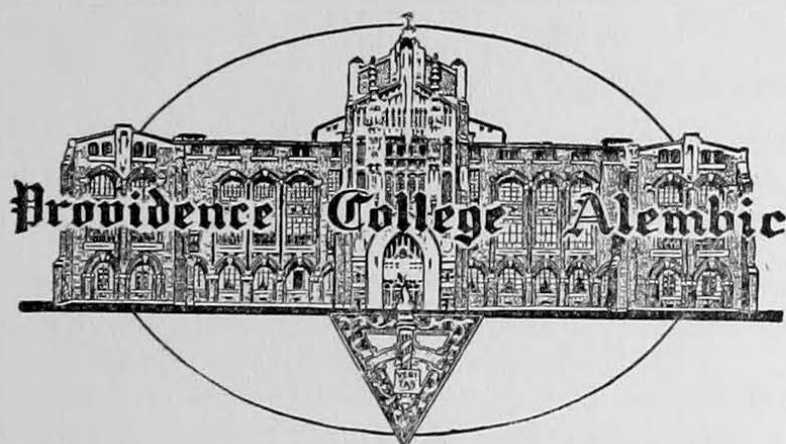


# THE ALEMBIC



NOVEMBER, 1949

# THE ALEMBIC



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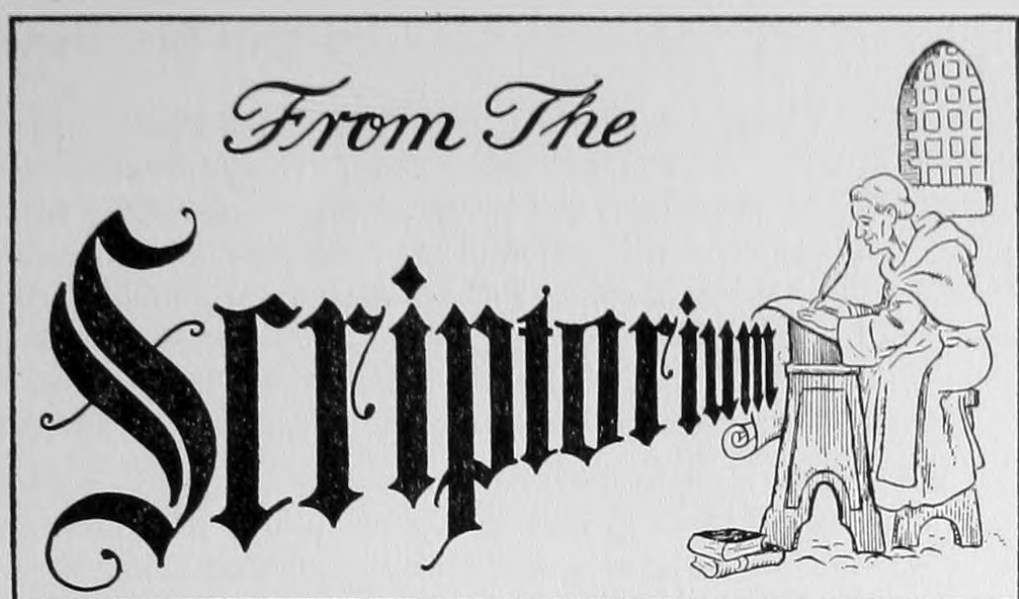
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CONTEMPORARY writing seems to have channeled itself into two definite schools of thought. The stark realists are always with us, exploiting a bit of the sordid side until it assumes proportion entirely out of keeping with the world as we know it today. On the other side of the slate are those writers who have found that the plain presentation of the moral-religious aspects of living will find an eager and receptive audience. The divergence between the two is clear-cut; the wonder of it is that both can find an equally profitable existence in our milieu.

Needless to say, the effects of both types of writing are far reaching and the consequences assume a vital importance in their formulation of moral principles for the coming generation. If the moralists could but offset the degenerating influence of the realists we might arrive at a happy compromise wherein the reader could equitably reach a Catholic moral conclusion. But the pity of the situation lies in the fact that those who need it least read the current moral literature while those who could use guidance are drawn to the clap-trap rantings of the realists.

We find a pleasing representation of the Catholic, or at least Christian, moral trend in the titles of many of the books as tabulated on the so-called "best seller lists" of such reputable newspapers as the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*. *The Robe*, *The Song of Bernadette*, *Peace of Mind* and *Peace of Soul* are but a few of the books which have reached prominence in the eyes of the American reading public. It is equally impressive to note that a



## *The Alembic*

single author, Thomas Merton, has thrice scaled the literary heights with such books as *Seeds of Contemplation* (reviewed in this issue), *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and his latest publication, *The Waters of Siloe*. The October 23rd edition of the *New York Times* lists *The Waters of Siloe*, *Peace of Soul* and *The Seven Storey Mountain* as being second, third and fourth respectively in the general rating of the national reading choice. This, indeed, is indicative of the fact that our current literature can be decent in nature and find a receptive audience.

Yet look for a moment at the other side of the page. We have a large and unfortunately prolific group of authors who insist that humanity, individually or as a whole, consists of men who are ruled by the animal nature solely. Volition, reason and morality have been subjugated to instinct, emotion and sex. For an attractive financial output we can fill our libraries and minds with a choice of items which run the gamut from prostitution to divorce, from illicit love to a series of vices which defy the imagination. It is certainly tainted meat in which to clothe young bones.

A moderate form of realism is a good thing, for none of us are naïve enough to believe that this world we live in is a pleasant little spheroid peopled by philanthropists and oozing with the milk of human kindness. Those things which are familiar to us should be represented as such, with that accuracy of detail and explanation which is necessary to sensible presentation. However, life contains more than is visible to the naked eye and we might all profit by letting our reading habits transport us to the regions of the soul more often than to the regions of the body.

The idea is altogether too current that the way to financial success in the literary field can be obtained by unlocking the back door with a key which represents filth and immorality. It is no credit to the American people as a whole or to the Catholic population in particular that they stand idly by while the field is swamped by degenerate literature. The qualities which make us different from the beast could be utilized to great advantage in the proper discernment of what is moral and what is trash on the printed page. If we cannot make this discernment and abide by Christian moral principles in our reading habits, then truly, we are no better than the licentious characters we read about.

W. B. H.

### *From the Scriptorium*

Each year an invitation is extended to the freshmen, assuring them that the editors not only welcome, but seek, their contributions to the ALEMBIC. They are urged to set down their sentiments in the form that best befits them and submit the results to the literary quarterly of Providence College. The fact that this invitation is so seldom heeded bespeaks on the part of Providence College writers either timidity or laziness, and it is not for the editors to name the greater vice. If it is timidity which inhibits the aspirant, we invite him to consult recent issues of the ALEMBIC to see how little competition confronts him; for laziness there is not so pat a cure.

What can we say, then, to charge our invitation with decision, to invest it with both a greater emphasis and a surer warmth? The answer, of course, is "nothing". You can lead a man to paper but you cannot make him write. Those who can write find it hard to abstain, and their only difficulty, in most cases, is to mount the public stage. The ALEMBIC exists to give them that opportunity. And to those who, while at home among the flexible cadences of the English tongue, lament that they have nothing to say, we answer this: surely there is some notion to be distilled from all they see about them.

G. L. E.

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# Laughter in Exile

By GEORGE EAGLE '50

IT sounded, on the edge of consciousness, like the alarm of his clock, but when it rang again, Leslie Allen reached for the phone. In a sleep-ridden voice he said hello.

"Did you know El Greco's Jerome is right here in New York?"

"Oh," said Leslie, taking a cigarette.

"Well that's a cheery good morning."

"I'm sorry, Ross, but it's a hell of a time to be calling about El Greco."

"Do you know the time?"

Across the room on the bookcase a decanter stood squarely before the clock, and when Leslie groped on the night table for his watch, he knocked it to the floor. "Okay, what time is it?"

"It's ten, and you can meet me at the Frick in an hour." Ross's voice was alert, he must have been about for hours.

"It may be ten, but I'm not meeting you anywhere in an hour, least of all a gallery."

"But, Les, you said once you'd love to see an original El Greco."

"I did?"

"You said he's the most spiritual painter you know."

"Damnation, did I say that?"

"Now what about it?"

Leslie crushed his cigarette in the tray. "Ross, this is Saturday and I've promised myself a weekend of rest. I've



been reading Hegel all week, and doing a paper on Voltaire, and for the next two days I don't want anything that even smells academic. I'm loafing till Monday and if it's true that it's ten, that's swell: it means I've slept eleven solid hours—rather a good beginning, I'd say."

"This militant laziness doesn't become you, Les."

"If you're real nice, I'll meet you tomorrow for a drink—say about six."

"Okay, I lose. Tomorrow at six."

Leslie swung his legs out of bed, slipping his feet into sandals. He sat there for a moment smoking and surveying the disarray of the apartment. He had thrown a suit onto a chair and now it would have to be pressed, and he should have emptied the ashtrays long ago. On the night table, its scarf awry, stood an uncovered bottle of aspirin, an empty cigarette carton, an uncapped pen, a dictionary, and a glass still sticky with beer. The curtains on the French windows were disarranged and not very clean perhaps, and his desk was heaped haphazardly with books from the library and old copies of the *New Yorker*. That work on Voltaire, of course, but it was time he tidied it up. And the carpet, why deny it, was smudged with ashes. He supposed he could have a woman come in, but still he should be able himself to clean one room, a bath, and a kitchenette.

He went into the bath and started the shower. The phone rang.

"I've been trying for hours to get you, who on earth had so much to say?"

"Guy by the name of Theotocopoulos."

"Darling, you're cute."

"A man loves those little compliments. What did you want, Janet?"

## *Laughter in Exile*

"I'm having lunch with my boss and I want you to meet him. But the thing you've got to do," said Janet, "is come with an open mind."

