

The University of North Carolina
at Greensboro

JACKSON LIBRARY



CQ

no.825

Gift of:
Deanna Jean Harris
COLLEGE COLLECTION

HARRIS, DEANNA JEAN. All Roads Lead to the Same City. (1971)

Directed by: Fred Chappell. pp.81

The stories in this collection are grouped together because each deals exclusively with black children and their reactions to a white-oriented black middle class world. Several characters are used in different stories for the purpose of suggesting the ambiguous nature of setting and situation of each. However, this is not to imply that any story is dependent upon another. Any thematic relationship or movement the reader may detect is intentional. The unscrutable wisdom found in the Proverbs of Wise Pickle at this point whisper,

To Explicate is to Shatter,
To Discover is to Know for Oneself.

Greensboro
January, 1971

Approved by

Fred Chappell
Thesis Master

This Thesis has been approved by the following
members of the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE SAME CITY

"

by

Deanna Harris

"

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
January, 1971

Approved by

Fred Chappell
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis
Adviser Fred Chappell

Thesis
Committee Members Robert Watson

Walter Barker

Fred Chappell

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Renee, Valerie, Kurt, Keith, Jr. Willie, Melanie, Timothy, Jill, Anthony, Nette, Loren, Reed, Stacy, Kim, Mansey, Billy, Lisa, Felicia, Derek, Keelan, Pernell, and Patrick for helping me remember with the hope that they will never forget.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Recital.....1

Pageant.....25

Red Lilies for Mary Annette.....41

Epilogue: A Street Song.....78

R E C I T A L

Charla squinted at the shadows the venetian blinds made across her bed and up the walls, then remembering, felt under the pillow. Not finding anything, she sat up and threw the pillow on the floor. Only two quarters; cheap old good fairy. She knew she could have gotten more if she'd waited longer, but the day before she'd heard her mother sneak and call the dentist. So, the only thing to do was tell her daddy to pull the top front tooth or wind up getting nothing. Now big, black fat Webster Frazier would make fun of her and she'd only have two quarters to show for it. Hearing her mother squish down the hall in wet thongs, Charla laid back down so fast that she forgot about the pillow. It was too late to get it though and she barely had time to turn her face toward the wall as the door opened.

"Charla? Honey, mama knows you awake."

Charla lay as still as she could and tried to keep from squeezing her eyes shut too much. The squishes moved into the room, then stopped on the rug.

"Come on now, else you going to be late."

"Hm-m-m? Mama?"

"You get up now while I go put some clothes on, you hear?"

"I don't feel so good and my lips hurt too."

The squishes had gone back out of the room and Charla was afraid she might have lost. "Mama, that good fairy left me only just two quarters."

"Well, how you know she didn't leave some somewhere else, now?"

"You think maybe she left some in my lunchpail like before?"

"Never can tell, but you hurry up now and I'll fix you a pony-tail."

"One in the back?"

"Yeah, but only if you hurry up."

When they turned off Apache onto Yorktown, Charla knew she was going to be late. Nobody on the jungle gym and Mrs. McIntosh, the traffic lady was walking toward her car. That meant the next to the last bell had rung and she'd be the last one to walk in class. Charla got out of the car and ran into the school before her mother could kiss her goodbye. It was bad enough being late without going in with lipstick all over her cheek. The late-late bell rang just as she opened the door to Miss Jackson's room and there was Webster, sitting in the seat behind hers.

"Patricia Kelso."

"Here."

"Samuel Kirkpatrick."

"Here, as usual."

"What?"

"Just 'here' Miss Jackson."

Charla giggled with the rest of the class and almost missed hearing her name called. Jessica was sitting in the row next to hers, but one seat ahead. Charla started to whisper to her, but decided a note would be safer. There was no one around she could trust to pass it; "Teterhead" Mitchell was sitting across the aisle right behind Jessica and Arlington, Webster's best friend was right in front of her: surrounded. She'd have to chance passing it herself.

"Oscar Robert ... Bring that to me Miss Charla Lawrence."

She took the note to Miss Jackson, then sat with a poked out mouth in her seat.

"Well class, since Charla is such a good writer we'll hear her homework report after arithmetic."

Jessica turned around and grimaced an understanding 'I hate Miss Jackson too' at Charla. Then they made times tables up to fifteen on the blackboard before going to the water fountain. When they got back, Charla fidgeted in her seat while Miss Jackson looked through the homework papers. Finally, she motioned to Charla who stomped to the front of the room and almost snatched the paper. She made a face at Arlington because he had been messing with her ponytail at the fountain and started to read.

"My Hobby, by Charla Lawrence. I have many hobbies. I like to make clothes for my dolls on my sewing machine that my grandmother gave me for Christmas. Also I like to play Old Maid and Crazy Eights and Monopoly. My biggest hobby is playing the piano. I have been playing the piano since I was three years old, which is equal to five years all together. I like going to my music teacher who is Miss McDougal's house that is large and pink. My mother is going to buy me a new dress for my recital which is Sunday at three o'clock p.m. at St. Paul's Episcopalian AME. I will play 'O Say Can You See?' which is our national song. It is three pages long. That is my interesting hobbies."

The class clapped until Miss Jackson rapped the desk with her yardstick. It was almost lunchtime and other classes were already in the

halls. The second bell rang at last and the class noisily lined up without Miss Jackson's saying a word. She walked over to the door, closed it and looked at them over the rim of her glasses.

"Well?"

They sat back down reluctantly. Lost again. Charla hoped that when she was big enough, she'd come back to Miss Jackson's class and tell the kids they could line up when they wanted to or she'd beat Miss Jackson up.

"Y'all know the rules, don't you? You've been my homeroom for eight months now."

Webster sighed loudly and started drumming his desk with his fingers. Charla knew he'd do it and that their row would be the last to line up. She wanted to turn around and punch him right in his big fat mouth, making all that noise just so the row would be last.

It was warm so that afternoon in gym, Mr. Hughes let the class go outside. Charla liked the playground best, because inside you couldn't play on the stilts. She picked out the highest pair and challenged Jessica to a race. She knew it wouldn't be hard to beat Jessica because she hadn't learned to walk on stilts at her old school. They dragged the stilts outside to the starting corner and waited while two second graders moved out.

"We're going to have so much fun tonight, Jessica."

"Yeah, what we go do afta we eat?"

"Oh, watch some t.v. I guess. We can play with my dolls too."

"You got some new ones?"

"Just a little paper doll. I got some new clothes for my Teeny

Tiny."

"You sure it go be okay wid yo' daddy if I stays?"

"Jessica! I told you a zillion hundred thillion times its go be okay, didn't I?"

"Yeah, yeah!"

"Come on, its our time."

Charla leaned against the wall, stepped on the stilts, then took a few steps forward and made little circles while Jessica was getting ready. They headed toward the far fence, past the hang bars and little kids' jungle gym. Charla had almost reached the fence when she heard a scuffle and the clatter of wood hitting wood. She turned around and saw Jessica on the ground and Webster and Arlington bent over in laughter. Jessica sat huffing and puffing for about thirty seconds before she threw a clump of dirt at Arlington.

"Hey girl, you can't be throwing no dirt on my friend!"

"You SHUT UP Webster Frazier!"

"You make me, you ole plantation darkie!"

"Yo' mama's one!"

"Girl, you better go on back to IT, MISS-IS-SIP-PI!"

"You leave Jessica alone, Webster Frazier!"

"You stay outta this Miss 'writer' Charla Lawrence!"

"You MAKE me, Mr. Fat Mouth Webster!"

"Better than being a ... uh black squaw's squirty ..."

"Better than being a ... a ... a voodoo witchdoctor's frog-faced

ELEPHANT!"

Arlington yanked Charla's ponytail and Jessica hit him with another

dirt clump.

dirt clump. The fight attracted the attention of all the second graders and pretty soon all the fifth graders too. La June Franklin was about to help Charla pin Webster down because he'd stolen her box of crayons, when Mr. Hughes stopped it. Arlington, who was about ten pounds lighter than Jessica was on the verge of tears. He'd let a stupid girl bloody his nose and tear the badge off his Captain Harvey shirt. The four marched off to the gym office and Mr. Hughes decided to make them apologize in front of the whole class. Webster said he wasn't going to say he was sorry in front of nobody, so he was the only one to get paddled.

Charla hoped that she wouldn't see the blue station wagon outside after school, but there it was. Her mother was going to have a fit about the tear in her blouse because she had just gotten it. She knew she wouldn't get spanked because her daddy wouldn't like that, but she was afraid of the things her mother might say. After waving goodbye to Jessica on the back seat of the school bus, Charla skipped towards the car.

"Hurry up sweetheart. You know Miss McDougal wants you there as soon as possible today."

So far so good, Charla thought, knowing that her mother hadn't seen the blouse yet. "Mama, do I have to go today? I been practicing and I know that old song."

"You ought to be glad to go. When I was your age I always liked taking my lessons."

"Yeah, but that's 'cause Grandma was your teacher and not ugly old Miz McDougal."

"Well, things are different now and besides ... What in the world

happened to that blouse? You been fighting again Charla Elan?"

"I didn't start it. And it wasn't none of my fault."

"What did I tell you about fighting, huh? If your daddy finds out you been up to that kind of stuff again .."

"It was Webster Frazier's fault, just like the last time."

"You go stop hanging 'round with that Jessica Logan like your daddy says."

"Jessica don't have nothing to do with it."

"Well, you go have to change that outfit before you go to your lesson."

They drove the rest of the way home in silence. Charla knew that her mother just had to say something about Jessica; she always did. Her mother wanted her to be friends with Kelli and Mary Annette, but she wouldn't. Just like her mother made her take those stupid piano lessons and practice.

"Now you go change and put those dirty things in the hamper and don't get in Mrs. Bryant's way, you hear?"

"Yes ma'am. Mama, we go pick Jessica up after I go to piano?"

"I guess, but you hurry up now."

Mrs. Bryant was in the kitchen and grunted at Charla when she passed through. Charla wasn't sure about her sometimes. When she was home alone with Mrs. Bryant they'd watch These Passing Days until Bin-Gee's Cartoon Show came on. Mrs. Bryant liked the cartoons too, but sometimes she made Charla watch them upstairs so she could look at something else. After checking out her gappy grin in the hall mirror Charla ran back through the kitchen to get a dill pickle and a cup cake, then out to the car.

"Are you sure you want Jessica to spend the night?"

"She's MY BEST friend!"

"If you two mess up your room, you'll have to clean it up by yourself."

"Jessica can help me."

"No ma'am. Jessica goes home tomorrow morning."

"We wuz going to play though!"

"YOU are going to practice. I'll pick you up in an hour and then we'll go get Jessica."

Charla could hear from the sidewalk Miss McDougal's voice counting, drowing out the sound of the accompanying piano. She didn't bother ringing the door bell and walked into the room full of excited pupils.

"And-a-one-e-and-a-two-e-and-a ... Sit down Charla. We're almost to your place."

Charla squeezed onto the couch next to Kelli who was going to play Yankee Doodle Dandy right before Charla's number.

"You know your piece Charla?"

"Of course I do."

"Mines longer than yours."

"So what? I don't care."

"Fasty. I hope you mess up."

Charla ignored her and started daydreaming about the wonderful time she was going to have with Jessica. She'd show that smarty pants Kelli and not miss one note. Miss McDougal had told Charla's mother that she was one of the best students she'd ever had. Charla could just see herself, up on stage with a big orchestra playing and on the front row, Miss

Jackson, Webster, Frazier, Arlington, Kelli, Jessica and her daddy, all smiling and maybe even crying as she played a really hard song. When it was over, she'd curtsy like a ballerina and the orchestra leader would give her a lot of roses, then she'd curtsy again. It would be just like all the concerts she'd ever stayed awake through in the world, except she would be the star.

"Charla, you mother's outside."

"Yes ma'am, I'm going."

"You be sure to practice with that metronome for me."

"Yes ma'am I will."

Jessica lived in a red and white house on eighty-first street north. Once Charla had ridden her bicycle over to see her and had been spanked by her daddy for going that far. He had told her that it was a dangerous neighborhood and it was much too far away for her to ride. Charla didn't think it was dangerous though and it wasn't that far if you knew the shortcuts. She and Jessica had joined some more girls and hiked through big drainage pipes and then an old car yard. Jessica had showed her how to spot poison ivy and before they went back to the house they'd caught a small turtle. Charla wanted to take it home for a pet, but Jessica's mother told her she'd better let it go.

Jessica didn't come out after the first two honks, so Charla had to go inside to get her. The house smelled like food and Charla remembered the lunch she and Jessica had had that day, greens and cornbread. When Charla had asked her mama to make some, she'd told her that she didn't know how. Jessica had her pajamas and toothbrush in a brown paper sack.

"Jessica, I hope this is okay with your parents."

"Yes ma'am Miz Lawrence, they say its okay wid them."

"I see you didn't tear your clothes up like that silly Charla."

"Well, they wuz tored up a little anyways."

Charla wanted to change the conversation. "We can go to the store and buy some ice cream and candy Jessica after we get home."

