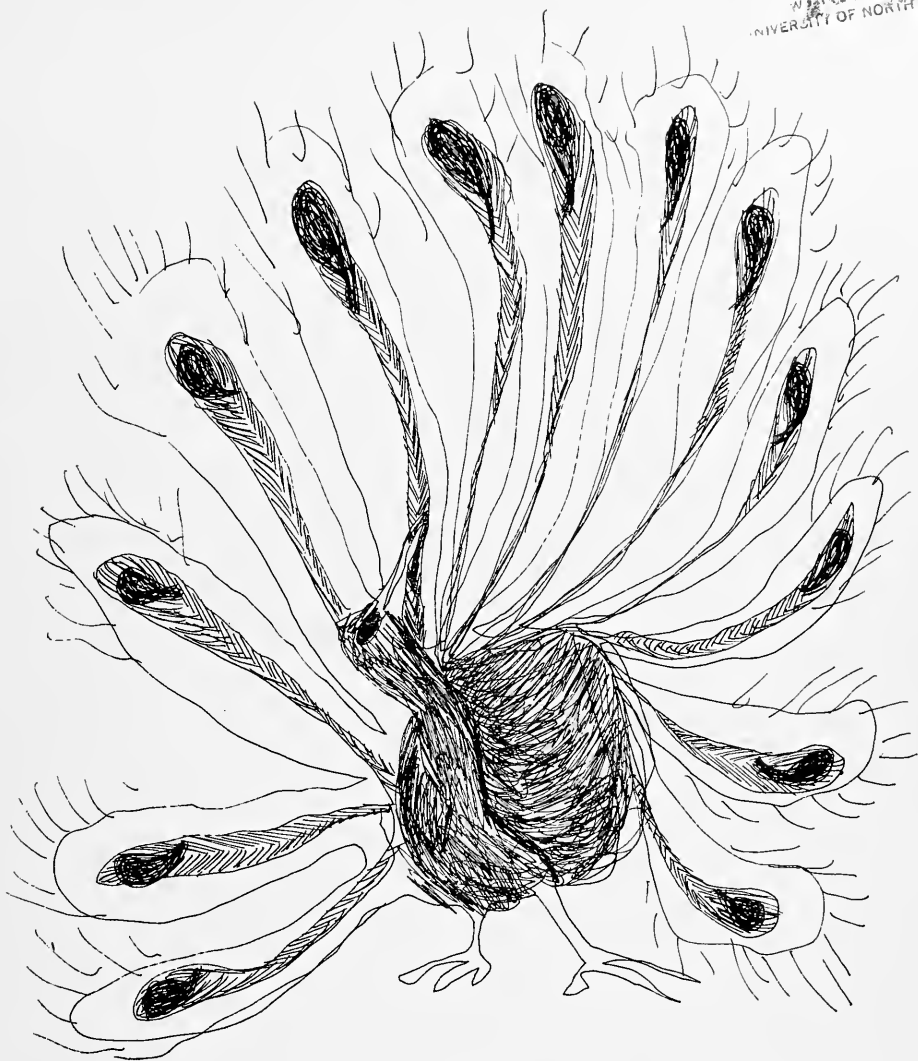


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CORADDI

CORADDI
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Winter Issue, 1964

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The Fence Breakers

BY KAYE GROSSMAN MATTHEWS

Roger Marshall moved next door late in the summer that he and I had just turned thirteen. I watched the moving men unload the van for half the morning, carting furniture, boxes, and barrels into the Sutton's house, only the Suttons didn't live there any more because they were dead.

"An au-to-mo-bile ac-ci-dent," my mother had explained, pursing her lips and dividing the important words.

For weeks after, the Sutton's lawn had grown longer under the late spring rains. Then the rains stopped and the grass started going patchy-brown and bald in places where the crabgrass used to grow until the time Mr. Sutton took after it with weed poison and an old ratched-up army knife. That didn't get all the crabgrass, though, so one afternoon we took a couple of medical syringes he had, loaded them with weed killer, and one by one injected some of the yellow liquid into the bases and roots of the weeds. That really did it, got every one. He gave me a buck and told me I was a good kid, why didn't I go take my girl to the movies? I told him, "I don't have a girl, but thanks a lot, Mr. Sutton."

"S'okay," he said and waved his hand just a little as he went up his front steps and into his house. Mrs. Sutton called out, "Thanks for your help, Billy," from way inside. We'd felt her watching us most of the afternoon, but Mr. Sutton didn't bother to mention it, so I didn't either. Mrs. Sutton was sort of pretty, for being married and all.

Once I started to tell Roger how she wore peppermint flavored dresses and smiled dark purple or bright blue smiles, but he slugged me hard, leaped on top of me, and spit out, "Don't you ever say anything like that out loud again. Not even with me. People don't know things like that. Only us—in this whole world. Y'understand?" He was sitting on top of me by that time, with his knees digging into my upper arms. It hurt just enough to be bothersome, so I said, "Sure, Rog, I'm a girl if I ever . . ." But I couldn't finish. I wasn't quite sure what he wanted me to promise. But all that came later.

Mr. Sutton was great. He had graduated from the University a couple of years before. I'd been going to the Stadium every home game for the past four years and could remember seeing him play. Quarterback, that was his position. The year he played, the University was first in the League and won the Bowl Game, too. But he quit after just one year. He told me it was cheating not to play the game straight, and impossible in the excitement not to use everything you've got in you.

Every once in a while I'd stroll by his house while he was trimming the lawn or spreading fertilizer—he spent half his life on that stupid lawn. I'd walk by tossing my football up in the air, and he'd sit back on his heels and call over, "Toss it here, Bill boy. How's about a bullet pass?" We'd fool around for half an hour or so with him showing me how to put perfect spin on the old ball, or else making me fade back for a long pass, stuff like that. Then he'd wince inside his head and take a look over his shoulder at the living room window. He looked automatically, even though he knew without looking that Mrs. Sutton would be standing there. Then he'd toss me the ball and say, "Well, I'll see you around, Bill. Someday we'll have a real game."

But we never did, because he and Mrs. Sutton piled up in a head-on crash on Route 30 and that was that. Totaled the car, too. And their lawn got to be really ratty looking.

Mom told me about the "automobile accident" the evening of the day it happened. It was an idiotic scene

since I'd already read about it on the front page of the Star Journal and it had been carried on TV and the radio. Anyway, I knew the instant it happened. Not "knew," really. Knew with my body. In a way, I'd been there.

I nearly gave the game away, too, because at dinner that night Mom and Dad got to talking about how sad it was, with them being so young and all. Mom said, "It was good they died instantly. They never knew what hit them."

Fool that I am, I popped out with, "Mr. Sutton knew. He didn't die right away, not till the ambulance was almost to the hospital."

Mom and Dad glanced at each other, then they both looked at me real sharp-like and I suddenly remembered the paper hadn't mentioned that. Neither had the radio or TV newsmen. "Anyway," I covered up fast, "that's what Mr. Pritchard told me."

Mr. Pritchard, Pop Pritchard, has a candy and comic book store three corners away. My folks never go there, so that seemed pretty safe.

Mom said something to Dad about how that old man should have more sense than to tell kids things their ears weren't ready to hear yet, but I just ducked my head and lit into my roast beef as if there was nothing more important in the whole world.

After Mr. Sutton's folks came down from their ranch and moved all the furniture and stuff out (his dad gave me Mr. Sutton's football, which I thought was darned nice of him), the house stayed lonesome until August.

I used to shinny down from my window at night all that spring and summer and go sit in the Sutton's backyard. They had this big tree with a place just made for sitting in, about ten feet off the ground where the first branches fork off from the trunk. You could scabble up there with no trouble at all, and then just lean back against the rough bark, feeling the upper branches moving real easy in the night wind. From there I kept guard on the house. Moonlight did eerie things to it, bouncing off the white sideboards and sliding in through the windows to make crazy-quilt patterns on the floor. The shades were just half-drawn, and the house seemed to be winking at you. I'd have sat inside to keep better watch, but I tried that once and nearly screamed out loud as soon as I'd slipped through the kitchen window and made myself quiet squatting up against the fireplace. The house was so empty it hurt. Boy, did I ever tear out of there fast.

But the house needed watching over, so daytimes I'd bring my air rifle and plink away at rats whenever they tried to ease the joint. Rats leave a yellow-green color in the air behind them, sort of dancing right up off the ground for a couple of minutes. That makes it easy to tell when they're around, even when you don't see them. They taste of fear, too, so you can't miss.

