

*Jew.*

last night's heavy ~~front~~. I looked back over my shoulders couple of times, but I could not hear my aunt anywhere in the house. After I finished eating, I washed my plate in the pan of soap water that she had left on the shelf in the kitchen window, then I went back to my room to look over some of my class work. I tried once more to speak to my aunt before leaving, but to avoid me this time she pretended to be making up her bed, which I knew she had already done two hours before. Around eight-thirty I crammed all of my class papers into the satchel and walked up to the school.

Now every little thing irritated me. I caught one of the students trying to figure out a simple multiplication problem on his fingers, and I slashed him hard across the buttocks with ~~my three foot~~ <sup>the</sup> Westcott ruler. He jerked around too fast and looked at me too angrily for my liking. ~~So I thought I should give him more attention.~~

"Your hand," I said.

He held out his right hand, palm up. He still held the piece of chalk.

*Jaw.*

"Put that chalk ~~away~~. I can't afford to break it."

He passed the piece of chalk to his left hand, and held out the right hand to me again. I brought the Westcott down into his palm.

"You figure things out with your brains, not with your finger<sup>s</sup>," I told him.

On the ~~next~~<sup>side</sup> board, one of the students, a girl, wearing a gray gingham dress and a black knit sweater, brown unpolished loafers,<sup>man</sup> stockings that did not match--her head, a forest of about twelve two inch plats, tied tight with short pieces of red ribbon--had written a sentence of six words with a downward slant of nearly a foot.

"And what<sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ that supposed to be?" I asked her.

She was so terrified at hearing my voice, ~~that~~<sup>she</sup> she jerked around to face me, ~~and~~<sup>she</sup> staggered back against the ~~wall~~<sup>board</sup>.

~~She looked at me as though she was just beginning to speak. She stared wild-eyed at me while breathing heavily from the mouth.~~

"Thi, thi, thi, tha, tha, tha, Mr. Wiggins," she stuttered. "Tha, tha, tha, that's a simple sentence, Mr. Wiggins."

"No, that's not a simple sentence," I told her. "That's a slanted sentence. A simple sentence is written on a straight line."

I reached for the piece of chalk, but her hand was shaking so much that it took me a while to get it away from her.

I drew three straight lines from one end of the blackboard to the other.

"Those are straight lines," I said. "Do you see the differnece?"

"Ye, ye, ye, yes sir, M, M, M, Mr. Wiggins," she said, looking at me, and not at the board.

I erased the three lines as well as her slanted sentence.

come in at twelve. I could see the smoke rising from the kitchen chimney of the girl who stuttered, and I knew that she was from a family of twelve, and that she had a pregnant older sister who was not allowed to come back to school but who had to work in the fields with all the others, and that she had an idiot brother, and a tyrant father, and that the father beat the pregnant girl and any other member of the family <sup>the mother included</sup> whenever he was angry, except the idiot, whom he showered with love. I could look at the smoke rising from each chimney or I could look at the <sup>rusted</sup> corrugated tin roof of each house, and I could tell the life that went on in each one of them.

I went back into the yard, all the way into the back to use the boys's toilet. Then I returned to my classes, but instead of coming in through the front door from which I had left, I came in through the back. Most of my students remembered the mood I was in and was hard at work. But one first grader had forgotten or ~~did not remember~~ <sup>did not care,</sup> and he found time to play with a bug or a worm on the sleeve of his sweater. From what I could see from the back door, he would let the insect crawl an inch or two from his elbow toward his hand, then pick it up and return it to the original spot to let it start all over again.

As I came upon him, I looked at my student-teacher to let her know that <sup>not to wear worn</sup> ~~she was not supposed to say a word to him,~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~then~~ <sup>good</sup> when I was in striking distance of his near-shavened head, I brought the Westcott down on his skull loud enough to