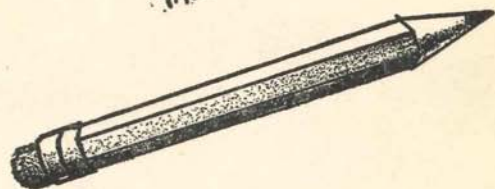
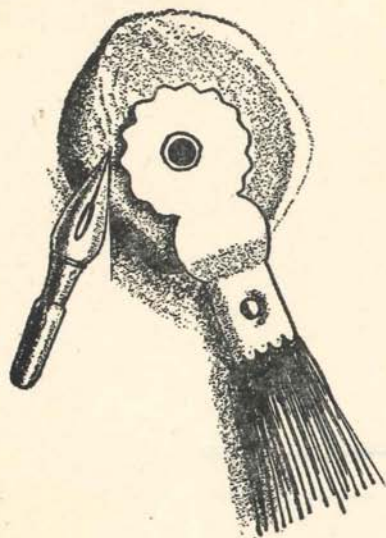




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Three Sisters

By Eleanor Mohr

Liz was ironing, but though her tall, slender body was bent over the ironing board, her thoughts were far away from the dingy living room and the family laundry. She was dreaming about what she would do when she had her little apartment in Greenwich Village. There she would be Liz Glover, the rising young poetess, not Liz Glover, the middle daughter of Amos and Catherine Glover who were killed in an auto accident two months ago.

"Be careful, Liz," Agnes said sharply. "You're ironing wrinkles in my best organdy apron."

"Oh, sorry, Agnes," Liz said.

Agnes stood in the living room doorway, framed by the dark portieres. Her long, dark hair was braided and aranged neatly on top of her head. Her black eyes burned in her white face.

I'm sick of those eyes searching through me, Liz thought. She can't stare my thoughts out of me, nor my dreams. But she'll try.

Agnes cleared her throat. Glancing up, Liz saw Agnes still looking at her. She lowered her eyes back to her ironing.

Ever since Mom and Dad died she's bossed Bunny and me, bossed us since the day of the accident—told us what to wear, how to act at the funeral, at home, everywhere—'til I thought I'd die. I can't stand her snooping, her prying. She's always watching us. I can't leave a book open or a slip hanging on a chair in my own room. She's everywhere, running my life, running everybody's life. I've got to get away—Mom and Dad knew that when I began saving my money—they knew I had to get away from Pottersville; they knew my dream—but Agnes, she doesn't know. If she did, she'd try to kill it. She'd hold a pillow over my dream 'til it smothered. But she can't. So she glares at me and is angry inside. I've got to get away from here—from her! I've got to! She pushed the iron viciously. The ironing board squeaked.

Bunny, who was draped over an arm chair reading, looked up. "What're you doing to the ironing board, Liz?" she asked.

"Nothing," Liz replied, looking at her younger sister. Bunny's almost grown up, she thought—funny, she's so tiny. Hardly seems possible she's graduating from high school tomorrow night. She doesn't need me. Bunny can take care of herself. Besides, Agnes likes to look after her. And Bunny likes to have people fuss over her. Bunny'll get along—so pretty, soft yellow hair, pointed little ears. I've seen her looking slant-eyed at Hal. As far as that goes, Agnes sighs every time he comes in the door. No, there's not enough to keep me in this house.

"Are you going to see Hal tonight?" Bunny asked.

"I guess so," Liz said. Her wide brown eyes softened as she remembered Hal. He's so good-looking, says he loves me, and kisses me like means it. She laughed to herself: he wouldn't know iambic pentameter from a rail fence. But he's such a nice guy. She remembered the way he put his hand on the back of her neck, pulling her hair down and tilting her face up to his when he kissed her.

"You haven't done much ironing this afternoon," Agnes accused, surveying the small pile of folded clothes.

"I guess not," Liz said absently, looking at the awkward bouquet of wax roses which Agnes had found in the attic one day, brought downstairs, and placed under a glass bell on the table. Liz wrinkled up her nose at the ugly flowers. She began humming an aimless tune.

"Thinking up poetry again instead of working, I suppose!" Agnes spat out the words.

Liz slammed the iron down on the metal holder. She faced Agnes defiantly. "If I'm thinking about poetry, that's my own business."

"That depends on what you think! Frankly, Liz, I was shocked when I just happened to find those love poems in your drawer the other day."

"You had no right to snoop in my dresser drawers!"

"I was merely putting away your clothes. If you'd pick up your own things, I wouldn't have to!"

Bunny put down her magazine. "Oh, girls, please don't start fighting again." She had her legs thrown over the arm of the chair, her scuffed mocassins dangled from her bobby-socked feet.

Agnes went over to her, putting her feet back on the floor. She sat on the arm of the chair, stroking Bunny's hair. "It's hard for you, isn't it baby?"

Bunny brushed Agnes' hand away. She cleared her throat.

"Did you want to ask me something, baby?" Agnes said, putting her arm around Bunny's shoulders.

Bunny turned her piquant little face up to Agnes and said, "You remember that tomorrow night is graduation, don't you?"

"Well, I thought," Bunny began—"that is, you know it's traditional—well, Gladys wants me to help serve at her party."

"Party!" Agnes drew her lips into a thin line.

"Yeh, you know that the graduating class always has a party the night before Commencement."

"You want to go to a party," Agnes blazed, "only two months after your mother and father were killed in the accident!"

Bunny turned her back to Agnes and buried her face in the back of the chair.

"May God forgive you for being happy enough to want to go to a party!"

Liz walked toward Agnes. "Don't you want anybody to be happy?"

Agnes looked at her piously. Smiling coldly, she asked, "What would people think; what would people say if we started going to parties before Mother and Father were even cold in their graves?"

"Don't talk that way," Liz begged. "You care so much what people think; but you don't care whether we're happy."

"Going to a party now would be sacrilege." She said the word precisely, syllable by syllable, enjoying its flavor.

Bunny sat up. "I don't care," she said. "I'm going to the party!"

