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Greensboro, N. C.*

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Rest In Peace

Betty Dove Adams

She sat waiting for her cold pills in the dispensary-room. Her sore throat ached and little hammers were thumping away inside her temples. The tall nurse ambled over to her nurse, who was much shorter and busier.

"The blonde girl has a temperature of 101. They think she's got—"

The tall one paused and glanced briefly at the waiting girl, then drew up her shoulders and raised her eyebrows. The short nurse stopped shuffling papers and nodded.

She collected her pills and left.

It would have been all right if he hadn't decided to give us an exam. I could have passed, I guess, if he hadn't done that. I wonder what his wife is thinking now. Probably glad to get rid of him. Anybody who acts that way on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, week in and week out, must act that way all the blessed time. I think it was an act of mercy. No one could enjoy living in that state.

She opened her post office box, took out a brown envelope and a white card. The brown envelope yielded a sign from Time magazine which stated coldly: "If you spit on the floor at home, spit on the floor here. We want you to feel at home." The white card was an overdue notice from the library, signed "Margery Memory."

Very appropriate. Wonder if they've found him yet. The door was closed. Unless someone goes in they wouldn't find him. I wore my gloves. The design on those things must have been inspired by a centipede. I never saw anything that looked more like a centipede.

"Sorry I'm late. Had an exam this morning."

The phone rang. She ran to answer it, knocking over a stack of books as she reached for the receiver.

"College library."

"Hello?"

"College library."

"Hello?"

"This is the COLLEGE LIBRARY!"

"I'd like to ask a question. Do you know what state Penn State College is in?"

"Sir?"

"I'd like to—"

"Isn't it in Pennsylvania?"

"No, no, young lady. What town is it in?"

"If you'll wait a moment, I'll look it up."

"Thank you."

She scurried to the reference room and took down Patterson's Educational Index from the shelf, flipped pages, and ran back to the phone.

"Sir?"

"Yes?"

"It's in Penn State."

"Yes, that's right. Penn State. Where is it?"

"It's in Penn State."

"I'm afraid you'll have to speak up, young lady."

"PENN STATE COLLEGE IS IN PENN STATE. THERE'S A TOWN NAMED PENN STATE."

"Oh. How far is it from Philadelphia? On second thought, never mind. You're probably pretty busy. Thank you very much."

Several people were looking at her strangely when she looked up. She sat down at the desk and began to file cards.

"Good afternoon, Bertha."

"Good afternoon. I brought you a present. Will you renew it?"

"Sure. *The Diabolic in Modern Society*. Why are you reading that?"

"It's by a man who says we can't believe in God without believing in the Devil. One chapter tells about a lady who told her psychiatrist that every time she went outdoors she was attacked by birds. He gave her treatments for months but nothing helped. She had to ride in closed cars. Finally, the

psychiatrist decided on a more direct approach. He took her out in his garden. They were immediately attacked by birds."

"My."

"Did you kill off one this morning?"

"No, I haven't had an exam yet."

She looked at her watch.

Time to go. Why does that girl always go by her box before she comes to work? Who would write her, anyway? Her mother loves her, I guess. I read everything he assigned. I knew what to say in class but it was such a big one. She's a nice girl, always says hello to everybody. Knows your name too. Bet she studies a lot. Wonder if she thinks she's pretty? "Beauty is momentary in the mind." I'll bet mind is momentary in the beauty. I always liked English in high school. She looked so like Lady MacBeth. They all laughed the day she slipped in class. She wasn't really too tall. I would have worn high heels anyway.

She walked slowly to the dining hall. The corridor was deserted except for the floor polishing man who sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" in a drowsy baritone.

I suppose I ought to thank Lois for the gloves. Wish Mother had less sisters and more brothers. I could take the centipedes off, maybe, after I wear them at her house. He used to sit on the desk, cross-legged, fiddling with his muffler. Why anyone would wear a muffler in the house is beyond me. A swamp-green muffler.

The line stretched across half the dining hall. Some people stood, unconcerned by the situation. Others fidgeted, glanced at the clock repeatedly, and turned pages.

"Hey there."

"Hello."

"How're exams?"

"Fine. I haven't had any yet."

"That's nice."

"Bertha. I thought you were going back to the dorm."

"I got hungry."

"Have you been staying up late or are your sins catching up with you?"

