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Woman's College of the University of North Carolina  
Greensboro, North Carolina

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2.

Lily C. Wiley

TWO FIGURES

Lithograph

The air was sticky; its weight pushed the black ants downward and slowed their footsteps. The scuffling of feet, large and small, sent up dust but there was no wind to catch it. Dust drifted up like steam on pavement and was pushed back in place by the weight of the air. But there were no pavements, no sidewalks, no green parks; just dust and brown grass around rotten wood shacks with cheap paint cracking and peeling and falling back into the dust.

Tobacco sleds scraped over the lumpy ground and mules' feet fell with hollow thumps. No one said words, they said sounds. Ghee, mule, ghee! The sun sucked the flower cans and the ponds; puddles were a forgotten obstacle and rain barrels collected trash to shroud the shriveled polywogs. Gray picket fences fell like dominoes, split shingles slid down the roofs, cow-itch vines strangled hollyhocks in the midst of neglect. But the sunflower stretched its long green neck above the weeds and its yellow and black face followed the sun as it ripened the tobacco. The large bottom leaves ripened first, then up the stem until a lavender-tipped bloom terminated the priming. From sticky hands to burlap sleds to sticky hands to wooden sticks to sweet-smelling barns went the leaves.

"Fill de oil tank—dob dat crack in de wall—not too hot—don't want 'er curin' too fast."

"I found one, John Junior; I found one! Biggest 'un I 'ere laid eyes on!" and a pink-palmed hand holds up a fat green worm with all the shine and color of a store-bought toy. "Ouch—bit me!" and the shiny toy is smashed in the dirt.

"A bell, the lunch bell, find a stoppin' place at the end of de row, mark it with a clod then, don't put in no extra time in dis heat."

Greasy bags and newspaper-wrapped biscuits are taken from under the bushes. A butcher knife is raised and another hot watermelon is guillotined, falling open to its blood-red inside.

"It's a good 'un—no second growth in dis hot summer. Hey Alf, want a hunk! Hee, Hee, ya crazy nigger, crazier 'an a bed bug."

Large beads of sweat rolled from Alf's matted hair, into his eyebrows, struggled for a moment; then fell into his eye and were batted onto his cheeks where they were sucked away by the sun. His hands dangled at his side and twitched when they were licked by a shaggy, colorless mutt at his feet. Seemingly unable to move his huge bulk from a discarded oil can, his watery eyes stared at a dry land frog and his eyebrows followed it premeditated leaps.

"Three over-coats, now ain't that the craziest thing you 'ere heard tell of. Like it wasn't the hottest spell of the year. Why, you'd think it was the dead of winter."

"Jess asked 'im what the fool he was wearin' 'em for and he said Mister Serles give 'em to 'im and he won't gone freeze this winner. Mister Coble he said, 'Yeah Alf, that's fine and dandy, but it's summer,' and 'ol Alf he jest nodded and said 'but winner's comin' and I'm gone be ready'."

"He ain't gonna be ready, he's gonna be cooked pure done."

Brown hands fell to their laps, sending biscuit crumbs to the lunking flies. As they laughed the bench shook rhythmically and dirt-dauber nests went plunging to the ground. Pink gums glowed against ebony faces and eyes were reduced to slits surrounded by wrinkles. Alf raised his chin from his chest, smiled faintly, and began to giggle in a quiet, low tone.

"Hey Alf, why ain't cha workin'? Ol' man Coble ain't gon be able to git along without his 'xecutive."

"Best bottle stacker this side of Georgia but Alf. Ne'er busted a bottle."

"Alf, why ain't cha workin'?"

Alf leaned forward from the can and reached for a rind on the ground. He looked up at the grinning faces and said, "Thru, all thru!" A bare foot kicked the half-rose, half-white melon rind. It rolled over and back upright and the rose and white was smeared with dirt. The reaching hand stopped, then clinched. The too-small head looked up again, and a grimace distorted the blank face. The grooves deepened, the mouth twisted, and the once-watery dull eyes flared. The scramble was abrupt as all the tenants rushed to the back wall of the shed. All was moving, but then suddenly still. Slowly Alf unclenched his fists and they fell back to his side. The croppers heaved out their pent-up breath as he threw his body upright. His massive shoulders, exaggerated by the three coats, fell forward as he turned and stumbled through the tobacco sticks, rattling and breaking them under his feet. He paused, snatched up the little dog and stuffed it into the pocket of the top overcoat. As he disappeared behind the barn, white-filled eyes blinked and looked at each other waiting for someone to speak.

"Damn ya, Junior, ain't ya got no mo' sense 'an to make 'im mad. Ya mitey lucky ya still a head 'at ain't busted wide open."

"I seen Alf snap a hickry stick like it was a soddy straw. Ya jest don't rile folks what ain't got good sense. No tellin' what they mite do, no tellin' at all."

As heads nodded they sat back on the benches and ate sour dough biscuits and cornbread. After each bite the bench creaked and red jam ran between their fingers. Their sounds were fading from Alf's ears as he walked through the woods toward Mr. Coble's store. Today was payday, Friday; after lunch each Friday Alf got to pick up his paycheck. His pace quickened as he saw the store through the trees, and a smile crossed his face as he leaped on the porch. The floor boards bent under his feet, and when the weight reached the mat: the boards popped and scraped back into place. Alf reached in his pocket for his dog and pointed his free hand at it as he set it beside the door.

"Don't ya move none from here!" and the little dog dropped open his mouth and his wet tongue dropped saliva on the dirty porch as he wagged his stubby tail, sending up little wiffs of dust.

Alf grabbed the screen and flung it back against the outside wall. Mr. Coble started and called out, "Hey, Alf, shut that screen, ev'ry fly in town 'a be in here and ya knows how Missus Ula is 'bout flies on 'er butter."

"Yessuh, Mista Coble!"

Alf walked to the door sill, reached out for the screen, and brought it shut with a bang that brought out a gasp from the candy counter and dry goods girl. The cow bells over the door began to hum and Mr. Coble's old shotgun thumped against the wall. Alf went over to the main counter but he didn't speak because Mr. Coble was talking to the Preacher Brown and Mr. Coble was a fine church-going man. The preacher turned, and his tombstone teeth emerged between his lips. He pinched Mr. Coble's little bouncing Lizzie Lou on the cheek before he walked out, gently shutting the screen. Alf stood with his hands folded for fear of breaking something, since he wasn't allowed on the inside of the store except on Fridays. And his eyes watched Lizzie Lou as she danced around him. Mr. Coble said, "Suppose it's time to pay ya. Did ya put in a good week's work?"

"Yessuh, Mista Coble, yessur. If 'ey won't stacked rite at first, I stack 'em again."

"O. K. Alf, that's fine," and Mr. Coble looked down at his check book beside the cash register. "Now I want to ask ya since I'm a mite short on checks 'is week, after payin' the salesmens and all, if I mite pay ya in cash."

Alf's face again faded into a grimace, and it was not anger this time. His eyes reflected the hurt of a child and grew dim and watery.

"Ahrite Alf," as Mr. Coble gave in, "jest a secon', I'll write it out for ya. Let's see now, it's two dollas for the week, ain't it."

"It's what ya say, Mista Coble."

Mr. Coble shook his pen, sending little drops of ink over the counter top and began writing the check while Alf ran his fingers through the wet ink drops. "Here ya are Alf, see ya Monday mornin'."

"Yessuh, thank ya, Mista Coble."

Alf didn't put the check in his pocket. He carried it by one corner to let the ink dry and walked in front of the candy counter and blew it. Then he walked to the door, opened and shut it as gently as Preacher Brown.

Mr. Coble stood with his hands on the counter as if waiting for an unexpected happening. Then the door swung open and Alf stomped merrily through the store again. Slapping the ink smudged check on the counter, he said loudly, "Mista Coble, would you please to cash my pay check please!"

Mr. Coble opened the register, pressed the check in the far side and pulled out one dollar and some change.

"Mite I please have it all in dollas?"

Mr. Coble dropped the change back and handed him the dollas.

"Much oblige Sir!" and Alf tromped out again.

Mr. Coble rested on his elbows and said to someone who wasn't there, "Now I'll have to change his dollas so he can try for the compass in the chewing gum machine again."