"I'll keep it open till he says my asthma is psychogenic."

"That's what I mean, you're poisoned against him. Well anyway, we'll see you at one—"

Leslie showered, smashed a shaving bowl on the tile, burned his toast in the kitchenette, and put on a blue suit. While he searched for a tie clasp the phone rang.

"Leslie? This is Stephen."

"Stephen?"

"Stephen Mills."

"Well Stephen Mills! I haven't seen you since—since forty-five, isn't it? Where are you?"

"At the Statler. I'd like to see you, Leslie, it's been a long time. I'm driving over to Jersey to see Jack, I thought maybe you'd like to come along."

"Jack?"

"You remember Jack, don't you? I thought you might like to see him again."

It seemed to Leslie he should say something to prove he remembered Jack. "Did he ever marry that girl—what's her name?"

"Phyllis?"

"No, the one he was always talking about in France."

"Oh—Connie; I don't think so. I just called him, but we didn't go into anything on the phone."

"Well, I'd love to go with you, Steve, but I'm having lunch with Janet—I guess you've often heard me speak of Janet—" He was trying to gauge precisely the degree of their acquaintance, how much they knew about each other,

he and Stephen; his mind was searching out the details of their friendship, that furlough in London together, those months on the Rhine, coffee in the billet and conversations over Moselle, that encounter in Paris. It was surprising how quickly the outline of Stephen filled in, until there he stood, a body to go with the voice on the phone.

"But I'm not leaving till three, Leslie, and I could pick you up, or you could meet me at the hotel."

"Three's fine, Steve, I'll meet you there. It'll be good to see you again, and Jack."

Leslie crossed the room and closed the windows, and then he found the clasp. He switched off the light in the bath, and in the kitchenette he discarded the toast. He retrieved his watch from the floor where it had fallen and slipped it onto his wrist. He glanced in the mirror at his tie.

He did everything with abstraction. He was thinking of Stephen Mills, and now the outline was complete: Stephen Mills, so alert, so exact, so New Hampshire; the colonel's secretary unfailing and the tourist in London who would remember it all, the size of Saint Paul's, the age of the Abbey, the changing of the Buckingham guard. They had met in Paris at Napoleon's Tomb—not the Follies of course, and certainly not Pigalle. How many stone angels surrounded the sarcophagus? Stephen Mills would know, and now he was at the Statler, and you remember Jack of course.

It was noon, enough time to walk and get the air. He locked his door and passed through the dusky corridor to the street. Ninety-third Street in September was bland and sunny, and even, after his apartment, inviting. He inhaled and felt an elation.

He must have walked for an hour, because when he reached the restaurant, Janet and Doctor Bush were waiting.



## *Laughter in Exile*

Janet had changed from her professional white to a trim green suit and brown pumps. She was a brunette with alert eyes, a rather sharp nose, and a large mouth. She spoke now in her accustomed contralto.

"Herbert, I've been wanting you to meet Leslie for the longest time." She must have said this to Doctor Bush a dozen times before, and now his smooth round face smiled at Leslie.

"I understand you don't approve of Freud."

Leslie gave a moderate little laugh. "I hope Janet hasn't told you everything I've said."

"Herbert," said Janet, "you've broken your promise already. You promised not to mention psychiatry."

They took a table and Doctor Bush turned to Leslie. "You know, Leslie, there's a law against talking about the thing that interests you most. They call it talking shop and that's a very dirty word. We've got peculiar customs, haven't we?"

"But the sane obey them, don't they, Herbert?" said Leslie.

The doctor turned to Janet with a smile. "That's what I mean, Janet, we've got to work like hell to convert them. They've all seen too many movies, and they've all read Mary Jane Ward." Then he turned again to Leslie. "Speaking of peculiar customs, Janet tells me you write."

"I did try a story once, I thought I could do it, but it didn't quite—"

"Come off," interrupted Janet. "He always says it didn't quite come off. There's something you should know, Les: Herbert considers writing an intellectual striptease."

Leslie took up his menu. "Well, I'm having shrimps, and I hope they don't mean anything erotic."

At coffee Doctor Bush remarked, "We've been having



a hell of a time, my wife and I, getting the boy to a barber. But of course it's natural."

"Yes," said Leslie, "most kids don't like to have their hair cut."

"It's the scissors, of course; he's afraid of the scissors."

"Herbert," warned Janet, and Leslie asked, "Why should he be afraid of scissors?"

Doctor Bush gave him a smile of intimation. "You know, Leslie." Then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "It's a damned funny thing—my son would give anything to see me, his own father—"

Janet set her cup down. "You forget, Herbert, that Leslie is a prude."

Leslie gave her a sharp glance and she turned her eyes again to Doctor Bush. "You have a two-thirty patient, Doctor."

They threaded their way between the tables to the street, where the afternoon crowds pushed by. Doctor Bush faced Leslie and Janet. "By the way, when are you kids getting married?"

Leslie grinned. "Probably never. We're too different."

"It's true you're male and female. It would be hard to find another nurse like Janet. She's got plenty of compassion, and that's what it takes in psychiatry."

"You mean soul?"

"Of course we don't believe in the soul, we're just trying to work with human beings in their down-to-earth situations. And after all, helping other people is the only wisdom."

"It is, Doctor?"

"The world is no paradise, Leslie, it's a pretty rough place."

## *Laughter in Exile*

"It does bear the look of having been got up in a hurry."

"Les," said Janet, "are you busy tomorrow?"

He flagged a cab and got in. Through the window he looked at them standing there on the sidewalk. "Yes; I'm going to study my Greek. I've plumb forgot what *psyche* means."

The cab took him to the Statler and Stephen was in the lobby when he got there. He regarded Leslie closely as they shook hands.

"Leslie, you look tired."

"I guess I'm getting old. Are you still with the insurance people, Steve?"

Stephen nodded. "We're awfully busy right now, I was afraid I couldn't get away. I'm on my way to Richmond, just for a few days, to visit folks I haven't seen in years."

They walked to the car, and Stephen drove carefully through the crosstown traffic to the tunnel. Soon they were in New Jersey, where the afternoon sun glared harshly on all the colors of the cars, on all the highways and service stations.

"Do you remember," Stephen was saying, "that time we met in Paris?"

"I was thinking of it this morning," said Leslie, and they both agreed it had been quite a coincidence.

Stephen stopped and asked directions of a policeman. He might have been asking a gendarme for the Place de l'Opera. They drove on.

"I often laugh," said Stephen, "when I think of that place where we stayed. And the concierge . . ."

Now they were passing through the streets of Jersey City, a confusion of trucks and signs, dingy shops and traffic lights and the glare of the four-o'clock sun.

"You know, Leslie," said Stephen, "I liked London, there was something solid about it. Jack said the people weren't friendly, but I never thought so."

London, Brussels, and Munich . . . What had got them together again, Stephen and himself? Did something of their past still linger in their lives, could something of another time remain? London, Paris, Berlin, and now Stephen was going to Richmond, to visit friends he had not seen in years. What held it all together, the years, the lives, the friends? Doctor Bush had a two-thirty patient, and New York had El Greco's Jerome.

"I wonder what became of Dick," said Stephen.

Leslie had not thought of Dick for some time. "I don't know. Didn't he want to be a teacher or something?"

Stephen laughed. "I'll never forget the night—do you remember?—when Dick got soused on champagne. We'll have to ask Jack what became of Dick . . ."

And now the traffic lights, the buses, the neon signs, and all these sooty streets.

Stephen turned the car into an elm-shaded street and started to read the numbers on the homes. "Eleven twenty-two, here it is."

Scarcely had they entered the yard when Jack appeared at the door, a lanky man of their own age in a limp sport shirt. Leslie expected him to say long time no see and he did. "I sure was surprised to get your call, Steve."

"I couldn't see passing this way without stopping in. You look the same, Jack."

Leslie expected Jack to say a little older, I guess; and he did. Then he turned to Leslie. "There's no reason for *us* to be strangers, Les."

## *Laughter in Exile*

"Well, you get busy at something and that's the way it goes." It was one of those remarks that meant nothing if you looked at them too closely, but no one ever looked at them too closely.

"There's no one home," Jack was saying; "let's go up to my room and relax."

He led them up a flight of stairs to a high-ceilinged room. It was papered in a drab, nameless hue, with woodwork of a glossy white. The room was crowded with a bed, a chair, a table, two bookcases, a desk, a bureau, and a television set. The house next door was so close that all you could see through the window was an expanse of wall covered with imitation brick. The curtain was gathered and stuffed behind a bookcase for more light.

Leslie had never seen the room before but now he seemed to remember it from some distant day.

"Just sit down any place," said Jack, "and I'll get us a glass of beer." He chuckled uneasily. "If I remember right, we all drink beer."

Stephen took the chair and Leslie sat on the bed.

"It sure is good to see you boys again," said Jack.

"You know, Jack, I was just saying to Leslie, whatever became of Dick?"

"You mean the fellow that sang in the choir? He's in California, I think, studying to be a Franciscan priest or something."

"Was he a Catholic?" asked Leslie.

Stephen turned to him in surprise. "Don't you remember how thick he was with their chaplain?"

And now the bookcases with their cheap novels, the television set, the curtain held back for the light. Jack was gone a moment and returned with tall frosted glasses of beer.



"Just like that place in Frankfurt, near the Bahnhof," said Jack. "Remember?"

Remember? And now the noises in the street outside, the dusk in the sky, the three of them again with their beer. They were all a little older, they guessed.

"Used to get some good kraut beer in the non-coms' club," said Jack, "and the cognac—that stuff could knock you blind."

