

# White Moccasin



# White Moccasin

**M.B. Goffstein**

Kodaly Books

New York

Copyright © 2008 by M.B. Goffstein. All rights reserved.

To my cousin Mary,

with love



## 2003

Mildred Vikla lived the way we thought the Indians had lived, without a trace.

She would leave, when she died, a few household furnishings, clothes, books, and notebooks.

But she was only fifty-nine and had excellent health insurance thanks to her father's advice to take typing and shorthand after she finished college.

She knew Bernard and Lillian weren't her real parents even before she saw *Crime in the Streets*, where Frankie says, "Don't touch me, don't you ever touch me," and his mother says, "When you was a baby I touched you all over."

Lillian said she had asked at the dime store for a little girl with blond curly hair, and they gave her an Indian.

Mildred grew up thinking she was her Aunt Alvina's illegitimate daughter.

## M.B. Goffstein

By the time she knew it wasn't true she was confirmed in her single life.

She liked buying her own popcorn and eating it at her own pace.

She didn't like discussing movies. She liked letting the characters live in her head.

Antoine Doinel, Antoine Doinel, Antoine Doinel from *Stolen Kisses* was still in there.

•

The phone rang in her small apartment in Excelsior, Minnesota.

“Mildred Mary?”

“Who is this?”

“A voice from your past.”

“Eddie?”

“How are you?”

“I'm sorry about Bea.”

“How did you know?”

“It's in the paper.”

## White Moccasin

“I just opened her safe deposit box. There’s a letter and two manila envelopes for you.”

•

Bea and her sons, Dean and Eddie, moved next door to the Viklas when Mildred and Eddie were nine.

Bea used to sit on her porch holding a wrinkly *Life* magazine.

She liked to fantasize that the Viklas would die and leave Mildred in her care.

•

Bernard received word that his brother Lewis was in the hospital.

Lillian refused to go to Detroit Lakes unless Alvina came to help clean Lewis’ apartment.

“Can Mildred stay with us?” asked Bea.

The great day finally arrived.

Bea showed Mildred her art books.

“They have better fireworks at Excelsior,” Mildred said, on seeing Whistler.

## M.B. Goffstein

Bea opened the Renoir. “See that big dog? Is one of those girls your age?”

“No.”

“Doesn’t your mother look like Mme. Charpentier?”

“No.”

She turned some pages. “Isn’t that a cute little dog?”

“She shouldn’t kiss him on the mouth,” Mildred said.

“You’re going to have my room.” Bea took her upstairs.

“Look!” Mildred said.

She had found Bea’s only treasure, a party favor from a lunch for her cousin Bonita.

Bea held out her hand.

“It’s so cute!” Mildred said.

“We used to say cunning.”

She didn’t like the way Mildred was holding it—and her hands were dirty.

Bea felt wrung out.

## White Moccasin

The boys never acted this way. She just loved them and told them to behave.

She expected more from a girl: sympathy, understanding, even compassion.

She had kept the little cake for twenty years, and it was an antique when she got it.

As Bonnie's best friend and first cousin, she got the plaster cake with white icing and colored candies.

"Can I have it?"

"No."

"Can I play with it while I'm here?"

"No. It's precious to me."

Mildred's tiny nostrils flared.

Bea drove the children to the Buckhorn, anxiously peering out at unfamiliar roads.

They arrived safely and sat in a booth under old license plates and joke cards.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

She let Mildred order shrimp, make a face when she tasted it, and order a hamburger.

She gave them change for the games.

After a game of driving up a dangerous highway, Eddie came back to the booth.

He had Bea's father's square jaw and pink complexion and even wore his hair like him.

Dean had a heart shape face, an olive complexion, and long green eyes. He carried a comb to keep his sleek dark hair slicked back with water.

At eleven, he was shorter and slighter than Eddie.

Eddie wore khakis belted at the waist. Dean's denims rode his slim hips.

Eddie liked shirts with crisp sleeves and collars.

Dean, the sleeves of his white T shirt rolled up over an imaginary pack of cigarettes, was looking after Mildred.

My sons are true gentlemen, Bea thought, her eyes welling with tears.

## White Moccasin

“Mom?” asked Eddie.

She waved her hand at the upside down sea of cigarette smoke.

•

“I’m in Minneapolis,” Eddie said. “When can I see you?”

“How’s Dean?”

“How’s your aunt Alvina?”

“She’s fine. She’s married to Ray Sims.”

“Who dat?”

“He drove the Greyhound bus she took to work!”

•

Mildred waited with Alvina until the bus came into sight. Then Alvina crossed the highway, said hello to the driver, and took a seat a few rows back.

“Going to work at the drugstore?” he called.

“Yah.”

The high-back seat felt luxurious.

“I never see you at the dances over in Spring Park,” the driver called.

