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The Vehicle, June 1960, Vol. 2 no. 3

Robert Mills French

Thomas McPeak

James M. Jenkinson

Jerry N. White

J. B. Young

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Authors

Robert Mills French, Thomas McPeak, James M. Jenkinson, Jerry N. White, J. B. Young, Kathleen Ferree, Ray Hoops, A. Seer, George Foster, C. E. S., Neil O. Parker, Richard W. Blair, and EDS

The Vehicle

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We invite manuscripts of all sorts — short stories,
articles, essays, poems, fillers, cartoons,
and photographs.

“Unless otherwise stated, any resemblance to living
characters is purely coincidental.”

Robert Mills French
Editor

Mary Ellen French
Assistant Editor

To the Reader:

This is the last copy of *The Vehicle* with Mary Ellen and me as editors. *The Vehicle* is being turned over to Eastern Illinois University for the coming year, in order to insure it life.

We hope that future editors will be given full opportunity to develop their capabilities. This can come about only if censorship is kept within the boundaries of protection from libel. The founding editor, Fred L. Miller, and I have dealt with the controversial and, in doing so, have incurred the wrath of a few narrow-minded individuals. It has been an editorial policy, however, not to deal with uselessly controversial topics but those which we felt needed development; the latter are usually controversial.

It is the duty of you, the reader, to demand a strong editorial position, for without it the publication will become tasteless. If, in the future, the magazine fails to meet past standards, look elsewhere for your literary reading. Next year's staff and advisor were appointed by the Publications Board, contrary to our recommendations. Let us hope they chose fairly and wisely, for a irresponsible staff can mean the death of any publication.

Whether it be a college faculty, a newspaper, or as in the present case, a literary magazine, freedom of expression is essential. If this freedom is not respected, there is no reason for a faculty, newspaper, or magazine to exist, for the opinions stated will be those of the powers that rule and dictate—powers which never lack the means of frequent expression.

We extend our thanks to you, our reader; Dr. Brooks, our selfless adviser; C. E. Schumacher, our printer and technical adviser; our contributors, and the many helpful persons without whom this venture into literature would have been impossible.

Robert Mills French, Editor

Blue-Nosed Robin

by Thomas McPeak

Lost a robin. Well, I didn't lose it exactly. I kinda let it fly away because I didn't need it no more. It had a blue nose. Prettiest blue-nosed robin you ever saw. I found it when I was almost ten. I'm ten now, almost. Found it right after Sissy died. Pa killed her. He didn't mean to, but he killed her.

Folks say it's kind of crazy. Me owning a blue-nosed robin, especially one nobody can see. They say that maybe they could understand it, if I were five or six years younger when kids sometimes do get to seein' things nobody else can. I'm getting to be a big boy, they tell me. I should be learnin' to hunt and fish and to help Pa around the farm and not foolin' around with no blue-nosed robin.

But you see, it really wasn't my blue-nosed robin, not at first. It was Sissy's. She was only five, so I guess it was all right for her to have a blue-nosed robin if she wanted one. At first the robin didn't have no blue nose, and everybody could see it and not just Sissy. Fact is, the robin had a Mrs. and young ones. They lived in a tree aside our house. Their nest was on a branch not two feet from Sissy's window. Every day Sissy would push her nose against the window and stare at them with her big blue eyes. And them robins didn't pay no mind to Sissy. They didn't care a bit. But when it began to get cold, those robins all of a sudden weren't there no more. At least not to nobody but Sissy. I told her there weren't nothing on that o' branch but branch. I told her there weren't no need to play watch a nothin' bird when we had a whole henhouse of chickens. But Sissy just began to cry. Ma said for me to stop teasin' Sissy or she'd smack me, but Pa, he just called Sissy over to him and picked her up in his big arms.

He said then, "Honey, I'm not saying there ain't a robin by your window, but if there is, that old robin is going to be so cold that his nose will be frozen blue."

"As blue as the ribbon on my pretty pink new panties?" Sissy said, her big eyes even bigger than ever.

Pa laughed and set her down and said, "Bluer."

She said, "I'm going to go see."

