## The Golden Girl By H.L. Dowless

The winking twinkling of multicolored lights cast a brilliant cascade of intense colored designs upon the plain white walls of a certain cabin's interior. Inside this humble dwelling were only two rooms; one large, in order that a few guests might be entertained, and one small, so that a single occupant might have a tidy place to retire after the daily labors.

On the western wall opposite the door, rested a mahogany Grandfather clock that dutifully announced the measurement of time with an outstanding consistency. The clock's endless TICK TOCK seemed to thunder as forcefully as any shotgun blast on this Christmas fortnight, for in the dead silence a vivid imagination harbored only the small elf and the tiny baby reindeer, allowing them to play about the few furnishings of this humble abode.

In the corner, formed when the western wall met the northern, stood a bright green fir tree. Tall and erect it stood, for it was chosen among thousands to show one's love for that most gentle babe of Bethlehem. Throughout its entire stand, not even one time did a single needle wilt or droop. It was almost as if the lifeblood that had sustained it rejoiced in it's final destination. About the tree's foot was spread a snow white cloth of pure cotton, sprinkled with the dust of ruby, emerald, and glittering sapphire. On the outstretched limbs of the fir rested lengthy strings of winking lights joyfully singing the good news message in their own voice of winks in time to well known songs of the season.

Against the southern wall was carefully placed a withered couch that seemingly had seen more than it's share of visitors. The intent was to replace it, but it's owner had long since abandoned the possibility of accomplishing such a demanding task. On this couch, with it's tattered covering of cloth and it's well worn cloth buttons, sat a young lady who was the sole survivor of a terrible disaster that had cruelly removed the only ones from her life who truly offered genuine love in a world of hate. Her heart was pure, in the traditional sense of the word, and her mind firmly fixed on God – like desires. In this respect she was enjoined with all that is positive, therefore in a world of forlorn negative darkness, she was doomed to walk alone on the dusty roads of life.

During her life in this warm cozy shelter of love offered by her parents, her cheeks were rosy, her body full of vibrant energy, and her golden locks appeared to be encased in an aura of moonlight, as though a halo had been placed upon her head by the holy angels in heaven above. In those days, when the cold world pushed her aside in rejection, some cruel ones even violently attempting to shatter her qualities of passionate beauty, she would race into this shelter of love spread before her by those who had given her life.

Unfortunately, those days had forever passed and now fate itself had delivered a horrible blow in a single attempt to crush her vitality. Those once rosy cheeks were now pale as hazed moonbeams; her bouncing hair of flaxen had wilted upon her head, and her once glittering eyes of sapphire had dulled into a pasty near blue film. The ability to sleep had long since fled from her grasp, and as she sat gazing blankly at the floor in front of this Christmas fir, the small energized girl that she once was again sat in the midst of the cabin floor, cuddling a doll clothed in a long satin dress. The small girl would gingerly nudge the doll's mouth with her tender hands, then quickly snap her radiant smiling face in the direction of her parents for their approval.

Today as every day that small girl had remained in her company, allowing her to find relief from personal stress through the power of fantasy. As that small girl played with numerous dolls on the floor of the cabin, during those times of trouble *she* would sit upon the floor, conversing with the girl in child like phrases, becoming totally absorbed in a delightful world of time lost to eternity. Inert dolls constructed of wood and plastic would suddenly breath and assume a fleshly consistency. The world inside of the cabin would provide new hiding places for a disobedient child to hide, and the tree provided new situations in which a reigning mother could exercise discipline and authority.

In this world Carol would reign supreme, dominant over all situations, and would likewise find love and respect in return. As she rolled about upon the red carpeted cabin floor, lovingly taunting her imaginary child, she would lose all sense of time and space. Hours would seem only as minutes, even days would whisk into the somber blackness of midnight. Tonight as always, the play that had inspired such overwhelming joy would suddenly deliver a blow of jolting depression and she would awaken only to find her room empty, her playmates only inert plastic images. All of life's blood now drained, she would fade off somewhere into the night, enveloped in heaving surges of self sympathetic tears. Tomorrow would bring a new day that was only destined to end like the one before it.., but somewhere in the darkest recesses of her mental voice, a gentle whisper reassured her that a new time would one day arrive, and all would be eternally well for her in the end.

