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ARTS FESTIVAL 1970

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover	Virginia Wright
4 My Relation to Her	Michael O'Shea
5 To Walk Barefoot on the Grass—For Marilyn	Ronald Woodell
6 Drawing	Bix Sherrill
7 Jane	Susan Gates
9 Photograph	Virginia Wright
10 Robin	Chris Moody
11 Way Last Night	Jim Lancaster
12 Photograph	Virginia Wright
13 Modern Jazz	Amanda Bullins
14 Debut	Amanda Bullins
15 Sun Days I Loved You	Kirby Holloway
15 An Aged of Reason	Frederick Chiriboga
16 Post-Party Wrap-Up	June Milby
17 The Daemon	Margaret Hoffman
20 In Memory of My People	Robert Nelson Moore, Jr.
21 Lithograph	Robin Lehrer
22 Drawing	Phil Sanders
23 Figure Study	Virginia Wright
24 Coon Hunting	Robert Nelson Moore, Jr.
25 Slide	Henry Link
26 Bluejohn, My Pharaoh Flew	Doug Sykes
34 Young Mark and the Booth-Truth	Mark Halliday
35 Drawing	Gretchen Bender

MY RELATION TO HER

At party, I believe,
Was where we met:

Our friends are all here, and full of good cheer,
And laughter we hear, and reciting of *Lear*,
Paining my ear, and plenty of beer.
No dearth of cheer: New York is near.
They call their girls dear while drinking from beer.
Chairs covered with rears, they smother their fears.
So what was left;
But for us to leave together.

And that first night is always the best,
With its silent doubts and suspicions.
And both of us trying to enjoy both
Immediately and Eternally.

And I planned:
We will walk barefooted on winter-cold beaches,
We will see places only moonlight reaches.
And if, by chance, while gathering flowers,
We fall asleep: the orange Dawn hears,
Will wake us before She goes about the task of
Breaking day:
So that we may see her secret display.

Michael O'Shea

Then we spoke of art
And once, she said, that painting a beach,
Try forever, but
She could never,
Remove the white from peaches.
So she always painted white-color peaches.

If we would talk before going to sleep,
And I'd be trying to recall, or in the middle of a progression,
She'd say—when it was late:
“Let's sleep now. Remember where the words are,
And we will take up there tomorrow.”
And in the morning she never forgot.

The gay yellow peaches was the sign, but
There still remained the question why?
Only the uncertainty of why—the suddenness does not bother me.
Only the blindness—the why.

Is anything lasting?
The ocean's deepening
Has anything meaning?
A lost child's weeping
And what is secure?
My each night's sleep.

Ronald Woodell

To Walk Barefoot in the Grass

FOR MARILYN

To walk barefoot on the grass
And it was March, and the world was frozen
And the sawtooth wind to which the trees knelt
Was at the door, asking shelter from the night

And each crystal star was crackling in the sky,
Frozen in heaven, waiting for the sun to come
But it was dark now, and the rocks on the hillside,
The pebbles in the field, stood calling

To their maker, but he did not hear
And the morning haze stood on the grass
Watching the night as it flew away to the south
For the summer and called to earth the

Sawtooth wind, for to hear a nightbird's song
And to go a'walking on the grass
Though it was March and the world was frozen
And I opened the door for the sawtooth wind



Jane

By Susan Gates

Jane propped her elbow on the checkered table cloth, and put a cool hand to her perspiring forehead. The knife she'd been using lay abandoned on her apron. Staring at the bowl of apples in front of her, she saw none of them. She was completely unaware of the fire that snapped on the hearth, the warm sunshine drifting through the open door behind her, and the sounds of chickens scratching and clucking in the yard outside.

It seemed like she didn't get much done since her boys had been gone, almost a month now, and no word. She constantly wondered about them, where they were, and if they were well. Jacob had been gone over a month, but Indiana wasn't an easy place to get to, not if you had to cross Union and Confederate lines to do it. He'd make it; she couldn't remember his ever failing at anything he'd set his heart on.

Rising from her chair, she wiped her hands on her apron, and scolded herself for her idleness. War or no, she still had a son at home to feed and keep in clothes. She walked to the window and held her hand to her eyes as she searched the horizon for his figure. Ben was growing up. This year he was old enough to take care of the fall plowing. With Jacob gone, there was no one else to do it. She could just see him in the distance, struggling to keep Sal in a straight line. That mule was a trial. Ben'd be hungry when he came in, so she turned back to her work. Guiltily she set aside the apples that hadn't been touched, and considered what to have for supper.

After having straightened up the main room of their two-room house, she bustled about trying to gather the makings for bread. The flour bin was dark, and the white powder felt cool to her tired hands. She had just gotten her hands coated in flour, milk, and lard, when she heard horses moving down the road toward the house. She'd expected Sam Avery to bring over some grain, but not so soon. She sighed, scraped the dough off her fingers, and hurried to get them washed before the company arrived.

At the sight of Charles Tate riding up, her first thought was that she shouldn't have bothered to clean herself up. He was the man who gathered conscripts for the Confederate Army in their section of the state, and Jane had had nothing but trouble from him. Tate, incidentally, was equally upset to be received by the white-haired Quaker lady who glared at him with flashing eyes.

"Good evenin', ma'am," he said uncertainly.

"It was," she answered.

"Now, Mis' Jane, I don't want no trouble."

"Then don't make any!" snapped the stern woman.

The man sighed and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a tobacco-smeared handkerchief. "I came to talk to your boy Ben. I understand he's seventeen now."

"Does thee?"

He hesitated. "Well, is he here?"

"He's not in the house," said Jane, scolding herself for having just shifted her eyes toward the field. She returned a steady gaze to the man's cold grey eyes, and none too soon. He had followed her eyes to the fresh plowed earth, but fortunately Ben was over the hill and out of sight.

"I see he ain't been gone long."

"Now, Tate," she started, "I need that boy to help me on the farm." Tate opened his mouth to speak, but Jane wasn't through. "Thee's already taken one of my sons from his family, and run another one away from home. Must thee put such a curse on me? Ben's just a boy, and thee knows we don't believe in thy war."

Tate looked at the soldier who was with him and shrugged. Then he backed off to make a fresh start. He fastened his steellike gaze on the bent figure. "Now I don't want no tricks. One a' your boys got by me, but it won't happen again. There'll be soldiers here for Ben in the morning, and he better be here. Do you hear me?"

She heard. The threat weighed down on her rounded shoulders as she returned to the kitchen. Forcing back hot tears, she focused all her frustrations on the sticky lump of dough. Her small hands squeezed the dough with all their strength—over and over. At least Jacob had gotten away from Tate, and if she had anything to say about it, Benjamin would, too. She couldn't bear to see him follow Andrew into battle.

Her heart ached for her oldest boy. Unwilling to leave his young wife and children, Andrew had refused to flee to an uninvolved territory with his younger brother. The soldiers had come, and now heaven only knew where Andrew was. She prayed for his safety, but also his strength. It took a lot of nerve for a man to march into battle without a weapon.

Jane's hands flew along with their work, fashioning

perfect white circles out of the dough. No matter where Benjamin decided to go, he couldn't stay there, and he'd need food to take with him. She slid the black pan into the warming oven, and moved to the window to see if Ben was in sight. Evidently he had heard their visitors leave, for he was already in the process of unhitching Sal from the plow. Not knowing what she would say, what she'd be able to say, Jane almost dreaded facing her son.

The sun was sitting on the top of a distant hill by the time Ben reached the house. With her ears Jane followed his footsteps from the barn to the house, as he occasionally stamped his feet to knock the loose dirt off his boots. Standing in the doorway, his lanky form blocked off the orange rays of the setting sun, and from the look on his face, Jane could tell that he already knew.

As they sat down to eat hurriedly, Ben told his mother that Daniel Davis had walked over to warn Ben that Tate was on the march, and likely to be out for him. Daniel was a thirty-seven year old bachelor, but it seemed that the draft age had been expanded on both ends. The Confederacy needed every man she could get, young and old alike, so between themselves, the two men had decided to try for Indiana. It wouldn't be easy: they couldn't come in contact with blue or grey, so all traveling would have to be done at night.

Since he seemed to have no choice, Jane resigned herself to the fact that she must match the courage of her young son with some of her own. From the time that this war had started, it had been a constant drain on her emotions. Now she was a veteran of worry and sorrow, but felt no more immune to it.

As she rushed to darn socks, and mend shirts and pants for warmth, she thought of the times when she as a young girl had spent long impatient hours with a darning needle in her hand. At that age, even learning to darn socks had seemed a great crisis. If only the dark threads of the material were the only maze now.

Moving to the fireside, Jane worked oil into the water-hardened leather of Ben's work shoes. It was probably the only attention they'd get for quite a while. There wouldn't be much time for boot-polishing on the road. As she lovingly rubbed the boots, she listened to Ben as he plotted out their course to her.

"I'll meet Dan at about 2:30 this morning. That should give us enough time to reach contact with some of Dan's relatives who live north of here before sun-up. From there, we'll keep on moving at night only. That way, we'll sleep when it's warmer, and stay in motion when it's coldest."

Jane was about to ask how and where they would be able to sleep, when she was interrupted by a chorus of baying hounds outside the house.

"Hey, soldier boy," a voice called out of the darkness, "you ready to go? We're out here waitin'."

Ben reached out instinctively to steady Jane as she rose from her low seat, but she shoved him away toward the back room. He moved quickly, careful not to pass between the front windows and the dim lamps. His shadow would betray him.

