

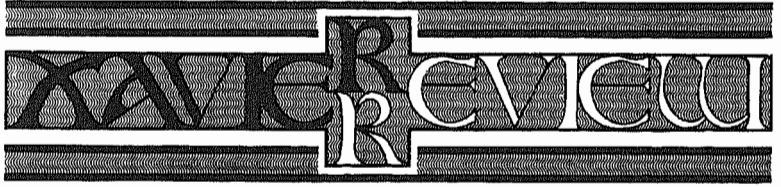
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REBIE TURNAGE WILLIAMS

From Louisiana Love (Novel-in-Progress)

Alcee Boudreaux was an extraordinary young man. In Leonville, the small Louisiana town where Creole speaking Negroes and Bayou Cajuns lived in close proximity if sometimes dubious harmony, Al Boudreaux was its best known and probably best liked citizen.

He was a young man with a quick mind and an equally quick temper. He was, however, a kind and considerate person, blessed with a charming sense of humor and striking good looks as well. In a milieu where good-looking men were the rule rather than the exception, Al Boudreaux still stood out. He was taller than most of his contemporaries, muscular, lithe and graceful. His shining black curls and complexion, the rich tawny yellow of the ripe olive, were the result of that rare combination of Cajun mother and Negro father. He was thought by some to be a womanizer; but that impression was due more to his appearance than to his actions.

He was the organizer and leader of Boudreaux's Bayou Band, an organization that in a few years had become well known throughout Assumption and Ascension parishes and which afforded him the opportunity to display his considerable talents as an entertainer. He was an exciting showman who could double on any instrument in his band as well as sing and dance. Additionally, he was an excellent raconteur.

He had not married, he said, because of the need to support his mother, Celine Boudreaux. His younger brother, Octave, was now prepared to relieve him of that responsibility, and it was generally assumed that Al would soon marry. Mary Louise Tunson was thought to be the likeliest candidate. She had been his acknowledged pretender for more than two years, and hers was the only name linked with his.

Mary Louise was a quiet unassuming young woman whose appearance initially merited only a cursory glance. Only later did one notice that she was pleasantly plump, brown skinned, with large dark eyes, soft dark hair and an easy smile that became brilliant when beamed at Al. She lived for the occasions when the Bayou Band performed in Leonville and she could watch and admire Al to her heart's content.

The St. Clothilde Social and Benefit Society had for years held its annual soiree at the Economy Hall, an event that attracted both the young and old of Leonville. There were those who came regularly for

the delicious food and the chance to win the coveted door prize, after which they drifted out; but on this occasion the majority, by far, came to hear and to dance to the music of Boudreaux's Bayou Band.

Al was at his best as the MC; and when, with his customary flair, he announced the drawing for the door prize, the well-fed happy throng responded with cheers and hand clapping. After presenting the prize to the proud winner, Al with great aplomb introduced the donor, Madame Josephine DeChant. As the elegantly dressed widow rose and bowed gracefully to acknowledge the introduction, Al noticed for the first time, the young girl seated next to her. He guessed rightly that the young girl was the widow's daughter. Their eyes met and he was immediately certain that he had never seen a more beautiful girl. He had to know her name. Why had he never seen her before?

It seemed an interminable wait for intermission when he could question Gus, the bassist and the oldest member of the aggregation. Gus was said to know just about everybody in Leonville as well as each one's life's history. Al's best efforts, however, elicited little from Gus; who folded his arms on his expanding pauch, patted his foot and answered briefly and succinctly: "Her name's Lydia Anne" and "You ain't seen her before because you don't go to school and she don't go to balls and saloons." Al was temporarily nonplussed but by no means discouraged.

It was not unusual for Al to intersperse the band's dance numbers with what he called "Cutting a few steps and cracking a few jokes." Tonight, both as dancer and raconteur he out-did himself, and the dancers loved it. Actually whatever Al did, whether on or off stage, was either praised or condoned, never criticized or condemned. To Al, the delighted approval to tonight's patrons was incidental and unimportant; his performance had been a paean to the lovely Lydia Ann DeChant, and he felt that somehow she knew it and was pleased.

As the musicians were carefully replacing instruments in their cases, Al again questioned Gus about the object of his admiration. Once again the answers were brief and laconic. "No, she ain't got no brothers or sisters. Yes, she's through with school."

"Gus, I'm gonna marry that girl."

"Don't be a fool man. Besides, she ain't but fifteen years old."

"I can wait."

Wit, charm, determination and persistence were well known Boudreaux characteristics, but patience was a stranger to Al. In little

more than a year he had done all of the waiting of which his eager heart was capable and had made good his promise to "marry that girl." Having once gained entry into the DeChant bastion, he easily won the regard of the widow along with the love of her daughter.

When the couple suddenly eloped, speculation ran rife in the community; but if the widow was disturbed or displeased, she gave no evidence of it. The only person intrepid enough to comment on the elopement to Madame was Cousin Florence, and she succeeded in eliciting from Madame only a noncommittal, "Eh bien, c'est la vie."

It could well have been that both mother and daughter came to the realization that the DeChant exchequer could not withstand the demands of a wedding befitting a DeChant. Hence the elopement. At any rate, a month later the marriage was quietly solemnized in St. Anne Church. A simple reception followed, and the couple officially moved into the DeChant home.

The source of the DeChant income was a matter of speculation and conjecture even when Joseph DeChant was alive. It was known that he made frequent trips out of the parish, but as far as anyone could determine these trips were not remunerative. Some said, however, that he was a gambler, and others that the DeChants lived off an inheritance. But an inheritance from whom? Even Gus had no idea.

The backgrounds of both partners were sketchy. Josephine DeChant's waist-long hair, ram-rod carriage and stoical demeanor attested eloquently to her Choctaw heritage, and she spoke not only Creole but excellent French as well, but it was known only that she had been reared by "The Nuns." Joseph DeChant boasted that his father was a "Free-man of Color" and his mother a Nicaraguan. While this kind of mongrelism was not uncommon, it rarely resulted in inheritances. Still, the rumor of the inheritance was given some credence when Joseph's death seemed to cause no particular hardship to the widow and daughter. There were only two notable changes in their lifestyle: no longer was there the succession of visitors to be entertained; and Cousin Florence moved into one part of the spacious home which had originally been built to accommodate more than one family anyway.

The location for the lovely old house had been well chosen. It was built on a kind of knoll in almost the exact center of town, where it seemed to look down benignly on the surrounding terrain. Its size and pristine whiteness were in sharp contrast to the other houses in the area, most of which were small and painted either a bilious yellow trimmed in muddy brown or two shades of sickly green.

The house itself was set well back, and the large front yard was

Madame's special pride. The lawn area was solidly covered with the lush green and white of clover in bloom and completely ringed with the colorful profusion of geraniums, verbenas, nasturtiums, phlox, daisies and zinnias. The huge veranda was verdant with pots of luxurious ferns. In the backyard were great old pecan, fig, mulberry, and persimmon trees. Along the sides of the henhouse and the tool shed were beds of red and yellow cannas and endless bushes of the ubiquitous four-o'clocks.

The DeChant property did not end there. Some distance beyond the confines of the back yard were four small cottages, each with its well tended garden but with no fence. Giving the cottages a separate identity were the well-worn foot paths that ringed each house and garden. There was little doubt that the minimal rent from these cottages and the produce from their small gardens contributed at least as much to the DeChant solvency as the rumored inheritance, but in no way did this diminish the DeChant status.

In the years that Al and Gus worked together they had become more than just fellow musicians. Their association developed into a little and big brother or father and son relationship. They admired each other, exchanged confidences and respected each other's judgment and opinions. Gus often told Al that he did not regret not having married. His only regret was that he had not moved when he was younger to New Orleans, where he felt a musician had the best chance of "making it big." But all in all he seemed reasonably content with his life in Leonville.

When Al and Lydia Anne agreed that the time had come for them to leave the comfort of the DeChant home and establish one of their own, Lydia Anne enlisted the help of her mother-in-law. She and Celine set out to find a suitable place for the new menage. After searching diligently, they reported to Al that they had been unable to find a house that was either suitable or available. After pondering this for some time, Al decided that maybe he had outgrown Leonville and environs, and should try his luck in some other place. Gradually thoughts that had been submerged in his subconsciousness began to obtrude themselves. The tales that Gus had told about New Orleans, to which he had paid scant attention at the time, began to surface and take on importance. Maybe New Orleans was the answer.

He confided his thoughts to Lydia Anne and together they decided that they should talk it over with Gus, who recounted for them

everything that he could recall about this several brief visits to New Orleans and with such evident nostalgia that without too much difficulty they succeeded in convincing him that it was not too late for him also to have a try at "making it big in the city."

The two men reviewed their finances and immediately began making plans for reorganizing the band that would continue under Al's name for a specified time. It was also agreed that Lydia Anne would remain with her mother until Al got a "toe-hold" in the city. In due time the men with their instruments and meager belongings boarded the local train for New Orleans.

Arriving in the city they found lodgings in a rooming house within walking distance of the French Quarter. Gus spent the first few days visiting honky-tonks and looking up former acquaintances who could steer them to jobs. The time was auspicious; many small combos were being formed in anticipation of the Carnival season. These musicians would be much in demand by the many small pleasure clubs with which New Orleans was dotted, as well as by the numerous private parties that enlivened the Mardi Gras celebrations in "la belle Nouvelle Orleans."

Al spent his time haunting the Vieux Carre, completely fascinated by everything he saw. He sauntered in and out of shops, looking but unable to buy, except for a couple of picture postcards here, a single praline there, or a beignet and coffee at the French Market.

He even visited St. Louis Cathedral on his way to the Holy Family Convent, the mother house of a congregation for Negro nuns. His mother-in-law, Madame DeChant had commissioned him to deliver to the Superior, Mother Elizabeth, hand-embroidered pillow cases, a gift to the nuns to be raffled at their next bazaar.

Mother Elizabeth had become friends with Madame DeChant when, as plain Sister Mary Elizabeth, she had been one of several nuns who stopped at the DeChant home on their begging tour of the parishes. The friendship had endured because, despite the disparity in their vocations, the two women were surprisingly alike. They were both charming, intelligent, creative women who saw beauty in all aspects of life. Both of them enjoyed writing; kept diaries and wrote voluminous letters to relatives and to each other. These letters kept the friendship alive, as they rarely saw each other. Al found Reverend Mother to be an interesting conversationalist who related much of the convent history to him, including the fact that the present chapel was once the

place where the famous, or infamous, Quadroon Balls had been held.

The word quadroon stirred Al's memory. In his mind, it was nearly synonymous with beauty. Mulatto women might or might not be beautiful; they were only half white. But quadroons, who were three fourths white, were invariably beautiful—or so it was thought. Even Leonville had heard the tales of the fabulous quadroon balls, where the wealthiest of New Orleans' white men came to cavort or find consorts or proteges among the only women permitted to attend, the beautiful quadroons.

With a flicker, Al brought his thoughts back to Reverend Mother, who proffered him a small glass of anisette and invited him to visit the chapel. He declined both offers with thanks saying that he had just had coffee at the French Market and had prayed at St. Louis Cathedral. Reverend Mother chuckled at the tone of Al's refusal. Her puckish sense of humor suggested that he was really saying "no mawkish anisette after rich cafe du monde and no prayers in a converted ballroom after those in a cathedral." However, she quickly dismissed her frivolous imaginings. Al had not mentioned the Cabildo, which was in close proximity to the cathedral, so she considered it safe to suggest that he visit there. She explained that in the early days of the city all of the administrative, legislative and judicial functions were conducted in the Cabildo. It was now a historical museum with exhibits that included such things as important documents; slave trade memorabilia and even the original stockades where prisoners awaiting trial were held: Al was fascinated and at his first opportunity he headed for the Cabildo, discovering that would become one of his favorite attractions of the French Quarter.

In the meantime, Gus had proven himself a very able agent. He and Al were doing well enough that by exercising the greatest frugality, Al was even able to save a bit. Especially since an inspired MC, without consulting Al, had given him a brand new personality. With great fanfare he had announced one night to the club patrons; "It is now mah pleasuh to bring to you a very special treat: The man with the beat, Singing Bill from Leonville."

Like the good trouper that he was, Al fulfilled the MC's promise. The patrons loved him. The word spread and the crowds came. The club owner expressed his pleasure with a pay raise; but Al had ambivalent feelings about his success. This was not what he had envisioned. He felt like a puppet with someone else pulling the strings. He could not have explained his rationale, but he had the feeling that Singing Bill, somehow, seriously diminished Alcee Boudreaux. He was, nevertheless, grateful for Lydia Anne and to get on with their life together.