Anyway, I breathed a lot easier to see stuff being moved into the Sutton's place. It's just not good to leave a house all by itself. A tree you can leave alone, because it's got things it can do even if nobody builds a tree-fort in it or hooks a hammock around it. But a house doesn't have anything it feels good about except taking care of people.

All that morning the moving van stood there. The men kept taking stuff out of the van and into the house, as if the truck had expandable insides. I got doubly interested when they brought out an English racer and a go-kart.

Right after lunch, a station wagon, a 1961 Ford, pulled up and three people climbed out—Mr. and Mrs.

Marshall and ol' Roger, who turned completely around as soon as his feet hit the sidewalk, stuck both hands in his hip pockets and took a quick dig to see if anybody was listening in. He botched it up though, because he completely missed me. It really wasn't his fault. I'd put up all my barriers just as Mr. Sutton had taught me as soon as Roger fumbled his way out of the back of the car. Anyway, as Roger and I later figured out, my house is in a bit of a dead-zone when it comes to mind-digging.

Not finding anybody, he glanced at the house. #H'lo, house, # came across my mind as clear as if I'd thought it. I could feel him digging its loneliness, and then he went over and ran his hand along the sideboards, focusing on a real strong thought pattern which went, #We'll fix that up real quick. #

Man, I should have turned cartwheels. I'd been going out to sit in some tree at night for over four years by the time Roger arrived. Every night I'd dug out as far as I could, calling low and lonesome, #Can't anybody hear me? # But if anybody had, he'd never answered. Except Mr. Sutton. He knew a little. As much as he could. But he'd grown up too far to truly remember. Also, he had a wife to keep him in the barnyard.

Now, suddenly, here was ol' Roger Marshall. And not by chance, either. I knew better than that. I couldn't quite figure out how he'd thought his mom and dad into coming, but I knew I'd find out soon enough.

I wasn't even sure I was glad he'd come. Before Roger appeared, I was the only one awake and alive — taking care of the whole shebang. And even though I'd called every night, it was like saying most prayers. You'd be in a gosh-awful fix if God actually did forgive you in the same way that you forgave those who trespassed against you.

Same with Roger. Why'd he have to show? I was having a darned good time being a loner, being the only wild horse in the corral.

Ambivalence. Yeah, that's the word. I'll have to remember to go look it up. But five'll get you a million that's the right word. Mr. Sutton called it "Picking Someone's Brain," but I really didn't do it on purpose.

Ambivalence. I needed him to come more than Christmas, so he came. I must send stronger than I receive—I'd never heard Roger calling. Of course, maybe he never did, maybe he just listened at night when he was asleep.

Mom's timing was perfect. She came into the living room drying her hands from the dishes and said, "I'm gonna whop you a good one if you don't have your shoes off that sofa by the count of three. One, two . . ."

I got them off, balanced on my knees and held my feet up in the air, still leaning over the back of the sofa to stare at the Marshalls.

"I see someone's moving into the Sutton's place," Mom said, just for something to say and a reason not to go back to the kitchen right away. I also make her a bit nervous sometimes.

"Yeah. They're the Marshalls, from Toledo, Ohio."

"How'd you know that? You haven't budged from this house all day."

Brother, sometimes I think I'll never learn. "It was stenciled on some of the trunks," I lied.

"Well. Looks like they've got a boy just your age. Have you met him yet?" If she was going to forget I hadn't been out all day, I figured I might as well go along with her.

"'s name's Roger. He's a prick."

"William! Watch your mouth," she said. "I think perhaps you'd better go make friends with him, for that little demonstration. Right this minute, now. Scoot. Y'hear me?"

"Yes'm. It'll take a real effort, though." Boy, it works perfect every time. Sometimes it's too easy. I'd really rather things just went along on their own.

I dragged out of the living room as if I were wearing ski boots. Mom laughed and went back to the kitchen. She knew I knew neither of us was fooling the other.

As soon as the screen door slammed behind me, I cut around the corner of our house into the back yard, over the Sutton-Marshall's fence, and up into Roger's tree. #Come and get me, # I threw out from inside my head. #I'm one up on you already. #

Ol' Roger eased into his backyard like a cat that knows he's being watched. I focused all my mind on the way a brick wall looks and feels, and then doubled the blankness by mind-swaying with the tree and its growth song. Even so, Roger headed right for us, right for the tree and me. I was just lucky that the tree's leaves were thick and heavy that summer. Roger didn't have a chance of digging me visually.

It was just like the movies, too perfect to believe. He stopped directly under me, five feet below, and stood there, slowly coming to sense the presence of the not-tree that was pretending to be tree. But just as he began to look up, I dropped down on him and sprawled the two of us onto the dust and dying lawn of the backyard.

He started to think-call, #I found you! # but I slugged him, as hard as I could, right in the face! I hated him so. Hated him? Loved him. I hit him again as he twisted under me. Then he found his mind-block and shoved it out at me. He was good—the block flattened me. Mr. Sutton and I had mind-fenced with one another, him trying to block me as I went running down the street after a long pass, but he'd been living *with* people for too long and had never really learned to block well.

So there I was, flat on my back with Roger pounding me around the face, flailing his arms and crving a hurt-happy cry. I was crying just as hard, and all the while gasping, "See, I'm laughing. I'm laughing. We're real. Now there are two of us. I don't mind. I'm glad you came. D'you hear me?" He probably didn't. His fist was in my mouth most of the time, and he just kept hitting me. So I told him again, inside-talk this time, and then put a shield up all around my face.

Shields are easy to learn. Just like those TV ads. All you've got to do is picture that invisible shield and remember to leave some air holes. Otherwise it gets pretty stuffy inside.

We called it a draw and sat there savoring the hurt and the forever-friendship, both of us covered with dust and mingled blood.

Mom put me to bed without any supper. Mrs. Marshall told Roger he must never see that horrid boy again. Later that night she wondered to her husband, "Whatever possessed us to move out to the Arizona desert?" Roger and I both cracked up over that line. He'd passed it over to me since I was having trouble clearing thoughts through the mental fog-pocket in which our house is located. Mr. Marshall shifted his paper and said, "I thought it was your idea, dear." Then he blanked his mind unconsciously as he went back to reading the day's news.

Roger and I sat in our separate bedrooms laughing. All night long we threw thought-sharings, mind-blocks, and dirty jokes between our two houses until the air channel smelled of ozone and the wind between the houses rattled like tissue paper. By dawn we knew each other. For the first time ever we'd opened our minds and let another person follow our thought around, any thoughts we figured were important enough to remember for the other. From then on, we never had to talk about, "When I lived in Toledo . . ." or "Before you came to Arizona . . ." All

our talk was putting jig-saw puzzles together, puzzles that maybe had a quarter of the pieces missing because we weren't yet old enough.

The next morning Mom went visiting, after she made me eat four soft-boiled eggs and a stack of hotcakes. She took a chocolate-fudge cake over to the Marshall's and came back about noon to tell me that Roger and I had been given one more chance to learn to be civil with one another. She said that Mrs. Marshall was charming, Mr. Marshall was a systems engineer with Planco in their Phoenix office now, wasn't that interesting? and that she'd convinced Mrs. Marshall that often as not boys say hello by slugging each other. She didn't use the word "slugging," though. Later that afternoon she told me to get on over there and make friends with Roger, "without further demonstration."

Rog and I didn't have much summer left, but we made up for it. The first day, I woke up to early morning sunlight dancing on and warming my face. I lay there on my back and tossed a beam over across to Roger's room, making his covers fly back. Then I hopped out of bed. I didn't know if I'd be able to toss the covers, since I had to fight our fog-pocket, so I was feeling pretty smug as I stood on the rug climbing out of my pajamas. To tell the truth, I was grinning like a fiend when, blam, the rug flew across the room and I hit the floor. From then on, it was a contest to see who'd wake up first. It got to be pretty dangerous to sleep late.

When we weren't out on our bikes investigating the Indian burial grounds or exploring along the river, we'd be up in Roger's room, going through his books on knight-hood and the Crusades. Roger really liked them, and they did have great gory battle pictures in them. Rog also had a huge collection of tin knights on horseback and some foot soldiers. We'd line them up on this monstrous mountainous board he had for his electric trains and then will them around, making them clatter like mad, skid, and fly around when they joined battle. Rog said we were fighting a "Holy War," that "God and the Right are on our side," and that "through persistent and valourous effort we'd achieve the Holy Grail." The words had nifty sounds, even if I wasn't sure what they meant. Of course, we were on opposite sides of the battle, but we'd switch sides now and then so that each of us had a chance to be on the holy team. (I keep getting knightly terms and football terms mixed up.)

