

Tuesday, April 20, 1982

8:15 p.m.

Reading
Josephine Jacobsen
Maclean Auditorium
Presser Hall

Wednesday, April 21, 1982

11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Reading
Doris Betts
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

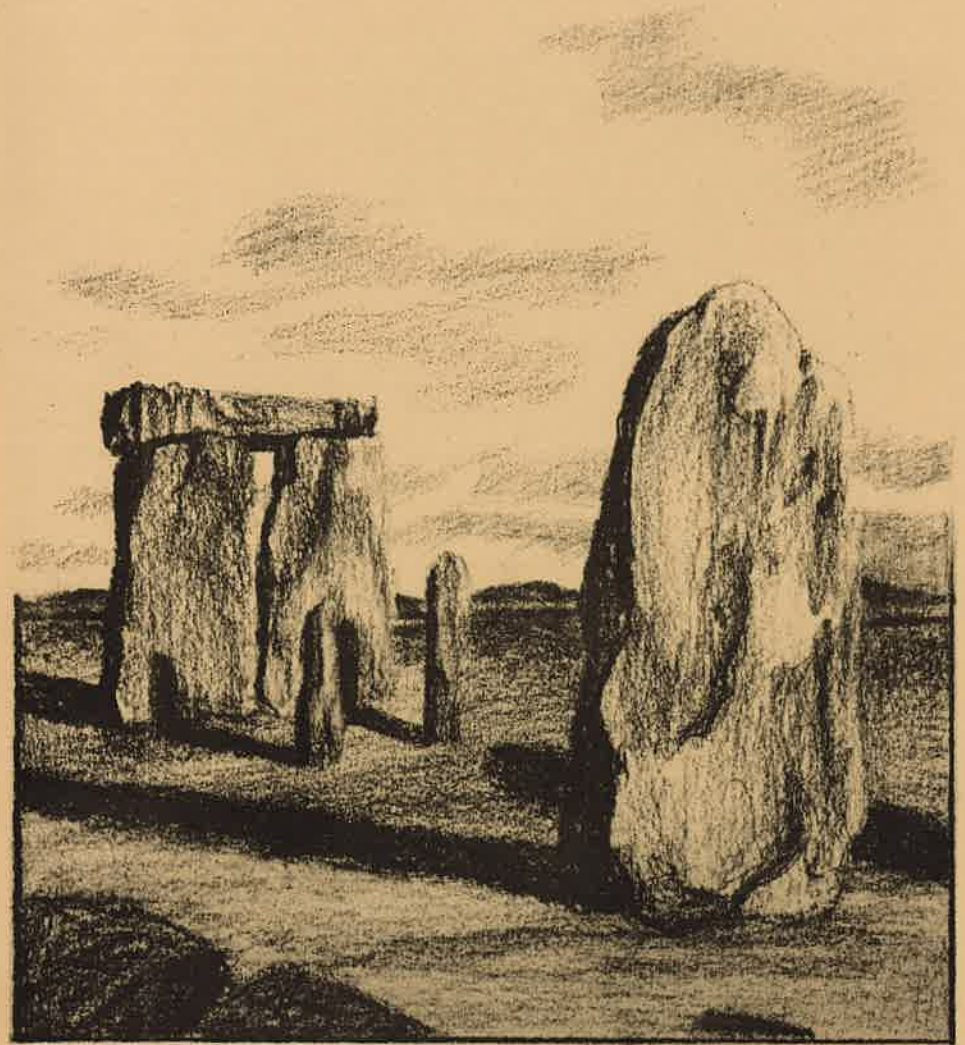
3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion of Student Work
Margaret Atwood
Doris Betts
Josephine Jacobsen
Gretchen Schulz, Moderator
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

8:15 p.m.

Presentation of Prizes
Reading
Margaret Atwood
Winter Theatre
Dana Fine Arts

The Festival Committee wishes to thank President Marvin B. Perry, Jr., and Eleanor Hutchens for their support.



*Agnes Scott
Writers' Festival 1982*

Participants

Margaret Atwood is a poet, fiction writer, critic, and ex-teacher. She has taught at the University of British Columbia and Sir George Williams University. She is the author of thirteen books of poetry, from *Double Persephone* (1961) to *Selected Poems* (1978) and *Two-Headed Poems* (1978). Among her publications in fiction are *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), and *Life Before Man* (1979).

Dorris Betts is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), where in 1973 she received the Tanner Award for excellence in undergraduate teaching. Her novels and collections of stories include *The Gentle Insurrection* (1954), *Tall Houses in Winter* (1957), *Scarlet Thread* (1965), *The Astronomer and Other Stories* (1966), *The River to Pickle Beach* (1972), and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (1973).

Josephine Jacobsen, Honorary Consultant in American Letters, Library of Congress, is the author of five books of poetry, from *For the Unlost* (1946) to *The Shade Seller* (1974). Her latest book is *A Walk with Raschid and Other Stories* (1978). Her poetry is widely anthologized. Among collections containing her fiction are *Best American Short Stories* (1966) and *Fifty Years of the American Short Story* (1970).

Gretchen Schulz is Assistant Professor of Humanities at Oxford College of Emory University where she heads the freshman writing program and sponsors the student newspaper and INK, Oxford's writing club. She has long been a supporter of The Agnes Scott Writers' Festival.

writers' festival
1982

Spring, 1982

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**To Awaken In
Two Places Distant As An Animal**

1.
Under me is damp and color of dead hog.
The slag of a dream still hopelessly dredging for sleep
Warns me I will be drunk,
Lying with my face on the black spine
Of a pig with my shoes on. But a goat
From the last charred shadows of sleep
Angles the hook of a hoof
Level with my eye,
Brushes away a black salamander raking for weevils
In his thicket of beard,
Knocks twice with a hoof on one black horn,
And barks daggers of threat from an eye
The depth of a fish's.
Expectant of flames gutting my carcass
I shake away the image.
But then the oink and grunt of awareness calls me awake
And I am not swaddled in the cloth of flames.
But the jail stripes of a dirty mattress,
The squeal of bed metal uncrucifying,
The fragrance of the sty,
The brown taste of a tongue bloated like a sow,
The feel of cold wrist thick bars around me
Focus and lock in the roots of my new
Squint sockets shoat ears tubular snout
Squat wedged tongue set of clubbed kickers.
The dream had lied:
I was locked up tight
In a hole: a cell in N.GA.
With ten other bad beasts.
I couldn't uncorkscrew my tail
Unkink the afro of boar cells inside brain
Return my sausage to intestine
Unfreeze the deep six of my bone box.
So I forced sleep back in the barn
Curled up on my trotters
And tried to dream myself a peccary in a cool velt.

2.
Above me jay and thrush trade lush vowels.
Sensation flows even through slow sleep:
My skin prickles with fresh fox sweat,
Under the white death of oleander flowers I am dreaming
I am a fox: And I am: my belly full of ripe tangelos,
Field mice, and my grandmother's sandwiches.
I am fox-aware of a corn snake nosing between racoon
Hollowed fruit shells: the orange meat munched clean

To the peels, lying scattered among citrus trees.
My whiskers sip the air and taste faroff the grammar of fishes:
The patter of a mob of minnows, the small talk of big trout,
The garbled monologue of the alligator gar:
These I can only sense with fox-sense, down there
In the lily-clotted canal where with no soft paws
And a pin bent into a hook, I once fished for my supper.
Also: The snowy egrets in pasture between the legs of cows,
The bamboo clustering in clumps making good fish poles
with their growing,
The armadillos burrowing deep in dirt combing fire ants
between their claws,
The opossum with her pouch full of young playing dead
for the red shouldered hawk,
The puzzle of wasps building a nest out of mud
in the dark eaves of the boat-house,
And the Kissimee flowing so slow as to be the cool shadow
in the eye of a sunning skink:
These also.
Dreams here don't lie: my eyes wet gold, my tail luxurious
Silver, my teeth rabbit rat ferrett bird sharpened.
I am all fox.
The dryads slip from the citrus trees.
A spray of Spanish moss unhooks overhead, slowly spirals
Down, and knocks my fox-face into a clump of fox-tail grass.
I awake and the first thought I have
Is of foxes.

