



Who's He?

by Carol Abel
English, Sr.

MY BROTHER was waiting for me outside the courthouse at 5:00. He leaned across the seat and opened the car door for me. "Hi, Cynthia, do you have enough books there?" he laughed.

"I think so." I got into the car trying to balance my armload of books.

"Anything exciting happen in the County Attorney's office today?" He backed the car out and started for home.

"No. Court isn't in session so things are pretty quiet. If anything did happen, I'd probably miss it."

"Why?"

"Well, I only work part time. Which reminds me—finals are only three weeks away. I guess I should start studying for them." Trying to ignore this distasteful thought, I rolled down the car window and enjoyed the refreshing spring air that blew across my face.

When we were about a half a mile from home, Chet said, "See that car up there at the side of the road?"

"Yes, what about it?"

"It's been parked there all afternoon with the motor running."

"How do you know it has?"

"I could see it from the field I was plowing."

"Let's stop and see if anything is wrong—maybe someone's sick."

"It's probably just a couple parked."

"In broad daylight? Come on, Chet, let's stop. Someone might have had a heart attack or something."

"It's a public road, nosey. Anyone can park on it that wants to."

I craned my neck as we drove slowly by, but I couldn't see anyone in it.

I was studying at the kitchen table when Dad came home about 8:00. "Dad, which way did you come from?"

"The east. Why?"

"Was there a two-toned green Chevy parked at the bottom of the hill?"

"I saw a car there, but I didn't pay much attention to it—I think it was green though."

Chet came into the kitchen. "Was the motor still running?" he asked.

"I don't know—I didn't pay any attention." Dad had a puzzled look on his face. "What are you kids getting at?"

"Chet said it's been parked there since this afternoon. I wanted to stop on the way home, but he wouldn't. I think we should go and see what's wrong."

"Don't get so excited." Chet gave me a disapproving look.

"Has it been there all afternoon, Chet?"

"Yes, but it's probably just some couple parked."

"I doubt it, if it's been there that long. Maybe we should go have a look."

"O.K., if you think we should." Chet put on his jacket.

"Wait for me," I yelled as I ran to get my sweater.

"You don't need to go," Chet said disgustedly.

"I do to—I want to know what's going on."

"It won't hurt if she goes," Dad said.

The headlights fell on the parked car as we drove down the hill, and Dad said, "That looks like Herb Johnson's car, Chet."

"No. He has a Ford."

"Who's he?" They ignored me.

“He had a Ford, but he got a new Chevy about a month ago.”

“Who’s he?”

“Oh! Seems as if I do remember you saying that now. You wrote his insurance for it didn’t you?”

“Who’s Herb Johnson?” I said louder.

“We’re not deaf, Cynthia. He shears our sheep,” Dad explained.

Dad parked and I leaped out and ran to the car. I was peering into the window when Dad walked up beside me.

Chet walked behind the car. “The motor’s not running anymore.”

I spotted two red lights on the dashboard. “The ignition is still on. It must be out of gas.” I had my hand on the door handle when Dad said, “Cynthia, don’t touch anything!”

“But I can’t see. It’s too dark.”

“I don’t care—leave things alone! Chet, go turn on the car lights.”

The lights from our car enabled us to distinguish a body lying on the front seat with an object between his knees that looked like either a crutch or a gun, but we couldn’t make out anything else.

“We’d better go back and call the sheriff,” Dad said quietly.

“Do you suppose it is a gun, Dad?”

“I can’t tell for sure, Cynthia.”

“Don’t you think we should open the door and find out before we call the sheriff?”

Poking me in the ribs with his elbow Chet said, “Be quiet for once.”

“What are you so grouchy about?” He didn’t answer and we drove home in silence.

Dad called the sheriff and explained the situation and location of the car.

I grabbed the flashlight out of the kitchen drawer. “Let’s go, I have the flashlight.”

Dad and Chet were sitting at the kitchen table. “We can wait a few minutes, we can’t do anything till the sheriff gets there anyway,” Dad said.

I paced back and forth impatiently and listened to them talk about how the farm work was coming.

In about five minutes Chet said, "We might as well go, the sheriff should be coming any minute."

When we got back to the car, we could hear the siren and see the headlights of the sheriff's car. I shined the flashlight into the car window.

I could now tell the object beside the man was a rifle. He had shot himself through the head. I stared unbelieving. "He killed himself!" I turned to look at Dad. He was leaning against the front fender of the car with his head in his hands.

Suddenly the sheriff was opening the car door. The light came on, illuminating every detail. I was hypnotized by the scene. He was a small man and was stretched out almost completely on the front seat with his knees only slightly bent. His shoes were untied. I'd never seen a dead man before. He looked rather peaceful.

The sheriff grabbed the dead man's ankles and pulled him from the car. He was stiff. I had a sudden impulse to touch him and extended my hand.

"Stay back!" the sheriff commanded. He put the body in the ambulance and started talking to Dad.

A strange curiosity pulled my eyes back inside the car. There was a half-smoked cigarette on the dashboard, and an open can of beer on the floor. In the back of the car, there were five cans of beer in a six-pack on the seat, and about two inches of blood all over the floor. How can anyone have that much blood in him? I turned to ask Chet about it. He was at the side of the road, sick. Why would anyone commit suicide? Maybe he had cancer.

I felt Dad's hand on my shoulder. "Cynthia! What's the matter with you?—that's not a very pleasant thing to be staring at." His voice was raspy. He guided me toward our car as the ambulance and sheriff drove away.

Chet was sitting with his head resting on the steering wheel. His arms were hanging limply from his body. When Dad opened the door, he sat up and gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles were white.

"I wonder why he killed himself—I didn't know anyone

could possibly have that much blood in him. When you read about something like this in the papers, it's—"

"For God's sake, shut up!" Chet shouted. "Don't you have any feelings at all?"

Both of their faces stared grimly at me. A hot flash raced through my body. For the first time that night I was aware of their feelings. "I didn't mean to—well *you* knew him—I'd never even *heard* of him before tonight," I cried.

Only a Cigarette

by Dee McTague

English, Fr.

I lift my cigarette.
In habitual man-gesture,
He pats his pockets,
Then takes the matches from the table.
Our eyes meet
As he strikes awareness
To illumination. They fall
At the flare of suggestive flame.
I dip my head,
My hair cascading to hide
The quickening in my face.
In a dance of desire
The flaming brand
Excites its sterile mate
To a shuddering surrender.
Our trembling fingertips
Linger just an instant too long
To claim necessity,
Then part their ephemeral embrace.
I smile at him, that he may not
Know my need.
He smiles at me,
Because
He knows.