Creative Writing, Level 9 (W233439)

Chicago Anthology, Various

Compiled and available for purchase from Beck's (school book store)

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Introduction

The summer reading for our class is this collection of pieces about Chicago.

Begin by reading the poem "Chicago" by Carl Sandburg in the introduction, and then read all the poems and stories that follow, representing a range of styles and time periods.

It will be interesting for us to see which pieces you connect with most. The stories and poems here are divided into four sections:

"Which Chicago?"

"Chicago Institutions"

"Special Places in Chicago"

"Chicago Food."

Come prepared with a story about three of these four categories and take a shot at writing one out. This can be a fully written out story or a set of notes, an outline, a storyboard, or a journal reflection. Try to offer the most detail possible. Instead of saying you like the Art Institute, we'd like to know your favorite painting in detail and why you like it so much. Instead of saying you like pastry, we want you to elaborate on exactly why the Raisin Bun from the Medici on 57th street is the most perfect food you know.

If no stories are immediately coming to mind, what are you waiting for? Go on an adventure in the city with your family or friends.

POETRY FOUNDATION

Chicago

BY CARL SANDBURG

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

Source: *Poetry* (Poetry Foundation, 1914)

Section 1

Which Chicago?

CHICAGO

After Carl Sandburg

SOUL Butcher for the Count
Heartbreaker, Stacker of the Deck,
Player with Northbound Trains, the Nation's Black Beacon;
Frigid, windy, sprawling,
City of Cold Shoulders.

They tell me you have lied and I believe them,
for I have seen your Mississippi women stumbling
Madison Street searching for their painted city legs

And they tell me you are evil and I answer: Yes, I know.
I have seen babies cooking their hair, fingering blades,
changing their names to symptoms of jazz.

And they speak of souls you swallow, and my reply is:
On the shadowed faces of men in the factory lines
I have witnessed the beginnings of the furthest falling

And having answered so I turn to the people who spit at my city,
and I spit back at them before I say:

Come and show me another city with head thrown back wailing
bladed blue, field hollers, so astounded to be breathing and bleeding.
Spewing electric hymns rhythmed against the staccato pound of
fiery steel presses, here is a defiant ass whupper
shaking its massive fists at sweating southern "towns";

Feral as a junkyard mutt, taut, muscled against his enemy, shrewd
as an explorer pitted against an untried land,

Wily as a Louisiana boy faced with days of concrete,
Wiry-headed,
Digging,
Destroying,
Deciding,
Swallowing, expelling, swallowing,

Under the rubble, thrusting forth, laughing with
perfect teeth,
Shedding the terrible burden of skin, laughing as a white
man laughs,
Laughing even as a soldier laughs, addicted to the need of his next battle,
Laughing and bragging that under that skin is the cage of his ribs
And under his ribs beats a whole unleashed heart.
Laughing!
Laughing the frigid, windy, sprawling laughter of
a Southern man, folded against the cold, sparkling, sweating,
proud to be
SOUL Butcher for the Country,
Heartbreaker, Stacker of the Deck,
Receiver of Northbound Trains and the Nation's Black Beacon.

1

The hustlers

To the east were the moving waters as far as eye could follow. To the west a sea of grass as far as wind might reach.

Waters restlessly, with every motion, slipping out of used colors for new. So that each fresh wind off the lake washed the prairie grasses with used sea-colors: the prairie moved in the light like a secondhand sea.

Till between the waters and the wind came the marked-down derelicts with the dollar signs for eyes.

Looking for any prairie portage at all that hadn't yet built a jail.

Beside any old secondhand sea.

The portage's single hotel was a barracks, its streets were pig-wallows, and all the long summer night the Pottawattomies mourned beside that river: down in the barracks the horse-dealers and horse-stealers were mak-

ing a night of it again. Whiskey-and-vermilion hustlers, painting the night vermilion.

In the Indian grass the Indians listened: they too had lived by night.

And heard, in the uproar in the hotel, the first sounds of a city that was to live by night after the wilderness had passed. A city that was to roll boulevards down out of pig-wallows and roll its dark river uphill.

That was to forge, out of steel and blood-red neon, it own peculiar wilderness.

Yankee and *voyageur*, the Irish and the Dutch, Indian traders and Indian agents, halfbreed and quarter-breed and no breed at all, in the final counting they were all of a single breed. They all had hustler's blood. And kept the old Sauganash in a hustler's uproar.

They hustled the land, they hustled the Indian, they

hustled by night and they hustled by day. They hustled guns and furs and peltries, grog and the blood-red whiskey-dye; they hustled with dice or a deck or a derringer. And decided the Indians were wasting every good hustler's time.

Slept till noon and scolded the Indians for being lazy.

Paid the Pottawattomies off in cash in the cool of the Indian evening: and had the cash back to the dime by the break of the Indian dawn.

They'd do anything under the sun except work for a living, and we remember them reverently, with Balaban and Katz, under such subtitles as "Founding Fathers," "Dauntless Pioneers" or "Far-Visioned Conquerors."

Meaning merely they were out to make a fast buck off whoever was standing nearest.

They never conquered as well as they hustled—their arithmetic was sharper than their hunting knives. They skinned the redskin down to his final feather, the forests down to the ultimate leaf of autumn, the farmer out of his last wormy kernel of Indian corn; and passed the rain-swept seasons between cheerfully skinning one another.

One such easy skinner listing his vocation lightly, in the city's first directory, as *Generous Sport*.

Mountain grog seller and river gambler, Generous Sport and border jackal, blackleg braggart and coonskin roisterer, Long Knives from Kentucky and hatchet-men from New York, bondsmen, brokers and bounty jumpers—right from the go it was a broker's town and the brokers run it yet.

It's still the easiest joint in the country in which to jump bond, as well as for staying out of jail altogether. The price commonly being whatever you have in your wallet. If the wallet is empty a fifty-cent cigar will usually do it.

Indeed, the city's very first jailbird got a pass from the city fathers. An antique stray named Harper was knocked down, under the local vagrancy laws, to George White, the Negro town crier, for a quarter. And legally led away by White at the end of a rusty chain.

When antislavery feeling forced the Negro to let the white escape, George wanted only his two bits back. And couldn't collect a dime. So each night scandalized the darkness by crying his loss instead of the hour. He never got his two bits back, but he made a hundred-dollar uproar over it. Every hour on the hour. All night long.

The joint is still in an uproar. Every hour on the hour. All night long.

When the Do-Gooders try to quiet it down they only add drums to the tumult. The village squares arrived too late for a firm toehold.

In 1835 they declared a "season of prayer" and wrested two outlaws right out of the devil's clutches—yet the devil seemed not to miss the pair at all. So they tossed two harder customers into pokey.

And still nobody cared.

Then they fined a brothel-keeper twenty-five silver dollars, and the battle between the Pure-of-Heart and the Brokers' Breed was joined for keeps. The ceaseless, city-wide, century-long guerrilla warfare between the

Do-As-I-Sayers and the Live-and-Let-Livers was on. With the brokers breaking in front.

Broke in front and stayed in front despite being crowded to the rail on occasion.

Not that there's been any lack of honest men and women sweating out Jane Addams' hopes here—but they get only two outs to the inning while the hustlers are taking four. When Big Bill Thompson put in the fix for Capone he tied the town to the rackets for keeps.

So that when the reform mayor who followed him attempted to enforce the Prohibition laws, he wakened such warfare on the streets that the Do-Gooders themselves put Thompson back at the wheel, realizing that henceforward nobody but an outlaw could maintain a semblance of law and order on the common highway. Big Bill greeted his fellow citizens correctly then with a cheery, "Fellow hoodlums!"

The best any mayor can do with the city since is just to keep it in repair.

Yet the Do-Gooders still go doggedly forward, making the hustlers struggle for their gold week in and week out, year after year, once or twice a decade tossing an unholy fright into the boys. And since it's a ninth-inning town, the ball game never being over till the last man is out, it remains Jane Addams' town as well as Big Bill's. The ball game isn't over yet.

But it's a rigged ball game.

Once upon a time, when Thirty-fifth Street was the far Southside and North Avenue was the limit on the north, something called the Law-and-Order League shut

the Sunday beer halls, and the Beer-on-Sunday Party won the subsequent elections in a walk. A horde of horrified Ohio spinsters thereupon counterattacking the halls by praying at the bar rails, pleading with the drinkers to kneel beside them.

There is no record of anyone getting sawdust in his cuffs: this was 1873, and thousands who had come to rebuild the ruins of the great fire were carrying ragged banners crying BREAD OR BLOOD on the streets. Sunday was the one day of the week the working stiff who was still working had to himself. So he just dipped his kisser deeper into his stein, wiped his moustache tidily and ordered another. He knew he wasn't getting any eight-hour day by kneeling for it.

Indignantly then in their hundreds the women marched to City Hall to demand legal prohibition of Sunday beer—and got turned down there cold. Working stiffs and out-of-work stiffs alike booing them gently back to Ohio.

After times had picked up again a Reverend Gipsy Smith, dressed like midnight itself, led twelve thousand black-gowned and black-tied saviors, carrying flaring torches and half stepping in funeral-march tempo to the menacing *boom* of a single drum, up and down the midnight streets of the old Levee.

The piano rolls stopped on a single surprised chord, the little red lamps blinked out together, the big drum called "Come to Jesus or Else," and the saviors cried in one all-accusing voice, "Where is my wandering boy tonight?"

"He ain't in here, Reverend," some awe-struck sin-

ner answered earnestly—and the little red lamps flickered with laughter, a piano roll lightly tinkled a jeer, and the revelry crashed like window-glass with one deep-purple roar.

And roared on all night long.

"We have struck a blow for Jesus," the reverend announced without changing his shirt.

"A church and a W.C.T.U. never growed a big town yet," Old Cap Streeter contradicted him flatly. "Hit's still a frontier town."

