

Blues Music in Literature

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The blues is an impulse to keep the painful detail and episodes of a brutal existence alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. -Ralph Ellison

Rationale

One of the greatest challenges with English Language Arts curriculum is that it lends itself to being uninteresting, not relatable, and far detached from students' lives and understanding of life. Lack of diversity – both in terms of cultural, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds, as well as in the contents and forms of the literary work itself – can make classrooms and the subject matter stale for adolescent students. One of the greatest consequences is that many students feel little to no connection to, or interest in, the curriculum. According to Bob Fecho in *Writing in the Dialogical Classroom*, some students have an easier time with English curriculum simply because of their cultural, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds. He recounts one student in particular whose work was technically and mechanically superior, yet it lacked the depth or purpose of which she was capable:

She's White and middle class, and that accident of birth grants her many privileges not afforded to others. She started her education with her language and culture closely aligned with that of the school... When she opened books to read, from the very first basal reader to her senior year literature course, Ashley recognized the people, events, and contexts of her life there on the pages. She was confident of who she was and what she could do because what she saw in media and experienced in life had confirmed her potential (Fecho 3).

Fecho then goes on to discuss the issues with the “unengaged classroom” where students are “told to leave their languages, cultures, and experiences hanging on a peg at the classroom door” (Fecho 15). As a mere substitute teacher, I notice an increasingly growing number of African American students that I feel are not being well represented in the current middle grades ELA curriculum. By teaching an ELA unit themed around blues music in a historical, literary context, I intend to create a more interesting and unified classroom experience.

“By thinking about the intersections of whites, blacks, and others around the blues, students will deepen their understanding of discrimination and prejudice,” states PBS. “They will also come to understand the ways in which music can, or cannot, create opportunities for people of different cultures, and varying degrees of power, to relate to one another and find common ground” (Whites, Blacks, and the Blues). The reason for the use of blues music as opposed to other forms such as rap or hip-hop, is that, aside from Native American music, blues is the first original American music. It is the foundation for all other forms of music – including the popular music students likely listen to – and it stems from the use of the oral tradition (Blues In The Schools). According to The Blues Foundation, “Through the study of blues traditions in any curriculum, educators can address educational issues like the color line, diversity, multi-culturalism, and interdisciplinary studies in a way that engages all aged students” (*Blues In The Schools*).

Blues music is also strongly tied to many literary elements. The themes of the Legend of Faust and the Crossroads are both predominant in literature, as well as in blues music. Additionally, many blues songs can be studied in terms of their poetic value. In fact, my textbook for an African American Literature course I took as an undergrad has an entire section of blues songs that are meant to be studied as poetry. Many African American poems follow a blues rhythm as well. According to Matt Copeland and Chris Goering, who developed an ELA lesson plan based around blues music, the music form itself is misunderstood as it is not intrinsically depressed

and downtrodden. Rather, “Blues lyrics take a realistic view of the world and human relationships and attempt to provide a sense of relief from the anger and frustration engendered by life’s obstacles.” Copeland and Goering also intend to “open our students’ eyes to a musical form often overlooked and misinterpreted in mainstream culture and to improve our students’ critical reading, listening, thinking, discussing, writing, and viewing” (Copeland and Goering).

Jon Schwartz, creator of Kids Like Blues, a blues band that consists of kids and promotes various aspects of educational curriculum through blues music, says that blues can be used as “a way of bridging the communication gap,” and reaching the kids personally. He believes the study of lyrics is important for English Language Learners in particular. “Another way students benefit from our work with blues music is that ELL [English Language Learners] are able to read and pronounce text at a level of complexity that exceeds what they can read when given text in isolation.” One specific student, a Japanese immigrant, “[D]idn’t feel comfortable enough to take any risks and try speaking English phrases,” but she was more comfortable working with sentences “in the context of a song” (Kids Like Blues).

According to Association for the Advancement of Arts Education, “Research has proven that students exposed to the arts as part of their core curriculum test higher in every other subject and develop superior problem-solving skills” (Blues In The Schools). So, it makes sense that teaching English through a musical genre would improve overall learning.

Works Cited

“Academic Benefits.” *Kids Like Blues*. Web.

“Blues In The Schools.” *The Blues Foundation*. Web.

Copeland, Matt and Chris Goering. “Blues You Can Use: Teaching the Faust Theme Through Music, Literature, and Film.” *Reading Online*. Web.

“Crossroads Blues.” *The Blues*. PBS. Web.

“FAQ.” *Kids Like Blues*. Web.

TeachHUB Interview. “Learning Through the Blues: Interview with kids Like Blues Creator Jon Schwartz.” *TeachHUB*. Web.

“White, Blacks, and the Blues.” *The Blues*. PBS. Web.

Works Used

Poems:

Cross Road Blues - Robert Johnson [lyrics]
Me and the Devil Blues - Robert Johnson [lyrics]
The Road Not Taken - Robert Frost
We Real Cool - Gwendolyn Brooks
The Weary Blues - Langston Hughes
Midnight Nan at Leroy's - Langston Hughes
Blues Fantasy - Langston Hughes
Po' Boy Blues - Langston Hughes
The South - Langston Hughes
One Way Ticket - Langston Hughes
Harlem: A Dream Deferred - Langston Hughes

Music:

Cross Roads Blues - Robert Johnson [2:39]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsb_cGdgPTo
Me and the Devil Blues - Robert Johnson [2:33]
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7ZzjfRzZuk>
Crossroads - Cream [4:19]
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=becWr0vc6cA>
When Will I Get to Be Called a Man - Big Bill Broonzy [3:25]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvG_FvPbEhg
Times Is Gettin' Harder - Lucious Curtis and Willie Ford [3:49]
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFa6ZOT6RSw>
Stack O' Lee - Mississippi John Hurt [2:58]
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAVv23MGT6Y>
John Henry - Big Bill Broonzy [3:22]
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7wluszxDrY>

Short Stories:

Young Goodman Brown - Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Devil and Tom Walker - Washington Irving
The Devil and Daniel Webster - Stephen Vincent Benet
The Man Who Was Almost a Man - Richard Wright
A Summer Tragedy - Arna Bontemps

Essays:

How Blues Affected Race Relations in the United States
<http://www.angelfire.com/sc/bluesthesis/rock.html>

White Blues

<http://www.bluesworld.com/WHITEBLUES.html>

Excerpts:

Chapter 14 (“Of the Sorrow Songs”) of *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/dubois/ch14.html>

Videos:

What is the blues? [7:45]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dclNCcdYho>

A Short History of the Blues: Emerging Music of the 20th Century [7:21]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnaorRAXhmU>

What were Jim Crow laws? [2:03]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMmKFqpU3Jg>

Overview of the Great Migration [2:18]

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4_u_6ucqmw

Audio:

Langson Hughes Reads From His Poetry (select “One Way Ticket”)

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/04/22/specials/hughes.html#audio>

Paintings:

The Migration Series – Jacob Lawrence

<http://www.phillipscollection.org/collection/migration-series/>

Goals and Rubrics

Students will be graded based on the following criteria:

Multigenre Project (30%)

Response Journal (20%)

Personal Narrative Essay (40%)

Classroom Participation (10%)

Multigenre Project

The multigenre project will consist of two parts: a ____, and a written rationale/synthesis. Mediums can include production of a song, rap, painting, sculpture, dramatic skit, dance, computer generated presentation, etc. However, all projects must be approved first. The rationale/synthesis paper is a way of explaining how this product is an appropriate representation of the student's understanding of the text(s) discussed and ideas presented in class. Students are likely to put forth more effort and learn more when they are producing something that is interesting and meaningful to them. This project is a way of harvesting all the classroom discussion and readings in a manner in which they feel confident.

Response Journals

Response journals will consist of a response to a given prompt or prompts. Said prompts will correlate with the reading in some way, but will be a little more personal in nature. The questions will be open-ended, to which the students write a free written response. Two will be assigned each week. Students will be given a prompt on Monday, which should be handed in at the beginning of class on Wednesday. They will also be given a prompt Wednesday, which will be handed in at the beginning of class on Friday. Journals will be primarily graded on participation and effort, as the primary purpose of this activity is simply to get students thinking and writing.

Narrative Essay

Students will compose a 2-page personal narrative based on a time when they were faced with a crossroads of their own - a time where they were forced to make a tough decision. Students should write in an engaging, personal manner that showcases their individual voice. They should describe the conflict presented, the options, the choice, and the result. All essays should be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins.

Classroom Participation

I'm not requiring every student to respond vocally in order to receive participation credit. This grade is simply to encourage students to pay attention and be respectful to those talking and do their work -- not to spend time texting, sleeping, daydreaming, etc. Simply put, it's to ensure that students at least put forth some effort. A lot of texts and ideas will be covered in class, and students aren't likely to do well on their other work if they don't participate in class.

Response Journal Rubric

Category	4	3	2	1
Evidence of Creative Thinking	Contains original ideas and perspectives	Contains somewhat original ideas and perspectives	Contains little originality and imagination	Does not contain original ideas and perspectives, and lacks imagination
Knowledge of Material	Shows strong knowledge of texts and class discussion	Shows some knowledge of texts and class discussion	Shows little knowledge of texts and class discussion	Shows no knowledge of texts and class discussion
Mechanics	At least half a page (hand-written) in length	At least half a page (hand-written) in length	Almost half a page (hand-written) in length	Significantly less than half a page (hand-written) in length

*Some ideas borrowed (and altered) from *I Will Speak Up* lesson plan

Multigenre Project Rubric

	4	3	2	1
20%	Product clearly represents a theme discussed in the unit	Product represents a theme discussed in the unit	Product attempts to represent a theme discussed in the unit	Product does not represent a theme discussed in the unit
20%	Product is unique and shows individuality and creative thinking	Product shows some individuality and creative thinking	Product shows little individuality and creative thinking	Product shows no individuality or creative thinking
20%	Project as a whole (product and paper) demonstrates multiple connections among the texts, classroom discussion and activities, and the product (medium) itself	Project as a whole (product and paper) demonstrates at least one connection among texts, classroom discussion and activities, and the product (medium) itself	Project as a whole (product and paper) makes an attempt to make connections among texts, classroom discussion and activities, and the product (medium) itself	Project as a whole (product and paper) makes no connections among texts, classroom discussion and activities, and the product (medium) itself
20%	Always uses textual examples to support rationale/synthesis claims	Usually uses textual examples to support rationale/synthesis claims	Sometimes uses textual examples to support rationale/synthesis claims	Does not use textual examples to support rationale/synthesis claims
10%	Paper is at least two pages long	Paper is almost two pages long (1.75)	Paper is at least a page and a half long	Paper is less than a page and a half long

*Some ideas borrowed (and altered) from *I Will Speak Up* lesson plan

Narrative Essay Rubric

	5	3	1
Ideas	One clearly focused topic with relevant information and details that support the main idea.	Somewhat clear main idea, but is either lacking information and details, or said information and details are somewhat unclear.	Unclear main idea. Lacks relevant information and details.
Organization	Logically ordered; flows smoothly from point to point.	Logically ordered, but flow is somewhat confusing.	Lacks order; arrangement is confusing.
Word Choice	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that paint a picture in the reader's mind.	Average use of words or phrases. May be vivid, but with the occasional misuse of a word.	Writing lacks variety. Vague use of words, or words are used incorrectly.
Voice	Writing has personality; it comes alive. Reader can develop a clear understanding of the writer.	Writing is personal in terms of experience, but lacks character. Writer doesn't seem to own the story.	Lacks personality. Writing is dry and ideas seem to belong to someone else.
Fluency	Paper is at least two pages long	Paper is almost two pages long (1.75)	Paper is at least a page and a half long

* Scoring scale borrowed (and altered) from *R.E.S.P.E.C.T. Find Out What It Means To Me* lesson plan

Lesson Plans

** Lessons are designed based on 55-minute class periods.

** Ideas borrowed (and altered) from PBS Blues Classroom

Week One

Day 1:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

4 minutes - Ask students to think about the connotations of certain colors. What things - particularly emotions - is the color red often tied to, for example? What about black? Green?

10 minutes - Have the students take out a sheet of paper and free write about the color blue, and the connotations that come to mind. What does it mean to feel blue, or to have the blues? What kinds of emotions come to mind? Briefly discuss their answers.

16 minutes - Watch the two videos, "What is the blues?" and "A Short History of the Blues," both of which are available on YouTube and linked above.

5 minutes - Explain the idea of a crossroads - both literally and figuratively. Have them think about a time in their lives when they were faced with a tough decision.

10 minutes - Hand out copies of Robert Johnson's "Cross Roads Blues" and play the YouTube clip linked above as they follow along. Encourage students to think outside the box in terms of the song's conflict. Make sure students are aware of the situation - selling one's soul to the devil - as it's not explicitly stated. Guide them to think about specific lines, and wonder what decision they think the speaker made in the song.

5 minutes - Have students begin to write what decision they believed the speaker made as a continuation of the story. Have them finish for homework.

Day 2:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

8 minutes - Discuss the song continuations. What decision was made? Why? What lyrics in the song led to their beliefs? What do the students believe was the result of said decision?

5 minutes - Distribute lyrics to "Me and the Devil Blues." Play YouTube clip aloud as students follow along. Ask if these lyrics help determine the answer to the last question (they should) and why.

5 minutes - Introduce the Faust theory (the selling of one's soul to the devil) by discussing the legend of Robert Johnson (who supposedly sold his soul to the devil in order to gain musical talents). Explain that this theory - as well as conflicts tied up with devils - is not only common in blues music thanks to Johnson, but is also a common occurrence in many literary pieces seemingly unrelated to blues music.

20 minutes - Distribute "The Devil and Tom Walker" and read aloud.

