WHATLEY, James Wallace, Jr. Stepchild. Short stories. (1972)
Directed by: Fred Chappell. Pp. 46.

The choice of these three stories arose from an attempt for a range, a range of subject and tone and theme, although the title of the first story and of the thesis itself may bring all three into a similar critical perspective. The first story is the kernel of a larger work in progress. The twenty-five pages here, lacking ten characters and hints and episodes in proportion, are no attempt to delineate the miser's brother-in-law, although the old man is the main character of a larger work. The association with the characters of the other pieces is in him.

Loot Worrell is among the men who sing. And there are times and places in the world when and where these men do not find company in the company of men, but they want it. In a minor way this observation fits the shortest, last piece called Toto the Marvelous Wonder Dog. It is a portrait and an equation. To use the mathematician's lexicon more exactingly it is an identity with an open end. It is a very different avenue from the one the monkey owner shows in the second story.

STEPCHILD

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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STEPCHILD

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She could not remember when she had started waking in the afternoon. Except for the cool of the long wakeful night there was an ease there, and a satisfaction. For she woke when the light reclined and men were home and through, so that all the hours ahead whatever she did were her own until she should lie down again. And an old lady who has sewn herself into clothes enough to retard or change or strictly schedule normal functions does not get very cold.

Outside by the outbuildings this particular afternoon, by the well house and the herb bed, the dry pump stretched a long shadow out toward the mailbox at the end of the drive. This drive wound up to her house from a white sand road three miles from the highway. And beyond the drive in the woods across the road, a dog barked. It woke her early. She would not have wakened at a dog that yapped through the underbrush of her fields after a rabbit. But this was an unsettled bark, ceaseless and very steady, and not usual at all. If the dog was Herod's, he was not at home, not on his porch ordering it to be quiet. Or he allowed the commotion for some reason he must be wanting her to know.

She was a patient lady. And she knew her tenants. But inside the house she could not tell if the dog was barking exactly in Herod's clearing on the edge of the woods or not. Her house was shut to the outside. It was boarded in the unusable places and locked very formidably every place else with the casements battened outside and the yellow shades drawn down within, and the unused rooms and aisles and hallways were stacked bale-high with old *Birmingham News* and boxes and crates and trunks so that only narrow passage was left on her carpets

and they were everywhere covered to be protected where they were exposed. All this absorbed any noise in the house. Before opening her house anywhere to leave it and investigate there were other clothes she had to choose and put on, and she had to eat if she would be walking. She ate the contents of one can with a bulletin-colored pictorial label and put on her stockings and her boots, boots the shape and color of a red bean, burred stockings of opaque tawny combed wool. She pulled the leather laces tight and hooked them about the eyes at the top and then rose very slowly from the side of the bed with one hand on a spool post to insure a hold should she black out, to prevent the total, helpless release of an actual, sudden fall and turn it rather to an eased folding up or settling, like siltation in a vial, softly down to her floor.

When her head was clear and ready and her legs and feet would go together she let go and walked out of the bedroom and into the hall and turned there to go down to her kitchen. It was lighted better than other rooms in the house; on the west side, the storm side here in this part of the land and the side where the sun goes down. In the evening the last, soft, natural light shone on the counters and the platters and pottery there and then rose to the cabinets and up the cabinets to a ceiling corner and grew dim and died -- and the sun was gone. So she turned on no light but opened a cabinet where the last of the sun, coming through the rusted screen of the back porch and the wool-skeined panes of glass where spiders scrambled this time of day in her windows, brought out the different labels darkly.

Most of the year Edna had canned goods, and most of all in the middle of the winter, because her order stood every year at the store on the corner

on the highway three miles away that whatever was left when they closed every Christmas Eve was packed in a truck and brought to her, and on Christmas Day she would pack her cabinets and see what she had received. So being the month of November now her selection was limited, down to canned okra, ends and pieces of Dubuque vienna sausage, golden hominy, white navy beans, canned turnips, quality tomatoes, luncheon tongue and Mask and Gray camp stew, and she took the stew and ate it and wiped the insides of the can with a piece of light bread and ate that too, before she unlocked the kitchen door and locked it back, and crossed the porch and unlocked the porch screen and sat the empty can out for the dog under the house. And she locked the porch screen behind her and let the keys drop on her apron again.

She would say to herself the yard behind her house or even in front of it was as still as Sunday evening,but it was as still as any other evening. There was an empty barn with a broken gourd pole and a stock lot behind choked high with dog fennel, poke, and mullin and bitter weed, green weed higher than the falling palings of fence around it. But Herod kept the grass mowed very short and clipped even around her oak trees' buckled roots and at the foot of the gas pump that leaned away from the house. And he kept antifreeze in her car and cranked it up every other day or so, so that it would not lock up. He was her yard boy. And the dog barked very near his house, constantly still, something Herod did not allow. She walked to the front of the house and confirmed the direction, then crossed the road past her mailbox into the pecan trees, very slowly, scavanging up nuts in a lap of her apron as she went. Once out of the naked orchard -- it was already November -- she stooped again

only when she pulled a briar out of her hose. The shoal of briars grew along the path to Herod's house. And on a white sand slope before his cabin was an acre of corn he had planted for hogs he kept, and in tunneled trails off in the pine straw and through the honeysuckle and briars were the shucks and cobs where squirrels and racoons had stolen his crop. And every once in a while the evening air would shudder gently in the stalks of the corn.

Underneath the cabin the dust was dimpled and dry and deep and dark as snuff. And between the kitchen steps in the back and a back corner of the cabin there was a damp patch of permanent gray where the still warm dishwater hit the ground two and three times every day as now, as the back screen banged the side of the house and Irena stood on the top of the kitchen steps. Irena elevated her dishpan and then snatched it back leaving the soapy water spreading slowly in the air to drop in the same damp, gray spot and splash. And chickens gathered and tapped at the slow pool before they straightened and looked and turned and walked away with indolent steps. Irena looked across the two strands of wire on the clearing's edge and saw the landlady. The lady's head was covered. And all her fingers came out of her mittens, and her hands held the pecans pouched up in a lap of her apron. She walked very slowly through the stubble and stalks of Herod's acre of corn.

Irena went back in the cabin and said in a shouted whisper, "Here come old Edna!" And the quilts hopped from the bed and a pair of turnip colored feet whirled out, and Herod sailed across the room for his clothes, his head of hair as white as his undershorts, and he said to his wife, "You watch what your goddamn mouth say." And she raised the dish

pan, but he went on to the corner for his hat and his clothes. They had been at odds when they spoke since they lost their grandchild. And they had not found him yet. He had lived with them before he disappeared. He was four years old. And his grandfather loved him better than he loved his solitude here in the clearing on the edge of the jungle out of sight or hearing from the lady's house.

The lady stooped and came between the two strands of wire and stood again and surveyed her clearing and the cabin she let for four dollars a month to her last black tenant. Another lived out of sight of Herod but as close as a neighbor to him across the branch head; it was her brother-in-law who as a youth had had a sun stroke on the tennis courts at the University of Alabama and who was a fool and of no account except to walk and hitch hike to town on Saturday. But Herod was most always on the place. And around his house there were marigolds and zinnias, bachelor buttons, rooster comb, cosma and verbena, the fall blooming flowers, and Herod came to his back steps.

He wore a stiffly starched, very bright green shirt and pants bought in the back of the store off shelves labeled *uniforms* and *work clothes*. And he wore a wide, fancy leather belt with a silver buckle as big as a rear-view mirror. On his feet he wore a pointed pair of yellow shoes, and on his head a sort of hat not often worn by rural black folks in that place, but by successful realtors in urban areas, Oldsmobile dealers and men in town who would like to look like either of the two, men in civic clubs and politics who are seen with good cigars. It was a small brushed hat of black felt with a narrow brim and a disproportionately wide band, a very fancy band that must have a matching feather from an upland

game bird, or more boldly, a handmade casting fly. But unlike these men in town Herod did not use any impressive tobacco, not even a pipe, not even once in a while, and never like those falsely supposed to be his confreres on the liquor-store corner in the town, the Lord Clinton cigars. But he did drink since the grandson was gone, and since that time he chewed chewing gum, a tiny kind advertised for dental benefit as well as pleasant breath, and he kept it always for such times as this. The black muscle on his jaws rolled out slowly as if the teeth within were being ground, and slowly, with a rhythm like the respirant glow of an ash smouldering. If his eyes seemed small it was because they were in the shadow of the low-snapped brim of the small hat. Herod was never outside without a cover on his head. His shoes were always bright, and he was always starched.

