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Voices

Voices

Vol. VII No. 2

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. . . life is at its best when we confidently recommend our mud-pies to each other's sympathetic consideration.

J. M. Thorburn

THE WAY OF ALL TOWNS

An Essay by Algie Ray Smith

Four a.m. Most of the town is asleep. The air is like the cool darkness in a burial vault. No sound permeates the silence: the business district and the cemetery are equally peaceful. A night attendant at the Ajax Oil Company on U. S. Highway 72 east pulls his faded jacket closer about his shoulders. The slight wind that precedes the dawn whips bits of paper about his feet.

The heavens shake off her dress of inky blackness and don a wrap of silvery-blue. A few stars still shine casting a pale light about the sky. The moon is a translucent spot of disappearing grey. From the surrounding hills and ridges comes the first cock's crow. A semi-trailer truck hisses nosily to a stop before a red light on Main Street, then continues through town on what was once a buffalo path.

In the shanties on East First Street men sit down to breakfast of fried hogs' jowl and grits, placed before them by wives and lovers with time-worn faces beneath disheveled hair. The men eat slowly: they are not eager to get to their dull jobs in the lime pits, the lumber yards, and the gardens of the wealthy. Some of the men wish they were like their more fortunate kin who arise when they please and live off unemployment checks, but there is still a little pride left in them, so they say nothing.

Also in the eastern part of town is the malignant growth on the town's maturing shoulders—the slums. Here children huddle three or four in a bed and awake to the sounds of all-night poker parties breaking up. The children go out on back porches to wash their hands in water as muddy as the water in the holes of the unpaved streets before their homes. Later Town Creek, which carries the sewage from the houses on Hill Street, will be the younger children's playmate through the long day. The older children are luckier, because they are forced to attend a nice, clean school and to forget for awhile that life is one big rummage through garbage can, and entertainment is a game of stickball in a filthy street.

The first rays of the morning's sun send golden arrows through the hole that Jesse James shot in the weather vane atop the court house. The first rays of the morning's sun stings the eyes of the sleepy night shift at the fertilizer company as ghostly-whitened men leave their work for home and a bed. The night nurses at the hospital see the morning sun as they sit in the lounge and drink hot coffee. There is much discussion among the nurses: a new addition is planned for the hospital. A baby was born just before day break, a Negro baby who has no known father and who will grow up in the streets, a baby who will fulfill his original purpose as an extra check each month from the Welfare Office and who will run about the town with his improperly-cared-for navel protruding from his stomach like a burned twig. A street department truck passes in front of the hospital and waters down yesterday's dust.

The streets will be clean and fresh when the cars start to hum about the town. The flowers will be bending in a slight breeze and adding more

untold beauty. As tourists drive down tree-lined Fourth Street, they will exclaim, "What a beautiful town!" Others will answer, after checking a tour guide, "Yes, and just think: this town is one of the oldest in the state."

By eight-fifteen the town has finished its breakfast. At the elementary school the first-graders are reciting the alphabet, while in a history class in the high school the teacher is discussing the town's role in the Civil War. At the parochial grade school the students are saying the Rosary. At the Negro school a third-grader is embarrassed at the rumbling noise coming from her stomach. All the schools are crowded, but basements and libraries are converted into classrooms. In a lawyer's office across from the town square a committee is trying to decide what to do with half a million dollars left by a native son to educate the town's people.

The stores which have been open for two hours are busily selling everything from work shoes to aspirin. The town's senior citizens have gathered around the Park Fountain to watch the goldfish wear out the day. Standing guard over the fountain are a statue or a Civil War soldier and a cannon. The statue was placed there in honor of the men of a nearby army camp, and a plaque near the cannon relates that the town was the site of the Confederate Convention.

A block due west of the Square is the building in which the convention was held. Until a few years ago the building was a stop-over for all the town's people who were on their way to the cemetery, but even death is now a booming business and the funeral home was moved to the suburbs. The building, which has been given a new face, as well as a new name, now contains a doctor's office, a dentist's office, and other smaller offices too numerous to mention. Next to the building is a new bank which boasts a Confederate flag.

In the pool hall the high school "drop-outs" idly chalk cue sticks and risk rolls of money that they always seem to have. In the drugs store two ex-servicemen thumb through copies of **Tight White Collar**, **Manchurian Candidate**, **PT-109**, and **Summer and Smoke**. A pre-school lad pulls a once-red wagon along the sidewalk and begs for empty boxes. A blind beggar sits near the doorway of the hotel: a pebble rattles against the sides of his tin cup, which at every sound the beggar extends forward. The town paper carries stories of house-breaking and lesser crimes.

The janitor of the Baptist church sits on the church steps and looks proudly at the new church Educational Building. He can still remember the dedication and the Governor's speech. Opposite the church is the Town Library, which was once robbed by the James Gang when it was a bank. A bullet hole in one of the rooms of the library may be seen as proof of James' infamous visit.

The siren atop the Police Station announces that it is time for lunch. The town's eleven restaurants become orchestras of clanging knives and forks and tinkling water glasses, become the "coffee houses" of the town, become the gossip bars. The town's great stomach is being filled with beans and meat, talk and business deals, and green rectangular portraits of Washington and Lincoln.

The school children are being fed well-balanced meals in the lunch rooms, or cold lunches from brown sacks, or cokes and twelve-cent hamburgers, or nothing. After lunch the students gather on the playgrounds or the school steps for a few minutes' relaxation before afternoon classes. Their teachers watch over them like hawks to be sure that the students do not get their desert from parked cars or from the fists of larger classmates. An Air Force jet leaves a thick, pillowy vapor trail across the mid-day sky.