An orange sun seared away the thick blanket of mist that had enveloped the countryside during the coolness of night fall. Soon the orange transformed into the yellow brilliance of a fully arrived day. Though the young lady was supported by a grand bank account left in the wake of her father's demise, she used it only to complete necessary repairs in her house that she could not make her self.

In the quest for food, she had acquired an extreme resourcefulness. Directly behind her cabin, in the woods was a well beaten trail that shone brilliantly in the rust colored clay of the foothills. The trail wound through small bushes and towering grasses for a few feet ahead, then disappeared into the timber stand behind. The trail meandered between towering oaks and birch trees, many times frequented by leaping bunnies and bounding deer filled with strength acquired from a life deep in the bush. These beasts traveled the trail because for them it was ready made, and led to areas that spawned green grass to quench their burning appetites.

Frequently these animals traveled behind Carol who arose early in the eve of the morning while the gray mist still hung in the air, so that she might follow the trail to the rippling creek that gave life to the rainbow trout that she found so much to her liking. In the center of the creek was a funnel shape trap woven from the springy vines and limbs of the elm trees that stood nearby. Every morning it was as though the angels themselves had supplied her with all the food that she needed the night before, for the traps were always teaming with twisting rainbow sided fish.

Upon removal of the traps, the young lady would slide round twigs of oak across the opening in a manner that would weave the mouth shut, then place them back into the creek. With this task complete, she would gather small dry twigs to construct a fire, and with the aide of twig skewers, the fish were in the flame fresh from the traps.

This was the way that she loved to live; to breath the fresh morning air, savor the new sunshine, to eat the fruits that mother earth provided, living life stress free and easy. As she finished her meal, releasing all of those fish unused, she would ease back upon a grassy knoll overlooking the crystal water where it suddenly transformed into thrashing foam upon obscure rocks below. In her mind's eye she would once again transform the world about her into a scene where a spring girl with dancing locks of golden hair would leap with joy at the sight of her new conquest.

"Mother, mother," the small girl would yell in her direction. "Look, I caught a fish!"

"Oh, John, look, she did catch one! I've never seen her this happy before in my entire life!," said a voice from behind coming from an unseen person.

The small girl would tug on an old cane pole, many times banking a fish that seemed half her own size. Her method of banking fish was truly unique, for she would lift to set the hook, then walk backward with the pole in hand until the struggling trout leaped furiously onto the grass before her small feet.

"Mother, mother, come quick, I've caught another one! Mama, Daddy, come here and look at what I've done!"

Over and over the small piercing voice would rehear itself in fading tones, until only the monotonous chirping of the insects could be heard throughout the contours of the timber stand.

Once again Carol was alone, deserted by the comforting ghost of her now dead past. With every visit

that the ghost made, ecstatic excitement consumed Carol; but this time as with every past visit, it's exit produced a backlash of tears, as did every reason for living that she had so desperately attempted to cling on to.

To prevent her depression from causing herself to regurgitate the contents of her morning meal, Carol arose from her place of rest and proceeded to walk the foot worn trail back toward the cabin door. As she walked along the beaten trail, her mind drifted back to a young boy whom she once knew back in school, who had taken an interest in her company, graciously offering courtship on numerous occasions. The boy was nearing manhood, as evident by the progressive muscular swelling of his chest, and the presence of fine hair inside the crevice of his chest. His voice had already deepened into a distinctly manly tone, but it was only at that time that she had come to notice his body justifying the deep pitch of his voice tone. She could recall how when she spoke in phrases concealing loving overtones, that she would begin to recognize him as being more than *just a boy* but as an object that was destined to develop her into more than *just a girl*.

She recalled being afraid of that thought but remembered how intensely she desired the development.., that reason to become more than just a child. She had long since recognized that all people who call themselves *women*, and were universally recognized as such, only acquired such recognition in the presence of a man, upon whom they had laid a solid claim. More and more she had came to desire this object in her life, and from within the midst of that desire arose a form of attachment that had expressed itself in numerous passionate hugs and kisses, of which she generously gave on a single motivating whim.

Even in the midst of that surging joy lurked a horror with devastating potential. Though she had refused to admit to the fact over and over again, the closer that she became in mind, the farther that he had departed from the grasp of her aching heart. She lunged forth in desperation, tenaciously attempting to seize upon her last chance for acquiring womanhood. Suddenly as the hurt from that tragedy was dying, she awoke one dark dreary rainy morning only to find herself alone, and she had remained alone from that moment forward ...to brave the savage elements of life all on her own. Many times the endless loneliness proved overwhelming, and she concluded that she could no longer live in the company of such hopelessness. She deeply longed for the company of one who really cared, and her mouth parched for the taste of manly lips.

