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The Vehicle

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The Vehicle

Publication office, 716 Johnson, Charleston, Ill.

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ROBERT MILLS FRENCH
Editor

MARY ELLEN MOCKBEE
Assistant Editor

To The Reader

In order that no misunderstandings concerning the policy of *The Vehicle* need exist, a re-statement of purpose appears necessary.

The Vehicle is intended to provide an outlet through which the creative writer of our area may present his works to the public. We say nothing of its being a means of expression. The writing itself is that; the opinions found herein are those of the individual author. This magazine is his means of exhibit.

We invite manuscripts of all sorts—short stories, novelllettes, articles, poems, fillers, and cartoons. We shall pass our best judgment on what we receive and publish what we like of it. We invite the readers to pass judgment upon us, too, and we shall publish some of the letters in which they do so—if they are kept short.

The Vehicle is an independent publication with no official affiliation with Eastern Illinois University. The main body of our contributors have been university students, but all writers are encouraged to utilize this opportunity for publication.

The Vehicle wishes the reader a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Judy

by Robert Mills French, E.I.U.

"The lousy broad deserved what she got," he muttered harshly as he slammed the car into gear. Spinning the wheel savagely, Jed pulled out into the lane of oncoming traffic and mashed the accelerator to the floor. Lurching like a frightened animal, the car raced forward out of the fast-moving lane.

As he cruised along with traffic, Jed thought back over what had recently entered into his dull routine. For three years now he had been a student in a small midwestern teachers' college. To look back on the time spent in that decadent burg, where the school was located, was bitter to him. The loneliness of that town when all the students went home for a holiday had played hell with Jed's nerves.

He laughed a forced laugh as he recalled the Christmas of his sophomore year. All alone in his quiet cell of a room, he had gotten very drunk. Throwing on an old coat he had stumbled out into the cold winter night to escape his loneliness. As he walked along, noticing the bright, myriad-colored lights along the street, a foolish notion came upon him.

In magnificent drunken tenor he had serenaded every house he passed. It had made him happy at the time; yes, he actually had thought he was spreading good cheer. But then the cops came. It turned out that some miserable old frump had turned in a complaint because he disturbed the peace. So he had spent Christmas Eve in jail, and as all the world about him celebrated the world's awakening, he sobbed his misery to deaf walls.

After that, everything had gone wrong. His fellow students, who never had paid him much attention, avoided him completely. He had tried to make friends at first but now he ignored everyone. He would show them he didn't need them!

Jed's thoughts jumped from the past to reality as he slowed the car and turned on to the side road. The motor strained painfully as the car again gained speed. "Why the hell shift?" he mused. "Why bother?"

"Why bother?"—that had been his byword of late. His grades had fallen to the point of no return but the incentive was gone and he threw his books aside with contempt.

"Even Judy," he thought aloud, "even her." How did it happen? How?! Why had he let her enter his private domain of unhappy brooding?

Remembering her, he once more dropped into deep thought. Although he never spoke to her he had wanted to. Several times he had started to approach her but at the last moment he thought better of it. "Why be friendly?" he would say to himself. "Why bother?"

After that he had seen her often and always he would look away so as not to let her know he noticed her. At the Records Office he had found out her address and class schedule. Many hours he had waited for her to pass by on her way to class. Very carefully he would park down the block from her house to see whom she dated and where she went.

Recognizing his destination a short distance ahead, Jed down-shifted and eased the car down the shoulder on to an old log road now grown over with grass so that it was barely noticeable from the highway. Swaying violently the car droned on into the darkness of the forest out of sight to all who might pass. Painfully slow, Jed eased the car off the path into a small clearing.

As Jed shut the motor off, he lay back into the seat and gazed out the window, seeing nothing. His mind wandered and he thought of his childhood. Why had he had to have a mean old aunt who wouldn't allow him to dance or do what he wished? He had hated her and all the restrictions she put on his life and now he hated her more than before. The Sundays he had had to serve as altar boy in his uncle's church still caused him to shudder with hate. But that had passed and he had come to college. So here he was—and he hated his aunt and uncle, he hated Judy because he could not dance with her, and he hated himself most of all.