Al was now irrevocably in love with New Orleans, at least with as much of it as he had seen; and the city seemed to return the compliment. As he strolled leisurely down Canal Street, strangers spoke or smiled as though they knew him or wished that they did.

He walked from the "down-town" side of Canal and Rampart Streets, admiring the window displays and memorizing the names of the more impressive looking stores. He then decided to return to his starting point via the opposite, "up-town," side of Canal Street. After only a short distance, on an impulse, he turned into Carondelet Street and was immediately aware that this was a totally different world from the Vieux Carre and one well worth discovering. Accordingly, he slowed his pace. When he had gone two and one half blocks, a sign in a window caught his eye. He stopped and read: Porter Wanted. He was still staring quizzically when a well dressed middle-aged man came out of the building.

"Young man, are you interested in that job?"

"I'm not for sure."

"Don't you want to work?"

"Mebbe."

"What's the problem?"

"I don't know what a porter is. Except on a train."

"Suppose you come inside and let's talk about it."

The man who invited Al to come in and discuss the job was Isador Jacobs of the "Isadore Jacobs and Sons, Bankers and Brokers." The two men entered his office, he took a seat and invited Al to do the same.

The two men could hardly have been less alike, yet they felt comfortable with each other almost immediately. Under gentle questioning Al revealed much of his past, his present situation and his hopes for the immediate future. Jacobs then explained what was expected of a porter and convinced Al that he could handle the job as easily as had the man who, until his recent death, had held it for 22 years.

Al left the office in a state of near euphoria. He now saw the light at the end of the tunnel in the form of his wife's lovely face. He rushed to report his news to Gus who, in his turn, had a piece of news that ultimately proved to be the perfect complement to Al's. Gus had learned through the grapevine, that the wife of a "guy who drew a long stretch" was trying to sell her possessions to raise enough money to return with her two small children to her folks in Detroit.

Together the two men met the hapless woman and learned that for

the munificent sum of one hundred dollars she would leave the house completely furnished and would also introduce and recommend them to the landlord.

Gus, still in his self-appointed role of agent, arranged for Al to appear at the club on weekends only. Now, with two jobs and the help of his employer, Al was introduced to the intricacies of making a loan. The one hundred dollars in hand, Lydia Anne's arrival was practically fait accompli!

The news that a young couple was moving into the neighborhood spread quickly. When Al, Lydia Anne and Gus, laden with luggage, alighted from the Elysian Fields street car, and walked to their new home, their arrival was not without witness or welcome. The neighbors had not been sympathetic to the unfortunate wife and children of the "jail bird" and were happy to see them replaced.

Lydia Anne paused on the porch, smiling shyly and waving to the onlookers, while Al and Gus carried the luggage into the house. Al returned to the porch and, to the delight of the spectators, gallantly lifted his bride into his arms and over the threshold.

At the end of three months, if the former occupants had returned to the small shot-gun house their amazement would have been complete. Gus had said, "With a lot of work and a lot of paint, we can make this place what it ain't." And he had been right.

Watching Al hammer, saw, and paint was a revelation to Lydia Anne, who had not ever expected to see anything in Al's hands but a musical instrument. (Her illusions would have been completely shattered had she seen him in action at the brokerage.) Al was equally fascinated by the domestic skills of the wife he had thought of as a pampered, helpless little girl. When they learned that Lydia Anne was definitely pregnant, the world was theirs! Or so they thought.

In no time at all they became the pride and focal point of the neighborhood: "The Couple."

One would think that there was not, nor ever had been, another "Couple" in the neighborhood. Certainly not another like the young Boudreaux couple. They were a study in contrasts. Al's personality was instantly disarming. Like a bright colored, well cut jacket, its impact was immediate and charming. Lydia Anne's charm was less obtrusive, but just as valid. Like metallic thread running through a soft hued fabric, it gave to her personality a special, yet subtle, glow.

The arrival of their baby girl was an event second only in

excitement to the neighborhood Mardi Gras parade. Lydia Anne had hoped that her baby could be born in Leonville, but the threat of complications suggested an alternative, so her mother came to New Orleans instead and remained for six weeks. Since it had been decided that the baby would be christened in Leonville, Al took time off from work to join his family for this momentous occasion. They were met at the Leonville station by the ever faithful Gus. He had resumed his life in Leonville, having proved to his own satisfaction that he could make it in the city if he so chose.

The baby was christened at St. Anne Church where both her parents had been christened as well as married.

Al had secretly hoped for a son on whom he would bestow his middle name, Victor. He had no special fondness for the name Alcee, which was the name of his father, for whom he also had no special fondness. He was, nevertheless, delighted with his baby daughter and would happily have given her her mother's name, the sound of which, he maintained, was "music to his ears." But Lydia Anne had retained a pleasant if vague memory of her baby sister Claudia who had died at the age of three years and she wanted to call her daughter Claudia. Mother and father agreed on the little sister's name and a combination of both their middle names: Claudia Victoranne. Both parents, if no one else, were pleased with the compromise.

Neither Lydia Anne nor Al were prepared for the trauma occasioned by their leaving Leonville for the second time to return to New Orleans. They empathized with the grandparents' reluctance to see the baby go and they were saddened by the sight of Gus waving good-bye to them; and well they might have been, for his forlorn figure was already showing the ravages of tuberculosis. Only four months later Gus was dead, victim of the dreaded "La patrine."

Once back in New Orleans, life seemed to proceed normally for The Couple and their baby. Al was doing so well at Jacobs and Sons that he was no longer "slinging a mop" but had his own desk, albeit in a rather obscure section of the office. It was being said with mixed reactions that he had "a white man's job," but his boss was pleased and Al was happy.

He was no longer appearing in clubs even on weekends, which were devoted exclusively to his family. Yet, in spite of his obvious devotion to his family, it was not until he came home one evening and found the house devoid of the usual tantalizing cooking aromas and Lydia Anne asleep across the bed that he suddenly saw how thin and pale she had

become.

His first reactions were of of shock and disbelief, then panic. "Dear God!" Why haven't I noticed before?" He resisted with difficulty the impulse to take her in his arms. Instead, he tip-toed into the kitchen to begin the preparation of the first of the many sketchy meals for which he would be responsible in the future. He was working noiselessly in the kitchen when his daughter's loud wailing announced her readiness for dinner and simultaneously wakened her embarrassed mother.

Lydia Anne sat facing Al across the small kitchen table, he reached for her hand and said softly,

"Baby Girl, why didn't you tell me you were sick?"

"I didn't know I was sick, Al, I just thought I was tired."

"You know now that you're sick, don't you?"

"Yes, Sweetheart."

"So now we can start getting you well."

In the weeks that followed, Al was torn between hope and despair. He thought of Gus and how he looked when they last saw him at the train. He remembered the things that Madame DeChant had said about the fatal illnesses of her husband and small daughter, and his heart plummeted. The awful words, consumption, tuberculosis, La Patrine, all with the same dreadful meaning, refused to leave his consciousness.

Isadore Jacobs, Al's boss, arranged for the very able Dr. Stern to take on Lydia Anne as a patient, and Al was grateful; but it soon became obvious that as hard as he tried, the doctor could not succeed in stemming the tide. He gave Al his diagnosis: galloping consumption. Al still had not forgiven himself for his failure to notice his wife's early decline and was almost paranoid in his sensitivity to the slightest change in her actions or appearance. By now, however, the wasting away of her youth and beauty was apparent to the most casual observer.

The neighbors were sincerely devoted to The Couple and their baby and they now relieved Lydia Anne almost entirely of the care of the house and child, leaving only the preparation of the evening meal to Al.

Al had insisted that he liked the sound of his wife's and daughter's names; yet he was never heard to address either of them by their given names. His wife was invariably Baby Girl, and his daughter just Baby. On a sultry evening in late September, Al came home from work hoping against hope to find Lydia Anne better. He greeted her in his usual fashion: A tender kiss with what she called his wrap-around hug, and the routine:

"Hi, Baby Girl! Where's the Baby?"

"Next door. How was your day?"

"Great! Like I hope yours was."

At this point there was a variation: "Al don't go in the kitchen. Stay here with me. I want to talk to you."

"It'll be my pleasure, Baby Girl."

"Then sit down."

In spite of himself, Al was shaken by the urgency in her voice. To dry himself he walked the length of the living room to the bedroom and sat in the sturdy rocking chair that had been bought to lull Coranne to sleep, but was now Lydia Anne's comfort spot. He gently held his wife to his lap.

"Now, what is it you wanted to say to me, Baby Girl?"

"Al, I want to go home."

"What do you mean? You are home."

"I mean Leonville, Al."

"You mean you want to go back to Leonville to live?"

She stroked his cheek and ruffled his soft curls.

"No, Sweetheart. Not to live. To die."

"Don't talk like that, Baby Girl. Dr. Stern is going—"

She interrupted him softly.

"Dr. Stern says I have galloping consumption and that I am going to die. Soon."

"That son-of-a-bitch! What the hell does he know? When did he tell you that?"

"When I asked him to please tell me the truth."

Unable to control his hurt and rage, he slid Lydia Anne gently from his lap, went into the kitchen and sobbed uncontrollably.

By bedtime he had regained some of his composure. As they lay in each other's arms he freed her long, lovely hair from its heavy braid and fingered it lovingly.

"Baby Girl, have I been a good husband to you?"

"The best in the world, Sweetheart."

"Then you know that there's nothing I want more than to see you happy."

"I believe that, Al."

"Well if going back to Leonville will make you happy, starting tomorrow."

They made love, and the salt of their tears mingled with the honey of their kisses.

The same neighbors, now friends, who had welcomed The Couple three short years before, now crowded around Isadore Jacobs' chauffer-driven limousine that was to take the little family to the train bound for Leonville.

Carefully dressed and flushed, either from fever or excitement, Lydia Anne looked as lovely as the day she arrived, but there was no mistaking how ill she really was. The neighbors tried to hide their grief behind forced smiles and:

"Hurry back."

"Get well quick."

"Write to us sometimes."

"God bless you."

"Have a good trip."

Lydia Anne tried valiantly to respond in kind, but as the limousine rolled slowly away she dissolved into tears in her husband's arms.

Octave, who was now chauffer to Dr. Nelson, Leonville's only physician, met the family at the train in the good doctor's car and transported them to the DeChant home, where both Madame DeChant and Celine Boudreaux awaited them on the porch.

The greetings were effusive and emotional. Whether from fatigue or sentiment, Lydia Anne seemed reluctant to enter the house. She asked to remain on the porch while the others carried the luggage and the baby into the house. Al returned to the porch and sat with her. Silent and pensive, their arms around each other, they looked dreamily out over the town until the light faded.

Back in New Orleans, Al went directly to the rectory of St. Katherine Church to unburden himself to the elderly pastor. Without really knowing what he wanted or expected to hear, he came away unrelieved. "A hell of a lot of help he was."

Still feeling the need to involve God personally in his problems, he decided to do it in his own way. Accordingly, at noon each working day he headed for Baronne Street to spend his lunch hour in the Jesuit Church petitioning God, not, as Father Sweeney had suggested, that he be given the strength to accept God's Holy Will; but instead to beg that his wife live. "She is so good; so young; and we have a child to raise." Only occasionally would he force himself to add "If not, dear God, I'll try to understand."

The first weekend that Al returned to visit his wife, his spirits lifted a bit. He thought that he detected some improvement in her condition.

She looked almost radiant. Between the two grandmothers, Claudia Victoranne was gradually being kept from her mother, as the doctor had suggested. She was still plump and rosy and seemed as happy as a clam. Her father was pleased.

Two weeks later, when Al returned to the office from the church on Baronne Street there was on his desk in the boss' handwriting: "Boudreaux, not to worry, but call Leonville." Al could barely summon the courage to lift the receiver.

Celine answered. "Son I think you better come. She's sinking."
"I'll be there. Tonight."

Josephine DeChant, haggard and tearful, in gown and robe, the heavy chignon reduced to its bedtime braid, met him at the door.

"Son, I'm sorry we didn't call you befo'. Now she just sleep. She don't see, and she don't talk."

Without answering, Al took his mother-in-law's hand and together they walked to Lydia Anne's bedside. He thought that she had never looked more beautiful. Like a lovely sleeping child. Her long braid lay along her side, an exact copy of her mother's except for the loving addition of a pink satin ribbon. Al bent and kissed her lightly on the forehead and on each pale cheek.

