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**NATHAN ASCH**  
**INLAND, WESTERN SEA**  
**READ BY VIRGINIA MAYNARD**



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CONTENTS:

1 LP  
1 text

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Nathan Asch

Photo by Eddy Walter

SIDE 1

Inland, Western Sea

As printed in THE NEW YORKER  
April 29, 1950

recorded by Moses Asch, July 18, 1959

SIDE 2

Inland, Western Sea  
(continued)

NATHAN ASCH was born in Poland in 1902. Brought to America in 1915. Began writing in Paris in 1924. Author of several books and many short stories, published in U.S., Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Russia. His short story, "Inland, Western Sea," published originally in the New Yorker, has been used by the U.S. Information Agency in its program to "create better understanding about the United States among people in other countries." It has recently been republished in the following languages: Sindhi, Bengali, Korean, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Tamil, Talugu, English (in the Philippines and in Japan), Gujarati, and Spanish.

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**NATHAN ASCH**  
**INLAND,**  
**WESTERN SEA**  
**READ BY**  
**VIRGINIA**  
**MAYNARD**

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTO BY WALKER EVANS

Auto Dump, Vicinity Easton, Pennsylvania, November 1935  
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FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FL9720

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**Nathan Asch**  
**INLAND,  
WESTERN SEA**

**Read by Virginia Maynard**

From the obituary column *New York Times*,  
Friday, December 25, 1964.

**NATHAN ASCH, 62,  
NOVELIST, IS DEAD**

**Son of Late Author Wrote  
on America's Depression**

SAN FRANCISCO\* Dec. 24 (AP)—Nathan Asch, son of the late author, Sholem Asch, and a writer himself, died yesterday in Kaiser Hospital after a brief illness. He was 62 years old.

A native of Poland, Nathan Asch took up writing in Paris in the early 1920's and published four novels and a non-fiction work, "The Road: In Search of America," a study of America in the Depression years.

In recent times Mr. Asch conducted a writers' workshop at his home in suburban Mill Valley and also at Novato and Hamilton Air Force Base.

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**An American Writer**

"I was born in Warsaw, the son of Sholem Asch, the Yiddish novelist," Nathan Asch once wrote. "By the time I was 13 and had come to America, my family had lived in Switzerland, Germany and France."

Yet in spite of this peripatetic background, and in spite of having a famous father whose works in

Yiddish had Biblical motifs, Nathan Asch became an American writer.

His themes were drawn from the life he saw in this country. His most noted work, published in 1930, was a novel called "Pay Day."

This was a story of a young Wall Street clerk telling of his thoughts and actions on the day he gets his \$30 weekly salary.

Soon after its publication the book was assailed as obscene by John S. Sumner and his Society for the Suppression of Vice. A hearing was held in New York City at which it was ruled that apart from not being obscene "the book would probably point a moral to young and inexperienced readers."

"The Road: In Search of America," written in 1937, received mixed reviews. One critic called its author "a writer of extraordinary sensibility"; another called the work "exceptional as a record of unusual experience and banal in its conclusions."

In a novel entitled "The Valley," published in 1935, Mr. Asch told of the lives of a number of Yankee types living in the lower Berkshires.

Mr. Asch also contributed reviews to such magazines as *The New Republic*, *The Nation* and the now-extinct *Dial*. He worked in Hollywood as a script writer and in Washington as a special assistant for the Works Progress Administration from 1935 to 1937.

NATHAN ASCH was born in Poland in 1902. Brought to America in 1915. Began writing in Paris in 1924. Author of several books and many short stories, published in U.S., Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Russia. His short story, "Inland, Western Sea," published originally in the *New Yorker*, has been used by the U.S. Information Agency in its program to "create better understanding about the United States among people in other countries." It has recently been republished in the following languages: Sindhi, Bengali, Korean, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Tamil, Talugu, English (in the Philippines and in Japan), Gujarati, and Spanish. Dated 1959, Mill Valley, Cal.

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As printed in *The New Yorker* April 29, 1950

WHEN the passengers who had settled themselves in the warm outbound bus saw Marge and her little brood approaching from the waiting room of the terminal, they became uneasy and looked at the vacant seats beside them. Mr. Purcell was particularly disturbed. He had arrived early and picked a seat in the rear of the bus. The night before, he and his wife had received a telegram from their son at the state university informing them that he had just married someone they had never seen. Mr. Purcell, on his way to his son, saw Marge and her three children and was afraid they would sit next to him and prevent him from solving his unhappy problem.