Where the gouging and the cunning and the no-holds-barred spirit of the Middle Border still holds as true as rent day.

For despite the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts, the missionary societies and the Bible institutes, the Legion of Decency and Lieutenant Fulmer, Preston Bradley and the Epworth League, Emile Coué and Dwight L. Moody, there's no true season for salvation here. Good times or hard, it's still an infidel's capital six days a week.

And with a driving vigor and a reckless energy unmatched in the memory of man. Where only yesterday the pungent odor of stewed dog trailed across the marshes, now the million-candled billboards, weaving drunken lights in the river's depths, boast of Old Fitzgerald, Vat 69, White Horse and Four Roses. Where only yesterday the evening crow crossed only lonely tepee fires, now the slender arc-lamps burn.

To reveal our backstreets to the indifferent stars.

Section 2

Chicago Institutions

At Shedd Aquarium

ROBYN SCHIFF

Watch them be themselves
in habitats contrived
in dark rooms with openings
like televisions broadcasting
a dimension where Pigment rides
in its original body
and metaphor initiates impractical
negotiations with Size and Color
and Speed and Silence
too thoroughly forward
but to feel
the self an excess.

Fastness, I am tired of resting.
Isn't it indecisive not to be smaller
driven through waters barely perceivable
but where a wake scribbles
a line like a Chinese character
abandoning its construction box
to slip as line only
into an opening
smaller than its shoulders?

Each fin scores the air
as it opens the surface.
A sliver of a fish circles
forever that day
as if to turn something over
in its skinny head keen
to resolve a difficulty
I have.

It is an opera with a lonesome
heroine pacing revolving moors
engineered to seem panoramic.
The diva opens and closes
the tragic mouth singing
deliberate, even breaths
intuition hears.

Theater of false proportion. Theater of constellations reconfiguring. Theater of readjusting the reception. Theater of missing appointments. Theater of driving into the ocean with the headlights turned lowest green and the theater of the engine shifting into oceanic-overdrive. Theater of hearing something coming closer and theatrical fields of theater set crops. Theater of this can not be my life, for which, it is too quiet. Theater of seeing something moving in the one light in the distance which is darkness. Theater of stopping. Theater of my mistake: not coming forward, going further, the something moving in the theater of lighting in the theater of the hour between the theater of morning and the theater of night in the theater of years in which the theater of regret is keeping the secret theater of the revision.

Theater of slipping between
two points in a simulated rock-mountain.

Theater of who will not tell
casually follows.

The Jewel

RICHARD JONES

I like this moment when there is nothing
more I need to do,
when I have emptied
everything on the counter—
eggs, bread, apples, and some chocolate
I will give my children after homework—
and I am free to study
the checkout lady's red face
ever so slightly gasping for air,
the quick hands of the teen-aged boy
distractedly bagging groceries,
and the lady behind me so tiny
she stands on tiptoes to empty her cart.
I have all the time in the world
to open my wallet and count bills
for the Salvation Army bell ringer
standing outside the automatic glass doors
in the dark and falling snow,
time even to survey the sad
faces on the magazines
and read the headlines and confessions
and forgive each star by name.
But when everything has been counted
and bagged, the bill calculated
and the receipt handed to me,
I've forgotten where I am and what I'm doing,
so determined am I to see the angels
William Blake tells me
stand among us,
cherubim lingering by the illuminated
bins of produce,
seraphim protecting the fish sticks
in the frozen food section.
The cashier is saying "Sir? Sir?"
but now I am seeking to pierce the veil
that separates us from the saints in heaven.
Gazing out over the rows of shoppers
waiting in lines with their carts,
and now holding up everyone in line behind me,
I am squinting to find my father, who loved fish sticks,
to see him in his appointed place
among the multitudes of angels and saints,
the heavenly choirs
I can almost hear
singing to me.

Postcard from Buddy Guy's Legends: Bar and Grill, Chicago

ALLEN BRADEN

Order the Big Bayou Blue Plate Special. Here, their motto could be the city's. "Damn Right We've Got the Blues!" The song I do for you more than music, color, clinical depression, more than beach glass blue; Picasso blue; Fourth of July bottle rocket burst blue; low-rise blue of distressed denim blue revealing a field guide to *Electric Blue* on some Betty's hipbone in tattooed blue; through her lips, clouds of nicotine blue; CPD Kevlar blue; The Blue Men blue; Bears and Cubs fanatics embroidered blue (or worse yet there's those game day, let's-git-a-lil-bit-rowdy, face-painted blues); pool cue chalk blue; Bar-B-Que brick blue; this quick flicker of floozy synthetic blue in a back alley off of Wabash Avenue where a busboy practices fly casting, pretending he's somewhere else, some place marvelously new.

Yours truly,
Allen

Hancock O'Hare

MICHAEL AUSTIN

When I was a boy my sister took me
to the top of the John Hancock
where I pushed my chin out
past my knuckles on a railing
to see the little cars on the street below

I flew a lot in those days
and when we took off from O'Hare
I watched vehicles and buildings shrink
until they looked like toys and then lost their shape

I tried to imagine the moment
of takeoff
or landing
when cars looked just like they
did from the Hancock

I have not seen a car from up there in years

I go up and look out
at other buildings now
and airplanes
coming and going
above the backlit horizon

I still look out from airplanes
on takeoff
and landing
watching cars and houses fall away like tiny models
or fade up into actual size

From the Hancock
when I see those planes
going up or down
by O'Hare

I wonder who is looking at what in them
and whether they can see
the tall black building on the lakefront
next to Oak Street Beach
that tiny, sooty toothpick stuck in the sand

Section 3

Special Places in Chicago

Cloud Gate

ELLEN WEHLE

Millennium Park

Because no man doesn't love to drink of his own image,

I dominate the plaza.

Think hot silver: Electric filament.

Mercury bead. Solder spark. Light inside a glacier.

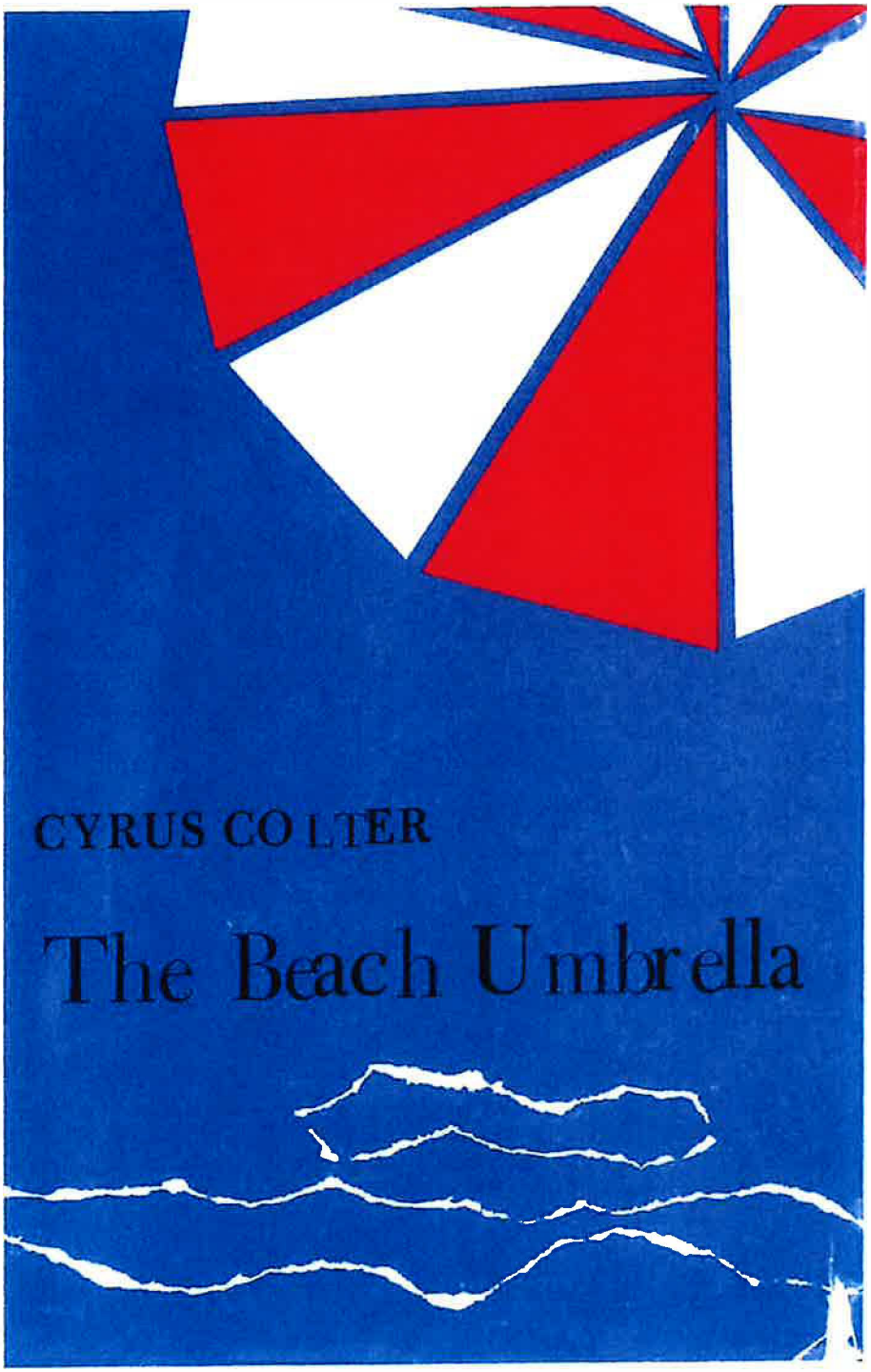
Vapor fogged on photographic plates.

Or that fish who slumbers, beatific, all winter at lake-bottom,

Kindling clouds out of empty

Mind and air. *If this is the only way in . . .*

If I am . . . in fact . . . sky's foyer.