The eyelids fluttered and the lips distinctly formed the word, "Al." Celine, who now spent most of her time in the DeChant home to assist in the care of her son's wife and child, was asleep when Al arrived. She was now awake and she persuaded Josephine to retire and Al to relax on the sofa in the back parlor while she remained in the sick room.

She sat near the bed and dozed intermittently. Shortly before dawn, she became intuitively aware that the patient was awake. She saw with surprise that the large brown eyes were staring unseeingly around the room. From the parched pink lips came the weak but unmistakable query: "Al? Al?"

"Son! Son! Come quick. She call you."

Celine then hurried to the room where Madame slept.

"Josephine! Josephine! Vien vite. She wake up."

When the two women arrived at the bedside, Al had his wife in his arms.

"I'm here, Baby Girl. I'm here."

After one glance at the dying girl, both mothers fell to their knees and recited aloud the Act of Contrition and the memorare, after which Madame, her body wracked with sobs, was unable to rise from her knees, Celine rose and tenderly coaxed her son to release his wife.

"Let her go; mon fil; she wid God now. Let her rest."

With the final realization that never again would he hear her

whisper his name or feel her warmth in his arms, Al's tears came. He stumbled blindly to the kitchen, sat at the table and drank himself into oblivion.

Having left Claudia Victoranne in the care of her maternal grandmother, Al was once again in New Orleans. He felt that without his wife and child the little house on Frenchman Street could never be home to him again. He chose an entirely different community and rented two small rooms at the rear of a house on Seventh and Saratoga Streets. The kind and motherly owner agreed to "look after" his little girl whenever he brought her there for a visit. This he did at every opportunity.

On week-ends whenever Claudia Victoranne visited him, father and daughter would roam Canal Street, visit the Vieux Carre, attend mass, go to Audubon park, and eat out. If his daughter's visit extended through the week, Al would go home on his lunch hour and bring her back to the office to spend the afternoon sitting quietly near his desk, drawing "stick people" or making endless necklaces with paper clips.

The little girl enjoyed her visits with her father in New Orleans and talked endlessly to her grandmothers about what "me and Daddy did." However, she was obviously happier in Leonville with her devoted "Gran" and "mamma Celine," and the other townspeople who fussed over Lydia Anne's baby.

Whenever Al came to Leonville, Mary Louise Tunson made a point of offering her help if he ever needed it. He never admitted needing her help, but after nearly a year he seemed to grow more comfortable in her presence and it appeared that their relationship might possibly be renewed.

Al Boudreaux had met Harry Davis shortly after coming to New Orleans. They were not close friends but they liked each other. They were both musicians and had performed at the same club and at a few of the same parties. And they found that they had more things in common than music, chiefly an uncommon devotion to their wives and small daughters, Christina and Claudia Victoranne. Whenever Al boasted of his lovely Lydia Anne, Harry countered with something amusing about his wife Ludie Mae, whom he described affectionately as "corn fed and country bred."

Harry and Ludie Mae both tried hard to comfort Al in his period of mourning after Lydia Anne's death, and when Harry was tragically killed in a hunting accident, Al was quick to offer his help to the grief-stricken Ludie Mae. She leaned gratefully on him.

Her best friend had also come to her assistance. Al was introduced to the out-of-town friend, Miss Eleanor Brown. He was neither impressed nor much interested; that is, until he noticed something in the way that Miss Brown related to the small Tina Davis.

He remarked on this to Ludie Mae and was told that Miss Brown was a teacher and therefore accustomed to dealing with children. She explained further that she and Miss Brown had been childhood friends, growing up in St. Simeon parish. Ludie Mae had married and migrated to New Orleans; Eleanor Brown had not married and was still teaching in the parish.

Al was not immediately impressed by or attracted to Miss Brown, but she was smitten at the first sight of the handsome widower. Ludie Mae saw this and adroitly steered them together and they began talking pleasantly to each other, first discussing children in general and then progressing to Al's child in particular. Responding happily to his show of interest, Eleanor invited him to visit her in St. Simeon parish. Two weeks after her return home, he followed through on the invitation.

Al had now been widowed for two years and felt that he had just about come to terms with his grief. His little girl seemed happy and well cared for; yet he was vaguely discontented. He knew that Claudia Victoranne was getting plenty of love and attention; but both Madame DeChant and Celine Boudreaux were getting older, and he was anxious to have his little girl with him in a home of their own. At the suggestion of and the help of his boss, he was buying an attractive bungalow near the edge of the Carrollton section of New Orleans. He had not yet moved in, but spent most of his spare time there, gardening, painting, papering, in a manner reminiscent of the work he and Gus had done at the little house on Frenchman Street. Perhaps it was time now to establish that permanent home for himself and his Baby. On his third visit to Eleanor's home in St. Simeon Parish, he asked her to marry him. She accepted with alacrity.

The mid-morning sun streamed into the large chambre a caudre and glinted brightly on the silver threads in Madame's neatly coiled hair. She sat at her sewing machine rhythmically pedaling the treadle to the tune of "Mamzelle Zee Zee." Claudia Victoranne sat nearby in her small caneback rocker, cuddling her beloved doll, Demetria, and humming along with her grandmother.

Cousin Florence came in from the post office and greeted the woman and child in her usual brisk manner:

"Bon jour, Cousine. Comment ca vas? Et tu BeBe?"

"Tres bien, Florence, tres bien."

The child gave no answer, knowing that none was expected of her. Florence handed Madame the mail. There was only one letter. Al's familiar handwriting surprised Madame. It was not time for the monthly child-care money, but why else would he write?

After reading the letter slowly and carefully, she replaced it in the envelope and sat motionless for a moment before resuming her pedaling, this time much more slowly and spasmodically, in rhythm with her chaotic thoughts. She anguished over how best to break to her granddaughter the news contained in the letter. She finally summoned enough courage to come right to the point.

"Ma Petite, your Daddy is soon going to get married and come to get you." She had anguished needlessly; the child's acceptance of the news seemed so casual as to border on indifference. There was no immediate response. After carefully and completely dressing her doll she said quietly, "I won't go."

"You'll have to, Cherie, or your Daddy will feel very bad."

"Let him!"

"He says she's a very nice lady."

"What's her name?"

Momentarily stalling, the grandmother said,

"What's whose name?"

"The one that's gonna marry with Daddy."

"Miss Brown."

"Miss who Brown?"

Gran laughed, retrieved the letter and read: "Miss Eleanor Brown." The child said merely "Umph," and returned her attention to her doll.

Removing his daughter from the arms of her two grandmothers and saying goodbye again to Leonville and friends was not easy to Al, nor for any of the others. However, with the insouciance of youth, Claudia Victoranne appeared to accept the situation with equanimity. Her father was less fortunate. He had felt that he should be the one to tell Mary Louise Tunson of his remarriage. It proved to be one of the most difficult things he ever had to do. Her stunned and pained face was to haunt his days and nights for many months to come. He pleaded with her:

"Please try to understand, Mary Louise."

"I do understand, Al, and I know that you don't love this woman."

"I think I do, Mary Lou."

"No, Al, you don't. You and me—we got that once only Louisiana Love. Death don't end it and nothing don't change it. You'll always love Lydia Anne, and I will always love you."

Al could find no words of response. He simply squeezed her hand and once again walked out of her life.

Gran, Mamma Celine and Cousin Florence wept in unison as Al and Claudia Victoranne, with Demetria in her arms, left the house. Claudia Victoranne wearing the new dress her Daddy had brought her and Demetria wearing the one that Gran had made.

Claudia Victoranne didn't like the train ride very much until Daddy bought some peanuts from a man with a basket on his arm. Arriving in New Orleans she was tired but wary. She didn't like Daddy's house very much either. It was not at all like Gran's. Daddy said it was a bungalow. A bungalow, phooey!

The day was warm and humid, as only a day in New Orleans can be. Eleanor Brown Boudreaux stood in the hot and steamy kitchen perspiring freely. Her mossy black hair, divided and twisted into four equal parts, seemed to accentuate the nearly square contour of her determined face. She perspired as much from exasperation as from the heat. Ten years of teaching told her that patience was the answer if she was ever to succeed with this recalcitrant child, but such patience as she possessed was now wearing very thin.

The day before, in an effort to welcome Claudia Victoranne, she had said:

"This is your very own room. The big bed is just for you."

"Gran's bed is bigger."

"But this one is just for you."

"I'd rather sleep with Gran. Her bed has a mosquito bar."

"There are no mosquitoes here. The house is all screened."

"Umph."

Today she was determined to have this newly acquired daughter of hers learn to call her mother. She had tried persuasion, innuendo, even veiled threats. All to no avail. It was not in her nature to coax or cajole, but as a last ditch effort she was now prepared to resort to bribery.

The child sat disconsolately on an up-turned pail in the middle of the linoleum covered kitchen floor. Her thin little legs hunched up almost to her chin, and two long russet braids nearly reaching the floor. The large brown eyes with just a hint of defiance were raised to the

imposing figure standing over her. The woman had in her hand a tall pink glace which she held out enticingly to the child. She asked, for perhaps the third or fourth time, "Now what are you going to call me?"

As she had done for an equal number of times, the child replied, "Miss Eleanor." As she had done each time previously, the woman returned the frosty glass to the big wooden ice box. At last the combined heat of the kitchen and the discomfort of her perch forced the child to succumb to the appeal of the icy concoction the next time that it was proffered. The word "Mother" fell from her trembling lips like a leaden pellet.

With the glace firmly in her grasp, she was told she might take her reward to the cool back porch. It was certainly cooler than the kitchen, but even more to her liking, she was alone on the porch.

The little girl sensed, somehow, that this morning's encounter with "Mother" was but the precursor of many more encounters in which she would always come off second best. Suddenly the glace was neither as frosty nor as sweet as she had imagined. She had crunched the last icy bit when Mother appeared at the door.

"C.V., it's time for your nap."

In the darkened room, lying tense between the talcum powdered sheets, the child's stormy thoughts precluded sleep.

"C.V.! Umph! She wants to be called Mother and not Miss Eleanor. Well I want to be called Claudia Victoranne and not C.V. She told me that was an awful name to give a child. Daddy and I don't think so. And Gran always made it sound so pretty: Clo-dee-ah Victor-ahn! Just like a song. Sometimes I didn't answer the first time she called, just so I'd hear it again: Clo-dee-ah Victor-ahn! And besides, Gran didn't put me to bed in a dark room when it was still daytime outside. Naps are for babies! I'm four and a half years old!"

Thoughts of Gran, however, helped to soothe the unhappy child. She remembered the comfort of Gran's big four-poster bed with the protecting mosquito bar and Gran lying beside her. She could almost hear Gran softly singing Frere Jacques and thus was gradually lulled to sleep.

Eleanor Brown and Alcee Boudreaux were as different as two individuals could possibly be. They had been drawn together, not because of the supposed attraction of opposites, but because each saw something admirable in the other and, more importantly, each saw the opportunity to meet a specific need. Eleanor had always known that

she was less attractive than her sister Millie; but she derived partial satisfaction from the knowledge that she was generally considered the smarter of the two and the better teacher.

Millie was teaching in St. John parish where she lived with her husband and an assortment of pets. Eleanor would not have admitted it, but she envied her sister. True, she enjoyed teaching, but she did not feel fulfilled. She was acutely aware that she was thirty years old and that eligible men in St. Simeon were almost nonexistent. Meeting the handsome widower at the home of her bereaved friend had been a lucky happenstance.

Life with Daddy and her new mother was often frustrating and confusing for C.V. There was so much that she was expected to learn and so much more that she was expected to forget. After Gran and Mamma Celine's affectionate indulgence, Mother's stern demeanor, rigid demands and expectations were difficult to satisfy, but she tried her best because she knew that it pleased her Daddy. But when Mother decided that Daddy should be called Father, as the proper complement to Mother, C.V. rebelled. She had accepted Miss Eleanor as Mother, and herself as C.V., but Daddy would always be Daddy. That was that. She protested vigorously:

"I don't want to say Father. He's my Daddy."

For the first time, and quite possibly the last, Daddy sided openly with his daughter.

"For heaven's sake, Darling, let her call me what she wants, what she's used to."

C.V. won this one, but Mother did not take defeat or Daddy's defection lightly and took steps to see that it did not happen again.