— David Bruce Denholtz

FIST OF A HEART

THAT HARD MUSCLE
LIKE A FIST
STRIKES THE HOLLOW
WITH BLOOD
AND BAPTISES THE CHAMBERS
WITH GUSH AND SPURT
AND DEVOURS ITS BLOOD
LIKE A LION
AND ROARS BLOOD IN BUSHELS
WHEN LIMBS AND BRAIN
NEED RED WATERS
THAT RAVAGE THE SHORES
OF THE WILD SEAS
IN THE MUSCULAR
FIST OF A HEART.

— David Bruce Denholtz

The Ties of Home

until my booted foot lost contact
 with the strut
 and I was airborne—
 I could have backed down

remembered attacks of the
 fast-beating heart flutter in the family;
 chicken they used to call it

but I spit in the face of my lineage,
 hijacked into the nothingness
 between here and the clouds/

played a child's trick on gravity
 journeying away from our planet
 to have it call me back again
 sailing toward its roundness
 under a canopy of colors

packed fear away
 in the bundle on my belly
 but

when my jarring feet moved
 our gargantuan Earth
 a fraction of an inch in space
 the spittle that left my mouth dry
 tossed at wind's will into my face.
 I clung to particles of earth kissed
 the ball of my feet.

— Janeice Ray

The Lineman

Out in the country, along the tracks
 I am a lineman.
 If a native comes along,
 I look at the rails and check the spikes.

I travel for miles, a lineman.
 Call me hobo, but I know better.
 Ha! I have more direction than many a man.
 The only man I fear is the alien,
 There at the end of the line.

I have jumped off in neighborhoods
 Where I keep the pace to shed the guise of hobo,
 And I know much of bridges; ask me
 How to hang for life on a tie
 When the trestle fills up with train and the
 Eye of the engine is bright with steel behind.

One hundred and one cars will test the grip.
 To scamper back up and miss the caboose
 Has been more than part of my life.

— William T. Fleming

Notes On Keith Rasmussen's Lithograph 'Upstairs View'

I

Glancing out a window
from a peculiar angle,
I stand surveying the mowed yard,
the yellow spaghetti trees
that create a dense forest.

II

The moss-green bush is almost
too symmetrical; it shades
the clothes-line where sheets hang.
Perpendicular shadows,
from the telephone pole posts
that hold the four stretched lines taut,
stand behind the roof's shadow,
which dims my own reflection.

III

Then my eyes shift
to the wooden window frame,
the rectangular glass panes,
and the little ink bottle shaped like a house
that rests on the narrow sill.
Now I can see myself;
the yard is fuzzy.

— Laurie McBrayer

To My Mentally Retarded Child

What is it like in that world of yours?

Your China blue eyes peer
uncomprehending
from behind their magnifying glasses

your China blue eyes are
prisms, deflecting,
dividing that whole of you
into so much indistinguishable minutiae. . .

I do not speak your language, son,
and you do not seem to hear mine.

I look into your spectrum and see only red.
Your presence is a flapping flag today
Daring Mother Bull to stomp you.
I would impale you on the horns of my anger,
this anger that terrorizes you,
terrifies me. . .

But I am no bull.

I am your mother.

What quirk of my body produced you thus:
A child who will never grow.

You stare
As I wave my arms
and scream my neon plight
to heedless ears of stone.

I shake you.
Will this loosen just one stone
in that Great Wall between us?

Madonna and child, what tender scene
As I spill my senseless words
into that inky tunnel
that spirals to your skull

And they dissipate: Meteor shower screams
in a vast universe, Lost to Eternity
or
Striking home by infinitesimal chance.

Do you think, little one?
 Are you capable of that?
 Can you understand that
 Mother is disappointed in you?
 Can you feel it?

A single teardrop
 draws a lonely answer
 down your freckled cheek

drops
 saltily

off your quivering chin

and

crashes
 silently
 bloodily

deep within my breast.

— Jane A. Zanca

Migration

A covey of shiny-black
 Birds-in-flight
 Hover for a moment
 In the grass,
 Resting and awaiting
 Instructions
 For the night.

— Elizabeth Hicks

The Geographer (a painting by Jan Vermeer)

You must have spent a thousand hours
 looking at the sky,
 staring up from your work,
 the sun filling the room
 slowly, like sand.
 Your face eclipses in the light.

There is not much
 in the room:
 maps and rolls of maps,
 a cabinet with its bald globe,
 and your great blank atlases
 thrown open on the rug.

Holding at least three continents
 at arm's length
 and a compass in your right hand,
 you wait for the bells to start
 and a fast runner to bring news
 from the dock:
 a boundary, a peninsula, a world.
 You will mark it down
 on your graph,
 a new daughter, a son.

— Robyn Perry

The Wedding Party

The red and white tent
collapsed before noon;
your two sisters
in their Sunday dresses
went to take off their shoes
under one of the maples.

We drank cheap punch
from the caterer's fountain,
passed handfuls of rice to the relatives,
went back twice
to cut the cake.
You posed first
with your mother,
then with mine.

Dad hung his jacket
on the back of a chair,
and separated the gifts
into garbage bags.
The violinist sweated and played;
it was too hot to dance.
The photographer finally stopped smiling
and put his bulbs away.

— Robyn Perry

Abandoned Sculpture

(Michelangelo's Captives intended for the tomb of Pope Julius)

Michelangelo's slaves:
Writhing naked trunks.
Arms raised to throw off
Blocks of black-streaked marble
Burying their faces.
Leg muscles ripple lifting feet
from rifted slabs
Crumbling to the dust beneath.

Souls, too, are carved in stone
In silence of death.
Like a monument, a statue
Cold and motionless.
Trace their forms with your finger
Touch them: unformed eyelids never wet.

— Rebecca Craven

Transcendence

By the river, litter
Left by summer lovers
Is covered with new snow.
The empty bags and cans
Look like gifts for the Kha
Dropped by a lazy serf
At the Valley Temple
Instead of up the hill
In the secret serdab.

— Barbara Owen

A Lovesong to Master Death

smooth red balloons, full and tight,
 the knot at their end is a lump in my throat,
 the string constantly tugging upward.
 if only it would snap,
 if only the balloons would pop,
 and expose their pink, furry insides.
 picture my expression:
 the images of my lungs,
 laid wide open
 and the world gawking—
 stiff and bug-eyed,
 as i rose above them, and floated away,
 like a dove.

— Kelley M. Vaughn

"Untitled"

Little boy, your eyes have moon-wishes;
 Your hands hold secrets equal to everywhere;
 No other face but yours could start and stop the music.
 And in magic simply,
 The circus is yours, my love.
 That and the gallant stars
 And the proud horses with heads high,
 And the blue and pink cats and dogs,
 And the sad clown and the laughing one,
 The fat bears and the slender ladies.
 And this night,
 Wrapped in milk-skin.
 How you make the thousand hands clap.
 And a dream ride a million miles,
 To become one of your wish-thoughts.

— Sheri Gunter

Vital Records

For some, this is the only way
 they are remembered:
 as the fuzzy negative space
 of so many sheets of fische.
 Listed alphabetically,
 those born before 1919 are out of luck,
 perhaps hidden somewhere
 among "Delayed" books.
 Their names and dates whisper
 from crumbling, brittle pages
 like winded tombstones in distant counties.
 These uneventful ones
 are cross referenced only once—
 the only two mandates of existence
 following currents of unnatural water,
 finally becoming only what is not.
 The more eventful ones
 cross lists several times;
 their marriages,
 adoptions,
 divorces,
 legitimations,
 and amendments
 give a paper substance
 to their lives.
 Through such substance,
 they are searched, found, and relost
 for future generations,
 who willingly pay the fee
 for a second search.

— Ginny Herren

Elroy McCabe's Gator Farm

Going to Weeki Wachee up US 19
 we see a splintered sign barely tacked together
 so we pull over and stop.
 "Where's the farm?" we ask
 expecting a lush tropic replete with flourishing fauna
 and Elroy says, "This is it," and points to the pick-up truck.
 Sure enough, he sold orange juice which he said was freshly squeezed
 but looked frozen for one dollar in the front
 And in the back he had converted the bed into a cage with
 three gators in it which, said Elroy, as he spit tobacco juice
 on the hubcap, were a steal to see at five dollars.
 The gators were on display and knew it, so they did
 nothing but look bored.
 I almost wished they would break out of their wire pen
 just so we get our money's worth and have a wild ruckus besides.
 They could have dragged themselves out on the highway
 causing havoc and a traffic jam
 and making people blow their horns at them.
 But motorists are pretty powerless because to
 kill a gator is against the law
 and the gators knew that, too.
 Some old lady might try to run over them
 on her tricycle with the groceries in the wire basket in the back
 But the gators would fix her by eating a tire and her food
 and while cars are backed up for miles
 and an old lady is lying on the road
 the gators would just sit there and smile,
 no longer bored but quite satisfied.
 But they didn't do any of that, so while Elroy was pouring
 some cheap vodka into his orange juice, we stole the sign
 and headed back north on US 19.