As he thought of Judy again, he remembered the night he had parked very near her house. He recalled how he had almost screamed aloud with envy as he watched her date embrace her. The plan was hatched that night as he sat quietly watching, suffering.

The thought passed as Jed got out of the car and walked back to the trunk. Opening it he winced as the hinge squeaked harshly, sending shivers down his spine. With great effort he lifted an object out of the trunk and staggered off down a footpath. Good thing he remembered this old farm that he had found in his lonely wanderings. "Good thing!" he wheezed through labored breath.

All those weeks he had waited with only one idea. He shrugged bitterly as he thought of the intricate planning that had produced only more frustration. He had thought, "If only I can get her all alone, with no one else around, then I can talk to her." But the opportunity had never arisen until tonight.

Earlier, as he waited in the bushes mulling over what he would say to her, he had dreamed. He saw them together and she was laughing lightly. But then she had come out of the darkness and the dream was lost. He had stepped out into her path and started to speak, but no words would come. Startled by him, she stopped and looked up at him fearfully.

Jed stopped and the pounding of his heart throbbed in his ears. A soft groan escaped him as he threw her body into the abandoned well, and it continued long after the echoing splash died away. "Why did you scream?" he choked, as he fought the tears that blinded him. "Why did you scream, Judy, when all I wanted to tell you was that I loved you?"

The Farmer

by Robert C. Miller

Like a dozen gulleys across an arid plain,
The burnt-lines etch strange paths down his face.
And two sunken eyes of tired blue with
Red rims stare beyond all the walls on earth.
Thus sits the tired farmer, his fields all tilled,
His harvest laid by, and now like his fields,
Worn and tired, eroded; of all that was coaxed
From his barren soil, not one sheaf came
Out that was not replaced two-fold over from
The farmer's heart and the farmer's hands.

Bah! Humbug!

by The Skeptic

We speak of love—but curse and shove,
We talk of giving—but must receive;
Sales and profits—not peace and love,
With Christmas spirit—ourselves deceive.

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Looking Backward

by The Optimist, EIU

Of the past I hold a wondrous measure:
Both laughter and tears make up the store;
Good times and bad times, but all are the same—
The pleasure is memory, the pain is no more.

Wisdom and Wonder are fed of reverie,
But foul grows the stream that ceases to flow;
The dawn of tomorrow will glow bright anew,
And with the new dawn comes more splendor to know.

Yesterday's galleons have passed into time,
And still is the ship that faces the breeze;
So I'll set my course and steer to adventure:
The past is my guide as I brave strange seas.

Strangers in the Town

By Al Brooks, E.I.U.

They went to watch their sheep by night,
And none of them sat down;
They said they had not trusted quite
The strangers in the town:

Why, that gaunt man whose pregnant wife
Lay in that shed asleep
Was just the sort—they'd stake their life—
To try to steal a sheep!

And there were others of his make,
So they would not sit down
But stood and bid the devil take
The strangers in the town.

Then came the star, and then the song
Of angels overhead,
And then the time to rue the wrong
That could not be unsaid.

Their names are lost, their bones are dust;
But still we follow down,
Aping their old misplaced mistrust
Of strangers in the town.

Not Once Only

by A. B. Carter, E.I.U.

Not that time only, nor that place alone
Had music out of heaven. Not for them
Who watched their huddled sheep when frost on stone
Silvered the stable-walls in Bethlehem
Was there a special star, and none for us:
The wise men bringing gifts are of our day;
They come, as usual, with the smallest fuss,
Adore as briefly, go as soon away.
No, every town is Bethlehem tonight;
So search the winter sky and find the star—
It will be hanging low and shining bright
Above the promise where the wise men are;
Then when the silver bells of midnight cease,
Hear heaven's reassurance, "On earth, peace!"

Ology

(in skinny letters)

by Ron Kelly, E.I.U.

The three stood near the latrine, picking up powder puffs. And she walked by and spoke: "Lo."

And as she did they turned and faced her but didn't speak.

And she touched one and fondled him. And he turned to look into her eyes. And as he did she held him high. And as they sat down, there wasn't any music. They just sat there high.

