

WPA Alabama Writers Project  
Short Stories by:  
Donnell Van de Voort, Jefferson



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*Oxford*

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November 24, 1982

Phyllis Gray  
Luther College  
Decorah, Iowa 52101



Dear Ms. Gray:

This is in reply to your inquiry of November 22 by long distance telephone conversation regarding Donnell Van de Voort and the story, "Wiley and The Hairy Man," taken from the WPA's Federal Writers Project of Alabama.

At present only fragments of this project have been abstracted and indexed. Other than appearance of a carbon, onionskin copy of the story under his name we have no other information about this writer other than his been attached to the editorial staff in Birmingham, Alabama. Also there were a two page essay, "Folklore and Folk Customs," a ribbon original which contains a version of "This Old Hammer," and a one page original data sheet on Anniston, Calhoun County, Alabama which was heavily edited.

The "Wiley" manuscript seems to be the exact contents of the story in Botkin's "A Treasury of American Folklore." There were no drafts or workpapers among our mss collections.

To our knowledge "Wiley and The Hairy Man" has not been published in any other volume or series. After the holidays I shall forward to you the names and addresses of the two ladies who have been interested in folklore of Alabama in the past ten years.

If we may be of further help, please write to me.  
Have a very heppy Thanksgiving.

Sincerely yours,

(Miss) Sarah-Ann Warren  
WPA Collections Depository  
Records Management Division

A TREASURY OF  
AMERICAN  
*FOLKLORE*

STORIES, BALLADS, AND  
TRADITIONS OF THE PEOPLE



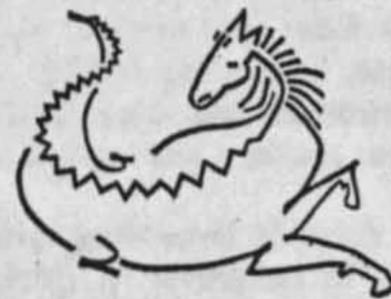
*Edited by*

B. A. BOTKIN

*In Charge of The Archive of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress*

*with a Foreword by*

CARL SANDBURG



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Botkin

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## FOREWORD

**W**E HAVE heard of the boy and his sister coming home from school to tell their mother, "We learned today we have been talking prose all our lives and we didn't know it." Likewise many of us grown-ups have talked off a lot of folklore in our lives and we didn't know it was folklore—and if we had known it wouldn't have made much difference. You can't stop 'em from telling it even if they politely warn you beforehand, "Stop me if you've heard this." They (or we?) are irrepressible as the tenacious debating opponent of whom A. Lincoln said in 1858 that the only way you could make him quit would be "to stop his mouth with a corn cob."

So here we have nothing less than an encyclopedia of the folklore of America. An encyclopedia is where you get up into box car numbers. There have been small fry collections of folklore we might say, but this one is a big shot. It will pass the time, furnish laughter, provide entertainment. And then besides giving you the company of nice, darnfool yarn spinners, it will give you something of the feel of American history, of the gloom chasers that moved many a good man who fought fire and flood, varmints and vermin, as region after region filled with the settlers and homesteaders who proclaimed, "We are breaking sod for unnumbered millions to come."

And now that the days of those pioneers are passed, we have cities and skyscraping structures of steel and concrete that would have amazed them, motion pictures and radio transmissions that some would have declared "plumb ridiculous," not to mention the tractors which can plow without mules and the storm-proof all-steel buggies and wagons that do better than a mile a minute without a horse to pull.

And this smart later generation of youth has its folklore and our encyclopedia has plenty of specimens of Little Audrey, of Knock Knock, Who's There?, of the little moron who being told he was dead ordered that he should be moved into the living room.

Something rather sweetly modern and quite impossible to see as coming alive out of any former generation is such a story as the editor dug out of "Chicago Industrial Folklore," by Jack Conroy. There it was hiding out in the Manuscripts of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Illinois. It tells about Slappy Hooper, the World's Biggest, Fastest

A.H. 7-18-44. Crown Pub. - 3.20 p. 243

"Sing that sweeten, gooden song again."

She sang, "Tray-bla, tray-bla, tray-bla, cum qua, kimo."

Wolf, he gone.

Pit-a-pit, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat coming behind her and there was the wolf, an' 'e say,

"You move."

"O no my dear, what 'casion I move?"

"Sing that sweeten, gooden song again."

She sang, "Tray bla-tray bla-cum qua, kimo."

Wolf he gone.

Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat.

She goes back some more and this time when she hears pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat coming behind her, she slips inside the gate and shuts it and wolf, he can't get her.

## Wiley and the Hairy Man

WILEY's pappy was a bad man and no-count. He stole watermelons in the dark of the moon, slept while the weeds grew higher than the cotton, robbed a corpse laid out for burying, and, worse than that, killed three martins and never even chunked at a crow. So everybody thought that when Wiley's pappy died he'd never cross Jordan because the Hairy Man would be there waiting for him. That must have been the way it happened, because they never found him after he fell off the ferry boat at Holly's where the river is quicker than anywhere else. They looked for him a long way down river and in the still pools between the sand-banks, but they never found pappy. And they heard a big man laughing across the river, and everybody said, "That's the Hairy Man." So they stopped looking.

"Wiley," his mammy told him, "the Hairy Man's done got yo' pappy and he's go' get you 'f you don't look out."

"Yas'm," he said, "I'll look out. I'll take my hound-dogs ev'rywhere I go. The Hairy Man can't stand no hound-dog."

Wiley knew that because his mammy had told him. She knew because she was from the swamps by the Tombigbee and knew conjure. They don't know conjure on the Alabama like they do on the Tombigbee.

One day Wiley took his axe and went down in the swamp to cut some poles for a hen-roost and his hounds went with him. But they took out after a shoat and ran it so far off Wiley couldn't even hear them yelp.

"Well," he said, "I hope the Hairy Man ain't nowhere round here now."

He picked up his axe to start cutting poles, but he looked up and there came the Hairy Man through the trees grinning. He was sure ugly



and his grin didn't help much. He was hairy all over. His eyes burned like fire and spit drooled all over his big teeth.

"Don't look at me like that," said Wiley, but the Hairy Man kept coming and grinning, so Wiley threw down his axe and climbed up a big bay tree. He saw the Hairy Man didn't have feet like a man but like a cow, and Wiley never had seen a cow up a bay tree.

"What for you done climb up there?" the Hairy Man asked Wiley when he got to the bottom of the tree.

Wiley climbed nearly to the top of the tree and looked down. Then he climbed plumb to the top.

"How come you climbin' trees?" the Hairy Man said.

"My mammy done tole me to stay 'way from you. What you got in that big croaker-sack?"

"I ain't got nothing yet."

"Gwan 'way from here," said Wiley, hoping the tree would grow some more.

"Ha," said the Hairy Man and picked up Wiley's axe. He swung it stout and the chips flew. Wiley grabbed the tree close, rubbed his belly on it and hollered, "Fly, chips, fly, back in yo' same old place."

The chips flew and the Hairy Man cussed and damned. Then he swung the axe and Wiley knew he'd have to holler fast. They went to it tooth and toe-nail then, Wiley hollering and the Hairy Man chopping. He hollered till he was hoarse and he saw the Hairy Man was gaining on him.

"I'll come down part t'way," he said, "'f you'll make this bay tree twicet as big around."

"I ain't studyin' you," said the Hairy Man, swinging the axe.

"I bet you cain't," said Wiley.

"I ain't go' try," said the Hairy Man.

Then they went to it again, Wiley hollering and the Hairy Man chopping. Wiley had about yelled himself out when he heard his hound-dogs yelping way off.

"Hyeaaaah, dog. Hyeaaaah," he hollered. "Fly, chips, fly, back in yo' same old place."

"You ain't got no dogs. I sent that shoat to draw 'em off."

"Hyeaaaah, dog," hollered Wiley, and they both heard the hound-dogs yelping and coming jam-up. The Hairy Man looked worried.

"Come on down," he said, "and I'll teach you conjure."

"I can learn all the conjure I wants from my mammy."

The Hairy Man cussed some more, but he threw the axe down and balled the jack off through the swamp.

When Wiley got home he told his mammy that the Hairy Man had most got him, but his dogs ran him off.

"Did he have his sack?"

"Yas'm."

