

THE AWAKENING

HARRIET BISHOP

And there I stood, a useless, living form
With roughened hands in worn out pockets pushed
And felt some force, not mine, had changed my will,
I turned my face up toward a darkened night.
There at my feet was spread an ancient world,
While high above there whirled a universe;
And far within the depths of treasured years
Strange, kindly voices dimmed the call of space.
For far below was all that used to be
While out in space stood life's futurity.

QUESTION ON A BUS

JACK T. KILGORE

"May I —," George cleared his throat. "I wonder if I could take Jean to the show with me tonight." His words were engulfed by the silence that spread over the table. "(Why doesn't somebody say something? They can't say no, they just can't. What are they waiting for?) I wouldn't be in late and there is no school tomorrow."

The mother looked up and smiled, and looked to the father for the first word. He said, "Jean who?"

"Jean Newcomb. She is in my English class. (And she smiles when she looks at me, and when she smiles I want to smile too. But I can't say that.) She lives on the south side."

"Is she a nice girl?"

"Sure, Mom, she's swell!" The mother looked down at her plate. "That is, she's— alright. She's a nice girl."

The father made up his mind. "I guess it will be alright, if you're in early. Just because you're old enough to have dates is

no sign you can neglect your sleep."

"Gee! thanks a lot. I'll be in early. (I hope I don't hear the usual lecture on rest and the growing boy.)"

"Are you sure Jean will go?" his mother asked. Perhaps you had better call her.

"Oh, I've already asked her."

The glink of silverware under water filled the small kitchen with familiar sound. In his excitement George had difficulty handling the hot utensils. His impatience kept him always waiting on his mother where he ordinarily lagged far behind her.

"George, you'll be a good lit- You'll be a gentleman tonight, won't you?"

"Sure, Mom. (Why isn't there an easy way of saying these things you want to say? What is it that holds you tongue-tied and keeps the words from coming?)"

The china, as it plashed into the water made a hole in the gleaming suds through which the grey water gleamed and winked. George stared at it, and at his mother's red

hands. "I'll be a gentleman."

"You may be getting in after I've gone to bed, so you may carry my door-key."

"Gee, thanks."

"I'll finish the dishes now, you run along."

"Oh, I've got time."

"No, you go on; I'll finish."

"I'll be in early."

As he left the kitchen, he heard the scraping of the Chore Girl against the pans, and his spine crawled and his teeth went on edge.

It seemed to George he had never waited so long for a bus before. "(Why doesn't it come? I mustn't be late. I wish I had a watch — Maybe on my next birthday Mom and Dad will get me one. They were swell tonight, not teasing me about Jean, and no lecture about getting in early, and the door-key! It will be better being a 'gentleman' than being a 'good little boy'. 'Gentleman' top-hat, tux, a watch like Dad's, and my own door-key for keeps. Go to night clubs instead of shows, and stay out all night. And I'll drive my own car then, instead of messing around with buses, yessir, I'll drive my own car then, my own car.)"

As he got on the bus and stood waiting for his change, he noticed Bill sitting toward the rear of the bus. Bill was a few years older, and very hard-boiled in a secretly thrilling sort of way. George had always been fascinated by his maturity and toughness, but felt ill at ease in his presence, as though it was presumptuous of him to claim acquaintance with such a man of the world. George approached diffidently and sat down.

"Hi-yuh, Bill."

"Hello, little one."

"(Little one, why does he have to sound so big? Just because he is older and been around more is no reason to be so condescending. Why am I so young?)"

At length George ventured, "These buses are pretty slow aren't they?"

"Yeah, they're slow as hell."

"I wish the dam driver would hurry."

George sneaked a sideward glance to see if the word had registered.

"I do too; I'm in a hell of a hurry."

"Then it must be a girl." George tried his best to look risque.

"That's right, kid."

"Is it the same girl you told me about the other day? (Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned her.)"

"Yeah, same dame."

"(I wonder if what he told me was true? Or if he was just blowing. No, I guess it was the truth. Gee!)"

Bill noticed the unusually tidy hair, the suit, and the shined shoes, also unusual, and said, "You look like you have a date yourself, kid."

"(He didn't sound so big then.) Yeah," he replied, very casually.

"Where you going?"

"Oh," again casually, "to a show I imagine." Implying, "Some indecision, doesn't really matter, whatever strikes our fancy."

"Who you going with now?"

Who you going with now? With that question George realized that Bill's condescension had lessened, and he gained in stature. Who you going with now? It implied a steady, it implied growing up, it implied acceptance. Who you going with now? Who you going with? The question echoed in his head.

"Oh," still casually, "a girl on the south side. Don't think you know her. Her name is Jean."

The name was caressed possessively before he hooked it to join the refrain that was dancing in his now adult ears. Who you going with now? Who you going with now? Jean. Who you going with? Jean. Who? Jean. Who? Jean. Jean. Jean.