At one o'clock women in the restaurants hastily finish their coffee and return to their machines at the clothing factory. Through the long afternoon the women will produce work pants and shirts which will turn up later on the backs and hips of farmers, truck drivers, janitors, and other men throughout the South.

Within the town limits on Highway 219 two young employees of the local dairy are unloading empty pint milk bottles from a truck just returning from an army base some hundred miles away. The government milk contract has helped the new dairy get a strong foothold. And the dairy has helped the town.

At the intersection near the dairy is the town's famous haunted house. Before the days of the three service station across from the house, cars would line the road so that their occupants might peer up at the silhouette in the house's tower window. The window's painted green now, but some people still claim that on rainy days they can see a girl's face there.

Beyond the house is the town's cemetery, where the population explosion is also showing its effect. Some of the new graves are being placed next to the road. There has been some talk of a new cemetery, but no one can decide where to start it. The Memorial Gardens on Highway 219 is not helping out much because the people can not either afford it or they have no trust in it.

The town's five doctors' offices are filled with patients who sit in deep-leathered chair and read year-old magazines. Every one seems to be sick or to have been sick. The older people say the town has come through another hard winter. Other people say that "fall-out" is causing all the sickness. Some of the people do not try to explain their illness: they just resign themselves to being sick and find pleasure in telling others their troubles.

The last of the buildings of a pre-Civil War college are being torn down to make room for more store in the town's first shopping center. Many of the buildings went up in smoke when the college burned. Those that were left standing were converted into apartment houses, but now the years have made them hazardous and unlivable.

Two new factories have brought the Northern people into the city. Two new sub-divisions have sprang up to accommodate them. At four p.m. Grapes, Whipples, Bondinis, Schwartz, Grivas, McCulloughs, and Averys can be seen mowing their lawns and cooking steaks over outdoor grills. Koesters and Poseys report to the high school stadium for football practice. And the Catholic church has doubled its congregation.

As the late afternoon sun begins to cool beyond the western hills, bearded men with red faces and palsied hands play coke-cap checkers in the

back of the fire station. A patrolman places an expired-meter ticket on a local car. Late shoppers fill the stories and double park around Town Square. The last of the school children leave their unfinished pepsis and "nabs" in the drug store and start home. A basketball game in a vacant lot is broken up when the ball bounces into the street and is run over. Tables are being set up around the Christian church for the annual ice cream supper. Somewhere in the distance an ambulance siren wails.

Two hours after the sun has disappeared the motels begin filling up with weary travelers. The local theatre has a full house for the first time of the year on the opening night of **Ben-Hur**. Many of the people do not go to see the feature because they saw the movie years ago. A clothing-store owner drops a canvas bag down the night deposit chute at the bank. The drug store locks up for the night.

A group of high school boys sit on the curb on Main Street and whistle at passing cars. On an unlighted street six bootleggers are doing a sell-out business to teenagers and adults alike. In an alley back of the movie house an eight-year old gets his first taste of a cigarette. In one of the restaurants a truck driver drops coins in a pinball machine.

A young girl stands placidly in front of the State Highway Garage. An ancient Ford pulls up, and the girl climbs in. An old man who has been watching her from a window across the street smiles to himself. Young people arriving at the Youth Center find it closed because the Youth Activities Incorporated is out of funds and can not bear the expense.

In a parked car in a country churchyard a young couple fight against adult desires. They contemplate marriage, but realize that is not the answer. They have been together too much, but there is no other place for them to go. Their talking is hushed, and the couple moves closer together. Somewhere behind a darkened window a baby cries. The moon has disappeared behind a cloud. Most of the town is asleep. The air is like the cool darkness in a burial vault. No sound permeates the silence; the business district and the cemetery are equally peaceful.

TAG

The winter morning comes creeping,
clawing with cold fingers
to keep the frozen crystals from spring.
Spring swells; sending sparrow songs
well into summer sunset.
Then the lavender twilight
comes to my door drawing me out
to sit silently in adoration of autumn haze
and watch children play their after-supper games.

Chloe Hughes

THE TIMES WERE GOOD

The times were good when I sat
gnomelike upon the hill of ignorance,
the green growing of world then came
sprouting up and soon higher than
the hill it grew.

And I sat.

The time of leaving the hill
was dread in coming,
creeping piteously through the
bulging stems of world.

When finally it settled heavy upon me,
I groped my way down, down.

There was no path.

My uprightness was futile.

I struggled.

The growing grew and then
there was no more.

The staid stems stood
shackled to each other.

My way was barred,
bringing me crawling.

The damp clutches of black came
and plucked at my sleeves.

I followed.

Janice Woosley

I AM AN OLD WOMAN

I am an old woman,
years run rippling over the cover of my cloak.
They chide me for being an old woman,
don't you see their hideous stares behind me?
I am tired of hearing their guttural joy.
I rise to bargain my case with them,
but my steppings are not moving.
I am an old woman.
I rock.
I rock.

I see them come and pass raucously away.
Their heads swivel from my sight.
The goings and comings have cankered my looking
I walk swaying no more; I am bent;
feet trample near me.
My callings drain away into drops
of crackling vintage.
I am an old woman.
I rock.
I rock.

