Last year

A few months ago my brother Arthur changed; and Mother doesn't say that about the twig anymore. The "twig" has been with us for ever so long, ever since Arthur's first day at school when he came home with a drawing of a red and blue apple; on the red side he had written "blue" and on the blue side, "red." I remember Mother sadly showing this to Father and in that strange, far-sounding voice saying, "You know Allison, 'as the twig is bent, so is the tree.'" She had looked at Arthur then and Arthur, a blond frowning boy with glasses, had looked up at her almost wonderingly. But she only shook her head and sighed a sigh that somehow seemed to last through all those terrible years Arthur crept his way through the Ashton Grammar School. And then the great "change" occurred.

Actually, I don't suppose it happened over night, this change. It just seemed that way. But I think I knew from the beginning, when I first heard what they were going to do to him, that something tremendous would happen. I'm the girl, you see---the last born. (This means things, I've found out.) But I knew first, even
before Arthur did, that they were going to send him away. I heard them talking, Mother and Father. This was after that school play when Arthur embarrassed us so by forgetting all his lines and just standing up there in the middle of the stage staring at everybody. Of course everyone laughed—everyone except us and we had to sit there, tall and straight, listening to the laughing and watching Arthur all red-faced and wide-eyed. Later that night I heard Mother saying that something "has got to be done about him now." And Father said he guessed so, too. Then Mother started talking about that school in Connecticut.

I listened to them and I was almost afraid. It seemed a terrible thing they were talking about. My own parents! Doing away with Arthur! If only he'd made better grades, I thought. Or got some "interests" like Mother had wanted him to... Still, I must say and I know it's true, I really think I sort of enjoyed some of Arthur's troubles; it gave me a sort of warm feeling, knowing I was thin and quick and different from him. Even so, it seemed a dreadful thing they were planning to do—sending him away, abandoning him more or less. So one night after dinner I told him what they were going to do to him. "You're gonna get sent away, Arthur," I said. And I remember the look of him, standing there in the middle of his blue-striped room—his face, moon-faced, and his spectacled eyes looking back at me, unblinking and round. I knew how afraid he was. And I felt closer to him then that I ever had before.

Arthur was fourteen when he finally got sent away. Connecticut is a long way away from Georgia, but my mother said a "change of atmosphere" was good for a child. So on a crisp blue September day we went down to the train station and saw Arthur, all name-taped and dressed in his new brown suit, off to the unknown spaces of Connect-
icut. He sat in the green pullman seat beside the window and I looked at him up there, bundled up in his suit and still chubby, and I thought how small he seemed and how tremendous the train was. Somehow I felt that Arthur, alone and unarmed, was going off to be killed. And as his hand waved timidly goodbye and he tried to smile, the train began to move and I looked up at Mother; her eyes were filled with tears, but she was trying to smile. I thought, "O Arthur, Arthur..." and sadly watched the great black train until it had rounded the bend, carrying Arthur away, I thought, forever.

Naturally, we missed him those first few days. To me it was as if someone had died and there were pathetic reminders of the person everywhere—a shoe, Arthur's cub scout uniform, an old rope. Mother, I think, missed him more than anyone else. And after the third day she started waiting for the mailman, hoping to hear some "word." But it wasn't until the end of the second week that "the word" finally arrived. It was written in pencil and on slick theme paper and since it was the first time Arthur had ever written a letter home, there was something sad to me about the "Dear Mother and Dad." But it was the rest of the letter that caused us worry. In a jerky scrawl he had written:

I got hear alright. I had five cheese sandwiches on the train and nearly missed the other train in New York. But I didn't.

My roomate, what the bed every night. Her name is Bob Leyden and he comes from a place called Marble Head, Massachussets. Mrs. Whitfield, he's my English Teacher, comes in at nights and tries to wake up Bob but he just goes on and what's anyway. It's real hard hear. We have to wash windows on Saturday—everybody does. Mr. Sykes said window washing can be fun, but it isn't. I've gotten to know a lot of the other boys but nobody likes my roomate. And on the other hand Wish I was home and there only 84 days until Christmas. They think I talk funny up here. I gotta go.

I don't like

Love,

Arthur
more than anything else. "Certainly," she said, "he knows better than that!" But the next morning I heard her telling Mrs. Johnston over the phone that she had heard from Arthur and that it was too bad Arthur had to get a roommate who was suffering from—and she whispered the word, pronouncing each syllable, "en-a-re-sis." I supposed she was talking about wetting the bed, but I was too embarrassed to ask. That night, though, we all sat in the living room because Mother said she wanted us to hear what she had written Arthur. In the letter she told him to be nice to his poor roommate—that he was probably just nervous about being away from home for the first time and she was sure young Bob Leyden hated his "difficulty" just as much as anyone else and probably more.

Still, this kindly tone from her didn't last very long. Because soon the "twig" came rushing back. Arthur hadn't been in school long before we started receiving sleek little envelopes from Mr. Sykes, the school's headmaster, Mr. Sykes never used the word "I" but always "we". And it seemed every letter began either "we fear" or "we are sorry" or "we believe." Anyway, Mr. Sykes and "they" quite soon decided Arthur had to go back a grade. "...Arthur just doesn't seem to have had the fundamental training some of the other boys have had," wrote Mr. Sykes. This caused no end of talk at home and Mother said, "He just can't keep up, that's all! I told you. I've always said, 'As the twig is bent, so is the tree!'" And she kept saying this, over and over, as other letters from the headmaster arrived those first few months. That was all we ever talked about—Arthur and school—Arthur and twigs...