13 minutes - Discuss the story:

What are the conflicts in the story? Are they physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional conflicts?

What are some themes in the story? How do they relate to the plot and characters?

Does the story end the way you expected? How? Why?

What is the central/primary purpose of the story? Is the purpose important or meaningful?

Day 3:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

Remainder of class: Distribute and read aloud copies of "The Devil and Daniel Webster" and "Young Goodman Brown." For the remainder of the class period discuss the following questions to get the students thinking about the stories:

DDW Questions:

According to the narrator, what kind of man is Daniel Webster?

Why does Jabez Stone make a deal with the Devil? What does he get from the deal? What makes him doubt it?

How does Daniel Webster make his case? How does the Devil make his? What do you make of the judge and jury?

How is the case resolved or not resolved?

To whom, if anyone, is Jabez Stone accountable? Is he justified in trying to get out of his deal?

What responsibility does Daniel feel toward Jabez? Why does he feel this way?

What links us to our neighbors or community? What weakens these links?

YGB Questions:

Why is nothing carved on Brown's tombstone?

Why would Satan look so much like Brown himself? Why is that creepier than a demon with horns and pitchfork and cloven hooves?

Brown declares that he has "lost his faith." Faith in what, exactly? God? Or something else?

When describing the events in the woods, count how many times Hawthorne uses ambiguous language in diction like *seems*, *must*, *appears*, *perhaps*, and *maybe*. Why does Hawthorne want to leave all this so ambiguous? Why not tell us clearly whether something is happening or not happening?

Overarching Questions (for past three stories):

How would each of the characters assess the choices made by the other characters?

Based on the story and the author's depiction of the evil/devil, what assumptions can you make about her or her personal and cultural background, and the time in which the story was written?

Who do you think makes the best choice? Why? Why makes the worst choice? Why?

Day 4:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

15-20 minutes - Continue discussing the questions from last class.

10-15 minutes - Discuss the relations of the Faust theory to the stories and the possible connections among the stories themselves, and between the stories and "Cross Roads Blues."

15 minutes - Have students write a journal entry about a time when they were conflicted with a "devil" of their own. When did they compromise their morals for personal gain? What was gained? Was it worth it? Discuss the situations students are willing to share.

Day 5:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

10 minutes - Return to the idea of a crossroads. Briefly explain the concept again. Ask students if the crossroads in "Cross Roads Blues" is more literal or figurative. How this is related to the Faust theory in the context of the song? Discuss the decisions the speaker made - or supposedly made - and the subsequent implications. What was/were the alternative(s)?

30 minutes - Present students with copies of "The Road Not Taken" and "We Real Cool." Read each aloud and discuss the following:

Both:

How do the poems relate to the idea of a crossroads?

TRNT:

Does the speaker think that he or she will ever travel the other path? Why or why not?

Do you think he or she might be telling the story with a "sigh" in the future? Why or why not?

What does the phrase "that has made all the difference" mean?

In what crossroads situations would you choose to take the less-traveled paths?

WRC:

What might the crossroads in this poem have looked like? What paths are presented?

What are the motivating factors behind the characters' decisions to chose one path over the other?

What point does Brooks make about the choices of the characters in the poem?

Is the path chosen the less traveled or more popular one? Why?

Have you encountered similar choices?

Both:

How do they relate to "Cross Roads Blues"?

10 minutes – Introduce the narrative essay assignment (draft DUE day 1 of week 4; final due day 4 of week 4).

Students will compose a 2-page personal narrative based on a time when they were faced with a crossroads of their own – a time where they were forced to make a tough decision. Students should write in an engaging, personal manner that showcases their individual voice. They should describe the conflict presented, the options, the choice, and the result. All essays should be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins.

Week Two

Day 1:

5 minutes – Attendance and housekeeping

5 minutes – Ask students if they are familiar with Jim Crow laws and the Great Migration – of what specifically are they aware? Briefly discuss.

8 minutes – Play the YouTube clip about Jim Crow laws followed by the clip about the Great Migration. Briefly discuss.

11 minutes – Present students with the poem “The South” by Langston Hughes (on the SMART Board or projector) and read aloud. Discuss the following questions:

What ideas does the speaker present about life in the South?

What does the speaker suggest is the solution?

What ideas does the speaker present about life in the North?

11 minutes – Present students with the poem “One Way Ticket” by Langston Hughes (on the SMART Board or projector). Play audio recording of Hughes reading as students follow along. Discuss the following:

What the condition in the South, as presented by the speaker.

What is the solution presented?

To what place does the speaker suggest blacks go?

10 minutes – Allow students to begin brain storming and drafting for their narrative essay. Go around the classroom answering individual questions and guiding students in the development of the narratives.

Day 2:

5 minutes – Attendance and housekeeping

10 minutes – Have students write a journal entry about a time in their life when a dream was deferred (delayed, postponed – in case they’re confused). How did it make them feel? Briefly discuss those who are willing to share.

8 minutes - Display "Harlem: A Dream Deferred" on the SMART Board/projector and read aloud. Thinking back to the previous discussion and the Hughes poems read, what dreams might the speaker be referencing? How might the dreams be deferred? How does the title "Harlem" tie into this?

15 minutes - Play "When Will I Get to Be Called a Man" and "Times Is Getting' Harder" on YouTube. Discuss how these tie into the discussion of Jim Crow laws and the Great Migration.

12 minutes - Have students get into groups of 2-3 and write some blues lyrics of their own, going off the songs they've heard thus far. Have willing students share their lyrics.

Day 3:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

10 minutes - Allow students to work on narrative essays individually.

30 minutes - Have students get into small groups of 3-5 students. Distribute copies of Arna Bontemps' "A Summer Tragedy." Have students take turns reading aloud in their small groups and answer the following questions:

Describe the main conflict the Pattons face in terms of the physical, intellectual, moral, and emotional considerations involved in making their decision.

What are the available options to the Pattons? What might the results of each option be?

Are the Pattons brave or are they cowards? Why?

Would the ending be considered a defeat or a victory for the Pattons?

10 minutes - Discuss students' answers.

Day 4:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

10 minutes - Allow students to work on narrative essays individually.

30 minutes - Have students get into small groups of 3-5 students. Distribute copies of Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost A Man." Have students take turns reading aloud in their small groups and answer the following questions:

What does the catalogue in the story symbolize?

Discuss whether Dave has role models to guide him through his adolescence. Why or why not?

Comment on the following quotes from the story: "They treat me like a mule, n then they beat me."

Identify when the narrator first lets the reader know about Dave's surname. Why do you think this could be significant?

Examine the last section of the story and identify how pulling the trigger successfully affects Dave. What does Dave's getting on the train symbolize? Do you believe that Dave has

become mature at the end of the story? Why? Why not?

10 minutes - Begin discussion of students' answers.

Day 5:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

10 minutes - Continue discussions of the previous two short stories. Discuss their relation to the Great Migration, Jim Crow laws, and the blues scene at the time.

8 minutes - Present students with the Migration Series of paintings by Jacob Lawrence on the SMART Board/projector. Have the students pick one of the pieces and write a short narrative journal entry about what they think is occurring in the work.

15 minutes - As a class, go through each of the paintings and discuss what they students concluded about the works. Have students volunteer to read their narratives aloud. How do these paintings represent issues discussed in the videos watched, and poems and short stories read?

18 minutes - Have students work individually on their personal narrative essays. Be sure to warn them that these will soon be reviewed by their classmates so as to spare any embarrassment. Walk around the classroom to answer questions and help guide the writing process.

Week Three

Day 1:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

8 minutes - Have students write a journal entry about a time when they felt that someone else tried to take credit for something they did.

8 minutes - Have the students write a separate journal entry about a particular time when they felt unified with someone from whom they were previously separated.

10 minutes - Read "White Blues" (linked above) aloud as a class.

10 minutes - Read "How the Blues Affected Race Relations in the United States" (linked above) aloud as a class.

16 minutes - Play Robert Johnson's "Cross Roads Blues" video on YouTube again. Then play the YouTube video of Cream's cover, "Crossroads." Discuss the differences.

Day 2:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

20 minutes - In terms of yesterday's class, discuss the following:

Was this about the racial integration achieved through music, or about white control over black music and legacy?

Were the white people 'taking' something from black culture as a show of dominance?

Were white people – those in control of major recording companies and markets – helping the musical culture by exposing the music in ways blacks at the time could not, and ultimately establishing a relationship between races?

Provide examples from yesterday’s texts and videos/songs.

20 minutes – Spend the remainder of class presenting the multigenre project. Explain explicitly what a multigenre project consists of, and show examples of other multigenre projects on the web. Answer any questions students have, and start brainstorming as a class topics from the unit that students could cover (the Great Migration, crossroads, the Faust theory, etc.) and different ways in which they could be presented. Genre proposals due day 4.

Day 3:

5 minutes – Attendance and housekeeping

8 minutes – Have students journal about the effects of a particular song on them emotionally. How does it make them feel? Why?

25 minutes – Ask students for suggestions for their favorite (classroom appropriate) songs in terms of lyrical content. Pick five, look them up, and project them on the board. Discuss poetic techniques in relation to the lyrics (alliteration, imagery, metaphor, personification, simile, rhyme, repetition, apostrophe, echo, allusion, hyperbole, etc.). Discuss how blues music employs the same poetic devices used in popular music today. Return to Johnson’s songs and go through the lyrics the same way, picking out and discussing poetic techniques.

17 minutes – Project “The Weary Blues” by Langston Hughes on the board, but leave his name off. Do the same. Then inform the students that the “song” is actually a poem by Hughes. Read “To Midnight Nan at Lecroy’s,” “Blues Fantasy,” and “Po’ Boy Blues.” Discuss similarities between the poems and blues songs.

Day 4:

5 minutes – Attendance and housekeeping; take up genre proposals

50 minutes – Divide students into groups of four. Assuming they have access to computers/iPads (if not, arrange to send to library or computer lab – whatever is available), assign each group one of the following poets: Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen, Etheridge Knight, and Sterling Plumpp. Have the students research their given poet – in terms of biographical information, specific poems, and relationship to blues music. Have students put their information together in the form of a cohesive presentation.

Day 5:

5 minutes – Attendance and housekeeping; return genre proposals

32 minutes – Have students each take eight minutes to present the previous day’s findings to the class.

18 minutes - Have students work on narrative essays individually. Walk around the room answering questions and guiding students' progress. Remind students that the first draft is due Monday.

Week Four

Day 1:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping; narrative essay draft 1 due

50 minutes - With their drafts, have students get into groups of 3-4 people each. Have students read other group members' works silently to themselves and answer the following:

What were the strongest points of the essay - what parts did you like the best?

What was confusing, and how could it be made clear?

Did the essay have one central theme? Did the essay manage to stay on track and not veer off on other ideas?

Did the essay flow smoothly? If not, how so?

Please include any additional advice that could **HELP** the writer improve their work.

Once students finish reviewing each other's work, have them begin to revise their essays individually based on their peer's responses.

Day 2:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

15 minutes - Read "Of the Sorrow Songs" aloud to the class.

7 minutes - Play the YouTube clips of "Stack O' Lee" and "John Henry."

8 minutes - Have students write a journal entry about what they believe the correlation is between the songs and text. What do they tell or show us about the oral tradition (when culture is transmitted orally - through speech and song).

20 minutes - Have willing students share their journals. Begin to discuss the correlation among the texts read the past few weeks - the short stories, songs, and poems - in terms of oral culture. What is the purpose? What are the themes? Why are songs and oral culture, according to DuBois, important? How do we see this tradition continue today? Provide examples from modern literature, music, movies, etc.

Day 3:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping

30 minutes - Divide students into groups of 3-4 people each. Have them take the texts from the unit - short stories, poems, song lyrics, essays - and construct a found poem. The poem should focus on one element we've discussed - race relations, financial struggles, migration, regional issues, crossroads, etc. Students should be prepared to defend their poems.

20 minutes - Have each group present their poem to the class, and explain its meaning with references to the works used. Students should also answer questions asked by classmates and the teacher.

Inform students they should bring their multigenre project - either the genre or the rationale (or both) - to class tomorrow.

Day 4:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping; narrative essays due at the beginning of class

Have students spend the class period working on their multigenre project individually or in small groups (whichever seems to generate the most productivity). Spend the period answering students' questions and help guide them.

Day 5:

5 minutes - Attendance and housekeeping; multigenre projects due

- This day should be left fairly flexible based on the type of projects students wish to pursue. If there are any performance pieces, accommodations should be made for students to present their work.
- Visual art pieces and the like should be displayed so other students can see.

Spend the class period watching a portion of Martin Scorsese Presents *The Blues*. There are episodes which cover all the different areas we've discussed. Choose whichever the students seemed most interested in.

Cross Road Blues

by Robert Johnson

I went down to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
I went down to the crossroad
fell down on my knees
Asked the lord above
"Have mercy now save poor Bob if you please"
Yeeooo, standin at the crossroad
tried to flag a ride
ooo ooo eee
I tried to flag a ride
Didn't nobody seem to know me babe
everybody pass me by
Standin at the crossroad babe
risin sun goin down
Standin at the crossroad babe
eee eee eee, risin sun goin down
I believe to my soul now,
Poor Bob is sinkin down
You can run, you can run
tell my friend Willie Brown
You can run, you can run
tell my friend Willie Brown
(th)'at I got the croosroad blues this mornin Lord
babe, I'm sinkin down
And I went to the crossraod momma
I looked east and west
I went to the crossraod baby
I looked east and west
Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman
ooh-well babe, in my distress

Me and the Devil Blues

by Robert Johnson

Early this morning
When you knocked upon my door
Early this morning, ooooo
When you knocked upon my door
And I said hello Satan
I believe it's time to go

Me and the Devil
Was walkin' side by side
Me and the Devil, woooo
Was walking side by side
And I'm going to beat my woman
'Til I get satisfied

She said you don't see why
That she would dog me 'round
Now baby you know you ain't doin' me right don'tcha
She say you don't see why, whoooo
That she would dog me 'round It must-a be that old evil spirit
So deep down in the ground
You may bury my body
Down by the highway side
Baby, I don't care where you bury my body when I'm dead and gone
You may bury my body, woooo
Down by the highway side
So my old evil spirit
Can get a Greyhound bus and ride

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

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.

