



## "It was autumn when Mr. Shelby came..."

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~~we got a roomer.~~  
~~the name was~~

It was autumn, when Mr. Stelby came. He was to room with us. Before he moved in we knew his presence was ~~we~~ looked forward to his moving in with great excitement. <sup>our</sup> Roomer; the word ~~was~~ full of <sup>ballooned from the lips</sup> mysterious and powerful and hovered about our heads - silent, separate, pleasantly mysterious. My mother was all ease and satisfaction in discussing his coming.

"You know" she said to her friends "Shelley Robinson. He's been living over there with Miss Della Jones on 13<sup>th</sup> St. But she's too <sup>addled</sup> ~~sick~~ now to keep up." So he's looking for another place."

"Oh yes" the <sup>her friend</sup> women <sup>with the same interest</sup> crowed. "I been wondering how long he <sup>was going to</sup> ~~could~~ stay ~~up~~ there with her." They say she is in a bad way. She don't know who he is half the time."

"Well that crazy nigger she married up with didn't help <sup>her head</sup> none."

"Did you hear what he told folks when he left her?"

"Uh uh. what?"

"~~Said~~ Well he run off with that tartlin Peggy - from Elyria. You know."

"Oh yes, ~~the one~~ One of Oha Shack Bessie's girls?"

"That <sup>the</sup> one. Well somebody asked him why he left a nice good Church woman like Della; for that matter. (You know Della







Kept a good house). Now he said the honest & good real reason was that he couldn't stand that violet water Della used. Said he wanted a woman to smell like a woman. Said Della was just too clean for him."

"OLD Dog. Ain't that nasty?"

"You telling me. What kind of reasoning is that?"

"No Kind. Some men just dogs"

"Is that what fried her brains?"

"Must have helped. But you know none of them girls wasn't too bright. Remember that grinning Hattie? She wasn't never right. And there Auntie Julia <sup>is still</sup> don't do nothing but walk up & down 16<sup>th</sup> Street talking to herself"

"Didn't she get put away?"

" Naw. County wouldn't take her. Said she  
wasn't harming nobody "

"Well she's harassing me. You want something to scare the living shit out of you, you get up at 5:30 in the morning like I do and see that old hag floating by in that bonnet. ~~Remember~~ the ~~best~~ thing in pea-time 'Have Mercy!'"

'Well I hope don't nobody let me room around  
like that when I get senile.' It's a shame"



"What they going to do about Della? Don't she have no people?"

"A sister's coming up from North Carolina to take care of her. I expect she'll <sup>she wants</sup> ~~try to get Della~~ ~~that~~ house of Della's ~~and~~ house."

"Oh. Come on"

"What you want to bet? Shelby said that sister aint seen Della in fifteen years"

"I kinda thought Shelby would marry her one of these days"

"That old woman?"

"Well Shelby aint no chicken." ~~He~~

"No But he aint a buzzard either"

"He ever been married to anybody?"

"No."

"What's he so picky for?"

"He aint picky. You see anything around here you'd marry?"

"Well. No."

"He's just sensible. A steady worker with quiet ways. I hope it works out all right."

"I+ will. How much you charging?"

"5 Dollars a week"

"That will be a big help."

"I'll say"

Mr. Shelby arrived on a Sunday night. He



Frieda and I smelled him to see what we  
should think of him,

He smelled wonderful, <sup>Like trees and food.</sup> ~~and Frieda and I made~~  
~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~men's~~ <sup>men's</sup> cosmetics lemon vanishing cream  
No Nile Dam oil + flecks of sea-saw.

Mr. Shelby smiled ~~at~~ a lot. ~~He had~~  
~~Small~~ even teeth with a ~~big~~ gap in the middle.  
~~A~~ friendly gap

We were not introduced to him - merely  
pointed out. Like - here is the bathroom the  
light switch is ~~here~~, Over here <sup>bro.</sup> - these are  
my kids Frieda + Claudia. He ~~smiled~~ <sup>looked sideways</sup>  
saying nothing + expecting him to say nothing -  
just do nod as he had done at the light switch  
acknowledging our existence. To our surprise he  
Spoke to us.

"Hello there. You must be Greta Garto. And  
you must Sherry Temple"

We giggled. <sup>Even</sup> My father was startled into  
a smile. He names Stock, Mr. Shelby  
~~always~~ <sup>always</sup> address a my sister as G.G. + me as  
Sherry Temple. How could he know

✓ "Want a penny?" He held out a  
shining coin to us. Frieda dropped  
her head, too pleased to answer. I, on the  
~~other hand, always frightened of losing~~  
reached for it. He snapped his thumb +  
forefinger. + it disappeared. Our shadows



poking one finger  
into his pocket looking  
up the back of his  
coat

land with delight, <sup>as</sup> ~~It was a~~  
~~joy~~ the peace fell over him. Of  
happiness is "anticipation with  
certainty" we were happy. ~~But~~ <sup>the car</sup>  
~~would appear~~ But while we waited  
for the car to appear we knew we  
were amusing our parents. ~~At~~  
~~My mother's~~ ~~eyes~~ ~~were~~ ~~soft~~ ~~and~~  
they followed our hands wondering  
over Mr. Shelby's body.

We all loved him. Ever after  
what came later we ~~always~~  
~~remembered~~ there was no  
bitterness in our memory of him.