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Brazynski

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THE FLAMINGO

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A Dog's Life

STEVEN H. BAMBERGER

THE SAVAGE blast of the automobile horn, the piercing screech of skidding rubber, a glimpse of scared dog in blinding headlights, a stifled yelp, a dull thud and sudden blackness. All quiet again except for receding whir of the speeding motor and a faint whimper from the crumpled mass of fur in the gutter. It shudders convulsively and snaps furiously at the air. Gradually, very gradually, the blackness gives way to the cold white glare of the street lamp and the hard, rough glint to the curb. It tries to get up. It struggles jerkily and in spasms, paws the pavement feebly, whines and falls back limp, exhausted. Blackness again. Ages pass. Slowly and painfully it raises its head and gazes questioningly at its crushed hind legs. A splash of sticky hot blood drips languidly from its half-open jaws. It sinks back once more—lifeless, inert, still. One listless ear waves to and fro, straining for a reassuring sound. A moth beats futilely against the lamp above. Far away a subway rumbles ominously underground and is heard no more. Tall tomb-like buildings loom up on either side like hideous phantoms. The cruel hush of the hollow street covers all. Suddenly the silence is shattered by two metallic footsteps echoing in the distance. The listless ear flutters for a moment, pricks up and stands tremblingly erect. Help at last.

Charles J. Mowbray strode pompously ahead, cane in hand, shoulders back, head erect. The conference had lasted a little longer than usual this evening and he was walking home to get the smoke out of his lungs. It would never do for him to appear at the office exhausted in the morning. After all, wasn't he the famous "fearless Mow-

bray" on the Exchange, the man without nerves, the man who never worried? Wasn't he the one whom everybody watched and copied? Didn't they hang on his every word and repeat everything he said? Yes, they did and he smiled to himself at the thought. The trouble with people was that they were all too scared. They lacked courage. They were timid as mice and not half so smart. Now if they were all like him—but of course that was impossible. It—

Hello, what's that? Looks like a dead dog. Damn those drivers anyway; they ought to be hung for that. Poor animal. It looks like it might have been a friendly pup at that. Probably was better dead than running around begging. It ought to be swept away too, before it starts to smell. That ear looks peculiar though. It looks as though it's moving. Wait a minute, it is moving! Why those eyes are wide open. By God, it's alive! Mowbray stopped and bent over. Incredible. He shuddered. There it is half crushed, covered with blood and still alive. And those eyes. Why did they have to stare up at him that way? They made him feel guilty. As though he had run over it. Damn!

Mowbray remembered the last deer he had shot. The animal had been still alive when he had run up to it and it had gazed up at him reproachfully with those same liquid eyes. He had almost imagined that he saw a big tear roll down before they closed for good. Anyway he had never hunted after that and here he was facing the same thing all over again.

Well it wasn't his fault this time and there really wasn't much he could do about it. The dog would probably die in a few minutes any-

way. He'd do the right thing though. He'd look for a policeman on the way home and tell him to go back and shoot it. That's what he'd do. If only that damn eye would shut, so he wouldn't feel so guilty walking away. Oh well, he was doing the right thing anyway getting a policeman. Well, he'd better be getting along. Wait a minute. Footsteps? Somebody else is coming. Damn! He'd have to stay now. Well, perhaps it was all for the best. He hadn't really wanted to leave anyway. Maybe this fellow would know what to do.

"Kid" Burkes swaggered along nonchalantly whistling a tune to himself and thoughtfully rubbing the knuckles of his clenched fist. Jeeze didn't they hurt. He must've hit that guy too hard tonight when he knocked him out. Funny they never felt this way after any of his other K.O.s. Maybe he broke something. Maybe he was getting soft hands. It sure was swelling up and look at how blue it was getting. Aw well, he'd get a little shut-eye now and see Doc Smith about it tomorrow. The Doc would know what was wrong. And if that guy standing under the lamp there started to get wise this'd be another customer the Doc'd have to attend to. What's he lookin' at anyway? Jeeze a dead dog. Guess I'll have a look at it myself.

"Sure is a messy sight," Kid muttered. "Didja see it happen?"

"No. I just arrived myself and saw that ear moving," answered Mowbray, "so I stopped. It's still alive you know."

"Huh?" Kid jerked his head toward Mowbray, "still alive?"

He bent over closer.

"Well I'll be damned if it isn't." His jaw dropped. "Christ, look at them eyes too. Why, Hell, they're lookin' right at us. Reminds me of a little crippled kid I picked a fight with once in school. He had that scared look too. Jeeze, I'll never forgit it. I made

up for it though. I fought all his fights for him after that and everybody left him alone—Whaddaya think we ought to do?"

Mowbray shook his head slowly.

"I don't think there's much we can do," he said quietly, averting Kid's questioning gaze. "We'll just have to watch him die." He paused. "He's too far gone to move him and besides it would hurt him too much."

Hurt him. He must hurt plenty now, thought Kid, looking at the mangled body and rubbing his own swollen knuckles mechanically. Hell, he sure did feel simple just standing there watching a dog die and not doing anything for it. But what could he do? The other guy must feel the same way.

"Sure is taking his time about dyin', huh?" Kid said nervously.

Mowbray didn't answer. He stood there fascinated by a new element that had entered the picture. A giant red-eyed roach was waddling to the scene at lightning speed. Stopping every few inches to wave its long feelers in the air, it would glide on again, becoming more cautious the closer it came. Nearer and nearer it drew, hungry and vicious. Even the dog was watching it now, shifting its eyes from Mowbray to the roach and back again. Mowbray doesn't move. His eyes are glued to the bug. It comes closer. It tastes the stream of blood that trickles from the dog's mouth. It isn't satisfied. It wants more. Warily it advances. The dog is trying to shrink away from it but can only grunt helplessly. It shoots one last pleading look at Mowbray. The roach is almost there now—right under the dog's jaw. It starts to climb. It's at the eye and looks as though it will begin on that first. It circles around greedily. It stops. It...

Swish! Kid couldn't control himself any longer. Trembling with rage he grabbed Mowbray's cane, whisked the bug away and stamped on it furiously.

"Goddam your hide," Kid hissed. "You'd just as leave see him eaten alive, wouldncha?"

"No," quavered Mowbray apologetically, feverishly mopping a damp brow, "but I can't watch it any longer. I'm going to call a policeman. That's what we should have done in the first place and there's no use postponing it any longer. Now give me my cane."

Kid didn't move.

"I said give me my cane."

Still Kid didn't move.

"If you don't give me my cane I'll call the police for a lot more than just shooting a dog."

Kid grinned.

"All right, then I guess I'll have to go without it." Mowbray started to turn around.

"You ain't goin' after no policeman, buddy," Kid said dryly.

Mowbray turned a sickly white. "Wha—What is this," he stammered, "a hold-up?"

"Naw," Kid said. "I'm just keepin' ya here 'til somethin' happens. 'Til that eye closes fer good. Ya see, we're not leaving him here alone and I ain't stayin' here alone with him either, savvy?"

Mowbray shifted nervously from one foot to the other. This was certainly the nearest thing to a gangster he had ever come across. He'd better stay though and do what he was told or there's no telling what might happen. Still those eyes were driving him crazy. He should have walked on in the first place. Ah! Somebody was coming. Two in fact. He'd try once more.

"Listen here," Mowbray rasped. "You hear those footsteps? Well, somebody else is coming. I'll give you one more chance. Let me go now or if that's a policeman I'll tell all."

"Shut up," growled Kid.

And they both listened to the approaching steps.

Father Dunn welcomed the sight of the

two men standing under the lamp-post and quickened his gait accordingly. He was positive that that shameful street-walker across the street was following him and it upset him spiritually. That there should be such women in the world was deplorable enough. That they should follow him was unbearable. He glanced hurriedly over his shoulder to see if she was gaining. No. But she was holding her own all right. He'd just have time to make it and a little to spare. Well, thank the good Lord he'd be spared the humiliation. He wouldn't have known what to do in the first place. Oh, he knew how these women were—hadn't he preached thousands of sermons against them—but he really didn't know just how they solicited their trade. His knowledge was purely from hearsay—all reliable of course—and he had no desire to learn the actualities. Well, fortunately there was no use worrying about it any more. He was almost there now and would remain unsoiled. By the way, what were they looking at over there anyway? That's a thought. What were those two doing around a lamp-post at this hour of the night. They were both looking at him now as he drew up. Maybe it was well after all that this woman was near. She could report any foul play. Oh no, impossible. There's a dead dog in the gutter. That's what it's all about.

"Why, good-evening, gentlemen," he droned with practiced dignity. "I see we have a tragedy here tonight."

"Yeah," Kid blurted out. "This dog's dyin' and we wanta know what to do about it."

"Alive!" Dunn stopped over and met the animal's beseeching gaze. "Well, so it is. How pitiful. How extremely pitiful. What's that? Oh, you want to know what to do about it. Now let me see."

He paused for a moment in deep thought, put his hand to his chin. Suddenly he be-

came aware that that woman was around too. He could feel it. She was probably listening to the whole affair. Well, he'd show her his authority. He'd show her that he was one of God's chosen apostles. His words might even change her entire life. Who could tell? Steeped in sin as she was she still might be able to erase some of her record for the Day of Judgment. But now for the dog. Oh, yes.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "We are all the children of God the Father. As He in His most infinite wisdom hath made us all and made the laws by which we abide, so must we respect His covenants. This apparent calamity is but a manifestation of His fearful might. To interfere with its normal conclusion would be an unforgivable sin. Rather learn by this to fear the Lord more than ever before. There is nothing to be done for this animal. We must realize that—"

Dunn stopped short, his mouth half open and his hand raised. That woman was standing before him and she was talking, too. He could hardly believe his ears.

"You yellow-bellied bastards!" she screeched. "And that goes for the whole damn bunch of you. There you two stand for God knows how long watching this dumb animal suffer and then this stuffed shirt comes along and tells you you did the right thing. I guess you feel good now that the Lord's on your side. Don't you? Well, just get this. If there is a Lord, the three of you are His mistakes. Now give me that cane."

Kid handed it to her meekly. Mowbray and Dunn stood stupidly, stared in silent amazement and fear. What would she do, anyway? There she was bending down and stroking the animal's head. The ear flattened out in a friendly way and the eye blinked several times. Why it even whimpered a little. It would serve her right if she got bitten. Sacrilegious shrew that she was. Why

didn't the dog bite her anyway? She was whispering something to it now. Well, that certainly wouldn't make it feel any better. That's a cinch. What was she doing with that handkerchief? Why she was covering the dog's head with it. Good God! She wasn't going to—

"All right, old boy. Now don't worry. Everything's going to be all right. Just close your eyes and you'll be out of this in a minute. If what they say is right, you'll be gettin' plenty of everything where you're going. If not, you're in for a good sleep anyway."

She's stepping back now with cane poised. She looks around. At Mowbray. At Dunn.