Jane herself was gathering all the strength she could muster. "Dear Lord," she prayed in silence, "I have asked

Thee to lend strength to my boys. Now I ask it for myself." She gathered up boots, pants, shirts, and socks in one great sweep around the room, and dumped the whole business in the half-empty flour bin. Trying to steady her breathing and her hands, she deliberately and slowly removed the pins from her long white hair. Then crossing the small room with steady determined steps, she drew back the bolt on the door and stepped out into the crisp night air. The icy blast gave her strength, and as her eyes adjusted themselves to the light, the images of Tate with two young soldiers took shape before her.

Tate was drunk and triumphant. "Tell him to come out," he said thickly, but proudly.

Jane smiled, also triumphantly. "Hello, Tate," she said cheerily. "I see thee's come for Ben."

"Tell him to come out," the drunk man repeated.

"Thee will have to come in," was her answer.

He dismounted, and swung forward with unsteady steps. "All right," he sneered powerfully, "I think I'll just do that." Then he stopped just in front of Jane and swayed uncertainly. "What're you smilin' at, old woman? I know you, and you don't smile at me unless you're up to something. That boy better be here. He is here, ain't he?" The man's voice had reached an intensity very close to a yell.

"I know thee must search the house," Jane said brightly. Then she turned to the young soldiers, still mounted. "Would thee like some coffee?" They were eager to accept her offer, but Tate motioned for them to remount.

"You babies don't know nothin'," he yelled. "She's up to somethin'." Then his face became even harder and meaner as he shoved it closer to Jane's. "He's gone, ain't he? An' you're stallin', ain't you? You think we might follow and find him."

A look of mock horror flashed across Jane's face. She was careful to show all of her very real fear. "Thee'd better search the house," she said pleadingly. "And the barn, thee must search the barn."

But Tate would have none of it. He knew Jane too well, he thought. Angry and reeling, he spat on the porch boards and then turned to rejoin the others. "We're gonna find that boy."

As they pulled their horses around and started away, Jane withdrew back into the house. She found Ben sitting on the edge of his bed, nervously plucking feathers out of a hole in the ticking. "Better get thy things and meet Daniel," she said.

They wrapped the flour-covered clothes and some food in a blanket, and Jane blew out the lights. Ben paused long enough to tell her good-bye, and then was gone.

After he left, the house was quiet, lighted only by the crackling fire. Jane seated herself wearily in the rocking chair, and watched the bright, dancing fingers jump on the hearth.

"Well, Thomas," she spoke to her deceased husband, "they've run off our last boy. It's a bad time here, but maybe tomorrow it will get better. Maybe someday we can be a good country. Maybe someday folks'll be proud."

Jane sat there thinking for quite a while. Not until dawn did she fall asleep.





WAY LAST NIGHT

by Jim Lancaster

Dream got me down
in a deep river bottom
peeped out of the gate
of a crazy red house
babies were naked
the highway was coming
beat up my brother
for three cigarettes
the air was all cluttered
with thin silver saucers
spinning and melting
like little hot moons
rats having dinner
in a church full of coffins
acres of echoes
of blazing mad flames
bottles were breaking
and children were dancing
in temples of cedar
and castles of smoke
an old man was fishing
in a cypress reflection
the rain fell like mirrors
and put out the fire . . .



MODERN JAZZ

"And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour . . ." (JUDGES 4:9)

The Skipper left our campsite an hour before her,
Tobacco smoke taking a curved piece from the air,
As though to punctuate a question and keep a souvenir
To make the night's Key Campground worth remembering.

I could wish to follow, and for more—a better season
And the early days when we were hidden
In the smoke the truck that killed mosquitoes
Left us by the shoreline fence.

Deborah's wish as always was for flight: she caught
The wind boxing wet bedclothes on the clothesline,
And she approached them, her voice climbing.

"My pillow, you are not as graceful
As a willow tree that blows, though you
Go the way the night breeze goes,
Like a spinnaker that billows in a race, full of air
Under a fast moon, falling, but full.
I used to parachute until," she said, "they
Found me underage. I had forged my father's name."

I could only say, "Let's snitch a crop dust plane.
(There's time.)" and I started an old camp song
My companion, withdrawing, did not finish:
"John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name, too."

(continued)

Alone, I dried the last brown dish.
 The fire had changed the coconut shells
 To layered coals, and patterned,
 They seemed steaks cut from expensive Red Salmon
 That, if tasted, would burn out a response.
 The candles had melted and run down the chunk
 Of coral that Deborah, for our festivity earlier,
 Had labeled "candelabra"—white lava forming
 The whitest pumice coating on gray shell,
 As though hardened in mid-dance, in a freeze.

Pulling my towel closer around me,
 I took down the New Year's tree,
 A finger sponge we had dived for—
 It twisted in the fire, curling and stiffening
 Branches—slender hands extended
 From arms too quickly stung.

"Deborah?" I called, running to my post beyond the hill.
 The edge uncovered by evacuating tide.
 The tent doors flapped where an old man snored.
 My blue towel flapping around my head
 Turned gray-green eye color in moonlight.

By lantern light I picked out baby conches,
 Limpets, a sponge still full of water.
 My toes rocked over waves of mud,
 Sinking in with each step,
 As I grasped the roots of a mangrove,
 Trying to loosen its roothold.

I could think the Captain would tell her,
 "The wind has died . . . we'll motor out . . .
 At least the boat won't hobbyhorse tonight."

I called, "My friend, my sister?"
 And heard a bird cry some distance from me.
 It is She, making her one bird call, I thought.

There were the spreader lights and a spotlight.
 She would be on the bow watching for rocks,
 Calling out depths to him.
 I watched them safely beyond the breakwater,
 Then slept—easy—in my tent.

She was holding a hibiscus upright in one hand
 When she returned—the flower, a festival color,
 Red-orange that turned to pigeon's blood
 Near the center, dark as the surface of well water
 Reflecting faces in the red clay regions.

"It came with the deal," she said,
 Throwing the present on its side on the table.
 Her eyes, a suspension of liquid brown
 On white, stopped on breakfast food,
 Followed unbeaten eggs floating in a pan,
 Then shifted focus to a vine-wrapped hedge.
 She moved from flower to flower, pulling
 Lavender morning-glories up a little
 From the vine. Then finding one to put
 Behind her face, she pinned it under hair
 To wear until it closed around itself.

Amanda Bullins

DEBUT

(A CURTSY TO FACULTY WIVES)
by Amanda Bullins

Lady, I am not
 an Husband Hunter.
 If I were, I
 would have learnt
 to sprint . . . or
 punt.

I am a partridge,
 and I balance—
 as though I had
 a beaver's tail—
 upon a nest
 of lap.

Would I contrive . . .
 to tap your anger,
 which runs like sap
 that's hot?

You guessed the
 danger. Lest
 your glinting eyes
 drive nails into
 my Purple Heart
 your turning glance
 has turned to
 newsprint,
 burnt,

I shall take my pail
 of hopes apart
 and leave, as though
 I never did
 arrive.

AN AGE OF REASON

by Frederick Chiroboga

I watch you take yourself
apart inside the
mirror, and as you put your
curves, hurriedly folded
into gaping drawers
I wonder if you'll also shed
your suntan gild tonight.

You slink into the
bathroom more naked than
naked, leaving a mouthwashed
"wait" for me to pass the
time with in a clockless
bedroom.

Why do you lock the
bathroom door? The keyhole lures
my eyes to suck your
trivial sins out, but I prefer
waiting.

I can hear you
splashing as I
sit, alone:
the air conditioner banished your
perfumed husk into the
night and makes me
want to search for you inside your
little flasks
and messy drawers,
but I wait.

(When you're through with
splashing and the bathtub's
drained your blush you'll
find my undressed self in bed,
smiling at some stranger
sitting on the sofa).

by Kirby Holloway

Sun days I loved you
time languishing under the trees
when scarves of iridescent steam
clung breathlessly about the window shade
the days heaving quiet cow sighs
in fly time

Post-Party Wrap-Up

by June Milby

My insides are a stale
cigarette butt, three
empty beer cans,
and two floating
aspirin staring
like dissolving eyes at
the walls of my decaying
stomach.

My nose, ameoid, slowly grows
to engulf my swollen
eyelids
and the reflexion in
my mirror is a scene from
Dracula's Ghost.

My shaking hands spill
hot coffee on
my aching feet.
And as my head turns
inside out
I am reminded of you.

The Daemon

by Margaret Hoffman

"I feel as if something were watching us," Evelyn had said as the two plodded onward past a covey of quail waddling one by one into the underbrush.

For five centuries the wood had not changed. It sprouted the same herbs, aged the same brambles, ruffled the same plumed wings that it did five centuries ago when imaginary configurations of man and beast were meditated amid an alchemist's chamber—of pale, winged gazelles climbing the stars, of battles fought among horses with silver horns.

"What could possibly be watching us?"

"Listen," said Evelyn.

Far above, James heard something clattering among the entangled trees.

"Probably some bird," said James.

"It doesn't sound like a bird," she answered. "It makes me nervous."

"Yellow were the barley hulls the field mice plundered and yellow the wet, wild, maple leaves trodden underfoot. It was autumn and as the two passed, the sudden tumult troubled the woodland with uneasy visions for, far above, there was a twitch of tails, a flurry of wings from fowl or flesh within the embattled branches.