Janice Woosley

TIME CAME GLOAMING OVER THE HILL

Time came gloaming over the hill
and settled
white upon the crag of misery
The rages of being grew thin and quaking
as a reed
and muted song muttered low
Grace grew into knots of grotesqueness
and stiffened
Veils drooped in agony.

Janice Woosley

I'm Born

I'm born.

I die.

Just like

A fly.

The only

Difference is

I cry.

Carolyn Wilson

THE GARDEN PATH

One day the sun is bright
And the deep blue of a happy sky
Smiles, and winks a sleepy cloud at me.
With carefree heart and skipping step
I seem to live my life
As if it were a garden path,
With better just ahead.
And then, before I realize,
I see but there ahead
The end of this lovely floral path.
Then with feverish haste
I turn to view and smell
Each beautiful flower,
And feel the thrill of pain
As I prick my finger on the thorns.
For all of this is Life,
And when it's nearly gone,
One seeks in vain to live
Each moment to its fullest.
Too late we realize,
Too late we learn.

Sandy Griffis

THE MEADOW LARK

The meadow lark that turned right
and covered autumn with its wet wing
is sheltered now where the briar waits
to bend when the breeze comes.
A rabbit track covered twice over
with a thick growth of green
is washed now and the hound has turned home.

Dawn lifts the dampness to perfume
the meadow with its own sweet smell.
Morning flashes on the golden briar
leaves and the light catches the bird's
eye beckoning it from a drowsy sleep.
The hare hears a whirr of wings and
sniffles in observation then hops from its hole.

The rabbit will leave to return again—
this time to its naked burrow—the lark
to its unsheltered nest.
The field will be dotted with square bales of hay,
for the rain has gone
and the sun warmed up a new world.

Chloe Hughes

WHEN ONE KNOWS

When
one soul
knows,
believes,
understands,
loves
another,
all the splendor
of the sun
shining on
mountain peaks
becomes
a guttering
candle
in the
quintessence
of the
rare
and
lovely
thing.

Barbara Reynolds

SNOWFLAKES AT TWILIGHT

When day begins to fade and night comes into
view,

The tiny, fluffy, snowflakes the lonely night
insue.

Each minute, white body a chrystaline delight,
Covering every object hidden by the night.

The toils of day are ended; my labor is no more.
I'll sit here by the fire and listen to it roar.

Now my head is nodding and my eyelids start to
close.

I have grown very sleepy looking at the snow.

When I wake tomorrow, I know that I shall see
The tiny, fluffy snowflakes on every house and
tree.

Sam Edwards

college

imperial

walks and grass and chairs

voices in spring and threats

rambling and certain

fire and gods on week-ends

with fragile flowers and athletes

running and sitting

mixtures of sex and smoke

in churches halls showers and back houses

loneliness of character

looking toward power and respect

without purpose or reason

searching finding loosing finding

futile completeness

C. W. Robinson

mass of st. patrick

god

stone-faced proud standing

walking auspiciously

pyramids of egypt

the pinnacle speaking not speaking

ruling not thinking

black sex follows after the pure external

construct wheels of emptiness

ambiguities and power

all is well

all is well

he is god

amen

C. W. Robinson

FRESH SPRING GRASS

A Short Story by John Warren Oakes

"Pete! He—ay—Pete! Pete! He—ay!! Pete! Damn, Pete—Whoa! Pete! Pete, wait! Come here—Stop damit! Pete!

We had parked in their "turf"—their block. How were we to know it was "their" turf. We were strangers in this city. Out on the town—to see "Gaslight Square." This "Gaslight Square" was fabulous—so I had been told—Two blocks of the old section of the city—vintage—late 19th century—set up—commercial venture—as a fun spot. The old buildings were transformed into night clubs and there was nothing but two blocks of night spots packed like cereal on store shelves. I had been told of the half-dozen murders around the "Square" in the last three months. You don't think about this when you go out in a city. You forget it in a hurry. This is how I was impressed with the place—

I had finally found a place to park about four blocks from "Gaslight Square". I put my transistor radio under the car seat and got my exercise rolling up my car windows. I locked my door and pushed the hood of the car to keep my balance in the dark as I hurried round to open the door for my date. She always had the door open and was maneuvering to get out as I got there but I made the gesture. I fumbled with the keys and locked her door. Taking my place curb-side of her we started toward the "Square." I was spooked by how dark and quiet it could be in a city of half a million people.

Their cries and shouts at Pete were magnified by the hushed surroundings. I wondered who this Pete was and why he was staying a little ahead of the others. I squeezed my date's hand and assured myself that she would not speak for she was trembling and I hoped she would be quiet for once. From the corner of my eyes I could make out that there was several of them—not too big—they were yelling at Pete to wait as they plodded after him—all going forward but at different angles. Chasing Pete in the dark—had they seen us? My stumbling feet kept catching on broken concrete of the sidewalks which rose like icebergs through waves of tree roots. Around their breaks I could feel about six inches of fresh spring grass. Huge Victorian buildings like secure castles cut off even the faint starlight. The cool spring night was betrayed by the perspiration which began to collect on my forehead and palms. I could feel my socks sticking to the soles of my feet. We walked quietly on—paralleling them. What the heck were they up to? As we crossed the street and rounded the corner, I could see the light of "Gaslight Square". In this block no other people were in sight but just outside the din of Dixieland—Oriental—Scotch bagpipes—Rock-n-Roll—Twisten'—Jazz we fell in line with the groups obviously going to "Gaslight Square". I sneaked a look behind me and saw that the shouters had caught up with Pete and they stood there dancing for Pete's bottle. Then they turned back into their darkness. I thought how glad I was to be in the light and carnival atmosphere of "Gaslight Square" and took a deep breath and laughed at the sight of so many people.