One afternoon we were so deep in the battle we forgot to leave feelers out. Roger had marched his foot soldiers around the mountain to a cow pasture and was deploying them in small groups to attack my encampment. His knights were just beginning to clash with mine at the foot of the mountain, and I was concentrating on bringing some foot soldiers I had stashed away in the railroad tunnel into action. My defensive was operating perfectly, and then I switched to offensive. I'd learned that an on-again off-again sort of mind-thrust works a lot better than just hammering home, so long as you remember to keep up your own mind-shield. Anyway, we had our minds and hands full.

I guess all the clattering and bashing did carry through the house.

Right in the middle of a brilliant offensive move by my knights, Roger dropped his mind-guard, dropped everything, and I sent his men skittering off the table.

##Cut it out!## he called. I looked around to see Mrs. Marshall standing in the doorway, her head wrapped in a house-cleaning scarf. She was leaning on a dust mop, and I didn't have the slightest idea how long she'd been there. Boy! I felt my warriors fall behind me. Shoot, I was so startled I leaned towards the table for support, and

missed it, falling against it and scattering the soldiers still more.

"What are you boys *doing*?" she asked as I picked myself up.

"Playing," Roger said, "just playing around with my soldiers."

"Playing! It sounded like you were *throwing* them around!" She was really mad. Then she paused, almost unwilling to ask the question I could feel forming in her mind. She asked it, though. "Why did all those toys fall off the table when I came in?"

I figured she didn't want the real answer, so I said, "I bumped into the table, Mrs. Marshall. I'm sorry." That seemed to satisfy her, because she became real strict and said, "Roger, I think you've played with Billy enough this afternoon. Billy, you'd better go on home now."

Scooting down the stairs, I stopped when I heard her say, "Now, young man, what's the meaning of this? What sort of games has that boy been teaching you?" She sounded scared, more than anything.

"He hasn't been teaching me anything," Roger said. "Really."

I made a point to shut the door a little harder than usual, so she'd know I was gone. I'm still not sure what else she said, but I know it was messy.

I took the stairs up to my room three at a time, and quick as I could I tanned Roger in. He didn't want to discuss it.

##Doesn't she know? Have you ever tried to tell her?## I asked.

All he'd reply was, ##Have you ever tried to tell your parents?##

Well, I just couldn't, but I'd never thought about why I couldn't until right then.

##She gets scared real easy,## he thought. ##Scared real deep. And, well, I'm afraid, too.##

##But they're sure to find out, sooner or later,## I insisted.

He jammed back at me, fierce and hot. ##Forget it, will ya? Just forget it.## He was so mad and tight inside.

##We'll just have to be more careful, I guess,## I thought.

So we pretended we'd forgotten it. We went back to our games of jousting, over at my house, now, and we started going on crusades. We'd go out to the desert most of the time. "Looking for the Golden Fleece," Roger said. I didn't really know what he meant by "golden," but just figured that he'd never seen a Navajo sheep close by.

That's how we passed the summer, exploring and playing around. Sometimes we wouldn't mind-talk or sky-soar for days at a time, we were trying so hard to forget that sooner or later something would have to be done.

School started early that year, the first week in September. In our district, elementary school goes through the eighth grade, which meant we were kings of the whole school, so it should have been pretty keen at school that year, even if it was stifling with rules for behavior and rules for thought. But school turned into a mess the very first day.

Our teacher, Miss Wills, had been a second grade teacher for about a hundred years. She was filling in for Mrs. Porter, the regular teacher, who'd just had a baby. Miss Wills is the kind of person who repeats. "There's nothing new under the sun," as regularly as she washes her hands. Anyway, she'd lored it over little kids for so long she didn't think in anything but absolute tones and colors.

Roger wasn't any help, either. I could have brained him at times.

At lunch the very first day we had to fight some school bullies from the other eighth grade. They believed in what Mr. Sutton called the "barnyard pecking order," and Roger was a new boy. The problem was that we licked them (shoot, it was easy. We just switched shields on and off), and then told them we couldn't care less about being the leaders of their gang. That upset them worse than being beaten. They couldn't figure out what to do with no one to follow.

As a result, though, Miss Wills decided we were troublemakers and formed tight little thoughts between her eyes about how to best deal with us. She told us so, right out loud. You see, after lunch Roger and I came in sort of bloody, with our shirts torn, and she asked us, as if she couldn't tell, "What have you boys been doing?"

"Fighting," Roger said.

"Don't you get persnickity with me," she said, and sent us down to the principal. Roger fumed for the rest of the afternoon.

For two solid weeks, Miss Wills used Roger as her pet target, and he grew tighter and tighter inside. I think he was still worried about us being all alone and needing to know what to do. He wouldn't admit it, though, he just got a little more wound up and separate into himself whenever Miss Wills made the class laugh at him or when she sent him down to the principal's office for being honest with his answers.

One period Miss Wills read to us out of *Mary Poppins*, from the chapter in which she takes the children to see her uncle and they all have tea while floating around near the ceiling. I could feel hope building up in Roger, so I mind-signalled him, "The author's been dead for years, I think." Rog slumped back in his chair. Miss Wills paused in mid-sentence to snap, "Mr. Marshall, Sit Up." The class snickered a little, but they were with him. He hadn't snickered her hatred, unless you figure she sensed he was different.

The rest of the period we discussed the difference between make-believe and reality. I just sat back and laughed a hollow inside laugh, but Rog steamed. Really. I could smell the heat-hate he felt at the stupid things she was teaching the kids to believe.

"People, of course, can't fly or talk with birds," Miss Wills said, "except in their dreams and imaginations." I shouldn't have done it, but I raised out of my seat half an inch. Nobody but Roger could tell, but he just clenched up still more.

"Roger," she said, "why don't you try to explain the difference between make-believe and reality to the class. If you can." She said it in a real mean way. Even I got mad then.

"There isn't any difference," Roger answered. I fell back to my chair with a thump, knocking my books on the floor. Binder paper scattered in the air. Miss Wills glared at me. Roger just kept on talking. "The only difference is in what you believe you can do . . . and if you don't believe me, I'll prove it . . ." He started to warm up to his words, so I slammed the thought "Oh, lord! Now you've done it!" at him and started to cough like crazy, contracting my windpipe and collapsing my lungs till I really was strangling. It took five minutes for the school nurse to arrive, and I was on the floor writhing around all that time. Poor old Miss Wills hopped around shrieking. "His tongue, his tongue, don't let him swallow his tongue!" Joe Morris tried to open my mouth to find my tongue, and I bit him, hard. He jerked his hand away yelling and swore. "God damn it, oh, oh, damn," shaking his hand like mad. Miss Wills gasped and whacked him on the side of his head, forgetting about me, so I started to hack and choke again.

By the time the excitement was over, with me in the nurse's office rattling in my throat now and again, Joe getting his hand swabbed and bandaged, and Miss Wills sniffing smelling salts, the class was out to recess and no one remembered that Roger had ever said anything. But now I was furious.

Lying there in the whiteness on the nurse's cot, I slowly cooled down, made my heartbeat slow down to normal, and eased my mind by thinking swimming-hole thoughts.

At lunch, the nurse dismissed me to go home, and I set out to track Roger down. It wasn't till after supper that I found him, still on the school grounds. He was way out by the fence, at the end of the playing field, lying belly down in the high grasses. He had his head turned sideways and kept opening one eye and closing the other. I couldn't figure it out until I flopped down and tried it. It's really sharp the way you can make the school buildings disappear into a world of monstrous grass stems that way. Then when you open the topmost eye and close the other, the buildings come back, but from afar, across a miles-wide sweep of savage lawn.

After a while, I rolled over and up, settling myself into an Indian cross-legged crouch. I took a deep breath of evening air, breathed it out, and called Roger inside. "Roger, come on, you dirty quitter, get up. We've got to see this thing through. He wouldn't sit up; he just lay there and sucked on a grass stem, but after a bit he thought a tired "Oh, all right," so I thought "Hook on, boy, we're going for a ride." I could feel him arranging himself in my mind.

I waited for Roger to hook on to my thoughts securely, and then remembered being really little, about six or seven. My dad had taken Spot and me (Spot was my dog, but he died) for a walk out by the Indian digs. They were just a lot of old adobe buildings, fallen to pieces. Nobody lived in them anymore, but they were keen for exploring and for coming to feel the insides of a place. Their home feeling is all gone; now they just echo of mud and earth, so I guess they've been empty for a long time. I still go out there sometimes, to repeat a vow I made because of what I learned there that day.