"This is what you worms didn't have the guts to do," she sneers. The cane is in the air.

"Stop her," groans Dunn. Mowbray buries his face in his hands. Kid's eyes clinch. A moment of suspense. The cane hisses through the air. Crack! Right against the hard cement. It splits, it splinters. She missed.

"An act of God," exults Dunn.

"Well, let's see your damn God stop me this time," she shrieks and frantically tears off her shoe.

She's on her knees. She begins. Thump, thump, thump. The high heel digs into crackling bone and gristle. Thump. thump. The handkerchief is a bloody rag. All struggle has long since stopped, but still she thuds on furiously. There's no outline of the head left at all. Everything is beaten level to the ground. She stops exhausted and looks up.

"Whew!" whispers Kid, and ambles away.

Mowbray holds a handkerchief to his mouth. He has to get home to bed. Funny though, how his legs tremble—

Father Dunn stalks away. "The Lord save us," he mutters under his breath. But

he knows what his next sermon will be about. They ought to put every one of them in jail.

She is the last to leave. She puts on her wet shoe, looks once more on the crumpled red mass under the lamp. The moth still beats against the cold white streetlight. Far

away a subway rumbles ominously underground. A breeze ruffles bits of paper from the sidewalk. Small eddies of dust whirl lightly around. Business was bad but she guessed she deserved a night's sleep now anyway. She limps away.

SEQUENCE

FRANCES PERPENTE

I

These were the women bowered in the bloom
And urgent growing leaves of man's desire . . .
White Eve, and Sappho shining through a gloom,
Helen the golden-haired, her face a fire.
Love made of them an altar, bright as air,
Silver as swans' wings, rosier than flowers,
Flaming like cherubim and twice as fair
With pointed hands they blessed the angeled hours.

Beauty was never mine but I could draw
Some loveliness upon me from your touch.
Love would bestow on me the ancient awe.
I dream, but O I think not overmuch.

And I could waive my dreaming for your own.
What worth is it to dream always alone?

II

My mind's great lust has met my body's need.
Eager it seeks for matehood with your own.
Imagination hungers for your seed.
The fertile field is crying to be sown.
What vigorous chanting child would wildly spring
Fathered by you, from my hot-laboring brain,
Naked and splendid-eyed and quick to sing,
An angel-demon blazing with my pain?

Hush let the lovely dream die in that space
Where wounded, hungry things unseen may creep.
I must immure my love behind my face,
Lull the unborn to torpor and to sleep.

For there are ghosts which never have had breath.
Shades before birth, as phantoms after death.

Of Shadows

ELIZABETH SCHOENING

IT WAS only because I missed my transfer from the university that I happened to walk across the bridge again, and down near the river shacks. I hadn't been near the place for two years at least—not since Steve had left, and Laurie, and all the rest.

It was autumn, and the wind from the river was cool, smelling faintly stagnant. Everything had taken on the blurred gray of evening. Ragged buildings, towering mills, squat dirty barges, all were touched with an opal haze which was like a sort of beauty. It made me feel strange—as if somehow I had lost touch with something, as if a part of myself were still here, in the river shacks, in the squalid muck of Third street.

I hadn't intended to stay more than a minute. It was getting late, and I didn't want to miss another car. But something held me there. Something made me sit down on a block of cement near the bridge, just sit there quietly and look at the river.

I lit a cigarette and watched the blue smoke spiral outward. All over the city, lights were beginning to flash on, and their reflections accented the sleepy darkness of the water. Placid river, I thought, what did it care for the little lives that crowded its banks, loving, hating, working, dying? It drew its strength from a clear source, far from the dingy wastes of Third street, and so you could come to it for peace. And if you wished it would give you final rest, quench the troubled flame of your mind forever, but not for kindness or love of you; only because you sought it.

Those people who sought it, I wondered, what did they find? Was it stillness, was it release, or did the dream go on even when the dreamer lay cold in the slimy blackness

of a water world? And suddenly, as if the wind had spoken, I heard Steve's voice, and the past rushed in upon me like a flood until all the things I had so carefully forgotten became reality again, and people who had become no more than shadows lived and moved once more.

Suddenly I was back there, three years ago, living in the little house set far from the street. I was back in the midst of the old, alive world in which people scrambling for existence somehow managed to breathe deeply and laugh and love and think. In summer the paint on the house would peel and blister and the rooms would be like dim chambers walled with fire. In winter, snow piled on the sagging steps and wind blew through the cracks. But in spring a twisted lilac bush would push pale tufts of blossoms out into the misty air.

It was at the little house that I first saw Laurie and Chris. Mother had got to know them somewhere, and they had stopped to see some of her paintings. I liked them both, and I could see that mother liked them, so I decided we'd probably be friends for a long time. I was glad of that, because they were the kind of people I like to know. They didn't talk to me like grown-ups speaking to a child. In fact Laurie didn't seem much older than I, though I knew she must be at least twenty.

I remember that at the time I thought Laurie was beautiful. I don't know what I would think now, but I would probably still like to look at her. She had a strangely shaped face, I remember—not oval nor round nor heart-shaped, but with a look of each. And her eyes were very blue and direct, and she was slender and straight and held her

head proudly. Even more than that, though, her face was filled with life. Her whole body when she moved gave an impression of constant vitality.

Chris did not seem to be her kind of person, yet strangely enough they fit together well. He came from a comfortable middle-class home, and he was big and blonde with good features and a certain solid strength. He laughed about the river shacks. "This is a hell of a place to bring your wife," he said, "but it'll be an adventure to tell the kids about." He had no conception of kids growing up in the shadow of the mills and playing in the river mud on summer days. "Had a run of bad luck," he said briefly. "Lost my job in the bank, but we'll be pulling out of here any day now."

When he said this, Laurie was silent. She never talked about her past life, but from the way she spoke of far places casually, you knew that hers had been a strange, nomadic existence. I think she found a certain peace in the river that she had never know before.

From that first day they were our friends, though, and we accepted them for what they were—never asking anything more about them. I saw them often. Sometimes when Chris was away seeing people about jobs, I would go over to the great brick tenement and talk to Laurie. I got to know her well—as well as anyone, perhaps, because I was very young and she could talk to me without fear of questioning. Sometimes she talked about things she had been long ago. Sometimes she talked about her childhood, and I knew that she had been lonely but never too unhappy. Sometimes she talked about Chris, and when she did I could see by the look in her eyes how much she loved him, and how much her happiness depended upon him.

Meeting Chris alone was different. He was always very kind and gay, but after the first his gayety took on a sort of desperation. "Never go hunting jobs, Kit," he would say.

"Marry some rich man and live happily ever after, far far from the river."

"But I like the river," I would answer. "I like to live here."

Then he would laugh again, and we would walk quietly for awhile. But I noticed that, though he never gave up writing letters and talking about "important contacts", his smile became strained, and his eyes, instead of looking directly at you, looked through you into some secret hopelessness.

I don't think Laurie noticed at first. He was different with her, you see. She seemed to release some spring of hope and vitality in him; perhaps because she herself was so vital, perhaps only because they loved each other.

When I saw them together, I had a sense of their one-ness. It was a thing that could not be broken, I thought—not by any outside force. I did not realize then that the seed of their destruction lay within.

But for a long time life went on for them as for the rest of us, and Laurie and Chris laughed, and Laurie alone laughed, but Chris alone stared more and more often into the darkness of his despair.

I have often wondered if, had Laurie seen the truth sooner, she might have been able to stop the thing that was growing in Chris's mind. She could not, of course, have seen any innate weakness in him, having seen him up to now only in the light of a sheltered life, a full and normal life having its logical end and triumph in her love. But Laurie understood shadows and she could master shadows, and if she had once seen the look in his eyes she might have guessed. I don't know, and it doesn't matter now. But the fact is that she might have known sooner, only Steve came, and things were better for awhile.

It had been raining for two days before Steve came up the steps of the little house, and muddy water swirled in rivulets through

the gutter. I was alone in the house looking out at the rain, and I saw the boy turn the corner. I watched him idly as one watches a passer-by—blown by the wind, one arm shielding his face from the driving rain. He came from nowhere and suddenly he was lost from sight. And this was such a natural thing that I was startled to see him outside of the door shouting, "Will someone for God's sake let me in? I'm wet!"

I let him in, and for a moment we stared at each other. I saw that he was tall, and I noticed a certain familiarity about the queerly curving mouth, the keen topaz eyes, the shock of brown curling hair coming to a peak on his forehead and wet now with raindrops. But I didn't actually recognize him until he held out his hand and said, "Well, Kit, I'm Steve." He smiled as he said it, and I liked the smile and remembered that I had always liked it.

Steve of course—Steve who was always going away mysteriously and turning up again quite unexpectedly. I remembered the last time had been when we were living in Montrose Place, and mother never stopped wondering how he found us. Steve—a rolling stone, a trouble maker, undependable, charming, and insincere. Dad completely disapproved of him, and even mother, who had always liked him, called him the perfect dime-novel villain. But that was when he was away. When he turned up again, I noticed, the family was his again—to cheat, to live on, to order about if he liked—but always his without protest.

I had been too young to know him well before, but now suddenly I understood a part of his spell. And when I took his hand and said, "I'm glad to see you, Steve," I meant it.

I have another queer memory of that day—queer because it is so unimportant. I remember Steve sitting on the couch and shaking the rain from his hair with a quick move-

ment of his head. Then he stretched out his arms and sighed, "Lord, Kit, the rain's wonderful. I'd walk around the world and back if I weren't so damn tired." And at the same time I noticed that he had no coat and his thin shirt was soaked with rain, and that he clenched his teeth to keep from shivering.

At dinner though, his hair combed into waves and smelling faintly of dad's bay-rum, he was as suave and flippant as always. He wore a pair of dad's old trousers and a borrowed shirt, torn at the sleeves, with the same grace that someone else might have donned impeccable dinner clothes. It was good to have him there. He gave the meal a formal quality, and afterward he passed a crumpled package of cigarettes with a charming gesture of generosity.

We talked after dinner. Mother started the conversation by saying, "Well, Steven, where have you been?"

He took it up from there, talking steadily and gesturing with his fine, strong hands. He had led a strike in Chicago. "We got beaten out by tear-gas and clubs, but I know a fellow who runs one of the papers, and I got us some good publicity. Photographs and everything."

There seemed to be no limit to the people Steve knew. "I lived three months in a Jap opium den in Frisco," he said. "I was broke, and the police were looking for me in connection with a brawl somewhere, so I went to this Jap friend of mine and he looked after me until it quieted down." That was only one of Steve's escapes from the police. Violent, hot-headed, he was always in some sort of trouble.

He had been in jail in a little town in Arkansas for stealing chickens. "That was a hell of a jail," he said. "Guy in the next cell had a guitar and he kept playing 'Frankie and Johnny' all day. Finally I asked him for God's sake to let me teach him 'The Prisoner's Song' or something. Well, I got

to know him that way and he was a good guy. A Communist from Atlanta. Next time I'm in Georgia I'm going to stop and see him."