"You're happy being unhappy," Liz accused Agnes. "But Bunny and I aren't! We like to live. We like to be happy!"

Agnes ignored Liz. "I'll take the sin on my own shoulders," she said. "I give you permission to go to the party, Bunny. Although it's sacrilege and sinful, I give you permission. Now the sin is mine."

Liz turned on her heel and went back to the ironing. She picked up the iron from the smoldering apron. A dark brown stain was burned in the white organdy. "I don't care," she thought, "I don't care about her damn old apron. I hate her! I hate her!"

Bunny pressed Agnes' hand. "Thanks, Aggie," she said. "You're a sweet old thing."

Agnes smiled fondly at Bunny. "You're welcome, Bunny." She straightened her stiff collar. "You're always so appreciative of the things I do for you—not like some people I could mention." She flicked an imaginary speck of dust off the glass bell which covered the roses. As she marched toward the kitchen, she called back, "I suppose Hal is coming again tonight, Liz?"

Liz took a deep breath before she answered. "Yes," she said.

"I'd think it's be dull for you, having him come every night and then just sitting here in the living room."

Liz looked at the old brown wallpaper, the straight curtains at the narrow windows, the worn spot in the middle of the carpet where the warp showed through. It as a threadbare room for threadbare people.

"Yes," Liz agreed, "it's dull. I thought I'd ask him to take me to the Crystal Ballroom tonight."

"The Crystal Ballroom! Do you mean to dance?" Agnes grasped the portieres, clutching theid dusky folds.

"Why not?" Liz asked with careful nonchalance. She didn't care what Agnes said. She was fed up with the dingy living room. She

thought, "I can't stand this ugliness, this depression much longer. I want to be where there are gay people, rustling dresses, and wild, dancing music." She was fed up with Agnes. This time she didn't ask her older sister; she told her. "Yes," she said, "to dance."

Agnes looked around desperately. Liz could see panic come and go across her face. "She's afraid to lose her hold on me," Liz realized; 'she's afraid I will get away from her!'

Agnes' eyes glimmered. She played her trump card. "I promised father on his death-bed that I'd look after you girls. He never let you dance at the Crystal Ballroom. So if you go there now, I betray that sacred trust."

"Sacred trust," Liz screamed, "If I hear another pious word from you Agnes, I'll—I'll—I'll—" She threw the iron at the glass bell. It fell to the floor shattering in tiny pieces. The hot iron sizzled on the melting wax roses. Liz ran from the room crying.

Bunny helped Agnes pick up the glass and the blobs of wax. Neither of them said anything. But Agnes' thin mouth quivered. And Agnes' mind made plans.

"Agnes," Bunny ventured, "I don't have anyone to go to the party with."

Agnes looked at her intently. "What about the Gallagher boy?"

"Oh, him," Bunny said derisively, "he's just a kid. I don't want to go to the party with him."

"Who could you go with, then?"

"I don't know of anybody, unless——"

"Unless who?"

"Unless Hal——"

Agnes' eyes narrowed to calculating slits. "Don't worry, Bunny," she promised.

That evening Agnes met Hal at the door. She had been waiting for him, and threw open the door before he knocked. Hal was tall and a lock of his curly hair hung over one eye. He was continually pushing it back, but it never stayed in place.

"Good evening, Hal, she said primly. "I'd like to have a little talk with you."

"Why sure," Hal agreed, grinning amiably. "We ain't talked together for a long time," he said, slapping her on the behind. He tossed his hat on the hall tree, laughing to see it spin on the peg before it settled down.

Agnes watched the muscles ripple across his back. His shoulders were broad, and his waist narrow. He was a big farm boy, and now inside the living room, he was a little awkward, pulling down his shirt

cuffs and straightening his tie.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

Hal grinned and sat down.

Suddenly she sniffed the air. "Oh, my goodness, my cookies are burning. Excuse me a minute," she said, hurrying toward the kitchen. Agnes swished behind the portieres and waited.

Hal picked up a magazine and started thumbing through it backwards, reading the cartoons. Then he heard a soft noise behind him. He turned his head.

It was Bunny. She was wearing a pale yellow sweater, the same color as her hair, and a tight black skirt. Hal had never seen Bunny so dressed up before. He noticed that her black pumps did things for her slim legs that bobby socks didn't do. She was crying.

"What's the matter, Bunny? Don't you want to graduate from school?"

Bunny wiped her eyes. "It isn't that," she sobbed.

"Tell old Uncle Hal," he suggested, patting the soft cushion beside him.

"I don't know how to begin," she answered, parting her lips and looking up at him.

Hal looked down at her, the little waves in her hair, the smoky grey eyes, the little nose, the soft curve of her breast. He looked back at the magazine.

Bunny put one small hand on his arm. "I can't go to the party tonight, Hal," she said, crying a little.

"Why can't you? Won't the old dragon," he motioned toward the kitchen, "let you?"

"No, is isn't that."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't have anybody to take me, Hal."

Hal laughed. "What about the Gallagher kid?"

Tears started trickling down Buny's face again. "We've broken up," she answered, "He's just a kid, anyway."

Hal laughed again. "You're just a kid, too, Bunny."

She broke into sobs, turning away from him, and burying her face in the back of the sofa.

Hal was surprised. "Gosh, Bunny," he said. "I didn't mean anything. "Honest, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

She kept on crying.

"Listen, honey," he said, putting his arm around her, "I'll take you to the party—just quit crying now and be a good girl."

Bunny looked up, all smiles. "Oh, will you really, Hal? Jeepers! I'll go get my coat, and we can leave right away."

Agnes, watching and listening behind the doorway nodded her head, satisfied. She came into the living room. "You've been coming here a long time, Hal."

Hal winked at her. "Your cooking keeps bringing me back."

Agnes smiled. "I thought you should talk to me about Liz."

Hal didn't understand. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I hope you're serious about her," Agnes went on.

"Why?"

"I found some poetry in her dresser drawer yesterday."

"Poetry? What's that got to do with me?"

"I was wondering the same thing," Agnes said, looking him straight in the eye.

