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Short Story

4250  
2250

*rough draft*

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*APPROP 2, 250*

Rural Route 2, Box 225

I turned the postcard over, face down, seeing the writing,  
black as sin in the morning sun:

Sun. 1986

Hey Sugar,

Five A.M. in New York, the Big Apple, and I  
just got off from work. Boy, am I tired but having  
a great time! Wish you was here. Write when you  
get the chance and let me know how things is going  
in good old Fargo. Ha!Ha!

Love your sister,  
Judy Lyn

P.S. I guess you noticed I changed the "e" to a "y"  
on my middle name. Kiss Daddy for me. Hope you like  
the picture. It's a real bronze sculpture. Don't  
let anybody see it. Ha!Ha!

I turned it back over to see if it was - was a sculpture -  
and sure enough that's what it said. In my estimation, it  
still wasn't nothing but a naked woman with a see-through  
curtain draped over her privates. Smelled like ~~Evening in~~  
*ripe pears,*  
~~Paris perfume.~~

Mr. Hoke's got his hands full with that one!

All them Fargo girls is pretty, but they'll wear you  
clean out. Ain't none of them can hold a candle to Mr. Hoke's  
girls, <sup>THOUGH.</sup> Can't hardly wait to get out of school and take off.  
I reckon by that time they done had a bait of Okefenokee gators  
bellering at their back doors and cotton-mouth moccasins sun-  
ning on their doorsteps. Looks like they think they got to

make up for coming from the flatwoods: got gold bracelets up to their elbows, and all kinds of fancy frocks and doings.

I wought to know, being the mail carrier in these parts for close to <sup>10</sup> ~~twenty~~ years. <sup>over</sup> ~~over~~ <sup>long</sup> I'm the one brings them their Sears & Roebuck catalogues and stuff for them to order out of when they can't get a ride into Valdosta, ~~fourty~~ miles away. I've had a little first-hand experience, too.

Yessir, it's a plum sight what comes through the mail! I told Ima Jean, I'm glad I got me a wife from Homerville where at least they settle down. Could've ended up with Mr. Hoke's Carmen Sue and had to chase her down in Valdosta for my supper.

Ima Jean's <sup>UGLY</sup> ~~plain~~ as home-made sin, but she can ~~sure~~ cook. Good as they come. I've seen her set and nuss our boy a many a hour out in the night. She'd play the devil trying to nuss him now, big ole fat youngun. I've got to find him something to do to get him out from under her dress tail.

"He ain't big enough, yet," Ima Jean says. "Besides, his eyes ain't good."

My eyes would be bad, too, if I set up in front of that television set, eating pecans, much as he does. But he'll grow out've it, I expect.

"Living halfway betwixt and between, ain't that easy on a growing boy," she always says, like they's something wrong with living between Fargo and Homerville.

I was born and raised here, and it ain't never hurt me. Course I had to work from can to can't, farming for Mr. Hoke,

I got the job cause nobody else  
didn't have the sumption to  
hunt up ~~mail boxes~~ <sup>mail boxes</sup> between chine stiller  
in the pine woods. All you got  
to do is make like you don't  
see nothing.

just to stay on his place. Our shack was down the dirt road apiece from Mr. Hoke's old farmhouse, with the big rooms where the girl younguns kept doubling up on the beds, fast as they come along. Last count I had, they was eight or ten of 'em. And they wadn't hurting none for money. Mr. Hoke sold enough timber ever year to keep 'em in high heels and brassieres.

My own Pa was laid up, half the time, drunk on Billy's Island in the swamp if our old mule couldn't figger out the way home. I heared that old buggy a many a time come rattling across the Swanee River bridge, long about midnight, in the Fifty's.

Got a new bridge, now, stark white over that black water; ain't so much wear and tear on a automobile. Course, we didn't never own one growing up.

Mr. Hoke bought a brand new, red Thunderbird, first'un come out, for that drove of girl younguns to show off in. Wouldn't never let 'em out of Fargo by theirselves, though,, till they got out've school.

