pleasantness, she could drowse for long moments.

The forgotten things in the dump were arranged in piles. It was fascinating to her that each of these things now strewn so carelessly about had been part of someone’s life. Here was an old ink bottle, or a smashed-in coffee pot with vestiges of grounds still in the nose. There was an old chicken incubator, with a red light bulb, painted with the stains of its long gone chicks. Next to it she had found a broken china doll, part of a musical lamp which played a few tinkly notes as she picked it up to hug the doll.

She always sought out a wicker baby buggy, made for twins, which had come in one of the last loads. She loved its round straw edging, furled like an Ostrich feather. It didn’t daunt her that the handle was half gone. “Poor thing,” she would say. “Were your twins boys or girls?”

In the center of the rubble heaps was a deep grown-over pond bed which her friends told her had been a lake at one time; ducks had come each summer and children could ice skate in the winter. Cautiously she would descend, with wild cherry branches snapping smartly against her legs, blackberry vines clawing at her dress. Standing in the pond bed she would dig with her stick searching for one last puddle of water that might not have dried up, yearning silently for the ducks and the cold, blue-white frozen surface over which she could skim in winter. But the shadows quickly passed from her face, and she climbed panting out of the pit into the hot and comforting sunshine.

She sensed that time had passed, and soon Mother would be calling. Before she returned, though, she must make her rounds. With excitement pressing against her chest she made a complete circle of the grounds. She poked everything, searching in all corners, hoping that from the rusty cans and broken bottles she could find something growing, sending forth fresh, green tendrils of life.

Nearly always she found it: waxy orange pumpkin blossoms springing from seeds of some smashed Jack-O-Lantern, small hard squash beginning to form on luxuriant green vines, a solitary zinnia standing tall among soggy, unread newspapers. But one day, best of all, she had discovered growing out of the gaping mouth of a furnace pipe a pink wild rose which filled her with wonder and sent her singing along the path home.

The Yellow Bird
Sharon Sperry

OWEN SMITH had been a garbage man for twenty years, but he had never had such puzzling collections as those he had been picking up the past week from the brick house on the corner of Maple and Jefferson. The house, he knew, had recently been sold by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, who had gone to Florida, to a middle-
aged couple who were strangers in Cawville. There would have been nothing particular in Owen's mind about a new customer, even a newcomer to town, except that he found such curious items in the garbage. Just last week he had come across two dead canaries stuffed into a milk carton. And again today, as he pulled the can up from its place in the alley, he noticed a limp wing sticking out of a cellophane box. He frowned and looking up, saw Mrs. Paetz taking laundry off her backyard line. She was a tiny woman who must have looked like a child until she was nearly thirty, Owen thought. As she bent to place a folded towel in the basket, her shoulder blades pointed through her dress. Her face, still pretty, was peaked and worn as though she'd been losing sleep. Large dark eyes, slightly ringed, stood out sharply under thick, black hair that alternately fell across her face and back behind her ears as she raised and lowered her head from the clothes line to the basket.

"Howdy!" he called.
She made no response, but continued folding a sheet she had just taken from the line.
"Hello, there, Mrs. Paetz!" he shouted.
She turned and looked at him curiously, nodded, and turned back to her work.
"Like our neighborhood?" he persisted.
She gathered the basket into her arms.
"Fine, thank you," she answered and disappeared into the house. Owen shrugged and dumped the can.

* * *

Rose Paetz closed the screen door behind her and took a deep breath as she set the basket under the ironing board. The garbage man wasn't the first this week. Yesterday a door-to-door salesman, usually easy for her to discourage, had managed to get into the living room. Julia had wandered out from the play room, attracted by his chanting pitch. Rose remembered the jump in his voice and his nervous cough when he saw Julia leaning against the door, the cotton dress she always wore falling softly around her narrow hips, her black hair brushing her cheeks, her bright eyes glistening. There had been an unintentional suggestiveness in Julia's slow smile that had sent a chill through her mother. An awkward pause had followed as the salesman looked from mother to daughter for an explanation. Somehow Rose had gotten Julia back into the play room and the salesman out without an incident, without an explanation. (How could she explain Julia to a stranger?) Perhaps they'd made a mistake coming to a small town where people were bound to be friendly. Rose sighed, if only . . .

Julia, who had been sitting on the stool by the stove watching her mother, giggled suddenly and broke Rose's thought. It was nearly five o'clock. Walter would be home soon, and there was supper yet to fix and Julia to feed. Rose set some leftovers on the
stove and helped Julia into her chair.

She had only given her two bites when Julia closed her mouth and refused to eat anymore. Rose tried everything, but the girl stuck out her chin and crossed her arms, defiance on her face. Rose stopped pleading and looked at her. Julia's eyes were fastened on something across the room. Rose looked over her shoulder and saw the empty bird cage swaying in the window.