"I aint got no money."

"I told you the good fairy left me some money, didn't I?"

"Okay, if you say so."

Mrs. Bryant had left by the time they got back. Charla was glad because sometimes she fussed about little girls messing up as soon as she cleaned up. Her mother went downstairs to call up her friends for the party and the girls went upstairs.

"I sure do like your room Charla."

"I picked out the wallpaper all by myself."

"Wall PAPER?"

"Yeah, what'd you think, somebody painted all those flowers on?"

"I don't know."

"See , here's my Teeny Tiny's new clothes."

"Them fo' dolls?"

"Yeah and when she drinks water, she ...he...he...she wets her pants."

"Just like on t.v.?"

"Come on, let's go watch Captain Harvey downstairs."

That night after supper Charla and Jessica played with the dolls, then with the Crazy Eight cards. Jessica wanted to play the big piano in the living room, but Charla's parents were watching t.v. so she never mentioned it. They played house with the Teeny Tiny and then watched the late show while they played Monopoly. Jessica unmarveled over the fact

that Charla had two beds in her room all by herself. She lied extravagantly about the house they had in It and Charla laughed at her. Finally the t.v. went off and they went to bed.

"Charla you know any ghost stories?"

"Nope, you?"

"I know one that's true."

"Aw, girl."

"Yes it is, my Grandpa said it is."

"Okay, so what's it about?"

"See there was this man who worked for the Youngers and Mr. Younger would always whip on him. Well, one time Mr. Younger whipped him to death and this man come back to haunt him. Well, when he whipped this man, his name was old Ebe, it was lightning and raining and storming real hard. So old Ebe runned into the church house trying to get outten the rain and not get beat. Mr. Younger caught him though, and killed him right there in the church house. Old Ebe runned up to the window with the blood running down him, but it were too late. Now every time it rain, and it late at night, if you go by the church you can see old Ebe's face and blood in the window and hear him hollerin'."

"For REAL, Jessica?"

"That's what my Grandpa said."

"You ever seen him?"

"Sho I done seen him, one Halloween with Marcus."

"Wasn't you scared?"

"Yeah, I wuz scared. What'd you think I wuz go stand there and just watch?"

"Girl, I bet you run so fast they couldn't even see you."

"Sho did..."

"All right girls, go to sleep in there."

They talked for about forty-five more minutes then Jessica started saying less, slower until she didn't say anything at all. Charla lay awake thinking about poor old Ebe. She wished Jessica had never told her the story, but it was just a story anyway, not for real; not for real ... There were no such things as ghosts anywhere in the world; not in It, Mississippi, or Little Rock, Arkansas, or Dallas, Texas, or Chicago or San Francisco or anyplace else in the world including the big department store where she and her daddy were getting on an elevator. Charla looked up and watched the numbers flash the floors they passed. She had to hold onto her daddy's hand because there were a lot of people and she didn't want to get lost when he got off. After picking up people on three more floors, the elevator was so crowded that Charla couldn't see anything except her daddy's wristwatch, ticking like the metronome. Finally, the elevator stopped and the doors opened from the back. They stepped out and it was no longer crowded; as a matter of fact, there was so much space in the room that Charla couldn't see the other end. They were up very high and there were green houses and red hotels at the far end of the board. The other people began to wander around a looking over the edges. Charla figured out it was a giant's room and they were on top of his Monopoly set. She was going to tell her daddy where they were when she realized that she couldn't hear the ticking. Daddy? Daddy? He was at the other end of the board with the other people and they were sliding over the side, down the table leg. She ran to that end, past the oversized houses and hotels and could see them standing below.

6
Jump Charla. Jump! Jump! She wanted to slide down the leg, but she didn't think she could hold on long enough. Then she felt the board begin to vibrate and heard a roar behind her. She turned and there was a lion wandering around the hotels and houses. He hadn't seen her yet, but she couldn't jump, even though it was best. The roar grew and the lion ambled lazily toward her. He was getting so close that she could feel him breathing on her coldly. She wanted to scream and the roaring grew and grew and grew and grew right below her window.

* * *

Mr. Johnson always cut the grass early on Saturdays in the late spring because it was coolest then. Charla looked across to the other bed and saw that the sheets had been taken off. Someone had opened her window and the curtains were blowing against the blinds, which rattled back and forth. Charla knew that cartoons weren't on yet, so she lay and listened to the sound of the lawnmower. Then she remembered Jessica. Her paper bag was gone so she figured that her father had taken her home as soon as Mr. Johnson and his helper Monroe had come. Charla had wanted to give Jessica some paper dolls but it was too late.

Hearing her daddy drive into the garage Charla decided that maybe cartoons were on. She went downstairs to watch the color t.v. and heard her parents talking in the kitchen. She was really sorry that she hadn't gotten to ride home with Jessica because she had wanted to tell her to come to the recital.

"Charla, you watch t.v. for a little while, then I want you to practice."

"Oh, mama! I know that old song."

"Now honey, don't argue with your mommy."

"Daddy, I already know that song, and I want to see Superjetjimmy."

"Roberta, she probably doesn't have to practice that much does she? Miss McDougal doesn't seem to think so."

"All right, but remember you said that tomorrow Charles Lawrence."

"Would you let me forget?"

"She's your talented daughter."

They sat around the crescent breakfast table and ate. Charla kept an ear tuned to the t.v. while her parents talked about grown-up things. Her daddy was going to an NAACP meeting at three o'clock so he could get the low-down on how to present their next case and her mother wanted him to be back in time to help her set up the extra lawn furniture and put up the lights.

"Mama, you go take me downtown to get a dress?"

"Oh god, I'd almost forgotten about that."

"I thought that girl just got something new."

"Well, at the rate she tears them up."

"What?"

"Been fighting with Webster Frazier again."

"Charla, how many time has daddy told you that's not ladylike?

I represent people all the time down in that court and usually they act just like the white people expect them too - ignorant. Now my own daughter acts like some bum off the street, even after she's been taught better. I'm ashamed of you and your perform ..."

"He called mama a bad name."

Her daddy looked at her mama then back at Charla. "Just what did he call your mother?"

Charla took a spoonful of cereal so she could avoid answering until she had thought of a good enough answer.

"I'll bet Kelli Hicks never gets into fights. You're getting too old ..."

"He called my mama an ugly old stuck-up black squaw."

"Why didn't you tell him some of your mama's ancestors were here long before the first slaves and ..."

"I told him his mama was a voodoo witchdoctor."

They both laughed and then dropped the subject of fights entirely. Mr. Johnson had finished with the grass and wanted to know if he should tell Monroe to trim the junipers. Charla's daddy had to go show him which ones had to be cut and her mother told her to get ready for going downtown. Charla figured that she wouldn't mind missing the rest of the cartoons if she could get a new outfit and hurried up to her room to get dressed.

Downtown was a lot better place than Heatherton Hills for finding new clothes. Her mother headed toward the parkade so Charla figured that they would be in town for a long time, which was a good sign. Mr. Logan worked inside and Charla hoped he would take their car, so she could say, 'hi'. She spotted him and started to wave so he would see them.

"Charla, stop that."

"Mama there's Mr. Logan."

"Who? You don't know any Logan."

"Uh huh mama...you know, Jessica's daddy."

"Well, all that waving isn't called for."

Logan walked over to the car and opened the driver's door. Mrs.

Lawrence took the house and office keys off the chain and left only the car key.

"Hi Mr. Logan."

"Well, how's you little lady?"

"Okay."

"How's you today Miz Lawrence?"

"Just fine thank you."

"My daughter sho did enjoy herself."

"Yes, well come along Charla?"

"Tell Jessica I said, 'hi'."

"Sho will honey."

Charla thought her mother should've been a little bit nicer to Mr. Logan since he was her best friend's daddy, but didn't say anything. Her mother was in a fairly good mood and she didn't want to make her angry for anything; not downtown anyway.

After she'd picked out a green and yellow dress with shoes and socks to match, Charla was ready to go home. Her mother decided they should eat so they went into the building where her daddy's office was to the top floor. Up there was a restaurant with big windows so you could see the whole city and part of the floor went completely around. Charla liked to eat on the moving part because she could see everything by the time she had cleaned her plate. Mrs. Dedmond and Andrea were eating when Charla and her mother walked in. Charla hoped they wouldn't sit with them, but her mother had seen them too, so they went over.

"I see you're shopping for this recital too, huh Camille?"

"Yes, Lord, Roberta and my feet are beginning to feel like they belong

to somebody else."

Charla didn't believe Mrs. Dedmon's feet really felt like that.

"You and George still coming tonight aren't you?"

"Wouldn't miss any set of yours Roberta. Hey congratulations!"

"Huh?"

"About being the only soul sister in Miss Alexander's Spring Young Fashionables."

"Oh that! Chile, let me tell you I was scared spitless."

"Now girl. I heard you did a real good job."

"Honey I was seeing stars the whole time; almost forgot to smile."

"I know better than that. Miss Charla, how you today?"

"Fine Miz Dedmon. Hi Andrea."

"Hi, you get a new dress?"

"Yeah and shoes too."

"Me too."

Charla ate in silence, mainly because she was hungry and partly because she didn't like Andrea. Andrea was okay, but she was too smart. She was only in the second grade but she knew as much arithmetic as Charla and she was going to play with the big kids' section in the recital. She must've practiced all the time Charla figured because she never made mistakes while she was taking her lessons.

Charla's daddy had set-up all the extra outdoor furniture and was working on the lights by the time she and her mother returned. Charla liked the grown-ups' parties because they always talked loud enough for her to hear and they always said the wrong thing at the wrong time. Mrs. Quentin would always say something about her first husband who had

to somebody else."

Charla didn't believe Mrs. Dedmon's feet really felt like that.

"You and George still coming tonight aren't you?"

"Wouldn't miss any set of yours Roberta. Hey congratulations!"

"Huh?"

"About being the only soul sister in Miss Alexander's Spring Young Fashionables."

"Oh that! Chile, let me tell you I was scared spitless."

"Now girl. I heard you did a real good job."

"Honey I was seeing stars the whole time; almost forgot to smile."

"I know better than that. Miss Charla, how you today?"

"Fine Miz Dedmon. Hi Andrea."

"Hi, you get a new dress?"

"Yeah and shoes too."

"Me too."

Charla ate in silence, mainly because she was hungry and partly because she didn't like Andrea. Andrea was okay, but she was too smart. She was only in the second grade but she knew as much arithmetic as Charla and she was going to play with the big kids' section in the recital. She must've practiced all the time Charla figured because she never made mistakes while she was taking her lessons.

Charla's daddy had set-up all the extra outdoor furniture and was working on the lights by the time she and her mother returned. Charla liked the grown-ups' parties because they always talked loud enough for her to hear and they always said the wrong thing at the wrong time. Mrs. Quentin would always say something about her first husband who had

been white and that would make Mr. Quentin who was colored get a little angry. Then she would drink too much and get sick and Mr. Quentin would get real mad and sit on the stairs like a little boy Charla thought with his mouth poked out.

"All right young lady, you go practice and use the metronome."

"That's right honey. That timer cost too much for you to just play with."

"Okay, okay, I'm going."

Charla played over the simplified version of "The Star Spangled Banner." The timer didn't help her keep the rhythm so after both her parents were outside, she turned it off. She played it better without all that noise anyway.

Around eight-thirty Mrs. Williamson and her boyfriend Albert came. Charla showed them out to the patio, then went to the kitchen and helped Mrs. Bryant make and arrange little sandwiches. Charla decided that Mrs. Bryant was probably the nicest before parties because she'd let her help and eat some of the goodies. Her mother told her she could watch t.v. downstairs if she promised to stay out of the way. Charla couldn't figure out what had brought on the good luck, but she really didn't care. The Colossal's Revenge was coming on and she had been afraid she wouldn't get to see it in color. Mrs. Bryant fixed her a plate with everything on it about ten and Charla went to her own room to watch t.v.

After Corral went off, Charla decided she'd write in her diary before the late show came on. She turned the t.v. down very low, listened to the party outside for a minute, then searched through her dresser for the diary.

"Dear Diary,

How are you today? I lost your key Tuesday, so I couldn't write in you until tonight. I hope that you aren't mad. Last night Jessica spent the night with me. I don't think my daddy likes her either so much because he taked her home early before I even got up, on Saturday too.

Today when my daddy went to his meeting me and mama went downtown. She told M. Dedmon those meetings and cases are a waste of his time because the people aren't worth it and all they know how to do is fuss. That's the way they are, the grown-ups. And always talking about us kids.

Mama and daddy is having a party right now on the patio. I can't hear them so well. I like the parties in the winters better since I can go in the bathroom and hear them through the heat vents. Also, if I roll out of my bed, someone will come get me and I can get some of their cake.

I don't think I ever told you, but I wish I was Jessica my best friend. She don't have to be in no old recital and she has lots of fun with her brothers and sisters. I'm never going to have any; that's what my daddy says. I don't want none anyway. My hand is starting to hurt so goodbye for now. P.S. (I wished I know what p.s. means.) Yesterday I had a fight with Webster and me and Jessica won. Good for us!"

