



# CENTER CITY

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OCTOBER 16, 1974

## The Trial of Wm. Peterson

### Part 2

This Mr. Merriweather was almost the exact counterpart of his deceased brother in personal appearance. Remembering that his brother intended to purchase a pocket Bible and pocket map of Arkansas, in passing through Memphis, he enquired of a book merchant if a gentleman had purchased such articles of him some five or six weeks before, who replied, "Yes, Sir, and you are the very man!" Upon being informed of his sad mission, the merchant told him that his brother, or a gentlemen much resembling himself, had called about the time specified and purchased the articles referred to, about three o'clock in the afternoon, and while in the store had remarked that he had visited Memphis *en route* to Arkansas, where he intended purchasing lands, but upon learning that the cholera was raging upon the river, and in a portion of the country through which he intended to pass, he had concluded to return home, that he would start out that evening and go some five miles on his journey home, and postpone his trip Westward until a more auspicious time.

There were several persons in the store at the time of this conversation, some of whom were unknown to the merchant. Upon receiving this information, Mr. Merriweather took the road his brother had taken homeward, and after a ride of six miles he reached the house of Mr. Hammel, the only public house in the vicinity, where he thought it likely his brother had spent the night on his journey toward home. Mr. Hammel, upon inquiry, told him about the time specified—and that on the same night a young man but poorly clad, whose name he did not learn, had spent the night there also. The young man came in, he said, from the direction of Memphis, a short time after

dark, and seemed to be traveling on foot. Upon the trial, Mr. Hammel recognized the prisoner as the same person. He was going toward Hernando, as he said, and from his appearance, was in feeble health. The young man and the deceased had conversed much during the evening, and he had heard the deceased giving the young man much kindly advice. They seemed, however, to be strangers to each other. The next morning the young man arose, paid for his lodging and supper, and left very early before breakfast, going on his way toward Hernando. He seemed to have but little money. When the deceased came down to his breakfast about 7 o'clock, he enquired for the young man, and upon being told that he had gone he expressed some regret, stating that the youth appeared to be frail and feeble, and that he intended to give him a ride during much of the journey to Hernando. The deceased left Mr. Hammel's and took the road toward Hernando immediately after breakfast. The body was afterward found about two miles from Mr. Hammel's, on that road. After getting this information, Mr. Merriweather resumed his journey toward his home in Mississippi. In passing through a village some hundred miles from Memphis, he instituted further inquiry, and was informed that some five weeks before, a young man rode into the village on a fine blood-bay horse, and offered him for sale at much less than he was supposed to be worth. A gentleman present suspected from this and other circumstances that the horse had been stolen, and upon catechising the youth pretty closely, he suddenly put spurs to the horse and galloped him off.

The young man's name was given as William Peterson; and the horse had been sold by him to a gentleman a few miles from the village. Mr. Merriweather then went in quest of the horse,

(continued on the last page)

We'd meet over coffee  
Sarah and me  
in the afternoons  
above the shopkeeper's memorabilia  
hot coffee and black it was  
causing my lips to burn and twitch  
every time  
as most I would drift  
seldom heeding the steam's warning  
seeing it as a predawn mist  
shifting and swirling over a dark lagoon  
way back, hiding in the woods.

Sarah sees coffee all the time  
and dislikes it that much more  
it reminds her of those  
she sees and serves  
who always try to prepare by it  
to be alert for possibilities  
of the day  
as long ago someone instilled  
into their fool heads  
a real place existing  
a place where they belonged  
a place with a secret door  
their name planted clearly  
clearly as a fresh wiped window pane  
or brightly, as a flapping neon  
coca cola sign  
(so they'd recognize that door right off)  
but nobody told the cost, right off  
or the type equipment to carry in quest  
or even that one should be equipped  
or that this special door  
might have thousands of names on it  
not even hinting what would happen when  
they reached that big oak door  
all at the same time  
They wouldn't believe it anyhow  
the coffee's their proof  
that inaugural potion  
it starts 'em to lookin every morning

Sarah never thinks of all that  
what with being inward  
and taking orders and dodging  
tables and chairs and hands  
I sometimes wonder  
if she considers our afternoon company  
during her lunch break  
or when waiting between those gone  
and those to come  
or in her silence

