

# The Reparation

Patty Lewis

The principal stopped checking the list and looked at his secretary. "Miss Adams," he asked, "isn't Ann Lupesko the girl with the thick, steel-rimmed glasses?"

"Why, yes," answered Miss Adams. "A thin, very ungainly child. Extremely homely. Why?"

"Nothing," the principal responded. He leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes. It was curious, Mark Davis thought, how the problems of teaching children remained the same year after year, generation after generation.

Here in front of him was a list of names representing nominations submitted by the students. All these nominees would be called to the school stage and, before the complete student body, introduced and applauded. Then, by secret ballot, six would be elected Central High's Representative Girls, and their pictures would be in the school annual and probably in the local paper. The nominees comprised the school's prettiest, best-dressed, and most popular girls—and Ann Lupesko.

Even the situations remained almost identical, Mark mused. He didn't remember what the honor had been called when he was a boy. Queen of Beauty or something similar. But, then too, the contestants had been summoned to the school stage. It had been his idea, as a hilarious joke, to nominate Sadie Whiteside.

In the auditorium he could see Sadie, sitting with her hands tightly clenched on the books in her lap. Her fat, homely face was intent as she watched. She vigorously applauded her favorites among the girls who were called to the stage.

Mark never knew whether the teacher in charge was consciously aware of the name before she called it.

"Sadie Whiteside. Will she come forward, please?"

There was a stunned hush in the auditorium. Only the row of boys in which Mark Davis was sitting made any sound, and their snickering was muffled. Sadie sat as if she didn't recognize her name. Her face looked blank and numb.

Then the girls around her began to repeat her name. Someone nudged her. There were loud whispers of "Go on! Go on!" They had caught on to the joke like vultures attacking a dead carcass. She was pushed into the aisle.

Still with a dazed expression on her face, she started toward the stage. She was fat, her hair was stringy, and her clothes were cheap and ill-fitting. There were giggles all over the auditorium as she started down the aisle, awkward and

frightened. One of the boys said loudly, "Our beauty queen!" and another whistled suggestively. Girls went into gales of laughter.

Halfway to the stage Sadie stopped. Beads of sweat glistened on her face. She stared about her as if she had lost her way. Her mouth twitched and slowly, very slowly, a look of terror came into her eyes. With a cry she turned to run.

But even her escape was too farcical. She put her fat hand over her eyes, stumbled and fell. Her dress flew up, showing fat legs and cheap cotton underwear.

Now, sitting behind the principal's desk of Central High School, Mark Davis could remember the whole scene in detail, though he could not remember at what moment it had ceased to be funny. He had quit laughing before the others. He sat through the teacher's angry lecture, scarcely hearing it. He kept seeing the look of terror in Sadie's eyes, and how the sweat had shown on her cheeks.

The teacher had never discovered who was responsible for Sadie's name being listed. There was no punishment. But Mark Davis found he could not forget the incident.

The girl had not returned to school for two days. Then she went to classes red-eyed, frequently weeping, and looking uglier than ever before. A thousand times he imagined how she must have felt with the laughter beating at her from every side, trapped by the mockery of it, as he was by his own shame.

When he could stand it no longer he went to her house to apologize. He was trembling as he went up the steps. It had taken him most of the afternoon to gather his courage, and it was nearly dark.

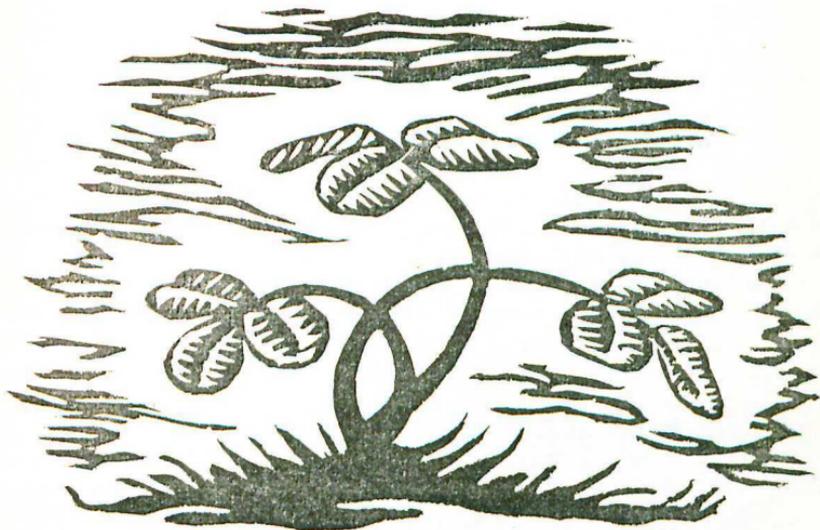
"I want to talk to you," Mark said when Sadie came to the door. "Will you come out a minute?"

She must have been working in the kitchen, for he could smell the odors of food and perspiration about her. "What is it?" she asked.

It was hard for him to speak. "Remember when they called your name to go up on the stage that time at school?" He did not wait for a reply but rushed on. "I did it. I nominated you. I didn't do it as a joke," his voice cracked a little. "I thought maybe you weren't as pretty as some of the others, but you make good grades. I thought—" He was backing away, feeling for the top step with his foot. She kept looking at him, saying nothing. Her face was only a pale disbelieving circle in the dusk. Then he had found the steps and had gone down them, and was running as she had run, blindly, trying to escape—and knowing already that he never could.

The principal opened his eyes, leaned forward and looked again at the list of names on his desk. He reached for his

pencil, but it was not primarily this girl at all. He knew that Sadie Whiteside probably had long ceased to be hurt by the memory of the incident and had even forgotten the name of Mark Davis. But for him, the memory and shame could come back so vividly that even now his hand trembled as he marked Ann Lupesko's name from the list.



## *Death, or Return Me*

Jack Harris Monninger

Hold my hand firmly  
And guide me through the snow,  
Then let the sun beat down  
Concealing where I go.

And when I reach the depths  
Of man-made destiny  
Close the gates softly  
Or set me free.