The biggest one, Carmen Sue, would drive them back and to, to old man Squire's store for a cold drink and some peanuts to pour in it, hanging around to wait for boys that might happen up out've the flatwoods from hunting. Wadn't all that many come by. Could've counted on my two hands how many of us boys lived there: me and Joe Sapp, Caulie Herndon, Buckshot Herring, Saul Carter. And that was about it!

You think they had ary bit of use for a one of us *in public?*  
Nosir! A pulpwood nigger would've stood a better chance!  
Not to say they'd have had things to do with a nigger. They  
wadn't that kind've gals.

They was well thought of. Went to church reg'lar, ever  
time the doors was open. They'd sing to the top of their lungs,  
showing off their pearly teeth and red lips. Got saved ever  
summer at the traveling tent revival. (I got my own ~~ideas~~ <sup>IDEAS</sup> about  
that)! Ever last one of them had bright blue eyes and ponytails,  
the color of syrup candy.

And I'm here to tell you, they had a temper! When fair  
time rolled around in November, they'd pitch a hissy fit if  
Mr. Hoke didn't lay down what he was doing and take'em to  
Valdosta, <sup>GEORGIA.</sup> He put up with it, too. I'd a wore the flinder  
rackets out of'em!

That's how me and Carmen Sue got to REALLY knowing  
one another. The fair. That's when I found out what they  
all was made out of. I called myself courting her; figgered  
she'd took a shine to me, too, and that was how come she had  
asked me to go. <sup>I'm satisfied</sup> ~~More than likely,~~ old man Hoke had the fore-  
sight to see I'd make something out've myself, seeing as how  
I managed the farm in spite of Pa's sorryness. Could've been  
he just got tired of going year after year and was scared to  
let'em drive that long stretch of back roads from Fargo to  
Valdosta without a man along.

Anyhow, I was just pleased as punch to get to go along with them. I wadn't innerstid in no fair rides! Caulie Herndon couldn't hardly stand it! I got dressed up in my best khaki pants and cleaned up Pa's old leather jacket. Had me a brand new five dollar bill from selling sweet potatoes the week before.

When they come by the house to pick me up that night, I was warming by the fireplace. I ain't never been no colder in all my born days than I was that night, but I thought to my Lord I'd smother to death in that cloud of crinolines and Dentine chewing gum, offer them a piece, and they'd take the whole pack.

They even brung the <sup>LEAST ONES</sup> baby, Judy Len, with'em, and I ended up toting her on my hip over the fair grounds while she smeared cotton candy in my hair. Carmen Sue brung her a big pink stick of it and then took off with some Valdosta boy she'd run up with. And that was the last I seen of her till we started back home.

I said to myself, right then, I wouldn't give no Fargo girl another chance to make a fool out've me, no matter how good looking they was.

Tell you how come me to get the <sup>IDEA</sup> ~~idea~~ Carmen Sue was stuck on me. I ought not to be telling it, but for two summers her and all her sisters had been practicing kissing on me down at the tobacco packhouse. Mr. Hoke had took a notion to learn them how to work, taking off tobacco at a cent a stick. They didn't

hit a lick at a snake! I ended up doing most of it, stopping in between to let'em kiss oneme. Carmen Sue took on like she was plum in love with me.

Them girls was wild! They didn't get out of the car good that night at the fair before they got to hollering and showing out; run off in all directions. Even now and then I'd <sup>CATCH</sup> sight of one of'em throwing darts and making eyes at the man running the games. Or two of'em perched up on the ferris wheel, holding big candy apples, matching their lips and the lights, with a strange boy between them. A poodle skirt would come a flirting by to go back to the booth selling them inscribed broken hearts on a chain, and I'd know it was one of Hoke's crazy gals.

Me and that jumpy youngun just walked around and around and around the fair grounds, looking at the rides and listening to all that racket. You couldn't hear yourself think!