## M.B. Goffstein

“I’m not much for dancing.”

“There’s a fellow who plays real good polkas. He’s a real good accordion player!”

Alvina was wearing a white cotton blouse and dark blue skirt.

As they dipped down and flew up the highway past white-and-black guardrails on the left and the Saga Hill grocery on the right, he sang “The Blue Skirt Waltz.”

Old Mrs. Ulrich across the aisle shyly kept time, rubbing a worn white-gloved finger on her purse.

•

Mildred’s mother’s maiden name was Similink, so Mildred had been worried that Ray and Alvina were related.

“Any relation to Cherry Sims?” joked Eddie.

“She’s my cousin.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No, she’s Alvina’s daughter.”

“I don’t believe it!”

“It’s true.”

## White Moccasin

“How’re your parents?”

Bernard had a stroke after lakefront property skyrocketed and he sold their place for \$1,000,000.

“He died, but Lillian’s fine.”

“How’s your uncle Herbie?”

“He’s in California with his family.”

“Are you married?”

“No, are you?”

He said, “There’s money in these envelopes.” He had made a little tear.

“Why would Bea leave me money?”

“She liked you.”

•

Eddie poured more scotch. He estimated there was \$20,000 in the envelopes.

Ever since he had seen his father’s brains splattered by a blast through their living room window, he had been in a fog.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

One night at the lake Bea told him and Dean that her parents disowned her when she married their father.

She had heard from their lawyer that she could be their daughter again if she moved back east and let them adopt him and Dean.

Dean was ready to go.

“Can Bud come?” asked Eddie.

“No.”

“Don’t do it!” he cried.

“I hate this place!” Dean kicked the heel of his motorcycle boot into a tear in the linoleum.

The locals had accepted Bea when she got engaged to the sheriff, Bud Craig.

She never knew that Mary Cay La Rochelle defended her, saying she had an upper class accent.

•

Bea told President Ingebretson that her father, Edmund Witty, was dying.

## White Moccasin

“Go, go,” he said, showing his mettle. “Tell Bobby Brinkma to come and see me.”

Mrs. Ingebretson would understand. She would want him to marry a Witty.

I’m handsome and tweedy enough, he thought, making a wry face and striking a pose.

•

Bea and the boys took a cab to Wold Chamberlin Airport.

She left her engagement ring and keys on the kitchen table.

Forgive me, she said in her note.

Bud returned the ring to Jacobs Jewelers in Minneapolis.

•

Bea started wearing bright colors, had her hair done once a week, and went to Maine every summer.

The house at Minnetonka was a good investment. She rented it out and sold it for \$4,000,000.

•

## M.B. Goffstein

Dean loved New York. Bea thought Eddie could marry a sweet girl and go back to the Midwest someday.

But he was too kind. The least attractive girls caught him.

His daughters from his first and second marriages were Catherine and Victoria.

When his third wife had a girl, he said, “Why don’t you name her Sky High?”

Her name was Isabella, but she was called Sky High.

•

“When are you getting married, Sky High?”

“When I find a sweet boy like my dad,” the tall blond beauty said.

Her half sisters complained, “It’s so unfair, because Isa is a great name.”

The fashion magazines loved her. “Who’s your favorite poet?” they asked, following her around Borders.

“Who’s your boyfriend?”

“This is David Manoogian,” Sky High said. “He’s a great composer. We’re just friends.”

## White Moccasin

Sky High Manoogian! The reporters salivated.

•

Hearing Eddie's voice brought back images from Mildred's childhood.

Your boots above the road

Your green glacier eyes

While paying her bills and cleaning her apartment, she worked on two lines about Dean.

Weekdays she got home at six, bathed, got ready for bed, made herself a sandwich, and worked on her poems. The hours went by in a flash.

As she waited to fall asleep she would work on a problem and solve it.

•

"You look the same," Mildred said.

"You, too. You look great, Mildred."

## **M.B. Goffstein**

He had bought her a briefcase at the Fendi shop in his hotel.

“Someone would be more apt to steal this than the envelopes,” she said.

She plotted her life like a crime, wearing plain but expensive clothes.

Each season, she bought five or six separates at Dayton’s, wore them to work, and gave them to the Salvation Army at the start of the new season.

When a coworker commented that she never wore jewelry, she bought diamond earrings, waited for winter vacation, and had her ears pierced.

Eddie hadn’t touched his steak. He had downed three or four drinks.

“Does Dean drink as much as you?”

“Tell me about yourself. No one’s a secretary anymore. They’re administrative assistants. Are you an administrative assistant?”

“Yes I am,” she said, laughing.

“Aren’t you going to read Bea’s letter? I want to know what it says!”

## White Moccasin

July 6, 1952

Dear Mildred,

You may not remember me by the time you read this. I hope it will be a long time from now, because I want to live a long time.