Miss Bama, six seats in front of him, was still shaky from the effects of a testimonial dinner given her the night before by hundreds of her former pupils, many of whom she had forgotten, who had gathered to do her homage upon her retirement and to present her with a travelling case. This most magnificent present lay in the luggage rack above her. Another, plainer case was in the luggage compartment of the bus. These, together with her person, represented all she was and had in the world. The night before, men and women, beaming at her, had assured her that they carried parts of her with them: phrases she had used, the sight of her walking up and down the classroom, her little absent-minded gestures. The memory of these they would hold precious, they had declared. Miss Bama lifted her shoulders slightly. She couldn't recall anything she had ever accomplished. What happened to teachers when they stopped teaching? The image came to her of a ship that for years had plied small and familiar waters, knowing each promontory, each indentation of the surrounding shores, now sailing out into a vast and unfamiliar sea and already meeting strange, outlandish craft.

Mrs. Arthur Berryman, who, with her Laura, occupied the front seat nearest to the door, drew her new spring coat closer about her. In the excitement following Laura's winning of a scholarship at a ballet school there in the city, Mrs. Berryman had indulged in a splurge of buying and had reoutfitted both Laura and herself. Now, with the whole future course of their lives at stake, she was



afraid that she had foolishly weakened her position, for it was her plan that she and Laura would return to the city after a visit with Arthur, and that he would stay home and earn what was needed to give the child her start. Laura was a genius and must have her chance. It was their sacred duty to skimp and save and sacrifice so that she could become a great dancer. But how to convince Arthur of this while his eyes were roving over the new spring clothes and his mind was speculating on how much they had cost? Mrs. Berryman watched Marge and her children approach and became frightened. Here was the result of someone's irresponsibility. She moved a little closer to Laura, as if to shield her, as if to assure both Laura and herself that they would never be the victims of such folly.

Pete Daly sat not only on his nice, soft seat in the rear of the bus but on top of the entire world, and through his head went all the dance music he had ever heard. One of his hands was in his pocket, clutching his lucky silver dollar. The back of this hand was pressed against a magnificent roll, containing one hundred and fifteen bucks. When Pete saw Marge and her kids as they crossed the platform of the terminal, the music stopped for a moment and his free arm rose and went across the empty seat beside him. The night before, he had gone into the back room of a bar and stopped to watch a dice game. Now he was the possessor not only of the roll but—here was a laugh—of a bus ticket. He looked hopefully toward the waiting-room door. At any moment now, some trim number in skirts might come tripping into the bus, someone for whom he could start peeling off the bank roll and for whom he was saving the other half of his seat.

Mr. Horace Coy, who with two small sample cases occupied the seat across the aisle, was figuring in his expense book. Absent-mindedly, he looked out and saw Marge. His eyes went to her ankles and registered the fact that she was not wearing his brand of hose.

Virginia Gowanus was staring at Pete Daly and didn't notice Marge and her children until they got on the bus. Virginia had sat down behind the driver's seat, hoping to begin a conversation with him, but while twisting about she had noticed Pete, with the bring-on-the-cockeyed-world look in his eyes, and she was sorry she had taken a chance on the driver.

There were still other people in the bus at the time the little family came to board it. There was a Mrs. Frazer, who had so many bundles she didn't have to worry about anyone's taking the seat next to her, and a Miss Tate, who was on the wrong bus and whom the driver was to let out, very indignant, just before it started.

And now there were Marge, Joey, Jerusalem Belle, and Baby. On this chilly spring day, Marge wore sneakers, torn cotton stockings, a wrinkled cotton dress, and no hat. The baby she carried in her arms. Joey and Jerusalem Belle were barefoot. Joey had patched trousers and a broken derby hat. Jerusalem Belle wore overalls, and a bright-red ribbon in her sandy hair. When the family was about ten feet from the bus, these two broke and rushed aboard. Jerusalem Belle was first. She pounded down the aisle, saw an empty seat beside a window, and threw herself into it. Joey sat down beside her and, in a loud voice, said, "I'll murder you."