Then Leslie remembered. It was a room in some hotel on the Rhine, with a high ceiling, bare walls, and white woodwork; like this in a way, but less crowded, less dingy, more remote. They were all there, with some others, drinking something, all those Americans in another land. He wanted to remind them of that room on the Rhine but Jack had got up to set the television dials.

"I didn't realize it was after six," he said.

And then the little images were on the screen. Jack came back to the bed and sat down.

"You're free, Jim, I can hardly believe it but you're free. We'll begin all over, we'll pretend it never happened. It'll be just like it used to be, Jim."

"I never really loved her, Gale; I never loved anyone but you."

Leslie looked at Stephen and Jack, their eyes fixed on the box, the light from the window faint upon their faces. That room on the Rhine was a part of their history, it was something to remember with a smile, but they must have felt no need to relate it to anything else. They were watching the television now, and nothing else was for the moment important.

"I knew that, Jim. I knew it all the time. It's the only thing that kept me going, it's all I had to live by."

## *Laughter in Exile*

"We'll go away, just you and I, together. That little place in the Catskills. The future is ours and we'll never part again."

"If your hair is dull, lifeless, and unattractive, why not try, for just ten days—"

Jack switched off the television and turned on the lights. "Bit slushy this week, but they usually have a pretty good show. By the way, have you boys eaten? I could scare up something in the kitchen."

"Thanks," said Stephen, "but I ate late, I couldn't eat a thing."

"Nothing for me, Jack."

Jack took their glasses and put them on the tray. "What are you doing tonight?"

"Nothing special," said Stephen, "but I suppose we ought to be getting back."

"So early? I promised Connie I'd take her to a show, but if I call her maybe she can get a couple of girls—"

"Thanks really," said Leslie, "but I think we'd better run."

They drove through Jersey City and merged with the traffic to the tunnel. Stephen's eyes were intent upon the car ahead of them, but he kept on talking.

"Jack's the same as ever, isn't he? I don't think he changed a bit."

"No, I guess not."

"I see he had the Kinsey report on his table."

"I didn't notice."

"I'm surprised you didn't know Dick was a Catholic."

"I guess I forgot."

In an hour they reached Times Square, where they dined. Then they endured a trifling film at the Strand. When

they came out, Stephen said he was going to drive Leslie home. Ninety-third Street was very quiet, and cool with the first hint of fall. The clock on the dashboard said midnight when Stephen parked at the door.

"Come in for a drink."

Stephen hesitated. "Well, a light one maybe."

They passed through the dark hall and into the apartment, now stuffy with the day's disuse. Leslie switched on some lamps and opened the windows.

"You've got a nice place."

"It costs like damnation but I'll have my degree before long. Rye?"

They sat in deep chairs and remembered the things that had happened—poor Cleary on the Autobahn, he probably never knew what hit him; and the things that people had said—will you ever forget Miller's crack to that major in Rouen?

"I should get back to the hotel," said Stephen; "I'm leaving early tomorrow."

But then they remembered that business in Cologne, and wasn't it lucky they didn't bust Smith? Leslie searched for things to remember, but Stephen remembered them all.

"Another drink?"

"No, thanks, I really should run."

Leslie took his own glass to the kitchenette. As he got the ice and soda, he could still hear Stephen's voice, crisp and certain. "I wonder if Jack's going to marry this Connie . . ."

"I don't know," said Leslie, and he mixed his drink strong. When he returned, Stephen was reading the titles in the bookcase.

"I see you've got some books here by Spinoza. Have you read them?"

## *Laughter in Exile*

Leslie nodded.

"What are they about? I mean in general."

Leslie gave a short laugh. "That's rather a hard thing to say. In general, everything."

They sat down again. "I've always meant to read some of his stuff," said Stephen, "and maybe I will, when things let up a bit."

"It won't matter much if you don't."

"Know who used to read Spinoza all the time? Levy. You remember Marvin Levy . . ."

And then they remembered Marvin Levy. "An awfully nice fellow," Stephen was saying, "but he had a few queer ideas. He told me once in Aachen that wisdom is the only thing that matters. So I told him that no one ever yet saw wisdom pay the rent."

"Sure you won't have a drink?"

Stephen shook his head and, when Leslie rose again with his own glass, gave him a slightly censorious look. His voice followed Leslie into the kitchenette. "Sorry Jack's folks weren't home, I'd like to have met them. Wouldn't you?"

"I guess."

Leslie returned to the chair and sat down. His head felt the liquor, and suddenly everything seemed a trifle absurd, especially Stephen, sitting opposite in his trim dark suit, his legs crossed, an empty glass in his hand, his eyes bright, not from alcohol but from the white New Hampshire snows. Something, it was neither delight nor contempt, made Leslie want to laugh, and he wished Stephen would say something funny.

"Have you ever been afraid of scissors, Steve?"

"Afraid of what?"

He wondered if Stephen had not understood. It was



possible, because Leslie's voice sounded strange even to himself. "Scissors. You know—snip, snip, snip."

"When I was seven I punctured my leg with a pair."

Leslie laughed now without an alibi. "Steve, you're normal—completely, damnably normal."

Stephen regarded him soberly. "You always liked to criticize, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did, but let me get you a drink."

"Thanks, but I've got to go." He stood up and extended his hand.

"You know, Steve, I just remembered something else that Levy said. He told me once that life isn't really a question of judgments, it's a matter of moods."

"That's what I mean. He was a nice enough fellow, but he had an awful lot of queer ideas.—It's been swell seeing you, Leslie, and I wish you'd come up some weekend."

"I'd love to—when things let up a bit."

Leslie closed the door and Stephen Mills was gone. Then the sound of the car in the street was gone too. And suddenly, as he stood there at the door, his hours with Stephen seemed as remote as that room on the Rhine, that meeting in Paris, that furlough so long ago. It was all part of his past, and he could not be sure it still held any meaning.

Turning from the door he caught his reflection in the mirror. He went closer and looked at himself. His face was a chalky white, his lips bloodless, and his eyes glistened with a counterfeit brightness.

"Damnation," he muttered.

He went to the kitchenette and mixed another drink.

II

Leslie awoke at noon and the light smarted his eyes. He sat up in bed, unable to gather his thoughts, and finally took a cigarette. Yesterday's suit lay crumpled in the same chair with the other, and the ashtrays were fuller. Stephen's glass stood on the table and his own on the bookcase, and the decanter still obstructed the clock.

He had only one thought, he did not want dinner alone. When he rang Ross's number, no one answered, so he phoned Janet.

"You sound strange—are you well?"

"In the bloom," he lied, "and I want you to meet me for dinner."

"Will I have time? I'm meeting Mary at three."

"Mary?"

"You know Mary. She's flying in from Frisco and told me to meet her."

"You'll make it—we'll bolt our food. I'll see you at one—"

The shaving soap was still on the tile, and later, having dressed, he could not find a clasp for his tie. He left in pique, took a bus downtown, and met Janet in a quiet place near Grand Central. They took a table in the back.

"Cocktail?"

She was slipping off her gloves. "We haven't time."

"You seem delighted to see me."

She took the menu. "Weren't you a bit cute yesterday, that crack about psyche and everything?"

"What about you? You called me a prude."

The waitress came, took their order, and left.

"You are, you know."

"I am what?"

"A prude. It's a trait of your sex."

Leslie smiled without humor. "Anyway, I know what Herbert meant about the scissors."

"You must read all the right fences."

Janet searched her handbag for something and Leslie drew lines on the napkin with a knife. "I suppose we ought to talk about something," he said. "Where'd you get that hat?"

She laughed now. "It's vile, isn't it? I hate hats. Les, will you come to the airport with me?"

"I'm never at my best with two women. And anyway, I'm meeting Ross."

"Oh yes—Ross. He's the one that loves the Middle Ages."

"One of many."

"I wonder what it is that beguiles him . . ."

"The people. He told me once they knew their way around."

"And what did you say—damnation?"

Leslie smiled. "Probably."

"I'm afraid that's only half of what he meant."

"By the way, Janet, what was wrong with your two-thirty patient?"

"Oh her. Frigidity."

The waitress brought their entrée. When she left, Leslie looked squarely at Janet. "Does it ever cross your mind, Janet, that you're wasting your time? I mean, with all the crises of the age do you ever feel sheepish about working on someone's frigidity?"

"Look, Les, don't lecture little ole me—all I do is hand Bush the needle."

## *Laughter in Exile*

"Half the world is starving and the Russians have the bomb and you spend your precious time—"

"Oh, why the hell don't you shut up?"

He put down his fork. "I suppose you think I'm criticizing you."

Janet gave a short snap of a laugh. "Criticizing Janet is America's favorite indoor sport."

They ate in silence for a time, but presently she looked up at him and remarked, "You know, Les, I've often wondered if you could ever fall in love."

He felt himself blush. "That's a funny thing to say."

"No, it isn't. I don't think you'd ever give any girl the satisfaction of knowing you loved her. You probably think it's a weakness, but maybe you're just plain selfish. And anyway, Les, you live in a minor key."

"You're talking like Ross."

"I'm not, Leslie, but if you don't know what I mean I can't explain." She smiled palely. "But I suppose you think I'm criticizing you. Mind if we skip coffee?"

They said good-bye at her car. It was two-thirty and he was not to meet Ross until six. He walked to Broadway, to the Capitol, but the film bored him and he left. He ambled for a time in the afternoon sun and then remembered what Ross had said about El Greco. He went to Fifth Avenue and took the first uptown bus. Through its windows the sunlight fell with a not unwelcome warmth, and the perfumes of the women blended in a sweet fragrance. In his mind swam lazy, inchoate thoughts, and sometimes the voices all about him reached his ears.

"I'll wear my black faille, if you think it's all right."

