

Short Story

(They were too old for company manners now; besides, they had none neither.)

~~The~~ "Ashes"

"Unset 'Edeel!" she called. "Edeel, get on up & get a fire going. It's ~~some~~ ^{terrible} cold in the night."

She lay breathlessly listening for the sounds the feet would ~~make~~ ^{lead to the} wind howling & the ~~same~~ ^{same} rain ~~trapping~~ ^{trapping} at her window.

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²⁸⁰
Grit) ~~It was~~ The darkness still lay like a harsh hand on the dawn, but she knew it was dawn by the

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¹⁰⁰
It was dawn. She knew it by the ^{phat} rhythms of her sleep, ~~even~~ ^{although} ~~the~~ ^{hand of} the darkness still ~~felt~~ ^{snuffed} like a ~~lean~~ ^{snuffed} harsh hand. ~~the light~~ ^{the light}

He'd get up now, she thought, knowing that his body ~~felt~~ ^{felt} it also, that his feeble mind ~~felt~~ ^{seized} it. He never did much for her, but he always built fires, roaring fires - sometimes ~~catching~~ ^{causing} a chimney blaze. Then every ~~time~~ ^{time} in Lowell, ~~you~~ ^{you} turned out to ~~scold~~ ^{scold} the fire red pipe, ~~taking~~ ^{taking} a chair from the porch to the yard for her to sit on, patting her shoulder ~~while~~ ^{while} she scolded him. And he would ~~scuff~~ ^{scuff} the dirt & ~~flash~~ ^{flash} her bare-gummed grin, his childish face beaming like the moon.

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¹⁸¹
²⁸⁰
¹⁰⁰
The ~~dark~~ ^{Bubba} ~~ain't~~ got any dab of sense; that's how come ~~to~~ ^{to} up & drink rubbing alcohol. I told him to give him a little shine ~~till~~ ^{till} he could get off'n it. Boy drunk it all hisself. My old man says they named a automobile after him.

"Edsel!" ~~she yelled~~ "You getting up or ain't you?" she yelled, lower than she intended, listening to the raspy loudness of it ~~with~~ ^{under} the rain's ~~clapping~~ ^{Peltin} on the ~~tin~~ roof.

Hope he set out the pots to catch it, she thought, looking at the dark window; it was glazed with the fog her breathing made; so she lifted ~~her~~ ^{her} hand ~~surged~~ ^{scrubbed} it, allowing it to drop back to her side. Getting as bad as the other 'un from the stroke, she thought.

She could see ~~the~~ light now, but it was only the security light at the convenience store next door. No better than no light, not real. Little Miss Ella Gay would soon hurry past to open up. Six o'clock ^{every day,} when she came ~~by~~ ^{by in} ~~her~~ ^{her} ~~man~~ ^{man} ~~trick~~ ^{trick}. The wind lay in like a reply, ~~shuffling~~ ^{shuffling} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~whole~~ ^{whole} ~~window~~ ^{window} with its ~~assured~~ ^{assured} ~~foot~~ ^{foot} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~whole~~ ^{whole} ~~window~~ ^{window}.

Yesterday ^{it think it was,} I was scrubbing for old Miss Lula, me & the younguns. No, Suggie ain't no youngun no more, and ~~done~~ ^{done} gone on to his reward. Drunk that old rubbing alcohol.

"Edsel, you up?" she called, listening for the ~~steps~~ ^{steps} ~~foot~~ ^{foot} in the next room. The ~~shotgun~~ ^{shotgun} ~~house~~ ^{house} ~~creaked~~ ^{creaked} in ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~wind~~ ^{wind} fiercer, the shotgun house creaked like nails pulling.

She thought about her ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~last~~ ^{last} ~~time~~ ^{time} she had seen him in the light. ~~him~~ ^{him} ~~from~~ ^{from} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~ward~~ ^{ward} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~meandering~~ ^{meandering} ~~home~~ ^{home} ~~from~~ ^{from} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~peeping~~ ^{peeping} ~~at~~ ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~dirt~~ ^{dirt} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~face~~ ^{face} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~eyes~~ ^{eyes} ~~over~~ ^{over} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~ash~~ ^{ash} ~~gray~~ ^{gray} ~~eyes~~ ^{eyes} ~~dulled~~ ^{dulled} ~~by~~ ^{by} ~~cataracts~~ ^{cataracts}. He had never

~~A~~ Ash gray beard frosted his ~~heavy~~ face,
and cataracts ~~dimmed~~ ^{filmed} his green eyes like milk skin.

used a cane before. Could he be getting old, she wondered? Remembering the capers of his youth, his ^{capers} ~~antics~~ ^{antics}, she decided not. But time he left women folk alone.

"Edeed, a frost come through ^{in the night} and its freeziny cold!" she come on & git a fire goin'.

Little Miss Ella Fay 'll ~~come~~ a be acom'g to open up ~~in~~ ^{any} minute now, lookin' for me through the window. ~~She~~ ^{He} 'll raise up her ar wane at her, like old always do. He 'll be an' 'up when she comes by, 'll call out ~~to~~ ^{to} her to see if she can check 'em bins. He always takes me to be excused, first thing in the morning, before he ~~see~~ ^{see} off sets out.

A chill stole over her as the cold rushed around the window. Deeper beneath the quilt she snuggled, seeing the patterns of it in her mind - not fancy patterns but ^{square} scraps of ~~clothes~~ ^{Buddha's} & Suggie's old clothes, hand-me-downs from Min Pula's children. Each scrap reminded her

of a day, a moment, a period of their lives that was gone like the spring, but fresh as a ^{resurrected} ~~resurrected~~ jonquil. That blue ~~open~~ blue & brown, bouby & indian, print shirt & flannel, it was, that ~~Abba~~ ^{Abba} had on when he cut his foot ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ two, while he ~~was~~ ^{was} tagged behind Suggie to the river, Suggie never did step on broken bottles. (She was lucky like that. Even found herself an old man that didn't beat her and didn't come back namore.