I had thought things would get better when Arthur came home for Christmas. For days before he actually arrived Mother was busy "getting things ready." She decorated the silver epergne with holly
and smiley and when she asked me how I thought Arthur would like it I said I thought he would but I knew he probably wouldn't even notice it. It was too bad Arthur's report card had to arrive the day before he did. He had made all "C's" and "D's". I remember looking at the card and thinking how nicely someone up there had written the letter "D."

I didn't think Arthur had changed very much. He got off the train, wrinkled and grinning, and I thought his hair had grown a lot and his socks were real wide and stretched at the top. But that was about all. He did seem to have more energy, though, and I heard Mother say, "He does seem to be more alert, don't you think, Allison?"

His new energy, though, soon wore off. Right away he lost the new top coat he'd got for Christmas. Mother was furious and I heard her out in the hall: "You're the most careless child I ever saw! Well, you'll just have to freeze to death!" So on that January day we watched Arthur board the train in his old top coat with the sleeves too short and I looked at him standing up there by the porter and I felt something of that old loss I'd known when he had first left home. He seemed to leave us a heavy silence whenever he left and, besides, I knew how he hated to go back. He was still frowning when the train left.

Naturally, I thought Arthur's first letter home after Christmas would have been a poem of gloom. But it wasn't at all. It was almost jubilant, for Arthur. His roommate, Ben Landen, had not returned to school:

"...He can't come back till he gets cured. And I'm glad. Now I got this new roommate. His name is Knox Campbell and he's from New York City and goes to night clubs all the time. I think his folks are real rich because he's got this picture of his house and it looks like a castle. He says his father makes those things like that one you've got Mother, up in the attic—that kind of dummy thing you used to fit clothes on when Hattie would come in and so.
He's in all my classes and we go around together all the time. He doesn't like Mr. Sykes either. Well, I gotta go.

He signed his name, "A." And Father wanted to know why he'd signed his name like that. Mother said it was just probably something he had learned.

But Arthur seemed to be learning strange new things all the time. Suddenly we received a letter from him and his handwriting was completely changed—-and unreadable. It was more of a printing than anything else and I'm sure the letter had take him a long time to write. But he asked us how we liked it. And he said he hoped we did, because this was the way he was going to write all the time now. Knox, his roommate, wrote that way, he said. Knox also said everybody at Harvard wrote that way. And Father said if they did he didn't understand how anybody ever got out of Harvard. Mother said she thought Arthur's new handwriting was "Quite interesting."

Yet it was Arthur's next letters that seemed to interest Father and I'm sure this was because every one of them had some mention of money in them. We were all quite shocked and I must say, hurt, when Arthur wrote us his clothes weren't right. "They don't wear the same kind of things up here that they do down there," he wrote in his new handwriting.

...Knox says some of my suits are kind of hicky and he said when you get to be almost fifteen it's stupid to wear ties that have scotty dogs all over them. He says his mother knows this store in New York City and if you'll just send me the money she can charge and I can pay her back. I can get my shoes here all right. They call them white bucks but they don't have any down there in Ashton so don't go around trying to find them." Knox says he guesses I'll need about a hundred dollars for all this. Well, I gotta go.

Love,
A.

Mother read this letter out loud and because of Arthur's new handwriting she read white "lucks" instead of "bucks." And when Father
heard this he stood up and in a loud voice said, "White lucks! What in the world has come over that boy? White lucks, my eye. A hundred dollars to make a sis out of my boy. Nothing doing. I wish Arthur still had that boy who wet the bed for a roommate!"

"Now, Allison," Mother said. "Perhaps the northern boys don't dress like we down here." But she added she thought southern boys always looked nice.

Nevertheless, Arthur was happy with all his new things. He wrote us he was really glad he'd got them because Knox had asked him to visit him in New York for spring vacation and that they would probably be going to a lot of night clubs and he didn't want to look "hicky." He said he'd write us and tell us how much he'd need. Father said Mother could sell that dummy up in the attic and then send the money to Arthur. But, Mother said to remember that it was Arthur's birthday and that it was interesting, she thought, for young boys to have "experiences."

"Like night clubs!" Father said.

"Now, Allison," Mother said. "You know better than that."

"Well, I don't know," Father said. "That Knox boy doesn't sound too bright to me. White lucks!" And he shook his head and left the room...

Still, I think it was during this period, listening to all the talk about Arthur's New York trip and thinking of him sitting in some great huge silver night club, that I began to feel forgotten somehow. My own life, in comparison, seemed to be an endless line of cold sun and cracked sidewalks along which I would walk the way from school to home. I hadn't made any "D's" either.

Then to add to all this, Arthur's letter describing his visit to New York was three pieces of theme paper packed with joy. When I got home from my music lesson, Mother had just finished reading his letter. I saw it in her hand, the folded pages all wadded up and half sticking
out of the envelope. Her face was flushed and she seemed happier than
I'd ever seen her. "We've had the grandest letter from Arthur!" she
said. "I'll read it to you when your father comes."

"That's all right," I said. "I'll read it now."