"So the day before Decoration Day the kid—that's the



youngest—steps in front of a swing. Seven stitches. Then the oldest broke his arm in two places, here and here. Nasty break. The poor kid had his arm in a sling for nine weeks and couldn't swim or anything. Then my wife's sister—"

"And every forty girls have a Big Sister. We have a lovely Big Sister and she's going to give us a party . . ."

And he also heard the voices in his mind. Janet was telling him to come with an open mind, and Jack was saying he had promised to take Connie to a show. Doctor Bush was talking about scissors and Leslie heard himself telling Stephen that he would love to spend a weekend in New Hampshire, when things let up a bit. The traffic horns on the avenue sounded distant, and when he closed his eyes in the sun he could almost fall asleep, but he could still hear the voices in the bus.

"Here's one we took at the lake. Look what Bob's got on, I thought I'd die."

"Last week our Big Sister took us on a nature walk. We had a lovely time."

"—so my wife's sister had her baby on Labor Day and I said to my wife—"

And Stephen was saying he really ought to go.

"Last stop, Fort Tryon Park, everybody out."

Last stop, Fort Tryon Park . . . there was nothing to do but get off. In the oblique rays of the sun the park was verdant and cool, and the voices of the children all about did not rend the halcyon time. Leslie descended the stone steps and followed the path till he came to a place that overlooked the city. The buildings, packed in a tight pattern that stretched for miles, reflected the sunlight from their windows and their vast brick walls. Lines of laundry fluttered on their roofs, and here and there factory chimneys stood, the sooty

## *Laughter in Exile*

spires of an industrial faith. Something in that denseness far below filled him with malaise.

He walked on, along that path between the trees. He passed a mother berating her child, and an old man reading on a bench. And suddenly, when he reached an eminence, it loomed before him, the Cloisters, on a summit against the blue, the western sun gilding its Gothic walls. It seemed to suggest to Leslie's mind a hundred distant things, evenings now forgotten, sunsets half eclipsed, churches and valleys, towers and fountains and mists.

The path led him to a portal, and entering, he walked along a flagged passage with its ancient stone arches from France. He came at length to a statue of the Virgin, carved in Strasbourg in a remote time. Before it stood a prie-dieu from the fifteenth century, and above it on the wall a candlestick, its iron brace wrought in the accents of a salutation.

Through a fluted portal he passed into the chapel, with its Romanesque arches, its canopied altar, and stained windows giving new interpretations to the sun. Unaware of the other visitors, Leslie tried to remember the tapestries he had seen, and the woodcuts. He hardly heard the scuff of many shoes. A large crucifix hung upon the wall, a rough wood image carved eight centuries ago in Spain and painted, perhaps, in violent Latin hues. The face, stark and impassive, suggested yet a disturbing and genuine life.

Leslie left the chapel and passing through a little cloistered court, came to a double pointed arch overlooking the park and the river. Below him, as he stood at the arch, ran a stone walk, and beyond it the river, blue and golden in the sunset, might have been the Seine or the Rhine. He tried to send his thoughts across the centuries, and then he remembered being with Stephen Mills and wondering if something

of another time could ever in some way remain. The moment was breathless, he could almost hear the Angelus chime, and now if someone came along the walk, it could only be a monk with his beads.

It was not the murmur of sandals that Leslie heard, but the sharp tap of high heels; not whispered aves, but the voice of a girl: "Of course you can't count on Lorraine to be on time, so we missed part of the first act, but Mary Martin was really a scream."

"Wasn't that the night Lorraine got so deathly ill?"

"Poor Lorraine! . . . They say scotch is easy on the stomach but I don't know. Moderation in everything, there's an awful lot of wisdom in that."

### III

It was six when Leslie reached the bar, near Saint Patrick's, where Ross was waiting. He went directly to the lounge, a Tudor room of dark wood and leaded windows. It was crowded with men and women sitting about the little tables, their chatter growing louder as the waiters passed among them with cocktails. The air was close with smoke and the scent of many perfumes. Ross, impeccable and detached, sat at a table on the hearth, beneath a marine oil, and he stood up when he saw Leslie.

"I've ordered martinis, you don't mind."

They sat down and Leslie asked, "Have you spent the weekend with El Greco?"

"You're the one that likes him."

"That's right—you're strictly medieval, aren't you?"

"I like the age; we'll put it that way."

"You've never really told me why," said Leslie.

## *Laughter in Exile*

"I haven't? Because it's over now and no matter how bad it was, no one can make it worse. The present has the defect that it can always be botched a little more."

Their drinks came and Leslie said, "You should have been with me today. I went to the Cloisters."

Ross laughed incredulously. "You? Why?"

He did not wish to admit that he had merely missed his stop on the bus. "I don't know. Curiosity, I guess."

"Did you see the Spanish crucifix, the one in the chapel?"

Leslie nodded.

"What did you think of it?"

"I don't know," said Leslie. "I guess I thought it quaint, a bit crude, and rather naive."

"I thought so. But it says more to me than any other work I've seen. I spent an hour before it one day, trying to see what it meant. I couldn't. It's passive, but there's defiance in it. It's so simple it's childlike, yet it's also immensely tragic. I could never reconcile all the different things it suggested."

Leslie considered him with a faint and rather serious smile. "You should be a Catholic," he said.

Ross laughed. "I couldn't. Catholics are too agnostic for me. They see things darkly, through a glass. Do you know what I found out the other day? They don't even believe God has a beard."

"You're a character."

"I've worked on it for years."

They finished their drinks and ordered again. After a silence Leslie asked, "Ross, what do they mean by wisdom, do you know?"

"I haven't the germ of a notion. Why?"



"I don't know, I just wondered."

When the waiter had served them, Ross regarded Leslie with a grin. "I imagine it's rather a dusty thing. I'm not sure I'd like it around."

"Really, Ross, I've known some phonies but you're the damndest."

"Of course I am—and anyone who isn't is a fool. The world's a chilly place, Les, and your only protection is a pose. I know what you're going to say—you think it's a retreat, an exile. Well, maybe it is; but in some way, God knows how, you've got to laugh about it."

Leslie glanced up sharply and fixed Ross for a moment with his eyes. Taking a cigarette from a pack on the table he quite solemnly lighted it. Then he smiled.

"Is that smirk supposed to be Byronic?" asked Ross.

"I guess it is. Damnation, I guess it is."

Ross finished the drink and took a bill from his wallet. "It's time we had a snack. Then we'll go to a movie. There's an English picture at the Sutton and everyone says—"

"Not me, Ross. I'm going to get a good night's sleep. I don't know why I need it but I do."

"You mean you're tired?" Ross was staring at him dumbly. "But you loafed all weekend, you couldn't even look at Jerome. What the hell tired you out?"

"I don't know. Really nothing, I guess."

"Damn it, Les, I don't understand you."

With a vague smile Leslie crushed his cigarette in the tray. "So there's something you don't understand. Well, drop around sometime, when things let up."

# Supplication

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

Thou said when I did'st wed thee  
That it would be for life, my dear.  
Now why, I ask thee, Sharon,  
Hast thou gone within the year?

Is it because I went not wi' thee  
To thy church on Sabbath day?  
Is that, I ask thee, Sharon,  
Is that why you went away?

Or perhaps because I beat thee  
When thou served my supper cold.  
Is not man's right to go a drinking  
Without to hear his wifie scold?

'Tis true I di'na gi' thee gold  
Thyself to purchase Easter's gown.  
But still you looked almost as well  
As other maidens of the town.

That girlie down on Friendly Lane  
Meant nothing dear to me,  
And still you cried as though my heart  
Belonged to her instead of thee.

Oh why, I ask thee, Sharon,  
Hast thou gone within the year?  
Did'st thou think I di'na love thee?  
It was that, 't was that, I fear.

# To a Milkmaid

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

Hear! Oh, hear! The night is ended;  
Arise, sweet maid, from off thy bed.  
Away, the fog is gently rolling  
Across the meadows far out-spread  
beneath the morning skies.

Oh, hear the stabled cattle lowing,  
The rooster's song of morning cheer,  
The crickets chirping in the meadow  
Happy that the morn is here,  
as always, when night dies.

The eastern sky is softly dawning,  
Revealing earth from darkness shorn;  
The eastern sky is softly dawning.  
Hark! Awake! sweet maid; 'Tis early morn;  
The day before thee lies.

## Double Date

By HAROLD E. VAYO, JR., '51

“H ELEN, I've got a little problem.”

“Really? Let's hear it.”

“Well,” began Sue, “I just received a letter from Tommy saying he'd be home from college for the week-end.”

“That's no problem.”

“Let me finish. He's bringing his roommate with him, and I was sort of hoping you'd make it a foursome this evening.”

“Why Sue, I've never even met the boy.”

“So what? Tommy says he's a swell kid, and not bad looking either. Who knows, this might be the start of a beautiful friendship. Besides, you've often told me you were dying to meet Tommy, and here's your chance.”

Helen studied her reflection in the long mirror at the far end of the living room. “Golly, I don't know. I would like to meet Tommy after all you've told me about him; but this idea of going out with a perfect stranger doesn't quite appeal to me. What it amounts to is a blind date, and I've heard of so many that went sour. If that ever happened, I think I'd die.”

“Look, Helen, you're only borrowing trouble. Tommy and I will be there in case the conversation lags. It's not as if you were going to sell your soul. What could possibly go wrong on a simple dancing date?”

“Nothing, I suppose.”



"Then you'll go?"

"On one condition."

"O. K. Name it."

"Promise me that if anything does go wrong you'll get the boys to take us home early."

"My God, Helen, stop worrying or you're going to ruin the evening before it starts."

Sue got up and walked towards the mirror, smoothing down her skirt as she went. Suddenly, turning to Helen, she exclaimed, "Hey, I've got to run along. Mother asked me to go down to Harper's this afternoon and help her pick out a hat. After she bought that bird-cage affair in April, Dad made her promise never to go hat-shopping without me.—Oh, I almost forgot: Tommy said he'd call for me at eight-thirty, so we'll probably get here about nine. Can you be ready by then?"