Not unlike C.V., both Al and Eleanor had their moments of frustration and confusion, but neither would have admitted any regrets. Eleanor had wanted a home and husband, while Al wanted a home and mother for his child. Both got what they wanted; an obstreperous child and a determined wife were just part of the package deal.

Shortly after the marriage Eleanor surprised her husband, not too pleasantly be it said, by turning the enclosed back porch into a classroom. She did not reveal her method of recruitment, but she soon had eight pupils. Six sat around the big oak table. The two who lost out on the scramble for seats at the table sat on the steps that led down from the kitchen.

No two of the pupils were at the same grade level, but they nevertheless were all taught reading, writing, spelling, and basic math. The cost of this personalized education was twenty-five cents a week, payable at the end of the week. The teacher apparently considered it crass to ask for this money, but she was not naive enough to think that

she would get it if her debtors were left entirely to their own devices. Accordingly, she devised a system that she considered both sure and subtle. Her modus operandi was as follows: Every Friday she placed on the study table an empty receptacle with neatly lettered label: TUITION MONEY. (The label said Tuition Money, but the aroma still said Luzianne Coffee and Chicory.) She would then call the roll:

"John."

"Present." (Plink—1 quarter)

"Theresa."

"I was absent two days." (Plink, plink, plink—15 cents)

"Martha."

"Momma say she'll ketch up nex week." (Silence)

And so it went each week. The classroom on the porch was C.V.'s favorite place. Only there did she feel no pressures. No effort was made to teach her nor to impede her learning. The teacher simply ignored her, but the pupils did not. They loved her, and she loved all of them in return. Especially Cat Eye and Pina. With the perspicacity of the very young, she suspected that they were in love with each other, and time proved her right. They constantly grouched or reported each other to the teacher:

"Miss Boudreaux, you better call here to Cat Eye."

"Miss Boudreaux, I ain't done nothing to Pina."

"Oh yes you did!"

"What I done?"

"You know you stuck yo ole big foot under neatha my chair, in the way of my own feet."

"Aw, Girl, you crazy."

"That will do! That's enough from both of you."

"Yas ma'am." (In unison)

C.V. was the only pupil not expected either to learn or to pay for the privilege; but she seemed to learn through the simple process of osmosis.

Al was completely amazed when one Sunday night he heard her reading the comics to her doll. He expressed his surprise and pleasure to his wife. "You're a wonderful teacher. I didn't know she had learned to read already."

His wife's answer was as brief as it was honest. "Neither did I."

A little more than two years after the Boudreaux classes were started, the new Public School for Colored Children was built in the

Carrollton section of the city. Since all of the pupils lived much nearer to the new school than to the Boudreaux home, their teacher reluctantly surrendered them to the dubious advantages of free public education.

With her usual determined competence, Eleanor redirected her energies to the more mundane pursuits of cooking, cleaning and gardening. If she regretted losing her young charges, she never admitted it. She was not one to cry over spilled milk or lost pupils.

C.V., however was desolate. The pupils had been her lifeline. They had helped to fill the void left by Gran, Mamma Celine, Cousin Florence, Mary Louise, and Leonville itself. She could converse with them, albeit in whispers. She could sidle onto a chair with one or another of them, or stand alongside a chair and feel an arm go stealthily around her waist or a hand gently stroke her hair.

C.V. hungered for physical contact and conversation. Mother offered neither, and seemed to disapprove of both. She spoke to C.V. only to issue directives. Their physical contact was brief and purposeful; as when she bathed C.V. and combed her hair, both of which ministrations C.V. heartily detested. To add to her distress, there seemed less and less time to talk to Daddy. Mother had also told her that she was now too big to sit on Daddy's lap, and Daddy had said nothing to the contrary. But happily there were still Sundays. Mother in her somewhat unfashionable black suit invariably attended six-o'clock mass at Sacred Heart Church near her home. Here, she was content to worship from one of the last pews reserved—and so designated—for Colored and to wait in line to receive Holy Communion after all the white communicants had left the altar rail. She then hurried home to begin the preparation of a hearty Sunday breakfast and sumptuous Sunday dinner.

After family breakfast, Daddy and C.V. would set out for St. Katherine Church where Daddy was an usher and an active member of most of the church organizations. In contrast to his wife, Al was always impeccably and fashionably dressed. Since his wife had little interest in clothes, he shopped for C.V. as well as for himself. He and his small daughter were always much admired wherever they appeared.

Eleanor was aware of her husband's involvement in church affairs, so she did not expect his return home much before dinner time. Thus he and C.V. had time to spend together, usually down in the Vieux Carre, or uptown in Audubon Park or visiting one of his friends who had small children. Eleanor had no friends, since Ludie Mae and her little girl had returned after Harry's death to St. Simeon Parish. Al, on the other hand had many friends, none of whom his wife had any desire

to know; consequently, they were never invited to visit, but occasionally Al would take a friend's child along with him and C.V. on their Sunday jaunts.

Whether walking in the Quarter, on Canal Street, in the park, or wherever they went, C.V. clung so tightly to her father's hand that her fingers sometimes ached. On the street cars she sat as close to him as she could possibly manage. Trying, it seemed, to absorb enough touching and togetherness to last until the next Sunday. Daddy never said so, but C.V. knew instinctively that their Sunday excursions were not to be discussed at home. There was always the possibility that Mother might consider one or all of them inimical to proper child rearing.

Al was acutely aware of his little girl's loneliness following the termination of the Boudreaux classes and he decided that something should be done about it. After bringing all of his charm and diplomacy to bear in a session with his wife, it was agreed to accept her sister Millie's repeated invitation for C.V. to visit her in St. John Parish. The length of the visit was not predetermined. They all knew that it would depend less on the child's adjustment than on the mother's whim. C.V. was delighted at the prospect. She loved Millie's cheery voice and warm smile and was anxious to see what Aunt Millie's one room school was like.

As she walked to school that first day with her hand in Aunt Millie's, she wondered if there would be someone there who would want to be friends with her. Would there be someone there whom she could like the way she had liked Cat Eye and Pina? Aunt Millie assigned her to a seat and told the children that her niece was a visitor, but that she could participate in the classes if she wished. As each class was called up, the pupils formed a line either in front of the teacher's desk or at the blackboard. C.V. was fascinated. She soon recognized that the fourth grade classes were at a level that she could handle. From then on, she was always one of the first to rise when a fourth grade class was called up.

Her alacrity, however, was due to motives more romantic than academic. It was necessary for her to move more swiftly if she was to be assured of standing next to Peter Stewart. Peter was, perhaps, the tallest boy in the school and certainly the blackest, a combination that would always be attractive to C.V. Peter revived half forgotten but distinctly pleasant memories for C.V. Standing next to him and

surreptitiously placing her small hand in his warm one, she was magically back in Leonville being held high in the arms of Big Al Boudreaux, the grandfather who found no favor with either Daddy or Mamma Celine. Fortunately for C.V., Cousin Florence liked Big Al. Maybe she even liked him a lot. She frequently took C.V. for a "nice lil' walk," always in the direction of Big Al's saloon; and by the greatest of coincidences, Big Al, or Big Dad as C.V. was taught to call him, was invariably standing out on the sidewalk in front of the saloon.

He would lift C.V. so high up in his arms that she felt "almost to the sky." While she patted the smooth ebony skin of his face and the strong forearm extending from the rolled up sleeves of the snowy white shirt, he would hug her tightly. To C.V.'s delight, and obviously Cousin Florence's, too, he would croon in his mellow baritone, "Everybody loves a baby that's why I'm in love with you! Pretty baby, pretty baby." He would then lower C.V. to the sidewalk; dig into his pocket and hand Cousin Florence an undisclosed sum of money with the directive to: "Buy somethin' fittin' for this pretty granchile of mine."

C.V. could not recall anything "fittin'" or otherwise ever bought with this money; but there was the distinct recollection of walking back home in step with Cousin Florence's gleeful, off-key rendition of "Pretty Baby."

Almost as if he sensed that C.V.'s thoughts had taken her far away, Peter gently squeezed her hand to bring her back to the reality of the moment. Aunt Millie was aware of C.V.'s maneuvering to stand next to Peter, but when she discovered that they were holding hands she decided to speak to C.V. on the way home.

"C.V., its all right to hold hands with someone to show that we like them, but it is against the rules to do so in school. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Aunt Millie."

C.V. did understand and knew that Aunt Millie also understood.

The Boudreauxs wanted their daughter home for Christmas; so the child made the train trip back to New Orleans in the care of an affable Irish conductor and was met at the terminal by her anxious father. Thus ended the St. John experience. It had afforded the little girl temporary surcease from her feeling of loneliness and boredom, and for this her father was grateful. Millie, however, incurred her sister's displeasure by suggesting that the child could benefit from more intimate or personal attention as well as from an opportunity to interact with her peers.

Al gave this very serious thought and, by happenstance, he learned that a fellow parishioner at St. Katherine, a Mr. Charles Burton, was a teacher at the new public school of the Carrollton section. He

discussed his little girl's situation with the teacher, who thought that Millie's suggestion had merit and added one of his own. He felt that the child should be in a structured learning situation and suggested that she be enrolled at the school where he taught. Al was in complete accord. It remained only for him to convince his wife. Despite his best efforts she remained unconvinced; but conceded grudgingly after Mr. Burton volunteered to drive the child to and from school and look after her until she adjusted.

Because of C.V.'s unconventional background, proper placement was not easily determined. It was finally decided that Miss Russell's fourth grade room was a good place for a start. Miss Russell was not so sure.

"What is your name, again?"

"My name is Claudia Victoranne Boudreaux, but mother doesn't like it."

"Who could blame her."

"She wants me called C.V."

"I'll be more than happy to oblige."

Mr. Burton kept his promise. He drove C.V. to and from school until her mother took over. However, he continued his interest in her at school, without which she could not have withstood the conflicting demands of school regulations and her mother's dictates and admonitions.

For reasons both inexplicable and inexplicable, anything public was repugnant to Eleanor Boudreaux, and public schools were no exception. According to her, only "riff-raff" or the "low-class element" patronized anything public, and, again, schools were no exception. She repeatedly admonished C.V. that:

"Birds of a feather flock together. So keep to yourself. Have nothing to do with any of them because association begets assimilation." It is doubtful whether C.V. understood any of this verbiage, but her mother's attitude was unmistakable. As she had been programmed to do, she followed her mother's instructions to the letter. She spoke to no one. She remained in the classroom at morning recess and ate a lonely lunch in the room at noon. She also followed her accustomed classroom pattern and participated or not as she felt inclined. At any given time she might be either an eager participant or in another world, deeply engrossed in the pages of "A Book of Knowledge" which she had discovered for herself in the classroom bookcase. There was no thought of asking for permission to remove it.

As might be expected, Miss Russell was not disposed to tolerate this unorthodox behavior indefinitely. One day during the morning

recess, C.V. was reading quietly in the empty classroom when she overheard Miss Russell and the principal in the hall.

"Miss Bouie, I just can't have that little Boudreaux girl in my room any longer."

"And why not? She's a lovely child."

"That may be but . . ."

Their voices trailed off down the hall, but not before C.V. had heard enough to plunge her into a deep blue funk.

That same afternoon, Miss Bouie came into the room and, with obviously forced cheerfulness, said,

"C.V., Dear, get your things and come along with me."

Miss Russell said not a word and, along with the entire class, breathed an audible sigh of relief. C.V. followed Miss Bouie down the hall, clutching her school bag and lunch box to her chest, hoping thereby to still the unaccustomed pounding. She had no idea of where she was being taken until Miss Bouie turned into Mr. Burton's fifth grade room. The sight of his pleasant face instantly relieved her tensions.

"Welcome, C.V. There are two vacant seats. You may take your choice."

"Thank you, Mr. Burton."

She chose the one in front of Walter Reed, a choice she would live to regret. He alternately tied her long braids into knots or held them like reins, hissing "giddy up, giddy up." But this was a small price to pay for being in Mr. Burton's room. C.V. was as close to happiness as she had come since leaving Aunt Millie. She adored Mr. Burton and knew instinctively that he liked her.