Although James had never walked this deep into the woods he moved swiftly, moved silently as if the wood, itself, had begotten him. The picnic basket swung back and forth, back and forth, in his frail arms. As the woods

deepened into darkness it seemed to James as some great, corrupted garden for the yellow leaves were the only vegetation to catch the afternoon light.

Evelyn didn't cook so James had prepared the picnic. When he had first moved into the apartment he had taught himself how to follow recipes. In the evenings when he had nothing better to do, he would mix exotic spices, cinnamon and cloves, he would pour strange herbs into pots and pans until he had seasoned the whole apartment in his own special recipe just as he had seasoned the chicken in the picnic basket. Yesterday he had made a chocolate cake—Evelyn's favorite. He had come home early in the afternoon so there would be enough time to prepare the food. Just last week Evelyn had suggested the picnic when he had invited her to his apartment as he so often did, since Evelyn didn't like to prepare meals and he didn't like eating alone.

The two halted before an open area. Again, there was the disquieted rattling of some beast. It was terrifyingly sudden and startled both of them. Among the yellow leaves, amid the pine needles, the reveries of the wood were disturbed. And all those needles of pine clanged side by side like swords of silver. And all those hovering leaves were hurled together like great, gonging shields.

"How does this look for a picnic?" Evelyn was asking and he answered, "Fine, I guess," following her to the center of the glade. He plucked a checkered tablecloth

from the basket, unfolded it, and spread it neatly on the ground. Lastly the food was unwrapped—fried chicken, potato salad, pickles, chocolate cake—and he checked everything twice. He hoped that Evelyn would say something about the cake as he placed it gently on the table but, she didn't.

"Did you forget the salt?" asked Evelyn peering down into the basket and James remembered he had left the salt on the kitchen table. He raised his slight hands across the basket, wondering if she would find anything else wrong with the picnic. She didn't. His foot relaxed slightly beside the roots of a tree.

It was not more than twenty feet away, the squirrel. James noticed it in the oak tree, lurking behind the leaves when he passed Evelyn a plate of potato salad and chicken. Perched like some ominous demon in its abode, the squirrel peered downward. James stared at the hunched body, stared at the one taloned foot claspng a branch, the other slightly raised and extended, the furry tail tucked around its haunches. And with eyes flaming like torches the squirrel pricked its ears, cracked a nut, popped it quickly into its mouth, and glared back again at James.

"Scat," shouted James vaguely waving his arms. The squirrel dropped an acorn it was munching on and looked down at James.

"Oh, don't scare it away," Evelyn said, and fetching the cellophane bag of peanuts from the picnic basket, she walked lightly to the oak the squirrel was settled upon, poured some peanuts into her palm, and seated herself below the animal.

Evelyn should have asked him for the peanuts, James thought. After all, he was the one that brought them. Not saying anything he continued watching her.

Without hesitating, the squirrel scurried down the tree, grabbed the nut, and darted to the nearest limb. Another nut disappeared from the cellophane bag, appeared in Evelyn's hand and soon a chaotic clamor from the peeling bark, produced not one, but two squirrels. Too quickly, too tamely, the squirrels scrambled from the branches. And slashing the peanut shell from the nut they devoured whole—the seed. They were only squirrels, James thought. And yet their paws were like those dark, half-human hands sought among manuscripts of the middle ages when the symbolic yale fled the wild forests and unknown hills; their tails as those imagined in some fifteenth century fantasy where men gathered among wine vats, and spoke of bodies neither talon nor tail, but only beliefs.

Soon a third squirrel emerged from the yellow leaves and the three nibbled at Evelyn's palm. James fiddled with the potato salad on his plate and wondered when Evelyn would come back and say something about the cake. One evening when she had her friends over for a party, she had praised him for the cake he made. She had asked James to help her with the party and of course, he had accepted—anything for a neighbor, especially a neighbor like Evelyn. She was delighted when he said yes, and gave him one of those huge hugs she always gave him when she was delighted. Somehow, though, after he had prepared the food, the party had ended up in James' apartment. But, he really didn't enjoy the party. He had just sat like

a small frightened animal, hunched in a corner sofa behind saffron curtains. At social gatherings he always had a hard time mixing. He only really enjoyed talking to Evelyn, although he hardly saw her that night. She had been so busy "entertaining" she explained afterwards. But, he didn't like those posh clothes she wore and those snobbish friends she had, and sometimes, sometimes, he knew she was laughing behind his back just because he didn't understand all her ideas or wear those mod clothes, or have that type of friends.

As Evelyn's guests had left someone mentioned that it was a lovely party, that they didn't see how Evelyn had the time, and a dark-haired man repeated that he thought a woman should always know how to cook. Evelyn had agreed tossing her hair to one side. Someone else told Evelyn the cake was delicious and she had smiled and thanked them. All of her friends disappeared slowly between the clinking of glasses tinkling like bell-beats from a distant cathedral.

James had expected Evelyn to help him clean up after the party, but she had one of those headaches. Evelyn had headaches an awfully lot, James thought. The more he thought about her friends the more he hated them. They were too snobbish.

When James had eaten his second piece of chicken, so, too, the squirrels had devoured all the peanuts. The squirrels had seemed demoniac as they ate the nuts only because they behaved too unnaturally tame, as if they had been denied food for so long that they had to ravish it at one, wildly voluptuous moment. Walking back to the tablecloth, Evelyn crouched beside him, her legs sprawling slightly sideways. "I think," she said, "they would have gnawed right through my fingers if I didn't stop them."

Watching Evelyn nervously laughing beside him, James had a sudden compulsion to kiss her. He leaned over, but she turned away. James had a hard time telling when Evelyn would like to kiss him. He supposed it depended on what mood she was in. Evelyn was a rather moody person and he had heard somewhere that one had to be extra patient with moody people. But, because he had been patient with her for so long he felt she shouldn't have turned away.

First, James glanced at Evelyn. Then he looked to the boughs cradling those furry haunches and talonous paws. The squirrels were still peering down at him, only now there were ten on the tree to his right and six on the oak to his left.

It was twilight in the woods. Like lanterns the yellow eyes of the squirrels swung back and forth, back and forth. And James knew it was not the squirrels he feared but some truth hidden forever behind the yellow leaves—the truth of power that like a demoniac squirrel was scrambling down to earth again.

"Those squirrels are kind of funny," Evelyn said. The shade of the squirrels tilted slowly, slowly, along the leaves.

"Funny?" he asked.

"Oh, not really funny. I mean it's just that animals are usually afraid of humans. They just don't sit and stare."

They both sat quietly for a moment. Eyeing the

chocolate cake, Evelyn asked, "Did you make that?"

James beamed, looking up at her. "From scratch. It took two hours."

"It looks simply scrumptuous," Evelyn answered. "I wish I could cook like you. But, really I don't have the time."

Evelyn got off from work two hours before he did, James thought. Suddenly, he felt a repulsive hatred for Evelyn. It was the first hatred he had ever felt for her. It startled him and he quickly handed her a slice of cake, hoping to somehow make up for his own feelings.

James fixed one eye upon the trees. And then, he perceived in the twilight an assemblage of some five and fifty squirrels among the branches. The woods had begotten a lethal, stillborn silence. Not a tail twitched, not an eye flickered. "You shouldn't have fed them," James mumbled.

"How was I supposed to know they'd be like that?" It was the first time James had ever questioned Evelyn and she glanced back at him angrily.

"You think they're hungry or what?" James asked.

"I don't know."

They were both silent. Squirrels were usually such timid creatures. And yet these squirrels seemed almost wicked. Shutting his eyes James tried to will away the squirrels. Opening his eyes he sighted the squirrels still communing in their mystical brotherhood.

James became aware of the isolation within the woods and feeling a strange power growing within him he turned to Evelyn saying, "Do you always have to feed the animals. Why don't you learn to leave things alone?"

Rather surprised Evelyn glanced back at him. "If I left you alone we would never have met."

"That's different," he said, startled at his own argument.

"I don't see how it's any different."

"Of course it is. I'm a man and they're squirrels. It's a lot of difference," he answered.

Very slowly, very silently, one of the squirrels leaped near the tablecloth and Evelyn screamed, kicking it away with the heel of her shoe. It made a strange, hissing sound and jumped back from her, into a tree. Now there were one hundred squirrels no more than twenty feet away. How many more were out there, James wondered, out there hidden among the leaves?

Far away, a fowl shrieked.

"You don't think . . .," James whispered and stopped.

"Don't think what?" Frightened, Evelyn lunged toward him.

"I don't know. I wonder if they're behind us, too."

Evelyn turned. What lay before them, lay behind them—a concentric circle of squirrels spiralled upward amid limbs and leaves turreting like ancient towers on a battlefield forgotten long ago.

Let's get out of here," James said.

"How?" she answered. Now, the squirrels were blocking the pathway. A few leaped back and forth above the branches. In front of Evelyn and James ten squirrels edged in another five feet.

It was Evelyn's fault, James thought. She and her high society friends. Now, look what they'd done.

James' hand was trembling. "Do something," he ordered as the squirrels leaped back and forth across the branches. "It was your fault. You're the one that had to go and feed them. Get them out of here."

"That's . . . not . . . fair." Evelyn looked surprised and frightened. "They aren't regular squirrels. They won't go away."

"Get out there and get them away. Now," he demanded.

"It's not fair."