I hope we will have been friends all these years and that you won't be surprised to hear from my lawyer.

I bet you think I am leaving you a book.

From the time I moved next door to you, I wanted to be of use to you.

What I am giving you belongs to you, but you wouldn't have it if not for me.

This is what I do as a teacher: give people the use of their own gifts.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

When you were nine you saved the life of a mobster. He had a certain courtly charm. But Mildred, gangsters are killers. I hope you stay away from them.

I was watching for him and intercepted him as he limped down your hill.

The money he gave me for you is sealed, dated, and addressed to you.

By the way, I know you took my little cake, but that's okay because you do take the cake!

I like to think you still have it as a souvenir of our friendship.

With love,

Bea Ashton

•

Lewis Vikla's apartment was spotless.

"Don't stay there!" he cried from his bed at the V.A. "Stay at Presidents Lodge!"

## White Moccasin

He was so happy to see Bernard and family that he called and made the arrangements.

Abe and Gertie Washko, the owners, were card sharks like the Viklas.

Their handyman, Joe Le Sueur, told Alvina his real name was Dayton.

His father owned Dayton's Department Store.

He was doing this to show the old man he was responsible enough to inherit his money.

Before he met Alvina, he didn't know if he wanted to be that rich.

He talked to her while taking out the trash, sweeping the floors, and emptying ashtrays.

He showed her repairs he had made that were written up in magazines.

He advised his father about Dayton's, told him to sell sporting goods, and look how that went.

## M.B. Goffstein

It wouldn't have surprised her that he was fired from Dayton's for stealing, but she liked hearing him talk as he went about his sad work, or the sad work he made of it.

The Washkos wanted to adopt him and leave him Presidents Lodge.

See that portrait? The Washkos didn't have that president, so he painted it.

He had replaced fretwork on the Victorian facade. That was hard, he admitted.

He must have thought Bernard was rich, because he said he was leaving and asked Alvina to come with him.

He told her to meet him that night behind the lodge and be prepared not to have it so good.

He stole some carafes.

"I bet he thought they were silver," Gertie Washko said, slapping down the cards.

•

"Alvina, It's for you!"

## White Moccasin

Alvina wiped her hands and went over the stairs to take the receiver.

“Hello?”

“Thanks a lot,” came Joe Le Sueur’s whiny voice. “Why’d you stand me up?”

“I hope you folks had a nice trip home.

“My old junk heap broke down in Wadena and threw a rod near Little Falls.

“The Washkos never paid me for the last three days I worked there.

“I’m in Spring Park,” he relented. “Tell me how to get to your place.”

“That’s okay.”

“I thought we were engaged.”

“No.”

“I need a place to stay.”

“You can’t stay here.”

“Who is it?” asked Mildred.

## M.B. Goffstein

“No one.”

“Why did you say I’m no one? Who’d you say it to? I thought your folks liked me.”

“They don’t.”

“Oh-h, because of the water jugs.

“I’ll see to it that you and your folks never step foot in Dayton’s again.

“Oh!” he cried in a falsetto, “I can’t get a new corset from the foundation department, thanks to Alvina.”

“Well, goodbye,” she said.

“You aren’t seeing him, are you?” Lillian asked, untying her apron.

“No.”

“Where is he?” Bernard asked. “He could be dangerous.”

“He’s just full of hot air. Thanks for doing the dishes, Sis.”

•

That night, Bud saw a shadowy figure from Bea’s front porch.

He slipped outside and found a youth trying to steal Bernard’s Oldsmobile.

## White Moccasin

“Look at that,” Bud said. “You scratched it.”

The Viklas’ back light came on, and Bud saw the boy’s sad clothes, botched haircut and furtive eyes.

“You don’t want to go back to prison, do you?”

“Let’s get you something to eat and somewhere to sleep. Then we can figure out what to do.”

•

Joe ate two salami and pickle sandwiches, drank two Cokes, and slept on clean sheets in Bud’s lockup.

The next morning, Bud made breakfast and they set out for St. Paul.

He said, “If Mr. Dayton really was your father, you’d know his first name.

“If you were half as good as you say you are, you wouldn’t have scratched the Olds.”

He let his words sink in.

“My grandfather wrote that song, ‘Sentimental Journey.’”

“I don’t know if that’s true, but what difference does it make?”

## M.B. Goffstein

“You been humming it. You didn’t know that? Say, you’re a good driver.”

“Thanks.”

They rode past Lake Nokomis and were almost in St. Paul.

“I think we can get you a job right here, and a room across the street.”

“Pearson’s Candy. Holy smokes! You mean it?”

•

While washing the vats, Joe told Franny Delmont about his rich girlfriend at Minnetonka.

Her name was Alvina.

“What’s her last name?”

“Pearsons. Her old man’s one of the brothers who own this place.”