Anyway, that day I was skinny around and crawling all over the walls, playing in-and-out-the-windows, the way little kids do. Spot was out and about, sniffing down the wind. Pretty soon I couldn't see him any more, but he was still in mind. Dad mainly sat on a hump of adobe. I remember, smoking his pipe and staring out towards the Southwest, kind of soaring with the sunpath. Late in the afternoon—afraid we'd have to head on home soon—I pecked in on his thoughts. Mainly they were patches of rhyming, and a wistful following of the sun westward. He'd just started to climb into this wistful wandering mood, and I was glowing with him and the urge to see new things and places, and then, whom! He started fussing with his pipe, tapping it real hard against his hand, lighting it and tamping tobacco and all, jamming around in his pockets for something he couldn't find. He turned away from the sun and, forcing himself to do it, formed must-do thoughts of Mom and home. He just reined up, and the way he was so set on building a little fenced-in area for his thoughts and his life flooded over me in a nervous rush.

I think he felt watched, cause he stood up stiff and straight and called, "Come on, Billy, time to go home." The word "home" came out weary and heavy sounding. I shivered in the desert coolness.

Dad didn't wait for me; he just turned and started to walk down the slope from the digs, calling and whistling, "Spot, Spot, hereby." But the night wind came up and scattered his voice waves, and Spot was off following a

jack rabbit trail. After a bit, Dad got to stomping around. Seeing me standing there looking puzzled, he snapped, he really snapped it out, "He's your dog—won't you ever learn to keep track of him?"

Boy, I just couldn't figure out what was going on. First of all, I knew where Spot was—why didn't Dad? Mostly though, I didn't answer right back because the words "He's your dog" stumped me. How could anyone own anything, when you all belonged to the same oneness? Spot happened to want to stay with us, because he loved us. After a bit I mumbled something about "He's here; he'll come when we need him," and called Spot in my head. In a couple of minutes he came lop-tonguing up and flopped down panting near us, happy at finding us where he'd left us. All Dad said was, "Well, it's lucky he came back. We'd have had to leave him behind." I didn't say one thing all the way home.

Right after supper that night, I went to bed. Mom thought I was sick. I wasn't, though, I just had a lot of thinking to do. Most of the night I spent realizing that Dad really didn't know where Spot was. After I recovered from the shock-wave that caused, the next step was coming to accept the fact that he called Spot by whistling and yelling because he didn't know or wouldn't accept the fact of any other way. It didn't make much sense to me, but that was how I figured it out.

So from then on, I started watching, watching people build fences and tame themselves. Don't get me wrong, it was a lot of fun, knowing something that everyone else made himself forget. Just like being an orphan.

That was what I remembered with Roger riding shotgun. Until that day at school, it had all been a game. Boy, I felt so rotten inside, realizing the game was over. But I formed one last thought. #Would you rather have it any other way?# and then I let myself feel bad.

Roger pulled on his mauled-up grass blade for a while longer, kind of humming. I just waited, playing here-again, gone-again with the school buildings. He had to want to play the no-longer game again. If he got tired and quit, I'd be alone, and while that had been fine just a handful of weeks ago, it wasn't any more.

"Well," Roger said, dragging out the sound, "what are we going to do now? We can't just go back and pretend everything's all right."

"It's about time you figured that out," I said. He jerked his head up and glared at me.

"Shut your mouth, Rog ol' boy, you're creating a draft."

"Who do you think you're calling 'boy,' vassal?" he asked, and jumped me. We battered each other around for a while and then fell back into the cool of the lawn, letting the night darken around us.

"If Miss Willis ever remembers what you said, we'll be massacred," I said. I knew that word would get him. Roger's always talking about massacres and sieges.

"You're not kidding." He grinned and rolled over on his back to look up into the coming night sky. I knew he was okay again, so I sat back and kept quiet while he pieced puzzles together.

"You know," he said, after a long pause, "there must be other kids . . ." He let the word whisper out. Then his jaw muscles started to bunch and work, and he twisted his mouth all out of shape. "I think this is something that maybe only we can do," he said. "And maybe other kids, if we can find them before they learn too much in school . . . before we learn too much in school, or get too disgusted. Or too lonesome."

All of a sudden I remembered Mrs. Sutton standing deep inside the deep house. It sent shivers all over my skin.

"Hey, Rog ol' boy," I said, hunkering down still farther into the field grasses. "There's some more about the Suttons you've got to know. Mr. Sutton was a one He knew. He once said it was 'racial instinct' that we had, something most people decided they didn't need anymore once they got fire and clothes and knew how to chip arrowheads. But, well, it's like somewhere deep inside a few people still remember. Mr. Sutton called them 'throwbacks,' which always sounded like a football player to me, but he said it meant something more.

"He quit playing football because he was one. But then, well, I guess he got tired of being alone all the time. He sort of made himself forget that he ever remembered, y'know? He told me once that throwbacks go through life apart from everybody else. That was how he said it. He said that it becomes a way of life and you learn to expect that you'll never be able to deep-talk with people.

"See, I was with him, with his mind, right before they crashed. He'd tried to tell Mrs. Sutton about him and about me. And, you know the way thoughts come real strong if they're about you? Well, that sort of linked our minds for a bit. He knew I was there, though, and he didn't mind. But Mrs. Sutton wouldn't believe him. She told him he'd better go see a doctor. Then he got sort of angry and told her again, with his mind. Boy! She screamed and hit out at him, hit him hard across the face with her open hand and her fingernails, so hard that I felt it. Then his mind just snapped closed and I wasn't with him anymore. And that's when he drove into that other car. He just couldn't see inside right then."

"Boy," Roger said. "This is serious. We gotta plan."

"Tomorrow," I said. "Your mom's getting worried."

"Hey, yeah, I better get on home," Roger said, jumping to his feet, "before she decides to keep me in tomorrow."

Everything was all right; I felt like shouting to the night as we headed for home.

Roger had his hands in his hip pockets again and was stretching further and faster than I'd ever seen anybody walk before. His sneakers rolled on the sidewalk like the runners on a rocking horse. I felt really good, too, now. The moon was nearly full and half-way up its skypath, and a few high ice-clouds added dark wisps and hints to the air. Arizona nights are cold, especially in the fall.

We headed down Pueblo Avenue, then cut through the Mitchell's vacant lot and over to Amarillo Way. I vaulted onto the cross-bar of the Stone's picket fence and ran along it, whistling as high and shrill as I could hit, and balanced with my arms, waving them around, playing Phantom-II. The Phantom-II is a supersonic jet bomber we sometimes see flying over from San Diego or San Antonio. If it's a good day for reception, every now and then we've been able to be in the pilot's mind for a couple of seconds.

Thinking of the plane made me scan the sky. I promptly fell off the fence. I made it look like I'd jumped, though. "CollyRoger, lookit up there."

A lone hawk was wheeling way up high in the night sky. I'd never known hawks to hunt at night. Owls, sure, but this wasn't any owl.

We stood there under a blackened street light and watched it circle. Then it swooped and dove whoosh straight down to disappear behind a row of houses. A bit later it rose again, carrying a something I didn't know what, and grew all blurred then blanked out as it flew off.

"Were you with it?" I pounded Roger on the back, the kill was so fresh in my mouth.

"Just towards the end," he said, moving more slowly towards home. "It tasted clean."

"Yeah, I know. Clean and fast. But he wasn't out to hurt." We stopped by Roger's front walk. "I don't think wild things ever hurt on purpose. They leave each other alone, or else they kill." I thought of Miss Wills then, and of Mrs. Sutton.

"Dogs and cats hurt without reason," Roger said.

"Yeah, but I'd bet anything that once long ago they didn't."

That's how we said goodnight, thinking about how people tame animals and train themselves.

The next day, we planned. We planned all day long that Saturday, dangling our feet in the river that runs by the Bailey's ranch. We planned all the time we watched the colts that had just been born in the spring high-leg it in circles around their grazing mothers.

"That's what it is," I said, kicking at a school of minnows that had come over to investigate my heel. The water broke our reflections into millions of rainbow-drops, and then came back whole again. "The wild horses. You ever seen one?"

Roger nodded a "no" and flung another flat skipping stone across the river. It bounced once, twice . . . five good bounces and then a whole slew of little bunched-together hops.

"The wild horses," I said again. "They're sort of stubby and scrawny to look at—compared to quarter-horses or thoroughbreds, anyway." The Bailey's train polo ponies and cutting horses, so those were the two breeds across the river.