And that was when he slapped her. She stumbled against an oak, the leaves rattling wildly like helms of silver. Eyeing a scratch across Evelyn's pale face, James felt a power upon him as if he had just overhauled the hierarchial macrocosm and was now an all-powerful ruler. Elated and unaware of any action outside his own, he slapped Evelyn's face again. Her body was tilted backward by the blow. He felt an unnaturally wicked urge come over him, a tendency for power subdued so long that it finally had no way of communication except for some cruel action. Before Evelyn could drop to the ground he grabbed her blouse, yanking her toward him, the sleeve ripped, revealing her naked shoulder underneath. Now he could only hear her small, suffocated cries and far away, his own hysterical laughter. Had she not struggled against him, he would have slapped her again. Finally, he released her arm.

He was dizzy, now, and terribly embarrassed. He had never hit a girl before—he had never expected to hit one, especially Evelyn. He stood, his slight framework trembling against the mournful harmony of falling leaves.

Evelyn's eyes pierced him with a hatred that made James shudder. Haughtily, she pulled her sleeve up, and slowly, silently, walked toward the squirrels, into the wood.

And in one great heaving movement she waved her arms and shouted, "Shoo!"

A tumult of furry tails and heaving haunches scuttled among the yellow leaves and disappeared within the oak and maple branches just as the swollen hooves of the unicorn wandering sixteenth century moors vanished with the whirling stars. And just as nothing was left of the unicorn but a time-worn fable so, too, nothing lingered of the squirrels but the clamoring of yellow leaves.

Five minutes passed. Evelyn began to walk toward the path, out of the woods. James picked up the leftovers, placed them carefully in the picnic basket. They left in silence.

As they emerged from the woods it could have been any time or any place. Take away the ice-cream vendors, the asphalt pavement, the honking traffic and there was only a man with a basket tucked under his arm, following a girl. Whirl the constellations backwards once . . . twice . . . and any century reeled by—say the fifteenth. And again, on a frosted October a horned horse galloped some lone moor, a winged gazelle fluttered above its own reflection padding a pool, and like these imaginary animals having talons, horns, and tails that were not their own, a man walked in the park with a demonic power within him, hidden among the falling, yellow leaves.

IN MEMORY OF MY PEOPLE

by Robert Nelson Moore

In ancient days my family had sired
generations of kings. Born in the bad
time of cold, my father, Rmkelf IV, had
dug in close, adding his body's fire

to my mother's heat. The beautiful Rmkai,
with fur of woven cashmere, would hang
warm teats near as the crazed wing sang.
When they found me at the thaw, my

people had frozen. I frightened them,
little as I was, on all fours. They praised
God that the animals hadn't killed me,
unable to believe I had survived that winter.

They called it a miracle. I was bathed, adopted,
and they named me Junior. I repeated this
medal of civilization, turning it with my tongue
so none would feel my wonder. It was only

during the cold season that I would feel my calves
stiffen and the hair hunch like needles on my back.
No one knew, but in school I would rake blood black
under my nails, trying to grip the wooden desk to

keep from racing for warm milk to the teat
of a lost jackal-mother. Those times would free
the memory of that first year; struggling out to see
the pack destroying a great bull buffalo for meat.

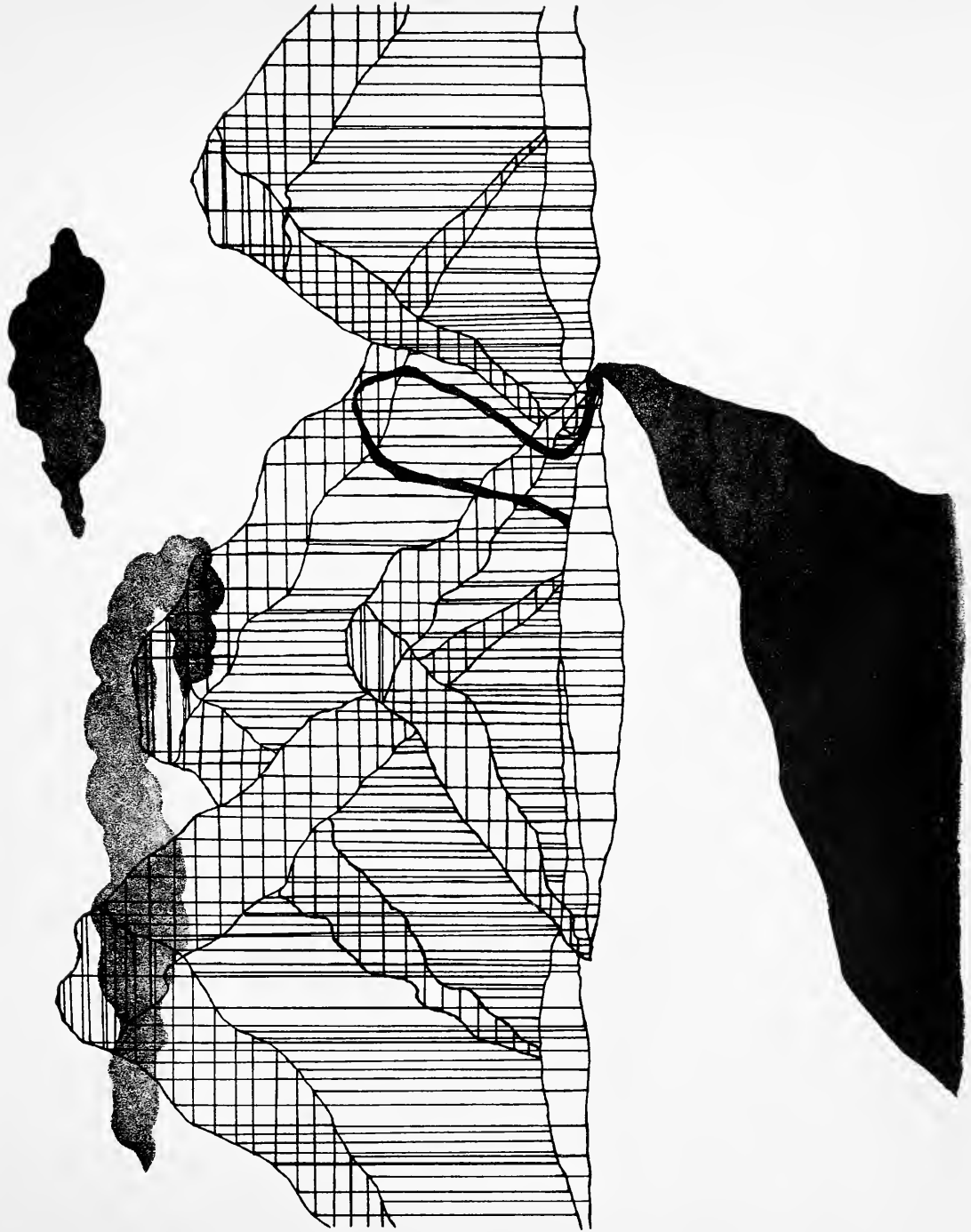
I could still hear the clicking of slick teeth as they
ripped the flesh. My father carried bloody-skinned
chunks to us. It wasn't enough. They still died in
the cold. Perhaps that is why, now, I am unable to lay

a snowflake in my hand or seed a woman joyfully
in winter. Perhaps also it explains why, when the
heat comes I go to the docks, unload fruit, and
live in anticipation of the dusk. When the sky is

hollow with the heat of failing daylight
I go into the chaste forest. On my knees
I go searching naked among the leaves
for steaming droppings. It is there that the

scent hangs upon the pregnant air like years
upon an ancient crone. There I can cradle on
my haunches and scream to the falling sun.
Soon, my people's broken howls reach my ears.

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COON HUNTING

by Robert Nelson Moore, Jr.

Crossing Steven's Creek, snow
crunching under our feet,
we glimpsed a coon's eyes gleaming
at us through the dark; yellow eyes
ablaze with the memory of fleet
hounds baying in throttled, feverish cries.
Our lead hound's urine drilled steaming
yellow holes in the snow's neat
crust; suddenly the feel of the coon's
terror sent tremors through the dog's thighs
and the pack began piping its hollow hymn
of whimpering desire. Like maddened steers
they careened ahead, their pained shaking
howls frozen in the quaking air and breaking
in brittle chunks around our ears.
The dim heat of anticipation crept along the rim
of our thighs and hollowed our eyes
with desire. The hushed moon's
one weary eye bent low, cloaking
us in a hell-spawn pool of icy light.
Hounds raged in the bullet-shattered night
as we thumbed a round into the smoking
chamber; understanding the fears
of all creatures who lie waking
in darkness, counting off the slow
seconds of their lives.



Bluejohn, My Pharaoh Flew

By Doug Sykes

If you was ever lucky enough to be a boy, and if you can remember when you was fourteen or so without getting all mushy about it, then I guess you'd understand how it turned out with Bluejohn and me. It would be an easy thing to misunderstand, even if I told it right, because things that are pretty simple have a way of getting all twisted around, if you know what I mean. But it was just that I was fourteen and Bluejohn was old. And that's all it was. At least it never got to be anything big between him and me. We was just friends who had what I'd call an understanding between us, if you can believe that. You probably don't believe it, though, because people all the time think an old man and a boy together are naturally going to do something real big and famous and sloppy-eyed, just out of the principle of the thing. But, looking on it now, I can tell you for sure that Bluejohn didn't care for that kind of thing, and even if he did he never said anything about it. I guess the only time he ever come even close to doing something big was when he give me Pharaoh, and even that turned out not to be so much.