Mother laughed. "You'll never die in prison, Steve," she said. "You were born to hang."

He looked at her quite seriously. "But you shouldn't say it," he said. "Tell you the truth, everyone I know says I'm coming to a bad end. It worries me a little—like an omen. So every time I get drunk or mad I say 'This'll be the time, Steve' but somehow it never is. Sooner or later I suppose—but you shouldn't say it."

Strangely enough, we were all quiet after he had finished. Nobody joked or even smiled. Dad said afterward that subconsciously we all felt just then a shadow of the thing in Steve, the evil thing, the seed of horror. It seems queer that he should have remembered it because I did too, up to the time the thing happened. And afterward when dad spoke of it, I always wondered exactly what we felt.

Now, it seems the final irony that Chris should have felt the same shadow over Steve. He and Laurie came in that night to see mother, and Steve talked to them without effort as he always talked to people—seeming to know them immediately and easily.

One thing about their meeting was the way Steve and Laurie fitted together. His buoyant life matched her own, and her enthusiasm equalled his. Right away you knew that here were two people speaking the same language.

I think it surprised Steve as much as anyone. Here was someone to whom he could say what he thought, certain that he would be understood. He had never known that before. He had always carried people along in his flight, and here was someone with wings of her own to fly beside him. Chris sat next to Laurie, the false tension of his gayety relaxed for a moment. He accepted Steve at once, with a sort of reluctant admiration.

Once he said, "What do you work at anyway, Steve? When you work, that is."

Steven laughed. "I started out to be a reporter," he said, "and since then I've been everything from an undertaker's assistant to a petty thief. It isn't very steady, but it's a good life and you learn a lot. Besides, I'm not very strong on steadiness."

Chris smiled and shook his head. "Wait till you get married," he said. "You'll settle down then. I remember when I was out of high school I had a sort of impulse to bum around the country. But then college came along and the job and Laurie, and I've never regretted not going."

"Well," Steve said, "my college days were limited by request. I've been thrown out of three universities and a Christian college. As for bumming versus marriage—I've tried both. She was all right, but I drove her nuts and she stifled me. It was a swell love affair and a first rate bust-up, and I'd rather roam around any day. God, looking at the same face over the breakfast table every morning is enough to give any man claustrophobia."

"I'm glad Chris doesn't agree," Laurie said. "Anyway, it depends a lot on the person behind the face. Do you know, I used to think the same thing and then I found out that a person you love doesn't give you claustrophobia—not in Wisconsin or Timbuctoo or—"

"Or the river shacks." Chris finished his sentence in a low voice with bitterness beneath it. "This is the hell of it, Steve, I can't even talk about settling down. Sometimes I almost believe we have, and then I see the brick tenement with Mrs. Ginsberg hanging her washing on the fire escape and—hell, we're no better off than they are. There's Laurie; she hangs washing on the fire escape too now, and we're one with the Ginsbergs. And the damned uncertainty—"

"Chris, don't!" The words seemed to have been jolted out of Laurie. She turned and

faced him. "I like the flat, Chris, and the river, and the Ginsbergs. Oh I know you're proud, Chris, but can't you see that in its own way this place is real and wonderful? We're—" she stopped and leaned back, looking toward mother helplessly.

Mother hesitated as if she were forming words, but Steve spoke quickly. "Sure," he said, "I can see that bumming is hell if you don't like it. And if you don't, I suppose you're never a real bum but only a victim of circumstance. Me, I like it. I never have been good for much. But we're being serious here, and what we ought to do is have a party. Let's drag out the victrola."

So we found the victrola and some old records and everybody danced, that was the beginning with Steve and Laurie and Chris. For now, when Laurie alone could not have kept Chris from despair, Steve was there—and listening to him, Chris could almost believe that the river shacks didn't matter.

It was not until the next day that I had a chance to ask Chris and Laurie what they thought of Steve. They had both been under his spell the night before, but in the clear light of day they tried to analyze their feelings, and succeeded about as well as the rest of us always had.

We were walking by the river, and we sat down near the bridge to talk. "He's a queer fellow that Steve," said Chris.

"Why queer?" Laurie asked. She lit a cigarette, shielding the match in cupped hands.

"Well," Chris looked out at the river for awhile, then took up his sentence abruptly, "He's no good of course. He's a sort of gentleman bum who hasn't even tried to get work."

"He lives though," Laurie said. "And he'll always live." Then she added in a voice so low I could scarcely hear, "Who can tell which is the better way?"

But Chris hadn't heard, being preoccupied with his own thoughts. "He's handsome

and careless and he ought to be a complete scoundrel, but somehow he isn't. Not quite. You know, Laurie," he half turned toward her, "I like that boy. But I can't help feeling something strange about him—not vicious, but violent. He's uncontrolled and he has been all his life, and it takes control and responsibility to make a man."

"Nonsense Chris." I thought Laurie's laugh sounded a little sharp. "You're talking like an Alger book." She stopped for a moment and then went on. "I'm not controlled either you know, Chris. I never have been. And you can't disapprove entirely, because you love me."

Chris took her hand. "Of course, Laurie. And I like Steve. It's just that—you have to be steady. And I keep wondering what will happen to him. A man has to have an anchor—something to believe in, if it's only himself."

During the long, empty days that followed I remembered the things that Chris had said—both about Steve and about himself. Because they were together a lot, the three of them, and it was only with Steve and Laurie that Chris was happy. Alone, he grew morose and silent. The imperceptible stoop in his shoulders deepened, and there were thin lines about his mouth. As for Steve and Laurie, they did not change but there seemed to be a wordless conspiracy between them, and it was this conspiracy, I think, that kept Chris alive and hoping far longer than any man, suddenly adrift with no anchor of belief, can hope.

Every day still Chris went to look for work. There were no bank jobs; they were all filled by responsible young men who needed their positions and would keep them. There was nothing in the line of business, but Chris refused to admit that there was nothing. And he might have gone on, blindly, seeing people and interviewing business men, being turned away from mahogany desks by

regretful executives, growing more and more shabby and thinner, indefinitely, had it not been for Steve.

The awakening came one evening. They were all at our house, and during dinner I had been noticing the hollows in Laurie's cheek and the faint blue tracing under her eyes. She lay back against the couch with a look of exhaustion and Steve, glancing at her quickly, suddenly turned away with an expression of tenderness almost like sorrow in his eyes. Chris was leaning forward discussing business with a sort of hectic animation, and until then dad and Steve had been discussing too—Steve with a tolerant smile, certain as he was that there was nothing to discuss.

"I interviewed the manager of a brokerage firm today," Chris was saying, "Told him about my training and all, and he was quite impressed. Said there might be an opening next spring; at any rate he'd keep me in mind. He's my best bet so far, I guess—he and Mr. Phillips of the bank. Mr. Phillips said the last time I saw him that as soon as things picked up a little I'd be back on the pay-roll, and—"

Suddenly Steve broke in. His voice was clear and unhurried. "When do you think that will be?" he asked.

Chris darted a quick, surprised glance at him. "Oh soon, I guess. Soon. It will have to be soon. By next spring anyway, I guess."

"Look here, Chris," Steve's voice was smooth and pleasant as always, but there was something beneath it that made you listen. You've been at this for months now without getting anywhere. Why don't you try—just temporarily—some other kind of work?"

"But I've been trained for business. I have the best recommendations—from college and from Mr. Phillips—I know—"

Laurie leaned forward as if to protest when Steve spoke again, but he caught the move-

ment and shook his head warningly, and she leaned back. "Of course, Chris, but your training is only useful if you do something with it. And what you probably need more than anything now is a little money. People have been known to take temporary jobs, even digging ditches, when they needed them badly. Think about it, will you?"

I was sorry for Chris then. I was sorry when he pushed back his hair in a gesture of bewilderment, like a small boy. As he rose from the couch he groped instinctively for his hat beside him, and stumbled out of the door. For a moment he stood silhouetted in the door and I noticed in a flash how gaunt his shoulders were, and how loosely his coat hung. Then he went unsteadily, like a sleep-walker, down the steps and away.

Laurie stood up quickly to follow him but Steve stopped her, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Let him think about it," he said. And then, "I'm sorry—I'm sorry to hurt him but he has to wake up sometime. And you—you—" Steve's voice broke. And as he stood there, looking into Laurie's face, I saw the look in his eyes and I knew suddenly that even he—even detached Steve was to be pitied, perhaps more than the others. For the thing I saw was flame, suppressed and forced to smolder unrecognized, yet there—always there, and not to be removed. I had never seen that thing in his eyes before, and I think it had never been there before. It was like a kind of madness, molded through will into tenderness and sympathy. And while he looked, Laurie's eyes were upon the door, upon the retreating figure of Chris. She broke away from Steve's hold, saying, "I must go with him. He can't be left alone." Then she too was gone, and Steve stared out of the darkened window after her.

For a few weeks after that night we did not see Chris. Laurie came sometimes, and one day she told us that he was working for a road mending outfit. "It's hard work," she

said, "and he's very tired. But it pays something, and temporarily—" Her voice trailed off.

I could imagine the rest well enough. Chris, accustomed to passing gangs of road-menders in his car, now one of the ranks, equipped with pick and shovel. Chris coming home at night, tired and dishevelled, riding on the truck with the other men, eating a little and trying to talk, then stumbling into bed, dead of weariness.

One night I realize that there was even more than this to imagine. Laurie had been talking to Steve and mother, and suddenly she pressed her hands together and said, "This job Chris has—I don't know. I thought it would help him, but now I almost wish—I almost think it's harming him more."

I could see then, and by the way Steve bent his head I knew that he saw, a boy who had lived all his life passively ignoring these laborers, now suddenly forced to be one of them and to be in turn ignored by his own kind. In a flash I knew that to be a road mender was good, but to be a banker mending roads was fine torture to Chris. And I was almost angry with his blindness until I realized that it was the blindness of a class, of a people, and not to be changed. Others might, in time, have been able to accept their lot; why then, out of all these, should Chris be chosen—Chris, whose ideas were molded and cast in granite, immovable?

Because of this, I was not too surprised when Laurie appeared in the doorway one afternoon saying that Chris had quit his job. She was dressed in worn slacks and a faded blue sweater and her hair was pushed back in a tawny mass and tied around with a handkerchief. She moved her hands nervously as she talked, and there was fear in her face.

"I don't know what happened," she said to mother. "He ran in as if he were mad—I've never seen Chris like that before. He shouted 'I've quit the chain-gang, Laurie!

We're free again. And don't worry, I'll take care of you. I have ways. We'll have plenty from now on, kid.' Then he rushed out—his eyes were blazing. I don't know where he's gone, and I'm afraid—I'm afraid!" She slumped down on the couch, trembling, her face in her hands. Then she looked up and said, "Find Steve—tell him."

