Something That Shows

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Abstract

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The midweek city bus was not crowded at five-twenty, but it was hot without the crowd. Marion sat in the back corner. The wind from the open window pressed her soft, brown hair flat against her head. She held the grown-out bangs back, out of her face, and watched the houses pass. One of the new cotton dresses Mom had just sent would have been cooler than this yellow one. Would Bill remember this dress? It reminded Marion of that last dance in the spring in Des Moines. Their last dance. She pulled the full skirt just over her knees and fingered her new sorority pin, turning it up so she could see the diamond. It didn't seem possible that two weeks had passed since initiation. Bill had worn dark sweaters and shirts for weeks to show off his pin after his initiation. She hadn't been able to understand this evident vanity. She had even been a bit jealous of the attention lost, but now she understood. There seemed to be something special about the tiny gold symbol. Something that set the wearer apart, if only in her own mind. Perhaps this was a snobbish attitude, but it was a good feeling. She automatically slipped her fingers over the catch, to see if it was secure, and she looked at the shining gold against the yellow linen. One single pin, beautiful, but alone over her heart.

The bus lurched over the bridge entering Big Ames and Marion grabbed the seat in front of her. When the road was smooth again she crossed her legs and resettled her skirt over the slight bulge where her other knee pressed against her leg.

She thought of the night her roommate had asked about Bill. "How long is that man going to lead you on? People think you're another gal who kids herself into thinking she has someone to wait for." Marion had been angry. It bothered her to remember that night and all the mean things she had said. But how could Marge know that Bill was real, and hers; that she had agreed to wait for him; that she didn't want anyone else. How could people
know? Or maybe she was kidding herself. Maybe she’d read things into his letters that weren’t there. Maybe the time-worn phrases that seemed so special and all-important were trite and common and meaningless. The continual wishes that they could get together, when he knew it was impossible, might have been—. She saw the USO across from the railroad station, pulled the buzzer cord and crossed to the door of the bus. Before the bus stopped completely, at the station stop, she jumped to the ground. Her white sandals matted the grass and she ran eagerly through the cindered street toward the railroad station. The stones bounded in under her toes, and she slowed to a deliberate walk. The new doubt overshadowed her eagerness. She noticed that no houses faced this short street, and, after looking around to see if anyone was coming, she opened the large straw purse and pulled out a slim, transparent comb. After coming her hair, down and straight at the sides, the old way, she brought out the lipstick and dabbed at her mouth. He wouldn’t notice the lipstick.

“The train’ll be on time, ma’am.” The station master had a proud, surprised note in his voice. “About five minutes.”

Marion dodged the puddles in the subway under the tracks. On the platform people were standing in fidgety groups, some sitting on the scattered baggage wagons, some women or girls, like Marion, alone.

A young woman held a tiny, red haired baby in her arms, tightly. She tucked the pale blue blanket closer around it, laughing at each sound it made, a soft, incredulous laugh. The others in the station were looking at the woman, too, but she was conscious only of her child. Marion stared at her, fascinated. She didn’t want to watch the two, because something about them caused a momentary feeling of disquiet, of inexplicable sadness in her. Then she knew why, and laughed nervously to herself. Everyone could tell that somebody loved this young woman. Someone far away, perhaps, but very real.

The low, distant train whistle awakened the crowd and some moved slowly toward the probable stopping place. Marion caught her breath quickly. The heart beats filled her chest and echoed in her ears. Did he love her? Would it be the same? The throb of the engine accented her nervousness and she wanted to turn, to run down the brick platform, through the subway and away from the relentless approach of the train. But she only backed away from the huge engine that shut out the air and light from
Sketch

the platform, and scanned the waiting line within the train. Tired, unshaven soldiers smiled at her from the dusty windows.

She felt faint but cold, and leaned against an iron pillar. She didn't move toward the train steps with the crowd, but stayed back, as if left out. Opening the purse, she could see her pale face in the mirror under the flap. It didn't really matter how she looked if he had changed.

