

I had heard enough tales to be uncomfortable at the thought of a night in jail. One of the policemen at the station turned out to be a decent man who patrolled the beat where many of my friends lived, and he insisted that I be put in a solitary cell. As the door clanged shut, all I could think of was the terrible disgrace, the shame that would be brought on my family, my whole life ruined. You know how adolescents are wont to brood, and I was worse than most, but gradually a sense of peace descended. Since there was nothing, after all, that I could do about anything, there was no point to worrying. My mind went blank and the next thing I remember is being awakened by the voices of friends who had come to bail me out.

In the end, this ruinous experience cost a total of thirty dollars. Our director of student affairs, a fine old man named Willard Silcox, who had no particular fondness for me, kept it out of the papers. So far as I ever could find out, my parents never heard about it, and even if they had, they would undoubtedly have laughed about the incident. Over the years, the whole thing has been polished into an

anecdote that takes at least fifteen minutes to tell. The story is so good that I don't think I can any longer distinguish the true details of "an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative" from the "artistic verisimilitude" it has accumulated. What I do recall quite clearly is the moment of peace that opened up like the broad blue sky after a day of rain.

Peace is not the natural condition of human life, and for most of us these moments are rarer than an uncloudy day. Peace is, however, another name for the land of heart's desire; it is the condition of being at home — not in this alien universe of things and forces — but in that other world of which we have glimpses from time to time in dreams and myths and poems that are like mirages of oases and cities: they are not real in the desert where they appear, where the only reality is sand and blistering heat. But somewhere we may never go there is a real city, a real oasis where weary travelers refresh themselves with pure clear water. In the meantime there is "the peace of God that passeth understanding." 

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## Sleepwalker

by Dabney Stuart

The questionable old man wanders  
the refuse dump, the railroad yards  
in his head, deserted, gets out of bed,  
traverses the room, goes down the stairs,  
his pajama shirttail flapping,  
the thin cotton pressing his legs.  
Look at that shin — razor sharp:  
barefoot to the wind, no more regard.  
I meet him coming  
out of the front door at midnight.  
He points his finger at the moon,  
pulls the trigger. I ask him  
where he's going. "Off," he says.  
The upstairs bedroom sucks at him  
through its open window, a vacuum cleaner;  
his hair flows toward it. He lifts  
his arms, grabs a low branch of the maple,  
hauls himself up. Moonbird,  
limbnestle. The tree vibrates  
from the suction. At its top finally,  
he hooks his toes into the ruff,  
flaps his arms, flies with the tree  
his wake, gone. The bedroom window  
shudders, a mouth moaning.  
I sit down in the great rootgap  
his takeoff has left me, his will,  
hoping to die in such arms.



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

## Life in the Happy Valley

by Katherine Dalton

My friend Dr. Bob grew up in a coal town called Packard in eastern Kentucky, a place that was abandoned years ago. All that is left these days is kudzu growing over old foundations. He's a neurosurgeon in Louisville now, and an amateur Kentucky historian, and my favorite tale of his is about the blue Fugetts and the blind Fugetts. The Fugetts live in Letcher county, and like so many families isolated in a rural area they have in-bred a bit and linked up two sets of bad genes. One branch starts going blind in their 30's and 40's—well after they've had their quota of kids—and the other has a blood condition (methemoglobinemia) that prevents them from getting sufficient oxygen, rendering the poor Fugett distinctly blue. When it's cold or the Fugett is stressed he is really blue. It's got to be so bad that nobody hardly will marry them, and so some of the family have moved over one county to Perry, and changed their name I think to Thompson. Not that this has helped a lot; now there are blue Fugetts and blind Thompsons.

Growing up in Kentucky as I did, I heard a lot of stories like that. Wolfe County, in the beautiful Red River Gorge

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area in the center of the state, had or maybe still has the highest incidence of schizophrenia (which is a genetically linked disease) per capita in the world, because the same gorge that now attracts the backpackers further isolated families in an area where isolation was already great, and some ancestor had a bad gene. Every or nearly every family in that county has at least one case of that affliction. My same friend Dr. Bob was out there visiting the gorge one day years ago with his wife and two young boys, when a beat-up station wagon pulled up beside them at a lookout point. Dr. Bob took one glance at the locals and quietly ordered his family to get back in their car. The folks in the station wagon were each one of them, he says, mad as hatters.

I'm telling you all this not because (or not only because) I have that typically Southern ghoulish pride in the distinctiveness of home, even if home is distinguished in its disease, but because there is always another side, even to such a problem as in-breeding. What people forget when they talk about the downside of marrying your first cousin, envisioning as they do the *idiot savant* banjo picker in *Deliverance*, is that just as in-breeding can group together weak genes or bad genes and give you terrible problems, so can it link up good genes.