“What color hair does she have?”

Joe knew it was auburn.

“Blonde,” he said.

•

## White Moccasin

“Wheet wheeew,” Franny whistled. “If it isn’t Alvina Pearsons. You’re even prettier than Joe said you were.”

“Thanks, but I’m not Alvina Pearsons.”

“I guess you don’t know Joe Le Sueur.”

“No.”

She stood on the shoulder of the road across from the Ashton’s and next to Forest Lake.

Franny looked in his rearview mirror, backed up, put the car in drive, and aimed it at her.

She knew he wouldn’t hit her, but she couldn’t help running.

It angered him that she didn’t trust him.

He turned the wheel half an inch, accelerated, and hit her hard enough to knock her down.

She got up and made the same mistake of running.

He looked in his rearview, backed up, drove forward, and hit her again.

As he drove off in a huff, she crawled across the highway and lay down in Bea’s driveway.

## M.B. Goffstein

•

“Don’t you ever clean your house?” Bud had asked Bea.

She said, “I’ll just say it. I grew up in a big house with lots of servants.”

He knew her sense of humor by then. “Ha, ha, ha,” he erupted.

“You don’t know the first thing about me! Tommy Ashton ran a freight elevator in one of my father’s buildings.

“My parents had our marriage annulled.

“When I married Louie they disowned me. After he was killed, a judge let me change our name to Ashton because Witty is too well known.”

•

As she was making a left hand turn into her driveway, she saw the girl.

She got out and asked, “Are you all right?”

The girl was unconscious, so she ran in to the house and got Deputy La Rochelle on the phone.

## **White Moccasin**

She went out again and found Bud cradling the girl in his arms, crying, “Jo Ann! Jo Ann!”

She was one of his old girlfriends from Hibbing, and had come to get him back.

•

The new English instructor, Nick Lamartino, went back to Brooklyn for Spring Break.

His father had a dossier on Mildred that Nick had been reading in secret ever since he learned to read.

As a skinny little girl with straight dark hair, her best friend was a goofy looking kid named Eddie Ashton, a son of Louis D.

By a further strange twist of fate, she had saved the life of one of Nick’s relatives.

## **A Little Girl Saved My Life**

Mobster Salvatore Lamartino spoke highly of a young lady who argued in the parking ramp with her father until police

## **M.B. Goffstein**

came and opened the car trunk he was locked in, he said today from his hospital bed.

Severe as Lamartino's injuries are, they cannot dampen his spirit.

"Mobsters are no good, but some police are no good either," he said, citing payoffs that this newspaper will be investigating.

After graduating from Mound High School in 1961, Mildred got a job as a file clerk at the University of Minnesota.

She lived at home and took the Greyhound bus to work.

A photo showed her and a beat named James Francis outside McCosh's bookstore in Dinkytown.

Francis went on to California and returned to New York.

In January 1962, Mildred took a Greyhound to New York.

"This is something I gotta do," she wrote to her parents. "Ciao, bambinos."

## White Moccasin

She stayed there for four months, working as a file clerk at Columbia.

Jimmy didn't have much time for her. He had an "old lady" named Juanita.

What to do, what to do, thought Nick.

"This is Mildred," said a pleasant voice.

"Are you sitting down?" asked Alvina.

"Yes." Mildred was at work, hoping to get a lot done during Spring Break.

"Lillian died in her sleep."

•

Mildred went to work the next morning, and no one knew she had cried half the night.

•

"Someone ought to say that she was beautiful. It wasn't just her features. It was her spirit. To use her own word, she was peppy.

## M.B. Goffstein

“She liked being complimented on her looks, and she loved clothes and jewelry.”

Poor Mildred broke down.

“Sit down,” she heard Cherry tell Ricky Anderson. “You didn’t know her!”

“I can still talk about her!”

Cherry jumped up. “I wish I knew the words to that song, ‘I Enjoy Being a Girl.’”

The mourners laughed, and she led them in singing “America the Beautiful.”

Ricky’s publicist told him to attend. As an actor, he truly felt bereaved.

Leaving the church, Mildred saw a crowd of young people scream in the stars’ faces.

They got in their limo and left, rather than cause another scene.

•

“That was a real fine eulogy,” Bud Craig said, holding Mildred’s arm.

## White Moccasin

“Bea died,” he said in a weak voice. “Do you ever talk to her boys, Dean and Eddie?”

“No,” she said, because Eddie never asked about him.

•

On her first night in Mound, Bea looked at herself in the spotted mirror and decided not to undress.

She opened her bedroom door, crossed the tiny landing, and quietly called, “Dean and Edward?”

She went downstairs and opened the phone book. Really a pamphlet, she thought, dialing.

“Sheriff,” said Bud Craig.

She gave her name and he said, “Didn’t you just move in next door to the Viklas?”