"I'm writing a paper. Sometimes I feel like ending it all."

"Do whatever you think is best."

"Don't be hard on Bertha. She's o.k."

"You see some nobility in Bertha?"

"I can see good shining through everybody."

They stood fifteen minutes while the boy brought another tray of cornballs. Then the line plodded on, mechanically reaching for maple syrup, milk, and apricots.

Wonder who invented cornballs. They're probably indigenous to this place. When they dig up this place a thousand years from now, they'll find a cornball and a coke bottle. He was a handsome man. Better make a death mask of someone like that instead of some ugly king. Maybe there's something in the room to eat.

She took her tray to the subveyor. The dining hall was filled with people, all of whom were poking away at their cornballs. She hurried out into the

(continued on page 8)



FISH BOWL

At the bottom of the seed store,
luminescent bubbles
multiply behind the glass and
split on the surface of
the aquarium's water
where
the fish bite oxygen;

where all is green or
cadmium-lighted
in the waving algae,
the fish are swimming above the
granite chips
to and fro and violet-striped
or transparent.

Where all the walls are
underwater,
steel-reinforced,
measured to the moving gills
drinking sunless shadows,
noiselessness stampedes.

Stairs of thirty-two steps
lead up to the sale of orange-boxed
turtle food and turtles
and to sun-netted people
floating in the street.

BERTHA HARRIS

SUGGESTION TO MARC CHAGALL

long-legged elephants
are a peculiarity
especially when birds
that are red and green-legged
sport up and down
on their wrinkled backs.

the elephant in the corner
sleeps in the fallen plaster,
but when he awakens,
the birds hang
their toes
over his eyeballs,
instigate conversation,
and annoy the absolute hell
out of him.
they try to explain that

no elephant ever had sound-proof
living conditions.

BERTHA HARRIS

THE TERRITORY

I transposed the walls of rooms
to the walls of skies, not
confining infinity but leaving
room for birds to fly.
They never enter windows.

Outside they grasp the branches
or stop some rain from touching grass,
clawing earth where there is
more water underneath;
or,
rising shattering leaves
they join my highest wall,
unhung with chestnut decor.

Quite soundlessly they
suck more water through
their wings and
lift themselves
to beat against the shifting plaster.

BERTHA HARRIS



French Minstrels of the Middle Ages

by Martha Jane Gilreath

"A verse without music is a mill without water;" troubador Folquet of Marseille's quotation mirrors the philosophy of all troubadors and trouvères of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These were the ardent poet-musicians who believed in "music for music's sake" and received no remuneration for their services of music making. Their titles "troubador" and "trouvère" may have stemmed from the French verb "to find," pointing to their imaginativeness and inventiveness. Troubadors originated in Southern France with two distinct concepts of love: one was chaste, worshipping woman as an unattainable being; the second was sensual, craving woman with passionate desire.

The first concept manifested itself in the nobility; the troubadors were knights, princes, even ladies, or other members of the aristocracy who held their art so high within their own circles as to be above the intellectual realm of the plebian. Their main subject was courtly love, with its almost spiritual worship of womanhood, its pretended sentiments, and its elaborate code of etiquette. This worship of the fairer sex applied itself to religion with a resultant feminization of the Diety and final worshipping of the Virgin Mother Mary.¹ One reason for this feminization of the Diety was to lessen the fearfulness of the Almighty God of the Roman Catholic Church, whom the troubadors found too unmerciful to worship and love. Other courtly love song types include the "pastourelle," (pastoral), in which the knight woos a shepherdess more or less discreetly and often unsuccessfully; the "chansons de toile," (spinning songs), in which a young girl laments that she is married to the wrong man, or that her lover is far away, or that her parents disapprove of her lover; and the "alba," (dawn song), in which the singer keeps watch through the night for a pair of lovers to warn them of the approaching dawn. These were the types of songs sung by Richard the Lion-Hearted, Blondel de Nestles, or Guillaume de Machuat; but for troubadors such as Marcabru of Gascony, who considered himself a woman-hater, there were other song topics: social conditions, politics, or the Crusades.

Each of these song topics was fitted into one of the approximately twenty forms according to num-

ber of melodies employed, number of repetitions of any melody, presence or absence of refrain, and use of solo voice with or without choir (audience). Of course the troubadors had to know each variation among all twenty forms—no small feat!—to be able to compose music for their poetry.