"Nex' time he come after you, don't you climb no bay tree."

"I ain't," said Wiley. "They ain't big enough around."

"Don't climb no kind o' tree. Jes stay on the ground and say, 'Hello, Hairy Man.' You hear me, Wiley?"

"No'm."

"He ain't go' hurt you, chile. You can put the Hairy Man in the dirt when I tell you how to do him."

"I puts him in the dirt and he puts me in that croaker-sack. I ain't puttin' no Hairy Man in the dirt."

"You jes do like I say. You say, 'Hello, Hairy Man.' He says, 'Hello, Wiley.' You say, 'Hairy Man, I done heard you 'bout the best conjureman 'round here.' 'I reckon I am.' You say, 'I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no gee-raff.' You keep tellin' him he cain't and he will. Then you say, 'I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no alligator.' And he will. Then you say, 'Anybody can turn theyself into somep'n big as a man, but I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no 'possum.' Then he will, and you grab him and throw him in the sack."

"It don't sound jes right somehow," said Wiley, "but I will." So he tied up his dogs so they wouldn't scare away the Hairy Man, and went down to the swamp again. He hadn't been there long when he looked up and there came the Hairy Man grinning through the trees, hairy all over and his big teeth showing more than ever. He knew Wiley came off without his hound-dogs. Wiley nearly climbed a tree when he saw the croaker-sack, but he didn't.

"Hello, Hairy Man," he said.

"Hello, Wiley." He took the sack off his shoulder and started opening it up.

"Hairy Man, I done heard you 'bout the best conjure man round here."

"I reckon I is."

"I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no gee-raff."

"Shux, that ain't no trouble," said the Hairy Man.

"I bet you cain't do it."

So the Hairy Man twisted round and turned himself into a gee-raff.

"I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no alligator," said Wiley.

The gee-raff twisted around and turned into an alligator, all the time watching Wiley to see he didn't try to run.

"Anybody can turn theyself into somep'n big as a man," said Wiley, "but I bet you cain't turn yo-self into no 'possum."

The alligator twisted around and turned into a 'possum, and Wiley grabbed it and threw it in the sack.

Wiley tied the sack up as tight as he could and then he threw it in the river. He went home through the swamp and he looked up and there came the Hairy Man grinning through the trees.

"I turn myself into the wind and blew out. Wiley, I'm go' set right here till you get hongry and fall out of that bay tree. You want me to learn you some more conjure."

Wiley studied a while. He studied about the Hairy Man and he studied about his hound-dogs tied up most a mile away.

"Well," he said, "you done some pretty smart tricks. But I bet you cain't make things disappear and go where nobody knows."

"Huh, that's what I'm good at. Look at that old bird-nest on the limb. Now look. It's done gone."

"How I know it was there in the fus' place? I bet you cain't make somep'n I know is there disappear."

"Ha ha," said the Hairy Man. "Look at yo' shirt."

Wiley looked down and his shirt was gone, but he didn't care, because that was just what he wanted the Hairy Man to do.

"That was jes a plain old shirt," he said. "But this rope I got tied round my breeches been conjured. I bet you cain't make it disappear."

"Huh, I can make all the rope in this county disappear."

"Ha ha ha," said Wiley.

The Hairy Man looked mad and threw his chest way out. He opened his mouth wide and hollered loud.

"From now on all the rope in this county has done disappeared."

Wiley reared back holding his breeches with one hand and a tree-limb with the other.

"Hyeaaah, dog," he hollered loud enough to be heard more than a mile off.

When Wiley and his dogs got back home his mammy asked him did he put the Hairy Man in the sack.

"Yes'm, but he done turned himself into the wind and blew right through that old croaker-sack."

"That *is* bad," said his mammy. "But you done fool him twicet. 'F you fool him again he'll leave you alone. He'll be mighty hard to fool the third time."

"We gotta study up a way to fool him, mammy."

"I'll study up a way tereckly," she said, and sat down by the fire and held her chin between her hands and studied real hard. But Wiley wasn't studying anything except how to keep the Hairy Man away. He took his hound-dogs out and tied one at the back door and one at the front door. Then he crossed a broom and an axe-handle over the window and built a fire in the fire-place. Feeling a lot safer, he sat down and helped his mammy study. After a little while his mammy said, "Wiley, you go down to the pen and get that little suckin' pig away from that old sow."

Wiley went down and snatched the sucking pig through the rails and left the sow grunting and heaving in the pen. He took the pig back to his mammy and she put it in his bed.

"Now, Wiley," she said, "you go on up to the loft and hide."

So he did. Before long he heard the wind howling and the trees shaking, and then his dogs started growling. He looked out through a knot-hole in the planks and saw the dog at the front door looking down toward the swamps, with his hair standing up and his lips drawn back in a snarl. Then an animal as big as a mule with horns on its head ran out of the swamp past the house. The dog jerked and jumped, but he couldn't get

loose. Then an animal bigger than a great big dog with a long nose and big teeth ran out of the swamp and growled at the cabin. This time the dog broke loose and took after the big animal, who ran back down into the swamp. Wiley looked out another chink at the back end of the loft just in time to see his other dog jerk loose and take out after an animal, which might have been a 'possum, but wasn't.

"Law-dee," said Wiley. "The Hairy Man is coming here sho'."

He didn't have long to wait, because soon enough he heard something with feet like a cow scrambling around on the roof. He knew it was the Hairy Man, because he heard him damn and swear when he touched the hot chimney. The Hairy Man jumped off the roof when he found out there was a fire in the fire-place and came up and knocked on the front door as big as you please.

"Mammy," he hollered, "I done come after yo' baby."

"You ain't go' get him," mammy hollered back.

"Give him here or I'll bite you. I'm blue-gummed and I'll pizen you sho'."

"I'm right blue-gummed myself," mammy sang out.

"Give him here or I'll set yo' house on fire with lightnin'."

"I got plenty of sweet-milk to put it out with."

"Give him here or I'll dry up yo' spring, make yo' cow go dry and send a million boll-weevils out of the ground to eat up yo' cotton."

"Hairy Man, you wouldn't do all that. That's mighty mean."

"I'm a mighty mean man. I ain't never seen a man as mean as I am."

"'F I give you my baby will you go on way from here and leave everything else alone."

"I swear that's jes what I'll do," said the Hairy Man, so mammy opened the door and let him in.

"He's over there in that bed," she said.

The Hairy Man came in grinning like he was meaner than he said. He walked over to the bed and snatched the covers back.

"Hey," he hollered, "there ain't nothin' in this bed but a old suckin' pig."

"I ain't said what kind of a baby I was givin' you, and that suckin' pig sho' belonged to me 'fo' I gave it to you."

The Hairy Man raged and yelled. He stomped all over the house gnashing his teeth. Then he grabbed up the pig and tore out through the swamp, knocking down trees right and left. The next morning the swamp had a wide path like a cyclone had cut through it, with trees torn loose at the roots and lying on the ground. When the Hairy Man was gone Wiley came down from the loft.

"Is he done gone, mammy?"

"Yes, chile. That old Hairy Man cain't ever hurt you again. We done fool him three times."

Wiley went over to the safe and got out his pappy's jug of shinny that had been lying there since the old man fell in the river.

"Mammy," he said, "I'm goin' to get hog-drunk and chicken-wild."

"You ain't the only one, chile. Ain't it nice yo' pappy was so no-count he had to keep shinny in the house?"

## Little Eight John

ONCE an long ago dey was a little black boy name of Eight John. He was a nice lookin little boy but he didn't act like he look. He mean little boy an he wouldn't mind a word de grown folks told him. Naw, not a livin word. So if his lovin mammy told him not to do a thing, he go straight an do hit. Yes, spite of all de world.

"Don't step on no toad-frawgs," his lovin mammy told him, "aw you bring de bad lucks on yo family. Yes you will."

Little Eight John he say, "No'm, I won't step on no toad-frawgs. No ma'am!"

But jest as sho as anything, soon as he got out of sight of his lovin mammy, dat Little Eight John find him a toad-frawg an squirsh hit. Sometime he squirsh a heap of toad-frawgs.

An the cow wouldn't give no milk but bloody milk an de baby would have de bad ol colics.

But Little Eight John he jes duck his haid an laugh.

"Don't set in no chair backwards," his lovin mammy told Eight John.