"What's that, Mista Coble?" rang from behind the candy counter.

"Jest talkin' 'bout ol' Alf. He's made two dollas here ev'ry week for the past two years and all of it I ere seen him spent was a bunch of pennies in the gum machine. Folks give 'im ere stitch he's got on and he traps for 'is supper."

"Probably curls up wit a jug of lightning down in Serles' stable."

"I ne'er seen him drunk if he did."

Alf was walking down towards Serles' stable where he spent his time when he wasn't working. He went in the back of the tack room and took down an old dry-rotten leather mouth guard that had been used on the mules to keep them from snatching off the corn leaves when they plowed. As he lifted it down it jingled and he stared at its contents of wadded bills and coins. He stuffed in his two new dollas and said, "Ain't gonna waste none of dis pay check on 'at spinnin' thing, no sir, not me. Gon save it all 'til I got enough to buy her."

Then Alf hung it up and laid down in the clean straw in the corner of the manure-filled mule stable, giggling as the little dog climbed on his stomach. He liked the stable; it had a good strong smell and it was dark and quiet. He shoved the dog off of his stomach and rose to his knees to take off the three coats. Rolling up one for a pillow, he pulled the other two over himself and the dog for cover. The dog squirmed out and climbed back on to Alf's stomach.

Monday was hotter. Alf had been asleep in the stable since Friday when he walked out into the glare of Monday morning, he had to shield his eyes with his hand until he got used to the sun. He had on the three coats, the second coat, a plaid one, hung below the other

two and Alf had ripped the elbows from all three leaving a brown elbow exposed from below the frayed wool. The sun was dizzying, Alf stumbled more than usual, but he had to hurry, couldn't be late to work on Monday morning. Alf walked around behind the store and Mr. Coble heard the familiar rattle of the loose pop bottles being put into the squares in the wooden crates. Alf looked at the orange and red and green labels and put them in separate crates. It was getting hotter, the sun beat at his back and he felt as though his body were melting beneath the coats as the sweat ran from top to bottom and his heart beat faster. He bent over to stack the lower crates, then waist high—higher—higher—couldn't reach—had to go higher. The stack was swaying! No, he was swaying! It was falling! He was falling! All fell!

A new sound reached Mr. Coble's ears, no longer a safe rattle, but the crashing, grinding, and shattering of glass and wood. All hands stopped and ran to the back of the store. A foot, a hand, a bloody sleeve; reaching in all directions from a jagged mound. No one moved or talked; then suddenly the mound heaved upward, crashed to the side, and a bloody monster rose up slowly from the earth. He stood, glass clinging to his coats, blood running in little cuts on his hands and face, and with huge tears streaming down his face. Someone snickered, someone laughed, they all laughed but Mr. Coble who said, "Don't worry 'bout it Alf, come on inside and we'll clean ya up! Don't worry 'bout it. We'll get the mess up later."

Alf stepped across the debris, not toward Mr. Coble, but toward the laughing mass who silenced themselves in fear and inched backwards.

"No Alf!" Mr. Coble said.

Alf looked up noticing for the first time, then swung around sending an irritating tinkle of glass to the ground; and walked away slowly toward Mr. Serles' stable.

He walked out of the daylight into the dark of the stable. He went into the tack room and snatched down the guard bag. Walking into the mule stable, he angrily flung the coins across the brown manure until they shone like stars on a black sky; and the wadded bills dropped at his feet. He bit his lip madly and pounded his sides with his fists saying, "Ain't ne'er gon have the money to buy her from Mista Coble. Done busted my job." Then Alf left the stable by the back door and walked through the woods toward the hills. As the door closed, the dog started backwards, trapped inside.

Three days passed; a new stack of pop bottles was started by the pile of broken glass. Mr. Coble was out in the hot sun putting them in the crates himself while Lizzie Lou ran around laughing and making faces at him.

"Lizzie Lou honey, watch out ya don't cut ya bare feet on the busted glass."

"Where's Alf, Daddy?"

Mr. Coble stopped, looked up and wiped his forehead on his sleeve and said, "Don't know honey, reckon the way folks 'round here hurt 'is feelins, he figured it was better somewheres else."

"Folk's 'urt Alf, Daddy?" The glass 'urt 'im, I seen it bleed."

"Someday you gonna fine out there's hurts worse than 'em what makes ya bleed."

"I don't want Alf 'urt and gone. He give me de chew gum and stuff from de thing in der and said I mite could 'ave de spinnin' thing if I was good and would kiss 'em when he got it."

Mr. Coble looked at the little girl and said, "He did, did he?" He watched her bounce off and throw up her dress as she wiggled her toes in the sand, then he went back to stacking the bottles for the routeman.

Late in the afternoon a tenant woman came in

and told Mr. Coble that she was missing her best tub and that she bet that good-for-nothing Alf took it when he left. Old Mrs. Angus was missing a doily from under one of her lamps that Mrs. Serles gave her, and she bet it was Alf; crazy men like that you know. Somebody took Moose Jones' singletree right out of the wagon bed. Mr. Coble had never see so many people in his store at once and the buzzing and talking was all about missing Alf and missing property.

Finally Mr. Coble raised his hands and said, "Folks, quiet a minute please, please! I know you all think dem things is gone but they mite been gone quite a spell and you ne'er noticed it til Alf left. Now why don't you all go home and look good fer 'em and try to 'member how long 'ey been gone. Alf wouldn't have no use for doilies and tubs and singletrees and stuff; fact is he don't ev'n know what they are."

"Are ya orderin' us out, Jess Coble?"

"No ma'am, I ain't, jest want ya to be a mite surer 'fore ya go cusin' Alf of thievin' 'cause in all 'is born days he ne'er took nuthin' what weren't 'is, and ne'er needed to 'cause he knew he could 'ave what he needed fer de askin'."

Mr. Coble heard sounds of disapproval and knew his speech was unheeded.

"Wait till it hits you home, Jess Coble, you jest wait, then you won't be sech a taker-upper fer 'im."

"Yeah, wait 'til he walks off in de nite wit somein' of yourn, mind ya he always took a shinin' to Lizzie Lou if I 'member c'rectly."

Then all the heads turned in awe and wonder at the speaker and back to Jess Coble. Some heads shook in disbelief and some stared with wide eyes at the thought.

Jess Coble bellowed, "I was 'is friend, he'd ne'er take nuthin' from me witout de askin'!"

An hour after closing time all the complainers filed out to a late supper, and now the lists of thefts had become almost unbelievable. Jess sighed with relief to have the quiet of his store, almost too quiet; Lizzie was usually in before now because she knew what a tanning she'd get if she was out after dark. The days were the longest now and there was no excuse for letting the dark catch you. Mr. Coble went out and the sky was hazy and the sun was falling in the west. He raised his hand to his mouth and shouted, "Lizzie Lou — Lizzie Lou honey!"

There was no answer. The stillness of the street cried out in his ears. His brown hands fell to his side and wiped themselves on the side of his apron. His eyes squinted as he looked up and down the quiet, still street; at Lizzie Lou's barrel hoop in the yard. Suddenly a chill swept over him and his throat erupted with an inhuman sound. He put his hand to his head and said, "Good Lord no!" Then he looked up again and ran blindly down the street calling her name and running to all her play places — not there — no — haven't seen her all day, Good God — not taken by Alf — God no — ain't seen hide nor hair of her — the barn — there's Serles' barn — maybe his tracks — something.

Mr. Coble flung open the door to the barn and dust fell from the loft in a stream over his head. The air choked him as he dug into his lungs for breath. He tried to call but only a whisper emerged from his throat. Suddenly he heard a tiny giggle in the mule stall, a scabble, and another giggle. Mr. Coble stumbled over the stall and grabbed the door frame. There was Lizzie Lou with Alf's dog, digging her brown hands into the manure in the dim light and pulling out the shiny coins which she dropped into her cupped skirt.

Mr. Coble sank to his knees in the stall and the knees of his pants soaked up the damp of the stable. He clutched her narrow shoulders and shook her gently sending the coins sliding back to the ground.

"Lizzie, Lizzie baby, you're 'ul right!" and he hugged her sending more coins to the ground.