"Mr. Sutton grew up on a ranch, and he said it's because of too much sagebrush and pine tree bark when the winters get rough. His dad used to break wild horses, but some horses never could be broken. Mr. Sutton said they'd sooner die than become domestic and tame. He always liked those best of all, and thought they should be set free again, but his father kept them and sold them to the rodeos. Mr. Sutton said that his father had actually been doing what was best for the ranch, even though it hardly seemed fair. He said that once a wild pony knew where the riding stock was kept, he'd come down from the high country to whicker over the fence at the horses inside. Every once in a while a mare would break and run, would leap over that corral fence and take off with the mustang. Somewhere deep inside, Mr. Sutton said, the saddle ponies, even if they'd been born in a barn, remembered the days when all horses ran free. And even if the run-aways came back, they were somehow changed, different. The rest of the remuda would avoid them for a long time, would kick out to hurt them if they tried to come too close. Mr. Sutton said that the wilderness smell had to wear off before the others would accept them again. So his father never let the un-broken broncs go free. They could have wrecked the whole system."

Roger didn't answer me back. He sat there on that log for half an hour I'd bet, not saying a thing. He just dangled his feet toward the water, sitting all stump-shouldered. Every once in a while he'd wriggle his feet like something was wrong with a leg muscle. I thought about tossing him a quick dig or mind-block before he could build his mind's brick wall. It wasn't such a hot idea, though, so finally I let myself fall over backwards into the river. With my stupid clothes on. Roger didn't think I was very funny, but he helped pull me back onto the log.

I was sitting at my end of the log, still dripping, and watching the way the water drops mussed up the reflection of the clouds and sky, when Roger came out with his big truth. It was one, too. I'm not laughing at it.

"I sure know one thing," he said, sober as could be. "There's gotta be more of us, or we'll give up some day. And you'd come to hate me, whenever you looked at me and remembered we just weren't strong enough. It's one—or it's lots. But it can't be just two."

That's why everybody thinks Roger drowned in old Shady Creek two Septembers ago. They never could find a body, but my wet clothes and the fact that I was totally incoherent for two days convinced them that he fell in and knocked his head or something. We planned it that way. I played incoherent because Roger figured that I wouldn't have been able to tell a bald-faced lie. I wouldn't have, either. It would have hurt everybody too much, coming from me instead of from inside themselves.

Roger's parents still live next door. Roger thought them into it right before he left for The Quest. They've got a nine month old daughter named Susan Jean. She's a one, maybe more than either of us. Already that makes three.

I've been calling Roger nearly every evening for the past two months to try to tell him about his sister, but I think he's switched off to long distance signals. He's too busy sending. Sometimes I can catch his calls. They come through clean and hard, like the hawk diving.

So I'm waiting. Waiting and baby-sitting for Susan Jean Marshall. Sue can mind-talk with me, but so far without words. I'm trying to teach her that not all people know the things she does, and that she's got to pretend to be a saddle pony. Otherwise people get scared. And when they're scared, when they're afraid of something they don't want to remember, people are more likely to kill than to understand. Mrs. Sutton taught me that.

We've got lots of time, though. And Roger needs to find at least one more girl, for when we all grow up.

Recently, I've been trying to wish Mom and Dad into having another kid. A couple of nights ago I overheard Mom saying, "Oh, Jonathan, I'm too old to go through all *that* again," so I think maybe it's working.

Wayward Horse

I'll try once more to break him,
That one there,
The snorting demon of a wayward horse.
See how he stands against the gate,
His cheekbones resting on the topmost rail?
He's looking out to pasture, but all he's done
With all that tearing at the poles
Is bare his cannon tendons to the bone.
I'll have him,
Or send him, as I swore,
To fetch his market price in fishing bait
When Jake can come to haul the carcass out.
This time I'll press him to the post
If I should heave him to his death against the ropes.
He's long past use to me with all his rearing, snorting ways.
But today we'll clear the thing between us, once and all.
My God, what folly makes him toss and pitch against the lines?
There's no way round the halter and the breaker's hand
But somehow ends with dangling from a butcher's hooks.

JEFFREY S. GRANGER, JR.

The Dead Sailors: To One On The Shore

We who have passed, longing, to the sea,
We who have died in the sea,
Sometimes walk the sand
Roam the sea edge, trackless,
When the waves are down;
And one we see each dawn,
Is to us a sister.
Marveling at her pale free glory,
How she winds her hair with salt drops
And twists our joy to sorrow with a song,
We fancy, even, she has wings
Like gulls a-storm,
Flying sidewise to the wind.

Were our tongues the small-flecked waves
We would lick her basking toes
And then endeavor sweetly,
Our weak mouths all on hers,
To suck out the threads of life.
But she plays away from water
And her eyes strike skyward, not at sea,
Searching for the noise of lonely birds,
Strong-lipped sea-birds.
Late, she turns, full of watching,
Grey eyes to the static sands,
Her footsteps tracing dips of silver
And loudly crying, still,
As we put out to green rest,
Speaking not of morning and the day.
There in weedy wreaths,
Half a-dream we lie,
Thinking birds may die
And fill the waves with feathers;
Then, that we could fly.

SYLVIA EIDAM

Desideratum

I.
I have been with you
In empty rooms unlighted.
Waiting to speak, I
Touched your wrist, lip, fingertip.
I have watched black firs
In the white-gold twilight sky;
My arms on the sill,
My head on my hand, waiting.
And all the days gone
And done and damaged and dead;
All the nights silent
And longed for, loved in, and lost.
My head on my knees.
Your asking what's wrong? And what's
Wrong? Quivering lids,
Kissed and cool and closed. Waiting.

II.

Imperceptibly,
The morning came to catch us
Unaware at love,
Pressing at the glass quickly,
Pulling at our shoes
Beside the bed; surprising
Us at breakfast juice;
Reading the World and waiting.

The years which have pushed
Have passed and pulled us. We have
Given up the touch.
We speak to tempt the memory
Of breath blown dreaming
On your shoulder, all a sigh;
Sleeping at sunrise,
A sea-sleep, tided, all a sigh . . .

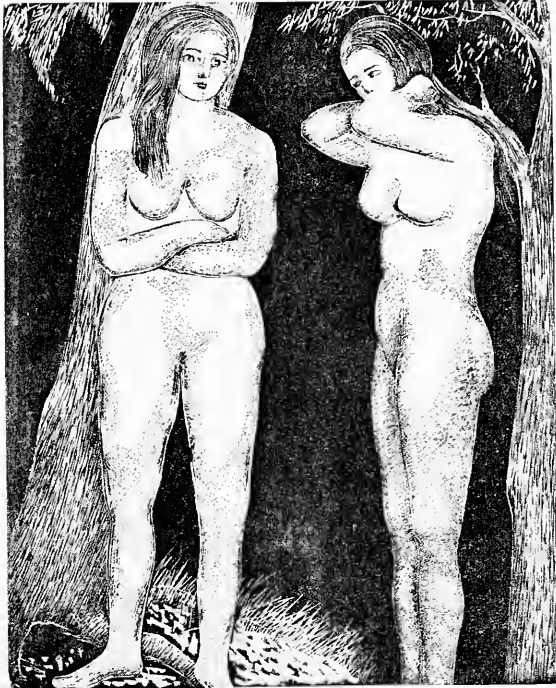
MARTHA PROTHRO

Clear Pane In Stained Glass

Brown beams vault to heaven,
Disappear in gloom
Over cold cobbles,
Paining knees for centuries,
And rock dead pews
Forcing backs and buttocks
Of fathers, sons, and their sons:
Rise, kneel, sit, stay
Under the archéd gloom.

But through this window
Observe the moon:
A winged unicorn flies across
Pulling souls of the dead
Strung together
Like hollow diamonds
That touch and
Ring like crystal bells.

TINA HILLQUIST



WOOD ENGRAVING
GEKI WU

Portent

The trees begrudged her coming
But were forced.
Green habit and roan stallion
Tore limbs apart and united with the wood.

No sound was there
Except relentless rattle of the leaves,
No light for way
But single cold green glow.

Time, bound and hanged,
Awaited up ahead
Just where the churlish cedar
Blocked her path.

She reined to recognize
The venerable tree,
And mist rose up to
Put her in her place.

Her mount raised hooves
In deference to age
While keening, shrieking cat cry
Pierced the haze.

PATRICIA ROBERTS WOLFE

Epilogue To An Evening

He speaks in his sleep —
(Incoherent as the spilling sounds of night
Where we have never been) —
Something slightly dreadful in the tone,
More his own, perhaps,
Than that he kissed me with tonight.
I am a child afraid of closets,
Locked in one for something sister did,
Confusing guilt myself;
Locked in arms so unaware of me,
I too forget the reason I am held —
(Arms that pull me in his universe,
Unknowingly and not at all in love).

This other darkness in the room
Is refuge after his.