You'd have to know him to think about it right. Bluejohn used to be a brick-mason, the journeyman kind who'd followed big jobs all during his life. Papa said he'd been a good one too, before he quit for good, and Papa knew about things like that. Bluejohn must've been just about everywhere in the country at one time or another laying bricks, but it seemed to me, me being just a kid at the time, that he'd never lived anywhere except in the old Parker place down from us, even though Papa told me he'd only lived there ever since old man Parker and his last daughter moved out only eight or ten years before. We all knew that Bluejohn lived alone most of the time, but I've figured since then that it wasn't because he was sad or didn't like company. He only had the house, since he couldn't afford any of the Parker woodland, and I guess he thought he could take care of that one thing by himself. He never owned an inch of land anywhere in his whole life, except for the lot the house was on—but I think he liked it there, even if he didn't own it. He never said he did. Once in a while, mostly on holidays, we'd see this young girl go in over there, sometimes with a man in a suit. We didn't find out till later that she was a niece or something who lived off in Chinaoak.

I'd called him "Bluejohn" as far back as I can remember. I never really thought about it, but I guess I called him that because he always wore this big blue-denim brick-mason jacket with big pockets and brass buttons all over it. He wore it everywhere and all the time, even on Sundays, which didn't bother him. It used to bother my Mama. She said he probably slept in it, but I knew that wasn't true, even though I didn't tell her that. I thought that coat was really something—and I guess that's what I naturally considered important when I finally decided I wanted to call him something. Kids got a way of naming things their own way anyway, so "Bluejohn" was fine by me. I couldn't think of nothing else. And besides, I couldn't say "Mr. Wladyslaw," which was his real name. "Bluejohn" I could say. It's crazy, but for a long time when Papa talked to Mama about "Mr. Wladyslaw," I didn't know it was really Bluejohn they meant. I thought Mr. Wladyslaw was either the devil or Santa Claus, I didn't know which, and it hurt my feelings when I found out it was Bluejohn's name. But I guess all in all I was lucky when it come to making names. Henry Pearson, this bird-hunter who Papa knew, had a dog once that he named "Elwood." That old dog wouldn't ever come when Henry called him. I can see why, too. If I had a name like "Elwood," I wouldn't've come either. That Henry Pearson sure was dumb.

But Bluejohn wasn't what you'd consider dumb. I knew that even before he give me Pharaoh. The first time I ever paid any attention to him, and him to me, was when I was seven or so. He was pretty old even then. Mama had asked him to build her a brick flower planter to connect onto the front porch. It must've pleased Bluejohn to get to use his old trade again, and he really took his time and planned and measured and muttered about that flower planter like he was going to build a Holiday Inn or something, although it was, I guess, a fairly simple thing to do. Even I could've done it with less pains than him. He griped about the color of brick and even brought the mortar sand to the house by himself with a wheelbarrow of his own. But he had to get Emmett Lawrence to make the mortar mud and keep the bricks laid up for him, probably because there wasn't nobody else around who'd do that kind of thing. Old Emmett was just a little simple, but he tried

his best to do everything right. I'd watch them from our front window when I got home from school. Bluejohn'd straighten up from the flower planter with his trowel in his hand and get this awful look on his face and say, "Mud's too thin, Emmett, too thin. Can't lay no bricks with soup, boy." Emmett, who couldn't say "Wladyslaw" either, would just bob up and down like a real crazy chicken and say "Yeecessir Mr. Lady, too thin." Bluejohn really got disgusted with him. You take a man that's done hard things all his life and give him something to do that's easy, and if he's a man that likes what he's doing, and really knows it, he'll do the simple thing with as much pains as the hard things and get the same kick out of doing it. That is, unless he's got to put up with somebody like Emmett.

I got myself straight home from school on the Friday that Bluejohn was finishing up the planter. It was a real beauty, as far as flower planters go—I'll admit that. And Mama wanted it to stay that way I guess, because she'd warned me to stay away from Bluejohn and Emmett and not go tearing down the wall. But I really got interested in it this time because it finally *looked* like something, so I just sallied on up and sighted down the wall with my hands behind my back like I really knew what I was looking at. My flower planter, yessir; and it was going to get inspected.

"What you doing now, Bluejohn?"

He took a good look at me, the way you'd look at a horse or something, and scraped the mortar off his trowel. "Putting on the rowlock," he said, and pulled the trowel over the top of a line of bricks. It made a noise like *sringg!*

I knew what a "rowlock" was, all right. That was what you put in a boat to hold the oars. But it was a funny thing to put in a flower planter. I just knew Bluejohn was crazy, him being so old and all. I thought about it for a minute and then I said, "How come you putting oars on our flower planter?"

"Oars?" Bluejohn turned on me. "Oars, what oars, boy?"

"You putting a rowlock on it, ain't you?"

Bluejohn straightened up his back and looked over at Emmett. "You thinking oarlock, boy, *oarlock*. I'm putting on a *rowlock*." He looked at Emmett again to see if he thought it was funny, but Emmett just said "Rowlock" and went back to chopping mortar.

Bluejohn must've thought I was pretty dumb kid, probably even dumber than Emmett, but he was nice enough to tell me, real slow so I could understand, that a rowlock was a crosswise course of brick laid over a lengthwise course so that a wall could be topped off without leaving the holes in the brick where they could be seen. That was OK by me. I agreed I didn't want no brick holes in no flower planter of mine. Then he showed me how the top bricks fitted in and how the mortar joints ought to be rodded with this funny-looking tool so they'd be even and smooth. He must've known right off that I liked it because then he said he reckoned a fellow of my age, if he was careful, ought to be able to hold his own with a few bricks wouldn't he?, and he let me take that trowel of his and

scrape the mud crumbs off the wall of the planter. I got to say even now that that was one of the best things I ever got to do in my whole life. Every time I scraped the wall, the trowel'd go *sringg! sringg!* and I'd feel it buzzing in my hand. And Bluejohn was having a good time watching me, but Mama come out and made me give the trowel back to him and go in, even though Bluejohn asked her to let me stay a while. She beat me good for getting mortar on my hands. I never forgot that trowel, though, and that night I think I dreamed I was laying real fat brown bricks row after row on this flower planter that was as tall as anything I'd ever seen, and every time I'd drag my trowel over a fresh tier of bricks, it'd go *sringg!* and I'd do it again until they all fell down.

But I was still a kid all the same, I reckon, and there was other things around that I was interested in, and I had to be in school all the time even though it wasn't doing me any good—so I couldn't be around Bluejohn for a long time after that. I'd see him out in his front yard every now and then when me and Papa'd pass the Parker place on the way to the store. He'd throw up his hand when we went by. But that was all for a long time after that. I must've been at least twelve or so before he really started taking special notice of me. It wasn't anything strange or crazy, nothing he'd thought on. I once thought that he must've kept his eye on me without me knowing it, but that probably ain't true at all. I guess he just figured that if you was twelve years old now you had been around long enough to know and understand a few things and not go around acting like some dumb kid any more, especially if you could handle bricks when you was seven.

He must've really been old then, when I was twelve, though I never asked or let it bother me one way or another. At least you'd never see him much any more. Papa said he'd heard that the old man had this thing about his heart and had to stay home all the time, and even I thought he didn't get around much any more—so Mama and Papa was both surprised when he come to our house on a Saturday morning in September with this big double-barrel shotgun with the hammers on the outside and said if they didn't mind he'd like to take me out shooting squirrels. He said his eyes was bad and I could help him sight out the devils when they flattened out and hid in the trees. Said he'd be real careful, and if they wanted, they could have every one of the squirrels we got.

They didn't like the idea, of course, but I made so much fuss that Papa finally agreed I could go, but Mama said I couldn't carry a gun of my own to shoot and made Bluejohn promise he wouldn't let me mess with his. I always got to go hunting, but that was all. I never got to have, or even carry, a gun of my own. My Papa'd had a gun, and had even killed a deer, by the time he was my age, but Mama said no sir. I wasn't going to have one absolutely. She even had Papa thinking I was too young to go off killing things. But I wasn't even wrought up about *killing* something, I just wanted to carry one, if for nothing else just to show I could do it and not go off and kill myself or shoot somebody's old cow. But looking on it now, I can see that it wasn't too important one way or another. I wouldn't've needed it anyway.

So me and Bluejohn took off hunting squirrels that

Saturday. I can tell you now that Bluejohn was spry for a man with heart trouble, and for a man who hadn't been out much lately, he sure knew where he was going. He took off like crazy, a real gentleman walker, all right, and even though I was twelve years old and was supposed to be able to not get tired, I was nearly out of breath by the time we got to Locklear's tobacco barns. He let me rest a minute on some rocks when we crossed the corn bottoms and got into Dunbar's, but then he took off as fast as ever. I thought about telling him to slow down, but I didn't. I liked Bluejohn, and I was excited about getting to go hunting with him, but after a while I started to think that by the way he was doing, he wasn't too much of a squirrel hunter any way you looked at it. Bluejohn was going way too fast, and in too straight a line, to be hunting many squirrels. He wasn't even looking in the trees at all, just hurrying along like he was going to catch a bus. You got to walk slow and easy when you hunt. Besides, all the good squirrel places was back over where the patches of oaks circled the edges of Dunbar's cornfields, where the squirrels could get easy corn when they wanted it. Dunbar's was the best place around, everybody knew that, but we'd already passed it. In fact, we kept on going out so far that we finally crossed the creek at the Blowed-Down Log and come out in some broomstraw at the foot of a real steep hill, where I hadn't even been before. I had sense enough to know that once you crossed on the Log, you was in pure hard highlands for sure, and you'd be more likely to run across a mountain lion in all the thickets than you would a squirrel. And from the looks of Bluejohn's old 12 gauge hammerlock, he certainly wasn't going to kill no mountain lion, unless he planned on beating it to death with the barrels.