I might have looked for Steve in any number of places—talking to people in the Square, bumming drinks in McCarthy's bar, up in union headquarters, talking to the labor leaders. But somehow I went directly to the river, and I found him there, looking out at the water.

He saw me as I came toward him, and smiled. "Hello, Kit," he said. "Sit down and let's have a look at the water."

"Steve," I answered, "I've been looking for you. It's about Chris."

He didn't seem to hear me. His eyes were on the river, on the dark water running steadily under the bridge. "Do you know, Kit," he said, "I feel a sort of friendship for the river. It's strong and free and alive—oh it's good to be alive, and it's good to be free. You can't have life without freedom, can you Kit? Suffering's all right, as long as you can suffer out under the sky, looking at water—but walls are no good. It's better to know you have a choice, though. The river or walls—"

He seemed to be talking to himself, locked in a dream which nothing could break. I tried again. "Steve," I said, "it's Laurie—she needs you. Come with me."

He stood up swiftly. "Laurie? What is it? Has anything—" His eyes blazed, their fire no longer hidden. Now I was certain of what he felt, and with all my mind I pitied him.

"No," I said, "nothing happened—yet. But she's afraid." I told him how she had come, and I told him about Chris. He listened and when I finished he nodded.

"We'll go to her," he said. "It was bound to come sooner or later." As we walked along the bank, he talked, looking out at the water. "Funny thing," he said, "you can't tell what to do for poor devils like Chris. All very well to say they get what's coming to them—penalty of the system and not waking up and everything. That's what our Communist friends would say—sad case of the sleeping bourgeoisie. But it's the whole thing that's to blame, and you can't think of them as just the bourgeoisie. You have to think of them as individuals, and you have to think of the people who love the individuals."

"If only Chris could get work—" I said.

Steve nodded. "I have a dream," he said. "It's a dream of freedom, and it's a dream of work, and of everyone doing what he's suited to do. It's a dream of plenty, that will abolish the river shacks and kids twisted by rickets, and men twisted by circumstance." He paused, and we walked in silence for awhile. Then he said, "Maybe Chris should dream more. Maybe that's what's wrong. But we aren't all made dreamers."

As we walked there I thought suddenly that there was evil in other men, but there was little evil in Steve. Only honesty and courage and the strange thing that made him different from everyone. I wondered suddenly if people didn't instinctively distrust honesty, and try to find something vicious in courage.

Then we were at the house and Steve was standing beside Laurie, her hand in his. And there was strength in the room, and hope again.

"Steve," said Laurie, "you'll find him, won't you?"

"I'll try, kid?" His smile was quiet, but there was a bitter twist at the corner of his mouth.

"You must, Steve. You see he's really so fine—it's just not being what he hoped to be, and then this other job—. He's fine, Steve,

and I love him so." She held Steven's hand tightly, as if she were a child.

He gently unclasped her fingers and turned away. I was glad then that I could not see his eyes.

It was late that night when Steve came home with news of Chris. We were all up, but Laurie was asleep on the couch, one arm flung over her head like a tired child. He told us in whispers, not to awaken her, and with one hand he brushed a strand of hair away from her eyes, tenderly.

"He's at a place on fifth street," Steve said. "He wouldn't come with me. It's a place called 'Silver Moon'—a cheap cafe with gambling rooms in the back."

"Silver Moon?" dad said. "That's the place Bob Ireland runs. It's a bad joint, Steve. How'd he ever find it?"

Steve looked down at the floor. "Sorry," he said, "I guess it's my fault. I used to go there and have a try now and then—still do for that matter. I like to see the place—it's tawdry and cheap and rough but it's fascinating. Anyway I brought him there one night, just before he took the road job. Thought it might cheer him up. We had a try at the games, just for luck, and he won a few dollars."

"But I don't see why—" mother began, but Steve went on.

"You see," he said, "he's in a sort of delirium now. He's drunk and he's gambling, and he has a crazy idea—well, that you can't be a gentleman road builder, but you can be a gentleman gambler. I can't get him away."

"And he's losing money?" mother said, looking down at Laurie.

Steve also looked down at Laurie, and his voice was muffled. "Worse," he said. "He's winning."

At dawn Chris came to us. Our house was nearer than his, and he was tired. He banged through the door and collapsed in a sodden heap on the floor, his clothes dirty, his hair dishevelled.

When he came in, I went downstairs, but dad said "Get to bed, Kit. You too," he said to mother. "He'll be out of this in the morning, and sorry he ever tried it."

But even as he spoke, Steve pulled a folded wad of bills from the stuffed pocket of Chris's coat. "He's doubled his salary," Steve said. And as the two men looked at each other, I knew they both doubted whether Chris would regret it.

Their look had more meaning than they themselves realized. By the next day, Chris was sober and pale, but not repentant. Dad and Steve had talked to him, and Steve had insisted that they hide most of the details from Laurie. But later in the day, Chris, in a burst of enthusiasm over his luck, told her the whole thing.

She told us afterward that she had asked him not to go back. "We've always been so together," she said, "but he wouldn't listen to me. 'I've found a way to support you now,' he said, 'and I won't give it up. You wouldn't want me to quit another job, would you Laurie?' I couldn't talk to him. It was like speaking to someone through a wall—a wall that couldn't be moved."

"Don't be afraid, kid," Steve said. "He'll be all right. I promise you."

Laurie took his hand. "I know you'll take care of him, Steve," she said. "I trust you. And you know—you understand that it means everything."

Then Steve did an odd thing. He bent and kissed her hand tenderly, her wrist and her palm. "I understand," he said.

Things moved swiftly after that—in a sort of bewildering whirl. During the day Steve and Chris and Laurie were together as always. Chris didn't try to see people any more. He seemed content to sit by the river with the others, or to stay quietly talking in the house. Yet there was no quiescence in his content. Always beneath it ran a feverish undercurrent of restlessness, as if he were marking time until the day was over.

After dinner every night he would come past the house and Steve would saunter casually out to him. "Hello, Chris," he would say, "going down town?"

"Chris would barely stop. The restlessness in him was at its height then. "Yes," he would say impatiently, "I am."

Then Steve would join him, waving to us as he went. "Goodbye people," he would say, "guess I'll go down with Chris and have a look around."

Sometimes after they were gone, Laurie would come to the house and wait for awhile. We talked in short jerky sentences about commonplace things, as people talk whose minds are on something unsaid. Then she would go, and late, very late, I would hear Steve come in quietly unlatching the front door. Sometimes there would be a murmur of voices, and I knew that he had brought Chris with him. Sometimes he would come alone.

I never asked Steve about these nights, but from other places I heard things—rumors based vaguely on fact. People said that Chris was winning, steadily. One night he almost broke the bank, and Bob Ireland paid up, smiling urbanely. He was a wizard at the wheels, and even better at cards; there had been tales of crooked dice and marked decks, but Chris's phenomenal wins seemed to disprove them all. As for Steve—his luck wasn't so good. He had earned a little here and there, and lost it all the first few nights. Some said that he hadn't wanted to play, at first, but Chris in a rage had accused him of being a spy, and from then on Steve had tried his luck every night. Lately he had been borrowing heavily from Ireland; that was bad, people said. Steve couldn't keep out of scrapes of course, but this was more than just a mild thing. Ireland was a hard customer; when you owed him, you paid up, or else.

Then we began to hear less of Chris's winnings. He was losing now, only a very little compared to what he had won, but he was losing. Now his impatience was intensified to

a sort of violence. When we talked during the day, he spoke sharply, scarcely listening to anyone. And at night Steve had to watch beside the door and run out to the sidewalk to catch him. Now he barely tolerated Steve, and sometimes it seemed that he felt the same impatience toward Laurie. When the two of them walked together he looked down at the ground, and if she spoke to him he answered shortly. And the fear in her eyes was growing, but when she looked at him, the tenderness in her look never changed. Sometimes I wondered why Chris had not chosen that look as his anchor—so much stronger it was than himself.

For a week this went on, and then one day Steve came home and told mother about a party Rolf Mayer, an artist friend of ours, was giving. "It'll be Saturday night," Steve said. "You people are all invited, and I don't need to tell you there's a meeting connected with it. You know Rolf. He's busy organizing the petroleum workers to strike, and when he needs a little cooperation that's how he does it." He paused and then went on, a little sadly. "God, I've been missing out on things lately. Rolf's meetings are the stuff—I'd like to be in on this one."

"Get Chris and Laurie to go," mother suggested. "They know Rolf pretty well." But she didn't sound as if she hoped it could be done, and by the way Steve laughed I knew he didn't even consider it. Steve was looking tired. There were dark circles under his eyes, and he didn't talk as gaily as he had before.

"You take Laurie," he said, "and tell me all about it. You go along too, Kit. You can do my part of the organizing."

"I'll talk to Chris," said mother firmly. But none of us really believed she would get him to come.

That was why we could scarcely believe her when she came in Friday evening and said that Chris was going to Rolf Mayer's

party. "He and Laurie both are going," she said, smiling triumphantly.

Steve stared at her in amazement. "You sure?" he said. And when she nodded he asked, "How did you persuade him?"

"I don't know," she confessed. And then, "To tell the truth, I didn't persuade him at all. I talked to him all day yesterday and he refused, and then today I met him coming home from down town and he said he'd changed his mind. I can't figure it out."

"He's coming out of it then," dad said. "I knew he would, sooner or later."

But Steve didn't share his certainty. "I wish I knew—" he muttered.

"What's the matter?" mother asked.

"Nothing," he said. "Only I wish I could be sure Ireland isn't mixed up in this. Chris has been losing, you know, and he wants a show-down pretty soon." Steve laughed. "Damn Ireland," he said, "I owe him a fortune myself. Guess I'll have to shoot him sooner or later. I haven't got the price of a hair-cut." He slipped a small revolver out of his pocket and pointed it ferociously at the ceiling. "Swell reformer you are, Steve my boy."

"Stop pointing that thing, Steven," mother said. "And where on earth did you get it? Don't carry it around with you for heaven's sake. It'll go off sometime accidentally and then where will you be?"

"Sing-Sing probably," answered Steve. "As a matter of fact though this thing belongs to Chris. His first thought after the road job. Fortunately he's morally against suicide, but I took it away from him just in case. I'll have to give it back soon I guess. He's been hounding me for it; likes to feel dangerous."

Steve slipped the revolver back into his pocket, but the sight of it deepened the foreboding that hung over us all until Saturday. To me, and to all of us I think, the feeling

was like a cloud that could never be lifted yet somehow must be shattered.

Seeing Chris and Laurie before the party didn't help the feeling. True, they were more natural than they had been for weeks. They walked together looking at each other, and Chris stood close to Laurie, his hand on her shoulder while he talked to us. But Chris's cheeks were flushed, and his hand trembled so that even lightly rested on Laurie's shoulder it was as if he leaned upon her for support. And Steve could no longer mask the flame in his eyes when he looked at Laurie, and when he passed her he brushed his hand lightly over her hair like a caress.