“Yes!”

Small towns are wonderful, she thought, and could have hung up and gone to bed.

“Welcome to Mound.”

## M.B. Goffstein

The implications made her anxious again. She said, “I’d like to talk to you.”

“Five minutes?” he asked.

“I’ll try to keep it short.”

“I’m taking a prisoner to Stillwater. I can be there in five minutes.”

He hoped she wasn’t as strange as she sounded, thinking he didn’t have time to talk to her.

It must be the lake. People on it could sound like they were right in your bedroom.

•

Bud pulled off the highway and walked up the steps.

Bea went to the door and said, “My husband was a gangster.

“I’m a professor at the U. I married him because he was paternal.

“Ya wanna go to school? I’ll pay fa’ ya’ school. He was no worse than my father.

“He just happened to be in the slot machine business.

## White Moccasin

“What concerns me,” she went on, opening the door and letting him in, “is that our neighbors went to a funeral for someone named Lucillano.

“That’s a well known crime name, and she was killed.”

Bud gazed at her through the kindly eyes of a dog as she took two cups from the cupboard, filled a coffee pot with water, and opened a new can of Folgers.

She spooned some in, plunked it on the stove, and turned on the burner.

In the time it took to boil and spew up grounds, she had told Bud her story.

She and her cousin Bonnie, who was also her best friend, were seventeen when they came from New York by train to visit friends in Minneapolis.

One night they let two courtly gentlemen with strange accents pay for their drinks.

“Just leave it,” she said of the mess on the stove. “It’ll dry, no?”

## M.B. Goffstein

“So you don’t have real criminals?” she asked, after he reassured her.

“Just sad sacks and sorry mistakes.”

“Which are you taking to Stillwater?”

“A sad sack who made a sorry mistake.”

Her big laugh boomed out.

“This is a good town,” he pleaded. “Lucille Lucillano’s best friend, Stella, was trying to do something nice for her.

“The kid in my car robbed a bank, and the other poor kid is my deputy.”

“HA! HA!” she laughed again. Bud hoped Alvina would hear her next door.

“Promise you’ll come back and tell me more,” she said, touching his arm.

•

“I liked what you said about Lillian. I wish you would talk at my funeral.”

## White Moccasin

Mildred knew Lillian would have said, He has to be the bride at every wedding.

•

She left Sally Chowen and Dean Brinkma messages that she was taking two more personal days.

“Alvina,” she said, “did I ever save a gangster’s life?”

•

Bernard had a surprise for his family. When they got to downtown Minneapolis, he drove inside a building and stopped beside a little house.

He rolled down his window and a man in the house gave him a ticket.

They drove up a ramp and saw rows of parked cars.

“Go around again,” Lillian said, but Bernard was going up to the second tier.

“Don’t go any higher,” she said.

“I can’t help it!”

He parked on the fifth and highest tier.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

At the elevator, he put their ticket in a slot, hit a handle, and the ticket was stamped “5.”

They rode down to the ground floor and walked over to the auditorium.

When they were in their seats, Bernard bought programs and hot roasted peanuts.

The woman next to Lillian pointed out Patsy Ann Buck’s mother and father, saying, “They live down the block from us in St. Paul.”

Patsy Ann skated on to the ice wearing a powder blue costume, her blond hair in a pageboy.

Her powerful thighs crisscrossing backward, her white shoe skates dazzling the ice, her tiny skirt fluttering over her rear, sometimes flipping up to show matching panties, she went into a spin.

Faster and faster she spun until she was just a blur. She crouched spinning with one leg out.

Still spinning, she started to gain height, raising her arms and spinning more slowly.

## White Moccasin

“I bet you wish you could skate like that,” the neighbor leaned over and said to Mildred.

A man came down the stairs selling dolls on sticks.

“Dad!”

Bernard reached for his wallet.

Her doll had fluorescent pink feathers and a glittery blue top hat. Sawdust, peanut shells, and popcorn littered the floor. Cold air emanated from the rink, and from the rafters came cones of colored light and gay skating music.

Mildred looked adoringly at Alvina’s low bumpy nose and small mahogany color eyes.

A man and girl skated out in Czechoslovakian costumes. The man lifted his partner high above his head, swooped her down, and whirled her above the ice.

Lillian’s eyes sparkled like the spangles on the costumes they wore. None of the girl skaters had the figure she once had.

“Popcorn?” asked Bernard.

“They feed that to pigs,” said Alvina.

## M.B. Goffstein

“I love popcorn,” Mildred said.

“Come skate with me, la, la, la, la,” Lillian trilled along with the music.

When they got to the parking ramp, Bernard consulted his ticket, pressed the elevator button, and up they went.

“EIIIII.”

“EIIIII.”

“The one from Iowa fell!” Alvina said.

“What do you expect?” Lillian asked, getting in front.

