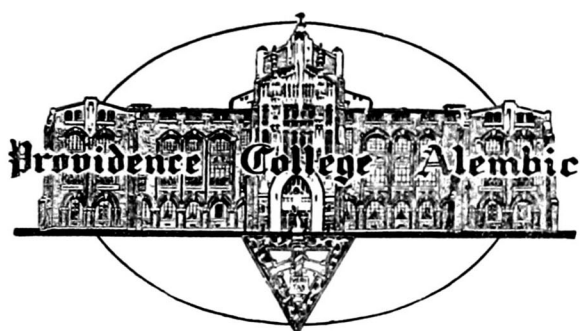


# THE ALEMBIC



DECEMBER, 1952

# THE ALEMBIC



PUBLISHED QUARTERLY  
BY THE  
STUDENTS OF PROVIDENCE COLLEGE  
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

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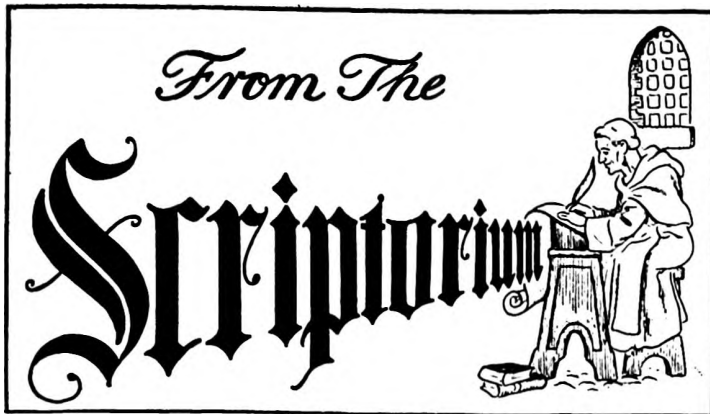
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**A**DMITTEDLY, last year's ALEMBIC was not a smashing success. Assigning the blame for this poor showing is difficult, but in the final analysis a good part of the culpability would probably rest on the students themselves. After all, an editor can work only with the material he receives; he cannot pull copy out of a hat. The fact that only two issues came off the presses last year was, for the most part, due to apathy and indifference on the part of the students in submitting material for publication. The ALEMBIC exists, but to keep it healthy and functioning well demands that the student body take an interest in it. That the issues that were turned out last year were poor, which is, of course, an opinion and not a fact, cannot be blamed on any person. We must all shoulder the blame and make sure that this sort of thing does not happen again this year. This can be brought about by more interest on the part of the students.

"The ALEMBIC is the College literary publication which features original articles, short stories, essays and poems written by the students. The ALEMBIC appears four times during the academic year. Any student is free to submit copy to the Editor and is urged to do so." This

## *The Alembic*

statement appears in the student handbook. It is easy to see from this that the pages of this magazine are open to all students regardless of what school or course they are in. All that is required is that the student translate his thoughts and ideas into something that is readable and worthwhile.

It seems rather damaging to observe that campus regional clubs, whose activities are wholly social, always have capacity memberships while the ALEMBIC boasts of only a meager following. The answer seems to be that the majority of students are not interested in activities that demand creative thought and some work. This is not a good sign. College life involves more than just dances, dates, and parties. These things are important, to be sure, but concentration on them alone leads to a one-sided individual. In developing the whole man, it is necessary to develop his intellectual powers also. Writing for the ALEMBIC, since it entails research and the use of empirical knowledge, aids in this development.

Perhaps this indifference to the ALEMBIC is due to the fact that students have the mistaken idea that only highbrow intellectuals take part in its creation. It is dangerous to think that just because a student takes part in an activity that is not social he is a "creep" or a "square," or worse yet, he is an "intellectual." The fact that a man is in college should be sufficient proof that he is an intellectual, since otherwise he has no business being in college. The point of the matter here is that we are not interested in the scholastic standing of the student. If he happens to be in the upper ten per cent of the class, that is fine. If he is in the lower ten per cent, that is fine, too (as far as we are concerned anyway). Association with the ALEMBIC does not betray a student into the company of men who are always immersed in the esoteric or the metaphysical. What we are interested in are men who can and are willing to write. After all, publishing student literary material is the purpose of the magazine.

Perhaps you feel that you have no talent as a writer or that

## *The Scriptorium*

what you have to say is of no importance to anyone else. That may or may not be true, but the least that can be done is an attempt to create something. It is assumed that we do not have professional writers here at the College. What we do assume is that there may be men on the campus who have the potentialities of becoming writers, and we offer them a medium to test their capabilities in this field. What we particularly desire is to attract a larger number of Freshmen and Sophomores to take part in this activity. To them will fall the mantle of leadership in coming years, and the continual success of a function demands able and experienced successors. This is not to be taken as an exclusion of Junior and Senior students. They can and are urged to submit copy also.

When the issues of the ALEMBIC appear, and you are tempted to come forth with some criticism, ask yourself what you have done to contribute to the success of this magazine. If your answer is nothing, then your criticism amounts to about the same thing. Perhaps you may have legitimate criticisms against the quality of the writing. If you do, the doors of the ALEMBIC are always open to better writers. If you think there should be more quantity, why not contribute something yourself? We welcome criticism, but when it comes from an armchair it serves no purpose. This has been a frank appeal for support of a worthy organization. It is our sincere hope that many students will answer the call and help to make the ALEMBIC a great success this year.

J. M.

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# The Miser

By JOHN HENRY CARR, '54

THE brisk, wintry wind blew yesterday's dry snow across his path as Andrew McCormick, nicknamed the "Miser" by his neighbors, hurried down the narrow street in New York's East Side. Carrying a small, brown paper bag and a tightly rolled newspaper, he plodded determinedly ahead, apparently unaware of the fingers of light which stretched out toward him from the shop windows. The variety of hues from bright fluorescent tubes, dim electric light bulbs, and multicolored neon beer signs glared from behind steamy, dingy plate glass windows, adding the only touch of color to the drab surroundings. Andrew encountered only a few other pedestrians, braced, as he was, against the biting wind, for most people were seated comfortably in their homes, reading the newspaper after enjoying a warm dinner. Andrew always returned from work at this late hour, and ate his customary "guinea grinder" in the solitude of his room in Schwartz's rooming house. The icy wind passed through his worn, dirty clothes that cold Friday in February as he rounded the corner to the street on which he lived, and he shivered involuntarily with each blast.

As so often happened lately, a gang of slum kids were waiting near the rooming house as Andrew approached. When they saw him, they began to jeer and ridicule him. Cries of "Miser" and "Crackpot" reached his numbed ears as he hurried past them and into the rooming house. Although Andrew



did not show it, those jibes deeply hurt him and made him wince. As he wearily climbed the stairs to his small, third floor room, he realized that these children shared their parents' opinion of him. He was aware that they considered him as slightly insane and eccentric, and he felt that he could never rise above this low opinion they had of him.

Across the hall from Andrew's room, Joe Schwartz, owner of the rooming house and, since his retirement on pension, part-time porter at New York's Metropolitan Hospital, looked up from the *Mirror's* sports page when he heard the door close behind Andrew. Turning to his wife, he said,

"Well, there's 'Mr. Rockefeller,' as usual."

Mrs. Schwartz, a large, round-faced woman, made no reply, but merely nodded.

Joe leaned back in his chair. "Let's see," he mused, "that guy's been here for almost two years now, and I'll bet he hasn't said more than a hundred words in all that time. Does he still slide the rent under the door?"

Apparently Mrs. Schwartz still didn't want to join in the conversation. Again she nodded.

Undaunted, Joe continued. "I don't see how he works those long hours day after day—six in the morning to seven at night. I bet he'd do it on Sundays, too, if they'd let him. He must collect a 'mint' every pay day."

At the reference to money, Mrs. Schwartz looked up and broke her silence. "So what good is it doing him? He never spends it. He's wearing the same old clothes now that he had when he came here. He looks like he's starving himself to death, too. All that work, and all he does is save his money. He's a 'Miser,' all right."

"What makes you think he's saving it?"

## *The Miser*

"Well, figure it out for yourself, 'Mr. Dick Tracy.' I was cleaning his room today, so I emptied his waste basket. All I saw were sports pages and more sports pages . . ."

"Sports pages?" Joe cut in.

"Yeah, so maybe he's a bookie! Don't interrupt. So all of a sudden I saw a piece of green paper in with the other stuff. I didn't think it would hurt if I took a look; so I picked it up and read it. And what d'ya think? It was official stationery from some bank, all covered with dollar signs and numbers—big numbers. He must have been figuring out his bank account or something and, believe me, from the size of those figures, he must be saving almost every cent he makes."

"I'll say he is!" replied Joe. "I was in Max's Delicatessen last night when he stopped in for his usual 'guinea grinder.' When Max told him the price had gone up five cents, he mumbled something like, 'Too much,' and walked right out. He wouldn't even buy the one Max had wrapped up for him."

"Always saving money, and what for? Do you think he spends much when he goes out on Sunday, Joe?" asked Mrs. Schwartz.