"Oh, no. Let's wait until he comes. He likes to be with us when
we read Arthur's letters."

So that night we all sat down in the library and Mother read it
aloud:

...First off, we went up on the train. We stayed in the
club car most of the way and then we ate. But guess what?
A chauffer met us at the train. He was white and looks
like Uncle Alex. We got in this huge black cadilack, in
the back, and then we drove and drove until we got to this
huge gray house made out of stone and it was Knox's house.
Knox's Dad is really rich but he isn't really Knox's Dad.
Knox said his real Dad was dead but he acts real nice.
Mrs. Campbell is sure pretty. She's Knox's real mother,
He told me all about it. But I can't tell. I had a room
all to myself and this real high bed. We ate in the hugest
dinning room you ever saw. At dinner Mr. Campbell said:I
had a good vocabulary for a boy my age and he asked me what
I was going to do and I said I guessed I'd be a lumberman
like you. Mrs. Campbell was always talking about me and
how polite I was. She said she was glad Knox was getting
Georgia influence from me. She said he needed manners.
Anyway that night we all got dressed up and Mr. Campbell
put on this top hat and a coat what had velvet around the
collar and Mrs. Campbell put on this blue dress and long
fur coat and they took Knox and me to the—STORK CLUB.
We sat in stripped seats and Mr. Campbell told this waiter
he knows to bring us some cherry wine. Knox drank his and
got blotto! But I didn't. There was a man in there that's
been married 15 times—a real old man and Mrs. Campbell
said he was going to get married again. The Stork Club is
real small, and not like the ones you see in the movies.
But afterwards we went to the Copa and it's even smaller.
Mr. Campbell said Knox couldn't have another glass of cherry
and I couldn't either. So we got a coke in there but Knox
said they always put whiskey in the cokes anyway and he was
really getting blotto, but I didn't. That was the best night.

But long about the last we had this dance. We didn't
have it till then because I told them about me not being
able to dance. But Mrs. Campbell showed me how until I got
so I could do it pretty good. She used to dance in a night
club and she really knows how. Anyway, all these girls
came! Knox's girl is a real dame. Sue. But there was one
there better than her. Rose. Knox said he thought she had
the hots for me and she would write. I hadn't gotten one
yet though. Northern girls are a whole lot different from
southern ones. They're much more grown up and they hit you all the time. Knox said one thought the way I talked was cute. But I don't think she'll write. You ought to hear the letters Knox gets from his girls—-at the end. Know what I mean? Anyway, Mrs. Campbell said I could come back any time at all. I think I will. And, oh yeah, she was glad I knew how to tip. They've got these white women for maids—-two. And I gave them fifty cents a peace. I told Mrs. Campbell about how mad you get, Mother, when Aunt Jane and Uncle Arthur come and never give Mattie and Isaiah one dime. Anyway Knox says he wants me to come up in the summer but Mr. Campbell said Knox had to go to camp again. Knox says he's not going because he's too old and I don't blame him. Well, that's all. There's a whole lot more, but I gotta go.

Love,
A.

When Mother finished the letter, she looked up at us, smiling.

"Weren't they grand to Arthur?"

Father wasn't smiling. "Used to dance in a night club," he said.

"Who?" Mother asked.

"That Mrs. Campbell. Isn't that what Arthur said?"

"Oh, that!" she said. "Arthur just probably got that wrong.

Anyway, she was certainly nice to him. I'll have to write her right away."

Everybody was smiling about Arthur—-that is, everybody but me. I started walking around the room with my hip out of joint, but they didn't even say anything about that.

Anyway, Arthur's next letter made me feel tremendously better. It caused Mother no end of worry and Father said he thought Arthur had gone "crazy."

The letter arrived on a Saturday and was written in ink this time. Mother discovered it on the hall table. "Well, a letter from Arthur," she said. I watched her open it and then before reading it she told Mattie, the cook, to be sure not to put too much garlic in the French dressing. Almost absently she unfolded the letter and began to read. Suddenly, her expression began to change and she frowned—-"Whaaaat!"
she said. "Why---" She looked up at the ceiling. "Aaaa---allison!"

she called to Father.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I---I don't know. Go up and get your father!"

I told Father to hurry up and come downstairs, that Arthur had done something again.

"What now?" he asked almost wearily.

"I don't know," I said and I was so excited I could scarcely breathe.

We found Mother seated forward on the sofa in the library.

"What now?" Father asked again.

"I don't know," Mother said. She looked up at us. "I just don't know."

Arthur's letter was the queerest thing I'd ever heard. In the first place he began, "Fond Parents," instead of his usual, "Dear Mother and Dad." But it was the rest of the letter that really upset us. Mother had some difficulty reading it because even though it was a better example of Arthur's new handwriting he had placed little round circles over every "i" instead of just plain dots and, though pretty, the circles were so large in places that it made the upper line hard to read. Arthur's first sentence nearly jolted us out of the room:

"I sit here in darkness, alone, and I am paralysed."

Father bolted forward in his chair. "What?" he boomed.

"No, now just wait a minute," Mother said, wavin him backward.