Charla locked the diary and went into her parents room, where she could look out the glass doors overlooking the patio. Mrs. Quentin was still eating so maybe she wasn't going to get sick. Mr. Lowe, who had told her daddy how to get a swimming pool for less, was walking around talking to himself. Charla saw her mother sitting with Mrs. Dedmon and could hear

her voice every now and then. Miss McDougal was talking with her father and he smiled at her like he didn't want to be bothered. Mrs. Bryant took out a tray of the sandwiches and brought an empty one back into the house. Charla hoped that Mr. Peterson wouldn't fall out and not be able to direct the choir the next day. She remembered that one time he had been standing around talking and then had just leaned against the wall and slid onto the floor. Soon tired of the snatches of conversation and heavy smell of liquor, Charla went back to her room and watched the end of the news. She fell asleep before the t.v. went blank and didn't hear Mrs. Bryant come in and turn it off.

* * *

Sundays Charla always woke up before anybody else, especially if there had been a party the night before. She woke that Sunday and felt butterflies in her stomach already. Maybe she should go over the song before church, but she didn't want to wake her parents. Mrs. Bryant probably spent the night, so that meant a *c'est si bon* breakfast. At least she'd get a lot to eat that morning. Charla was so hungry she could almost taste the french fried potatoes, scrambled eggs with cheese, ham and link sausage and grape juice. One big glass of grape juice; exactly what she wanted. She put off brushing her teeth because that would ruin the taste, and tiptoed downstairs. The living room was still cleaned up so Mrs. Quentin must not have gotten sick. She heard water running in the kitchen and knew that Mrs. Bryant had spent the night.

"Well, what you doing up this early chile?"

"I wanted some grape juice."

"Not the kind yo' mama drinks I hope."

Charla didn't understand, but she was glad to see Mrs. Bryant. "Wow, there's sure a bunch of them dishes dirty, huh?"

"Always is when there's a party. You knows that."

"Can I have some grape juice?"

"Sit down over there a minute and I'll whip us up a whole breakfast."

"A 'say see bone'?"

"Sho will honey."

Charla and Mrs. Bryant talked about the party until everything was ready then ate contentedly. By the time they finished, they could hear Charla's mama and daddy moving around upstairs. Charla hurried to get ready for church. In the car her parents talked about the party too. Her daddy said he would bet a hundred dollars that Mrs. Williamson would get happy and start shouting, just because Albert had left her before the party was over. Her mother agreed and said she wouldn't be surprised if old man Quentin didn't get a little spirit himself since he didn't have to carry Mrs. Quentin home bodily. Charla waited all during the service to see if either one of her parents had been right. Later on she wished she had bet her daddy because Mrs. Williamson didn't get happy. Mrs. Quentin cried a little though because Charla saw her wipe her eyes with a handkerchief.

Charla went over her piece again and again as soon as they got back from church until dinner was ready. She kept telling herself that she didn't have to be afraid because she knew it by heart and she knew to come on after Kelli. So there was nothing for her to be afraid of. She'd practiced as much as she could plus all the times her mother had

told her to. Her daddy said she was a good little pianist and so did Miss McDougal. Messing up was the last thing she would do and she knew it because she had memorized her song a long time ago. Dressed in her yellow and green with her hair curled and pulled back by a green ribbon, Charla rode in silence to the church.

"You aren't scared are you honey?"

"Nope. I forgot to tell Jessica to come though."

"Well, all your real friends are going to be there."

"I still wish she was coming."

"Look baby, me and mama and Mrs. Jackson and everyone important'll be there to hear you perform and we know you'll do a good job, right mama?"

"Watch where you're going Charles, please."

Charla thought Miss McDougal looked really stupid in her orange dress with the big purple flowers. Kelli and Andrea were there with their parents and so were some other people Charla didn't know. Miss McDougal took all the students to the choir stand near the piano and told them that if they felt scared it was a sign that they would be extra careful and not mess up. Charla didn't believe one word of it. After the sanctuary was nearly filled and all the guests were seated, Miss McDougal walked to the end of the grand piano.

"Ladies, gentlemen, parents and friends of McDougal's School of Music..."

The butterflies Charla had felt early that morning began to grow as it got closer to her turn until they felt like kites. She heard Jonathan Lowe's name called and watched him walk over to the piano. He had it easy, just a little song, not more than a melody. Applause, then Marcia

Quentin went on. Charla thought about a picture she'd seen on Easter Sunday about men going out to fight each other in a big circle. They could hear the people clapping for them and the last one had to go out and fight a whole lot of lions. The closing strains of Yankee Doodle Dandy filtered into the arena. Charla wanted to go to the bathroom but there wasn't enough time. Her heart pounding in time with some giant metronome, she walked up to the piano. The keys looked numb and lifeless in their black and white grimace. She breathed deeply and remembered the first note of 'O Say Can You See?'. Her moist hands began to slip over the cool keys. Whose broad stripes and bright stars? What was the rest of it? She felt the sting of rockets red glare and the roar of bombs bursting as the melody ran away from her in all directions. She couldn't make it. Stop Charla. Stop! STOP! She stared at the eighty-eight teeth frowning at her through her tears. Miss McDougal brought out her music and told her to finish.

Afterwards, Charla ran to the bathroom and cried. Stupid; why did anybody ever have to be in stupid recitals anyway. She didn't want to see her parents or Miss McDougal or any of the kids who had played. Even Jonathan had beat her. She wanted to be home or anyplace in the world except that bathroom listening to the end of the program. Anyway it was over. She felt better when she thought about that side of it; it was over. Now, that she'd messed up, she figured she wouldn't have to take any more lessons or be in anymore recitals.

"Charla, you in here?"

"Yes ma'am ... Mama?"

"Its all right honey, don't cry now."

"I was the only one to mess up."

"All right now. I mess up too. Just like that fashion show and I almost tripped over my own dress."

"Mama, I don't want to take no more lessons."

"Okay, you won't have to take any this summer, okay?"

"Never mama."

"Well, we'll have to see what your daddy says."

Charla agreed, but she wasn't going to take any more lessons. Everyone was standing around in the foyer eating donuts and cookies. Charla wanted to leave right away, but her daddy was talking to some men from his office about an old case he'd almost lost. Kelli came over to Charla and started to pat her shoulder, but she jerked away and hugged her mama. Mrs. Quentin told her that the best of people make mistakes sometimes, but Charla didn't feel any better. She wanted to yell at them and tell them all that she knew they were silly at parties and to leave her alone and stop smiling. Finally they left.

"Well honey, looks like you're going to have to do a lot of practicing between now and next year this time."

Charla didn't feel like arguing so she didn't say anything. She knew though that she wouldn't go through that again for anybody over.

* * * * *

P A G E A N T

Of all the times to send him to the store, why, Sammy wondered, had his mother picked 11:30 o'clock on the last Saturday before school. It wouldn't have been so bad, but the 34th Street Busters had been champs of the hydrant all summer and they'd be late on account of his mother and two sticks of stupid oleo. Scoot, Kermit, and Bad News were waiting by the bike rack sweating like it was the middle of August.

"Well, if it aint Speedy Gonzales."

"Mama's little helper."

Scoot waved his hand for the other two guys to knock it. "Come on y'all let's go upstairs wid him to makes sure he get back."

The Busters played pirates with an improvised armada of broken broom handles, empty toilet paper rolls, and pop cans. Sammy's ship rammed Kermit's just before the current took over and as they raced to the drain, Sammy slipped and scraped his knee.

"Huh oh. Speedy got to go home so's his mammy can kiss his little ole knee."

"Shut up, Bad News, and I aint playin."

"You know yo' mama got to make it well."

"Aint neither."

Scoot listened indifferently this time. Since he was captain he had to be cool sometimes. Anyway, he had decided it would maybe be better for the Busters if Sammy was counted out. The Busters would be in an iron bag come rumble time if they didn't have somebody there to take Sammy's place.

"You know he's right Sammy."

"Whatcha mean Scoot?"

"Well, yo' mama DO tell you everything to do and you sho does it."

Sammy was somewhat taken aback. He and Scoot had been friends since the 4th of March when Sammy and his mother and sister and nephew had moved onto 34th.

"How come you say that Scoot?"

" 'Cause it true."

"Aint neither and you knows it."

"You callin' me a liar, 'mama's baby'?"

"Yeah and I aint no 'mama's baby'!"

"How come you goin' to that new school? Huh? 'Cause yo' mama said you got to!"

"So? If yo' mama made you go then ..."

"MY mama don't make me do a damn thing!"

"Oh yeah she do. How come you was hollerin' the other night? 'Cause she beat you fo' not coming home when she said!"

"I AINT going to no other school 'cause I DON'T want to and ..."

" 'Cause yo' MAMA don't want you to!"

Sammy didn't let one tear drop until he was on the fifth floor landing. It wasn't right, just because he was going to a different school. He wished he hadn't got good grades; then Miss Jackson wouldn't have told his mama how to get him into another school. But he wasn't a mama's baby and he wasn't going to be scared the least bit.

He heard Florida's baby crying so he figured that the door was open. It was but the screen was locked and he wiped his eyes and nose before pounding on it.

"What you been into now, Sammy Henson?"

"None of yo' business."

"Okay, little evil boy. You just better get in here and find them buttons if you 'spect to look half-way decent come Monday."

"Aw shutup Florida!"

"Been fightin' aintch^a and got yo' head whipped good."

"Why don't you mind that baby?"

Maybe there'd be a gang at the new school that Sammy could join. Of course there would and there was no reason to be scared. His mama had told him the kids would be just like the ones in their projects, probably even nicer. They had good backgrounds. She didn't know it but he had heard her telling Florida that those other colored people weren't any different. Florida had said she knew better because they always came in the store where she worked and were high saddity towards the colored help there. At any rate, he wasn't going to be scared.

* * *

Monday it cost exactly 75 cents for Sammy to get to and from the school. It was just as he remembered it, a pretty yellow brick building with bushes around it and a marbles pit surrounded by grass. All the kids looked to Sammy like they were going to church instead of school, on Easter at that. He saw Mrs. Williams, the lady who was over his class, the 3-1's. When she saw him she didn't say anything, so he figured she must've forgotten him since the time they'd met. There was one boy who looked a little bit like Kermit except he was skinnier, with big buck teeth and sandy-colored curly hair. The bell rang and everyone who wasn't already inside hurried to their rooms.

At lunch a lot of the other kids had brought their lunches too. Sammy liked their lunchpails with pictures of cartoons and comic book people on their sides. The cute girl in his class who'd sat across the aisle from him in the classroom, stood behind him as their group waited to go into the cafeteria.

"What's that for?"

Sammy at first didn't think she was talking to him. He turned around as she pulled his sleeve. "Just my lunch."

"In a GROCERY sack? What you got your milk in?"

"I aint got none."

"Kool-aid?"

"Naw."

The boy who looked like Kermit nudged the fat boy near him and they both started to snicker.

"Well, what you got in it then?"

"A SAMITCH, what you think?" Sammy didn't mean to sound evil, but some more kids had started listening to the cute girl. He hadn't meant to be mean, but she turned down the corners of her mouth, tossed a long braid over her shoulder and said to the girl standing beside her,

"I guess he doesn't have anything in that old raggedy sack!"

Sammy wanted to pop her one, but then he felt like it was maybe his fault for being evil-sounding in the first place. Maybe she was just trying to make friends. The line moved into the cafeteria and Sammy found a seat at a table near the water fountain. He started to take out his peanut butter and jam sandwich but hesitated. Maybe someone was watching and would start to laugh at him. So what if he had a bag instead of a pail? Who needed a pail anyway, just something

for somebody to steal. The little cute girl sat at a table near Sammy with her friend. On her two braids she had blue ribbons, like the sky, which were the same color as her dress and socks. When she looked toward him, Sammy stared for a minute, then defiantly pulled his sandwich out and ate as loudly as he could.

After lunch and recess, the class was in the room just a little bit before the bell rang. Mrs. Williams told them they would have their reading lesson in different groups. It ended up as redbirds, the best readers; bluebirds, the second best readers; blackbirds, the medium readers; and jaybirds, the kids who couldn't read. Sammy made the bluebirds on the first try, but was determined to be a redbird. The cute girl, Kelli, whom he had decided not to like in spite of her long hair, was a redbird and he had to show her up.

When three o'clock came, Mrs. Williams told Sammy she wanted to see him after class for just a minute. He hoped she wouldn't keep him long or he would miss the 3:15 "el" which was the last train he could get a free transfer on.

"Well Sammy, how do you like our school?"

"Just fine, Miss Williams."

"Do you understand everything? I don't want you to hesitate to ask me anything."

"Yes ma'am."

"No questions about anything that's happened today?"

Sammy looked at the clock and shook his head. "No ma'am."

"I want you to be sure now, and tell me if any little thing bothers you, okay?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Yes ma'am what?"

"Yes ma'am I'm certain."

"All right. See you tomorrow?"