"It bring de weary troubles to yo family."

And so Little Eight John he set backwards in every chair.

Den his lovin mammy's cawn bread burn an de milk wouldn't churn.

Little ol Eight John jes laugh an laugh an laugh cause he know why hit was.

"Don't climb no trees on Sunday," his lovin mammy told him, "aw hit will be bad luck."

So dat Little Eight John, dat bad little boy, he sneak up trees on Sunday.

Den his pappy's taters wouldn't grow an de mule wouldn't go.

Little Eight John he know howcome.

"Don't count yo teeth," his lovin mammy she tell Little Eight John, "aw dey come a bad sickness in yo family."

But dat Little Eight John he go right ahaid an count his teeth. He count his uppers an he count his lowers. He count em on weekdays an Sundays.

Den his mammy she whoop an de baby git de croup. All on count of dat Little Eight John, dat badness of a little ol boy.

By James R. Aswell. From *God Bless the Devil! Liars' Bench Tales*, by James R. Aswell, Julia Willhoit, Jennette Edwards, E. E. Miller, and Lena E. Lipscomb, of the Tennessee Writers' Project, pp. 172-175. Copyright, 1940, by the University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill.



WILEY AND THE HAIRY MAN

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"Well," he said, "I hope the Hairy Man ain't nowhere round here now."



He picked up his axe to start cutting poles, but he looked up and there came the Hairy Man through the trees grinning. He was sure ugly and his grin didn't help much. He was hairy all over. His eyes burned like fire and spit drooled all over his big teeth.

"Don't look at me like that," said Wiley, but the Hairy Man kept coming and grinning, so Wiley threw down his axe and climbed up a big bay tree. He saw the Hairy Man didn't have feet like a man but like a cow, and Wiley never had seen a cow up a bay tree.

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"How come you climbin' trees?" the Hairy Man said.

"My Mammy done tole me to stay 'way from you. What you got in that big croaker-sack?"

"I ain't got nothing yet."

"Gwan 'way from here," said Wiley, hoping the tree would grow some more.

"Ha," said the Hairy Man and picked up Wiley's axe. He swung it stout and the chips flew. Wiley grabbed the tree close, rubbed his belly on it and hollered, "Fly Chips fly, back in yo' same old place."

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"You ain't got no dogs. I sent that shoat to draw 'em off."

"Hyeaaaah dog," hollered Wiley, and they both heard the hound-dogs yelping and coming jam-up. The Hairy Man looked worried.

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'Hello, Hairy Man.' You hear me, Wiley?"



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"I reckon I is."

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"Shux, that aint no trouble," said the Hairy Man.

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So the Hairy Man twisted round and turned himself into a gee-raff.

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The gee-raff twisted around and turned into an alligator, all the time watching Wiley to see he didn't try to run.

"Anybody can turn theyself into somep'n big as a man," said Wiley.

"but I bet you cain't turn yo'self into no 'possum."

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When Wiley and his dogs got back home his mammy asked him did he put the Hairy Man in the sack.

"Yes'm, but he done turned himself into the wind and blew right through that old croaker-sack."

"That is bad," said his mammy. "But you done fool him twicet. 'F you fool him again he'll leave you alone. He'll be mighty hard to fool the third time."

"We gotta study up a way to fool him, mammy."

"I'll study up a way toreckly," she said, and sat down by the fire and held her chin between her hands and studied real hard. But Wiley wasn't studying anything except how to keep the Hairy Man away. He took



his hound-dogs out and tied one at the back door and one at the front door. Then he crossed a broom and an axe-handle over the window and built a fire in the fire-place. Feeling a lot safer, he sat down and helped his mammy study. After a little while his mammy said, "Wiley, you go down to the pen and get that little suckin' pig away from that old sow."

Wiley went down and snatched the sucking pig through the rails and left the sow grunting and heaving in the pen. He took the pig back to his mammy and she put it in his bed.

"Now, Wiley," she said, "You go on up to the loft and hide."

So he did. Before long he heard the wind howling and the trees shaking, and then his dogs started growling. He looked out through a knot-hole in the planks and saw the dog at the front door looking down toward the swamps, with his hair standing up and his lips drawn back in a snarl. Then an animal as big as a mule with horns on its head ran out of the swamp past the house. The dog jerked and jumped, but he couldn't get loose. Then an animal bigger than a great big dog with a long nose and big teeth ran out of the swamp and growled at the cabin. This time the dog broke loose and took after the big animal, who ran back down into the swamp. Wiley looked out another chink at the back end of the loft just in time to see his other dog jerk loose and take out after an animal, which might have been a 'possum, but wasn't.

"Law-dee," said Wiley. "The Hairy Man is coming here sho'."

He didn't have long to wait, because soon enough he heard something



with feet like a cow scrambling around on the roof. He knew it was the Hairy Man, because he heard him damn and swear when he touched the hot chimney. The Hairy Man jumped off the roof when he found out there was a fire in the fire-place and came up and knocked on the front door as big as you please.

"Mammy," he hollered, "I done come after yo' baby."

"You ain't go' get him," mammy hollered back.

"Give him here or I'll bite you. I'm blue-gummed and I'll pizen you sho."

"I'm right blue-gummed myself," mammy sang out.

"Give him here or I'll set yo' house on fire with lightnin'."

"I got plenty of sweet-milk to put it out with."

"Give him here or I'll dry up yo' spring, make yo' cow go dry and send a million boll-weevils out of the ground to eat up yo' cotton."

"Hairy Man, you wouldn't do all that. That's mighty mean."

"I'm a mighty mean man. I ain't never seen a man as mean as I am."

"F I give you my baby will you go on way from here and leave everything else alone."

"I swear that's jes what I'll do," said the Hairy Man, so mammy opened the door and let him in.

"He's over there in that bed," she said.

The Hairy Man came in grinning like he was meaner than he said. He walked over to the bed and snatched the covers back.

"Hey," he hollered, "there ain't nothin' in this bed but a old suckin' pig."



"I ain't said what kind of a baby I was givin' you, and that suckin' pig sho belonged to me 'fo' I gave it to you."

The Hairy Man raged and yelled. He stomped all over the house gnashing his teeth. Then he grabbed up the pig and tore out through the swamp, knocking down trees right and left. The next morning the swamp had a wide path like a cyclone had cut through it, with trees torn loose at the roots and lying on the ground. When the Hairy Man was gone Wiley came down from the loft.

"Is he done gone, mammy?"

"Yes, chile. That old Hairy Man cain't ever hurt you again. We done fool him three times."

Wiley went over to the safe and got out his pappy's jug of shinny that had been lying there since the old man fell in the river.

"Mammy," he said, "I'm goin' to get hog-drunk and chicken-wild".

"You ain't the only one chile. Ain't it nice yo' pappy was so no count he had to keep shinny in the house?"



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Red Bay, Alabama

(Franklin #1)



with impatience, her small hand stopped him. He was so stubborn, so male-headed, looked like he could have a little artistic conception.

She was silent so long that Otto rolled over on his stomach, and pulled himself to a sitting position. Then he propped himself against the trunk of the shade tree, and said real friendly: "Gosh, now, we've been going with you another all our lives. We played hide and seek together. You were the putting on airs..."

Leeta turned sharply, and her blue eyes narrowed until you thought she would have looked mean. But Leeta was so pretty she couldn't look mean if she wanted to. Her mouth and her eyes were made so they looked better and better the more she twisted them around.

Now she stood up and pushed her hair back from her face. She LEETA RIDES HIGH sprang Otto with scorn and contempt.

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"Really, Ottison, you shouldn't call me 'Lee'."

The girl speaking was small and cute. The boy she was speaking to was square and corny.

"Lee---Leeta---why do you have to be so uppity? Now, you know there's no sense in all this highflalooting stuff." Otto rolled over on his back, and looked up at the sun. He had shade his eyes. Crossing his legs he looked at the girl standing in the sun with pity for him written on her fine features. Her



lips quivered with impatience, her small hand dropped with hopelessness. He was so stubborn, so mule-headed! Looked like he would have a little artistic consciousness.

She was silent so long that Otto rolled over on his stomach, and pulled himself to a sitting position. Then he propped himself against the trunk of the shade tree, and said real friendly: "Gosh, hon; we've been going with one another all our lives. We played hide-and-seek together. There ain't no use putting on airs...."

