

it gets out of its tank, blowing a spray of water against the glass of the cage. Mamma made that same sputtering noise when she washed her face, too. She made an O with her mouth and blew out the water when it came running down her face. Maybe Daddy learned how to do that from her. I wondered how Julie washed her face. I decided that after this I was going to start blowing water and making a sputter out loud with my mouth when I washed my face. Then I could be like Mamma. But I still wondered how Julie washed her face and what she was doing while Daddy was with us, shaving.

## Goodbye, Mark

K. Rountree

NO AIR was stirring on that hot July night . . . the heat oozed into the studio apartment. Mark wiped his perspiring face and got up to turn the fan a notch higher. He was starting toward the kitchenette when the French doors began rattling . . . he opened them to a delightful freshening breeze.

Whistling softly, he went to the kitchenette and started to mix a Tom Collins. He could stand at the counter and reach everything he needed without moving . . . bachelor efficiency, he smirked. A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts . . . or was it the doors rattling in the wind? He finished making his drink . . . adding an extra half-jigger of gin plus a lime stuck on the lip of the glass. Looking pleased, he headed for his leather chair and sat down. The knock again . . . no mistaking it this time . . . someone was at the door.

"Why, hell, it's past twelve," he muttered as he got up. "Well, I'll be damned," was all he could say when he saw Jean standing in the doorway.

"That's quite a welcome," she said coming in.

"I thought you were all safe and sound back in Des Moines . . . what're you doing here?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said vaguely, taking out a cigarette. She waved his lighter away, and laid the unlighted cigarette down quickly.

"How about a drink . . . here's a nice fresh almost untasted one. You can nurse it while I run up another."

"No, Mark, thanks. I wish you'd sit down." Jean said this as she got up and walked over to the French doors.

"You looking for someone, Honey?"

"Yes, I really can't stay long. I just wanted to see you before I leave."

"Who's the lucky guy this time?" Mark said looking at her shapely legs.

"Lucky guy? Oh, you mean the one calling for me. No one

really. Just someone picking me up."

"Interesting . . . I'll be glad to meet the latest sucker."

"Now, please, don't be nasty, Mark . . . and besides I'm to meet them down at the car . . . they can't come up."

"Too bad. By the way, how's good old Dutch? I assume you left him at home."

"As a matter of fact, we're separated. I walked out a couple of days ago."

"The story of your life, my sweet. He lasted . . . let's see . . . two years . . . two years this coming August. I'll never forget that brawl . . . sorry, that lovely wedding."

"Look, Mark, I want to talk, not be sneered at." She got up again and went over to the French doors.

"Hey! You sit down. He—oops, they—can honk, can't they? I want to catch up on the family. How're Uncle Rick and Aunt Nora? So you and little Jean are back with them again. Sometimes I think you'd be a helluva lot better off if you couldn't run back."

"Oh, Dutch was impossible. He was drinking like a fish."

"Funny, isn't it. After you get 'em, they all become first-rate alcoholics. You're quite a gal. It would have saved a lot of good manpower if you'd been homely. What do you do to these guys? You wear out a husband quicker than I do a suit."

"You're terrible, Mark. Really you are. You make me look like a fiend."

"No, I don't think you're that. I just don't think you've got a soul . . ."

"Don't say that! Don't ever say that!" Jean's voice was oddly tinged with panic.

"Okay, I just wanted you to know that I'm still a great admirer of yours."

"Funny, Mark, that you aren't married. A tall, handsome . . . sarcastic . . ." She stopped abruptly and went over to the doors again.

"This will surprise you. I thought marriage was a farce. Lord, no one in our whole damn family takes it seriously. But I've really found a nice, intelligent girl . . . she's even good-looking."

Jean came back slowly and sat down for a moment with her head in her hands. Looking up she said, "I'm glad, Mark." Then she started to cry.

He went over to her, "Why, little Princess," he said patting the top of her golden head, "you should be glad that finally someone would have me. I thought you'd be delighted that old Danny boy would be getting into the harness."

She pushed him away, and took out her compact, retouching the tear damage to her face.

"It's just so unexpected. If you had known that Dutch and I . . . No, you wouldn't have wanted me . . . would you? Why haven't you ever liked me? I've wanted you to. Oh, Mark, if you only

knew how I've wanted you to."

"We're cousins . . . kissin' cousins."