Helen nodded.

"Good. We'll see you at nine.—Don't bother coming to the door with me. After all these years I think I can find it."

"So long," Helen called after her.

## II

It was a few minutes past nine when Helen heard a car pull up in front of the house. Having given herself a last critical look in the mirror, she played nervously with the pearl bracelet on her wrist. The door chimes sounded. She took a deep breath, walked to the door, and opened it.

"Good evening, I'm Bill Craig."

"Hello, I'm Helen Graves. Won't you come in?"

"I'm awfully glad to meet you—"

## *Double Date*

"Please call me Helen."

"I'd love to, if you'll make it Bill.—Tommy is still at Sue's house. She wasn't quite dressed, so he suggested that I drive over and pick you up."

Her nervousness was strangely gone as she spoke.

"Wonderful. Would you care for a drink before we leave?"

"Thanks, but I'd rather not just now, if you don't mind."

"Not at all."

"May I get your coat for you?"

"Golly, it's so warm I think I'll go without one." "Say," she said, starting towards the door, "we'd better not keep Sue and Tommy waiting too long."

\* \* \* \* \*

As they approached Sue's house, she and Tommy came out of the house and down to the curb to meet them.

Sue was the first to speak.

"It's about time you two got here. I was beginning to think you'd skipped town with the car."

"Oh, nothing like that," Bill tried to explain, "we just stopped a minute for gas."

"Hundred octane or hundred proof?" quipped Tommy.

"There's a friend for you," countered Bill.

"Hi, remember me?" It was Helen speaking.

"Vaguely," said Sue, grinning impishly.

Tommy opened the rear door of the car and they got in.

"Helen, this is Tommy Norton."

"You know, Sue, I had a sneaking suspicion you were going to say that. How are you, Tommy?"

"Ready for action. By the way, has anyone decided where we're going?"

"I think the Wisteria Room at the Commodore would be as good a place as any," Helen suggested. "Larkin's orchestra is there tonight, and their manhattans are simply out of this world."

"The Commodore it is, then. Do you know how to get there, Bill?" asked Tommy.

"Sure thing. I passed it on my way to Helen's house."

Tommy was aware that Helen had been studying him through the rear-view mirror for several moments. Sue noticed it too.

"What's the matter, Helen," she said, "has Tommy got two heads or something?"

"Huh? Oh, I'm sorry. Tommy, I'm sure we've met before."

"I'll bet you say that to all the boys," he replied coyly.

"No, seriously. I can't seem to recall where it was, though."

Sue was amused. "Old home week", she commented.

Ahead of them a huge neon sign crawling up the side of a building spelled out HOTEL COMMODORE. They found a parking space without any difficulty, and shortly afterwards they were seated comfortably around a circular table in a booth directly across from the orchestra. Then came the inevitable "Excuse us for a minute, please", and the girls disappeared through a door marked LADIES, leaving Tommy and Bill to order the drinks.

### III

When they returned to the booth, Sue looked angry, almost belligerent; and her mouth was set in a tight, thin line.

## *Double Date*

Tommy had seen her like this before, and he knew that it meant trouble. She sat down and her eyes bored into the table.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing at all." Her tone was cutting, icy.

Bill, sensing the situation, motioned to Helen and together they moved out onto the dance floor.

Tommy tried to be natural. "Would you like to dance?"

"No!" She spoke softly yet emphatically. "Tommy, I'm going home."

"Home? Hey look, we just got here. What's come over you all of a sudden?"

"I'm not going to make a scene here. If you drive me home now, you'll find out in good time. If not, I'll call a cab."

"Of course I'll drive you home, but hadn't we better wait and tell Bill and Helen where we're going?"

"I said *now*! I've already told Helen."

He slipped a bill under his glass and followed Sue. He overtook her in the lobby, and they walked in silence to the car. When they had left the lights and the Saturday-night traffic far behind, Tommy broke the silence.

"Now what's this all about, Sue?"

"While we were in the powder-room, Helen remembered where she had met you before."

"Well?"

"It was at the Delta Tau Sigma dance last month; the one you said you couldn't take me to because you'd just had the car fixed and were short of money. You had enough to take that blonde vixen Marilyn Willcox, though, didn't you?"



And those weekends you said you couldn't get home because you had heavy studying to do. You were studying, all right, but not out of books. There are probably names for people like you. I wish I could think of one low enough."

Tommy switched off the ignition and the car coasted to a stop in front of her house.

Sue unfastened his fraternity pin from her dress.

"Here," she said, throwing it in his lap, "you'll need it for future conquests."

In an instant she was out of the car. She ran up the front steps, tore open the screen-door, and slammed it behind her. Then everything was quiet except for the lament of a lonely bullfrog in the distance.

Tommy turned the pin over in his hand. Slowly a relieved smile spread across his face. Perhaps it was better this way. Anger is so much easier to take than tears. After all, he had promised Marilyn his pin on their very next date. And a promise was a promise.

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## Thoughts of Sadness

By WALES B. HENRY, '50

They crystallize, these thoughts of sadness.  
Just like hailstones made from rain,  
But when their short-lived course is fallen  
They simply turn to rain again  
And find within the earth a warmth  
That made their flight seem not in vain.

# The Papier Mâché Christ

By JOHN J. SLAIN, '51

“**I** SINCERELY wish to hell I weren't going!” He kept looking straight ahead into the white path his headlights were cutting in the dry, cold December night. He felt Annie half turn to look at him, not saying anything, going to wait him out. All right, he'd outwait her.

She gave in with an “Oh?”—questioning, mildly surprised, an explain-if-you-want-to oh.

‘And that’, he thought, ‘was the kind of wife to have. Sympathetic. Okeh, husband mine, you’ve got the green light if you want it.’

He decided he did want it.

“I hate these things. The visiting benefactors come to give the poor underprivileged kids a Christmas party.”

“Why? I had rather gotten the impression you were fond of children.”

“I am. That’s why I don’t like it.”

“You’re a sentimentalist.”

“Not at all.”

“What then?”

He let it go for the moment, keeping his eyes fixed on the night and highway ahead. The night was winter, no snow on the ground, the air still, dry, crisp—almost brittle.

Better say something. Not start the night off on a sour note, spoiling Annie’s time, not during the holidays. Besides she always understood; sensed the mood at least even if its causes and parts were too tenuous for understanding. Sympathetic.

After lighting a cigarette he had at it.

"I joined the Guild to provide the kids with a few little amenities and to give them some contacts in town. That's okeh; that I like. This is different altogether."

"Maybe the Home depresses you. I mean depresses you because it is a Home."

"No. It does, yes, but not the way you mean."

She let *that* go and he didn't blame her. He tugged it around, trying to introduce a distinction, trying to get it in focus. After a minute he gave up. 'Either I'm subtle as all hell or I'm getting fuzzy in my middle years.'

Annie's hand on arm surprised him as she gave it a little squeeze. He felt a thrill and pleasure and gratitude and drove along for a moment enjoying it. Annie's hand was always there, always when you needed it.

She had taken her hand back before he realized he hadn't acknowledged it and then he cursed himself. Couldn't take her hand now—an after thought. It wasn't wise to rebuff a wife's gestures, especially not without a reason. Damn it all anyway.

They drove along in silence.

There was a small crowd milling around in the foyer, Guild members, officials and their underlings from the Home. He and Annie went in, shook hands and helloed their way across the room; Annie doing most of the work at it while he absorbed the atmosphere of impeccable manners and smiles in mixed company, gruff heartiness when one of the little knots that dotted the room was stag. As they got out of their coats he watched people come and go from one group to another and noticed that it was a kind of receiving line, picking up the newcomer at the door and moving him by port and

## *The Papier Mâché Christ*

starboard tacks, across the hall to the cloak-room and then on to the door of the auditorium.

What intelligent end does that serve, he wondered? Why couldn't you just plain walk in?

Inside the auditorium the superintendent met them and Annie rattled off the responses to the litany of small talk. It was nice of them to come; the pleasure was all theirs. There was such a nice program arranged; they were sure of it. Annie, he thought did this sort of thing rather well. Graciousness perhaps? Or perhaps Annie enjoyed it. You could never tell, not even about a woman who'd shared your pillow for fifteen years. Maybe Annie went in for this sort of thing; he'd have to ask her. 'Annie, do you really like these rites—?'

Rites! That was it. This thought came in focus easily and his mind's shutter clicked on it. The whole business was a rite; the liturgy of the religion of Niceness, a burnt offering to the god of Respectability.

"Damned Paganism," this half aloud.

His wife looked up at him.

"Wow," she said, "you are in a mood."

"No, I'm not."

"You picked a fine time and place for it."

"Oh, let it go."

'And this I can see is going to be one nickel plated hell of an evening.'

But the auditorium he had to admit was adequate. Neat rows of chairs had been set for the children on one side and for the adults on the other. On the stage there was a table, on the overhang of whose table cover were pinned papier mâché Santa Claus and reindeer. His first impression was that a natural gravitational pull had drawn the 300 odd young-



sters together on their side of the room and the 150 adults together on theirs. But closer examination showed that the reason was place cards. Everybody in the room was busy trying to find his own seat, presumably so he wouldn't be embarrassed by being ejected from someone else's.

As they picked their way among the rows of tables, looking for the cards bearing their names, he decided to try a little conversation.

"Isn't that rather overdoing it?"

Her face, voice and statement were equally noncommittal.

"You're being cryptic."

"Place cards at a children's Christmas Party. A trifle formal."

She snorted.

"Silly. It's not formality—its organization."

"How so?"

"It's simple enough. Do you know a better way to keep everybody from wandering around?"

After a moment, "And stop being disagreeable."