Ahead the trail meandered around the bulk of a massive tulip poplar tree that had long since been gutted by fire, and as a result, was hollow. The prospective volume of it's hollowed area was enough to house four men comfortably; and on many occasions she had envisioned herself as the sole occupant therein, dwelling in complete harmony with nature. She envisioned as she awoke, that scores of cotton tailed bunnies and small fluffy fawns would be there to accompany her on the bank of the frothy gurgling stream as she made her morning bid for bath and refreshment.

The young lady paused before that massive popular, caressing its coarse texture worn ragged by centuries of pelting moisture pellets. The pasty leathery composition of the towering tree's bark caused her to be reminded of flesh, blackened in places and wrinkled by the weight of the ages. Suddenly in the wake of it all, she came to acknowledge that the tree was not an inanimate object at her disposal, but a living, breathing, organism of life. She became humbled as a small child does on the eve of a new discovery in the new surrounding environment. In it's side the great tree possessed a massive gap that had been formed by the actions of past woods fire, and the years.

"This is now the door of my new house," she said out loud to herself.

Usually the tree was void of any surrounding elements, both organic and inorganic, but on this day a truly unique phenomenon had made itself known only to Carol. Within the trees' inside interior, the floor dropped approximately two feet below that of the ground level as a direct result of the huge expanding roots decaying in their uppermost extremities. By some inexplicable means during the course of the past month this area had become flooded, and now a small cesspool filled the cavity to the lower edge of the side gap. The sap from within the veins of the tree, which continuously raises upon

the trees' interior in droplet-like tears, had combined with the crystal clear water inside, producing a sweet aroma highly pleasurable to the sense of smell. The mist of a medicine-like aroma was so intense that it's effect was that of *intoxication*, and the young lady gazed forth into the crystal clearness of the pool as though she were hypnotized by the power of some enchanting spirit within.

There, as she gazed forth into the smooth crystal clear surface of the cesspool, her mind once again began to race. She envisioned a small house sitting snugly in the distant richness of a hardwood timber stand, where peace and eternal tranquility could be found to abide within. No longer would she be forced to flee from daily existence, but she could live and enjoy conquest over all unmerciful confrontations. She saw a boundless meadow full of lush grass and forever shaded by the arms of towering sycamore and wild pear. Upon a small knoll in the meadow's midst sat the young golden girl that she once was, dressed elegantly in an ankle length cotton gown of pink muslin. In the child's arms was a small male doll, upon which she tossed her unrestrained love and affection.

"Now mommy says you are going to grow up and become a great man someday. Yes, how would you like that? Well I think that it would be great! Then, oh then, I could be ever so proud of you, Michael. Why don't you smile for me, Michael? Now that's right!"

The golden girl attempted to stretch the contours of the doll's mouth with her tender right index finger. "You're being bad, Michael. Mommy says smile! NOW!"

The girl raised the doll high above her head, then dashed its head to bits upon a granite slab nearby. She did not mean to destroy the doll, only to punish it. As she gazed down upon the shattered fragments of the doll's head, she began to long for the comfort of its completeness, and company. Helplessly she gazed down on the injured doll, covering her face with both hands as torrents of tears obliterated the world surrounding her.

"I broke Michael's head! I killed him! Oh what will I do now? Help me, help me, somebody!"

The small child uncovered her face, turning in the direction of Carol. Suddenly her tears dried and she sat staring into the face of Carol as if she were fully aware of her presence.

"Can you help me? Mommy? Momma! Please come here, I love you Mamma! Will you bring Michael back to life?"

Carol gasped for air in utter shock, muttering aloud to herself with trembling lips.

"This is not real, this cannot be happening, but it is! I see it before me now!"

"Mommy, please come here. I love you! Mommy!,"cried the golden girl.

Carol muttered again to herself.

"Oh how can this be? How could it be possible for a vision to become living flesh and blood?"

"I love you," cried the golden girl, as Carol attempted to analyze the distorted information that she perceived!

"I am coming sweetheart," said Carol aloud, without realizing it.