"Little Daddy, bring that baby over here and win her a teddy bear. Two throws for a quarter. The first one's free," that trashy fair man would holler.

I'd shake my head or play like I didn't hear him if he kept on. That was the aggravatinnest bunch I ever seen. Wouldn't take no for an answer. To keep'em from hollering out at me, I finally took'em **up** on it and used up just about ever bit of my money to get that youngun a weaved tube to get her finger stuck in.

I had to set her up on the counter to throw them rings on the bottles, and next thing I knowed she'd done bailed off

the other side and come up a squalling. Everbody there was looking at us, come up close to see what all the racket was about. And that was before the fairman give her that thing-a-ma-jig to get her finger stuck in. Lord and she did set in to bawling, then!

I seen one of them girls come prissing by about that time; and do you think she payed ary bit of mind to her own baby sister? Nosir! She just bounces right off and ducks into the picture booth, pulling the curtain behind her.

I had to give two dollars to the fair man for busting up his game and cutting that thing off the baby's finger and helping me change her britches. I'd stuck the safepin clean through her hide and couldn't figger out why she was still screaming bloody murder. Seems like it was Sue Ellen brung me the diaper, flitting off like a butterfly.

To get to set down a spell and warm up, and try to get that youngun to hush, I spent my last quarter to get in a side show.

I'd got just about easy, setting there on one of them benches with the baby finally satisfied. It was trying to rain outside, and her lil ole fuzzy head was sopping wet. Smelled like clabbered milk.

A dirty old man with excited green eyes come out on the stage just ahead of us and set in to blowing a mouthharp. The baby got to clapping her fat little hands and kicking my knees, couldn't set still for nothing. Kind of like being at home, I expect, cause Fargo folks loves a good hoedown.



Wadn't long, though, before a right good looking woman with long black hair comes sidling out from behind a red curtain with a big slimey snake wrapped around her neck. She gyrated around and cut her eyes at us men - didn't have on nothing but a red and gold speckled rag tied around her waist. The music picked up and pretty soon she got to cutting the buck, that old snakes head darting out at us, not two feet away.

*She was just getting to the good part when*  
That youngun like to tore my clothes off of me! She got loose, and I took out after her, crawling in the sawdust toward the door. My big foot got hung on the bench and turned it over, and two or three big men set in to cussing me. By then the baby had done seen the big snake they was holding up outside to get people to come in; so she turned around and headed back around the inside of the tent, along the edges, squealing like a bee had stung her. The woman on the stage had done quit dancing with the snake and come down to h'olp *US HEM HER* *VP.* *?* ~~out~~. She got to that poor lil ole baby first. Had her hugged up with the snake, and her just a beating at it with her little fists. (I was busy getting everbody off of me for turning their bench *(over)*). The snake and the baby looked like they was square dancing in the woman's black hairy arms, bowing to each *OTHER* and backing off. Finally, the baby scooted down the woman's leg and set out crawling off and out the door.

When I got loose and got out, I seen Sue Ellen, ~~carrying~~ <sup>LUGGING</sup> the baby, coming towards me. She was puffed up like a toady frog.

"You floppy-eared, bug-eyed scandrel, Homer Suggs!" she hollers. "How dare you turnour baby sister loose on the fair grounds? You wait till Daddy hears about this!"

She practi'cly throws the baby at me and sets off again.

By the time I got back up to the front gate, they was all ~~standing, waiting on me, mad as hornets.~~ <sup>RAISING SAND ABOUT THE BABY GETTING LOOSE,</sup>

Wellsir, I'd done had a bait of the fair and them Fargo girls by the time we loaded up to go to the house.

They didn't get the chance to tell their Pa on me; I told on THEM. And that was the last time they went to the fair.

I might tote their letters back and forth for them, but that's it! Anybody wants them ~~crazy~~ <sup>FARGO</sup> gals can have'em, naked pictures and all. I AIN'T GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO HANDLE THEM.

I'm plum satisfied/ with ~~WHAT I GOT~~  
ATHE ONE I GOT!