Where did that leave him, gently reproved or firmly told off? He didn't know, wished he did. After they found their places he sat and wondered about it. Sitting on his right was Hicks the dentist; not much of a talker, thank God. Around them the other Guild members were making social noises. Most of them he knew at least casually, but he confined himself to an occasional wave.

Years before there'd been an old trick, a schoolboy's trick, of closing his mind and letting sounds emerge into a drone. Now it was useful again, protecting him from the intrusion of utterly pointless conversation. 'I wonder why it's always pointless, always meaningless?' Supposing you were

## *The Papier Mâché Christ*

to turn to Hicks and say something important, like "Doctor, from what you've seen of me do you think I'm more likely to go to heaven or hell?" Better not. No point in getting a reputation as a character.

The minutes droned by and finally the program got under way with a welcoming speech from one of the children, a very cute peroration filled with jaw breakers and frankly aimed at making an impression.

"I," he announced to no one in particular, "hate precocious children."

Several people glanced at him and looked away quickly; Annie gave him a look that read 'Shut up,' and her lips pressed together for italics and an exclamation point.

'But, damn it, I do,' her husband protested mentally . . . Or did he? Was it the child you hated or his precociousness? Probably the latter, because it was such a handicap. Everybody patronized you, even your classmates, but nobody asked you to play ball, nobody asked you over to his house. The other kids always felt you were a freak, that there was something wrong with you—maybe they were right. All things considered, it was pretty lonely. He closed his ears and mind to the child on the stage, feeling something like embarrassment at the child's unnatural, earnest, serious voice. It was almost like being present at a spastic's burlesque of his incapacity.

The little boy ran out of words and was washed back to his seat on a breaker of applause. The next speaker was George Simpson, Guild President and realtor. Simpson favored his audience with a warm, kindly smile, learned by twenty years of selling people houses two weeks before the Spring Thaw was due to flood the cellars. George Simpson thought the little man had given a wonderful talk and that

was a wonderful thing, because anybody with ability could go far in this land of free opportunity.

‘True, I suppose, but what’s that to do with the birth of Christ? What after all are we celebrating—Christmas or the 4th of July? What does Jesus Christ have to do with Free Enterprise?’

George Simpson went on to explain that he, George Simpson, was there to tell them that George Simpson loved little boys and girls—

George Simpson didn’t hear the snort, and neither did Annie. Dr. Hicks did, however, he turned his head briefly and grinned.

Apparently it was to be forgotten that last Halloween, when some children had exercised their God-given right to behave like little bastards in a perfectly normal way by affecting some slight damage to Mr. Simpson’s property, Mr. Simpson had felt differently. Letters to the local press over Mr. Simpson’s signature had demanded the dismissals of the chief of police, the school committee, the mayor and the governor. At the same time George had intimated that he was favorably disposed toward a proposal to make birth control retroactive. Really, you didn’t mind the man’s being a hypocrite, but he didn’t have to get sloppy about it—

On stage George was triking a different note. By virtue of his position of preeminence in the business community, Mr. Simpson had been chosen as the obviously proper person to discuss the moral and religious significance of the holiday. He looked at his shoes and then examined his finger nails. Glib tones slowed till they became disjointed—almost inarticulate. His voice came across the room haltingly.

‘Now, boys and girls, I want to talk a little about the holiday we’re celebrating. You know it’s a wonderful thing

## *The Papier Mâché Christ*

that once every year we can all get this feeling of good-will and brotherhood . . . You know that's what Christmas is really about . . . All the presents and turkey and everything are fine, but when you get right down to it you have to realize it's a time when everybody is good to everybody else and there isn't any hate or anything and you feel good inside. You sing carols and are nice to your friends and they're nice to you and—it's wonderful. You know that all these things they teach you in school about brotherhood and tolerance and democracy are true. It's true because you believe it's true."

With one member of the audience it didn't go over. Annie ignored him pointedly as he stirred uneasily in his seat; his hand went into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette. Everyone he could see was listening with rapt attention, apparently bemused. Maybe they were right. Maybe it was all good and fine and affecting. Somehow he thought not.

He fumbled through his pants and vest and finally found matches in his coat. Then, remembering where he was, he put them back. Did, he wondered, Simpson really understand what he was saying? Was it so good and touching as everyone seemed to think? Was it altogether a symptom of health in our society that a grown man could mention the birth of Jesus Christ with downcast eyes? And brotherhood and tolerance, splendid things surely, but were they enough? In effect, wasn't Simpson saying that Christ was born, lived and was crucified simply to add to the world's stock of platitudes? Wasn't that writing it all off a bit too easily?

He wanted to walk up on the stage and put his questions aloud, and for half a moment half thought he had half a mind to. Then he settled back in his chair and shrugged. What could you do? . . . Another thought came to mind. Why was George Simpson discussing these things? Why was it



considered the greatest of possible compliments to the Infant of Bethlehem to have a business man or a popular entertainer or an atom scientist acknowledge His having been born?

He said nuts, a tired nuts, that meant that it was all very difficult—that something was wrong, but God knew what.

However, he had not meant to say it loud, and regretted it immediately. This time his neighbors looked around and frankly stared. 'Probably think I'm drunk.' Annie must be seething. He turned and looked at her.

A surprise—Annie was gathering her belongings. She turned, glanced at him, and got up to go. 'Oh, oh! this rips it.' Together they went quickly out of the auditorium into the foyer. Her face was absolutely expressionless.

Not a word passed as they got into their coats. Not a word passed as they walked out into the night. They walked to the car and he tried to sense her attitude and couldn't. It was as though she weren't with him.

The car swung out of the Home gate, took the turn back toward town, changed gears with only a single cough of protest, and then warmed obediently to its work. In its front seat the silence seemed like a third person.

He decided to say something—almost anything. 'I'd better get it over with now, before it has a chance to build.' But say what? You couldn't explain, it was too intangible, too half realized. He knew that there was something wrong, but he didn't know what. It was just a feeling that the people in that room had done an evil thing, that the good well-meaning men and women of the Guild had somehow failed; a feeling that something lacked. That was it mostly. You felt rather than knew, but were sure nevertheless, that something weak and tawdy and artificial had been subtly substituted for something strong and fine and true.

## *The Papier Mâché Christ*

'None of which faces the immediate problem. Better wade in.'

"Annie."

"What?" Her answer was expressionless and her voice was distant and like the air, and one with the air—cold in his ears.

"I'm sorry."

No answer. He took a deep breath.

"I wish I could explain, Annie, but I can't. Annie does it help if I say it wasn't petulance, that it was something deep? Does that help, Annie?"

"Yes, it does—some."

She paused—then, "Dear—"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry too—sorry I don't understand, that is."

"That's okeh."

"Thanks."

"Thank you."

"That's okeh, too."

". . . Want to stop for something to eat?"

"No, not tonight, I'm tired."

He drove along through the chill and the still of the December countryside. In the car the cold was getting a little less. Just a shade less.

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### ENCORE . . .

Making his first ALEMBIC appearance since *R. S. V. P.* in 1947, JOHN SLAIN returns to these pages with this polemic against the confetti Christianity so palatable these days. In addition to its obvious vitality and insight, *The Papier Mâché Christ* probably possesses that particular virtue which we call orientation. This means that not everyone will agree with it, but Mr. Slain, a Junior here and a graduate of La Salle Academy, will likely continue to accent his fiction with just a dash of vituperation.

# Rosinda

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

She smiled; And all my world was gay  
To favored be by one exceeding fair.  
We loved; My heart was hers that day  
When we were young, and prone to such sweet care.

Just as the verdant grass of springtime  
Mellows in the summer sun  
Did our romance grow all the sweeter  
As our web of love was spun.

We wed; And such sweet bliss as ours  
Is seldom found this side of Heaven's shore.  
It is to her that I will goblet raise  
When lovers drink to lovers, the world o'er.



*Seeds of Contemplation*

by Thomas Merton

201 pp.

Norfolk, Conn., New Directions Book, 1949

EVERY so often an author dips his pen in fire and writes in flame across the darkened skies—the fuel is his Life's blood and only a heart with a magnimity of purpose can generate the intensity needed to reach the stars. Should you be doubtful, then here is your answer:

"I have what you have not. I am what you are not. I have taken what you have failed to take and I have seized what you could never get. Therefor you suffer and I am happy; you are despised and I am praised; you die and I live; you are nothing and I am something, and I am all the more something because you are nothing. And thus I spend my life admiring the distance between you and me; at times this even helps me to forget the other men who have what I have not and who have taken what I was too slow to take and who have seized what was beyond my reach, who are praised as I cannot be praised and who live on my death.

"The man who lives like that is living in death. He cannot find himself because he is lost; he has ceased to be a



reality. The person he believes himself to be is a bad dream. And when he dies he will discover that he long ago ceased to exist, because God, Who is infinite in reality and in Whose sight is the being of everything that is, will say to him: 'I know you not.' "

This is Thomas Merton, the Merton whose *Seven Storey Mountain* unravelled a complex religious development in a manner that is unique in our twentieth century; the same Father Louis who offers the sacrifice of the Mass daily in the Cistercian solitude of the Monastery at Gethsemani, Kentucky. Because of the attention accorded *Seven Storey Mountain*, his *Seeds of Contemplation* has been relegated to a position of secondary consideration; which should not be, inasmuch as it represents the few grains of gold that all the sediment in *Seven Storey Mountain* produced.