Alvina got in back. Both doors closed on the passenger side of Bernard’s Oldsmobile.

“Get in,” he said to Mildred.

“Someone’s in the trunk of that car!”

“No they’re not.”

“EIIIII.”

“Get in!” he yelled.

“No!”

“I said get in!”

## White Moccasin

“Who is it?”

“Who cares!”

“EIIIII.”

Lillian leaned over and rolled down Bernard’s window. “What’s the problem?”

Bernard opened the back door and tried to push Mildred in. He hurt her.

“Stop it!” she screamed.

Lillian got out.

Bernard shouted, “Get in and let’s go!”

“Aaaaagh!” Mildred screamed, hoping Bud would hear her.

But he had parked on the street, and he and Bea and the boys were eating at White Castle.

The police chief roared up the ramp.

“What’s going on?” he asked Bernard.

“She’s just tired.”

The chief said to his sergeant over the squeal of his tires, “I’d hate to hear her when she’s not tired!”

## M.B. Goffstein

“EIIIII.”

“You heard him, Dad!”

“I heard him. I should have let him arrest you.”

Mildred screamed again, and the chief drove back up the ramp.

“What’s going on,” he asked with feigned weariness.

“There’s a man in the trunk of that car!”

The chief loved mobsters. Thanks to them he was living his childhood dream.

“Now what?” he barked.

Alvina’s big bones, dark red hair, and brown eyes reminded the sergeant of an Irish setter who befriended every child in the small town he came from.

“These folks.”

“They have to leave,” the chief said.

Bernard, Lillian, Alvina, and Mildred went back to the car and opened their doors.

“They have to leave the car.”

## White Moccasin

It was 11 p.m. Patsy Ann Buck whirling like a top on the glittering ice was forgotten.

The sergeant asked, "Would you folks mind going out and getting a hamburger or some pie and coffee?"

"Get the works, our treat," the chief said.

This wasn't getting the trunk open. "Go on, now—get!" the chief said.

They got in a cab.

Bernard sat in front with the driver.

•

The officers had reinforcements and a light explosive.

The young sergeant retched when he saw Sally Lamartino's legs encased in cement.

As they hauled him out, he memorized the license of the dark blue Olds before he fainted.

•

## **M.B. Goffstein**

Babe and Julius Mulestine and Shorty Shortino drove up to the fifth tier and saw an Olds parked next to the car Shorty was going to drive to Lake Calhoun.

Julie and Shorty got out, their hands on their pieces.

Babe opened his door, ready to fire over the roof.

The first shot rang out.

Julius and Shorty were killed. Babe was wounded and taken into custody.

The young sergeant lay on the oil-spotted floor.

The chief wanted the cigarette he held to the dying man's lips, so the gallant young man who never smoked used his last breath to take his first puff.

•

At 8 a.m. Bernard called the parking ramp.

"It's the owner of the blue Oldsmobile," the employee told his boss.

"Oh, boy."

## White Moccasin

“Mister, you better come get your car. You already owe sixteen bucks.”

“I’m out in Mound,” Bernard said. “I’ll take the bus.”

“You don’t plan on driving the car back, do you?”

“Sure.”

“You can’t drive that car.”

The boss grabbed the phone.

“Tell me how you can drive with a busted motor, busted windows, and no door on the driver’s side!”

Bernard dialed the police and gave them hell.

“Maybe we can pay for the parking,” the desk sergeant said.

Bernard yelled, “You’ll pay for the whole goddamn thing!”

He called his insurance agent, and Mr. Krantzas took him to Minneapolis.

•

“You don’t want this?” Alvina held up a brown and yellow vase that had been on the living room mantel.

“No, but I wouldn’t mind finding my charm collection.”

## M.B. Goffstein

“Lillian gave it to Cherry—I almost said when she was your age.”

On the floor of Lillian’s closet Mildred found a ball of fluff and crumpled wire.

•

“Alvina and I are collecting these chickens,” she told Bud Craig, taking him out to the porch.

“How many have you got?”

“Eight.” She made one peck his arm. “Do you want to hold him?”

The poppy-seed eyes were glued to a pompon. The beak was the tip of a green cocktail toothpick.

“I wish I could get more for Alvina.” Mildred looked at Bud intently, like a little dog or cat.

“Where is Alvina?”

“I don’t know!”

“Where’re your folks?”

“When I know how many we can get, I’m going to make them each a little bed.”

“You’re such a cute kid. I wish I had a little sister like you.”

## White Moccasin

“You could marry Alvina, and I could live with you.”

•

Bud drove back to the drugstore.

He asked a shrunken Mr. Cohen if he still had Mrs. Lucillano’s lunch plate.

“Sorry, Kenny,” he apologized to the cook as they entered his kitchen.