Only Laurie did not notice. She stood strong as always, and jubilantly happy. I knew that she believed everything was right again, and I wished I could share her belief. But the cloud was too strong. It cut us off, separated us, and there was no way for us to reach her certainly.

We went to the party with Steve and we came late. "It doesn't matter," he said, "as long as we're there in time for the talking. I want to get in on this organizing though. It's a new interest in life."

The steps up to the studio were narrow and steep, and the door at the top was flung open. We came together into the room, its low ceiling covered by a sky-light through which you could see stars and darkness, and even a thin sliver of moon. The walls of the studio were hung with paintings—rough, direct things that conveyed through a single figure the story of a life. There was the city alley-cat, prowling around garbage cans. There was a prostitute, her lined mouth painted vivid scarlet, leaning wearily against the corner of a gray stone building, her eyes closed.

I looked at them all quickly, and then I tried, in the confused welter of sound, to distinguish a familiar voice. Near the center of one group I saw Laurie, laughing. Steve

approached her and smiled, and then glanced swiftly about the room as if he were looking for something. Just then I realized that I hadn't seen Chris, and when I looked I could not find him. And unreasonably, something like terror grew within me.

But that was foolish of course. Chris must be somewhere about. He and Laurie had started out together earlier I knew, for I had seen them pass.

I looked around the room again. There was dad, talking to Rolf in one corner. Mother was looking at the paintings critically. She approved I knew, because of the little smile on her lips. The younger people—those my age or a little older, were grouped on the other side of the room, and if I wished I could go and join them. Steve had joined Laurie in a discussion, but now and then he would glance uneasily over the crowd. Once our eyes met and he smiled, but there was a worried frown between his eyes.

Suddenly a small door at the other side of the room opened, and a man came into the studio. Beyond him I could see light and the shadows of people, but he closed the door after him, quickly. He was unfamiliar to me; most of the people here I knew at least by sight, but I could not remember having seen him before. He moved rapidly through the crowd, around the edges of the different groups, until he came to the place where Steve and Laurie stood. Then he tapped Steve's shoulder and said a few words to him in a low voice. Steve, still smiling, turned to Laurie, pressed her shoulder and said something to her. Smiling, he followed the man to the end of the room, to the door. When he reached the door his smile faded suddenly, and as he opened it his teeth were set and he tossed a stray lock of hair back from his eyes.

At that moment the cloud that had hung overhead settled definitely into black terror.

Blinded by fright, I rose and walked aimlessly about the room. I wanted to reach dad and tell him about the man and Steve, but I had lost him among the groups of people which were slowly congregating into one group. Looking for him or for Rolf I found myself near the little door, and as people moved toward the other side of the room I could hear voices beyond the door.

"No use to interfere, Steve," someone said. The voice was smooth and bland, never raised. "It's all straight. The stakes are high of course, but you know Chris's luck."

Then I heard Chris's voice, hoarse with bravado. "Sure, winner take all, I say. No use talking, this is my night to get out of the river shacks for good. We fixed it all up Friday, and it goes."

And Steve's voice, serious and with a note of urgency that I had never heard before, "Don't be a fool, man. He'll clean you. You owe enough already. Remember Laurie, Chris—"

Then a low laugh, and silence, except for tense voices, calling cards.

Once Chris broke the silence, and his voice sounded strained. "I am remembering Laurie. Think I want her to spend any more time in this dump? She ought to have—" the words trailed off, and the calling continued.

Suddenly it stopped short, as if broken off. There was blank silence for a moment. Then I heard the sound of a chair being pushed back, and a sharp exclamation.

Someone said, "Tough luck."

Then I heard Chris's voice, strangely contorted. "That was a marked deck," he said. "You bastard, that deck was marked."

The laugh sounded again. "You'll have a hard time proving it. Winner take all, remember—"

Unreasoning, blind panic rose in my throat. I tried to fight it down. I turned the knob on the door, opened it, and stepped into the

small room. The door closed behind me with a click, but the men, intent upon their own affair, did not hear—did not even see me standing in the room.

As I entered, I saw Chris standing by a table, on which lay a scattered deck of cards. Across from him stood the little man, a smile on his face, his hands at his sides. "Remember Chris," he was saying, but Chris was muttering thickly, "You bastard—you bastard—that deck was marked." Suddenly he swayed and grasped the table for support. Steve, standing near him, reached out his hand as if to catch him, but Chris brushed the hand away, and drawing himself up to his full height, took something from his pocket. For a moment the thing gleamed in the light. The little man's smile froze. Then there was a sharp report and the little man sagged and crumpled to the floor. Slowly a dark stain formed on the front of his shirt, over his heart.

Steve was the first person in the room to recover enough to act. With one swift movement he swept the deck of cards from the table and put them in his pocket. Then, as Chris stared stupidly at him, he took the revolver from Chris's hand, and holding it, he pushed Chris away from the table. "Stay there," he said. Then looking over, he saw me, and stepped back, startled. "Kit! Child," he said, "what—"

The door burst open, and the room was filled with people moving, with people shouting, "What's wrong? What happened?" But as soon as they entered they were forced into silence by the thing they saw. I stepped back with the rest of them, and I saw it just as they did—through a maze of horror.

There on the floor lay the little man, Bob Ireland, the dark stain growing and spreading. Over him, holding a revolver carelessly in his hand, stood Steve, a thin smile on his lips. And apart from them both Chris stood, looking at them, yet seeming not to see them.

As Laurie ran to him he swayed and collapsed, lying in a silent heap on the floor.

Mother spoke the first word. All she said was "Steve!", but the way she said it made me step forward suddenly. Steve saw me move and he looked directly at me and shook his head slightly. Then he glanced down at Laurie, bending over Chris, her eyes on him and him alone. I understood, and I was young. I could not decide quickly the wrong or right of such a thing. So I remained silent.

Quietly, Steve placed the revolver on the table. He turned, and before we realized what he was about to do, he walked directly through the crowd and out of the studio door. I heard his footsteps on the attic stairs, and I was glad. He would be free again.

He would be free—he would have been free. But there was an hysterical voice at the window shouting "Police! Stop that man! He's a murderer!" It was dad, I think, who dragged the person away, and stifled his shouts. But it was too late then. Watching from the window, we saw a dark form run out from the other side of the building in answer to the call. We saw Steve try to leap away—but it was too late. The policeman's hand was on the boy's shoulder. In the white glare of the street-light I saw Steve's face turned upward toward the window, no longer smiling.

He stood there passively for a moment, and my heart sank. Then with a sudden wrench he was free, running along the middle of the street, twisting and dodging. The policeman followed close and I knew that soon he would be caught again, but the chase for freedom was wild and breathless. When they approached the bridge, the policeman fired into the air. He was coming nearer, and Steve paused suddenly in the center of the bridge. The boy seemed like an animal at bay, crouched slightly, looking this way and that, and finding all sides of escape blocked.

Not all though—not all were blocked. In one leap he was up on the steel side of the bridge, standing there, etched against the stars and against the crescent moon. "Don't jump, Steve," mother whispered fiercely, and I clenched my hands. Through my mind words were running—strange words. "You can't have life without liberty. Walls are no good. It's better to know you have a choice."

It's better to know you have a choice. And it's better, perhaps, to trade liberty and life itself for the happiness of someone you love. Who can say, Steve—who but yourself?

Swiftly the figure jumped clear of the bridge—clear of the concrete below—arching downward into black water. His body cut the water, and slow ripples widened where he fell. We waited, hoping he would come up, but at last even the ripples ceased and the river flowed quietly again. Beneath its surface I knew the undertow would pull anything down, down, irretrievably.

And when we turned away from the window, there was Laurie still bent over Chris, oblivious to everything, even to the long look Steve had given her as he walked out of the door.

All this was long ago—three years ago, but time enough to forget when you try hard enough. We left the river shacks shortly afterward, and I seldom go back now. It's no good walking streets peopled with shadows; it's no good watching in vain for Steve along the river bank or for Chris and Laurie walking across the bridge.

I have not seen them since. Once, on the car from the university, I thought I saw Laurie—but it may have been only a woman who looked like Laurie. I would like, in a way, to think it was she. The woman was fairly well dressed and she had been shopping down town; her arms were filled with packages. In another way I would be sorry, for in this girl's face was no eager spark of life

like that kindled by Steve and the river shacks.

Somewhere I heard that Chris has a job—not a good job, but some small clerical position where he might rise or he might remain forever, enmeshed in security. I know that after the shooting he was ill for a long time, and he never spoke to anyone about his part in it. I think he never fully realized it; it all seemed part of his delirium, and perhaps it was. And respecting Steve's secret and Steve's right of choice, I have never spoken to anyone about the truth of the thing.

There is no way to end a chronicle of lives, because the lives themselves do not end. They go on and on, living strange stories with climax and anti-climax, weaving obscure threads of connection from person to person and on into infinity. And until we can com-

prehend infinity, we must take small parts of it, for we can see so little at one time.

I sometimes wonder whether Steve understands now, or whether understanding came to him in those few brief seconds between heaven and the lightless core of water. And I sometimes try to grasp fully with my mind the parts of him—his dream, his eyes when he looked at Laurie, his curving smile, the revolver, the boy who stood at bay in the center of the Third street bridge. I think if I could piece it all together some way I might see the thing he saw, and comprehend his overwhelming love of life and his breathless, eager leap for death.

But there are many things to do, and I do not think about it often any more. Sometimes it is better to forget what you cannot understand.

THE MORNING BIRD

WALTER ROYALL

Too well I know the years have left their trace.
 So many youthful fingers smooth the brow
 Where my own linger desperately now.
 A group of slender lovers haunt the place;
 You cannot still my heart, no matter how
 The timely words may offer careless grace
 For I shall feel the drifting ghosts enlace
 Your brilliant youth; before them I shall bow.
 The shades of past events shall rise and spread
 A cover over my ambitious heart.
 It is not for your mind to understand
 The casual turning of my puzzled head.
 So do not hold me, lest I shall depart
 And feel too many fingers on my hand.

There was my youth and in abandon flung
 Upon an altar, at your heedless feet.
 There were the aching nerves, the body young,
 So soon to learn the sharpness of defeat.
 How ruthlessly you left my wine alone

To taste a newer nectar. I was there,
 A flashing spirit, whitened into bone,
 Unguarded from the wind, left hard and bare.
 Your words were truer than you ever thought,
 "A youth so sensitive will know a pain,
 So like the tortoise grow a shell." You taught
 A lesson beautifully clear, in vain.
 Now turn away and leave me with your smile
 For I shall grow a casing in a while.

II

Yes, we who loved so fervently must fade
 Into the soft forgetfulness of years,
 And slowly will the seasons pass a shade
 Across our laughter, over transient tears.
 The little pond will sparkle, and the trees
 Will sigh awhile above the garden spot;
 They will remember, when the morning breeze
 Has stirred them from their dreams, what they forgot.
 The beauty and the breadth of timeless peace
 Has formed our minds in utter confidence,
 Nor shall we ever question a release
 But share with others, too, the consequence—
 The strange forgetfulness of passions through.
 But look! We pass—two others stand anew.

