Escapist

Jean Ross*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1941 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
SUNDAY afternoon lethargy hung over the house. Janie, pressing her nose against the window screen, tried not to think of the dinner dishes, in sticky stacks on the cupboard.

“Now hurry and finish them,” her mother had said, too cheerfully, before she and Dad had left to go calling. “When you’re through maybe Mike will help you make some fudge.” He wouldn’t though. Mike could make swell fudge when he was in the mood, but lately he had been grouchy as heck. Outside there was nothing but heat and dust and drowsy hens clucking. Inside there was only dirty dishes and Mike, and he was probably studying.

Janie started upstairs. Lately she had acquired the ability to mount the steps two at a time. “If my legs keep growing as fast as they have this year, I can go up three at a time pretty soon,” she thought.

SHE opened the door to Mike’s room. He was digging around in a dresser drawer.

“Whatcha doin?”

“What.” He was, though. He was pitching socks and undershirts into an open traveling bag on the bed.

“Why’re you doin’ that, Mike?” Janie sat down beside the traveling bag. Mike was dressed only in his shorts and house-slippers. An ash from his cigarette dropped on his chest and made one of the curly hairs sizzle. He dropped the cigarette on the floor and ground it with his slipper.

“I’m going to give my old clothes to the W.C.T.U. rummage sale.” He was just kidding. Those weren’t his old clothes. He was throwing in his best suspenders and his good shirts, washed stiff at the laundry.

“You going away?”

“Oh, no. I’m just doing this for the fun of it.” He put on one of the undershirts, and began dashing hair tonic on his hair. Janie sniffed the spicy smell and wondered what it reminded
her of. Oh. Sure. The time she helped Mike dress for a formal
dance. She had filled the thin gold cigarette case and put it in
the breast pocket of his tail-coat. Then she had put in his cuff
links, and pulled the white pique vest tight around his waist, so
that he looked just like Fred Astaire. The studs were worst.
Mike's hands had been sweaty, and it had taken what seemed an
hour before the last pearl was in place. They were just for
looks, too. She had told the girls at school how Mike looked
just like Gene Raymond.

HE WAS sitting on the edge of a chair now, struggling with
his socks and lacing up his size twelve shoes. Where could
he be going? "The car's gone, Mike."

"I know it."

"Mike is the socialite of the family," she had heard her mother
tell friends. "Donald doesn't care at all about such things. You
would never know they were brothers. Donald is so steady; he
has never given us a moment's worry." O.K. So Mike didn't
get good grades in college. So he wasn't able to keep his job
with the insurance company. So what? At least he wasn't dull
like old Donald, with his budget, and his bank account, and his
refusal to smoke. Everybody knew Mike Froman, and liked him,
too. The girls were crazy about him. He . . .

Gosh. Maybe that was why Mike was packing. Maybe he was
elop ing. That would be something to tell the kids. Maybe it was
with the girl who wrote real slushy letters, with purple ink on
lavender paper. She sometimes talked like she and Mike were
practically married already.

The other one, who used a typewriter, had been writing
stuff like "I can't go on like this. I'll kill myself, first." Still,
people didn't elope in broad daylight, even to keep some babe
from committing suicide.

He was pulling on his trousers now, and buttoning his shirt.
He snapped his suspenders into place, and reached for a comb.
He sorta needed a haircut.

"Mike."

"What?"

"How can you leave without any money?" He never had
money, unless she loaned it to him.
"I can take care of myself. And I don't need your money either, see?" He was just talking like that. Gee, what would he do? He put his wallet, flat and thin, in his hip pocket and strapped on his wrist watch. She followed him downstairs.

"I'll be here alone, Mike."

"The folks will be back soon." He was walking toward the door. She felt a sort of lump above her Adam's apple.

"Where ya goin, Mike?" Her voice sounded high and cracky.

He looked straight ahead, his jaw hard.

"I dunno. I don't know where I'm going."

He went down the steps, across the lawn, and started up the hot, dusty road. Toward the crossroads. She couldn't stop him. Nothing could. Mom and Dad would come back and she would have to tell them. And Donald would look smug.

"Mike! Come back!"

The editors of Sketch will be stealing a page from the next few issues so that we can have our say about the contents of Sketch. First, a word about the selection of Sketch material. Several thousand sheets of paper have filtered through a half-dozen sets of hands to produce the selections in this issue. Our material comes from the Sketch box in Beardshear, the cream of freshman work submitted through the instructors, the writing of the creative writing classes of Drs. Hogrefe and Walker, and from Writers' Round table. From four to six people read this preliminary material; the best is laid aside until the entire field has been covered. Then comes the period of great wrangling when the editor, associate, and assistants fight for the ones they particularly like. If any of these persons submits his own work, he has a hard job. Nine times out of ten we lean over backwards to avoid printing our own material. Certainly anyone on the staff is at a disadvantage when his own work is considered—we don't like talk. But half the time Sketch workers are chosen by their literary ability, so where does it get you? Right. Finally a folder of papers is sent around to five members of the Publication Board for comments and orders of preference. At the zero hour, these are checked and re-checked, battled over, typed, and sent to the printer. Then after innumerable trips to get proofs and dummies, Sketch is ready. Next time we'll tell how the stories are judged.