

SUN ON THE STEEPLE

RICHARD MOORES

*Ranking entry in 1942 Butler Literary
Contest*

The man rolled over in bed and woke up. He opened his eyes slowly and carefully and immediately closed them. Bright yellow sunlight came through the second-story window and struck the bright yellow ugliness of the wall paper. The man put his hand in front of his eyes and blinked a few times, then he took his hand away and looked at the clock on the table beside the bed. It was 10:15 and the post man always came by at 9. The man decided to take it easy. He shook the last cigarette out of the pack on the table and lit it slowly. He inhaled deeply and his head and stomach felt like hell. The man smoked the cigarette about half way down and put it out in the ashtray on the table. Then he saw the whiskey bottle on the table with about two inches left in it. He leaned on his right elbow and slammed the bottle against the wall with his left hand. The yellow wall paper turned a kind of muddy brown. He sat looking at the wall for about five minutes and then he got out of bed.

He walked over to the dresser and he stumbled a little bit. He pushed his hair back and looked in the mirror. He hadn't really taken a good look at himself in two weeks.

He ran his hand over his chin and pinched the ends of his eyes and decided to clean up. The man washed almost his whole body in the little basin and then he shaved and dressed and he felt a lot better. He started to shake a little bit and he wanted a drink badly, but he remembered the muddy brown of the wall paper. He decided to go downstairs and look in the mail box.

The man was down to thirty dollars

when he thought of the idea for the story. He had worked on the story for four days and nights and he knew it was good. Too damn good for the pulps. He had written for the pulps twice under another name, and he got a hundred dollars for each story, but he wouldn't do it again. This story was good and he had sent it to a good magazine. He had sent the story to the magazine over two weeks ago and he had been drunk ever since.

It wasn't easy to get used to cheap, rotten whiskey, but he had gotten used to it, and when he was drunk he forgot about the rat-trap he lived in and about being broke. He remembered the nights he staggered up the narrow stairs softly whistling "The Marseillaise," or screaming it at the top of his voice. He knew he had a woman one night too, but he couldn't even remember what she looked like. He just remembered that she was soft and white. He had sent the story in and then everything had been darkness and light and he had lost all sense of time.

He stood at the top of the narrow stairway and thought about his drunkenness and his head was spinning and he felt very sick. He began to walk down the stairs—he had to stop two or three times and lean against the bannister, and he wondered if he would vomit on the stairs. When he reached the first floor he felt much better, and he leaned against the front door and felt the dizziness go away. Then he opened the door and stepped out into the sunshine and there was no sickness in his stomach, and he blinked at the houses across the street. The yellow sun was on the little houses that were always so dirty and slovenly and the

sun made them look all new and bright and shining. He looked up at the bright blue sky with the bright white clouds and he looked down the little street that was so strangely quiet with only a few people on it. The sun was behind the steeple of the little brick church on the corner, and he watched it climb in the blue sky until it hurt his eyes. Then he went over to the little row of mail boxes nailed on the front of the house.

He found the one with his name printed unevenly on a dirty white card and he put his hand on the rusty little latch and opened the little door — it made a tired squeaking noise. He looked inside the small black box and saw the black paint flaking off the box where it had rusted and the gray paint flaking off the front of the house when the box was fastened and a broken

brown left in the bottom of the box. The man looked at the leaf for a long time and then he carefully closed the little door and looked down at his feet. A brown ant was running around his shoes and he stepped on the ant and opened the front door. It took the man a long time to get up the stairs and he didn't look back at the sun on the little houses across the street.

The sun climbed in the blue sky until it was above the little brick church on the corner. The bright yellow light bathed the wooden shingles on the steeple and made the little weather-cock shine with a light that was almost heavenly. The sound of a shot split the quiet of the morning. Then the church bells began to ring, the doors of the church opened, and the people walked out into the bright sunlight.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH POETRY

RACHEL WHELAN

Poetry? A strange parade of multi-colored, grotesque and unique figures begins its march through my mind. Far down a misty street of reminiscence it is headed by a gingham dog and a calico cat, and passing the reviewing stand at this moment is the pitiful crowd from the "Fall of the City" led by the mysterious woman. My parade is distinguished from all others because its end is never viewed, and the beginning never stops, for there will always be spectators for this parade, and though the street is winding and narrow in spots it never terminates.

The beginning has long since passed from view with its "rain that's raining everywhere," "Radiator Lions," and "cocoa and animal crackers." The formations are rather thin at points, or perhaps they're just

too far away to see clearly. Hiawatha is there though, and the little girls from the "Childrens' Hour." There's a bareboot boy and Little Orphaned Annie. That wicked black bird of yore flies over the winding file. The twelve Canterbury pilgrims plod slowly on telling and retelling their stories. Lady MacBeth and Brutus walk stealthily together while the wedding guest listens tirelessly to the ancient mariner's tale. The walrus and the carpenter are chuckling as they watch Belinda lose her precious lock.

There's a ponderous accompaniment for my pageant. It's a wild melody made of songs from the hearts of a multitude of composers. First there must be marches, "Aye, tear her tattered ensigns. . .," "The people will go on. . .," "and heard the shot fired 'round the world." There's the wail