The lady asked, "Well, Herod, what they barking so for? I saw you just now fly out the bed. In my bed inside the house across that hill, they woke me up. You gonna wait to slap dark to go and see? Reckon what they barking at?"

"Likely some hunters is over there."

"Hunters?"

"Yes ma'am. That's right."

Herod had two bird dogs. And they lunged with each bark now at the edge of the ferns on that side of the cabin that faced the jungle. They barked more fiercely as if they knew Herod would come to a decision or rather as if they knew other dogs trailed birds or crossed and recrossed in hunting patterns where only Herod ordinarily hunted them, old dogs that knew the location of every covey on Edna's land and walked cautiously in these areas before they even got any scent. The lady said, "You know how

I feel about that. And then there's always fires in these woods we have to worry about. You know where they are at all?"

"Heard guns in a covey rise over there. Liable to be on the Sears side. A covey there. A covey that flushes toward the line. Was not so close when they was singles-shooting. I say the Sears side."

"Well. You have time, I suppose?" The lady asked.

"Yes ma'am."

"Well, will we need the automobile?"

"Be quicker."

"Then we'll have to go back to the house."

He did not appear anxious to have anybody off the place. He appeared unconcerned. Through the orchard before the house he bent over occasionally and picked up pecans himself. Herod could hold a pecan in his black fist and crack the shell with only the grip of his hand, clinching it there until he heard it give. It was a thing he had done for his grandchild, afterward showing the child the broken pecan in the open hand the print in the flesh beneath it, like a fossil leaf in a lump of coal. She left the pecans in the fold of her apron on her back porch inside the screen which she relocked on coming out.

Herod opened her door, and she got in the car. And he went around and got in and let off the brake and turned the key and mashed the starter in the floor. But he had to get out and raise the hood and juggle there, and return and try, and then go back again. But he started the car at last and backed out of the drive and straightened up by her mail box on the white sand road. And as they drove very slowly in the deep sand past the crepe myrtle and japonica on either side, Edna took a dental

bridge out of her apron and fastened it to the teeth that remained on her gums. They passed two mail boxes side by side, one for Herod and one for her white renter. Then they came out of the dip where he and Herod lived out of sight of this road and drove in the open with fields of yellow sage and blackberry briars on either side, fields that were turned and humped with fresh mounds of ants. And Edna said, "Law, Herod, can't it be just like it used to be sometimes? Here we are riding around the place in a car and you driving. I guess it could be a truck though. You know you need a truck." He agreed. And they came to the woods where Herod believed the trespassers were hunting. They turned in and drove slowly. They drove in second gear and the tall briars on either side of the narrow double path squealed on the fenders of the lady's car. When they came to a dumping place Herod stopped to protect the tires.

Only a little of the garbage was blackened, burned before it was brought here. Edna got out. Herod did too. And while he only watched, waiting, Edna walked over the garbage in her boots and ancient stockings and poked at it and picked up pieces and cast them back, except for a gathered lamp shade. She picked up the lamp shade and kept it, wrapped to her body with one arm. There were empty cans and oyster shells, a doubled mattress, a boot, a hubcap cocked to one side and filled halfway with water, a doll with a head of quills where her hair had been, and old aeroshave cans and vodka bottles, open cans labeled Cling Peaches and Stewed Tomatoes, ketchup bottles and old broken gallon jugs.

"Herod, people have been drinking on my property."

"Yes ma'am."

"Where are those hunters? We got to find them." And Herod led the lady down the hill further. He found the empty shotgun shells where the

birds had broken cover. The brass rims came halfway up the shells, a kind that Herod could not afford. They went on. And Herod drew up and listened. Two men were coming through the reeds across a branch at the foot of the hill. Their pointer dogs broke out first and dashed running up the hill with rolling tongues. Edna stepped behind Herod. And as soon as the dogs were passed, ignoring them completely, two white men came out of the reeds below, and Herod stepped aside to show the lady who had not yet moved. The two men walked up the hill exchanging looks as they came, and she still did not move or change her expression and she still held the old lampshade of gathered fabric wrapped with one arm close to her body. She greeted the young men very kindly. "Good afternoon. It's nice to see two young people out in the woods on such a nice afternoon. I don't guess you knew these were my woods." But the men had not answered yet, and she asked bluntly now, "Who are you?" But they were awed. They were silent. She added, "I'm Edna Worrell. You know you are in my woods? I want to learn why you are here. Oh, I see you been hunting and so forth. What you don't know is .. only Herod hunts in these woods. He's the last one I got. And he's always kept bird dogs, and I have to let him hunt here. I got to have somebody and then keep 'em satisfied to keep 'em here. Ain't got but two left and one hunts. The other ain't no account anyhow, but this one here is all the help is left to me, and he hunts in these woods with my permission I wrote out on a slip of paper for him to always carry. And I can't do nothing like that for you. Can I do it for everybody? I ain't never even seen you before. Who are you? Where are you from? It looks like you could put out your cigarettes in front of me at least." As her greeting and the consequent talk became more and more

anxious and faster and faster the face in the shawl changed from a condescendingly kind face to a burred face, the face of an old lady with hair where hair had not been before widowhood, and her eyes narrowed and the pupils grew small as the worm holes in pecans.

She would never recognize a laboring white on seeing him only a second time. The first time Herod had seen the men they were in a red truck from a furniture store, and they pulled up at the gas pumps before the store on the corner where the dirt road crossed the highway. It was the morning he waited for the bus into town to go from there to the World Series in New York. And it was before his grandson disappeared. In the back of their truck they carried a highly polished cedar chifforobe, a flaming mustard colored Lazy Boy reclining chair and a couch covered in Early American rifles and lanterns. And there was a breakfast-room suit on chrome legs, and protruding out over the tailgate were three canon barrels of linoleum printed with leaves and daisies. The driver of the truck asked a question of the several black people gathered behind the gas pumps under the store shed before the locked doors that would not open for another hour, but his question was not answered, but not so flagrantly unanswered as scuffled by their feet into the ground there cobbled with old soft-drink caps. Because Herod was among them. And the man asked where Herod lived. Herod did not even look up. He owed no man. And he knew the likes of the men in the red truck. It was painted on the door of the cab: EASY TERMS, TRADES & ROTATING CREDIT. And he had nothing to do with it. Not even when they said the item they carried for some Herod was already paid for and only needed delivery. And because Herod neither spoke nor claimed any knowledge of it no other there would speak either, but he did know what it was and who it was from. And he could

have guessed where it would end up. The two white men in the red truck drove deep into the country that day on powdered roads they had never seen before, and on returning, fourteen miles out of town they saw a white lady walking in a field late in the afternoon. She had a bundle of dried sticks in her arms that time, and when she reached their truck -- they stopped in the road only to ask another about this Herod they looked for -- she said, "Surely you don't think you have anything for me."

"Nome. Well, we ain't real sure."

"Why you say you're unsure?"

"Looking for a man named Herod around here. We have something for him. For his grandboy I believe it is."

"What do you have?"

"Basketball goal. It's paid for. An old white man come in the store and paid cash and asked it be delivered down here, but we can't find where it goes. Old man comes in and visits all the time. We'll see him again before long."

"You just leave that thing with me."

"Beg pardon?"

"I say you can just put it up on my porch yonder for the time being. I dare say they ain't expecting it. And even if they are, and they find out it's been delivered they'll know where it is soon enough. Who'd you say bought this thing? This...?"

"Basketball goal. An old white man name of .. what we call that old fool ?.. anyhow he's in the store all the time."

"I see. Well, he can't be buying no play toys with his money. Because he ain't got any money. Oh, he pays his rent. They all do that.

But he ain't got any money to be paying for anything as expensive as whatever-you-are-calling-it must be."

