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—
right. 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

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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 wanted 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."