Year 9 Summer Homework: Short Story Anthology

You should take the time to read all of the stories. They will help you with the creative writing coursework you will complete in Y10. Make sure that you consider what is effective about these stories, and what you can steal and employ in your own writing!
Have a good summer!
-The English Department

The stories within this anthology deal with issues of racism and some mature themes. They have been chosen as a precursor to the texts the students will study in year ten and year eleven. Many thanks.

The Pedestrian

by Ray Bradbury

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of pavement in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D., 2053 or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden grey phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomb-like building was still open.

Mr Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, towards the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

'Hello, in there,' he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. 'What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?'

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in mid-country. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the centre of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry river beds, the streets, for company.

'What is it now?' he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. 'Eight-thirty p.m.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?'

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of pavement. The cement

was vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not one in all that time.

He came to a clover-leaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town. During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the petrol stations open, a great insect rustling and a ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarab-beetles, a faint incense puttering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions. But now these highways, too, were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

He turned back on a side street, circling around towards his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn towards it.

A metallic voice called to him:

'Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!' He halted.

'Put up your hands!' 'But-' he said.

'Your hands up! Or we'll shoot!'

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left, wasn't that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

'Your name?' said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

'Leonard Mead,' he said.

'Speak up!'

'Leonard Mead!'

'Business or profession?'

'I guess you'd call me a writer.”

'No profession,' said the police car, as If talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

'You might say that,' said Mr Mead. He hadn’t written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomb-like houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the grey or multi-coloured lights touching their faces, but never really touching them.

'No profession,' said the phonograph voice, hissing. 'What are you doing out?'

'Walking,' said Leonard Mead.

'Walking!'

'Just walking,' he said simply, but his face felt cold.

'Walking, just walking, walking?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Walking where? For what?'

'Walking for air. Walking to see.'

'Your address!'

'Eleven South Saint James Street.'

'And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr Mead?'

'Yes.'

'And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?'

'No.'

'No?' There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

'Are you married, Mr Mead?'

'No.'

'Not married,' said the police voice behind the fiery beam. The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were grey and silent.

'Nobody wanted me,' said Leonard Mead with a smile.

'Don't speak unless you're spoken to!'

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

'Just walking, Mr Mead?'

'Yes.'

'But you haven't explained for what purpose.'

'I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk.'

'Have you done this often?'

'Every night for years.'

The police car sat in the centre of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

'Well, Mr Mead,' it said.

'Is that all?' he asked politely.

'Yes,' said the voice. 'Here.' There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide.

'Get in.'

'Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!'

'Get in.'

'I protest!'

'Mr Mead.'

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no-one in the front seat, no-one in the car at all.

'Get in.'

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh anti¬septic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

'Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi,' said the iron voice. 'But - '

'Where are you taking me?'

The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes. 'To the Psychiatric Centre for Research on Regressive Tendencies. '

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

'That's my house,' said Leonard Mead.

No-one answered him.

The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty pavements, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

[1]The Tell Tale Heart
Edgar Allan Poe

True! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses - not destroyed - not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily - how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture - a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees - very gradually - I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded - with what caution - with what foresight - with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it - oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly - very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! - would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously - oh, so cautiously - cautiously (for the hinges creaked) - I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for

[1] Acute = strong Conceived = made Dissimulation = hiding of the truth Vexed = annoyed

seven long nights - every night just at midnight - but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked upon him while he slept.
< 2 >

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night, had I felt the extent of my own powers - of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my [2]feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back - but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out - 'Who's there?'

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; - just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief - oh, no! - it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself - 'It is nothing but the wind in the chimney - it is only a mouse crossing the floor,' or 'it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.' Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of that unperceived shadow that caused him to feel - although he neither saw nor heard - to feel the presence of my head within the room.
< 3 >

[2] Sagacity = cleverness Bosom = chest Suppositions = ideas

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little - a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it - you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily - until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.
[3]

It was open - wide, wide open - and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness - all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! - do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me - the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once - once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

< 4 >

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned; and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

[3] Tattoo = steady beat waned = came to an end

Then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye - not even his - could have detected any thing wrong. there was nothing to wash out - no stain of any kind - no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all - ha! ha!
[4]

When I had made an end of these labours, it was four o'clock - still dark as midnight. A the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, - for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, - for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search - search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They say, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: - it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness - until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

< 5 >

No doubt I now grew very pale; - but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased - and what could I do? I was a low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath - and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly - more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men - but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! What could I do? I foamed - I raved - I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder -

[4] Suavity = being suave – smooth/confident Vehemently = strongly
Gesticulations = hand movements

louder - louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! No, no! They heard! They suspected! They knew! They were making a mockery of my horror! This I [5]thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! And now - again! Hark! Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder!