The Weary Blues

by Langston Hughes

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,

I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway. . . .

He did a lazy sway. . . .

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key

He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone

I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—

“Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf.”

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.

He played a few chords then he sang some more—

“I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied—

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died.”

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

To Midnight Nan at Leroy's

by Langston Hughes

Strut and wiggle,
Shameless gal.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your pal.

Hear dat music....
Jungle night.
Hear dat music....
And the moon was white.

Sing your Blues song,
Pretty baby.
You want lovin'
And you don't mean maybe.

Jungle lover....
Night black boy....
Two against the moon
And the moon was joy.

Strut and wiggle,
Shameless Nan.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your man.

Blues Fantasy

by Langston Hughes

Hey! Hey!
That's what the
Blues singers say.
Singing minor melodies
They laugh,
Hey! Hey!

My man's done left me,
Chile, he's gone away.
My good man's left me,
Babe, he's gone away.
Now the cryin' blues
Haunts me night and day.

Hey!....Hey!

Weary,
Weary,
Trouble, pain.
Sun's gonna shine
Somewhere
Again.

I got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.

Sing 'em sister!

Got a railroad ticket,
Pack my trunk and ride.
And when I get on the train
I'll cast my blues aside.

Laughing,
Hey!....Hey!
Laugh a loud,
Hey! Hey!

Po' Boy Blues

by Langston Hughes

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold.

I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
Fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
She made me lose ma money
An' almost lose ma mind.

Weary, weary,
Weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary,
Early, early in de morn.
It's so weary
I wish I'd never been born.

The South

by Langston Hughes

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
 Beast-strong,
 Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
 Cotton and the moon,
 Warmth, earth, warmth,
 The sky, the sun, the stars,
 The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
 Passionate, cruel,
 Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
 That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
 So now I seek the North—
 The cold-faced North,
 For she, they say,
 Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.

One Way Ticket

by Langston Hughes

I pick up my life,
And take it with me,
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East,
And not Dixie.

I pick up my life
And take it on the train,
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake
Any place that is
North and West,
And not South.

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket-
Gone up North
Gone out West
Gone

Harlem

by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

A Summer Tragedy

by Arna Bontemps

Old Jeff Patton, the black share farmer, fumbled with his bow tie. His fingers trembled and the high, stiff collar pinched his throat. A fellow loses his hand for such vanities after thirty or forty years of simple life. Once a year, or maybe twice if there's a wedding among his kinfolks, he may spruce up, but generally fancy clothes do nothing but adorn the wall of the big room and feed the moths. That had been Jeff Patton's experience. He had not worn his stiff-bosomed shirt more than a dozen times in all his married life. His swallow-tailed coat lay on the bed beside him, freshly brushed and pressed, but it was as full of holes as the overalls in which he worked on weekdays. The moths had used it badly. Jeff twisted his mouth into a hideous toothless grimace as he contended with the obstinate bow. He stamped his good foot and decided to give up the struggle.

"Jennie," he called.

"What's that, Jeff?" His wife's shrunken voice came out of the adjoining room like an echo. It was hardly bigger than a whisper.

"I reckon you'll have to he'p me wid this heah bow tie, baby," he said meekly.

"Dog if I can hitch it up."

Her answer was not strong enough to reach him, but presently the old woman came to the door, feeling her way with a stick. She had a wasted, dead-life appearance. Her body, as scrawny and gnarled as a string bean, seemed less than nothing in the ocean of frayed and faded petticoats that surrounded her. These hung an inch or two above the tops of her heavy unlaced shoes and showed little grotesque piles where the stockings had fallen down from her negligible legs.

"You oughta could do a heap mo" wid a thing like that'n me—beingst as you got yo' good sight."

"looks like I oughta could," he admitted. "But my fingers is gone democrat on me. I get all mixed up in the looking glass an" can't tell wicha way to twist the devilish thing."

Jennie sat on the side of the bed, and old Jeff Patton got down on one knee while she tied the bow knot. It was a slow and painful ordeal for each of them in this position.

Jeff's bones cracked, his knee ached, and it was only after a half dozen attempts that

Jennie worked a semblance of a bow into the tie.

"I got to dress maself now," the old woman whispered. "These is ma old shoes an" stockings, and I ain't so much as unwrapped ma dress."

"Well, don't worry „bout me no mo", baby," Jeff said. "That „bout finishes me. All I gotta do now is slip on that old coat'n ves" an" I'll be fixed to leave."

Jennie disappeared again through the dim passage into the shed room. Being blind was no handicap to her in that black hole. Jeff heard the cane placed against the wall beside the door and knew that his wife was on easy ground. He put on his coat, took a battered top hat from the bedpost, and hobbled to the front door. He was ready to travel. As soon as Jennie could get on her Sunday shoes and her old black silk dress, they would start.

Outside the tiny log house, the day was warm and mellow with sunshine. A host of wasps were humming with busy excitement in the trunk of a dead sycamore. Gray squirrels were searching through the grass for hickory nuts, and blue jays were in the trees, hopping from branch to branch. Pine woods stretched away to the left like a black sea. Among them were scattered scores of log houses like Jeff's, houses of black share farmers. Cows and pigs wandered freely among the trees. There was no danger of loss. Each farmer knew his own stock and knew his neighbor's as well as he knew his neighbor's children.

Down the slope to the right were cultivated acres on which the colored folks worked. They extended to the river, more than two miles away, and they were today green with the unmade cotton crop. A tiny thread of a road, which passed directly in front of Jeff's place, ran through these green fields like a pencil mark.

Jeff, standing outside the door, with his absurd hat in his left hand, surveyed the wide scene tenderly. He had been forty-five years on these acres. He loved them with the unexplained affection that others have for the countries to which they belong.

The sun was hot on his head, his collar still pinched his throat, and the Sunday clothes were intolerably hot. Jeff transferred the hat to his right hand and began fanning with it. Suddenly the whisper that was Jennie's voice came out of the shed room.

"You can bring the car round front whilst you's waitin'," it said feebly. There was a tired pause; then it added, "I'll soon be fixed to go."

"A'right baby," Jeff answered. "I'll get it in a minute."

But he didn't move. A thought struck him that made his mouth fall open. The mention of the car brought to his mind with new intensity, the trip he and Jennie were about to take. Fear came into his eyes; excitement took his breath. Lord, Jesus!

"Jeff...O Jeff," the old woman's whisper called.

He awakened with a jolt. "Hunh, baby?"

"What you doin'?"

"Nuthin. Jes studyin'. I jes been turnin' things round „n round in ma mind."

"You could be getting" the car," she said.

“Oh yes, right away, baby”

He started round the shed, limping heavily on his bad leg. There were three frizzly chickens in the yard. All his other chicks had been killed or stolen recently. But the frizzly chickens had been saved somehow. That was fortunate indeed, for these curious creatures had a way of devouring “poison” from the yard and in that way protecting against conjure and black luck and spells. But even the frizzly chickens seemed now to be in a stupor. Jeff thought they had some ailment; he expected all three of them to die shortly.

The shed in which the old T-model Ford stood was only a grass roof held up by four corner poles. It had been built by tremulous hands at a time when the little rattletrap car had been regarded as a peculiar treasure. And, miraculously, despite wind and downpour, it still stood.

Jeff adjusted the crank and put his weight upon it. The engine came to life with a sputter and bang that rattled the old car from radiator to tail light. Jeff hopped into the seat and put his foot on the accelerator. The sputtering and banging increased. The rattling became more violent. That was good. It was good banging, good sputtering and rattling, and it meant that the aged car was still in running condition. She could be depended on for this trip.

Again Jeff’s thought halted as if paralyzed. The suggestion of the trip fell into the machinery of his mind like a wrench. He felt dazed and weak. He swung the car out into the yard, made a half turn, and drove around to the front door. When he took his hands off the wheel, he noticed that he was trembling violently. He cut off the motor and climbed to the ground to wait for Jennie.

A few minutes later she was at the window, her voice rattling against the pane like a broken shutter.

“I’m ready, Jeff.”

He did not answer, but limped into the house and took her by the arm. He led her slowly through the big room, down the step, and across the yard.

“You reckon I’d oughta lock the do?” he asked softly.

They stopped and Jennie weighed the question. Finally she shook her head.

“Ne mind the do,” she said. “I don’t see no cause to lock up things.”

“You right,” Jeff agreed. “No cause to lock up.”

Jeff opened the door and helped his wife into the car. A quick shudder passed over him. Jesus! Again he trembled.

“How come you shaking so?” Jennie whispered.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“You mus’ be scairt, Jeff.”

“No, baby, I ain’t scairt.”

He slammed the door after her and went around to crank up again. The motor started easily. Jeff wished that it had not been so responsive. He would have like a few more minutes in which to turn things around in his head. As it was, with Jennie chiding him about being afraid, he had to keep going. He swung the car into the little pencil-mark road and started off toward the river, driving very slowly, very cautiously.

Chugging across the green countryside, the small battered Ford seemed tiny indeed. Jeff felt a familiar excitement, a thrill, as they came down the first slope to the immense levels on which the cotton was growing. He could not help reflecting that the crops were good. He knew what that meant, too. He made forty-five of them with his own hands. It was true that he had worn out nearly a dozen mules, but that was the fault of the old man Stevenson, the owner of the land. Major Stevenson had the old notion that one mule was all a share farmer needed to work a thirty-acre plot. It was an expensive notion, the way it killed mules from overwork, but the old man held to it. Jeff thought it killed a good many share farmers as well as mules, but he had no patience with weakness in men. Women or children might be tolerated if they were puny, but a weak man was a curse. Of course, his own children—

Jeff’s thought halted there. He and Jennie never mentioned their dead children any more. And naturally, he did not wish to dwell upon them in his mind. Before he knew it, some remark would slip out of his mouth and that would make Jennie feel blue. Perhaps she would cry. A woman like Jennie could not easily throw off the grief that comes from losing five grown children within two years. Even Jeff was still staggered by the blow. His memory had not been much good recently. He frequently talked to himself. And, although he had kept it a secret, he knew that his courage had left him. He was terrified by the least unfamiliar sound at night. He was reluctant to venture far from home in the daytime. And that habit of trembling when he felt fearful was now far beyond his control. Sometimes he became afraid and trembled without knowing what had frightened him. The feeling would just come over him like a chill.

The car rattled slowly over the dusty road. Jennie sat erect and silent with a little absurd hat printed to her hair. Her useless eyes seemed very large, very white in their deep sockets. Suddenly Jeff heard her voice, and he inclined his head to catch the words.

“Is we passed Delia Moore’s house yet?” she asked

“Not yet,” he said.

“You must be drivin’ mighty slow, Jeff?”

“Nah, baby, I ain’t scairt.”

“You know how we agreed—we gotta keep on goin’.”

Jewels of perspiration appeared on Jeff’s forehead. His eyes rounded, blinked, became fixed on the road.

“I don’t know,” he said with a shiver, “I reckon it’s the only thing to do.”

“Hm.”

A flock of guinea fowls, pecking in the road, were scattered by the passing car. Some of them took to their wings; others hid under the bushes. A blue jay, swaying on a leafy twig, was annoying a roadside squirrel. Jeff held an even speed till he came near Delia’s place. Then he slowed down noticeably.

Delia’s house was really no house at all, but an abandoned stone building converted into a dwelling. It sat near a crossroads, beneath a single black cedar tree. There Delia, a cattish old creature of Jennie’s age, lived alone. She had been there for more years than anyone could remember, and long ago had won the disfavor of such women as Jennie. For in her younger days Delia had been a gayer, yellower, and saucier than seemed proper in those parts. Her ways with menfolks had been dark and suspicious.

And the fact that she had had as many husbands as children did not help her reputation.

“Yonder’s old Delia,” Jeff said as they passed.

“What she doin’?”

“Jes sittin’ in the do’,” he said.

“She see us?”

“Hm,” Jeff said. “Musta did.”

That relieved Jennie. It strengthened her to know that her old emeny had sen her passin her best clothes. That would give the old she-devil something to chew her gums and fret about, Jennie thought. Wouldn’t she have a fit if she didn’t find out? Old evil Delia! This would be just the thing for her. It would pay her back for being so evil. It would also pay her, Jennie thought, for the way she used to grin at Jeff—long ago, when her teeth were good.

The road became smooth and red, and Jeff could tell by the smell of the air that they were nearing the river. He could see the rise where the road turned and ran along parallel to the stream. The car chugged on monotonously. After a long silent spell, Jennie leaned against Jeff and spoke,

“How many bale o’ cotton you think we got standin’?” she said.

Jeff wrinkled his forehead as he calculated.

“‘Bout twenty-five, I reckon.”

“How many you make las’ year?”

“Twenty-eight,” he said. “How come you ask that?”

“I’s jes thinkin’,” Jennie said quietly.

“It don’t make a speck o’ difference though,” Jeff reflected. “If we get much or if we get little, we still gunna be in debt to old man Stevenson when he gets through counting up agin us. It’s took us a long time to learn that.”