She was certain that he was the smartest man in the whole world. Even smarter than her Daddy. He knew music like Daddy, but he also knew about great men like W.E.B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, James Rosamond Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Marcus Garvey, and many others, like George Washington Carver whom Daddy admitted he had never heard of. He even knew about C.V.'s great grandfather, Joseph Allard Nicaud, and told her not to feel ashamed of his having been a slave owner. Mr. Burton said he was a brave and good man who defied Louisiana laws by educating his slaves and arranging for them to be baptized, married, and buried according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

Al shared his daughter's admiration of Charles Burton, crediting him with, among other things, encouraging C.V.'s interest in music, literature and drama. He never missed one of Burton's school productions whether C.V. was performing or not. Such was not the case

with his wife. Although she continued to escort C.V. to and from school, she never deigned to enter the building. She stood at the corner nearly one hundred feet away, the farthest point from which she could see C.V. enter or exit the main door. Apparently, her refusal to enter the school was her way of dramatizing her dislike of an arrangement that neither originated with her nor had her complete approval. But then Eleanor Boudreaux's complete approval was difficult to come by, her lips seemed to have some sort of selective barrier that made difficult the issuance of words of praise, approval or accord.

High on her disapproval list were her husband's friends: "Those ignorant down-town Creoles, all trying to be white." Yet she seemed comfortable and content, in the melange of the heterogenous neighborhood in which she lived. On the same block with the Boudreauxs were: Madame De Las, Madame Mireaux, the Gatipons, Golemis, Morans, Lesters, Chavignys and Pohlmanns. None of these was particularly friendly with the other, but Eleanor felt that all of them liked the Boudreauxs. Al was more cynical about it. He felt that what they really liked was the convenience of the only telephone and radio set on the block, which they readily availed themselves of. If when they came to the house there was a child with them, C.V. and the child simply stared silently at each other.

C.V. was now spending every Saturday morning at the Holy Family Convent where she took piano and violin lessons from Sr. Seraphine and embroidery lessons from Sr. Rosalie.

On the very first morning of the Saturday sessions, she and her mother boarded the street-car at the corner of their home. A few blocks on, a woman passenger came on board and sat opposite them. After staring at C.V. for a moment, the woman leaned across the aisle and addressed the mother:

"Pardon me, Lady, but isn't that Lydia Anne's little girl."

Eleanor glared balefully at the woman and reached for the buzzer. If looks could kill, the hapless questioner's demise would have been both sudden and certain. The car came to a stop and Eleanor quickly alighted, nearly leaving C.V. behind.

Her mother's behavior did not surprise the child. She was aware by now that any inadvertent mention of Lydia Anne's name was likely to have bizarre results. Waiting at the stop for the next car to come along, Eleanor had second thoughts. She decided that after today C.V. could be trusted to travel alone to the convent. Thus, a surprise encounter resulted in a surprising and happy decision for C.V.

C.V. so loved the convent that her Saturday mornings there were beginning to rival her Sunday mornings with Daddy. The convent was so peaceful, so beautiful. There were large lovely pictures on the walls, colorful statues of saints on pedestals in little niches and alcoves, and the highly polished wide stairs with gleaming bannisters that C.V. could barely resist sliding down. There were the quietly moving nuns who smiled at you or patted your head. Maybe someday she'd be a nun. Just maybe.

Always the first nun she encountered was Sr. Berchman, the doorkeeper. Sr. Berchman was the proud owner of a parrot with the predictable name of Polly. Most of the nuns spoke French to the pupils and expected them to respond in kind. Sr. Berchman saw no reason to do differently with Polly. Actually, she went a step further and demanded that Polly sing in French.

"Chante pour moi, Polly. Chante a haute voix."

Polly needed no urging. She would immediately raise her voice in song:

"J'ai moi fait, pour volez,

Lessaiz moi, mon alez."

"Tres bien, Polly, tres joli."

Sister would then join in the second time around, and the two voices would become completely indistinguishable.

C.V.'s second encounter was usually with Mother Anne, an aged nun who had, or thought that she had, exclusive territorial rights to the second floor, where she trudged slowly and ceaselessly back and forth fingering her rosary and murmuring aloud. Their greeting was automatic and unvaried:

"Bon jour, Mere Anne."

"Bon jour, ma Petite."

"Comment est votre sante, ma mere?"

"Tres bien, merci pour Dieu."

After this exchange, C.V. would scuttle quickly into the music room to preclude any further strain on her limited French.

If asked, Eleanor Boudreaux would not have admitted it, but she was secretly pleased with C.V.'s progress in her classes at the convent. Along with her husband she attended every festival, concert, bazaar or other event of any nature in which C.V. participated that benefitted the nuns; and they were legion.

C.V.'s musical progress was marked. Due perhaps as much to heredity as to Sister Seraphine's proficiency as a teacher. Her progress with the needle was less spectacular. Heredity failed her here, and her teacher's methods were, to say the least, suspect. Sr. Rosalie would

produce the bag, which she kept at the convent, that held the samples of the various stitches that C.V. had learned, as well as the luncheon cloth on which she was currently working. She would see that C.V. placed the embroidery hoops properly, threaded her needle, knotted the thread, put on her thimble, and took at least a few stitches correctly.

Always chary with words, Sister Rosalie would simply say: "C'est bonne" and remove her chair from the small table where they worked, place it cater-cornered at the far end of the room, seat herself decorously and fall instantly asleep. As soon as C.V. heard the sounds of her erratic snoring, she knew that she had time to slip away for a brief visit with her friend Philomena, an orphan who worked in the convent kitchen.

The establishment referred to as the "Convent" consisted of, in descending order, the nuns, the specials, the boarding students, the day students and the orphans, each having and clinging to a separate rung on the school ladder. The specials were students who came in once or twice a week for lessons in music, needlework, art or whatever a more affluent or ambitious parent might consider de rigueur at that time.

The loyalty and generosity of C.V.'s parents was well known to all of the nuns, as a consequence of which C.V. was greatly indulged. It is doubtful whether any other student, special or not, would have desired, dared, or been permitted to invade the sacrosanct convent kitchen for the express purpose of fraternizing with an orphan. But C.V. was not only a special, she was different.

Sr. Thomas, the nun in charge of the kitchen, would give each of them a slice of French bread and half of a banana with the admonition to "scoot." They would quickly hie themselves to an old wooden bench in a remote corner of the paved schoolyard. There they hurriedly and happily devoured their treat before returning to the bustling Sr. Thomas and the snoozing Sr. Rosalie.

If, as rarely happened, Sr. Rosalie awakened to find C.V. gone, she assumed her to be in the washroom. Having finished her siesta, she would dismiss C.V. with one word, "Bientot."

After two years, the luncheon cloth was finished and donated to the nuns to be raffled. C.V., reluctant to part with the result of two years of time and effort, desperately hoped to win it back in the raffle. She spent all of her allowance on the tickets. Her father, with his usual sensitivity where she was concerned, conspired with the nun in charge of the raffle to buy all of the remaining tickets.

When her name was announced as the winner, C.V. was ecstatic. She excitedly hugged her father and he suggested, sotto voce, that she

present her work of art to her mother. Mother accepted it with quiet thanks and, on arriving home, placed it in a drawer where this costliest of table covers was to remain forlorn and forgotten.

Al Boudreaux could scarcely believe that his 11-year-old Baby was ready for high school. Mr. Burton succeeded in convincing him that despite her tender years she was sufficiently mature emotionally to make the transition to high school without undue trauma. He recommended the co-ed Catholic High. Her mother, however, preferred the all-girl Academy of Our Lady.

Al agreed with Mr. Burton. Accordingly, C.V. took the entrance exams at Catholic High and was accepted for the fall term. Al had gradually begun to assert himself in matters pertaining to C.V. and had nearly precipitated a domestic crisis by insisting that C.V. be permitted to spend a part of her summer vacation in Leonville.

The father was aware that his daughter had an almost obsessive hunger for love and for the human touch. He recognized also that his wife was by nature austere and undemonstrative and considered any show of affection, even between parent and child, unseemly. Because of this, he was more reserved with his daughter than his natural instincts dictated and often felt guilty as a result.

Although C.V.'s interaction with her fellow pupils at school had been severely restricted, she had managed to share vicariously in their lives. With the close of school, her father knew that she would be deprived of this outlet and would also miss the contact with Mr. Burton. He felt that a few weeks in Leonville, basking in the warmth of her grandmothers' love and attention would be good for the child and make the grandmothers happy as well.

In the previous year, there had been an important change in the DeChant menage. Cousin Florence had married and moved to Denver, Colorado. Not surprisingly, her marriage had caused a bigger sensation than Al and Lydia Anne's elopement. She was no longer very young and she married a widower she had not seen until he and his sister arrived in Leonville for the nuptials. Florence had met the sister while vacationing in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The sister introduced them through the mails, and they took it from there. The couple's initial greetings to each other were:

"You look shorter than your picture."

"And you look darker."

Obviously, pictures had lied, but love triumphed. The wedding

plans proceeded without a hitch, and the "shorter" bride and "darker" groom set out happily for Denver. Mamma Celine moved into the DeChant home as Cousin Florence moved out, and the two grandmothers couldn't have been more pleased with the arrangement.

Leonville welcomed Al and Lydia Anne's little girl with open arms. It was soon obvious to C.V. that her parents had been very special in their home town and she enjoyed every moment of the reflected popularity. She was meeting relatives that she did not know she had and seeing again those that she had all but forgotten she had.

Ti Taunt was one of the former. She was the youngest and only surviving sister of Joseph DeChant. Her name, Marie, was almost lost in the Creole custom of calling the youngest in the family Ti, a corruption of "petite." As the youngest aunt, Marie was dubbed Ti Taunt. At any rate, the little aunt had never married. She had for years been comfortably ensconced in the home of Isaac Bloom, the town's bachelor jeweler. The town's gossips had long ceased to speculate on the relationship, but they continued to marvel at Ti Taunt's pious attendance at daily mass and at her blatant custom of wearing a ring on every finger.

Her flamboyant style and merry chatter amused and entertained C.V., who hung on every word as she was regaled with bits of lore of Leonville and its inhabitants. C.V. had gradually become accustomed to her mother's tendency to separate people into "our kind" and "their kind," but she was totally unprepared for her great-aunt's brand of anthropology. Ti Taunt explained to C.V. that life in Leonville was very pleasant because of the fact that all three of the races got along so well. When C.V. inquired innocently, "Which three races?" Ti Taunt replied with absolute guilelessness, "The white folks, the niggers, and us." Octave Boudreaux was one of the relatives of whom C.V. had retained only a glimmer of memory; but he was at his avuncular best with his young niece, and they spent as much time together as he could spare. He took her to visit Big Al Boudreaux, who was ailing and no longer in business. Big Al was surprised and pleased to see his younger son, whom he had not seen in more than a year, and overjoyed at the sight of his granddaughter. He pulled her happily onto his lap and hugged her as he had done when she was a toddler. She returned his hugs and kissed his still smooth ebony cheeks again and again as he wept quietly. To hide his own emotion, Octave admonished his father crossly to "Cut out all the crocodile tears."

Most of Leonville seemed aware of the unspoken commandment: "Thou shalt make no mention of her mother," as evidenced by often interrupted sentences and awkward silences. If Big Al was aware of any such restriction, he chose to ignore it. He bade farewell to his granddaughter with the prediction that: "You are gonna be evvy bit as pretty as yo po lil' dead mamma."

C.V. tried her best to spend an equal amount of time with each grandmother, but she found herself being relentlessly drawn to Gran's part of the house. She had been given the choice of sleeping with either Gran Mamma Celine, both of whom had huge beds, or sleeping alone. She chose the last, knowing that she would be in the room that had been her mother's.

Lying there in bed, she tried to imagine what it was like to have been the lovely Lydia Anne in love with, and loved by, handsome Alcee Boudreaux. Certainly it was not like Al and Eleanor, who, as far as she could tell, exchanged only lukewarm kisses when arriving or departing. She mused on the fact that they unfailingly addressed each other as Sweetheart and Darling, neither of which sounded warm or convincing to her.

Both Gran and Mamma Celine scrupulously refrained from mentioning Lydia Anne; but C.V. was permitted to spend as much time as she wished wandering through the large old house, gazing at the many family portraits on the walls of the front and back parlors and studying the many pictures in the fat blue-velvet-covered family album.

She had no problem identifying the subjects. The couple with the small girl and infant could only be Gran, Grandfather Joseph, Lydia Anne and the baby sister, Claudia. One picture startled her, and she found herself returning to it again and again. It was the picture of a little girl in First Communion garb who might easily have been C.V. on her First Communion day. Even the dress and slippers were similar to those that C.V. had worn. The only obvious difference was the hair style. The girl in the album had long curls brought forward over her shoulders, while C.V. had worn long braids brought forward. (Eleanor considered curls an affectation.)