MARTHA PROTHRO

Lines To The Children, From A Fowl

I mount up as with wings, pretending.
There is no air to beat.
There is no wind to fill my bones;
Empty, I plummet to the dust,
Flapping on the rusted sands
At all Their feet,
Their brown, steel-strung feet
And Their trenchant toes.
My red eyes of blood
Are pierced straight through
By Their illegitimate fingers;
My keeper
Has picked me naked.
They have done this, laughing,
Even at my singing,
At this, today Their favorite game.

SYLVIA EIDAM

Witch and Toad

Unwarranted friend, we have hunched too long
In this enchanted wood, stretched tight
With small wrinkles. Our song
For rain has come to nothing.

It has happened that children have feared
My kiss, seeing that I kept friendship
With such a one as you,
And have all sought other rooms
And not my antiqued frog-house.

Useless the years spent in hunting them.
Old and empty flap my hands;
I have found no potion save that
Which dribbles down my eves,
Which is jabbed through these clotted fingers
By the wind, to water brown dirt
For a thirsty, dying toad.

See. The silence
Crawls along my skin like so many bugs.

Now, that the night has come again,
That my heart is somewhat patched
With these spotted leaves dropped here
Upon our backs, let us stop this bootless talk.
I will sit alone with you
And we will sing for those sterile tears,
And for the children who ran away.

SYLVIA EIDAM

Spectre

He belongs to cold starlight.
The night wind that stalks the fir trees
Quivering on the winter mountain
Rumbles his starvation.
Trapped by the pale blue walls of civility,
He paces off the night in steady, hungry steps,
Cocking his ears toward the mountain and the wind.
When darkness fades and hope is paralyzed,
He spreads his lithe hulk on a silken sheet,
Smoothly draws grey morning to the subtle muscle,
And turns his slanted eyes inward
To an evening star that never sets.
Sleep is no giver of peace:
The dream lies grim about his mouth;
His body is icy as the night wind
On the winter mountain,
Or the cold starlight.

JANE GROSSNICKLE

Time-Ties

I am held by these woman strings,
The stains on a favorite rug,
Nights under well-known cover
And days become dusk with a shrug.

(Once we walked down the dusty morning
With our arms confused until tea,
Every Sunday kicking the same leaves
And speaking so bravely of these:)

The muddy pies no one could love,
The tears for a broken plate.
I have watched my timers too carelessly
To notice them ticking too late.

(Once the wind blew a night about this house
And pressed us warmly to this fire
On whose lap I settle nightly now,
Repairing coats we'll need.)

MARTHA PROTHRO



WOODCUT
INA VON McINNIS

Key to the City

by DIANE OLIVER

One story . . . two stories . . . five stories . . . Continue counting until the windows become blurred, then add ten. An apartment building . . . Not a very unusual one—Chicago has several housing units designed from this same architectural plan. The early morning sun sparkles on the windows. Hundreds of window panes glisten in the sun, leaving a transparent glow on the building. A chalky white sidewalk juts in and out of green park benches, following the brick contours of the apartment unit.

In another region of the country, the peaches are yellowing on the tree near a small unpainted frame house. In sunlight, the sides of the house are brownish grey. On the side of the yard nearest the peach tree, three thin-necked chickens wander around, scratching the clay. The house and the chickens belong together. They were a part of the farm land when the first tenants moved in a generation ago.

In the smallest bedroom of the white house, the cord belonging to the Manila window shade swings back and forth, pushed by a slight breeze, making a queer tapping sound on the window ledge. Directly across from the room's single window, a big imitation mahogany bed is set squarely on the floor. Suddenly the next door dog barks at the chickens, and the hens, enjoying the excitement, giggle with cackles as they flap across the yard.

At the peak of the noise, a thin brown hand reached out, grasped the sheet, and pulled it tightly toward the top of the bed. The figure on the other side grunted, and turned in the direction of the slowly moving sheet.

"Move over Babycake," a sleepy voice muttered.

Babycake made another peculiar sound, turned over, and was quiet.

The room was still except for the continuous ticking of a big white alarm clock stuck on a table in the crowded corner of the room. A pair of jeans, two tee-shirts, and a baby-doll lay on the arm of the chair. A few minutes passed. The same hand crept from under the covers. A pair of dark eyes peeped over the sheet and stared absently at the clock as if counting the tick-tocks.

Only six-thirty. She slid down under the covers and thought about getting up. She knew the alarm would not ring for an half-hour yet. The sheet muffled her yawn but this time the burial was short-lived. On one side of the bed, the cover was thrown back and a small brown-skinned girl sat on the edge of the bed, wrinkling her nose in an effort to wake up.

With her big toe, Nora Murray felt under the edge of the bed trying to find her bedroom slippers. Finding one rubber thong sandal, she slipped it on and rubbed the rough pine floor under the bed until her foot touched its mate. One, maybe two seconds passed. Then found, two blue sandals. She slid off the bed, careful not to wake Babycake, and made her way to the window. Raising the half-lowered shade, she looked past the chickens scratching up the grass, seeing instead the picture of Chicago her father's letters described.

Chicago. She whispered the word. Chicago was on the water front. They had arrived yesterday she decided. And from her father's letters she felt as if she knew this neighborhood. From the tenth floor where their new apartment was located, she watched a Pet Milk truck turn the corner, beginning the early morning milk run. A few minutes later Officer Todd passed McConnell's Grocery and Drug store, completing the first round of his six-thirty A.M. police beat. This section wasn't exactly the nicest part of town, but then she didn't expect it be.

She had known she was going to be a city girl for years now. But this—All those buildings and things down there. She had never dreamed the city would look like this. Back home the county courthouse wasn't even as big as the apartment building she was standing in right now. Why this place made Mayor Dodge's house look like a little chicken farm. Chicken farm? Now why would she think about—Good heavens! She had almost forgotten. It was time to go out and get the eggs. Nora dressed quickly and hurried out the back door.

She was so excited she could hardly count the eggs. After her graduation from high school, they had all planned how they would make the big move. Tomorrow, finally, the family would leave. After saving Mama's egg money, her baby-sitting money, and the few dollars Daddy had sent before he got so busy he didn't have time to write, they had saved enough money for the bus trip. And she was sure her father was saving money in the Chicago bank. He had a good part time job, he said. Tomorrow, she, and Mattie, and Mama, and Babycake planned to ride all the way from Still Creek to Chicago without ever leaving the bus except when they all had to go to the bathroom.

Mama probably would have a time with Babycake. She always got sick whenever she rode for a long time. And they couldn't wash her very well in those bus station bath rooms. But they would get to that later. Her Daddy, she knew, would meet them at the downtown bus station. He would be awfully glad to see them. A lot of people around Little Square said that he'd left them and wasn't going to send for them or even see them again. She had known better. If he said he would send for his family, he would. Besides, when he first married her mama, he promised they'd get away to Chicago. Which was really why Mama took on another job instead of staying with the kids. With both of them working full time, she figured she could save some money.

Nora had so many things to tell him, she could never write down every thing in one letter. She would rather wait until she saw him. Neither one of them was very much for writing letters, and he had missed her graduation program. He hadn't even heard her valedictorian speech. It was a good speech, everybody said it was. And then when the time for the program came, she didn't make a single mistake.

After Mr. Douglas awarded the diplomas, he announced the two members of the class who would go on to college. Which was really why they were moving. Her parents said she could go to a branch of the city college practically free and finish up her education. They were moving so she could have a chance to be something better than Mrs. Pringle's maid. Even thinking of that Mrs. Pringle made her mad. Maybe a teacher. Yes, she would like that. History always had been her favorite subject, she could be a history teacher. And then they wouldn't have to live in an apartment, they could afford a real house. Even one with a real yard.

They had planned to move "one of these days" for as long as she could remember. She could repeat their special family formula backwards, frontwards, and even sideways. They had talked about it ever since she was a little girl. Mama and Daddy would get jobs up North, and with the money she could earn, she would eventually get through college. Then she would put Mattie through and Mattie would see to it that Babycake graduated. And of course if any other sisters or brothers came along, they would do the same thing for them.

She waved to Mrs. McAuley who was hanging out clothes next door. Already early morning sounds had be-

gun in the neighborhood. Behind the chicken coop, she could hear the grinding noise of Mr. Johnson's tractor. Yes, a history teacher, she decided definitely. So she could have an electric washing machine and drive a Buick.

She had seen a brand new Buick once, a long time ago. She was walking home with Jimmy Douglas and for some reason the fifth grade let out early that day. When they were half-way home, they saw the lady Mrs. McAuley worked for driving her home. She had taken sick on the job, and the lady had put her right on the front seat. She wondered even then how it felt to ride in a car like that. Later, she told Mama about Mrs. McAuley and the white lady bringing her home.

"Why can't we have a car?" she had asked. Her father just laughed and said right now they couldn't even afford a pair of roller skates. How childish she must have sounded. Even then she should have realized their money was always low.