Hal squirmed uncomfortably. "I don't know anything about poetry," he said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Listen to this." Agnes took a scrap of paper from her apron pocket.

"The name of this is 'Tree in Winter', but I'm sure the title doesn't mean a thing," she said, pursing her lips. Agnes read word by word:

"Oh, I stood lonely, waiting, bare,
And shamelessly beseeching
To any wind who wandered there,
My hungry arms out-reaching.
But passion's flame is little warmth,
Desire is lesser cover
Against the bitter winter storm—
And wind, a fickle lover."

Hal laughed in embarrassment.

"Well?" Agnes asked significantly.

"I don't understand poems."

"She wasn't talking about any tree," Agnes told him. "She wrote that poem about you. She was——"

"Yes?" a cold voice asked. Agnes started. Liz was standing in the doorway. She was white and shaking. "What right do you have to read my poems?" she demanded, advancing on Agnes.

"Did you write that about me?" Hal asked.

Liz turned to him, looking at him as if she's never looked at him before. "No," she said in disgust, walking toward Agnes.

Hal grabbed her arm and spun her around. "Then I want to know who you wrote it about."

Liz's eyes blazed. "It wasn't about anybody!"

"Don't lie to me. I want to know who he is."

"I told you," she answered fiercely. "I made it up."

"Don't lie! Don't lie to me!" he yelled, shaking her.

She slapped him hard across the mouth. "Don't be so stupid," she screamed. "Don't be so damn stupid!"

He let go of her and stepped back, dazed. "You swore at me," he said, "you swore at me."

"Get out! Get out!" she screamed.

"I can't go," he said, backing toward the door, "I'm waiting for Bunny."

"Bunny?"

"Yes," Agnes stepped between them. "Hal is taking her to the party."

"That's your idea," Liz accused her.

Agnes smiled, "Hal asked her himself."

Liz glanced at him. He looked at the floor and nodded.

Bunny came skipping into the room, her pink coat over her arm. "Well," she laughed, "we have a send-off party." She patted Liz's shoulders and hugged Agnes. "Good-night all," she said blithely, waving to them. "Come on, Hal."

The door closed behind them. Agnes and Liz faced each other. Agnes smiled her tight, twisted smile. Liz, tears streaming down her face, looked steadily at Agnes. "You planned this. I see your dirty conniving behind this scheme!"

"I'm surprised at you," Agnes answered coolly, taking her fancy work from the sewing box. "I thought you were concerned about whether Bunny was happy. She didn't have a date to take her to the party."

"Oh, oh," Liz moaned, throwing herself down on the sofa.

"So Hal offered to take her. It's as simple as that. It doesn't mean any more than that." Agnes sat down. Her sharp needle flashed in and out of the pillow slip he was embroidering. "You remember when you were in high school. Those parties meant so much to you—I never went to parties, but you did—just remember how you felt then."

"I'm tired of your running my life and everybody's life. Now you're running Hal's too!"

"Bitterness is sin, sister," Agnes chided in her dry voice. "I was only helping you apply the golden rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' If you had been Bunny, you would've wanted to go to the part."

Liz sat up, her eyes flashing. "The devil can quote scripture. And you're a devil, Agnes. But I understand you. I know what you really want."

Agnes jerked her needle through the cloth. The thread snapped. She looked up, fear flickering around her thin lips.

Liz went on, taking advantage of Agnes' fear. "I've seen you look at him hungrily. I know why you like to have him come over for meals—because he always praises your cooking! Because then you have a chance to talk to him. Oh, I've seen you glowing with pride just because he said he liked your dumplings! You're in love with Hal!"

"That's a lie," Agnes said through clenched teeth. "A lie!"

"But you made a fatal mistake, Agnes. You maneuvered him into taking Bunny to the party. You knew how I'd feel about that."

"Liz—" Agnes began.

Liz cut her off. "You wanted Hal and me to quarrel! You planned it this way!"

"I swear on the Bible—"

"You knew if Hal took Bunny to the party, we'd quarrel. That's what you wanted. With me out of the way, you thought Bunny was too young to be any competition for you with Hal."

"I never had such thoughts—"

"Yes, you did! You're not so holy. But I want to tell you one thing—Hal's not in love with you. He'll never love you!"

Agnes held her needle up to the light to thread it. Her hands trembled.

"Bunny's smart," Liz went on, "and she thinks she's in love with Hal, too. Haven't you seen her look at him?"

"I haven't seen anything," Agnes denied.

"She's probably kissing him already," Liz said brutally, watching her older sister.

Agnes winced. She glanced up and saw Liz watching her. She tied a vicious knot in her thread.

"I'm sick of the whole mess," Liz cried. "I'm sick to death of it!" She paced the floor, taking long, quick strides, graceful as a cat.

"Before God," Anes said, "I've done everything for your own good. I've slaved every day for you and Bunny, doing the cooking, cleaning, picking up your clothes. I've done everything for you!"

"Yes," Liz agreed bitterly, "everything. You tried to run Bunny's life, my life, Hal's life!"

"Everything I did was for your own good," Agnes pleaded. "I'm older; I know better than you do. And I prayed God for guidance. You don't pray."

"Not to your God!"

"That's sacrilege!" Agnes folded her hands and turned wild eyes to heaven.

"Oh, hell!" Liz answered, throwing the sofa cushions on the floor. "I have just one more thing to say before I leave."

"Leave!" Agnes gasped.

"Yes, leave!" Liz shouted. "I'm going to New York!"

"You can't go! I won't let you!"

"You haven't anything to say about it! I'm going! I'm leaving—I'll—I'll take the train tomorrow!"

, "You can't! You can't!"

"Be quiet! You read my poetry to Hal tonight! He and Bunny are probably laughing about it now!"

"It was wicked poetry!"

"They're laughing about it!" A sob caught in her throat. "And I hate you for it, Agnes!"

Agnes leaped at Liz, slapping her face. "How dare you hate your own kith and kin!" she screamed.