"No, he's only gone for a few hours. I wonder where he does go, though. When he comes back, he acts happier, and sometimes he even smiles. He's a queer one, but harmless."

"I think he's one of those 'nuts' who save money just for the thrill of it. He's a miser just like Mrs. Kreipzig says. Everybody in the neighborhood knows there's something wrong with him." She paused. "Joe, do you think it's wise having him in the house? Those other people are always talking about him and making fun of him, and maybe they'll think that we . . ."

"Let 'em talk," Joe said sharply. "He's all right, and as long as he pays his rent, he stays."

Joe opened the paper then, and no more was said about Andrew. Before reading the comics, however, he asked himself why he had risen to Andrew's defense so swiftly, but the answer wasn't to be had; so he shrugged it off.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Andrew trudged home from work the next day, he saw several people shovelling the freshly fallen snow from their sidewalks. The snowfall was a heavy one and had lasted all morning and afternoon, only having ceased just as the street lights were turned on. The old, dirty snow now had a glistening new covering, and under this new blanket, too, the shabby buildings appeared more cheerful and inviting. The night was clear and there was hardly a whisper of a wind as Andrew turned the corner and walked toward the rooming house.

Suddenly, something white whizzed past his face, and, almost instantaneously, two icy-hard objects struck him in the back. Then he heard the jeers of the slum kids as they threw one snowball after another at him; but, paralyzed with fright, he couldn't run to the shelter of the rooming house. Andrew looked for some aid, but, seeing none, he huddled on the sidewalk, hoping that the attack would cease.

Inside the house, Joe Schwartz heard the cries of ridicule that usually accompanied Andrew as he returned from work. When they had continued for a span of several minutes, he decided to go and see what was happening. Seeing Andrew crouched on the sidewalk at the mercy of the gang, a feeling of compassion overtook Joe, and he ran down the street to Andrew, scattering the attackers as he went. When Joe reached him, Andrew was speechless and shivering vio-

## *The Miser*

lently. Joe took Andrew's arm and led him to the rooming house. Once inside, Joe offered to get him a drink, but Andrew, who by then had recovered sufficiently, refused the offer. Thanking Joe in a weak voice for what he had done, Andrew turned and climbed the stairs. After he had gone, Joe thought to himself, "Well, what d'ya know! He finally said something. Poor guy."



It was early Sunday evening as Joe Schwartz prepared to leave work at the Metropolitan Hospital. He carried his overcoat on his arm as he walked down the corridor to the washroom. He looked up just in time to see a familiar figure step into the elevator. He was positive it was the "Miser," but before he could speak to him, the elevator doors closed and he was gone.

Joe's curiosity was aroused. He forgot about washing up and, instead, got on the next downward moving elevator. He hoped to find Andrew on the ground floor, but when he got there Andrew wasn't in sight. Joe hurried to the door and peered out. Still not seeing Andrew, he put on his overcoat and walked to the subway station, wondering as he went, whom the "Miser" could have been visiting.

It was the usual crowded subway ride into the city, and Joe was glad to get off when he reached the station near his home. As he stepped up onto the street, Joe again saw the unmistakable, hunched-over figure of the "Miser" ahead of him, and he stepped up his pace until he drew alongside him. When Joe greeted him, Andrew started, but, seeing who it was, he returned Joe's salutation.

"Say," Joe began as they walked along, "I don't mean to be nosey, but weren't you at the Metropolitan Hospital tonight?"

As usual, Andrew was happier and more friendly on a Sunday night, and, speaking slowly, he answered, "Yes, I was there for the afternoon."

"I thought I recognized you. I work there, you know."

"Yes, my son has told me about you."

"Your son?" asked Joe in a startled voice. "Does your son work there, too?"

A smile crossed Andrew's face. "No, he doesn't work there; he's the patient in the room opposite the elevators."

Joe thought for a moment. "You mean that little Jimmy McCormick is your son?"

"That's right," replied Andrew, as they mounted the steps of the rooming house. "Well, it's been a nice walk. Good night, Mr. Schwartz," he said as he climbed the stairs to his room.

Joe stood speechless as he watched Andrew depart. It seemed incredible that Jimmy McCormick, the crippled little blind fellow whom everyone in the hospital loved, could be the son of this haggard, tormented old man. And yet, was Andrew an old man? Certainly the "Sunday smile" he wore tonight was youthful, and he had had an unaccustomed bounce to his step as Joe recalled their walk home. A faint glimmer of the reason behind Andrew's back-breaking work and scrimping came to Joe, and he determined to learn more about this man who was called, "The Miser."

## The Stowaway

By JOHN ALEXYN, '54

THE turquoise waters of Sandy Cove were fairly calm and serene as they lapped at the barnacle encrusted bow of *May's Ark*. She was an antiquated boat, but she still had a couple of years to go before she went to Davy Jones's locker. The man who stepped out from the cockpit of the vessel was Bob Wilson, an ex-soldier, who had come to Florida only a few months before to try his hand at fishing. As he stretched his arms in the warm Florida sunlight, he thought, "What a beautiful day it would be to go swordfishing!" After he had eaten a hearty breakfast, he made a thorough inspection of the engine. The old engine sputtered and choked as he pushed the starter button, but soon it was purring like a kitten. Bob cast-off the lines, put the gears in an ahead speed, and the boat started to move slowly from its warped berth. It was only a matter of minutes before he had cruised out of the sheltered waters of Sandy Cove.

The water gurgled and foamed past the bow of his boat as he rolled southeast past milky reefs and turquoise shoals. Everytime that Bob had come out on one of these fishing trips he could not help day-dreaming; he often thought of those steaming hot days that he had spent in Africa during the war, and of how lucky he had been to escape the ravages of the conflict with only a shrapnel wound. But this day would be different; the sun was beaming; the sea was calm; and he didn't have a worry in the world. As he approached his favorite fishing

grounds he heard a gnawing sound beneath his feet, but he did not pay any attention to it. To port, he observed two large swordfish. He started to give the boat hard right rudder, but, to his amazement, the wheel just spun around. The boat moved crazily off its course—Bob was frantic. "What can I do?" he screamed aloud. He turned the motor off to prevent any further disaster; then he ran aft and yanked open the hatch through which he could view the darkened bilge. Bob was horrified when he saw that the rope cable which connected the rudder to the steering post had been cut. "How could this have happened?"

Then it dawned on him, that he had neglected to inspect the crude steering apparatus of the boat. Only *May's Ark* and its soldier skipper could have wound up in this kind of a fix.

He attempted to repair the damaged cable by connecting the two ends with a piece of wire, which he had used as leaders on his fishing line, but the strain on the wire was so great that it snapped as soon as he turned the steering wheel. He wouldn't give up that easily; so he went to the cockpit for his book. He thumbed slowly through the pages, but no mention was made of how to repair a damaged steering cable. As he sat on his bunk, peering at the seemingly blank pages, he heard the faint alien sound again; and he lifted his head quizzically. He was not certain whether it was a gnawing sound, but then he heard it again—now he was positive. In the moments that ensued, it became much louder.

Suddenly, he dropped forward on his knees and snatched up the floor hatch. As he peered into the darkened bilge, he thought he heard a slight thump as though some object had touched one of the fuel tanks. He listened there on his knees for several minutes before he decided he was prob-

## *The Stowaway*

ably jumpy and had thought the sound much louder than it actually was. "Must have been a cockroach," he assured himself.

Now, as he sat on his bunk reading, he was distracted again by the sound, which was much too loud and persistent to be a mere cockroach. He stamped his foot heavily and the noise stopped.

Squinting into the sunset, he stood on the deck of his boat, letting the wind whip his shirt sleeves. This, he thought, was the sort of experience he was born for. He had often thought that if he were marooned on a desert island, the sight of an approaching boat would have been a disappointment.

When he went below again, he got out his flashlight, and, lifting the floor hatch, discovered several chunks scooped out of the keel. Bob Wilson got out his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and got down on his knees in the bilge. As he shined his light around, he picked up two red eyes which glowed briefly at him, and then disappeared. Puzzled, he climbed back through the hatch. Something he had read in his guide vaguely returned to him. He picked up the manual and found the reference.

"Caution should be exercised in wooden vessels regarding the problem of rats. A safe practice is to burn a sulphur stick in the bilge before embarking on a cruise."

During the next hour, each time the rat began to gnaw, he would begin to stamp the deck. The rat would move to another place, and a few minutes later he would have to stamp him quiet again.

The sun had begun to set in the west as Bob climbed to the top of his cabin and braced himself against the rolling of his boat. The late afternoon sun gave the broad, sluggish



swells a glassy look and made him shade his eyes as he searched to the west toward the Florida coast. But he saw nothing—not a shrimper returning for the night, nor even a sea gull. He had the odd feeling that the swirling green sea sloped upward on all sides, leaving his boat imprisoned like an ant in a shallow pool of water. After he had searched the entire horizon for a possible mast, he decided to go below again; he wanted to find out which of his several dozen pennants he was supposed to fly when in distress.

