

triviality and mediocrity and conformity of our society, the situation is not entirely hopeless. Here and there sensitive people are taking a stand against the second-rate and demanding higher standards of our society. While floundering in trivia, television has attempted to raise the quality of its broadcasts with beautifully done specials, serious drama, and informative documentaries. Leonard Bernstein, Helen Hayes, and Bishop Sheen represent an element among us still dedicated to the pursuit of excellence. Will the energizing presence of the few awaken society from its lethargy? Or will the dull, dead weight of the masses crush out, at last, the few, faint-burning embers of inspiration? Only the future will tell.

## the alley

Diane Steinfeld

Hope walked home slowly. She had to collect her thoughts. She couldn't let her family see how hurt and angry she really was. It wasn't their fault anyway. It had been all her idea to take a night course at the university. She had saved what she could from her small paycheck until finally she had just enough to sign up for one course. She had talked to her newly-appointed college advisor and he had said, "Take sociology. Learn about people. Know the world in which you are living. It's the basis of everything." So sociology it was. Tonight had been her first class.

The January night air felt cool on Hope's face as she walked. It was a welcome relief from that hot, embarrassed feeling she had suffered through her class. It was a large class, forty or fifty. All the older women were dressed in expensive tailored suits, and the girls Hope's age were in rich-looking sweater and skirt outfits. Even the men had a distinguished, sophisticated air about them. She felt so dowdy in her cheap cotton dress that she took a seat in the

back of the room and waited there after class until everyone had left. The lecture the professor had given was what hurt the most. He discussed the class structures in the United States. Hope saw the smug smiles on the various faces when the words upper and middle class were mentioned. She also felt her own face redden when the word lower class was discussed. She heard the terms blue-collar worker, illiterate, moral decay, and non-existent goals, and she couldn't help but think of her family. Her father had been born into his lower class status and he had never tried to rise above it. Her mother seemed content enough, and even her thirteen year old brother, Pete, didn't complain when the paycheck was extra low and things got scarce. No one seemed to care, except Hope.

After high school, she had taken a clerical job in a large office complex. The pay was poor, but she had learned how to stretch it into helping support the family and saving a little for night school. She saw a good education as her one big chance for bettering herself. She thought that with a college education she would be able to hold a better job. And maybe she could get a scholarship, and maybe. . . . There were so many ideas and so many plans Hope had carefully thought about and anxiously awaited their happening. Tonight, her first college class had been the beginning.

By the time she reached home, she had decided that she could bear being poorly dressed and so obviously lower class to the rest of the world until she came up to the place she had set for herself. Hope even greeted her family with an unusual enthusiasm. She could answer her mother's silly questions, and overlook the fact that her father had used some of the grocery money for a new bottle of whiskey.

"How'd it go, Baby?" her mother hollered from the kitchen.

"Fine, just fine."

"Were you as smart as the rest of 'em?"

"Well, Mother, it isn't a question of . . . you see . . . yes, Mother, I was just as smart as the rest of them."

"Good for you, kid. Better be gettin' something for all that dough you've been throwin' around," her father managed to spit out between gulps of his whiskey shots.

Hope could feel the anger and resentment rising. She always felt that way when her family acted like they were tonight. She hated to see them living as they did. They thought they were fine, but not one of them had to sit in a classroom and be embarrassed in

front of people who had so much more.

"Well, it won't last long," she thought. "Pretty soon I'll be away from all this."

With that idea uppermost in her mind, she went to bed.

It happened for the first time that night. She dreamed about the alley. The alley passed by Hope's house. She had always hated to walk through it at night because it was so dark. There were garages all along the sides and the open doors flapped eerily in the wind. The alley was long, fifty feet in length, and very narrow. There were deep ruts and rocks which made walking difficult, not to mention the stench that came from the overturned garbage cans. She had cold shivers every time she walked through it, but it was the only way to reach her house. In the dream, Hope started to cross the busy street that ran horizontal to the alley when a car passed so close to her that she heard the air whip around her. She saw a bright flash of red color, and the next thing, she was across the street and beginning her walk down the alley. The night was clear and the full moon was up in the black sky directly in front of her. She glanced down the length of the alley and there, approaching her, was a black figure. She stopped walking, but the figure kept advancing. The moon was behind the figure and she could distinguish no features. The figure was about five feet from Hope, when she awoke. The dream had frightened her. She had had nightmares before, but this one was different. There was something unknown, something that seemed meant for her and her alone.

The weeks went by. Hope's mother kept trying to stretch the food, her father kept buying his cheap whiskey, and Pete just existed from day to day. Hope kept attending her night course, but she was fast becoming discouraged. She had received low grades on all her tests and the professor had advised her to withdraw from the class. She had politely refused. Worst of all, the strange dream kept recurring. It was always the same—the busy street, the fast car, the flash of red, the alley, and the black figure. It came more regularly now, sometimes three times in one week. Hope tried to find a meaning, but it eluded her. She once talked to her mother and described the strange events. Her mother laughed and asked, "You been nippin' your old man's booze?"

Hope tried to keep at her job, and study for her class, but she was letting both slip. There would always be another chance for a



job. The university was another matter. Her final examination was in a few weeks and she had to do well in order to pass the course and be eligible for the next session. The dream haunted her, and she blamed it for her slipshod work and her poor grades. She could see everything she so desperately wanted deserting her. Her home had become unbearable because she saw herself living in a house like that for the rest of her life stretching money for a drunken husband. She couldn't stand it. She couldn't live like that.

Hope was walking home from class. She had taken her examination and she had failed it. The professor had graded it as soon as she finished. "I'm sorry," he said. "Your grade was just too low. There was no way I could have helped you."

"What about next session? Will I be able to attend then?"

"No, I'm afraid not," he had told her.

She felt numb. So this was the end of it, she thought. Over before I had a chance. But then that's not right either. I had a chance. I just couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it.

She started to cross the busy street when a car whizzed by her and she heard the air whistle. She saw a bright red flash, and then she was walking in the alley. The night was quiet and clear, and there was a full moon. "No," she thought. "No, no, no! This is my dream. I'm living it. It's happening to me and this time it's for real."

She raised her eyes slowly, afraid of what they would tell her. She looked to the end of the alley, and there was the black figure walking toward her. She stood rooted to the spot, unable to move. She wanted to run, and yet she couldn't. The figure kept approaching, only this time it didn't stop, and this time she didn't wake up. It was only inches from her face when she saw the features. It was herself she was looking at. She could have had a mirror in front of her. The black figure she was face to face with was an image of herself. She was unable to say anything. How long she stood there before the figure reached out a pale hand and pointed over her shoulder!

"Don't you know? Don't you see?" it had said. "You are no more."

Hope turned and looked at the street. There, lying in the middle of it, was a body, bloody and mangled, crumpled in a pitiful heap. She had only to look for a moment to see it was herself.