— Laurie Esterbrook

Day by day activity

I wash my hands several times a day
 open and close the windows take a shower
 brush my teeth twice a day comb my hair numerous times
 think of food eat three square meals
 get my thoughts together make my bed talk endlessly on the phone
 Think of you Think of you Think of you Think of you

— Carla Thomas

P. BOELCKE, MARVEL— BUILDER

When Boelcke phoned me near midnight, I wasn't surprised. Day and night mean nothing to Boelcke. He'll come home from work at five-thirty and go directly into his garage workshop, and often his light there is still on when I wake up and look out my window at two or three.

On this night I dressed quickly and walked up the street to his house. Peter Boelcke is not a sociable man, and will call only when his excitement compels him to share one of his new inventions with me. In our neighborhood I alone appreciate the genius of his creations. But, then, I suspect that I'm the only person who is ever invited over for demonstrations.

Boelcke is an aeronautical design engineer, perfectly suited to his job, and his personal interests are just an imaginative extension of his profession. Many of his projects are merely home-built versions of common appliances and machines. But Boelcke's unique talent lies in his ability to take scrap parts and materials and modify them to serve entirely new uses. He seems undisturbed by his occasional failures.

Last summer he dismantled his lawn mower, and while the grass grew up and fell over he worked happily converting the machine to an ice cream maker. The powerful engine was geared down to churn slowly. There was a thirty-quart tub attached to the top, and the thing could make more ice cream in fifteen minutes than you could eat in a year. Our rich neighbor, Joe Givens, heard of it and borrowed it for a posh lawn party one evening. But the throttle cable broke and the engine oversped, and before it ran out of gas it rained fudge ripple on some pretty fancy clothes. Givens was hot about that one, but Boelcke shrugged it off.

Curious, as always, I walked the dark street up the steep hill to Boelcke's house after that midnight call several weeks ago. His house sat atop the hill, unlit against the deep summer night sky. Behind his house, the stars lay flat and white as plaster, visible even down to the horizon in the absence of the usual summer haze.

I fumbled with the gate latch, broken like many of the fixtures of Boelcke's large, neglected house. As I crossed the unlit yard I could see, atop the roof, the silhouettes of solar-heating equipment and his huge, home-built observatory telescope. The spire of a tall antenna stood higher than any tree in the yard. I tripped over some junk machinery lying in the two-foot weeds of Boelcke's front lawn.

Boelcke greeted me at the door, and we dodged through his cluttered house to the dark, screened veranda in back. There he poured for me a drink of his cheap rum and quickly ran through the usual how-are-Judy-and-the-kids questions. He fidgeted while I answered, and finally interrupted me in mid-sentence.

"I've built a new world for my beetles," he blurted out. I gave him a blank look. I was accustomed to these statements of his which would come abruptly into a conversation with no introduction. I had learned to listen for the roundabout explanation which would eventually follow. And I was enjoying just sitting in the cool atmosphere of the veranda.

Boelcke had filled the place with jungle plants, and left it dark except for the fluorescence of a large salt-water aquarium. The aquarium had

been built as a result of another passion of Boelcke's, the study of natural history. At the auction of an old estate nearby, he'd bought a huge free-standing bathtub. He had cut out the sides, and replaced them with glass, to make his aquarium. Inside, it teemed with odd Pacific fish which Boelcke had imported from the Phillipines. He'd once told me that most of these strange species were several million years old.

I waited to hear more about this business of a "new world" for Boelcke's beetles.

He frowned. "I've spent far too long with these beetles. For twelve years my uncle bred them, and now I've been fooling with them for another ten."

Then I remembered about the beetles. He had a horde of them living in a walled-off area of his back yard. I knew he bred them, but I'd never asked why.

"Beetles have been around since the days when your uncles were monkeys," Boelcke said. "But most people pay no attention to them. And when they do think of beetles, they picture only the bad ones they've heard about. The boll weevil, the bean beetles, you know, that kind of pest. But there are 220,000 species of beetles, each with its own peculiarity. Some beetles live with bees; buffalo beetles eat your tennis sweaters; each one is different."

I could not see where he was headed.

"I see," I said.

He smiled. "Now, all my beetles are ladybugs and tiger beetles. Good beetles. They help save crops by killing other insects."

I nodded.

The smile left his face. "But the damn things don't grow and multiply fast enough." He jabbed his finger at me. "If ladybugs could double their number overnight, the citrus growers in California could forget about spraying for fruit flies. The ladybugs would eat 'em all! Millions of dollars would be saved."

"But they won't breed." I tried to help him along.

"Right," he said, then settled down and was silent. His eyes drifted away as if following a fly. It looked as if I might be losing him for awhile, something which frequently happened during conversations with Boelcke.

"Well," I said, groping, "don't you, um, think that God's made a plan for all that? Ha-ha."

"Ha! God's not interested. Either he's lazy, or he's bored with this whole planet. His rate of evolution drives me nuts. Look how long he's taken to come up with a presentable human being. And, even now, do you really believe we're the final edition? His best model? Top of the line? Take a look at us!"

I looked at Peter Boelcke, marvel-builder: Tall, gaunt, sharp-featured, with intense dark eyes glowing even through his thick glasses, and dark swept hair behind an unruly mustache. A genius, one of our gifted few; a grouchy, anti-social crackpot building things that didn't matter and that people couldn't use.

He had a point there.

"And look at the plants and animals around you." He swept his arm. "You never wake up and see anything new. No, if we count on God we'll

be waiting one hell of a long time. But, never mind that. Come with me."

We stepped out into the back yard, where he turned on a yellow floodlight. We looked over the edge of the low wall surrounding his beetle-breeding area. There were hundreds of ladybugs crawling around, and another type of bug I didn't recognize.

"Those others," he pointed, "are my tiger beetles. They have very strong pincers, and can outrun almost any other insect. They're unbeatable. Once they get after another bug, that guy might as well mail his paycheck home to Mom; the show's over. I tried to cross the tigers with the ladybugs, but they wouldn't mix with each other."

"Ah."

"Well, anyhow, for ten years I've bred them, and bought new beetles, and kept only the best. The other, I throw out in the yard and sic the birds on them."

I scratched my head. "What do you look for in a beetle?"

"Oh, size, speed, intelligence. I pick out the biggest ones, and I put them into a maze. A very simple maze, actually. Beetles aren't as smart as most people think. Then I select the more successful ones and test their running speed to determine pursuit capability."

I shook my head slowly, and muttered, "How the hell do you find the time—"

"With this stopwatch right here," he said impatiently.

"No, I meant—"

"But come into the house. That's where I've built their new world."

We walked through the dusty house to his den. There, I knew, was a pool table where he often relaxed with a solitary game late at night after working in his shop. But now the den was stripped of its bookshelves and furniture. The room was almost completely dark, with only the extremely dim, blue glow from a hidden fluorescent fixture. As my eyes adapted to the low light, I could see that alone in the room sat the pool table, its surface covered with several inches of fresh dirt. A glass wall, twenty inches high, had been installed along the top edge of the table to enclose the dirt. Then atop the wall was a domed, clear plastic roof. The walls and ceiling of the room had been painted a deep blue, with thousands of tiny splashes of luminous white.

I peered through the top of the plastic dome, and saw that the dirt-filled surface of the pool table was inhabited by hundreds of beetles. They were very busy, tunneling and building.

"These are my choice beetles," said Boelcke. "The strongest and smartest from my backyard herd." He chuckled, "we're going to try to speed up evolution a bit here. This plastic cage, as far as they know, is their world. Accepting that, they'll adapt to whatever living conditions it offers. And since I control the cage, well," he smiled at me, "the little buggers will have to dance to my tune."

"So what's the plan?"

