Postmarked New York

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Abstract

CHRIS sat swinging her feet back and forth, back and forth...
CHRIS sat swinging her feet back and forth, back and forth. Her moccasins flopped loosely against the soles of her feet, letting in small gasps of the cool air. Sitting on the porch railing, swinging your feet, wasn't very amusing, not very ladylike either. But there was so little to do now. Mom hadn't called for over ten minutes, and that job had lasted as long as it had taken to turn down the radio. A year ago she didn't wait, with a tight feeling under her ribs, for the mail to come. Knowing all the time, telling herself that the last letter, months ago, postmarked New York, was a warning of the long wait ahead of her. The long wait with nothing to do.

A year ago she wouldn't have had time to do everything before Curt came loping across the lawn. Curt had a long, casual stride; he seemed to toss his foot out in front of him for the next step in an uninhibited sort of way. Curt's shoes would swing in rhythm with hers while they spent half the morning trying to think of how to get away from work. Most of their time was spent getting away from things and people. Not just running away like the time they were dodging the guard in the apple orchard. A different kind of getting away.

"Chris, let's go to the show," would be the opening plan for the evening. Just as if Chris didn't know Curt was broke. The cokes had been on her since yesterday. But it would be getting away from the house. The walk uptown would take ten minutes.

"I picked up fifteen cents today; have you got that nickel change from the quarter we had yesterday, Chris?" Half way to town the money problem would be settled. Funny, each one's holdings belonged to the other. Chris liked to think of the things they owned together. The records they had gotten last spring. "On sale for only twenty cents. We can buy two and a bottle of ginger ale." That left them with one cent and a long walk home. But neither bothered them.

Standing on the bridge Curt had pulled the penny out of his pocket and dropped it into the water. The waves started in little,
tight ripples and grew, and grew, until they covered the still pool by the log. Curt leaned over her and Chris felt the waves of her feeling grow from tight, little ripples into wide encompassing warmth.

"Just walking" was theirs together, too. "With twenty cents we can buy a package of cigarettes; then maybe we can just walk?" The last was a question; Curt's questions always had two meanings. This one meant "please, not people tonight, let's be together." Parties were the worst kind of bores for them both. "Just because we met at a party we have to be civil to them." "Across the room, over all of those people, you looked at me. I could feel you, all of you; and the wind in my face." "Two pairs of eyes can say enough in one glance to fill the whole Library of Congress a thousand times." No, even parties with Curt near weren't quite as boring. But just walking was better, much better.

Chris had learned a lot, just walking. Lots of little things about Curt. That he liked to run across the streets and make the cars honk. And yell "Your horn works; try your lights." He liked to slide on little patches of ice, leaving sliver scratches from his heels behind him like the silver threads of a snail. That he liked rain and wind, cold wind, not hot and filled with sand. And that he liked her. He liked her in the wind; looking down at him on his back with the wind blowing her hair. That he liked her to run with him, to make their own wind to blow their hair. That he liked her close, relaxed and cool.

Curt had a very special way of ducking his head when he lit his cigarette. He always lit the first because he could keep the match going longest. "I should be a sailor." He'd said that last year, just a year ago. But he wasn't a sailor, he was a cadet. "I'm a cadet now, darling," he'd written. "Don't ask me what it means; it's just army." "There are three ways of doing a thing in the army, the right way, the wrong way, and the army way." His letters had come often those first two months; laughing letters, endearing letters. His meal-times suffered because that was the only time he'd had to write them. Now they don't come; or he didn't write—he didn't write, he didn't write—the words kept time to Chris's swinging feet.

Her moccasins were fuzzy and blurred but they kept swinging. Chris had learned how to cry. She had learned that first week; now she could cry without other people noticing it.
March, 1943

There was a sharp, sliding click of the mailbox being shut. Another eleven o'clock had gone by. Chris didn't go to the box; she had stopped that after the second week. Mom would come and get the mail.

"For you, Chris." Probably just another invitation to a wedding. All the old crowd were being married. The envelope was heavy. "New York." It was from New York. The envelope tore jaggedly across the top.

"Chris, my very dear." Yes, he had written, he had written. The letters became frosted with little fur edges.

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Transition

Stella Lou Johnson

The warmth upon my back grows cool.
I look at tree-tops
And see bare arms turn gold—
The sun has set the world on fire,
Sliding past another day.
Then I find a patch of sky beyond the flame,
Where shelves of clouds like writing
Blur the moon for a comma—
And smear across a page of blue.

Willows, dressed in winter drab,
Bend to wash their fingertips—
Reflected in this mirror disc,
And framed in black of earth.

The rusty gray of path leads on.
And in the dim of growing shade,
Trees are turned to lace
Against the velvet sky.