"Don't Daddy," she said pulling away. "We'll lose de money. See!" and she held up two smudged coins.

"O. K., honey, O. K.," he said as he released her and realized his fear had passed as suddenly as it had come. Then he looked questionably at her and said, "What money?"

"Dis-here!"

"Alf's money, it's Alf's money!"

"Help me git it Daddy, we'll be rich, you and me and Doggy."

"Doggy?"

"Doggy, see!" and she grabbed the wagging dog and held it up in Mr. Coble's face.

"O. K., honey, I'll help you," so Mr. Coble began to dig reluctantly in the manure in search of the coins. After night had come, he finally told Lizzie Lou that she would have to wait until daylight to finish searching for the money.

"But Daddy, dey mite come git it tonite and it'll all be gone tomorrow."

"Who'll git it honey?"

"Dem, the goblins!"

"Honey goblins ain't real 'sides if ere Alf does come back dis here money goes straight to 'im 'cause he earned ev'ry cent o' it. Ifin he says he don't want it, then ya can 'ave it."

A dirty and bright-eyed Lizzie Lou climbed to her feet holding the edges of her skirt up so the money wouldn't fall out. As she went along in front of Mr. Coble, she hopped on every other step and hummed as the money jingled in her lap.

After Mr. Coble got Lizzie Lou to bed with her money in an orange sack on the bed post, he walked out to the porch to put Alf's dog in the street. The little dog tumbled down the steps and stopped at the bottom. He looked de'ached from all living things without Alf. Mr. Coble thought of that tiny little mongrel and the huge Alf, and how they had seemed like an inseparable team. In the street was Preacher Brown, walking in front of the store and watching his feet as they skimmed over the ground.

"Mr. Coble said, "Makin' ya evinin' calls Preacher?"

"Yessuh, Jess," he said jerking his head up suddenly. "Done finished fer tonite." He smiled broadly and continued, "Don't much like messin' 'round after dark, 'sides folks won't even open their doors fer de preacher without peepin' out the window at him furst." Preacher Brown looked down at the little dog scratching in the dust, "I aw me, ain't that Alf's dog?" and his eyeballs were suddenly surrounded with white.

Mr. Coble calmly replied, "Yep, Lizzie Lou found 'im closed up in the stable. Reckon Alf left so fast he fergot 'im."

The Preacher's eyes blinked and before he could bid goodnight and start on his way Mr. Coble spoke again, "Was poor of Alf 'traid he done lost his job or was it dem folks makin' fun of 'im what made 'im go so fast, Preacher? Lawd, I shore don't know. Can't 'member when you weren't purty shore where he was at; messin' 'round de stable or up settin' traps or sumin'."

A lock rattled and Mr. Coble and Preacher Brown glanced to the left and saw Ula Shaw checking her door lock. Mr. Coble shook his head and said, "Ain't no sense in bein' 'traid of Alf when he ain't here ifin ya ain't 'traid of 'im when he is. Course I guess if folks knew where he went dey wouldn't worry so; don't guess dey know why he went neither but a simple-minded fella like dat don't need no reason."

"I don't know Jess, don't know," and the Preacher looked around himself nervously. "I gotta be going Jess, the Missus don't fancy being left there alone at nite," and with a quick wave he started

impatiently towards home.

Mr. Coble watched him disappear, then he sighed and turned to go in. As he stirred from his steady position on the steps, the little dog scurried off in the dark barking shrilly. Mr. Coble thought suddenly, "Was Alf comin' back, what was it? Maybe the little dog was just yappin' at the Preacher or jest 'cause he was glad to be loose. Yeah, that was it," and he went back into the store. But later even after Mr. Coble had gone to bed, the dog was still barking. "How long can sech a little fella keep it up? He must just been lonesome, maybe he shoudla let it stay in the house; no, that was bad too, it weren't his to keep locked up." Simultaneously windows were thrown up, and the little dog was called names that befitted a devil singing in the streets of heaven.

Ula ran out in her petticoat, sloshing a bucket of water down her legs. Then suddenly she stopped and feeling her aloneness in the night except for the cry of the dog, she threw down the remaining contents of the bucket in no direction. She ran back into her house and latched the door before she felt safe to speak. Then another fear struck her, maybe she had locked that crazy nigger in with her. He might have planned for her to run out like that. Bet he found out her men-folk had been spending these last nights tending the oil burner at the number five barn. Yes, he was here! Picking up an empty bottle, she peeped around in every likely hiding place being careful not to get too close in case he were there. She lifted the curtains, looked behind the circulator, under the bed, and even lifted the stove lid, but no Alf was to be found. Then she had out-smarted him, he thought he would trick her, did he; she had locked him on the outside. Then she crawled back into her bed, put the bottle under the pillow, and leaned back, eyes wide open.

6. Maizie had let her white cat stay in tonight; it had fleas but she couldn't take no chances. Moose Jones was sleeping in his wagon with his hand on his new singletree. Lessie had picked all the hollyhocks she'd been saving for the church altar and set them by her bed. She lay awake watching them, everyone was awake. The bark of the dog backgrounded every sound—doors latching, doors checked, doors relatching and checked to make sure; unheeded abuse hurled at the dog, women whimpering in fear, men swearing. Yet the barking didn't stop until dawn. Day was never so welcome to the weary croppers. After breakfast there was talk of a search party to hunt the hills for Alf. Then what if they found him? Lynch him up? Where? Give him to the state? Who'd pay for it? Lock him up? Where? Kill that blasted dog? No! no! you fool—don't you see what that might do if he found out? Maybe he'll come back on his own, we gotta wait and see.

Lizzie Lou went back to the stable and returned at noon with wadded up bills in her fist. Mr. Coble could only stand and stare when he saw the bills clutched in her hands.

"Law me honey, I didn't see the paper money when we was there las' evenin'." You run get the orange sack and we'll make a count."

As she skipped away, he instinctly straightened out the bills as if for a cash register and began counting, licking his fingers after each one. Lizzie Lou returned with the change and he stacked it in dollar stacks. Lizzie Lou stood and stared at more money than she had ever seen.

"On hundrid niny nine dollas and forty-three cent. Woo! chile, I should 'a stacked them bottles myself and we'd be plumb rich."

"We're rich, Daddy, I found it."

"But it's Alf's money, can't go takin' a man's mornin' lest he says you can 'ave 'em and no man ain't 'n do that hardly."

He spread open the bag and handed it to Lizzie

Lou who held it open beside the table as he brushed off the neat stacks into it. As they tumbled off into the bag, Lizzie Lou grinned and clutched it tighter. Then he took it from her and pulled the cord. After glancing around the room, he lifted the mattress and stuffed it under.

As the sun set, the little dog crawled out from under Mr. Coble's store and resumed its barking. No one swore at it now, it was no use, leave it alone, maybe it will go find Alf. But there was no rest again, no noise but the bark on the outside and the restless movements and loud heartbeats on the inside. Ula said she seen him peeping at her window to see if she was alone last night and Moose heard him fiddling around in his wagon but he was scared to jump up and conk him like he'd planned to. Isabel heard him rattling around her tubs but he didn't take none this time seeing as is he got her best one last time. Old Mrs. Angus slept on the three doilies that she had left; he'd have to take her too if he got 'em this time. But she couldn't sleep tonight, the starched doilies poked through her night shirt and her heart was beating like a drum.

Thump, thump, thump; everywhere hearts were beating—like footfalls—louder—it was footfalls—in your chest—no—no—in your ear—only the heart—couldn't be—couldn't be—louder—deafening—deafening—it stopped!—the thumping stopped—the bark—the bark had stopped—silence—horrible; horrible silence—no the thump again—the heart—no—no—not the heart—footsteps—loud—growing louder—nearer—nearer—no—growing softer—dimmer—dimmer—gone—silence—no bark—no footsteps—all gone.

Alf had come—in the night—Alf had come for what was his—he's near—all the time he was near—the dirty thief—see Coble—told ya—told ya so—he come back and got his dog.