"I've provided a perfect breeding place for them here—quiet and dark, with no threat from birds or animals. Their whole world now is only five-by-ten feet, so they won't waste time exploring. I've put the ladybugs at one end, the tiger beetles at the other, so I can compare their progress. You can see how I've separated them with that little wooden wall across

the middle of the table."

I frowned. "It seems to me they'd spend most of their time trying to escape, trying to find some daylight."

"Oh, they would," he said, "they would!" Then he giggled. "But that's all taken care of. I told you, I've built them a new world. Look up at the ceiling. Recognize the big dipper?"

Now I could see the thousands of bright white dots on the dark blue ceiling and walls were in the patterns of stars and constellations. Right away I identified the moon and several familiar stars.

"Right now it's nighttime in this room," Boelcke said. "Later an electronically-timed light will gradually illuminate the place and it'll be daybreak for the beetles. Now, that table is mounted on a pedestal, with an electric motor, and it turns very, very slowly so that the starts will seem to change position. That simulates the yearly shifting of the earth's orbit. I've installed bearings and gimbals which allow the table to tilt in any direction. I drop food into their cage through a six-foot tube, so there's no need for me ever to disturb their work. And I can watch everything they do, through the transparent dome."

"This is unbelievable. How long did it take you to build it?"

"Well, as you know, I've spent years breeding the beetles. But my universe-room here took only about eight months. Most of it was those damn stars. If you ever try something like this, figure on spending about one and a half days per galaxy."

"Lord."

"But here's the payoff," he said, his eyes dancing again. "I plan to speed up the day-night cycles gradually, giving them shorter and shorter days, till finally they have a sunrise every five hours. I figure they'll work faster, sleep harder, and breed their little hearts out. The species should improve at a much faster rate than before."

Before leaving his home that evening I watched the beetles for awhile through the plastic roof. There was plenty of activity on the tiger beetles' side. The ladybugs were a little more quiet. I wondered whether they felt more secure in their new world, or hopelessly lost.

I travel a lot, and so it was several weeks before I spoke to Boelcke again. When I called he asked me over immediately. We went to his beetle room and he showed me the situation.

"I'm not too happy with what's going on," he told me. "Look here. The ladybugs are okay. They work hard, building comfortable homes and storing the food I give them. No complaints there. But the damn tiger beetles. . .," he grumbled. "They run around like idiots, eating and fighting. And so far their only unified effort has been directed right here." He pointed to the wooden fences separating the beetles' two living areas. "They've eaten a hole in the fence, and now they spend most of their time raiding the ladybugs' area. They steal food, and even kill the ladybugs."

"Why don't you replace the wooden fence with plastic or aluminum?" I asked.

"Well, I'm reluctant to interfere with the evolutionary process. Maybe the tiger beetles just need to establish their superiority. The ladybugs are more intelligent, but if they're not aggressive enough to defend themselves then maybe we'll be better off with the tigers as the dominant

species. Whatever happens, I wish they'd get it settled so they could get back to turning out baby beetles."

It was settled shortly. The tiger beetles just marched in during one of Boelcke's four-hour nights and with their powerful jaws they snuffed out every last ladybug. The next day Boelcke was furious.

"I know what I told you, all that business about survival of the fittest," he said, "but I just went berserk when I walked in here after breakfast and saw all those dead ladybugs. My best examples, from years and years of breeding." He shook his head. "Bloodthirsty bastards."

"It's over, though," he sighed, "so now that the tigers own the whole damn turf, maybe their hostility will ease up. Maybe they'll be more productive." He stared out the window into the clouds. "If not, I swear, I'll drown the whole crowd."

A few days later I saw him in his yard, finally mowing the knee-high weeds with a powerful three-wheeled tractor he'd built from an old Harley-Davidson motorcycle. It slung grass for thirty feet and had no provision for a muffler. The racket was deafening. He shut down the machine and walked over to me, brushing off the bits of grass and dust which covered even his head. He raised a pair of large goggles from his eyes.

"They're up to something," he told me. "They are not fighting anymore. They're eating like pigs, and building tunnels all day. Finally they've started working together like my ladybugs used to."

Boelcke went into that thousand-yard stare again, and I couldn't tell how far he'd traveled before he spoke further.

"They're building something," he mused. "Some structure, up the side of the cage. It doesn't seem to have any purpose. I'll just have to wait and watch, I guess. I'll keep you posted. So long."

He put his motorcycle goggles on and went back to work.

It was two weeks later when he phoned me, an hour past midnight, very cheerful.

"Hello, Alan," he said, "Are you busy?"

I stepped out of bed and took the phone into the hall so I wouldn't wake up Judy.

"What's up, Peter?" I yawned.

"We're making some progress. Come on down and take a look."

I dressed and was at his door in ten minutes. He had a tall rum drink in his hand, and led me to the dark screened porch. As usual, the salt-water aquarium was the only source of light on the porch. A large overhead fan, cut from the fenders of his old motorcycle, stirred the air. The banana tree leaves waved gently under the fan, sweeping huge shadows across the wall. Boelcke stood at the aquarium for several minutes, watching a small clown fish with an iridescent blue vertical stripe which looked like grease paint. He explained at length the fish's strange symbiotic relationship with the deadly sea anemone plant. Boelcke was relaxed and talkative this night, and soon I realized that he'd forgotten why I was there.

"What's the latest on the tiger beetles?" I asked. I yawned involuntarily but the coke in the rum drink was beginning to wake me up.

"Oh, let me tell you," he said. "They're smarter than we all thought." He smiled and shook his head. "That's why I called you tonight. So you

could see what they've done."

His face darkened for a moment. "One night, Alan, a while back, the tigers went over the wall and cleaned house on the ladybugs."

"Yes, I know. I saw you that next day, remember?"

"Oh, sure, sure, Alan, that's right. Well. After that, you know, they were making a sort of cement mixture from the dirt and sticking it to the glass wall, building a ladder up the side. When they reached the roof of the cage, they started across it toward the center of the dome. This work always seemed to take place during their simulated nights, when the light were out. When their sun came up, I'd go in there and find new construction, but the beetles would be resting and eating." Boelcke's eyes narrowed and he looked me in the face. "I'll tell you frankly, Alan, it was driving me nuts."

"It would any man," I nodded attentively.

"So I switched hemispheres on them. To change their night environment. One night I'd a couple of shooters of this stuff," he held up his glass, "and I lost my patience and just went in and tilted the table and spun it around a couple of times. When it stopped," he chuckled, "they were in Christchurch, New Zealand. So you know what happened?"

"I can't imagine. My brain must be sleepy."

"The direction of their building changed! They started off across the dome toward a far corner. Shrewd little bastards. So a few days later I gave them another whirl, made 'em think they were in Goose Bay, Labrador.

"They set off in a new direction," said Boelcke. "They were taking their bearings from the stars, of course."

"Where were they trying to go?"

"To the moon," he muttered disgustedly, "to the goddam moon and there they were with all the food, all the dirt they needed. Clean air, no birds, no DDT. And they pooled all their energies to try to penetrate a glass sky and get to the bogus moon painted on the ceiling." He sighed.

"Maybe I just overbred the little devils," he continued. "They're too ambitious, too imaginative. But it's okay now." He gave me a little smile. "Come on into the den and see how their universe is coming along."

He picked up a large magnifying glass, which I had not seen before, and we went into the den.

It was also nighttime in the beetle world at that hour. The only light in the room was the very dim illumination Boelcke used to make the painted galaxies visible. The quiet room, in deep blue, resembled a small planetarium.

"It became obvious to me that we had to get rid of that moon," said Boelcke. "And I had to make them realize it was gone for good, so they wouldn't watch for it and wonder about it. So one day I wired up a dozen flash bulbs and climbed up a ladder and glued them to the moon. I left and waited for nighttime. Then I sneaked back in here and when it looked like they were at the height of their activity, climbing the dome, I set off the flashbulbs.

"Of course it was bright as hell in here for a second, then pitch black. I turned off *everything*, even the blue night-light, then I walked out and closed the door. Left the place totally dark for three days, so they'd have

a chance to forget about the moon.

"During those three days I was pretty curious about them, so several times I came in here. I couldn't see anything in the dark, of course, but I'd put my ear against the dome and listen. I know they could sense my footsteps walking around their world, because I'd hear them scurrying around nervously whenever I moved.