The second, or worldly, concept of courtly love was derived from the goliards, students in the lesser clerical orders who rejected the piousness of the church. Their songs dealt with drinking, love (both varieties), and satire on the church, while their actions complemented their bawdy beliefs. Their songs may be found in a collection titled "Carmina Burana."² Naturally their disreputable behavior caused the wrath of the church, which denied them the "privileges of the clergy."

Outside of the "music for music's sake" category were the jongleurs and minstrels, who performed to earn their living. They were not composers in their own right, but improvised on the troubador's songs. Jongleurs were expected to play at least nine instruments, which could be chosen from the vièle, harp, guitar, lute, psaltery, zither, dulcimer, portable (small organ), flute, oboe, trumpet, drums, or tambourine. Sometimes the jongleurs were hired to accompany the higher ranking troubadors or trouvères. They reverted also to tricks of magic, knife throwing, tight-rope walking, other acrobatic stunts, and showing off trained bears to supplement their singing. Their costume in two different bright colors added to the "gypsy-like" picture — and gypsies they were, travelling from town to town, performing at court festivals, noisy peasant feasts, tournaments, warlike assemblies, weddings, and religious plays. Their latter service may seem surprising, since the church considered them a menace to the spiritual welfare of the people and banned them from taking communion, as it banned epileptics, sleep walkers, and sorcerers. Nevertheless, the wandering minstrels played a very important part in the Middle Ages, travelling from town to town telling stories of other places, and in many ways filling the role of our modern newspaper.

¹ This latter development is especially true of the German Minnesinger, counterpart to the French troubador.

² Latin verses set to music by Carl Orff. (b. 1895)



harris

As A Youth Walked One Spring Day

I

The barking of the dogs
and the children shouting,
The pink dogwood and the white dogwood
and the rickety old wagon and its horse,
The wrinkled, toothless, old colored man
and the tiny smiling boy by his side,
The tiny black boy with the white-toothed smile,

The smell of burning leaves
and the hill with the tall, green trees,
The white-barked tree and the dark-barked trees,
The whippoorwill and the Mourning Dove belong to
God and me, and my heart sings with them.

The crooked dogwood and the tall straight cedar
are free,
And the deep, cool valley below them reminds me
of another day and picnics and the coming dusk
and fading firelight,
The crickets and the quiet summer water
and the laughter.

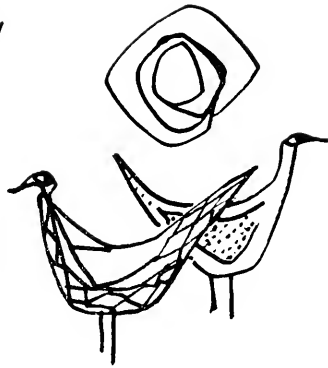
II

My love of people bursts forth
and the wind blows it from my lips into the
hearts of strangers.
They smile and the world is good for a little while.

III

The sun pours brightly into my face
and burns my eyes.
And I love its stinging brilliance.
I love it
and the yellow flowers by my side.
I caress with my heart each green blade and each
yellow ball, and the stinging bee is my friend.

MARY LILES



ANN DEARSLEY

POEM

Beige blobs
of moving men
slipping the
sidewalks like
belts of machines,
stamping their
neutral designs
time after time,
after time.

—LANY WALDEN

DESCENT

After warm water: the brain and dexterous fingers.
(And he ran his hands through his hair.)
A million years, stone squeezed, he fingered the
spark,
Touched it to clay, to hearthstone, meat, and hide.
(And he laid it onto his tongue.)
A million years, wire strung, he handled the spark.
Set it to forge, to furnace, wheel, and voice,
Wrapped self in its warmth, offered its glow to ally.
(But he hurled it onto his neighbor.)
(But he let it die in his mouth.)

The spark in the tongue was the first and the last
of his treasures.
Was the light he snapped out with a stroke of the
finger and head:
With loss of power, the darkness of thought, voice,
and feeling.
(And he holds his mute head in his hands.)

CHARLOTTE RIDINGER

February

A thin hair of light
creeps under the door,
an extension of itself
making the darkness visible.

Something stronger than a high-strung
candle flame
gives form to invisibility,
but if you look
you can not see it.