Jennie was not listening to these words. She had fallen into a trancelike meditation. Her lips twitched. She chewed her gum and rubbed her gnarled hands nervously. Suddenly, she leaned forward, buried her face in the nervous hands, and burst into tears. She cried aloud in a dry cracked voice that suggested the rattle of fodder on dead stalks. She cried aloud like a child, for she had never learned to suppress a genuine sob. Her slight old frame shook heavily and seemed hardly able to sustain such violent grief.

“What’s the matter, baby?” Jeff asked awkwardly. “Why you cryn’ like all that?”

“It’s jes thinkin’,” she said.

“So you the one what’s scairt now, hunh?”

“I ain’t scairt, Jeff. I’s jes thinkin’ bout leavin’ eve’thing like this—eve’thing we been used to. It’s right sad-like.”

Jeff did not answer, and presently Jennie buried her face again and cried.

The sun was almost overhead. It beat down furiously on the dusty wagon-path road, on the parched roadside grass and the tiny battered car. Jeff’s hands, gripping the wheel, became wet with perspiration; his forehead sparkled. Jeff’s lips parted. His mouth shaped a hideous grimace. His face suggested the face of a man being burned. But the torture passed in his expression softened again.

“You mustn’t cry, baby,” he said to his wife. “We gotta be strong. We can’t break down.”

Jennie waited a few seconds, then said, “You reckon we oughta do it, Jeff? You reckon we oughta go „head an“ do it, really?”

Jeff’s voice choked; his eyes blurred. He was terrified to hear Jennie say the thing that had been in his mind all morning. She had egged him on when he had wanted more than anything in the world to wait, to reconsider, to think things over a little longer. Now she was getting cold feet. Actually, there was no need of thinking the question through again. It would only end in making the same painful decision once more. Jeff knew that.

There was no need of fooling around longer.

“We jes as well to do like we planned,” he said. “They ain’t nothin’ else for us now—it’s the bes“ thing.”

Jeff thought of the handicaps, the near impossibility of making another crop with his leg bothering him more and more each week. Then there was always the chance that he would have another stroke, like the one that had made him lame. Another one might kill him. The least it could do would be to leave him helpless. Jeff gasped—Lord Jesus! He could not bear to think of being helpless, like a baby on Jennie’s hands. Frail, blind Jennie.

The little pounding motor of the car worked harder and harder. The puff of steam from the cracked radiator became larger. Jeff realized that they were climbing a little rise. A moment later the road turned abruptly and he looked down upon the face of the river.

“Jeff.”

“Hunh?”

“Is that the water I hear?”

“Hm, Tha’s it.”

“Well, which way you goin’ now?”

“Down this-a way,” he said. “The road runs „long „side o“ the water a lil piece.”

She waited a while calmly. Then she said, “Drive faster.”

“A’right, baby,” Jeff said.

The water roared in the bed of the river. It was fifty or sixty feet below the level of the road. Between the road and the water there was a long smooth slope, sharply inclined. The slop was dry, the clay hardened by prolonged summer heat. The water below, roaring in a narrow channel, was noisy and wild.

“Jeff.”

“Hunh?”

“How far you goin’?”

“Jes a lil piece down the road.”

“You ain’t scairt, is you, Jeff?”

“Nah, baby,” he said trembling. “I ain’t scairt.”

“Remember how we planned it, Jeff. We gotta do it like we said. Brave-like.”

“Hm.”

Jeff’s brain darkened. Thing suddenly seemed unreal, like figure in a dream. Thought swam in his mind foolishly, hysterically, like little blind fish in a pool within a dense cave. They rushed again. Jeff soon became dizzy. He shuttered violently and turned to his wife.

“Jennie, I can’t do it. I can’t.” His voice broke pitifully.

She did not appear to be listening. All the grief had gone from her face. She sat erect, her unseeing eyes wide open, strained and frightful. Her glossy black skin had become dull. She seemed as thin, as sharp and bony, as a starved bird. Now, having suffered and endured the sadness of tearing herself away from beloved things, she showed no anguish. She was absorbed with her own thoughts, and she didn’t even hear Jeff’s voice shouting in her ear.

Jeff said nothing more. For an instant there was light in his cavernous brain. The great chamber was, for less than a second, peopled by characters he knew and loved. They were simple, healthy creatures, and they behaved in a manor that he could understand. They had quality. But since he had already taken leave of them long ago, the remembrance did not break his heart again. Young Jeff Patton was among them, the Jeff Patton of fifty years ago who went down to New Orleans with a crowd of country boys to the Mardi Gras doings. The gay young crowd, boys with candy-stripped shirts and rouged brown girls in noisy silks, was like a picture in his head. Yet it did not make him sad. On that very trip Slim Burns had killed Joe Heasley—the crowd had been broken up. Since then Jeff Patton’s world had been the Greenbriar Plantation. If there had been other Mardi Gras carnivals, he had not heard of them. Since then there had been no time; the years had fallen on him like waves. Now he was old, worn out. Another paralytic stroke (like the one he had already suffered) would put him on his back for keeps. In that condition, with a frail blind woman to look after him, he would be worse off than if he were dead.

Suddenly Jeff’s hands became steady. He actually felt brave. He slowed down the motor of the car and carefully pulled off the road. Below the water of the stream boomed, a soft thunder in the deep channel. Jeff ran the car onto the clay slope, pointed it directly toward the stream, and put his foot heavily on the accelerator. The little car leaped furiously down the steep incline toward the water. The movement was nearly as swift and direct as a fall. The two old black folks, sitting quietly side by side, showed no excitement. In another instant the car hit the water and dropped immediately out of sight.

A little later it logged in the mud of a shallow place. One wheel of the crushed and upturned little Ford become visible above the rushing water.

Young Goodman Brown

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afraid of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year."

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?"

"Then God bless you!" said Faith, with the pink ribbons; "and may you find all well when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; 't would kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach and walked onward side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking as I came through Boston, and that is full fifteen minutes ago."

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveller was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and who would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table or in King William's court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveller, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter thou wot'st of."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go; and if I convince thee not thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet."

"Too far! too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interpreting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

"Wickedness or not," said the traveller with the twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General

Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too--But these are state secrets."

"Can this be so?" cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. "Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day."

Thus far the elder traveller had listened with due gravity; but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted he again and again; then composing himself, "Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don't kill me with laughing."

"Well, then, to end the matter at once," said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, "there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I'd rather break my own."

"Nay, if that be the case," answered the other, "e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us that Faith should come to any harm."

As he spoke he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

"A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness at nightfall," said he. "But with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going."

"Be it so," said his fellow-traveller. "Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path."

Accordingly the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road until he had come within a staff's length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words--a prayer, doubtless--as she went. The traveller put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

"The devil!" screamed the pious old lady.

"Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?" observed the traveller, confronting her and leaning on his writhing stick.

"Ah, forsooth, and is it your worship indeed?" cried the good dame. "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But--would your worship believe it?--my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unchanced witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed with the juice of smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf's bane"

"Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe," said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

"Ah, your worship knows the recipe," cried the old lady, cackling aloud. "So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling."

"That can hardly be," answered her friend. "I may not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse; but here is my staff, if you will."

So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi. Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance. He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and, looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveller alone, who waited for him as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"That old woman taught me my catechism," said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment.

They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveller exhorted his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself. As they went, he plucked a branch of maple to serve for a walking stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them they became strangely withered and dried up as with a week's sunshine. Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther.

"Friend," said he, stubbornly, "my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven: is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?"

"You will think better of this by and by," said his acquaintance, composedly. "Sit here and rest yourself a while; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along."

Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was as speedily out of sight as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister in his morning walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but so purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but, owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot,

neither the travellers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the wayside, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tiptoe, pulling aside the branches and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination or ecclesiastical council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.

"Of the two, reverend sir," said the voice like the deacon's, "I had rather miss an ordination dinner than to-night's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, besides several of the Indian powwows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion."

"Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!" replied the solemn old tones of the minister. "Spur up, or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground."

The hoofs clattered again; and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered or solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying so deep into the heathen wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

"With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible, except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of towns-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine at Salem village, but never until now from a cloud of night. There was one voice of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain; and all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

"Faith!" shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, "Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

The cry of grief, rage, and terror was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices,

fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

"My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied moment. "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given."

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds--the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Goodman Brown when the wind laughed at him.

"Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your devilry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you."

In truth, all through the haunted forest there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out, and his cry was lost to his own ear by its unison with the cry of the desert.

In the interval of silence he stole forward until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon was in a blaze. As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

"A grave and dark-clad company," quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth they were such. Among them, quivering to and fro between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen next day at the council board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm that the lady of the governor was there. At least there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy them. Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his revered pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their pale-faced enemies were the Indian priests, or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.

"But where is Faith?" thought Goodman Brown; and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung; and still the chorus of the desert swelled between like the deepest tone of a mighty organ; and with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconcerted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke wreaths above the impious assembly. At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches.

"Bring forth the converts!" cried a voice that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms and led him to the blazing rock. Thither came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil's promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she. And there stood the proselytes beneath the canopy of fire.

"Welcome, my children," said the dark figure, "to the communion of your race. Ye have found thus young your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!"

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend worshippers were seen;

the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have revered from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshipping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds: how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels--blush not, sweet ones--have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest to an infant's funeral. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places--whether in church, bedchamber, street, field, or forest--where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot. Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power--than my power at its utmost--can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other."

They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

"Lo, there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race."

"Welcome," repeated the fiend worshippers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband, "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one."

Whether Faith obeyed he knew not. Hardly had he spoken when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp; while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on

Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema. Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechizing a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit with power and fervid eloquence, and, with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, waking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom.

The Devil and Tom Walker

by Washington Irving

A few miles from Boston, in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp, or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge, into a high ridge on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly and at night to the very foot of the hill. The elevation of the place permitted a good look out to be kept that no one was at hand, while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate.

About the year 1727, just at the time when earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meagre miserly fellow of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself; they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other. Whatever the woman could lay hands on she hid away: a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn looking house, that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveller stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron, stalked about a field where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of pudding stone, tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously at the passer by, and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine. The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom's wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them; the lonely wayfarer shrunk within himself at the horrid clamour and clapper clawing; eyed the den of discord askance, and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy.

One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighbourhood, he took what he considered a short cut homewards through the swamp. Like most short cuts, it was an ill chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high; which made it dark at noonday, and a retreat for all the owls of the neighbourhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses; where the green surface often betrayed the traveller into a gulf of black smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bull-frog, and the water snake, and where trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half drowned, half rotting, looking like alligators, sleeping in the mire.

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest; stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs; or pacing

carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees; startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern, or the quacking of a wild duck, rising on the wing from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a piece of firm ground, which ran out like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strong holds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children. Nothing remained of the Indian fort but a few embankments gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamp.

It was late in the dusk of evening that Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there for a while to rest himself. Any one but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely melancholy place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it from the stories handed down from the time of the Indian wars; when it was asserted that the savages held incantations here and made sacrifices to the evil spirit. Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind.

He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the tree toad, and delving with his walking staff into a mound of black mould at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mould, and lo! a cloven skull with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

"Humph!" said Tom Walker, as he gave the skull a kick to shake the dirt from it.

"Let that skull alone!" said a gruff voice.

Tom lifted up his eyes and beheld a great black man, seated directly opposite him on the stump of a tree. He was exceedingly surprised, having neither seen nor heard any one approach, and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither negro nor Indian. It is true, he was dressed in a rude, half Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body, but his face was neither black nor copper colour, but swarthy and dingy and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions; and bore an axe on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

"What are you doing in my grounds?" said the black man, with a hoarse growling voice.

"Your grounds?" said Tom, with a sneer; "no more your grounds than mine: they belong to Deacon Peabody."

"Deacon Peabody be d--d," said the stranger, "as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to his neighbour's. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring."

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody. He now looked round and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great men of the colony, and all more or less scored by the axe. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.

"He's just ready for burning!" said the black man, with a growl of triumph. "You see I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter."

"But what right have you," said Tom, "to cut down Deacon Peabody's timber?"

"The right of prior claim," said the other. "This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white faced race put foot upon the soil."

"And pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?" said Tom. "Oh, I go by various names. I am the Wild Huntsman in some countries; the Black Miner in others. In this neighbourhood I am known by the name of the Black Woodsman. I am he to whom the red men devoted this spot, and now and then roasted a white man by way of sweet smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of quakers and anabaptists; I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grand master of the Salem witches."

"The upshot of all which is, that, if I mistake not," said Tom, sturdily, "you are he commonly called Old Scratch."

"The same at your service!" replied the black man, with a half civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story, though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage in this wild lonely place, would have shaken any man's nerves: but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife, that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement, they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homewards. The black man told him of great sums of money which had been buried by Kidd the pirate, under the oak trees on the high ridge not far from the morass. All these were under his command and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favour. These he offered to place within Tom Walker's reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him: but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were, may easily be surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man to stick at trifles where money was in view. When they had reached the edge of the swamp the stranger paused.

"What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?" said Tom.

"There is my signature," said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom's forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home he found the black print of a finger burnt, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers with the usual flourish, that "a great man had fallen in Israel."

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down, and which was ready for burning. "Let the freebooter roast," said Tom, "who cares!" He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man's terms and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject, but the more she talked the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her. At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself.

Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she set off for the old Indian fort towards the close of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man whom she had met about twilight, hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forebore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain: midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety; especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver teapot and spoons and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed, another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It is one of those facts that have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp and sunk into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household booty, and made off to some other province; while others assert that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire on top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man with an axe on his shoulder was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph.