Plaid shirt, tiny blue jeans, and yeller pig tails raced up the stairs like she was being chased by a mother sow. It weren't but two minutes that she came running back down the stairs straight to Pa. She said, "You're right, Daddy. It DOES have a blue nose."

Pa said, "Honey, that's not exactly what I meant." He looked kind of helpless over at Ma; and soon him and her were both laughing.

So like I said, it wasn't my blue-nosed robin at first, and I am interested in things like huntin' and fishin'. Pa was going to learn me to shoot. And we even went huntin' once. But just that once.

We got a rabbit. At least Pa did. I didn't have no gun. Pa had the gun. A shot gun. He had it when he tripped on the porch steps before we got into the house

It was a pretty bum trade! That skimpy ol' cotton tail, for a soft, blue-nosed robin.

Pa got to spendin' a lot more time doin' the chores. He didn't do as much, but he spent a lot more time doin' it. He didn't come near the house except to sleep and eat. And he and Ma didn't talk, didn't talk. Pa tried a few times, but Ma always seemed just a little too busy to answer. So Pa just quit trying. Ma didn't talk much to me neither. Not even to scold me when I left my clothes on the floor ruther than hangin' 'em up like I know I'm supposed to. She didn't scold Pa either when he went outside without buttoning his coat all the way up and left his bare neck ashowin'. No doubt about it, things had changed about the house.

I didn't mind going to school anymore. Sad state of affairs, when a fellow got to likin' school better than home. But after awhile, even school wasn't the same. Especially after I got to takin' that box to school with me. That box caused me trouble the first day I took it to school. When I walked into the schoolhouse carryin' my lunch pail and that ol' hot box, Mrs. Kenly said to me, "Toby, you're eating kind of heavy today, aren't you?"

And I said, "No ma'am, no more than usual." She raised her eyebrows a little but didn't push me no farther. At lunch time I could see some of the kids were pretty interested in that box of mine. Carl Stebbely—and I knowed he'd be the one—came up to me and snooped like it was his business or somethin', "Whatcha got in that there box, small fry?"

I weren't no small fry to him. I was a year younger than him but there weren't no difference in our size. None that you could tell, but I played like I paid no mind to his small-fry talk, and I said, "A bird."

He said, "A live bird?"

I said, "I wouldn't be keepin' no dead bird penned up."

He stuck his face close to mine and said, "Where'd you find a live bird in this cold weather?"

I pushed him a step back from me and said, "Never you mind where I found it. I know and you don't, and that's it."

"You ain't got no live bird in that box," he said. "Hows it supposed to breathe?"

"I do too have a live bird in this box," I told him, "And if you don't believe me, you can see for yourself." I held the box to him so he could take a look. That kind of shook him up because he stepped back from me. But then he put his pudgy hand, real slow-like, on the rim of the box. He still wouldn't open it, though. He said, "You sure you got a bird in this box and not a rubber snake or something."

I said "Why don't you open it and find out?"

All the kids by this time began to crowd around Carl and me and some of them started urgin' Carl to open the box. Carl said, "If you're playin' a trick on me, I'll rub your face on the floor." I kind of doubted that, but I didn't say so. I said "Now seein' how curious you are about what's in this box, then you better open it quick because I'm not going to stand here all day waitin' for you to make up your mind."

Carl snatched the lid off and jumped back a foot at the same time. He then came up again and looked real careful in the box. "There ain't nothin' there!" he said. The other kids shoved closer to get a look inside the box. Benny, Hilda, and Curly—they all said the same thing, that there weren't nothin' in the box.

I put the lid back on the box and said, "I gotta keep the lid on because if I don't, she might take a notion to fly away and not come back."

I walked away then and left them standing with their mouths hangin' open. I knew that just as soon as school got out, it'd be all over Tendle county that Toby Grogan had lost his marbles good and proper.

When Pa came home from town that evening, I wasn't a bit surprised to hear him bellow for me as soon as he hit the kitchen door. Ma said angrily, "Hush up! There's no reason in the world to come in here shouting at the top of your voice! What's the boy done?"