She began the letter again:

...I sit here in darkness, alone, and I am paralysed. My heart is a cold gray stone and I am paralysed with gloom. I walk about in darkness alway and my feet go SLUSH, SLUSH SLUSH and gloom overtakes me. No one knows about all this but I. Even when the sun goes down I watch it SINK, SINK, SINK and darkness comes. For darkness and blackness are my kin folks, like you all, and I can tell it to the like of you. But nobody else! The moon rises up. RISE, RISE, RISE.
But it's yellow and no kin. So, like the black ghost that I am I walk with my heavy gray stone and my feet go SLUSH, SLUSH, SLUSH! Farewell.

Your Obedient Servant,
A.

For a time we just stared at each other. Finally Mother said, "Do you suppose it would be a good idea for us to send this to the school authorities? May—maybe Arthur has—Oh Allison—do you suppose Arthur has—what do you call it?"

"What's that?"

"Melancholia? They say young boys get that sometimes in adolescence." She put a handkerchief to her nose, not crying or anything, just holding it there. "But there's nothing like that in either side of our families."

"I wouldn't be sending that around to anybody," Father said.

"It's too nutty!"

Father was smiling, but I wasn't. The idea that Arthur really might be crazy pricked me with a sort of kittenish fear and a horrible picture formed in my mind of Arthur, chained to a great iron chair in the attic, howling mad, and I shuddered, vowing I'd never think of that again. But Father made it all seem better when he suggested perhaps Arthur was suffering from an unrequited love. I asked him what that was and he said it was when one party does and the other doesn't.

But, as we soon learned, Arthur's attack of gloom was not caused by love. It was caused by an entirely different thing, even stranger. Two days later another letter came with the same round circles over the "i's." Mother brought it in from the mailbox and she said, "I'm almost afraid to open it." I didn't blame her too much. But she ripped open the envelope anyway and glanced down the letter quickly. Then she seemed to relax. "Well," she said and she was smiling.

"What?" I said.

"Well," she said again. Her eyes were bluer than I'd ever seen
them. "Arthur, it seems, wants to be a writer!"

"A writer?!

"Yes, an author. It seems his English teacher told him if he ever learned to punctuate and spell he might have some talent."

"Arthur, a writer?" I said. "You mean books and all?"

"Oh, maybe," she said and the way she said it made me think she really believed Arthur was going to write books.

Father was not so sure. "Who's going to pay for his white lucks then?"

"Well, you don't know, Allison. Maybe Arthur will be successful."

Father just stared at her...

Nevertheless, this was the end of Arthur's gloom letters, and as time went on his letters became shorter and shorter and some of the time he even forgot to write in his new handwriting. Exams were coming on, he said, and he was really studying. He'd be glad to get home for Christmas. "It'll be divine to get out!" he wrote.

"Divine?" Father said. "He talks like a sis!"

But the day Arthur finally did get out Mother and I had a sort of argument. I didn't want to go to the train station to meet Arthur. But Mother said she had never heard of such disloyalty. "Here your brother has been away for almost half a year and you don't even want to go to the train to meet him!" She told me to go right upstairs and put on my blue dress; we were leaving for the station in a few minutes.

Actually, I think I was almost afraid to see Arthur. He had done so many things, been to so many places, and now he was going to write books and I--I was still just me.

At the station Mother kept saying, "I wonder if he's changed. My, how exciting it is!"

And the train came in triumphantly. I listened to the roar of
the wheels and the sound of the whistle and it was almost as if Arthur, himself, were causing all that noise—coming home in a burst of glory.

The train stopped and the three of us stood there, smiling, as each passenger descended, waiting for the moment when Arthur's round familiar face would suddenly appear and we could appropriately jolt into joy. But when the last passenger came down we stood there, still smiling somehow, and Mother said, "I wonder where he is?" Father, then, asked the porter if there had been a young school boy on the car. And the porter said there had been. But at just that moment Arthur appeared at the door. At least I thought it was Arthur. I looked at him again.

He certainly looked different. In the first place he had lost weight, a lot of weight, and his hair was cut very short all over. He was wearing his dark blue suit and right away I noticed his white shoes and the newspaper tucked up under his arm. But the funny thing was he wasn't smiling or anything. He didn't even seem very glad to see us. He came down the train steps, slowly, and Mother rushed up to him and hugged him. He half-way reacted to this, smilingply slightly. Then he suddenly backed away from her and looked into her face as if he were examining it. "Well l, hellowo, therrrrrre, Mottleerrrr," he said in the strangest accent I'd ever heard. Then he looked at Father. "How arre you, sirr?" He shook Father's hand. "And, Felicia," he said, looking at me as if I were a mere child. Then he straightened his shoulders and looked about. "Welllll, I see the little town is just about the same."

He sighed an almost tired sigh.

We walked to the car in silence. Arthur sat up front with Father and I could see him slowly moving his head, glancing at everything. "Noo," he said, "nothing has realilly changed."

"You've gotten a new way of talking up there, haven't you, Arthur?" Father said.
"Why, nooo," Arthur said. "I don't really think sooo." Mother didn't say anything and I was afraid to someone.

But as the morning progressed Arthur sometimes forgot his new accent and at times sounded almost like the Arthur we had always known. Still, he was quite changed. And as I looked at him sitting in the winged-back chair with all of us there, I thought he seemed quite splendid, making Mother and Father look older somehow and very much less worldly. He made me feel timid. But it was when he started telling us all those startling things that I knew he had changed; really changed.