"By Miss Williams." It was all Sammy could do to keep from running down the middle of the empty hall. Mr. Lowe, the principal might be around to swat him though; like he'd swatted a boy during lunchtime. He just made the train and sat breathless for five minutes. The cool air felt good at first, then it seemed to get colder. Down below the streets jogged by. Sammy knew that he was moving, not the streets, but ever since his first ride on the "el" he'd thought of them that way, keeping time with the train sound: in the rough spots, junkety-junk, junkety-junk; but when it was going smooth, junkety, junkety, junkety, junkety. The train's abrupt stop at 39th woke Sammy up just in time to get off. That was a close one. If he'd gone past 42nd, he'd have had to pay double fare or get taken to juvenile court. That's what Monroe had told him.

* * *

The last day of September Mrs. Williams' third grade class took a bus trip. The day before they'd all brought back the permission slips and some had come extra early and had to wait outside for the janitor to let them in. Sammy made it just one minute after Mrs. Williams and hoped no one noticed or would call him Speedy.

"Now, what are we going to do on the bus, children?"

Kelli raised her hand. The showoff. She really thought she had all the answers. Maybe for a girl though she'd do.

"We're going to go to a farm."

"Of course Kelli, but what are we going to do on the way to the farm?"

Ride the bus, what else? Sammy decided not to answer or it might make the class laugh like the time he'd read his composition, "My Best Friend."

Monroe, my sister's boyfriend, is my best friend.

He is very tall, but not like a basketball player. He is the same color as peanut butter and has very good hair. I can always tell when he is at our house, even if I don't see him at first. If there is a black and orange beret on the sofa, that means he's around. He knows lots of things about how to make it and not get caught. My mama says he is no-count, but everybody counts to me.

I went in the kitchen and sure enough there was Monroe. He had bought some things for us and the baby. The baby is my sister's which makes him my nephew, Duncan. Monroe grabbed me and we wrestled in the front room until Florida told me to change the baby's diaper, who was crying. All babies wear diapers because they don't know how to go to the bathroom yet. They also stink.

That's when everyone had laughed and laughed, even after Mrs. Williams hit the desk with her ruler. She had got so mad. She must've thought they were laughing at her, but they were laughing at babies, as anyone could have told her.

"We are going to be ladies and gentlemen on the bus. Now how does that mean we'll act?"

Sammy was very anxious to leave, but he didn't want the other kids to think he didn't know what a farm was like in real life. He'd seen

pictures on the t.v. about cowboys and Indians on farms but that was all.

Mr. Lowe came in and told Mrs. Williams that the bus had come. The class was very quiet when he spoke.

"I want you children to behave today."

"Yes sir."

"You know white people always say we act up."

"Yes sir."

"I want all of you to do as Mrs. Williams says and don't meddle with the animals because sometimes they bite."

A big brown cow baring sharp, blood-dripping fangs loomed in Sammy's imagination for a fraction of a second.

"Anyone who get out there and acts like a 'darky' will be sent to my office tomorrow. Is that clear?"

"Yes sir."

After Mr. Lowe left, Kelli told Sammy that she wasn't going to bother any animals, but she was going to pet the baby chicks because she liked them.

"Now everyone find a seat and let's be quiet, okay?"

Jonathan Lowe sat next to Sammy and they compared pocket treasures until the bus turned off the express onto a less super highway. After about a mile or so of white fence rails and a small herd of milk cows, the bus turned into a drive with a big white gate.

" 'H.J. Conne Farms, manager, Lee Westiss.' "

"Wow! Sammy, look at that old man over there!"

Sammy was annoyed because Jonathan was pointing like somebody who didn't know better, but when he looked he laughed too. "Sho' is a old man."

"That is a ole ol-l-l-ld, o-o-o-o-old man!"

The kids around them began laughing and pointing until Mrs. Williams hurried them off the bus. They saw a pig with her piglets, a chicken house, chicken self-feeder, and a chicken incubator, and horses, cows and a field of corn. Sammy could hardly believe that corn got to be so tall, some stalks even taller than Monroe. He knew the Busters wouldn't believe him if he told them that corn weeds were taller than men, he just knew they wouldn't.

For once he had been absolutely right. As soon as he got home, he ran to the hang-out. Bad News and Kermit were waiting for Scoot.

"Well, if'n it aint Speedy Gonzales."

"What's happenin', S.G.?"

"Man, you aint go believe when I tell you."

They bantered about corn and giants awhile before Scoot lifted the potato sack curtain door.

"Hey, Speedy, how ya been?"

To Sammy's surprise, Scoot offered him the secret handshake.

"This mean I'M in?"

"Sho' man, we was just ... uh ... testin' you. I think you can be a ... uh ... a spy for us."

"Groovy, man."

Bad News and Kermit readily agreed. They plotted spy adventures for half an hour before playing them out until long after sundown. Scoot and Sammy were the American spies and they had to make it back to Werdhart's Drug before the enemy spies, K006 and BN37 caught up with them. Somehow or other, the good guys got lost in the basement of the

enemy complex which was doomed to be blown up in thirty-five seconds. Scoot could hear the enemy prowling around outside, he thought, and told Sammy to get down while he fired his super laser gun, but Sammy wasn't there.

"Bingo! Got'em Speedy! Speedy?" He listened intently, then suspecting foul play to his counteragent inched forward to the spot last occupied by his comrade.

"Calling Super Agen' Same, over and out. Where are you?" No reply, not even the sound of secretly hushed breathing.

"Don't put me on man, we on the same side."

There was the sound of a scuffle from behind and super agent Scoot whirled just before enemy spy K006 had time to clobber him. Sammy yelled from the secret passage where he struggled with BN37, "Get the lazier gun Scoot!" It seemed his warning came too late. Already K006 had Scoot to the floor in a terrific bear hug. Calling up his last reserve of strength, Sammy wrenched himself free of BN37 and reached the bent coat-hanger.

"Buzz-z-z-z-z! Gotcha K006." In due time K006 loosened his death grip on Scoot, but BN37 meanwhile, having regained consciousness, pulled out his electronic de-lasering gun.

"Now I got YOU covered, Speedy."

Sammy was about to surrender but Scoot tricked them at the last minute and got all the weapons.

"We is the best, me and Speedy, 'cause we the 'mericans and you guys gotta give up."

After the proper ceremony in which the enemy traded two killer

blue babies for seven cats' eyes, there were handshakes all around.

* * *

Mrs. McDougal, the music teacher yelled at the angels for not making a straight line. Sammy, the second shepherd, watched silently as they tried again. He was happy that his part was so easy, just be sure and step back for the kings and angels and bow at the crib; no, no at the manger. 'Away in the manger, no crib for a bed.'

"Sammy, you're too close! Now step back like I told you."

"Yes ma'am."

Kelli readjusted the doll wrapped up like the little lord Jesus and assumed again her most motherly expression. Sammy had wanted to be Joseph or a king or at least an angel, at first. But after three practices with Mrs. McDougal and all the name calling she did, he was happy to be just a shepherd. After they'd first received their parts, Jonathan Lowe, the principal's son who was a blackbird was chosen as Joseph, even though Sammy had become a redbird and was lots smarter. Even Kelli had said he should've been given one of the talking parts. Anyway it didn't matter because it was just a play and Sammy really didn't care because he KNEW he was smarter. Even Mrs. Williams thought so or he wouldn't have been a redbird.

It had turned cold after the first of November and Sammy was sorry he was in the Christmas play at all. The practices after school got longer as it got colder and Sammy hated not only having to pay the extra dime, but to wait the half hour in the Wabash station. Nothing was right anymore. It wasn't the play, or the school or even his class; that part

was just fine. The kids were okay and Mrs. Williams too. Right then, though, he didn't like the noise of the tin can rattling down the sidewalk, but he couldn't keep from kicking it. The sound made it seem like he was the only person on the street, even in the whole neighborhood; no, no slum: slumberhood projects. Somebody's frozen wash made a couple of fast thuds against the building and Sammy wanted to shout at it to be quiet or to go to Py Ling's father's laundry, like in "Knowing Our World", the redbirds' book.

Sammy stopped by the Busters' hang-out thinking that no one would be there because it was so cold. He was wrong. Scoot was there and he had a puppy.

"I found it and don't you tell nobody."

"I aint. Where from?"

"That busted out house over on St. Lawrence."

"Can I hold it?"

"Yeah, but be careful." Scoot handed the fuzzy puppy over to Sammy and they both smiled when it whimpered a little in its sleep.

"What you go do wid him?"

"Keep him forever."

"How you go feed him?"

Scoot frowned. "I got ways and g don't worry 'bout it!"

"I aint man, I aint." The puppy yawned and opened its eyes. "Where's the mama?"

"Damned if I know. Probably he got lost from her."

"I 'spect."

They discussed the puppy's mother and father at length and decided

it was a special cross between boxer, collie, German shepherd and hound. It watched them in typical puppy fashion, looking first from one to the other and finally dozed off again.

"How come you coming from yo' school so late?"

"Christmas play?"

"YOU in it?"

Sammy thought, of course, stupid, but remembered Scoot before their big fight when they were best friends. "Yeah."

"How's yo' spying coming along?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Them folks mean?"

"Naw. They like me. I got five A's and a B on my grade card."

"So? You aint got no puppy."

"So? You aint got no girlfriend."

Outside the hang-out the clouds had finally covered the sky. It had been getting that way all day, slowly but surely. Sammy hadn't intended to make the lie about Kellie such a big one, but before he left he convinced himself that Scoot believed he had the prettiest chick in the school and some day, MAYBE if the Busters were lucky, he'd bring her over.

No such chance. Kellie Marie Hicks was going to invite only her friends to her Halloween party, Sammy remembered. She had passed out invitations in class and everyone got one except fat Emory and Sammy. Even after he had helped her in the library with her arithmetic. Sammy had felt evil about it so he decided to ask her at recess.

"How come you didn't give me one of them?"

"I'm only supposed to ask my BEST friends to my party."

"I'm not your friend, huh?"

"Yeah, you're my friend Sammy. EVERYbody is my friend, but you're not one of my BEST friends."

"Okay, then from now on you do yo' own 'rithmetic."

"I was going to ask you Sammy, HONEST, I was."

"How come you didn't then?"

"Well, can you keep a secret?"

"Yeah."

"My mama told me not to ask any of you special kids."

"I aint special!"

"Oh yes you are too. All you kids from the projects are 'cause that's what Mrs. Williams told my mother a long time ago."

"But I AINT special!"

"I can't help it Sammy. But we can still be friends, okay?"

"Yeah, I guess." What had they meant by that? Special? He wasn't different. He was smart; smarter than all the Busters except Scoot, but that didn't make him special. Special because he lived in the projects? Naw.

The memory of that missed Halloween party helped Sammy decide to run away once and for all. He'd been thinking about it for a long time, but made up his mind to do it after he'd walked about a block from the hang-out. He started running, listening to the pounding of his feet. Then he tried to make his heart keep time with his feet. It didn't work though and when he slowed down for a rest it was almost dark. He ate the half of his sandwich left over from lunch and looked for a nice

place to sit down for awhile. His hands began to get cold so he rubbed them together like an Alaskan Eskimo standing in front of his igloo and wondered what it would be like to be in hot Australia riding in a kangaroo's pocket. After he'd rested, he started running again, then slowed to a walk. Already he was meeting a lot of faces he didn't know. That was a good sign he figured since no one would ask him what he was doing so far away, if they didn't know that he was far away. He passed a "Fish and Chips" and the warm smell wrapped itself around him for two blocks. He tried not to be hungry and concentrated on watching where he was headed.

It was completely dark before it started to snow, big soft flakes that stuck to his hair and eyelashes. The first time was always the nicest. He'd never been out at night in the snow and he liked it. It came down so quietly and nicely, that nobody could really be mad about it like about the rain. That's what Sammy decided he liked best about the snow. The way it made things quiet. The cars couldn't make as much noise and people sounded like they were walking around with just their socks on. Soft and quiet, like 'silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.' An "el" passed over the street and even it had lost its usual junkety, junkety. Scoot had said there was a giant Christmas tree downtown and Sammy made that his goal. He wondered if the lights would go out because it was snowing and someone might get an electric shock. Maybe they were built so that couldn't happen.

A glassy-eyed beggar held out a bunch of pencils and Sammy ducked under them. That might, in a squeeze, be a good hustle Monroe had said, if there was some way you could get the item back which you sold, maybe have a friend standing around the corner to snatch it. It would be too

cold in the winter though to stand outside. If you could sell inside the store lobbies it would be better, but then you couldn't get back the item you sold.

A siren sounding in the distance woke Sammy out of his meditation. It occurred to him then that the police might catch him loitering around and throw him in juvenile court. Scoot had been caught once, stealing a comic book, but he hadn't been to court yet. He said he wasn't scared, but Sammy thought he was. Scoot was going to get caught stealing food for that puppy and really get tossed in, unless Sammy was around to warn him or protect him. That's the way the Busters operated. He'd have to go back, because Scoot would need him and that was that. Besides, it was freezing and the snow was beginning to soak through his shoes.