"Basketball goal."

"Oh. Oh, I know the children play some kind of ball. I hear that pumping sound over yonder until way up in the dark ... though I wouldn't let 'em if I was their parents. I'd soon enough put a stop to that. It'll be the pure ruination of their eyes. Why, they'll go plumb blind aplaying ball in the black dark. Grow up without the sight in their heads."

"These children belong to Herod then?"

"Yes. He's the only one I have left. When your tenantry is down to only two -- and one of them a feeble minded gentleman -- well, it just seems you never have anybody really around you can count on. 'Course time was *I* had all the help a body purely *needed* when Clemment was alive and employed the Negroes. Oh, I'd just stand out here in the yard and call roll and they'd drop whatever they's doing and come on here. But I have only two now."

"Yes ma'am. Well. We'll thank you for seeing it gets to him. We have to ask you to sign a receipt for it though."

"Well. You know, I just don't believe I have my spectacles here in my apron, so, I don't guess I can really put my name on anything really. You just tell your employer you left your package with an old lady and what all kind of trouble she was and ..."

"Oh, no ma'am, you ain't no trouble. None."

"And rest assured. Your employer will understand."

"Yessum. He'll understand."

"Then I suppose that will be all?"

"Yes ma'am. Thank you kindly ma'am." With that the routeman and his helper boarded the red truck and drove into the dark, for dark caught them there then too. And they left the package propped next to an old rattan love seat unravelling on the lady's front porch. It was morning before the light let her read the label. But when day came, before she lay down again for her sleep through all the morning and afternoon, she did not read it. She went out the back door and locked it and walked straight over the fields to the clearing where Herod lived. He was in New York City for the World Series.

The grandchild sat on the porch steps with an air rifle. And he shot bluejays out of the chinaberry tree, and they fell into the pen and were eaten by the pigs. But bluejays and all other birds had already become wary that morning and avoided the clearing, so now he shot the tin backboard of the goal his grandfather had made. The rifle would go *tump* and a b b would strike the backboard with a *ting*. The goal itself, or hoop, was more of a fishbasket. It was made of chickenwire. And the backboard was a Miller High Life Beer sign, a metal sheet that flaked worst around a largely bald gray spot behind the basket where the ball rebounded most. The child became still and stopped shooting altogether when Mrs. Worrell came in the yard. Irena came out on her porch in a sweat, also in an apron, and she had floured hands. And Mrs. Worrell said, "The child just entertains itself, doesn't it?"

And Irena replied, "Yes ma'am. Suger smart. I say so myself even he is my own grandbaby. He smart."

"When my boys were home, they just played all the time it seemed. 'Course they had a world of a place to play too. But I don't guess they

remember anymore. One of 'em's dog still stays around, but I just hear nothing no more from either one of the boys themselves. I just guess an old lady is easy to leave. Irena, what you see of old Loot lately? Oh, I see him on the first of the month, but I got to watch him closer than that ain't I? Oh, I got to watch him or they'll be saying, 'Oh, she let him go and do this something or other ..' and I just don't want that. Irena, I'm too old for trouble."

"Yes ma'am."

"Well, watcha see of him? Uh?"

"Miss Edna, I ain't seen him. I guess this baby here see him more than me and Herod. He wild about this baby most as this baby is wild about him."

"Oh, I'm sure that's so. They'd have things quite in common, wouldn't they?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Well, I'm just out looking for him. You know, I can count on seeing him first of the month. Oh, I see *all* y'all then. But what can I tell anyone who might complain about him any other time? I just kind of have to know where he is."

"Yes ma'am."

"Now don't mind me. Go on with what you're doing. I'm just checking on old Loot you know."

"Yes ma'am." When Edna stopped talking she regarded the two English setters gobbling out of separate bowls, eating a green dried pellet. She asked about it, and Irena said, "Yes ma'am. Herod left me these animals of his to feed, these bird dogs and them hogs, and I

just feed 'em all out the same sack of feed 'cause he cut my credit off at the store." There were four bags on the porch.

And Edna then asked, "You better let me borrow some of that feed for Son's dogs at the house. The dogs won't leave my house to go to somebody who could feed 'em you know and... Just give me one sack. You know I'm afraid they'll get mean if they ain't fed and ... Herod ought'n be gone more'n another week anyhow. What am I going to do for yard help if he ain't?" Irena leaned down to pick up one of the sacks of feed on the porch. The widow interrupted the effort, "Now that sack's been opened." So she picked up another one, an unopened bag, and put it on her shoulder, and Edna said, "Yes, that'll do. That'll be just fine. Bring either one or two this trip and come back for the rest whether it'll be the last one or what not, however you do."

And Irena asked -- with better sense she knew -- "What you come in, Miss Edna?"

"Oh, I'm walking, Irena. You know I don't ever bring an automobile in here. How would I get it in? Just put that sack on the front porch and come back for the others. I believe the screen'll be unlatched, and I'll pull it inside the door when I get back. You wanna give me three bags now. And. And you'll be repaid, but just let me thank you now until you are."

Herod was three more weeks getting back from the World Series. The setters fell off and the hogs gnawed the bark off the pine rails that sided up the pen. And a week after the runt disappeared, the child did too, and Herod was called long distance collect from the store on the corner and told the grandbaby was gone, and he came home early.

"Mr. Worrell told us we could hunt here."

"Mr. Worrell! Young man! Why do you want to say such a thing to me? There's no Mr. Worrell alive. I've been a widow these twenty years. There ain't no Mr. Worrell anymore. There's just me. I'm the one has these woods for him, and he told you nothing at all like what you say. *I'm the one* says who can hunt here in these woods. Clemment Worrell *was* the one to say. Now *I say*. Herod can hunt here. Why he hunted here I reckon when you's hunting your sugar-tit. Now you straighten your shoulders up. Hand me here those birds."

"Yes ma'am. I wish you would take 'em. I want you to have 'em. We got enough for you to have a supper. Here they are. Mr. Loot just said ..."

"Loot! What's Loot got to do with it? He's a *feeble mind*. Don't pay *no mind* to what Loot Worrell says. It ain't his land. It's mine. And he ain't nothing but a worry to my soul. You hear? You don't see Loot no more. He don't know what he says or mean what he says, and he ain't got *nothing to talk about*. You remember that, and find your truck and go. Go. Go." And the young men disappeared without apologies and did not even begin whistling up their pointer dogs until they were out of sight around the next pine knoll. And Herod and the landlady left the woods too. Both his hands were full of quail, and she carried the gathered lampshade. They put all these things in an empty pasteboard box on the back seat of the car parked before the garbage dump.

They drove around most of her land as the dirt roads allowed, crossing through it for a half mile in one corner then bordering it for a mile on the north side and finally came back by a county road to the

old steep high house. There was no red truck, no car, jeep, or other thing that showed the hunters had remained. And at the house Herod drew a bucket of water to clean the birds while the lady went in for newspaper to wrap them for freezing. As she unlocked the back porch screen at the top of the steps she reminded the man in the yard, "You know, Herod, I don't like to bite down on any of the shot."

Herod only pulled the breasts out of the birds and threw the remains away on the lawn in the dark where cats ran out already, and she brought newspaper and wrapped her birds and took them in to the light on the porch where her freezer was. And she marked them with a carpenter's pencil, Nov. 68, and set them aside. There was a bar and hasp with a padlock to open before she could get in her freezer. And she opened the lock and removed the bar and stood it against the wall. Then she made a new nest in the frost-cushioned box and put the wrapped quail there. But she took out an old package which she lifted to the bare light that hung down on the porch to be sure she put the game birds with other fowl -- which she had done. She held a whole fryer. *June 1933*. And she put it back and closed the lid and let down the bar and locked it and pulled the chain from the bulb and closed down house and porch and yard in total dark.

"I go now, Miss Edna?"

"Yes Herod."

