

whiteyellowgreenbluered

by *Robert Boyd*

Journalism, Sr.

CHARLEY twisted the last chrome plated screw into place and stepped back to survey his work.

"Yessir," he thought, "I'm finally learning something!" He plugged in the air-conditioner to give his craftsmanship the final test. After a few seconds, the machine on the workbench spewed cool air in his sweating face. He thought of the feel of Judy's hand on his face.

"Yessir," he repeated, as if to reaffirm his assertion, "I'm finally learning." He wrenched the plug from the socket and tossed the cord over the top of the air-conditioner as a sign to himself and the world that the task was successfully completed.

Glancing at his watch, seeing that it was 4:45, he began putting away his tools. After washing up and changing out of his dirty coveralls into slacks and a white shirt, he walked into the office.

"Hello, Charley." The aging woman behind the desk knew all the boys at Universal Trade School by name. "Come to see Mr. Davidson?"

"Yes, ma'am," Charley answered politely. "He in?"

"Sure, go right in."

Charley walked to the old wooden door with the white opaque glass marked "Mr. Davidson—Supervisor," and knocked.

"Come in!" the terse reply came through the glass.

He opened the door and stepped in.

"Hello, Erickson."

"Hello, Mr. Davidson." Charley hesitated, "I don't suppose. . . ." his voice trailed off.

"No, no one called today," Mr. Davidson looked down at the desk. "But that don't mean they won't," he looked up

quickly, smiling the smile Charley had seen before.

"It's just that they need men to work full time, not much work after five."

"Yeah, I knew, well, I'll stop in again Wednesday. Le' me know if anyone calls." He left, quickly, he had to catch the bus to meet Judy.

Mr. Davidson arose momentarily, picked up his hat, and stepped out of the office.

"Ya know, Bessie, I sure feel for that boy. He wants work s' bad. Only kid I ever saw thought he could work sixteen hours a day."

"Oh, there's been others, sir," she always called the younger man sir. "You just never saw one like him. He's a little smarter than most of 'em, an' so quiet an' serious for bein' only twenty and all. He worries a lot, but he'll make it, he's a good one."

* * *

"Judy, that's too much blue! If you don't start getting more conscientious, I'll just have to inform Mr. Richard my business will be taken elsewhere. I just can't afford to have the job done poorly; my hair must look exactly perfect!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Hansen," Judy said, her voice tinged with panic. The old bitch was the salon's best customer, and she would surely lose her job if Mrs. Hansen complained.

"It'll just take a few minutes to fix it," she lied.

Judy hurried through the repair work and managed to get her out in forty-five minutes.

"That's better," she said, glancing down her nose at the mirror. "I shall be back on Friday," she added curtly.

Judy could hardly wait.

Stiffing her disgust for the old woman, Judy hurried her out of the shop, for she was already late and Charley would be on his way.

Rapidly exchanging her soiled white uniform for her blouse and red jumper, she brushed her hair and was on the corner in ten minutes. She hoped she looked all right, for they were having dinner at his house.

* * *

"Mrs. Erickson, did you get the midstream urinalysis and the blood test completed on the patient in 605?"

"Yes, sir, and both were negative."

"Damnation, what can be the matter with him? We've tried almost everything."

"Well, sir, I've only seen one like him before, and he never did recover. It was a malfunctioning ventricle and he died in a coma." The nurse knew her business.

"He has no record of heart trouble and the cardiogram shows up perfect. It can't be that." The doctor knew his business too.

"Dr. Moreland, Dr. Moreland, 4th floor ward, 4th floor ward, immediately," the intercom softly interrupted.

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow, Mrs. Erickson. Have Dr. Ferguson stop in on the patient, maybe he'll be able to figure something out."

"Yes, sir, good-night, sir."

Mrs. Maxine Erickson walked down the hall she had patrolled for the last fifteen years.

"Have Dr. Ferguson stop in on 605," she instructed the student nurse at the desk. "He's becoming quite a mystery case."