**T**HE bus rode on the highway like a ship upon the sea, rising and falling on hills that were like waves. Inside, it was crowded with rows of green plush seats, each having a white headrest; with handles to hold on to when you were walking down the aisle, curtains, shades; with lamps, cords for signaling the driver, straps to grab when there was a sudden lurch; with warnings, advertising signs; with a shining fire extinguisher and a water cooler. It was made doubly crowded by the mirror that spread its reflection of the interior above the windshield. It was also crowded by the ever changing outside scene—telegraph poles and wires, houses, fields; by filling stations and by villages come to and passed.

Charlie Farrell, the driver (company classification B-1—having had one warning—married, one child), glanced up at the rack behind him, where rested three dozen eggs, then took one hand off the wheel and felt the knot in his tie. His eyes went for a moment toward the mirror and took in the positions of his passengers. He pressed his foot lightly on the accelerator, making the road recede faster underneath and the increased vibration teem up into his leg. He looked again in the mirror at the fellow with the blond hair falling over his eyes, to make sure he was just grinsilly and not getting a bun on from a bottle he was hiding. Charlie heard a movement behind him and decided that

the plain-puss was about to begin shooting questions at him. He hunched his shoulders forward and leaned over the wheel.

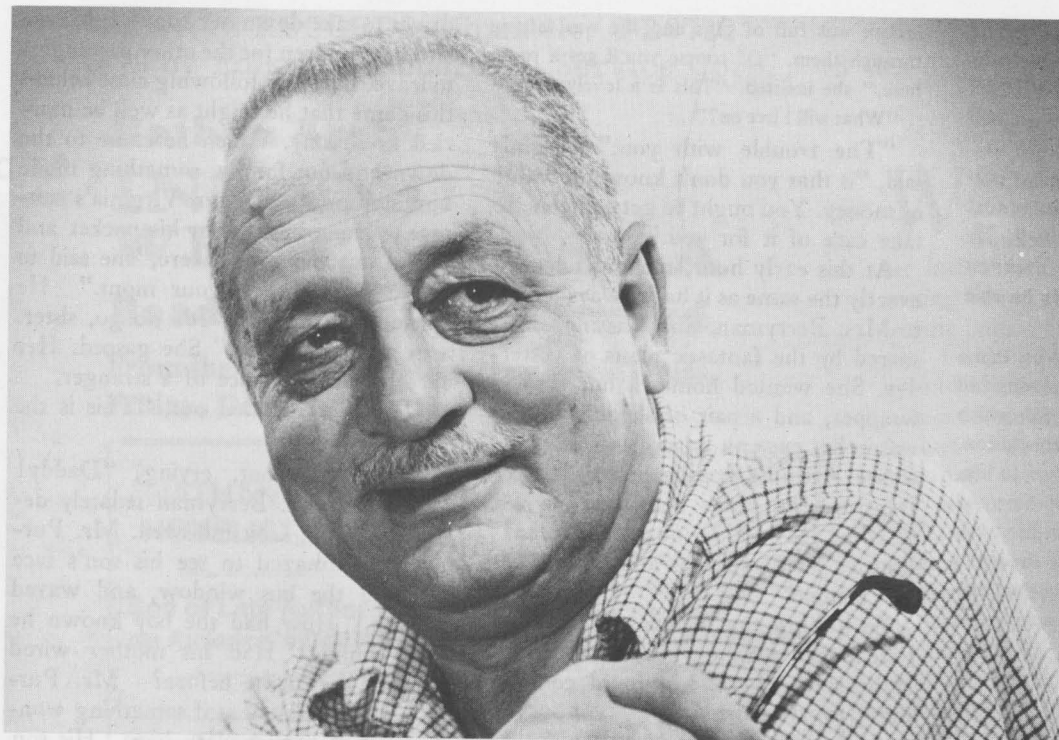
The seat beside Mr. Purcell remained empty. In his imagination, he was standing over his son, pointing a finger at his son's painted, bedizened wife, and saying, "Think of your mother, who is weeping her heart out." Miss Bama's eyes were closed. She again heard Dr. Cowley exclaim, "You've gone plumb crazy—you who have been a sensible woman for more than sixty years." Pete Daly suddenly realized that he was hungry; in all the excitement, he hadn't even broken into the bank roll to buy himself a meal. Virginia Gowanus was about to ask the driver if he didn't get tired driving the bus all day long when from the rear came Pete Daly's clear laugh. She turned around, then jerked her head back, furious. He had winked at her. Jerusalem Belle, her nose pressed against the cool window, counted the trees along the highway—"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight"—until in a rush she lost them all behind her. She became aware of the weight of Joey against her side and pushed him away from her. She drew her hand down the center of the green plush between them. "You stay there," she said. "This side of the line is mine."

