

LETTERS
to the Editor

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FEATURES

RENE

by Fred Cogswell

Rene never saw his father. A German bullet at Hill 70 saw to that. Consequently his earliest memories were those of his mother. She was a good mother and a good Catholic, and she filled the gap left by her husband's death with her devotion to Rene and to the Church. Unfortunately when Rene was seven she died.

Her sister, Aunt Marie and Uncle Fernand took Rene to live with them. They also took among other things the picture of the Virgin Mary which had always hung in his mother's room. They took it and they hung it up in the little cubby-hole that Rene was given for a room.

Aunt Marie and uncle Fernand had a strict sense of duty, but they were old and did not understand children. They were fond of Rene, no doubt, but it never occurred to them to demonstrate. In their fear for his purity they kept him as much as possible from playing with the children in the squalid street where they lived. Rene had from them everything their poverty could afford . . . everything but affection, love and understanding.

Through the days of his grey childhood Rene had held fast as long as he could to the few happy memories he had. His link with the past was the picture of the Virgin. When he looked at it long and steadily it was not hard to imagine that he was back in his mother's living room once more, clinging to the folds of her skirt while in her soft low voice she told him stories. But even these memories blurred and faded like ripples from a stone dropped in water. Their place came to be filled not by the drab monotony around him, but by the picture of the Virgin. It came more and more to be the warm reality in his life. It seemed to Rene that the Virgin was more beautiful than any person he had ever met and much more friendly. She always smiled, and, wherever he went in the room, her dark eyes seemed to follow him. He loved to look at her soft hair parted in the middle and the warmth of the blue robe she wore.

Rene was a quiet boy at school. He did not have much to do with other children. At recess he played by himself. He worked hard, but he was always in the bottom half of the class. When he was twelve years old he was working after school as a delivery boy. Times were hard, and he did not wish to burden his aunt and uncle any more than he could help.

One night when Rene was thirteen he went upstairs to bed. He had been working too hard. He was very tired. He undressed, said his prayers and went to bed. In the dim light his eyes fell on the picture of the Virgin. There was a blurring of form and line. The picture vanished. He felt lifted out of himself, remote from place and time. Around him there was only a sea of blue light that came and went in wave-washed coolness, folding him around with the softness of a blue robe. Now the light retreated, twisted in a circular movement, funneled about a face, the rapt face of the Virgin, transfigured in indescribable radiance, smiling, beckoning . . . The light deepened; the Virgin was gone. Now it was a violet flame and he a white moth plunging - plunging with a fierce ecstasy toward the burning core . . .

Rene never came to understand this experience, but he no longer felt unhappy nor alone. He had learned to take the Virgin with him. He had but to close his eyes or to stare intently at an object to pass beyond his surroundings to a brighter reality which came to be the biggest thing in his life. He let his school work slide, and when his aunt and uncle suggested he quit school and get a job he agreed and went to work in a small garage.

The years passed, and with their passing Rene grew to manhood. He worked in the garage quietly, efficiently. Everybody liked him, but he had no close friends. He had no vices, and as he was often seen kneeling in prayer in the neighbouring church, word got around that he was very devout. The girls in the district began to have eyes for him, but he never seemed to see them.

When Rene was twenty and uncle Fernand and aunt Marie moved to Beapre, Rene stayed on at the garage and moved his belongings, including the picture of the Virgin in the blue robe, to Mrs. Dupont's boarding house.

Mrs. Dupont had a daughter, Claire. She waited on table, washed dishes, made the beds for the lodgers. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, she was demure, almost shy in appearance. But her adolescent mind yearned to explore the mysteries of sex and canvassed all possibilities toward that end.

She waylaid Rene on every occasion. She would pop into his room, pretending to have left something behind; after she had retrieved the object she would show a marked propensity to linger. When she waited on table she stood provocatively close to him, brushing his arm with her body as she leaned forward to put down a loaded tray.

One summer night, Rene had returned late from the garage, washed the grease from his face and hands and changed into clean clothes. Claire gave him his lunch in the kitchen. Every one else had gone out that night.

Continued on Page 4

Fable For A

Forester

Once upon a time, as the saying goes, there was a Rabbit who wanted to be a Forester. Now he was a perfectly normal rabbit in all other ways, such as having long ears and liking girl rabbits, so you can understand why his mother was quite beside herself with worry. She simply did not know what to do, so, like all modern mothers, she consulted her hand-book on "Rabbit Psychology" where she found it is a very bad thing to keep a rabbit from doing what he wants to do. Consequently, she decided to send this extraordinary rabbit to the finest school in the land. Since he had made up his mind to be a Forester he might just as well be a good Forester.