C.V. decided that if she looked that much like Lydia Anne as a little girl, maybe Big Dad was right: Someday she might be as pretty as Lydia Anne. The thought made her smile happily. However, the picture that affected C.V. most deeply was of her parents with their arms around each other, obviously dressed for a special occasion and even more obviously in love.

C.V. was a sensitive and rather astute little girl, and the more she saw and heard about Lydia Anne and her family, the more she

sympathized with Eleanor's reluctance to hear about her. She did not understand quite why this was so, but it made her wish that she could somehow let her stepmother know how she felt. Somewhat to her surprise, she found that she was suddenly missing both Al and Eleanor almost equally.

Al had been right. His daughter enjoyed Leonville. The visit was good for her, and it certainly made her grandmothers happy; but it came close to precipitating an identity crisis. C.V. had assumed that she was not one of those "ignorant Creoles trying to be white," nor was she one of the "low class, common element," since her mother spoke of both with equal disdain. But only recently had she begun to question in her own mind exactly where in this scheme of things did she fit? Ti Taunt's classification of the "Three Races" added to her puzzlement. She attempted to put it all into perspective by remembering what Mr. Burton had said about racial consciousness as opposed to class consciousness, but she remained confused. She'd have to talk seriously to Daddy and Mr. Burton some Sunday after mass.

Back in New Orleans, with only one week before the opening of school, C.V.'s excitement was reaching fever pitch. She was hardly able to sleep at night. Just think—first of all, there would be no Mother escorting her to and from school! Then, Catholic High was even farther away from home than the convent; so that meant much longer solo rides on the street car. Also, she exulted in the knowledge that Mother would make no attempt to restrict her associations. She had overheard her say to Aunt Millie, "She will be with her own kind in a strict Catholic environment."

Another cause for rejoicing was the fact that she would be wearing a uniform. She was tall for her age and in her blue serge skirt and white middie blouse she would surely look as old as any other freshie. After one month at school, C.V. found the reality every bit as thrilling as the anticipation. Her mother, however, was having second thoughts.

At the dinner table, C.V. and her father exchanged what she secretly called their "Look of Love." He listened with obvious pleasure as she recounted all of the happenings of her day. C.V. had come home with a yellow rose in her hair. Her mother had chosen to ignore it. But her father asked:

"Where did you get the Marshall Neil rose?"

"A boy gave it to me. We met in the hall this morning."

She fell silent—reliving the encounter. Actually, it wasn't much of

an encounter. The boy had smiled, handed her the rose and continued on his way. She accepted it, looked surprised, stuck it in her middy pocket and continued on her way. Neither had uttered a word. Two classes later they met again.

"I meant it for your hair, not your pocket."

"Oh!"

"I like your red hair."

"It's not red. It's auburn."

"Oh!"

Her father interrupted her reverie.

"Did you thank the boy?"

C.V. giggled, "No, Daddy, I forgot."

At this point, Eleanor broke her stony silence.

"Why should she thank him? He probably stole it from someone's garden. Flowers belong on the altar, not in a schoolgirl's hair."

Al grinned and couldn't resist asking:

C.V. asked to be excused; took her water glass from the table to her room, placed the drooping rose in it, and set it on her dressing table before the statue of the Virgin Mary.

"Please, Blessed Mother, next time let it be candy."

As C.V.'s school interests and involvements increased, Eleanor's doubts escalated. Her faith in the vaunted strict Catholic environment and discipline was being slowly and painfully eroded. When C.V. announced proudly that she had literally beat out two fellows for the spot of drummer in the school band, Eleanor's doubts crystallized into acute distress. She had reluctantly permitted Sr. Seraphine to give C.V. lessons on the drums, at no extra cost and on the school's drums, but she had extracted a solemn promise from Sister that C.V. would not perform on the drums before an audience. Her distress was, now, compounded by the knowledge that she could neither influence nor intimidate those white nuns at Catholic High. She was forced to accept the fact that she had a daughter who played the drums and who would undoubtedly do so in public. Adding insult to injury, her husband seemed as pleased about the whole thing as his avante-garde daughter!

Because of her unique spot with the band and her consistently good grades, C.V. was soon very popular with both student body and faculty; and her expansive nature seemed to embrace all and sundry.

Early in her sophomore year she became an integral part of a five-

member clique, who modestly called themselves The Elites and surprisingly, they were accepted as such. This connection in no way diminished C.V.'s overall popularity. The Elites were both envied and admired.

C.V.'s close association with these four girls provided her with the kind of education she was not receiving either in the classroom or at home. As a result, her demeanor in both places changed. At home she became less inhibited with her father. With her mother she became more assertive, refusing to have her combined or her bath drawn for her, and insisting she be permitted to remain after school for intramural sports and other extracurricula activities.

At school she and an equally unsophisticated classmate had received simultaneously love notes that shocked them. They promptly turned them over to their teacher. It was then that the other Elites decided that C.V. should be taught the facts of life.

Myra Jenkins became chief instructor. Myra lived with her grandmother, Lucy Jenkins, a Baptist missionary well known in the city who visited hospitals, jails and other places of confinement and thus was familiar with many facets of life. Lucy Jenkins wisely passed on some of her wisdom to her granddaughter. Gram Jenks, as Myra called her, was a no-nonsense person, but she and Myra were devoted to each other. The other girls were a little in awe of her, but they liked and respected her.

Mary Devereaux was the daughter of the well-to-do Dr. Pierre Devereaux. Her mother was a timid, self-effacing person, completely overshadowed by her husband, her son, and her daughter. As the daughter of a doctor, Mary was very proud of her anatomical knowledge and only too ready to share it with C.V. or for that matter any other willing listener.

Cissy Stover lived with her widowed father, the national head of a large Colored fraternal organization. With no mother in the home, Cissy had been exposed to such a preponderance of social activities that she felt well qualified, and with some justification, to instruct C.V. in the gentle art of fending off or accepting graciously male overtures.

Ora Jones was the only one of the Elites who couldn't have cared less about what C.V. knew or learned. As far as any one could tell, Ora was affected by only two emotions: her extreme devotion to Sr. Benedict the music teacher and her intense dislike of Miss Griffin the biology teacher. Ora became an Elite on the strength of her looks. Fair skinned girls at Catholic High were said to be "a dime a dozen," and the sight of four or five of them together hardly merited a second look. But Ora was a stand-out. Nearly six feet tall with a voluptuous figure,

coffee colored skin, regular features and slightly slanted eyes, she looked like an Abyssinian princess and carried herself like one. The girls knew that she would attract attention to their group as well as give testimony to the fact that they were not "color struck," two things they devoutly desired. Their reasons for recruiting Ora may not have been strictly kosher; nevertheless, she was a bonafide member, and their affection for her was genuine.

The girls hearily always did things as a group and as such had visited several times to C.V.'s home, where they were well received by her parents. They were served dainty sandwiches, home-made ice cream and cookies; and, without exception, they had fallen in love with her handsome and affable father. However, they were not quite comfortable enough with her mother to return as often as C.V. would have liked.

C.V. was now spending less time with her father on Sundays and was permitted to spend more time with the girls. They went frequently to Mary's home, where she and C.V. took turns playing the piano while the others danced and sang. Other times they just sat around and indulged in their favorite topic of conversation, boys, alternately giggling and laughing loudly as they encouraged C.V. and Cissy to demonstrate the way certain boys talked, walked or danced. They all fantasized about the most popular boys at school, since none of them was as yet permitted to "receive company," their social contact with the opposite sex was limited almost exclusively to school dances and celebrations of one kind or another, always under the watchful eyes of the nuns and an occasional priest. Consequently, they drew heavily on their imaginations in assessing the potential of each of the boys as a possible lover. When Mary and C.V. thought to shock the others by admitting that they had been kissed a couple of times and described how, when and where, they were jeered relentlessly by Cissy and Myra. If they were to be believed, they had been "bussed" by experts and were more than willing to go into elaborate detail. After a few moments of this, Ora called a halt.

"I've heard enough of all this spit and germ swapping. It's disgusting if you ask me."

"Nobody's asking you, miss Prissy."

"Well, anyway it's time to go home." And they did just that.

Occasionally they went to the theatre. If Ora was not with them; they marched boldly up to the main ticket window, purchased their tickets, and entered the theatre and were directed to their seats by the usher. If, on the other hand, Ora was with them or Cissy had not had her hair straightened, they headed for the Colored ticket window,

purchased their tickets and trekked nonchalantly up the dark stairs to the second balcony "Reserved for Colored Patrons," euphemistically referred to by the locals as the "Buzzard Roost."

WILLIAM D. LINDSEY

The Parable Of The Dark
(To Theodore Roethke)

Bumbling in the dark is either aimless or it's not.

It all depends, ducky, says the blind man to the deaf mute.

Pity the poor moth. She bumbles nicely, thank you,
Til light robs her of sight, and, whoopsy doodle, down she twirls.

Feather of moth's wing at our fingertips tracing the dark,
We walk our way through the nighttime room,
Seeing as we never see alight:

Indistinct menace of the huddled hassock;
Glint of the clock's face;
Pattern of the tattered curtain.

Seeing then you see makes us not see
What not seeing we see as never seen til them.

And so the tale is told.

PHILIP C. KOLIN

Sea Dreaming

The sky as an inverted sea
Every cloud an atoll aloft
Hangs in the blue cavern of my eye.
Sleek cirrus streaks of pearly flora
Swaying like wedded weeds lost to the winds.
Marsh-bound geese, noisy flapping flocks,
Lapping up swelling billows of air,
Are quieted by thought and distance
Like becalmed stately anemone
Undulating below now above me.

SUE WALKER
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Beside The Tawny River: Literary Mobile

Mobile—where *the human heart's a most untidy pilgrim*, where *the crickets drone a night-watch from the trees*, where the salon rivaled Paris from 1844 until a few years before the Civil War's end. Mobile—beside that tawny river where the *Cottonmouth* swims, city that carries a strain of Creole blood which like the Gulf Stream *is a never ending current; a warm, vivid flow of color through the white. Once it's there, it stays there, retaining its temperature, its color, no matter what alien waters surround it.* Mobile—where a Russian Princess found a favorite sport in taking over the old horse-drawn street cars and driving them up and down Government Street, unceremoniously passing by astonished would-be passengers. And this when she wasn't writing the twenty-five novels, numerous short stories and Broadway plays that ennobled her name. Mobile—a city whose literary heritage is as colorful as its Mystic Balls and Mardi Gras, as splendid as March azaleas, as rich and satisfying as *court bouillon* made with snapper throats.

The characteristics that delineate the literature of Mobile are revealed in the excerpts above: a strong sense of place, preserved not only topographically but with fidelity to language, its nuances, cadences, inflections, and intonations, the everyday speech heard along the back fence, in the finest parlors, along the water front by the docks, and in the street; a predilection for truth which strips both social and political facades and reveals the humanness of being human, the mystery, passion and sin; and the various *bildungsromane* that chart the course of Mobilians as they become *civilized* in the city and beyond. In *The Untidy Pilgrim*, Eugene Walker's young man from Persepolis, five bus hours north of Mobile, describes it thus:

Down in Mobile they're all crazy, because the Gulf Coast is the kingdom of monkeys, the land of clowns, ghosts and musicians, and Mobile is sweet lunacy's county seat. I can tell you that's the truth. I know. You used to say you were never the same after living there, and I reckon I'm not either. Few years there done fixed me up. Which is what I want to tell you about. People have been saying of me, "Hasn't he changed?" and "My, he is certainly different," and the thing is, they're right, I have changed, but it's not some change you can point at with your finger and say lookathere, see-what I mean. It's more

subtle than that, and it occurred in strange degrees and lapses, quick and slow, long and short, noted and unheeded. I suppose it might be considered a change from country boy to somewhat citified boy, if you honestly believe in those distinctions. I don't myself, especially after a glimpse of New York. Some people would say I've become civilized, others would say I've gone to hell with myself. What is civilized, I ask you, and as far as that goes, what is going to hell? (New York: Lippincott, 1954, p.11)

Mobile played an important part in establishing a literary heritage not only in the city but in the state of Alabama as well. The first book published in Alabama, a legal volume entitled, *The Alabama Justice of the Peace* (Cahawba: William B. Allen, 1822) was written by a Mobilian, Henry Hitchcock, and along with Harry Toulmin's *Digest of the Laws of Alabama* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1823), it represents the outstanding legal writing in the early years of Alabama's statehood. Additional firsts are credited to Mobile, the establishment of the first permanent repertory theatre in 1824 which produced the first known dramatic composition, the play, *Aaron Burr*, and the first literary magazine, the *Bachelor's Button*, all of which bear the name of William Russell Smith and helped establish him as "The Father of Alabama Literature." (See Benjamin Buford Williams, *A Literary History of Alabama*, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1979)

It is not the catalogue of firsts that distinguishes literary Mobile; it is the contribution of outstanding women and the impact not only of their talent but of their beauty, glamor, and *savoir faire*. The leading lady of this cultural scene was Madame Octavia Le Vert (1835-1909), whose salon in her palatial Government Street home rivaled Paris and brought her national and international recognition and fame. A woman who fluently spoke French, Spanish, and Italian at the age of twelve, she was recognized not only for her intellectual accomplishments but also for her amiable disposition, grace, and charm. Few strangers of distinction visited Mobile without seeking her acquaintance. John C. Calhoun called her "the gifted daughter of the South," and Washington Irving wrote that she was "a woman such as appears but once in the course of an empire" (Evelyn Dahl, *Belle of Destiny*, New York: Greenberg, 1958). Although she produced only one book, *Souvenirs of Travel*, she represents much that was ideal in the antebellum woman: the capable erudition and social grace that made her one of the most acclaimed hostesses of America.