'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed! - tear up the planks! here, here! - it is the beating of his hideous heart!'

Jesse by Joy Booth

Jesse. I am five years old and I hate the name. It reminds me of my great uncle Jesse Long. A drunk. At family gatherings he would roar in, all hot stinking breath and red face. He liked to sing "Mule Train" at the top of his lungs and stomp and stumble around like he was buck dancing. He scared me to death.

One thing led to another, I guess, until he put the shotgun he used to hunt with under his chin and blew his head off. I have heard Aunt Nanny, his wife, tell how it was a hundred times. "I was cooking back-bone and liver," she'd say, "and it was bad hot that day. And flies, Lord, I've never seen as many flies as we had that summer. Jesse came in from the field to eat. He was sober for once. I was surprised, but I didn't say anything one way or the other. You know he was bad to hit me if I mentioned his drinking. Anyway, he gets his gun out of the bedroom and walks out on the back porch. 'Nanny,' he says, real polite, 'would you come here, please?' Well, just as I stepped out on the porch, he pulled the trigger. His jawbone flew at me and hung in the screen by my head."

Now, in Sunday school, when I study about Samson slaying his enemies with the jawbone of an ass, I picture Nanny and Jesse on the screen porch.

…

I am eight, and Daddy is the gluing foreman at the plywood mill. Daddy prays at church to be a good man. He prays for Granddaddy and all the farmers in Alabama. I pray for my daddy to not be sad. He gets mean if he is sad too long. I like it when Daddy starts talking about a man named Jesse on his crew, mostly about what a hard worker he is or something funny he has said or done. I can tell Daddy likes him.

[5] Dissemble = to hide the truth

Our septic tank has stopped up, and Daddy says somebody from work is coming to help him dig it up. Before good daylight the next Saturday morning, I am awakened by a man's surprised yell outside my bedroom window, followed by a deep, rolling belly laugh. Hearing it, I start laughing myself. Daddy hurries down the hall past my door and says, "That's Jesse." It turns out that Jesse stepped on my little sister's rubber frog. It sounds like a big fart when you step on it.

Jesse and Daddy work in the hot sun all day long digging up the septic tank. I hear them laughing and talking like they are off fishing instead of ankle deep in stink. My sister and I carry them ice water with wooden clothespins on our noses. At lunchtime, Daddy takes two heaping plates of collards and cornbread and says he will eat on the back steps with Jesse. Now I know he really likes Jesse. We can't have Jesse in our house because he's a n*****.

…

The mill boss moves Daddy from third to second shift when I turn nine years old. Mama fixes a hot supper every night with enough extra to take to Daddy. At first I hate walking to the mill, especially on the night "Rawhide" comes on TV. I am in love with Rowdy Yates, the trail scout, and claim him as my boyfriend. My sister gets mad when I make her take the not-so-handsome old trail boss, Mr. Favor, for hers.

We leave on a porch light and head out. There's not much light to see by as we walk down the narrow sandy-clay road. Here and there we pass a house with droves of moths beating at lit doors and windows. We sniff at the smells of fried meat, playing at guessing if the family inside is eating pork chops, chicken, or liver. Mama carries Daddy's tin foil-covered plate in one hand and leads my sister with the other, trying to keep her from stepping on sandspurs. My sister and I fight over which one of us gets to carry Daddy's jug of sweet Luzianne iced tea, as we scratch at welts from bug bites, blackberry briars, and stinging nettles.

The mill is made of tin, roof and walls, and the tin is rusted full of holes. Ahead of us in the night, with the lights shining through, the mill looks like the fairy castle in the storybook Mama read us when we were sick with the mumps. In a hurry to get there, I run a little ways ahead and pretend Rowdy Yates and I are riding side by side on horseback, guarding the cattle drive. I arrive itchy, my bangs plastered to my forehead with sweat.

