steeple—we could paint it, cut it to fit . . .” He looked at it and let his fat fingers run over the blue and red smoothness of it. Then he said “. . . honey, could Daddy use this? I would buy you a new one next week, you know.” And of course, I could never refuse my Daddy anything and so I said “Yea.” And he took the ball and I walked with him out to the pick-up truck and waved good-by.

Then I dragged back to the house and there was nothing to do, because I had no ball to throw against the chimney and roller-skating on the pebbly, cracked, noisy, string sidewalk after my beautiful church-rink was like drinking milk after you had tasted Coca-Cola.

Later, Daddy took me by the church, and my ball on the steeple was beautiful and it did add to the whole church—Daddy said all colonial churches need balls on their steeples. We went there on Sundays for a while, and I used to sit in the auditorium, near where my kitchen had been. Daddy would remind me to be quiet and bow my head and pray and listen to the scripture and the sermon.

And that was not very hard for me to do, because I would daydream . . . I had nothing against churches, but I could never stop thinking about what a beautiful roller-skating rink that building could have been.

Three Time Loser
Margaret Hiles

THE SIDEWALK ended at the alley where last night’s rain had turned the hard-packed earth into slime. This made walking difficult because I wanted to keep my new shoes shiny. I picked my way along, trying to find something solid to step on. I raised my eyes only long enough to look at the house numbers. Finally, across the street, I saw it. The number was the same as the one on the slip of paper in my pocket. I stopped a minute and stared at the house. It was a small white bungalow, now situated in a sea of mud. Two decaying planks led from the street to the steps. The porch was wooden and high with two cement blocks on each of the four corners holding it up. Around the porch was a narrow board railing. At the side a large square addition gave the house a peculiar shape. I started on, crossed the street, walked up onto the porch, put down my suitcase and pulled at my clothes. From the inside of the house I could hear voices but the minute I knocked they ceased abruptly. I heard steps and the door opened with a squeak. A tall, gaunt man with a bony, sallow-complexioned face stood before me.

“Yes?” Then he saw my suitcase. “If you’re selling something, we don’t want any.” He began to close the door.

“Sir, I’m—my name is Will Glaze. Warden Bean sent me here. He said—”

The man looked at me. “Yes, I know. I forgot you were coming today. Come in.”

I stepped into a dark room, overcrowded with furniture. At
first I had the impression that everything was grey. My eyes be-
came accustomed to the darkness and I saw maroon drapery at the
windows and a maroon and black afghan thrown over the grey mo-
hair davenport. Then I saw a woman standing at the door. She
wore a printed housedress which was too tight for her, but other-
wise she appeared neat and clean. Her face was puffy and tired
but there was still some evidence of prettiness and vitality there.

"This is my wife, Mrs. Minty, and I am Mr. Minty. She didn't
particularly want you to come, but I believe that one should always
give the sinner another chance."

"Clarence!"

"I see no reason to color the facts for him. He has paid his
debt to society and now he has the opportunity to make a clean new
start. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, that's it."

"We shall find plenty for you to do. Of course you will be
expected to attend services."

"Services?"

"In my church. Surely the warden told you that much. You
will have a room off the kitchen. We have one daughter, Magda-
lene. She's in church now. Alice, show him the room."

I picked up my suitcase and followed the woman. She had not
said anything since Mr. Minty said she didn't want me there. I
didn't know what to say either.

We walked through a small kitchen, down two steps and into a
room crowded with only a cot and stand.

"I'm sorry. This is the best we have." She fussed with the
bed coverlet.

"Madam, it is so much better than what I have had before."

For the first time Mrs. Minty really looked at me, then she left
the room quickly.

I sat down on the bed. These were funny people. They didn't
even ask me why I had been in prison, but then they probably knew
that. I got up and walked to the window to see what was outside.
The sound of voices began again in the living room. I realized that
they had been arguing.

"I really do not care to discuss it further. Magdalene has a full
life now. She should be happy."

"That's not it. She needs more freedom and some friends. Do
you know she has never brought one person into this house whom
she—"

"She has the whole congregation. She doesn't need others.
Really, you have never talked this way to me and I do not like it."

I wished the walls weren't so thin or that they wouldn't talk so
loud.