After he had hoisted the emergency pennant, he put a small dish of water in the bilge to keep the rat from chewing through the keel in an effort to get fresh water. He set his alarm clock for six o'clock, and stretched out on his bunk, which felt as soft as a bathtub full of lard.

When he awoke it was daylight, but the alarm had not gone off. The first thing he saw was the rat; it had come up out of the bilge and was sniffing around the galley. It was not brown like a wharf rat, but gray, with white undersides, and had erect, squirrelish ears. He watched the rat, not daring to move. Presently, when it hopped up on the galley and began to sniff around where the food was stowed, he figured if he had something to throw, he could hit him. The only thing within reach was the alarm clock. He took careful aim and threw, but he missed the rat completely, and the clock smashed against the bulkhead. The rat dropped like a fireman back into the bilge.

He'd no sooner collected himself, when the rat began to gnaw again. He stamped the floor so hard the cups rattled in the cupboard. "If it wasn't for that dang rat," he told himself, "I could sleep and conserve my energy until somebody spots us. If I could just think of a way to get him—if I just had a gun, or a trap, or some poison I'd be all set." The more

## *The Stowaway*

he thought about it, the angrier he got. Then he recalled the battles that he had gone through in Africa, and thought that now his life was being thwarted by an ordinary bilge rat, whose sole aim in life appeared to be to sink his boat. "I have just got to get him!" he vowed.

Grimly determined, he got a boat hook and began to pry up the floor boards. The sweat was soon streaming down his neck, and he had to stop every few minutes to rest and wipe his forehead. When he had completed the task, he took a longer rest; then he straightened out a long-handled gaff hook and got down on his knees in the bilge. For about ten minutes it was he against the rat. He'd poke at it, but the rat would see the shaft coming and jump to one side. Finally, the rat dodged behind the water tank and Bob saw it was no use.

He came up for air and pondered some more. He knew that the rat was thirsty, so he filled a dish with water, put some gasoline in it, and shoved it into the bilge. Bob hoped that this would kill the rat. He lay down, peeped over the side of the bilge, and talked. "Come on out, little fellow," he urged in a gentle voice, "and get yourself a drink of fresh water." He continued this for several minutes and, at times, was almost persuaded to drink the water himself. He was rewarded, at last, by the sight of the rat, which cautiously approached the dish. He watched him twitch its whiskers around the brim; then he was almost positive the rat looked him straight in the eye and curled his lip in disgust before it backed away. Bob mumbled under his breath; he took a fishing line out of a nearby locker and baited the hook with a little piece of corned beef. Then he threw it back to where the rat was, and sat on his bunk waiting for a nibble. But the rat was good at bait

stealing also. Bob soon concluded that all he had done was to give the rat strength to gnaw some more.

All of the second night he plaited rope to keep awake, so he could stamp the floor whenever the rat started to gnaw at the hull. He decided there was one more thing he could do. He'd thought of it during the night, but he wasn't sure he had the strength to put the floor back in. He decided that if he took things slowly, it would be sure to work; he'd have the rat. He began to place and nail the floorboards he had ripped up. This done, he put his washrag in an empty coffee can and drained a little oil out of the motor. He set the can down in the bilge, lighted the rag, let it burn until it was smoking well, then he covered the floor hatch. He got a gaff handle and waited for the rat, which he could already hear sneezing, to come up through the motor box. Black smoke began to curl into the cabin through various openings in the floor. His eyes began to water, and he joined the rat in sneezing. Suddenly, a loud "whoof!" lifted the floor hatch to one side and red fire began to slither up through the smoke.

It took him an hour to get the fire out. His red face was soot streaked, his eyes streamed tears, and his shoulders sagged under the weight of the fire extinguisher. Bob sat down among the charred debris and listened attentively for the gnawing sound, but he heard nothing. He smiled as he crawled into his bunk, because now he had the satisfaction of knowing that the rat was dead. It was not long before his eyes closed, and he was sound asleep.

When Bob awoke it was noontime. He sat up in his bunk and gazed, glassy eyed, out of the port hole just above his head. He thought he saw land, but, then again, how could he have reached shore when his steering apparatus had been

## *The Stowaway*

rendered useless by the rat? Soon his eyes were clear, and he was sure that he saw some people on the sandy beach, not more than one hundred yards away. He shouted to them, but to no avail. Bob ripped off his shirt and waved it above his head, but this attempt to attract attention failed also. Meanwhile, a Coast Guard patrol boat approached his boat to port. They had seen his signal and had come to his rescue. Bob told them the complete story of the stowaway rat. Two of his rescuers remained aboard *May's Ark*, while he was wrapped in blankets and taken ashore by the patrol boat.

As Bob Wilson lay in his hospital bed, recovering from his exploit, a man in uniform was introduced to him. He was the captain of the boat that had rescued him.

"You're very lucky to be alive," explained Captain Jones. "When we inspected the damaged rudder in your boat we found a rat wedged between the rudder and the bulkhead. Apparently, when you tried to smoke him out, he attempted to squeeze through that small opening in an effort to get air. He was stuck in such a position that the rudder became secured in a dead ahead position, headed for shore; and the tide was strong enough to carry your boat to within sight of land."

"Well, what do you think about that, Mr. Wilson?"

Bob Wilson didn't answer; he just gazed thoughtlessly at the ceiling.

# POSTSCRIPTS

PROVIDENCE, R. I. (AP)—A 16 year old boy who drove his car into a police car has been referred to juvenile court as a reckless driver . . .

*You can trust those minions of the law not to be rash in their charges.*

Ad. in *Look*, Oct. 21, 1952—

Make this "Kiss Test":

Eat onions;

Take CLORETS (Candy mints or Chewing Gum);

Now exchange a kiss.

You'll find your breath is "Kissing Sweet."

*Sweet what?*

From *The Cowl*, Oct. 1, 1952—

. . . students repeatedly violate the parking regulations. Considered to be the chief reason for indifference was thoughtfulness on the part of the students.

*That student mind again!*

*Time* Rhyme:

*Time*, September 1, says, of Mau Mau, "rhymes with yo-yo," and

*Time*, October 27, says, "rhymes with bow-bow . . ."

*Why not try coo-coo?*

"Work is the curse of the drinking classes."—Oscar Wilde

## *Postscripts*

John Gillooly in the *Boston Record*:

When Mantha (whose goal beat the Bruins 1-0 in the Garden inaugural on Nov. 20, 1928) played twenty-five years ago, the NHL schedule called for only 44 games. Games were never played on successive nights. There was always an interlude. You'd play Sunday, Tuesday, Saturday, for example.

*A mighty strange interlude, as you might say.*

John Gillooly in the *Boston Record*:

"Tie games make me sick like they make everybody else but what's really hurting hockey are these back-to-back games," said Sylvia Mantha, an amusing Chevalier-type who only needed a straw hat and the lyrics of "Louse."

*Don't try to Louise us up.*

Mickey Rooney anent his current marriage, according to INS, "We believe this is the real thing and we did not run into this marriage." The dispatch adds later, "Rooney . . . said he met his red-haired, freckled bride two months ago . . ."

*No creature of reckless impulse, that Rooney!*

CUMBERLAND, R. I. (AP)—An automobile bagged a 90-pound deer . . . Thomas A. Smith, 65, told police he was driving along a country road when the doe leaped a stone wall and ran into the path of the car.

*Almost like a pedestrian?*

Ad. in *Look*, Oct. 21, 1952—

"Wherever you go, notice how many people have changed to PALL MALL in the distinguished red package."

*We'll certainly keep our eyes open, but, we have our doubts.*

# VERSE

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## Male and Female

By JOSEPH D. GOMES, '53

A male, and hale,  
Try not to fail,  
Don't rush and gush,  
Or make a fuss;  
Be shrewd, elude,  
But don't be rude,  
He'll not be free  
For long, you'll see.

A miss, a dish,  
A wish to kiss,  
Don't swerve, unnerve,  
Her you deserve;  
Be shy, and sigh,  
Tell her a lie,  
She'll be, you'll see,  
Your chicadee.

## A Sonnet?

By JOSEPH D. GOMES, '53

At times in pensive mood I wish  
To emulate poetic figures of the past,  
Is there some genius that I miss  
To make the lines come hard and fast?  
Can any man arrange a line,  
Or must he first poetic insight gain  
To transpose verse and make it fine,  
In language sometimes thought insane?  
Does this gift call on many men,  
Or does it visit just a few  
Who are most able and contain the yen  
To do what others most eschew?  
Try hard, dear friend, no one can say  
It may not visit you one day.

## Personal Relativity

By JOSEPH D. GOMES, '53

Each man perceives, the world in orbit  
Round him spins;  
Nor thought gives he  
How others also see  
Him as he confidently grins,  
Wrapt in his own important (to him),  
Activity,  
Which to others appears  
Only as a vagary;  
A minor incident in the spheres,  
Surrounding each in his own universe.