"I learned from you, Agnes. You hate me!" Liz shook Agnes' bony shoulders. "You hate me!" Liz pushed Agnes down on the sofa. She looked at her for a long time. "And I hate you," she said brokenly. Turning, she ran out the door, down the dark street. The early summer night was black, cool, and clean. When at last she stopped for breath, she looked around her. The houses of the village sat back among the trees, their lamps glowing through the leaves. Liz looked back at them, through them, beyond them, feeling free.

Burning

By Dean Hughes

Have I got everything? The rags, the kerosene, matches? Yes. I've got everything. It's all ready.

The rags. Wedge them in by that cotton bale. It's dry. It'll burn. There. The kerosene; not much, just enough to burn. The matches. Three of them. I hold them tight in my wrinkled hand. Kitchen matches, wood and strong. They'll burn easy.

Soon the flames, orange and blue and hungry, will eat this cotton, this warehouse, and the flames will rise up and melt with the sky. The flames: so easy to start, so hard to stop.

One match, one will do—I hold it close to my eyes, stare at it; the flames writhe over the end, glimmering, waving, taunting . . . shadows cast by the flames glance off the walls of my mind and awaken a memory; a memory of youth and hate and fire . . .

* * *

The fall day was hot, muggy hot, and I was late for school. I crept up to the door of the fourth grade room and peeked in.

Roll call. Miss Devon's ragging voice snapped the names. She was looking down. Maybe she wouldn't see me when I sneaked in. Quiet now. The door squeaks sometimes. Easy now . . . easy . . . Eawk!

Miss Devon's prim head jerked up and she glared at me. "Take your seat!" she barked.

I sat in my seat, hot all over, and the others leered at me. "You're gonna get it," somebody whispered.

"You!" Miss Devon's voice trumpeted, "Come here." She meant me, I knew. She didn't like me, Miss Devon didn't. I stood up trembling and approached her desk.

"You're late," she accused, pointing her pencil at me.

"Yes."

"You know what happens when you're late."

"No."

"You don't know? Then I'll tell you. You stay after school." Miss Devon turned her head toward the windows and the light reflected on her glasses, hiding her eyes.

I cleared my throat.

"Well?" Her voice was asking for trouble.

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"Uh . . . Miss Devon, tonight?"

"Certainly tonight." Miss Devon rose out of her chair and towered above me. "You can't put this off. I won't allow my pupils to do the things you try to do."

"I was going fishing." I swallowed hard and strained my eyes up at her.

"So?"

"Well, I thought . . . uh . . . if you'd let me, I'd stay tomorrow night."

Miss Devon charged around the desk and gripped my arm.

"No!"

She began jerking me around, screaming "No!" at me and her hair came loose from its pins and she looked like a crazy woman. The class giggled.

"You'll stay tonight." Miss Devon clamped her teeth on the words.

She let loose of my arm and stepped back, maybe to see what I was going to do. I'd swung at her once.

I just stood there, staring at the scarred front panel of the desk and not saying anything.

Miss Devon propped her clenched fists on her sagging hips and snapped, "Take your seat."

I mumbled softly, "I hate you" and started shakily back to my seat. Then I heard Miss Devon's flat heels start up behind me and I began to run.

I beat her to my seat, slid in and sat staring at my empty inkwell. Miss Devon stood beside me. She leaned down and grated, "What was that you said?"

"I said I hate you." I said it loud this time and the other kids gasped.

Miss Devon grabbed my arm again and pulled me up.

"You little brat," she gritted, and slapped my face.

I pulled away and stood glaring at her.

"You old witch!" I screamed. "I hate you, I hate you! I hate school too! I wish it'd burn down and you with it! I'll burn it down and you'll roast."

Miss Devon snatched a ruler from my desk and advanced on me. She took hold of my shirt front and began hitting me with the ruler. And the tears came as she kept hitting me and hitting me with the ruler.

I didn't sleep much that night. I rolled and tossed and my bruised back ached. I kept remembering how Miss Devon hit me with the ruler. Finally I fell asleep and dreamed over and over about being beaten.

I awoke with a jerk and sat up. I could hear a low steady whine. It began to rise higher and higher, it pierced my ears, screamed at me. Then I knew what it was. The firewhistle.

I jumped out of bed, grabbed my jeans, and ran to the living room window. Outside people were beginning to run up the street toward a faint glow above the trees.

"The schoolhouse!" somebody yelled.

My insides jumped and the palms of my hands went sticky.

"Go back to bed, honey." Mom, wrapped in a tattered robe, stood beside me, her sallow face puffed with sleep.

"No!" I shouted, scrambling into my clothes. "It's the schoolhouse, Mom! I've got to go!"

"All right," Mom said and hugged me for an instant against her warm thin body.

"Be careful," she called after me as I slammed the screendoor. "Stay 'way back."

I raced up the street, panting and grinning. No more school, I thought gleefully. It's burning, it's burning! Then I stopped thinking and just ran madly.

When I reached the scene, I could see that the fire was bad. The whole roof of the old frame building was blazing and crackling. It was burning like paper. They'd already stretched a rope barrier around the area and wouldn't let anyone any closer. I stood gripping the rope, staring into the heart of the flames, enjoying the heat and the excitement.

This was the place I'd gone to every day for four winters, hating it always: the work, the teachers, the kids. And now it wasn't any more, I thought, and grinned happily to myself.

Then it hit me. I'd done this. I'd said I wished the school would burn. I'd done it just as much as if I'd struck the match. Why, Oh why had I said it? God must have heard me. He must have heard my wicked words.

The belltower leaned crazily, then crashed to the ground, sending sparks flying into the smoky darkness. The scorched and blackened bell rolled out of the fire and along the ground, clanking lamely, sadly.

I stared at the bell, at the frayed and burned rope still clinging to

it. I'd ruined this bell, I thought, and my legs began to tremble. I had killed, burned this bell. It wouldn't ring any more. I was guilty. I was guilty.

I dragged my eyes from the bell and looked around at the other people; looked at them to see if they knew I was guilty.

Then I saw her. Miss Devon, standing a few feet away. She was turned toward me. Her glasses reflected the fire, hiding her eyes, but I knew she was watching me. She was staring right into me. She knew I was guilty. She knew I was the one who'd done this evil thing.