"Julia, listen to me," she started carefully. "Daddy will get a bird tomorrow morning. Now you have to eat. Don't worry about the bird. Let's eat supper."

Julia's eyes filled.

"Let's go play," Rose said suddenly, wistfully determined not to spoil this evening. And Julia, although she looked back at the cage, went with her to the play room. Rose left her there with the dolls and blocks and went back to prepare Walter's supper.

It was nearly six o'clock when Walter got home. Rose heard him trudging through the living room and looked up to smile as he sank down at the table.

"How was it?" she asked, trying to sound bright.

"Better, I suppose. The car broke down again."

"Oh, no."

"We'll have to get a new one soon."

She set the pot roast in the center of the table and slipped in the chair beside him.

"Didn't anything good happen to you?"

He smiled slightly.

"We're invited to a company party. Dick Mills and his wife are having all the agents' families for a picnic Sunday."

Rose laid a slice of meat on his plate.

"You told them, no, of course."

"Not yet, I thought maybe we could . . . ."

"What? Get a baby sitter?"

He dropped a spoonful of potatoes beside the meat.

"Yes. I suppose you're right. I'll tell them, no, tomorrow."

He took a sip of coffee and asked, "Where is she, anyway?"

"In the play room. I fed her about five."

He glanced at her over the rim of his coffee cup.

"She wasn't there when I came in."

Rose's head jerked up. She stared blindly at Walter for an instant and he quickly set his coffee cup down. Without a word they went into the front play room. It was empty. A drooping clown, oozing straw, gaped at them from the toychest. Walter spun around and ran to the back of the house. Rose hurried to the dining room, the front porch, back to the kitchen. She could hear Walter opening the garage door. She searched the back yard and ran into Walter in front of the house.

"I'll go this way," he said, pointing up the block. "You go that way and we'll circle back through the alley."
The block was deserted. Children who crowded the sidewalk throughout the day were sitting at supper. Everywhere were the remnants of them: a rusty bucket and shovel beside the walk, a stray skate, a boy's bicycle sprawled against a porch. No one was on the street; particularly, there was no Julia, but Rose could hear the quiet murmur of tabled families drifting along with the rich aroma of home cooking: ham from the green shingle, hot rolls and chocolate cake from the white clapboard. An occasional burst of laughter rippled the leaves in the trees. Sounds of friendly voices turned to mockery in the chilly evening air. Rose turned bitterly away and clattered down the cobbled alley. Here the stones rattled under her feet, and the grass lifted indignantly to shush at her. It had begun to get dark when Rose reached the house. Walter was already there, sitting on the front porch steps, his head down.

"No luck?" he asked tonelessly.

She shook her head.

"I found some records when I was in the back bedroom," he added. "They had been chewed up."

Rose shuddered as the night air crept up her arms.

"She was upset today, Walter. She missed the bird, I think."

"Which one?" he asked dully. "Well, I'll get the car out and see if I can find her. It's usually a pet shop or a zoo. There aren't many in this town. I won't be long. If I don't find her right away, I'll call the police."

He pulled himself up by the porch rail.

"How long must this go on?" he asked, looking at the moon hanging from a twig of the maple tree. She glanced up to see what had caught his attention, but all she could see was the roof of the house across the street. He reached down and pulled her up beside him.

"Go in, now. You'll catch cold out here."

Julia sat down on the curb. The bird she had been following, the one with the yellow bill, was gone, flown far away over the house top across the street. There were no birds here. The clown was crying in her room, crying because he missed the yellow bird, and so did she. She'd promised him she'd bring him a bird and now the birds were all gone.

A scream of fire trucks careened around a corner and raced past her. She jumped up, forgetting the bird and ran after them. They stopped two blocks away where a clump of people pushed and yelled in front of a crackling red house. Julia ran as close as she could, watching the men in polished hats squirting water at the house. The trees bowed and nodded and she laughed with them. The water began to wash the red fire away and left the house dripping black. Julia looked at the smoking house that had been so pretty to her be-
fore and began to cry. A tall boy standing near heard her sobbing and leaned over.

"What's the matter, honey?" he asked.

Julia looked up wide-eyed at his shiny black face.

"I want my daddy," she sobbed.

The boy's mouth dropped open.

"You been drinking, kid?"

Julia threw her arms around his chest and cried into his shoulder.

"I want my daddy."

Several people had turned around. The boy looked quickly at the dark look beginning to form in the eyes of a few men on the outskirts of the crowd and pushed Julia away.