With living hands pressed
to a plaster wall,
we wait in ghosted silence,

MARTHA RAINEY

Why should man be concerned over his physical world—it will be transformed by the artist as nature is transformed by the seasons.

Buildings are reality, cold and there. They mean little other than to sever man from his instinctive self which he may call real. They inhibit him more than his society. He cannot run, even could not fly if he had wings. A building is not an object of illusion; it is merely an object apart from the man. Buildings provide man no escape: their doors, mere directive entrances and exits, bar man's exploration of what is actually there and his expression of that vision. A building is an object made by man as what it is and what it is to be, purely. Buildings provide man with the protection which should be given him by his kind, hence an unnatural protection. He could not face an open, illimitable space; he would soon find himself insane, if structure after structure had not afforded his vision some interruption, some deviation from that which he knows as real. Why should man want to call himself a rational creature; why should he even want to call himself *man*? Buildings are creations, but not in a full, pure form. They are pitiful rationalizations of what man thinks he is. They *are*, as gas heaters are, no more than man's innovation on fire. The intuitive self, ordered by a natural reason, is the vital self. Fire was a natural revelation, not a harnessing or a blundering bind. Fire came, it was not brought. Man is such a calculating bastard that he is, even if he hasn't found himself to be, without a free action. His sobriety is his unconsciousness. From the time he learns that he is entangled in a vicious, laughing society he is no longer human, but social. And buildings are the unnatural acts of man-made men.

CAROLYN HARRIS

REST IN PEACE (continued)

cold air, anxious to escape the sounds that worried her ears. A worm lay on the sidewalk. She stopped, watched it for a moment, then gently lifted it from the walk with the tip of her pencil, deposited it on the grass. She pounded on the locked door, drawing the scarf closer about her collar. A girl with a book appeared, opened the door. She took the stairs two at a time.

Lobster paste. I'd like some lobster paste. Here it is. "Used cold, makes delicious sandwiches." Crackers are so darned crumbly. Taste pretty good. Can't eat all of this though. Maybe someone else yearns for lobster paste.

"Anybody want some lobster paste?"

"Some what?"

"Lobster paste. It's good. Have some."

"No thanks."

"How about you?"

"I'll try some."

"See? Isn't it —good?"

"Sure is."

"Have some more."

"No thanks."

"Anyone want some lobster paste?"

"Don't call it paste. They think it is paste."

"Do you want some lobster?"

"I love lobster."

"Take the rest of the can."

She went back to the room, undressed, and put on her pajamas. A piece of paper lay on the dresser.

"At library. Will be back at ten. Don't turn on the radiator. Where were you at lunch?" Where was I at lunch, indeed. I was at lunch. Where was she at lunch? Humph. If he had had any children, I wouldn't have done it. Children are good for people. Society is made up of people. Why shouldn't its laws be for people instead of beings that don't exist outside of books? He told someone he learned to flamenco in a cave in Spain. Those Spaniards had it rough sometimes. Imagine talking to your girl through a window, never seeing her except through a window. And the ones who lay on their stomach to talk through the cathole. Lovely senorita with her face at the cat's door. Maybe I can snatch a nap before she gets back.

She curled up on the bed, reached for the table lamp, and turned it out.

The Journey . . .

by Patricia Carden

At the station we got on the train. I got on myself and Mother lifted Jane on. I was standing behind a man who had a kitten in his pocket. I rubbed its soft gray face, but it scratched me.

"Go to the end of the car," Mother said. The man with the kitten pushed a path through the people and I went behind him right to the end of the car. He went into the next car, but I sat down on the end seat. Mother came carrying Jane and sat down beside me. She sat the green case on the floor at her feet.

There were a lot of people going places. They were in the car with us and out on the platform and back in the station. I didn't know any of them. Daddy wasn't there yet. A woman out on the platform was holding a baby and waving its arm up and down. The man beside us waved back. He put his face up to the window and wiggled his hands and his ears and laughed.

There was a loud noise, the train blew its whistle, and we started sliding along beside the platform.

"But Daddy isn't here, yet," I said.

"Be quiet," Mother said.

I looked up and down the platform, but the faces were running together like the top of my paint box.

"He must not be coming," I said. The train slid away from the platform until I couldn't see the people's faces anymore; then I couldn't see their bodies anymore; then I couldn't see them at all.