He did not go directly home. He went to the Health Man three miles down the road, two miles from her last property line, and he bought a full gallon jug there with a red and green label (Coca Cola Syrup) intending not to take a swig until he was two miles on his own side of the Health Man's

house and walked on the soft dirt road within her property line again, making no noise because he was barefoot. He was almost to the two mailboxes on the edge of the jungle when he heard the truck. The white sand road where he walked was loafed up on the day before by the mail rider's car. Few people had business on this part of the road, for few had business with Mrs. Worrell. Her land lay on either side back to a fork. But the truck did not bare away at the fork. The lights shone in the bay leaves that arched over the road. They illumined these leaves and the boughs of pines and disappeared just as the truck ascended a hill, crested it and went down again. It drove fast and came closer. The headlights plainly speared off into the night now racing up out of the dark behind him, and he would have to be out of sight when it sailed by, but he misjudged. The truck topped the hill behind him and threw his shadow down before him in the sand, and he leapt into the briars across the ditchbank just short of the two mailboxes. He held the jug in both hands like a child would be held in a fall from a horse, and he landed in the briars without hearing a crack of glass. But his hands were wet. And he sat on the jug to cover it and pulled his head down between his legs, and it left his back exposed to the air, and cold, for the sweat balled up on his face and neck and rolled as big as buck shots down his body. The truck slid with frozen wheels to a stop in the powdered road, in the dust -- now behind the dust which did not stop with the truck but went on in the tunneled foilage down the white sand road in the dark. And a light played down the edge of the ditch and crossed it. It was a beacon handled from the cab of the truck. And it caught him and stopped, burning white through the dust that still slowly passed across its beam.

"What you doing in that ditch? What you doing down there? Talk to me! Can't you talk?"

"I. I. I thought I saw a rabbit jump in here."

"You got a hunting license."

"Yessir."

"Say yessir to us?"

"Yessir I say yessir."

"That license bought this year?"

"Yessir."

"Keep your hand out your goddamn pocket."

"Yessir."

"Gonna catch that rabbit with a gallon of liquor?"

"Nossir." Herod heard another voice this time.

"A gallon of liquor? Has he got a gallon of liquor?"

"Settin it like a banty on goose eggs." The hard voice said this. It continued. "'Only Herod can hunt here.' People say Mr. Herod won't hunt nothing without feathers on it, that he's a bird hunter. But he's nigger enough to jump in a ditch after a rabbit ain't he? Hunting at night. Reckon what the warden'd think about that?"

"I don't knowsir."

"He might want to learn you some game laws. It ain't legal to hunt at night. It carries a fine. What they ask for that jug where you get it?"

"Eight dollars."

"About one-eighth of the warden's fine. Is it any good?"

"Yes sir."

"Put your lip in it yet?"

"Not yet."

"Wouldn't tell no lie, would you?"

"No sir."

"Ease it up on the edge of the road."

"Yes sir."

"Slow."

"Yes sir." The cab door opened, and the man reached a hand under it and took the jug inside the cab and closed the door. And for a moment there were no words, only sighing long gasps in the cab. Herod could not see outside the beam when he looked, blinking. And in the unmoving beam there was only white light, not even any dust anymore. Then the man who talked for the two -- if there were only two -- spoke again. "Now we ain't gonna tell nobody this time. And you ain't either. And we want you to stay sitting in that ditch 'til we're gone, so won't nobody see you get out of it."

The round trip to the Health Man was six miles, and Herod went in debt. When he pulled the cork out of the second jug, black night seemed to go inside it. Every swallow was as cool as the carbonation of the night, and every drink went out to his limbs. And the gray dissolved the moon in the sky. Day came. And he did not eat. And soon he could not use his legs. And when he came from the privy one time he could not get up the porch steps so he crawled up under the house and lay on the cool dimpled earth. And the dish water splashed on the yard nearby after breakfast was off the table inside. And it splashed again in the same place after dinner. And in the afternoon when he woke sweating like

a root cellar and dry as the powdered ground where he lay, he crawled out from under the house and took a dipper of water. His wallet was gone from his overalls pocket. When he looked under the house where he had slept in the cool, one of the dogs was chewing up the cards and pictures it had shaken out of the wallet, and the dented wallet lay beside the dog. And he did not have the strength to retrieve any of it. He just backed out and rose and leaned on the side of the cabin. The water he drank had started his bowels again, and he went back to the privy. And as he sat there with his overall around his ankles, he felt the fur rub on his buttocks. One of the setters had come in the backside of the open hole. Herod took a stick that was in the privy for killing snakes, and when the dog backed out enough at his movement he struck it once behind the ear and killed it. And when the other dog came out from under the house with his billfold in its mouth he slung the stick at it, and the dog disappeared in the edge of the woods around the clearing. And the clearing was quiet. It was afternoon. The light reclined, and cars could be heard very distantly on the highway three miles away, coming from town.

When the old man saw him, Herod's head was on his arms, and his arms were one over the other on the top rail of the hog pen on the edge of the narrow jungle that separated their two cabins. The hog pen was right where the footpath came out of the branch head. There were only two hogs now. There had been three. And the mimosa tree in the pen was peeled as white as a wand as high as the hogs had been able to reach. Their eyes were far up in their heads. And they did not move. Herod was startled when he saw the old man.

"It's only me, Herod. I ain't seen you since the little boy. Since the little boy. I ain't seen you since then. I come because I was in town today, and I seen two men. And Herod, people know about your dogs. They know about your dogs. And I told these two men you had dogs. I told them you had these bird dogs, and that interested them. And they said, 'Loot.' They said this. 'Loot, we'll go much as twenty-five dollars for both them dogs. Can you take that little message?' And they made me say back what they said say. 'Will you deliver that little message for us?' And I said, 'If you will say my name right.' They said twenty-five dollars."

When Herod struck and hit and found that he was on both feet upright again on the footpath, leaning on nothing, and saw each of his closed hands in front of him, as tight as anthracite, he still had a moment of disbelief. The old man's feet did not even show on the edge of the ferns where the footpath went down into the woods. He lay in the path in the dark of the woods with his legs together. And his arms were at his sides. The pupil was visible in the corner of one eye, and his bare, sunbrown forehead was only sunken, very naturally. It was like a flat rock on the ground at a corner of a house where water has dripped for a hundred years.

REMEMBER MY UNCLE'S MONKEY

Wallace Whatley

Put Sunday stories out of mind. It just happened then -- in the afternoons of those seventh days of unquestionably starched regimen and visiting that happened to have been named Sabbath when the days were getting christened a long, long time ago. Not that long ago:

...to that day in the other time whiled away on yards as wide as the afternoon, the gardened yards abiding under long porches, porches sedulous with company rocking, cousins, almost cousins, cousin neighbors and just neighbors talking, conversing severally, in turn and all afternoon. There was time. Time for things to happen over and over, and they did, when the house behind the sibilant porch had emptied; and any ceremony on its feet to shuffle out more chairs would not even rise until all the doors slammed on the new car in the drive and its people were at our bottom step. But new welcome was never interruption -- something which indeed could not be. For there was nothing unexpected on a Sunday afternoon. But had the possibility been suggested to us, our commonly agreed reply would have been *Alloms*. And that reply would have come undiscussed, pre-existing and unquestionable, shared absolutely as our brown eyes and entailing about as much choice, our Alloms. He is the uncle. And that is his Christian name, a man who was never starched up in church on the Sunday mornings, because at his house you could watch it! At my uncle's house you could see a gospel singing and be disturbed by no stomping or shouting because you watched it alone. You could watch from the couch. You could even lay down and watch it I guess. You might lay down if the sermon did not apply to you. But we did not watch it ourselves. We didn't have one. We

went to the sermon itself on Sunday morning. But we went to my uncle's house on those afternoons. For he had everything. A boat and trailer in the drive distinguished his house. And there were salt-water rods, clubs and irons and a bag and trolly, a very appealing black helmet with lightning painted on the sides, an arrow head collection, upright piano, pet monkey, any man's choice of whiskey, and television in the same cabinet with radio and victrola. But we didn't watch it. Uncle Alloms and that monkey were better than television ever has been. We witnessed. We are Methodists. And we know that in this world we have to witness. I think we are called that because we are methodical. And we will speak of method soon enough, the method of our Sabbath afternoons, for they entailed some prediction, or anticipation, always.