Sammy's hands were so cold by the time he got home that he couldn't tell the difference between his fingers and the steel handrail. He clomped very slowly up the stairs and could feel the lump on the soft sofa even before he knocked on the door.

* * * * *

RED LILIES FOR MARY ANNETTE

The maintenance man at the Garrison Y had turned the air conditioner on Thursday night before leaving because his wife had told him that the weatherman forecast 95° for Good Friday. So, Friday the building was freezing. Sweat formed along the aluminum handrails and on the bars in the ballet rooms upstairs. The mirrors in those rooms fogged over early in the morning so that Mrs. Ollaby had to wipe them off before her afternoon dance classes. The high school girls would tolerate the chill without much fuss, but the little ones would whine because they'd rather be at home roller skating anyway. That is, all except the little Sanders' girl, Mary Annette and possibly Kelli Hicks, her two promising students. Two out of fifteen wasn't a bad average. When she'd first given up touring and started teaching, she'd hoped to find several Tallchiefs, possibly one Nureyev, but two wasn't bad. The Hicks girl probably wouldn't have been half as good as she was, but she seemed to enjoy competition. Mary Annette though was her real star. If she stuck with it, as it seemed she would, Mrs. Ollaby figured she would be able to write her own ticket.

The class was finally over. Ballet boxes stuffed with street clothes and slippers were out of her life for another week.

"Bye Miz Ollie."

"Yes, yes, next week children. Be princesses, all of you."

The older girls had finished earlier and Julie had just called J.R. as Mary Annette slid down the steel bannister.

"Mickey Sanders, you know bet ..."

Mary Annette stuck her tongue out at Julie, then giggling skipped down the hall to the girls' bathroom with Kelli. Struggling to get out of her tights, Mary Annette asked, "Don't you hate having to go to the bathroom when you've got you leotards on?"

"Yeah and sometimes I can't get 'em down fast enough."

"Oh, Kelli, yes you can."

"Uh uhn. Then it slides down my tights and its gooky feeling."

They both laughed. Mary Annette finished first and tried to see how much water it would take to make the washbowl overflow.

"Mickey, you better let that water out, girl."

"I am silly."

"Your sister's gonna get you."

"You better not tell."

"Will too."

Mary Annette took the wad of paper towels out of the drain and scowled disgustedly at Kelli. She almost forgot to dry her hands, but then remembered the time she didn't dry her hands and got a shock from the metal door handle. Her brother J.R. had told her about electricity and lightning and not to touch metal when you're wet, so she re-washed and thoroughly dried her hands.

"Race ya to the front door."

"Okay."

They left their ballet boxes by the elevator and ran without interruption to the corner where they bumped into M. Julie.

"Mickey!"

"We're not doing nothing, so there."

"Where's your case?"

"By th'elevator."

"Go get it knucklehead and DON'T RUN!"

Back around the corner, Mary Annette confided to Kelli that big sisters were a lot of trouble and told her she should be grateful she didn't have one.

After leaning quietly for about five minutes against the wall directly opposite the bench where Julie and some other big girls sat, Mary Annette decided it was too cold inside. Her back was getting numb so she started for the door.

"Just stay there, Mickey."

"It's cold in here Julie."

Kelli agreed by shivering and wrapping her arms around herself.

"Mary Annette." Julie had a very ugly way of saying her name sometimes, but Mickey was determined.

"You're NOT my Mama!"

"You two better not be running up and down the street."

Mickey made a face at her then went out and sat on the brick wall around the flowerbed. At first it felt good and warm, but the longer she sat the warmer it got. It was just a bit windy and Mary Annette noticed that all three of her ribbons had come loose and were straggly on the ends of her long braids. She wasn't surprised that the one on the top braid had come loose, she had to retie that one all the time, but the other two usually stayed bows until she got home. Kelli wore barrettes because she said she liked them better than ribbon, but Mickey

knew the real reason was she didn't know how to make bows.

"Want me to tie the other one Mickey?"

"No."

Kelli playfully snatched off the ribbon closest to her and started down the block. Julie saw them, but didn't have time to raise her voice. When she opened the door the temperature difference between the outside and inside made her sneeze. She didn't have her hay fever tablets and there was only one unused kleenex in her purse. As she was about to go get some toilet paper, J.R. pulled up and had cool Kevin Hicks with him. Good grief. J.R. rolled down the window and beckoned for her to hurry up. She pointed down the street, but he apparently didn't know what she meant. Kevin smiled at her as he turned down the radio, but J.R. looked peeved.

"Come on Julie!"

"Mickey's gone runnin' down the street, J.R."

"What's happenin' Julie?" Kevin was really turning on the charm and there she was with her nose about to drip and her stupid sister to chase.

"Hey, Kevin."

"Well, get in and we'll look for her."

Julie found a fairly clean space on her kleenex and wiped as she climbed in the back seat. Kevin turned off the radio and put in the Tempts' tape before turning to her.

"That's a sexy sweater, kid."

"Aw, Kevin."

"Little close fitting isn't it?"

"I know you've seen your sister in one."

"Yeah, but she's just eight."

J.R. spotted Mickey and Kelli trotting back to the Y and honked for them. If there was any disadvantage to having his own car, J.R. figured it was also having two sisters who didn't know the value of gas or how to save it. When he was three-fourths of the way home, Mickey screamed.

"What's the matter wid you girl?"

"You goin' the wrong way."

"Oh, you don't live with us anymore?"

"We gotta go to practice at the church."

"Damn!"

"Oow-wee J.R. I'm gonna tell ..."

"Why didn't you say that when I passed the church?"

"Now, J.R. Have patience with your little sister."

"Cram it Julie."

Everybody laughed until J.R. couldn't keep from laughing himself. "Guess that's what I get for having two nutbutts. You lucky Kevin."

"Like hell. Kelli's just showin' off being nice, aintcha sis?"

"You shut up Kevin Hicks."

All the laughing had made Julie start sneezing again and she had run out of clean kleenex. Luckily the ones from the morning had dried sufficiently to look like they were clean if she unfolded them. Mickey knew exactly what she was up to and couldn't pass up the chance to get even for having to lean against that cold wall. She nudged Kelli and snickered. Julie eyed them, knowing that they knew and smiled from

behind her kleenex. Then she sneezed again. Mickey started, then Kelli joined in,

"Good - ness
Sneez - y!
Snotty - nose
Jul = ee!"

Julie would have hit Mary Annette, but J.R. had pulled into their drive. She held a tissue to her nose as she got out and promised her sister that she was really going to get it when she got home. On the way to church J.R. preached to Mickey about being nice to her only sister, then started talking with Kevin about their girlfriends. Mickey was silently repentant until they reached church. She and Kelli were the last to arrive.

Mrs. Willsey had prayed for patience to see her through the last rehearsal. God said no. In spite of all her coxing, Mark Townsend insisted on singing, "spirits" instead of "spirit" in his solo. She sent him to the basement with one of the older children to work on his enunciation, but he returned in fifteen minutes, still singing "spirits." Suffering with the little children, she decided to do it one more time from the top, then forget it as best she could. Mickey was concentrating on the hole in the knee of her tights and how she was going to explain it to her mother, so she didn't hear Mrs. Willsey tell them to line up for the procession.

"Mary Annette Sanders." Wayward little brat. "Mary Annette!"

Mickey was startled out of her reverie and just a little angry that old Popeyes was shouting at her, especially when she hadn't done anything. Then she noticed that everybody was moving towards the door. Kelli had tried at the last three practices to take her place by cute Mark, and

she had to hurry to see to it that she didn't succeed.

"You're in my place Kelli."

"No special places."

"Girl, you better go get your partner." Mickey knew that Kelli didn't want to stand by Mark. He'd been Kelli's boyfriend last year before he put her down and she wanted him back. Anyway, Mary Annette was cuter than Kelli and Kelli knew it and so did Mark. Mickey hated to resort to force, but Kelli was being stubborn. They began pushing until Mrs. Willsey saw them.

"Now what's all this shoving?"

"Kelli won't go to her place."

"We don't have special places."

The other children were getting progressively louder and a small group had left the line to see what was happening. Kelli had poked out her mouth and Mickey pretended she was going to cry.

"She won't go over to her place, Miz Willzee."

"That's nothing to cry about Mary Annette."

"She's not crying for real."

Mickey managed to squeeze out one big tear which she let roll down her cheek, then caught it in her dimple before letting it reach her mouth. Mark scratched his ear and looked bewilderedly from Mickey to Old Popeye to Gerald then back to Mickey. He wasn't sure whether he was being talked about or not, but decided if he was it must be good since Old Popeye wasn't yelling at him. He'd had enough with that song as it was.

Mickey decided not to tell Mrs. Willsey that Kelli was too tall to

stand next to Mark, hoping that she could see that for herself. But just to make sure, she volunteered to trade places with Kelli. It worked perfectly.

"Well, let's see, Kelli. You are taller than Mark. Honey, you don't want our line to look crooked do you?"

Kelli turned down the corners of her mouth and huffed for three seconds before she could answer. "No ma'am."

"That's a big girl. You and Mary Annette switch places, okay?"

"Yes ma'am."

As Mrs. Willsey forced herself towards the piano, Mickey turned around just enough to quickly cross her eyes and wriggle her tongue out at Kelli, who returned the compliment.

It was nearly 5:30 when Mary Annette got home. She wished she didn't have to be in the Easter program and if it weren't for the fact that she got to stand next to Mark and sit by him and the fact that her father had said she should want to do something to earn those new clothes, well if it weren't for that she wouldn't be in it at all. She didn't mind standing in front of grown-ups saying speeches, but she didn't think it was fair for the kids to have to do all the work. Why, she wondered, couldn't the grown-ups give programs? Being small wasn't fair and she couldn't wait to grow up. Maybe it was worth it though, getting a new dress and shoes and socks and gloves to match. If she didn't mess up on Sunday, maybe her mother would let her wear her dress to school. All she'd have to do would be to write a note to the sister telling her that 'Mary Annette's uniforms were, well, lost at the laundry', or maybe, 'Mary Annette's uniforms were mixed in with some other people's clothes

and all got dyed purple so she'd have to wear regular clothes to school until her new uniforms arrived.' Her mother might do it if she was a really good girl. One time she'd let her skip school because her Grand-mama came to visit them. Mickey had wanted to go to the airport and her mother'd let her. She couldn't remember if she had been especially good that week or not, but maybe if she tried real hard and promised to stay out of Julie's lipstick, her mother would do it. She decided to start by helping cook dinner.

"Can I do something Mama?"

Her mother was washing something green in the sink that smelled like mustards.

"Well, Mickey, let's see." She always liked it when her mother said 'let's see' because that meant she was thinking of something easy.

"Get the crackers out."

"Do I get to crump-pell'em?"

"Now how'd you guess?"

"Sweet crackers or ..."

"No, no I'm gonna make meatloaf."

Mickey faked a frown. "Aw, I thought we was gonna have lemon pie."

"You want a lemon pie?"

"Yeah, can I help make it?"

"We'll see."

That meant yes. Mickey rolled out a length of wax paper as her mother put the greens through their final rinse.

"Can I light the oven Mama?"

"Now, you know you can't do that, baby."

"Yes I can. Please Mama?"

"No girl. Be blowin' us all up."

Mickey didn't pout because she was just a little bit afraid of trying to light the oven. Besides that, crumbling crackers was a pretty important job. Julie used to have to do it whenever they had lemon pie.

"Let me hear your speech."

"I know it."

"Practice won't hurt you."

Mickey sighed as loudly as she could then began,

'Although I'm just a little one
As you can plainly see,
I know my Lord arose today

...uh..."

"Thought you knew it Miz Fasty."

"Aw, Mama. You making me forget."

"Go 'head and finish."

"Well, don't talk none. Uhm ...

'I know my Lord arose today
To ...uh...to set my poor soul free.

Up from the tomb on Easter morn,
My Blessed Saviour came,
And now my heart ...uh...

Wait a minute, I messed up ...

Now my heart sings with joyous song
Praise to His Holy name.'

"Sounds like you need to practice a whole lot to me."

"I know that ole speech, just I forget sometimes."

"Be careful now. You gettin' them crackers all over the floor."

Mary Annette brushed the spilled crumbs onto a paper towel, then

worried her mother into agreeing to let her break the eggs into the hamburger. The phone rang and it was Mrs. Skinner who liked to gossip with her mother, so Mickey not only got to break the eggs but to squeeze them through the meat. It was something she had always wanted to do because she loved the smell of the crackers and eggs and onions and peppers and hamburger. She was tempted to take a bite, but thought better since her Mama had sat down at the table as she talked.

Julie wanted her skirt just a bit shorter, but knew that her mother wouldn't hem it again. She had decided to do it herself and was about half way through cutting it when Mary Annette came in.

"Oow Jul-ee. I'm go tell Mama."

"Mama knows," Julie lied.

Mickey moved to the side of her sister's bed and rested her elbows on the edge so she could thoroughly examine the shortening process. Julie continued to cut, eyeing her sister suspiciously all the while.

"You smell like onions."