"After three days of that I reset the timer to their old routine, and sneaked in to wait for the sun to come up. When it did, I was there on the spot, looking in with this twelve-inch magnifying glass to see if there were any new larvae."

Boelcke was speaking of the glass I'd seen him pick up.

"Well," he continued, "I didn't understand the panic that followed, until I realized that when the 'sun' light came on the beetles also were looking up at me through the magnifying glass. That made my face look about eight-hundred feet wide. You should have seen their reaction. Here, I'll show you."

Boelcke pushed a button on the wall, and I was blinded as his "sun" shocked the dark room into an intense, noon-day brilliance. I blinked for a few seconds, then gradually was able to open my eyes and look at Boelcke, standing there with the huge magnifying glass held to his face. The effect was startling. Through the glass his cheeks were bulbous and his eyes like great dark moons. With his wide mustache and overblown head, he looked like a huge fat frog with long hair. Still holding the glass in front of him, he leaned over and put his face near the dome.

There was absolute bedlam on the floor of the cage. Tiger beetles scurried and dug frantically to conceal themselves. Several fought each other to reach the safety of the tunnels. Boelcke laughed with satisfaction.

"Look at 'em hustle!" he giggled. "Sometimes I scowl down at them till I get their attention, then I start rolling my eyes and stick out my tongue, just to watch the panic it sets off. They'll eat dirt, roll over and play dead, do all kinds of crazy stuff. See that tall dirt mound they've built in the center of the cage? They climb up there when it's dark and leave bits of food on top of it for me. I find it there every day. Cute, huh?"

"And," Boelcke said, "I'll guarantee you that those boys have lost interest in climbing out to the stars, now that they see what's up here. No more fighting among themselves, either. They have enough on their minds just wondering what would happen if I ever decided to come in through that glass dome for a visit.

"If they continue the good work," said Boelcke, "I'll have to come up with some sort of reward for them. I've been thinking about it. I may give them two summers this year; just skip the winter altogether."

In Their Fathers' Footsteps

Jackie Winslow waited in front of his father's store for his friend Leon to arrive. He swept the front steps and watched the farmers drive up in their battered pickups and Model T-Fords. They always came to town on Saturdays, bringing their wives and children. The children wore overalls and no shoes. Inside the store, they gaped at the clean bright knives under the show case, the jars of rock candy, and the china-headed dolls that were slowly gathering dust in the corner.

Jackie saw the children at school during the winter when the farm work was lighter. He nodded shyly at them as they went into the store, but he remained outside, watching the road.

At last he saw the wagon. It was drawn by a dusty mule, and Ben, a heavy-set black man, was driving. Beside him sat his son, Leon.

Ben pulled the mule to a stop in front of the store. He jumped out of the wagon and hitched the mule to a post. "Morning," he said, looking down at Jackie. Shining black, he towered above the boy.

Leon, grinning, remained perched on the wagon seat.

"Hey," Jackie said.

"My daddy killed a rattlesnake yest'day," Leon said. "Big 'round as me."

"Aw, they don't come that big," Jackie said.

"This 'un did. I seen it." Leon climbed down. He was smaller than Jackie, and wore only a ragged pair of shorts. His skin was a much lighter shade than his father's.

Jackie remembered how, out on his grandfather's farm, he'd seen a rattlesnake that a Negro had killed. The man had cut off the head and rattles and nailed the body to a fence post.

"Did you keep the rattles?" he asked.

"Un-huh." Leon fished in a pocket, brought out nine segments. Jackie had never seen a longer set. Leon shook them at him. Jackie jumped.

"You hear that soun' in the woods, you do right to jump," laughed Leon.

"Where'd he kill it?"

"It was crossing the road in front of our place. Daddy took a hoe an' cut his head off."

"Wasn't he scared to get close to it?"

Leon shook his head. "My daddy ain't scared o' nothin'."

Ben came out of the store and loaded sacks of cornmeal on the wagon.

"How you doin', Jackie?" he said. "When you gonna come go fishin' wif Leon?"

"Maybe I can come now," Jackie said.

"Better ask yo' pa," said Ben. "I got to take this mule over to the smith an' get that shoe fixed 'fore it come off. Ya'll kin meet me over there."

The boys ran inside the store.

"Well, hey there, Leon," Winslow said from behind the counter. "Your daddy forget something?"

"No suh," said Leon.

"Dad, can I go fishing with Leon?" Jackie asked.

"Hey there, J.D.," Winslow said, his eye on a new customer that had just walked in. "Don't see why not," he said to Jackie. "If they bring you back this evening."

"I'll bring him back," said Leon. "I kin drive that mule myself."

Winslow laughed. "Go on, then. What can I do for you today, J.D.?"

The boys ran down the street, past the depot to the blacksmith's shop. Ben held the mule by the bridle as the smith worked. A tall man idled nearby, leaning against the wall, chewing tobacco. At his feet the smith's dogs snarled over hoof parings.

The boys watched in awe at the smith's strength as he hammered the hot shoe into shape and nailed it to the mule's hoof.

"That'll do," said Leon, inspecting the newly shod hoof.

The smith laughed. "What's a little shaver like you know about it?"

"Oh, I knows lots," said Leon.

The tall man curled his lip back. He stared at Jackie, then at Leon. His eyes narrowed, and he spat. The stream of tobacco juice barely missed Ben's leg, but Ben did not look up. He motioned for the boys to get in the wagon.

Jackie didn't know whether Ben had noticed or not. As they drove away the boy looked back to see the tall man still staring, watching them out of sight. Leon kept his eyes on the back of his father's head.

At Ben's cabin the boys dodged Leon's young brothers and sisters and found fishing poles. The yard was littered with pieces of rusty scrap metal and broken glass. Leon picked up an old tin can to put the bait in. At the edge of Ben's peanut patch they dug worms and then set off through the field to the creek.

Leon said he knew the best place. A tree had fallen across the creek bed, and they climbed out to its middle. They swung their feet back and forth as they fished. Leon balanced his pole on the trunk.

"I caught a fish this big once," he said, throwing his arms wide and nearly knocking his pole into the creek.

"You got a bite, Leon! Pull him in!" said Jackie.

Leon put the bream on the stringer.

"Did you see that man at the blacksmith's?" Jackie asked.

Leon shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah."

"I didn't like him. I bet your dad would have hit him if he'd seen him spit like that."

Leon nodded. "Sure he would. He ain't scared o' him."

He frowned and jerked his line out of the water, threw it in again. They fished in silence.

"I wish I didn't have to go to school all the time," Jackie said after a while. "You can go fishing anytime you want to, can't you?"

"Yeah," Leon said. "But sometimes I wish I did go to school."

"How come?"

"I dunno. So's I kin write my name."

"Shoot, Leon, I can show you how to do that." They jumped down from the tree trunk, landing in the deep soft sand of the creek bank. Jackie picked up a stick and wrote first his name, then Leon's. "Here," he said, handing the stick to Leon. "Now you try. The first letter's an 'L'."

Leon held the stick clutched in his fist, frowned as he tried to copy the marks in the sand.

"Hold it like this," Jackie said, fixing the stick between Leon's thumb and forefinger. "That's right."

"Hey, I'm pretty good at it!" Leon said.

"Sure you are. I knew you would be."

Jackie stayed for supper at Leon's. Leon's mother made cornmeal fritters and fried the fish that the boys had caught that afternoon. She was a tall woman, dark and silent. She saw to it that Jackie's plate was kept full.

After supper Ben hitched up the mule to drive Jackie back to town. The boys hung their legs over the tailgate and watched as the light from the cabin grew smaller and smaller before the darkness swallowed it up.

They were almost asleep when Ben pulled the mule to a stop in front of Jackie's house. Winslow came out to meet them.

"Thanks for looking after my boy, Ben," he said.

"He ain't no trouble, Mr. Rob. He's a fine boy."

"Bye, Leon," Jackie said.

"Wait a minit," Leon said. He pulled the rattles out of his pocket, handed them to Jackie. "Here. You kin have 'em."

"Thanks, Leon," said Jackie, wishing he had something to give in return. "Good night, Ben."

"Come back an' see us now," said Ben, and slapped the reins on the mule's back.

Winslow laid a hand on his son's shoulders. "Have a good time?"

"Yes, sir. We caught a whole mess of fish."

"Brings back memories," Winslow said. "Ben and I went fishing when we were boys."