CYRUS COLTER
The Beach Umbrella

The previously published stories in this collection appear by permission:

"A Man in the House," *Prairie Schooner* (1967), University of Nebraska
"A Chance Meeting," *Threshold* (1960)
"The Rescue," *Epoch* (1962), Cornell University
"The Lookout," *University of Kansas City Review* (1961)
"Rapport," *Epoch* (1964), Cornell University
"Mary's Convert," *Chicago Review* (1965), The University of Chicago Press
"Black for Dinner," *Chicago Review* (1966), The University of Chicago Press
"Overnight Trip," *Epoch* (1961), Cornell University
"A Gift," *Northwest Review* (Fall-Winter, 1966-67), University of Oregon
"The Beach Umbrella," *Soon, One Morning* (1962), Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

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Cora's mouth fell open. ". . . Oh . . . ." The blood went from her face. ". . . husband . . . ." Then in the instant she flashed a desperately brilliant metallic smile—"*Oh, I see!* . . . I see! Well, good for her! Ain't that nice! Well, thanks, anyhow . . . thank you!" She was backing toward the door.

"They won't be gone long, though!" the girl laughed, "—when Mattie's money runs out! Just give 'em one more week! Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

But Cora had hurried out into the street.

The Beach Umbrella

The Thirty-first Street beach lay dazzling under a sky so blue that Lake Michigan ran to the horizon like a sheet of sapphire silk, studded with little barbed white sequins for sails; and the heavy surface of the water lapped gently at the boulder "sea wall" which had been cut into, graded, and sanded to make the beach. Saturday afternoons were always frenzied: three black lifeguards, giants in sunglasses, preened in their towers and chaperoned the bathers—adults, teen-agers, and children—who were going through every physical gyration of which the human body is capable. Some dove, swam, some hollered, rode inner tubes, or merely stood waistdeep and pummeled the water; others—on the beach—sprinted, did handsprings and somersaults, sucked Eskimo pies, or just buried their children in the sand. Then there were the lollers—extended in their languor under a garish variety of beach umbrellas.

Elijah lolled too—on his stomach in the white sand, his chin cupped in his palm; but under no umbrella. He had none. By habit, though, he stared in awe at those who did, and sometimes meddled in their conversation: "It's gonna be gettin' *hot* pretty soon—if it ain't careful," he said to a Bantu-looking

fellow and his girl sitting nearby with an older woman. The temperature was then in the nineties. The fellow managed a negligent smile. "Yeah," he said, and persisted in listening to the women. Buoyant still, Elijah watched them. But soon his gaze wavered, and then moved on to other lollers of interest. Finally he got up, stretched, brushed sand from his swimming trunks, and scanned the beach for a new spot. He started walking.

He was not tall. And he appeared to walk on his toes—his walnut-colored legs were bowed and skinny and made him hobble like a jerky little spider. Next he plopped down near two men and two girls—they were hilarious about something—sitting beneath a big purple-and-white umbrella. The girls, chocolate brown and shapely, emitted squeals of laughter at the wisecracks of the men. Elijah was enchanted. All summer long the rambunctious gaiety of the beach had fastened on him a curious charm, a hex, that brought him gawking and twiddling to the lake each Saturday. The rest of the week, save Sunday, he worked. But Myrtle, his wife, detested the sport and stayed away. Randall, the boy, had been only twice and then without little Susan, who during the summer was her mother's own midget reflection. But Elijah came regularly, especially whenever Myrtle was being evil, which he felt now was almost always. She was getting worse, too—if that was possible. The woman was money-*crazy*.

"You gotta sharp-lookin' umbrella there!" he cut in on the two laughing couples. They studied him—the abruptly silent way. Then the big-shouldered fellow smiled and lifted his eyes to their spangled roof. "Yeah? . . . Thanks," he said. Elijah carried on: "I see a lot of 'em out here this summer—much more'n last year." The fellow meditated on this, but was non-committal. The others went on gabbing, mostly with their hands. Elijah, squinting in the hot sun, watched them. He didn't see how they could be married; they cut the fool too much,

acted like they'd itched to get together for weeks and just now made it. He pondered going back in the water, but he'd already had an hour of that. His eyes traveled the sweltering beach. Funny about his folks; they were every shape and color a God-made human could be. Here was a real sample of variety—pink white to jetty black. Could you any longer call that a *race* of people? It was a complicated complication—for some real educated guy to figure out. Then another thought slowly bore in on him: the beach umbrellas blooming across the sand attracted people—slews of friends, buddies; and gals, too. Wherever the loudest-racket tore the air, a big red, or green, or yellowish umbrella—bordered with white fringe maybe—flowered in the middle of it all and gave shade to the happy good-timers.

Take, for instance, that tropical-looking pea-green umbrella over there, with the Bikini-ed brown chicks under it, and the portable radio jumping. A real beach party! He got up, stole over, and eased down in the sand at the fringe of the jubilation—two big thermos jugs sat in the shade and everybody had a paper cup in hand as the explosions of buffoonery carried out to the water. Chief provoker of mirth was a bulging-eyed old gal in a white bathing suit who, encumbered by big flabby overripe thighs, cavorted and pranced in the sand. When, perspiring from the heat, she finally fagged out, she flopped down almost on top of him. So far, he had gone unnoticed. But now, as he craned in at closer range, she brought him up: "Whatta *you* want, Pops?" She grinned, but with a touch of hostility.

Pops! Where'd she get that stuff? He was only forty-one, not a day older than that boozy bag. But he smiled. "Nothin'," he said brightly, "but you sure got one goin' here." He turned and viewed the noise-makers.

"An' you wanta get in on it!" she wrangled.

"Oh, I was just lookin'—."

"—You was just lookin'. Yeah, you was just lookin' at them young chicks there!" She roared a laugh and pointed at the sexy-looking girls under the umbrella.

Elijah grinned weakly.

"Beat it!" she catcalled, and turned back to the party.

He sat like a rock—the hell with her. But soon he relented, and wandered down to the water's edge—remote now from all inhospitality—to sit in the sand and hug his raised knees. Far out, the sailboats were pinned to the horizon and, despite all the close-in fuss, the wide miles of lake lay impassive under a blazing calm; far south and east down the long-curving lake shore, miles in the distance, the smoky haze of the Whiting plant of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company hung ominously in an otherwise bright sky. And so it was that he turned back and viewed the beach again—and suddenly caught his craving. Weren't they something—the umbrellas! The flashy colors of them! And the swank! No wonder folks ganged round them. Yes . . . yes, he too must have one. The thought came slow and final, and scared him. For there stood Myrtle in his mind. She nagged him now night and day, and it was always money that got her started; there was never enough—for Susan's shoes, Randy's overcoat, for new kitchen linoleum, Venetian blinds, for a better car than the old Chevy. "I just don't understand you!" she had said only night before last. "Have you got any plans at all for your family? You got a family, you know. If you could only bear to pull yourself away from that deaf old tightwad out at that warehouse, and go get yourself a *real* job . . . . But no! Not *you!*"

She was talking about old man Schroeder, who owned the warehouse where he worked. Yes, the pay could be better, but it still wasn't as bad as she made out. Myrtle could be such a fool sometimes. He had been with the old man nine years now; had started out as a freight handler, but worked up to doing inventories and a little paper work. True, the business had been going down recently, for the old man's sight and hearing were failing and his key people had left. Now he depended on *him*, Elijah—who of late wore a necktie on the job, and made his inventory rounds with a ball-point pen and clipboard. The old man was friendlier, too—almost "hat in hand" to him. He liked everything about the job now—except the pay. And that was only because of Myrtle. She just wanted so much; even talked of moving out of their rented apartment and buying out in the Chatham area. But one thing had to be said for her: she never griped about anything for herself; only for the family, the kids. Every payday he endorsed his check and handed it over to her, and got back in return only gasoline and cigarette money. And this could get pretty tiresome. About six weeks ago he'd gotten a thirty-dollar-a-month raise out of the old man, but that had only made her madder than ever. He'd thought about looking for another job all right; but where would he go to get another white-collar job? There weren't many of them for him. *She* wouldn't care if he went back to the steel mills, back to pouring that white-hot ore out at Youngstown Sheet and Tube. It would be okay with *her*—so long as his pay check was fat. But that kind of work was no good, undignified; coming home on the bus you were always so tired you went to sleep in your seat, with your lunch pail in your lap.

Just then two wet boys, chasing each other across the sand, raced by him into the water. The cold spray on his skin made him jump, jolting him out of his thoughts. He turned and slowly scanned the beach again. The umbrellas were brighter, gayer, bolder than ever—each a hiving center of playful people. He stood up finally, took a long last look, and then started back to the spot where he had parked the Chevy.

The following Monday evening was hot and humid as Elijah sat at home in their plain living room and pretended to read

the newspaper; the windows were up, but not the slightest breeze came through the screens to stir Myrtle's fluffy curtains. At the moment she and nine-year-old Susan were in the kitchen finishing the dinner dishes. For twenty minutes now he had sat waiting for the furtive chance to speak to Randall. Randall, at twelve, was a serious, industrious boy, and did deliveries and odd jobs for the neighborhood grocer. Soon he came through—intent, absorbed—on his way back to the grocery store for another hour's work.

"Gotta go back, eh, Randy?" Elijah said.

"Yes, sir." He was tall for his age, and wore glasses. He paused with his hand on the doorknob.

Elijah hesitated. Better wait, he thought—wait till he comes back. But Myrtle might be around then. Better ask him now. But Randall had opened the door. "See you later, Dad," he said—and left.