"But we aren't. You know that. Remember how upset we both were when we found out I was adopted? You were as mad as I was that the folks hadn't told me sooner. You were so nice, Mark . . . my big wonderful cousin . . . you were all of fifteen. When I think of you it's the way you were then . . . sweet, understanding, and crying because I was so sad."

For a fleeting second, Mark was afraid he would cry now. He got up and mixed himself another drink. Jean seemed different tonight. She was so nervous and tense . . . and something else . . . she was frightened . . . very frightened, but what of?

"Hurry, Mark, I'm going to have to leave."

"So soon . . . is he here?"

She came up to him, and put her hands on his shoulders. How cold they felt through his thin shirt. He looked at her closely. There was a distant far-away look in her eyes that he couldn't understand. She stood on tiptoe and brushed her lips against his cheek.

"I loved you," she said, "I never loved anyone else." Then she was gone.

He felt stricken. He wanted to talk some more. He rushed out into the hall after her, but she had disappeared. Curious, he looked out into the street, but it was empty. He hadn't heard a car. He must have sat there for an hour.

The next morning, he awakened to a hot muggy day, and again there was someone knocking at his door. This time the knock was loud and persistent. Mark grabbed his robe and tried to straighten his hair with his hand. He found a Western Union boy waiting impatiently. He opened the telegram and stared incredulously at the words.

He lighted a cigarette . . . and shook his head trying to clear it. He read the six words over and over.

"Jean is dead . . . come at once."

He looked at the date and where it was from . . . Des Moines. He was so stunned he sat staring at the ceiling. Jean had left at what time last night . . . twelve twenty or twelve thirty? Was she heading for Des Moines and had an accident? Or did something happen to her here in Chicago?

He rushed over to the 'phone and dialed long distance. No use calling Jean's house; he'd call Aunt Nora. A strange voice answered the 'phone.

"May I speak to Mr. or Mrs. Worthington," Mark said nervously.

"Sorry," said the voice, "they are not available."

"Look, I'm their nephew. I have to talk to someone."

Then it occurred to him . . . it was Jean's daughter who had died . . . little Jean . . . that was it.

"Is Mrs. Jean Witwir there?"

Silence on the other end, then, "Why . . . I'm sorry, Sir, but Mrs. Witwir . . . she . . . that is . . . she passed away, Sir."

"When . . . do you know when she died?"

"Yes, I believe they found her shortly after midnight."

"Where was she? Where did the accident happen?"

"Accident? They found her in her room."

Mark held the receiver in his hand for a long time before placing it back in its cradle.

He recovered enough to get into some clothes and go out to his car. As he drove along, he thought about Jean's visit. She had been very nervous, and had looked tired. She had worn some sort of a pink linen dress with a matching jacket. He remembered the jacket because it had surprised him when she put it around her shoulders . . . the apartment was still very warm and uncomfortable in spite of the breeze.

He must have dreamed it all. Of course that was what it was . . . a dream! He had mixed a good stiff drink and had thought he heard a knock . . . and then he'd dozed off. It was a coincidence that he would dream of Jean at approximately the time of her death, but that happened to many people . . . perhaps there was more to this "extra-sensory perception" than he thought. He would mention this sometime to Baker . . . he was a psychiatrist and would undoubtedly be amazed that old Mark was that sensitive.

His head throbbed . . . he would try not to think about it. The whole terrible thing was that Jean was dead . . . what a waste her life had been . . . and what possibilities. She was a smart little gal . . . quick, alert, and with a terrific sense of humor . . . at least they laughed at the same things. Why hadn't he thought of these things before? That was a peculiarity of the human race . . . something catastrophic had to happen before you appreciated a person. Had she really loved him? He had dreamed she had . . . or was that just wishful thinking? Did he love her? Yes, he supposed he always had. She had a wistful, little girl charm that he found irresistible. But there were no winners in the game as she played it, so he had stepped back and watched. As the divorces kept piling up, he congratulated himself on his good sense. Now he wondered if he hadn't cheated them both. It might have worked out. But it was too late . . . he mustn't torture himself.

He drove into the circular driveway of his aunt's house. He half expected to see Jean run out. He found the downstairs deserted, so he went upstairs trying to find Mrs. Mabee . . . she had been with the family for years.

He found her in Jean's room. She cried when he came in. "Oh, Mark, I can't believe it. It just don't seem right that Miss Jean won't be coming in any minute. I can almost hear her running up those stairs."