"Every place I stopped in town, people were asking me what was wrong with Toby. It seems he made quite a spectacle out of himself at school today."

"How?" Ma asked.

"Something about him having hallucinations. They think he's crazy, though they didn't come right out an' say it. Toby . . .! Come down here! I want to talk to you!"

I was down already, so I just walked into the kitchen and said "Hi, Dad. Supper ready, Ma?"

"Forgit about your supper," Pa said. "What have you been doing at school?"

"Not so bad, Pa. I got the best grade in class on my division problems, and Mrs. Kenly says I got a good chance to win the county spelling"

"That's not what I mean. What's this nonsense about a hot box with nothin' in it?"

"Oh, you mean the box I had at school?"

"Yes, I mean the box you had at school. The empty box. The box you told the kids had a bird in it."

I said slowly, "There was a bird in it."

Pa, softening his tone a little, said, "There was? What kind of bird? A dead barn swallow?"

"No Pa," I said, looking him square in the eye. "It was a blue-nosed robin."

Pa flinched. Ma clenched her hands against her mouth. Then Pa hit me. I thought he knocked my o' head clear off my shoulder. His open hand spun me half way around and dropped me on the floor with one swipe.

Ma screamed, "Jess!" and before I really knew I was down, she was kneeling and had my spinning head in her arms. She snapped at Pa, "Dampen that clean dishtowel and bring it to me!"

Pa, lookin' guilty and confused, offered Ma the towel from his big hand. I stood up wobbily and Ma dabbed the

blood from my lips. Then gently twistin' me around by the shoulders so's I could face her, she almost pleaded, "Toby, why?"

I turned around to face Pa and I said, "You had a right to hit me, Pa. I told a lie. There weren't any bird in that box, a blue-nosed robin or any other kind. But I was hopin' there was. One somebody else could see for me. The way Sissy, you, and Ma could when I couldn't. I thought it was silly then, but I miss the blue-nosed robin now. When we had that blue-nosed robin, you, Ma, and I had plenty to talk about even when there really weren't anything to talk about. When we had that blue-nosed robin, Ma would scold me once in a while when I had it comin' to me and you and she acted like you knew each other." I felt the tears comin' but I bit my lip hard. "Pa, I sure wish somebody else could have seen the robin in that box." I left them then, and climbed back up to my room. Ma, still kneeling, was staring at the floor. Pa was watching her.

When I got back to my room, I opened the window and threw the hot box into the falling snow. The cold wind burned my wet cheeks as I watched the lid flip off the box and roll toward the ground. And for a second, just for a second, I swore I heard a robin chirp.

Forest Etude

by James M. Jenkinson, Albuquerque, N.M.

Suspended
in tree tendrils green
with
 breathless
 anticipation
of lazy cloud drift
Falling leaves
blend
 tweed paint swirls
on Autumn's canvas
Sheen-smooth rocks
resist
 the playful push
 and slide
of searching
 streams

Chant For The Men

by Jerry White

(Last Verse)

The old men:
Sit on the doorstep,
Stand on a streetcorner,
Lean against a lamp post,
Squint at the sun.
"Git'n hot."
"Gonna git hotter."
Chew on a chaw,
Spit on the ground,
Take out a knife,
Cut on a plug.
"Hava chaw?"
"Reckon I will."
Large, large hands,
Brown like the soil,
Gnarled plow-hands,
Hooked on a gallus.
"Corn git'n tall."
"Be a good crop, don't burn."

(chorus)

Tap with a shoe,
Tap with a cane,
Tap on the ground,
Tap, Tap, Tap . . .

(Middle verse)

The young men:
Sit on a chair,
Squat on the floor,
Lean on a cue-stick,
Gaze at the table.
"Nice shot."
"Couldn't hardly miss."
Take out a bottle,
Pass it around,
Wipe off a mouth
On the back of a hand.
"Kinda burns goin down."
"You're perty soft."
Walk around the table,
Look for a shot,
Five-ball in the corner,
Mark up the score.
"Hell, I won!"
"The hell you did!"

(chorus)

Click of the cue-balls,
Click of a heel,
Click of a knife,
Click, Click, Click . . .