A young patrolman—younger looking than I, smiled nervously as we

walked by and swung his billy self-consciously as he walked his beat under the bright street light. I noticed that those coming into the "Square" were in groups—should have found out more about it before we came—the "Square" is perfectly safe—I guess—. Boy, I hate those black blocks around it. I felt that the young policeman knew I sensed his fear of any dark spot and wondered if it was mutual. His dad was probably a cop.

Jean, my date, eased an elbow into my side and made some snide statement about my taciturnity. I begged pardon—said I was thinking. She looked through her green contact lens at me with that "can this be possible look" and I started forgetting about Pete and his friends and the lonely dangerous dark they played in—looking down at Jean, clicking her little heels, walking beside me; I thought how many years we accepted each other as real necessary and of the nights.

"Gaslight Square", a carnival for adults—I guess we are adults—we got I.D.'s—we window shopped by each night spot and decided to go into the "Dark Side" featuring the "Quartet Tres Bien"—Jazz jazz—intermission—breaktime—punk piano player—boozed drunk drummer—loose drums—loud horn—everybody boozed. Jean says she likes her ice cream—says its cold—the ice cream dish. Jazz too loud but Jean's so pretty talking, talking, talking. Why the heck doesn't she shut up once. Now she has noticed the tables were covered with dust and fingerprints and candle wax.—and sticky booze and how she just hated the place so we pardoned our way out of the thick smoky people. I made the customary nonchalant stop by the cash register and the cashier formed her 867th smile and we were out in the cold night-morning again. About three A.M. People everywhere. Fake artist selling poor imitations of poor artists who didn't sell. Woman—48—maybe—kissing little dog in a big Cadillac. I felt sorry for the dog. Her husband—I guess—got out of the car—skinny little man with a skinny little mustache. Now I felt sorry for the woman.

I was fascinated with the "Square" but Jean was still harping on the gummy tables theme so we left the "Square" and I had almost decided that this was the last money I spent on Jean and me. She talked on into the dark as we walked to the car.

I was still again and scared, for the darkness was all around us now. The night was so black it hid the car. I swore when I got home to paint it all over with luminous paint. We had come two blocks, now two to the left and no car. Turning the corner I looked back and saw the young cop turning around and under his street light beat he stood. Some help. He would not know where the car was. I felt lost and Jean started in on why didn't I know where the car was. If she were a guy I would have hit her. Staring into the black I listened for anything and heard nothing but Jean whispering, whispering in my good ear. I asked her to be quiet and she yelled back that she didn't feel like being quiet and why didn't I understand the artist's temperament and that I should at least take a course called Art 100 or music appreciation at the university and she said she was going somewhere and shop tomorrow—something about a sweat shirt with Bach's picture on it. I remembered the times I had heard Jean play the piano. She had a great pair of hands on a piano. This thought was pushing out my suspicions of the

blackness when the light from a camera flashed—something barely noticeable from a distance—in a fraction of a second had blinded me.

Jean got quiet for once, then yelled as I felt her pulled away from me. I swung around at the purple spots mocking my vision. Look—out—Pete! something slurred. I heard a spring ping and felt a blade press my Adam's apple. Jean was crying—then was shut-up somehow. My vision coming back I faded back off the blade. I could see them now—standing in tight T-shirts with the sleeves ripped out. I started toward one and saw a line of reflected light run down a looming lead pipe swung by the power of a huge hand and arm and I knew I would not get up—not survive—the blow which drove me down. I cried out "God—forgive! and grasped the fresh spring grass as all pain left.

John Warren Oakes

THE IDEALIST

Enjoy your summer in maze-dwelling make-belief,
Clothe yourself in sweat-sweet days,
Then with assurance of autumn's sobering relief,
Discard all in a hamper of haze.
Live your saucy and Sunday pleasures
With satisfaction of no moments wasting,
Ignore the bee-raped rose,
Summer life is not taking the blows.
Clouds are cotton, confectionary tasting;
Never clouds with a look of acid,
As sour milk in a blue-glazed pan.

Pat Jackson

OH, CHILDREN OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Oh, children of the seventeenth century
(With sort of significant revisions
to tatter ole T. S.)
Dew bells sometimes chase weeds,
Through trees considered majestic.
Plains span, long and wide.
Test tubes reveal four dimensions.

Ernest Everyman was born through grace
And was taught to embrace space
As commonplace.

While angels
Fell—
Logically
Awhile

And then Ernie hurried along with
his hands a knight's move from his feet
holding a noisy newspaper.

Flapping hands clutched
Out
Frantically feeling
About his flying coat.

for he was tall

He did speak.
Come under, my friends, and be safe.
But bring with you, your years
Regardless how small.
I say, death is not the disaster.
Now, give me all
But yourselves
And hate me.

Ripe watermelon rain, Fall
Some of the way down.

But then someone burst forth
Crying, beware,
Beware the schmaltz.

Larry Harrel

IN A ROOM AMONG MANY ROOMS

In a room
Among many rooms
With doors locked
Thoughts came faster
Until they raced.

No, she said and placed
A finger on my lips
While thin rain mist
Fell,
And was still.

There is something
I don't know,
I thought,
But
I don't know what.