"Mama let me make the meatloaf."

"Humph. Know I'm not gonna eat no dinner tonight."

Mickey giggled and began fingering the scraps of material. "Julie, will you make my Cherie doll a dress?"

"That's not enough for a dress."

"A skirt then?"

"Yeah, but not tonight."

"Tomorrow?"

"Next week Mickey." Julie thought she was beginning to understand about the younger generation, always wanting things right now.

"How come you can't make it tomorrow?"

"Number one I've got to go to the beauty shop, number two, I've got to get ready for the picnic, number three, I've got to finish my dress for the party next Friday."

Mickey thought about her sister's timetable for a minute and a half before coming up with an easy solution. "You could do it after you come from the beauty shop Julie."

"No."

"Come on Julie, please?"

"How many dresses that doll got now?"

Mickey shrugged her shoulders.

"More than you and me put together, that's how many."

"Promise you'll make it next week?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Are you finished helping Mama?"

Mickey nodded yes, then turned on the television. During dinner, she rehearsed her speech to herself so that when her daddy asked her to say it she did so without any mistakes.

* * *

Julie shifted until her head was completely under the pillow. It didn't help drown out Timmy Tiger's Cartoon Circus though, so she decided to get up. Good grief! She could hardly wait for their new house to be finished where she'd have her own room.

"Can't you turn that thing down?!"

Mickey started to nod no, but turned the set down, remembering that she was going to be good that week. Just to get Julie really on her side

she decided to make up for calling her snotty nose. She went to the bathroom door and peeped in at her sister who was grinning foolishly at herself in the mirror.

"Whatcha doin'?"

"Isometrics."

"Icy what?"

"Face exercises."

"We gonna have fried chicken at the picnic."

"I know." Julie grimaced, then pushed a pimple on her earlobe. She had decided to let Mrs. Henderson simply press her hair, put just a little curl in the bangs and leave the rest in a ponytail. Otherwise she'd look like Fried Franny Frizzle for a week before her hair got that just right look. "Better get your clothes on girlie."

"I wish I didn't have to go to that ole beauty shop." Mickey hated missing all the cartoons.

"You wanna look pretty dontcha?"

"She always burns me though."

"Yeah. I could just hear your mouth tomorrow if Kelli had her hair fixed and you didn't."

"I don't care 'bout her no more."

"What? Your best friend?"

"We're not best friends and I don't like her no more." Mickey didn't want to talk about Kelli, so she went back to their t.v.

Outside the girls' bedroom window a sweat suited figure ran by a couple of times, then dropped and stooped beneath the sill. Mickey didn't see him, so when J.R. jumped up and hollered through the screen,

she was so scared that she thought she was going to have a heart attack.

"BOY!"

"Scared ya didn't I, kiddo?" He could hardly get the words out for laughing so hard.

Mickey stomped over to the window and tried to spit out, but J.R. was too far away and the screen was too thick.

"Hey girl." Although he had feigned anger, J.R. kept on laughing because the spit just made a splotch on the screen.

"You make me sick!" Mary Annette had really been scared and her heart was still beating so hard that she thought he should have been able to hear it. The more he laughed the madder she got. "I'm go tell my Daddy on you!" Determined to carry out her threat, she searched the house until she found her father in the kitchen with her mother. "Daddy?" Mickey started to wail although her mother's presence would definitely take away the full effect of her tears. "Daddy?"

Clicking his tongue and shaking his head, her father knew she was more angry than hurt. She knew that he knew it and cried just that much louder.

"J.R. scared me on purpose."

"Scared you baby?" He was making fun of her and she had meant for him to feel sorry for her.

"I almost had a heart attack Daddy!"

"Come here and let me see." She didn't budge, so he pulled her towards him, carefully feeling then listening to her chest. "Still going strong. Here MAMA, you listen."

Mickey tried her best to cry more tears, but couldn't. So she settled

on ear rending sobs and sighs.

"Get him Daddy."

"What you want me to do to him?"

"Just get him."

Her mother called Julie to breakfast as her father went outside after J.R. Mary Annette really didn't expect him to do anything to J.R. because he hadn't been very serious and didn't appreciate how scared she had been. When he came in, J.R. grabbed her from behind and lifted her above his head in spite of her yelling and their mother's scowls.

"Now leave her alone J.R."

"Aw, Mama, she knows I'm just playin'." He swung Mickey around until she couldn't help but giggle.

"You better stop or I'll throw up on you."

He swatted her behind and said, "That's for spitting at me, you little devil."

Mickey turned up her nose in mock disgust, then stomped back to the bathroom and slammed the door. As she brushed her teeth she resolved to not speak to any of them again until J.R. said he was sorry. However, the odor of fried oysters and omellette helped her change her mind. When she got back to the kitchen, they were just beginning to say the blessing, so she waited at the door.

"Come sit down Mickey."

"Tell J.R. to say he's sorry."

"Mary Annette!" Mickey decided that Julie had learned to say 'Mary Annette' from their mother.

"Daddy?"

J.R. winked at her, but didn't apologize. "Not nice to spit at your only brother, kiddo."

"You BE QUIET, J.R.!"

"You apologize and I'll apologize."

Mickey moved to her seat and plopped down without a word. She thought Julie was about to laugh at her, but instead she started talking about the march.

"Why can't I go too, Mama?"

"Because I don't want you to, that's why."

"J.R.'s going and ..."

"J.R. is 17 years old AND a boy."

"So? They hurt boys too."

"You are NOT going to march, Julie."

Mickey saw her chance to speak up for kJulie. "Why come, Mama?"

"YOU eat up your breakfast."

J.R. had sat silently. Since he was the only one being allowed to participate in the demonstrations, he felt obligated to say something to make his sister feel better. "It's only gonna get worse Julie."

"Well, you're gonna be there and they could even arrest you!"

"Yeah, but they can't rape me!"

"J.R.!" Their father was getting tired of the way the conversation was going. "Let's forget about demonstrations and marches and talk about tomorrow, alright?"

"That's not fair, Dad."

"It's fair as long as I'm the man of this house."

J.R. finished his breakfast quickly then went to his room without excusing himself. Mickey felt sorry for him because their father had fussed at him. Her record player needed fixing, so as soon as she finished eating, she took it to his room.

"J.R.?" Mickey knocked as she pushed the door open. He was reading a car magazine and didn't look up. "J.R., you mad at me?"

"Nope."

"At Daddy?"

"Nope."

Mickey was a little perplexed. If he wasn't mad at anybody, then maybe he was just in an evil mood.

"Will you fix my record player?"

"Again?"

"That needle keeps falling out and the table won't turn."

J.R. put his magazine down, yawned, then turned the small phonograph over on his desk.

"Who stuck this tape on the cartridge?"

"What car-ter-ridge?"

"Right here." He pointed to the arm of the machine and looked at her accusingly.

"I put that on there so the needle wouldn't fall out."

"But it still falls out?"

She shook her head yes, then watched him attentively as he examined then discarded the needle and opened the battery case.

"J.R. don't be mad."

"I'm not mad."

"You was mad in the kitchen."

"So, I'm not mad now, okay?"

"Okay." She smiled at him as he kissed her forehead and re-examined the record player.

"Are you scared to march, J.R.?"

"Naw." He tried to exude big brotherly confidence, but he knew that Mickey would see right through it. "Well, maybe just a little bit."

"Why you gotta march then?"

"You'll understand when you get bigger."

"How come Julie can't march with you? She's big."

"Because we only need one marcher from this family, that's why and I'm the oldest, okay?"

"I guess."

J.R. knew he hadn't convinced her because he didn't understand completely himself. He wanted to go because it seemed the right thing to do and that was the only real reason he thought. The other guys would be there for the same reason and they could all be scared together.

"Mama don't want you to go either J.R."

"I know it."

"Why you goin' then?"

"Look girlie, I can't fix this thing if you're gonna stand here and jabber."

Their mother saved the day for him. She called Mickey because it was time to leave for the beauty shop. Mary Annette made a face because she didn't want to go, but J.R. pushed her playfully out of the room.

Mrs. Henderson's La Coiffure Boutique Salon was crowded with patient

customers by 8:30 a.m. When the Sanders ladies arrived, they had to wait longer than usual before they could even get their hair washed. Because it was the day before Easter, Mrs. Henderson did the styling only for her regular patrons and had three extra girls doing the washing and pressing. Julie's friend Cookie was there and they talked about school and who they were going to the party with the next Friday. Mickey copied her mother and looked at the pictures in the magazines, then drank a bottle of pop before her turn came. Mrs. Henderson came up front to answer the pay phone then started talking to Mary Annette's mother.

"How you today, Marva Jean."

"Just fine. You mighty busy this time of year."

"Aint I though?" She squeezed one of Mickey's long braids. "Brought this thick-haired little miss along with you today, huh?"

"Yes, Lord I couldn't handle that head of hers by myself." Mickey ignored them because they always said the same thing about her hair everytime she was at the beauty shop.

"How you want it fixed, Mary Annette?"

"Curls."

"You're not go cry on me today, are you?"

"Not if you don't burn me." Mickey's mother looked warningly at her.

"Burn you? Now, you know Miz Henderson don't burn her babies."

"Except sometimes."

"Mary Annette!" Her mother laughed, but it was a fake laugh to cover up the fact that she was getting angry.

"Well, I'll try not to make this one of those 'sometime' days. Now

you let Jackie wash and press it for you, okay?"

Mickey turned down the corners of her mouth and passed reluctantly to the back of the shop. That part of the building smelled like the special kind of hair "conditioner" alias grease Mrs. Henderson used on all her customers, guaranteed to resist moisture and give the hair indefinite sheen. It turned out that Jackie was a better presser than Mrs. Henderson. Mickey wasn't burned once; not even around the edges. She sat with her hair perfectly straight as Mrs. Henderson curled and styled her mother's hair. Bored by sitting still for so long, Mary Annette searched through her mother's purse for a comb, then played beautician, "styling" her hair in a variety of ponytails and updos, while the adults gossiped. Mrs. Henderson's nephew was in college where he was learning to be a lawyer. She asked Mickey's mother, "Where's your son goin', Marva Jean?"

"He still hasn't decided, but probably State."

"Still want to be just a teacher?"

"Girl, yes, and I don't know if we can talk him into anything else."

"Well, I guess everybody can't be a professional."

"It's not a matter of what he can't be, it's what he wants to be. I told him he could go into practice with his daddy if he went to law school, but he don't want that."

"Well, my sister's Tim is dead set on law. And that's the only way we go ever get anything is through changing the law."

"That's right. J.R. just determined to be a history teacher though, so I don't discourage him too much."

"He'll probably grow out of it."

"Lord, I pray he will."

"He's a senior this year?"

"Yeah, honey, I'm gettin' ole."

They laughed as Mrs. Henderson brushed the hair clippings off Mrs. Sanders' neck. Mickey had parted her hair down the middle and made two lopsided twisty braids. If she'd had bangs, she could have been an Indian, but Kelli had bangs so Mary Annette definitely didn't want to have any cut. Although Mrs. Henderson lowered the chair for her to climb into, Mickey's feet dangled over the edge. Just a little while and they'd be at the picnic. Just a little while and if Mrs. Henderson was careful, no burns.

J.R. and Kevin were washing J.R.'s car when they got home. It was almost time for them to leave for Lake Umojah and Mickey couldn't decide if she wanted to ride with her brother, because his car still smelled new on the inside. Not only that, but sometimes he'd let her sit on his lap and drive. Her daddy would only do that if her mother wasn't in the car. He said it made her nervous, but J.R. didn't mind. With Kevin riding with them though, J.R. might not be so ready to let her behind the wheel.

"Got ya hair done, uh Mickey?"

"You like it Kevin?"

He winked, "Makes me wish I was eight again."

J.R. had been wiping the front windshield and threw the wet shammy at Kevin playfully. "Hey, BOY. That's MY girl you flirtin' with!"

Kevin wrung the water out of the shammy, then popped it at J.R. "So? Maybe she got better taste in men than you think."

Mickey didn't mind being the center of this kind of argument, but she had to find out if J.R. would let her drive. "J.R.?" He didn't pay her any attention at first because Kevin had wet his shammy and was about to throw it. "J.R.!? Listen to me!!"

"What princess?"

"Can I ride with you to the picnic?"

"Yeah, but tell Mama you going with me."

"You can sit on MY lap," Kevin was teasing J.R. now.

Mickey didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but the only reason she wanted to ride with them was so she could drive. "Is J.R. gonna let you drive, Kevin?"

"I wouldn't let that boy drive a tricycle with training wheels!"

"Can I drive then J.R.?"

They had stopped playing and were drying the car. J.R. simply shook his head which always meant no.

"Okay, ole stingy boy."

"Don't get mad."

"I'm gonna ride with my Mama and Daddy." She turned quickly so that her new curls whipped her face and shoulders. Then just to show that she wasn't really angry, she turned and made a funny face at J.R.