Elijah, shaken, again raised the newspaper and tried to read. He should have called him back, he knew, but he had lost his nerve—because he couldn't tell how Randy would take it. Fifteen dollars was nothing though, really—Randy probably had fifty or sixty stashed away somewhere in his room. Then he thought of Myrtle, and waves of fright went over him—to be even thinking about a beach umbrella was bad enough; and to buy one, especially now, would be to her some kind of crime; but to borrow even a part of the money for it from Randy . . . well, Myrtle would go out of her mind. He had never lied to his family before. This would be the first time. And he had thought about it all day long. During the morning, at the warehouse, he had gotten out the two big mail-order catalogues, to look at the beach umbrellas; but the ones shown were all so small and dinky-looking he was contemptuous. So at noon he drove the Chevy out to a sporting-goods store on West Sixty-Third Street. There he found a gorgeous assortment of yard and beach umbrellas. And there

he found his prize. A beauty, a big beauty, with wide red and white stripes, and a white fringe. But oh the price! Twenty-three dollars! And he with nine.

"What's the matter with you?" Myrtle had walked in the room. She was thin, and medium brown-skinned with a saddle of freckles across her nose, and looked harried in her sleeveless housedress with her hair unkempt.

Startled, he lowered the newspaper. "Nothing," he said.

"How can you read looking *over* the paper?"

"Was I?"

Not bothering to answer, she sank in a chair. "Susie," she called back into the kitchen, "bring my cigarettes in here, will you, baby?"

Soon Susan, chubby and solemn, with the mist of perspiration on her forehead, came in with the cigarettes. "Only three left, Mama," she said, peering into the pack.

"Okay," Myrtle sighed, taking the cigarettes. Susan started out. "Now, scour the sink good, honey—and then go take your bath. You'll feel cooler."

Before looking at him again, Myrtle lit a cigarette. "School starts in three weeks, she said, with a forlorn shake of her head. "Do you realize that?"

"Yeah? . . . Jesus, time flies." He could not look at her.

"Susie needs dresses, and a couple of pairs of *good* shoes—and she'll need a coat before it gets cold."

"Yeah, I know." He patted the arm of the chair.

"Randy—bless his heart—has already made enough to get most of *his* things. That boy's something; he's all business—I've never seen anything like it." She took a drag on her cigarette. "And old man Schroeder giving you a thirty-dollar raise! What was you thinkin' about? What'd you *say* to him?"

He did not answer at first. Finally he said, "Thirty dollars are thirty dollars, Myrtle. *You* know business is slow."

"*I'll* say it is! And there won't be any business before long—

and then where'll you be? I tell you over and over again, you better start looking for something *now!* I been preachin' it to you for a year."

He said nothing.

"Ford and International Harvester are hiring every man they can lay their hands on! And the mills out in Gary and Whiting are going full blast—you see the red sky every night. The men make *good* money."

"They earn every nickel of it, too," he said in gloom.

"But they *get* it! Bring it home! It spends! Does that mean anything to you? Do you know what some of them make? Well, ask Hawthorne—or ask Sonny Milton. Sonny's wife says his checks some weeks run as high as a hundred sixty, hundred eighty, dollars. One week! Take-home pay!"

"Yeah? . . . And Sonny told me he wished he had a job like mine."

Myrtle threw back her head with a bitter gasp. "Oh-h-h, God! Did you tell him what you made? Did you tell him that?"

Suddenly Susan came back into the muggy living room. She went straight to her mother and stood as if expecting an award. Myrtle absently patted her on the side of the head. "Now, go and run your bath water, honey," she said.

Elijah smiled at Susan. "Susie," he said, "d'you know your tummy is stickin' way out—you didn't eat too much, did you?" He laughed.

Susan turned and observed him; then looked at her mother. "No," she finally said.

"Go on, now, baby," Myrtle said. Susan left the room.

Myrtle resumed. "Well, there's no use going through all this again. It's plain as the nose on your face. You got a family—a good family, *I* think. The only question is, do you wanta get off your hind end and do somethin' for it. It's just that simple."

Elijah looked at her. "You can talk real crazy sometimes, Myrtle."

"I think it's that old man!" she cried, her freckles contorted. "He's got you answering the phone, and taking inventory—wearing a necktie and all that. You wearing a necktie and your son mopping in a grocery store, so he can buy his own clothes." She snatched up her cigarettes, and walked out of the room.

His eyes did not follow her, but remained off in space. Finally he got up and went back into the kitchen. Over the stove the plaster was thinly cracked, and, in spots, the linoleum had worn through the pattern; but everything was immaculate. He opened the refrigerator, poured a glass of cold water, and sat down at the kitchen table. He felt strange and weak, and sat for a long time sipping the water.

Then after a while he heard Randall's key in the front door, sending tremors of dread through him. When Randall came into the kitchen, he seemed to him as tall as himself; his glasses were steamy from the humidity outside, and his hands were dirty.

"Hi, Dad," he said gravely without looking at him, and opened the refrigerator door.

Elijah chuckled. "Your mother'll get after you about going in there without washing your hands."

But Randall took out the water pitcher and closed the door.

Elijah watched him. Now was the time to ask him. His heart was hammering. Go on—now! But instead he heard his husky voice saying, "What'd they have you doing over at the grocery tonight?"

Randall was drinking the glass of water. When he finished he said, "Refilling shelves."

"Pretty hot job tonight, eh?"

"It wasn't so bad." Randall was matter-of-fact as he set the empty glass over the sink, and paused before leaving.

"Well . . . you're doing fine, son. Fine. Your mother sure

is proud of you . . . ." Purpose had lodged in his throat.

The praise embarrassed Randall. "Okay, Dad," he said, and edged from the kitchen.

Elijah slumped back in his chair, near prostration. He tried to clear his mind of every particle of thought, but the images became only more jumbled, oppressive to the point of panic.

Then before long Myrtle came into the kitchen—ignoring him. But she seemed not so hostile now as coldly impassive, exhibiting a bravado he had not seen before. He got up and went back into the living room and turned on the television. As the TV-screen lawmen galloped before him, he sat oblivious, admitting the failure of his will. If only he could have gotten Randall to himself long enough—but everything had been so sudden, abrupt; he couldn't just ask him out of the clear blue. Besides, around him, Randall always seemed so busy, too busy to talk. He couldn't understand that; he had never mistreated the boy, never whipped him in his life; had shaken him a time or two, but that was long ago, when he was little.

He sat and watched the finish of the half-hour TV show. Myrtle was in the bedroom now. He slouched in his chair, lacking the resolve to get up and turn off the television.

Suddenly he was on his feet.

Leaving the television on, he went back to Randall's room in the rear. The door was open and Randall was asleep, lying on his back on the bed, perspiring, still dressed except for his shoes and glasses. He stood over the bed and looked at him. He was a good boy; his own son. But how strange—he thought for the first time—there was no resemblance between them. None whatsoever. Randy had a few of his mother's freckles on his thin brown face, but he could see none of himself in the boy. Then his musings were scattered by the return of his fear. He dreaded waking him. And he might be cross. If he didn't hurry, though, Myrtle or Susie might come strolling out any minute. His bones seemed rubbery from the strain. Finally

he bent down and touched Randall's shoulder. The boy did not move a muscle, except to open his eyes. Elijah smiled at him. And he slowly sat up.

"Sorry, Randy—to wake you up like this."

"What's the matter?" Randall rubbed his eyes.

Elijah bent down again, but did not whisper. "Say, can you let me have fifteen bucks—till I get my check? . . . I need to get some things—and I'm a little short this time." He could hardly bring the words up.

Randall gave him a slow, queer look.

"I'll get my check a week from Friday," Elijah said, ". . . and I'll give it back to you then—sure."

Now instinctively Randall glanced toward the door, and Elijah knew Myrtle had crossed his thoughts. "You don't have to mention anything to your mother," he said with casual suddenness.

Randall got up slowly off the bed, and, in his socks, walked to the little table where he did his homework. He pulled the drawer out, fished far in the back a moment, and brought out a white business envelope secured by a rubber band. Holding the envelope close to his stomach, he took out first a ten-dollar bill, and then a five, and, sighing, handed them over.

"Thanks, old man," Elijah quivered, folding the money. "You'll get this back the day I get my check. . . . That's for sure.

"Okay," Randall finally said.

Elijah started out. Then he could see Myrtle on payday—her hand extended for his check. He hesitated, and looked at Randall, as if to speak. But he slipped the money in his trousers pocket and hurried from the room.

The following Saturday at the beach did not begin bright and sunny. By noon it was hot, but the sky was overcast and angry, the air heavy. There was no certainty whatever of a

crowd, raucous or otherwise, and this was Elijah's chief concern as, shortly before twelve o'clock, he drove up in the Chevy and parked in the bumpy, graveled stretch of high ground that looked down eastward over the lake and was used for a parking lot. He climbed out of the car, glancing at the lake and clouds, and prayed in his heart it would not rain—the water was murky and restless, and only a handful of bathers had showed. But it was early yet. He stood beside the car and watched a bulbous, brown-skinned woman, in bathing suit and enormous straw hat, lugging a lunch basket down toward the beach, followed by her brood of children. And a fellow in swimming trunks, apparently the father, took a towel and sandal from his new Buick and called petulantly to his family to "just wait a minute, please." In another car, two women sat waiting, as yet fully clothed and undecided about going swimming. While down at the water's edge there was the usual cluster of dripping boys who, brash and boisterous, swarmed to the beach every day in fair weather or foul.

Elijah took off his shirt, peeled his trousers from over his swimming trunks, and started collecting the paraphernalia from the back seat of the car: a frayed pink rug filched from the house, a towel, sunglasses, cigarettes, a thermos jug filled with cold lemonade he had made himself, and a dozen paper cups. All this he stacked on the front fender. Then he went around to the rear and opened the trunk. Ah, there it lay—encased in a long, slim package trussed with heavy twine, and barely fitting athwart the spare tire. He felt prickles of excitement as he took the knife from the tool bag, cut the twine, and pulled the wrapping paper away. Red and white stripes sprang at him. It was even more gorgeous than when it had first seduced him in the store. The white fringe gave it style; the wide red fillets were cardinal and stark, and the white stripes glared. Now he opened it over his head, for the full thrill of its colors, and looked around to see if anyone else agreed. Finally after

a while he gathered up all his equipment and headed down for the beach, his short, nubby legs seeming more bowed than ever under the weight of their cargo.