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he sat out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer's afternoon he searched about the gloomy place, but no wife was to be seen. He called her name repeatedly, but she was no where to be heard. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as he flew screaming by; or the bull frog croaked dolefully from a neighbouring pool. At length, it is said, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls began to hoot and the bats to flit about, his attention was attracted by the clamour of carrion crows that were hovering about a cypress tree. He looked and beheld a bundle tied in a check apron and hanging in the branches of the tree; with a great vulture perched hard by, as if keeping watch upon it. He leaped with joy, for he recognized his wife's apron, and supposed it to contain the household valuables.

"Let us get hold of the property," said he, consolingly to himself, "and we will endeavour to do without the woman."

As he scrambled up the tree the vulture spread its wide wings, and sailed off screaming into the deep shadows of the forest. Tom seized the check apron, but, woful sight! found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it.

Such, according to the most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had been accustomed to deal with her husband; but though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it. She must have died game however; for it is said Tom noticed many prints of cloven feet deeply stamped about the tree, and several handfuls of hair, that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the woodsman. Tom knew his wife's prowess by experience. He shrugged his shoulders as he looked at the signs of a fierce clapper clawing. "Egad," said he to himself, "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!"

Tom consoled himself for the loss of his property with the loss of his wife; for he was a man of fortitude. He even felt something like gratitude towards the black woodsman, who he considered had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a farther acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old black legs played shy, for whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for calling for; he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of his game.

At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's eagerness to the quick, and prepared him to agree to any thing rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodman dress, with his axe on his shoulder, sauntering along the edge of the swamp, and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advance with great indifference, made brief replies, and went on humming his tune.

By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle about the terms on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favours; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffick; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused; he was bad enough in all conscience; but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave dealer.

Finding Tom so squeamish on this point, he did not insist upon it, but proposed instead that he should turn usurer; the devil being extremely anxious for the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste.

"You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month," said the black man.

"I'll do it to-morrow, if you wish," said Tom Walker.

"You shall lend money at two per cent. a month."

"Egad, I'll charge four!" replied Tom Walker.

"You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchant to bankruptcy-

"I'll drive him to the d-l," cried Tom Walker, eagerly.

"You are the usurer for my money!" said the black legs, with delight. "When will you want the rhino?"

"This very night."

"Done!" said the devil.

"Done!" said Tom Walker. -So they shook hands, and struck a bargain.

A few days' time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a counting house in Boston. His reputation for a ready moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Every body remembers the days of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deluged with government bills; the famous Land Bank had been established; there had been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land jobbers went about with maps of grants, and townships, and Eldorados, lying nobody knew where, but which every body was ready to purchase. In a word, the great speculating fever which breaks out every now and then in the country, had raged to an alarming degree, and every body was dreaming of making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual the fever had subsided; the dream had gone off, and the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of "hard times."

At this propitious time of public distress did Tom Walker set up as a usurer in Boston. His door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and the adventurous; the gambling speculator; the dreaming land jobber; the thriftless tradesman; the merchant with cracked credit; in short, every one driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices, hurried to Tom Walker.

Thus Tom was the universal friend of the needy, and he acted like a "friend in need;" that is to say,

he always exacted good pay and good security. In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms. He accumulated bonds and mortgages; gradually squeezed his customers closer and closer; and sent them at length, dry as a sponge from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand; became a rich and mighty man, and exalted his cocked hat upon change. He built himself, as usual, a vast house, out of ostentation; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished out of parsimony. He even set up a carriage in the fullness of his vain glory, though he nearly starved the horses which drew it; and as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axle trees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors he was squeezing.

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, he began to feel anxious about those of the next. He thought with regret on the bargain he had made with his black friend, and set his wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. He became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent church goer. He prayed loudly and strenuously as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when he had sinned most during the week, by the clamour of his Sunday devotion. The quiet christians who had been modestly and steadfastly travelling Zionward, were struck with self reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new-made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious, as in money matters; he was a stern supervisor and censurer of his neighbours, and seemed to think every sin entered up to their account became a credit on his own side of the page. He even talked of the expediency of reviving the persecution of quakers and anabaptists. In a word, Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches.

Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, Tom had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due. That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, it is said he always carried a small bible in his coat pocket. He had also a great folio bible on his counting house desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions he would lay his green spectacles on the book, to mark the place, while he turned round to drive some usurious bargain.

Some say that Tom grew a little crack brained in his old days, and that fancying his end approaching, he had his horse new shod, saddled and bridled, and buried with his feet uppermost; because he supposed that at the last day the world would be turned upside down; in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives fable. If he really did take such a precaution it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend which closes his story in the following manner.

On one hot afternoon in the dog days, just as a terrible black thundergust was coming up, Tom sat in his counting house in his white linen cap and India silk morning gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land jobber begged him to grant a few months indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated and refused another day.

"My family will be ruined and brought upon the parish," said the land jobber. "Charity begins at home," replied Tom, "I must take care of myself in these hard times."

"You have made so much money out of me," said the speculator.

Tom lost his patience and his piety-"The devil take me," said he, "if I have made a farthing!"

Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse which neighed and stamped with impatience.

"Tom, you're come for!" said the black fellow, gruffly. Tom shrunk back, but too late. He had left his little bible at the bottom of his coat pocket, and his big bible on the desk buried under the mortgage he was about to foreclose: never was sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child astride the horse and away he galloped in the midst of a thunder storm. The clerks stuck their pens behind their ears and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the streets; his white cap bobbing up and down; his morning gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man he had disappeared.

Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman who lived on the borders of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thunder gust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and that when he ran to the window he just caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills and down into the black hemlock swamp towards the old Indian fort; and that shortly after a thunderbolt fell in that direction which seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins and tricks of the devil in all kinds of shapes from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffers all his bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and was burnt to the ground.

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill gotten wealth. Let all griping money brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak trees, from whence he dug Kidd's money is to be seen to this day; and the neighbouring swamp and old Indian fort is often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in a morning gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact, the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is the origin of that popular saying, prevalent throughout New-England, of "The Devil and Tom Walker."

The Devil and Daniel Webster

by Stephen Vincent Benet

It's a story they tell in the border country, where Massachusetts joins Vermont and New Hampshire.

Yes, Dan'l Webster's dead—or, at least, they buried him. But every time there's a thunderstorm around Marshfield, they say you can hear his rolling voice in the hollows of the sky. And they say that if you go to his grave and speak loud and clear, "Dan'l Webster—Dan'l Webster!" the ground'll begin to shiver and the trees begin to shake. And after a while you'll hear a deep voice saying, "Neighbor, how stands the Union?" Then you better answer the Union stands as she stood, rock-bottomed and copper-sheathed, one and indivisible, or he's liable to rear right out of the ground. At least, that's what I was told when I was a youngster.

You see, for a while, he was the biggest man in the country. He never got to be President, but he was the biggest man. There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty and they told stories about him that were like the stories of patriarchs and such. They said when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out in the sky, and once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground. They said when he walked the woods with his fishing rod, Killall, the trout would jump out of the streams right into his pockets, for they knew it was use putting up a fight against him; and, when he argued a case, he could turn on the harps of the blessed and the shaking of the earth underground. That was the kind of man he was, and his big farm up at Marshfield was suitable to him. The chickens he raised were all white meat down through the drumsticks, and the cows were tended like children, and the big ram he called Goliath had horns with a curl like a morning-glory vine and could butt through an iron door. But Dan'l wasn't one of your gentlemen farmers; he knew all the way of the land, and he'd be up by candlelight to see that the chores got done. A man with a mouth like a mastiff, a brow like a mountain and eyes like burning anthracite—that was Dan'l Webster in his prime. And the biggest case he argued never got written down in the books, for he argued it against the devil, nip and tuck and no holds barred. And this is the way I used to hear it told.

There was a man named Jabez Stone, lived at Cross Corners, New Hampshire. He wasn't a bad man to start with, but he was an unlucky man. If he planted corn, he got borers; if he planted potatoes, he got blight. He had good enough land, but it didn't prosper him; he had a decent wife and children, but the more children he had, the les there was to feed them. If stones cropped up in his neighbor's field, boulders boiled up in his; if he had a horse with spavins, he'd trade it for one with the staggers and give something extra. There's some folks bound to be like that, apparently. But one day Jabez Stone got sick of the whole business.

He'd been plowing that morning and he'd just broke the plowshare on a rock that he could have sworn hadn't been there yesterday. And, as he stood looking at the plowshare, the off horse began to cough—that ropy kid of cough that means sickness and horse doctors. There were two children down with the measles, his wife was ailing, and he had a whitlow on his thumb. It was about the last straw for Jabez Stone. "I vow," he said, and he looked around him kind of desperate—"I vow it's enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil! And I would, too, for two cents!"

Then he felt a kind of queerness come over him at having said what he'd said; though, naturally, being a New Hampshireman, he wouldn't take it back. But, all the same, when it got to be evening and, as far as he could see, no notice had been taken, he felt relieved in his mind, for he was a religious man. But notice is always taken, sooner or later, just like the Good Book says. And, sure enough, next day, about suppertime, a soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger drove up in a handsome buggy and asked for Jabez Stone.

Well, Jabez told his family it was a lawyer, come to see him about a legacy. But he knew who it was. He didn't like the looks of the stranger, nor the way he smiled with his teeth. They were white teeth, and plentiful—some say they were filed to a point, but I wouldn't vouch for that. And he didn't like it when the dog took one look at the stranger and ran away howling, with his tail between his legs. But having passed his word, more or less, he stuck to it, and they went out behind the barn and made their bargain. Jabez Stone had to prick his finger to sign, and the stranger lent him a silver pin. The wound healed clean, but it left a little white scar.

After that, all of a sudden, things began to pick up and prosper for Jabez Stone. His cows got fat and his horses sleek, his crops were the envy of the neighborhood, and lightning might strike all over the valley, but it wouldn't strike his barn. Pretty soon, he was one of the prosperous people of the county; they asked him to stand for selectman, and he stood for it; there began to be talk of running him for state senate. All in all, you might say the Stone family was as happy and contented as cats in a dairy. And so they were, except for Jabez Stone.

The stranger came up through the lower field, switching his boots with a cane—they were handsome black boots, but Jabez Stone never liked the look of them, particularly the toes. And after he'd passed the time of day, he said, "Well, Mr. Stone, you're a hummer! It's a very pretty property you've got here, Mr. Stone."

"Well, some might favor it and others might not," said Jabez Stone, for he was a New Hampshireman.

"Oh, no need to decry your industry!" said the stranger, very easy, showing his teeth in a smile. "After all, we know what's been done, and it's been according to contract and specifications. So when—ahem—the mortgage falls due next year, you shouldn't have any regrets."

"Speaking of that mortgage, mister," said Jabez Stone, and he looked around for help to the earth and sky, "I'm beginning to have one or two doubts about it."

"Doubts?" said the stranger, not quite so pleasantly.

"Why, yes," said Jabez Stone. "This being the USA and me always having been a religious man." He cleared his throat and got bolder. "Yes, sir," he said, "I'm beginning to have considerable doubts as to that mortgage holding in court."

"There's courts and courts," said the stranger, clicking his teeth. "Still, we might as well have a look at the original document." And he hauled out a big black pocketbook, full of papers. "Sherwin, Slater, Stevens, Stone," he muttered. "I, Jabez Stone, for a term of seven years—Oh, it's quite in order, I think."

But Jabez Stone wasn't listening, for he saw something else flutter out of the black pocketbook. It was something that looked like a moth, but it wasn't a moth. And as Jabez Stone stared at it, it seemed to speak to him in a small sort of piping voice, terrible small and thin, but terrible human. "Neighbor Stone!" it squeaked. "Neighbor Stone! Help me! For heaven's sake, help me!"

But before Jabez Stone could stir hand or foot, the stranger whipped out a big bandanna handkerchief, caught the creature in it, just like a butterfly, and started tying up the ends of the bandanna.

"Sorry for the interruption," he said, "As I was saying—"

But Jabez Stone was shaking all over like a scared horse.

"That's Miser Stevens' voice!" he said, in a croak. "And you've got him in your handkerchief!"

The stranger looked a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I really should have transferred him to the collecting box," he said with a simper, "but there were some rather unusual specimens there and I didn't want them crowded. Well, well, these little contretemps will occur."

"I don't know what you mean by contertan," said Jabez Stone, "but that was Miser Stevens' voice! And he ain't dead! You can't tell me he is! He was just as spry and mean as a woodchuck, Tuesday!"

"In the midst of life—" said the stranger, kind of pious. "Listen!" Then a bell began to toll in the valley and Jabez Stone listened, with the sweat running down his face. For he knew it was tolled for Miser Stevens and that he was dead.

"These long-standing accounts," said the stranger with a sigh; "one really hates to close them. But business is business."

He still had the bandanna in his hand, and Jabez Stone felt sick as he saw the cloth struggle and flutter.

"Are they all as small as that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Small?" said the stranger. "Oh, I see what you mean. Why, they vary." He measured Jabez Stone with his eyes, and his teeth showed. "Don't worry, Mr. Stone," he said.

"You'll go with a very good grade. I wouldn't trust you outside the collecting box. Now, a man like Dan'l Webster, of course—well, we'd have to build a special box for him, and even at that, I imagine the wingspread would astonish you. But, in your case, as I was saying—"

"Put that handkerchief away!" said Jabez Stone, and he began to beg and to pray. But the best he could get at the end was a three years' extension, with conditions.

But till you make a bargain like that, you've got no idea of how fast four years can run. By the last months of those years, Jabez Stone's known all over the state and there's talk of running him for

governor—and it’s dust and ashes in his mouth. For every day, when he gets up, he thinks, “There’s one more night gone,” and every night when he lies down, he thinks of the black pocketbook and the soul of Miser Stevens, and it makes him sick at heart. Till, finally, he can’t bear it any longer, and, in the last days of the the last year, he hitches up his horse and drives off to see Dan’l Webster. For Dan’l was born in New Hampshire, only a few miles from Cross Corners, and it’s well known that he has a particular soft spot for old neighbors.