Mama asks someone working near the door to pass word back to Daddy, who works on the finishing end. We wait outside on the loading dock with our eyes watering from the fumes of the glue that sticks the plywood together. Mama combs her hair, looking in her compact mirror. She says she wants us all to look pretty for Daddy, and tries to do something with our bangs. She puts on Avon lipstick while my sister and I kill time, poking our dirty feet at giant toad frogs, piled two and three deep under the security light. We stick our tongues out and in as fast as we can, watching the toad frogs send out sticky tongues that look as long as my yoyo string. They

founder on endless swarms of mosquitoes pouring out of the swamp that pushes up to meet the mill land on one side.

Daddy comes to the door to get his supper, and the smell of the glue comes out with him. Mama snaps at Daddy and tells him to stop rubbing his eyes, that a man in his twenties should not be having headaches and backaches all the time. My sister and I look away and keep poking at the toad frogs. Daddy asks what else she thinks he could do for work with farming all dried up. He dumps the BC powder Mama brought into his tea and drinks it down in one long gulp.

Nights when Daddy is too busy, he sends Jesse out to get his supper. Jesse asks me questions and listens to me. He says he has a little girl my age. Mama laughs with us when Jesse makes sounds like toad frogs and crickets. One night Jesse says, “Honey, you want to see where your Daddy works?” Mama doesn’t look too sure, but says she guesses it is okay. Jesse swings me up on his shoulders to keep me out of the glue. He is tall and I feel like queen of the world looking at the mill from so high up. Sometimes he makes up little songs. His voice is deep. “Lord what a pity but it’s true, me and my baby done stuck like glue. Ain’t it a mess, wish I could rest, but I’m stuck like glue to you.”

I have never touched a black man before Jesse, and it surprises me the first time he picks me up, that his hands feel just like Daddy’s, warm and callused. Granny has brought me up on stories about what n***** men do to little white girls if they get the chance. Some nights I have screaming dreams about her story of turpentine n***** strangling a poor little white girl who took a wrong path on her way home from school and stuffing her dead body in a hollow log. Boy, was Granny wrong, but I can’t tell her. She’d have a hissy fit if she knew Daddy let Jesse carry me through the mill.

One night Daddy comes home early from work. He looks sick and is shaking all over. He goes to the bathroom and throws up. Mama goes in with him. I hear him start crying and say, “Oh, Carolyn, oh my God. Oh my God.” Then he tells what has happened. Jesse had been working on the glue press. As Jesse set the big roller to press the plywood together, it grabbed his arm and jerked him in to the shoulder. Daddy was there in a minute, but the only way to get Jesse out was to reverse the roller. It meant cutting off Jesse’s arm. Daddy reversed the roll. Old Doctor King somehow kept Jesse from bleeding to death.

Daddy begs the mill to let Jesse keep his job, telling them that Jesse can do more with one arm than most men can do with two. But the mill lets Jesse go, bragging that they gave him two hundred dollars. Daddy says Jesse knows it isn’t right, and it makes him mad, but Jesse isn’t the kind of person to get bitter. Daddy is scared that Jesse won’t have a way to take care of his five little children. He’s been trying to make a living doing odd jobs, but it isn’t working out. Mama and Daddy yell at each other a long time one night because Daddy gave Jesse fifty

dollars that Mama says we didn't have to give. Jesse leaves town and Daddy has nightmares, jumping out of bed in his sleep and beating the wall with his fist.

…

I am eleven and staying at Granny's. It is June 7, 1963. Two days ago, Daddy lost his mind while we were getting ready for Wednesday night church service. I had helped mama warm up supper and set the table, right before he shot her in the heart, then asked me if I loved him and shot himself. Now I am eating boiled peanuts and pretending to watch "I Love Lucy."

Mostly I am staring at a vase of pompom chrysanthemums sitting on top of the TV. A widow woman neighbor of Granny's, who smells like snuff and talcum powder, brought them. She carried on praying, spitting in an empty Prince Albert can, and calling me and my sister poor little orphans. I hear a knock and familiar voice at the back door. By the time I realize it is Jesse and go outside, he is gone.

I want to go and call after him, but Granny won't let me. She says Jesse wanted to know if she would mind arranging a night at the funeral home when the n***** men who'd worked with Daddy could pay their last respects. She had told him that she reckoned it would be all right. I ask if she'll take me that night so I can see Jesse. Granny looks at me like I have lost my mind and says we don't have any business in a room full of n***** men. She says that she will make sure mama's coffin is closed shut that night.