I listened to him and it was odd; just as he began to talk, I heard a train whistle. It sounded far away in the summer sun and with the sound of it and the clock ticking and Arthur like he was, saying what he was, it came to me, queerly, that everything was changing---not only Arthur but all of us there. Things would never be the same again. We would never be the same again. Any of us. And I suddenly ran out of the room, unable to face this strange, new world.

Arthur had just told us he had made two "B's" at school. And then he told Father he wanted to get a job for the summer, that he wanted to make some money. The twig, I knew, was lost forever.
a change of atmosphere is good for a child. The school Arthur got sent to was a school where you have to work. Arthur had never seemed to like work before; he just wanted to stare and flip through worthless magazines all the time. That was why my father chose a place with self-help in it. My father is very partial to waxing floors; "it'll make a man out of him," he said.

In the beginning we thought it had. When we drove up at the end of the year to get him, the school had a little ceremony and we all sat tall and proud as Arthur's name was called out for being the boy who had washed the most windows "and with the best spirit" during the school year 1937-38. The only thing was that afterward the Headmaster, Mr. Sykes, told us Arthur was going to have to be put back a grade. He said Arthur's main trouble was he didn't know how to read.

Mother thought Mr. Sykes was talking about Arthur's glasses. He's had to wear glasses since he was in the first grade. At recess sometimes you could see him, the last one in line, looking like he wanted to cry and his glasses almost bigger than he was. Then, too, Arthur was never able to run and play like the other boys. He inherited Grandfather's flat feet. Mother told Mr. Sykes this, but he said he didn't think spectacles and feet had anything to do with Arthur's failures. He said: "The boy just doesn't seem to concentrate. He dreams all the time."

Which, if you think about it, might be the cause of what Mother calls "Arthur's little phases." He started going through these that first year too. He got this New York boy for a roommate, Bird Dog Cooke. His name wasn't really Bird-Dog but that's what everybody called him. Anyway, that's when Arthur came home sophisticated. He didn't have any expression on his face and he yawned all the time.
He was sophisticated for six days and then this boy who lives near us said Arthur had gone up north and got "daft." See, our town is small and nobody's ever been sent up north before. Nobody's ever come home rolling their "r's" and talking about nightclubs all the time either. That was when Father thought he had malaria again.

But the worst thing was Christmas when he come home religious.

He took to genuflecting in the Episcopal Church and this was horrifying because our church is very small and low. Finally Mother told him that since no one else seemed to be doing that she thought it was a good idea for him to follow the service as he always had. He didn't stop, though, until he nearly knocked his knee cap off on the pew in front of him. Boys genuflected all over the place at school, he said.

I suppose you could say Arthur's growing sincere was just an outgrowth of all these other things. Mother said so. At times she gets very partial to Arthur. But then when it happened nobody really cared, because what he did was so horrifyingly embarrassing that it really didn't matter how it started. This was his second semester in Connecticut and Father said he thought Arthur had "gone crazy."

See, the first thing that happened was we got this letter from Arthur saying he was bringing the most unpopular boy in the entire school home with him for Easter. His name was Seymour Yates and the reason he was so unpopular was because he "wets the bed all the time." Somehow it had become Arthur's duty to be nice to Seymour: "...Only last week the Head (Mr. Sykes) thanked me personally for my spirit in aiding the handicapped." At the end of the letter he said for Mother not to worry because "old Yates" had these rubber sheets he took around with him all the time.

Mother was furious. She said she didn't have enough sheets to
be changing them all the time and it did look as if Arthur could be a little more considerate of his own family. "Why can't Arthur help out some normal boy?" she asked.

I was too embarrassed to say anything. But Father said it wouldn't hurt us to be nice to the boy. He said if it was necessary he would go down and buy some extra sheets. "A great many boys have that trouble," he said. "It doesn't mean anything."

Mother said: "Maybe so," but she just wondered if Arthur had any other friends. "What will everybody think?"

"They don't have to know anything about it," Father said. "Besides, I think it's pretty darn nice of Arthur."

"Maybe so," Mother mumbled again. But she said she really didn't think she could take much more; she wished Arthur would hurry up and "come into his own."

The very next day, though, she went downtown and bought six extra sheets. Then she had Velvet, our cook, string this extra rope between the two oak trees in our backyard. "We may have some additional washing to do next week," was all she told Velvet. I guess that was why she was sort of upset when Arthur's next letter came. I mean she had gone to all that trouble and everything and Arthur wrote that Seymour wasn't coming:

....His parents said he couldn't come because he's got to go to this doctor that the Head recommended. The Head told Mr. and Mrs. Yates that if Seymour didn't get cured he believed it was a good idea for them to keep him home until he did. You ought to see all these alarm clocks and everything he's got. I'm like the Head, though. He says he thinks it's cruel the way all the boys tease poor old Yates. And yesterday the Head told me privately that I stand a good chance of getting the Amos T. Caldwalter award because I've started showing all this character. He said all the faculty had been noticing me and he hoped I don't flunk anything. I told the Head how I had always believed in the helpless and down-trodden and everything. You have to if you want to get the Amos T. Caldwalter award. It's the highest award any boy can get. Well, I've gotta go.

Your servant, as always---

A.
Father was more interested in why Arthur had signed himself, "Your Servant" than he was in the character award. "He's never shown any signs in that direction before."