(First verse)

The very young men:
Lie on a bank,
Sit on a dock,
Float in the water,
Stare at the sky.
"What is God?"
"I dunno."
Dive underwater,
See the fish swim,
Come to the surface,
See the birds fly.
"How was I born?"
"I dunno."
See a dead fish,
Floating on the water,
See a dead bird,
Lying on the bank.
"Why do things die?"
"I dunno."

(chorus)

Splash of a fish,
Splash of a boy,
Splash of the water,
Splash, Splash, Splash . . .

"It's OK Now, Chief"

by J. B. Young

"Briargate of communications, what's that, yes chief, sure chief, I'll get on it right away, thank you sir." As the small, rat-faced man put the phone back on the receiver he chuckled. His narrow, stooped shoulders trembled at first, then shook convulsively as he laughed openly. "He heee, the chief ordered the plan, let's get moving," he shrieked to a pudgy, bulldog-faced man who crouched over an array of charts at the far end of the room.

Ignoring the staid, expressionless face of his co-worker, who looked up blankly, Briargate scurried to the vault where the top-secret records were kept.

"We'll have to compile a complete list by tonight in order to take them by surprise," he talked on, ignoring the dull "uh huhs" that Gabriel, his fat co-worker, constantly uttered.

Mastering the complex combination of the safe, Briargate pulled on the bolt, using all his puny strength in the effort, and wrenched the door open.

"Phew, it's hot in here, why don't we see if the funds committee will appropriate money for a fan?" he muttered as he clawed at the piles of bound folders.

Each folder held the complete record of a commune member, from childhood to the present. Each day new information poured into this, the central communications office, further enriching the stockpile. A large staff worked constantly, cataloging conversations and random remarks made by each commune member. Later, if a member should go astray, a ready past conduct report would be available for consideration by the chief.

"It's a good thing the chief started this file, otherwise we might not know where to start," Briargate panted as he moved back and forth carrying armload on armload of folders to a long table.

"Uh huh," Gabriel grunted as he rubbed his bulging stomach, "the chief thinks of everything."

Ignoring the uncouth Gabriel as best he could, Briargate thumbed through the first of the folders, noting certain names on a list.

"Too bad these members have to be operated on," he said to no one in particular, "they would have been some of our most promising district leaders. But like the chief always says, one bad situation and the commune gets a lasting black eye."

"Uh huh," came the inevitable reply, "we got one black eye already and the chief don't want no more."

"One black eye is right," Briargate thought, "a situation like that can ruin years of meticulous propaganda. As an intelligentsia commune we have to keep a constant watch over the district leaders we turn out, otherwise they might stray from the party line and spark an uprising."

"What's the chief plannin' to do now? Gabriel asked, "stop another uprising?"

"Do your work and don't ask questions," Briargate snapped back annoyed that Gabriel should read his thoughts.

With Gabriel temporarily silenced, Briargate settled down to his task. As he worked through each pile of folders, his mind wandered. "The chief has sure stabilized things since he came here," he mused, "I can remember when members would deviate constantly and go unchecked! Two years ago, for example right after the chief came, some district leaders agitated for local authority." Smiling to himself Briargate spoke his thoughts, "the chief sure handled the liquidation smoothly, the overseer didn't even investigate."

"Huh?" Gabriel demanded, "what'd you say?"

His train of thought shattered, Briargate moved to the telephone, ignoring Gabriel who looked at him in anticipation.

Dialing, he waited to speak until a voice came from the receiver, "Hell chief, I've got the leaders, shall I read them?" Consulting the list he had compiled, "Jakes, Lawrence Bronzely, Orwell, Frank, and Sims, but Frank and Bronzely are the bad ones. All? O.K. chief, if you say so, I'll notify the infirmary. Right. Good night sir."

The six sleepy commune members were led into the hospital by a white frocked doctor and several guards who held revolvers on the six.

"What is this," one demanded, "dragging us out of bed in the middle of the night at gun point?"

"Shut up you!" a guard threatened, "you and your ideas!"

"You and your ideas," the doctor giggled as he repeated, "we'll see about that!"