Then she saw him on the steps of the train, tall and self-assured, but somehow alone, towering over an elderly woman's shoulder searching the waiting crowd with his eyes. Marion closed her purse and ran forward. "Bill, over here." Relieved and sure. It was the same feeling. As if he stood on the steps of Chemistry last spring waiting for her. He saw her and waved his garrison cap, jumping from the train. The uniform was just like the uniform of millions like him, but it looked different on Bill. The few minutes she had seen him in it at the induction center were not impressed on her memory. For the first time she really looked at him. She looked at the khaki blouse pulled tight across his athlete's chest, the khaki tie perfectly tied, and the immaculate shoes, even after such a trip. This was different from the Bill she had fallen in love with as a college man. Yet so much was the same. The grin, the black crew-cut hair, so soft for a boy's hair, and the way he grabbed her hand and said, "Let's git."

She ran beside him through the subway and up the steps, taking her eyes from his face only to avoid the water. "Where can we go? I have only an hour." Bill sounded hurried and imperative.

Marion stopped. "An hour!" The disappointment filled her voice only momentarily. "But, honey, we're lucky to have any time at all. Let's go to Art's. It's closest." She pulled him to a faster walk.

"Looks familiar." He smiled like a small boy as he pushed open the door of Art's for her. They pardoned themselves through the crowd of high school kids to the corner booth, and a waitress followed them. "Bert, are you still here?" Bert smiled at his recognition and took their order. She remembered Bill. Everyone did. He liked them all, not for a reason, but genuinely, and he let them know it. They remembered.

"Well, Marion, we're together." He spoke low, below the noise, and took both of her hands in his brown ones, grasping the fin-
gers hungrily and looked at her. “We’re in love and alone—. I like that yellow dress. Remember—? You haven’t changed. I was afraid—.”

“So was I, Bill. But it is the same.” She pressed her hands against his and looked into his eyes, sure.

“What’s this?” He reached over and touched the sorority pin, reading the letters. “When were you initiated? I haven’t heard from you for three weeks because of bivouac. That’s a honey.”

“It’s two weeks old.” Marion couldn’t say more. The words were caught somewhere in her mind.

“The pin means a lot, doesn’t it? I remember when I got mine, how shiny it was. I polished it about every day. I hated to take it off even for that. The Army doesn’t like such jewelry.” His voice was casual, but his hazel eyes were dark.

“Don’t you wear it ever?” Marion tried to sound natural. Bill laughed tightly, reached just inside his blouse collar, and pulled a gold fraternity pin out.

“Sometimes I do.” He turned the pin over and over between his fingers, in the palm of his hand. Then he set it on the black table top carefully.

“It’s a handsome pin, Bill.” Still she couldn’t find the right tone.

“Marion, if I didn’t think it would change your college life, I’d ask you to wear this. But it really wouldn’t be fair to you, I guess.” He leaned toward her, still holding her hands firmly, and looked at the pin. “No, it wouldn’t be fair.”

Her brown eyes searched his face. Was he making excuses, or was he serious? “I’d take it, Bill.” It was testing, half-questioningly. “If you really mean that.”

He was startled and his eyes wrinkled, wanting to believe her. Her hand freed itself from his and she ran her fingers around the sugar bowl lid. “It would help so much.” Her voice was soft and earnest.

Bill smiled possessively, picked up the pin and fastened it below her sorority pin on the yellow dress. “Honey, you’re a pinned woman. This is makeshift, but someday we’ll do it up right, five pounds and all.” He looked at the clock. “Holy smoke, we have three minutes.” He picked up the check, pulling her with him out of the booth.

They ran to the station. The train was within hearing distance. He kissed her hard, on the mouth, holding her shoulders with
his hands. She held her breath hard within her chest, and was afraid and lonely. He kissed her again, tenderly, quickly, and the engine intruded. "Whatever happens, honey, don't forget I love you and I'll be back for you someday soon." He ran for the train.

The observation car disappeared around the bend by the water tower. Bill was gone, but she could wait, now. She had something to show that she was loved. For the first time, contentment and security lay behind her tears.

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The River
Doris Allen

*Winner, Freshman SKETCH Contest*

Water was my first love,
the river was my first world.

In the long summers of childhood
I lived by the river,
with all the life of the fields
and the life of the hillsides.
The long-legged heron stood all morning
on the grassy banks,
holding one clawed foot tucked against his blue feathers.
If I rustled the waving marsh grass
he would fly away,
slowly flopping his great wide wings.