On the seat behind Joey and Jerusalem Belle, Marge and Baby, who was relaxed and warm upon his mother's arm, were both gazing at the old lady with the lovely snow-white hair. Miss Bama opened her eyes and smiled at Marge and Baby. She asked, "Isn't he heavy?" Marge shook her head. "He's awfully big," Miss Bama said.

Mrs. Berryman stood in the wings of the Metropolitan Opera House, the strains of a full orchestra rising from the pit. She held a silk wrapper in her trembling hands, and her heart fluttered as the divine Laura Berryman floated out on the stage. Mrs. Berryman began to shake her head vehemently. To be away from Arthur would be a sacrifice, not a relief. She tried to forget the irritating sound he made when he cleared his throat, and how, in the late afternoons, she always began to feel tired and cross the moment she heard his footsteps on the front porch. Nervously, she glanced down at Laura and said, "Would you like a stick of chewing gum, dear?" Laura nodded.

Mr. Purcell said sternly to his son, "I assume that, now that you've taken off





Nathan Asch

Photo by Eddy Walter

my shoulders the burden of your support, you have, of course, found yourself a job." Mr. Coy looked at his sample cases and decided that taking a taxi to the bus terminal would have been justified. He entered an item of eighty-five cents and added a fifteen-cent tip. Pete Daly reconsidered; the thick steak would be smothered with mushrooms, not with onions. Miss Bama became aware of the two older children, kneeling on the seats in front of Marge. Their heads turned toward her. The little girl said in a singsong voice, "We didn't have no breakfast this morning."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Bama.

Jerusalem Belle and Joey shook their heads. Marge nodded hers. Baby remained almost unnaturally still.

Virginia Gowanus leaned forward and said to the driver's back, "Do you think further in the rear it shakes as much as this?"

"It's all about the same," Charlie said.

Virginia giggled. "You know, I'm very funny," she said. "But this is the first time I've ever been on a bus. I feel the vibration so."

"I'll move you at the rest stop," Charlie said.

The bus descended into a valley, came to a stream, crossed a bridge, hummed as it began to climb, then strained. It eased up as Charlie shifted gears, and at first with a faint and then with an increased roar, it rolled toward the top, reached it, hovered an instant

over an expanse of undulating country, and slid down. Inside, heads swayed:

THE bus stopped with its nose against a sign: "Joe's Barbecue." Charlie pulled a cigarette out of his breast pocket, swung the door lever toward him, stood up between the steering wheel and seat, and said, "Ten minutes' rest stop. You'll find ladies' room inside, gents' in the rear." Cigarette in his mouth, he helped Miss Bama down. She thanked him and walked through a broken screen door into the ramshackle building. A man was pouring boiling water into a coffee urn. "Do you have two quarts of milk?" she asked.

The man turned his head. "I don't know. I guess maybe we have."

"I want four chocolate bars also," Miss Bama said, "and some doughnuts."

The screen door squeaked open and Pete Daly appeared in the entrance. "What you got to eat?" he said.

"We don't get much call for food," the man said. "We got coffee. We got doughnuts. We got cigarettes."

"Don't that barbecue sign mean you got something else?"

The man had poked his head inside the icebox, looking for milk, and didn't answer.

Inside the bus, Mrs. Berryman and Laura looked on coldly as Charlie moved Virginia Gowanus two-thirds of the way to the rear. Virginia was being conspicuously genteel. "Did I push the

little girl?" she exclaimed as she passed them. "I'm sure I'm sorry." Neither Mrs. Berryman nor Laura said anything or stirred.

Mrs. Frazer, with the many bundles, beckoned to Charlie. "Oh, driver," she said, "can you get these up on the rack for me?"

"Sure can," Charlie said, and left Virginia's suitcase, abandoned, in the aisle. When he had arranged Mrs. Frazer's bundles, he went outside. Virginia saw Pete come into the bus. She seized her suitcase and stood there, weighed down, forlorn, until he came up to her. "You want me to get this up there for you?" Pete asked.