She picked up her coat and purse, and walked to the elevator, thinking about what she would fix for dinner. She remembered that Charley and Judy both liked tuna and noodles, so tuna and noodles it would be.

She hoped Charley would be on time tonight and not out looking for some job.

As the elevator descended the six floors to the lobby, she thought about her fine son and wondered why she couldn't convince him she didn't mind supporting him while he was in school.

* * *

"Mom, that was sure a great dinner!"

"Heavens, I should hope so! The way you wolfed it down you'd think it was your last. How 'bout you Judy, you better have some more, you hardly took any to begin with."

"No, thanks, Mrs. Erickson," she answered softly. "I guess I'm just not hungry tonight," she picked at the napkin on her lap.

"You have a hard day?" the older woman asked soothingly.

"Oh, that ol' Mrs. Hansen was in again," she spat the

words. Then, more quietly, "Nobody can ever please her."

"Well," said Mrs. Erickson in her most cheerful voice, "you two can go now and leave an old lady to her dishes."

"We'll do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Charley, picking up his plate and hers too. "We'll help!"

Mrs. Erickson laughingly consented and decided she loved her son more every day. He was so much like his father had been.

After the dishes were done, Charley pushed the table to one side of the living room, the room which was also his bedroom.

"Too bad we don't have a TV for you two to snuggle up in front of."

Charley unwittingly flinched, causing his mother to turn a bright red.

"Darn!" she said to herself, "why is he so sensitive?" She thought of all the times he had apologized for being a burden to her. It hurt her inside to think he felt so badly. Didn't he know she would rather have him in school than have all the televisions in the world?

"Let's look at the album," she suggested.

They spent the evening pouring over and laughing over the pictures Mr. Erickson had taken of Charley and Mrs. Erickson when the family was young and he was still alive.

Finally it was time to go, and Charley and Judy reluctantly descended the stairs to the street.

* * *

dirty buildings

I L L U M I N A T E D

WhiteYellowGreenBlueRed.

N E O N .

squiggles of light on sooted walls,

beautiful when lovers walk

hand-in-hand,

sensing only one another.

half-seeing,

half-feeling,

as they walk among them.

sounds—

traffic,

24-hour crowds,
they neither hear nor see
as
they walk among them.
yes, they are lovers,
groping,
 sighing,
in the swirl of the
C I T Y .
the gutter,
the sky,
one step . . .

* * *

Mrs. Arceri's boarding house, the tallest brownstone on the block, loomed up in the distance. Even on this block, the welcome darkness was broken every nine seconds by the flashing neon "EAT" across from Mrs. Arceri's.

As they approached the steps, Judy began quaking inside. "How can I explain it?" she asked herself for the millionth time. "Come in for a while, sweetheart."

"Okay, but only for a while, it's getting late, and looking at all my baby pictures wore me out," he laughed and pushed her gently inside.

As they climbed the four flights, Judy didn't notice the bare bulbs set in the walls nor the worn carpeting under her aching feet.

The fourth floor landing came, and reaching it, she hesitated.

"Come on, honey," he prodded her. Then, noticing the ashen color of her face, he said, "Say, what's the matter, you haven't hardly said two words all night. I think Mom even noticed it."

Entering he closed the door all but a crack. Mrs. Arceri didn't allow the door closed when male callers were with her girls.

"Honey," she spoke softly, "I'm sure now, I'm nine days late and this is the second one I've missed."

Charley sank to the bed, the springs singing a staccato tune at his weight and the color rushing from his face.

"What can we do?" He knew his mother would be nice about it, but it would crush her, O, GOD! it would crush her.

He stood suddenly. "We'll get married, this week!" His voice was falsely resolute. "I'll quit school and get a job."

Reading his previous thoughts in his expression, Judy said, holding back the tears, "Oh, darling, I want that more than anything, but we can't."

"The hell we can't."