Leeta turned sharply, and her blue eyes narrowed until you thought she would have looked mean. But Leeta was so pretty she couldn't look mean if she wanted to. Her mouth and her eyes were made so they looked better and better the more she twisted them around.

Now she stood up and pushed her hair back from her face. She looked down on the sprawling Otto with scorn and contempt. Then she bent and took a book from the leaves: The Complete Works of William Blake. There was a firmness to her lips, a quickness to her movement that made Otto jump up in alarm. His stubby, brown hand reached out; but Leeta was haughty. She jerked away.

Then she stopped and put her hands on her hips, spread her skirts by spraddling. Her eyes flashed from under long lashes. Otto almost fainted with her beauty, as he reached toward her.

"Listen to me, Ottison Newgood, I've tried my best to understand the higher things of life. I've done all that's humanly possible... You're just stubborn..."

Her voice shook with emotion, her lips trembled; and she brushed her hair nervously. There was a pleading in her tone. Yet she was firm and resolute. Otto could hardly listen to her she was so pretty with the sun coming through the leaves of the tree and making her hair full of light, and making her moist lips shine just a little. He was so dreadfully in love with her! But what could a man do? When a woman has fits a man had better just shut-up---he guessed. Gosh, but it was hard to be quiet with her so pretty and so cute.

"You won't read what I tell you. You won't talk right. You won't pay any attention when I try to tell you about poetry and art and---the real things. Why, when I was reading that essay on T.S. Elliot you went to sleep!" One hand left her slim hip, came up slowly and accusingly: "You're just plain stupid. And Ottison New Good, I am through with you. I am totally, completely, and finally through with you. You can have your old picnic, your old car, and everything you have. Go ahead and fish, I'll walk home---" Here her voice grew dreamy--- "and I'll enjoy the glory of nature while you snore your head off on that fish-bank." Her little chin went into the air, her heels stuck firmly into the soft earth.

"Gee, Lee-ta, I don't know what to do."

"You needn't come to get me for the show tomorrow night either. I am going to catch up on my reading."

"Gee..."

But it was no use. She was behind a bush, and hitting it toward the road, fifty yards away. Otto dropped back on the ground with a whimper, and reached for a sandwiche.



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He munched heavily and sadly. He crossed his legs once more, and closed his eyes. The freckles showed plain by the bright light.

His mind was very busy. He was pained and hurt. Women have to be queer and funny. A guy didn't know what got into them. They were happy one minute, sad the next, and high flalootin' the next. Sometimes they had their nose so high in the air that you walk around like you are barefooted on glass. Then they get sweet and chummy and you feel like the biggest guy in the world.

There was Leeta, the girl he used to play leapfrog with, reading that fellow--William Blake--going around saying: "Tiger, tiger, burning bright in the forest of the night." She was jumping on him about his talking and telling him how to say things. Telling him he ought to sit straight, and quit walking with his head down. One time Lee wasn't that way. One time she didn't care if he yelled across the street: "Hey, Lee! Hiyah, kid!"



Maybe she would get over it. Reckon she was going through some kind of a stage. He hoped so. He wanted to marry her someday. Then they'd go to the farm and have a family. But the way Lee was talking now there wasn't much chance of a fellow bringing up something serious. For she would, sure as shooting, start talking about some of the poets, telling about a fellow name of Rossetti, Wordsworth, and shooting off her mouth about Shakespeare. A man had no time for such stuff. Life was too good to be wasting with a lot of dead men. He tried to tell her that once, as they were swimming down on the creek. The swim was over, and they were sitting near the edge of the water with

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their feet dangling in the flowing water. They had been picking blackberries that afternoon, and had brought their swimming suits. Now, they had swam, and were resting on the bank.

"Here's the way I figure it, Lee," he said. "A man has got to be serious. It don't matter how much he talks, it's what he really is that counts. I ain't no talker like you are," he confided, as she looked still and quiet. His eye caught her round shoulder and it was hard to think, much less say anything. Most of the time, in the old days, he wouldn't have had to say anything else. She would have smiled and acted like she understood everything. That made a fellow feel swell. Now, she was quiet and cold. "I ain't no talker, but you know what I mean.

"No, Ottison, I don't know what you mean. Some man said that anything that cannot be expressed does not exist."

Of course she had him there, and he just had to be quiet. All the time he new well as anything what she was thinking. She was thinking he was a dumb ox.

"Ottison, it is getting late," was what she said.

Otto took a bite of his sandwiche without opening his eyes. There was a frown on his face. He had asked, he remembered, about her. He told his mother, and she couldn't answer him. "Some girls get some mighty bright notions in their head. I'd drop her cold," was what his mother advised. But she didn't understand things. She didn't know how Leeta could be sweet and nice. How she could make a fellow so glad and so thoughtful. How her voice could make noises so sweet he had to swallow. Even now he loved her when she was digging him and telling him just as plain as everything he didn't have any sense because he wouldn't understand poetry.



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"Please, please, try to like good things. Call me 'Leeta' not 'Lee'. My real name is not vulgar. And you ought to make everybody call you Ottison. Otto---how vulgar!"

It looked like she was going too far sometimes. Especially that time he went on a date with her and she spent four solid hours reading to him about the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Spots of it were pretty good the first time, but ~~she~~ she kept on reading things over, and saying: "What does it mean?" "What does it suggest?" "How wonderful, how beautiful!" All he could do when she'd read it over was to grunt, and she wanted to know what "images" he saw. She would talk about the meter and try to get him to sing it off. And he never did like things twice, three times, and he just couldn't stand the tenth time. He was the sort of fellow that can't stand to see a movie twice.

So it wasn't any wonder he was glad that date was over. Let her have her Keats, he muttered, as he grabbed his hat. He was muttering all the way home and while he was taking off his shoes and getting into bed. He usually went to sleep quick when he hit the bed. But he lay for a long time thinking about her. It was a revolution with all that poetry buzzing in his head and her "ahs," and anger.

"I'd be a pretty peaceful fellow," thought Otto as he rolled over, and picked up his fishing pole, and walked to the edge of the creek and threw in his hook and sinker with a wriggling worm. He held the pole out over the creek, and thought hard.

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"I ain't a person to get mad and fight. The only fight I ever had was when that Jack Beers threw a cup of white-wash on Lee. I wouldn't have fought then if Lee hadn't squalled."

Otto saw there was no bite. So he too his pole in his armpit, and picked up his straw-hat, and pulled it down over his dry, yellow hair. Then he walked down the road that Leeta had left on in all her haughtiness. He was thoughtful as he plodded on to the car he had parked in the ditch by the bridge. He was thoughtful as he piled his things in the rear of the open car, and crawled beneath the steering wheel.

It wasn't a long walk for her, he reasoned. Before he bought the little car, he and she had walked it a lot of times. No, she could make it. The chances were she would be mad though. But what can you do when a girl is in a pet? You can't sooth them with words. You can't laugh it off, and you can't ignore them. Gee!

Otto's car pattered and popped, and pitched forward. He was in a daze of thought and dreams as he drove, Otto was a deep thinker, he thought. Lee, didn't think so, but he knew he was. She ought not to think I am dumb just because I don't know a lot them double-jointed words and read a lot. Just because a fellow makes a failure in school is no sign he ain't got any sense. The principal had told him about that when he quit school.

"Come in here, my boy," said the principal. He was Mr. Duff. He is a fine fellow, remembered Otto sleepily, and yawning into his cupped hand which he moved from the steering

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wheel a moment. They had gone into the office. "Take a seat, Otto. You're not doing so good in your work, are you, my boy?"



"No, I reckon not, Mr. Duff. You see, I..."

Then the principal had raised his hand and smiled. It was good to get that smile. For Otto was felling pretty low. Those grades he was getting were hurting him a lot. He didn't admit it, but they were. The other fellows seemed to make grades without any trouble. He must be dumb, he thought. The principal never got mad at him, though. His mother worried about him, and used to say to the teachers: "Otto will not study. He doesn't even read the funny papers. I have never seen him pick up a book in all his born-days. All he is interested in is fishing and playing. He doesn't care about anything else."

The teachers were worried, too. They couldn't get him to write plain. They couldn't get him to read distinctly. They couldn't get him to prepare his lessons. He just wouldn't learn history.