"Why, aren't you the perfect gentleman!" she exclaimed. Pete swung the suitcase into the rack and went on up the aisle to his seat. There she was, sitting beside him. "I always say there are some people you can trust the minute you lay your eyes on them," she said. Pete tried not to listen, tried to push himself against the window.

Charlie stepped into the bus and called, "All aboard!" He helped Miss Bama, laden with two paper bags, up the steps and waited until she sat down. Then he slipped into his seat, pushed the lever to shut the door, and stared back of him down the road.

Mr. Purcell smiled. "I knew you'd come around to my way of thinking," he said, now that he had got his son away from that woman and could talk to him privately. "Some people have trouble with their children, but your mother and I never had any trouble with you. We'll go back together and we'll surprise her. She's worrying about you now."

Mrs. Berryman said to Laura, "Now, remember, you let me do the talking. You're not to say a word."

Miss Bama drew four paper cups from one of her bags and took the cap off a milk bottle. "The little boy will have his first," she said. "He is a little boy, isn't he?" Marge nodded. Baby waited, face expressionless, lips moving. When the edge of the cup reached his lips, his eyes shut and his mouth continued moving.

Now that there was no one in the



seat behind him, Charlie pushed back his shoulders and relaxed. He looked up into the mirror and grinned. That sourpuss dame certainly knew her stuff. She had that happy-go-lucky kid backed up against the corner of his seat and she was giving him the works.

Miss Bama offered chocolate bars to the two older children. They hesitated. "Take them," she said. Two hands came forth slowly and then snatched the bars from her. Twisting, the children fell back on their haunches. Their bare feet curled under them. Their heads bent. They unwrapped the silver foil. "Would you like a doughnut?" Miss Bama asked Marge.

Virginia Gowanus said, "I'm very funny. It doesn't make any difference what a fellow does. If I like him, I just like him. I'm not like some other girls, who won't give you a tumble unless they know exactly what you've got."

Mr. Purcell's smile faded. He took out his watch, glanced at it, and put it back in his pocket. He stared out of the window, his gaze travelling over country he did not see. Deep lines appeared in his face. "All right, young man," he said. "You've made your bed. Now you lie in it."

"No," Miss Bama said to the two older children. "Perhaps you'd better not have any more. Not for a little while. Not on an empty stomach. Wouldn't you like some milk?" The children shook their heads. Their eyes were not on her face but on her hands and on the bag in her lap. Breathless, they watched her search inside the bag, find more chocolate bars, and take them out.

Laura's little tongue appeared and wet her lips. She said, "Mother."

"What, dear?"

"Mr. Burns is very nice."

Mrs. Berryman felt something cold strike her. She moved her head down to see Laura's eyes, but Laura's new hat obscured them.

"Is he going to meet us when we go back to the city again?" Laura asked.

Mrs. Berryman waited a moment before she said, "I think so."

"Will he find an apartment for us?"

Mrs. Berryman looked down on Laura's thin shoulders for a few moments. Then she became terrified of her own silence and said, "I suppose so, dear."

As if to music, the bus swung on.

"STOP the bus!" yelled Joey. From all sides, heads jerked in his direction. "Stop it! Stop it!" Charlie swung the wheel and came to a stop on the

shoulder of the road. He went back to where Miss Bama was bending over the boy.

"Too many chocolate bars," somebody said.

Miss Bama could scarcely speak. "He needs fresh air," she said. "We had better take him outside for a moment."

Charlie saw her wrinkled, agonized face. "You sit down, lady," he said. "I'll take him outside."

Baby watched the commotion, became frightened, and began to scream. Marge rocked him on her arm. Miss Bama fell back into her seat. She heard Dr. Cowley's voice saying clearly, "I told you." She felt the compressing, restricting pain under her breastbone. It shot up to her shoulder and ran down her left arm. The world about her was disappearing, dissolving. Somewhere, a million miles from her agony, never to be reached, was the little box containing the tablets Dr. Cowley had given her.

Pete was looking through the window at Charlie, standing below the door with the little tramp, who was trying to vomit. "Go on," the driver said. "Hurry up and be sick." Pete became aware of Virginia's breath on the back of his neck. When he turned his head sideways, he saw that she was not looking outside but at him.

Joey strained and strained again. He began to weep. "I can't!" he wailed.

Laura did not see or hear anything of what was happening. She was waiting for her mother, rigid beside her, to relax, so she could strike at her again.