Julie had decided to ride with J.R. because she hadn't finished her dress for the party and told her mother that she wanted to work on it some more before going. Mickey knew though that the reason she waited on J.R. was she wanted to be with Kevin. Anyway, it turned out that Mary Annette had the whole back seat of her parents' car to herself. Lake Umojah was a forty-five minute drive from their house, but Mickey

enjoyed the ride. There were lots of trees along the way and they got to pass over a dam before reaching the park grounds. Once before, they had stopped on top of the dam and gotten out of the car. On one side there was just a little stream where people could swim or hunt for shells and on the other side was the lake which seemed to blend in with the sky at the far end. Her father had told her that the power from the dam made electricity for their city and the other towns in the surrounding counties, but she really hadn't understood how. That day they didn't stop because her father was supposed to help at the picnic and they were already late.

"You think there'll be trouble this week?"

The word caught Mickey's attention and she began to listen more carefully.

"Naw, nothing for them to do but get mad." Her father and mother laughed, but it wasn't like somebody'd made a funny. Mickey couldn't tell exactly what that kind of laugh meant.

"Why would they want to start something now?"

"I don't know Julius. Just that they might. Its happened before."

"What Mama?"

Her father looked at her in the rear view mirror and smiled.

"You sure got some big ears little girl."

"Always does have, 'cept when it comes time to pick up her room."

"Aw, Mama. What y'all talking about?"

"Nothing baby." Her father was being serious now. That meant that whatever it was they were talking about she wasn't supposed to be able to understand. It always made her angry when they acted like she was a little kid with no sense at all.

"You guys always leave me out."

"Grown-up talk, Mary Annette, that's all. Nothing for you to worry about."

Mickey wasn't satisfied, so she pretended to concentrate on her coloring book, but really was listening to them.

"I just hope none of these kids get hurt."

"That's the point of using 'em, Marva Jean. They won't do nothing to them without looking like damn fools."

"Well, seems to me they's looked like fools before."

"I know you don't want J.R. in it, but he's got to grow up sometime."

"You don't want him out there either."

"Let go the noose, honey. You think I'd let him go if ..."

"It's just we can't never tell."

Julius looked in the mirror again at Mickey. "No need to upset you know who." Her mother turned around and smiled at her daughter's apparent obliviousness. Then she and her husband started talking about something else.

Mickey wasn't upset anyway because she had forgotten to listen to them. Everytime she tried to color the eyes of the clown, the car would hit an extra bumpy spot or turn so that she wound up making lines outside the clown's head.

Just before they turned off the highway onto the picnic area road, Mickey spotted something ahead. At first it looked like a fat brown pig, but as they got closer she could see that it wasn't.

"Ooow Mama, lookit that, lookit."

Her father saw it too and told her to close her nose. Mickey had seen dead dogs before but never like that. In town the ones she'd seen

were smashed and bloody, but they never looked like this one.

"Why that dog like that y'all? Is he dead for real?" As they passed the dog Mickey could see that it was really dead. It lay on its bloated side with its stiff, strangely huge legs pointed towards the road. Mickey always felt bad about dead animals in the street. She wanted to cry or scream because it didn't seem fair that dogs and cats and things could be run over and the people who'd done it wouldn't be sent to jail. Somehow a dead dog always made her feel like it was her fault because after all, she was a people too. But this dog was whole, not mashed and gooky like the ones she was familiar with.

"How come he's like that, Mama? Mama, how come?" Mickey insisted. This new kind of death was appalling and a threat to her previous understanding of dead things.

"The blood's still in him honey."

"The blood? YULCH!" Mickey frowned, then thought about the idea. "Blood's still in me and you and Daddy, but we don't look like that."

"He's dead Mickey. Anytime something's dead and the blood stays in it, well, it swells like that."

"Do people do that when they get buried?"

"No. Finish coloring honey."

But Mickey didn't want to color. The dog worried her because the idea of something being dead and bigger than it was alive made her feel sick. It was as if that particular dead dog knew something or had some kind of secret power just because it was dead. She didn't feel sorry for it and suspected that somehow the dog was really alive. That idea appealed to her. The dog wasn't dead except on the outside. Its real self was still alive and floating around on the inside. The live self

was caught in the body, but having a good time, like diving and swimming around underwater. That was it, she thought. The live self of the dog couldn't die as long as the body was like that, but if it got squashed, it'd die for real. In her own mind Mickey knew that was the answer, but decided not to tell her parents because they'd think she was crazy or just being eight.

Finally they reached the area reserved for the Negro Professional's Association picnic. At first Mickey didn't see any kids her size, then she spotted Kelli drinking punch near one of the tables. Some older boys were playing softball, umpired by Bald Eagle Skinner, the Sunday School superintendent at her church. He had covered his hairless head with a red cap that had a button on top. Mickey wandered over to the game to look for Mark although she was certain he wouldn't be there. She began fingering one of the curls beneath her scarf and nonchalantly placed it over her shoulder. Kelli's hair was still in pigtails, so Mary Annette figured she hadn't been to the beauty shop yet. She snickered to herself imagining Kelli coming to church on Easter with her hair nappy and no new clothes. It would be just what she deserved for trying to steal Mark. Mrs. Willsey's son made a hit that looked like a home-run. Bald Eagle took his cap off to scratch his head and before he could get it back on, something white and gooky splatted right on the baldest spot. Mickey didn't know what it was at first, then she heard one of the boys tell another that a bird had dookied on the Eagle. She tried not to giggle, but couldn't help it when the Sunday school super wiped his head with his handkerchief. He had to wipe it twice because the first time he made a streaky trail down the back of his neck. She ran back to tell her mother just what had happened.

"I AM a good girl !" Mickey was about to cry for real this time.

"You been acting nasty all day young lady; spitting at your brother, then being mean to Miz Henderson, and now to Kelli."

"She started it Mama." Mary Annette put her head on her knees and started crying.

"She did not start it. You ought to apologize, behavin' so evil. I'm ashamed of you."

Mrs. Skinner just smiled and nodded her head. "That chile's just a little bit spoiled Marva Jean."

"Tell me about it. Her daddy give her too much."

"You're gonna have problems with her, I swear."

Mickey got up and walked down to the stream where a couple of men were fishing. She sat down and stared at the water for a long time. One of the men got something on his line and Mickey hoped it would get away but it didn't. He pulled the fish in and Mickey moved closer so she could see. It was a medium sized one, but Mickey felt sorry for it, having that sharp hook in its throat. The man threw it back in the water because he said it was too small. Mary Annette thought he was mean, catching a fish and hurting it, then just throwing it back so he could catch him again. She walked around behind them and further up the stream. There were a lot of large rocks in the water and Mickey was going to use them as a bridge, but one of the men saw her and told her not to get near the water. She told him she ^{could} swim, but she didn't want to get her hair wet, so she went back to the general picnic area. Kelli and some more girls were playing hide and seek, so Mary Annette walked towards the bench that was the safe spot. She sat there until they talked her into joining them.

"I AM a good girl !" Mickey was about to cry for real this time.

"You been acting nasty all day young lady; spitting at your brother, then being mean to Miz Henderson, and now to Kelli."

"She started it Mama." Mary Annette put her head on her knees and started crying.

"She did not start it. You ought to apologize, behavin' so evil. I'm ashamed of you."

Mrs. Skinner just smiled and nodded her head. "That chile's just a little bit spoiled Marva Jean."

"Tell me about it. Her daddy give her too much."

"You're gonna have problems with her, I swear."

Mickey got up and walked down to the stream where a couple of men were fishing. She sat down and stared at the water for a long time. One of the men got something on his line and Mickey hoped it would get away but it didn't. He pulled the fish in and Mickey moved closer so she could see. It was a medium sized one, but Mickey felt sorry for it, having that sharp hook in its throat. The man threw it back in the water because he said it was too small. Mary Annette thought he was mean, catching a fish and hurting it, then just throwing it back so he could catch him again. She walked around behind them and further up the stream. There were a lot of large rocks in the water and Mickey was going to use them as a bridge, but one of the men saw her and told her not to get near the water. She told him she ^{could} swim, but she didn't want to get her hair wet, so she went back to the general picnic area. Kelli and some more girls were playing hide and seek, so Mary Annette walked towards the bench that was the safe spot. She sat there until they talked her into joining them.

"Mama, guess what?"

Her mother was sitting under a shade tree in one of their lawn chairs, talking to the Eagle's wife.

"Mickey, can't you speak to Miz Skinner?"

"Hi Miz Skinner. Guess what happened to your husband?" She told them and they all laughed even though her mother pretended not to believe her. Kelli came over to their quilt and spoke to everyone but Mickey, who concentrated on the print of Mrs. Skinner's culotte-dress.

"I hope you know your part better than this young lady, Kelli."

Mickey felt thoroughly betrayed and eyed her mother with almost complete contempt.

"Mickey don't know her speech yet, Miz Sanders?"

"Not as well as she ought to."

Kelli savored Mary Annette's irritation and decided to carry it as far as she could. "I've known mine for a long time."

"I'll bet you practiced every day before you knew it, didn't you?"

"Yes ma'am. Wanna hear ..."

Mickey had taken all that she was going to. That stupid Kelli was just trying to get even because of Mark. "Don't nobody want to hear your speech girl!"

"Mary Annete! What's the matter with you today?"

"If you hear that speech now, you won't be surprised tomorrow."

"That's all right Miz Sanders. I do know mine though." Kelli had come down on her anyway and that's all she'd wanted. She left to get some more punch.

Mary Annette's mother scolded her, then threatened, "You better start actin' like a good girl if you 'spect to get to heaven."

After playing catch, tag, racing, tug of war and chase me, Mickey and Kelli were almost friends again, but not quite. They sat together to eat and laid down on the same quilt to take their naps. Kelli had a new coloring book and before she fell asleep she gave Mickey permission to color one a page. Mickey's mother took the book away from her because she wouldn't go to sleep. So Mickey waited until she heard her mother turning the pages of her magazine before she opened her eyes, squinty at first, then all the way. She could see clouds through the leaves of the tree and began to make up pictures as the clouds changed shape. The first one looked like a man with a cowboy hat on, then it stretched out and up and became a castle with pointed towers and triangular banners. Across the blue came a horseman and just as he was about to pass the castle, the gate opened and he went in. On the inside everything was blue and white and gold and red. She was a fairy princess in a golden dress with a silver crown on her head. She danced down to meet the handsome prince as he got off his beautiful white horse, then they danced around the courtyard, a soft blur of gold and blue. She shook herself awake for a moment, blinking hard to fight off the weight that kept pulling her eyelids down. The green and blue shone brightly before the castle stretched itself into thin air. Mickey gave up against her will and finally rolled over on her stomach, using her hands as a makeshift pillow.

* * *

Sunday morning Julie and Mary Annette both wanted to ride with J.R. Julie because his car was new and she would be able to see Kevin if she stuck with her brother; Mickey because she liked the smell. He was com-

pletely dressed before either of them.

"Come on you two if you're goin' with me."

"Coming J.R." Julie straightened Mickey's ribbon and brushed a stubborn wisp behind her ear. "Now you look like a nice little girl."

Mary Annette smiled sweetly at Julie's back, then to her own reflection. Just like a real fairy princess. Dark elbow length curls, which swung freely from the side part; deeply dimpled chin and cheeks. And the dress. Just what she had wanted, all nice and yellow. She loved the embroidered pinafore maybe because it made her color seem more honeyish and her hair just that much darker. All she needed was a crown and perhaps a fairy godmother to change J.R.'s car into a golden coach with six, no eight white horses, one for every year of her reign. Mark could be her prince riding to save her from dragons and evil villeins.

"You're gonna get left, Miz Ann."

"Like my clothes, J.R.?"

"You're beautiful honey, now come on."

Unconvinced, Mary Annette turned slightly to make sure her slip wasn't hanging. She thought J.R. wouldn't mind, but he resorted to hair pulling so she followed without further fuss. All the way to the car she walked with just enough spring in her step to achieve maximum hair bounce.

On the way to the church Mary Annette started thinking about the program. It wasn't that she was scared or anything like that. She just didn't want Mark to forget the second part of his solo like he'd done the year before. Then it hadn't mattered to her, but this time he was her boyfriend and Kelli would really rub it in if he goofed. Maybe, just to make sure, she'd give him confidence. As J.R. circled the block

looking for a park close to the church, it occurred to Mickey that if the church were sitting on the hill next to Bald Eagle's house, it might look like a real castle from the road. She imagined maybe someday the people might want to move it and she'd suggest that hill because if they did then you'd be able to see the whole city from the Sunday school rooms upstairs. Besides that, they could have lots of grass and trees and a sparkly blue stream running all around with a red safety bridge across it.

J.R. turned off the radio and the silence shook Mary Annette out of Wonderland. Before she realized what was coming, it started to happen. Her stomach began to get shaky and the words of her speech came to her head, all jumbled up. "Although ...uh...my Lord...uh...up from the tomb." She hated it. Everytime she remembered the words before a program, when the time came to say them she'd forget. But there they were, running as fast as they could between her stomach and her head.

"Well, Miss Mary Annette Sanders, we didn't think you'd make it."

"I'm sorry Miz Willzee."