It was early in the morning when he got to Marshfield, but Dan’l was up already, talking Latin to the farmhands and wrestling with the ram, Goliath, and trying out a new trotter and working up speeches to make against John C. Calhoun. But when he heard a New Hampshireman had come to see him, he dropped everything else he was doing, for that was Dan’l’s way. He gave Jabez Stone a breakfast that five men couldn’t eat, went into the living history of every man and woman in Cross Corners, and finally asked him how he could serve him.

Jabez Stone allowed that it was a kind of mortgage case.

“Well, I haven’t pleaded a mortgage case in a long time, and I don’t generally plead now, except before the Supreme Court,” said Dan’l, “but if I can, I’ll help you.”

“Then I’ve got hope for the first time in ten years,” said Jabez Stone, and told him the details.

Dan’l walked up and down as he listened, hands behind his back, now and then asking a question, now and then plunging his eyes at the floor, as if they’d bore through it like gimlets. When Jabez Stone had finished, Dan’l puffed out his cheeks and blew. Then he turned to Jabez Stone and a smile broke over his face like the sunrise over Monadnock.

“You’ve certainly given yourself the devil’s own row to hoe, Neighbor Stone,” he said, “but I’ll take your case.”

“You’ll take it?” said Jabez Stone, hardly daring to believe.

“Yes,” said Dan’l Webster. “I’ve got about seventy-five other things to do and the Missouri Compromise to straighten out, but I’ll take your case. For if two New Hampshiremen aren’t a match for the devil, we might as well give the country back to the Indians.”

Then he shook Jabez Stone by the hand and said, “Did you come down here in a hurry?”

“Well, I admit I made time,” said Jabez Stone.

“You’ll go back faster,” said Dan’l Webster, and he told ‘em to hitch up Constitution and Constellation to the carriage. They were matched grays with one white forefoot, and they stepped like greased lightning.

Well, I won’t describe how excited and pleased the whole Stone family was to have the great Dan’l Webster for a guest, when they finally got there. Jabez Stone had lost his hat on the way, blown off when they overtook a wind, but he didn’t take much account of that. But after supper he sent the family off to bed, for he had most particular business with Mr. Webster. Mrs. Stone wanted them

to sit in the front parlor, but Dan'l Webster knew front parlors and said he preferred the kitchen. So it was there they sat, waiting for the stranger, with a jug on the table between them and a bright fire on the hearth—the stranger being scheduled to show up on the stroke of midnight, according to specifications.

Well, most men wouldn't have asked for better company than Dan'l Webster and a jug. But with every tick of the clock Jabez Stone got sadder and sadder. His eyes roved round, and though he sampled the jug you could see he couldn't taste it. Finally, on the stroke of 11:30 he reached over and grabbed Dan'l Webster by the arm.

"Mr. Webster, Mr. Webster!" he said, and his voice was shaking with fear and a desperate courage. "For heaven's sake, Mr. Webster, harness your horses and get away from this place while you can!"

"You've brought me a long way, neighbor, to tell me you don't like my company," said Dan'l Webster, quite peaceable, pulling at the jug.

"Miserable wretch that I am!" groaned Jabez Stone. "I've brought you a devilish way, and now I see my folly. Let him take me if he wills. I don't hanker after it, I must say, but I can stand it. But you're the Union's stay and New Hampshire's pride! He mustn't get you, Mr. Webster! He mustn't get you!"

Dan'l Webster looked at the distracted man, all gray and shaking in the firelight, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm obliged to you, Neighbor Stone," he said gently. "It's kindly thought of. But there's a jug on the table and a case in hand. And I never left a jug or a case half finished in my life."

And just at that moment there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster, very coolly, "I thought your clock was a trifle slow, Neighbor Stone." He stepped to the door and opened it. "Come in!" he said. The stranger came in—very dark and tall he looked in the firelight. He was carrying a box under his arm—a black, japanned box with little air holes in the lid. At the sight of the box, Jabez Stone gave a low cry and shrank into a corner of the room.

"Mr. Webster, I presume," said the stranger, very polite, but with his eyes glowing like a fox's deep in the woods.

"Attorney of record for Jabez Stone," he said Dan'l Webster, but his eyes were glowing too. "Might I ask your name?"

"I've gone by a good many," said the stranger carelessly. "Perhaps Scratch will do for the evening. I'm often called that in these regions."

Then he sat down at the table and poured himself a drink from the jug. The liquor was cold in the jug, but it came steaming into the glass.

“And now,” said the stranger, smiling and showing his teeth, “I shall call upon you, as a law-abiding citizen, to assist me in taking possession of my property.”

Well, with that the argument began—and it went hot and heavy. At first, Jabez Stone had a flicker of hope, but when he saw Dan’l Webster being forced back at point after point, he just scrunched in his corner, with his eyes on that japanned box. For there wasn’t any doubt as to the deed or the signature—that was the worst of it. Dan’l Webster twisted and turned and thumped his fist on the table, but he couldn’t get away from that. He offered to compromise the case; the stranger wouldn’t hear of it. He pointed out the property had increased in value, and state senators ought to be worth more; the stranger stuck to the letter of the law. He was a great lawyer, Dan’l Webster, but we know who’s the King of Lawyers, as the Good Book tells us, and it seemed as if, for the first time, Dan’l Webster had met his match.

Finally, the stranger yawned a little. “Your spirited efforts on behalf of your client do you credit, Mr. Webster,” he said, “but if you have no more arguments to adduce, I’m rather pressed for time—”and Jabez Stone shuddered.

Dan’l Webster’s brow looked dark as a thundercloud.

“Pressed or not, you shall not have this man!” he thundered. “Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the service of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in ‘12 and we’ll fight all hell for it again!”

“Foreign?” said the stranger. “And who call me a foreigner?”

“Well, I never yet heard of the dev—of your claiming American citizenship,” said Dan’l Webster with surprise.

“And who with better right?” said the stranger, with one of his terrible smiles. “When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck. Am I not in your books and stories and beliefs, from the first settlements on? Am I not spoken of, still, in every church in New England? ‘Tis true the North claims me for a Southerner and the South for a Northerner, but I am neither. I am merely an honest American like yourself—and of the best descent—for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don’t like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours.”

“Aha!” said Dan’l Webster, with the veins standing out in his forehead. “Then I stand on the Constitution! I demand a trial for my client!”

“The case is hardly one for an ordinary court,” said the stranger, his eyes flickering.

“And, indeed, the lateness of the hour—”

“Let it be any court you choose, so it is an American judge and an American jury!” said Dan’l Webster in his pride. “Let it be the quick or the dead; I’ll abide the issue!”

“You have said it,” said the stranger, and pointed his finger at the door. And with that, and all of a sudden, there was a rushing of wind outside and a noise of footsteps. They came, clear and distinct, through the night. And yet, they were not like the footsteps of living men.

“In God’s name, who comes by so late?” cried Jabez Stone, in an ague of fear.

“The jury Mr. Webster demands,” said the stranger, sipping at his boiling glass. “You must pardon the rough appearance of one or two; they will have come a long way.”

And with that the fire burned blue and the door blew open and twelve men entered, one by one.

If Jabez Stone had been sick with terror before, he was blind with terror now. For there was Walter Butler, the Loyalist, who spread fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution; and there was Simon Girty, the renegade, who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn. His eyes were green, like a catamount’s, and the stains on his hunting shirt did not come from the blood of the deer. King Philip was there, wild and proud as he had been in life, with the great gash in his head that gave him his death wound, and cruel Governor Dale, who broke men on the wheel. There was Morton of Merry Mount, who so vexed the Plymouth Colony, with his flushed, loose, handsome face and his hate of the godly. There was Teach, the bloody pirate, with his black beard curling on his breast. The Reverend John Smeet, with his strangler’s hands and his Geneva gown, walked as daintily as he had to the gallows. The red print of the rope was still around his neck, but he carried a perfumed handkerchief in one hand. One and all, they came into the room with the fires of hell still upon them, and the stranger named their names and their deeds as they came, till the tale of twelve was told. Yet the stranger had told the truth—they had all played a part in America.

“Are you satisfied with the jury, Mr. Webster?” said the stranger mockingly, when they had taken their places.

The sweat stood upon Dan’l Webster’s brow, but his voice was clear.

“Quite satisfied,” he said. “Though I miss General Arnold from the company.”

“Benedict Arnold is engaged upon other business,” said the stranger, with a glower.

“Ah, you asked for justice, I believe.”

He pointed his finger once more, and a tall man, soberly clad in Puritan garb, with the burning gaze of the fanatic, stalked into the room and took his judge’s place.

“Justice Hathorne is a jurist of experience,” said the stranger. “He presided at certain witch trials once held in Salem. There were others who repented of the business later, but not he.”

“Repent of such notable wonders and undertakings?” said the stern old justice. “Nay, hang them—hang them all!” And he muttered to himself in a way that struck ice into the soul of Jabez Stone.

Then the trial began, and, as you might expect, it didn’t look anyways good for the defense. And Jabez Stone didn’t make much of witness in his own behalf. He took one look at Simon Girty and screeched, and they had to put him back in his corner in a kind of swoon.

It didn't halt the trial, though; the trial went on, as trials do. Dan'l Webster had faced some hard juries and hanging judges in his time, but this was the hardest he'd ever faced, and he knew it. They sat there with a kind of glitter in their eyes, and the stranger's smooth voice went on and on. Every time he'd raise an objection, it'd be "Objection sustained," but whenever Dan'l objected, it'd be "Objection denied." Well, you couldn't expect fair play from a fellow like this Mr. Scratch.

It got to Dan'l in the end, and he began to heat, like iron in the forge. When he got up to speak he was going to flay that stranger with every trick known to the law, and the judge and jury too. He didn't care if it was contempt of court or what would happen to him for it. He didn't care any more what happened to Jabez Stone. He just got madder and madder, thinking of what he'd say. And yet, curiously enough, the more he thought about it, the less he was able to arrange his speech in his mind.

Till, finally, it was time for him to get up on his feet, and he did so, all ready to bust out with lightning and denunciations. But before he started he looked over the judge and jury for a moment, such being his custom. And he noticed the glitter in their eyes was twice as strong as before, and they all leaned forward. Like hounds just before they get the fox, they thickened as he watched them. Then he saw what he'd been about to do, and he wiped his forehead, as a man might who's just escaped falling into a pit in the dark.

For it was him they'd come for, not only Jabez Stone. He read it in the glitter of their eyes and in the way the stranger hid his mouth with one hand. And if he fought them with their own weapons, he'd fall into their power; he knew that, though he couldn't have told you how. It was his own anger and horror that burned in their eyes; and he'd have to wipe that out or the case was lost. He stood there for a moment, his black eyes burning like anthracite. And then he began to speak.

He started off in a low voice, though you could hear every word. They say he could call on the harps of the blessed when he chose. And this was just as simple and easy as a man could talk. But he didn't start out by condemning or reviling. He was talking about the things that make a country a country, and a man a man.

And he began with the simple things that everybody's known and felt—the freshness of a fine morning when you're young, and the taste of food when you're hungry, and the new day that's every day when you're a child. He took them up and he turned them in his hands. They were good things for any man. But without freedom, they sickened. And when he talked of those enslaved, and the sorrows of slavery, his voice got like a big bell. He talked of the early days of America and the men who had made those days. It wasn't a spread-eagle speech, but he made you see it. He admitted all the wrong that had ever been done. But he showed how, out of the wrong and the right, the suffering and the starvations, something new had come. And everybody had played a part in it, even the traitors.

Then he turned to Jabez Stone and showed him as he was—an ordinary man who'd had hard luck and wanted to change it. And, because he'd wanted to change it, now he was going to be punished for all eternity. And yet there was good in Jabez Stone, and he showed that good. He was hard and mean, in some ways, but he was a man. There was sadness in being a man, but it was a proud thing too. And he showed what the pride of it was till you couldn't help feeling it. Yes, even in hell, if a

man was a man, you'd know it. and he wasn't pleading for any one person any more, though his voice rang like an organ. He was telling the story and the failures and the endless journey of mankind. They got tricked and trapped and bamboozled, but it was a great journey. And no demon that was ever foaled could know the inwardness of it—it took a man to do that.

The fire began to die on the hearth and the wind before morning to blow. The light was getting gray in the room when Dan'l Webster finished. And his words came back at the end to New Hampshire ground, and the one spot of land that each man loves and clings to. He painted a picture of that, and to each one of that jury he spoke of things long forgotten. For his voice could search the heart, and that was his gift and his strength. And to one, his voice was like the forest and its secrecy, and to another like the sea and the storms of the sea; and one heard the cry of his lost nation in it, and another saw a little harmless scene he hadn't remembered for years. But each saw something. And when Dan'l Webster finished he didn't know whether or not he'd saved Jabez Stone. But he knew he'd done a miracle. For the glitter was gone from the eyes of the judge and jury, and, for the moment, they were men again, and knew they were men.

"The defense rests," said Dan'l Webster, and stood there like a mountain. His ears were still ringing with his speech, and he didn't hear anything else till he heard Judge Hathorne say, "The jury will retire to consider its verdict."

Walter Butler rose in his place and his face had a dark, gay pride on it.

"The jury has considered its verdict," he said, and looked the stranger full in the eye.

"We find for the defendant, Jabez Stone."

With that, the smile left the stranger's face, but Walter Butler did not flinch.

"Perhaps 'tis not strictly in accordance with the evidence," he said, "but even the damned may salute the eloquence of Mr. Webster."