"Charley, don't swear!" She thought of all the swearing that went on in her sister's house. Her sister had had to get married when she was seventeen.

"Besides, you can't quit school now and ruin a whole year's worth of work. You've only got six months left." She looked down at the floor. "And I talked to Sally today," she said in a very small voice, "you know Sally, the blond down at the shop. She knows how to get out of this. She did it herself once."

"Oh, honey," he moaned in a low voice, "you can't do that. Listen, I'll quit school for now, but after the baby's born, I'll go back and finish." As an afterthought, he said, "We can move in with Mom."

She thought of living in their little apartment, someone having to sleep in the livingroom, Mrs. Erickson probably insisting that it be her, and said, "No, you know as well as I do that would never work."

He had known that as soon as he said it. "Dammit! We'll make thing work out. I'll come get you tomorrow night after work. I'll get the license over my lunch hour." He had no idea it took two people to get a marriage license.

Judy, putting her arms around his neck and, resting her head on his chest, said, "All right, darling." She was more firm than ever in her conviction, but she wanted no more argument. Reaching up and kissing him, she said, "Now, you better go, or Mrs. Arceri'll be up here screaming Italian and waking up the whole block. She rarely comes to the fourth floor, but she has a sixth sense when there's a man in the building. See you tomorrow." She kissed him again.

After Charley left, Judy called Sally to make sure exactly how it was done. Sally told her it was simple and she didn't know why every girl in trouble didn't do it. It hardly hurt at all . . . only except for the cramps a little.

The words convinced Judy. She went to the closet and undressed, picking out one extra hanger.

Charley fumed all afternoon. "How could that idiot be so stubborn?" he hissed at the water cooler. "Why couldn't she just sign it at home? Why did he have to see her sign it?"

He crushed the cup, tossed it in the bin, and went back to his workbench.

"Charley," the sound of his name startled him, he turned and saw nothing but teeth between Mr. Davidson's ears.

"Why the jaw-breaker, sir? Your wife have twins or something?"—"Jesus, what am I saying?" he thought to himself.

"Better than that, son. Got you a job, if you want it."

"WANT IT?" Charley shouted, dropping a wrench not an inch from the old man's neatly polished shoe. "You bet I want it! Where is it?"

"Here's the address, drop in tonight if you can, they're open till nine." He added, "It's an appliance store on Rochelle Avenue."

Charley almost told him he wouldn't be back, but decided to wait till tomorrow. He wanted to make sure they would take him full time.

At 5:01 he called Mr. Richard's. He would see Judy after he saw the appliance store people. The place was only a few blocks from Mrs. Arceri's and he could walk the distance in five minutes.

"Hello." It was the petite voice of Mr. Richard.

"Yeah, hello, is Judy Griffin there?" he hurried the words.

"No, and she didn't even come in all day."

"What? NO, I said JUDY GRIFFIN."

"And I said she didn't come in," the effeminate voice reiterated.

"Why not?"

"I don't know, she didn't call."

He clicked the phone down and wondered, the sound of the dime ringing down woke him.

"Aw, she must'a gone for a new dress for the wedding or something." He strode out of the building toward the bus-stop.

"Good thing Mom's on duty tonight, she won't be waiting dinner for me."



The electric sign announced that directly beneath it was the door to Henderson's Appliance Corporation. He pushed

the door open and went directly to the rear of the store. Entering the office, he encountered a young man of about twenty-seven years.

"Charles Erickson," he introduced himself. "Mr. Davidson at Universal Trade School sent me."

"Oh, yes," said the man, extending his hand. "Jackson's my name. Mr. Davidson spoke well of you. So you need some work, eh?"

"Yes, sir, full-time if you've got it."

"Full-time?" he said, somewhat surprised. "Your supervisor said you only needed work after school."

"I'm quitting school, getting married."

"Oh, well . . . ah, how long you been at the school?"

"About thirteen months, only five to go," he exaggerated both ways.