She hadn't thought about Jimmy for weeks. He was at the summer science institute of the Negro branch of the state university. Ever since she won the first prize in biology he hadn't said very much to her. She guessed he wouldn't write her from college in the fall. But if he got angry over a school prize, he wasn't worth worrying about. Still, she wondered if he would remember the Buick.

The Edwards, their neighbors three doors up, had been the first people in Little Square to own a car. It was a 1948 Chevrolet. She had ridden in that one lots of times. In fact, they were to be driven to the bus station in the Edwards' car. That was just a day away and even thinking about leaving home made her throat feel a little funny.

Mama and she started packing the day after school was closed. They had begun very systematically. The little kids' stuff went into the last suitcase. They were to be kept quiet and out of the way with some of their play things. Only it hadn't worked out that way. Every thing went along fine until Mattie decided to help. Oh . . . that Mattie. Even her name almost made Nora drop an egg. Mattie had dumped over a whole cardboard box, which they had to fix up all over again. Trying to pack with two little girls in the house made her nervous. Twice she found herself trying to pack the butter dish with butter still in it.

By the time the eggs were gathered and set up high on top of the ice box, Mama had long since been off to work. Nora made Mattie and Babycake mayonnaise and egg sandwiches for breakfast, and fixed a fried egg for herself. After they were through eating, she tried to persuade the two little girls to play house outside. But in an hour they were tired and wanted to help her.

"Go on, Mattie, go back outdoors and play." She was losing her patience now.

"But we don't got nothing to play with," Mattie said, determined not to leave. "Margie and Tanker-Belle are all packed up and you said we won't see them again until we get there."

Mattie's brown eyes began watering as if she were going to cry. Margie and Tanker-Belle were the two dolls of the family. Tanker-Belle had been one of those fancy toaster cover dolls. Some well-meaning aunt on Mama's side had sent Mama a cover for her toaster as a Christmas gift. Which would have been nice, but they didn't have a toaster.

Mattie had practically confiscated the doll and for reasons known only to Mattie had named her Tanker-Belle. She had spent most of her time since Christmas in the Pretend House back of the pecan tree. Tanker-Belle was rather frayed now, after having spent several nights in the rain.

Now Nora explained to the little girls that at last she was going to have a nice long rest. She had packed the

doll immediately after breakfast while Mattie was busy with something else. Tanker-Belle was now inside of the big roasting pan with the dictionary and the kitchen forks. But Mattie insisted that she knew Tanker-Belle was lonely inside of the turkey pan.

"I'll tell you what, Mattie," Nora said as she tried to comfort the sobbing child. "Look on my dresser and get a nickel out of the blue bag. You go find Babycake and you all walk up to Mr. Jame's store for a double orange popsicle. Then go play in the Pretend House until lunch time."

"Can I, Nora! Oh, can I?" Mattie's smile stopped the tears running down her cheeks. She raced out of the little hall way jumping over boxes and through the bedroom for a nickel. In a second she was calling Babycake and the two little girls started up the road.

Five dollars and ninety-five cents worth of graduation money was left. Nora kept a mental record of her savings since June. Well, it was worth the money to get them out of the house. They would never be ready to leave at this rate.

She stooped down and began cramming some books in another cardboard box, in a hurry to move on to something else. By the time the little girls were finished with the popsicle, it would be time for their naps. Nora tied a string around the box and made a double knot. If she could just have an hour by herself, she could finish the packing.

She sat down on the floor and reached up to the table for the sugar can. Mrs. Pringle wouldn't let Mama off early from work. And because they needed all the money she could earn, Mama wouldn't just walk out. She emptied the sugar from the can into a brown paper bag. In fact, Mrs. Pringle had acted really nasty about the trip. The least Mama could have done was to help her find another cook. Well, Mama had tried, but with the new factory hiring colored help now, nobody much wanted an all day job like that with the Pringles. Nora stood up and downed the can in a pot of dish water. She picked up the dish rag and began scrubbing.

A noise that sounded like a rock hitting the wire of the chicken coop made Nora drop the rag and step out of the back door.

"Babycake, you and Mattie stop bothering the chickens. We won't get any eggs if you keep on. What's wrong with you anyway?"

"Babycake wants all the popsicle, Nora. And you gave it to me, didn't you Nora?"

By the time Mattie explained about the popsicle and how Babycake had gotten angry and thrown a rock at the chickens, Babycake was crying, Mattie, upon seeing Babycake's tears, had begun to cry herself. Nora stood there outdone. Faced with two squealing little girls and her with all that work to do.

"I can tell," Nora said firmly, "that it's time for two naps. Give me the popsicle and you can eat it after you've had a nap." She marched her sisters through the back door, stopped to deposit the ice cream on the kitchen table, and continued toward the bedroom. While she undressed the little girls, the popsicle lay forgotten.

Fifteen minutes passed. Babycake was asleep. Mattie who was ready to get up again decided she was not sleepy and began singing to herself. Nora had to stop packing again and tell her to be quiet. She didn't notice the popsicle until she saw the sticky orange drops on the floor. Oh, not on her clean floor. . . . She took a rag from under the sink and dunked it in water. While she was sprinkling soap powder on the cloth, she ate a bite of popsicle. Mama didn't believe in letting anything go to waste. The melted popsicle came up without scrubbing; she took another bite.



WOODCUT
REBECCA BARHAM

Nora rinsed the rag in the water and wiped the spot again. She would have to spend another nickel for some more ice cream. She wiped up the table and swallowed what was left of the dripping orange popsicle.

Nora worked all evening, sorting clothes, folding linen, and packing kitchen utensils. Finally, the boxes were ready to go.

In the morning the smell of freshly fried chicken lingered throughout the house. The two friers Mama killed last night plus the one Mrs. McAuley brought over would last them the time the trip would take. In the bottom of the lunch basket were three sweet potato pies and a brown bag full of the Georgia peaches that grew wild in their back yard.

In an half-hour, according to the schedule propped on an empty milk bottle on the kitchen table, everybody would be ready to pile in the Edwards' car for the bus station. She was glad they didn't have to move every thing. The Edwards were going to keep all the house pieces in their barn until they sent for the furniture.

The two big beds already had been dismantled and Mattie's roll-away cot was folded up near the front door. Nora walked from the hall into the living room. The whole house looked so empty. Even the mantel Daddy built over the fireplace looked bare without the pine cones and greenery. The gold pine cones Mattie painted at school had been packed away. All of the window shades were down and rolled up on the floor. Even the woodwork was clean.

All summer the neighbors had been saving newspapers for the Murrays. The papers certainly came in handy now. Nora covered the living room sofa with sheets of the *Still Creek Bugle*. Suddenly she smiled. Even covered with newspapers the sofa cushions sagged. She decided to leave the newspapers in the hall. Mrs. Edwards might need them for house cleaning.

By seven-thirty Babycake had been freshly washed and ironed for the trip. She was commanded to sit still on the front stoop and announce the Edwards' arrival. Mattie who also had been dared to get dirty, kept her company. The two little girls sat on the first step, facing the swing tied to the pine tree. Their sliding feet had trampled the little bits of grass growing beneath the rope swing. Scattered in the yard were a few green weeds the chickens had not pecked away. Babycake reached over and gave the potted Christmas cactus a good bye pat. The leaves were shiny because she had poured water over them this morning. Mama wanted the plant to be clean when Mrs. Edwards took home the pot.

All at once there was a honk from the horn and a long lanky boy, the oldest of the Edwards' boys, was running up the stairs.

"Pop says are y'all ready yet?" Without giving them a chance to answer he started piling boxes in the trunk of the car. Babycake and Mattie were so scared they would get dirty and get left they did everything Nora told them to do.

"Mattie, pick up the little shoe box . . . Babycake, make sure we got the lunch. No, I'll take care of the lunch, you grab the hat box over there."

Their little house had never been so cluttered and then so empty. Come to think of it, their neighborhood seldom had seen such excitement.

Everybody in Little Square was at the bus station to see the Murrays off. There was no need to ask how they'd gotten there. Those few people who had cars drove down and piled in as many neighbors as they could. Uncle Ben, Aunt Mabel's husband, was one of those who had walked the three quarters of a mile to the bus station. Mabel had caught a ride. Anyway, they were all there. A mass of black

humanity overflowed the little waiting room marked, "Colored."

In one corner of one-half of Still Creek Bus Terminal, Mattie sat on an upright box as Aunt Mabel gave her pig-tails a quick brushing. When she had tied each end with a bright yellow ribbon, Mabel thumped Mattie on the neck and pushed her off the box toward her Mama's voice that attempted to round up the family.