They went inside. Winslow sat down in his easy chair and opened his newspaper. Jackie sat on the sofa and watched his father as he read. Unmindful of his son's gaze, Winslow lit his pipe and began to smoke. Jackie remembered how, once when he was out at Leon's, Ben had made corn-cob pipes, filled them with rabbit tobacco, and let the boys smoke. Jackie couldn't imagine his own father doing that. Once he'd caught Jackie smoking a cigarette and had liked to warn him out.

Thinking of Leon made him remember the rattles. He opened his palm and studied them. He wondered why Leon didn't have to go to school. He'd asked his father once. Winslow had seemed surprised at the question.

"There's not a school for Nigra children," he had answered.

"How come?"

"They don't need books. They work on the farms."

"But the white farmers' children go to school," Jackie said.

"The Nigras are different," Winslow said, and he refused to talk about it anymore.

Jackie couldn't figure it out. He knew his father liked Ben; they'd been friends from way back. Ben's father had share-cropped for Winslow's father. Old Ben had been given to drinking, and whenever he'd been thrown in jail for causing a disturbance in town, old Mr. Winslow had gotten him out. And when he died, he left a small parcel of land to young Ben in his will. The rest of the farm was sold, because Jackie's father wasn't interested in farming. He went into the lumber business and started his own general store. More money in trade than farming, he had said.

Ben traded at his store, because the two of them had grown up together, and Winslow bought all the surplus peanuts Ben could raise. But Jackie still didn't understand why, if they were friends, his father called the black man "Ben," but Ben always called his father "Mr. Rob."

Jackie's mother came in and noticed that he was holding something in his hand. "Jackie, what on earth have you got there?"

"Leon gave it to me."

"Good Lord," she said. "That is just plain nasty. Go throw that away this minute."

"Oh, let him keep it, Aileen," said Winslow, looking up from his paper. He sounded bored.

She frowned. "Well, go on to bed, Jackie. It's way past your bedtime."

He went to his room, dragging his feet. He carefully placed the rattles in the old cigar box in which he kept things—a real shark's tooth from Savannah, an Indian arrowhead, the corn-cob pipe. He could hear his parents talking.

"Rob, I don't like him playing with that Nigra child all the time."

"Good Lord, Aileen, what's wrong with that? I think a lot of Ben."

"Well, it's just not proper," she said. "He ought to be playing with the white children."

Jackie lay in bed and tried to shut out the drone of their arguing voices.

In the weeks that followed Ben came to town alone. He did not stop at Winslow's store, but unloaded his wagon at Molson's Pharmacy. Jackie stood by the store window and waved as the mule trotted by.

"That Molson's got a good thing going," he heard one of the customers say. "Folks'll come far and wide to get a jug of ol' Ben's concoction."

Another customer laughed. "An old family recipe."

Jackie didn't pay much attention to them. He wondered why Leon didn't come to town with his father anymore.

One Sunday morning, just as the Winslows were sitting down to breakfast, the sheriff knocked on the door.

"Come on in, Clay," Winslow said. "Have a seat. Want some breakfast?"

"Just coffee, thanks." The sheriff sat down opposite Winslow, ignored the coffee when Aileen set it before him.

"I need to talk to you about that nigger who used to work for your pa, that Ben Jones," he said.

Jackie saw his mother frown at the word "nigger." She always said only trashy people used that word.

"What about Ben?" Winslow said.

"He's down at the jail. I had to arrest him. Caught him running bootleg whiskey."

"Good Lord, Clay, why don't you let him go?" Winslow laughed. "Your jail couldn't hold all the men in this county who run whiskey."

"Rob, I wish I could let him go. But it ain't that simple."

"Why not? What's the matter?"

The sheriff looked straight at Winslow and lowered his voice. "I don't like to say in front of your wife and young 'un."

"Clay, will you just tell me what's going on?"

"Well, when I was going through his pockets, he had this wallet, see, and he had pictures of naked women in it." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Naked white women."

Winslow stared at him.

Aileen flushed. "Jackie, go outside and play," she said sharply.

Jackie left the table reluctantly. He lingered in the next room to listen.

"I figured you'd want to know, Rob," the sheriff was saying. "Word's already gotten out, and when Anderson and his boys hear about it there's gonna be hell to pay."

"Clay, don't you know when you keep your mouth shut?" Winslow said. "How the hell would anyone find out if you didn't tell them?"

"Dammit, my deputies are in with them!" the sheriff said. "And so are most of the men in this town. You know that."

"Well, let's get down there before trouble starts up."

Jackie heard the kitchen door bang shut, and knew his father was gone. He wandered back into the kitchen.

Aileen sat at the table, twisting her apron in her hands. She frowned when she saw Jackie. "I thought I told you to go outside and play."

"Mamma, why was the sheriff so upset about those pictures?"

"Get on outside," she said. "We're not going to church today."

He went out to the backyard. He wondered who Anderson and his boys were, and what they would do to Ben. He felt uneasy, almost frightened. But his father had gone to the jail to see about him. He wouldn't let anything happen to Ben. Then Jackie recalled the look of horror on his mother's face, and even on his father's, when the sheriff had told them about the pictures.

He sat down on the back steps and propped his chin on his hands. He watched a trail of ants as they marched up from a crack in the steps and along the side of the porch. He heard his father's words. "The Nigras are different..." Again he felt a deep uneasiness that would not go away. He wondered what Leon would do when he found out that his father was in jail.

The news was all over town by that night. Word was passed in the churches, and afterwards on the front porches where folks gathered on the hot Sunday afternoons to pass the time of day. But nobody came to the Winslows. Winslow himself did not come back from the jail until late, after Jackie had gone to bed. The boy awakened to the sound of his father's footsteps in the hall.

"Well?" he heard his mother say.

"It's true about the bootlegging. And he had those pictures, all right," his father said. "Wouldn't say a word as to how he got them."

"What's going to happen now?"

"God knows. There'll be a trial, if nobody gets to him first."

"You mean Anderson. Rob, what are you going to do about this?"

"What can I do? Aileen, the whole town is riled up..."

Jackie lay awake long after they had moved on down the hall and he could no longer hear their voices. The shadows in his room bothered him as ghosts.

At breakfast his father was silent. His mother told Jackie that he was to come straight home after school. But when school let out, Jackie didn't think about going home. He went down to the jail to see Ben.

He was surprised to find a dozen men or so gathered around the front door of the jail. Jackie stood unnoticed on the outskirts of the crowd. He recognized a few of the men. The blacksmith was there. So was the tall man from the shop. The men talked among themselves in low voices, worrisome as wasps. The tall man seemed to be the leader of the group. Several times his voice rose in a shrill whine above the rest.

They grew suddenly quiet when the door opened and the sheriff came out with Leon at his side.

"Boys, why don't you go on home?" Clay said. "You got no business here."

"Clay, you know what we're here for," the tall man said. "We mean to see our women protected from that nigger."

Leon broke away from the crowd and ran. Jackie followed. He caught up with him at the depot. They crouched behind the barrels and boxes on the loading platform.

"Leon," Jackie said. "My dad'll help Ben. I know he will. He'll get him out of jail."

"Yo' daddy cain't do nothin' about it," Leon said.

"He will! I promise he will!"

Leon shook his head. "He cain't. I know he cain't."

They stared at each other. Leon stood up. "I got to git home. Mamma be worrit about me."

Jackie had to pass by the jail on his way home. The men were still there, arguing with the sheriff. The tall man saw Jackie and shouted at him.

"Hey, boy!" he said. "Ain't you Winslow's young 'un?"

Jackie nodded.

"Better stay away from them niggers," the tall man said. "Even if your pa's too friendly with 'em."

"Let the boy be, Anderson," the sheriff said.

Jackie didn't stay to hear more. He ran all the way home.

At supper he picked at his food. For once his mother didn't fuss at him to eat. Winslow only drank coffee.

Jackie broke the silence. "Dad, why don't you get Ben out of jail?"

Winslow set his cup down on its saucer so hard that the coffee splashed over the edge. "Ben's broken the law. Now he's going to have to stand trial."

"Granpa always got Ben's father out of jail."

"Don't argue with your father," Aileen said. "It's not his place to get that Nigra out of jail."

"But I don't understand why everyone's so mad at him about those pictures," Jackie said.

Aileen flashed a look at her husband. "I think it's time you went to bed, Jackie."

He did not move. He looked at his father.