She always sits across  
that converted butcher's table  
She calls it her coffin table, knowing  
it causes me to tremble of a sudden  
enclosing night  
a universe contracting  
her eyes do that to me  
in their silence  
but for what else they do  
I endure their taunting coldness  
(a brightness too bright for contact  
too searching to realize their eclipse)

She looks in wonder as to  
why I have no bills nor fill out  
tax forms, nor vote, nor work  
and behind that look is a look  
that doesn't care  
cause it all doesn't matter to her  
anyhow  
she never looks at my look

Sarah

I sometimes wish her wrath  
to be punished  
for my eyes and their deceit  
they gaze her head to foot  
seeking totally her presence  
longing as a simple worker  
seeking release through lust  
(as seed's inability to mature)  
these moments I despise her  
and despise more her blindness to it  
a deep lust lava rich  
trapped by its reluctance  
and her self-centeredness  
these moments are as hell  
more realized than a Sunday's  
mad thrashing about it

I could go on about her molasses  
browned skin  
or her upkept free floating straw hair  
or her calloused palms with switching lines  
and long crooked stain-tipped fingers  
with nail polish ragged as the contours  
of her nails  
or her pierced ear higher than the other  
or her elegantly knocked knees  
and slightly knocked nose  
but I won't for each would become a  
paragraph and paragraphs are personal  
things which I can tell only her  
from a written distance

But I can share her boredom  
which returns eternal as the mail.  
She doesn't belong here  
is what the boredom tells her  
not on this earth  
it's all too distant or close  
or parked  
so she takes it for what its worth  
and me along with it

William Thornton

I have watched and waited and watched  
for her return from an outing  
with a man  
they hold hands to the door  
(her thinking how silly it is all the while)  
sit on the steps  
sometimes looking up  
sometimes looking down  
sometimes allowing a sun-drenched arm  
to stretch, inching across her  
medium shoulders  
sometimes releasing a lock of hair  
placed behind an ear so to slide along her  
relaxed reclining forehead  
sometimes both going in  
but the next afternoon she's always the same  
unconvinced

Maybe she knows what she's about  
she knows what she's about  
I think I know what she's about  
but will never be sure  
only to take me into her  
and let me dwell there  
to be sure

A morning came with the bus  
loud and pushing  
blandly announcing itself  
starting that way I stopped  
I saw her washed  
and both hands locking belongings  
I cried and did  
out in the open  
where people could see if they wished  
I was not there for them nor here  
for what it mattered  
she was shifting positions  
fixing a new point  
conspiring toward a new circle  
I know the moon held her hand  
pulling her as the tide

It was her duty to move  
I know that  
the day it rained and her  
looking out the window  
with me trying to see what she saw  
she saw her duty  
and I can see now

As the bus pulled west we waved  
she from the universe  
me from the drugstore shadowed edge  
she would never have thought  
that I shared a touch of what she felt  
she would think that impossible  
but we waved and I knew  
what she didn't and never would  
that her duty was here  
with me  
for she will never be understood  
as I understand her  
and only through me  
would she be found  
for only through me  
lay her total reflection  
but she saw only her own  
self-dispensing reflection  
I was her mirror  
which was blocked  
by that impregnable mirror  
which was hers  
her self-imposed duty  
to bear

the Editor:

"...won't 'low  
no easy riders  
here"

With revived fervor over the completion of I-40, CENTER CITY feels obliged to say what no other observers have stated so concisely and reasonably. There is no suitable solution to the completion of that strip of interstate without devastating injustice to one of the oldest, most pleasing, authentic neighborhoods in the City of Memphis.

Who has been mistaken in thinking Overton Park is the primary issue of this 15 year old controversy--the hippos and hyenas did not provide the funds for contesting the expressway's route. It is consistent with American paradox that those from the suburbs who screamed so vehemently for neighborhood schools should so hastily demand the obliteration of a peaceful neighborhood. We have an expressway for those wishing to by-pass Memphis--as I'm sure that is exactly what the suburbanites and Dr. Dunn have in mind: the passing by of Memphis.

Scientists, economists, city planners and legislators have been telling American cities and governmental leaders that progress now lies in efficient mass-transit; could not this \$17.7 million be better spent, along with a portion of the proposed \$12 billion national bill for mass-transit assistance, in up-grading Memphis' deficient transportation system. MTA's marketing study released week before last points up the need for radical improvements of MTA services. It is mass-transit which is at the very heart of the 70's, 80's and 90's dilemma of the American City.