Jane kept sliding her feet up on the seat. Mother slapped her knees, but she didn't stop.

"I want a drink of water," she said.

"Wait a while," Mother said.

"No, I want a drink of water now."

"Martin, take her to the end of the car and let her get some water," Mother said. "And be quiet."

We walked back down the long aisle. All the people looked at us. Jane had to jump over all the squares in the floor. I tried to make her stop, but she wouldn't. When we sat down again, I looked out the window at the telephone poles going by. I

wanted to go into the next car and find the man with the kitten and ask him if I could play with it.

"Do you think maybe I could go into the next car?" I said.

"No, I don't think you could," Mother said.

I looked back out the window and thought about why Daddy didn't come. Maybe he was sick from the scar. The other night he had to work late at night. Mother waited up for him. I woke up when he came in. Mother was crying and he had the big red scar on his cheek. They made me go back to bed. I wasn't sleepy. I wanted to talk, but they made me go back to bed.

Jane said, "Let's count cows." So we did. She couldn't count any further than ten, so I counted for her, too, after that. We came to a graveyard on her side. I told her she would have to bury her cows. She said they weren't dead. We didn't play any more after that.

The telephone poles went by. The back yards full of washing went by. A man with a very red collie standing in a field went by. The collie turned his head and looked at us until we were hidden behind the cedar trees at the bend. The collie looked just like the one on the farm when Daddy took me fishing. That was two years ago. I was just five then. The collie had a bunch of pups. The people promised to send me one, but they never did. I wanted to go back and get one, but Daddy didn't have time.

"I want a drink of water," Jane said.

"No," Mother said.

"Mother, why didn't Daddy come?" I said.

"Hush," Mother said and put her hand over my mouth. "Go with your sister to get a drink of water."

"I don't want to."

"Just this once. Go on now."

When we came back, I looked out the window and thought about my knife that I left at school in the back of the nice dark hole in my desk. There was an orange there, too, behind my books and a stick of chewing gum.

I wondered if Daddy was with the men. The men came to the door that morning and asked if Daddy was at home. They came in and looked for him anyway. He wasn't really there. He left just before they came. We came to the train station after that. I thought he had gone to the train station.

Watching out the window made me sleepy. I went off to sleep. I don't remember anything else until I woke up.

When I woke up, Mother was shaking me. The train had stopped. Mother took the green case and got off and Jane and me got off, too. The station wasn't big at all. It was just a little house. There weren't any people there, not even one person on the platform.

"Go in and see if there's someone inside, Martin," Mother said. I went in, but there wasn't anyone at the counter. I went around behind the counter. There was a man sleeping on the floor there, but he woke up when I stumbled over him.

"What a ya want?" he said.

"My mother wants to see you," I said.

He got up from the floor and went outside with me.

"You can call a taxi inside," he said to Mother.

"I think we'll walk. Is the business district back that way?"

"Yeah," the man said. "I guess you might say the business district is back that way. Just keep going straight and you'll hit it."

Mother took the green case and we walked across the railroad tracks and up the street on the other side. The buildings were dusty, but the street was muddy. There were crates of apples and grapes sitting out on the sidewalk and big bunches of bananas hanging in some of the doors. The insides of the stores were green and dark and you couldn't see anything in them. Every now and then someone would come out of the darkness up to one of the windows and look at us. Then he would go back into the darkness again.

We came to the end of the sidewalk. There was just a muddy path beside the street. A taxicab stand was on the corner where the sidewalk ended.

"We'll get a taxi, now," Mother said.

"I thought we were going to walk," I said.

"Just be quiet," Mother said.

We got into a taxi with a blue top. Jane wouldn't get in. When Mother tried to pick her up, she sat down on the sidewalk and kicked her heels and screamed. Mother gave me the green case to hold

while she spanked Jane. Then Jane crawled into a corner of the seat and rolled herself up there.

"Go to Locustville Road," she said to the driver. "I'll tell you where to stop when you get there."

We went out into the country then. In the taxi Jane stretched out and kicked me, then rolled back up again. She's like that when she's mad.

After a while we went down into a hollow where there were a bunch of shacks that colored people lived in. They all came out on the porches and shouted and pointed at us and said, "There goes a taxi." There were blue violets all over the ground between the houses. Beyond the shacks there were red clay gullies and after that there was another hill. I could look out the back window and see all the colored people standing in the road looking after us.