"Mind your mother," Winslow said.

"I promised Leon you'd help."

"Go to bed!" Winslow slammed his fist on the table.

Eyes downcast, Jackie pushed his chair away from the table.

"Son, I don't expect you to understand why I can't help Ben," Winslow said, his voice calmer. "I would if I could. You'll understand when you're older."

Jackie went to bed, but he did not go to sleep. He listened to the familiar sounds of his mother washing the dishes, his father tuning the radio, the crickets singing outside his window. Before long the hall light clicked off, and the floor boards creaked as his parents walked down the hall to their own room.

With the rest of the house dark, the shadows in his room grew more threatening. He heard the distant, warning whistle of a train. The crickets

buzzed like rattlesnakes.

The sound of a back-firing engine nearly made him jump out of his skin. He went to the window and looked out. He saw a cavalcade of cars—pick-ups and Fords—approaching his house from up the street. White robed figures rode the running boards. They held flaming torches aloft. The flames flickered on their guns and shone upon the tallest figure, highlighting the coil of rope about his shoulder. They wore masks. Their eyeholes were large and black, and as they turned their heads from side to side Jackie crouched closer to the floor. He cried out for his father, or thought he cried, but no sound came from his mouth, and his father did not come.

Jackie stood on the front steps of his father's store. He was supposed to be sweeping, but he held his broom in the crook of his arm and watched as the wagon drew near.

Leon pulled the dusty mule to a halt in front of the store. The wagon was piled high with sacks of peanuts. He looked straight at Jackie.

They stared at each other for a long time. Neither spoke. The mule began to fret, shaking his head. Leon slapped the reins on the mule's back and slowly drove away.

When he was almost out of sight Jackie began to sweep. His broom made little swirls that rose and mingled with the dust clouds kicked up by the wagon wheels and then settled back upon the steps. He went on sweeping in long, slow strokes.

— Norma E. Edenfield

Ruby May Not

I shoved my dust mop in front of Norma's. "There's a new girl coming today," I said.

"How do you know?"

"Because Miss Steppanus is wearing her black suit. And because she's been using her *friendly* tone of voice all day."

Norma started to answer me but the door to the hallway opened and Miss Steppanus strode in. She was followed by a woman in a mousey brown dress. The woman kept her arms folded tightly against her chest. A man was with them. He was bald, short, and pudgy, and his gray eyes looked tired behind rimless spectacles. He kept his hands shoved deep in his pockets. Miss Steppanus waved toward the two neat rows of beds in the dormitory.

"This is where the girls sleep," she said proudly. "They have their own bed, their own chair, and each girl is assigned a basin." She pointed to the wall of washbasins. "And a closet of her very own."

With her very own personal roaches, I could have added. The man and woman followed Miss Steppanus' practiced gestures and nodded.

"The girls have chores to do every day," Miss Steppanus trilled, "and of course they are in study hall from four to six. Daily."

"I'm sure this will be fine," the man said. "We'll get her things from the car."

"Claudia," Miss Steppanus said to me, "go to the linen closet. We'll be needing linens for the bed next to yours."

"Yes, Miss Steppanus." I tossed Norma an "I-told-you-so" look.

By the time I returned, two bulging suitcases were plunked on the bed. The man and woman huddled in the hall with Miss Steppanus. The woman twisted a tissue in her hands, and then patted a girl who stood beside her. Miss Steppanus was directing the show, as usual.

"Oh, she'll do fine here," she said. "The girls will show her around."

The new girl brushed a tear from her cheek and waved with four fingers at the man and woman. They disappeared down the steps behind Miss Steppanus. The girl chucked a wad of tissues into a wastebasket and bounded into the dormitory.

"HI!" she chirped. She tossed her long blond curls. "I'M RUBY MAE STELLA NEELY."

Norma and I looked at each other.

"But you can just call me RUBY."

Norma took a step back. It didn't take much to intimidate Norma, but this wasn't just intimidation. Ruby Mae was what you might call a bursting personality. She was just about to burst out all over the place. Angela Tornoso, who had been the first girl in the eighth grade to wear a bra, was going to slit her wrists when she saw Ruby.

"I'm from Bow-gah-loosah, I'm fourteen years old, and this is the fifth school I've been in this year," Ruby said and flounced on the lumpy bed.

Considering that this was only January, I'd say that Ruby Mae had been around. I got the feeling that she wasn't bragging; she was just filling us in on the basics. She had a sweet face and soft peachy cheeks. Her eyes were green and clear and honest.

"Well," I said, "I'm Claudia, and this is Norma." I thought Norma was going to curtsy to Ruby. She clutched her brown serge uniform skirt at the thighs, and stared through her round glasses at Ruby's chest. Norma just kept staring so I said, "Wow, five schools. Do your parents move a lot? I mean, how come so many schools?" I thought I was handling this with real diplomatic flare.

Ruby Mae lay back and sank slowly into the mattress. She stretched her arms out and concentrated on the ceiling a minute. "Oh, you'll see," she said flatly. She bounded into a sitting position. "Wanta see my clothes?" She unsnapped one of the suitcases and started spilling stuff out onto the bed. Norma's eyes nearly popped. I heaved a load of silk blouses over my arm so Ruby could sort through them.

"You know we wear uniforms here, don't you?" I ventured as she held a pink bouclé sweater up against me. I could have fit inside it twice.

"Oh, sure," she said. "But a girl's got to have a few pretty things for weekends, doesn't she? Hey, that looks great with your complexion. You can borrow it anytime. *Anything* you want, *any time*. Just reach in my closet and help yourself." She held a red knit pullover up to Norma. "No, not red. Too, too daring for you. How about a nice baby blue? There's one in here somewhere." She rooted through a rainbow of sweaters.

Ruby had even brought her own hangers. Each one was daintily wrapped with pink ribbon and had a little bow with tiny flowers at the top. The roaches weren't going to believe it.

We got Ruby unpacked. The last item was a billowy pink nightie with a see-through lace negligee. I thought Norma was going to swallow her tongue.

Ruby went to her basin and lined up her hairbrush, comb, toothbrush, and a bottle of almond hand lotion. She dropped a heart-shaped bar of perfumed soap on the rusty soap rack. "Well, that's that for a while," she said. The bell rang for supper. "How's the food here?"

We took Ruby down to the dining room and introduced her around. The second-grade boarders fell in love with her and fought over who was going to sit near her.

"Ooo, I just love children!" Ruby squealed.

"Shhh," Norma shushed her. "Supper time is silent hour."

Miss Rosemun came in from the teachers' dining room. She wiped the corners of her mouth daintily. She placed a leather-bound volume on a lectern at the center of our table and began reading Shelley's "Adonais." Norma's eyebrows rose and fell over her spectacles with Miss Rosemun's voice. I nudged Ruby. She just smiled and dove into her mashed potatoes.

That night we showed Ruby how to lay her clothes out on her chair beside the bed, and how to place her shoes so Miss Steppanus wouldn't haul her out in the middle of a night raid to line them up *just so*. Ruby dropped her negligee across the foot of the bed. Norma, on her knees, was clutching a wooden cross and saying her night prayers. Her eyes followed the pink puffy cloud as it floated down.

Ruby snuggled and stretched under her covers. The quilt made big up-and-down curves over her.

Norma snored. That girl should have gotten her adenoids fixed. I looked for something to toss at her. Her hands were crossed primly over her

breasts, and the crucifix dangled over her head from the frame of the iron bed. Jeez, Norma. Betcha Ruby can't sleep like that. I felt the two pitiful little lumps that had been swelling shyly on my chest for two years. Hopeless.

In the morning we left the dormitories and crossed the street to the real world, where people talked during meals and boys were on the premises. I was usually not too lively on Monday mornings, but having Ruby to show around cheered up my day. She was assigned to my eighth grade room, so I would have lots of time to get to know her better.

Ruby slid into her seat in front of me. I waited for her to say to someone, "Hi, I'm from Bow-gah-loosah," but she didn't. She lowered her eyes and sat very still. Miss Rosemun made an introduction. "Class, this is our new student, Ruby Mae Stella Neely." There was a stir at the back of the room where Mack and the Dudes sat. They were a tight group. They were the Duds to those of us who knew them well.

At lunchtime I tried to find Ruby. She was nowhere in sight. I figured she could take pretty good care of herself, so I sat with Norma and munched on an apple.