Each commune member was led into a small room where two attendants held him while a third administered an injection which quieted the patient instantly. After the member was quiet he was carried to another room and placed on a table beneath a circular green light.

"Scalpel," the doctor muttered.

"Scalpel," the nurse echoed.

"Forceps," the command.

"Forceps," the reply.

And so on through each of six identical operations performed that night.

"Chief?" Briargate questioned the receiver, "good morning sir, we got it done. All six, frontal labotomy, we won't have them to worry about anymore, right chief, thank you sir."

"Mission well done," he murmured over and over again as he carried the folders back to the safe. "The chief is pleased with our mission," he called to Gabriel, suddenly happy with everything and everyone, including Gabriel. No longer was he an insignificant figure, he was now Mr. Briargate!

"Those trouble-makers are taken care of, huh?"

"Right, taken care of," Briargate replied, "they're just like all the other commune members now."

"Well, that's best," Gabriel murmured, pausing to belch loudly, "a few like them, with ideas I mean, can mess a commune up good!"

Magic Words

By Kathleen Ferree

Magic words were once used by man
To make his dreams come true;
For all that he would think and plan
He'd say a magic word or two.

Magic words are used today
To help us. They are these:
"I'm sorry." "How are you?" "Good day!"
"Thank you." "You're welcome." "Please."

Spurned

by Ray Hoops

The stairs protested his weight with a noisy cadence something akin to that of a drunken musician attempting to tune a battered horn. But the gnarled old man, through over-exposure, had become insensitive to the noise as well as the foul animal odor of the rat-trap apartment building which seemed to, without changing, year after year attract the same bickering, slouchy, beer-drinking tenants.

The old man, however, was not impressed with the dramatic significance of his surroundings. His gaze was firmly fixed upon the door at the top of the stairs he was climbing. He reached the landing and hesitated. He seized the door knob and hesitated again. Then, with an air of desperate resolution, he opened the door.

A scene equally as sordid as the rest of the building greeted his eyes. The room was dim with almost all the light coming from a tear in one of the drawn shades. The dirty wall paper hung in shreds and the apartment smelled of unwashed bodies. The old sofa and the lone overstuffed chair had numerous holes in them and the stuffing hung out. Under foot, the old linoleum, with its numerous bare spots, had the gritty feel of the sand that is placed on ice to prevent slipping.

In one corner of the room, lay something vaguely human. She was very fat with dirty blond hair. Her dress gaped between buttons at the seams, and her toothless jaw sagged on her breast. On her feet were old shoes, which apparently were designed for an athletic court, but now they were torn in various places and were held on her feet with twine. Her dress was above her knees and the portion of limb that was exposed was swollen and the veins were large and purple. The assortment of empty bottles around her were so numerous that they defied enumeration. Her breathing was very loud and she moved slightly from time to time.

She had not always been this way, he recalled. There had been a time when she had been beautiful. It was, perhaps, her beauty that had caused him to love her—to love her so much, in fact, that he had been willing to marry her in spite of the fact that she was a prostitute. Their relationship had been pleasant, if not happy, when she was young and he had

loved her though he knew she would never, because of the thirty odd years difference in their ages, love him. He had pursued her with all the foolishness of an old man. Every rebuff was a defeat almost as bad as dying and each kind word was a memory to be hoarded. Then, as he finally realized that her affection depended upon his wallet, he had decided that his only chance of keeping her was to marry her.

"Funny," he thought, as he copied the numerals on the gas meter and prepared to leave, "I was crushed when she refused me."

Danger!

by A. Seer

Some of these days I am going to check back and see if *The Vehicle* was not inadvertently "launched" in an eclipse. Or maybe it just slipped its stays and struck the waves too soon. Or maybe the omen was one we couldn't have read had we seen it. But, somehow or other, to lay hand to the helm (God steer you through my metaphor!) of *The Vehicle* has been calamitous—to the helmsman's blessed state of celibacy.