Mr. Coble leaned on the counter, exhausted but aware of all that was going on about him. What was it? Did it have to be so big? Why was it big? So a man leaves—so what? So he comes back for what's his—so what? It was his, he had all right to come for what was his. It was all he had—no—no—it wasn't—the money—I have his money—I can't let them know 'bout the money—they'll blame me if he comes again—God, don't let him come in the night.

At the noon break from the barns, no one ate their lunches packed in the greasy bags. They came to Mr. Coble. Nothing more was to be said. All questions, fears; there were no answers.

Suddenly the screen door swung open and hit the side of the porch, setting the cow bell and shotgun in motion. All the heads turned around, and the mouths dropped down and the eyes widened. Alf stood in the doorway with his sleeves rolled up and his dog at his heels.

"Can I come in Mista Coble, it's Friday!"

"Sure Alf," came from Mr. Coble in a hoarse whisper. As Alf left the doorway, all the hands rushed out; no one was left but Mr. Coble and bouncing Lizzie Lou. Mr. Coble attempted to speak, not yet regaining his voice.

"I got ya money, Alf," he said.

"Ya have," Alf said, his eyes lighting up, "then can I have her now, huh?" and he was unable to hide his excitement.

"Sure Alf," Mr. Coble said wearily, "I'll be right back," and he walked back into the bedroom.

Alf walked up to Lizzie Lou, but she didn't run. He smiled and gently folded his fingers around her waist and lifted her to his shoulders. She giggled and pounded on his woolly head and his smile widened. He walked toward the door and stooped to keep her head from bumping the ceiling, as he kicked open the screen. After he went down the steps, he began to



hop on each foot and Lizzie Lou kicked her feet with glee against his chest. He bounced her higher, higher than she had ever been.

"Alf, stop, stop, Alf, you damn fool, you goddamn fool!" But Alf didn't hear him, Alf heard no one but giggling Lizzie Lou. Alf didn't hear the shot either from the old shotgun over the door, the shot that rang out in the street, that brought the black ants from their hiding places, that sent Alf crumbling to the

ground, and threw poor Lizzie Lou in the dust.

"Good for you, Mister Coble, he deserved it, the crazy nigger!"

"Alf, Alf, maybe we'll get the shiny thing in the machine today. I'm glad you're back Alf, I'll kiss you, Alf! Why did you drop me, Alf?"

"He said I could 'ave 'er, I woulda worked more, but he said I could 'ave 'er."

\* \* \*

## Dark Cape, Dark Hood

It was a strange comfort,  
To lie awake in the old house  
Listening to flyaway fever of train whistles.  
Dark cape, dark hood,  
Rubbed in throbbing old velvet,  
I swam witch cat corners  
And swept a moon-pitched ceiling.  
The long whistles lay lovely  
Across the windowglass.  
Crystally they passed  
Into transparent echo.  
Dark cape, dark hood,  
The rich, witch blackness,  
Haunted sleep of fairy wood,  
Only madmen would have understood  
This dark and whistling pleasure.

It was the dark of thief and child,  
Mask and blanket,  
Snowy black, icy swift, half-moon sharp, and full-moon mild.  
And through it all the train whistles  
Pealed mournful silver  
From their long, quivering throats.  
They comforted my little coats  
Of black and moon.  
They tied my little caps of ink and evil.

Then sleep would come,  
Knitting my stitch that was dropped.  
The whistles dimmed and cooled.  
The thief, his theft fooled,  
Escaped from porches and towers.  
In the dark, the child chuckled softly at her powers.  
Then,  
A whistle's length away,  
A delinquent spray of sunlight  
Crept to cape the day.

HEATHER ROSS MILLER

Tolstoy's "Porcelain Doll" is a complexity of the feelings of a bridegroom of six months when he finds out that his wife is pregnant. Sensitive and conscientious, he feels that perhaps he is abnormal in his feelings; he wants her passionately—yet he wants to set her on a pedestal and worship her from a distance. He fears the child's intrusion upon their common and private love, and resents the unborn being because of this as much as because of his concern about his wife's health. He resents her bulkiness and contracts (probably from her) a feeling that she has lost her feminine grace and charm in this greatest of all femininities. And he feels that she is growing cold, losing her love for him and her youth with its hot desire. Therefore he represents her relationship to himself as a porcelain doll—" . . . all smooth, pleasant, and cold porcelain."

The husband's desire is expressed in his reference not only to colors, but also to containers and textures. The bright red of the doll's mouth and the box of morocco and raspberry represent the heat of passion and the sexual features of woman. Her black-painted eyes and hair denote woman's traditional wickedness as well as her depths unknowable to man—mysteries emotional, psychological, and physical. Earthiness with its lust and fertility and cycle of dust comes to light in the brown and green of the stand and the brown revealed by the chipped place in the chemise. In fact, the porcelain itself, being created from an earth-substance, is in this sense a brown. The white of the eggs is self-explanatory—the female gamete linked with feminine purity, and the produced's attachment to its producer (mother).

8.

Containers are feminine symbols—the empty flask is representative of his wish for her to be empty of the child and resulting cares, and to be light of form and weight again. Also, it shows his apprehension of lack of love on her part (which could be suggested by her tiredness and depression, to him emptiness of feeling, when he comes to her—seemingly whenever he comes.) The box from Tula, of course, is the womb with its richness of color and texture, its ability to satisfy. But it is also a manifestation of his wanting to protect and worship her as the propagator of humanity and to salute her strength, representing man's respect and awe for this function of woman. It is his shrine for her.

Texture is also important, as is exemplified in the unyielding, smooth, porcelain, the velvet lining of the box, and its leather cover. He feels that she cares nothing more for the heat of sex—she does not feel it—she is firm and cool and removed from the passion they had shared in the first few months of the new marriage. And the velvet and leather are further illustrations of his desire for her—the feel—distinction.

The solidity of the statuette is frightening to him; she is one unit protecting herself from outside interference with her self-sufficiency. When she does not open that bright red mouth to speak, she is shielding herself as firmly as she does with her porcelain skirt and the other clothes which are one with her, a built-in suit of armor. The protection is so unified to him, against him, that none of his being can penetrate to help him become part of her once more.

This difference—this coldness—and sufficiency—is only apparent when they are alone; she is the same as ever around other people because of society's veneer which covers the individual inside passions upon which people actually live. Her passions are not shared—they do not shine through the front she pre-

sents to everyone but him; thus they are unimportant to anyone but him. And therefore she is a normal human being to everyone else, but a cold porcelain doll to him.

The stand being part of her—the entire form being one lump—is his illustration of her self-sufficiency; he feels unnecessary. Therefore, in this wish fantasy he converts her into a doll which he must control: ". . . what could a porcelain creature do?" And to make her completely helpless and to elevate his importance, he breaks her, thus making her entirely dependent on him to make her whole again. The breakage is also his wish for abortion. The request for the recipe (which is, of course, very unlikely to be fulfilled and which, in any case, he does not want to be fulfilled) is his conscience forcing him to at least make an attempt to preserve her and the child. The name Natalya Petrovna, used in an effort to place the blame elsewhere, actually stands for Tolstoy himself.

When he writes to Tanya that he does not know how she will feel about Sonya now, he illuminates his own uncertainty.

Throughout the story, conscience conflicts with possession and his wish for things always to remain the same. He is constantly fighting for his old superior value, feeling that his wife is now more valuable, and therefore dominant.

There is a possibility (suggested by ". . . that very porcelain about which [her] parents had a dispute") that Sonya may be inclined toward frigidity. In *War and Peace*, Natasha's father is a jovially passionate man; her mother, worn out by childbearing. Since Tanya is the Natasha and Sonya is her sister, their mother may well have had great influence upon Sonya, so that when she became pregnant she became frightened and therefore cold. Or, the husband could be afraid that his wife will be like her mother since they have only been married six months and are already expecting a child.

Yet Sonya wants children. This is symbolized by the doll's stump (" . . . without this stump she could not remain erect.") She is a woman and knows that childbearing is her major reason for being; she would not be so much of a woman if she did not want—and have—children. When her leg is broken ". . . above the knee with the stump", it represents her being damaged not only physically, but also in her husband's regard, by the rigours of pregnancy and birth.