The young ladies bare feet came to rest in the lushness of the meadow. She paused, gasping for breath as her tender feet tingled with the freshness of new life that the meadow now hauntingly afforded her. No longer did her limbs tire with the weight of stress. No longer did she worry about the way that she would find her daily bread. She now, at least, had discovered peace, perfect peace with herself and total harmony with her environment. High energy now coursed through her veins as though she had consumed some new form of drug that truly resurrected the lost souls of the eternally damned.

There sat the young girl, her voice was clearly audible, and the light rustle of her cotton gown created a clear impression upon her ear. Her golden hair radiantly danced about in bursts of gentle breeze that only shaded meadows afford. The clearness of her flesh glistened in the gleaming sunlight; surely this child was no mere figment of any vision!

"What is your name, child,?" inquired Carol, attempting to induce the child to speak by offering a soothing smile.

"My name is Carol."

"My name is Carol too, but friends call me Goldie. They call me that because my hair is so blond that

it turns into golden strands in the sunlight, they say."

"That's nice, you have beautiful hair, Goldie. Have you heard the story of Goldilocks and the three bears/, "asked Carol in a loving tone of voice.

"Oh yes, bunches of times! I guess that's where they got my name."

"Where are your parents?," asked Carol.

"They're over there," said the child, pointing toward the hill in the near distance.

Carol turned in the direction of the hill, squinting to allow her eyes to adjust to the distance. The hill crest was shaded by huge drooping oaks that had given shade for hundreds of years. The birds zipped to and fro as though they had found true paradise.

"Where are they, honey? I don't see them."

"They're over there," said Carol, once again pointing toward the hill crest.

Once again a quick glance in that direction revealed only the singing dance of the song birds amid the boughs of huge drooping sycamores and oaks. Two by two they appeared to sit, filling the air to overflowing with the song of their courtship.

"Here honey, let's take your doll to Daddy. Maybe he can fix it. I am no good at repairs."

"Won't you please try? I can't take it to Daddy,"replied the child.

"Why not? I am sure that he will not mind the trouble of helping you."

"No," replied the child with a harsh scornful angry face. "No! No!"

"O.K. Then, we will not take the doll, but I would like to have the pleasure of meeting your Daddy."

"Only if you promise not to mention the doll," snapped the child with a slightly relaxing face.

" Sure, just take me to him. I just want to meet him."

The child seized Carol's left hand, guiding her down a trail of bent grasses where heavy feet had trodden earlier. As they traveled, the child sang a happy ditty to the tune of *Pop Goes The Weasel*.

"My father went into the wood to hunt,

Thought he had a bear,

But oh...it was a beaver!"

"Where on earth did you learn that silly song?," laughed Carol.

"Oh, I like making up rhymes. I got an A in poetry the other week. Ain't I good?," asked the small child.

"Why yes, and a bit unusual I might add as well," laughed Carol.

By now they had reached the hill crest that which was delightfully shaded by numerous oaks and sycamore trees. So sparsely positioned were they that the shaded area from one intersected the other along the area's' edge. A chilly breeze hissed through the leaves in such a manner that it finally filtered through to cool the inhabitants below. The songbirds chirped joyful melodious hymns to the tune of their quest for mates with obscure words that tend to soothe the human mind, inducing sleep and overall relaxation.

"Where are your parents?," inquired Carol to the child.

"Oh, there is a pool on the other side of the hill, that's where they are."

"They sure are awfully quiet if they are down there," said Carol in a muffled tone of voice.

"Oh they are down there all right. Come follow me, I'll show you!"

The hillside below jutted out into a granite overhang that tended to stick out like some sort of huge fingernail. From above one could only view the surrounding area at that point, but indeed a new world did lie below. Centuries of sand and leaves accumulated, cushioning any penetration of sound vibrations, and in this manner, the voices of the child's parents remained obscured from the ear. A foot worn trail led the couple around the overhang, so that they entered into a depression in which the basin was filled with murky water. Upon flat rocks that aligned the water's edge next to the overhang, sat the two parents of the child.

Her father was a man chiseled stern in appearance, his face hardened by years of toil and strife. So heavy were the years' weight upon his face, that his very skin was ruddy with sun and stress, and it

appeared to be well tanned boot leather rather than flesh. His chest was exposed by the release of the uppermost shirt button, was of the same texture, but covered by a thick mat of wiry gray hair. He never offered speech unless spoken to, as if he had distrust any conversation that was offered him.