We stopped there in the broomstraw just a minute. Bluejohn motioned towards the top of the hill. He was breathing just a little hard by now. "S go up there," he said, keeping his words in between his teeth. "Might see us a red-squirrel. Time's right for them." He put his old 12-gauge on his shoulder. There was a smooth groove wore into the forestock where it'd been carried so much. I figured he'd be tired of holding on to it by now.

"Want me to carry that gun?" I said.

"Nooope. Promised your Ma."

"I could carry it. I could. It's heavy on you ain't it? It wouldn't be heavy for me, though, honest it wouldn't."

"I give my word."

"Aw Bluejohn, I'm old enough. I'd be careful."

"I know that," Bluejohn said, "You old enough, all right. And you'd blow hell outa the first thing that moved, without no thought at all." He cradled up the old gun and took off again.

I followed as good as I could. I was pretty tired after all that walk. "No I wouldn't. I wouldn't shoot nothing unless you told me to. I'd be careful. It'd be stupid for me to just shoot something without asking, wouldn't it? How come I'd throw away a chance like that? I never get to do anything, blame it. I'd carry it just like it was mine, just like it belonged to me and everything."

Bluejohn just kept walking on up the hill all the time I was talking, so I finally had to hush to keep up with

him. "Maybe later," he said, "Maybe you'll tote her on the way back. Just keep quiet and keep them eyes open for a red-squirrel."

Squirrel, hell. There wasn't a squirrel in fifty miles of that place. I give it up. It was too hard to climb that hill and talk at the same time. What made it worse, too, was that we started getting straight into this awful laurel thicket about half-way up. Laurel, where it grows close to the ground, is like about forty barbed-wire fences all tangled up together with all the briars and wild grapevines and raspberry shoots that hang around. We both had to bend and stoop to get through it. My pants started getting briars broke off in them, and I'd have to stop and pull them out. Bluejohn would wait a minute for me, then he'd bend back over and start thrashing out another path on up the hill. Once when I was going around some bushes, this single vine whipped back behind me as fast as a mule-kick and plugged me right in the ass with a briar, and it hurt me so bad I nearly wanted to cry and go home; but I didn't let on for Bluejohn to stop, because he didn't see it hit me and I didn't want him to. He'd've never let me carry the gun on the way home if he'd known about that briar. Bluejohn was funny about a lot of things. He'd think somebody who could get a briar in his ass just going up a hill didn't have no right to carry *no* gun, *no*-where, even down a hill. I finally pulled it out myself, without stopping. I swear I could've cried.

We finally got to the top of the hill, though, where there was a lot of locust trees and oaks around, and I was gladder than I'd ever been in my life. I could stand up then, and I felt a lot better. Bluejohn didn't stop just yet, though, but got on a pretty clean little trail that he seemed familiar with. It took us into the locust trees and around some high rocks and on up a little further, till we come into this big hollowed-out place right on top of the hill, sort of like a crater, where there was a big thicket and grapevines growing all around. He led me over to an oak that had probably been struck by lightning and was broke down to the ground still on its stump, sort of like a natural bench. The bark on it was smooth. I noticed that, and there was a lot of bushes on both sides that sort of hid it. Bluejohn propped up his gun and set down on the bench real slow, just like in an easy chair. He was breathing harder than me now, and looked like he wanted to cough but decided not to just to impress me. He told me to set down and quit stomping around, which I did, but I had to hang way over the oak-bench so I wouldn't have to set where that briar had got me.

We was there a long time, and I sort of liked it. From where we was, it was like setting on the edge of a big washpan, or even like having a seat at the Stock-Car Races in Pulaski, where you was looking down and could see the whole track—only they couldn't've had no race down there where we was looking because of all the briars and grapevines. I though it was a great place for a while, I guess because I'd never been there. I even set still for a long time, because I needed the rest after that climb, but after I got rested I sort of got to wanting to move around a little. I got to scuffing my feet and twisting my rear around on the log, and I got itchy all over where the laurel leaves and briars had scratched me. I tried for a

while to pretend that I had a gun and was shooting at stock-cars down there, but it didn't help. Then I started humming a little bit, but Bluejohn didn't say a word, just set there like he was waiting for a bus. He knew I was getting restless. I could hear him breathing all over the place.

"Bluejohn," I said after a while, "I don't think they's no squirrels here at all."

"Hush."

"I been looking, I really have, but really I ain't seen a thing."

"I said be quiet."

"Don't you think we could—"

"If you don't shut up your racket, they ain't going to be no squirrels nor nothing else up here for sure. You the loudest boy I ever seen."

I said "Yessir" to him. I wished I'd never come. I wished I'd stayed home, because now I was not only itchy and wanted to move, but I also decided after a while that I had to go to the bathroom. But I waited. I'd've been ashamed to ask Bluejohn to turn his head.

But in a minute Bluejohn touched me, and I must've jumped nearly straight up, because he made a big thing about me making so much racket.

"Listen," he says, "hear that?"

I didn't hear nothing, I really didn't, except him beating.

"You move up," he says real low, "and part them bushes. And be quiet, blame it."

I got down on my knees in front of the oak-tree bench and pulled back a branch of the ivy bush with my hand like he said to do. I could see down into the hollowed-out place real clear when I did. I thought that maybe some squirrel had lost his mind enough to come to this place, but for a long time I couldn't see nothing to make such a big deal over—though I was beginning to hear something rambling around down there in the leaves like Bluejohn said. I was about to turn around and ask him what I was supposed to be so interested in when I finally seen this big brown-red spot way off under some low grapevines. I was making all the noise, all right, pulling off the lowest grapes that was left at that time of year. And if that was a squirrel, it was the biggest one anybody'd ever seen. But when it moved again, this time I seen that it for sure wasn't no squirrel at all.

"HEY!" I said, "there's a PHEA—!"

Bluejohn caught his hand over my mouth just in time to keep me from screaming "pheasant" as loud as Tarzan. I nearly peed on myself.

Bluejohn pulled me back on the oak-bench and kept the bushes parted so we could see. It was a pheasant, all right, one of the biggest pheasants there ever was anywhere. He must've been what people nowadays call a "ring-neck," because the first thing that caught my eye was this white ring of feathers around his neck. I nearly didn't take my eyes off that ring the whole time. I'd seen a picture of a pheasant once on a calendar that Papa got, but it wasn't half as good as having one right down there in front of me, with a white ring and everything just like a stock-car at Pulaski with a racing stripe. And what was more, I started thinking that he was coming real slow over

toward us. At least it looked like that because he was feeding on the lowest grapes in a sort of circle that was bringing him closer and closer up and around all the time. He'd jerk down a grape, fluff up that white ring of his a little, and weave in and out of the brush until he wasn't more than twenty feet away from us. I didn't think I could keep still. I figured that any minute he'd see us and fly away and I'd never get to see another pheasant as long as I lived, at least not as close as this one. I thought of Bluejohn's gun just setting there against the tree. Boy, what would Mama say if I brought home a pheasant? All I could think of was for me or Bluejohn to shoot him quick. I knew he'd see us, though, if I told Bluejohn to shoot him or if either of us moved. A pheasant is sharp. He'd be bound to see us. But then when he kept on coming a little closer it hit me all of a sudden that he *did* see us already, seen us clear as day setting there with the bush pulled back, and had seen us for a pretty good while. And he wasn't making bones about us being there at all. He was wild, I could tell that—he wasn't nobody's pet—but I could've sworn that he knew people, or at least knew they wasn't supposed to hurt him. Once in a while I'd see his eye roll up to the edge of the brush where we was, real crazy-like, like he wasn't too sure about us, but he finally went on past us in his little circle eating and weaving in and out of the brush like it was OK for us to watch as long as we wasn't messing up his dinner. Then he fed on back down and around and kept in pretty good cover until he decided he'd had enough, then all of a sudden he hopped up on an old dead locust log, stretched his neck, and made this loud noise that sounded like he was saying "Challlk!" He done that twice and then flew off through the trees. It sounded like a cannon shot when he took off, with them wings as long as arms, I swear.

"A pheasant," I said. "Bluejohn, that was a pheasant."

"That he was."

"Where'd he come from?" I said. "How'd you know about him? How come you didn't shoot him huh Bluejohn? We couldn't shot him when he flew couldn't we?"

But Bluejohn didn't say nothing at all, just let me talk on all the time we was going back down the hill. I must've asked a million things. When we got to the broom-straw at the bottom, Bluejohn finally slowed up a little and said, "You got a belly-full of questions, ain't you?"

"I never seen no bird like that before *anywhere*."

Bluejohn slung his gun down into his elbow. "You like to have him?"

"Have him? You mean take him home and all?"

"Hell no. I mean have him here."

"That bird? Have him? How could I have him if I didn't take—"

"You want him or no?" Bluejohn said, still walking.

I reckoned I did, so I said "Yessir."

"Yessir what?"

"Yessir I want him but I don't see how you could just—"

"Then you got him then," Bluejohn said. "Yours all free. I'm giving him to you."

"You mean he's your bird to give away?"

"Might be."

"But how did you—"

"But he ain't mine no more, because I just give him to you. You understand that?"

"Yessir, I understand," I said, but I really didn't.

Bluejohn walked on and let me think on it. "But you got to promise something," he said.

"Yessir."

"You got to promise that you ain't ever going to tell nobody about that pheasant, not even your Ma or Pa or anybody. You got to promise you ain't never going to take nobody up there where he is, always just by yourself alone. And you got to say you won't never go up there and bother nothing or throw no rocks at him or try to catch him. Ever. You handle that?"