"Hi."

And as they sat there, she held the one high up higher and just looked and turned him to face the door.

Doors can't speak!

And as the three were four they sat. The puffs had quit fluffing.

October 25, 1959

What a scary place.

Snow

by Jean Nightingale, E.I.U.

Falling quietly
Muffling sound
Drifting lazily
————— Snow.

Moment of Power

by J. B. Young, E.I.U.

Mr. Schramm had not set the alarm the night before, so it was after nine when he awoke. He regarded vacantly for a moment the twin parallelograms of sunshine that the windows threw upon the russet carpet near his bed. Then came the thought, with a trace of panic, that he would be late at the office. But he remembered at once that today was the last day of the month. He relaxed, lying on his back, his arms crossed under his head, pillow-fashion. Presently he yawned, and his mouth, finishing its gape, settled into a little smile, and his eyelids closed luxuriously.

It was the last of the month—his day *not* to hurry. He would go down to the office about 10:30—just a few minutes before the special-delivery package arrived from the state capital (the postman came regularly about a quarter of 11:00). For *that*, he had to be there. But he would attend to no other matters the last day of the month.

Down there at the office, the telephone would ring continually from nine until eleven, and Miss Baker, his assistant, would be asked the same question by half a hundred people: "Have the checks arrived?" And Miss Baker would slowly, as always, lose her equanimity, and her pretty mouth would grow angry and her big eyes would flash behind her glasses, and she would forget to be polite, and the callers would say, at coffee-break, that she was getting to be pretty damned rude and that somebody ought to tell her off. Eventually Miss Baker herself would go for coffee, sitting petulantly and defensively alone while she drank it, and the telephone would be answered by one of the quintet of praying mantises that kept the books in the outer office.

But let Miss Baker suffer a little. Then she would be glad to see him when she returned from her coffee break. Then when she went to hang her short jacket in the narrow ell of the office where the outer wall was a tier of postoffice boxes for the employees, he would follow her. And when she put up her hands to hang the jacket, he would slip an arm around her, and, cupping her left breast with his right hand, turn her about. As her mouth came around to his, he would kiss her, and, at the same time, press her against the wall with the full weight of his body. Then he would tell her crudely what he was going to do to her and when.

And all the time she would stand there passively and say nothing.

Always on this last morning of the month, before he got up, there came to him one of the two or three scraps of poetry he had ever learned. This he had read many times under a picture of scant-clad bodies behind a bar in Chicago, when, twenty years ago, he had been studying at a college there to become a certified public accountant.

. . . to live and lie reclined

On the hills like gods together, careless of mankind.

He had been married even at that time, with kids aged three and five, and a dull, fat wife, with whom to lie reclined was not, nor had ever been, to be like a god. With Miss Baker—all the difference in the world. He knew that, through fifty offices, the rumor ran that Miss Baker was his mistress. Too many people, opening their mail-boxes, had heard their undertones through the apertures. Now and then, no doubt, someone peeping into his box had seen the beginning, or the end, or the middle of a kiss.

So what? Miss Baker was almost forty now, and she had better be loved before the tight bun at the back of her head that pulled all the wrinkles out of her brow became any tighter. And he—well, his kids were twenty-three and twenty-five now, married and away; the fat, dull wife was fatter and duller; and he himself was a little paunchy, a little stoop-shouldered, and more than a little thin of hair on the top of his head. Who would blame him for making hay before the evil days came when he could have no pleasure in them (*them* meaning women)?

He moved over in the bed and pretended for a moment that another lay reclined like a goddess there, careless of man- or womankind, and then he sighed deeply and got up. He heard his wife vacuuming below and hurried to bathe, shave, and dress, and to go out without seeing her.

He tarried over coffee and doughnuts at a snack bar and finally arrived at his door almost simultaneously with the postman who brought the package from the state capital. Miss Baker was still out on her coffee break; so he signed for the package and went to Miss Baker's uncluttered desk to open it. He indicated to one of the praying mantises that she was to answer the telephone, and he opened the package and thumbed through its contents.