The next fall our hero packed his belongings, kissed his mother and father goodby and set out for the University of Notable Beavers. The beavers at first thought it strange that a rabbit should wish to learn how to cut down trees, but when they perceived that he was sincere in his desire to learn they were glad to teach him all they knew. Soon he was a true Forester; he wore high boots on every possible occasion, he wore a plaid shirt always open at the neck and he never under any circumstances cut his whiskers. In short, he was a real he-rabbit outdoor type.

Time flew as it always does in fables, and when next we find our hero he is out in the great wood about to fell his first tree. After an hour and a half of very difficult calculations, much too obscure for this humble audience, he was ready to begin. He set to work and soon the great tree trembled and groaned, and wonder of wonders the damn thing fell right on him.

Moral:- If you have big ears you had better be an Arts student.

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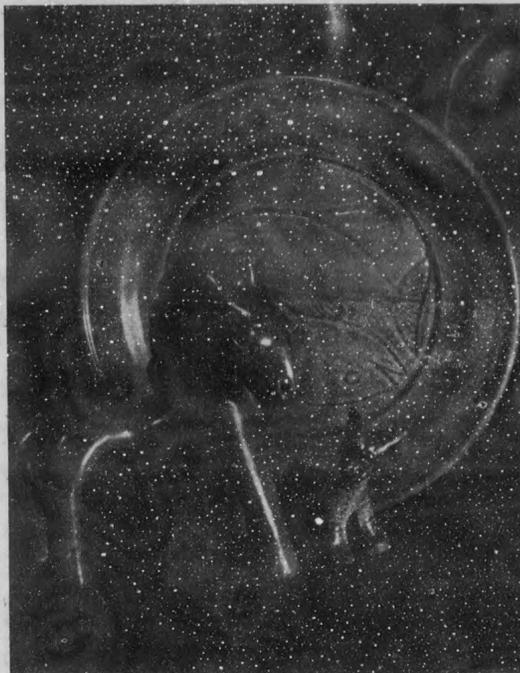


Photo by Ed Bastedo

The Fat Man

by Laurie Solomon

The girl closed the door quietly, turning the knob slowly so that it would not squeak, took off her shoes and tiptoed towards the stairs. The big clock in the hall whirred warningly and in deep tones struck twice. The girl, a shadow on the second step, froze one hand on the banister, and listened. There was no sound in all the house except the slow tick of the grandfather clock. Satisfied she crept up several more steps and was about half way to the landing when a light flashed on downstairs and the bulky figure of a man was silhouetted in the doorway.

"Eleanor," he said in deep tones, "come in here at once."

Without a word the girl turned and slowly came downstairs again, stopped at the foot to put on her shoes, and entered the room, closing the door behind her.

The man was standing against the fireplace, the fire out at this hour, one hand in his trouser pocket. His many-chinned face looked pale in the bright light, his lips in one thin line.

"Well?" was all he said.

The girl looked sullen, her clasped hands working nervously, her loose hair hiding her face.

The fat man's fury broke loose.

"What the devil do you mean coming in at this hour? Do you think I am a fool, an idiot, or something, to let you continually disobey me after I have expressly ordered you to be home by eleven thirty? Answer me! Come on, speak up, you are not dumb! Come! I want an answer!"

"Father! I am not a child, I'm twenty now! Soon I will be of age. Surely I should be allowed to use a little discretion! Eleven thirty! Whoever comes in at eleven thirty? I would be the laughing stock of the college if I left everything in order to be home by then!"

"I don't give a God-damn if you are the laughing stock of the blasted county! You certainly aren't going to make me a laughing stock of this place by continuously disobeying me! One more offence of this kind and I will take you away from the university for a year and send you to your aunt's! She will look after you! You are no child, but you are not of age yet. When you are, that will be a horse of a different colour, but while you are in my house and a minor, you will do as you are told, or by God! you will wish you had!"

The girl had flushed darkly, but her jaw had set and the resemblance between the two was strong. Two pairs of grey eyes looked into each other, one narrow and bloodshot with anger, the other clear and young and narrowed in determination.

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