

# *Sketch*

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*Volume 25, Number 2*

1959

*Article 12*

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## Battle on Tenth Street

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# Battle on Tenth Street

Lorena Duncan

## **Abstract**

If you ever walk along Tenth St. in the Big City you can't miss what's on upper Tenth. Oh, just listen to the...

Listen to the laughter in a thousand empty rooms.  
Listen hard and don't miss the latest glittering star.  
Deafen yourself in smug society's roar —  
Then you won't hear someone crying in the next room.

# Battle on Tenth St.

If you ever walk along Tenth St. in the Big City you can't miss what's on upper Tenth.

Oh, just listen to the . . .  
sluggish hot summer wind  
busy hum of neon making the night sky red  
honk-honk, grinding gears, police whistles, motor roar  
click, shuffle, scrape, slide, clomp of thousands of  
shoes on sidewalk and pavement  
throbbing pulse of the BigCity, a beehive BigCity with  
every waxen cell brilliantly lit in the neon night sky.

If you ever go into one of the brandnew mile-high buildings on upper Tenth St. you can't miss what's in the rooms.

(Everything's bigger and better this year)

Listen to the . . .  
laughter in a thousand empty rooms (beehive rooms)  
powerful purring from millions of white and piercing  
lights  
silence of feet in gray plush carpet  
tinkle of glasses seen reflecting in sparkling mirrors  
whirr of the air conditioner wafting ladies' heavy  
perfumes.

Listen hard and don't miss the latest glittering star.

Listen to the laughter,

"We're having fun, aren't we?"

"YesYesYes."

"Opening the Country Club swimming pool—gardens floating in the water, big name band."

“Fabulous! Neat!”

“Hear about the convention in our city?”

“Going to be a big parade tonight — sixty new white convertibles carrying the convention dignitaries.

Should be quite an impressive sight.”

Be sure and deafen yourself in smug society’s roar.

Then you won’t hear someone . . . on down on lower Tenth St.

(It’s really quite easy to miss)

Listen to the . . .

sluggish summer wind toying paper scraps on the cracked sidewalk

dragging footsteps breaking through black night on the lonely street

soft clank of garbage can lid stealthily replaced as a child steals his supper

hacking cough of the BigCity, a broken beehive Big-City with sickly yellow patched cells, weak and tottering.

If you ever go into one of the crumbling brick wrecks on lower Tenth St. (really you don’t have to go — it’s so easy to miss)

Listen to the . . .

creaking of rough wooden stairs

soundlessly spinning spiders in the pale haze of a dusty light bulb

alive silence of invisible people watching you, people who leave the smell of musty urine and who scratched

“tony is a bastard” on the wall beside the stairway

sifting trickle of filth-encrusted plaster

patter of rats scurrying across broken linoleum.

Hear someone . . .

“Dear Jesus, help us.”

“Amen.”

“Got laid off again.”

“Now tell me how we’ll get school shoes for the kids?”

“I tole ya ta lebe dat bottle o’ mine alone.”

“For Christ’s sake put that knife down!”

“Hear 'bout the rape last night in this buildin’?”  
“Yeah, guess the guy walked right into her room—  
damn landlord — won’t even give ya locks fer yer doors.”

“Don’t, Mama.”

“Mama, why are you ——”

That’s enough of this. Let’s go back to upper Tenth and  
see the parade with the neat white convertibles. Just  
think, sixty —

No! Wait!

You crazy or something?

Through all that roar did you hear a different sound? Did  
you hear someone crying in the next room?

Quick, run stuff cotton in your ears.

(I did)

but I can still hear

someone

crying . . .

— Lorena Duncan, S. Jr.

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## *Pammel Court*

**A** BABY cries, a door slams and children shout on the  
next street. A distant lawnmower is interrupted by  
the clamor of a nearer garbage can. The mower moves again  
— it hesitates, stops completely, then resumes its clatter,  
punctuated by a few seconds silence at the end of each run.

You cannot hear the turnaround but imagine it as being  
a time of quick rest, the pusher wiping sweat from his face  
and surveying his surroundings before the next effort. The  
mower moves again. Now a smell of cooking moves with  
the late afternoon breeze and a man laughs somewhere.

A woman calls and the mower stops. The other human  
noises gradually die out. It’s getting dark, the school day is  
over, and it’s suppertime in Pammel Court.

— William Kershner, S. Jr.