Please, she said and soothed
Me softly to sleep
Where smooth,
Deep,
Watery things surged.

Then slowly I woke, urged
By her calm hand
On my brow,
And for awhile longer
Stared out the window.

Larry Harrel

I SEE AN EASTMAN COLOR WORLD

Softly, slowly I see an Eastman Color world
Emanating an intense low-pressure excitement.

Early street lights shine neon blue
Under a sunset gold from zenith to horizon.

Refuting the mysterious,
I only wonder why slim, brown haired girls

Appear so quickly
And disappear so finally.

Leaving only—
The glimmer of a smile,
The nape-form of a child-breast.

Faster—
A distant door slam,
A reflected street light,
A childhood odor,

Until—
I focus the drizzle gray dusk,
A long, low sound.

Larry Harrel

MR. LEWIS

A Short Story by Carolyn Wilson

The old man stood in the shadow of the building rubbing his hands together for warmth. He was dressed very well, but the light jacket he wore would have been better suited for a cool summer evening. It was now late fall and the wind chilled him. People had been surprised that it had rained—they were expecting snow.

"Hey, Mr. Lewis!" a couple of small boys cried. "You'd better go home out of this cold. How was your day?"

The old man said nothing, but crowded in closer to the wall. The boys looked at him a minute longer, then shrugged and went on up the street. Mr. Lewis, or Old Lou as he was better known, was debating whether or not he should go to the cafe down the street. He had had nothing to eat since morning and the hunger, as well as the cold, kept him silent. He liked this cafe because it was quiet. It was not a familiar hang-out. Teen-agers or other rowdy groups did not frequent the place. There was only the owner and his daughter and they paid him little attention. Nobody paid him any attention really, he thought. Just the kids and sometimes they laughed at him.

He stopped just outside and looked into the cafe through dusty windows; it was empty. "Good evening," he said, as he opened the door. Nobody heard him and he said it again, louder.

The proprietor nodded and yelled "Anna!" in the same instant. The kitchen door swung back and Anna came out pulling a cart of dishes behind her. She lifted her eyebrows when she saw Old Lou but went over to his table.

"How do you do?" he said. "Cold evening, isn't it?"

Anna merely looked at him and he tried again. "Reminds me of a time back in Iowa when it . . ." He broke off as she turned around and looked meaningfully at her father. "What's good tonight? Guess I'll take roast beef," he said.

"For 65 cents we got roast beef," Anna said.

Lou felt in his pockets and pulled out some change. While he counted it, Anna left and began stacking up dirty plates on the counter. "How about putting it on the bill?" he said. Silence. Regretfully, he pulled a quarter out of another pocket and laid it beside the nickels and dimes.

Anna noted this and soon brought a steaming roast beef sandwich and put it before him. He ate rapidly and soon finished all but a slice of bread which he put to soak in his coffee. He consulted a silver watch that he brought out of his pocket and said to no one in particular, "I believe that I shall take small nap before I go." He began to nod and soon fell asleep,

his head bent almost over to the table bringing his yellow-white hair dangerously close to his coffee cup. His coffee had turned to a sodden mess of bread when he awoke. The owner was looking at him coldly as he got up. He muttered to himself while he paid and when he turned to go he remembered the coffee, "Just one moment," he said to Anna who was already beginning to clear the table. He stumbled back and pushed a good-sized hunk of the bread into his mouth.

As he went out the door, Anna said, "That old cheapskate. You know he's got money to pay his bill. Did you see the size of that watch? He's always talking about the money he has."

"Well, we'll never see any of it," her father said and went into the kitchen.

Lou walked for several blocks, but his legs hurt and he was cold. "Don't think I'll go on home," he said. He continued walking until he was in a shabby district near the main part of town. A dog trotted near him and he stopped to pet it, but it started violently and ran off into the darkness. "We are alike," he thought. But he couldn't quite think how so he went on.

He chose a door-way large enough to draw his legs inside and sat down. Three men crossed on the corner, but they went unnoticed because the old man's head had fallen on his chest and a wheezy snore echoed loudly through the street. While he slept, a cold rain began to fall and he moved restlessly, sometimes moaning softly. His hands moved out instinctively for a covering and finding none he only huddled himself closer to the wall. A policeman hurried by, anxious to get home. Water streamed down his shoulders and the only sound he heard was that of a certain tea-kettle whistling on a stove. The street was silent now; traffic lights were turned off until morning and the bars had locked their doors. And the old man slept.

He heard a voice yelling something about a bum. When he opened his eyes, finally, he saw a woman looking at him from behind the screen and he tried to stand, but fell again to the sidewalk. He had a dull ache in his joints and his breath came painfully after his damp sleep. The woman kept on yelling but he couldn't understand and wondered briefly who the bum was. So he pulled his jacket tight around him and tried to hurry off, but his legs were stiff and he couldn't move quickly. The rain had not stopped and the sky was gray in the early morning. A paper boy stood on the corner and an old policeman leaned under the awning of a drugstore. It was by the latter that the old man stopped. He wanted warmth and dryness and perhaps someone to talk to. The aging policeman looked at him and noted his hacking cough, then turned his back. A dressed-up bum, he thought. He had seen many like him and he had no desire to see another one. But the old man tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Rainy, this morning, isn't it? Why back in Iowa, we never used to have rain like this. Just the cold. Why that cold was terrible, Sir, terrible." He talked on, seemingly not to notice when the policeman left. Only the paper boy noticed the tears trickling down his cheek. Whether it was from the cold or not, the boy could not tell.