Cabbage for the next day’s sauerkraut was steaming as Bud searched Lucille’s mashed potatoes.

He didn’t see any meringue, so it looked like Lucille ate it.

He scraped it into the garbage, put the plate in the sink, and said, “There’s nothing wrong with it.”

As Bud rinsed his hands, Ellery Cohen’s craggy face regained its ruddiness.

In his dark blue suit, white shirt, and red tie, he was again tall, dapper, and urbane.

## M.B. Goffstein

He had worked in a drugstore as a boy, learned English from the magazines he baled, and changed his name from Etienne to Ellery to be more American.

“Oh, Sheriff,” called Mrs. Ottie. Bud rushed out without buying a Nut Goodie.

•

It was too cold to play cards on the porch, so Alvina washed and dried the kitchen table and set out four crepe paper baskets of fancy mixed nuts.

Then she went to her room and pulled the shade over the door.

Wearing her mink coat and gold charm bracelet, Mrs. Ottie entered in a cloud of perfume.

Mildred had a little metal clicker. “I can’t talk,” she said. “When I do this once, it means yes. When I do it twice, it means no.”

Stella Hurok drove up in a big pink Cadillac and Bernard thought, “Who says crime doesn’t pay?”

•

## White Moccasin

“Here’s Lillian’s watch and Bernard’s watch and his papers. What are you looking for?”

“Was I adopted?”

“Your real name is Violet Martin. A man gave you to Bernard. You should have heard Lillian scream when he brought you home.

“You had fourteen thousand dollars in your diaper.”

•

Mildred walked to the lectern and said, “Good manners kept World War Two veterans from talking about their service.

“They were like ghosts. I remember being surprised that my dad could spell!

“These ghosts raised angry children who ripped apart the fabric of our lives.

“We can only hope that future generations will be stronger and finer.

“Bud Craig didn’t marry or have children. He was our hero, and yesterday I learned he got a bronze star for gallantry in the Pacific.

## M.B. Goffstein

“He didn’t have the star or the citation, and we may not be able to get a copy of it because the archive in St. Louis burned down.

“It’s on his separation paper, and I will only add, To a kind and handsome man who kept us safe, we say farewell.”

•

Among the papers Alvina gave Mildred was a mounted photo of Bernard on a pony. In it he had curly blond hair.

He was bald the whole time Mildred knew him.

•

Nick Lamartino was writing his doctoral thesis on Robert Lowell.

He wanted to write about White Moccasin but his advisor shot it down because she hadn’t published a book.

Nick’s second proposal, to gather her poems and make a critical edition of them, also got shot down.

Mildred, alias White Moccasin, was Nick’s father’s aunt and Nick’s great aunt.

## White Moccasin

Nick wanted to write poetry. He had read the Prologue and Epilogue to Twayne's Robert Lowell (second edition) so many times, he had memorized some parts.

To be honest, he liked its author, Richard J. Fein, more than he liked Lowell.

Lowell had made fun of his cousin Amy Lowell.

Nick loved "Thompson's Lunch Room—Grand Central Station, Study in White," in *Men, Women, and Ghosts*.

Nick's father had tear sheets of White Moccasin's published poems, starting in the early sixties.

In her tailored clothes and straight salt-and-pepper hair, she was totally unlike his other female relatives.

To use a metaphor from his childhood, their hair looked like it had been peed on.

•

I can help you, said White Moccasin. "What to do, what to do" is your voice. Try,

**M.B. Goffstein**

That's my boy

That's my dad

Ecstatic, Nick went on.

That's all we ever said to each other.

I'm a young English instructor

and he's an old ex-hood

on Sheepshead Bay

Is all we ever said to each other/Is all we said to each other

When I was a kid

On Sheepshead Bay/Growing up on Sheepshead Bay

Which when you think about it

Has an ominous sound.

Leave it, said White Moccasin. You'll get it later.

Ominous sounding,

## White Moccasin

Isn't it?/Ain't it

She was instructing him!

Her clothes were loud

and her hair

looked like someone

Peed on it

Maybe not, said White Moccasin.

She tried too hard

That part's good.

I'm an English instructor

not an expert in these matters/what do I know?

## M.B. Goffstein

He had a poem!

He walked to St. Paul and back over the Washington Avenue  
Bridge, saying, “Yo, Berryman!”

My old man

Is an old ex-hood

My mother’s dead

Her clothes were loud

and her hair was a disaster

Her hair was a disaster

She tried too hard

Her clothes were too loud

Her hair was

a disaster area.

She tried too hard/She tried too hard

to look . . .

## White Moccasin

How did she want to look?

He was exhausted.

He had to write it down, so he could work on it.

He staggered into a bookstore, bought a notebook, went to a pizza place, and wrote,

That's my boy

That's my dad

Is all we ever said to each other

I'm a young English instructor

and he's an old ex-hood

on Sheepshead Bay

Is all we ever said to each other

When I was a kid

On Sheepshead Bay

Which when you think about it

Has an ominous sound.