"It's just probably something he's learned," Mother said and then almost wearily she told Velvet she could pack away the extra sheets.

That night, though, she got very jolly about Arthur's maybe getting the character award. "He's just like my father," she said. "I don't think I ever heard Father say an unkind word about anybody."

Arthur was the same way, she said. "Even in grammar school when all those horrid boys teased him about his glasses and everything, Arthur never said one word." Her eyes filled up. "He really hasn't had a very happy time." She just hoped Arthur would get that award and show everybody!

On Thursday we all had to go down to the train station to meet Arthur. There're only two trains which pass through our town, the one going and the one coming. Arthur was on the one coming and as usual he was the only passenger to get off. Right away I noticed something different about him. At first I thought it was his glasses but I remembered he had gotten the horn-rimmed ones Christmas and I guess I hadn't got used to them yet. But too, he wasn't running and waving toward us like he usually does. He was walking with his hands folded in front of him and as he got closer I noticed this peculiar look in his eyes—a kind of blue-eyed gleaming I'd never seen before. And then he came up and took Mother's hand with both of his, putting his left hand on the top of Mother's; not shaking it or anything, just resting it there like the minister does on your head when you're confirmed. That gleam was still in his eyes and he looked as if he were examining Mother's face. "Mother," he said softly as if he hadn't seen her for one million years. "Are you all right, Mother?"
Mother looked down at their hands and then at Arthur. "Why, of course," she said weakly and then she broke into a wide smile. Arthur ignored the smile and then looked sadly at Father. He tried to shake hands the same way with him.

"A manly shake, Arthur," Father said, dismissing Arthur's prayerful left and practically shaking off his right.

Arthur folded his hands back in front of him and looked at me as if I were some pathetic child. "How are your studies, Felicia?" he asked.

"They're all right, I guess." I started brushing my bangs back with my hand and rolling my eyes upward. You had to do something; it was so embarrassing!

One thing, though, his socks were still all wide and stretched at the top which showed he'd forgotten to wash them again.

We didn't say much until we got to the car. Arthur sat up front with Father and as we drove I noticed he kept moving his head back and forth. "The town of my youth," he said as we passed this parking lot full of broken-down cars.

Father just glanced at him and didn't say anything. Mother started talking about his character award. "That's so fine, Arthur! We really are proud of you."

"Well, I haven't gotten it yet," Arthur said, turning all the way around to smile at her. "I really don't deserve it. It's just like Albert Schweitzer says—- 'A thoroughbred doesn't need the ear of corn.'"

"Did he say that?" Mother asked.

"Uh huh. We've taken up old Schweitzer in English." He turned back to Father. "Such a great man. If only there were more like him in the world."
Nobody said much else until we got home. Then Arthur started acting really batty. See, we have these two colored servants---Velvet and Extra. We’re not rich or anything. Extra is Velvet’s forty-six year old son. He’s not a real butler or chauffeur or anything; he does everything. Arthur is his best friend; he told me that one time when he was making this ping pong table for them to play on.

Anyway, when we got to the house Extra and Velvet both came out to welcome Arthur home. They’re practically nutty over Arthur. Right away they came all beaming—glad up to the car and Arthur, instead of waving and carrying on like he always does, just slowly got out of the car and then gave Velvet that same handshake and look he gave Mother. “Poor Velvet. Are you well?” he asked her.

I guess Velvet thought Mother had been telling him something, because she started backing away and saying, “Whatsamatter with you, Arthur? Somebody been talkin’ to you ’bout my blood again?”

Arthur said “no”; he just wanted to know she was, that was all. Then he turned to Extra. “And Extra---” he said in this stupid, half-crying voice.

Extra just stared at him, then reached down for Arthur’s luggage.

“Oh, no,” Arthur said. “Let me. I never want to consider myself too good to carry my own bags.”

Extra got that white-eyed look he gets when Velvet starts fussing at him.

“Now, you rest,” Arthur commanded Extra.

“Let’s go inside,” Father said. And when I caught Velvet’s eye, I glanced at Arthur and then pointed my finger at my brain.

“Lawdy mer-ceece,” Velvet said and we all went into the house.

That night after dinner Arthur bored us all to death, talking
for hours about Bird-Dog Cooke and Albert Schweitzer. He hated Bird-Dog Cooke now because Bird-Dog didn't care a thing in this world for anything except football and all these girls he had in New York.

Albert Schweitzer wasn't like that. Bird-Dog was always making people do things for him, but a man like Albert Schweitzer wouldn't let a flea work for him if he could help it. Arthur thought we ought to fire Velvet and Extra. "How would you like to be some slave in somebody's house?" he asked Father.

Mother asked what Velvet and Extra would live on if they didn't work.

"Pay them any-way," Arthur said. "Do unto others like you would have them do unto you. That's what Albert Schweitzer said."

"Somebody else said that too," Father said.

"I've got to go to bed," I said. Boring, boring, boring.

Arthur was so boring I was almost sorry he had come home. I liked him better when he flipped through worthless magazines all the time.

"Yes, Felicia. You go right on up," Mother said in this worried voice.

I said good-night and walked out of the room with my hip out of joint.

"And don't do that anymore," Mother called. "You may freeze that way."

"Okay, I won't," I said and went on up the stairs.