Kelli had on a bright pink, low waisted dress with a lime colored sash and she didn't have ONE curl. A page boy, the fink.

"Hi-i-ia Mary Annette."

"Hi-i-ia Kelli. That's so pretty and your hair's cute too."

"Yours too. MY mother wanted me to have curls, but I told her I wanted mine like this."

"MY mother doesn't care HOW I wear MY hair, but J.R. and my Father like long curls."

"Does Julie have curls today?"

"She's too old."

Mark came in with Tony and Gerald. They'd been to the water fountain and Gerald had a big stain on his coat. Mrs. Willsey scolded him as she tried to dry the water off, but Mary Annette figured it was lucky he hadn't gotten it on his pants. Everybody would have thought he'd had an accident going to the bathroom. At least it wasn't Mark, who was being bashful and pretending not to see her. Time to share confidence, so Mickey dimpled her prettiest in spite of Kelli's frown.

"Hello Mark. That's a nice suit." Whew! She'd almost said 'pretty suit', but changed it just in time.

"Thanks Mary Annette."

"I told you you could call me Mickey."

"Okay, okay, Mickey. I like your .. uh .. things too."

"Are you kinda scared?"

"Yeah, but not much."

"Me too."

It was almost time for them to go upstairs and Mrs. Willsey made everyone be quiet. Bald Eagle stuck his head through the door, then came in. Some silly second grader started to snicker, but Mrs. Willsey popped her eyes towards them and whoever it was shut up.

"Oh my, Miz Willzee. These childrens sure lookin' nice this mawnin'."

"Yes sir, just pretty as little lambs."

"You children know all o your lines?"

They all answered yes and began a general discussion of the program, church, Sunday school teachers and birds.

"Well, God bless you all, each and everyone. 'Bout that time Miz Willzee."

They lined up in twos and as Kelli glowered around Gerald, Mary

Annette dimpled again at Mark. Holding his hand in her yellow gloved one, she quickly whispered, "Don't worry Mark. It'll be over in no time."

"I'm not scared."

"We can get Easter eggs after the program in the basement."

"I KNOW that!"

"Wanna sit with me?"

"I guess so. Now be quiet, willya?"

Mickey began to walk so the curls would bounce and when too many fell over her shoulder, she tossed them lightly, turning her head just enough to grin victoriously at Kelli.

The program was over in no time, but after Mark finished his solo, it seemed to last forever. Mickey had tried to imagine him a bird because old Popeyes had called him that once, but it just ~~wouldn't~~ wouldn't work. He was too people or something. Although the cherub choir had to sing, Mary Annette didn't mind. Everyone important had seen her outfit already. Old Popeye made them sit down before she passed out the eggs and made them promise to eat them up before going to the sanctuary. She really didn't need to make them promise because Mr. Jackson, the grumpy clean up man was at the door.

Kelli ate three eggs. Mickey didn't even want ONE, but thought it best to keep up. Mark and Gerald really gobbled theirs down in a hurry, much to both girls' dismay. Mickey almost choked trying to eat hers fast and the boys left before she could regain use of her mouth. Kelli watched her with a degree of pleasure.

"You're gonna get strangled."

Of course she was gonna get strangled, eating so fast, any dummy could see that. Mickey gulped a whole cup of grape juice. And that stupid Mark, running off and leaving her. If her mouth hadn't been so full, she would have really told him about being a little pig, eating so much so fast. Kelli savored her juice, sipping as slowly as she could until she and Mary Annette were the only children left. Finally, she too arose.

"Hurry up Mickey!"

"You DON'T have to wait!"

"You're gonna be late and old Popeyes'll have a hissy ..."

"I am NOT going to eat any faster!"

"Well, I'm gonna get my robe. Want me to get yours?"

Mickey was completely ticked off. Everything had started out so wonderful and now was beginning to fall apart. She knew that Kelli knew she was ticked off which only made her more ticked. "NO, I'll get it myself."

"See you upstairs then."

Mickey was the last child in the basement as she started on the second half of her fourth egg. She detested boiled eggs. Mr. Jackson was still standing guard at the door so she couldn't sneak it out. The waste basket was right by him so she couldn't throw it away either. Anyway that wouldn't be right because kids were starving in China. So she ate it and finished just as the organ prelude started upstairs. Wiping her hands on the paper tablecloth, she slipped her gloves back on, then ran for the choir room. She had forgotten about Grumpy and when he caught her shoulder she almost yelled.

"You know better than that little Sanders."

"I'm sorry Mr. Jackson, I forgot. I'll walk. Promise." She tried to smile but her heart was still beating too fast. He scowled his ugliest at her then turned to finish cleaning the hall. Mickey walked slowly, almost tiptoeing. Tip. Tip, take a deep breath and let it out easy. Just around the corner and ole grumpy'll never know. She turned and smiled back at him, then safely out of sight, galloped for the robe room. Before she reached the door, the whole building seemed to come alive as if it had taken it upon itself to move. Mickey lifted her hand to scream ... scream because the sound that followed was so loud and so close that it killed her ears. In front of her the floor cracked, then made weirdly widening scribbles up the wall and across the ceiling. What? What? I want my Mama? The choir room door opened by itself and danced crazily up and down, back and forth. Daddy? Dad-dee? The words came out. She knew they did, but different. Thin and hollow, woven forever with the sound of shattering glass, creaking crumbling timbers, fiendishly suspended. Mickey tried to hold onto something because she thought she was falling. It didn't seem right because it took such a long, long time before she hit the bottom, like diving and swimming underwater. Then she felt it with her head and shoulders, the sky from the windowless basement choir room, exploding for an eternity, blue and white and blue and white before the pain. Mom-mee? Mom-mee?

At the diner next door, the soda glasses and ice cream dishes lined neatly behind the counter seemed to explode of their own volition. Simultaneously, J.R. and Kevin were soaked by the coffee they were about to drink before being slammed through their table to the floor. In the supermarket a block and a half away, Mrs. Ollaby and her sister Elaine heard the blast then felt it as their car lunged into the back of the pastor's

new Mark III. It was over though, almost before it began. Except for the sprinkle of shredded hymnbooks and Sunday school pamphlets, various sizes of stained glass, brick and iron, it might never have happened. An uneven ebb of people flowed from the front and side doors, all terrified and in their shock, not quite sure they were safe. Julie saw J.R. as he wobbled towards the remains of his car. One of the pianos from the second floor had landed intact except for its pedals directly on his car's roof. Before he could stop them, tears began to dilute the blood from his head wound.

"J.R.! J.R.!" Julie pushed her way through the crowd to him.

"Aw hell, Julie!" He embraced her comfortingly, assuring her that his biggest hurt was the Story and Clark planted on top of his four summers worth of hard labor.

Because he was tall, Julius saw them first. His wife trailed behind, following the new straw hat as it weaved through the crowd towards Julie and J.R. At the sight of her son's bloody face and shirt, Marva Jean felt a flicker of fear, then began to wipe and patch his wound as best she could.

"I'm alright Mama."

"Now, honey, let me..."

"I'm OKAY, Mama."

Julie was the first to sense it, the horror that they weren't complete. She remembered just before the explosion, the kids' choir filing in: fat little Gerald, Tony, Kelli, Mark ...

Marva Jean continued to dab at J.R.'s wound. "Where's your sister?"

J.R. looked at Julie's flushed face. His mother stopped her first aid.

"Where's your sister? Where's MICKEY?" Hysterically each of them began to hurry around Julie into the crowd, searching, examining, dismissing each white robed figure. Mickey? Julie figured out the corner where the choir robe room had been. The building there was no more than rubble and dust rising like feeble, wind whipped smoke columns. As she walked to the back, the dust got in her nose and made her sneeze. Goodness, Sneez-y! Snotty nose, Jul-ee! It became almost uncontrollable as she started digging, tugging at the brick and chunks of cement until she pulled the yellow glove speckled orange and brown and red from Mickey's grave.

* * * * *

Each I mean fightin' and you I whipped him; what you think - I got this sure and let you slip me? Kuppel. He fat head Jerry! Talkin' here can't none of us know what's happenin', capt to Irene too and we ought to go on back down where we belong here.

He hit you first?

Yes, can't be started in talkin' here Irene too, and I told him not to touch my baby and she baby, so he didn't shut up and I hit him.

What ya another say?

Well, cause she weren't in there.

But Lesley give me a note to name. Said I said her name was Irene and been goin' to sleep in her chair and my nose ought to get on with it right. She don't. Now she put me to no bed since a long time ago before I was even here.

Well you better shut that note up and throw it down where it belongs and you always in a rage and what did they ever do for you?

EPILOGUE:

A STREET SONG

Hey Jarvis! Jarvis, come on here! Hurry up boy. You know mama tole us to be home befo' dark.

Doggit Toby. Shoot, I know my way home by now and I sho aint scared've no dark!

You know she done said, 'aint no need fo us to git in no troubles fo we done even been here a year. Sides, we don't want her to start wonderin bout that...

Yeah, yeah, I know, but shoot, it aint even nearly dark yet and anyhow ... hey, what's that sore on yo eye? You been fightin, aintcha? Didya whomp him good, huh?

Yeah I been fightin and yeah I whipped him; what you think - I got this sore and let him whip me? Humph! Ole fat head Jerry! Talkin bout don't none of us know what's happenin, cept fo Irena Mae and we ought to go on back down where we come from.

He hit you first?

Naw, cause he started in talkin bout Irena Mae, and I tole him to shut up bout her and the baby, so he didn't shut up and I hit him.

What yo teacher say?

Nothin, cause she weren't in there.

Miz Lezley give me a note fo mama. Said I aint been payin tention and been goin to sleep in her class and my mama ought to put me to bed at night. She-oot! Mama aint put me to no bed since a long time ... befo I was even five.

Well you better tear that note up and throw it away. Mama find out bout yo sleepin in class and what wid them extra groceries she been

findin, she soon figure out bout our deal with Mistuh Washin'ton. You know he said if'n them cops was to catch us carryin them packages to ole Mr. Smith they go snatch us bald.

What you think, I dumb or somethin? I throwed that thing down the stool fo I left school.

Lookit there goes Thomas. Hey Thomas, where you goin?

Better go on down to the store cause yo boss might fire you if you late!

I wonder if Oscar went lookin fo a job again?

Prob'ly not. You know what mama tole Irena Mae.

Yeah, I guess he aint gone lookin.

Maybe we ought to tell him bout Mr. Washin'ton, him bein older'n us he oughta be able to work real good and mama wouldn't say nothin to him even if she caught him goin out nights.

Hey, we see Mr. Washin'ton and we could ask him to find a job fo Oscar tonight. Then you could stay home and wouldn't be fallin to sleep in class.

Naw suh! Mr. Washin'ton hired me first and all three of us could work fo him. Sides, he said I was real good cause I aint got no sus- sus- susterpicious face.

Naw, You sho aint, just got a ugly face is all.

Aw, you shut up! I least got ME a girlfriend!

Yeah, ole Lucille back home, that wouldn't nobody cept you want.

Humph! She prettier'n ole Sandra Melorose!

Sandra Melorose weren't never my girl friend no ways.

Oh yeah? How come you talked with her at that fish fry then? Cause you liked her I knows!

You crazy colored boy! Bout the craziest chile.

Aint neither! Humph! I aint crazier'n Sammy.

Sammy who?

That ole boy in my class. Everybody say he the teacher's pet.

He don't never do nothin cept clean off the blackboard. He caint even hit a ball good as me!

Yo teacher like him real good?

Yeah. She always sayin how good he do his homework and let him take names when she go out the room. He think he smart too just cause they go let him go to a new school. Humph!

Ooo-wee-e-e-e! Lookit that train Jarvis, just like fo real.

They musta just put it out, cause them bows and arrows was here this mawnin.

I sho wished we had one of them! Jarvis! It startin in to movin!

Lookit that! Hot damn, smoke and everythin!

Come on. Come on! COME ON, JARVIS!! Let's go fo that ole man calls the polices. Caint even touch his ole window. Ole ofay!

Shoot, we wasn't doin nothing! Caint even look!

Maybe if daddy comes up here ... Hey Jarvis, we could save the money Mr. Washin'ton give us and.

You wanna start hearin that baby hollerin? Humph! And anyhow, mama caint NEVER find out bout our workin fo him, stoopid!

Yeah, yeah, OKAY!

We go to buyin toys and junk like that she'll sho find out! Bad nough tellin her the grocery man give us extry food sometime.

Yeah, I know it. I sho be glad when somethin happens; daddy comin on up here, or Oscar findin a job or even Irena Mae gettin married, or

something Jarvis.

Yeah, me too. Hey Toby! TOBY! Lookit that big joker. Lookit them red eyes!

Watch out Jarvis! You crazy, throwin a pencil at a rat? That aint no arrow you's got. Move out the way!

Come on Toby, he done run in that box and caint get out. I know he caint; see them eyes shinin?

Pick up that piece of bottle.

Yeah and here's a ole broomstick too. Tie'em good Toby. Here let me do it.

Now we got ourselves a spear.

* * * * *