Her mother was glowing with light, so it appeared to all that met her. She appeared to catch the glory of the golden sunlight, releasing it to anyone that passed her by. Her complexion was extremely fair, as though she had been freshly taken from some distant land covered year round by snow and ice. Her eyes glittered like two sapphire jewels centered with black onyx. The ruby smile radiated forth as though it were produced by some fairy that dwelt in those cheer filled rhymes of Carol's lost childhood. Her countenance , in all of it's beauty, was completed with hair that transformed the yellow beams of sunlight into gold, like that of the small child. Clearly this lady was the child's mother.

"Mother, mother, I've found a new friend!"

"Let me see her child, let me gaze upon her," replied the mother, flashing a glittering smile that appeared to betray the immense warmth and compassion deep inside her soul.

As Carol stood gazing into the woman's eyes, she came to feel as though she had stood before her many times in days now long since passed. As she allowed her eyes to roam the ladies' delicate features, abrupt flashes betrayed the fact that with certainty, she had indeed known this lady somewhere deep in the murky past. In her mind's eye she witnessed the lady playing on the floor with the child who now stood beside her. The lady was not an adult who was indifferent to the child's imagination, but as a mother who delighted in a chance to share in the secret story of a child and the small doll.

"Mother!," Carol screamed at the top of her lungs toward an image that was transmitting a sensation of being more a bizarre mirage than reality.

The lady never answered, only continued to speak to the golden girl, but Carol could not discern the words that issued forth from her moving lips. The lady would only glance in Carol's direction, then turn toward the child, while continually speaking to her in inaudible tones.

"Mother! Please answer me! Do you hear me? Please.., Mother!"

Still the lady continued to speak to the golden girl as though Carol never even existed.

Oh how impolite these people are, she said in the silence of mental voice. She abruptly burst into tears, covering her face with her hands and asking herself if she was still sane.

"What's the matter," inquired the child, tugging hard on Carol's lose shirt tail. "Why are you crying?" "Oh, I don't know. I just don't know! Where are we?"

"We're at the Emerald Horizon, or at least, that's what I've always heard it called," replied the child.

"Emerald Horizon?," Carol gazed into space for a short span. "Sounds so familiar.."

"You've probably heard of it before, that is, if you've ever been on a date! My brother used to come here all the time with his girlfriend. I bet you'll never guess what happened to him."

Carol gazed into space for a brief moment, then replied on a sudden whim. "He was chased off by old man Hamrick who lived from where we just came, just on the other side of the timber stand."

"How did you know? I suppose that you heard all about it too. Everybody else sure has!"

"I don't know...oh yes,...I heard it from a friend."

Carol glanced before them toward the flat rocks where the child's parents were just sitting, which were now empty.

"Where are your parents?"

"Oh, they've already left. They headed toward the house. They usually don't mind me playing alone, just as long as I am home by supper time. I really do enjoy this meadow with the song birds and animals. I come up here lots! Want me to show you the rest of the meadow?"

"Sure!," Carol snapped in reply."

Once again they retraced the foot worn trail from whence they had came. The route uphill produced a great struggle, causing Carol's mind to drift back toward the days of her carefree youth, in which she played amid the trees and shrubs of the woodland. The aromas of savory meals simmering in the obscure distance caused her mind to reflect back to the walnut table upon which she had helped herself

to many meals during the course of her traumatic and cheerful childhood. A smile jerked across her face as she completed the uphill climb; not that she had triumphed in the physical feat, but that the memories themselves had inspired such as everlasting scene deep in her mind's eye.

"Do you see that thick timber stand next to the horizon, right where the trees are the greenest? That's where I live!"

A column of smoke arose from what appeared to be a short distance above a chimney obscured by the greenery of the distant trees. This column of smoke billowed upward in an endless flow to such an extent that it puddled against the skyline of the distant horizon. Within the puddle's center, Carol imagined, was a hole that sucked the column upward so that the puddle would not expand.

"I'll race you!," said the child with a sharp smile and a quick dash.

The child's body zipped and bounded through the waist high grass that flourished in the meadow. For a short distance Carol followed right at her heels, but the age difference between them began to weigh heavy on her. Soon the child was ahead by a hundred yards or more, consistently gaining speed with a new found energy that propelled her forward in sharp, brisk, bursts. Carol panted heavily, she never was an athlete at heart, her wind simply just never sustained her body through the race. Ahead Goldie disappeared into the distant timber stand across the meadow from where she now stood. The leaps and bounds of the young girl were almost animal like, and the weight difference between them..,the weight difference..., oh!