"She needs friends her own age. Not one of the congregation
is young. Besides, you insist she come home immediately after school.
It's no life for a young girl."
"All right. That is enough. She is your daughter after all, just like you. If you feel so strongly about it, she can stay out as long as she wishes if she does her work here. But she can not bring anyone here. I do not care to meet the friends she will make."

"How long have you been standing there eavesdropping, Magdalene?"

"I wasn’t eavesdropping. It is only that I had never heard you speak that way before."

"I suppose you have heard it all. I have tried to bring you up right. Little help I have received from your mother. She wants you to have freedom. All right, but just see that you remember your teachings."

I decided I had heard enough. I was sure the family had forgotten me but felt as if they would not wish this to be heard by an outsider. I left my room, walked through the kitchen and entered the living room.

Mr. Minty saw me immediately. "Mr. Glaze! Magdalene, this is Mr. Glaze."

I turned to Magdalene and was quite surprised at the natural beauty of the girl. She looked... well, untouched. She had long taffy-colored hair and blue eyes, but when I looked into her eyes, they appeared more like the glass eyes of a doll than the eyes of a young girl. I noticed that they never changed expression. Her voice was low, almost childlike.

"My father says you are to live with us."

"Yes, that’s right."

Mr. Minty interrupted, "He is not to be one of Magdalene’s friends, however. Understand that."

Magdalene turned to her father and I finally saw a change come into her eyes. Was it hatred or fear?

The room at the side of the house was in reality Mr. Minty’s church. During the next few months I went to many services there and helped in many ways. I noticed that the congregation was, indeed, mostly older people. I liked it when they sang the hymns and called out that they had been saved.

I cleaned the church every Saturday morning, getting down on my hands and knees and scrubbing the floor, dusting the seats and the pulpit and even washing the high small windows whenever they needed it. I had been happy these last months, really for the first time in my life and I seemed to get along well with everyone, even Mr. Minty. Mrs. Minty looked less tense and Magdalene had even talked to me once or twice. She now had a girl friend, Jean, to whom she seemed devoted.

As I was scrubbing the center aisle I happened to glance through the open door to the living room. The light streamed in the windows and onto a table with a bouquet of yellow daffodils in a crystal vase. The light caught the glass and sparkled. Then I heard someone come into the living room and Magdalene walked into the church.
She didn’t see me.

“Hello.”

She jumped.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“Mr. Glaze. I thought my mother might be here.”

“No, I haven’t seen her. I am almost finished. Perhaps I could find her for you.”

“Oh, no, it wasn’t important.”

She seemed somehow troubled and I realized that I had grown fond of this strange girl. I didn’t like to see anything bother her.

“Have you seen Jean today?”

She looked sharply at me, “No, why?”

“Oh, I just wondered. When are you going to bring her here?”

“Papa wouldn’t like that at all.”

“On the contrary. I’m sure he would like to meet your friend.”

The outside door opened and closed and presently Mr. Minty came into the church.

“Magdalene, where is your mother?”

“I was looking for her father.”

“In here? With Will. I thought I told you once that you were to keep your distance.”

“Mr. Minty, she just walked in. I haven’t said over ten words to her in the whole time I’ve been here.”

“See that it stays that way. Go see if you can find Mrs. Minty. I want to talk to Magdalene.”

I wiped my hands and walked down the aisle but glanced back. Mr. Minty was standing directly in front of Magdalene, who was backed up against the pulpit.

“You mother says you have a new girl friend. Don’t you think you are—”

I closed the door.

All through the long summer I worked hard and in the evenings I usually took a little walk. As I was walking home I remembered the first time I had come down this street. Across the street stood the Minty’s house. It now had a narrow cement sidewalk leading to the porch. The next thing I was going to do was make the porch more substantial. It was still propped up on the cement blocks and still had the narrow board railing. Even Mrs. Minty seemed to appreciate my willingness to work around the house.

I started on and I heard someone running behind me. I turned and saw Magdalene. She saw me and let out a gasp. I looked at her and saw that she had lipstick on. She was pretty and her eyes were no longer glass.

“You had better take the lipstick off before your father sees you.”

She grabbed at her mouth, “I don’t have any on.”

“Now look, I’m not blind,” I laughed.

“Please, you must promise, you won’t tell.” She was almost
crying.