Tolstoy, having reflected and analyzed, realizes the truth in all of these things and its meaning, through them, for him at the present and in the future. Rationalizing, he finally makes himself believe that he is understanding about and satisfied—even happy—with the passive companionship of his wife.

(I suddenly felt it pleasant that she should be as she was, and ceased to feel surprised—it all seemed natural.)

It is natural—he is maturing and aging; the marriage and the partners are being prematurely forced into the comfortable companionship stage from the hot beginning. But he naturally resents it and yearns for that passion and newness. The last paragraph illustrates his still-remaining, deep-seated wishes, which will always bother him to some extent.

In "The Porcelain Doll," Tolstoy illustrates not only his own feelings, but those of most men and the male-like half of practically all associations among beings. The story is a highly compressed, metaphoric commentary on the relation of beings.



## Benediction

I remember the day  
when you put flowers in my hair,  
and laughing in my ear  
invited me to be your love.  
Even the sunlight came  
to dance upon my face,  
but I could not think of proper words.  
"Take me to wed?" I said,  
and turned away  
for that was not at all  
what I had meant to say.  
But you took my hand and smiled.  
And in the evening  
we sat upon a hill,  
leaning against the sky,  
and sure enough  
I went to live with you.  
And each day had four seasons,  
each morning was a new Spring.  
We raised peafowls and mushrooms  
and gaily chased the sun behind the hill  
in evening.  
In the winter  
you would come home  
with crisp air in your pockets,  
bringing frosty kisses  
and cedar logs for the fireplace.  
Then after the embers grew sleepy  
on the brick-warm hearth  
we talked of profound things  
until the blankets hanging on the mantel  
had been warmed.  
And one time you told me  
never to hold a wild thing in my hand  
for its heart would burst;  
never cry when a wild bird flies away  
for it will sleep quite warmly on the wind.  
This morning I saw flowers at your feet,  
and picking one, I put it in my hair  
and stood  
looking up.

## Rolling Stock

Stale smell of identically cooked food  
served to sun-burned people  
shifting with the swaying train:  
Bouquets of gaudy Miamians  
push for immediate service from  
a frowning grouch of a steward,  
yelling cackled greetings to a remote fellow-believer  
drifting in a mop of dead smoke.  
Lunging children hunger for new pacifiers  
discarding their red-white train menus,  
(courtesy bribes for peace) now drumming  
tables with stainless steel sticks.  
Coffee-faced waiters in starch stiff whites  
make yo-yos of their clustered trays,  
looping, squeezing them through  
gourmandizing tourist, still snurlurging.  
A la carte delicacies slide whole  
past rattled palates as  
unruffled tongues still vocalize.  
Chaotic rendering of impatient cash,  
the party adjourns en masse  
sideswiping crammed tables: the club car:

11.

There, ghost-powdered maidens in Bardot-twist  
flutter brittle green eye-lashes at  
a gone beatnik snapping fingers,  
lost in inspiration of private swing-poetry.  
Garrulous teenagers in unabashed skirts  
girdling their drooping buttocks  
tease blue bell-bottomed sailor's eyes  
red-like-road-maps drawn with alcohol.  
An obese woman, pimpled, in wired wig,  
churns tobacco with pigeon-toed teeth,  
cushioning a carton-like nurse on her heaving stomach.  
Nearby, unscathed, sputtering snores  
erupt as a tie-less traveler  
dilates in awkward positions and  
a distilled reveler moves in chew-rhythms  
as perplexed, unbalanced passersby  
scrunch their protruding feet.

All balance all, all push all  
falling with cetacean force into fat laps  
as the faster-than-lightning train  
transports the herd to the Florida show.

AUDREY LUCILE TAYLOR

## Trois Petits Grottesques

Sallie K. Gordon

Helen hesitated midway across the street at an opening in the crowd and took a crumpled program out of her purse. The play of the hot wind expanded the pleats of her skirt, bellowing them out like an accordion straining on a deep note. With a pencil she traced a line over the diagram on the inside cover, following one leg of a triangle of intersecting streets, turning up the other leg, and then rhythmically crisscrossing the center through a maze of short alleys, back to its apex. She must have seen all of the major artist's exhibits, and then a few, she thought; and looking up at the round-roofed booth a few feet in front of her, she marked an X over the italicized "concession stand." She checked her watch — 6:00 and still the heat. She chewed the eraser of the pencil and thought about a cigarette. A half hour until closing time. Perhaps there was a place on the other side of the stand to sit. She pressed down on the ball of one foot and rubbed it against the hot lining underneath. In a minute she would begin to wander again and perhaps find the painting.

The smudged program dropped at her feet, taking its place in the litter that the wind was kaleidoscoping into unobserved patterns. Two black-haired Italian girls stepped on it as they pushed unseen past her, and a third, following behind looked down, stopped, and picked it up, stretched out the wrinkled lettering "Art Fair" and handed it to one of her friends.

Helen looked past them and continued slowly to a bench filled with late-lunchers on the far side of the red stand. There was one vacant spot beside a blond boy who was eating a foot-long hotdog, dripping mustard down his shirt. "Pardon me," she murmured to the single stare of the group and squeezed in beside him.

A large woman, on the other side of her, shifted her weight to one hip, warmly appraising her new seat companion, while she groped for a strap under the wide neck of her loose flowered print that perspiration had creased into the cracks under her arms and along the lines of her thighs and widespread knees. Helen opened her purse and took out her compact. She caught some wild hairs from the control of the wind, patting them back into place. The old woman leaned back and grinned into the mirror over her shoulder, twisting her own bleached ringlets into damn circles across her forehead.

Helen snapped the compact shut. The old woman's smile widened as she uttered foreign accents through tobacco-stained teeth, and she held out a piece of kosher sausage.

"No, thank you," Helen smiled briefly and held up the compact again. But the old woman had begun chewing on the warm meat.

As she touched the puff to one side of the fine nose, the line of her vision ran upward to a corner of the reflection and focused on a patch of black. That was it. She turned sharply, bumping the heavy knee.

It was the painting, half showing from the recesses of a small courtyard, one without the usual crowds of spectators. The painting stood, in fact, without an artist in the totally empty garden, leaning against what must have been the wrought-iron banister of some unseen steps.

She opened her purse, took out a Parliament and lit it. While the left hand mechanically placed the smoking fiber between her lips with indifferent composure, the betraying right hand lay trembling in her lap.

On one side of the open courtyard gate, a white-haired artist in a black string tie was talking, as

articulate with his hands as his lips, to three middle aged women who had separated from the thinning crowd into his circle of pastels. He gestured toward the three rows of pictures tacked on tall sections of corkboard. A flamboyantly dressed woman, a brown piece of drapery fabric in one gloved hand, was studying a group of pastoral scenes that were propped up in the gutter against the high curb.

It was the same rectangle of black, now clinging to its ebony frame in the slant of the late sun, and in the center, as if being drawn from the shrinking background, danced out one figure in blue.

It was so easy, she thought, so easy to find the picture again, after all. It was last summer, a cool summer, when she had first seen them. The artist and the painting were both standing on the steps of an old brownstone, on which street she didn't remember; but remembering the scene, she imaged them diffidently facing the crowds, forming a unity, as it seemed to her then, that one could not possibly preserve.

Helen stood and began walking toward the antique brick wall.

She had been with her brother. He had ignored the scene and moved on to a group of collages strewn across the next lawn, but she had hesitated and watched the eyes of the three figures in the painting and the head of the artist that twitched in his musing over the passing crowds. She hadn't stayed long, for some persistent friends had pushed her on. But the image had remained, sharpening under the palette knife of the winter's hand.

Helen hesitated and watched the clean wind rush ahead of her, leafing through the loose canvases on the old man's display board, and enter the gate, turning back the blades of grass in an arc across the courtyard floor. The current of the crowd flowed across its path, millepeding under the bannered entrance into the stream of open-windowed cars on the other side.

She paused to drop her cigarette, rubbing the toe of her shoe over and over it until the pieces disintegrated and bare cement grated under the friction. And she entered.