At home in bed, he had known his moment of godlike leisure; now ensued his moment of godlike power: he held in his hands the life sustenance of his whole institution. He knew that they earned from two hundred to nearly two thousand per month, yet not one out of ten could stretch a month's pay two days beyond the end of the month. Suppose he, seated here like Providence among improvidence, decided to drop this batch of vouchers into the incinerator? Chaos would ensue. Chaos? Worse than that—disaster! True, the checks could be duplicated in a few weeks, but panic and distress would strike the institution's family. Mr. Schramm smiled to think of the number of car payments that would become overdue, the number of insurance policies that would lapse, the number of notices of discontinuance of service that would be mailed. Harold Chase would not be able to get his new wife and baby out of the hospital. Miss Parker would be unable to get her glasses back from the optometrist. Harry Fergus would be arrested again for failure to pay alimony, and Blanche Skinner would have to postpone her wedding. The monkey would crawl back onto the back of Dave Bennett in Public Relations, and poor Miss Baker's idiot sister would be ejected from the home in Natchez. Bill Bray's kid would have to postpone his tonsillectomy, and Mabel Foster's daughter would begin to skip school for lack of decent shoes to wear. Maureen Phillips would probably have to give up night school. And certainly the houses of good liquor and ill repute along Sixth Street would feel a slump in patronage. It wouldn't be stretching the truth much to say he held their lives in his hand—at least he held the shape and substance of their lives in his hand. Should he drop the checks into the incinerator?

Why not? And then, without a word about it to anyone, walk through all the offices and enjoy the irony of their respect! He was a nonentity yesterday, and would be a nonentity tomorrow—nonentity with dandruff—but today everybody would greet him with a smile. They would get up from their desks and say, "Here's the man we've been wanting to see!" and the girls would say, "Here's my hero! I'll buy you a drink if you'll give me my check *now!*" He'd lap it all up, ostensibly; then he'd go back and borrow the president's inter-com to tell them all a horrible accident had befallen the checks. Think of their attitudes tomorrow! But they wouldn't forget. Should he burn the checks?

To enjoy and strengthen the temptation, Mr. Schramm gathered up all the checks and went to stand near the incinerator. The feeling was so delicious that he opened the in-

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—Shakespeare

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cinerator door and let the bundle of checks hang over destruction. Then he became aware that all the praying mantises were watching him in horror.

"Mr. Schramm," cried one. "Are those our *checks*?"

"Yes, Miss Pringle," he replied, smiling at her over his shoulder but not moving the hand in the incinerator shaft.

Miss Pringle sank in wordless terror on her chair.

And then two doors opened. From the next office came the vice-president. And from the hall came Miss Baker. Miss Baker went into the narrow ell by the postboxes to hang up her jacket. The vice-president said,

"Schramm, are the checks here? I'd like to have mine if they are; otherwise, we're going to have pork and beans for lunch at my house."

Mr. Schramm was already on his way back to his desk.

"Yes, sir, they are," he said. "I was just finishing checking them. Here is yours, and I'll put the rest of them in the boxes immediately."

The vice-president accepted his check and went wordlessly back to his own office. Miss Pringle breathed again. The other praying mantises returned uneasily to their work.

Mr. Schramm took the rest of the checks into the post-office ell. Miss Baker was straightening her make-up in a purse mirror. He did not have to turn her around to kiss her. He made his threat in the same rude manner as always. Miss Baker chuckled.

"As far as you're concerned," she said, "I'll die a virgin."

He did not know whether it was threat or regret. Either way it would all come out to the same thing: one day he and Miss Baker would lie reclined like god and goddess together, careless of mankind. Moments of divine power might be fleeting, but they always came again—and regularly, to paymasters.

Life

by Robert C. Miller

A wrought clay crock by turns of fate
Becomes a Grecian Urn all gilded and glazed,
And yet it's as empty now . . . as empty it was.

The Restless Sea

by Rhonda McGowan, E.I.U.

Clear and sterile, the empty blue of the sky contrasts sharply to the angry sea. Only a distant haze far on the horizon suggests relief from the cold bleakness of that lifeless infinity, an unfeeling cloak of death that holds all life subdued. Nothing save that restless desert, the sea, moves in the spell of it.