"Look, kid, I don't know you from nobody," he said loudly and hurried away. Julia ran after him, but she lost him at the end of the block. The tears on her face were dry and itchy. She couldn't remember why she had cried or where she was, but she could feel the darkness setting in. Bushes and trees that had wrapped their shadows up in settled shapes in the day now spread them out. The black sky had blotted out the houses and streets. Things that would have looked cozy to her in the daylight, were hissing strange sounds in the unfamiliar night. The happy cry of birds, a sound she longed to chase, was gone. She stood alone beneath a street light and cried.

A passing truck stopped at the corner and the driver, looking down at the girl with the glistening eyes, smiled and drove on.

Julia thought it was her father and she ran screaming after the truck until it roared away and left her standing on brightly lit Main Street. To her right lay the center of town with the attractive glint of neon signs. Bright reds and blues flickered from the store fronts and drew her toward them. She wandered aimlessly, gazing at the displays in the windows, smiling at a strangely familiar face that smiled back at her from the windows, until she came to one where a barking puppy leaped in his cage. Beyond him, crowded among other cages, was a wire coop full of yellow birds. Julia ran to the door of the shop and pushed it open. She didn't notice an older woman at the back of the room or the shopkeeper who was showing his customer some cats.

The birds were dancing a song on the perches. One climbed under the top of the cage and sang to her upside down. She laughed softly and they sang louder. Their wings spread open and fluttered soft air against her face. They nodded their heads and the fine feathers around their necks rippled with color like silk in the light.

Julia pushed open the cage door and grabbed a tiny yellow bird. The others flew away. She held him against her cheek and was tickled by the warm beat of him. She held him to her ear and listened to the gurgling twitter of his voice. She held him in her hand and felt the lumpy softness of his body between her fingers, his satin bones slipping upon each other.

The shopkeeper wrapped a chubby hand around her arm.
"What'd you think. . . . Here, what have you done?"
He pried her hand open and the red-stained bird fell to the floor.
"What did you do that for?" he yelled at her.
Julia didn't hear him. Her eyes were on the birds who were bouncing along the ceiling.
"You'll pay for this!"
He let go of her arm and hurried to the phone on the wall. Before he could lift the receiver the shop door tinkled open and a gaunt man stepped in. The man looked immediately at the girl and his strained mouth relaxed. The shopkeeper eyed them both.
"You know her?"
The man nodded.
"You know what she done here?"
"I can imagine," Walter Paetz answered. "How much do I owe you for the damage?"
The shopkeeper hesitated and looked again at the dreamy-eyed girl and at Walter Paetz’s narrow, tired face.
"If you'll leave your name, I'll send a bill."
Paetz looked quickly at the little man, but all he could see were gently upturned eyes.
"You don't know me," Paetz said simply.
"That's all right," the shopkeeper answered. "You live here, don't you?"
Paetz nodded.
"Well, then, that settles it. I'll send a bill."
"Oh," Paetz added quickly. "Would you sell me one of those?"
The shopkeeper turned back, frowned slightly, and looked at the girl again.
"If you help me catch 'em."

* * *

All the way home Julia leaned across the front seat to watch the bird in the cage sitting on the floor of the back seat. When he had parked the car in the garage, Walter hoisted the cage high on his shoulder and pushed Julia into the house in front of him. Rose looked up, bleary-eyed, as they came in.
"I thought you'd never come," she said.
"She was in a pet shop when I found her."
"All this time?"
"I didn't ask," Walter answered and carried the cage to the play room. Julia and Rose both followed.
"Her clothes are so mussed. What could have happened to muss her clothes so much?" Rose begged at his heels.
Walter set the cage in the window and guided Rose out of the play room, closing the door behind them. Julia leaned over the toy chest and picked up the one-legged clown. She stood him against the chest where he could see her and the bird and sat down on the braid rug. The clown winked an eye at her, looked down at yester-
day's cereal lump on the end of his nose, and sighed happily. Julia
where she could see the reflection of the yellow bird, could hear the
stuck a fist under her chin and stared into the clown's button eyes
rush of its voice from the window.

**THE PASSING YEAR**

The table of men from River Charles
no longer will meet: the King is dead.
We still have the lovely Guinevere,
the prince and the princess romp and play.
The crown is no longer worn by them—
one year has passed: Camelot is gone.
A charge had been made to Bedivere
so people won't let it be forgot
that magic was what he gave to them,
and through the year Bedivere was true.

We know the new order must begin
and we now accept its leadership.
Yet still we can long for that new day
when ours will be Camelot once more.

—**STAN PATTON**

**ACOUSTICS**

Noisemakers drown out the sounds of now,
prolonging the asking of how and why
yellow, not red, black, not white,
denim of blue and not purple.

Questions mark discovery:
brothers are hueless.
The din of sin blatantly sounds.

—**NANCY NELL WILSON**