# A Study of Graham Greene

By JOHN MARTISKA, '53

**I**T is the business of a man who professes to be a novelist to write novels. On the face of it, that sentence seems to belabor what is obvious. However obvious it may seem, it is possible that both critics, and writers themselves, are capable of forgetting that fact. A novelist has, as his overall subject, man. No matter what sort of a story he sets out to write, the human element underlies his plot. Even if he is writing a novel about animals, they still talk, think and act like people. This is inescapable. Also, it is inevitable that the author's faith and beliefs will become apparent in the course of his writing. If he is an atheist, God will be scorned or completely ignored. A materialist will exalt the mechanical and try to make man look like a machine. A hedonist will have his characters revel in the pleasures of the world. For the Catholic, man will appear as a stepchild of the world, whose problems are mainly spiritual and who needs outside aid to help him. The point is that all of these writers have the same material, human material. What they do with this material is the important thing. What they see in it and how deep they look into it mark off the great writers from those that are mediocre.

Literary critics are a powerful group of people. They can "make or break" a book by the type of review that they write. Actually, there is something of the mind-reader in every critic, because he has to try to imagine what the author had in mind when he created the story he is reviewing. It is very possible that critics may be wrong in their analysis, and unless the author himself steps forward to contradict them,

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their views of a particular book pass unchallenged, except by other critics, of course. In order to do justice to a novel, the critic must treat it as such, a novel. It is in regard to novels that deal in moral problems that a critic has to be particularly careful in not bringing the author on the carpet because his views do not jibe with those of the critic or the critic feels that the author is not conforming to orthodoxy. A sentence of printed words is rather sterile in itself. The thought behind the sentence is known only to the author and, as happens quite often, it is not the same thought that is put there by the critic. What the author had in mind, what actually has turned out in the finished book, and what the critics say the book is, are, in many cases, three different ideas. Critics, like taxes, are inevitable, and like taxes they are many and varied. However, regardless of their different views, it is still their duty to keep in mind that a novelist writes novels.

It is the peculiar advantage of the Catholic writer to see the most and to see the deepest into human material. Through the framework of theology he has a complete picture of man. For a Catholic writer, a good grounding in moral and general theology are necessary. So is a basic knowledge of ethics. This is so because the author should know about what he is to write, man. However, the novelist is not writing a moral treatise nor is he writing a book of theology in novel form. This is not his task. He is writing a novel. The same holds true for ethics. That science treats of things as they ought to be; a novelist is writing of things as they are. As soon as a novelist begins to write moral treatises or stories about a world that is neat, orderly, and precise, in short a utopian world, he has ceased being a novelist.

In a sense, the preceding paragraphs have been an apology for Graham Greene. I say in a sense because I do not think

that Greene needs an apology, but because his writings are capable of meaning all things to all readers, I meant them more as an evaluation. He has written novels which have caused uproars in the literary world. He has had critics belabor him for all sorts of vices and, in the main, his sharpest critics have been those of his own faith, Catholics. They have accused him of handling God's grace shabbily, treating evil in too light a manner, and writing only of prodigal sinners while eliminating the average people.

Graham Greene is a successful writer. He is England's best-selling author and he has a considerable following here in America; his "Heart of the Matter" was a Book-of-the-Month selection in 1948. For an age that is not distinguished for its adherence to moral principles or for its tastes in literary material, this fact is an achievement of some degree. One is even more surprised at the success Greene has had when the fact that he is a Catholic and writes of Catholic principles is taken into consideration. In a world where Catholics are a minority, it is heartening to see that a Catholic writer's books are being read and seemingly enjoyed by a large portion of non-Catholic readers.

In his novels, the most fertile concepts that man's mind can ponder are put to use—God, Grace, Good, Evil—to tell gripping and powerful stories. Using these concepts, concepts that are usually relegated only to theologians and philosophers, he has told stories of moral problems that are shockingly real and have a note of familiarity for many of their readers.

The material that Greene uses in his novels is not unusual. As I have noted earlier, a novelist has as his subject humanity, and Greene's stories are about man and his problems. It is the style and the ease of his presentation that marks Greene off from other writers. One might suppose that a

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writer would be rather limited when he came to write about man because over the centuries man has not changed. His nature is substantially the same now as when it was first created. His capacity for evil has remained the same also. In a sense, a writer is somewhat limited when he comes to deal with man. He is concerned not with an absolute, but with an entity which, while not changing basically is capable of infinite variations. That is why we are able to have thousands and thousands of novels on the same subject, man, but yet each of them can tell us a different tale. To be sure, in spite of all the stories that have been written about him over the centuries, man is still a mystery. Father Jean Mouroux, in his book, "Meaning of Man," has this to say of the mystery of man:

"Man is a mystery first because he is a kind of limit or horizon between two worlds. He is immersed in the flesh but constituted by the spirit; occupied with matter, but drawn towards God; growing in time, but already breathing the air of eternity; a being of nature and of the world but also transcending the universe in virtue of his liberty and capacity for union with God. But if man is twofold he is also one, (he) is susceptible of a full unity and, on the other hand, of a full disaggregation; (he) has to acquire a significance of his own, and is tossed about meanwhile in all the whirlpools of the flesh and of the world. We live out this drama, we suffer from it and bleed, but remain for the most part inwardly withdrawn from it because we do not have an acute sense of it. On the day when by some flash of intellectual enlightenment, or some effort at spiritual progress, we come to realize what we really are, we will be seized with a kind of shiver. Man then is radically a 'mystery' that refuses to be degraded into a problem."

In his novels, "The Power and the Glory," "The Heart of the Matter," and his latest, "The End of the Affair," Greene

has attempted to give us a "flash of intellectual enlightenment" so that we might be able to see what we really are. Through the characters of the whiskey priest, Scobie and Sarah, Greene scales the span of man, from the sordid depths of sin to the heights of virtue which are possible for any man. The people in his stories do not seem ordinary. The sins in which they fall are not ordinary but the worse—sacrilege, suicide, adultery, fornication. This has led to the criticism that Greene has ruthlessly eliminated the average person and is dealing only in prodigals. This, I believe, is a shallow observation.

As soon as we begin to deal with "average people," we leave the world of reality and begin to deal in fantasy. An average person is a convenient fiction. One can never find such a creature walking in this world. All of us, regardless of our external appearance, have something which separates us from our fellow men. If it were possible to put a man's heart under a microscope, we could see that this business of an average man is a myth. Each individual would show some extreme of virtue or vice. It is impossible for a man to be static in either state. The vicious get more vicious and the good increase in their perfection. Perhaps it is the outward appearance that deceives us. A man of virtue does not give off a glow of holiness, nor does a vicious man limp or display a scarlet letter.

It is in the realm of possibility for all of us to be saints; it is possible to be damned also. While Greene uses the worse sins in his novels, he is not using them in the restricted sense that they are possible only to prodigals. These sins can be, and are, found in all sorts of persons. Sin is a willing captive and it has no predilection for its victims.

It is this double capacity of man—salvation and damnation—that is the central thesis of Greene's novels. He says,

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"The greatest saints are people with more than a normal capacity for evil, and the most vicious people only escaped sanctity with the greatest difficulty." On the face of it, this may seem a rather bald statement, and one that does not make much sense. It is difficult to see how St. Therese of Lisieux or St. Maria Gorretti could have had a "more than a normal capacity for evil," or why Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini escaped sanctity "with the greatest difficulty." However, a little reflection on the matter reveals that what Greene has said is quite true.

Human character and personality are so constructed that good and evil can be accomplished in equal terms or, I should say, in equal amounts. Through the gift of free will from God, a man can do good or commit evil, and it is also within his power to control the intensity of both of them. Saints and great sinners have something in common, and that is that they both possess strong personalities. The difference between the two is that their powers are used in opposite directions. One is towards good and the other toward evil. It all depends on which way the particular individual channels his powers, that he becomes a saint or is condemned. The point that Greene is making is that this strong personality of both a saint and a great sinner moves equal distances. If a person is capable of tremendous good, that same person is also capable of great evil. The reverse is also true.

As an example of this, let us look at Stalin. His energies and power are now being used in evil ways to exploit and degrade the people of Russia by means of murder, slavery, and regimentation. However, this same power that he has could be used in the opposite way (homes, education, and a decent life for his people), and it would result in his being proclaimed as the savior of Russia. In the lives of all of the saints, it is evident that the strong personality of the saint was used to

generate goodness and holiness, but it could have been used in the opposite manner and would have produced people of immense viciousness.

It is this possibility of great evil and great goodness that makes heroic virtue possible. Father Farrell, in Volume I of "A Companion to the Summa," puts the thought into forceful language. "Because men can lie, cheat, steal, kill, and make beasts of themselves, there is great merit in truth, honesty, justice and chastity. Because we hate so bitterly and live so selfishly, human love is the precious thing it is. It is only because the gates of hell are wide open for us that we can batter down the walls of heaven with our own fists."

After reading one of Greene's novels it is easy to come away feeling that the author has a good grounding in theology and Catholic doctrine. Perhaps that is where the greatness of Greene lies, his ability to treat of theological subjects with ease and familiarity. In "The Power and the Glory," for example, he puts forth a central doctrine of Christianity, the Redemption, in these words: "It was for this world that Christ died: the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around the death. It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for the home or children or a civilization—it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt." Further on, in the same novel, when he talks of Communists trying to stamp out all belief in Christianity, he talks of man's likeness to God. "It was odd—this fury to deface, because, of course, you could never deface enough. If God had been like a toad, you could have rid the globe of toads, but when God was like yourself, it was no good being content with stone figures—you had to kill yourself among the graves."