"O.K., then," Charlie said. "You hop in." He followed the kid inside, past the two with the new duds on, past the one with the bundles, past a couple of others. "Sit there and stop twisting about," he said. Joey, his face drawn, sat down beside Jerusalem Belle, who looked at him, awed. Marge, swinging Baby up and down as hard as she could, also watched. Charlie asked Miss Bama, "Can I do anything for you, lady?" From somewhere far away, Miss Bama was able to shake her head. "Anything at all is the matter, you just pull the cord," he said.

Charlie started the bus, and a smile came on his face. He didn't know whether to surprise his wife first with the bargain in eggs or tell her what had happened that day. In a way, he was sorry that all this had happened when he had the eggs. Other days he went home, the kid was playing in the yard and Helen would come out and say, "Oh, hell," and there was nothing to tell. Now there would be two

things to talk about, both on the same day. He looked up into the mirror and his smile disappeared. The old lady must have slipped down in her seat. He couldn't see her.

Mrs. Berryman shook her head. Sacrifice your life for a child, give her your best years, stay awake nights, worry . . . Into her mind came Jack Burns' eyes and the weak-kneed feeling that looking into them gave her, but righteously she thrust aside the fascinating gaze and began to carry on an imaginary conversation with Laura. "Great dancer, indeed! What you need, young lady, is a spanking, the kind you don't forget."

Miss Bama came out of the heart attack feeling smaller, not really herself at all. She was afraid she couldn't move her head, but she could move it. She looked at the strangers beside and beyond her, saw the two children, the mother with the extraordinary baby. The baby was smiling at her, and Miss Bama was surprised at how indifferent she felt toward it.

Pete said, "I guess not. I'm going straight through."

"What do you mean, straight through?" Virginia asked. "You need rest, don't you?"

He shook his head and stole a look at her, trying to find something about her that he liked. He began to worry. What had he done to deserve her? Had he been pressing his luck too hard?

"If you think you would be imposing," Virginia said, "you just forget it. I'm the friendliest person. I always say a smile here and a smile there is no trouble at all, and it makes people happy."

The bus came to the end of a broad highway. Charlie slowed it down and bounced it easily onto a narrower macadam road. It was late afternoon and the sun was touching his eyes. He pulled down the sun visor.

THERE had been a meal stop. Charlie had taken the bus into the midway depot, had announced, "Twenty minutes for dinner," and had started home with the eggs and the story of the tramp family and the sick old lady who had fed them. Motionless, the bus had looked abandoned. Mrs. Berryman and Laura had eaten at a table in silence. Mr. Coy had sat at the counter and ordered soup. Faint, famished, Pete had perversely announced that he wasn't hungry, and Virginia had thought it was very strange, but she didn't feel like food, either. Miss Bama had lain exhausted on her seat, searching her mind for links with the outside she could at-



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each herself to. There came to her faint stirrings of the past, roofs she had seen for forty years outside her classroom windows, the pockmarked face of the janitor at the school.

Now the bus was again rolling, driven by John Joseph Toohey, senior driver of the company, with not a black mark against him. Toohey could have had any run he wanted, but he had chosen a night run, because he didn't like to stay home evenings now that his children were married and had gone away. The road led west, alongside woods. The bus seemed to be riding straight into the sun. Miss Bama sat up a little, felt stronger, and even became aware of a slight pang of hunger. As she turned to pull out the second bottle of milk, the bus entered a small town, hovered at a traffic light, came to a sign, "Bus Depot," and stopped. Toohey opened the door, pointed his thumb toward Marge, and said, "This is your stop." When she didn't move, he walked back to her. "Isn't this where you're going?" he asked. She shook her head. "But this is where your ticket reads to," he said. "Where did you get your ticket?"

"She bought it," Jerusalem Belle said.

The driver turned to her. "Can't she talk?" he asked.

Both older children nodded their heads and said, "Sure she can."

Virginia Gowanus leaned from her place and called to the driver, "I don't think they have any luggage!"

Toohey asked again, "Where did you get your ticket?"

"She signed for it," Jerusalem Belle said. "The man said we got to go to Grandpop's."

"What man?" the driver asked.

"The complaint man," Joey said.

"The man from the insurance company."

There was the blast of a horn outside as a car approached the standing bus.

Miss Bama asked, "Where does your grandfather live?"

For the first time, they all heard Marge's voice. "At the end of the line."