But everybody liked him. The boys liked for him to go on hiking trips and be a boyscout with them. He could tell jokes and laugh; and he had a pretty good singing voice. But his songs were homemade. He never could learn, or never would, the songs ~~were~~ the teachers wanted him to. He'd pick his guitar and hum a little, sing a little. He was best when he was around a camp-fire; then a word now and then would come out pretty sleepy. A humming would come, more words; and all of a sudden he would be singing something that was happy

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and bright. The boys would turn over on their blankets to listen.

 Otto liked the principal better than any teacher because Otto knew the principal didn't mark down so much as did the other teachers. Even when Otto would say made-up things about George Washington on history, the principal wouldn't mark down.

So Otto didn't mind when the principal called him into the office one day, and said: "Don't you worry about your grades, Otto. You aren't dumb. You're smart enough. Some people aren't cut out for grades. You weren't made to study books. You were made for other things. Don't you worry, and you just laugh if anybody tells you that you are dumb."

Otto was remembering those words as he drove. Never had he felt dumb any more. He didn't really believe he was dumb when Lee said he was. The principal knew if anybody did, he reasoned. He was the smartest man in town, schoolman.

"I don't think you ought to be wasting your time in school, Otto. You ought to be somewhere else. Now, you can stay if you want..."

Otto remembered how happy he was when the principal said that. He had never liked the school. He would sit very lonely in his seat about Springtime and look at the sky and the green branches of the bushes that grew against the panes. He had the hardest time sitting through the classes.

So he quit school.

Lee did not quit school, but went on through the classes, and on until she got on the school stage and made a speech. Otto went to the program the night she graduated,

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and listened as she spoke her piece bravely. She was pretty in her white dress, her hair done up just right. After it was over he took her in his arms, and she hugged him. It was before she went arty, and she did not talk about him quitting school.

He often wondered why she took up with him. She was smart in school, and he couldn't do a thing. She was always the best when the class had to memorize a poem. She was always the best when they wrote themes. But she had always like ~~him~~ him better than anybody. They went to school-parties together, played together, courted together, and laughed together. She was always understanding. Then she began that poetry-business. She read things to him, talked of things to him. She ~~said~~ <sup>said</sup> that poets had the keys to the universe. When he kissed her good night, he thought she had them.



"Do you know what life means, Otton?" she wanted to know another day. He always grew cold when she asked things like that; he felt naked. She began to talk about the creative imagination, the sublimity of thought. She talked about the rhythm of the senses. She told him about the intoxication of the soul, the beauty of words, and the power of sound. He watched the light in her hair and was silent.

Then he said: "The dickens, Lee, you know, I ain't good at that kind of stuff. I sorta like them poems you read, the ones that sound pretty. But I ain't going nuts over them. I ain't cut out for things like that. Professor Duff said I ain't dumb, just not cut out...."

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locked a lot. That kind of talk always made her mad and she wouldn't talk, but would be still and calm. Then off she would go again when things settled down. It was pretty good to listen to sometimes. Especially when she got eager and leaned forward, talking fast as she could, the words tumbling out, her eyes flashing, her fingers jabbing. Then she would make things all rough again by asking questions; and, God knows, he didn't like questions. If she would just talk herself and quit wanting to know if he was convinced, it would be o.k.

"I tell you right now," she said one day when they were eating a chocolate frosted, "I tell you I don't like to talk to a person I can't convince." She must have gone to the school to get some library books. Otto decided when he got to town that the best thing for him to do was to go around to her house and try to talk her out of her pet. She might be darn serious this time. He sure didn't want to lose her when she was prettiest thing in the world and the person he couldn't live without. So he pulled the steering wheel sharply to make the turn around the block to her white home. He parked near the shade in the yard, jumped out, and knocked on the door. He brushed his yellow, sandy hair quickly as he waited. He smiled. He heard somebody coming, and he caught his hands behind his back, and began to whistle idly. He turned around when he recognized the footsteps of Leeta's little sister.

"Hello, Otto," said the little sister: she



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looked a lot like Leeta. "Where's Lee---Leeta?"

"She's not here?" The face of the child was all smiles. She liked Otto and Otto usually told her stories to make her like him more. She would sit in his lap as he spun dreams about fairies and giants out of his head and stories that didn't come out of story-books you buy.



"Say, Sis, when has she been in?"

"You took her with you, didn't you?"

"You mean she hasn't been back since we left this morning?"

"No, Otto." Otto put on his hat, and walked back to his car at the shade. He looked at the sun, and saw it was getting pretty low. She must not have come in when she left him. She must have gone to the school to get some library books. Otto, backing the car almost into the culvert, turned around, charged toward the school, around blocks. Twisting and turning he wound his way to the school. He parked on the driveway, and once more jumped out, and went to a door. He pushed into the vacant building, across a hall to a door which had a sign printed in black letters on it: LIBRARY: silence. He heard the fluttering of pages. Somebody here.

He caught the knob of the door, pushed in. Glancing along the stacks of books, the chairs under the light of the tall windows, he saw Mr. Duff. The principal lifted his length from a chair, and closed his book on a long finger.

He smiled: "Otto, don't tell me you want a book?"

"No---no---" He glanced swiftly. "I'm looking for Lee---Leeta."

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"Leeta," repeated Mr. Duff. He was still smiling. And welcoming. Darn soothing. But Mr. Duff didn't know where she was, and hadn't seen her. He spoke softly and slowly, and the first thing Otto knew he was sitting down and telling Mr. Duff about the spat.

"What can a guy do, I'm asking you, Mr. Duff? I like her a lot. In fact, I'm crazy about her. She just sticks her nose in the air and gets mad when I can't memorize that poetry of hers." Duff listened quietly and warmly and he found himself telling things he was surprised about later on.

"I tell you: We'll look her up, and I'll talk to her. You're a fine boy, Otto, and she ought not treat you this way."

Later the two were in the little car, and the frown was deepening on Otto's freckled features. They drove back to the woods, to the path she had left on, and to the bridge where the car was parked. They struck out through the woods. They yelled and they called. They cut across a pasture to a place where Otto and Lee built toadfrog houses of damp sand as kids, and where they sat as older people. There they found her foot-prints. Sharp heels of her shoes stuck deep.

Then there was a movement, a sight of color, and Leeta perched on a fallen log, book open, and in a deep study on the roundness of cheek and forehead. She must have heard them long before.

"Leeta," exclaimed Otto. She looked up, and showed her boredom by continuing to read. Otto dropped his hands to his sides.

"Leeta."

She looked up. Mr. Duff motioned Otto to one side. Then he walked up. "Let me talk to you about Otto." Otto himself dropped to a log some distance away. He put his face in his hands, dug in the pasture with his heel. He watched the two as they talked. He saw Leeta shaking her head and the calm, insistant head of the principal. The sun was sinking behind the pasture, and nothing could be seen but the light coming up pink. There was a stillness and Otto could hear the sound of their voices. Mr. Duff was soft-voiced, but Leeta sounded mad.

Finally the young man could stand it no longer. He went to them when they were very evident at odds. He was hesitant and his eyes were pained. He walked slow and was timid. At first he didn't say anything. Stood there looking at Leeta. He tried to make words come to his mouth. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her, to blurt out he was different like Mr. Duff said, not cut out for words and books. He wanted to tell her that he knew things about fish and rabbits and dogs. He wanted to tell her he had grand feelings some days, and he felt so full he nearly burst with feeling.



He stood there. "I ain't much."

Her chin went into the air. He felt warm at the stubbornness that made her prettier than ever. He saw how bright her eyes were. He saw her little clinched fist, and the little foot tapping against the log she was couched on.

"If I could write a poem it would be about you." He looked up as he said that. For he felt sort of sugary as he said it. Leeta stole a cautious glance at him, but immediately froze up.

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He moved closer, hands outstretched. He was pleading. Higher and higher her chin went into the air. When her eyes caught his she trembled, and almost melted.

Her heel kicked the weeds at the base of the log, where it was buried in the loose gravel of a dry-stream bed. She was feeling his voice. Then there was a soft, definite rattle down at her feet. A sudden rattle, a sharp warning rattle. A snake uncoiled and struck even as they watched. The girl's bare leg bore a mark of red blood.