I don't know how long they stayed downstairs. It must have been late because Arthur didn't get up until eleven o'clock the next morning. Father wanted to know if we thought Albert Schweitzer slept that late. But Mother said for Father not to be "flip" about Arthur. "He's just feeling his way, that's all."

"I wish he'd hurry and find it then," Father said.
"Well, let's not worry about him," Mother said. "I really think he might be coming into his own."

She kept saying that more and more as Arthur started staying up in his room typing on his typewriter.

"What's he doing up there?" I asked Mother.

"Just thinking," she said. "Just thinking."

The thing was that Arthur thought too much, because two days after Easter Father got this telephone call. We were all having lunch and Extra came and told Father that someone wanted him on the telephone. We always answer the telephone during meals. A lot of people don't, but we think it's rude not to.

"Anyway, we heard Father say, "Whaaaat? What are you talking about, Charlie?"

Mother put down her fork and listened. "It must be old Mr. Henry. Wonder what he wants with Allison?"

Arthur stopped eating and his eyes behind his glasses got round and unblinking.

"It's rude to listen to other people when they're talking on the phone," I said.

But then Father's voice got louder. "I never wrote anything for your newspaper in all my life," he said. "Yes. Yes. I know. Well, you go down there and stop the press then! Somebody's just trying to make a--- What do you mean you can't stop it?"

"Heavena," Mother said. "Allison shouldn't talk to such an old man like that."

"I guess he's gotten something wrong again," I said. Everybody in Ashton knows about Mr. Henry. He's editor of our weekly newspaper---The Ashton Star---and he's always getting things wrong.

Father came back in the room and his face was redder than his
tie. "Somebody wrote some damn fool letter to the paper and signed
my name!"

"Don't say that, Allison," Mother said.

"Don't say what?"

"You know. I've never heard you say that word before—"Dim," she said, using an "i" instead of an "a."

Father looked at her. "That was Charlie Henry! He wanted to
tell me he had edited some of the stronger points in my letter.
Dimmit, Charlie Henry ought to retire. He's too old."

"What was it about—the letter?" Mother asked.

"I don't know. I didn't ask him." Father stood up. "Now I've
got to go read what I've written for the whole town to see."

"Poor Mr. Henry," Arthur said. "I guess he does get things
confused. He must be talking about my letter."

Father just stared at Arthur. There was a white line round his
mouth and for a moment I was frightened. "You!" he said. "Why in
the name of heaven did you sign my name then?"

"I didn't," Arthur said sadly. "I signed my initials and
last name. I guess they are the same. Never thought of that."

Father didn't say anything. He walked out of the room and in
a few minutes the back door slammed. Soon we heard the car whizzing
down the driveway.

"Oh Arthur," Mother said in her "shirt-sleeves" tone. "Why do
you want to do these things?"

"I didn't think a simple thing like a letter would cause all this," "Arthur said and looked up / at the ceiling. His eyes were magnified
behind the glasses.

That afternoon the paper arrived. Mother got it first and I
followed her into the library. The two of us sat there while she
hurriedly and mumbledly read Arthur's letter out loud. It was the queerest thing I had ever heard and every now and then Mother kept saying "mercy" and "oh dear." I kept thinking of people all over Ashton reading the letter and I decided then and there I'd never go out of the house again. Arthur wrote:

Every morning I go to my little bench beneath the spreading Chinaberry tree and there I sit me down to contemplate the worms. ("Mercy, I hope they don't think Allison wrote that!") Who would make a slave of these poorly creatures—working and loving and knocking out their brains? Once of a morning I watched the worms from my little bench and I thought: "I am for you, worm." Yes, I am for them. So, too, am I for the other down-trodden of the world—prostitutes and opium eaters and ("Mercy!") yes, for the lowliest bum. They are my friends. They are your friends. Ashton, Georgia is full of them. They are the town's worms. (Oh dear.)

We must all go toward the central flame. ("He spelled central wrong.") This means LIFE. You travel through a dark passage and then in the midst of the jungle there is this little rustling of leaves. Behold! The Central flame. It behooves us. Be kind, even to little worms. These are my thoughts as I sit upon my little bench. Bums, too, march down the aisle of LIFE. "The flame burneth!"

Sincerely,
A.T. Whitfield
L Woodland Road

We heard the back door close. It was Father. "He's sick," he shouted as he came into the library. "He's crazy as a bat bug! If anybody thought I wrote that rot, they're crazier than he is."

Mother put her handkerchief to her nose, not crying or anything, just holding it there. "Now, don't, Allison! Don't let Arthur hear you. He's very proud of the letter, I know."

"Sitting on my little bench!" Father quoted Arthur. "Where is he?"

"I don't know," Mother said quietly and she didn't move her handkerchief.

"Maybe he's looking at his worms," I said.

Mother looked at me. "Don't tease him, Felicia. His thought really is quite fine."
"Fine my foot!" Father said and stormed out of the room.

But the worst thing about Arthur's letter was that no one said anything about it. None of Father's friends called him up. I guess they were afraid to. Father had just started teaching a class at Sunday School and I guess they figured he'd really gotten "that way." He thought of asking Mr. Henry to run a correction, but Mother said that would only mean we weren't "sticking by" Arthur. "Besides, the paper won't be out for another week," she said.