"Yessir," I said.

"Yessir what?"

"Yessir I ain't never going to tell nor never throw rocks at him or try to catch him, and all the other things."

"OK then," Bluejohn said, "you done said it. You done give your word on it." He pushed the gun up to his shoulder. "You got to mind them things. If you break the promising, then something bad'll happen to you."

"Aww it won't," I said. "But I won't tell noway."

"Yes it will. Will happen. All the walls of your house will fall down if you do it, if you tell." He turned and looked right at me.

"Aww Bluejohn that ain't so."

I think he almost laughed, but I ain't sure. If he did, it was the first time. You never could tell. "Maybe not," he said. "Maybe it ain't so. But you promised. You done said it now."

We walked on for a long time without talking. I was thinking about how come that bird was his when it was really nobody's bird and how come he could give it to me if he really wanted to, but I decided not to bring it up, because I knew he'd just get around it. He was funny about a lot of things. We'd crossed the Blowed-Down Log and had got into the corn bottoms agin before he slowed up and said, "Well?"

"Yessir," I said, "well what?" That always burnt me up. He always just expected me to know right off what he was thinking about.

"Well what you going to call your bird?"

"I ain't thought on it any," I said. I was still wondering who-the-hell's bird he was in the first place.

Bluejohn said, "Well you can't go see him or think about him much if he ain't got a name. You can't just call him 'bird' or 'Tom' or 'Dick' or 'Harry'."

"I kinda like 'Tom'," I said.

"Helllll no, you can't call no pheasant 'Tom'."

He acted like it was important, and I reckoned he was right. If that was my bird, he was going to have to have a name for it. I kicked in the bushes with my boot. I walked on and finally said "Pharaoh" just off the top of my head. I think we'd been reading in school or somewhere how them pyramids down in Egypt was the graves of the Pharaohs down there. I'd always liked the Pharaohs anyhow, them being the underdogs to old Moses and all. "Pharaoh," I said, "Pharaoh's a good name."

Bluejohn spit in the weeds and said, "Pharaoh? That

the best you can do?" He walked on a little further. "But it sure beats 'Tom' I got to admit."

"Pharaoh the pheasant," I said, nearly to myself.

Bluejohn grunted again and shifted the old gun. "Blamed Sunday School been rotting your mind." He said "Pharaoh" again a couple of times to himself like it had a bad taste in his mouth. I don't think he ever liked it. He never said he did.

When we got back to the Locklear barns on the road to home I realized all of a sudden that I'd forgot that Bluejohn said I could carry the gun on the way back. At first, I could've kicked myself, losing a chance like that. But I didn't mention it to him. There wasn't much further till we'd get home anyhow.

From then on Pharaoh was my bird. I guess it ain't much to tell. But it was like I really did own him, though, him and the land and trees he lived in, and that finally after a while come to mean something to me. I wasn't dumb, at least not *too* dumb. I knew for sure that you couldn't go out in the woods and just pick out something just like that, say a rabbit or even some old rock for instance, and say, "This rabbit or rock here is mine and if you want one for yourself you'll have to go someplace else to get it, but don't mess around with mine." You just don't do that. I knew you could buy the land, which is dirt, but I didn't figure that just by buying the dirt you got it in some special way, like if somebody told you you owned it for yourself, even if they didn't own the dirt in the first place. That's a lot to say, and I ain't yet understood all of it, but Bluejohn said I owned Pharaoh, so I did. I figured Bluejohn didn't tell me no lie.

I ought to be able to tell about Pharaoh in the right way, because I went up to that place an awful lot during them two winters and springs, sometimes with Bluejohn but mostly by myself. I never got tired of seeing old Pharaoh, but maybe that was because I was a kid and didn't know better. I reckon you'd think he was really something to see down there. Right above that white ring I told about, his head-feathers was black or dark green, whichever way you looked at it, and below the ring he was all a shiny brown like tobacco with dark spots on him. He had these two or three real narrow tail feathers over a foot and a half long each, I swear, and they stuck up in the air like they was spears or something. He was pretty nice to look at, I'll say that for him.

But looking was all I done. In all the times I went up there, I never once got the least bit closer to Pharaoh than he wanted me to. Pharaoh had it all figured out. He thought it was all right if I wanted to come to the oak-bench on Saturdays or even weekdays after school, and just watch him—but that was all. I never tried or even wanted to catch him, because I'd promised Bluejohn, but during the worst months when all the stuff for him to eat was gone, I'd sneak a few raisins or an apple up there and leave it. But he never touched any of it—I guess he lived off seeds and ground-nuts when all the grapes was gone. And it was like he really didn't want what I left, even if he was hungry. I've thought on it some, and I guess Pharaoh just wanted to keep me like an audience and him

an actor, even if it is crazy to say so, and didn't want to start no close relationship like a pet or have to depend on me for anything. I guess he really didn't know I owned him. There wasn't a way to tell him.

I found out later what "vanity" means, and I can say now that that was what Pharaoh had, Vanity. You could tell, if you'd ever watched him as long as I did, that he really thought of himself as being *some* bird. Sometimes he'd act just like some of them Chinaoak boys do in the poolroom over there. It was funny, even to a kid. Ohhh, he'd keep his head craned out in front of him and his tail out and up so he always pranced around in this "s" shape, like that any minute he just knew for a fact that somebody was going to come and take his picture to put on a calendar. He'd go real slow around the low vines in the hedges and pull off a few grapes, then he'd stttop and llliiisten and strrrrrtch his foot and preen himself like he was some kind of king. Then he'd get this idiot look and open his beak and scream "Challlk! Challlk!" like he was saying "Anybody wants my picture for a calendar better come and take it quick because I'm posing now and I ain't got all day." He'd even strut around admiring himself the same crazy way a rooster does, only he did it about a thousand times better than a rooster. He was uppity for sure, as far as birds go. But I liked it for a while, I guess because he was mine.

Bluejohn didn't go up there too much any more after he give Pharaoh to me. I don't know whether he couldn't take the walk or had got tired of seeing Pharaoh or whether he just figured that now that he had give him to me it wasn't none of his business to go up there because I, being the owner, was the only one who had a right. But I didn't mind if he went, although I never told him that. He was the only other person in the world that even knew about Pharaoh anyway. I even liked for him to go, but I never told him that either.

The last time he felt like going was when I was thirteen, and I was glad that he did go that time. It was in the winter and we was coming back through the broom-straw at the foot of the hill when all of a sudden I seen this big red dog ranging around the edge of the field. I figured he was stray, but when I hollered at him he come over leaping around and wagging his tongue out his mouth like a puppy. I seen right off he wasn't stray. Bluejohn got him down and tried to find something on his collar, then he run his hand on the little sharp bone at the back of the dog's head.

"Ir'sh Setter," Bluejohn said to me. "Kind they use for pheasants and quails." The dog's breath steamed up in the air. Bluejohn let him go and before he'd romped up to the top of the field again, we both seen the men he belonged to coming over. I knew what hunters meant, and if Bluejohn hadn't've been there, I don't know what I'd've done. There ain't a bird hunter ever lived that wouldn't've give his right arm to have Pharaoh's wing tacked on his wall.

They was both short, I remember, and they both carried 12-gauge special bird-guns, one an automatic and the other a double, with real short barrels for natural shot scatter. One of them had on his new red deer-cap and the other was bareheaded but had on the stupidest pair of

sunglasses I'd ever seen, the kind you can see yourself in. When they got closer, I could tell their boots was new.

"Lo," Bluejohn said. "Seen your dog here. Fellas going to hunt in here, are you?"

The Red-Cap fellow whistled for his dog. He was out of breath. "We thought we would," he said. "Thought we'd look a pheasant or quail up this way."

"Ohhhhh," Bluejohn said, and clicked his teeth. "I guess I ought to tell you then that they ain't no pheasants here. Ain't been in a long time. Fact, ain't even no quail as I seen. Be wasting your time."

Old sunglasses looked at Red-Cap, then back to us. "You own this land?"

"Fact I do," Bluejohn said, and looked at me, but he didn't have to because I knew already to keep quite.

Red-Cap leaned on his gun. "We didn't see any posting signs."

"Wind," Bluejohn said. "Wind's bad to blow them down, that's right." He looked at me and said then, "Mind me to put some more up, hear?"

I said "Yessir" to Bluejohn and watched Sunglasses shift his double-barrel. I remember seeing how it was silver engraved with a picture of a pointing dog on the fore-breech, like I seen in a catalogue once.

Red-Cap said, "Fella name of Pearson told us there was plenty of pheasant in this country."

"Pearson?" Bluejohn squinted and looked off. "Pearson, Pearson. Don't know no Pearson. You know a Pearson, boy?"

"No sir," I said.

"But I can tell you," Bluejohn said to Red-Cap, "they ain't no game here as I seen. Foxes and cats does it, keeps it all killed off. No food either. I know. I'm up here a lot. No game in these parts."

Red-Cap put a leash on his dog. I could see myself in the other one's sunglasses. "Well, we thank you anyhow," he said.

As they was leaving, Bluejohn called out, "I'll get them signs up pretty soon so all you fellas'll know next time. Save a extra trip for you." And I'll never forget as them two hunters was going out of sight over the hill, Bluejohn just stood and looked after them and after they was gone he finally said, "Bastards. Bastards'd shoot him if they could."

"What's a bastard?" I said. I really didn't know then, even though I was thirteen.