Tomorrow you will rise and leave this land
 That we have learned to cherish; fragrant grove
 Of pines, the lillied pond, the stretching band
 Of road, the oaks and moss that interwove.

The house will echo strangely and the dust
 Will settle slowly with the passing days.
 The jasmine vine outside the door will thrust
 Its perfumed asterisks in careless sprays.

Tomorrow, when the morning bird appears
 And sings upon the oleander bough,
 He'll sing a little longer—no one hears;
 He'll sing upon another tree-top now.

Beloved, I will learn my task at last
 To understand the Present is the Past.
 Its perfumed astericks in careless sprays.

These Mortals Be

FRANCES GODWIN

SNOW SIFTING down; white flakes up here swirling and free; trodden and dirty thirty stories there below. Neon signs—like coiled luminous serpents—set high on tall buildings and flashing regularly. And down there tiny cars and smaller people moving like automatons with the click-signal lights. God, what a fool I was to expect the whole world to stop and puzzle this out with me. With my own mind going 'round like a squirrel in a cage—Big Ben striking again—and this damn scotch not doing any good. What a strange one you are, James McNeil Morrow, sucking so desperately at an empty pipe with your throat tight, and your heart sore within you. Yet this one-track mind of yours doggedly ticking over plot implications—force of habit I suppose. And you'd better look out, old boy. Even considering this scotch, talking to oneself is a bad sign. But it's enough to make any man gibber a bit—sitting in on a private drama like that—not as a mere spectator either—or even a front row critic—more like an old Greek chorus, right there on the stage—only a chorus that muffed its lines and missed its cue. The old "Bard of Avon" was righter than he knew—or did he? "What fools these mortals be!" It's no use burying one's face in one's hands and muttering about the twisted threads of fate (trite thought anyway). Get it down in black and white, man, — makes one think more clearly. "I take my pen in hand"—only it's a typewriter. There, that's better. The clicking drowns out the clanging in my head—no it's the "el" down there below, or is it? (Maybe that scotch *is* taking effect.)

We were late for the performance tonight and had to slip in between selections, because we'd lingered too long over dinner. It was

Ronnie's birthday dinner, a good one by the way, (I'd just sold a story) with a very fine "sole" and the right vintage to go with it, Chateau Thierry '14. So we waxed pretty gay, and it was one time when three seemed no crowd at all. The candle-light and the wine had made Ronnie breathtakingly lovely in her silver gown with the violets on her shoulder. She's a fine looking girl anyway, but tonight Bryant couldn't keep his eyes off her. For that matter, I quite enjoyed looking at her myself! Usually it makes me very cross to be late to the theater, being a sworn bachelor and set in my ways. But tonight, because I was full of benevolence and wine, I followed Ronnie and Bryant down the aisle and stumbled amiably for my seat. We had picked up tickets at my club, rushed to the theater, and gone so quickly through the lobby; that when I finally had a chance to study the program, I was startled to see that Teresa Angell was singing. When Ronnie had chosen the Carnegie Concert for the evening's entertainment I had been pretty surprised—it didn't seem like her some how; and having just come back to town, I didn't know Teresa was singing tonight.

But there she was, walking out on the stage with that slow graceful gait of hers, and looking even more fragile than ever—strangely fragile for a singer. She always made a good stage appearance, Teresa Angell. In response to the enthusiastic applause, she nodded her head like a queen and smiled—only it was so infinitely weary it could hardly be called a smile. When she turned to give a direction, her cameo clearcut profile was effectively silhouetted against the dark background. Well done, old girl, I silently applauded (Teresa was an artist who knew her

effects.) On the stage the lights were dimmed so they cast an iridescent radiance over her, and soft shadows modeled subtle feminine curves on her gaunt body. The lights made her hair gleam dully like an old gilt satin; coiled around her head like that, it was like a crown. Her hands were quietly clasped in front of her, and the garnet ring did not sparkle, but glowed steadily with a warm ruby glow. The fluted folds of her gray gown, some very filmy stuff (do they call it illusion?) enveloped her in a misty transfiguring softness. Standing well back on the stage against velvet curtains and lit by a soft light, she was like a dream figure, remote and ethereal. Her voice floating from the depths of the stage was like a dream voice too. In the orchestra the strings were muted and there was no other accompaniment. She sang Brahms' "Lullaby"; her voice was tender with a minor note and very smooth. (Her technique was perfect). As her voice floated from the stage I thought dreamily of a continuous silver ribbon softly waving. Just before the last phrase the song was like a sob, and the final note ended on a downward inflection. I had to admit that in the gentleness, the depth of her tone, was conveyed an intangible spirit of maternity. (Teresa!) In spite of myself, I was touched. The song did not crescendo to thrilling heights, did not make my blood tingle and my ears ring, as Teresa had done years ago. (I shall never forget her as Elizabeth in the Hall of Song) But tonight her voice was like a delicate insistent finger plucking at one's heartstrings (Yes, even mine) calling up forgotten and deep buried memories. And the singing of the strings was like the sighing of an autumnal wind. The song trailed off, held for a moment in a faint clear note and ended. Then she smiled faintly and was gone. And I knew that no matter how loud the applause, she would not be back until after the intermission.

When the lights began to come on in the theater, the three of us made no move to rise. An echo of that voice seemed to hover over us like a ghost. Curiously I turned to look at my companions. Bryant's face was completely obscured as he stooped to pick up Ronnie's program; but Ronnie was still staring at the empty stage with a faint set smile curling her lips, and her head cocked to the side in that funny little way she has when she's thinking hard. For some reason I hesitated to break into her reverie, even though the crowd was beginning to surge up the aisles and I was badly in need of a smoke. So I gave myself over to the pleasure of studying Ronnie, rather curiously too, because the gaiety was entirely gone from her face.

Watching Teresa I had thought of an autumn leaf, golden, lovely, fragile, and desperately clinging; and watching her I was rather sad. Looking at Ronnie gave me a queer nostalgic twinge. She was, I thought, like a stirring breath of Spring that one might remember with a quickening pulse in the winter. Even in her pensive reverie there was a warmth, a glow to Ronnie that would quickly stir the most cold and sluggish sense. The glow was on her cheeks under the creamy transparent skin, in the clear depths of her eyes, like blue iris in the spring. The dark brown hair that rippled back from the soft peak on her white forehead glinted with ruddy copper lights. She was breathing rather deeply with a child-like regularity, and I could see a pulse beating in her rounded ivory throat. Oh believe me, she was something to hold one's glance, Ronnie. Feeling rather ashamed of myself, she was so entirely oblivious of my gaze, I looked beyond her to Bryant, and was not at all surprised that he too, was looking intently at her. As if he were storing up every detail of her in his mind. I wondered if he was thinking about Mexico and whether Ronnie would go with him.—There was a tautness about his wide mouth

and a set to his lean jaw, a strained expression in his extraordinarily blue eyes—even that familiar nerve beating in the hollow of his brown cheek were signs of his inward unhappiness. I knew what he was thinking. I thought how hellish it must be, loving one woman, to be tied to another. And you see, I guessed too, how much Bryant needed Ronnie. Dear Lord, there should never be created two people like Ronnie and Bryant unless they were destined for each other, to live and laugh and love together! And if there was ever a man who knew too much for his own comfort that man was James McNeil Morrow, because I knew that—Well anyway, for a fifth wheel, I knew a damn sight too much. Looking at Bryant I could see he was absently running his fingers through the cropped silvery hair at his temples, the way he does when his mind is in a turmoil. Feeling my eyes upon him Bryant quickly looked up, and for a moment my gaze met his. Then like a mask, a whimsical smile was on his face, turning up the corners of his fine mouth in a puckerish grin, crinkling the corners of his blue eyes. He leaned over and gently touched Ronnie's arm.

"Ronnie, would you like to go out for a smoke?" She was still staring queerly at the empty stage. His burry pleasant voice did not seem to break in on her thoughts. Absently she shook her head. Suddenly, I was rather uncomfortable with all this inexplicable silence. As if it were a game, I too leaned over and touched her arm.

"Like the concert, Ronnie?" That sounded somehow like a very superfluous remark to me, and I reached nervously for my cigarette case. Again she only nodded. That set quizzical smile was still on Bryant's face.

"Have you lost your voice, my dear?" he asked, his voice pleasant and carefully impersonal. She turned startled, then slowly her lips curved in her wide charming smile, (but

I don't think her eyes smiled.) She leaned over and put her soft warm hand over Bryant's. He sat quite rigid with the corners of his mouth still turned up, but I saw that the tiny nerve in his cheek beat noticeably and his eyes were grave.

"Ah, Bryant, dear, forgive me. I'll confess, that I was afraid to try my own voice—knew it would sound harsh and brazen to me after Her voice. And she's so exquisitely graceful too, isn't she? It makes me feel all hands and feet, and much, much too hearty." She laughed a little self depreciating laugh. (Ronnie, buoyantly confident Ronnie!) "She's very glamorous, isn't she"—When she said that I realized how young Ronnie really was, and somehow the realization made me angry. But I smiled kindly at her and squeezed her hand, because when she had turned for an instant to me (although I didn't understand then) I had noticed a deep reminiscent hurt in the depths of her eyes.

"Don't be a fool, Ronnie!" Startled, we both turned to Bryant. In his usually pleasant voice was a strangely harsh tone. Of course he noticed our amazement, and quickly his tone was suave again. "I mean, Ronnie, that your voice is charming, like yourself, and because I think so much of you, what you said just now made me angry. Our good host, James, over there looks as if he were badly in need of a smoke. We still have time to go out." And this time his suggestion was more a command than a question. She rose immediately, and he slipped her gleaming evening cape about her bare shoulders, his hands lingering for a moment in the soft fur collar. He stood looking down at her so I could not see his eyes, but I heard him give a little sigh, and saw his nostrils flare; but his voice was steady as he said in a low tone, "You're very lovely, Ronnie." And he lightly touched her neck with swiftly caressing fingers. Even I was rather intoxicated with the

swift flash of white teeth, of dark upturned lashes, and it was at Bryant she was smiling, not me.

She was walking up the aisle, her arm through Bryant's when suddenly she gave a little gasp and "all smiles ceased together". She stared, her dark eyes dilated at a young man, who sat slumped in an aisle seat. He was gazing dreamily at the stage as I remembered Ronnie had been. We all three had come to an abrupt halt and were staring at him foolishly with varied expressions. Ronnie was pale, wide-eyed, Bryant very taut, and I, I was frankly bewildered. As I remember, he was quite a good-looking young fellow with a shock of black, unruly hair, and dark brooding eyes set in a moody Celtic face; but he had a rather too sensitive and poetic mouth to suit me. He was utterly oblivious of us until Ronnie involuntarily exclaimed, "Kevin!" He turned slowly and saw her. Rising to his feet he said easily:

"Hello there, Ronnie, I haven't told you happy birthday yet, have I? Congratulations."