Carol paused in the tall grass, gasping for breath while gazing toward the woodland where the child had disappeared. The wind about her moved in sharp bursts, tossing and licking the golden locks as though they were being fondled by some ghostly lover. This meadow was strangely void of all life sign, not even the birds chirped as they usually did. A well worn trail betrayed the fact that the area had been used on a regular basis. Carol gazed forward in the direction of the smoke column, noting that the trail headed forward in that direction. Maybe this trail will carry me to the house, she thought to herself.

The light of day had already begun to dim into orange as nightfall became more imminent. She picked up the tempo of her pace. As she jogged along, a small branch that lay across the beaten trail snatched her leg with a sudden jolt. Her entire body was suddenly thrown violently upon the cool damp earth, her head striking a very solid object that felt just like a rock, causing a veil of pitch black darkness to settle before her eyes. The thickness of the dark was so boundless that she lost all account of time and space.

Time had passed, she did not know just how much, and as her eyes gingerly opened, they revealed a world of light blurred by a conglomeration of tears. She rubbed her eyes with her index fingers, causing the blurred light to clear. Now she lay beside the vaporous cesspool contained inside the massive tulip poplar tree. A certain tense, dull sensation suddenly gripped the pit of her stomach, and she realized that the terror of her impending loneliness was once again upon her. She picked herself up feeling as though she had not touched a single morsel of food in days.

"Why did I have to return?," she kept saying aloud to herself.

In that world she felt secure, warm with the sensation that only true love has the power to bestow on individuals in want. Over and over again that sensation kept reoccurring, hinting that she had trod down that dusty road before. Deep in the darkest recesses of her past she had rambled through that lush meadow with her bare feet, allowing them to tingle with the sensation of fresh dew that sprinkles the morning grass in the cool of a new summer's' day. She had known the girl before as well, much more than she had ever realized, but she somehow could not recollect the meeting place. Repeatedly her subconscious mind continued to whisper these words into her ear, but simultaneously she had told herself that the she and the golden girl were two separate individuals, unbound by any personal knowledge of each other.

As her eyes beheld the well worn trail glowing with the red clay of the hillside, and she stood gazing through the crisscrossed trees standing tall on the hill crest, once again coming to grips with the cabin that housed that enemy of sanity called *loneliness*, *she* then turned, falling upon her stomach only to

bury her flaxen head in crossed arms, crying. Tears poured from her eyes in a manner not previously experienced since her long lost childhood.

Why must I live like this, she repeated to herself in the silence of mental voice. Is there anything that I can do to end the pain of this despair? Pray, replied her subconscious mind! She then began to unravel a prayer that had been bottled up inside her breast for a period of time that seemed like years. She began to pray aloud.

"Dear God," said she with a sob and a sigh. "Please deliver me from the grips of this insanity. Give me warmth and strength, that I might find a new life. Please whisper the instruction into my wanting ear. Allow me to enter into that promised land of eternity, to live and truly savor happiness once more again. Show me the way Lord, show me the way, please Lord."

She gazed upward into the heavens with it's lights that twinkled in winks in such a way that it caused one to believe that the skies were as one body. She thought of the words that she had spoken and wondered if God really paid any attention to their seriousness.., if he even cared that she hurt so inside.

The grip of despair tightened around her very throat in such a manner that she had difficulty in breathing. In the past, the only remedy that she had made use of that had truly released this tightening despair was the soothing burn of alcohol, but since she did not possess any at the moment, she would now be forced to endure her suffering.., to seek another means of escape.

There comes a time when one must arise to face the real world about them, she told herself in silence. This was to be a time when daydreams prove to be worthless, and dreams in unison are only attributable to childish minds. Why must this be so? Why could not God have allowed adults the means to escape reality from time to time?

"This is not fair," she mumbled aloud to herself. "It isn't fair, Lord!, "she screamed, as if she intended to seek out a vengeance upon the Almighty himself.

