

A QUICK flurry of snow shrouded the street lamp and swirled close around the figure of a woman who walked rapidly, her head bent.

She paused in front of a small drugstore and stamped the wet snow off her shoes. Pushing open the door, she stepped into the too-warm brightness of the over-stocked room. Removing a blue silk bandana, she shook the snow from it and carefully spread it over the end of the counter and slid onto a stool.

"Evening, Eloise." The slight, grey man put aside his newspaper and peered at her over his glasses.

"Hello, Mr. Simmons." Her voice was flat

She was not aware that she was staring at him until he smiled and said, "good evening." She smiled briefly and turned back to her coffee. Nor did she look at him when he sat on the stool beside her. She could smell the dampness of his overcoat, mingled with a faint odor of tobacco and whiskey.

She waited until he ordered coffee before she stole a look at him. His thin shoulders were hunched over the counter and the skin, stretched taut over the angular features of his face, was reddened with cold. Before she could turn her eyes away, he was smiling at her again.

"Some weather, huh?"

To Go By Night

By Jo Morton

Sophomore in Liberal Arts

and nasal. "Could you get me some more of those pills for Aunt Florence?—and coffee."

"Miz Henderson not feeling any better?" he asked, setting a steaming mug before her.

She dumped two spoonfuls of sugar into the coffee and stirred savagely.

"No," she said.

It was the same. It was a re-enactment of a scene that had changed little now that she was a woman in her late twenties instead of a shy, frightened child of ten who was not yet accustomed to the chronically ill aunt with the lashing tongue and the hard eyes, so different from those of her not-yet-forgotten mother.



Mr. Simmons tottered behind the "prescriptions filled here" sign and returned with a small bottle twisted into a piece of blue wrapping paper.

"Medicine's ninety-five cents," he said, and she handed him the twenty dollar bill her aunt had given her.

When he brought her change, he said, "Hear you quit your job down at the court house?"

"Yes," she drank a sip of coffee. "Aunt Florence needed me."

She could feel him looking at her with his weak, pitying eyes, but she stared into her cup until he moved away and picked up his newspaper.

A chill blast turned her attention to the door through which a man had entered. He was tall and wore a heavy overcoat of grey tweed. His head was bare and the snow glistened white and damp on his dark hair.

She nodded.

"And some town—you live here?"

"Yes," Eloise said.

It was the first time she had felt embarrassment, or any other emotion, concerning the staid village.

"I suppose it isn't much."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," he said, sipping at his coffee. "Small towns are all right. I guess I'm just griped because they don't have train service through here. I hate busses."

"Me, too," she said, and wondered if he could tell that she had never traveled any way, except by bus, and then only to Milton, forty miles away.

"Do you travel a lot?" she asked, and was shocked at her audacity.

"Quite a bit," he grinned, setting his cup on the counter. "I can't seem to stay put—itchy feet, I guess. But I like to travel and see new places and new people. Someday, I suppose, I'll settle down in some quiet town. Who knows," he laughed, "it might be right here in—"

"Mayfield," she finished for him.

She smiled into her cup. He probably didn't know how ridiculous a picture it was, him settling down in Mayfield, planting his vitality in the decaying town and allowing the cloying vines to strangle the life from him.

"How about you?" he said. "Do you travel much?"

"No. Not much."

"That's too bad. I was hoping maybe you were going somewhere tonight, too—on my bus."

Mr. Simmons was at the far end of the counter.

"As a matter of fact," she said suddenly, "I am."

His eyebrows raised in pleasant surprise.

"Good," he said. "south? How far?"

She thought of the nineteen dollars in her purse.

"Only as far as Milton," she said. "I'll take

the train from there to—Chicago, later."

Only as far as Milton or all the way to Chicago—did it matter how far?

Her hands clutched the edge of the counter and she turned her face slightly away from him. Could he detect the beating of her pulse?

"Milton," he mused. "Well, it isn't far, but it's something, I hope," he added, "that you won't go to sleep like everyone else."

"No," she said, "I won't go to sleep."

"I'm not taking any chances." He laughed and signaled Mr. Simmons to refill their cups. "I want someone to talk to."

She was glad that they drank their coffee without talking. The excitement within her was too great and she wanted only to feel the thrill of it without speaking. There was nineteen dollars in her purse lying there on the counter, and she would get on the bus with this man and be carried away into the night—as far as nineteen dollars worth. After that, what? But there was nothing after that. There was just a bus in the darkness and when the sun came up she would look out the windows and she would not see Mayfield or the grey walls of her room in the red brick house.

"Hey," he said, startling her, "it's almost a half-hour before bus time. Let's walk. I like walking in the snow."

"Yes, let's do."

He stood waiting while she tied on her bandana. She picked up the blue-wrapped package and, outside, let it fall into a drifted pile of snow. She was surprised to find that the cold did not chill her. It only made her skin tingle which added to the fire that burned inside of her.

She yanked the bandana off her head and shook her hair back from her shoulders.

"Hey," he said, "you mustn't do that. You'll catch cold."

"Oh, no. I often walk in the snow like this."

He laughed and she laughed with him. He took her hand and swung it as a school boy might have done, and they laughed some more with the snow in their faces.

They walked to the end of the block before either of them spoke.

She said, "It must be exciting to travel as you do."

And he said, "Yes. It's good to be moving and free, and part of things without being tied by them. I want to travel and travel till I've seen everything and by that time I'll be an old man, ready to die. And I won't have any roots or even anyone to care."

He grinned down at her.

"Do you mind?" she said.

"No," he answered. "I don't like roots."

They walked several blocks and when they came to the bus station, the bus was loading a line of half-asleep people, who stood and blinked stupidly in the light. The exhaust from the idling motor sent a wisp of vapor into the air, and the vibrations echoed dully in the loading tunnel.

"Do you have your ticket?" he asked.

"No." She felt the laughter go out of her. "I—I'll get one."

"Better hurry," he said. "You go ahead and I'll save seats for us."

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