She screamed, her fingers caught her book. Both hands tightened on the volume of Blake. Otto dived with the eloquent words of his dying in his throat. He slung the girl from the log, and she fell in a pile ten feet away. His hands caught the snake. Pop, like a whip over a pair of mules. The head of the snake was off. He threw the still squirming, thrashing coils into the weeds.

A moan of agony left his lips. He had the girl in his arms. He was whinng with her pain. He was hugging her. She was sobbing on his shoulder. But on her leg there was the red mark of snake-fangs. More of her blood was easing into the break.

"Sweetheart." He carried her to the green grass of the pasture. Placing her down gently, he knelt over her. By this time Mr. Duff was there, whipping out his knife. The girl's face blanched.

"No." She clutched at her volume of Blake.

"We have to, Lee. In a hurry. We have to. It's poison."

Otto didn't argue with her. He took the knife from



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Duff's hand. He pushed the girl down. He caught up her leg. His own teeth sunk into his lip, as he slashed deep. The girl moaned, but the look on his face expressed more pain than did her voice and face combined. He was firm and he was steady. He sucked the blood from her leg, bandaged it with his white handkerchief.

"My darling," he whispered.



The Blake was still held tightly to her breast. He dropped her leg; then almost without warning fell back in a faint. He was ~~like~~ like turning out a light. Duff smiled at Leeta, but she was taking the boy into her arms. The principal took him from her, placed him back, lifted her ~~leg~~ on the log in her comfortable niche. He propped her injured leg. Then he took care of the boy. Slapped his face.

Otto looked at Leeta first when he came to, and bounced up swaying. He rushed toward her. He caught her hand. He looked at her leg. There was a wild light in his eyes.

Mr. Duff started across the field.

"We've got to have a doctor....for her leg."

Leeta was studying Otto. She looked at the book in her hands. She looked into his eyes. He was scared to death. He had the same look on his face the time he came to see her when she was sick and the doctor said she wouldn't live. He had the same look on his face all day the time he jerked her from before a car. Now, his fingers trembled.

"You've got to have a doctor. That leg!"

"Mr. Duff has gone. I'm all right. You sucked all the poison out." He was examining the leg. His fingers were fumbling and tender like a fussy mother.

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"It's my fault." He was filled with a hate for himself. "I made you mad. It was me that didn't like books. I'm dumb, Leeta. Don't you ever pay any attention to me. I ain't worth it. I don't know a thing. I can't pass. I flunked, do you understand? I flunked!" He caught her hand. "You gonna forget me. You're going to quit dating me. You're going to leave me alone."

She was looking into his eyes. Then she looked at the sky, and then at the book in her lap. A rosy hue was filling her ~~face~~ face and her soul.

"I ain't got any knowledge why you ever cared a thing about me. I never did know why you looked at me. ." Her chin was trembling, but her sturdy, small body was like a fist full of determination. Her fingers clutched the volume of Blake. "You want me to talk about Poe, but I don't know nothing about that sort of fellow... I never did feel like he did in them poems you read to me. I can't talk..." She was thinking that Tennyson, maybe, didn't have anything on this guy.

The sun was entirely gone. Soon Duff was a long distance across the pasture. But ~~at~~ didn't notice, nor did Leeta. She was still <sup>✓</sup>cared on the log, and Otto was talking and pleading.

"I promise you I'll like books and I'll read the papers so I can talk to you about Hitler and Mussolini. I'll try to learn about Rome and Greece. I'll do my best to know things. I know you get tired talking to a fellow that never did know anything. But Mr. Duff said I wasn't dumb. He told me straight-out. But I guess you do get tired of me just talking about woods, the things there. You get tired me telling you how I feel when I go swimming, how I like snow. But that



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is all I know. Honest, will you be friends with me, I...?"

Leeta got off the log. She dropped her book, put her finger on his lips. She didn't pay any attention as her book rolled into the weeds.



"You can call me 'Lee,' if you want...."

R.F. Waldrep, ed. Dept

SMALL FLOP  
J.T. Beasley  
Red Bay, Alabama  
(Franklin Co #1)



A&H Editor's Note: J.T. Beasley appears in the  
1931 Ala Official & Statistical  
Register as Mayor of Red  
Bay, Ala. (FAM: 5-6-1980)

SMALL FLOP

He's a small town politician, this Joe T. Beasley is.  
He was mayor once, and he still is town clerk. There has been  
a time when he was a big shot, but now he ain't no big shot, and  
this damn town, she sure is proud of it. The bastard, he  
beat this town out of more money than you can guess.  
Hell, he sent his daughter to school, sent a boy to school,  
and lived in a Birmingham hotel on thirty bucks a month he got  
for being mayor. Damn his hide to hell, I don't min' telling  
off on him. And, By God, I don't care if he is scared to death  
~~right now~~ right now. He can kick the bucket any time he

gets good and ready.

This town has seen enough of his pot-belly twisting  
along the street, that fat face and <sup>them</sup> thin lips. The damned  
liar, cheat, pie-eater!



He thinks he is in one hell of a spot right now, and  
the funny thing and the good thing about it, he can't pull no  
dirty politics and get away from it. He can't call in some  
of his relatives to vote him out of it. He can't name his man  
and his spot now. He's got to face it all on his own, damn  
his hide.

JOe T. Beasley, Judge, they called him, God knows why!-----

he can't carry that belly around now; its gone; its wasted  
away; and the rest of him's going to waste away. He threw  
too many of them parties while his old wife was home eating  
corn bread poked in butter-milk---like slopping pigs, by ~~God~~  
God, while he goes to town and sleeps in hotels, and calls in  
them <sup>things</sup> ~~pillow-bellies~~ bitches that don't have to eat butter  
milk and corn bread, and milk and **churn** the milk like his

old, swivelled, burned-out wife does.

far as Joe T. Bessley is concerned. Just the place for  
 Buddy, you know how he started out. Of course, it's  
 a life! He was here in town about thirty years ago, they say.  
 I can't remember. They say he was a farmer then, had a little  
 patch; the saw-off bastard, clod-hopper didn't work then.  
 Maybe that's the reason he raised all them no-count kids,  
 the damned Charley, Howard, Wheeler, Wallis---that sorry-assed  
 bunch! I guess he ~~figgered~~ <sup>figgered</sup> he'd get them to work, and when  
 they wouldn't he quit.



He come up to town during the war, and bought the house  
 there this side ~~next~~ of the bridge, on the corner on main-  
 street. It was a box; but as he got a better chance to steal  
 from the town---Goddamn his stinking, brown hide---he put  
 on a porch, roofed, painted, and fixed it a little. Sure, he  
 still owes for the house, and always will. He pays the interest  
 that is all. And he owes every store in town a few dollars,  
 more or less. They don't ~~and~~ credit him any more.

Well, ~~the~~ <sup>he</sup> sorry-assed, bastard come to town, sold his  
 little two-bit farm out there on the railroad toward Golden.  
 He put him up a pool-room. Now, I admit that was the stuff as

far as Joe T. Beasley is concerned. Just the place for  
a saw-offed, dark, black-haired rascal.



And you'd think he wouldn't have any ambition. Especially  
when you heard the tale, as how he once work<sup>ed</sup> on a bridge, and  
lifted so much he couldn't work no more. By, and on the living,  
eternal God, he didn't. He ain't worked a lick since, if you  
don't call that vote-chasing he does work.

~~That sorry-assed bastard~~ <sup>And he</sup> got to be mayor somehow---back  
before I can remember. He walked in, and all I can remember, <sup>^</sup> the  
first thing I can remember, <sup>^</sup> was my Paw cussing an' raising hell  
because he got into office. He knew the fellow wasn't no  
count.

I reckon you'll put up with anything for mayor. Well,  
he shore put up with the job. He dragged ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> butt around  
town on high. He politiced, and he politiced. He slapped  
shoulders...

And he grafted---grafted---grafted---crooked and he  
crooked. Go to jail for a drunk, you would, and he'd come  
around grinning and a-hinting, and a-rubbing his hands. You'd

~~know~~ know what ~~you~~ he wanted. You grease that fat runt's paws with half the fine, and you'd go scott free. But that old brother-in-law---the one that got shot through the neck by the fellow that was going with his daughter---that old brother-in-law, Shamlin, could get to jail and never pay a dime. But the rest of the fellows would stay in that jail a-cussing and a-goddamning-a-helling all night until people couldn't sleep for the ever-lasting cussing, but Joe kept him there until he forked over a nice little lump of money.