With that, the long crow of a rooster split the gray morning sky, and judge and jury were gone from the room like a puff of smoke and as if they had never been there. The stranger turned to Dan'l Webster, smiling wryly.

"Major Butler was always a bold man," he said. "I had not thought him quite so bold. Nevertheless, my congratulations, as between two gentlemen."

"I'll have that paper first, if you please," said Dan'l Webster, and he took it and tore it into four pieces. It was queerly warm to the touch. "And now," he said, "I'll have you!" and his hand came down like a bear trap on the stranger's arm. For he knew that once you bested anybody like Mr. Scratch in fair fight, his power on you was gone. And he could see that Mr. Scratch knew it too.

The stranger twisted and wriggled, but he couldn't get out of that grip. "Come, come, Mr. Webster," he said, smilingly palely. "This sort of thing is ridic—ouch!—is ridiculous. If you're worried about the costs of the case, naturally, I'd be glad to pay—"

"And so you shall!" said Dan'l Webster, shaking him till his teeth rattled. "For you'll sit right down

at that table and draw up a document, promising never to bother Jabez Stone nor his heirs or assigns nor any other New Hampshireman till doomsday! For any hades we want to raise in this state, we can raise ourselves, without assistance from strangers.”

“Ouch!” said the stranger. “Ouch! Well, they never did run very big to the barrel, but—ouch!—I agree!”

So he sat down and drew up the document. But Dan’l Webster kept his hand on his coat collar all the time.

“And, now, may I go?” said the stranger, quite humble, when Dan’l’d seen the document was in proper and legal form.

“Go?” said Dan’l, giving him another shake. “I’m still trying to figure out what I’ll do with you. For you’ve settled the costs of the case, but you haven’t settled with me. I think I’ll take you back to Marshfield,” he said, kind of reflective. “I’ve got a ram there named Goliath that can butt through an iron door. I’d kind of like to turn you loose in his field and see what he’d do.”

Well, with that the stranger began to beg and to plead. And he begged and he pled so humble that finally Dan’l, who was naturally kindhearted, agreed to let him go. The stranger seemed terrible grateful for that and said, just to show they were friends, he’d tell Dan’l’s fortune before leaving. So Dan’l agreed to that, though he didn’t take much stock in fortune-tellers ordinarily. But, naturally, the stranger was a little different.

Well, he pried and he peered at the lines in Dan’l’s hands. And he told him one thing and another that was quite remarkable. But they were all in the past.

“Yes, all that’s true, and it happened,” said Dan’l Webster. “But what’s to come in the future?”

The stranger grinned, kind of happily, and shook his head.

“The future’s not as you think it,” he said. “It’s dark. You have a great ambition, Mr. Webster.”

“I have,” said Dan’l firmly, for everybody knew he wanted to be President.

“It seems almost within your grasp,” said the stranger, “but you will not attain it. Lesser men will be made President and you will be passed over.”

“And, if I am, I’ll still be Daniel Webster,” said Dan’l. “Say on.”

“You have two strong sons,” said the stranger, shaking his head. “You look to found a line. But each will die in war and neither reach greatness.”

“Live or die, they are still my sons,” said Dan’l Webster. “Say on.”

“You have made great speeches,” said the stranger. “You will make more.”

“Ah,” said Dan’l Webster.

“But the last great speech you make will turn many of your own against you,” said the stranger. “They will call you Ichabod, they will call you by other names. Even in New England, some will say you have turned your coat and sold your country, and their voices will be loud against you till you die.”

“So it is an honest speech, it does not matter what men say,” said Dan’l Webster. Then he looked at the stranger and their glances locked.

“One question,” he said. “I have fought for the Union all my life. Will I see that fight won against those who would tear it apart?”

“Not while you live,” said the stranger, grimly, “but it will be won. And after you are dead, there are thousands who will fight for your cause, because of words that you spoke.”

“Why, then, you long-barreled, slab-sided, lantern-jawed, fortune-telling note shaver!” said Dan’l Webster, with a great roar of laughter, “be off with you to your own place before I put my mark on you! For, by the thirteen original colonies, I’d go to the Pit itself to save the Union!”

And with that he drew back his foot for a kick that would have stunned a horse. It was only the tip of his shoe that caught the stranger, but he went flying out of the door with his collecting box under his arm.

“And now,” said Dan’l Webster, seeing Jabez Stone beginning to rouse from his swoon,

“let’s see what’s left in the jug, for it’s dry work talking all night. I hope there’s pie for breakfast, Neighbor Stone.”

But they say whenever the devil comes near Marshfield, even now, he gives it a wide berth. And he hasn’t been seen in the state of New Hampshire from that day to this. I’m not talking about Massachusetts or Vermont.

The Man Who Was Almost a Man

by *Richard Wright*

Dave struck out across the fields, looking homeward through parting light. Whut's the use talkin wid em niggers in the field? Anyhow, his mother was putting supper on the table. Them niggers; can't understan nothing. One of these days he was going to get a gun and practice shooting, then they couldn't talk to him as though he were a little boy. He slowed, looking at the ground. Shucks, Ah ain scareda them even ef they are biggem me! Aw, Ah know whut Ahma do. Ahm going by ol Joe's sto n git that Sears Roebuck catlog n look at them guns. Mebbe Ma will lemme buy one when she gits mah pay from ol man Hawkins. Ahma beg her t gimme some money. Ahm ol ernough to hava gun. Ahm seventeen. Almost a man. He strode, feeling his long loose-jointed limbs. Shucks, a man oughta hava little gun aftah he done worked hard all day.

He came in sight of Joe's store. A yellow lantern glowed on the front porch. He mounted steps and went through the screen door, hearing it bang behind him. There was a strong smell of coal oil and mackerel fish. He felt very confident until he saw fat Joe walk in through the rear door, then his courage began to ooze.

"Howdy, Dave! Whutcha want?"

"How yuh, Mistah Joe? Aw, Ah don wanna buy nothing. Ah jus wanted t see ef yuhd lemme look at tha catlog erwhile."

"Sure! You wanna see it here?"

"Nawsuh. Ah wans t take it home wid me. Ah'll bring it back termorrow when Ah come in from the fiels. "

"You plannin on buying something?"

"Yessuh."

"Your ma lettin you have your own money now?"

"Shucks. Mistah Joe, Ahm gittin t be a man like anybody else!"

Joe laughed and wiped his greasy white face with a red bandanna.

"Whut you plannin on buyin?"

Dave looked at the floor, scratched his head, scratched his thigh, and smiled. Then he looked up shyly.

"Ah'll tell yuh, Mistah Joe, ef yuh promise yuh won't tell."

"I promise."

"Waal, Ahma buy a gun."

"A gun? Whut you want with a gun?"

"Ah wanna keep it."

"You ain't nothing but a boy. You don't need a gun."

"Aw, lemme have the catlog, Mistah Joe. Ah'll bring it back."

Joe walked through the rear door. Dave was elated. He looked around at barrels of sugar and flour. He heard Joe coming back. He craned his neck to see if he were bringing the book. Yeah, he's got it. Gawddog, he's got it!

"Here, but be sure you bring it back. It's the only one I got."

"Sho, Mistah Joe."

"Say, if you wanna buy a gun, why don't you buy one from me? I gotta gun to sell."

"Will it shoot?"

"Sure it'll shoot."

"Whut kind is it?"

"Oh, it's kinda old . . . a left-hand Wheeler. A pistol. A big one."

"Is it got bullets in it?"

"It's loaded."

"Kin Ah see it?"

"Where's your money?"

"Whut yuh wan fer it?"

"I'll let you have it for two dollars."

"Just two dollahs? Shucks, Ah could buy tha when Ah git mah pay."

"I'll have it here when you want it."

"Awright, suh. Ah be in fer it."

He went through the door, hearing it slam again behind him. Ahma git some money from Ma n buy me a gum! Only two dollahs! He tucked the thick catalogue under his arm and hurried.

"Where yuh been, boy?" His mother held a steaming dish of black-eyed peas.

"Aw, Ma, Ah jus stopped down the road t talk wid the boys."

"Yuh know bettah t keep suppah waitin."

He sat down, resting the catalogue on the edge of the table.

"Yuh git up from there and git to the well n wash yosef! Ah ain feedin no hogs in mah house!" She grabbed his shoulder and pushed him. He stumbled out of the room, then came back to get the catalogue.

"Whut this?"

"Aw, Ma, it's jusa catlog."

"Who yuh git it from?"

"From Joe, down at the sto."

"Waal, thas good. We kin use it in the outhouse."

"Naw, Ma." He grabbed for it. "Gimme ma catlog, Ma."

She held onto it and glared at him.

"Quit hollerin at me! Whut's wrong wid yuh? Yuh crazy?"

"But Ma, please. It ain mine! It's Joe's! He tol me t bring it back t im termorrow. "

She gave up the book. He stumbled down the back steps, hugging the thick book under his arm. When he had splashed water on his face and hands, he groped back to the kitchen and fumbled in a corner for the towel. He bumped into a chair; it clattered to the floor. The catalogue sprawled at his feet. When he had dried his eyes he snatched up the book and held it again under his arm. His mother stood watching him.

"Now, ef yuh gonma act a fool over that ol book, Ah'll take it n burn it up."

"Naw, Ma, please."

"Waal, set down n be still!"

He sat down and drew the oil lamp close. He thumbed page after page, unaware of the food his mother set on the table. His father came in. Then his small brother.

"Whutchu got there, Dave?" his father asked.

"Jusa catlog," he answered, not looking up.

"Yeah, here they is!" His eyes glowed at blue-and-black revolvers. He glanced up, feeling sudden guilt. His father was watching him. He eased the book under the table and rested it on his knees. After the blessing was asked, he ate. He scooped up peas and swallowed fat meat without chewing. Buttermilk helped to wash it down. He did not want to mention money before his father. He would do much better by cornering his mother when she was alone. He looked at his father uneasily out of the edge of his eye.

"Boy, how come yuh don quit foolin wid tha book n eat yo suppah?"

"Yessuh."

"How you n ol man Hawkins gitten erlong?"

"Suh?"

"Can't yuh hear? Why don yuh lissen? Ah ast yu how wuz yuh n ol man Hawkins gittin erlong?"

"Oh, swell, Pa. Ah plows mo Ian than anybody over there."

"Waal, yuh oughta keep yo mind on whut yuh doin."

"Yessuh. "

He poured his plate full of molasses and sopped it up slowly with a chunk of combread. When his father and brother had left the kitchen, he still sat and looked again at the guns in the catalogue, longing to muster courage enough to present his case to his mother. Lawd, ef Ah only had tha pretty one! He could almost feel the slickness of the weapon with his fingers. If he had a gun like that he would polish it and keep it shining so it would never rust. N Ah'd keep it loaded, by Gawd!

"Ma?" His voice was hesitant.

"Hunh?"

"Ol man Hawkins give yuh mah money yit?"

"Yeah, but ain no usa yuh thinking bout throwin nona it erway. Ahm keepin tha money sos yuh kin have cloes t go to school this winter. "

He rose and went to her side with the open catalogue in his palms. She was washing dishes, her head bent low over a pan. Shyly he raised the book. When he spoke, his voice was husky, faint.

"Ma, Gawd knows Ah wans one of these."

"One of whut?" she asked, not raising her eyes.

"One of these," he said again, not daring even to point. She glanced up at the page, then at him with wide eyes.

"Nigger, is yuh gone plumb crazy?"

"Aw, Ma- "

"Git outta here! Don yuh talk t me bout no gun! Yuh a fool!"

"Ma, Ah kin buy one fer two dollahs. "

"Not ef Ah knows it, yuh ain!"

"But yuh promised me one-"

"Ah don care whut Ah promised! Yuh ain nothing but a boy yit!"

"Ma, ef yuh lemme buy one Ah'll *never* ast yuh fer nothing no mo."

"Ah tol yuh t git outta here! Yuh ain gonma toucha penny of tha money fer no gun! Thas how come Ah has Mistah Hawkins t pay yo wages t me, cause Ah knows yuh ain got no sense."

"But, Ma, we needa gun. Pa ain got no gun. We needa gun in the house. Yuh kin never tell whut might happen."

"Now don yuh try to maka fool outta me, boy! Ef we did hava gun, yuh wouldn't have it!"

He laid the catalogue down and slipped his arm around her waist.

"Aw, Ma, Ah done worked hard alla summer n ain ast yuh fer nothin, is Ah, now?"

"Thas whut yuh sponse t do!"

"But Ma, Ah wans a gun. Yuh kin lemme have two dollahs outta mah money. Please, Ma. I kin give it to Pa ... Please, Ma! Ah loves yuh, Ma."

When she spoke her voice came soft and low.

"Whut yu wan wida gun, Dave? Yuh don need no gun. Yuh'll git in trouble. N ef yo pa jus thought Ah let yuh have money t buy a gun he'd hava fit."

"Ah'll hide it, Ma. It ain but two dollahs."

"Lawd, chil, whut's wrong wid yuh?"

"Ain nothin wrong, Ma. Ahm almos a man now. Ah wans a gun."

"Who gonna sell yuh a gun?"

"Ol Joe at the sto."

"N it don cos but two dollahs?"

"Thas all, Ma. Jus two dollahs. Please, Ma."

She was stacking the plates away; her hands moved slowly, reflectively. Dave kept an anxious silence. Finally, she turned to him.

"Ah'll let yuh git tha gun ef yuh promise me one thing."

"Whut's tha, Ma?"

"Yuh bring it straight back t me, yuh hear? It be fer Pa. "

"Yessum! Lemme go now, Ma."

She stooped, turned slightly to one side, raised the hem of her dress, rolled down the top of her stocking, and came up with a slender wad of bills.