Korea was a popular thing. Long conversation (if you caught it every so often enough to be confounded with new wonder at how they could still be at it), Korea. It sounded like something that settled in the old lungs of an inlaw's uncle languishing away in a Florida retirement, absolutely epidemic conversation. My daddy and his brothers (even Alloms too) would shoot an afternoon on the subject and hardly get to politics at all -- another word for still another infestation. For whenever you hear *that's politics* you can understand the meaning crudely to be that *it is infested*. When I am sick from school I return with my excuse. It is the only way, and I confess, that too involves a little politics of its own -- a time to oil the difference. Though there are troubles for which soothing seems impossible, and things for which there seems no immunity (something in which my daddy is knowledgeable -- immunity, something in which my family is obliged to believe). You will hear my daddy say, and any of his brothers agree, that immunity is cheap for what it guarantees.

And Alloms is pleased to say, this is what they learned at the cow college. He is the only one I know in the whole family who did not go there. If he had, our football and politics would doubtless be his football and politics too. But he didn't, and they are not. Daddy is afraid he is a Republican (and that will never do). But we do not say a word. And there is Alloms at all our games. Indeed, could we have them without him? Perish the thought. Football will describe us all.

We sit on one row. And we fill it up. It is a real reunion hardly interrupted by the week between the Saturdays all during the season. But it is the only reunion where you will ever see the glass pint come out. It is the only reunion run by the young crowd. And, as you must have already guessed, our bellwether is the brother in politics! His bottle goes among the uncles behind my back because I sit on the edge of my seat with excitement following cheerleaders and mascots and crepe paper, bright helmets and shoulders and whistles, brass bands, boy scouts and niggers with starting lineups, ice cream, popcorn, hotdog and cocacola. We will soon be very interested in the coke boy and know where he is at every moment of the play. But first there must be the preacher in the pressbox, then the R.O.T.C. and the flag and the introduction of the doctor and the governor, for the governor of the sovereign state is always there. He is introduced in the crowd. However, our family sits a little higher in the stadium, for once the governor was hit on the head with a cup balled up full of ice. Alloms witnessed. His thought was that it might have been a brick, but not that my mamma and daddy had to know. And here we are back to politics again. We might not have been there at all if my daddy had not had a brother in politics. But he did, and the tickets - good tickets, we always say "good tickets" - were passed out free as Sunday

bulletins on Trinity steps. It might not be the same row every year, but by the middle of the season no one looks down for numbers on the steps, just climb until we see family, neighbors, employees, or Alloms, whom we would hear, Alloms who married in. That's how he got in. And he is the only one on our side of the stadium who can be loud for the other side, can rah for uniforms and helmets of strange colors. Doubtless he can be loud in this wise, because he is well known. All around in the block where we sit, people know old Alloms is the brother-in-law of the brother in politics. And there he sits, the only time he is a spectator instead of the show, which is what my mamma says. We will look at him anyway.

He is a large crab-red fellow burned with golf and slow trolling in the best lakes all year round -- a man with a grin so big and wide it has flattened out his ruby nose, and so many gleeful teeth you wonder how his lips can cover them up enough to put his mouth in a paper cup. He can do it. He can drain the last drop and never loose the plaid derby cap that is screwed down on his crew cut. My uncle's head looks like one of those hairy souvenir coconuts the unmarried aunt brings back from Lake Junaluska International World Religious Methodist Camp, the kind with about a cupful of white seashells glued in its boat-shaped mouth. Alloms can grin because he has that free five-dollar ticket stuck between the right lens of his sun glasses and his face, and the bright fall afternoon sun in the high west cannot interfere with his fifty-yard line perspective. This blinder gives him the look of a mule in raggedy tack. But Alloms hardly cares how he looks. He just watches the game in the shade of that free ticket and shouts and stirs, unconsciously kicking the many empty cups beneath his seat with his boat-sized weejun shoes. The coke boy does a flush business here.

We are talking about a gentleman, and a monkey owner. And however much we might discuss old Alloms, the next afternoon we will see him, and the old lady -- his wife -- and his little girl and the pet monkey on their front porch in the dry county -- 7,681 Baptists Welcome You, by the billboard at the border.

He will not have on any shirt. He will be bare and hairy, wearing only the Eighth Air Force swimming trunks, a pocketless pair of khaki drawers with a faded emblem beside the khaki-buttoned crotch. But I will still be in my chafing white shirt, though deep in hydrangea beneath his porch stalking bees with an empty mason jar, putting up with Edna, his only child, who (I have to admit) is my cousin. But bees are easy sport. For one who can be deaf to a girl cousin. I can. And I will witness it all.

We are in the audience of the bridge champion at the University of Alabama long, long ago, who next, as far as I can tell, brought respectability for billiards to this dry place where his job brought him to live, thanks to an uncle equally intractable -- if in another direction -- again, the brother in politics, which no family should be without. Perhaps we had designs. For I have heard them say of Alloms, "He's dee-are-you-inn-kay," another thing no family should be without -- an imbibing, happy, hairy uncle behind a monkey on a leash.

Remember now, it is not a Sunday story, just always on a Sunday, a day we certainly packed as full of incongruity as Lost and Found; yes, a day of paradox, as the story will tell.

On that chary morning, the whole house stirred later. No maid came to rattle the back screen wanting in at seven. No milk waited in the

increasing sun on the front porch, together with the *Advertiser*, as fat on that fresh morning as all the week's papers together, rolled up dry inside brown paper on our shining lawn. Things began to happen as soon as it came in. This paper quickly broke down into sports (half-truths about the game the afternoon before), society (or less than half-truth), the market, funnies, front page and weather. Each retarded our morning incredibly. Together it rattled; it got lost; it got cussed; and it got egg on it, and there was never any happiness at that. Generally it was a time to say sir and ma'am when you could not stay out of the way. This is not to say it was an unhappy time, not at all, rather a time to be politic, to avoid panic over missing shoe polish.

And time was what I most often needed on those morning before Sunday School (perish that memory!). Can anyone forget the verses! I was one to put them off until Sunday morning. And then I had to chatter the lines over and over until my recitation would surely pass the ear and scrutiny of Aunt Jimmie Baily; she put a premium on memory work. My mama says it is the Baptist in her family. And whether it was worth a Bible stamp or not, we went along. And it always came to an end. Even the learned droning sermon, eventually ... *while we are absent one from another. Amen*, after which we rise and cough and shuffle, nod to this one, shake that man's hand, get fresh air, wake, and go straight to Sunday dinner, which waited on buffet tables at the old Appleton, elegant restaurant.

Week nights were steak-and-potato times and usually at the Traveler's Paradise Motor Court on the edge of town -- Allom's choice. And the fare of weekend nights was catfish at the backwater (you had a choice of biscuits

and froglegs). Alloms found this satisfactory also. But it is Sunday we are talking about, our morning routine before afternoon's visiting and Alloms had no choice at all. Alloms was absent. He could stay at home and watch it. But even Easter, when he might be there with his brood, the old lady and his heavy daughter, Edna, he would forfeit choice and suggestion and come along with us for Miss Frances' cooking at the old Appleton. After all there was choice enough there. Buffet. Every Sunday.

Remember the Easter that Alloms came. He forfeited. And we went as usual to the Appleton. Rabbits and eggs were the centerpiece. And the little heavy daughter had a basket, a yellow basket and new patent leather shoes. And wasn't she received well by the hostess. Miss Frances could flatter a bed bug. At Sunday School they'd forgotten who she was. She told them before I could introduce her. And that she was a legacy of the Kappa Delta sorority. These were things Miss Frances Appleton did not need to know, only that she was the first little girl to profile around her dining room in a new Easter dress that Sunday. Early arrival was an advantage of being what Alloms called a good old corn-liquor Methodist. It was the advantage of Miss Frances that Alloms might come only once a year.

We ate until we had no more room. We ate until it was embarrassing. Not only did we tamp ourselves with vegetables and meats and breads and sauce and relishes and cakes and pies, we ate until her dining room was so full that when you sliced the roast and your elbow sawed out into the aisles it bumped other people who waited or who had already been served, and who carried dangerously heavy plates.