When he reached the sand, a choice of location became a pressing matter. That was why he had come early. From past observation it was clear that the center of gaiety shifted from day to day; last Saturday it might have been nearer the water, this Saturday, well back; or up, or down, the beach a ways. He must pick the site with care, for he could not move about the way he did when he had no umbrella; it was too noticeable. He finally took a spot as near the center of the beach as he could estimate, and dropped his gear in the sand. He knelt down and spread the pink rug, then moved the thermos jug over onto it, and folded the towel and placed it with the paper cups, sunglasses, and cigarettes down beside the jug. Now he went to find a heavy stone or brick to drive down the spike for the hollow umbrella stem to fit over. So it was not until the umbrella was finally up that he again had time for anxiety about the weather. His whole morning's effort had been an act of faith, for, as yet, there was no sun, although now and then a few azure breaks appeared in the thinning cloud mass. But before very long this brighter texture of the sky began to grow and spread by slow degrees, and his hopes quickened. Finally he sat down under the umbrella, lit a cigarette, and waited.

It was not long before two small boys came by—on their way to the water. He grinned, and called to them, "Hey, fellas, been in yet?"—their bathing suits were dry.

They stopped, and observed him. Then one of them smiled, and shook his head.

Elijah laughed. "Well, whatta you waitin' for? Go on in there and get them suits wet!" Both boys gave him silent smiles. And they lingered. He thought this a good omen—it had been different the Saturday before.

Once or twice the sun burst through the weakening clouds. He forgot the boys now in watching the skies, and soon they moved on. His anxiety was not detectable from his lazy posture under the umbrella, with his dwarfish, gnarled legs extended and his bare heels on the little rug. But then soon the clouds began to fade in earnest, seeming not to move away laterally, but slowly to recede into a lucent haze, until at last the sun came through hot and bright. He squinted at the sky and felt delivered. They would come, the folks would come!—were coming now; the beach would soon be swarming. Two other umbrellas were up already, and the diving board thronged with wet, acrobatic boys. The lifeguards were in their towers now, and still another launched his yellow rowboat. And up on the Outer Drive, the cars, one by one, were turning into the parking lot. The sun was bringing them out all right; soon he'd be in the middle of a field day. He felt a low-key, welling excitement, for the water was blue, and far out the sails were starched and white.

Soon he saw the two little boys coming back. They were soaked. Their mother—a thin, brown girl in a yellow bathing suit—was with them now, and the boys were pointing to his umbrella. She seemed dignified for her youth, as she gave him a shy glance and then smiled at the boys.

"Ah, ha!" he cried to the boys. "You've been in *now* all right!" And then laughing to her, "I was kiddin' them awhile ago about their dry bathing suits."

She smiled at the boys again. "They like for me to be with them when they go in," she said.

"I got some lemonade here," he said abruptly, slapping the thermos jug. "Why don't you have some?" His voice was anxious.

She hesitated.

He jumped up. "Come on, sit down." He smiled at her and stepped aside.

Still she hesitated. But her eager boys pressed close behind her. Finally she smiled and sat down under the umbrella.

"You fellas can sit down under there too—in the shade," he said to the boys, and pointed under the umbrella. The boys flopped down quickly in the shady sand. He started at once serving them cold lemonade in the paper cups.

"Whew! I thought it was goin' to rain there for a while," he said, making conversation after passing out the lemonade. He had squatted on the sand and lit another cigarette. "Then there wouldn't a been much goin' on. But it turned out fine after all—there'll be a mob here before long."

She sipped the lemonade, but said little. He felt she had sat down only because of the boys, for she merely smiled and gave short answers to his questions. He learned the boys' names, Melvin and James; their ages, seven and nine; and that they were still frightened by the water. But he wanted to ask *her* name, and inquire about her husband. But he could not capture the courage.

Now the sun was hot and the sand was hot. And an orange-and-white umbrella was going up right beside them—two fellows and a girl. When the fellow who had been kneeling to drive the umbrella spike in the sand stood up, he was string-bean tall, and black, with his glistening hair freshly processed. The girl was a lighter brown, and wore a lilac bathing suit, and, although her legs were thin, she was pleasant enough to look at. The second fellow was medium, really, in height, but short beside his tall, black friend. He was yellow-skinned, and fast getting bald, although still in his early thirties. Both men sported little shoestring mustaches.

Elijah watched them in silence as long as he could. "You picked the right spot all right!" he laughed at last, putting on his sunglasses.

"How come, man?" The tall, black fellow grinned, showing his mouthful of gold teeth.

"You see *every*body here!" happily rejoined Elijah. "They all come here!"

"Man, I been coming here for years," the fellow reproved, and sat down in his khaki swimming trunks to take off his shoes. Then he stood up. "But right now, in the water I goes." He looked down at the girl. "How 'bout you, Lois, baby?"

"No, Caesar," she smiled, "not yet; I'm gonna sit here awhile and relax."

"Okay, then—you just sit right there and relax. And Little Joe"—he turned and grinned to his shorter friend—"you sit there an' relax right along with her. You all can talk with this gentleman here"—he nodded at Elijah—"an' his nice wife." Then, pleased with himself, he trotted off toward the water.

The young mother looked at Elijah, as if he should have hastened to correct him. But somehow he had not wanted to. Yet too, Caesar's remark seemed to amuse her, for she soon smiled. Elijah felt the pain of relief—he did not want her to go; he glanced at her with a furtive laugh, and then they both laughed. The boys had finished their lemonade now, and were digging in the sand. Lois and Little Joe were busy talking.

Elijah was not quite sure what he should say to the mother. He did not understand her, was afraid of boring her, was desperate to keep her interested. As she sat looking out over the lake, he watched her. She was not pretty; and she was too thin. But he thought she had poise; he liked the way she treated her boys—tender, but casual; how different from Myrtle's frantic herding.

Soon she turned to the boys. "Want to go back in the water?" she laughed.

The boys looked at each other, and then at her. "Okay," James said finally, in resignation.

"Here, have some more lemonade," Elijah cut in.

The boys, rescued for the moment, quickly extended their

cups. He poured them more lemonade, as she looked on smiling.

Now he turned to Lois and Little Joe sitting under their orange-and-white umbrella. "How 'bout some good ole cold lemonade?" he asked with a mushy smile. "I got plenty of cups." He felt he must get something going.

Lois smiled back, "No, thanks," she said, fluttering her long eyelashes, "not right now."

He looked anxiously at Little Joe.

"*I'll* take a cup!" said Little Joe, and turned and laughed to Lois: "Hand me that bag there, will you?" He pointed to her beach bag in the sand. She passed it to him, and he reached in and pulled out a pint of gin. "We'll have some *real* lemonade," he vowed, with a daredevilish grin.

Lois squealed with pretended embarrassment. "Oh, *Joe!*"

Elijah's eyes were big now; he was thinking of the police. But he handed Little Joe a cup and poured the lemonade, to which Joe added gin. Then Joe, grinning, thrust the bottle at Elijah. "How 'bout yourself, chief?" he said.

Elijah, shaking his head, leaned forward and whispered, "You ain't supposed to drink on the beach, y'know."

"*This* ain't a drink, man—it's a taste!" said Little Joe, laughing and waving the bottle around toward the young mother. "How 'bout a little taste for your wife here?" he said to Elijah.

The mother laughed and threw up both her hands. "No, not for me!"

Little Joe gave her a rakish grin. "What'sa matter? You *'fraid* of that guy?" He jerked his thumb toward Elijah. "You 'fraid of gettin' a whippin', eh?"

"No, not exactly," she laughed.

Elijah was so elated with her his relief burst up in hysterical laughter. His laugh became strident and hoarse and he could not stop. The boys gaped at him, and then at their mother.

When finally he recovered, Little Joe asked him, "Whut's so funny 'bout *that?*" Then Little Joe grinned at the mother. "You beat *him* up sometimes, eh?"

This started Elijah's hysterics all over again. The mother looked concerned now, and embarrassed; her laugh was nervous and shadowed. Little Joe glanced at Lois, laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. When Elijah finally got control of himself again he looked spent and demoralized.

Lois now tried to divert attention by starting a conversation with the boys. But the mother showed signs of restlessness and seemed ready to go. At this moment Caesar returned. Glistening beads of water ran off his long, black body; and his hair was unprocessed now. He surveyed the group and then flashed a wide, gold-toothed grin. "One big, happy family, like I said." Then he spied the paper cup in Little Joe's hand. "Whut you got there, man?"

Little Joe looked down into his cup with a playful smirk. "Lemonade, lover boy, lemonade."

"Don't hand me that jive, Joey. You ain't never had any straight lemonade in your life."

This again brought uproarious laughter from Elijah. "I got the straight lemonade *here!*" He beat the thermos jug with his hand. "Come on—have some!" He reached for a paper cup.

"Why, sure," said poised Caesar. He held out the cup and received the lemonade. "Now, gimme that gin," he said to Little Joe. Joe handed over the gin, and Caesar poured three fingers into the lemonade and sat down in the sand with his legs crossed under him. Soon he turned to the two boys, as their mother watched him with amusement. "Say, ain't you boys goin' in any more? Why don't you tell your daddy there to take you in?" He nodded toward Elijah.

Little Melvin frowned at him. "My daddy's workin'," he said.

Caesar's eyebrows shot up. "Ooooh, la, la!" he crooned.

"Hey, now!" And he turned and looked at the mother and then at Elijah, and gave a clownish little snigger.

Lois tittered before feigning exasperation at him. "There you go again," she said, "talkin' when you shoulda been listening."