She knew I was guilty. Everything told her I'd done it. I'd told her I would, screamed it at her. She knew I was guilty. I was guilty. . .

* * *

The match burns low and the memory of youth and hate and fire dims. Everything's ready. I always have everything ready. Matches, rags, oil—all will burn. Just drop the match on the rags.

There. Watch the beautiful flames as they curl around the rags, around the cotton. Watch how they float in the air. Teasing, flaunting fingers, wriggling at me, laughing at me.

Laughing at me and burning, burning.



"Summer Heat"

By George E. Rush

"Jim, for goodness sake stop snoring . . . Jim!"

Her voice was shrill with irritation and her face of almost classic purity was flushed with the heat. About her bare, brown shoulders clung a damp mop of taffy-colored curls. Her slim, young body, sticky with perspiration, sagged limply in the big chair. She glanced at the long, lean form sprawled loosely in the chair across the room, noting, with what almost amounted to distaste, the deeply tanned body clad in faded khaki shorts, the straight black brows, the breadth of brown shoulders, the slim hips and long legs. Rattling her newspaper impatiently, she said again, "Jim . . . Jim!"

"Whas-a-matter?" The form stirred sluggishly, sleepily.

"Stop snoring! I don't see how in the world you can sleep in that chair anyway . . . JIM!"

"Whazat, whazat?"

"Why don't you go lie down? Anyway, how do you expect me to get any sense out of this paper with all that racket going on?"

"Good Lord, woman," he yawned, "can't you let me alone—even on Sunday?"

"Let you alone, let you alone . . . That's all I hear. I might as well be alone."

"Thought you were trying to read the paper? Did you wake me up just to start an argument?" He mopped absently at a small rivulet on his chest.

"No I didn't! But it's bad enough having to sit here and melt without having to put up with that infernal racket you make when you sleep."

"Aw, stop it, will ya'? I'm just as hot as you are but I don't go around biting people."

"I didn't bit you . . . but it's a good idea."

"Now don't get smart, youngster. Such talk as that deserves a good spanking." He was fully awake now.

"Go ahead—beat me, beat me! That's all you men think of . . . beating!"

He rolled his eyes upwards and raised his hands in resignation. As an afterthought he suggested, "Let's go for a drive, Doll Baby."

"No. It's too hot. Anyway I'd have to bathe and change clothes."

"What do you mean 'change clothes'? Seems to me you need to put some on."

"You don't look so well-dressed in those old shorts yourself, Bub."

"Stop calling be 'Bub'!"

"Stop calling me Bub," she mocked. "I suppose you reserve that for your new secretary. She's such a pure, sweet, demure . . ."

"Stop it, Janie," he cut in sharply. "You know she's all business and efficiency . . . besides she's married."

Jane glared. Rising swiftly she clattered into the kitchen. Jim could hear her rattling ice-cubes, clinking glasses and generally banging

things around. Raising his voice he called, "Hey, Peach-Fuzz, hot coffee is supposed to be better than iced drinks on a hot day." For a moment the silence was thunderous.

"Coffee!!" The air around the word seemed to freeze and form icicles.

"Now . . . now Baby, don't get excited," he squeaked. Lord-a-mighty! Why did he have to go and open his big, fat mouth.

"Mr. Sutter! I'll remind you once more that I'm not going to turn on that blast furnace in this heat!!" Her voice rose gradually and ended with a shout.

Jim struggled to his feet and padded out to the kitchen. Coming up behind her, he started to put his arms around her. At his touch she whirled, cat-like, and slapped him hard across the cheek. Jim turned pale.

"I came out here to apologize for even thinking coffee; I get a whack in the puss for it. Heat or no heat you can go to . . ." He turned abruptly and left. She heard the bedroom door close firmly.

She stood there in the middle of the kitchen floor, legs trembling, feeling misery build a solid wall around her; tears glistened momentarily and then rolled unheeded down her cheeks. A sound intruded upon the wilderness of her thoughts; she was thinking absently that it seemed like thunder. Suddenly a delicious, cool, cool, breeze whipped the dainty curtains over the kitchen sink and Janie, with a start realized that the room had grown quite dark. Then, with an ear-splitting crash, thunder ripped the silence to shreds and hard upon this came the whine of rising wind and the drumming of rain. She stood there dumbly, listening to the roar of the storm and with the coming of the cool breeze, she felt the tension go out of her body, healing the ragged nerves, soothing the wounds. From the bedroom came the rasp of closing windows and rapid steps hurrying toward the living-room. In sudden panic she started to run! Wildly she thought: he mustn't go, he mustn't go . . . catch him you little fool . . . catch him! Then his form loomed up in the gloom before her and with a sob of relief she threw herself into his arms. Pressing close to him, her face tight against his shoulder, she began to cry with great, tearing sobs. Jim, his arms holding her gently, spoke above the storm, "There, there, Baby; go ahead and cry . . . you'll feel better." He raised his head and squinted at the streaming window and said, "Let's just forget it, chum. Lord-a-mighty listen to that rain come down . . .!"

For A Moment

By Dean Hughes

I loved you for a moment, once;
 For just a moment, that's all.
You found strength in another's two arms
 circling you,
Found life in another's lips meeting yours,
Found fire in his warm body held close—
I loved you for a moment, once;
 For just a moment, that's all.



Empty City

By Patricia Pentony

Empty City, where brilliant lights
Once illumined the sky,
The throb is gone from your fainting heart
O City, why do you sigh?

An echo speaks in your lonely streets,
An echo with no reply
To stop its shattering, pleading note;
O City, why do you cry?

Deserted City, what do you need
To rekindle a spark in your eye,
To make your arteries pulsate again;
O City, why must you die?

You need the beat of a human heart,
People who laugh and cry
The stirring warmth of human love
And, O City, so do I!

The Visit

By Dean Hughes

A match flared and died in the impenetrable jet darkness of my room and I sat up in bed, trembling.