It is a book that should not be read, only sampled—its intellectual atmosphere is such as to render such considerations as Merton handles alarmingly simple; for it is our complexity that makes such thoughts, such ideas, difficult to grasp. However, it is not this intellectual aura that elevates Merton, but his access to the rarer spiritual world in which he moves. In addition he doesn't attempt to give answers, rather he tells how to find them, and just as important, where to look. Never does he stoop to the apologies; his certainty is refreshing in a world of continuous compromise, on subjects that Catholics all too readily apologize for. Try this one:

"Everyone of us forms an idea of Christ that is limited and incomplete. It is cut according to our own measure. We tend to make ourselves a Christ in our own image, a projection of our own aspirations and desires and ideals. We find in Him what we want to find . . . Therefore, although it is true that perfection consists in imitating Christ and repro-

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ducing Him in our lives, it will not take us very far on the way to perfection merely to imitate the Christ that we have in our imaginations."

If any criticism has been leveled at Merton's work, it is upon that of his insistence on the relative merits and difference of function of the active and contemplative orders. Such a consideration is not ours to deal with here; however, Merton does justify his writings in the following way:

"If a writer is so cautious that he never writes anything that cannot be criticized, he will never write anything that can be read. If you want to help other people you have got to make up your mind to write things that some men will condemn."

Constantly, while you are in Merton's company (for he has that wonderful power of communication), you will come into contact, knowingly or otherwise, with his ability to penetrate the individual's thought processes, and to exercise influence from within, as it were, rather than to absorb himself with the task of penetration. It is his knowledge of what goes on *inside* that makes *Seeds of Contemplation* what it is:

"If Christians had lived up to the Church's teaching about property and poverty there would never have been any occasion for the spurious communism of the Marxists and all the rest—whose communism starts out by denying other men the right to own property."

"It is easy enough to tell the poor to accept their poverty as God's will when you yourself have warm clothes and plenty of food and medical care and a roof over your head and no worry about the rent. But if you want them to believe you—try to share some of their poverty and see if you can accept it as God's will yourself."

These are a few of the *Seeds* that Merton spreads

*The Alembic*

throughout the book—like all seeds they need fertile ground in which to grow, and as with all seeds there are the responsibilities of care and nourishment. But there is that promised flower of maturity, a better and a more beautiful life through contemplation, that Merton uses to speed the process, a process applicable not only to anyone in the world, but also to you.

C. F. W.

*The Brave Bulls*

by Tom Lea

270 pp.

Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1949

TOM LEA speaks in glowing terms of the men who face what Hemingway dramatically calls, "death in the afternoon"; pitted against the unrelenting horns in the *corrida* with the brave bulls. A true *aficionado* of the drama enacted in the ring cannot help but be gripped by the accurate and moving story of the men who test their courage in a contest where the penalty for faltering must be paid in blood. True, Tom Lea, has ventured into a field about which we in the northern continent have little or no realization. Our own conventions rebel at the thought of the letting of blood under any guise; however, Lea does not excuse us for that matter but rather assumes that the reader must be initiated to the ritual of the horns by placing him in the mind of his own character-matador. We see death through the eyes of Luis Bello and face the same fears and hold the same red *muleta* in our own hands. The sand of the bullring is soft under our slippers and the tinsel of the *banderillas* sparks in our eyes as the shoulders of the beast brush past us.



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It is not an introduction—it is a transplanting as we stand with the main character, Luis Bello, in the *Plaza de Toros* at Cuenca.

The brilliance of the drama, the gold-encased matadors, silk-shining, holding their capes tightly in their hands, scarlet-red and lavender-red, the march of the *toreros*, the multi-colored garb of the picadors mounted on their padded horses: these are the sights that hold your eye as the parade crosses the sandy ring to the box of the judge. The easy stride, the lithe gait of the death-dealers belies the fear and tension that grips them and will soon cause the loud "*Oles*" to subside to a breathless hush. Yes, the *corrida* is dramatic; it is fiercely impassioned; it is a picturesque affair, full of the color of Life and the ballet action of Death.

This is what Tom Lea has given us in all its intensity and color. It is fiction marked by accuracy in the slightest detail. Like the drama it depicts, *The Brave Bulls* is the story of all mankind. For to face death or to face the horns requires courage. Neither we nor the matador must fail in our given chore.

Luis Bello lives by the sword and his strong right wrist. He deals death and yet he subjects himself to it. He is an actor on a glorious stage; the central figure in a powerful drama. His younger brother, Pepe, would follow in his footsteps, yet he must first prove himself before he can hope to be worthy to succeed to the place of glory occupied by the Swordsman of Guerreras.

*The Brave Bulls* begins with the desire of the *impresario*, Eladio Gomez, to have in the ring at Cuenca the very finest of *corridas*. Tom Lea carries the vein of the story through to its ultimate climax when Pepe receives his baptism from the horns and Luis Bello defeats his fear. But within



this simple network is contained all the phases of a man's life for the horns of the brave bulls have affected not only Luis, but his family, his mistress, his friends and his will. When Pepe steps into the ring at Cuenca he takes with him ambition and hope and the fire of youth. But when Luis faces the horns, he is a man with his life behind him and only the challenge of Fear and Death confront him.

Tom Lea gives us this contrast in a vivid setting. Luis at the peak of his professional glory, inwardly torn by the wounds of the horns that have not only affected his body but his fighting heart, defying fate and yet not caring if fate overwhelms him till the final instant when he sees in the fallen *toro* his great victory; Pepe, fired with courage, facing the danger with overconfidence in his own ability, yet proving the stuff he is made of.

The fire that must surely be in Latin hearts is spread through the pages of *The Brave Bulls*.

Yet it is, perhaps, a fire which we cannot understand. Nor is it easy to grasp the reason why the Spanish people cheer what we might feel to be a cruel display of inhumanity. Lea explains it in this manner:

"The festival of the bulls is the only art form in which violence, bloodshed and death are palpable and unfeigned. It is the only art in which the artist deals actual death and risks actual death, as if a poet were called upon to scan his lines with his life. It is the contemplation of this visible violence and actual death that gives the art its peculiar power . . ."

And he goes on to say,

"There is enormous difference between the thrill given by art and the thrill given by watch-

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ing merely exciting forms of peril . . . Peril moves us simply as witnesses to a gripping body sensation. Violence, or peril, made significant by art amplifies the sensation beyond the body, distills it, lifts it above the realm of mere incident. A *corrida de toros*, by that token of art, presents us with a moving image and symbol of our own hearts grappling with violence and death. Can this be a sport? Unless, indeed, man facing his destiny is sport, combat between equals. No! In the plaza the man lives, by his bravery, and the bull dies. Sometimes it is another case, but that is not the plan of the festival which is designed to show the glory of courage over the power of death. Each of us reads into this theme our private response. It is that meaning of man face to face with the inner and outer brute force of living, and man's tragedy in dealing death while subject to it himself, which has gripped the mind and emotion of the Latin race."

Bullfighting is not a sport as we think of it in the conventional terminology we apply to our own forms of competitive entertainment. Rather, it is placed in the field of the drama. Every movement of the matador finds an explanation in the Latin mind. Every instant of the *corrida* has a deep and full meaning from the opening stanza of the Andalus song of bravery, "La Virgen de la Macarena", through the dramatic moment when the Gate of the Fright is opened and the magnificent beast hurtles forth. The crowd is held spell-bound by the final profile, aim and lunge, and thunders their ovation or registers their disgust with the performance of the

matador as the bull is dragged through the gate of the *ar-rastre*.

Truly this might be another Hamlet on the sands of the ring, standing, waiting with the *muleta* and sword, waiting for the horns and phrasing the soliloquy, "To be or not to be . . ."

Is bullfighting a cruel art? Is it morally wrong? Well, we can counter a question with a question—Has a beast any rights? To be sure, it is a magnificent specimen of animal that charges into the arena, shortly thereafter to be dragged ingloriously across the sand. But we know that it has no rationality, no volition. It reacts only to instinct and that instinct is to kill. The stroke of the picador's lance and the prick of the banderillas are not meant to be delivered with the sole intent of hurting the beast but rather to infuriate it so that it will direct its wrath toward the central figure of the drama, the matador. Which contest bears the lesser stigma—a man facing a beast and dispatching it with skill and adroitness or two rational creatures of God standing face to face in a ring, the sole purpose of each being to hammer the other to insensibility with his fists? The bull receives, in a matter of minutes, the same fate for which it was eventually destined in the slaughterhouse. Yet, of the two rational men in the boxing ring, one, if not both, will bear from the contest the scars that dull the mentality and numb the senses. The creatures that God has put on the face of this earth are for the use of man. It is our duty to use them well, efficiently and with due consideration. Yet they have no right to, nor must they necessarily be accorded, the same treatment we owe to rational man.

As Tom Lea points out very strongly, the matadors are brave men. They are matched with carefully bred and

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selected opponents—the brave bulls. Yet in the tragic and brave festival there is compassion and feeling that mounts to great heights. Consider the words of the great matador, Juan Belmonte:

“And at the end of a faena, when my enemy was exhausted and caring no longer for the trouble of the muleta, and I had to mount the sword, then it gave me compassion, then I felt pity, feeling pain and remorse that I must kill my bull, such a noble beast, that many times pardoned my life and in return for that pardon I only sent him away forever from his green and happy pastures.”

*The Brave Bulls* is the story of blood and emotion, of love and violence, of Life and Death. It is the story of mankind standing small and solitary, yet defiant and courageous, in the *Plaza de Toros* at Cuenca.

W. B. H.

### *The Problem of Pain*

by C. S. Lewis

142 pp.

New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944

A FEW years ago the ALEMBIC reviewed C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* even though at that time it had been out for some time, and it seems that *The Problem of Pain* possesses an enduring significance which makes its belated mention no less justifiable. The same could probably be said of the author's *Christian Behavior* and *The Case for Christianity*, which, like the others, explore with wit and incisiveness the problem of religion in the modern world. The review of an old book is usually an anomalous thing, but the



nature of Mr. Lewis's work can be cited, we believe, to justify the practice in this case.