Elijah laughed along with the rest. But he felt deflated. Then he glanced at the mother, who was laughing too. He could detect in her no sign of dismay. Why then had she gone along with the gag in the first place, he thought—if now she didn't hate to see it punctured?

"*Hold the phone!*" softly exclaimed Little Joe. "Whut is *this?*" He was staring over his shoulder. Three women, young, brown, and worldly-looking, wandered toward them, carrying an assortment of beach paraphernalia and looking for a likely spot. They wore very scant bathing suits, and were followed, but slowly, by an older woman with big, unsightly thighs. Elijah recognized her at once. She was the old gal who, the Saturday before, had chased him away from her beach party. She wore the same white bathing suit, and one of her girls carried the pea-green umbrella.

Caesar forgot his whereabouts ogling the girls. The older woman, observing this, paused to survey the situation. "How 'bout along in here?" she finally said to one of the girls. The girl carrying the thermos jug set it in the sand so close to Caesar it nearly touched him. He was rapturous. The girl with the umbrella had no chance to put it up, for Caesar and Little Joe instantly encumbered her with help. Another girl turned on their radio, and grinning, feverish Little Joe started snapping his fingers to the music's beat.

Within a half hour, a boisterous party was in progress. The little radio, perched on a hump of sand, blared out hot jazz, as the older woman—whose name turned out to be Hattie—passed around some cold, rum-spiked punch; and before long she went into her dancing-prancing act—to the riotous delight of

all, especially Elijah. Hattie did not remember him from the Saturday past, and he was glad, for everything was so different today! As different as milk and ink. He knew no one realized it, but this was *his* party really—the wildest, craziest, funniest, and best he had ever seen or heard of. Nobody had been near the water—except Caesar, and the mother and boys much earlier. It appeared Lois was Caesar's girl friend, and she was hence more capable of reserve in face of the come-on antics of Opal, Billie, and Quanita—Hattie's girls. But Little Joe, to Caesar's tortured envy, was both free and aggressive. Even the young mother, who now volunteered her name to be Mrs. Green, got frolicsome, and twice jabbed Little Joe in the ribs.

Finally Caesar proposed they all go in the water. This met with instant, tipsy acclaim; and Little Joe, his yellow face contorted from laughing, jumped up, grabbed Billie's hand, and made off with her across the sand. But Hattie would not budge. Full of rum, and stubborn, she sat sprawled with her flaccid thighs spread in an obscene V, and her eyes half shut. Now she yelled at her departing girls: "You all watch out, now! Dont'cha go in too far. . . . Just wade! None o' you can swim a lick!"

Elijah now was beyond happiness. He felt a floating, manic glee. He sprang up and jerked Mrs. Green splashing into the water, followed by her somewhat less ecstatic boys. Caesar had to paddle about with Lois and leave Little Joe unassisted to caper with Billie, Opal, and Quanita. Billie was the prettiest of the three, and, despite Hattie's contrary statement, she could swim; and Little Joe, after taking her out in deeper water, waved back to Caesar in triumph. The sun was brazen now, and the beach and lake thronged with a variegated humanity. Elijah, a strong, but awkward, country-style swimmer, gave Mrs. Green a lesson in floating on her back, and, though she too could swim, he often felt obligated to place both his arms under her young body and buoy her up.

And sometimes he would purposely let her sink to her chin, whereupon she would feign a happy fright and utter faint simian screeches. Opal and Quanita sat in the shallows and kicked up their heels at Caesar, who, fully occupied with Lois, was a grinning water-threshing study in frustration.

Thus the party went—on and on—till nearly four o'clock. Elijah had not known the world afforded such joy; his homely face was a wet festoon of beams and smiles. He went from girl to girl, insisting she learn to float on his outstretched arms. Once begrudgingly Caesar admonished him, "Man, you gonna *drown* one o' them pretty chicks in a minute." And Little Joe bestowed his highest accolade by calling him "lover boy," as Elijah nearly strangled from laughter.

At last, they looked up to see old Hattie as she reeled down to the water's edge, coming to fetch her girls. Both Caesar and Little Joe ran out of the water to meet her, seized her by the wrists, and, despite her struggles and curses, dragged her in. "Turn me loose! You big galoots!" she yelled and gasped as the water hit her. She was in knee-deep before she wriggled and fought herself free and lurched out of the water. Her breath reeked of rum. Little Joe ran and caught her again, but she lunged backwards, and free, with such force she sat down in the wet sand with a thud. She roared a laugh now, and spread her arms for help, as her girls came sprinting and splashing out of the water and tugged her to her feet. Her eyes narrowed to vengeful, grinning slits as she turned on Caesar and Little Joe: "*I* know whut you two're up to!" She flashed a glance around toward her girls. "I been watchin' both o' you studs! Yeah, yeah, but your eyes may shine, an' your teeth may grit . . . ." She went limp in a sneering, raucous laugh. Everybody laughed now—except Lois and Mrs. Green.

They had all come out of the water now, and soon the whole group returned to their three beach umbrellas. Hattie's girls

immediately prepared to break camp. They took down their pea-green umbrella, folded some wet towels, and donned their beach sandals, as Hattie still bantered Caesar and Little Joe.

"Well, you sure had *yourself* a ball today," she said to Little Joe, who was sitting in the sand.

"Comin' back next Saturday?" asked grinning Little Joe.

"I jus' might at that," surmised Hattie. "We wuz here last Saturday."

"Good! Good!" Elijah broke in. "Let's *all* come back—next Saturday!" He searched every face.

"*I'll* be here," chimed Little Joe, grinning to Caesar. Captive Caesar glanced at Lois, and said nothing.

Lois and Mrs. Green were silent. Hattie, insulted, looked at them and started swelling up. "Never mind," she said pointedly to Elijah, "you jus' come on anyhow. You'll run into a slew o' folks lookin' for a good time. You don't need no *certain* people." But a little later, she and her girls all said friendly goodbyes and walked off across the sand.

The party now took a sudden downturn. All Elijah's efforts at resuscitation seemed unavailing. The westering sun was dipping toward the distant buildings of the city, and many of the bathers were leaving. Caesar and Little Joe had become bored; and Mrs. Green's boys, whining to go, kept a reproachful eye on their mother.

"Here, you boys, take some more lemonade," Elijah said quickly, reaching for the thermos jug. "Only got a little left—better get while gettin's good!" He laughed. The boys shook their heads.

On Lois he tried cajolery. Smiling, and pointing to her wet, but trim bathing suit, he asked, "What color would you say that is?"

"Lilac," said Lois, now standing.

"It sure is pretty! Prettiest on the beach!" he whispered.

Lois gave him a weak smile. Then she reached down for her beach bag, and looked at Caesar.

Caesar stood up, "Let's cut," he turned and said to Little Joe, and began taking down their orange-and-white umbrella.

Elijah was desolate. "Whatta you goin' for? It's gettin' cooler! Now's the time to *enjoy* the beach!"

"I've got to go home," Lois said.

Mrs. Green got up now; her boys had started off already. "Just a minute, Melvin," she called, frowning. Then, smiling, she turned and thanked Elijah.

He whirled around to them all. "Are we comin' back next Saturday? Come on—let's all come back! Wasn't it great! It was *great!* Don't you think? Whatta you say?" He looked now at Lois and Mrs. Green.

"We'll see," Lois said smiling. "Maybe."

"Can *you* come?" He turned to Mrs. Green.

"I'm not sure," she said. "I'll try."

"Fine! Oh, that's fine!" He turned on Caesar and Little Joe. "I'll be lookin' for you guys, hear?"

"Okay, chief," grinned Little Joe. "An' put somethin' in that lemonade, will ya?"

Everybody laughed . . . and soon they were gone.

Elijah slowly crawled back under his umbrella, although the sun's heat was almost spent. He looked about him. There was only one umbrella on the spot now, his own; where before there had been three. Cigarette butts and paper cups lay strewn where Hattie's girls had sat, and the sandy imprint of Caesar's enormous street shoes marked his site. Mrs. Green had dropped a bobby pin. He too was caught up now by a sudden urge to go. It was hard to bear much longer—the loneliness. And most of the people were leaving anyway. He stirred and fidgeted in the sand, and finally started an inventory of his belongings. . . . Then his thoughts flew home, and he reconsidered. Funny—he hadn't thought of home all after-

noon. Where had the time gone anyhow? . . . It seemed he'd just pulled up in the Chevy and unloaded his gear; now it was time to go home again. Then the image of solemn Randy suddenly formed in his mind, sending waves of guilt through him. He forgot where he was as the duties of his existence leapt on his back—where would he ever get Randy's fifteen dollars? He felt squarely confronted by a great blank void. It was an awful thing he had done—all for a day at the beach . . . with some sporting girls. He thought of his family and felt tiny—and him itching to come back next Saturday! Maybe Myrtle was right about him after all. Lord, if she knew what he had done. . . .

He sat there for a long time. Most of the people were gone now. The lake was quiet save for a few boys still in the water. And the sun, red like blood, had settled on the dark silhouettes of the housetops across the city. He sat beneath the umbrella just as he had at one o'clock . . . and the thought smote him. He was jolted. Then dubious. But there it was—quivering, vital, swelling inside his skull like an unwanted fetus. So this was it! He mutinied inside. So he must sell it . . . his *umbrella.* Sell it for anything—only as long as it was enough to pay back Randy. For fifteen dollars even, if necessary. He was dogged; he couldn't do it; that wasn't the answer anyway. But the thought clawed and clung to him, rebuking and coaxing him by turns, until it finally became conviction. He must do it; it was the right thing to do; the only thing to do. Maybe then the awful weight would lift, the dull commotion in his stomach cease. He got up and started collecting his belongings; placed the thermos jug, sunglasses, towel, cigarettes, and little rug together in a neat pile, to be carried to the Chevy later. Then he turned to face his umbrella. Its red and white stripes stood defiant against the wide, churned-up sand. He stood for a moment mooning at it. Then he carefully let it down and, carrying it in his right hand, went off across the sand.