…

I have no idea what happened to Jesse, until one summer day when I am fourteen and Granny sends me to Uncle Alvin's fish market. Uncle Alvin and Pa Sam go pole fishing on the Steinhatchee River every Thursday. The road is buckling in the sun, and tar is sticking to the bottoms of my feet. A long time before I get to the store, I smell hot fish guts from where they are cleaning the fish.

I stick my head in the door and tell them that Granny wants a mess of bream, and then I get a grape Crush and a bag of salted peanuts from the machines out front. I've just dumped the peanuts in the cold drink when I hear his laugh and, "Lord, what a pity, but it's true, me and my baby done stuck like glue."

I want to cry, to hug him, to have him put me up on his shoulders. There are other people around, so all I can say is, "Hey, Jesse." I pray that the other people will finish their business and move on. I just want a few minutes to talk. When the others finally leave, Jesse asks me how I am getting along. He is the only one, in this whole time around Mama and Daddy's death, who asks how I am and is not afraid to listen.

Jesse talks to me about Daddy, not so much about him dying, but stories about him living. Stories that make me laugh, that give me good things to remember. I ask Jesse about himself.

He is taking care of white folks' yards in Jacksonville. He tells me that he makes enough to live on and that his babies are growing up fine. He offers me his hand and I shake it. This is the last time I see Jesse.

…

I'm twenty-seven, home visiting, my belly just beginning to swell with my first baby. The Pepsi-Cola thermometer hanging outside Granny's back screen door has been reading over one hundred degrees since eleven this morning. My stomach is sitting in my throat. Granny turns away from the stove where she's frying corn bread and okra in hot grease. "So what are you going to call the baby?" she asks.

I hesitate before answering. Granny and I don't have a lot left out of the past to love but each other. After years spent with only a few letters and phone calls between us, we have arrived at an unspoken truce. We step gingerly, leaving well enough alone. We have wasted years of words in hateful arguments going nowhere. We know well enough where the other stands and we know for sure the places we will forever stand alone.

"I'll name it Rita if it's a girl, and Jesse if it's a boy," I answer.

"Jesse," she says. "I despise that name, reminds me of Nanny's old man. He's the only Jesse I've ever known . . ." She pauses. "Except for that big n***** worked for your Daddy at the mill." Our eyes meet for a second and I know that she knows. Everything about her stiffens. She turns away. "I'd better make some gravy to go with that roast," she says. I know we will never talk about it again. I name my son Jesse.

The End of the Party by Graham Greene

Peter Morton woke with a start to face the first light. Rain tapped against the glass. It was January the fifth.

He looked across a table on which a night-light had guttered into a pool of water, at the other bed. Francis Morton was still asleep, and Peter lay down again with his eyes on his brother. It amused him to imagine it was himself whom he watched, the same hair, the same eyes, the same lips and line of cheek. But the thought palled, and the mind went back to the fact which lent the day importance. It was the fifth of January. He could hardly believe a year had passed since Mrs Henne-Falcon had given her last children's party.

Francis turned suddenly upon his back and threw an arm across his face, blocking his mouth. Peter's heart began to beat fast, not with pleasure now but with uneasiness. He sat up and called across the table, "Wake up." Francis's shoulders shook and he waved a clenched fist in the air, but his eyes remained closed. To Peter Morton the whole room seemed to darken, and he had the impression of a great bird swooping. He cried again, "Wake up," and once more there was silver light and the touch of rain on the windows.

Francis rubbed his eyes. "Did you call out?"' he asked.

"You are having a bad dream," Peter said. Already experience had taught him how far their minds reflected each other. But he was the elder, by a matter of minutes, and that brief extra interval of light, while his brother still struggled in pain and darkness, had given him self-reliance and an instinct of protection towards the other who was afraid of so many things.

"I dreamed that I was dead," Francis said.

"What was it like?"' Peter asked.

"I can't remember," Francis said.
"You dreamed of a big bird."

"Did I?"

The two lay silent in bed facing each other, the same green eyes, the same nose tilting at the tip, the same firm lips, and the same premature modelling of the chin. The fifth of January, Peter thought again, his mind drifting idly from the image of cakes to the prizes which might be won. Egg-and-spoon races, spearing apples in basins of water, blind man's buff.

"I don't want to go," Francis said suddenly. "I suppose Joyce will be there ... Mabel Warren." Hateful to him, the thought of a party shared with those two. They were older than he. Joyce was eleven and Mabel Warren thirteen. The long pigtails swung superciliously to a masculine stride. Their sex humiliated him, as they watched him fumble with his egg, from under lowered scornful lids. And last year ... he turned his face away from Peter, his cheeks scarlet.