In his latest book, "The End of the Affair," Greene has used a new medium, that of first person narrative. His theme,

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however, is the same—the struggle between good and evil. The novel is the story of an adulterous love affair between Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix. The plot has nothing that is extraordinarily new about it, but Greene uses it as a vehicle to sanctity. Out of a mistress he makes a saint. Out of hate, he hopes to abstract love. I would imagine (this is what I meant by a critic's mind-reading) that it was Greene's intention to prove by this novel that saints are real persons, that the love of God is greater than human love, that to hate God may be an avenue at arriving to the love of God, and that a love affair, regardless of its legality, is a thing that has endless implications. He certainly created Sarah as a believable person. She is a simple and faithless woman to whom the adulterous affair appears as honest love. When tragedy strikes she turns to God.

There is something sincerely human in her realization of her iniquity, her realization that she was "a bitch and a fake." Her profession of faith, while somewhat vulgar, is just as sincere. "I believe there's a God—I believe the whole bag of tricks; there's nothing I don't believe; they could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I'd believe. They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted, and I'd believe just the same. I've caught belief like a disease." Through Sarah, Greene gives a blueprint for sanctity—realization of one's sins and a complete act of love and faith. What is the machinery that brings this about? Grace.

When one deals with grace, he is dealing with a supernatural mystery, of course, so the difficulties are many. If the author hands out, or I should say dispenses, grace to his characters in too large a quantity, he places God in the position of Santa Claus. If the grace is rather restricted, God may be



taken for a skimpy old man who is not very generous with His children. The author also runs the risk of taking everything away from man and puts him at the mercy of grace alone. Catholic critics have pointed up the fact that in many cases in Greene's works, man is a puppet of grace and that God is reduced to a *deus ex machina*. It is true that in Greene's novels grace plays an important part. This is not surprising. Grace plays an important part in the life of every person, and without it man would be hopelessly lost. However, in Greene's characters, grace was provided because they had merited it; it was not simply poured down their throats as a sort of cure-all.

The priest in the "Power and the Glory" moves through despair, lust, alcohol and sacrilege, but he is always conscious of his guilt and longs for absolution. Scobie in "The Heart of the Matter" tells lies through pity for his wife and commits suicide to relieve his friends of burden, but he is wholly conscious of his guilt. Greene redeems Sarah, and endows her with miracles, but only after she has been dragged through the furnace of agony and loneliness over the loss of her sensual pleasures with Bendrix. Greene does not create his characters and simply dump in grace to make them emerge triumphant over evil. They have received grace, but they have merited it. The question of whether Greene has been too liberal in his dispensation of grace is one that has many answers. It all depends on the point of view that is held, and that can be as different as there are people that read Greene's novels and care to comment on them. This much can be said with certainty, Greene has handled grace with the dignity it rightly deserves.

Greene has also aroused the displeasure of Catholic critics in his handling of pity. In the "Heart of the Matter,"

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the protagonist Scobie commits his sins from an unselfish sense of pity and it is through this pity that Greene rescues him from damnation. Pity, in Greene's words, "is a terrible thing . . . Pity is the worst passion of all. We don't outlive it like sex." Through pity it has been possible for man to achieve both good and evil. Through pity for an unfortunate in poverty, man is moved to open his purse and give him aid, but through the same pity, he wants to start euthanasia societies for the elimination of persons afflicted with incurable diseases. To get back to Greene's Scobie, his suicide, while being against the law of God, does not necessarily mean damnation for him as some critics have so vehemently declared. In the seconds before his death, it is possible that Scobie manifested the necessary repentance for his sins to escape damnation. While it is rather easy to have pat answers to such questions as this, one must ponder the words that Greene has at the end of this novel ". . . the Church knows all of the answers but yet it does not know what goes on in a single human heart." What went on in Scobie's heart at the time of his suicide was known only to God and it seems fair to suppose that He looked upon his thoughts with His justice.

The man who is responsible for these three great novels is an Englishman. In a cover story on him, *Time* magazine described him in this fashion. "Tall (6 ft. 3 in.), frail and lanky, he dresses like a careless Oxford undergraduate, walks with a combination roll and lope that emphasizes a slight hump between his shoulders. Physically he is an easy man to forget, except for the face with its wrinkled skin that looks as if it had shaken loose from the flesh, and the startled, startlingly washed-out blue eyes, slightly bulging." This is not a very flattering portrait of a world famous author, but it does not detract from

his novels since a man's appearance has little to do with his talents as a writer.

An evaluation of Greene is difficult because, as was stated before, his works are capable of meaning all things to all readers. If he wrote in an individual style, such as Hemingway or Faulkner, it would be possible to use that as a yardstick. However, Greene's prose is neither awe-inspiring nor extraordinary. If it is anything, it is plain and simple. Therefore, we must consider not how Greene writes, but of what he writes. His stories may be taken for just that, stories. They may be taken as a spiritual autobiography being written in piecemeal fashion, but this is vigorously denied by Greene. Some might consider his novels as good reading but with bad moralizing mixed in, or as stories with good moralizing but difficult to read and understand.

Due to the underlying Catholic spirit of his novels, I should say that Greene had a purpose in writing his novels and it was not simply to provide the world with material to pass the time away. This purpose was to show that man's most pressing problems are of a spiritual nature and in order to solve them a spiritual machinery is needed. His books seem to call to mind the immortal lines of Francis Thompson's poem, "Hound of Heaven."

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him . . .*

They end on the same note as that of Thompson's poem,

*Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!*

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The question of how well Greene has handled his material in tracing a soul's flight from God, and consequently, a flight into sin, and then, being aided by grace, coming back to God, has been raised by many Catholic critics. The fact that Catholics are in the forefront of Greene's critics should occasion no surprise. They, of all the critics, see the most and the deepest, into his works. They are familiar with the subjects in which he deals—Mass, Communion, Confession, Penance. To Protestants, these subjects are for the most part, meaningless or passed off as superstitious practices. Unbelievers are so far from Christian thinking that their criticisms are lacking in any objectivity. Now, the fact that Catholics are Greene's most vigorous critics does in no way imply that there is division among Catholics about their faith. The questions that are argued are not over beliefs but over how well beliefs have been expressed. One has to admit that translating Catholicism into a novel is not an easy task. The possibility of not adhering to strict orthodoxy is always present, but I believe that no one can ever hurl the charge of heresy at Greene. One does not have to agree with the manner in which Greene handles his themes, but his thoughts are thoroughly Catholic.

What will be the impact of Greene's novel in the future? This is another difficult question; since Greene is a contemporary figure, predicting this author's appeal in future years has obvious perils. However, in spite of the perils, it seems safe to predict that future generations of readers should enjoy his works. I say this because the ideas that are expressed in his novels, those that are written and those that shall be written, are as old as Catholicism. No future generation will be free of its Sarahs or Scobies. As long as man is on this earth the possibility of his falling into sins such as theirs is ever present, and the way they are saved from their folly shall also be

the same. In the future, there may be authors who will put this struggle between good and evil into better novels, but the theme will still be the same.

Perhaps it is somewhat early to begin talking about a Catholic Literary Revival, but it is in this regard also that the name of Greene may loom large and important as one of the forerunners of this movement. The appearance of quite a few first-rate novelists would seem to indicate that the groundwork of such a movement is being laid. Writers such as Bloy, Waugh, Bernanos, Mauriac, and, of course, Greene, have done much in the way of raising the standard of novel writing. Unfortunately, America has not yet produced a Catholic novelist of any great stature, but this, I am sure, is a temporary defection. If Greene is seen as a part of this, and I use the term cautiously, Catholic Literary Revival, his future fame is secure. In any event, whether his popularity in the future is large or small, he is doing a fine job today of proving that a Catholic can write as a Catholic and produce excellent books which can be read and enjoyed by those of all faiths. For that alone he deserves our praise.

## Evening Vigil

By HENRY GRIFFIN, '54

THE old man sat quietly before the partly open window in an archaic Morris chair which was threadbare in several places from long usage. Behind him the room was a picture of disarray. Various articles of clothing and segments of old newspapers lay scattered on some straight-backed chairs and on a high legged, purple Victorian couch which stood against the far wall, next to the bedroom door. Heaped upon an old fashioned circular dining table in the center of the room was a pile of unwashed dishes, along with a cheap tin tray containing a full glass of milk, a few pieces of bread, a pat of melting butter, and a bowl of cold tomato soup in which a dead housefly was floating.

Upon the crest of the Morris chair's right arm a small round hole, probably the result of a cigarette burn, disclosed some strands of the woolen upholstery; and with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand the old man was abstractedly tearing small pieces of this wool, rolling the pieces into pellets, and then dropping the pellets. The floor around the chair was littered with these objects, and each time he performed this peculiar operation of picking at the wool, rolling, and dropping it, he would nod his head in a deliberate, almost judicial manner—for no apparent reason.