"How did it happen?" he said, slumping wearily into a chair.

"Well, yesterday was little Jean's birthday . . . and Miss Jean gave her a lovely party . . . had six little girls . . . balloons and everything. You know how she liked to fuss for her little girl. She loved little Jean."

"Yes, but how did she die?"

"Last night around twelve . . . little Jean called, and I went in . . . the child had a stomach-ache . . . too much party. She wanted her mother so I went in to call Miss Jean . . . and there she was . . . sitting in the chair you're in right now . . . with her head back. I thought she was asleep. Oh, it was awful . . . just awful. The doctor found an empty bottle of sleeping pills."

Mark got up from the chair and walked over to the dressing table. He was looking at Jean's picture. Mrs. Mabee came over and flipped the frame. On the other side was a picture of him. He picked it up.

"Why this is my graduation picture! I don't remember giving it to Jean."

"You didn't. Jean got it from your mother. She looked at it all the time. Just a couple of nights ago, I came in here and found Miss Jean sitting there just staring at it . . . she didn't hear me come in. She'd been drinking, and she asked me to sit down and talk to her. She was blue . . . don't think I'd ever seen her so depressed like. You see she had left Dutch the day before, and you know what she said?"

"Mae," she said, "I think the folks are always glad to have me back. Now they'll have another flock of suitors running in and out . . . and Mother will have a chance to give another big wedding. The next will be my fourth . . . I'm like having a bunch of daughters, Mae. I'm a regular three ring circus."

"Then she cried her poor little heart out. You remember that column you wrote about her when she married Dutch?"

"No, I guess I've forgotten."

"Where you said . . . just a minute I'll get it and read it to you. It's here in amongst her handkerchiefs. . . . 'My Golden Girl got married again last night . . . what a blast! Poor guy thinks he's got a wife, but he'll find he has nothing more substantial than a beautiful sunbeam.'"

"Yes, I remember it now . . . so she kept it all this time."

"Kept it . . . she read it over and over. One day she said, 'Mae, I'm a puppet with Mother and Father pulling the strings. They made me think that beauty and popularity were all that mattered . . . well, they aren't worth a tinker's damn. Only two people in this whole world know I'm a human being . . . little Jean and Mark.'"

"She gave me too much credit."

"I couldn't count the times she's told me this." Mrs. Mabee wiped her eyes on the edge of her apron. "It was right after her first divorce, and you pleaded with her to go to college. You wanted

her to come to Chicago . . . you said you'd help her with the studying."

"Why didn't she do it? I gave up when she kept marrying all those bums."

"She didn't come to Chicago because she wouldn't leave little Jean. One night when she'd been drinking too much, she told me she was scared . . . scared she'd fail and then you'd be sure she was a dumb little blond."

Mark got up slowly and crossed the room, then turning around he said, "What was she wearing last night?"

Mrs. Mabee looked up at him, "Why she had on a little sleeveless dress. She was wearing it when I found her."

"What color was it?"

"Why it was pink . . . with a little pink jacket."

Mark drove to the mortuary in a daze. He sat in the car trying to collect himself before going in. He didn't know whether he could take seeing her now . . . but he had to. Somehow he felt a compulsion to see her . . . to look at her. Maybe to prove to himself that she was really dead.

He walked into the building and was relieved when the receptionist told him that the body was not to be shown until the coroner had checked everything thoroughly. Mark felt like he had had a reprieve. Pulling out his handkerchief, he wiped his perspiring forehead. As he put the handkerchief back, he felt a round metal object. He felt it again and took it out of his pocket. It was the compact he had picked up from the endtable at the apartment!

He got into the car and drove back to the house. Uncle Nick and Aunt Nora were still not around. Mrs. Mabee had said they were resting. He again searched the house for her. This time she was in the family room dusting. As he approached, she came over to him.

"What's the matter, Mark . . . did you see her?"

"No, but do you recognize this?"

"Why, yes." She took it gently from him and put it in the palm of her hand. "This is Jean's compact . . . little Jean gave it to her last Mother's Day."

He sat down, taking a long drag on his cigarette.

## Retrospect and Thought

Tamalyn Haines

The news has come.

Attack?

Is it true? Oh, no God, no! Not now.

I sit back in the chair, my hand fingers the straw in my glass.

Why? . . . .