The sun now had gone down behind the vast city in a shower of crimson-golden glints, and on the beach only a few stragglers remained. For his first prospects, he approached two teen-age boys, but suddenly realizing they had no money, he turned away and went over to an old woman, squat and black, in street clothes—a spectator—who stood gazing eastward out across the lake. She held in her hand a little black book, with red-edged pages, which looked like the *New Testament.* He smiled at her. "Wanna buy a nice new beach umbrella?" He held out the collapsed umbrella toward her.

She gave him a beatific smile, but shook her head. "No, son," she said, "that ain't what *I* want." And she turned to gaze out on the lake again.

For a moment he still held the umbrella out, with a question mark on his face. "Okay, then," he finally said, and went on.

Next he hurried to the water's edge, where he saw a man and two women preparing to leave. "Wanna buy a nice new beach umbrella?" His voice sounded high-pitched, as he opened the umbrella over his head. "It's brand-new. I'll sell it for fifteen dollars—it cost a lot more'n that."

The man was hostile, and glared. Finally he said, "Whatta you take me for—a fool?"

Elijah looked bewildered, and made no answer. He observed the man for a moment. Finally he let the umbrella down. As he moved away, he heard the man say to the women, "It's hot—he stole it somewhere."

Close by, another man sat alone in the sand. Elijah started toward him. The man wore trousers, but was stripped to the waist, and bent over intent on some task in his lap. When Elijah reached him, he looked up from half a hatful of cigarette butts he was breaking open for the tobacco he collected in a little paper bag. He grinned at Elijah, who meant now to pass on.

"No, I ain't interested either, buddy," the man insisted as

Elijah passed him. "Not me. I jus' got *outa* jail las' week—an' ain't goin' back for no umbrella." He laughed, as Elijah kept on.

Now he saw three women, still in their bathing suits, sitting together near the diving board. They were the only people he had not yet tried—except the one lifeguard left. As he approached them, he saw that all three wore glasses and were sedate. Some schoolteachers maybe, he thought, or office workers. They were talking—until they saw him coming; then they stopped. One of them was plump, but a smooth dark brown, and sat with a towel around her shoulders. Elijah addressed them through her: "Wanna buy a nice beach umbrella?" And again he opened the umbrella over his head.

"Gee! It's beautiful," the plump woman said to the others. "But where'd you get?" she suddenly asked Elijah, polite mistrust entering her voice.

"I bought it—just this week."

The three women looked at each other. "Why do you want to sell it so soon, then?" a second woman said.

Elijah grinned. "I need the money."

"Well!" The plump woman was exasperated. "*No*, we don't want it." And they turned from him. He stood for a while, watching them; finally he let the umbrella down and moved on.

Only the lifeguard was left. He was a huge youngster, not over twenty, and brawny and black, as he bent over cleaning out his beached rowboat. Elijah approached him so suddenly he looked up startled.

"Would you be interested in this umbrella?" Elijah said, and proffered the umbrella. "It's brand-new—I just bought it Tuesday. I'll sell it cheap." There was urgency in his voice.

The lifeguard gave him a queer stare; and then peered off toward the Outer Drive, as if looking for help. "You're lucky as hell," he finally said. "The cops just now cruised by—up on the Drive. I'd have turned you in so quick it'd made your head swim. Now you get the hell outa here." He was menacing.

Elijah was angry. "Whatta you mean? I *bought* this umbrella—it's mine."

The lifeguard took a step toward him. "I said you better get the hell outa here! An' I mean it! *You thievin' bastard, you!*"

Elijah, frightened now, gave ground. He turned and walked away a few steps; and then slowed up, as if an adequate answer had hit him. He stood for a moment. But finally he walked on, the umbrella drooping in his hand.

He walked up the gravelly slope now toward the Chevy, forgetting his little pile of belongings left in the sand. When he reached the car, and opened the trunk, he remembered; and went back down and gathered them up. He returned, threw them in the trunk and, without dressing, went around and climbed under the steering wheel. He was scared, shaken; and before starting the motor sat looking out on the lake. It was seven o'clock; the sky was waning pale, the beach forsaken, leaving a sense of perfect stillness and approaching night; the only sound was a gentle lapping of the water against the sand—one moderate *hallo-o-o-o* would have carried across to Michigan. He looked down at the beach. Where were they all now—the funny, proud, laughing people? Eating their dinners, he supposed, in a variety of homes. And all the beautiful umbrellas—where were they? Without their colors the beach was so deserted. Ah, the beach . . . after pouring hot ore all week out at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube, he would probably be too fagged out for the beach. But maybe he wouldn't—who knew? It was great while it lasted . . . great. And his umbrella . . . he didn't know what he'd do with that . . . he might never need it again. He'd keep it, though—and see. Ha! . . . hadn't he sweat to get it! . . . and they thought he had stolen it . . . stolen it . . . ah . . . and maybe they were right. He sat for a few moments longer. Finally he started the motor, and took the old Chevy out onto the Drive in the pink-hued twilight. But down on the beach the sun was still shining.

POETRY FOUNDATION

We Real Cool

BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS

The Pool Players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Source: *Poetry* (1959)

The Golden Angel Pancake House

Or coming out of Bento on a wild midwinter
midnight, or later, closing time Ron says, the last
rack of pool balls ratcheted down until dawn,
bottles corked and watered, lights out, going out
the door beneath the El tracks over Clark and Sheffield,
always a train showing up just then, loud, sure
as hell showering sparks upon the snowfall,
shaking slightly the lights and trestles, us
in our fellowship shouting and scurrying
like the more sprightly selves we once inhabited
behind parked cars and street signs, thinking,
hey, should we toss some snowballs? Bull's eye,
the beauty of fresh snow in the hands, like rubbing
tree-bark to catch that contact high direct
from the inexplicable source, unique however
often repeated, carried along on woolen thumbs
to the next absolutely necessary thing,
sloe gin fizzes to Green Mill jazz or the horror
of Jägermeister at the Ginger Man or
one of those German bars up around Irving Park
where a sup of the Weiss beer on tap is enough
to convince me to foreswear my stake in any vision
of the afterlife you might care to construct, say
the one with the photo of the owner in his Nazi
uniform beside a pristine fjord, could be Norway,
1940? Whichever, we're hungry now, cast out
into the false dawn of snow-coiffed streetlights
embowed like bowl-cut adolescents or
Roman emperors sated on frost, thumbs up
or down to hash & eggs at Manny's
or the locally infamous Alps, then there's one
at which I never ate though it looked absolutely
irreplaceable, the Golden Angel Pancake House,
which is a poem by Rilke I've never read
though I've used its restroom, seen its dim
celestial figures like alien life-forms
in a goldfish bowl, tasted its lonely nectar
in every stack of silver dollar buttermilk flapjacks,
though the food, for all I know, is unutterably
awful, the way it resonates is what carries me

down the swirled chords of memory
toward the bottom of the frosted glass
aquarium of dreams, whatever that means, it's
what it meant to me coming home those nights
from the Lutheran college after teaching
the *Duino Elegies* to the daughters and sons
of Minnesota farmers, the footbridge over
the North Branch of the Chicago River, frozen
solid, eddies of whirling ionized powder
around my boots in the bone-cold subzero
that makes the lights in the windows of houses
so painfully beautiful—is it the longing
to get the hell inside or the tears the wind
inevitably summons forth? Homeward,
all the way down Lincoln Avenue's amazing
arabesques and ethnic configurations
of Korean babushkas and Croatian karaoke
that feeling set upon me like the overture to god
knows what dread disease, that cathartic, lustral,
yes, idiot laughter, threat of tears in the gullet,
adam's apple stringing its yoyo to follow
the bouncing ball, as if boulevards of such purity
could countenance no science but eudaemonics,
hardly likely, as if this promethean eruption
were merely one of the more colorful dog-
and-pony acts of simple happiness, acrobatic
dromedaries or narcoleptic dancing bears,
but which I've come to see with perfect hindsight
was no less than the mighty strongman
joy himself bending bars of steel upon a tattooed
skull, so much nobler and more rapacious
than his country cousins, bliss, elation, glee,
a troupe of toothless, dipsomaniacal clowns,
multiform and variable as flurries from blizzards,
while joy is singular, present tense, predatory, priapic,
paradoxically composed of sorrow and terror
as ice is made of water, dense and pure,
darkly bejewelled, music rather than poetry,
preliterate, lapidary, dumb as an ox, cruel as youth,
magnificent and remorseless as Chicago in winter.

Section 4

Chicago Food

PET MILK

Today I've been drinking instant coffee and Pet milk, and watching it snow. It's not that I enjoy the taste especially, but I like the way Pet milk swirls in the coffee. Actually, my favorite thing about Pet milk is what the can opener does to the top of the can. The can is unmistakable—compact, seamless looking, its very shape suggesting that it could condense milk without any trouble. The can opener bites in neatly, and the thick liquid spills from the triangular gouge with a different look and viscosity than milk. Pet milk isn't *real* milk. The color's off, to start with. There's almost something of the past about it, like old ivory. My grandmother always drank it in her coffee. When friends dropped over and sat around the kitchen table, my grandma would ask, "Do you take cream and sugar?" Pet milk was the cream.

There was a yellow plastic radio on her kitchen table, usually tuned to the polka station, though some-

times she'd miss it by half a notch and get the Greek station instead, or the Spanish, or the Ukrainian. In Chicago, where we lived, all the incompatible states of Europe were pressed together down at the staticky right end of the dial. She didn't seem to notice, as long as she wasn't hearing English. The radio, turned low, played constantly. Its top was warped and turning amber on the side where the tubes were. I remember the sound of it on winter afternoons after school, as I sat by her table watching the Pet milk swirl and cloud in the steaming coffee, and noticing, outside her window, the sky doing the same thing above the railroad yard across the street.