"What's the matter?"' Peter asked.

"Oh, nothing. I don't think I'm well. I've got a cold. I oughtn't to go to the party."

Peter was puzzled. "But Francis, is it a bad cold?"

"It will be a bad cold if I go to the party. Perhaps I shall die."

"Then you mustn't go," Peter said, prepared to solve all difficulties with one plain sentence, and Francis let his nerves relax, ready to leave everything to Peter. But though he was grateful he did not turn his face towards his brother. His cheeks still bore the badge of a shameful memory, of the game of hide and seek last year in the darkened house, and of how he had screamed when Mabel Warren put her hand suddenly upon his arm. He had not heard her coming. Girls were like

that. Their shoes never squeaked. No boards whined under the tread. They slunk like cats on padded claws.

When the nurse came in with hot water Francis lay tranquil leaving everything to Peter. Peter said, "Nurse, Francis has got a cold."

The tall starched woman laid the towels across the cans and said, without turning, "The washing won't be back till tomorrow. You must lend him some of your handkerchiefs."
"But, Nurse," Peter asked, "hadn't he better stay in bed?"

"We'll take him for a good walk this morning," the nurse said. "Wind'll blow away the germs. Get up now, both of you," and she closed the door behind her.

"I'm sorry," Peter said. "Why don't you just stay in bed? I'll tell mother you felt too ill to get up." But rebellion against destiny was not in Francis's power. If he stayed in bed they would come up and tap his chest and put a thermometer in his mouth and look at his tongue, and they would discover he was malingering. It was true he felt ill, a sick empty sensation in his stomach and a rapidly beating heart, but he knew the cause was only fear, fear of the party, fear of being made to hide by himself in the dark, uncompanioned by Peter and with no night-light to make a blessed breach.

"No, I'll get up," he said, and then with sudden desperation, "But I won't go to Mrs Henne-Falcon's party. I swear on the Bible I won't." Now surely all would be well, he thought. God would not allow him to break so solemn an oath. He would show him a way. There was all the morning before him and all the afternoon until four o'clock. No need to worry when the grass was still crisp with the early frost. Anything might happen. He might cut himself or break his leg or really catch a bad cold. God would manage somehow.
He had such confidence in God that when at breakfast his mother said, "I hear you have a cold, Francis," he made light of it. "We should have heard more about it," his mother said with irony, "if there was not a party this evening," and Francis smiled, amazed and daunted by her ignorance of him.

His happiness would have lasted longer if, out for a walk that morning, he had not met Joyce. He was alone with his nurse, for Peter had leave to finish a rabbit-hutch in the woodshed. If Peter had been there he would have cared less; the nurse was Peter's nurse also, but now it was as though she were employed only for his sake, because he could not be trusted to go for a walk alone. Joyce was only two years older and she was by herself.

She came striding towards them, pigtails flapping. She glanced scornfully at Francis and spoke with ostentation to the nurse. "Hello, Nurse. Are you bringing Francis to the party this evening? Mabel and I are coming." And she was off again down the street in the direction of Mabel Warren's home, consciously alone and self-sufficient in the long empty road.

"Such a nice girl," the nurse said. But Francis was silent, feeling again the jump-jump of his heart, realizing how soon the hour of the party would arrive. God had done nothing for him, and the minutes flew.

They flew too quickly to plan any evasion, or even to prepare his heart for the coming ordeal. Panic nearly overcame him when, all unready, he found himself standing on the doorstep, with coat- collar turned up against a cold wind, and the nurse's electric torch making a short trail through the darkness. Behind him were the lights of the hall and the sound of a servant laying the table for dinner, which his mother and father would eat alone. He was nearly overcome by the desire to run back into the house and call out to his mother that he would not go to the party, that he dared not go. They could not make him go. He could almost hear himself saying those final words, breaking down for ever the barrier of ignorance which saved his mind from his parents' knowledge. "I'm afraid of going. I won't go. I daren't go. They'll make me hide in the dark, and I'm afraid of the dark. I'll scream and scream and scream."
"Francis, come along." He heard the nurse's voice across the dimly phosphorescent lawn and saw the yellow circle of her torch wheel from tree to shrub. "I'm coming," he called with despair; he couldn't bring himself to lay bare his last secrets and end reserve between his mother and himself, for there was still in the last resort a further appeal possible to Mrs Henne- Falcon. He comforted himself with that, as he advanced steadily across the hall, very small, towards her enormous bulk. His heart beat unevenly, but he had control now over his voice, as he said with meticulous accent, "Good evening, Mrs Henne-Falcon. It was very good of you to ask me to your party." With his strained face lifted towards the curve of her breasts, and his polite set speech, he was like an old withered man. As a twin he was in many ways an only child. To address Peter was to speak to his own image in a mirror, an image a little altered by a flaw in the glass, so as to throw back less a likeness of what he was than of what he wished to be, what he would be without his unreasoning fear of darkness, footsteps of strangers, the flight of bats in dusk-filled gardens.