Like dying men the sea rises up in protest, only to fail and crash back in a swirl of forgetfulness at the highest point of the cycle of life. As far as time extends, that same sea rises and falls, rises and falls.

Driven to destruction by a cruel wind, the sea is helpless in the face of the inevitable. Never to know rest, it is driven on by the unrelenting breath of desire. Spreading chaos across that suffering waste, the wind races on howling with delight.

In a reckless stir of confusion that has no end, the sea bucks and plunges rebelliously towards the unknown horizon that few attain. All start that way, but many fail in a spray of destruction and are forgotten in the sameness of that tormented plain.

An island lying on the horizon gives off a ray of hope across the violent sea. Those that reach this point are few, and many are smashed to nothingness as headlong they race into the reef of reality. Some do not smash headlong but drift with the current to attain the peaceful lagoon in the lee of that island of truth surrounded by a sea of torment and despair.

Approaching of the Yule

by Roger Perkins, E.I.U.

About the 20th, or so
Love is flowing free,
Cards and cheerful greetings
A spirit one can see.
And as the day approaches
The kindly feelings grow,
But shortly after New Year's
Where do these feelings go?

The Old Model

by Mary Ellen Mockbee, E.I.U.

As new and streamlined as a 1960 Cadillac—that's the kind of news we like to read. But once in a while, a wobbly, but solid old Model T goes chugging by, and the present generation stops to look. It's fun to see what our ancestors thought and did. We recapture some of the spirit of 1926 when the old Model T proudly rattles by, and we recapture the atmosphere of Eastern thirty years ago when the early editions of the *Eastern State News* are spread out before us.

We often feel that past generations were anything but streamlined in thought and appearance, and, particularly, that they were dowdy and lacking in fashion-consciousness. It might be a surprise, then, to most of us to pick up the *Eastern State News* of September 17, 1928, and read "What the Well-Dressed College Man Will Wear":

"Balloon trousers have made their exit. Trousers will be wide but not baggy. This means, of course, that suspenders are snapping back into place. A very novel effect is obtained by wearing suspenders, socks, and tie to match, and having a 1914 Ford of the same color to complete the ensemble.

"Garters will be worn just above the ankle. They will not harmonize with the above mentioned suspenders and socks. Therefore they will be visible.

"When the bituminous plague begins, grey collars will be in vogue to match the soot.

"Green, purple, and orange striped blazers are just THE thing; thanks to this ruling, street lights will be no longer needed. However, the city fire department will take on an extra force."

It looks as if tongue-in-cheek humor is a durable fashion, even if suspenders and garters have not survived the years.

'Tis the Season

by R.M.F.

Christmas comes but once a year,
I thank the heavens for that;
The sacred Babe is lost I fear
As greedy merchants grow fat.

The Spirit of Christmas

by Kathleen Ferree, E.I.U.

What is the spirit of Christmas?
Is it Santa and reindeer and snow?
Is it tinsel, fir trees, and holly,
And a kiss under green mistletoe?

No, Love is the spirit of Christmas
To shine in the hearts of all men,
A gift that increases with giving
And returns to be given again.

Christmas in the Heart

by Kathleen Ferree, E.I.U.

"Christmas", they say, "is for children."
In a manner of speaking, it's true,
For receiving gifts is for children
And Santa is their treasure, too.
An adult must find a new meaning
Or Christmas means nothing to him:
Santa has lost his attraction
And the glow of gift-getting is dim.
I've found Christmas in music and poems,
In giving and sharing, and art.
Within me the heavenly Babe is reborn;
I keep Christmas in my heart.

That's Boys

by Kathleen Ferree, E.I.U.

They get dirty and never care;
They put gray in mothers' hair.
Tramp through puddles made by rain;
Start, but don't finish a model plane.
Won't eat green beans, but love chocolate bars;
Rather than study, they colonize Mars.
Hate girls today, love them tomorrow;
Cause their parents' days to be fraught with sorrow.
Dirty-faced fishermen, maddening joys . . .
That's boys—thank goodness—that's boys!

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