

Lights and Shadows

Volume 19 *Lights and Shadows* Volume 19

Article 13

1975

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Larry Garland

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Recommended Citation

Garland, L. (1975). Neophyte at Five and a Half. *Lights and Shadows*, 19 (1). Retrieved from <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol19/iss1/13>

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HONORABLE MENTION: SHORT STORY

by Larry Garland

NEOPHYTE AT FIVE AND A HALF

Great globules of dew clung stubbornly to my newly polished shoes as I raced toward the bus. The day so long thought about, talked about, dreamed about, had finally arrived. Innocently, I ran out to meet it.

The focal point of my attention was that bus; all other things became merely peripheral. I remember the eastern sun only because it transformed the yellow bus into sunshine. I remember the dusty road only because of the grumble of the tires as they grated to a stop on the loose dirt and gravel. I remember the dew only because of the way it quivered on the hood of the bus. Most vividly; however, I remember the unique way the door swung open to beckon me inside. Looking up those two or three steps that loomed before me, I stood alone beside that great airgulping noise maker. I took one honeysuckle-deep breath and scurried up to find a seat. I hesitantly traced an imagined letter in the cold, cracked vinyl at my side. At last with growing confidence, I slid over near the window. Then with both hands clasped firmly on the bar across the seat in front of me, I eased forward until my nose just brushed the smooth, cool metal. It smelled of strange, unknown excitement!

Before me was the driver, beyond him was the road. A moment's uneasiness tickled my spine. I spun around in my seat. Behind me, near the back, were some older boys. Beyond them were the massive slabs of dusty, graffiti-infested glass which made up the rear window of the bus. Through the rearranged dust that made a word I could not read, I saw home. The house seemed empty somehow, like a bird's nest in autumn. I looked toward home until a twisted clump of wild plum trees blocked my view. Then I slowly turned back around to face the oncoming road. I now know that the word scrawled on the dusty glass was a prophetic goodbye.