She arose and began to plod along in the direction of the cabin on the hill top, *that dungeon of loneliness*, as she called it in silence. The sweet song of the night-bug, the blue sparks of the firefly, all were music that soothed her troubled mind. Her tensed body began to ease like she had taken a medicine as she ambled along beaten trail. As the pressure began to release, even a warm smile discovered it's solace in the evening.

"What's the matter? Did you tire of the race?," said the voice of the golden girl from behind.

Carol snapped around as if she felt massive hands grip her about the tender nerve of her neck line,

"Oh, I'm more cunning than to allow you to catch me simply by turning around, dear."

Carol snapped in the direction of her cabin, then glanced both before her and behind.

"Child, why do you wish to fool around with my mind like this?"

"I am all alone since you left me, just me and my doll. Come and play with us," asked the voice of the golden girl.

Carol's breast heightened it's thumping pace. The night bug's call grew more intense, and her pace quickened into a brisk walk. She glanced over her shoulder and before her as well.

"I can't now. I have things that I am obligated to do, child. Maybe some other time."

"Now you wouldn't want to disappoint me.. PLEASE!"

"Child, I told you.!"

She glanced toward that great tulip poplar tree, which now glowed with the strange sapphire aura. A low pitched voice spoke as a voice of whispering wind rustling amid the new leaves of spring, constantly repeating her name with each burst. She raced toward the cabin door enveloped with the fear that some dreaded ghost from Christmas past might ascend upon her to drain all spiritual vapors from within her fleshly existence. A beckoning sensation gripped her, for she had come to feel that to turn from the call might sever her from the eternal bliss that she had just experienced in the child's company. Her mad dash abruptly halted into a sudden stop.

"Oh that's right," said the voice of the golden girl. "Come to the enchanted cesspool now, or lose me forever! To gaze into it is only to find eternal peace and happiness within. If you should leave now you

shall regret it for the duration of your natural life. Come to me, mother! I love you."

Carol turned to gaze upon that great tulip poplar tree. There by it's side, materialized a small flaxen haired girl adorned in a pink muslin dress, motioning with open arms for Carol to walk in her direction.

"Child, what's the matter?," asked Carol in a distressed tone of voice.

Suddenly the child burst into tears, covering her face as if to shield it from harm's' way.

Carol raced toward the child, seizing her fragile arms, then embracing her with the free arm in order that she might comfort the child's troubled soul. The small tender tear-stained face of the child gazed upward through glittering eyes of crystal sapphire, then her mouth poured forth a potion of words that thoroughly bewitched Carol's already despairing heart.

"I have been a very troubled person. My grades at school were not very good at all, and my Mother deserted me yesterday, saying that I could not contribute to the positive image of the family, so therefore I was of no worth. I have been considering running away! Would you come with us?"

"Who has been advising you to run, child, who? You know that to run from your problems is not the proper thing to do!," said Carol, seizing the child by her shoulders, shaking her as she spoke.

"Christopher Nichols. He's the best friend that I have."

"Who?"

"Christopher Nichols, the Christmas charity leader. Don't you remember him from your childhood," said the child through a steady stream of tears?

Carol paused, the very words that the girl had spoken sent jolts of electrical passionate sensations pouring into her breast. She could still stand back and admire that tall statue of a man. She could still see the moonbeams glitter from the gloss of his jet black hair. She could still see the splendor of his fine body in tuxedo. She could still recall, as a young lady of sixteen, her gazing forth upon the man with an idyllic gaze of total admiration. Carol had always felt that deep inside Chris had always held the same desire for her, but because of their age difference, he inhibited all expression of this forbidden pleasure.

"One day I will be as old as you, and I will come back to marry you," she blushingly recalled saying as a small child of five.

By the age of sixteen she had come to realize that such desires were only for fantasy alone, and fools to pursue. Even so, his ghost still inhabited the darkest recesses of her mind.

"Introduce me to this man," said Carol, gazing into space as though entranced by some magical potion.

"What's the matter?," asked the dear child.

"Nothing, oh nothing, just take me to him!"

The child seized Carol's trembling hand. "Come with me then. He will enjoy seeing a new face."

The pair raced down a small trail that branched off from the tulip poplar tree to its left. The trail was seldom traveled, but the bending of the grass betrayed excursions that had been made at some time during the recent past.

"Where are we headed, Goldie?," demanded Carol. "I have never seen this trail."

"This is the way to where he lives, Carol. Don't you remember?"