Across the room, above the rocking chair, the orange tip of a cigarette glided up, flared, then floated down again.

"Who is it?" I called, and the bedspring squeaked hoarsely.

"Easy, Tom, it's me," said a man's voice, pleasant and husky.

I shuddered. I knew that voice, but it couldn't be, it couldn't be . . .

"Dad—dad, is it you?" My voice quivered.

"Of course it's me. Who did you think it was?" The cigarette tip went up again, glowed warmly, and descended.

"Dad, didn't you . . . aren't you . . .?" My breath labored under my ribs.

"Of course, Tom, I'm dead. Don't you remember seeing me in the coffin at the church? I remember you there." The cigarette illumined the glass ash tray, then rested on the edge.

"But Dad, how can you be here? I didn't think it was possible."

"It's not impossible. It seems strange to you that I'm here. But I couldn't get away before. I've never been busier."

"But Dad," I repeated, "Why did you come?"

"Well, don't you think I have a right to be interested in my son?" His voice had a querulous note.

He chuckled a small remembered chuckle, and the cigarette drifted off the ash tray. "Take it easy, Tom," he said, "I can't explain anything to you, so don't ask me. But I've come to find out what's been going on since I left."

"Things are the same. Things don't change much, no matter where you are," I said, steadying my voice, and my legs stopped shivering as the sweet-sharp odor of tobacco smoke reached my nostrils.

"How's your mother?" he asked, and the cigarette tip stopped in mid-air.

I hesitated, and then said, "Look, Dad, I might as well tell you. She's married again."

The cigarette tip seemed to quiver a little before it climbed up in the thick blackness and brightened.

"Well . . ." he said quietly, "Well. Who?"

"I don't think you'd know him. Isn't it enough that she's married

again?"

"Well . . ." he repeated, and again the cigarette tip came down and perched on the edge of the ash tray.

"Your mother never loved me, you know, Tom. She married to get away from her step-father." His voice was calm, with just an undercoat of shakiness.

"I can't tell, Dad," I said, "But she cried when you . . . when you left."

"I know, Tom, but we'd been married for twenty-five years. She missed me, but she didn't love me. Is your step-father good to you?"

"Dad, I was fourteen when you died. I'm nineteen now. I don't need anyone to be good to me. I'm a free agent."

"Oh," Dad said, and his voice held a grin. "He probably has more money than I ever had."

"At least we haven't forgotten you. Every once in a while when I'm home we remember you together, while Mom's husband is outside doing the chores."

"You're farming, then," Dad guessed, and the cigarette tip became very bright. "Your mother always loved the farm."

Dad's voice seemed to hesitate, then he said, "Do you call him 'Dad'?"

"Should I?"

"You can, you know," Dad chided.

"I don't think I want to. I don't belong to him and he doesn't belong to me."

Dad's voice chuckled, then was silent. The cigarette tip rose and fell again.

"What are you doing?" he asked finally, "Are you helping your 'mother's husband' on the farm?"

"Can you see me as a farmer? I can't. No, I'm putting myself through college. Mom's husband wanted to help me, but I wouldn't stand for it."

Dad chuckled again, and I seemed to feel that he wanted to lay his hand on my shoulder.

"Do you have enough money?" he asked.

"Does anyone ever have enough?" I countered, "But yes, I get along. I owe two weeks room rent, but I get paid tomorrow."

"I'm glad," Dad said. "Things seem to be working out all right without me."

"I miss you, Dad," I said, after a short, comfortable silence.

"I'm glad," he said again. The cigarette tip jerked. "Well, I'd better

get going and let you sleep. I'll be back, though, Tom, I'll be back."

The cigarette tip drifted up again, brightened, then held there in the darkness, and suddenly I realized that when Dad inhaled, his face was not illumined, for no face was there.

"Dad!" I burst out, "Dad, don't go, I . . ."

The cigarette tip came down swiftly and struck the center of the ash tray where it broke into three glowing fragments. The fragments brightened, dimmed, then slowly, one by one, they winked out.

The acrid smoke reached my nose and hung, lingering in the darkness.



Autumn, 1951

By Eleanor Mohr

Across the yellow paddy fields,
Above the grey, the unknown mountains,
The delicate silver leaves fall down
End over end, slender willow leaves spiraling.
Orange fingers of flame
Clutch the silver leaves that have fallen,
And black plumes rise from the mountain,
Curling back in the wind—
Plumes for the helmet
Of an armoured Autumn,
Striding across the yellow stubble
And the dark mountains.



Meteors

By Eleanor Mohr

Like two unknown stars
Down their courses swinging
Somewhere out in the intensely blue,
God-beautiful universe—
Down the outside arc,
The further circumference,
The point where time and space intercept—
We held together.
But there was no denying
The orderly orbits
Across the measured extremities away:
We had one brief, shining day.

Without a Song

By Edalene Moone

"Jim, Jim, get in here, I'm tired of having to yell my lungs out at you every morning."

"Aw, shut your blasted mouth. Every morning it's the same thing, 'Get up, get up, GET UP.' Why? So I can run down quick and earn a few shekels so you can feed your fat face."

Marty was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, wiping her soapy hands on the corner of her stained housecoat. Her uncorseted body rose and fell rhythmically as she lashed out at Jim. "Don't be talking to me like that. Who asked me to marry you anyway?"

"Don't remind me of any more of my mistakes. What ya standing there for? You ain't going to see nothing."

"You goin' to get up?"

"Sure, sure, I'm gonna be a good little boy this morning. Goin' to do everything the old lady tells me. Well, what you waiting for, go on, get going. God, but you're fat!"

As Marty turned to leave the room Jim's slipper landed with a resounding smack on her broad backside. Biting her lips and trying hard to fight back the tears, she continued to waddle into the tiny kitchenette.