"What is the difference in the amount they would have to pay?" Miss Bama said to the driver.

"Well," Toohey said, "the baby rides for nothing and the two children are half price. It will be eight dollars and thirty cents."

"I'd like to share that." Pete Daly pushed by Virginia and took the roll of bills out of his pocket. "I'll pay the

whole business," he said.

"I'll pay half of it," Miss Bama said.

"I'm glad you're doing it," Toohey said. He took the money they held out to him and gave them change. "You know, I don't make the rules."

"Forget it," Pete said. Then, winking at Miss Bama, "Hey, lady, easy come, easy go?"

Miss Bama smiled at him. He walked back, pushing the roll into his pocket.

"Can you imagine that!" Virginia said. "She didn't even say thank you." She turned aggressively on Pete. "You shouldn't be so careless with your money."

He sat down, feeling good. Then he looked anxiously at this dame beside him. My God, she was already spending his money for him!

Mr. Purcell said, "Now, you listen to me, boy. I had a terrible object lesson coming up here. There was a poor family on the bus. The children were barefoot and had had nothing to eat since the night before. The father evidently had just died, perhaps in an accident, because they said something about an insurance man giving them money for the trip. They didn't even have enough to go all the way and a collection had to be taken up for them on the bus. They were going to their grandparents, destitute, to live off relatives' charity, because once, in a weak moment, a young man and a young woman did something foolish, something they should not have done, just like you."

To herself, Laura said, I guess I can have anything in the world now. And I can do anything I want to, because if she won't let me, I'll tell her I'll write a letter to Daddy.

**T**HE bus rode through the evening and came into the night. In the front, two bright, searching eyes shone out, but the interior was dark. Trying to relax, the passengers turned, twisted, adjusted their bodies to unfamiliar angles, and waited for sleep. After a time, some gave up trying, opened their eyes, sat up, peered through the windows at the night, turned their heads, and saw each other's unquiet forms, saw the driver's back against the sheen of the headlights.

Mrs. Berryman decided she had never had a chance, remembered her last year in high school, her courting days, Arthur's expensive wooing. Why did people have to make life's most important decision at a time when they were least experienced? No instinct had warned her that the reason Arthur had

been able to send her chrysanthemums and to drive her to roadhouses for dinner, while high-school kids could only take their girls out for a soda, was that he had had an earlier start, was of a previous generation and settled. Now the kids who had paired off in high school had caught up financially with Arthur and her, or had even passed them. Arthur was an old man and she had been about to be laid away on the shelf beside him, though she was still young, with normal desires for laughter, for fun. She began to smile. She was again in the restaurant of the night before, a little drunk and a little frightened, listening to Jack Burns tell her about herself.

Laura was afraid of the dark. She edged toward her mother and said silently, "I didn't mean it, Mother dear. I wasn't going to write a letter to Daddy at all." She was afraid to say it out loud, because maybe she was lying and if she was her mother would know it. Her mother always knew when she was lying.

Jerusalem Belle and Joey lay sprawled across their seat, arms and legs intertwined. Baby was restless. A complaining whimper issued from him.

Miss Bama said, "Will you let me hold him?" She leaned over and took the warm, heavy child. In the darkness, she felt his eyes fastened on her, and she searched her mind for ways to make a baby sleep. "Sweet and low," she sang, "sweet and low, wind of the western sea . . ."

Mr. Purcell thought he heard someone singing a song his wife used to sing when the boy was only a baby. The boy had been a sickly child, and sometimes, when Mr. Purcell had awakened late at night and found the other side of the bed empty, he had gone into the baby's room and found his wife bent over the crib, singing "Wind of the western s-e-a-ee . . ."

Inside his hunger, Pete felt himself rolling, rolling. Where had he been yesterday? Where would he be tomorrow? When would he ever stop, hook on to, take hold of something? Why had he taken this bus? What was he doing on it? What did this anxious dame want from him? He had nothing for her. He was alone, free, falling down head over heels, rolling, rolling.

Virginia saw *him* coming out of a cloud, or the moon, or somewhere, shining in magnificent armor on that tall white horse of his. *He* was not like this crazy fellow next to her, whom she didn't want and didn't know why she



was so anxious about. *He* was smiling and easy, and *he* said, "Give me your hand and let us go." *His* hand was cool and strong, and they went into a cloud somewhere.