Drawing her inward, the perplexing half-smile of the first little horrible sweated and glued with a sun ray that hung on its pale blue lips. It arrested her gaze, refusing to relinquish it, except to the second and then to the third who sprang out to her eyes as she turned her head. And as she faced them turn, all three in a solid affront glared at her with a frozen grotesqueness, and the wind, tempering cool, moving the shadowing branches, shifted dark and light across them, making them grimace and dance in it hideously.

Straining against the swallowing blackness behind them, the eyes in six sections arched encompassing her and all around her, the three blues receiving the single image into the apex to a final dissolution.

Helen stood before the painting as the wind, now agitated and cooled from its lake passage, cycled in the square between the old buildings, snaking the branches of the elm until the full-sapped seems, snapping at their green joints, loosed their heavy leaves to fall around her.

The heavy sculptured doors at the top of the stair opened and the artist shuffled down behind the painting, running his long fingers along the banister to the newell post that projected above the three heads, curving his hand tightly around it until the pressure whitened the skin over the knuckles.

With one motion he glanced over her and picked

up the painting. "The show's over."

She gestured with his movement and answered him: "I want to buy this painting."

"It's not for sale," he said.

"Then why are you displaying it?"

"I'm not," he retorted and indicated the seclusion of the courtyard with a single swivel of his brilliant eyes. She could feel the pressure of his hand on the newell post as if the pressure of the blood pulsing against the top of her head, as she turned to see the empty courtyard, the half-closed gate.

"But you did last year." His eyes penetrated hers until she felt that they were flowing blue into her brown eyes.

His blond hair darkened with strokes of his large palm, and his eyes animated, staring at her in the darkening light. "It's not the same painting," he spoke gently.

"It's not?" she wanted to leave the stare, the eyes pushing her back.

"Wait," he said, and the word encircled them in a void of silence. "You were here last summer?"

The interest in his tone stopped her and her voice, pulled taunt between the poles of desire and fear, answered: "I saw the painting and thought it was for sale. I happened to see it when I was leaving today. I'd seen it last summer and you were selling it then."

"I was, but a different painting. That was lost. This isn't it—it's an imitation."

She looked hard at the painting. The dull black was catching the late light that was reflecting on

the textured surface. The three little horrors, stilled and mute, stared impotently in almost two-dimensional tones with the background.

"It is different," she said softly. "Well, thank you; I'm sorry." She looked at her watch. "It's late; the show must be closing," and as she hastily dropped her wrist, the black purse slipped to her feet on the round stone that was six stones from the iron gate.

He looked beyond her to the quiet street while she knelt to pick it up, and he said vibrantly as if to the ghosts of the noonday crowd: "Now I cannot find the original; and in this one meaning is lost."

As her fingers curved around the purse, she was looking into the eyes of the three forms in the painting that he had dropped again on the grass against the bottom step. And the chilling wind twisted a single zinnia stem, now torn blossomless, down across her line of gaze, and vibrated green before the black that seemed once again to swell backward.

She stood straightening her pounding back and whispered to his eyes. "Sell it!" But he shook his head and turned to watch the faces with her as they seemed to have renewed life with the touch of the fingering shadows that were sliding across the courtyard floor, away from the west light, back to merge again with their approaching origin. And still shaking his head, swinging a blond strand from side to side of the creased forehead, he murmured, "To sell it I would have to sell myself and hang on the wall with it, enframing it."



Lily C. Wiley      PIGEONS      Lithograph

## Three Green Ladies

Beneath an old turf-covered dike  
Lies a newly murdered knight;  
His mother, wife, and virgin daughter  
Are returning from his slaughter.  
Donning robes of fading green —  
Emerald, lime, and aquamarine —  
They mourn their lately fallen knight  
Hidden beneath the old turf dike.

This night they stole out one by one  
And buried their father-husband-son  
With three green daggers at his heart  
That only they could tell apart.  
The mother draws her emerald nails  
Through her emerald hair and wails  
Once again for her only son  
As the ladies return one by one.

The knight was laid in his chosen place  
And every sign of a grave effaced.  
The ladies mimed a funeral hymn  
And prayer before returning home.  
Through her lime lips held awry  
The lime-breasted widow forces a sigh  
Knowing the grave they have effaced  
Will not remain his resting place.

The winter sun was rising there.  
As they reached home, they dressed with care  
In royal robes of stately white  
For the absence of their knight.  
The daughter's eyes glow aquamarine  
With tears she shed upon the scene  
While waiting now without a care  
The coming of her lover there.

Today the ladies don their green —  
Emerald, lime, and aquamarine.  
Now the turf grows bright and green  
And not a drop of blood is seen.  
The spears are bright above his grave;  
In him they find the life they have;  
Emerald, lime, and aquamarine —  
New spring robes of freshest green.



Is this but a dream?  
or have the gods opened a canopy,  
showering myriad lights on the moonpath  
where we romped under the colonnade of trees,  
and sat gazing at the imaginary catalogue of ships  
on the beach of grass and trodden apples in the echoing amphitheatre?

And even as  
Helios drove his barking stallions down  
the western cavity, did rascal I, sink in your lap,  
and we,  
too, ate the moonflowers and drank the nectar of the gods.

There's beauty there,  
I'm sure, in your winged lips and fluted ears  
that received my confidence, but what of us  
in our empty plots of grass?  
For now,  
wreaths of memories dwell on my seared tongue,  
and all emotion fled.

Even beyond the night  
of our glittering personal festival,  
and even so,  
beyond the grotto of every moon silence,  
I awaited inspiration from your ancient eyes . . .  
and found it.

GERARD MALANGA

15.



## First Corinthians

Dear Saint Paul, you speak more like my grandfather  
Than an apostle from Tarsus.  
Poor old gentleman, beset, as he said,  
By nine children and an unknown quantity of  
Grand and great grandchildren,  
He always should have been a bachelor,  
"It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

My grandmother managed both house and farm,  
Sewed to send the children past elementary school,  
Died and left her carefully hoarded insurance  
Policy to the youngest son in hopes he would go  
To college;  
The old man, resentful, buried her in a pine box,  
Preached the sermon himself as a local deacon.  
"The man is not of the woman; but the woman of  
The man."

Four of his five daughters were spinster ladies,  
Who baked chocolate layer cakes for their father  
And sang as a quartet for Baptist Church revivals;  
Only Aunt Ellen managed to escape,  
Ran away in the middle of the night with a truck driver,  
Became a waitress on the Dixie Turnpike,  
Finally died in Childbirth.  
Pleased, my grandfather wept,  
"Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the  
Lord; yet I give my judgment as one that hath  
Obtained mercy of the Lord to the faithful."

My father, the youngest son, away at college,  
Tried to shake off the chill of the mountains;  
Read his fine-print Milton and Chaucer with  
Inherited washed-out blue eyes until he  
Was all but blind, wrote home for money  
For spectacles and laughed 'til tears at  
His father's scrawled refusal,  
"It is reported commonly *that there is*  
Fornication among you."

Dear Saint, the old man grey and sick,  
My grandfather, died bellowing *his*  
Fate and everyone else's lack of faith;  
All in mock love we followed the casket  
To his pine-grove grave;  
I cried as I should but whispered under  
My first alcohol breath,  
"I praise *you* not."

JEROME MATHERLY



Alice Pohl

HELLO, HENRY!

Lithograph

## A Mourning

And  
On an afternoon  
Late with snow  
The gladiola sun  
Came rolling from the sky  
To hide itself icily warm  
In the nothingness of ground.

And  
In the dusky time  
The snow made soft sounds  
While shrouding the warmth,  
And from grey seasonal clouds  
The cloths of winding spiraled  
Unceasingly downward.

And  
In this shaded time,  
Mingling with the grey,  
Came the mourners;  
Old ladies first in lavender  
~~Who in quiet whispers~~  
Told of death and dark.

And  
In the evening early  
Enter then the gentlemen  
On muffled black feet  
Who from their coats of dark  
Were whisking off the snow  
As soundlessly they met the others.

And  
In the late of night hiding all  
In dark and funeral sad  
They spread their great coats  
Then knelt silently to pray  
For the Lazarus sun  
Throughout the night.