In the darkened bedroom Jim slid from the bed, groping blindly, finally found the chair where he had thrown his clothes the previous night. He pulled them on hurriedly, not bothering to button the shirt. He glanced quickly around the room in hopes of discovering his shoes. "Hey, Marty, where's my shoes?" The silence was broken only by an off-key duet of glasses and spoons. Jim strode out into the kitchen. "Listen Marty, what did you do with my shoes? I got fifteen minutes to make it." Jim shook her by the arm. "Listen kiddo, I want to know where my shoes is. Well, my God, you're crying. Ain't this a touching scene. Tears of joy, I'll bet, cause you're getting rid of your husband for a while. O. K. I'll go in my stocking feet."

Marty wiped a soapy hand across her face and then ventured a weak, "Your shoes are—in the cabinet."

"In the cabinet?—what the——. Hey! These aren't mine. What you doing hiding your lover's shoes? These things are brand new." He picked them up and walked to the doorway. "They're those I saw at Barker's. Hey, what is this anyway, Marty?"

He was answered by a monotonous, "It's your birthday."

"My birthday?" and glancing at the calendar he added, "Well, I

guess it is. A well—a well, thanks Marty."

Marty turned to watch him as he seated himself on the edge of the dinette chair and pulled on the shoes.

"They fit?"

"Ya, sure Marty, just right."

Marty dried her hands and opened the oven door. "I fixed you some creamed tuna like you like. It's kinda soaked now though."

"It looks fine." He ate hurriedly, then ran into the bedroom, buttoning his shirt on the way, and, grabbing his coat, dashed out into the kitchenette. "It's real late. I got to hurry. Oh, Marty," he ventured, offering her a dollar bill, "thought maybe you'd like to have your hair fixed or something. Maybe we can make it out tonight, something kinda special, you know to celebrate. Well, I gotta go." Jim kissed Marty on the cheek, then in three squeaks on his new shoes, he was out the door and clumping down the stairs.

Marty picked up Jim's dishes and walking wearily over to the sink, scraped the creamed tuna into the strainer.



Man from the Mountain

By Eleanor Mohr

I cannot write small, pretty songs for you,
Man who came down from the mountain,
Clean as a white rock washed in the waterfall,
Old as the snow on craggy peaks,
Yet young as the pale green tips of the pines.
Your arms were strong as branches flexed against the canyon winds,
Your laughter, sunlight on the golden sand of the mountain river.

The things buried behind your eyes you never told me.
The eagle's scream is not so fierce
As the sounds you stifled in your throat.

I remember the fingers of the sun touching
The sky in the morning, your hand as gentle,
If the sky were my heart, the glory would shine the same,
Oh man who returned to the mountain.

Enough for All

By Albert E. Scott

"Good morning, John."

"Good mo'nin', doctuh. Nice day, ain't it, suh?"

"A little wet underfoot, though."

"Yassuh, but de Lawd knows we need dis rain if we's to git any-thing outa de gardens. We sho' has had a long dry spell. Yassuh, it's a good day."

"Yes, I guess you're right. By the way, John, I've meant to ask you ever since I came down here—how long have you been working here?"

"Oh, ah been cleanin' up 'roun' dis hospital fo' about ten—no—twelve years, Ah guess. But Ah been 'roun' dis town all mah life."

"And that's been quite a few years, hasn't it? I'd think you'd be able to take your pension and take things easy."

"Yassuh. Me an' mah wife could git by easy on de social security benefits Ah's entitled to, but Ah's got a boy in school. He's got a couple mo' years to go. 'Sides, Ah's in good health an' still has mas strength. An' besides, Ah's happiuh workin' than Ah would be jes' sittin' aroun' home. De place ain't big enough to keep me busy. What little there is to do Ah kin do easy, jes' putterin' aroun' evenin's."

"A boy in school, eh? How many children do you have, John?"

"'Leven, suh. Dis boy is de youngest. He's goin' to school down to de university."

"What about the others?"

"Oh, dey all been through. Yassuh. Some of 'em's teachers. One, he's a doctuh. One, he's a dentist. Two o' de girls is registered nurses. One boy's a officuh in de navy. Yassuh, dey's a fine bunch o' kids. Ain't one of 'em Ah isn't proud of."

"And they've all been through college, you say?"

"And they've all been through college, you say?"

"Yassuh. 'Co'se de older ones helps out now, but me an' de wife—she was doin' day work an' 'takin' in washin's, fo' de fam'ly got so big—we help de first boy through. An' then he help me git de first girl through, an so on. Yassuh. Ah figure it's jes' as easy to put 'leven through as it is one. Ah figure if you does de best you can do an' trusts de Lawd fo' de rest, He won't let you down. At least, dat's de way it's been fo' me."

Second Fiddle

By Evelyn Decker

As Marge rolled over she burrowed her head into the pillows; one hand shot out to shut off the alarm. Since it was only seven, she decided to snooze a few minutes longer. Through her mind a name wafted—Bruce!

The body that had become taut slowly relaxed once again. Finally she pushed herself up on one elbow to peer at the clock—five minutes after. Marge hastily reached for her robe. She put it on as she went flying out of the room and down the stairs.

In the bathroom Marge splashed some cold water on her face. Thoughts of Bruce once more became uppermost in her mind and she wasn't able to push them aside so easily now that she was awake. She glanced into the mirror and muttered, "Another day: same old problem."

As Marge began dressing she reviewed her problem. Bruce wasn't perfect—just a man. After all, everyone has some irritating habits. He is moody and I don't happen to like that darn blue pin-striped suit he fairly lives in. Why, she thought abruptly, if I feel this way about him, don't I move on? Because a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush? Oh I wish I'd stop rationalizing with those silly proverbs. But, she thought wistfully, he can be so cute and so sweet—when we aren't fighting. That blonde butch hair-cut and those big blue eyes are so nice. I wish he were a little taller, though.

Marge dashed into the kitchen, opened the ice-box and poured a glass of milk. She snatched up a banana, peeled it, and began eating. I think that he ought to finish college. I want to. Maybe, I could go on in the field of psychiatry. Bruce wouldn't like my spending seven more years in school, though. Of course, Bruce and psychiatry could be combined. But he won't wait. If he really cared, he would wait. As far as that goes, if I really cared, I'd—so what . . . Marge finished her breakfast. Then she grabbed her coat and dashed out the door . . .