The trail wound in and out through the thick entanglement of the surrounding woodland. Periodically, Carol would demand time for a rest, which was usually cut short by the girl's prodding phrase.

"Better hurry, Chris does not wait for ever, he has work to do you know."

Hours passed, Carol did not know how many. The sun still shone from its lofty perch high in the sky, but Carol knew that things were strangely not as they appeared lately.

"Are we there yet," she would ask?

"Yes, it's just around the bend ahead."

The couple raced around the curb of the trail, and suddenly the entanglement opened without warning, exposing the lush meadow where she and the girl first met. Carol took a seat upon a small mound of dirt that encased an oaken root that branched from some unknown source in the timber stand.

"So this is it, huh? I thought that I would never get here. Where is Chris at?"

The reverberating slap of an ax against hardwood sent sharp shocks across an expanse of openness.

"He should be just over that knoll, behind the hickory stand on the other side. I believe that he is preparing to heat his stove for Christmas dinner tomorrow."

Carol stood, brushing the sand from the seat of her faded jeans.

"I have to meet him."

She seized the hand of the child, and the two briskly strode toward the grass covered knoll ahead.

"Mama! Mama! Don't go there, he has work to do! He will get very angry at our rude intrusion!," screamed the child through more tears.

Carol clenched her teeth at the thought of the elements that were attempting to lead her away from this chance of a lifetime. She was predestined to have this gentleman of the range, she thought, why else was she here?

"Hush up now. We're going to visit him, and you had better just like it!" Carol huffed to the child.

As the couple reached the summit of the knoll, Carol's pace quickened into a jog, then a hungry gallop. She released her hold on the golden girl, racing forward as though she had taken some strange pill that gave new strength to her weary limbs. The child turned, then disappeared into the timber stand which swallowed her up like a hungry demon from the underworld.

"Hey there! Hey!," Carol waved her arms frantically as though she were attempting to cause her body to lift from the ground beneath her feet. "Hey, do you remember me? I told you that one day I would grow up and be old enough for you to marry!"

"Carol!"

The man tossed aside his ax and raced forward to offer a wide open-armed greeting.

"Where have you been dear, it's been so long!"

"I've often thought of you in my dreams," said she. "I've always had a special kind of love and adoration for you, Chris."

"Mine is for you, likewise," said he, gazing into her glistening eyes, as he simultaneously brushed her hair with his free right hand.

"You know, I have spent my entire life waiting for this moment," said he. "I hope that we can spend eternity here together, in this very meadow."

She tenderly allowed her warm moist lips to embrace his.

"I want to be with you."

"We can do it, child," said he, placing the palms of his hands against the rosy cheeks of her tender face. "We live in two worlds, but you can make the difference. You were not meant to be mortal forever, but in spirit you can be flesh again in the realm of the metaphysical world. Only a dramatic transformation can make your mind forget the secular world."

"I never said that I wished to remain in the mortal world," she replied as she gazed upward into the man's enrapturing face.

A small bulge remained noticeably protruding from the midst of his velvet vest pocket. His vein-streaked sun browned hands eased into the pocket of his vest, producing a shiny black, pocket sized .38 caliber revolver.

Her mind abruptly flashed back, revealing a small cozy cabin on the hillside, above the winding creek from whence she had gathered her breakfast of fish each morning. Inside the cabin a small girl who was consistently thrown into depression over the negligence of family and friends, crawled for solace under a decorated fir tree. Her tender hand eased underneath the cotton cloth that draped the foot of the tree, producing a shiny black pocket sized .38 caliber revolver.

"Only you can make the difference," The man said to her with a warm beckoning smile. "Come be with me for eternity."

The tender hands raised the revolver upward, causing the cold hard barrel to sink deep into her soft plush temple. The hammer clicked backward seemingly moving all by itself, as if done so by an unseen

phantom hand. A great noise issued., greater than any produced in the history of the entire world, echoing vibrantly throughout the contours of the entire universe. A heavy vaporous cloud of smoke suddenly choked all vision from the eyes and breath from the nostrils.

Into the slightly opened door of the cabin a small burst of evening wind abruptly poured forth, clearing the heavy blue smoke from the room, exposing a now completely opened door to a lush meadow that extended as far as the eye can see. An orange sun gingerly crept downward nearer the horizon.., and in the shimmering horizon distance two figures ambled forward, arm lovingly entangled in arm, into the berth of eternal bliss.