And I remember, much later, seeing the same swirling sky in tiny liqueur glasses containing a drink called a King Alphonse: the crème de cacao rising like smoke in repeated explosions, blooming in kaleidoscopic clouds through the layer of heavy cream. This was in the Pilsen, a little Czech restaurant where my girlfriend, Kate, and I would go sometimes in the evening. It was the first year out of college for both of us, and we had astonished ourselves by finding real jobs—no more waitressing or pumping gas, the way we'd done in school. I was investigating credit references at a bank, and she was doing something slightly above the rank of typist for Hornblower & Weeks, the investment firm. My bank showed training films that emphasized the importance of suitable dress, good grooming, and personal neatness, even for employees like me, who worked at the switchboard in the basement. Her firm issued directives on appropriate attire—skirts, for instance, should cover the knees. She had lovely knees.

Kate and I would sometimes meet after work at the

Pilsen, dressed in our proper business clothes and still feeling both a little self-conscious and glamorous, as if we were impostors wearing disguises. The place had small, round oak tables, and we'd sit in a corner under a painting called "The Street Musicians of Prague" and trade future plans as if they were escape routes. She talked of going to grad school in Europe; I wanted to apply to the Peace Corps. Our plans for the future made us laugh and feel close, but those same plans somehow made anything more than temporary between us seem impossible. It was the first time I'd ever had the feeling of missing someone I was still with.

The waiters in the Pilsen wore short black jackets over long white aprons. They were old men from the old country. We went there often enough to have our own special waiter, Rudi, a name he pronounced with a rolled *R*. Rudi boned our trout and seasoned our salads, and at the end of the meal he'd bring the bottle of crème de cacao from the bar, along with two little glasses and a small pitcher of heavy cream, and make us each a King Alphonse right at our table. We'd watch as he'd fill the glasses halfway up with the syrupy brown liqueur, then carefully attempt to float a layer of cream on top. If he failed to float the cream, we'd get that one free.

"Who was King Alphonse anyway, Rudi?" I sometimes asked, trying to break his concentration, and if that didn't work I nudged the table with my foot so the glass would jiggle imperceptibly just as he was floating the cream. We'd usually get one on the house. Rudi knew what I was doing. In fact, serving the King Alphonses had been his idea, and he had also suggested the trick of jarring the table. I think it pleased him, though he seemed

concerned about the way I'd stare into the liqueur glass, watching the patterns.

"It's not a microscope," he'd say. "Drink."

He liked us, and we tipped extra. It felt good to be there and to be able to pay for a meal.

Kate and I met at the Pilsen for supper on my twenty-second birthday. It was May, and unseasonably hot. I'd opened my tie. Even before looking at the dinner menu, we ordered a bottle of Mumm's and a dozen oysters apiece. Rudi made a sly remark when he brought the oysters on platters of ice. They were freshly opened and smelled of the sea. I'd heard people joke about oysters being aphrodisiac but never considered it anything but a myth—the kind of idea they still had in the old country.

We squeezed on lemon, added dabs of horseradish, slid the oysters into our mouths, and then rinsed the shells with champagne and drank the salty, cold juice. There was a beefy-looking couple eating schnitzel at the next table, and they stared at us with the repugnance that public oyster-eaters in the Midwest often encounter. We laughed and grandly sipped it all down. I was already half tipsy from drinking too fast, and starting to feel filled with a euphoric, aching energy. Kate raised a brimming oyster shell to me in a toast: "To the Peace Corps!"

"To Europe!" I replied, and we clunked shells.

She touched her wineglass to mine and whispered, "Happy birthday," and then suddenly leaned across the table and kissed me.

When she sat down again, she was flushed. I caught the reflection of her face in the glass-covered "The Street Musicians of Prague" above our table. I always loved

seeing her in mirrors and windows. The reflections of her beauty startled me. I had told her that once, and she seemed to fend off the compliment, saying, "That's because you've learned what to look for," as if it were a secret I'd stumbled upon. But, this time, seeing her reflection hovering ghostlike upon an imaginary Prague was like seeing a future from which she had vanished. I knew I'd never meet anyone more beautiful to me.

We killed the champagne and sat twining fingers across the table. I was sweating. I could feel the warmth of her through her skirt under the table and I touched her leg. We still hadn't ordered dinner. I left money on the table and we steered each other out a little unsteadily.

"Rudi will understand," I said.

The street was blindingly bright. A reddish sun angled just above the rims of the tallest buildings. I took my suit coat off and flipped it over my shoulder. We stopped in the doorway of a shoe store to kiss.

"Let's go somewhere," she said.

My roommate would already be home at my place, which was closer. Kate lived up north, in Evanston. It seemed a long way away.

We cut down a side street, past a fire station, to a small park, but its gate was locked. I pressed close to her against the tall iron fence. We could smell the lilacs from a bush just inside the fence, and when I jumped for an overhanging branch my shirt sleeve hooked on a fence spike and tore, and petals rained down on us as the sprig sprang from my hand.

We walked to the subway. The evening rush was winding down; we must have caught the last express heading toward Evanston. Once the train climbed from

Cotton Candy

Edward Hirsch 1950 –

We walked on the bridge over the Chicago River
for what turned out to be the last time,
and I ate cotton candy, that sugary air,
that sweet blue light spun out of nothingness.
It was just a moment, really, nothing more,
but I remember marveling at the sturdy cables
of the bridge that held us up
and threading my fingers through the long
and slender fingers of my grandfather,
an old man from the Old World
who long ago disappeared into the nether regions.
And I remember that eight-year-old boy
who had tasted the sweetness of air,
which still clings to my mouth
and disappears when I breathe.

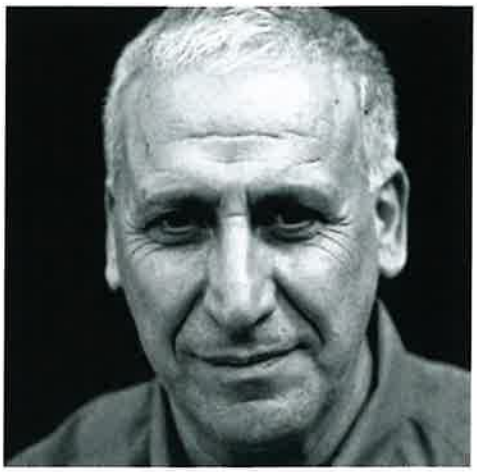

Photo credit: Julie Dermansky

Born in Chicago on January 20, 1950, Edward Hirsch is a poet and literary advocate. His second collection, *Wild Gratitude* (Knopf, 1986), received the National Book Critics Circle Award.

About Edward Hirsch>

Themes

Audio

god made the hundreds, man made it wild

they mama tell them it wild over there she say over there buses quit running like utilities or dead boys in them hundreds they schools lock doors after the tardy bell like prison standards is low like the waistline of uniform pants dropout rates is high dropouts is high like them girls shorts come the month of May for them police officers is hall monitors them businesses over there fail like the schools most all fail except liquor stores, them never close over there them streets burning them blocks hot them people fired it wild them police over there is overworked & not working they don't got enough of them police they do got too busy sitting in Walgreens parking lot hiding from the fire

Harold's Chicken Shack #1

i was born by a lake, chicken shack,
& a church
— Common, "The Morning"

1st defense against food deserts.
when the whitefolk wouldn't sling
us burgers you gave no fuck.
stuck your golden-ringed hand
into the flour & fixed the bird.

you 1st example of black flight.
original innovation of deep fry.
you beef tallow, city slick
& down home migration taste.

of course your sauce sweet
& burn at the same time.
of course you call it mild
so whitefolk won't know
to fear until it's too late.

you no corporate structure,
just black business
model. they earn the recipe
& go make it their own.

every cut of crow you
throw in the grease is dark
meat. the whole shack:
shaking, drenched in mild
sauce, sweet spirit, baptized.

Reza's Restaurant, Chicago, 1997

By Kaveh Akbar (/people/kaveh-akbar)

ISSUE: Summer 2018 (/issues/94/2/summer-2018)

the waiters milled about filling sumac
shakers clearing away plates of onion and
radish
my father pointed to each person whispered
Persian about the old man with the silver
beard whispered *Arab* about the woman with
the eye mole *Persian* the teenager pouring
water *White* the man on the phone
I was eight
and watching and amazed
I asked how he could possibly tell when
they were all brown-
skin-dark-hair'd like us almost everyone
in the restaurant looked like us
he smiled a proud
little smile a warm nest
of lip said *it's easy* said *we're just uglier*

he returned to his lamb but I was baffled hardly
touched my gheimeh I had huge glasses and bad
teeth I felt plenty Persian
when the woman
with light eyes and blonde-brown
hair left our check my father looked at me
I said *Arab?* he shook his head laughed
we drove home I grew up it took years to

put together what my father
meant that day my father who listened
exclusively to the Rolling Stones
who called the Beatles
a band for girls
my father who wore only black even
around the house whose arms could
cut chicken wire and make stew and
bulged with old farm scars my father my
father my father built
the world the first sound I ever heard
was his voice whispering the azan
in my right ear I didn't need anything
else my father cherished
that we were ugly and so being ugly
was blessed I smiled with all my teeth

Kaveh Akbar (/people/kaveh-akbar)

Kaveh Akbar is the author of the poetry collections *Pilgrim Bell* (Graywolf, 2021) and *Calling a Wolf a Wolf* (Alice James, 2017) as well as the chapbook *Portrait of the Alcoholic* (Sibling Rivalry, 2017). Akbar's poems appear in the *New Yorker*, *Poetry*, the *Paris Review*, *Best American Poetry*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere. The recipient of honors including multiple Pushcart Prizes, a Civitella Ranieri Foundation Fellowship, the Levis Reading Prize, and a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship, Akbar is the Poetry Editor of the *Nation*. Born in Tehran, Iran, he teaches at the University of Iowa and in the low-residency MFA programs at Randolph College and Warren Wilson College.

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