"Stop here," Mother said.

We were on top of the hill. There was a house there, a tall house with lots of windows. It didn't have any paint. There wasn't any grass in the yard. There weren't any trees.

"Let's go in," Mother said. We walked across the hard, gravelly yard and up on the creaky porch. Mother pushed on the door, but it was locked. She took a key out of her pocketbook and opened the door and went in. Jane and I looked in through the screen. There was a big dark hall in there. It was dusty and spiderwebby.

"Come on in," Mother said. "There's nothing to hurt you." We went in. There were doors on both sides of the hall and the end. Mother opened the end one. It was a kitchen. She put the green case in a cabinet, a funny cabinet with bow-legs.

"Let's see how the other rooms look," she said, so we looked in all the rooms on the hall. Some of the rooms had beds and dressers in them. One of them had a big black table and lots of chairs. One was a living room where all the furniture was covered with dirty yellow sheets. There was a picture of a woman over the mantel.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"That's your grandmother," Mother said. I didn't know I had a grandmother.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"She's gone away," Mother said.

"Where did she go?"

"Get some cloths from the kitchen, Martin. In the brown cabinet. We've got to clean up some of this dust." She never did answer my question.

After we dusted in the rooms and swept with a broom I found on the back porch, Mother said, "Let's go upstairs."

There were some stairs behind a door in the kitchen. We went up stairs but there were just some more dusty bedrooms.

"I'm hungry," Jane said.

"Yes, I know you must be," Mother said. "There couldn't be anything in the house. I saw a store in the little shanty town when we came through. If you and Martin will be very good and stay in the kitchen while I'm gone, I'll go down and try to get something to eat."

We watched her go down the road from the window until she went around the curve and we couldn't see her any more. Then we sat at the table and hopped our fingers from square to square on the oil cloth. Most of the squares were so faded that you couldn't see them. We had to trace them out from little specks of color. There were funny noises in the quiet house, in the rooms upstairs and in the rooms in front. Sort of moving noises that got closer and closer to the room.

"Let's go outside," Jane said.

"All right. We'll just go sit on the steps."

We sat on the back steps. There was a nice wind blowing. It didn't feel right though. It felt like someone was watching us from the windows.

"Martin, where is Daddy?" Jane asked.

"I don't know."

"Do you think he'll come?"

"I guess he will."

"Martin, are you scared?"

"No."

"I'm not either."

We sat with our backs to the windows.

"Martin, let's go in," Jane said.

"Well, I guess so," I said. We opened the door and went in. Whatever it was wasn't in the kitchen. It didn't matter. I could hear Mother coming through the hall. Everything was all right.

"Let's have a picnic," Mother said. We took the food and went out into the back yard and found a place with enough grass to sit on. The ground was wet though, so we stood up. We could see the shanty town from where we were. There were lots of people doing something down at the edge of the red clay gullies.

"What are they doing?" Jane said.

"They're going to barbecue a pig," Mother said. "They were talking about it in the store."

"What's barbecue?"

"Well, it's just barbecue, that's all."

"Where is Daddy?" Jane said.

"He's coming," Mother said.

"When is he coming?"

"He'll get here when he comes. He'll get here if he comes. Don't bother me. Pick up the paper and we'll go inside. It's getting cold out here."

In the house it was getting dark. The sun was setting.

"I think you and Jane had better go to bed," Mother said. "It's going to get cold and we don't have any wood to build a fire with. We'll have to use candles, too. The house doesn't have any lights."

"We want to sleep upstairs," Jane said.

"Well, I guess you can if you want to," Mother said, so she got a candle out of the cabinet and we went up the stairs behind the door. We had to sleep in our underwear because Mother had forgot to bring any pajamas. There were two beds in the room, a big high bed and a little one in the corner. Jane wanted to sleep in the big bed, but I decided to sleep in the little one.

Mother came over and kissed me on the forehead. Her hands were cold. "Don't worry about your daddy, son," she said. "He'll be here." Then she picked up the candle and went out. I could hear her going down the steps. I wished we had gone to bed downstairs.

Jane was asleep. I could hear her breathing through her mouth. My bed was so low I felt like I was laying on the floor. I almost couldn't see the ceiling even in the moonlight.