Had herself a lil ole pinafore of red, it was, she thought, fondly, the ^{memorized} ~~square~~ ^{scrap} ~~made~~ on the quilt. Got the fire bet out 'ere her at school that

day, so I let her quit. She was going on 13 then
and smart as a whip. Dick & me did no book learning
~~nothing~~. ^{Babba} ~~Alvin~~ now he ~~made~~ ^{set} good ~~marks~~ ^{marks} till he
fell off the play slide & broke his collarbone and
Elsel got mad as a hornet. Stuck holes all in ^{it} from
the back side. Said they wash & no use in no seek
for yonguns to fall off'n. Got a belt of lil ole

~~Alvin~~ ^{Babba} too, for getting himself broke up. Took a dog femmel
that time, ~~blasted~~ ^{blasted} his ~~base~~ ^{rare end}. ~~That time~~
Elsel! ^{she} called, hopelessly, allowing the
name to drop like ~~peas~~ ^{peas} in a ~~bucket~~ ^{tray}.

~~As she~~ Turning her head towards the room, she
thought she could make out the ~~wood~~ ^{pit-belled wood} stone with the
crack - seeing the crack in her mind's eye only. ~~she~~
~~and~~ ~~if~~ she strained she could see the table, caked with
grease & crumbs, and the sofa, covered with an
old pink spread. But the ~~dark~~ ^{dark} was as
thick as the wind, & one, filling the space she
breathed until her breath ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~became~~ ^{became} crowded

as her mind, cluttered with memories like the
room's junk. A ~~new~~ ^{new} calendar flapped on
the wall, unseen. 1986. (When did the ~~last~~ ^{year} ~~years~~ ^{years}

^{two decades past} ~~galloped~~ ~~away~~ ~~the~~ ~~40's~~ ~~and~~ ~~20's~~ ~~years~~ ^{years?} ~~years~~ ^{years} Before
they had galloped on a thundering hoover, merging but
separated by events she could pinpoint: ~~at~~ the
time ~~Alvin~~ ^{Babba} slumped bleeding on the floor while the dogs

sniffed him, and the time Suggie jumped in the well, (yelling ^{detached & hollow} "Mamma, Mamma! Help!") as she ~~looked~~ ^{looked} the bucket to her. And then there had been the ~~entire~~ fair when Edsel got drunk & took them all to eat cotton candy & ride the ferris wheel. They had laughed that ~~night~~ ^{evening} seeing the tops of the gables in Lowell for the first time, associating the roots ~~of~~ branches & trunks with the trees, the whole trees seen ~~from above~~ at once. And finally lashing down to the ground (with their stomachs rising in their throats).

She felt the (siddiness) rise in her and smiled. As Edsel ~~got older~~ advanced in years, he pulled his belt ~~tighter~~ tighter on his emaciated wrist ~~until it~~ until it dangled like a tail between his legs.

"Babe, what cha got cooking," he always said, coming in sheepishly. She knew when he had been into mischief by the gleam in his eyes & the way he ~~shook~~ rammed his fists into his pockets, dancing from foot to foot. After his little fell out, he looked like a baby, innocent & ^{chubby} ~~fat~~, creased cheeks ^{reddening} ~~turning~~ like ^{crab} apples.

"Don't tell me you ain't been up to nothing, Edsel Tate. I know you, good as I know myself," she would snap, going on ~~to the stuff~~ ^{to the stuff} cramming the wood in the stove, expecting nothing.

He ~~had~~ never worked regular a day in his life; she ~~had~~ expected that, also. She knew when she married him that he was a loafer. ~~He one told her~~

But she married him any way ^{for something to do,} thinking to change him, but finally forgetting it as she got caught up in work. ~~They managed with her taking in washing & such.~~

Suddenly the room grew lighter & her breathing ~~stilled, ~~and~~ relaxed~~ ^{interceded as} she recognized the familiar wall where the calendar flapped. She could smell the rank ^{presence of} them, her family, herself, like sulfur ~~at~~ Ronald's door.

the only reason in it was Edsel's light above

"Edsel! Edsel!" she shouted, listening with all her strength, ~~held~~ ^{held} breath, a twist of a finger, lay between her hearing, between her inevitable arising,

he had to (eventful)

She jerked her head toward the window straining to see through the gray ~~veil of~~ ^{gray veil of} ~~morning~~ through the wind & rain, ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~has~~ her tortuous companions in the dark. They flung the moss in the vases with an angry zeal, less angry than in the dark unseen, though.

A swift car passed on the highway, only a shard hissing like fire. And walking past, ~~she~~ ^{she} ~~hunched~~ ^{hunched} beneath an umbrella, Miss Elda Lay ~~hastened~~ ^{hastened} toward the show with her eyes ~~peered~~ ^{peered} bearing straight ahead. Edsel's old lady struggled to ~~sit~~ ^{sit} and ~~lifted~~ ^{lifted} ~~her~~ ^{her} ~~made~~ ^{made}

a fist at the window pane, rapping, rapping, knocking, knocking.

Miss Ella Fay walked on without looking ^{to the} left or ~~to the~~ right ~~behind~~ at the white face pressed in the window, like leftover traces of canned Christmas snow,

250
1730

last

Edsel! Edsel!

knock on window, girl passes
without looking - ^{white} face pressed like remnant
of canned Christmas snow