For some time Old Lou stood, trying to call up a view of his home in Iowa. He tried to tell folks about it. Sometimes they listened, but more times

they seemed unheeding. Did any one care about those old days? Apparently not. Sometimes he himself could barely remember. Perhaps if he had someone to listen, he could remember. Perhaps not. He had wanted to be a doctor; then he had wanted to be a janitor in that school. Where had it been? Maybe tomorrow he would remember. His wife had been good, but without money for a hospital, she had not lived. Lots of sorrow. Two little girls dying. No anti-toxin. No tuberculosis treatment. When he died his will would be read. He'd remember his two girls. He would build a wonderful hospital for tuberculosis. It would have anti-toxins everywhere. And the paper boy wondered why the old codger laughed there under the awning.

Sometime later he began to walk slowly uptown toward the business district. The rain had stopped and snatches of sunlight filtered down upon him between buildings.

He paused in front of an expensive-looking men's shop and eyed an overcoat in the window. "Thinking of buying this one, Mr. Lewis?" a man said.

Old Lou looked up and smiled. He had known Mr. Brady for years and enjoyed their daily chat. For Old Lou went uptown nearly every day, rain or shine. The fact that Mr. Brady owned one of the better men's shops in town did not keep him from being good company. "It's a fine coat, all right," he said, "but now what's that fabric there it's made of?"

"One hundred per cent wool, Mr. Lewis—best stuff on the market."

"Well, now, that is a shame, sir. I never could wear any wool. I'm, uh, well, I guess you might say allergic to it. Sure would have liked that coat though."

Mr. Brady agreed, it was a pity and the two of them talked on for a few minutes. Then a customer came and Old Lou was left alone. He started on up the street. Several people nodded and spoke. Anyone that had ever been on city streets knew him and some had been known to say that he added dignity to the streets.

"Believe I'll go to the bank", he said to no one in particular. He walked the few blocks at an unhurried pace. Then, arriving at the bank, he stopped to look at the current display in the window. It was a large picture of the new hospital being built. He secretly thought of it as his hospital and he spent a good part of each day looking at the picture. When I die, he thought my hospital will be bigger than that one. It will have six stories and a special children's building. He visualized the floors one by one. Marble in this one, beautifully finished panelling in that one. He had just got to the third with rooms of shining equipment when he noticed a young woman approaching. He fumbled in his pocket for something, absent-mindedly, his mind still on the equipment. She paused in front of him for a moment, then went on. He shook the dime out of the tin cup, and slowly put it in his pocket. When I die, he thought, people will find out what a good hospital looks like.

"He shouldn't stand out here," the woman remarked. "Look, his eyes are watering from the cold now." And she pulled her fur tighter around her before she stepped into the taxi.

LANGUAGE LIKE MUSIC

What can I do
When language like music runs through my mind?
What can I do
But let it flow? But write it down?

What can I do
But ignore lessons, work, everything?
I must write
When tunes in rhyme race through my brain.

What causes it,
This music in words I can't explain?
These things I feel,
Feel so strongly, but will never feel again.

I'll never know.
I only know I must write, and be glad I can.
This is my life.
When language like music runs through my mind.

Libbie Thompson

FRAGMENTARY

The leaves are so gold and red
And so beautiful
Just before death.

The rain is slightly self-inflicitory
As I walk through it bare-headed
Head bent to save my mascara
Alone.

Libbie Thompson

ALL NIGHT GOOD FOOD COME IN

All night good food come in
And I looked back again
To read the blinking sign again
For I was cold and lonely

The man I guess who ran the thing
Bald up from his gravy arms
Leaned over grinned
Said. I seen a lot like you so order up
Give me a happy coffee cup
With tears I said

An angel sat
Wrapped tight around the stool right next to me
All fat and painted as I looked her over
And then Hold on with all your bony fingers
He said the man I guess who ran the thing
And round and round we went
And round and round again

In other words she screamed
I hardly know you're there
And the flowers in her hair
Blew back at me perfumed of sweat and gin
For I was close behind
As round and round we went
And round and round again

The man I guess he grinned
Faster up and down and faster
Singing circus music louder than he grinned
As round and round we went
And round and round again

And then we stopped came down
I nearly fell
The man I guess quit singing
But still he grinned and says
I seen a lot like you
And when I'm leaving yells
Come back again

Ralph Price

LIFE AND DEATH

The snow is pure.
It covers everything that is ugly.
I watch it as it drifts down from the sky
And forms a cushion for my feet.
The wind bears it rapidly and
Drives it into my face, chilling my nose and
Cheeks and blurring my vision.
White powder dusts my hair, paints
The tree trunks, fills holes and
Leaves a smooth surface before me.
It leaves a trail behind the hare,
Guiding to him the fox and the hunter.
It covers the food for the bird and the
Woodland creature, leaving him hungry.
It brings death to the unfortunate
And sustenance to the lucky.
Could life be so ugly?
Could death be so beautiful?

Joe Beckham

THE COMING OF AGE IN FIELDSPOT

A Short Story by Algie Ray Smith

I watched the workers for nigh on to a year, but I'm still confused as to what they have built. I reckon I should have hired on with them when they began work. Then I would have been on the inside and would have known what was happening, but then I don't feel obliged to do much work. The fancy lettered sign by the path leading to the grounds is all the more confusing. From best I can see, the sign reads, "Fieldspot Finishing School for Girls."