Nora saw Aunt Mabel trying to catch Uncle Ben's eye. Mabel tried to speak above the noise in the room.

"Haven't been this many people here since they brought that Jackson boy's body home," she said. "You know the one who was killed overseas three years ago."

While Uncle Ben and Aunt Mabel discussed the community gatherings at the station during the last five years. Mama was getting ready to buy their tickets. Somebody got up so she could sit down and count out the money for four one-way tickets to Chicago.

Mattie was hanging over her shoulders wide-eyed. "Mama," she breathed, "are we rich?"

"Hush child, I'm trying to count." When she had counted out the correct amount of money four times, she tied what was left into a handkerchief and put it in the blue denim purse which in turn went into her genuine imitation leather cowhide bag. Still counting silently, she made her way to the ticket window. When the man had given her the tickets and counted out the change, Nora felt like giving a glorious hallelujah of relief. At times like this she always felt something wrong was going to happen. She could imagine the fare going up and them without enough money having to go back home.

With Mama talking to Aunt Mabel, Nora slipped out of the side door for a final look at her home town. The Georgia landscape was shallow and dull, and to her eyes that had seen no other part of the country, beautiful. Even this early in the morning a thickness had settled over the countryside, covering everything with a film of fine red dust. She fingered the purse inside of her pocket. Six dollars even she had now. Mrs. Edwards had given her a dime to buy some candy or something in case she got hungry on the way.

The sound of voices inside the waiting room reached her ears. She could hear Aunt Mabel crying, louder and louder. The voices seemed to reach out and carry her with them. The bus—the bus must have come. Quickly she shut her purse and ran back toward the waiting room.

Sure enough there was her mother frantically hugging and kissing everybody and thanking them for all the good things they had done for the Murrays. Mattie was pulling Mama's hand and begging her to hurry up before they got left. Seeing Nora, her mother beckoned her to come and get Mattie and Babycake for a final trip to the bathroom.

By the time everybody had been pushed out of the waiting room, the men had most of the luggage stored underneath the bus. Then began the last minute hugging and kissing and gift-giving all over again. Nora felt a dollar bill pressed into her hand. She couldn't help the tears, but she knew Uncle Ben really didn't have any money to spare. She bent over and kissed the old man on his cheek.

The bus driver checked his watch and in a dry matter-of-fact voice announced that anybody who was leaving with him had better hurry up and get on because he was leaving in exactly two shakes. Finally the steel door closed. In the rear of the bus, their noses pressed against the window panes, the four Murrays waved goodbye to friends and neighbors and to Still Creek, Georgia, "the original home of fine Georgia peaches."

After hours of riding, Nora lost track of the towns they passed. The slight joggling of the bus didn't even make her head hurt any more. Still Creek seemed so far away. She

had never been a long way from home before. Except once when she was five, they made a trip to Atlanta. She spent the whole morning almost kneeling in her seat, counting the split-level houses. What would all those people in the cars think, she wondered, if they looked up and saw her staring down at them. Heavens knows what they did was none of her business.

At the next rest stop, Nora decided to stretch her legs in the bus aisle. Mama herself took the little girls inside for a glass of milk and a trip to the bathroom. When the bus started again, she began telling a fairy tale to Mattie. But she didn't have very long to think about stories. A few minutes after the rest stop the accident happened. Little Babycake stuffed herself with too much sweet potato custard and lost all of her dinner on the back seat of the bus. They tried to clear up the seat with some old waxed paper, but they couldn't clean and pay attention to Babycake too.

Babycake started crying. Her stomach hurted and she wanted to go home. Mama tried to hush her, but the more she patted, the more Babycake cried. By the time the odor had spread throughout the bus, Mama sent Nora up to the bus driver to ask him if he would stop and let Babycake get her stomach settled.

Nora stood up and held on to the seat, cautiously walking up the aisle. She wished the bus had a ceiling rail, then she could keep her balance. She looked at the back of the bus driver's grayish blue suit. After hours of riding, the jacket still looked freshly pressed. He didn't even turn around when she approached the driver's seat. He looked into the mirror instead of glancing at her.

"My little sister's sick," she explained. "If she could get some air, my mother said she might feel better." She held on to the pole near the front steps facing the back of the driver's gray head.

Muttering something unintelligible, he said No. He had lost enough time and would be stopping soon anyway. They would just have to wait like everybody else.

While she was standing in the aisle, the bus picked up speed and turned a sharp curve. Nora felt herself fall against two elderly women who were sitting with pastel handkerchiefs to their noses. And although the bus was airconditioned, one was struggling trying to raise the window. Glaring at her, the other woman helped Nora get her balance by elbowing her in the ribs.

"Dirty nigger," she whispered.

Nora was not certain she had heard the woman speak, but even thinking of the words hurt her ears. Nobody'd ever called her a nigger to her face before. At least not like that. She travelled the rest of the trip hearing nothing but the woman's words. When she looked up the bus had pulled into a station and after a few minutes she felt the wheels moving again. She didn't know how many rest stops the bus made. Once, as she turned toward the window she realized the daylight had changed into darkness. Nora even forgot to watch for the sign telling them they had crossed the Illinois state line.

Mattie wanted her to play Crampa Bear, but Nora did not feel like playing games. She sat at the back of the bus, making up things to think about, trying not to remember the words. She was almost asleep when the bus turned into an entrance, pulled up to the curb and stopped.

Because there were so many bundles to carry out, they were the last people getting off the bus. Babycake was the first to see him. She caught hold of Mama's hand yelling "Here we are, Here we are," and started to run across the terminal to the man in the tweed overcoat. Nora had to hold her back. The man Babycake saw was not her father. He was a little too tall, and when he passed the family, he just looked at them strangely.

They stood outside the big glass door with the little packages, waiting and looking through each crowd of people, but no one came. After fifteen minutes and two "May I Help You's" Mama guided them through the revolving door and to a bench in the middle of the station. "That way he can see us when he comes," she explained. They sat down on the bench and Nora again braided Mattie and Babycake's hair. And then there was nothing to do but wait.

He was supposed to be here. They had sent the letter last Friday telling him the exact time of their arrival. Babycake was getting sleepy again, "Where's Daddy?", she asked. "Aren't we there now?" Mama told her to hush up and motioned for Nora to get up. "Maybe he can't find us," she whispered.

An hour had passed, Nora stood up. "Where you going, Nora?" Mattie asked.

"To check the luggage." Nora began walking down the side of the terminal, near the shiny cigarette machine and past the magazine rack. Everything glittered with a metallic glow, but the fluorescent lighting only emphasized the emptiness inside her. She looked up and saw an overhead panel advertising a course in speedwriting—gt - - gd - - jb . . . Then she met Elizabeth Taylor's gaze beneath the sign pointing to the telephone booth.

At once she was aware of what had happened. He was working overtime, and had overslept. She had the apartment building's telephone number from one of her first letters. She would call. Nora slipped into the booth and loosened a dime from her money collection. With sticky fingers, she lifted the receiver and dialed the number. The phone rang once, and a voice answered: "McConnell's Drug Store—Hello? This is McConnell's Drug Store."

"Please," Nora whispered, "could I speak with Mr. Joseph Murray?"

"Sorry Miss, but no Joe Murray works here."

"But don't you know him?"

"No, but I'll check the list of people working in the building." In two minutes he was back and he was sorry, but no Murray was even listed there.

Nora emerged from the booth and stood at the lockers, wondering if she should look outside when she felt someone bump into her. She turned around quickly, but it was only a woman tugging on a little boy who murmured "Excuse me." Nora abruptly pulled away and ran toward the doors out to the walkway into the darkness.

She tried to brush the air from her face, but when she removed her fingers they were damp. She stood outside until her eyes were dry.

Nora went back to the station bench and whispered to her mother who was sitting down quietly. She and Mama agreed—they would spend the night in the terminal, just in case. She watched her mother cover Babycake with a coat, her face turned from Nora as if afraid she might cry. Nora wondered if she had known all the time. Strange that it was morning already, outside the sky was still dark. Later they would call the welfare people, something they'd never done before, and they would find them a place to stay.

Stepping over the suitcases piled near the bench holding Babycake, Nora began sorting out bundles. She'd probably have to babysit for a while, until Mama found a job and a place to leave the little girls during the day. She began fingering the boxes. Today was Saturday and Mattie and Babycake's Sunday dresses would need ironing, but she'd worry about that later. Their ribbons didn't have to be pressed, if she could ever remember where they were.

Slowly Nora put down the box. Her shoulders slid down the back of the bench. She couldn't press anything, she couldn't even remember where they had packed the iron.

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