Furthermore, this perfunctory operation was the sole indication of his being conscious, since in all other respects he seemed entirely oblivious. His face, small boned and lined with deep creases, wore an impassive expression—a pair of pale, watery eyes staring blankly ahead, two thin, bloodless

lips drawn together in an unbroken line. His body was held in a rigidly upright position.

A hot summer sun had just gone down, releasing the earth for the time being from its oppressive bondage; and as the shadows grew with each passing minute, a slight breeze came along to sustain the room's heavy, blue window curtains and stir the old man's white hair. But he paid no attention to it, nor to the shouts and cries of some children who had gathered to play games on the sidewalk in front of the house. He must have felt the breeze as it caressed his hair and heard the children as they played, but neither seemed to make any impression on him.

"You're out, come on, I tagged you," said one boy.

"No you didn't, you missed me," returned another.

Every word of their ensuing argument was distinctly audible to him. He found it neither amusing nor annoying.

"Okay, okay, we'll leave it up to this guy here. Did I tag him or didn't I?"

"How should I know, I wasn't watching."

"Whaddya mean, you were standing right here . . ."

And they continued along in this vein for a few more minutes before finally dispersing.

The day was dying fast, and even now everything was sunk in a light sea of shadow. From across the street the amber colored letters of a neon sign blinked automatically at the old man at two-second intervals, while all over the city other lights were being turned on. In the distance a bell leisurely pealed eight times. Overhead, the sky was deepening into rich blue.

**RRRINNG!!! RRRRIINNG!!!**

The sound of another bell, the telephone bell, shattered the quiet with a shrill staccato insistence . . . six, seven, eight times . . . He gave just the slightest indication of having heard

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it—an almost imperceptible movement of the ancient head, the merest divergence of the eyes from their unknown focal point. But whoever was calling apparently did not give up very easily, for the bell clanged steadily for about two minutes before lapsing into silence. Then five minutes later it began again, wailing for some acknowledgment, this time for well over three minutes. Finally it stopped, and there remained only the wind to disturb his solitude, with it also fading to a scarcely distinguishable scraping of a curtain against the wall. Back and forth, back and forth, like the sound of a baby rat scurrying about behind a wall panel.

Suddenly, for no visible reason, the old man's right arm dropped wearily into his lap, as if it were too tired to continue with its pointless operation any longer, and his eyes disengaged themselves from their point of interest to take refuge in rest behind their veils of blue veined lids. The muscles in his small body relaxed a little as he rested his head on the back of the chair. Now he had all the outward signs of a man asleep, but actually his mind was only beginning to re-emerge into activity.

It's getting chilly, he thought. I should close the bedroom window, Mary might catch a cold. And he passed one arm across his eyes as if to dispel sleep, then slowly and painfully he lifted himself from the chair. A violent influx of blood to the head made him feel dizzy for a few seconds, but soon he felt better. Surveying the room, he muttered that he would have to clean it up, because Mary would be displeased if she saw it looking like this, she was so neat and . . .

"Get him, get him!" someone shouted through the open window, after which there followed the irregular stomping of many racing feet and a chorus of youthful screams and yelps: the children had returned.



A momentary glitter of terror flashed on the old man's face before he realized that they were only young boys chasing one of their companions.

"I see him, he's over there," cried one of them.

The old man stepped quickly to the window and looked out. By the light of a street lamp he could see them on the sidewalk below. His face was flushed with anger at having been duped by their sudden shouting.

"Hey there, you kids, get away from this house," he said petulantly.

They turned and looked curiously up at him.

"What for?" one of the bolder ones asked.

"I'll show you what for," angrily replied the old man. "If you don't get away from here right now, I'll call the police."

"We ain't done no harm, mister," responded a second boy. "We're just playing."

Their stubbornness incensed him.

"Did you hear what I said," he cried shrilly. "Get away from here. Play somewhere else. My Mary's been sick lately, and she's sleeping now, and I won't have you waking her up, do you understand?"

None of the children knew what he was talking about, but most of them began to walk slowly away from the house. A few, however, still lingered, unwilling to give up so easily. He pointed a warning finger at these remaining few, and threatened them again. At length they too abandoned their position and left.

"Those fresh kids, they did that on purpose," he muttered to himself as he watched them disappear around the corner.

"Somebody sent them over here to pester us, and I'll find out who it is."

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He closed the window and drew the shade, then turned and peered through the darkness at the bedroom door. It was barely visible.

"Mary," he called with caution. "Are you awake?"

There was no response.

"The poor thing is still asleep," he remarked softly and tenderly. "Tired . . . my Mary's tired." And his speech, slow and often fumbling, betrayed his own weariness.

The room itself was quite small, the distance between the old man and the bedroom entrance being only about thirteen or fourteen feet, yet he found it difficult going in the dark and twice he stumbled, nearly falling on both occasions.

"Mustn't make any noise," he kept murmuring to himself as he groped his way toward the door, looking like a somnambulist, with his arms extended before his body to act as feelers. He reached the door and gently pushed it open. A draught of air floated rapidly into the vacuum created in the wake of the swinging door and brushed coolly against his face.

He stood in silence for a moment, trying to make up his mind, then he whispered to her.

"Mary, are you still sleeping?"

To his left the wooden slat in the window shade banged noisily with the wind's sudden departure. He gripped the iron bedstead with both hands and bent low over the rumpled sheets to obtain a closer look. There was no sign of movement in the bed.

For a brief spell the old man appeared unsure of himself, then he decided. "A chair . . . I'll get a chair—so I can sit beside her for a while and talk to her when she wakes."

Returning to the other room, he began to search in the darkness for one. He didn't turn on the light although the switch was only a few feet away. No light, he thought, it might

disturb her, I don't like it anyway, it's better this way, nobody to come up and bother us and try to . . . I know what they're up to, if they had the chance; I won't turn it on and let them know . . . And so his old hands moved gingerly among the unseen objects, doubtful of their exact location. Then the table. He was running his fingers along the rough grain, along the worn edge, he was touching the tray and it felt cool and somehow reassured him. I must be very close to one now, he thought, just a minute, Mary, just a minute, dear, I'm coming, I'll be right there, yes, yes, here's one, I've got one, I'm touching one, I'm coming right back, now all I have to . . .

**RRRIINNG!!! RRRRIINNNG!!!**

This time he heard it, this time he received the full impact of its grating, deafening noise emitted from the tiny black box which he couldn't see, but which he knew housed it. Startled and terrified at first, he felt his terror quickly becoming intermingled with dull anger and finally with hatred. He rubbed his knuckles brutally across the top of the table, tearing the skin in several places. He could feel himself tremble as he spoke.

"Please, please, stop it, we won't answer, no, please, you'll wake her, we don't want you, we don't need you, you can't take her from me, go away, away . . ." The blood raced through veins and arteries, throbbed in the temples, pressed against the brain . . . "away, away . . ." The words punctuated his fear, the ringing continued. He brought his hands up to his ears to block out the sound, and uttered a sharp cry, as if he were suffering some severe pain. Finally, when he thought that he could stand it no longer, he rushed crazily toward the telephone stand to tear out the wires. Before he had taken more than two or three steps, however, the ringing had stopped. A swift gust of wind rattling the window was

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the sole audible sound in the room. He returned dazedly to the chair and sat down.

"My God," whispered the old man hoarsely. "Give me peace. Don't let them take her away from me. They want to, I know they do." Then fiercely: "I won't let them, though. Why don't they let us alone? I'll make them, they'll see, I'll make them!" And his frail body shook as though it were being racked by an ague, the clenched hands with the pin points of blood on the knuckles, where he had ground them into the table, trembling violently.

Five minutes elapsed before the old man was strong enough to stand up again, and even then he felt very unsteady. A queasy sensation moved heavily in his stomach and his head began to ache. He half carried, half dragged the chair into the other room and sat down beside the bed. His breathing was heavy and labored and loud, each inhalation seeming to cause him a maximum amount of effort. And yet they were but minor triumphs of will power, simply prolonging the existence of something which was destined to die shortly.

He spoke to her again: "Mary, don't you want anything to eat? It's been such a long time since you had any food. You have to keep up your strength, you know, the doctor said you had to, she's a very sick woman, he said, and she's got to keep up her strength. I made some soup for you, Mary, but I can't remember when that was, though, it's probably cold by now, shall I warm it up again, wouldn't you like some?" His words were whispered anxiously and were frequently interrupted by his efforts to catch his breath.

"Let me warm it up again," he continued, after a short pause during which he waited for an answer that did not come. "I'll bring it in here and you can eat in bed. You won't have to get up, will that be all right?"

A faint wave of fear began to move disturbingly into his consciousness. Why didn't she reply? She had been asleep now for such a long time (he couldn't say how long) that it wasn't natural. Perhaps he ought to call the doctor . . . no, he might be one of them . . .

"You're not pretending to be asleep, are you, Mary?"

The fear wave advanced rapidly.

"You're not angry with me, are you?"

