

American Flyer

by Charles Daughaday

The boy awoke to the sound of voices, across from his bed,
 As his Mom and Papa spoke in hushed tones.
 "Bill will be coming home tonight; I'll stop at the store
 And cook a good meal for us tonight, so I'll be later."
 "I will watch the children after Evelyn leaves," Papa said.
 Suddenly the ring of the phone stabbed the air,
 As the boy rubbed at the sleep in his heavy eyes.
 His Mom, closest to the phone, answered, and suddenly
 The air was pierced with the most horrible and ungodly
 Scream the eleven-year old boy had ever heard, followed
 By the bang and clatter of the heavy phone and its base
 Bouncing on the floor. "Bill is dead," she screamed, "He
 Fell dead as he was going to work! My god, what will I do?"
 Papa had closed on her and wrapped his arms around her,
 One of the few and perhaps the only occasion the boy ever
 Witnessed a show of sympathetic feeling from him, "We
 Will get by, Sis," he seemed to whisper.

The funeral was concluded and friends and neighbors
 Had brought food; people stood around in a huge, high-
 Ceiling room with the large bay window facing the street.
 The boy entered and moved close to the mantel, head down.
 One of his father's friends laid a hand on his shoulder, saying
 "You will have to be the man of the house now." He nodded.

The next day, he was instructed to take his red wagon
 Down, around the block and then across the street to a
 Grocery store run by his Papa's cousin. There, he would
 Receive a wagon load of much needed groceries.
 He was given no money. He got out his wagon he
 Was so proud of; he especially liked the tires which seemed
 To be like small versions of auto tires. He pulled it out
 To the sidewalk and turned right toward the grocery.
 Halfway down the street were three concrete steps leading
 Down as the land fell away. He was careful to back down
 The steps and partially lift the wagon so it would not suffer
 Scrapes and dents. Then, he came to the rounded corner
 On Second street, which led to the grocery. Sitting on the
 Front porch of the corner house were the old Pemberson
 Couple who gathered the gossip of everyone passing and
 Served as the local clearinghouse for all that passed for "news."

As he passed and pretended not to look at them, he noticed
 How the man leaned over to whisper in his wife's ear,
 And suddenly the boy realized he would have to make the
 Return trip with a wagon load of groceries in a few minutes.
 His eyes began to water and burn with embarrassment and shame.
 He suddenly hated his bright red wagon and wished he could
 Run it into the nearest ditch and hide himself in the bushes.