MARGARET E. GRAVES

## Path to the Sea

There is much to be said for paths,  
For wild salt-grains riding  
And wind shift-sands sliding  
The foot of the runner;  
And the sound of the bosun's pipe.  
Hollowed over and over  
In the salty wrinkles of shell.  
I have walked there  
On the sea soil,  
Full of the sea smell and the sea noise.  
In my lovely, long-legged leisure.  
And I have seen the winking shells, wet and tumbled,  
Pressed upon sand  
Like holy, broken windows.  
They have said:  
    You are no longer a child.  
    You are no longer.

The hungry, spot-cheeked race,  
The slip-ripple-ripple chase  
For a path to the sea  
Burst gaiety in rivulets and runnulets of sea rain,  
Rhythmed radiance in leaping, rolling sky flame.  
The bosun's pipe, the shell, and the sea became  
Amberhaze against the pane,  
Browning acorns in a bowl,  
A wild chevron of geese on the wind,  
And my orphan hand on the door.

HEATHER ROSS MILLER

## Phoenix Maple

Fall fire consumes your plumage.  
Dying feathers spiral-blaze  
To a ring-around your skeleton,  
Stark, in depths electric blue.

Flame follows summer  
And leaves around your feet  
A brown ash heap:  
Cold bed for being born.

Wind twists the rot of rain  
Through fire-spent cinders, holding,  
Death-body bears the winter crystal,  
And rattles to the roots for the wind.

Earth at last warms and surges,  
And your own bird-bones swell to burst  
With ultimate pride: father, mother, son —  
One. You move from fire toward fire.

JANE GENTRY

## To Omar Khayyám

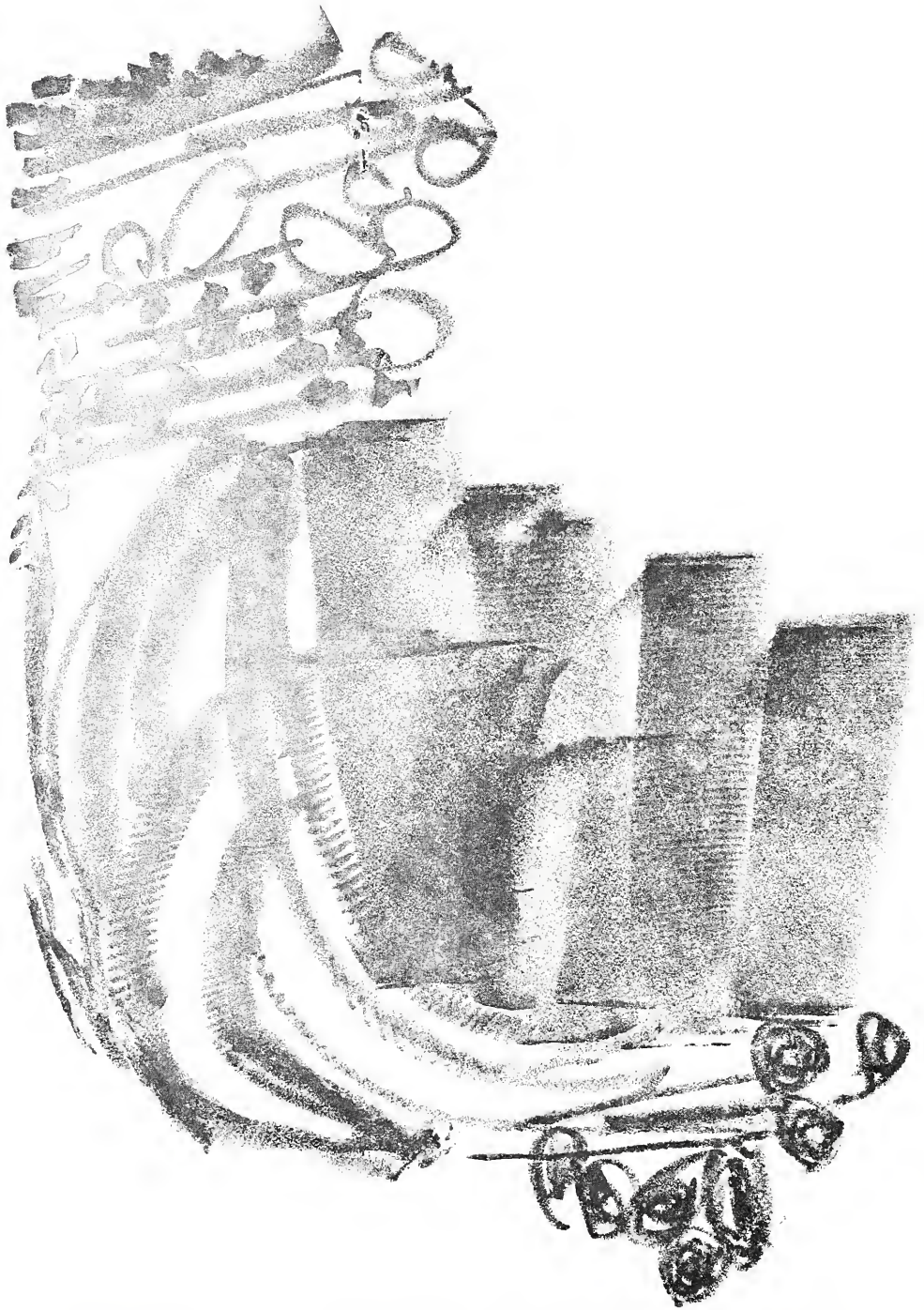
Today the spring of life — tomorrows fall  
And bare the boughs. The prophet's hymns recall  
    A promise long gone dry. What is there, Omar,  
That can offer hope? Wine quells the squall.

An hour, at least, until the stupor's flown  
The mystic juice is able to postpone  
    The Hell within that rages endlessly,  
And will, until our flesh like sand is strown. 19.

You revel in the moment, fill the cup  
With wine, embrace who gives you sup  
    And soothes your senses with her ripened fruits:  
Kissing the urn's lip, again you turn it up.

Could I, like you, emboldened, disdain Fate  
And scorn immortal Hell, not hesitate  
    And stumble headlong? I wonder can the seers  
Feel, or fear, who in their graves still wait.

LOUISE EFIRD



Melissa Bassler

NO TIME FOR THE LIVING

Lithograph

## CATCHER IN THE RYE

Betsy Speck

*The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most perceptive novels written, showing human nature through the eyes of an emotionally disturbed sixteen year old boy, who lives underground in New York for two days after having flunked out of his third prep school. The narrator, Holden Caulfield, plays the most direct role throughout the book by his interpretation of the world as he sees it.

To Holden Caulfield, there is only one thing which is genuine, and that is innocence. Anything lacking this quality therefore is false and odious to him. Consequently, through his excessive employment of the word "phony," this term actually constitutes the philosophy of the entire book.

Every tangible and intangible force represents one of the two preceding qualities to him, and unfortunately, they are mostly the latter. His headmaster is phony, for he has the reputation of varying the length of his handshakes according to prestige and money. The Christmas pageant at Radio City is phony, because as Holden says, "It's supposed to be religious as hell, I know, and very pretty and all, but I can't see anything religious or pretty, for God's sake, about a bunch of actors carrying crucifixes all over the stage. When they were all finished and started going out the boxes again, you could tell they could hardly wait to get a cigarette or something . . . I said Old Jesus would've probably puked if He could see it all—all those fancy costumes and all . . . The thing Jesus *really* would've liked would be the guy that plays the kettle drums in the orchestra . . . He only gets a chance to bang them a couple of times during the whole piece, but he never looks bored when he isn't doing it." The play is an empty shell. What is it but a group of actors looking saintly because they are paid to? Holden is correct when he believes that Jesus would have liked the kettle drum player the best. The drummer, of all these people, is the only person who is acting sincerely. He alone is true to himself and his desires. The actors are no more than parasitic shades of Hades, who wander around aimlessly and must drink human blood to assume a shape temporarily.

Holden's aversion to movies is for the same reason. Movies are phony because they are merely phony people playing phony roles, and those who enjoy them are phony for becoming so emotionally involved in a false situation.