"I'll not tell. It's none of my business."

She began looking through her pockets for a handkerchief and I took mine from my own pocket and handed it to her. We walked slowly up onto the porch. She was rubbing furiously at her mouth.

"We had better stay here until you do a good job of removing it all,"

"Yes, I guess so." She smiled at me and I realized that it was the very first time I had made her smile.

"You're pretty when you smile."

"And not at other times?"

What was she doing now?

"Yes, all the time but you look—well—almost scared."

She laughed a little loudly and then remembered where she was.

"I'll have him down on us again, won't I?"

"I guess so. Your parents have been wonderful to me."

"Let's not talk of my parents. Let's talk about you, where you grew up and things like that."

I noticed that because Magdalene had been rubbing her lips vigorously, they had become naturally pink. I looked at them for a long time and then decided to do something. I picked up Magdalene's hand and she jerked it back angrily.

"What are you doing?"

"Don't you know?" I asked.

"No, I don't know. Don't you touch me."

"I'm sorry. I thought you wanted—"

"What? For you to paw me—you an ex-con—"

"That's not necessary," I said sharply.

"Now I'm sorry. I should never have said that. Can you forgive me?"

I grinned at her and finally she smiled at me again. She held out her hand and I took it.

"There, you're pretty again, all the time."

We both laughed. I took her arm abruptly and pulled her toward me. She pulled back, but I jerked her forward again. Again she pulled back but I didn't let go of her. She slapped my face hard with the other hand. It was so unexpected that I dropped her arm. She was off balance and fell backwards. I realized too late that she was going to topple over the board railing of the porch. She realized it too and screamed. I grabbed for her and caught only her dress front which tore away in my hands. I heard the scream and the splintering of the wood and then stood there dumbly looking at the still form on the ground below. She didn't move and her head was at an awkward angle.

The lights in the house came on and Mr. Minty walked out on the porch.

"What's going on?" Then he saw Magdalene.

"You've killed her, you've killed her."

Mrs. Minty ran out on the porch. "Oh no. Look, Clarence,
Magdalene’s dress—there in his hands—and his face—"

Some of the neighbors had heard the scream and they had come to see what was wrong.

“She’s dead all right. Better call the police.”

“He killed her.” Finally I realized that Magdalene was, indeed, dead and that I was being accused of killing her.

“No, it was an accident.”

But no one wanted to hear what really had happened. The police came and took me with them. As we were leaving, I looked back and the neighbors were taking Mr. and Mrs. Minty into the house.

They told me there was a provision for the state to hire me a lawyer. I didn’t want a lawyer, particularly a state one. This time I was innocent and the judge would surely believe me. After all, why should I lie? Sure, I tried to kiss her but that didn’t mean I pushed her off the porch. Why should I?

The cell door clanked open and I looked up.

“Mr. Glaze? I’m your lawyer, Bill Miller.” He held out his hand but I didn’t take it.

“Look, I know I’m in a jam but when I tell the judge I didn’t do it—"

“Do you realize, Mr. Glaze, the jam you are in? You’re accused of murder. Now, from what I know of the case already, I believe you should plead guilty and—"

“Guilty? I didn’t kill Magdalene. I won’t plead guilty. Aren’t you even going to listen to my side?”

“Yes, yes, but you see there is a mound of evidence against you and if you plead guilty and—"

“No, I won’t do that and furthermore I don’t need you.”

“What do you mean you don’t need me? I’m your only hope. That’s what I don’t understand about you punks who think you can lead a pretty girl on—"

“I only tried to kiss her—"

“Kiss her. You with lipstick all over your handkerchief?”

“Find Jean. She’ll know that we never—"

“No dice. There never was a Jean. You’re it. I don’t know why you fellows think you can go out into society and do anything—even murder. Well, this time it’s double murder. Don’t tell me you didn’t know she was pregnant.”

Family Picture
Mary Johnson

When I grow up, I’m gonna be a witch—just like my Aunt Jenny. She’s all the time tellin’ us kids what witches’re like. Aunt Jenny’s got an apartment house and some of her boarders even moved out cause they said she was practicin’ bein’ a witch on them. When Mommy told Daddy, he just laughed and said the only thing wrong with those boarders was they couldn’t spell.