To the blessed state of singleness, mind you! One's other misadventures aboard *The Vehicle* could make a fascinating chronicle, but what misadventure compares to losing one's self? Yet here are the sad facts:

A young bachelor named Fred Miller projected *The Vehicle* in the early weeks of 1959. At that time he was squiring various co-eds about. He invited a pretty senior, Linda Lyons, to be assistant editor of his new magazine—and after putting out three issues of it, *wedlock befell them—both!* They honeymooned in Oregon, and it was from Portland last week that they wrote me they had launched another sort of vehicle—an eight-pound boy.

The Vehicle became the property, last June, of Robert Mills French. To assist him, he chose Mary Ellen Mockbee. (I would say "pretty" Mary Ellen, but she is *still* assistant editor and would doubtless pencil out my adjective.) When school resumed, the two got out three numbers of their magazine, and wham!—Dire Matrimony struck again.

Young sir, young ma'am! Do you aspire to maneuver *The Vehicle*? Weigh well the likely eventuality! Three little issues was all *they* lasted, remember! Three little issues!

Genecide

by George Foster

In the beginning I created heaven and earth. I made all the underbrush and beasts; I made the fishes in the ponds. It was peaceful in my garden and the silence was sweet. Lacking anything better to do, I molded from the dust the creature now called 'man'. After forming man, I decided he was dull and blew life into his nostrils—this was old hat among us immortals—and, lo, he came to life. At first he gloried in the goodness of my garden, but soon he became dissatisfied and proceeded to tear down the tall trees, to slay the beasts of the underbrush, and to pursue the fishes in the ponds. In desperation I tore from him a rib, but to my dismay it grew and grew and, lo, I had created 'woman'. She assumed the position of 'help-meet' of man and has controlled him ever since.

Throughout time have I pursued my creation, trying to stop his destruction-bent path. He hath destroyed my green garden; he hath created for himself pain and sin. Lo, though I walk in the valley of chaos, I fear no evil, for I have put science in the hands of man. With this gift he shall question my rule. He shall destroy the green garden; he shall slay the beasts of the underbrush and the fishes in the ponds. In the end he shall bring the cloud of destruction upon himself. Then, shall silence rule once more, and I shall rest.

To a Stern Parent

By C. E. S.

From the time that my years numbered seven,
You lectured and disciplined me well;
So someday I may get to heaven
Though all that you gave me was hell!

Reservation

By Neil O. Parker

Sticks and stones may break my bones,
But words in vain assail me;
For them, my dear, I'll shed no tear—
Unless the damned things fail me!

The Worm and I

by Richard Blair

Gad! What fascinating things:
Coelom, anus, segment rings,
There, in jumbled disarray,
They lie on the dissecting tray.
Pins thrust through each slimy part:
Septam, setae, crop, and heart.

Wielding scalpel like a wizard,
I decimate your little gizzard.
Like a Mau Mau, throwing fits,
I carve you into minute bits.
Worm, I hold no grudge for thee.
I just don't like biology.

One Way --- Non-Transferable

by Robert Mills French

Wheels spin wildly on a capillary of steel:

CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK carry me far . . .

Whistle the dawnspring, flee from the shadow:

CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK carry me far . . .

Race from the jungles of steel and stench,
Race towards the far land, the clean land, the light:

CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK reach for a star . . .

Goodness and peace, relief from despair,
Pull now, strain now, over the brink:

*CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK flash through the
void . . .*

Sound clarion voices; stop, we've arrived.
Seek out the answer; redcap—my soul.

*CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK blissleep, I've
come . . .*

Hasten from lifetrain into the dawn,
Wait—a leader, a slave, a cry.

CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK drawing away . . .

Fly soul, cling life, climb on and stay.

CLICK CLACK, CLICKETY CLACK back to the clay . . .



Photograph by Vern Richey

Northlight

A gem-cutter holds a diamond to the north-light—a very special light which makes clear the quality of the stone gleaming in it. Any flaw or impurity, no matter how well-hidden, is exposed in its probing rays.

Held in the northlight
by unknown appraiser,

One instance of time
may a man know his worth;

Resign him forever
to gloom whence he came,

Or, seeing his flaws,
bring his soul to rebirth.

—EDS.

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