"Thank you, Kevin." Her voice sounded breathless as if she had been running. "Are you enjoying yourself," she asked, not quite looking at him.

"Yes, thanks, very much", he said. She made her eyes look directly into his.

"She is wonderful, Kevin." She said it softly, regretfully and the color kept coming and going in her smooth cheeks. As a faint light dawned upon my reason, I rather ached for her. Putting my hand under her elbow, I gave her a little nudge.

"That smoke." I reminded her gently.

The three of us walked up the aisle in silence. The marble lobby was blue with smoke and crowded with people standing or strolling in little groups. There was a babble of voices and high heels clicked on the marble floor.

Snatches of conversation floated over to our silent little group.

"By Jove, you know I rather liked that last number".

"You mean Teresa?"

"Yes, she's losing her power and range, and she's clever enough to only try things she can handle."

"Remember when she sang 'Elsa' with long yellow braids? Seems ages." Ronnie was listening to every word. Remotely I heard my own voice breaking in.

"Who was the young man, Ronnie?" And then I could have bitten my tongue.

"Oh, we, we have a mutual land-lady; that's where I met him. We're both 'third floor backs.'" Ronnie's little laugh was only a weak echo of her usual rich chuckle.

"Didn't you know James? He's 'the man in her life'—the romance of the third floor backs." Bryant was lighting his pipe and the glow from the bowl was reflected along his fine profile and the gaunt attractive hollows under his heavy brows. I could see he was smiling an amused paternal grin, but I could not see his eyes. I'll admit I was completely confused. How much did Bryant care, and know? And Ronnie, what about her? How much had Bryant told her? Everything seemed to be moving in circles much too quickly for my poor mind. Ronnie was studying Bryant with a puzzled, almost calculating air. Comparing him, I supposed, with that young man. As if there could be any comparison! I thought of the look in Ronnie's eyes as she had talked to that boy in there, thought of the way he had been gazing at the stage where Teresa had stood.—Oh, I had seen young romantics before, gazing from afar at Teresa. Youth worshipping illusion—But it hurt me to see Bryant so carefully not looking at Ronnie. Ronnie whose throat and face glowed with a vital luminous quality in spite of her pallor.

I realized that our silence was rather aw-

ful and was relieved when Bryant said, "Must see that man over there. He's a client I've been trying to reach all week. Will you two excuse me?" Ronnie and I watched him cross the floor. His dark head, silvery at the temples, showing above the crowd. I could not help but admire his splendid carriage, the strong easy swing of his broad shoulders. I knew that Ronnie was watching him, too, with that wondering little glance that made me want to shake her.

She tugged at my arm. "I want some fresh air, James." I realized there wasn't time, but I was never one to resist Ronnie. I liked the feel of her arm through mine and the sweet fragrance of her hair. And I'll admit I enjoyed looking closely at that clear ivory skin close to mine. So I let her lead me out through a side exit, and we were in a dark alley next to the theater. The crisp night air blew refreshingly on our hot faces. I lit a cigarette for her, shielding the match so I could look directly in her eyes, but she quickly turned away. We paced slowly in silence, and she seemed to know where she was leading me. I looked up to see we were at the back of the theater near the stage door. Ronnie was holding my hand tightly, and her's was much colder than the night warranted. "James," she said and hesitated.

"Yes, Ronnie?"

"I want to tell you something—ask you—"

"Go ahead," I said trying to make my voice impersonal and at the same time encouraging. She opened her mouth as if to begin and shut it again; as I watched her surprised, she leaned quickly forward. Turning, I saw that where the stage door had been, there was suddenly a harshly bright square of yellow light. Beyond, was a vista of doors, and from one we heard a crash and tinkle as if some heavy glass object had been swept to the floor. We heard voices; a high pitched one, uncontrollably angry, which rose above the undercurrent of a low expostulating murmur. Then

Teresa Angell was standing in the doorway, the bright overhead light shining harshly down on her tired bitter face, on the bleached and brittle yellow hair which hung loosely over her shoulders. Her dressing gown was clasped tightly about her gaunt body; she was shivering in the cold night air. A maid appeared behind her, and anxiously handed her a wrap. With an ugly violent contraction of her features the singer struck it from the maid's hands. As she bent her head we saw the deep circles beneath her eyes, the hollows in her cheeks. Quickly I put my arm through Ronnie's and led her away along the dark side of the alley where we would not be seen. Ronnie walked dazed, her face straight ahead. But once looking back, I saw Teresa, her head bowed against the door.

Near the theater entrance Ronnie paused, her hand on my arm. "James," she said. Her voice was muffled with conflicting emotions. "She's really not beautiful at all, is she? Her face is so hard, and in that light her hair—" Instinctively I put my fingers over her mouth. I felt very guilty, as if we'd intruded upon something we shouldn't have seen, and my throat ached with pity.

"She was very beautiful once, Ronnie. I can remember—" I guess I paused, and something in my voice made her look at me so curiously I hurried on. "But she's a strange unfortunate creature, unbalanced, I think. She's terribly unhappy herself, and she makes everyone around her unhappy. She—well, I can't explain, Ronnie—but the only thing she has now is her voice, and she won't have that long—" For a while Ronnie was silent, thinking. Then she said musingly.

"She's sort of an illusion then, isn't she, James?" I nodded and moved to go in, but she held me back. Her words came more rapidly as if she were talking to herself. "Kevin's in love with an illusion then, isn't he? He doesn't really know her at all, but he thinks he's in love with her. Isn't that strange?"

But then Kevin is strange. He's musical too, you know, a pianist. And he's so young—He lives in a sort of dream world, and she's part of the dream. That all fits in rather well, doesn't it? Except I happen to have fallen in love with him myself. You knew that, didn't you? And I'm not a bit dreamy. But except for his music Kevin is so helpless—he needs me and uses me. I mean, I take care of things for him and encourage him when he's down. Sometimes he does come down to earth—(He has kissed me, and then he's very human.) Last month he took me to a concert, James. She was singing—and then I understood. It was terrible sitting there with him as he looked at her. But since then, she's had an awful fascination for me. That's why I wanted to come tonight. I don't know why I should love Kevin, but I do; and that's—" The next words did not seem to come, so she shrugged her shoulders instead. I saw that her eyes were very shiny, so I crushed my cigarette out and averted my gaze from her.

"And what about Bryant?" I asked in a low tone.

"He loves me," she said.

"I know," I answered, but there was still a question in my voice.

"I'm sure I don't know why he should." Her tone was evasive, and I realized we were both thinking of the same thing. I wondered what she had told Bryant about the trip to Mexico. Her voice broke in, breathless, hurried. "He's a pretty wonderful person, isn't he, James? I thought so the moment he came into the office that first time with Mr. Blaine's blueprints. I liked talking with him and that quick smile of his, and his burry New England voice. I've enjoyed everything we've done together; the walks and picnics we've had this fall and our rides together in the early mornings. But James, I never thought of his falling in love with me."

"Then you must have been blind, Ronnie," I said.

"No, really, I just knew he was unhappy, too, about something; and I always tried to make our evenings together as gay as possible. And then when I knew it was too late—" My mind flashed back to evenings when I'd been with the two of them, to pictures of Ronnie laughingly scolding and mothering both of us, Ronnie scrambling eggs and bacon with a long apron tied about her waist, and her round young arms bared—Ronnie's voice interrupted my musing.

"He's told me very little of his wife, James, but from little things he's said I've guessed a lot, how unhappy they've been, and the wretched life they must have had together. I can understand because Bryant and I are fundamentally alike. Oh, James, it's so ironic, or like a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit together! Bryant loving me, when I love Kevin, and Kevin—" That made me very angry at first, thinking of the contrast between the two men. But what is that old saying, "Youth calls to youth"? So my voice was even as I said glancing at my watch,

"Ronnie, Bryant will think we've deserted him."

"All right, James, we'll go in now." She rubbed her cheek against my shoulder with a quick caressing movement. "James," she said, "You're so darn nice and understanding." And so of course I couldn't be angry at her.

The concert was all over and people were streaming out into the lobby when we entered. Bryant looked at us curiously, but he didn't refer to our long unexplained absence. He just smiled, and taking Ronnie's arm, he turned to me. "Let's not go anyplace now, Jim. How about a drive by the river?"

So that's why the three of us were sitting close together in the front seat of my car watching the bridge lights reflected in the river and moving smoothly along over the

winding boulevard that was wet with melting snow. Through the steamy windows we could see the tiny flakes whirl down, and the mist and snow made great blurred halos around the boulevard lamps, blurred, too, the headlights of the cars which we passed on that road. Below in the dark waters of the river, the red lights of the barges glimmered and wavered. The interior of the car was warm and permeated with the spicy, spring-like fragrance of Ronnie's violets. Bryant's arm was lying against the back of the seat, and Ronnie threw her head back against it with a sigh. She was humming to herself a nervous little tune. Bryant's voice hardly rose above the sound of the motor.

"Ronnie—it's certain now that I'm going down to Mexico on this job—"

"Oh, Bryant," I thought I detected a slight gasp in Ronnie's tone. Apparently they had both forgotten all about me. Bryant was speaking slowly, as if he were carefully picking each word, and was afraid to hear the answer.

"Well, Ronnie, have you made up your mind? Do you think you could like Mexico?" Ronnie was quiet for so long, I wondered if she'd heard his question, then she said in a low tone,

"Yes, Bryant, I want to go with you." Then even lower she added, and he caught that too. "There's no reason to stay here. Oh, Bryant dear, I am sorry!" But he just smiled slightly and bent his head to lightly brush her forehead with his lips.

"Ah Ronnie," I heard him sigh as if to himself. I wonder if I jerked the wheel, anyway they didn't notice, didn't notice that I was swearing under my breath because these two people were going off this way and Ronnie not loving Bryant, but trying to forget that boy, and Bryant in love with Ronnie and —. I could hear Ronnie talking, her voice still troubled and uncertain.

"Bryant, your wife, you said you were go-

ing to tell her, anyway, that I was going with you, did you?" The way Bryant gave his head a quick little shake, I could tell he disliked talking about it.

"Yes, I thought that would—" I coughed and cleared my throat, but no one paid any attention to me. A multitude of unspoken questions flashed through my mind. Somehow I didn't say anything though, just leaned forward and turned up the radio. As we slid over the slippery boulevard, the music, a soft, slow waltz combined with the drifting snowflakes to make us quiet and dreamy. Bryant's arm was around Ronnie, her head on his shoulder; he was gazing straight ahead of him. Ronnie's head was bowed, and she was picking nervously at his coat sleeve. I noticed that there was a funny little droop to her mouth.