It was not Alloms. It was that food that can always be expected of Miss Frances at the old Appleton Hotel. Alloms was fine, except once he caught a waitress bringing out more for the buffet and told her to bring him a damp wash rag to replace the napkin he had used. But it was embarrassing mostly because my daddy and his brothers can unbutton themselves at the table and then eat as much more as that which they had to unbutton to ease. Now my daddy and his brothers do not unbutton in public, but they had reached the point. Alloms too. And Alloms was out of practice. It could be seen when he first slowed up that instead of being satisfactorily chewed each bite got larger as it was worked about in his mouth. And when he quit he did a very rare thing, he drank all his goblet of water. He looked like a man that needed it. But it did not look to do any good.

Outside the line still stretched to the street. We knew most of them all. And I'm afraid they all knew us. They were mainly the Presbyterians and Baptists, and mainly in that order. All the little girls had new white Bibles, and at the end of the line there were the excited older brothers and sisters with the damp, clinging hair, because they had accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior that morning and had just been completely submerged as a consequence. Their daddies were proud. Beamed and spoke to us. And they spoke to Alloms too just as if they saw him there every single Sunday in the Christian year. I remember an especial character, a choir director, asking, "Alloms, did you leave Miss Frances any groceries for us?" And my uncle typically replied, "Man, I put so much in this belly I ain't got the skin left to wink my eye at the pretty gals!" Being an especial character, and calling it on himself of course, the choir director could laugh. And a number of people in the line sort of

tittered. But Alloms thought it was the greatest. And a terrible thing happened because of it.

He was still standing beside one of our cars with his hands flat on its roof like he has shown us how he was asked to stand for the highway patrol search, still standing that way with his head far down uttering the strange noises when Miss Frances came out on the porch of her dining room to see what had happened to the rest of her crowd.

We went that afternoon I think to show his Old lady we had not been unduly embarrassed. And we saw him first, half-naked in the driveway washing down his car where it had been splattered. The fact was that we had been embarrassed, as not a thing at all was said during the drive to my uncle's house, not until we turned in at his drive and saw the worry-less smile. "Grinning like a possum in a sull," Daddy broke the long silence. That did not entirely describe it. For my uncle had crimped the hose back on itself to stop the jet of water and said this to my daddy when he had stopped our car: "Brother-in-law! Brother-in-law, you mean I get company in the time of my disgrace! Won't miracles never cease to happen!"

Just recall, there is a great red brick, two-story house deep within a lawn that is always dark and cool with the very oldest blackgum, mulberry, locust, elm, tulip and willowoak trees. The house has many gables upon its roof and a great front porch over green shrubbery at either side of marble steps, all set cool and dark, far back in the somnolent depths of grass and trees. On this porch there are roomy wicker swings on old chains that creak to-and-fro, slowly, with rust and the weight of the afternoon company (that is us), and a pet monkey stepping

gingerly as a gypsy in a garden in the dark. He knows the grown folks have change in their pockets. That is what he wants. Getting none of it, he waxes bold, shows out a little, jumps on the backs of the swings and the double rockers and even on Coud'n Eh's old rocker so long out of use.

Now Coud'n Eh cannot enjoy the monkey, for she is always in her musty therapeutic bed where she has been damp and sobbing since we stopped our car in the drive. Fact is she has been there all day long. And the day before that and the day before that. Coud'n Eh has been in that bed so long she has wallowed out a wormy slot in the mattress which when she is lifted up will show like a narrow mold in which you might pour a dour pudding and some way have a copy of this old, old aunty lady who needs to die so badly (if they honestly know what is best for her). She is among our first business on this visit though she knows none of us at all, is deaf and crying and no longer has even the understanding to misunderstand what we say. She calls me by my father's name over and over. And there I stand without a word, always too close to her odorous bed, and watch her squeeze her rubber exercise ball, or pull at the ropes that hang like air roots over her pillows out of the cage-top over her. She has lots and lots of pillows, and they are always wet. And she wets herself, slumbers in her bed and cries and cries. And Alloms says every so often while the level is still quite high in the amber bottle and apparently heavy to lift where it stands with ginger ale and lemons on the butler we have wheeled out to the porch, "Well, I guess I better get off my pore one and go back there and turn hers or be told her ass ain't been anointed and begoddamn how welcome that would sound!" And he goes back there and we hear the snores dissolve into weeping and hear him yell to

his wife, "Christsake old lady, when you last scrub your mama, JeZUZ!" And he comes back shaking his hands, and his nose is red and screwed in a grimace as though he had tried to fix his old lady's sink and broke a sumptrap.

The monkey is the only one who may rock in Coud'n Eh's chair. Masterless cats would not even sleep in it a night because it was never warm after someone getting out of it like the others. The monkey certainly has a master, but it does not help his patience. He sits nowhere long at a time. Could he sit long in Coud'n Eh's rocker his fanny would be too little to warm it. But Alloms' monkey will rock in it a while. He will rock with a maniacal vigor, showing out, chimping, until he catches his chain under one of the rocker curves on a backward pass and it slams him fast against the back. The monkey screams at the humiliation, and Alloms shouts to him, "Get out her goddamn old chair; get out it, get out it or someday 'fore God you old bastard I'll have your seeds in my hand. Now get out her old chair! One of you chillun help the ugly sonofabitch!" Lady Edna meets the occasion, gets the monkey loose, and he bounds again to the ceiling joints, the beams of muddabbers and spider webs up above our heads. Oh false illusion of sanctuary, yet illusion it is and let him have it. Daddy says to me, "Amy, close your mouth." I recall myself. I do what he says and continue to watch.

The monkey sits up there making scatalogical gestures and grinning wide with yellow teeth. We can not understand his stuttering screech. We never know what the monkey is trying to say, though I believe we often have an idea of what is on his mind. Though his natural movements and thoughts of monkey lady friends present some bewilderment. He despises

dogs. And he lets us know when he is hungry. And he is often hungry. In fact, his owner is the only reason the A & P store in his town carries the large sacks of Monkey Chow.

And the monkey gets enough of it. And money. We can hardly forget that. Big money too: nickels, dimes and quarters, solid silver which he can regurgitate into his master's open hand. There will be people who will not believe, and not about all the dee-are-eye-inn-kay-eye-inn-gee on the Lord's own day. But we hardly hide it. We are not ashamed. And as they say, the bee-oh-why may as well know, and Edna's too little to matter much, innocent, ignorant, and in the family too -- a consolation of these Sunday afternoons -- we are all in the family.

The mannerless bastard is up there in the beams over the porch chimping at us right now with his chain hanging down and swinging. Where Edna is plain and can not point in a sodawater bottle on a long trip like me, he is holding his in his hand and popping his yellow chimpy teeth at the same time. Alloms says it gives him pleasure, but his old lady makes him bring the monkey down. She knows the monkey is getting too rough for the party. So, he pulls him down by the chain at his neck and he screeches as he is dragged in, reeled in up to his master's lap fighting like a trout in home movies.

Now I had never seen a vitamin and we did not have Walt Disney, but even then I had made the leap of faith these invisible things require. Vitamins are like germs which you can not see with adult glasses. You couldn't see a germ with a granny's glasses. Evidently my damp one needs them. She calls me Jefferson and my name is Ambrose, after a general because I couldn't wait to get here, an inky baby, though Edna cannot say Ambrose. I think she is just lazy; she calls me Amy. And mamma wanted

me to be a girl though papa wants me to be a general, like MacArthur probably, or Mathew B. Ridgeway. Papa is Jefferson and neither of us is supposed to say that, just daddy, uncle, and sir. And Alloms is just plain old Alloms. And Coud'n Eh is wet and slumbering in the awful bed loaned her by the Baptist Men's Bible Class.

No, germs can not be seen, for they travel on the money in anyone's pocket. But it does not matter to Alloms' monkey who has no trousers, no purse or pocket at all and can not even think on the darkest pockets of pen knives and rocks and rubber bands, and paper clips and arrowheads and copper pennies and lint and germs, the trouser pockets of anyone. The onus is there. And that is the source of my uncle's money, Alloms, who has a lot of it, who can buy ell-eye-Q in pasteboard cases. I have been there and I have sat on the greenfront counter. The clerks know us all. They ask when is old Alloms gonna make another run? My daddy who ignores the question does not laugh at it either. He is of a generation I have noticed with very little concern for vitamins. But can't we believe there is something he is missing that would put a spark in that wary eye? Like wheat germ. It is the friendly one. And there are others certainly friendly for my uncle's monkey, like the germs on the money from anyone's pockets.