"Well, ordinarily we'd prefer to have you finish, but since Davidson spoke so highly of you, I guess we could teach you the rest. You'll have to start low salary though."

"That's okay," he rushed. "I'll learn."

"Hundred a week okay?"

"A hundred a week?" he repeated the fantastic sum.

"Well, I know it's not much, but we can't give you any more than \$2.75 an hour while you're still learning."

"I guess that's fair enough," he spoke too loud and too fast, his voice and flushed face betraying his attempt at non-chalance.

"Good, be here Monday."

"Monday? That's a week away! I can start tomorrow."

Laughing, he said, "Maybe you could, but I don't think your bride would like that." He smiled and shook his hand once more, adding "Congratulations."

Charley walked out of the office wondering how what had happened had all happened. He pinched himself to make sure he hadn't fallen asleep in the school cafeteria and dreamed up this whole thing.

"Jesus," he thought, "Jesus . . . now Judy won't even have to work . . . God! . . . what'll Mom say?" His head spun.

The phone by the door caught his eye. *Call Judy.*

Not remembering he was only five minutes away, he dialed Mrs. Arceri's fourth floor pay phone.

As the phone rang, his heart grew lighter and lighter.

"We got it made! Good God!! We got it made!"

But slowly, as the phone continued to ring, his heart moved into his throat. "Answer, you dope, answer!"

Not at work? Not at home?

He glanced at his watch, 6:15, probably still downstairs at dinner. His heart moved down closer to where it ought to be.

* * *

dirty buildings
I L L U M I N A T E D
WhiteYellowGreenBlueRed
N E O N .

* * *

Charley saw none of it.

He didn't even notice the ambulance as it screamed and flashed past him.

* * *

sounds—
traffic,
24-hour crowds

* * *

He rounded the corner, and suddenly he rejoined the world of sight and sound.

R E D .
An Italian woman.
S C R E A M I N G .

He ran, the buildings blurred, he joined the gathering crowd at the foot of the worn steps.

"I'ma know she'sa der, da phone, she'sa ring an' ring. I tink how come she'sa no answer? How come she no come down for dinner? She'sa der all day. I'ma know, da radio, it go all day.

"I'ma knock, she'sa no come to da door, she make'a no noise. Only dat radio. So I'ma use'da key."

"An' MADRE MIA!! what I'ma seein'? Da poor ting on'a da bed, blood all over. *Blood ALL OVER!!*"

The ambulance driver, trying to calm the hysterical Mrs. Arceri, asked her if she had touched or moved anything.

"ME?? I'ma no touch nutin'. You tink I'ma nuts? I call, dat's all, jus' call."

The driver shut the door of the ambulance on the sheet-covered stretcher and said, "Take it easy, ma'am, I didn't

mean you did anything wrong. You did just fine. Don't go in the room; the coroner will be out shortly to take some pictures." He turned, walked around the ambulance, and got in.

As he was driving away, Mrs. Arceri, still hysterical, went on, "What he tink I'ma touch sumptin'? I'ma not crazy. She'sa da crazy one, do sumptin' like dat witha coathanger. I jus' call, dat's all, jus' call."

Charley, in a daze, stood . . . silently.

"O God!!" he whispered, "O GOD!!!"

He turned and staggered.

Whiteyellowgreenbluered through his tear-filled eyes. His skull exploding.

He walked, he ran, he wandered walking running lost.

Blocks, miles, tens of miles, thousands of miles.

"We had it made, WE HAD IT MADE!!"

Judy. Mom. Hundred a week.

"WE HAD IT MADE!!"

He stumbled as his toe caught a crack in the sidewalk.

"Where am I?"

"O please somebody, where am I?" his body heaved, sobbing.

He didn't know.

in the swirl of the

C I T Y .

the gutter,

the sky,

one step . . .

Haiku

by *Ellen Feinberg*

English, Jr.

Brushing against the green nap
Gently the still wind
Of the meadow's grain