"Here," she said. "Lawd knows yuh don need no gun. But yer pa does. Yuh bring it right back t me, yuh hear? Ahma put it up. Now ef yuh don, Ahma have yuh pa lick yuh so hard yuh won fergit it." "Yessum. "

He took the money, ran down the steps, and across the yard.

"Dave! Yuuuuuuh Daaaaave!"

He heard, but he was not going to stop now. "Naw, Lawd!

The first movement he made the following morning was to reach under his pillow for the gun. In the gray light of dawn he held it loosely, feeling a sense of power. Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody, black or white. And if he were holding his gun in his hand, nobody could run over him; they would have to respect him. It was a big gun, with a long barrel and a heavy handle. He raised and lowered it in his hand, marveling at its weight.

He had not come straight home with it as his mother had asked; instead he had stayed out in the fields, holding the weapon in his hand, aiming it now and then at some imaginary foe. But he had not fired it; he had been afraid that his father might hear. Also he was not sure he knew how to fire it.

To avoid surrendering the pistol he had not come into the house until he knew that they were all asleep. When his mother had tiptoed to his bedside late that night and demanded the gun, he had first played possum; then he had told her that the gun was hidden outdoors, that he would bring it to her in the morning. Now he lay turning it slowly in his hands. He broke it, took out the cartridges, felt them, and then put them back.

He slid out of bed, got a long strip of old flannel from a trunk, wrapped the gun in it, and tied it to his naked thigh while it was still loaded. He did not go in to breakfast. Even though it was not yet daylight, he started for Jim Hawkins' plantation. Just as the sun was rising he reached the bams where the mules and plows were kept.

"Hey! That you, Dave?"

He turned. Jim Hawkins stood eying him suspiciously.

"What're yuh doing here so early?"

"Ah didn't know Ah wuz gittin up so early, Mistah Hawkins. Ah wuz fixin t hitch up ol Jenny n take her t the fiels."

"Good. Since you're so early, how about plowing that stretch down by the woods?"

"Suits me, Mistah Hawkins."

"O.K. Go to it!"

He hitched Jenny to a plow and started across the fields. Hot dog! This was just what he wanted. If he could get down by the woods, he could shoot his gun and nobody would hear. He walked behind the plow, hearing the traces creaking, feeling the gun tied tight to his thigh.

When he reached the woods, he plowed two whole rows before he decided to take out the gun. Finally, he stopped, looked in all directions, then untied the gun and held it in his hand. He turned

to the mule and smiled.

"Know whut this is, Jenny? Naw, yuh wouldn know! Yuhs jusa ol mule! Anyhow, this is a gun, n it kin shoot, by Gawd!"

He held the gun at arm's length. Whut t hell, Ahma shoot this thing! He looked at Jenny again.

"Lissen here, Jenny! When Ah pull this ol trigger, Ah don wan yuh t run n acka fool now! "

Jenny stood with head down, her short ears pricked straight. Dave walked off about twenty feet, held the gun far out from him at arm's length, and turned his head. Hell, he told himself, Ah ain afraid. The gun felt loose in his fingers; he waved it wildly for a moment. Then he shut his eyes and tightened his forefinger. Bloom! A report half deafened him and he thought his right hand was torn from his arm. He heard Jenny whinnying and galloping over the field, and he found himself on his knees, squeezing his fingers hard between his legs. His hand was numb; he jammed it into his mouth, trying to warm it, trying to stop the pain. The gun lay at his feet. He did not quite know what had happened. He stood up and stared at the gun as though it were a living thing. He gritted his teeth and kicked the gun. Yuh almos broke mah arm! He turned to look for Jenny; she was far over the fields, tossing her head and kicking wildly.

"Hol on there, ol mule!"

When he caught up with her she stood trembling, walling her big white eyes at him. The plow was far away; the traces had broken. Then Dave stopped short, looking, not believing. Jenny was bleeding. Her left side was red and wet with blood. He went closer. Lawd, have mercy! Wondah did Ah shoot this mule? He grabbed for Jenny's mane. She flinched, snorted, whirled, tossing her head.

"Hol on now! Hol on."

Then he saw the hole in Jenny's side, right between the ribs. It was round, wet, red. A crimson stream streaked down the front leg, flowing fast. Good Gawd! Ah wuzn't shootin at tha mule. He felt panic. He knew he had to stop that blood, or Jenny would bleed to death. He had never seen so much blood in all his life. He chased the mule for half a mile, trying to catch her. Finally she stopped, breathing hard, stumpy tail half arched. He caught her mane and led her back to where the plow and gun lay. Then he stooped and grabbed handfuls of damp black earth and tried to plug the bullet hole. Jenny shuddered, whinnied, and broke from him.

"Hol on! Hol on now!"

He tried to plug it again, but blood came anyhow. His fingers were hot and sticky, He rubbed dirt into his palms, trying to dry them. Then again he attempted to plug the bullet hole, but Jenny shied away, kicking her heels high. He stood helpless. He had to do something. He ran at Jenny; she dodged him. He watched a red stream of blood flow down Jenny's leg and form a bright pool at her feet.

"Jenny ... Jenny," he called weakly.

His lips trembled. She's bleeding to death! He looked in the direction of home, wanting to go back, wanting to get help. But he saw the pistol lying in the damp black clay. He had a queer feeling that if he only did something, this would not be; Jenny would not be there bleeding to death.

When he went to her this time, she did not move. She stood with sleepy, dreamy eyes; and when he touched her she gave a low-pitched whinny and knelt to the ground, her front knees slopping in blood. "Jenny ... Jenny . . ." he whispered.

For a long time she held her neck erect; then her head sank, slowly. Her ribs swelled with a mighty heave and she went over.

Dave's stomach felt empty, very empty. He picked up the gun and held it gingerly between his thumb and forefinger. He buried it at the foot of a tree. He took a stick and tried to cover the pool of blood with dirt - but what was the use? There was Jenny lying with her mouth open and her eyes walled and glassy. He could not tell Jim Hawkins he had shot his mule. But he had to tell something. Yeah, Ah'll tell ern Jenny started gittin wil n fell on the joint of the plow... But that would hardly happen to a mule. He walked across the field slowly, head down.

It was sunset. Two of Jim Hawkins' men were over near the edge of the woods digging a hole in which to bury Jenny. Dave was surrounded by a knot of people, all of whom were looking down at the dead mule.

"I don't see how in the world it happened," said Jim Hawkins for the tenth time.

The crowd parted and Dave's mother, father, and small brother pushed into the center.

"Where Dave?" his mother called.

"There he is," said Jim Hawkins.

His mother grabbed him.

"Whut happened, Dave? Whut yuh done?"

"Nothin "

"C mon, boy, talk," his father said.

Dave took a deep breath and told the story he knew nobody believed.

"Waal," he drawled. "Ah brung ol Jenny down here sos; Ah could do mah plowin. Ah plowed bout two rows, just like yuh see." He stopped and pointed at the long rows of upturned earth. "Then somethin musta been wrong wid ol Jenny. She wouldn't ack right a-tall. She started snortin n kickin her heels. Ah tried t hol her, but she pulled erway, rearin n goin in. Then when the point of the plow was stickin up in the air, she swung erroun n twisted herself back an it . . . She stuck herself n started t bleed. N fo Ah could do anything, she wuz dead. "

"Did you ever hear of anything like that in all your life?" asked Jim Hawkins. There were white and black standing in the crowd. They murmured. Dave's mother came close to him and looked hard into his face. "Tell the truth, Dave," she said.

"Looks like a bullet hole to me," said one man.

"Dave, whut yuh do wid the gun?" his mother asked.

The crowd surged in, looking at him. He jammed his hands into his pockets, shook his head slowly from left to right, and backed away. His eyes were wide and painful.

"Did he hava gun?" asked Jim Hawkins.

"By Gawd, Ah tol yuh tha wuz a gun wound," said a man, slapping his thigh. His father caught his shoulders and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Tell whut happened, yuh rascal! Tell whut . . ."

Dave looked at Jenny's stiff legs and began to cry.

"Whut yuh do wid tha gun?" his mother asked.

"Whut wuz he doin wida gun?" his father asked.

"Come on and tell the truth," said Hawkins. "Ain't nobody going to hurt' you."

His mother crowded close to him.

"Did yuh shoot tha mule, Dave?"

Dave cried, seeing blurred white and black faces.

"Ahh ddinn gggo tt sshoot hher ... Ah ssswear ffo Gawd Ahh ddin.... Ah wuz a-tryin t ssee ef the old gggun would sshoot -"

"Where yuh git the gun from?" his father asked.

"Ah got it from Joe, at the sto. "

"Where yuh git the money?"

"Ma give it t me. "

"He kept worryin me, Bob. Ah had t. Ah tol im t bring the gun right back t me ... It was fer yuh, the gun."

"But how yuh happen to shoot that mule?" asked Jim Hawkins.

"Ah wuzn shootin at the mule, Mistah Hawkins. The gun jumped when Ah pulled the trigger ... N fo Ah knowed anythin Jenny was there a-bleedin. "

Somebody in the crowd laughed. Jim Hawkins walked close to Dave and looked into his face.

"Well, looks like you have bought you a mule, Dave."

"Ah swear fo Gawd, Ah didn go t kill the mule, Mistah Hawkins!"

"But you killed her!"

All the crowd was laughing now. They stood on tiptoe and poked heads over one another's shoulders.

"Well, boy, looks like yuh done bought a dead mule! Hahaha!"

"Ain tha ershame."

"Hohohohoho. "

Dave stood, head down, twisting his feet in the dirt.

"Well, you needn't worry about it, Bob," said Jim Hawkins to Dave's father. "Just let the boy keep on working and pay me two dollars a month."

"Whut yuh wan fer yo mule, Mistah Hawkins?"

Jim Hawkins screwed up his eyes.

"Fifty dollars."

"Whut yuh do wid tha gun?" Dave's father demanded.

Dave said nothing.

"Yuh wan me t take a tree n beat yuh till yuh talk!"

"Nawsuh!"

"Whut yuh do wid it?"

"Ah throwed it erway."

"Where?"

"Ah ... Ah throwed it in the creek.

"Waal, c mon home. N firs thing in the mawnin git to tha creek n fin tha gun."

"Yessuh."

"Whut yuh pay fer it?"

"Two dollahs. "

"Take tha gun n git yo money back n carry it t Mistah Hawkins, yuh hear? N don fergit Ahma lam you black bottom good fer this! Now march yosef on home, suh! "

Dave turned and walked slowly. He heard people laughing. Dave glared, his eyes welling with tears. Hot anger bubbled in him. Then he swallowed and stumbled on.

That night Dave did not sleep. He was glad that he had gotten out of killing the mule so easily, but he was hurt. Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they had laughed. He tossed on his bed, feeling his hard pillow. N Pa says he's gonna beat me ... He remembered other beatings, and his back quivered. Naw, naw, Ah sho don wan im t beat me tha way no mo. Dam em all! Nobody ever gave him anything. All he did was work. They treat me like a mule, n then they beat me. He gritted his teeth. N Ma had t tell on me.

Well, if he had to, he would take old man Hawkins that two dollars. But that meant selling the gun. And he wanted to keep that gun. Fifty dollars for a dead mule.

He turned over, thinking how he had fired the gun. He had an itch to fire it again. Ef other men kin shoota gun, by Gawd, Ah kin! He was still, listening. Mebbe they all sleepin now. The house was still. He heard the soft breathing of his brother. Yes, now! He would go down and get that gun and see if he could fire it! He eased out of bed and slipped into overalls.

The moon was bright. He ran almost all the way to the edge of the woods. He stumbled over the

ground, looking for the spot where he had buried the gun. Yeah, here it is. Like a hungry dog scratching for a bone, he pawed it up. He puffed his black cheeks and blew dirt from the trigger and barrel. He broke it and found four cartridges unshot. He looked around; the fields were filled with silence and moonlight. He clutched the gun stiff and hard in his fingers. But, as soon as he wanted to pull the trigger, he shut his eyes and turned his head. Naw, Ah can't shoot wid mah eyes closed n mah head turned. With effort he held his eyes open; then he squeezed. *Bloooooom!* He was stiff, not breathing. The gun was still in his hands. Dammit, he'd done it! He fired again. *Bloooooom!* He smiled. *Bloooooom! Bloooooom!* Click, click. There! It was empty. If anybody could shoot a gun, he could. He put the gun into his hip pocket and started across the fields.

When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight and proud in the moonlight, looking at Jim Hawkins' big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had jus one mo bullet Ah'd taka shot at tha house. Ah'd like t scare ol man Hawkins jusa little ... Jusa enough t let im know Dave Saunders is a man.

To his left the road curved, running to the tracks of the Illinois Central. He jerked his head, listening. From far off came a faint *hooooof-hooooof; hooooofhooooof; hooooof-hooooof...* He stood rigid. Two dollahs a mont. Les see now ... Tha means it'll take bout two years. Shucks! Ah'll be dam!

He started down the road, toward the tracks. Yeah, here she comes! He stood beside the track and held himself stiffly. Here she comes, erroun the ben ... C mon, yuh slow poke! C mon! He had his hand on his gun; something quivered in his stomach. Then the train thundered past, the gray and brown box cars rumbling and clinking. He gripped the gun tightly; then he jerked his hand out of his pocket. Ah betcha Bill wouldn't do it! Ah betcha . . . The cars slid past, steel grinding upon steel. Ahm ridin yuh ternight, so hep me Gawd! He was hot all over. He hesitated just a moment; then he grabbed, pulled atop of a car, and lay flat. He felt his pocket; the gun was still there. Ahead the long rails were glinting in the moonlight, stretching away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man.