The most famous and successful Alabama novelist of the nineteenth century was a Mobilian, Augusta Evans Wilson (1835-1909),

who excelled in novels of domestic sentimentality which Carl Van Doren claims gave America "its most tender, most tearful classics." (*The American Novel, 1789-1939*, 2nd ed., New York: Macmillan, 1940, p. 106). Although most critics question her literary merit, Augusta Evans Wilson is said to have made over a hundred thousand dollars from the sale of her works; her novel, *Beulah* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859) sold over twenty thousand copies within nine months of its publication, and when *St. Elmo* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1949) was reissued in 1949, the jacket of the book advertised the printing of over 1,000,000 copies. Certainly Augusta Evans helped dispel the traditional view that women had no place outside the home as she established their intellectual equality and their ability to achieve success.

Like Octavia Levert and Augusta Evans Wilson before her, Mary McNeil Fenollosa (1865-1954) typified the best in late nineteenth century womanhood. An accomplished poet and novelist herself, she cultivated the excellent in literature, history, and art. Born in Baldwin County at Sibley Plantation on the old Montgomery Road about one month before the end of the Civil War, she grew up in the genteel poverty typical of the Reconstruction days. She began writing early and published some in what she classed as "second rate publications." but her writing, at this time, was mainly a pastime. When a young man wrote from his consular post in Japan and asked her to marry, she agreed. And taking her son from a previous marriage at fifteen, she married him on board a ship bound for Japan. Though she again divorced and returned to Mobile, the years in Japan influenced her life as she developed her love of the Orient and used her experiences to broaden her writing and her art. She later married the curator of the Oriental collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the leading Oriental scholar of his day, and returned to live in Japan at Kobinata in the suburbs of Tokyo. Here she published her first important work, a volume of verse entitled *Out of the Nest*, an immediate success in 1899 when it was published.

The other work she was working on simultaneously was *Truth Dexter*, the novel that her husband suggested she write to overcome her longing for home. But given no thought to the novel's possible publication, she wrote her story of Alabama and an Alabama girl's loneliness in Boston, a city far from home, in more explicit terms than were considered proper for a well-bred woman of her day. Little Brown, her publisher, thought it wise to give her a pen name, Sidney McCallum and though this created a new "gentleman" author, it was the real beginning of Mary Fenollosa's literary career. *Truth Dexter* was a

literary and social sensation and its author, safe behind her masculine pseudonym, collected her \$50,000 in royalties without fuss and stir.

With *The Dragon Painter*, Sidney McCall and Mary Fenolosa, now spelled with one "l" became one, as Mobile's glamorous novelist won a \$10,000 prize from *Collier's Magazine*. It was also a successful motion picture and in it the Japanese actor, Sessue Hayakawa, won his first fame in the title role.

Red Horse Hill, Fenolosa's third novel marked her entrance into a new literary type, that of social criticism, as she attacked child labor in the cotton mills of the South. Ethel Barrymore later played the screen version of the book, but Mary Fenolosa's main interest was no longer her writing. It was the completion and publication of her late husband's life work, the great *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. Its publication in England brought her into the company of Ezra Pound who agreed to edit the mass of material that she and her husband had collected on the Noh theater; he later produced three volumes from the Fenolosa file of notes.

Returning to Mobile, an influential woman of the world, Mary McNeill Fenolosa died at the age of 89 at her daughter's home in Baldwin county, leaving an indelible stamp on the history of literary Mobile.

Another fascinating Mobilian was Amelie Rives who became a princess as well as a playwright and novelist and who, it is said "threw Victorian conventions to the wind" driving horse-drawn street cars wildly down Government Street, avoiding people during the day except when walking her white collie in the afternoon and going to dances at night. Flamboyant loveliness and instant literary success were hers when a first story written under a pen name at seventeen was published by *The Atlantic Monthly*. "The man who wrote this," the editor appended to his acceptance, "will never do anything stronger." A real testimony to Amelia Rives talent, though she was, perhaps, ahead of her time, for the frankness of her first novel published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in April 1868 shocked Mobile and the rest of the country as well. The independence and strength of the character, Barbara Pomfret, seemed representative of Amelie herself as her heroine struggled to come to terms with her husband's death, with her uncertainty about the will of God, and with her sexual attraction to her husband's brother.

But novelist, Amelie Rives, was as captivating as her fiction. Divorced from her first husband, John Chanler in 1888, she subsequently married Pierre Troubetszkoy, a Russian prince whose reputation as a portrait painter was international at that time. Oscar

Wilde brought the lovers together as the two most beautiful people at a garden party they were attending. With at least a dozen books as best sellers and four plays produced in New York City, Amelie Rives added royal luster to the archives of literary Mobile.

Another Mobilian, dealing with race relations and causing something of a creative maelstrom, was Marie Stanley or Mrs. Sheip as she was known in Mobile. Like William Faulkner who published *The Sound and the Fury* one year before her own *Gulf Stream* came out, she dealt with unorthodox subject matter. Sheip chose to treat miscegenation by dramatizing the emotional problems of Adele, a Negro half-breed, as she attempted to find her place within the social structures of two widely divergent worlds, the world of the whites and the world of the Negro which she likened to the Gulf Stream that never loses its color. The novel traces not only Adele's love affair with her rich and prominent white lover, her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter whom she refuses to rear because she fears she is disgracefully black, but also the development of the child, Delly. Having grown up away from her mother, Delly respects her birthright, refuses to deny what she cannot change, and when reunited with her mother at Aunt Dora's death, she rejects the white world. She chooses to attend a Negro college and marries a man of her own race. Her mother, heart broken, walks out into the sea.

A novel of strong characterization, one that preserves the mellifluous quality of native speech, and also the local proverbs and charms with their directives and magic cures such as "you kain't make soap thicken when de moon's too young," was nevertheless too much for Mobile. "Negroes don't commit suicide," the locals said as they denied even the novel's realism. But the book was well reviewed in the *The New York Times*, particularly for its warmth of treatment and for its powerfully moving conclusion. Ranking with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and with Shirley Ann Grau's *The Keepers of the House*, the novel has failed to achieve the recognition and acclaim that it deserves, a fact that may be attributed to circumstance. Intended only for circulation in drug-store lending libraries, only a thousand or so copies of the book were made, and it is almost impossible to obtain *Gulf Stream* in any search and find service today.

Twentieth century Mobile continues as a productive center of literary art though the outstanding writers are predominately men instead of women, namely Julian Lee Rayford, Eugene Walter, Roy Hoffman, and Winston Groom.

A native Mobilian, Julian Rayford (1908-1980), is said to have been the greatest living authority on the restoration of the folk tale in its

original form. Hitchhiking four times across the country trading chants for bread, he is famous for his songs on Abe Lincoln, Davy Crockett and other American heroes. Additionally he excelled as a painter, sculptor, and novelist whose subject matter was primarily Mobile. *Cottonmouth* (New York:Scribners, 1941) is a *bildungsroman* in which a small town boy grows up in Mobile, gradually awakens to the spirit of his country, and finally sets out down the long road to Texas, to California, to America. What is conspicuous in in *Cottonmouth* and in Julian Rayford's subsequent works is truth, his fidelity in creating natural, intimate speech. *The First Christmas Dinner* (Mobile: Rapier House, 1947) is a sermon delivered by an old-time Negro preacher, and *Whistlin' Woman And Crowin'Hen* (Mobile: Rankin Press, 1941) is a combination gab fest, story book, folktale, and unorthodox local history. It is here that Eddie Bosarge tells how to make *court bouillon* with snapper throats. "You start with a half an inch o'grease in the bottom o'the heavy pot" and finally "when the potatoes are half-done, put in three or four pounds of snapper throats right on top" (p. 154). Words straight out of the mouths of the folks at home.

A central figure in the Mobile art scene at this time is Eugene Walter, novelist, poet, artist, actor, and columnist for *The Azalea City News and Review*. His first novel, *The Untidy Pilgrim* won the Lippincott Prize for fiction in 1955, his book of verse, *Monkey Poems*, a Sewanee-Rockefeller fellowship, and his story, *I Love You Batty Sister* an O. Henry citation. Often called Mobile's modern "eighteenth century man," he attributes his versatility to the fact he never knew he was a child. He grew up as the ward of Hammond Gayfer in a large riverfront home busy with creativity, with the coming and going of artists and actors. Robert Penn Warren wrote his first book on a card table set up in the chicken house no longer inhabited with fowl, and Conrad Albrizio, the Italian painter, set up his easel on the old front veranda. Young Eugene painted, worked on his marionette theater, and often failed to go to school. "I was never ordered to do or not do anything," Walter says. By the time he graduated from high school he was so accomplished in the arts that his lack of physical education credits was ignored and he was awarded a diploma without them. His numerous prizes and awards for both art and writing were graciously accepted instead.

Away from his native city for thirty years, Eugene Walter has come home again, blowing in, he says about the time of Hurricane Frederic, and bringing with him the experience of his more than a quarter century in Paris and Rome.

The two Mobile novelists currently achieving recognition in New

York are Winston Groom whose newest novel, *Only* is receiving prestigious reviews, and Roy Hoffman, whose recent *Almost Family* follows the tradition of local novels as it deals with race and class relations in Madoc, Alabama, a thinly disguised Mobile. But this is only a part of what is happening in the city's literary milieu, and two names should be noted and watched: Charles McNair who has published in *The Atlantic*, *Southern Living*, and *The Black Warrior Review* and Tom Perez whose *A Compleat Survey Of Funeral Practices In The Late 20th Century Deep South*, *Three Closet Dramas*, published in *Negative Capability* drew X.J. Kennedy's praise.

A recent visitor to the city's Second Saturday Series, an organization that sponsors professional readings and performances of literary works on, of course, the second Saturday of each month, recently commented to a Muse of Mobile: "My gosh, everything's going on in this city—what with all these readings and the publication of *Negative Capability*. I just heard it was ranked fourth in the nation in the *Writer's Digest* rating of non-paying poetry markets. And the magazine sponsoring that fine reading by W.D. Snodgrass last spring. What do y'all think you're doing down here?"

"What comes naturally," the Muse replied.

Meditations In Passage

[In the early 1800s, captives on the slave ship *Amistad* mutinied while in passage to America. When upon arrival the slaves were prosecuted under criminal law, John Quincy Adams successfully pleaded their case before the United States Supreme Court. As composer Hale Smith notes, the saga of this mutiny touches "a universality of human experience It relates equally to the boat people who fled Southeast Asia or to the Jews who were uprooted and victimized by the Holocaust."]

I

Night—
and the innumerable concourse of stars
Crowding across the skies
Are silent witnesses of this unspeakable outrage.
If there be Gods,
Why do they give these brutal men the gift of sight
By which they guide their ships
When light of day
Has met the farthest edge of this unending sea?
By whose command do they have the right
To burn our homes and make us hide
In fear of chains and fire belching guns,
And to plunder all that we hold dear?
By whose command do they have the right
To pack us in the holds of ships
As if we were commodities
And take from us all that we hold dear?
If there be Gods,
Why do they give these brutal men the gift of sight
By which they read the stars
And guide their ships by night?