Will I ever have enough to help a monkey over his hunger? I am told I may when I have that sheepskin! I could have a class reunion. I would be like Alloms.

The monkey is in his lap now. But there are no pockets at all to the Eighth Air Force swim trunks Alloms wears, so the monkey chatters and wrings his little hands with hurt feelings and misunderstanding. And

the monkey has cute little hands each like a meaty half of the pecan taken whole from a very carefully broken shell. Alloms will appease the hurt of his pet, and so he gets out of his swing to go back to a bedroom for the trousers to the suit he wears to work. His change will be there. The monkey drops to the floor louder and hurt more than ever, and Alloms rises from his swing. He is not naked; only the monkey covered his lap so a newcomer might indeed have had misgivings. There were so many folks in the Eighth Air Force they couldn't put much material in every pair of swimming trunks.

Alloms is back with a nickel in his hand, the last of the change in his suit trousers pocket. The monkey covers his lap again as soon as he is seated in the old wicker swing. And Alloms offers him the nickel, held like a wafer before his face. The monkey understands. He takes it gratefully and rubs it swiftly against his hairy sides with the motion of flea-stroking. He gets the coin polished and grins widely. He shows the coin to all of us, proud of his talent, bites at it to show us it is real, and swallows it.

The Salvation Army would be pleased with the amount this monkey has swallowed this afternoon. Everybody on the porch found money enough to keep him off their laps and he has all our collection wherever he hides it, in his craw, I guess. And we will not see it again until he has all the monkey nutritives out of the silver and copper wherever he has put it in his throat or underneath his fur -- unless Alloms induces regurgitation. It is not funny at all yet. Rather, it is the quiet time. And copper looks just full of them, rich with the things a monkey must need.

And now it is time to see if the bottom of the bottle is as good as the first little dee-are-eye-inn-kay, and we find that the ginger ale is

all gone. And it is Sunday, and no one can straight gut the stuff, not on this day, not a gentlemen, and hardly before three or four in the afternoon any other day, excepting Saturday of course -- one o'clock then.

Now Edna and I have already been to the store once and got jaw-breakers and licorice and mary janes and purple blow-gum and generally squandered what the monkey isn't banking in his craw right now. Edna's face is smeared and flavored with every kind of trash from the foreigner's store, and if she isn't made to wash it off before she is tucked in it will not only rot her teeth but feed rats in the night. Nurse-maids tell about it. And it can be believed. The gnats are busy with my cousin now.

Her daddy is a gentleman as we have observed, and an alumni (our great institution, my alma mater across the state and so forth), and he will not let anybody break a five, nor even a one if he can possibly help it. We can count on my daddy. We got his change before we went to the store the first time, all of it. He reaches for his billfold but Alloms is trying to outfumble him saying, no, he will go through every pair of pants in the dirty clothes. They need ginger ale. They will dry out if they do not have it soon. My daddy has found a five-dollar bill. My daddy can meet any occasion. It is all he has. The bill is proffered to me: "Don't lose none of the change."

Alloms replies to that, "Jeff, you can't send no five down there. The foreign sonofabitch don't carry business enough on Sunday to make change for it." But there is someone on the porch with change. He is in the beams over our heads again where the chains from the swings are attached and creak the worst, up there with the muddabber nests.

The long cane poles are on the back porch with fly rods and spinning reels all stacked in a tall corner like the collection of lances at the

auction of a great hall on the death of the last tax-paying noble. His old lady begs. Once he broke the hinges off a cedar gewgaw chest, souvenir of Panama City (Mama said it could have been a seashell with a silver Jesus inside). Alloms knocked it off a table in the hall with the uncontrollably limber end of a fishing pole. Oh, we still talk about it, but we still visit them, and Edna puts on her old lady's lip lard and tacky shoes and ear bobs and tries to get me to be the husband and come home from work to eat her mud pies. I don't sull. I go along with her ignorance, pretend-like, though at this juncture my attention is all for Alloms.

And here he comes. It is a clean, simple, definitive sound, the flat feet spanking the wide boards on the dark floor of the long, high hall. My uncle's feet are honestly flat. He was never in the army and so they are feet which have slapped no barracks floors. Alloms was at home looking after his mother-in-law, just as he is home and spanking up the hallway this instance. What will he break this time?

On either wall are the brown pictures, people as we can not see them again if we have ever seen them before - a grandfather - and even Aunt Eh when she must have really been a person, and parents and aunts and uncles - as children - and as college people, and there were paintings and prints too, the bookcase, the telephone, beneath a lamp with a porcelain globe.

Once he broke a bird dog, an excuseable item. It still stands in the hall on the bookcase, all glued back but for two legs of wire which must be the cheating frame inside the thing. And its nose is white where a chip was lost with the two legs we heard rattling through the furnace grate when his old lady swept up after him.

And there it is this time. It is the lamp I think. What else in that hall but the porcelain globe could have splashed into so many pieces. It is the porcelain. We hear him shuffling barefoot through the pieces, and we hear Aunt Eh again. Perhaps she wails because we are gathered on her porch in her absence for a good time. Or perhaps she heard the splash of so much glass and worries that someone barefoot could be cut. Alloms acknowledges no damage at all. The monkey is too much on his mind.

A kick swings the screen out wide, and a fishing pole emerges. Half naked he is behind it. This is his challenge: "Organ jockey, come out that doggamn ceiling corner! You pickpocket monkey sonofabitch, come down! Come down! Come down here! Come on!" But the monkey only cups his little hands over its nut-colored ears. That is not enough. Nor is dodging nor escape along the horizontal beams,for he comes to a vertical joist and in swinging around it Alloms catches his leg, and it is all over. I believe the nickels and dimes and quarters are coming out before Alloms begins to cuff him across his mangy back, which Alloms is doing, crying: "Puke 'em up you bastard; go on now blow your groceries for us, boy; put 'em in the sunshine!" Then: "Get 'em, Ed (gravely miscalling his daughter), get 'em and go to the store! Get that damn money and go change it for ginger ale! You tryin to wean me!"

I begin collecting the empties and put them all into cartons, one for me and one for Edna, and each carton will fit in a paper sack. It is Sunday. And we have a second trip to the store, past the other yards, other houses, people on copious porches rocking slowly, soundless with pasteboard fans. And we smile. But we do not linger, we hurry, because we do not want the change to dry.

The houses closest to the store we are more easily able to ignore. Clothes are drying on a rack on the porch of one. A motorcycle is parked on the porch of another. These are people in and out of the store all the time, they live so close, though I have seen the grocer ignore them. Fact is, they are trash. But who is he? You will find out.

This time I tell Edna she better stand outside and hold both cartons and say something like, we don't want to be accused of giving him empties from his own rack at the door. He is not busy. And sure enough he was watching us on the sidewalk.

"A carton of ginger ale? Or the Seven-Up? Which is it will you have?"

"Two cartons of ginger ale, pleasir. Little girl's outside with bottles. You can see her through the window."

"Then with bottles returned ... fifty cent." I put the quarters on the counter and see him take them up and punch his cash register all with one lackadaisical move. The drawer rools out to a stop at his paunching spotted apron. But before he drops the pieces of silver in it, he looks down at me threatfully, placing each coin between his big foreign teeth for a bite, mumbling something like, "just to be sure you giving me good stuff."