By God, ~~and~~ <sup>he</sup> was elected again; even when he bank-rupted the town. Hell, <sup>the</sup> town bankrupted four more times.

If we was like a car, we'd been drove off long ago, but you can't pull-up some roads and sidewalks and water works and haul them off. And one time we could have paid every thing off. When Dr. Copeland was Mayor, he had the five thousand that would set the whole town free of debt, then that Joe T. came in. He squandered, he <sup>wasted</sup> ~~spent~~, and he <sup>spent</sup> ~~spent~~. We sunk into debt.

Worse than that, as far as the church people are concerned,

Honky Tonks sprung up, it wasn't good for a woman ~~to~~ to

You know that son <sup>Woman</sup> ~~was~~ walk down the streets. ~~was~~ was everywhere, and they say

Christ preacher, the Campbellite, some people call his kind. Joe kept him a woman.

You know how he went up into Arkansas and went through that He pumped this town dry as a mash-orange, and he strutted

Campbellite college, and made a preacher---well his as didn't around spruce as ever. He grinned and gave that soft old

handshake. He'd pull the fellers off to one side to talk pay that, not Joe T. and his ~~son~~ mayor, he didn't. You know,

he let that little church that can't pay a preacher regular--- confidential-like, you know. It drug in the votes; ~~and~~

let them pay his boy through school. I don't ~~know~~ sure of course, he was elected again and again.



he really paid that set of gals way to college. But I He was a big shot. He was head of the democratic

do know that them gals is pay <sup>t-model</sup> machine. The party give him a ~~money~~ in the t-model days

See him going ~~in~~ in ~~the~~ ~~school~~ teaching to work the county in. He went up to Russellville and

money. talked with the fellers up there. He could trade the town

Sure, he brags about having a job. Says he could like a dozen eggs. I've got this and that, you give me this

have one up in Tusculum for campaigning for ~~some~~ Dixon--- and that, and we'll all get out man, he'd say.

job hell---that's bosh! He's an old man---I'll tell you--- His gals went through college, part anyway, and taught

school, but, by ~~god~~ god, that daughter of his, her vile temper and

~~see~~ You see him hanging around ~~Joe~~ Weatherford's ~~place~~ all don't teach in Red Bay no more---she's out now, just

begging for scraps. You see him all ~~around~~ ~~the~~ like Joe T.'s going to be---only he's going to be out like a

know something's eating his guts out.

I tell you he's scared. He's afraid.

light.

It ain't because the machine double-crossed him, liked

You know that son of his, Wallis, the Church of ~~Christ~~  
him out of the mayor nestor than he ever knifed anybody else.

Christ preacher, the Campbellite, some people call his kind.  
It ain't that, and you know how he got out. You know how they

You know how he went up into Arkansas and went through that  
state and told him that he was a coner. "You're lost out in

Campbellite college, and made a preacher---well his pa didn't  
this town. You couldn't drag down enough votes to buy the

pay that, not Joe T, and him ~~mayor~~ mayor, he didn't. You know,  
bust of a pigger girl. Joe, ~~we're~~ we're telling you---get

he let that little church that can't pay a preacher regular---  
out. He says "no" to them, but they pushed him, and said,

let them pay his boy through school. I don't know for sure  
that Cleveland fellow we want in---well, he's soft. He's

he really paid that set of gals way to college either. But I  
pussy." And that is the truth so help me. Cleveland ain't

do know that them gals is paying Joe T. money right this hour.  
got any sand. He'll glad-hand every guy he meets. They told

See him going viding in Martin's Taxi---that's school-teaching  
him anyway that Cleveland ~~resign~~ resign, mind you, and Joe would

money.

be appointed---that'd be ~~put~~ put on the voters.



Sure, he brags about having a job. Says he could

Joe come through and Cleveland was eased into office,

have one up in Tuscumbia for campaigning for ~~Dixon~~ Dixon---

but not before there was a hell of a fight and a lot of trading

job hell---that's bosh! He's an old man---I'll tell you--

around. They even had to put out a notice saying Cleveland

Shoot, you ought to know what kind of a guy he is.

wouldn't resign. Well, you know what happened. After she

~~He~~ You see him hanging around Doc Weatherford's office,

election Joe was ~~was~~ was stung---he run around like

begging for scraps. You see him all worried an' thin. You

hell. He didn't know where he was. There was ~~find~~ find records

know something's eating his guts out.

I tell you he's scared. He's afraid.



It ain't because the machine double-crossed him, kicked him out of the mayor neater than he ever knifed anybody himself. It aint that, and you know how he got out. You know how they come and told him that he was a goner. "You're lost out in this town. You couldn't drag down enough votes to buy the butt of a nigger girl. Joe, ~~we~~ We're telling you---get out." He says "no" to them, but they pushed him, and said. "That Cleveland fellow we want in---well, he's soft. He's putty." And that is the truth so help me. Cleveland ain't got any sand. He'll glad-hand every guy he meets. They told him anyway that Cleveland would resign, mind you, and Joe would be appointed- -that'd be a slick un on the voters.

Joe come through, and Cleveland was eased into office, but not before there was a hell of a fight and a lot of trading around. They even had to put out a notice saying Cleveland wouldn't resign. Well, you know what happened. After the election Joe was out--he was stung--he run around like hell. He didn't know where he was. There was Finch recording

all the <sup>finer</sup> ~~finer~~, fining people, and collecting the money. They give him a little job, but if he couldn't git his paws on some fines and taxes he wasn't noway interested.



For a while he could console hisself with the knowledge his boy Travis was collecting the water-work bills, but after a while the juice was all strained out of that. Some of the fellows begin to notice crookness in the bills and ~~begin~~ begin wanting some checking. That put Travis on the hot spot. He had to tighten down, and get honest, and that is a hell of a job ~~for~~ for a Beasley.

Then old man Shamlin got in jail, and he couldn't pay his fine---Joe couldn't turn him out, for it wasn't his job to turn out people any more. He send Howard up to plead, but pleading didn't do any good.

Nor was Joe dragging in any bribes from the Honky Tonks.

Now you know why the bastard's so sick, why he talks in a ~~whisper~~ whisper. You know why he high-tails it to hospitals all around the country--living off his sister. You know why he hires a taxi---being sick he says--and rides in the afternoon?

He is so thin he can't wear his old clothes.

Now, you know what he's doing? He says people bother him, and he's gone to Florence to live in a hotel a while.

Bother him!



He's sunk, and I for one am shore glad. I know, I know--- these little jack-leg towns have to be crooked, but By God, if that is true, I'm always glad to see a little bastard like him go down. I ain't much myself, just a loafer, and I'm glad to say good-by to the runt. No, I ain't telling my name, and I wouldn't be talking if I knew <sup>I'd</sup> ~~see~~ see you again!

You know why he so sick looking now, eh. Hah!

He thinks he's dying and going to hell---and he will! Hah!

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CANDY TOWN

You ain't a-goin' to believe what I'm a-goin' to tell you, but I don't  
min' that a-tall; fer I didn't neither when I heerd hit, but I allus was  
kind of bull-headed that-a-way. He ole mummy tol' me 'bout hit, and I air  
goin' to tell hit just the way I heerd hit.

Hit's about 11'1" Billyboy, down on Gum. He was a-eatin' green apples,  
and that there is a bad thing for the belly; fer it draws you up and shoots  
pains around. Billyboy was a-hurtin' and he figgered he'd go git on Grandma's  
big feather bed and git over hit 'fore his mummy come 'long with the castor oil.

He got hisself a chair and plunked right in th' middle of that there bed,  
and hugged his belly and moaned for the pain to stop.

But Billyboy, he ain't been there a minute 'til he done felt something  
happening to that there bed. He crawled over to th' edge and looks at th'  
floor, and hits still there, but hit shere looks fur than ordinary, shere as  
heck. Billyboy guessed hit was that there belly of his'n makin' him see  
that way and feel that-a-way. He said: "Billyboy, you-all plumb gone foolish.  
You quit that."