II

The sky looks so strange at night—
Even the stars look different from those we knew.
And when there is no moon and the wind is still,
I dream of home.
Remembering games played in my childhood
And the joy of dancing in rain,
I still feel the yearning of innocent love.
Can it be that I will never see my home again?
That I may forget my mother's face?
For me to awaken and know how long we've been gone,
To try to imagine the distance we've come from our homes,
Is enough to remind me that hope is a bringer of pain.
Has there never been joy in the hearts of men of the sea?
Have they never felt joy in the touch of a child,
In the smile of a friend, or the joy of dancing in rain?
Unmerciful Gods!
Why do you give these brutal men the gift of sight
By which they guide their ships
When light of day
Has met the farthest edge of this unending night?

III

There can be no joy among us.
Betrayed by our ignorance of northern skies
Whose stars are so different from those we knew,
We've failed in our enterprise
Of returning home.
In fear and desperation we rose against our captors,
Claiming our right of freedom.
but they call it mutiny:
Revolt against authority
Of those who've bought the right of ownership
Of what we are, or hope to be.
Still—
To walk on land is better than to lie
Chained in holds of stinking ships
Where vermin cover everything.

IV

How beautiful is snow.
We have never seen the earth turn white before.
But this pale beauty—this fragile looking whiteness
Blankets all we see around us
And chills with its penetrating cold.
In our homeland, everywhere is filled with brilliant colors
Which are warm to the human eye
And warm to the human soul.

V

This place, where we have lived
While hoping to return from where we came,
Is different from all we knew,
The snow, the bitter cold, has gone
And once again the land is green.
How beautiful is spring:
Flowers scent the air and everywhere
There is newborn life.
This land is filled with beauty:
Though different, it is no longer strange—
As if we've known it all our lives.
But when we sleep, we dream of distant shores
And faces—unfamiliar, but strangely intimate.
Can it be that I shall never see my home again?
That I may forget my mother's face?
Yet still we wait while learned gentlemen,
Sworn to the cause of Freedom,
Argue that we have no right
To life as we would live it:
That we belong to others who have bought the right
Of ownership of all we are or hope to be.
Have they never felt joy at the thought of their loved ones?
Could they ever feel joy at the thought of forgetting,
And the sadness of dreams
Growing dim in the shadows of time?
Had they been taken from all that they knew
In bondage of chains, with no hope of their freedom

But the justice of those who were friends of their captors,
Would they then be so blind that they couldn't see
The truth of their own corruption?
When we sleep, we dream of distant shores
And faces—unfamiliar, but strangely intimate.
Can it be that we shall never see our homes again?
That our return is but a hopeless dream?

Two Unpublished Letters by Flannery O'Connor

Most of Flannery O'Connor's correspondence which is of literary or biographical interest has been edited by Sally Fitzgerald (*Flannery O'Connor: The Habit of Being* [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979]). An earlier collection appears in M. Friedman's book of critical essays (Melvin J. Friedman and Lawson A. Lewis [eds.], *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor* [New York: Fordham University Press, 1966]).

Though the following two letters conform in style, mood, and attitude to the general pattern of Flannery's correspondence, they may shed some additional light on her personality, literary interests and intentions.

The first letter is a reply to a copy of my essay "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories" which I sent to the author at the end of March 1963. The article must have broken some new ground at the time and pleasantly surprised Flannery. For though she is generous with praise and encouragement throughout her correspondence, her letters show only few instances of similar enthusiasm about critical writings. She actually recommended the essay to at least one of her friends (possibly the "A" of her correspondence in Fitzgerald's collection), a graduate student at Duke University. In a letter of April 5, 1963 this student asks me for a copy of my article since her "friend Flannery O'Connor . . . has approved of no other article as much." Louis D. Rubin's statement that the essay "received the enthusiastic approval of Miss O'Connor herself" (*The Curious Death of the Novel: Essays in American Literature* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967], p. 251) may be based on this source.

The second letter was written in response to a copy of "Some Possible Contributions of Existentialism to Christian Education" (*Xavier University Studies*, Vol. 2 [June 1963], 64-70) which I had sent to Flannery in July 1963 after moving to Florida. Unaware of her terminal illness, I postponed visiting her until the following August and so was prevented from meeting her by her premature death.

Both letters are typewritten in what seems to be a "pica" fond. The first is on ordinary paper (8½ x 11") single-spaced, the second on a smaller sheet (6 x 7") with a printed letterhead.

Milledgeville
Georgia
4 April 63

Dear Mr. Stelzmann,

I am very grateful to you for writing the essay on my fiction and for sending it to me. It is the best essay I have read anywhere on my work. There is nothing in it that doesn't fit in with my own view of what I was attempting to do in the novels and stories (except that the baby-sitter in "The River" was supposed to be a white woman) and I shall hereafter refer anyone who makes inquiries of me about my work to Vol. 2, No. 1 of Xavier University Studies.

This letter doesn't at all convey my appreciation, but believe me it is deep and genuine. You restore my faith in criticism.

Sincerely,
Flannery O'Connor

MISS FLANNERY O'CONNOR
ANDALUSIA
P. O. BOX 947
MILLEDGEVILLE, GA.

18 August 63

Dear Dr. Stelzmann:

Thank you so much for sending me your essay on existentialism and Christian education. I was very pleased to read it and am much interested in the subject in general.

I hope you like Tampa and the University of South Florida.

We'd be most pleased to have you stop and see us sometime when you are passing this way.

Sincerely,
Flannery O'Connor

(Permission to publish the two letters was kindly granted by Mrs. Regina Cline O'Connor. I also should like to thank Mrs. Sally Fitzgerald for her assistance in this matter.)

Reviews

Ella-Prince Knox and David S. Bundy. *Painting in the South: 1564-1980*. Richmond: Virginia Museum, 1983.

An overall view of art in the South has heretofore been hazy and clouded, but with the recent emergence of serious scholars on the scene, the picture is finally coming into focus. The 1983-1985 traveling exhibition entitled "Painting in the South: 1564-1980" provided new angles and broader vision. Attempting to span the entire history of America, the exhibition was organized roughly into five time periods: "The Early Years, 1564 to 1790;" "The Emerging Nation, 1790-1830;" "Growth and Development of the Old South, 1830 to 1900;" "Toward a New South, 1900 to 1950;" and "The Post-War Period, 1950-1980: A Critic's View." The exhibition catalogue—a high-gloss, high quality edition with black and white reproductions of the 174 paintings and select color photographs illustrating the text—contains an introduction by project director Ella-Prince Knox and corresponding essays by the five guest curators of the exhibition: Carolyn J. Weekly, Linda Crocker Simmons, Jessie J. Poesch, Rick Stewart, and Donald B. Kuspit, respectively. A catalogue of reproductions, compiled by David S. Bundy, gives biographical and historical information in synoptic form. Well documented, indexed and with bibliography included, the entire catalogue becomes a valuable scholarly reference source for serious students of art.

The two year exhibition itinerary included five southern museums—the Virginia Museum of Art (Richmond), the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Mississippi Museum of Art (Jackson), the J. B. Speed Museum of Art (Louisville, Kentucky) and the New Orleans Museum of Art—as well as the National Academy of Design in New York. This New York connection indicates the organizers' awareness and acknowledgement of the crucial need for recognition in America's premier hub of art activities in the North. Although New Yorkers have developed a quick acceptance of the avant-garde, the irregular, and the unusual, they have at times been notoriously hypercritical and condescending toward that which exists beyond their own purview. The curator-essayist for the final section of this exhibition unfortunately falls into this category of New Yorkers, and it is in this latter division that the project has its shortcomings—in the essay and in the selection of the works themselves.

The exhibition is admittedly not definitive, as we are still in the process of self-discovery. Knox explains that the intention of the project is to affirm that the South is part of America. The painters represented here have either lived and worked in the South, or visited briefly and recorded what they saw. Billed as "the first clear and comprehensive exhibition of American art with a Southern accent," the subject matter and style of the paintings vary according to prevailing taste and changing historical conditions. Themes of family and land and a strong narrative tradition are properly evident throughout, reflecting the attitudes, mores, and customs of the Southern people throughout the vast diverse area. The exhibition portrays a deeply spiritual people—through various religious activities as well as the predictable presence of churches which punctuate the city views and landscapes. Several works focusing on industrial development, conservation, suffrage, injustice, poverty, and economic depression document historical events and issues. Others explore the gamut of human experience—struggle, death, despair, hope—which is common to all peoples.

What is new here is a conscious and concerted effort to examine the development of racial relationships through pictorial representation—a common theme running throughout the exhibition. Recognizing the black race as emblematic of the South, a significant number of works focus on the black-white relationship—two forces which appear as parallel lines that converge only in the distance. The viewer is pleasantly surprised to find numerous sympathetic, objective, favorable portrayals of Blacks. America's multi-racial culture is further emphasized in several paintings of Indians—a sobering reminder of the Five Civilized Tribes who once populated the New World until they were shunted aside to accommodate the newcomers.

A portrait of a young Creek warrior, *Mistipee*, received criticism during the artist's lifetime for the obvious European look given to his features. We are reminded here of the criticism of Michelangelo's sepulchral sculpture of Giuliano de Medici—to which Michelangelo, understanding the longevity of the sculpted image, had retorted that a thousand years later, no one would care what he had really looked like. Indeed, the "spirit" of the young *Mistipee* is celebrated in a timeless manner.

An image which is potentially problematic is Sarah Miriam Peale's *Still Life of Watermelon and Grapes*, a detail of which serves as the catalogue's cover art. At first glance, this cover seems an unfortunate choice because of its present pejorative connotations. Peale's still life is undeniably tactile, appealing in color and texture, arrangement and

juxtaposition. The fruit, native to Africa, has become thoroughly accepted as a natural part of Southern culture. In light of the new perceptions presented in this exhibition, the watermelon bears rethinking as an image, much as the question of racial relationship is viewed from a different perspective. The Indian with Anglo features merely underscores the basic humanity common to all men regardless of race, a shared humanity which is not based on physiognomy. Race is integral with the history of America—in its various strengths and accomplishments and in its weaknesses and conflicts. This exhibition obviously concerns itself with how these inter-racial and multi-racial relationships are reflected in art.

We are given a pictorial history of America from the first faltering steps of infancy through adolescence into maturity. Undeniably, the Southern focus parallels American history, and we are confronted here with an overview of the manner in which the South has matured, both physically and psychologically. The rhythm and tempo of Southern art is varied, but the cadence conveys a vitality and complexity which lingers in the memory.

**J.R. LEMASTER
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY**

Lucy M. Cohen. *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984.

A professor of anthropology at the Catholic University of America, Lucy Cohen has done a superb job of researching her book *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*. Using unpublished manuscripts from a variety of sources, both published and unpublished government documents, newspapers and periodicals, books and pamphlets, as well as interviews and correspondence, she tells a convincing story of the Chinese in the South after the war. She tells how they came to the South, of how they lived and worked while they were there, and of how they disappeared either by leaving the South or by being absorbed into a largely rural southern society.

In the 1840s and 1850s southerners contributed heavily to establish missions in China, and some missionaries brought Chinese back to the United States with them to further the cause of missions in China. Some of the Chinese who came stayed to further their education, but the Chinese who came with the missionaries, even though they represented one of the oldest civilizations known, were more curiosities than anything else.

Before the Civil War enterprising southerners were considering the possibility of using Chinese workers as a cheap source of labor. Slaves were expensive both to own and maintain, and Chinese labor had been introduced into the West Indies, Cuba, and Peru. Coolie traffic appeared to be preferable to renewing African slave traffic, and it might have caught on except for government legislation forbidding the transporting of Chinese coolies. Actually, the enforcing of legislation forbidding the transporting of Chinese coolies did more than anything else to prevent coolie traffic both before and after the Civil War.

The result of the legislation was that plantation owners had to negotiate contracts with Chinese workers as free men, and the workers negotiated through their own Chinese agents. The contracts seldom lasted very long; the Chinese worker usually left his employer because of a breach of contract on the part of the employer. At any rate, the Chinese worker in the South could not be owned as the slave had been owned, and largely because of that the contract system failed. Chinese workers returned to China, but some stayed and merged into the surrounding communities. Because no Chinatowns existed in which they could preserve their language, culture, and social structures, those

who stayed in the South quickly became "a people without a history."

In giving us the first history of the Chinese in the Reconstruction South, Lucy Cohen has also given us what should prove to be only the beginning of a long and much-neglected story of the historical role of the Chinese-American in America.