TOTO THE MARVELOUS WONDER DOG

a short story

by Wallace Whatley

The story of Toto sought him out unlike anything else the summer he won the big prize. And it found him celebrating his first success on the Fourth of July at the lodge where he lived four miles off the pavement from Beaver's Store Crossroad. And first thing when he walked in Beaver's Store on the morning of July the fifth he was asked, "Did that man find you?" For the Beavers brothers were intensely interested in his beginning career, Cyril saying, "Someday I'm gonna sit down and write *me* a story." Now Water Hole Number One two miles up the highway directly across from the fortune teller begins serving at two o'clock every afternoon, and the first afternoon he came in the place that same week in July he could not order a cold beer before the owner asked the same thing, "Did that man find you?" Besides his cousin's, this left one last store where he visited and traded least of all on the whole highway. And he began to avoid it altogether, finally seeing Christmas as a sort of limit by which time they would have forgotten anything of the sort. But he forgot himself and stopped for a box of shells before October. And the owner there asked with the same tone of voice like *have you received your subpoena,* "Did that man find you?" And a retired man who lived across the highway and was always in this store whenever it was open grinned very wide, put one hand down in his bibjeans and said, "That man wanted to get rich with you." The man found him. What he did not add was that he left in a rush and covered his trail . And here we have the only addition to the only story the boy will tell exactly the same every time.

This is added, that when he tried to get the man after the brief visit, operators would only say, "I'm sorry, but telephone service in that name has been discontinued." And he has not tried to go through the Army.

The man stopped first at his cousin's store, apparently seeing the name on the Coca-Cola sign and believing his odyssey was already over. Everyone here takes the Fourth of July, and on that day every stool and keg and chair and drinkbox in Homer's store had a man on it, and every one of them got quiet when the man slammed his door and left his wife out in the sun in the car in front of the two gas pumps. Homer, his cousin, told him later, "I didn't know whether I ought to tell the old sonofabitch where you lived or not. That is, I didn't know whether you'd want to see him or not. He was like all these sonsabitches stop here looking for Florida and take four syllables to say, 'I'm lost.' Most of 'em want you to read a roadmap for 'em. But this one has him a newspaper, slaps it in his hand like he's in a hurry and would like to have our undivided attention in the meanwhile. Everybody was here. And with our undivided attention he stood in that middle aisle on his two dirty bare feet and declared, 'I'm looking for Mr. Hayden,' like his old lady is sitting out there in that unairconditioned Dodge Dart with the goddamn glass slipper on a little old pillow in her lap, you see. I said, 'Just a goddamn minute. That's Highway 49 out there. And us Haydens is kind of like the newspaper all up and down it, one in every home. Now exactly which Hayden do you think you want?' So he showed me his paper. Said, 'I want the writer.' You seen that paper yet? We saved you one. Well, cotton mills was closed for Fourth Day, and old Ben was sitting over there, said, "Where'd you get that paper?' And the man showed him it was that morning's Atlanta paper.

And you know how Ben thinks. Ben told him too, didn't have but one more thing to say, took his pipe out his mouth and said, 'If there's one thing I don't like, it's an *old hippie*.' Well. The impatient bastard got mad at that and left here with his feelings hurt. But he did find you?"

"Yes sir."

He had been up all night watching the pig and putting coals in the pit underneath it and had not even had time to shower and shave when his company started gathering and the man and his wife came out of the woods. He heard them driving down the footpath through the briars and the honeysuckle with the sweetgum saplings slapping the car before it came in sight. They were coming from his neighbor's house across the branch head. There was no road in to that house and no road between the two, just the footpath. And where the footpath came out of the undergrowth the little white Dodge lunged into the ditch. The county had cut one on either side of the white sand drive that came through the woods to his lodge. The man got out of the tilted car and climbed up on the road and inspected the front end and both tires while the haggard wife leaned out of her window asking over and over, "Butch, can I make it?" And the man mumbled and grunted and backed up in the road and raised both arms over his head so that his belly dropped out of his undershirt. He signalled to the lady driving, and he shouted. "Jump it. Jump it. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. This way. This way. This way. To me. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Jump it. Jump it. Jump it. Give her the gas. Give her the gas." The lady obeyed. And the little white Dodge jumped out of the ditch. But its owner was not satisfied. Now the car pointed away from the hunting lodge in the clearing where the company gathered for the barbeque watched the surprise in total silence.

Then the host came away from his company and walked down the drive to the man and his wife at the white car. And the man stopped in the middle of his new signals as he saw the other approach. In one hand the man still held the newspaper, and he came smiling, stepping quickly now, his free hand extended for shaking. He had not shaved that morning. And he wore a tee shirt with two neck ties, a red neck tie and a brown neck tie, intertwined. They were properly tied but stuffed down the neck of the white tee shirt. And he asked, "Mr. Hayden?"

"I am a Hayden."

"Glenn Lane, Hollywood."

"Hollywood. I knew there was a Hollywood, Florida, but I didn't know..."

"California! California! Holly-wood, son." But the boy did not understand yet, because he was looking at the plate on the back of the car: HEART OF DIXIE -- ALABAMA. And on the back bumper there was a civilian gate pass to an Army post. The man did not take a breath before saying, "Son, we been after you all day. You got to drive over fields and through woods to get to you. Why don't you have a road cut in here so the world can find you? And I don't see no dogs. Where are your dogs?"

"In the pen behind the house."

"He calls it a pen. Mr. Hayden, I got more dogs than you ever seen. Champions. Won't have nothing but. I bred and raised and trained Toto the Marvelous Wonder Dog which is exactly why I am here today; will you sign a contract for twenty-five thousand?"

"You're looking for another Hayden. There are a lot of them."

"James Hayden?"

"My first name is James, yes, but there are other James Haydens. They call me..."

"You just ain't seen this!" Now he thrust the newspaper at him. Except for the ballpoint pen in his pocket, the boy was dressed in the newspaper picture exactly as he was standing in the white sand drive, his shirt tail out, barefooted, with eight fox dogs lying asleep on the ground around his feet: PRIZE WINNING AUTHOR JAMES HAYDEN WITH PETS AT WOODLAND RETREAT -- HOPES TO WRITE NOVEL. The story next to his had a picture too: GAME OF DOMINOES OCCUPIES NURSING HOME. So they had used his first name (he had not yet decided whether he wanted to be published as James Hayden, James Andrew Hayden, James A., J. A., or Andrew). But he hardly had time to think about it this time. "You wanta writa novel dontcha? Let's write the *true* novel. Forty thousand in it."

"What?"

The man reached at the back window of the car, "Gertrude, the clippings. Get the clippings." And she began handing him clippings. "It's what everybody wants. What a writer dreams. *A true novel.* The story of *Toto the Marvelous Wonder Dog*! You seen him. All the world has. *The Wizard of Oz.* And you get his story. Start your career. Take it and I'll be on Ed Sullivan tomorrow night and sell a million. They already know Toto out there. Ed knows and I know and you know, and *they want to know his story*!" Gertrude was on all fours behind the steering wheel where she'd been reaching over the front seat and passing old yellow newspapers and poster bills out the window. In one picture a little black rat terrier was tucked under his arm while Glenn Lane shook hands over a dishevelled banquet table with Dr. Shade Trimble, our chiropractor. And

there was an old poster showing the same little black dog in a great white collar like Shakespeare's in the First Folio, and this little dog was stretched out in the middle of the air halfway through a hoop of fire: THE BAYONET LITTLE THEATER -- FORT BENNING, GEORGIA. And Gertrude said, "You know people just love animal stories."

"Shaddup," said Glenn Lane and, "Look here, Mr. Hayden. Going through a hoop of fire. And here. At a banquet in his honor. Read what it says. Dog? No! Man's best friend! And there's no greater glory I'll clue you, and I've already begun it! Manuscript!" he shouted to the car. And the lady started pushing cigar boxes full of mimeographed paper out the window, and Glenn Lane took them all in his arms until they bowed his legs, "A head start! A good story! And it's too true! When we gonna start?"

"Well. I teach school everyday."

"Monday! Let me tell you how you find our kennel"

"I have classes on Monday."

"No! Monday! We got to get started Monday!"

"I'm afraid this Monday's out for me. Mr. Lane, if you can give me a number..."

"Butch, give him my number at the office on the reservation."

"Shaddup! I'm the agent here!"

"Maybe some other time, Mr. Lane..."

"Forget it. We'll give it to Ed Sullivan." And Gertrude moaned long, "Ohhh Butch..." and she drove Glenn Lane down the white sand drive, and he could be seen through the rear window unloading his arms on the back seat.