Arthur came home just in time for dinner. He had had a new haircut which made the two bumps on the back of his head more noticeable. Also he had his gleaming, simple look again. Father started to say something to him, but Mother shushed him. "No, now Allison. We want to have a peaceful dinner." Arthur himself brought up the letter. He wanted to know how we liked it. And when no one said anything, he said he had first written it at school. It was an English theme and he had gotten C-minus on it. The English teacher had written that he appreciated Arthur's "sentiment" but that his spelling and punctuation were atrocious. Arthur had corrected that, though, before he sent it to the paper.

"That's good," Father said and Mother shushed him again. I guess seeing how proud and everything Arthur was nobody could really say very much. Besides, he had to leave next day for school. We wouldn't see him again until we went up to get him in June. But all that night this picture kept forming in my mind. I kept seeing Arthur up in the attic, chained to a great iron chair, howling mad. I tried to erase it but it kept coming back. Earlier Father had told Mother that he had had a cousin somewhere on his mother's side who had to be "sent away": the cousin got to thinking he was a dog catcher.

The next day, though, I felt better and we all watched in
silence as Arthur boarded the train for Connecticut. He didn't much want to go back, he said. "Best vacation I ever had." But then as the train rounded the bend and we could see Arthur still waving, I looked up at Father and he was smiling. "My son, my son," he said and started shaking his head.

After a while we didn't think so much about Arthur's letter. Everybody found out it was Arthur who had written it and a lot of people even thought it was funny. "How's your little bench getting along, Allison?" all these men kept asking Father. Even so, it was still pretty embarrassing. I guess some people really did think Arthur had gone up north and got "daft."

We didn't hear very much from Arthur after that. He was studying hard, he wrote, and he had been put on the tennis team. Pretty boring letters and I didn't pay much attention to them. But as May came on and then June we started packing and getting ready for the trip to Connecticut again. Arthur had written he wanted us there in time for Class Day. "That's when they give out all the awards."

"We can't disappoint him," Mother said. So on Thursday, Class Day, the three of us were ushered into the school chapel and we sat near the back with all the other families. Arthur and the rest of the boys sat up front. I could just see the back of Arthur's head and I noticed he wasn't grinning and whispering like the rest of the boys. He was looking straight ahead and I knew he was waiting for the moment when his name was called out and he could walk up and receive the Amos T. Caldwell award. I hoped he would get it. On the trip up Mother told us she had even prayed that "something grand" would happen to Arthur. "He does deserve something," she said.

How sad the world is! How tragic it is. Arthur didn't get the Amos T. Caldwell award. Instead, a tall thin boy with a brown crew
out walked down the aisle and shook the Headmaster's hand. The Headmaster even patted him on the back and you could tell by the way the boy was hanging his head that he had all this character. But poor Arthur. I could see the two bumps on the back of his head which showed he had even cut his hair for the occasion. He didn't look to the left or right and the back of his neck was red. Mother looked down at the gloves in her hand and I guess maybe we felt even worse than Arthur did. He had wanted it so very much.

Arthur's name was called out for being the boy who washed the most windows and "with the best spirit" for the year 1958-59. We congratulated him heartily for this and never mentioned the other award. He was putting up a brave front, beaming and introducing us to his friends. Seymour Yates was there and by the way he was grinning and everything I guess he had got cured. But Arthur said he'd gotten tired of old Yates. "He's gotten this new thing now. He keeps thinking he's going to stop breathing and has to run to the window all the time."

"How really unfortunate for him," Mother said. And then Arthur's English teacher came up. His name was Mr. Wilson and he was a tall, sandy-haired man who talked like an Englishman. I was afraid he was going to tell us Arthur hadn't passed, so I kept looking up at the sky. But then all at once he started saying these very startling things and I looked at him square in the eye. He said he wanted to tell us he had rarely taught a more interesting "case" than Arthur. He said—and he really believed it—that Arthur (ARTHUR!) was going to be a writer!

"A what?" Father asked.

"What do you mean, Mr. Wilson?" Mother asked quietly.

Mr. Wilson smiled at Father. "Yes, I think so. He shows a real gift for words and has quite a feel for the dramatic."

"But—" Father started to say.
"Of course he has a long way to go," Mr. Wilson said. "There's a little matter of grammar and spelling," he said, patting Arthur on the back.

"Well, that's certainly interesting," Mother said and somehow I thought she sounded a little sad.

They talked some more about this and when Mr. Wilson left we all turned to Arthur. He was standing a little away from us and somehow standing there in his dark blue blazer he seemed an older Arthur, a different Arthur. He was happier than I had ever seen him and then he told us he had decided to get a job on the newspaper this summer. He was sure Mr. Henry would let him do something and besides Mr. Wilson had told him that being a newspaper reporter was the best way in the world to become a writer.

I thought I heard Father sigh, but I wasn't sure because somewhere, far away, while Arthur was talking I heard the sound of a train whistle. It sounded long and lonely in the morning sun and all at once I formed this picture in my mind. I could see our house in Georgia—a hundred years from now. Thousands of people were flocking to it and inside, all the rooms were marked off with ropes. People were coming to see the place where Arthur Whitfield lived. My brother!

All at once I felt a kind of crying inside and I thought: "Oh Arthur. Arthur. You're going to show everybody yet. You're going to be famous! You're going to be a great, famous man, Arthur!" I smiled at him, full of pride and crying. And the four of us walked side by side into the old brick building.