surprised while Reverend Rocoff went on about how the light had finally dawned on cousin Lloyd and how he would never regret it. Cousin Lloyd just stood there until Reverend Rocoff got tired of pushing his head down and jerking it up and finally let it go. Lloyd walked out of the water as if he were in a trance. Finally someone threw some blankets around him, and all the people of the church crowded around him and shook his hand, calling him brother and crying how wonderful it all was. Lloyd finally came to enough to accept the congratulations and thank the people for their kindness.

Cousin Jeanne was standing about a hundred yards away by herself. I don’t know how she got so far away after pushing Lloyd into the pond.

The Happiest Time of Your Life
June Lalen

Do you really think Charlie will bring her an orchid?” Mrs. James exclaimed to Mrs. Mathews. Mrs. Mathews almost swallowed a clothes pin in quickly advising Mrs. James that if she were Mrs. James she would see that her daughter’s formal was a color to go with orchid, just in case.

“You never know,” she said, with a wink of her eye.

Nobody had talked of anything but the high school Senior Dance since the posters had been tacked up two weeks before. Fathers were getting the cars shined for Junior to use. Mothers were carefully planning exactly what Jane or Josephine would wear for the big night. Even the children had been counting the days, for there was a balcony where the parents and children could sit and watch the teen-agers dance in what had normally been the school gym. But suddenly for that one night it would become a fairyland with crepe paper, dim lights, soft music, and cokes.

In a small town like Mapleton things do not happen very often, and when something big like a dance comes along everyone has a part in it. It is not just a dance for the teen-agers. It gives a carnival spirit to the whole town. It is true that only the juniors and seniors were allowed to attend the dance, but everyone was invited to watch. Each child in the balcony dreamed of that day when he or she could really be down there. Instead of hoping to grow up to be president, in Mapleton the children were eager to grow up and go to the Senior Dance. It was that important.
This is why Laura's heart had skipped a few beats as she heard the masculine voice on the other end of the phone ask, "Would you maybe like to go to the dance with me, Laura?" She had not said a word for a minute. She could not seem to breathe. Finally she had managed to blurt out, "I'll let you know, Charlie," and had had just enough energy left to replace the receiver.

Now that the night had come, she was sitting before her mirror running a brush through her long brown hair. She smiled at the mirror, and the reflection of an average looking brown-eyed girl smiled weakly back. Some would have called her pretty, but Laura could not have believed them. The girl she saw in the mirror was far from the perfection she sought, so she turned quickly away.

She wondered how Charlie would look dressed for the dance, and if he were getting ready now. She could see him ringing the doorbell, and then the sort of crooked grin he would manage when somebody answered. She tried to imagine just what he would say then, but she couldn't because she had never had a date with Charlie, or with any other boy. She tried to remember what they said in the movies or in the novels she had read. But she decided to skip that part and went on to the part where he would hand her a corsage, maybe an orchid. She would pin it on carefully. Then he would help her into her evening wrap and they would be on their way.

They would drive up in front of the school gym in the big shiny blue car that Charlie's father had provided for just one night. The children would look at her enviously. The gym would look like another world. When they reached the inside everyone would be laughing and talking, and she would be laughing, too, and smiling at all of the friends she knew at school. Only they wouldn't look like school kids tonight. Everyone would know just what to say and every girl would look just like a beauty queen.

What if she didn't know what to say? What if nobody asked her to dance? Even if she danced, what if they laughed at her because she couldn't dance as well as they could? They might all be laughing at her. How ridiculous she looked with her muddy colored hair and her too long nose pretending to be pretty. Sure, they would feel sorry for Charlie because he had made the mistake of bringing her.

They would make fun of her for trying to be a part of their world when she didn't fit. They wouldn't talk and laugh with her—just at her and she wouldn't know what to do. The whole town would know that she was different. Then
they would all know how ugly she was and that nobody really liked her. They had just pretended to. They could not really because she wasn't one of them.

Why, Charlie had probably only asked her because his mother had forced him to. Or maybe it was just a joke. That's what it was. The whole school was in on it. They'd had him ask her just to see if she would be stupid enough to believe that he would really ask a girl like her. They had all had a big laugh. She remembered how she had refused him and he had seemed surprised. Yes, he had expected her to fall for it, too. The thoughts tumbled over themselves, each making her more miserable than the one before.

"Laura, honey, are you sure you don't want to just go along with us and watch?" her mother's voice called up the steps. Laura could hear little Billy asking why Laura did not want to go and quickly adding that he would sit in the front seat if she was not going.

"No, mother. I don't believe I care to go. I'm just dying to read that new book I got today," she answered artificially.

Just then her ten-year-old sister, Joyce, stuck her head in the doorway. Laura noticed that she was wearing her new taffeta party dress and that there seemed to be a special sparkle in her eyes. She had the same look that she always had on Christmas morning when she ventured down the stairs at dawn, Laura remembered.

She had come to see if she could borrow some of the perfume Aunt Sarah had given Laura for her birthday. "Sure," Laura managed to answer.

Then she quickly became absorbed in the book which she had picked up. Joyce lingered as if to say something else. What if it were the same horrible question that everyone had asked. In order to avoid the question, Laura completely ignored her. She was not sure she could go through the excuse she had made up once more. This time she might break down. And she must not now. With a shrug of the shoulders, Joyce left the room and skipped around the hall and down the stairs.

Laura hear her mother say very lowly to her father, "I'll never understand that girl. The class president asks her to the dance, and she'd rather not go. I wish I was sixteen again. Why it's the happiest time of your life."

"Beats me,' her father answered.

Then came the trail of goodbyes and Laura heard the front door shut, Billy and Joyce chattering excitedly as they went out
the front walk, the car motor starting, and then the car driving away.

She opened the book again, but for some reason she could not see a word. She told herself that she was glad she had not gone to make a fool of herself. To prove how glad she was she forced a great big smile which suddenly somehow turned into a flood of tears. Her heart sank, and she could feel a deep ache as she asked herself the same horrible question. She had no answer. It might have been fun, but she could not take the chance. She just couldn’t.

A Pink and Blue Room

Joan Rabold

When I was seven years old my mother, grandmother, and I moved into a pretty little brick double. Before long I fell in love with every gleaming inch of our new home and the semi-rural neighborhood surrounding it. I lived in this house when I was given my first puppy and when I knew my first puppy love.

And in this house I had my first “own” bedroom. It was a typical little girl’s room with pink and blue walls and cream colored furniture. Fluffy, white, crisscrossed curtains dressed the big double windows, and my story book dolls stood calmly on two shelves of my desk while on the third the radio told Saturday stories of “Let’s Pretend.” Under the right window, beside the pink ruffled bedspread, was Pal’s rumpled rug; and here my puppy and I sat many nights gazing out across the windswept fields at the two blinking red lights atop the WISH radio station towers.

To me these blinking lights were the symbol of a better life somewhere whenever my little dreams did not come true or whenever one of my pranks backfired in the form of a switch. Although we were a closely united family, we had our differences and problems; like most offspring I was the biggest problem in the smallest package. Therefore, I remember sitting at this window in tears, in anger, sometimes ashamed, and sometimes happy but always watching those two blinking lights in the black night sky and talking over my troubles with Pal.

In the summertime when I could not see the lights,