Mr. Coy was nodding, his head falling forward. There was an item that he couldn't remember very well. He had just noted it down in the darkness and he was afraid he wouldn't be able to decipher it tomorrow.

"... While my pretty one..." Miss Bama lingered through the last words of her song and with them through her whole long life, which was coming to a final, summed-up conclusion. Mrs. Berryman felt Laura move closer to her. Virginia and her knight were rising higher and higher, her head on Pete's shoulder, her arms wound around him. Mr. Purcell was dropping off into tomorrow. Miss Bama finished her song and lifted a sleeping baby back to his mother. Then she sat up and waited.

It was morning. The bus came to a sign, "City Limits—State Maintenance Ends," to filling stations and garages, to houses gathering into a town, to a red traffic light. Toohey retained the position he had held through the night. When the light showed green, his foot and hand touched the clutch and the gearshift, and the bus moved again. The passengers stirred behind him. Mrs. Berryman looked at her face in a small hand mirror in the harsh, gray light, and saw wrinkles. Laura was asleep, her head in her mother's lap. Miss Bama sat quite still. Ahead of her, Joey and Jerusalem Belle had their noses against the window. Marge was still holding her heavy baby. Mrs. Frazer called from her seat, "Driver, you be sure to get these bundles down for me!"

Mr. Coy hoped the bus depot would be clean enough for him to shave and wash in, so that he would look like someone just off a pullman sleeper. Mr. Purcell had opened his collar during the night and was now trying dejectedly to button it. Virginia was fixing her hair. Her

mouth was full of pins and she was talking through them. "Of course you'll get a room here," she insisted. "This is a lovely town."

"What will I live on?"

"The trouble with you," Virginia said, "is that you don't know the value of money. You ought to get someone to take care of it for you."

At this early hour, the town looked exactly the same as it had always looked to Mrs. Berryman. She was no longer stirred by the fantastic plans of yesterday. She wanted home, a hot bath, a wrapper, and a pair of slippers. There was in her even an unaccountable desire to see Arthur's familiar face. She felt Laura's head move upon her lap and asked, "How did you sleep, dear?" Laura's puckered eyes and lips opened into a smile.

So hungry that he was lightheaded, Pete looked out the window beside him. If he stayed here, he would come to know every stone and every brick on every building, every store front they were passing, every face that was going by.

Mr. Purcell saw a sign: "University 1 1/2 Miles." He wondered whether he could get a taxi, whether he would find his son on the campus or somewhere in town with the woman. The bus stopped. Virginia watched Pete swing down her suitcase. She wanted to take him by the arm, hold on to him, make sure he came with her. Mr. Coy, happy because he was earning a porter's tip, was moving toward the exit with his bags.

"There's Daddy!" Laura cried.

Mrs. Berryman said, "The first thing you'll do, young lady, is go straight to bed."

Everyone but Miss Bama had risen. Only she still sat, her eyes closed, a smile on her face. Mrs. Frazer waited for the

driver to take down her bundles, Marge and her children for the other passengers to leave. Pete was following close behind this dame that he might as well be married to already. When he came to the down-and-out family, something made him stop and put down Virginia's suitcase. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the roll. "Here," he said to Joey, "give this to your mom." He turned to Virginia. "It's no go, sister. I'm a rolling stone." She gasped. Her face became the face of a stranger.

The driver called out, "This is the end of the line!"

Laura ran out, crying, "Daddy! Daddy!" Mrs. Berryman sedately descended. Mr. Coy followed. Mr. Purcell was amazed to see his son's face through the bus window, and waved to him. How had the boy known he was coming? Had his mother wired to him the night before? Mr. Purcell was as excited as if something wonderful had happened to him. His son waved back and then motioned to someone. Mr. Purcell saw a girl looking shyly in his direction. Why, she's just a child, Mr. Purcell thought.

Marge moved, clutching Baby and the miraculous money. Jerusalem Belle and Joey followed. Mrs. Frazer called out, "Driver, I'm still waiting!"

Toohey looked up into the mirror. The only ones he saw were this impatient woman and the old lady, who was still asleep. She looked something like his wife, Martha, and he was sorry to have to wake her. She probably had nothing to wake up for anyway. He disposed of Mrs. Frazer and her bundles first and then went back down the aisle. As he bent over Miss Bama, she opened her eyes. —NATHAN ASCH