* * *

It was noon. Marge didn't know exactly how she had gotten through the morning classes. Although the constant, nagging worry in the back of her mind had crept forward to mar her concentration, she felt she had done well in her business psychology test. She left the social science hall and cut across the campus to Mike's. As she walked through the door, she saw that her girl friends had managed to save her a place. Marge

threaded her way to the corner booth. She piled her books on the left bench. Then she sat down on the other side.

"Have you ordered yet?" she asked as she took off her coat.

"No, Marge. We just got here. We were lucky to get a booth because they're awfully crowded today," said Helen.

Marge studied her friends. Helen was a tall, stately blonde—calm and quiet. Suzi was her complement. She had a short, compact body and the forgiveable tendency to say the wrong things. Marge sighed and watched vaguely while the waitress wiped off the table, thumped down three glasses of water and placed a menu before them. As Helen reached for the menu, Suzi turned to Marge to begin her endless chattering.

"Marge——"

"Umm," mumbled Marge while sipping her water thoughtfully.

"I thought that you said that Bruce wasn't going to buy a new car. I thought you two had finally settled on his coming back to school."

Marge snapped sharply out from her reverie. "Well," she began, hesitantly, "As far as I know, he is. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered . . . you know my brother has been looking at cars——"

Marge interrupted, "Yes, Suzi I know. Will you please get to the point?"

"Well, anyway my brother John was looking at cars up at the Ford place when Bruce came in. It was last Saturday. Naturally, they stopped and talked a few minutes. Bruce said that he was just 'sort of dreaming.' Well, my brother left and then about a half hour later they met at the other end of automobile row. That time they looked at Chevvies together."

Marge reached for the menu. "Are you through, Helen?" She stared at the menu a minute before answering. Inwardly she was seething, but to Suzi she replied calmly, almost icily, "I really don't know exactly what he intends to do. It's up to him, now."

She glared at the menu and decided on chili; it was the first thing she saw. Marge handed the menu to Suzi and leaned forward with her elbows on the table. Helen smiled understandingly, but she said nothing. Marge grinned back and then began to think savagely of Bruce. Just wait—wait till I get my hands on him. Bitterly she remembered her early morning problems. Then her mind pounced on three words—Bruce, college, and cars.

When the waitress appeared, Marge ordered her chili and milk. Helen, after making her order, tactfully started talking to Suzi.

That's the way it is, I guess, Marge reflected ruefully. Spent all morning playing the martyr. Should I be a psychiatrist or should I marry Bruce. Be a tender, loving wife. Ugh! He knows how I feel about cars and college. Financially, they don't mix. A boy with a mind like his spending his life as a welder! The idea! How anyone with such a high I. Q. and so many talents could be born without any ambition . . . Suzi's voice finally penetrated Margie's mind. "What did you say, Suzi?"

"I just wondered if I'd said something I shouldn't have. You've been so quiet since I told you about Bruce's looking at cars."

Instinctively Marge lied, protecting her small hold on Bruce. "Why, no, Suzi. Bruce is always looking at cars. In fact, he spends most of his time dreaming about the latest models."

When their order arrived, they silently began to eat. I should have known he was looking at cars. Saturday night he acted guilty—he was much too sweet. I was too thankful that we weren't fighting. Marge smiled maliciously as she thought of the discussion that Bruce and she would have that evening. All I need is a billowing apron and a big rolling pin. Maybe, I can put the subject off so that I can enjoy part of the evening. She turned to Suzi. "Are you going to the game tonight? If you want a date, I can get Stan. Or are you going with Helen?"

"I'm going with Helen."

"Are you sure you don't want to go with Stan?" questioned Helen.

"Good grief, no! I get along with you better. I think that it's nice of you to get dates for me Marge; I really appreciate it. But not Stan; just skip him, please."

"O.K., then. But I'll have Bruce pick you up. Then we can sit together." And having finished, the girls silently put on their coats, preparing to leave.

* * *

Marge was finishing the supper dishes. Her father had gone to work and her sister had gone to a girl-friend's for the evening. As she scoured the last frying pan, she puzzled over her extreme dislike of a new car. It's not that I don't like cars, she thought. And it certainly isn't that I don't want Bruce to have a car if he could afford it. I've always wished he could afford one. He has always wanted one. So, just because he

buys a new car I plan on breaking up. It doesn't make sense.

With a ring of the doorbell, Bruce came bounding in. "I didn't hear you drive up Bruce," said Marge as she walked into the living room.

"Oh, I came from the other direction and besides the radio is on," he said easily. His face shone happily. "Are you ready?"

"No, I just finished the dishes. But, I'll be ready in a minute. You can go pick up Helen and Suzi while I'm getting ready."

"Oh, heck, do they always have to go with us? Can't they get a boy friend?"

"Now, Bruce," Marge began pacifyingly, "You know they are just between guys."

"They've been between guys——" he began grumblingly. He smiled suddenly. "Oh hurry up and we'll go to get them together."

Marge turned toward the kitchen, then changing her mind again, she faced Bruce. "Now wait a minute. It's not like you to be so buoyant. Would you mind telling me why the sudden hurry and the sudden desire to pick up the girls?" Marge advanced. "Are you sure you didn't drive up in a nice new car with a nice quiet muffler—a car that you want to show off?"

The cheerful little-boy look disappeared from his face. He started defensively, "But Marge, I got a good deal on my old car and it was beginning to cost too much to run. Besides, Dad signed for me and I got a loan. I can still go to coll——"

"I really don't care about the details," she interrupted. "You could at least have consulted me about it. Now, I will always hate that car!! And I'm certainly not going to let a mere car bother me. I told you before to take your choice. I'll call Suzi and Helen and tell them I'm not going."

Feeling the determined finality of Marge's words, Bruce walked out to the kitchen while Marge reached for the phone. He walked back through the living room and opened the front door. "Marge," he said sharply. "Are you sure it's the car? Or is it an excuse you want the car to stand for?"

She looked at him for a moment, then back at the numbers on the dial of the phone. "Good-by," she said.

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