Billyboy went 'head holding his belly, and a-looking out the windows

through them nice white curtains of his mawmy's. Shore as heck something was a-happening to that there bed of his'n. He crawled over, and shore as heck hit looked like he was plumb four feet from that there floor. The chair he climbed up on was under him. "Doggone my hide," said Billyboy. "I'm fetching on a crazy spell, air II!" He batted his eyes and he looked again. Hit shore looked funny.



Hit was funny; fer that bed was moving toward that there window, and them white curtains was a-brushing Billyboy on the shoulder. Billyboy, he just grabbed at them curtains, and he pulled them down, and he knew his Mawmy would whip him shore. But a feller had to hold to soapin when beds was a-movin' like one of them there balloons at the carnival.

That there big ole, fat ole, soft ole feather bed was out'n the window, and Billyboy he was crawling over that there bed, crawling from left to right, bottom to top, and all 'bout like a scared little pig in a piggan. Hit shore was soapin th' way that there big ole, fat ole, soft ole bed was a-doin'. Maybe Granpappy's spook was a-ghosting that there bed. He died in hit, didn't he?

Hit was plumb night out there, and the moon and th' stars was a-shining like Pappy's lantern when Pappy was a-huntin' 'possums. Billyboy he decided he'd cry for his mawmy, and he cried, but hit weren't no use; fer that big ole, fat ole, soft ole bed was up there so high Billyboy could see the top of the

house and the new shingles Pappy put on yisterday. An' there was the peach orchard and the ole cow at th' barn.



That ole bed jist kept a-rising and a-rising; so Billyboy wiped his eyes on the sheet, and said he'd be a man and jist go meet the Angels and the devil too if he wanted him. Billyboy jist knew he was a-dying, and he thought hit plumb unnatural for a little booger like him to die, but he'd heard tell other kids had died, and he reckoned hit was all right; since God was a-doin' hit.

He stood up on that bed, his feet siring in the soft ole bed. He walked to the edge, and almost fainted he was gittin' so high up there. He could see plumb over to the ole Hatton place. There as anything he could see the lamp a-burning in Pat Martin's house. Danged if he weren't up there. And he was still a-rising.

Billyboy felt cool and he crawled under the sheets and hugged 'em to him; fer the breeze was a tugging and a flapping them sheets.

The bed ris and ris and ris. Hit rized slow-like, but hit was regular. Billyboy thought 'bout leaving his mummy and his pappy, and he was glad his li'l' sister and his li'l' bruder was a-staying with them. He wished he could stay and keep 'em company, pick th' cotton, hoe th' corn and chop th' wood. Fore mummy and pappy!

Billyboy lay there and he lay there and hit got dark and darker; fer he

was gitting up above some of them stars and 'course hit wasn't as light as hit would've been. He sailed up past the big dipper and th' little dipper, and he was a-coasting up th' Milky Way.

Billyboy looked down and he could see ole Gum Creek a-shinin' down there and the Iukay Road a-windin'. He was lonesome.



He riz and he riz, and he comed to th' moon. He comed and comed to hit 'til he could see th' trees and the houses on hit. That set ole Billyboy to thinkin', and he knew he could put off goin' to heeven a li'l' and he shore wanted to meet ole Peter on 'nother day. So Billyboy pulled out th' pillar, and he begin to un-embroider all that fancy lace. He did it quick, and he made him a lasso, and he comed up close to th' moon, and got up on his knees, and whirled that lasso. He whirled hit, and whirled hit, and throwed hit on a tree over there on th' moon. He got hit too.

He pulled hisself over there close to the tree, tied the corner of that there bed to th' tree. He jumped out on that there tree. Gosh, hit was sticky! The rocus shore was rising early.

He went to th' tree like one of them squirrels. He landed on th' ground, a-knockin' bark as he went. His feet was smack-stuck. Hit was muddy as all git-out. Must have had a soaker fer hit to be so muddy. He pulled his foot,

and the stuff was like sweetgum on the teeth.

That bark was all over his fingers where the rosum was sticking, and he put his hand to his mouth. Gosh, hit was sweet--this here rosum was. Hit was the flavor of new 'lasses. That was scupin'!



He lugged out 'n that mud like mules a-loggin in a bog. He used a little gravel path, and he was glad he was on hit. The rocks was white, and he picked one of them up, and hit looked like rock candy. He licked hit, and hit was rock candy.

Billyboy said: "I guess this is heaven shore." He looked at the grass, and grabbed a handful, and hit was stiff, and he tasted hit and hit was candy, the flavor of wintergreen. Gosh, hit beat all git-out, now didn't hit?

He comed to a bridge, and the logs of hit were nuthin' but that ole striped peppermint and that ole horehound candy. The water was a rushing and skirlin' under the bridge, and he was thirsty, and he bent down among the rock candy, and took him a drank, and hit was lemonade. He got up, and went on and used a well; he drawed a bucket of rootbeer, and took a drank. Hit was fine. Maybe mammy and pappy could hoe the corn all right without him.

Every dang thing was candy. There was all flavors, all kinds. Stick, assorted, and fancy. There was chocolate and divinity.

Billyboy he just went along and a-reachin' down and a-grabbin' handfuls to eat. He was stuffin' it away like he was a big at sloppin' time.

Then th' ole witch come along, and Billyboy's eyes begin to pop, and he rubbed his sticky hands on his shirtwaist. He knew; he knew! Hit was the devil shore. Hit was a woman, but hit was the devil too. Can't you see them there long ole teeth a-dripping smuff juice like melting icicles? Can't you see that mean ole eye, a-shooting red and fire and smoke? That ole smile was belong to the devil shore.



Billyboy runned, but he got mired in a caramel swamp. That ole devil said: "I'll fetch you out." Them ole joined fingers caught him, and pulled him out. "Thank you, suh," said little Billyboy, "I'll be a-goin'."

"You kin come with me, li'l' boy."

"My nanny an' my pappy will be a-lookin'."

"Come with me." He comed; fer th' devil tuck him. He come to the chocolate-brick house, and went into a room, and the door hit was shut and locked behin' him.

That night, while Billyboy was a-gnawing on the marshmallow pillars and a-licking the lemon bedstide, he heard that ole Devil a-singing a song. And a-talkin' to hisself. "I'm goin' to eat rale meat, rale meat, shore as I' bohn. Here I eat candy all my life, and now I'm goin' to eat meat. I'm plumb sick an'

tired of that ole candy. Billyboy, he will eat good.

Billyboy whimpered an' whimpered an' bawled an' squalled, but hit didn't do a speck o' good. He et candy 'til he couldn't stand no candy. He wished ole Santa Claus would quit brangin' him that ole stuff an' jist bring him some thickain' gravy an' some good ole cornbread.



The day hit passed, and at night li'l' Billyboy slept on what was left of his marshmallow pillow. He woke all sticky and sweet, and the day passed, an' another an' another; fer the ole witch wanted a big meal of rale meat.

Billyboy thought an' thought fer a way to git away. He thought an' he thought, but hit weren't no use. Then the witch comed, an' led him to th' kitchen where he was stirrin' th' pot. "See that," said the ole witch. "I'm cooking you some stuff. You're goin' to be boiled in rootbeer."

"How," said Billyboy, fer he was smart some of the time, "How, looks to me lak you'd want to cook me in water."

"Where, but there ain't no water on the moon; ain't nothing but lemonade, orange juice, an' rootbeer."

"I can make rootbeer into water."

"You kin? I'll be dang. Here's the spoon."

Billyboy he poked more wood under the pot, an' piled on more peppermint wood, and horehound logs. It was a-sputtering an' a-popping. The rootbeer was

a-bellin'. Billyboy said funny noises, and closed his eyes like he was prayin'.  
Th' ole witch watched an' watched, an' he nodded his head, an' looked at li'l'  
Billyboy an' licked his lips. Them ole tusks was a-drippin'.



"How," said Billyboy, "taste this here water." The rootbeer was bubblin'  
an' billin'. Ole withh come near, an' stuck out his lip over the pot to keep th'  
water from drappin' on th' floor. He stuck out over th' pot, and Billyboy, well,  
he jist up an' pushed ole within, an' he runned out th' door, an' runned to the  
tree, and runned on top the feather-bed. He ripped him a hole in the feather-bed,  
an' pitched out half them feathers, an' he done landed in the Jones pasture,  
'bout a mile from home, 'fore dark. He was plumb thankful.

8/24/39

S.J.