We have heard the parroting and sudden intellectualism about "the minority impeding the greatest good of the majority" from those hardly familiar with the difficulty philosophers like Bentham and Mill had in exacting the "greatest utility." It is asserted here that a prosperous future consists of "neighborhood conservation" and public transport systems.

Those who have barely kicked the mud off their boots are immediately disqualified when they talk as if they could in anyway appreciate a city park or an urban community. One North Mississippi woman in writing to the COMMERCIAL APPEAL suggested a commercial or industrial use for our two large parks so as to rid them of the rapists and muggers. This attitude will be the cancer that consumes this city in isolation, fear, boorishness, and non-cooperation.

It is difficult for us to admit mistakes, and we usually don't; instead, we just either let things die or become even more determined to rid ourselves of opposition--without the bright stars the dull ones appear less dull. The source of Memphis' ills is not busing, crime and sprawl, but these and others arise from an extremely poor community spirit--and by that I don't mean boosterism. The feather in this city's cap nation-wide has been the concerted victory, if brief, over that noise, expensive, belligerent, six lanes of wasteland threatening to further divide a fragmented city.

## THE TRIAL OF WM. PETERSON, CONTINUED

which proved upon inspection to be the noble animal referred to, of his lost brother. The father of Peterson lived not far distant, who is said to be a very respectable and worthy citizen. Mr. Merriweather had confidence in the old man's truth and integrity, and fearing that he might do injustice to the family and to Peterson, by prematurely denouncing him as the murderer, he visited the father and unfolded to him all the circumstances of suspicion by which his son was complicated. The story fell upon the ears of the father and devoted young sisters of Peterson, like the explosion of a bomb shell. The young man had returned home after a long absence, riding the fine horse in question—well dressed and well supplied with money. He had told them that the horse was purchased by him in Holly Springs, at auction, upon the streets. This they believed, and were still in the confidence of affection, hopeful of his innocence, and assured that he would be able to dissipate the cloud of suspicion which enveloped him. Mr. Merriweather informed them of the circumstance of his brother's having purchased a pocket Bible and small map of Arkansas, in Memphis. At this announcement the father was still more startled and wholly subdued, and the sisters in an agony of tears admitted that the brother had brought home and presented to them such articles as Mr. Merriweather described. The little bible and pocket map were at once produced and delivered to Mr. Merriweather, and upon the trial were identified by the merchant as the same that he had sold the deceased. William Peterson was ascertained to be at that time sojourning in the town of Grenada. Mr. Merriweather, accompanied by a few friends, went in search of him.

*(To be continued next week.)*

### *Center City*

First Presbyterian Church  
166 Poplar Avenue  
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

## Announcements

"The Shelby County Penal Farm Volunteer Program Needs Your Help!" The program needs donations of musical instruments, (old, new or inbetween) books, and the time of concerned citizens, to maintain activities designed to improve those men who are incarcerated there. If you can help, in any way, please contact Martin R. Toma, 386-4391, Ext. 78.

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"Meet Me in the Middle", at UT's Randolph Student Alumni Center will hold its luncheon in the auditorium at noon, October 16, and the topic will be "Confessions of a Male Chauvinist Pig."

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MSU

October 18, "Tillie's Punctured Romance"  
Lyceum Film Theatre

October 22, "Camille"

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### CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

*Serving from 11:30 to 1:00*

*First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue*

*PRICE: \$1.25 per serving, including drink*

#### MENU FOR OCTOBER 17 - 25

##### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

*Fried Chicken, rice and gravy, squash and rolls*

##### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

*Roast Beef, whipped potatoes, english peas and rolls*

##### MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

*Country-fried steak, blackeyed peas, creamed corn, corn bread*

##### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22

*Oven-baked chicken, rice and gravy, peas and carrots & rolls*

##### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23

*Spaghetti, cole slaw, and French Bread*

##### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24

*Corned Beef, scalloped cabbage, buttered potatoes, corn bread*

##### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25

*Beef stew, tossed salad, and corn bread*

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*Second-class  
postage paid at  
Memphis, Tennessee*