"Sweet child," said Mrs Henne-Falcon absent-mindedly, before, with a wave of her arms, as though the children were a flock of chickens, she whirled them into her set programme of entertainments: egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races, the spearing of apples, games which

held for Francis nothing worse than humiliation. And in the frequent intervals when nothing was required of him and he could stand alone in corners as far removed as possible from Mabel Warren's scornful gaze, he was able to plan how he might avoid the approaching terror of the dark. He knew there was nothing to fear until after tea, and not until he was sitting down in a pool of yellow radiance cast by the ten candles on Colin Henne- Falcon's birthday cake did he become fully conscious of the imminence of what he feared. He heard Joyce's high voice down the table, "After tea we are going to play hide and seek in the dark."
"Oh, no," Peter said, watching Francis's troubled face, "don't let's. We play that every year."

"But it's in the programme," cried Mabel Warren. "I saw it myself. I looked over Mrs Henne-Falcon's shoulder. Five o'clock tea. A quarter to six to half past, hide and seek in the dark. It's all written down in the programme."

Peter did not argue, for if hide and seek had been inserted in Mrs Henne- Falcon's programme, nothing which he could say would avert it. He asked for another piece of birthday cake and sipped his tea slowly. Perhaps it might be possible to delay the game for a quarter of an hour, allow Francis at least a few extra minutes to form a plan, but even in that Peter failed, for children were already leaving the table in twos and threes. It was his third failure, and again he saw a great bird darken his brother's face with its wings. But he upbraided himself silently for his folly, and finished his cake encouraged by the memory of that adult refrain, "There's nothing to fear in the dark." The last to leave the table, the brothers came together to the hall to meet the mustering and impatient eyes of Mrs Henne- Falcon.

"And now," she said, "we will play hide and seek in the dark."

Peter watched his brother and saw the lips tighten. Francis, he knew, had feared this moment from the beginning of the party, had tried to meet it with courage and had abandoned the attempt. He must have prayed for cunning to evade the game, which was now welcomed with cries of excitement by all the other children. "Oh, do let's." "We must pick sides." "Is any of the house out of bounds?"' "Where shall home be?"
"I think," said Francis Morton, approaching Mrs Henne-Falcon, his eyes focused unwaveringly on her exuberant breasts, "it will be no use my playing. My nurse will be calling for me very soon."

"Oh, but your nurse can wait, Francis," said Mrs Henne-Falcon, while she clapped her hands together to summon to her side a few children who were already straying up the wide staircase to upper floors. "Your mother will never mind."

That had been the limit of Francis's cunning. He had refused to believe that so well- prepared an excuse could fail. All that he could say now, still in the precise tone which other children hated, thinking it a symbol of conceit, was, "I think I had better not play." He stood motionless, retaining, though afraid, unmoved features. But the knowledge of his terror, or the reflection of the terror itself, reached his brother's brain. For the moment, Peter Morton could have cried aloud with the fear of bright lights going out, leaving him alone in an island of dark surrounded by the gentle lappings of strange footsteps. Then he remembered that the fear was not his own, but his brother's. He said impulsively to Mrs Henne-Falcon, "Please, I don't think Francis should play. The dark makes him jump so." They were the wrong words. Six children began to sing, "Cowardy cowardy custard," turning torturing faces with the vacancy of wide sunflowers towards Francis Morton.

Without looking at his brother, Francis said, "Of course I'll play. I'm not afraid, I only thought ..." But he was already forgotten by his human tormentors. The children scrambled round Mrs Henne- Falcon, their shrill voices pecking at her with questions and suggestions.

"Yes, anywhere in the house. We will turn out all the lights. Yes, you can hide in the cupboards. You must stay hidden as long as you can. There will be no home."