Now there's something that's hard to reckon on—an unfinished girl. Maybe some pore little girls somewhere ain't put together right, or maybe they just ain't all developed. Anyway, the whole town is buzzing. Seems like this here is the biggest thing that has ever happened to Fieldspot. Least ways that's what Jeb Richardson said; and he ought to know cause he went away for two years to one of them big city schools and came back educated. Why I heard him saying to Emily Quitcher from over on Turkey Rise that he made sixty dollars a week keeping track of the money down at the bank.

Well, now maybe Jeb ain't too reliable as to opinions and such, but he weren't the only one. There was a piece in the *Fieldspot Weekly* about the school. The paper said that this here school would bring money to Fieldspot, and that we was rising above the census classification of just being a horse-and-plow community.

The way I see it is it's all because of the mountains and Tater Lake. Seems these city fellas must think the mountains and old Tater will help them unfortunate girls. Any how, the first bunch of puny girls is arriving next week.

Slink Biller, Honorable Biller that is, being that he is mayor of Fieldspot, seen to it that he said his credit. Said that in a few years we'd have a real progressive town cause all these girls got money, big money and lots of it. Said some of it was bound to get loose in Fieldspot and into our hands.

Old Slink sure looked funny that day when they had the ground breaking. He took one of them little army shovels like Paw keeps in the barn for cleaning out the horse stalls; and after Slink said near about what he said in the paper, he turned over one little shovelful of dirt. Everybody cheered and clapped, even down to Auntie Lagdin, who ain't got no more sense than a May fly playing around a trout stream. Shucks! I seen Slink lift more dirt than that when he was digging fence holes down by Turner's Creek.

Anyways, after Slink showed his muscles, this city fella stood up and jawed awhile. He explained as to why his school had picked Fieldspot for the site of their new branch school. I figured right then if they was making branches in this school that they would need some men like there is in the sawmill, but the city fella said that his school would be limited to girls only. It was then that I was most confused. This blamed school was going to use girls, and unfinished girls too, to make branches when they could cut all they could use in a month of Sundays off'n the trees.

The city fella went on to say that they liked the peaceful surroundings

and the wide open spaces. Well, the only wide open spaces I know of its between Matty Mauldy's front teeth; and I don't figger that the man ever been in Fieldspot on Saturday night or Mule Trading Day. Sure ain't going to have time to make branches or get finished either; they're going to spend all day wandering round the woods, swimmin' in the lake, riding horses, and shooting city-bought bows and arrows.

Don't matter none though! Everybody is tickled pink over the school. Well, almost everybody. Most of the Fieldspot girls are fuming and cackling like a bunch of old hens who just seen the rooster walking round the barnyard with Miss Duck. The other night I was calling on my girl Ida Jo Timble. She's really more than just my girl 'cause I been setting up with her kinds regular here lately.

"Luke," she says, "I better not hear of you galloping around that school."

Right then I tried to make my peace with her. "Ida," I said, "you know me better 'n that. Didn't I tell you the tuther nite when we was coming back from church that you done got me caught? Didn't I say I was just about struck on you?"

"That's whut you said, but—"

"Now, ain't gonna be no buts. The Swallows are good to the word. I done quite going down to the valley school and I'm fixing to take up with old man Shepherd on his milk route. I'll be getting some easy money, and then I'll make my claim."

That almost convinced her, but I could tell that Ida still had some doubts. See, I been around in this world. I ain't been as far as Jeb Richardson, but almost. I stayed a week with Aunt Clotilde once, and she took me to the fair at Little Rock. I seen a lot of women there, but none of them could draw a match to Ida. She's all right, but she's like that Bible fella who's all time having doubts.

If Ida had her doubts, she was right 'cause I've been having this here bug in my ear. This little bug has been saying, "Boy, you got to sneak a peep at them girls when they come, 'cause yore damper is way up. There ain't nothing for you to do 'cept satisfy yourself."

"Bug," I been saying, "I aim to!"

Summer came to Fieldspot like a match hitting Japan silk. The days got longer and hotter; and then they got hotter and longer. Me and old man Shepherd was up every morning about dawning collecting the milk from the farms and delivering it to the Muscle Minder Dairy. Seems like Shepherd did a lot of gabbing with everybody, and he knew what was happening everywhere all the time.

One morning as we were coming back from the dairy, I asked him what he thought about the girls' school. He said it weren't exactly a school, but that it was more of a camp where rich girls come when they didn't have anything better to do. He said that he was earning on the deal because the dairy had hired him to deliver milk to them every afternoon. I asked him if he ever went on Saturday, and he nodded that he did.

"What's on yore mind, Luke? I been seeing you eye that place every time we drive near."

"Nothing," I answered. "I was just wondering, being that you went out there on Saturday, if I could go."

He laughed and winked. A drop of tobacco spittle eased from one corner of his mouth and trickled down his chin. "You aimin' to latch on to one of them city fillies?"

My ears burned a right smart, and I could feel that my face was all red like I'd washed it too hard. "I'm just curious. I ain't never seen an unfinished girl. And well, blame it, I just gotta get a look!"

Before we could talk more, we were home. He let me out, but not before he had promised that I could go over with him on Saturday. He said that I'd have a chance to stay and look for awhile 'cause he had to collect all the week's empty bottles.