The colored people were singing down on the red clay banks. The sound came in the window and was all around us in the room. I couldn't quite make out the words. I got up and went to the window. I could see the colored people standing in the firelight. The porch roof was right under my window. It was cold in the room so I put my clothes on and went back to the window. I thought maybe I could hear the singing better outside so I crawled out on the roof. I skinned my knee on a piece of screen wire, but it stopped stinging when I spit on it . . . I was going to crawl down the porch post, but Mother was digging in the back yard so I climbed in the window. I stayed at the window listening to the singing. After a while Mother slammed the back door.

I took off my shoes and got in bed and pulled the covers up over my clothes. I turned my back to the door. In a minute I could hear her coming upstairs. The door opened. The room got light. Mother's shadow rose up across the bed and onto the wall. I could see it with my bottom eye. Then

the door shut and I could hear her going back down the stairs.

I got out of bed and crawled out of the window again. I scratched the same place on my knee, but I just let it hurt. I slid down the porch post. The wood came off in my hands and I could feel the splinters sticking into my stomach. I walked down the road. The sand made scratchy noises under my feet.

I ran right on across the red clay banks jumping over the ditches. I went right up to the fire. The colored people stopped singing. An old woman came out of the crowd and touched my hair.

"Leave the young'un alone," a man said behind her. The old woman went back into the crowd.

"Come and sit with me, boy," the other man said. He had a long white scar on his cheek and a guitar on a string around his neck. We went and sat at the edge of the fire. The people started singing again.

A white hound dog came and stood by the guitar man. I scratched his ears and slapped his sides and said, "Ol' boy, ol' boy. How are you, ol' boy?" He poked his wet nose into my hand and sniffed and wagged his tail.

The guitar man stopped playing after a while. Someone else was playing a banjo.

"Got a friend, huh, Bill," the guitar man said, patting the hound. "I don't b'lieve I got your name," he said to me.

"It's Martin," I said.

"How do, Martin. My name's Eli," he said.

"Why have you got a scar, Eli?" I said.

"Oh summun knifed me long time ago. Maybe five, six year ago, maybe ten, twelve year ago."

"Did it hurt?"

"He hurt, too."

"My daddy's got a scar, too."

"Summun knife him?"

"I guess so."

In a little while Bill started whining. Everyone got quiet and listened. Out on the road there was a car. First you could see the white lights coming and then you could see the red lights going up the hill.

"Taxi," everyone said very quietly.

"C'mon, young'un" Eli said and we went home. The taxi was in our yard and Daddy was in it. Mother came out of the house but she didn't say anything to me.

"Hello, Eli," she said.

"Hello, ma'am."

"Is Eli there?" Daddy said. He got out of the taxi. We all went into the kitchen. Mother had breakfast ready but it wasn't light.

"No, you sit here with us, Eli," Mother said. She gave me some bacon and found a box for me to sit on. She still hadn't said anything to me.

"This is a fine place, Eli," Daddy said.

Eli nodded. He was eating bacon, too.

"I took care of our papers," Mother said.

"How's Chiquapin County these days, Mistah George?" Eli said.

"Corrupt," Daddy said.

"How's de sheriff?"

"Rotten."

"How's de Klan?"

"Mean."

"How's de hunting?"

"Scrawny, Eli, scrawny."

Eli put his elbows on the table. "We've got the biggest coons round here you've ever set your eyes on."

They all laughed then.

"What's the Klan, Daddy?" I said.

"Why aren't you in bed?" Mother said.

"Let him stay," Daddy said, so I did. He picked up a piece of rope from the cabinet and put it around my neck. It was scratchy.

"I've had that right there," he said.

"Don't do that, George," Mother said. She gave me another piece of bacon.

"It don't feel too good. That's a fact," Eli said.

We heard Bill whining at the door and Mother got up and let him in.

"Is that Sam?" Daddy said.

"Gran'son," Eli said.

I tied the piece of rope around Bill's neck. He tried to get it off.

"What are you folks going to do now?" Eli said.

"Wait it out. I can't help much dead," Daddy said.

"Are you dead, Daddy?" I said.

"Hush," Mother said.

"Why isn't that boy in bed?" Daddy said.

But Mother didn't make me go to bed. They didn't make me go to bed at all.



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