He leaned forward and gripped the bed covers with both hands. His eyes were intent on the bed, strained with such intensity that secretions from the tear ducts were clouding his vision. His breathing, as it grew more pronounced, became faster and faster. Then, with a hesitant motion, he drew his left hand from the covers and moved it slowly toward the bed pillow.

"Now don't be surprised, Mary, don't be afraid. Nothing is wrong. Are you awake? I just want to find out if you're all right. You haven't got a fever, have you? I've got to find out. We have to take care of you, we have to see . . ." Suddenly his hand stopped in its flight, hovered over the bed for an instant, then withdrew to its original position. "No, no," he said. "I might wake you from your sleep. You ought to sleep. There's nothing wrong, nothing. I don't know what's the matter with me. I'm foolish, a foolish old man." His eyes were focused on the pillow as he spoke. "Sleep, my dear, go back to sleep," sleep, sleep, when had he last slept—he didn't remember, long ago, long long ago, no time, had to watch, watch, don't be tricked, tricked into sleep . . . and then ". . . oh, no, never while I draw breath, cruel people, yes, to want to do that was cruel, everything I have they would snatch from me," have a good rest." Rising from the chair, the old man shuffled into the other room again.

## *Evening Vigil*

"Hello! Hello in there! Is anybody awake?"

Someone was on the outside landing, right by the door, and was calling—to him.

"Hello, Mr. Burton, are you there, do you feel well?"

It was a woman's voice. It took him by surprise, and for a moment he couldn't think straight. The voice came again.

"Open the door, please, Mr. Burton," it said.

He crouched like an animal in the darkness, his huge eyes brimming with animal fright, and fixed on the door.

Then a second voice had replaced the first, this one a man's voice. "Open up in there, mister, this is a policeman speaking."

It was them, they were coming for her, they were already here. With a convulsive movement of his whole body, he jerked himself backward (they're coming, get back) but in doing so, his foot tripped on the rug and he fell.

The noise of his fall was apparently heard by those on the landing, for they renewed their shouts with greater vigor and urgency, although he couldn't understand what they were saying, so confused had he become. The voices crescendoed into madness while he sat there, trying to think. Mary is sleeping and they're at the door and I am here and they're trying to come in, why doesn't it stop, stop because she's in there and needs her strength because the doctor said so, the screaming hurts, it hurts like dying, Mary, Mary dying, no no not, she's not . . . He could distinguish three voices now, and one of them seemed vaguely familiar. "Please, please, open the door," it cried.

The old man scrambled to his feet and listened to it just as a fearful animal listens to a death rattle—warily, noiselessly. The pain returned to his head with such accelerated

severity that he wanted to scream his agony, yet he didn't utter the slightest sound; something warned him that his only escape lay in stealth, that he would lose her forever if he revealed himself. He had already forgotten his fall.

Creeping softly toward the door, he tried to discover what they were planning, for he knew they were planning something; they hadn't given up so soon, he knew that. The policeman was speaking excitedly, and appeared to be giving instructions to the women, who were weeping. The old man then heard a scuffle of feet. He moved right up to the door and listened. There was a complete silence now from the other side of the door. He arched his body forward in the blackness and at that moment heard it: the metallic scratching of a key being inserted into the keyhole. They were coming in!

The old man's facial muscles twitched involuntarily and his eyes bulged in their sockets. Coming, the word burned through to the core of his petrified brain and ignited latent insanity. He stomped hard on the floor with both feet, completely forgetting everything but that one fact. They were coming.

"Don't come in! Stay away!" he yelled. "I warn you, I won't let you take her!" And grasping the doorknob, he held onto it with all the strength his small body could muster, all the while bellowing incoherently at them.

This makeshift defense didn't last long, however, and the policeman slowly began to force the door open. He was hollering at the old man.

"Take it easy, we aren't going to hurt you, let us in!"

With a final furious wrench, he tore the old man's grasp from the knob, and the door stood wide open. The white

## *Evening Vigil*

beam of a flashlight suddenly blazed in the old man's haggard face, blinding him.

"Take it away," he cried, and, drawing one arm across his eyes, he struck wildly at the instrument with the other and knocked it out of the policeman's grasp to the floor, where it spun crazily in a circle, shooting its light in all directions. Then it went out. The old man ran back into the room. Voices, their voices, filling the room, Mary in there, save me, save me, don't let them, help, save, dying, alone, NNOOO! . . .

"Where's the light switch?" roared the policeman. "This guy's nuts, he's broke the flashlight."

. . . if they do, I'll kill, kill, KILL!!! . . .

"You stay away," stammered the old man fearfully but tenaciously. "You get out of here. I know what you want, but you wont take her."

. . . where are you, what are you doing, no tricks, no

...

Something clicked and the darkness vanished into burning bundles of electric light. When the initial flash subsided he saw the policeman standing about seven or eight feet away from him, a short, stocky, red faced figure clad in blue. Behind him were the two women, but the old man couldn't see them clearly.

"Talk to him, please," said the policeman over his shoulder to one of them. She stepped forward into the light. It was the old man's daughter.

She began to plead with him to come away with her, but he wasn't even listening. Phyllis talking, here with them, on their side, against him, too . . . He stood there muttering her name, betrayed, not listening to anything she was saying. Finally the policeman said to her, "You see, it's no use," and then started to walk cautiously toward the old man.



His body grew tense. "Stay away! I'm not joking! I'll do anything!" he threatened.

"Now take it easy, Mr. Burton," rejoined the other.

"I warn you! Stop!"

But he didn't stop, and he was almost within arm's reach. The old man backed away toward the bedroom door, his face glistening with sweat.

"Now there, Mr. Burton," the policeman was saying in a soothing manner. The old man hated him for it.

"Don't try that on me, I know what you're after!"

He was just inside the bedroom door now, and the women had begun to scream hysterically. "Please, Father, please," he heard her cry. He jerked his head savagely back and forth in reply, still keeping his eyes on the advancing policeman, who by this time was almost to the bedroom threshold.

"Just come along with us, Mr. Burton," he kept saying.

Suddenly, with a heavy grunt of warning, his stocky blue form came rushing like a squat, ugly bird of prey, the half-opened hands resembling talons. The old man made a desperate attempt to elude the policeman's lunge, but only partially succeeded. His left arm was pinned in the other's grasp. He struggled to free it. "Don't try anything, I've got you," shouted the policeman, breathing hard. Then, with a face grotesquely contorted, and in a frenzy of fear and hatred, the old man brought his free right arm in a sledge-like motion down on his tormentor's neck.

The policeman, stunned by the blow, released his grip on the old man's arm and fell to his knees.

"You old fool!" he roared, then he began to rise to his feet again. The old man's victory had been only a temporary one.

## *Evening Vigil*

The pain smashed like a hammer against the old man's brain, and his whole body went limp; he thought he was going to vomit or faint; he was too weak to fight any more. The room began to rock violently, and he could hardly see the other man any more. They would win and they would take her away from him. There was nothing he could do about it—he realized this now. Everything was turning around so fast, so fast. He was barely able to stand up, and he hadn't the strength to fight them. There were too many. Even his daughter, she was one of them. Why were they so cruel? He didn't know. Yet he didn't hate them any more. Too tired for hate. The only feeling he had was one of crushing, unyielding hopelessness. "Oh, Mary!" he sobbed pitifully, and turning away from his adversary, he tottered to the bed and threw himself across it in a gesture of despair. The policeman turned on the bedroom light and walked over to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later the policeman was telephoning in his report from the first floor tenement of the house's landlord.

". . . yes, that's right, sergeant," he was saying. "The daughter brought me over here with her. She said she was worried about him. She said she called him four or five times over the phone, but he didn't answer. Huh? Oh, the landlady here gave me a key and we got in that way. Yeah. He fought like a wild man, I think he's crazy. Kept on talkin' about his wife, said we wouldn't get her or something like that. I told the daughter she oughta bring him to the hospital. What? The wife? No, she's dead; she died last week. The daughter said he felt bad about it, but she didn't think he was that bad. Yeah, she took him with her. Her husband came over and picked them up. Huh? No, no, he was pretty quiet when they left, just talkin' to himself. We couldn't get

a word out of him. Yeah. Well, I guess that's about all. I will, yes. Okay, sergeant, so long."

He replaced the receiver in its cradle, and turned to the landlord's wife, who was drying her eyes with a handkerchief.

"I guess that's about it, ma'am," he said. "Thanks for letting me use the phone."

"Oh, it's awful, officer," she replied in an ancient, high-pitched voice. "And me here all alone, what with my husband working nights now. He might have come down here and murdered me."

The policeman shook his head. "It's too bad."

"Yes," she continued, "it's terrifyin' just to think about it. I noticed he'd been actin', well, queer for the last couple of days, but I didn't think anything special about it, you know, with his wife bein' dead and all."

The policeman began to edge toward the door. "Yes, ma'am," he said, "well, I'll have to . . ."

"But then," she interrupted, "I should've noticed something funny was goin' on the night I went to the wake. There he was, just sittin' by the casket, not sayin' a word to nobody, just lookin' at her."