I thanked him and got out of the truck. It wasn't till Shepherd was out'n sight that I remembered Ida. She sure would pout if she knew I was going over to that school. She didn't have to know. And besides, we weren't promised yet. So I reckoned that she didn't have any real claims on me.

Saturday morning when I got off the milk truck Paw put me to plowing. I think he knew I wanted to go somewhere 'cause it was too hot to plow and the ground was too hard. Didn't need no plowing done anyway. But I run the mules as hard as I dared and finished in plenty of time to spruce up a mite before Shepherd came.

I wondered what I should wear and started to put on my Sunday wool suit, but then I remembered what Jeb once said. He had said, "To catch a girl's eye you have to dress like you weren't aiming to dress right, yet look good all the while."

There was a problem 'cause most of my clothes were handed down to me from my brother, I did have a pair of genuine levis that I'd worn only once; and I had a shirt that I had ordered from Sears. The shirt was a light blue pull-over with a little yellow 'gator on the pocket. I found my brother's best dancing shoes and stuck them under my shirt 'cause I didn't dare wear them out of the house. If I did and he caught me, I'd have a lot of explaining to do.

Nobody seemed to notice me so I went down to the mailbox to wait for Shepherd. Weren't long before his old truck came rattling down the road. When I got in the truck along side of him, Shepherd was grinning like my hound does when he's got a coon treed. I put the shoes on.

"Gonna git out amongst em, huh, son," he said.

I pretended to be having trouble with a knot in one of the shoe laces. "You kinda dressed ain'tcha?" Shepherd jibbed again.

"Always dike up for Saturday," I answered, but I could tell he knowed I was fixed special.

We turned down the private road that the school had made, and I craned my neck to look for a girl. I didn't see any.

"No need of looking. I 'magine that they're all out riding now. Usually are on Saturday afternoons."

Shepherd stopped by an oak tree that had a bench around it. He told me to get out and sit on the bench. Said I'd probably see some girls after awhile. I got out, and Shepherd and the truck eased on over a little rise until they was out of sight. From where I was standing I could see a row of long buildings that reminded me of a picture I'd seen of some army barracks. In the distance I could see the lake and some smaller buildings that were almost like the shack behind our house, 'cepting they didn't have no half-moons on the sides.

Finally I got tired of looking and sat down on the bench. I leaned back comfortable-like against the tree and closed my eyes. Suddenly I heard a yell like two cats fighting over a salmon on a hen house roof.

"Yeeeeeow! It's a man!"

I looked up hurriedly, and my feet kinda twisted into a running position. Not more than fifty feet away were more girls than there was in the picture books at the drug store. I guess they came down the path that lead into the woods, 'cause I could hear feet running down in the woods somewhere.

At first the girls just grouped around me and squealed. My mouth felt like it was on hinges; I couldn't get it to stay closed. Finally one of the girls came up and poked me in the stomach with one of them horse riding sticks. And what a girl! She was all dressed in tight pants, a bright red cowboy shirt, and high-topped boots like Paw wears when he goes frog hunting. Right away I looked for some unfinished parts. I didn't see none! All I could see were lips, all a-flame like a sunset, and hair of solid gold.

"Little Abner," she exclaimed, "it's Little Abner in the flesh!"

"No, ma'am," I said, "you got me mixed fer someone else. My name's Luke."

All the girls giggled. One of the girls dropped to her knees and made a noise like the wind whistling through winter trees. I just had to laugh.

Laughing was a mistake. They all rushed me, touching my hair and pinching my arms and pulling at my shirt! Right then and there I decided that the shirt had to go, 'gator or no 'gator. I guessed they would have tore me apart, but a bell began ringing outside of one of the buildings; and they all lit out.

Well, not all of them. The gold-haired one stayed behind.

"Don't mind the girls," she said. "They were just teasing you. After all, we don't have many male visitors out here."

I gulped! "I didn't mind a-tall."

Then she smiled. "My name's Hope," she explained. "I'm from Boston."

"I reckon that's in North Arkansas," I said, trying to be tolerable.

She laughed, but politely, and went on to explain to me all about Massachusetts and as to how that was where Kennedy was from. I reckon we talked for quite a spell because pretty soon old Shepherd came down the road with the truck.

"I got to git," I said.

"So do I," she replied. "But you will be in town tonight, won't you?"

I could think of nothing else to say, so I said, "Yes." She smiled.

"Then we have a date for a soda at the drug store," she replied. Then she was gone.

Shepherd had stopped the truck. I stood and watched her go until she was over the rise. When I finally got in along side Shepherd, he said, "Wal, whut you think now?"

I didn't answer. I was too busy thinking of how I was going to explain to Ida why I wasn't at her house on Saturday night like usual.

The editors of **Voices** wish to announce a \$5.00 prize to be awarded to the best entry by a student in each of the following categories:

Short Story

Poetry

Essay

Print or Photograph

Deadline: March 15, 1963

There is no limit to the number of entries an individual may submit, but each entry should be properly identified by the student's name and address. Winning entries will be published in the Spring issue of **Voices**. Payment of prizes will be made at the time of publication. Other entries may also be considered for publication either in the Spring issue or at a later date.

Contest rules:

1. Previously unpublished
2. Typewritten (short story, poetry, essay)
3. No photograph smaller than 5x7

The decisions of the judges will be final.

Material may be submitted in person in Cherry Hall 111, or it may be submitted by mail to The Editors, c/o Western Writers, College Heights. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should be included for material to be returned to contestants by mail. The editors assume no responsibility for material submitted for the contests.

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