Peter stood apart, ashamed of the clumsy manner in which he had tried to help his brother. Now he could feel, creeping in at the corners of his brain, all Francis's resentment of his championing. Several children ran upstairs, and the lights on the top floor went out. Darkness came down like the wings of a bat and settled on the landing. Others began to put out the lights at the edge of the hall, till the children were all gathered in the central radiance of the chandelier, while the bats squatted round on hooded wings and waited for that, too, to be extinguished.

"You and Francis are on the hiding side," a tall girl said, and then the light was gone, and the carpet wavered under his feet with the sibilance of footfalls, like small cold draughts, creeping away into corners.

"Where's Francis?"' he wondered. "If I join him he'll be less frightened of all these sounds." "These sounds" were the casing of silence: the squeak of a loose board, the cautious closing of a cupboard door, the whine of a finger drawn along polished wood.

Peter stood in the centre of the dark deserted floor, not listening but waiting for the idea of his brother's whereabouts to enter his brain. But Francis crouched with fingers on his ears, eyes uselessly closed, mind

numbed against impressions, and only a sense of strain could cross the gap of dark. Then a voice called "Coming", and as though his brother's self- possession had been shattered by the sudden cry, Peter Morton jumped with his fear. But it was not his own fear. What in his brother was a burning panic was in him an altruistic emotion that left the reason unimpaired. "Where, if I were Francis, should I hide?"' And because he was, if not Francis himself, at least a mirror to him, the answer was immediate. "Between the oak bookcase on the left of the study door, and the leather settee." Between the twins there could be no jargon of telepathy. They had been together in the womb, and they could not be parted.

Peter Morton tiptoed towards Francis's hiding-place. Occasionally a board rattled, and because he feared to be caught by one of the soft questers through the dark, he bent and untied his laces. A tag struck the floor and the metallic sound set a host of cautious feet moving in his direction. But by that time he was in his stockings and would have laughed inwardly at the pursuit had not the noise of someone stumbling on his abandoned shoes made his heart trip. No more boards revealed Peter Morton's progress.

On stockinged feet he moved silently and unerringly towards his object. Instinct told him he was near the wall, and, extending a hand, he laid the fingers across his brother's face.

Francis did not cry out, but the leap of his own heart revealed to Peter a proportion of Francis's terror. "It's all right," he whispered, feeling down the squatting figure until he captured a clenched hand. "It's only me. I'll stay with you." And grasping the other tightly, he listened to the cascade of whispers his utterance had caused to fall. A hand touched the book-case close to Peter's head and he was aware of how Francis's fear continued in spite of his presence. It was less intense, more bearable, he hoped, but it remained. He knew that it was his brother's fear and not his own that he experienced. The dark to him was only an absence of light; the groping hand that of a familiar child. Patiently he waited to be found.

He did not speak again, for between Francis and himself was the most intimate communion. By way of joined hands thought could flow more swiftly than lips could shape themselves round words. He could experience the whole progress of his brother's emotion, from the leap of panic at the unexpected contact to the steady pulse of fear, which now went on and on with the regularity of a heart- beat. Peter Morton thought with intensity, "I am here. You needn't be afraid. The lights will go on again soon. That rustle, that movement is nothing to fear. Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren." He bombarded the drooping form with thoughts of safety, but he was conscious that the fear continued. "They

are beginning to whisper together. They are tired of looking for us. The lights will go on soon. We shall have won. Don't be afraid. That was someone on the stairs. I believe it's Mrs Henne- Falcon. Listen. They are feeling for the lights." Feet moving on a carpet, hands brushing a wall, a curtain pulled apart, a clicking handle, the opening of a cupboard door. In the case above their heads a loose book shifted under a touch. "Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren, only Mrs Henne-Falcon," a crescendo of reassuring thought before the chandelier burst, like a fruit-tree, into bloom.

The voice of the children rose shrilly into the radiance. "Where's Peter?"' "Have you looked upstairs?"' "Where's Francis?"' but they were silenced again by Mrs Henne-Falcon's scream. But she was not the first to notice Francis Morton's stillness, where he had collapsed against the wall at the touch of his brother's hand. Peter continued to hold the clenched fingers in an arid and puzzled grief. It was not merely that his brother was dead. His brain, too young to realize the full paradox, wondered with an obscure self- pity why it was that the pulse of his brother's fear went on and on, when Francis was now where he had always been told there was no more terror and no more--darkness.