"Yes, ma'am, well I'll have to be getting back on duty now."

"All right, officer," she acquiesced, smiling. "Good bye."

"'Bye, ma'am."

He stepped out into the night and looked up at the sky. There were patches of ragged clouds overhead, but otherwise it was perfectly clear. Then he took a deep breath, descended the porch stairs, and went away.

## A Reminiscence

By WILLIAM SULLIVAN, '54

I suppose everybody at some time gets the urge to write, to tell something that stands out in his life; I'm no exception.

I first met Jack at Hickham Field in good old Hawaii. I had just arrived, and, as is the custom, I was introduced to my future buddies by the squadron commander. Being a neophyte, and until the past year solely addicted to ground travel, I was kind of shy and retiring; they call it green. Most of the handshakes were casual or even mechanical. Jack's was different. He vigorously thrust his hand into mine. His effusiveness was accompanied by the words, "Greetings, fella, on behalf of all the military personnel, and especially the celebrated Third Fighter Squadron, I welcome you to the vacationland of the world. I trust you'll do Hawaii and its Hula Hula girls justice." Too befuddled to discern whether he was kidding or not, I thanked him and wormed my way into the background and obscurity.

That's what is known as a preliminary meeting, but in the months to follow, I came to know Jack intimately. He was a rare creature. Cocky like Napoleon and as optimistic as a saint, he was the man of the hour. Feats impossible to perform were so, only because he hadn't tried to do them yet.

In the intensive months of training that followed, I became fairly dexterous at manipulating my ship, but compared to Jack I was the slime of the earth. He'd try, and do anything. Just watching his aerial acrobatics would give the

rest of us goose pimples. Those goose pimples materialized into mountains when one of our less fortunate brethren found the neighboring sea as his permanent resting place. Such occasions were not infrequent either. After such affairs an atmosphere of depression reigned supreme in our barracks. We figured that it could just as easily have been us who crashed, but not Jack. It's true that he joined in our sympathy, but never once did he think that he might be next in line. He laughingly expressed his indestructibility by philosophizing, "Only the good die young."

One day, the orders came. You can't say you're not expecting them, but they still come as a surprise. It's sort of like a June swimmer dipping his foot into the water and then eruditely announcing, "Gee, it's cold." The squadron, *in toto*, was ordered to recently-finished Kansas Field in Korea. The time had come. We were to go from one extreme to another; from sun-scorched, lackadaisical Hawaii, to war-torn Korea. It was a complete transition, to be effected by but twelve hours' flying time. This coveted news acted as a soporific that night. As they say, we slept the sleep of dead men; insomnia was non-existent.

The bugle brought our refreshed bodies spritely from our beds. Our bodies stood erect . . . why just our bodies? Our minds had already negotiated the distance to Korea. This proves that there is something faster than jets.

We plodded our way to the mess hall. The aroma of bacon and eggs revived us. Our bodies began to color; it was as if Dracula had repented. Each man, unable to eat, looked at his neighbor to see how he had reacted to the report. All appearances were alike; that is, except Jack's. I can still see him piling bacon, sausages and fried eggs on his plate. We looked on—mouths agape—unbelievably. It seemed as

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though the food disappeared in the blinking of an eye into Jack's cavernous receptacle. After interminable erections of the right forearm, he stopped for a respite and accidentally looked around. Seeing our expressions, he blurted, "What's the matter, boys? Is this too early an hour for you?" We all grumbled a perfunctory "yeah."

What happened between then and the take off, only God knows. The next thing I remembered was flying over the vast Pacific. Yes, the serene Pacific, a panorama of lethargy and content. Too bad it couldn't influence the countries that border it. It was a twelve hour trip but I like to think of it as sixty seconds times sixty minutes times twelve hours, because that's how it felt. However, we managed to get there although the mighty heavens voiced a protest on our way. By the time we reached Korea, nature's rage had subsided and we stood face-to-face with the more-dreaded, maniacal fury of man. We landed . . . How do I know? Simply because we must have.

The next two weeks were hell on earth (pardon the expression). Already our number had dwindled. The picture of their mothers and fathers reading the dull, prosaic, War Department telegram was as clear as our inevitable doom. The only change in the picture was the faces—once it was Bill's mother and father; another time it was Al's. When would it be mine?

But the indestructible one was unaffected. The ratter-tat-tat of machine gun bullets was to him a lullaby; the detonating of blockbusters, a bursting ballon; a bullet pierced body in a parachute, a bright mushroom in soiled earth. I hate to use such gaudy metaphors but they suit Jack to a "T." His detachment from the mundane was personified in the terminations of his highly optimistic letters. "See ya next week" was

typical of them. We all expected to see somebody soon, but only our past life would tell us who it would be.

So as day follows night or vice versa, so did nightmare follow nightmare. Each diurnal or nocturnal expedition was the worst conceivable until the next. Jack was impervious to the life-and-death struggle that surrounded him. His sole references to a mission were, "What a romantic moon last night" or jokingly, "How about getting down to earth on the next flight?" Such was the "condicioun" of the man, as Chaucer would say.

Then it happened. We were returning from a routine mission (Ah, I love that word *routine*) when all of a sudden we were ambuscaded, if that can happen in the bright, blue yonder. It was a routine flight—again my respect to the Department of War—only four pilots had been lost. I had somehow become separated from the squadron, in the process of which I denuded the sky of one of Confucius' illustrious grandchildren. Veering back to join the fray, I became a spectator to calamity. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." In this scene Jack was the central character, although a reluctant one. By a twist of fate he was now the pursued; how this happened, I'll never know. He was the cynosure of all eyes, or at least of mine and his consequent company. Suddenly Jack's plane emitted smoke, then fire, and then Jack himself. I tried to follow Jack's downward flight but motor trouble prevented me. A blossoming of his parachute caused a momentary halt in his progress; then he floated gently, almost majestically. I muttered, "Thank God." However, a third party interrupted with his remarks. They were a little less thoughtful than mine, they were uttered a little more gutturally. What were they? . . . Bullets!! Jack was there, then he wasn't; his life was there, then it wasn't. I was there . . . helpless.

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All the way home I glanced over my right shoulder, hoping against hope to see Jack protecting the rear. I'd have had more chance to see my guardian angel. But I looked—again and again.

Bad weather grounded us for the next few days. I spent eternity on earth. My purgatory was over. I vowed revenge. Retaliation was indelibly imprinted on my mind. I was like a child who, deprived of a lollipop, vows secretly to get even. I plotted and I schemed. No revenge seemed adequate, but I swore I'd get even for Jack. Patience, persistence and perseverance, I lack; but I waited. Every dog has his day. As a cat waits for a mouse, so I waited for my opportunity.

It would never come; I was grounded. They called it battle fatigue. I needed a complete rest. Yes, a two week vacation. Back home . . . close. Where? . . . Japan. I rested, but while I rested I thought. Revenge was still uppermost in my mind, but now I thought logically about the matter. Was I justified in what I intended? After all, everybody knows the end doesn't justify the means . . . or does it? That's the devil in me again. It's funny that I should have thought of such things. In battle, I would never have; instinct would have governed me . . . or, again, would it have? I argued with myself pro and con and I vowed that I'd still get even for Jack.

Do philosophers ever agree? I mean disagree. It is said to look before you leap but also that he who hesitates is lost. I disregarded the initial axiom when I was asked by the "big boy" one day if I would volunteer for a two week reconnaissance job in Korea. He explained that I had every right in the world to refuse. I don't need to tell you how I answered.

I was generously flown back to the mainland in a conventional aircraft—that's how much they thought of me.



After landing I reported to headquarters where I was briefed on my job and just what was expected of me. It was a snap. I was to fly a P-51 Mustang and scout the enemy. What a let-down. To top it off I was ordered not to engage the enemy as my information would be more valuable than a dozen downed Migs. The latter part of the statement was stressed to supposedly inflate my ego.

So, like a school boy taking physics, I took avidly to my job. I fancied myself as a spy because after all I stole secrets from the enemy. It's true that I didn't apply Mata Hari tactics, but after all I'm not a woman.

However, as a river is inexorable in its motion, so was I in my waiting. I said every dog has its day and I finally got mine. It started off innocently enough. I was on a routine mission, having been shot at only a hundred times. While busybodying nonchalantly over hill and through dale I espied a dog fight high up in the skies. Again, I was the sole spectator. Planes dove and zig-zagged, guns spat fire, and an occasional ill-fated plane fell earthward. I can't say I was disinterested, but I prepared to go. Wanting to get my money's worth, I took one last peek. It was as if I had seen the same show over again. A parachute fluttered high off to my left. In the interests of speculative science, I investigated. As I flew by I discerned a blood-smeared figure with a yellow complexion. Simultaneously the idea of revenge returned. It had been dormant but now it exploded alive. The opportunity comes but once. I dove at him, I measured the distance, I counted the seconds, I readied my thumb; my heart pounded, my blood raced; I could almost hear a voice saying, "Now!"

I demurred. He landed. In modern terminology one would say I chickened. What would you say? Be the Almighty and pass final judgment.