Suddenly the music ceased, so abruptly that we were startled. We heard the announcer's dry voice. The words came to us in jerky disconnected patches, for the first moment, quite meaningless.—"News Flash—Teresa Angell, singer—found dead—after the performance—gas-filled dressing room—locked door—no explanation" Each phrase as it crackled through to us was like something sharp-pronged, prodding us into painful consciousness. We sat there stunned, and the music blared on again. Quickly I switched it off. For a very long moment no one broke the silence, but I, and my muffled groan went unnoticed. And it would have been hard to explain just why I did groan. It wasn't because I felt a chill breath as if an autumnal wind had sobbing, dropped a yellow leaf, and I hated to see it go. I wasn't only because, like that young man, I was remembering a lovely illusion gently misted in filmy gray, garnets and pale gold gleaming in a subdued light. Not because I was remembering that voice—like a silver thread—only now that thread was gone. It was that I remembered weary eyes in a bitter face and a gaunt racked body,

and brittle hair pathetically gilded. No, it wasn't that. I was remembering too, the look of Ronnie as she gazed at and beyond the velvet curtains, that bewildered hurt in her eyes. And I remembered the way she had looked at that boy, who drunk with his own foolish dream gazed enraptured at the stage. And Bryant's tired blue eyes looking at Ronnie, the freshness and glow of her. Ronnie's words echoed in my mind—"like a jig-saw puzzle, and the pieces don't fit". Glancing at those silent two who sat upright staring straight ahead, I swore against fate and all the gods of fortune, like an old Greek chorus, futilely cursing the tragedy. Then beyond the uproar and thunder in my ears, as if from far away I heard Bryant's voice, which sounded very queer—like a stranger's.

"Ronnie," he said, "Ronnie, Teresa was my wife".

So you see, I had muffed my lines, not explained that Bryant's wife did love him in her strange twisted way, not explained that Bryant's wife was Teresa, that Teresa Angell who in her peculiar way, so desperately wanted Bryant to be content forever with loving an illusion. And if I had explained, what good would that have done anyway?

Ronnie said, "Oh!" Then there was a long pause. "Teresa Angell". Softly, meaninglessly she repeated the name. And her tone too, seemed to be expressionless. Both of them were staring straight ahead into the night. Almost peering, as if they were staring into the future. And I know, I could not guess the epilogue. With a mighty jolt, I realized the whole infernal circle was as completely perfect as a classic tragedy. All I could do was savagely strike a cigarette, and the match made only a tiny flare in the darkness.

BELIEF

LOIS RAEGER

When the young spirit has answered
From its unproven belief
Let not the heavy mind press it
With its unsatisfied grief.

What if the sepulchered brain
Has searched in the ancient hours
All the unyielding ruins,
All of the empty towers?

What axiom has it uncovered
Out of the cloying dust
More real than the untried spirit
Believing because it must?

She Who Insists

JACK MAKEMSON

As they came out of the movie into the light, Dolly turned to Jim. He was looking either way along the street, doubtful, puzzled.

It was up to her again. "Shall we have a soda?" she suggested.

"Oh, yeah! Sure. Let's have a soda." He was relieved at having the decision made for him. "Where shall we go?" They started down the street.

Two years of this, thought Dolly, I wish he wasn't so slow. I'll bet he cares a lot about me, but he won't ever say anything. I guess he doesn't even like to think.

She looked up at the full moon. Tonight, she decided, I'm going to make him tell me how he feels about us, even if I have to ask him right out. I'll bet I could do anything with him; I might even make him propose tonight.

Jim thought, Boy, am I tired. I put in a full day today, alright. That bed's gonna feel plenty good.

When they were in a drugstore, the counterman looked at Jim. "What'll ya have?"

Jim turned a questioning face to Dolly. "Oh, whatever you want", she said. "You always know what's best."

"Well, uh—". The counterman drummed his fingers on the marble slab. Jim looked worriedly at the signs on the mirror. "Uh—uh, well—what have you got?"

Dolly broke in. "Maybe we'd better have a couple of chocolate shakes."

"Sure! That's right. Two chocolate shakes."

When Jim reached for his glass she noticed again the dirty broken finger nails on his stubby hands.

"I wish you would quit at the garage, hon-

ey. You can't go on working on engines all your life. I want you to have a future."

The last sentence bounced off a mind already churning over the first thought. He said, "I don't know how to do anything else."

"You could learn. Don't you want to do big things, and have a home, and get married?"

Jim's brow furrowed. "How could I learn? Anyway, isn't fixing motors big things?"

Dolly decided to try a different tack. In a few moments she asked gently, "Isn't that a cute baby?", pointing to a large cardboard figure designed to show that "babies cry for it".

Jim took a long look. "I wonder if that was a real baby, or just some artist drew her?"

"Do you like babies, Jim?"

"I dunno, I never had one."

Dolly was not doing so well. She realized that. But after all—in a drug store! Things would go better out under the moon. She was still confident.

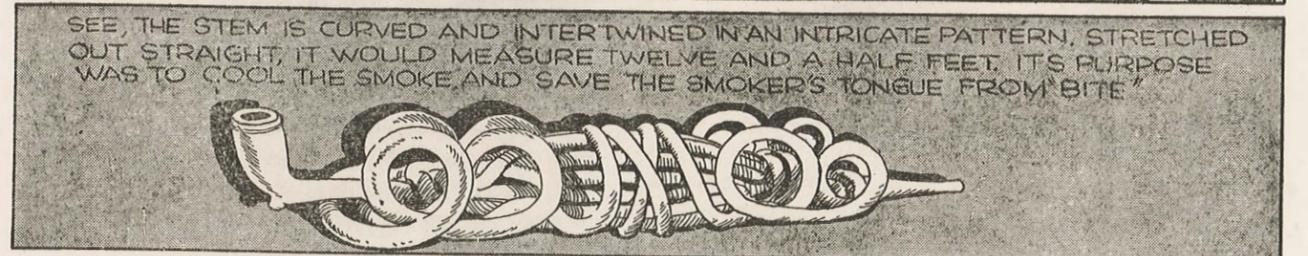
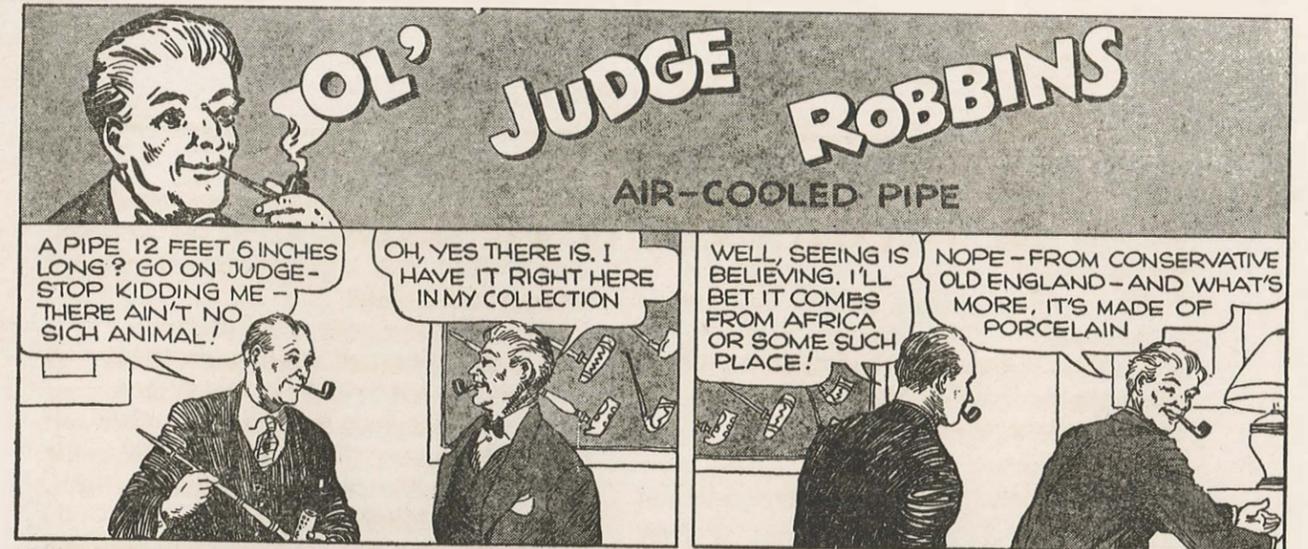
"Let's go, Jim; it's stuffy in here", she said.

"Oh yeah, sure. Let's go." They walked out. There was a small park just across the street. Benches were in it, on which the old folks read newspapers during the day.

All I have to do is to get him to take me over into the park, thought Dolly. I know I can work the rest then. She squeezed his hand. "Oh Jim, stop a minute. Look at that moon. Isn't it wonderful! Isn't it romantic!"

"Huh?"

"Look at it shine through the trees in the park. Say," with a fairly respectable note of surprise, "There are benches over there; let's go sit down for a while and," she sighed, "just look at the night."



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"I'm pretty tired. I guess I better take you right home. I have to get up early in the morning."

"But only for a little while. You can do it this once." This once, was right. Never yet had he led her into anything resembling a romantic situation. She could not understand it. Now, most men. . .

"No. I guess not tonight". Could it be that he was going to make up his own mind?

"You never do anything for me. I don't think you even like me. Why don't you try to be nice to me sometime?" she pouted.

Startled by this unjust attack on a new front. Jim allowed himself to be led across the street. He was still wondering just where he stood when he woke up to realize that he was settled on a bench, his arm around Dolly's substantial waist.

"Isn't this nice?" she cooed, and snuggled closer to him. "You're such a strong man; don't squeeze me so tight. You'll hurt me." He had not known he was squeezing her. After thinking about it for a couple of minutes he was sure he had not been. Oh well. . .

"Don't you like just us two being alone here?" she asked softly. "Wouldn't it be nice if we could always be together." She did not ask that; she stated it dreamily, and made it sound very desirable indeed.

He did not answer right away. The back of the bench was hurting his arm where she

was leaning against it, and he was wondering what he could do to relieve the situation. Then, "Yeah, yes I guess it would. Once I thought about that."

She smiled dreamily. All was well.

The wind rustled through the trees. A soft cloud passed before the moon, then went on, leaving the moon apparently brighter and redder than ever. From far away the music of a roof garden orchestra drifted to them. Dolly sighed blissfully.

The arm Jim had between Dolly and the bench had gone to sleep. He tried to wiggle the fingers, hoping to work feeling back into them. There, that was better; feeling *was* coming back. And with it came the realization that he had been gently massaging her hip. Yes, he could feel alright!

She stirred slightly. "A penny for your thoughts."

"Aw—no."

Poor bashful boy. She would have to draw him out. He must be ready to propose.

"Come on now. Tell me what you were thinking about."

"I don't think I'd better."

"But I want you to. Please dear."

"Well, alright then." She turned expectantly toward him as he began to fumble for words.

"I was just thinking," he said, "That a young healthy girl like you shouldn't have to wear a—a, what do you call it, a girdle?"

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