The importance of Lewis's *Problem of Pain* lies in the importance of the problem itself. Although it is not an innovation of the twentieth century, men today have come to question the goodness of a God Who permits the suffering which everywhere appalls us. They are hard put to find a reason for it, and eager to discover in it a significance which alone can render it tolerable. The apparently irrational existence of pain is undoubtedly behind much of the atheism of the day.<sup>1</sup>

Bringing into play his gentle and sophisticated humor, C. S. Lewis takes up such problems as the existence of both human and animal pain and whether they can be reconciled with the goodness and omnipotence, to say nothing of the mercy, of God. They are issues which trouble most Christians at one time or another, and in some cases, obsessively. In the face of the most challenging tragedies, can we continue in our belief that God is not only powerful but just, not only wise but loving—or must we surrender one or more of these concepts, with the ultimate surrender being to atheism itself?

In an even tone of voice, Lewis faces one issue after another, unafraid to raise objections which even the most critical reader may never have himself conceived. His prose, as always, is lucid and unimpassioned, his viewpoint sane, and his mood compassionate. While neither postulating nor denying Lewis's conclusions, this review nevertheless recommends his lively and urbane dissertation on *The Problem of Pain*.

G. L. E.

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<sup>1</sup>While it is true that faith is an assent of the intellect, and therefore non-emotional, its absence is likely to engender in the subject a mood unfamiliar to most believers and one which they can know only vicariously. For a vicarious experience of this special "mood", readers are referred to Irwin Edman's eloquent *Candle in the Dark*.

# Things Worth Remembering

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

Memories past, why haunt me so  
With silhouettes of time gone by  
Of love and laughter, little things,  
That blossom forth, to fade and die.  
To die? but only in reality,  
This love, this mirth, and laughter,  
For while greater things forgotten lie  
Are these remembered after.

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## Two Lovers Meet

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

Two lovers meet; their kisses sweet  
Are freely, freely, given,  
The love obtained that each refrained  
From others who had striven.

May it endure as sweet and pure,  
As fresh as fresh can be.  
May it endure as strong and sure  
Through all eternity.

## Pessimism

By HAROLD E. VAYO, '51

The still-born day breaks in the East,  
And casts its sickly light  
O'er hill and dale; and ghostly pale,  
Shoulders the burdens of night.

The sordid air, teeming with things  
That breathe of sickly death,  
Hangs low, and demon-like, spreads everywhere  
Its evil, sticky breath.

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## Inspiration

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

Oft when at work my interest wanes,  
And the tedious hours around me coil,  
'Tis then my thoughts turn homeward:  
To the ones for whom I toil;  
To the little lips that kiss me;  
To the little eyes that smile;  
To the little arms that hold me;  
That make my working-day worth while.

## Farewell to Cleats

By CHARLES F. WOOLEY, '50

A SLIGHT breeze made its way across the field, twisting the loose dirt into pillars of moving particles; then dumping these same particles ingloriously from whence they had come. The neat, white lines that marked the field had been trampled into near-oblivion, and the shadows seemed to lengthen in order to cover the untidy scene as the sun sank to parts unknown.

The din of the crowd had died away, and a few tardy souls pushed their way up the paper-littered stairways, with visions of a steaming meal at home helping to offset the nip in the air.

The locker room beneath the stands presented a weird scene of weary ball-players in various stages of undress. The instantaneous glow of victory had begun to wear off; the bruises and aches began to be felt, and as a result the early clamor died down. The clickety-clack of the cleats on the concrete floor ceased as heavy football shoes were cast quickly aside, and the steam from the showers lay like a heavy blanket along the ceiling of the room. The pungent fumes of alcohol drifted from the rubbing table, enveloping for a time the heavy, stale odor of sweating bodies.

In front of one of the lockers a well-built player sank onto the hard wooden bench, and for a moment, just stared straight ahead at the metal door which bore his name. His aching body seemed to rebel at the thought of further motion and, for the time being, he was inclined to side with it. He



stamped his feet on the ground, shaking loose the hard packed dirt which accumulated between the cleats, and the dirt lay in tiny, almost half-moon, mound-like shapes.

Without changing his position, he ripped the tape from his wrists in short, stinging pulls—rolled it, now black with grime, into tiny balls and dropped it to the floor. Slowly, he peeled off the wet clinging jersey over the stubborn shoulder pads, and then down over his tape-marked wrists. Everything was done purposefully, with a slow precision, as if it had been done a thousand times before; there was deliberation in every movement that seemed to tell a great deal about this particular football player.

He had a kind word or flippant remark for *anyone* who passed by; and did a successful job of waving off invitations for post-game celebrations with a friendly grin and a sorry-but-I-have-something-planned, excuse. His pleasant voice and almost gentle manner gave no hint of his fierceness on a playing field; instead, they gave his character a “Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde” twist that frequently surprised those who had seen him in action on the gridiron.

Hands that shook momentarily untied the shoulder pads, for the release of such tension disrupts ever so slightly even near-perfect coordination; the bulky hip pads now received his undivided attention. Slowly, almost laboriously, he worked the now very heavy shoes off his feet, held them in his hands, then dropped them one by one on the bench at his side. Imported kangaroo leather—quite a contrast, he mused, to the worn, ragged sneakers that once tread the vacant lots where he’d had his “basic training” in the art of football. The lots where he’d learned the meaning of sportsmanship and love of the game.

His was a thoughtful mood, for today was his last game.

## *Farewell to Cleats*

The pondering was rather a natural action, for it's not every-day a man gives up a sport which he loves like a living thing, something that's an integral part of his life. That he'd finished in a blaze of glory meant little, but it was a nice way to finish up, and he felt contented about that end of it.

Gone were the days of glowing write-ups, the congregating autograph hunters, and tributary banquets. More important, gone too, was the warm feeling of victory, the quick response of well-trained muscles, the long, grueling hours of practice, and the strict, but worthwhile, rules of training. No longer would he listen with strained attention to the plays being called in the huddle, nor feel the terrific smash of a full-back's knees from the backer-up position; nor undergo the anguish which takes possession of a player when, after being sucked in, a reverse runs smoothly around the end. No, those things were of the past; an enjoyable past, grueling, dog-eat-dog competition; but still enjoyable.

He got up slowly, walked to the trainer's table; picked up the large, surgical scissors and proceeded to cut the tape from his ankles. His walk was a little uneven and as he made his way into the showers he was conscious of the slow throbbing in the right leg. Not that it was something new, mind you, but it made him realize more than ever that he had just finished a season of football—with all its body beatings, aches, sprains and bruises.

His shower was something delicious, if such can be said of showers, for no prescription ever soothed a tired body like a steady stream of warm water stinging the skin. It washed away the grime and sweat in tiny, swirling rivulets. The soap lay at his feet—and he made no effort to retrieve it—just standing there, he decided, would suffice for a while. The fatigue seemed to flow out through his pores, and the muscles

which had felt like stretched rubber bands began to loosen and resume normal proportions.

As he stood and soaked himself, his thoughts wandered far and wide. There had been other fall afternoons, some bright and warm, others cold and biting, still others wet and sloppy; and in turn the fields they played upon were either fast, hard or gooey. There's a distinct sensation in being tackled on a field as stiff from the cold as concrete, and still another in being dumped in the mud, allowing the cold water to seep down one's back; a distinct sensation. The cold makes the skin very tight, and every contact means a scratch or a cut; while the mud adds its weight to the many odd pounds of equipment and makes one feel like the unseated, armored knight of old.

He wondered idly how much sweat he had lost underneath the August sun; and how often he'd had a sudden desire to take up marbles, or maybe cheerleading as a sport. The extra weight that the summer seemed magically to add was very difficult to lose; and calisthenics was always his weak subject, anyway. It's amazing—or at least it was—how long a quarter-mile track can seem to be when the muscles in one's legs are woefully far from shape. Yes, the rigors of getting in shape were always an awfully high hurdle; yet one sometimes longed for the time when these rigors would begin.

How many times, he wondered, had he felt the sting of the coach's tongue, the satisfaction of a block well thrown, the surprise and the anguish of being hit from behind when out in the open. How often had he gone off-tackle on a quick-opening play, cut back quickly—sometimes to find everyone but the hot-dog man waiting for him, other times to find a smooth swept alley waiting, down which lay those precious yards, the measuring stick by which ball-carriers are valued.



## *Farewell to Cleats*

Yes, these and many other feelings he had experienced—the deep hurt that sometimes accompanies defeat, the excited sensation in the pit of one's stomach before the kickoff, and that welcoming first body contact of a game to “take the edge off the nerves”.

His hand turned the water faucet slowly, regulating the warm water to cool, and in turn, cold. The chilling stream made every hair on his body feel as though it were standing up straight, and almost before the water stopped running, a brisk towel was removing all external traces of the shower.

Slowly, this time a little stiffly, he made his way to the locker—stopping only to survey in the mirror, which was badly in need of cleaning—the tiny purple ring developing around his eye. He felt good—clean, refreshed, and tired with a sense of satisfaction; and as he slipped into his street clothes he let his thoughts run on unchecked.

He'd learned many lessons, he decided—lessons both in football and in life: the value of a clear head, the worthwhileness of forgetting yesterday's triumphs, and most important—respect for men as *men*. His playing days were over and the loss was like that of a lost tooth, which leaves behind a large gap—one impossible to fill, yet one which would slowly close up.

One last stop before the spotted mirror to straighten his tie—and he was on his way. Stopping at the locker for his coat, he hesitated, bent over, and with a few quick flicks of his wrist unscrewed a loose cleat from his shoe as it lay there on the bench. Straightening up, he rolled it in his hand for a moment or two, then shoved it into his coat pocket—just as then, too, he shoved his memories, his triumphs, and the lessons he had learned, into a far corner of his mind—there to nourish him in leaner days.