Bluejohn never moved. "A bastard is men like them."

That impressed me to no end and that night at the supper table I couldn't help it when I slipped and said, "Me and Bluejohn seen two bastards today," and Mama beat hell out of me and wanted to know where I'd learned that, so even though I tried and tried not to, I finally had to tell her how Bluejohn'd lied. But I didn't tell about Pharaoh—I'd done swore on that. But Mama said if Bluejohn was going to do things like lie to them hunters for no reason, then I'd better not be around him any more. She said Bluejohn was old, said his mind was getting bad.

I knew that Bluejohn's mind was probably better than hers, if you wanted to think on it, but it didn't matter that she didn't want me around him any more, because he finally got sick that next February and couldn't've gone

anywhere anyhow. I sort of wished he was OK though, because in the same year, but later on in the spring, something happened with Pharaoh. I was fourteen then, and although I didn't need Bluejohn to explain things to me, I know he'd've got a kick out of seeing it.

I was going like usual up the hill through the laurel, and I'd only got about half-way up when all of a sudden I heard Pharaoh screeching real fast and high. At first I thought he was in trouble for sure, like a dog or something had got him, so I nearly run through the thicket and tore my pants trying to get there quick.

Old Pharaoh was there, but he wasn't in trouble. He was standing right out in the open. His head-feathers was raised up just like them Greek soldiers' helmets I've seen pictures of, and for the first time in my life I seen his tail feathers fanned out and up and spread like a big long hand behind him. But what got me was when I seen what was happening. I didn't notice at first, but there was this pheasant-hen on the ground in front of him, laying with her head flattened up on her breast and her legs folded underneath. Old Pharaoh was walking around her and saying "Challlk! Challlk!" to her every now and then, and she'd answer him every time. He kept circling closer and closer and then all of a sudden he went up and bowed and bowed all over the place and pecked her all over her back—then when she was screeching about it, he flogged out his wings like two arms and mashed himself right down on her. They both screeched then, and Pharaoh beat his wings on the ground like he was trying to kill a snake. I wish Bluejohn could've seen him. All I could do was to stand there, real stupid, just like old Emmett Lawrence would've done. I remember that my hands shook and my throat burned and I just wanted them to stay right there and wanted old Pharaoh's wings to flog and flog on the ground till there wasn't no feathers left. But then I found out all of a sudden that I was running down the hill and straight down through the laurel thicket, just running and running and never touching the ground with my feet at all, getting clean away from that place. I nearly run all the way home, or at least till I got to the tobacco barns, before I couldn't do it on more and fell on a rock and cracked my knee.

I wasn't ever able to forget what I seen, though. I just couldn't. I'd set and thought about that a hundred times I know of, and every time I did, the whole thing come back to me and I'd see old Pharaoh's wings flogging on the ground clear as everything. It was something for me to think on, all right. I had about a million things I wanted to say about it, and about a million different ways to say them, but every time I'd try to think on a way to do it, I found out I really couldn't do it at all, and besides, there wasn't nobody to tell it to anyway—Bluejohn being sick and all. I'd've told Bluejohn, honest. In fact, I think I could've told Bluejohn everything about it, but as it was I wouldn't've had a chance to tell him even if I'd had a way, because I waited too long and Bluejohn finally got real bad off and died in the summer, June I think it was.

I hated for Bluejohn to up and die like that, I really did, not just because it was him dying, but because dying meant a funeral. If there was a thing I couldn't stand, it

was a funeral, no matter whose it was. The way I figured it, there was something just naturally stupid and crazy as hell about a funeral.

Like once in the sixth grade this girl in my class named Helen died of asthma or something and all the room-mothers thought it'd be a real sweet idea for some of her classmates to be the paulbearers. Room-mothers are crazy as hell. I didn't know old Helen or even care for her much because she always got good grades and turned her homework in on time. This teacher we had in the sixth grade was strict as hell about homework, and was always praising old Helen to no end, and letting all of us have it for being so lazy. But me and five other boys got elected paulbearers anyway. It was the stupidest thing I'd ever been in. The first thing that happened was that somebody left the church door open and this little puppy, who didn't know no better, come running in right in the middle of the service and started wagging his tail and licking everybody's ankles under the seats. Us boys got to giggling over it, and the preacher turned red and finally one of the funeral men took the pup out just as he was beginning to pee on the front bench right in front of old Helen's casket. And, like that wasn't enough, when we was bringing her out of the church to the hearse, we was all tickled and got the stupid casket started out in a tilt and nearly dropped it. We must've shook old Helen up because we all heard something go *bump!* inside of it. And this smart-ass friend of mine who was holding the casket-handle right behind me, leaned up and said to me, "Hey listen to that—old Helen's setting up doing her homework." We giggled all the way to the cemetery, and I got to admit I was glad when Helen finally went out of sight in the ground. I think I finally told Bluejohn about it, and he thought it was funny. I was ashamed as hell of it later.

That was mostly why I didn't like funerals. I had to go to Bluejohn's funeral, though, and no bones about it, because Mama and Papa said I *had* to go out of respect. They made me. Otherwise, I'd've never gone.

And it was stupid like other funerals, not exactly like old Helen's, but still stupid. They can fool you, you know. I mean, how was I to know if Bluejohn was really in the casket or not? They never opened it. I never seen him in it. I kept figuring that here was all these people, even Mama, being sad as hell over Bluejohn and thinking how he was dead, when he was really out there on Pharaoh's hill, setting on the oak-bench and laughing his ass off at them. That was a crazy thing to think, I knew that, and I knew it was a lie, a bald-assed lie. But I thought about it anyhow. I just wanted to, that's all. I guess I was the dumbest person there.

But that wasn't the only thing I thought about, especially when the funeral got over and all the time me and Mama and Papa was going home from the cemetery. By the time we'd got to the house, something had come clear to me. I was fourteen years old, and for the first time in all them years I knew I had thought a thing through and had made a thing work out in my mind, my own mind. I guess you just can't trust yourself at a funeral.

I knew exactly what I wanted to do, too. When Papa was changing out of his funeral suit in the bathroom, I

sneaked out his keys and unlocked the gun cabinet. I was quiet about it, but I wasn't afraid. Even if Mama and Papa caught me, they wasn't going to stop me, and I wouldn't even be afraid then. But I was careful. I took Papa's old single-barrel 20-gauge and a few shells and run out of the house while they was drinking coffee and talking about the funeral.

It took me a long time to get to Pharaoh's hill, because I walked slow and that old gun was sure heavy just to be a 20-gauge. I hadn't took time to get out of my funeral clothes either, and I was having to be careful of briars. But it give me time to think and plan.

I had to wait for Pharaoh like I thought, so I loaded the 20 and just set on the oak-bench a while. I was tired after all that funeral. I wanted just to close my eyes till Pharaoh come to feed, but I was afraid to because I knew he'd see me if I did, he'd see me with that gun there before I could do anything. I kept my hand on that 20. Pharaoh knew a gun. He was a smart bird, and I knew if I closed my eyes that him and the whole hill and the grapevines and everything would just know that gun was there and would just disappear and I wouldn't get no more chances. No sir, I would't close no eyes of mine. I was waiting for him. Pharaoh wasn't going to fool me. I was going to do it no matter. I figured I was smarter than any uppity bastard bird.

He was there, I knew that even before he finally come out to start feeding. I'd kept my eyes open, all right. And I was quiet as everything. I put the old 20 on

the edge of the bush and slipped the barrel up real slow without a sound till I got a bead on him. I seen him clear as day then, seen him with his big spear feathers right down in the bushes, and I moved easy till I got a sight on that white ring of his. I knew how a gun was supposed to feel, all right. That trigger was the smoothest and warmest thing I'd ever put my finger on. I touched it real easy and thought, I'll take your bastard picture all right, and then I held my breath.

I never shot him.

I thought I pulled back on that trigger about a thousand times, but I guess I didn't. I kept that 20-gauge on him till I couldn't hardly hold it any longer, just kept it laid right up on my shoulder and my finger on that trigger till sweat run down my arms and I started shaking so hard I couldn't see. I kept that bead on his neck as long as I could. I could do it, I could do this thing no matter. I'd thought it out, It was a thing I knew was right, or at least thought was right. But it looked like I had thought wrong.

At any rate, I knew that if I wasn't really going to shoot him, then I couldn't just set there all day in my funeral suit and hold that stupid gun on him like a dumb-ass. So I finally just quit and give it up, and took off down the hill toward home. I made a lot of noise going down through the laurels. I heard old Pharaoh back there screech and fly off. I was carrying the old 20 in the crook of my elbow and it was still loaded. Well hell, I thought, at least I'd finally got to take a gun out by myself.

Young Mark and the Booth-Truth

by Mark Halliday

I stand aghast on Thayer Street
and guess the truth.
The clouds in this night sky are still
there and dare not move; the moon
is being pulled across their faces,
scraping. Down this street car doors
slam, they slam in front of the Hungry
Sheik: metal on metal. The iron shrieks
("my God") and sirens agonize
the air, their engines disembowel
my night and scatter hurts. I scare
myself to guess how far—and somewhere
men are breaking into a phone booth
to arrest the caller, steal his dime,
spit into his mouth. They shatter glass.
I can't help remembering.
times when I've felt
the pain of a whole globe
in the pit of my stomach.
I can forget all but my groin by my art.

This is the insulation that secretes
the other pains on other streets.



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*erratum--In Miriam Kilmer's poem "The Loved One," eruption should read irruption.