The "genuine" side of life is depicted less extensively. It is evident in children playing on playgrounds, in the two nuns that he meets, in his luggage as contrasted with the imitation luggage of one of his roommates. It is even symbolized in the fact that he couldn't bring himself to throw a snowball at a car and fire hydrant because they were covered with white snow. The snow represents this same purity of which Holden could never justify intentional destruction. But most of all, this trait is epitomized in the unscathed freshness and genuineness of his sister, Phoebe, and his dead brother, Allie.

But Holden is clinging to an idea that is futile and can never be realized as long as human beings exist. The fate of Holden is ominously described by one of his former teachers, Mr. Antolini, when he philosophically warns Holden, "This fall I think you're riding for — it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement's designed for men who at some

time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn't supply them with. So they gave up looking. They gave up before they ever really even got started."

Holden *has* built up this unrealistic idea to the point of the synonymy of basic goodness with sacredness and in his conception of virtuousness, he allows no room for human error.

Even if the people and ideas previously mentioned do live up to his expectations, they can only be ephemeral. Children grow up and as they take their places in the world of adults, they too will become a part of Holden's "phony" world. As for the two nuns, Holden himself admits that the feeling of sincerity would have been lost if they had asked about his religion. His luggage will soon grow old and dirty and appear no different from his roommate's suitcase of imitation leather. It will remain only a shabby, dingy memory, and nothing else. In a way, it symbolizes the fate of the children. When the snow melts, there is going to be a car and a red fire hydrant on some street corner in New York. The snow will have melted, and the wheels of the passing cars will have made the remaining slush black. The car will be streaked with mud from the storm, with muddy ripples of water running down the windows. Perhaps, now that the snow has melted, if one could see the interior, it might reveal a pair of torn seat covers or a cigarette butt lying on the floor. The fire hydrant in its nudity is unmistakably a vivid red. It is not white, or even a subtle pastel, but a gaudy, lustful, and flashy red. This is what remains of two transient symbols of purity.

All of these, Holden will probably accept without too many misgivings, for they were never really close to his heart to begin with. It is when applied to Allie and Phoebe that the words of Mr. Antolini have the most force. When Phoebe asks Holden if there is anything he likes, Holden can name only two things — talking to her, and thinking of Allie. In Allie, Holden clings to a dead dream, which leaves only Phoebe, but Phoebe is still human and is therefore merely a live dream. She, too, will fade out—part of her will go to the future but the soul of her youth will remain in the past and in the mind of her brother. Holden cannot face this reality. We see him as he happily buys a record for Phoebe, itself representative of innocence. Unfortunately, the record "innocence" falls and is broken. Does Holden scoop up the pieces and throw them away or just leave them lying there? No, he painfully picks up each piece individually and carries them around in his pocket.

One cannot help wondering whether Holden actually understands these symbolism, even though they are false until about the end of the novel when he tells Phoebe, . . . "I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going, I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy." Holden Caulfield has actually pictured himself as the savior of mankind. The field of rye represents a world of innocence, almost a type of heaven inhabited by hundreds of Allies, Phobes, snow-covered fire

hydrants, and genuine leather suitcases. He is God, and it is his duty to keep them from running over the cliff, because once they have leaped over, they will fall into the terrible, dark, unfathomable abyss or hell of the "phony" world.

The situation of mankind as Holden Caulfield has painted it is foreboding and unnatural, but where will it end? Has Holden already begun his fall? He certainly is searching for something that his environment can't supply him with, and he will have to reach the point of frustration that results from all unfulfilled aspirations. This falling that Mr. Antolini mentions possibly denotes mental illness or at least some form of neurosis. This supposition would tend to be unsubstantial except that Holden himself does mention his own mental disturbances. He tells of having injured his hand by smashing windows the day his brother died. He admits being somewhat of a coward, and being a coward, his fights are all the more noticeable. He attacks almost like a wounded animal with a blind and unpremeditated rage. The word "psychoanalyst" appears in several passages throughout the book and is especially noticeable, although still nebulous, in connection with the following phrases: ". . . what school I'm supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here . . . this one psychoanalyst guy they have here." Holden also refers to a lagoon in Central Park. He continually asks himself what happens to the ducks during the winter—whether someone takes them to the zoo, or whether they merely fly away.

This seems to emblemize more than anything the plight of Holden Caulfield. "Lagoon" is an apt word, for what could be more appropriate to describe Holden's life, so rayless and mysterious in itself? He is the ducks and although he is not conscious of his own future, he has unknowingly prophesied it in posing this question. The "flying away" indicates his mental condition and attempted escape from reality, while the idea of being taken to a zoo actually represents his future commitment to a mental hospital.

This is Holden's mental escape from the world, but there is also his physical escape; this takes the form of nonconformity and rebellion. Because everyone else at school attends football games and refers to them enthusiastically, Holden refuses to do either. He wears a red hunting cap as a sign of defiance against those who do conventionalize. He also demonstrates his distaste for society by the constant use of profanity, and the only times that this is restrained is in the presence of the wholesomeness which he sees in Phoebe and the nuns. Holden's most graphic negative action is in his erasing of the signs that he sees in the museum, but as in the case of the broken record, when he tries to erase one scribbling, he finds that it is impossible because it has been firmly etched on the wall, deeply and permanently. There in one word is the inescapable sordidness of the world.

Reading this book once, you will laugh until tears run down your face, but the second time, if you really analyze it, it will break your heart.

## Lumière Dansante


My love  
 my only love  
 gay like me  
 sad like me  
 lost like me  
 lost in the dancing light  
 lost in the sky  
 lost in the rain  
 my love  
 my lost love  
 Are you happy now  
 gay again  
 Is the joy of life  
 yours again  
 Do you remember  
 or have you forgotten  
 the bursting tenderness  
 of new love  
 of new life  
 sweetening the pain  
 of lost  
 and broken  
 You know  
 you live  
 and love  
 and laugh  
 I thought I never would again  
 but  
 I do.



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CORADDI, the fine arts magazine of the Woman's College, contains in this issue the best of the literary submissions from the Woman's College and participating universities. The poems, stories, and features will be discussed by a panel composed of Randall Jarrell, William Blackburn, and John Allan on Monday, March 6. The Eighteenth Arts Festival emphasizes music in art, but the panel discussion of Coraddi remains one of the major attractions of the Festival

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MILTON



on Life Savers:

"Sweet is  
the breath"

from *Paradise Lost*, The Beautiful World, line 1



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Arts Festival Calendar, 1961

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday  
March 1, 2, 3

THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES  
Theatre of the Woman's College  
Music composed by Thomas Cousins  
8:00 P.M., Aycock Auditorium

Monday, March 6

PANEL DISCUSSION OF THE  
ARTS FESTIVAL *CORADDI*  
William Blackburn, Duke University  
John A. Allen, Hollins College  
Randall Jarrell, Woman's College  
3:00 P.M., Virginia Dare Room  
Alumnae House

Tuesday, March 7

POETRY AT THE WOMAN'S COLLEGE  
Randall Jarrell, "The Poetry of Eleanor Ross Taylor"  
Poetry Readings by Students and Faculty  
Stella Jefferson                      Jill Hoffman  
Heather Ross Miller                  Carl Selph  
Martha Alice Miles                  Murray Nauss  
3:00 P.M., Virginia Dare Room  
Alumnae House

Tuesday, March 7

Edward Kilenyi, Pianist  
8:00 P.M., Recital Hall  
Music Building

Wednesday, March 8

Alabama String Quartet  
8:00 P.M., Recital Hall  
Music Building

Thursday, March 9

Alabama String Quartet  
8:00 P.M., Recital Hall  
Music Building

Friday, March 10

Dance Concert — Woman's College Dance Group  
8:00 P.M., Aycock Auditorium

Saturday, March 11

Madeline Carabo-Cone, Violinist;  
Harold Cone, Pianist  
8:00 P.M., Recital Hall  
Music Building

Sunday, March 12

Greensboro Symphony Orchestra  
Edgar Alden, Violinist, Soloist  
8:00 P.M., Aycock Auditorium

March 10 - 30

Associated Artists of North Carolina —  
Exhibiting Members' Show  
Weatherspoon Art Gallery

March 7 - 28

"Small Paintings by Americans"  
from the collection of I. B. M.  
Elliott Hall Gallery

March 1 - 15

Student Photography Exhibit  
Elliott Hall Gallery

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