When I got back to the classroom, I found Mack setting up camp in my desk.

"Outta my desk, Mack," I ordered.

Mack chewed a toothpick and placed his feet across the aisle so I couldn't get past him. He and I were not on very good terms since I found one of his cheat sheets taped to the back of my chair and he started calling me Claudia Fartia. I never turned him in. I guess he just didn't like it that I knew his little secrets.

"This is my desk now," he said.

"Says who?"

"Says Miss Rosemun," he lied. "Ruby here has promised to help me with my history so I can pass to high school this year."

"Well, you've certainly had enough tries at that," I retorted. "If you think Ruby can help you, be my guest."

Ruby just sort of fluttered her eyelashes. Mack tucked his huge feet under the desk and grinned.

"Hey, Mac," I hissed as Miss Rosemun turned to the board. "Slouch. I can't see around you." Mack scrunched down in his seat. He bent his knees and propped his ratty sneakers so they rested on Ruby's rear. She wiggled and looked over her shoulder but he didn't move.

On the way back to the dormitories I grabbed Ruby by the arm. "Listen, Ruby," I said, "watch out for Mack. He's in trouble all the time."

"Mack?" she said. "Oh, he's nothing. Just a sweet guy, that's all." She pulled ahead of me.

"Straighten those lines, girls," Miss Steppanus said. "Claudia, that means you." The line of brown serge skirts undulated through the gates of the boarding school.

Ruby needed a little settling in, I decided. Mack would sooner or later make such a nuisance of himself that Ruby would see what I was talking about. And it would take a little time for Ruby to learn how to stay out of Miss Steppanus' way. That negligee, for instance. I wondered how long it would be before old Steppanus called her down about that. It didn't take long. A week after Ruby's arrival, a package came from her parents. It

contained a gray chenille robe with a high neck and long sleeves. The pink negligee was never seen again.

Ruby didn't get to wear her fancy clothes much, either. Old Steppanus went on a kick about order and neatness and decided we would stay in uniform until bedtime except on Sundays. The brown serge skirts and long-sleeved white blouses were not what you'd call provocative, but somehow word of Ruby's charms travelled anyway.

One morning when we crossed the street to school we encountered a group of strange boys slouched against the corner mailbox. Miss Steppanus frowned at them. She always frowned at kids who didn't go to our school. The boys just stood there, flexed their muscles, posed, and watched Ruby swing across the street.

Mack looked strangely industrious that morning. He bent over a borrowed sheet of paper and wrote steadily. Maybe Ruby was having a good influence on him after all. Miss Rosemun nodded approval in Ruby's direction. Ruby smiled. Mack folded the page into a tight square and dropped it over Ruby's shoulder into her lap.

Curiosity reared its ugly little head and gnawed at me. At lunchtime I fiddled around at my desk until the room was empty. I chewed on my hangnails a while and then decided that what I was about to do was for Ruby's sake. I dug in her desk for the note, took it to the girls' bathroom, and locked myself in one of the peeling pink wooden stalls.

"Dear Ruby," it said, "You are nice. You are so beautiful. No one is so kind like you are. Your hare is beautiful. Your ruby red lips are beautiful. Meet me after school under the bleachers. I love you. Mack.

"P.S. Are they real?

"P.P.S. Miss Steppanus..."

He had crossed out a word with dark, heavy strokes and written over it "stinks" and ended with "BURN THIS."

I folded the letter along the crease lines and slipped it back inside Ruby's desk. At least I wouldn't have to worry about her going under the bleachers. Miss Steppanus always marched us straight back to the dormitories at 3:00 sharp.

"Ruby," I told her later, "I'm telling you, Mack is trouble. Take it from one who's been here since first grade."

Ruby whirled her face to mine. "And I told you, Mack is nothing to me. He's just a passing ship in the night."

That night I lay in bed thinking about ships that pass in the night. Norma snored in the glow of the nightlight. I looked her way and saw that, as always, she had neatly hidden her undies, even her socks, under her blouse on the chair. Ruby's chair had two white circular-stitched mountains sticking up in plain view. I always slept in my undies and kept the covers pulled up so Miss Steppanus wouldn't find out. I tugged the covers up tight and closed my eyes.

Somewhere in the darkness outside came a low noise, like a coyote howl. The lone voice was joined by a second and a third. I slipped out of bed and pulled my robe on. Under the street lamp near the gates stood Mack and his friends. Carefully I nudged the window up a few inches and leaned my ear down. The January air blew cold and on that blast I heard clearly what those wolves were singing.

"Rooooooooooooobeeeeeeee."

The springs of Ruby's bed squeaked loudly. She rolled over so I couldn't see her face.

I went in to the bathroom, stood there for a minute, and flushed the toilet in case Miss Steppanus had heard me stirring.

The next morning Ruby buttoned her blouse all the way to the top and tied her neck ribbon so tightly I thought it would strangle her. She was very quiet. Her blond hair hung down over her face as we walked past the group in the corner. Miss Steppanus' face was set rigidly and she looked straight ahead. Norma huddled down even further than usual over her books.

In class Mack leaned over his desk and absently fingered Ruby's hair. Ruby sat ramrod, her eyes riveted to Miss Rosemun.

Miss Rosemun wrote an assignment on the board in her perfect rounded script. "I expect this assignment to be completed by the time I return from the faculty meeting," she said. "And, need I say, I expect that you will behave as befits perfect ladies and gentlemen. This is a great responsibility to be on your own for an hour..."

The Duds could hardly wait for her to get out the door. A spitball blizzard fell. Mack stood up and leaned his elbows down on Ruby's desk so his face was nearly touching hers.

"Oh, Mack, you're just too much," Ruby said.

Robert, Mack's chief dud assistant, asked if he could use my scissors. I handed them to him and immediately regretted it. From a magazine picture of a woman, he cut two circles from her chest. He stuck his fingers through the circles and with his ballpoint pen made dots on the ends of the fingers. He wiggled his fingers where Mack would see them. Mack laughed.

Robert wrote "Ruby" on the picture and held it up again for Mack.

Mack's smile dissolved. He grabbed Robert by the collar and lifted him out of the seat.

A spitball splattered my ear. Miss Rosemun came through the door. She seemed to hover in mid-air. "That will be QUITE enough," she said icily.

Mack dropped Robert into his seat. We spent the entire afternoon standing beside our desks, watching the minute hand of the clock crawl around, and around, and around.

That evening Miss Steppanus came into the dorm and called a surprise inspection. She crawled under the beds and looked for dust; opened closets; checked to be sure blouses were all in one neat row and skirts in another; she ran her finger over each basin for soap scum.

"The beds," she announced suddenly, "are not properly made. You girls will simply have to re-do your beds, each of you." She went to Ruby's bed and whipped back the bedspread. She tossed the pillow on the floor and ripped off the sheets. "All of you, strip your beds," she demanded.

Ruby's eyes were wide and round.

"It's O.K., Ruby," I whispered. "She does this every time she falls off the roof." I thought Ruby would laugh, but she didn't. She was watching Miss Steppanus, who hesitated a moment before snatching up Ruby's pillow.

She struggled with the pillowcase. A folded square of paper fell to the floor.

Miss Stepanus swooped down, clutched the paper, and stuck it in her pocket. Victory glistened in her eyes.

Ruby's face was scarlet. She pulled the sheets from the floor and slowly re-made the bed.

"That's fine, girls," Miss Stepanus said cheerfully. She swept out of the dormitory in the direction of her office.

Ruby's bed was in perfect order now. Not a wrinkle in sight. She smoothed the white spread one more time, sighed, and went to her closet. She took out the pink bouclé sweater and the baby blue knit top. She laid the pink sweater on my chair and the blue top on Norma's.

"HERE," she said in her bounciest Ruby Mae Stella Neely voice. "I REALLY would like for you to have these. They don't suit me anyway."

The next morning at breakfast, Miss Stepanus called Ruby out of the dining room. They disappeared into the little room where Miss Stepanus entertained visiting ministers when they came to call.

I had to stretch my neck to see through the dining room doors. Ruby was crossing the hall, a wad of tissues balled up in her beautiful, soft hands that I knew smelled of almond lotion. The little bald man was shuffling down the stairs. His eyes were lowered behind the rimless glasses. He dragged Ruby's bulging suitcases toward the door.

— Jane A. Zanca