Sounds ominous,

## M.B. Goffstein

don't it

Her clothes were loud

and her hair

looked like someone

Peed on it

I'm an English instructor

not a beautician

My old man

Is an old ex-hood

My mother's dead

Her clothes were loud

And her hair was a disaster

Her hair was a disaster

She tried too hard

Her clothes were too loud

Her hair was

a disaster area

## White Moccasin

She tried too hard/She tried too hard  
to look  
not to look like a hooker

When you get it right, the words lock into place, said White Moccasin.

•

Mildred was in her apartment planning a vacation around the used bookstores of Seattle.

194 became 190 just before Billings. Driving time was about 24 hours.

She would offer to take Alvina, but Alvina would be bored.

Her message light was blinking. She pressed the button.

•

Nick had cousins who were so dumb they were some kind of genius.

## M.B. Goffstein

If they ever found the file on Mildred, they might harass her, so Nick had put rubber bands around the boxes and taken them to Minneapolis.

•

“I need them boxes, Nicky.”

“I shredded them.”

“I didn’t see no confetti.”

“They must have picked up the garbage.”

“Nah. They don’t pick up.”

“You want the truth?”

“It’s always inaresting.”

“I shredded them here.”

“It ain’t the troot, but it’s inaresting.”

•

Nick read a new copy of his poem, and went on,

My aunts are ugly

My cousins are so dumb

## White Moccasin

they're some kind of genius

In a shoe box

In my father's/old man's closet

Is a copy/lies a copy

Of a birth certificate

And some snapshots

Of a girl

Words started to mean something to me,

And I wondered if Hedy Lamarr

Was a relative.

It didn't matter that the lines were no good. He would get them to the level of "My old man is an old ex-hood" and "Her hair was a disaster area."

•

"Are you sitting down?"

## M.B. Goffstein

“Yes,” Mildred said, pacing.

“Cherry wants me to move to California. I just hate leaving you alone here, kiddo.”

“If you decide to move, someday down the road, I’ll come and help you pack.”

“You took everything you said you wanted. I’m leaving tomorrow morning.”

•

Alvina awoke in the dark. Herbie was sleeping in the little room off the kitchen.

He arrived the night before, wearing his sailor uniform and carrying his ditty bag.

How Lillian had cried and hugged him. How Bernard gripped his hand!

At Mildred’s request, Herbie sat down at the piano and played “Dark Eyes.”

Alvina stole over the stairs to the bathroom and washed up.

## White Moccasin

The gifts he brought were displayed on the living room sofa: a card shuffler for Lillian and Bernard, a Brownie camera for Mildred, and a sterling silver charm bracelet with a sterling silver charm of California for her.

She put on her best dress and black suede flats.

•

Later that morning, Judge and Mrs. Parks saw them at the drugstore.

“Is that her boyfriend?” asked Mrs. Parks. “He sure is good looking.”

The judge knew everything. “He’s her brother. That’s why they’re both Similink.”

•

Mildred rolled her chair back. “I’m leaving now,” she told Sally Chowen.

At night, in motels in North Dakota and Montana, she worked in her notebook.

## M.B. Goffstein

Jingling their charms  
the pretty debutantes  
went in to lunch  
At each place setting  
a miniature  
plaster pastry  
might have pleased  
Queen Mary.  
How cunning they cried  
One girl kept hers  
for twenty years  
till a poor little  
neighbor girl stole it

Carrying some books she had bought, Mildred passed a small shop  
for rent.

The owner or agent was inside, and she indicated she'd like to talk  
to him.

## White Moccasin

•

Mildred left her car in Seattle. When she got to Minneapolis, she called Eddie.

She said, “I have over sixty cartons of poetry books in my storage locker.”

If no one came to the store, she could sell the out-of-print titles on the Internet.

By supporting what she believed in, she had made a good investment.

“Moving to New York was the worst thing that happened to me,” Eddie said.

“Didn’t you like Deerfield?”

“How did you know I went to Deerfield?”

“Pete Hayes was in a class I took at Columbia.”

She had written,

Peter is back

from Bangor, Maine

## M.B. Goffstein

in a new black hat,

Understanding.

“You were in New York?” He didn’t want to believe it. “Why didn’t you call me?”

•

Mildred printed a hundred labels and called UPS.

Her landlord let her break her lease. She had been a model tenant for thirty-five years, and he had a long waiting list.

Dean Brinkma was badly shaken but agreed to let her leave right away.

“Where are you going? Give me your address,” Nick cried in anguish.

Sally Chowen felt sorry for the two men. “You still have me,” she said.

•

Mildred found a blue Mexican clay bird Jimmy Francis had given her, and almost threw it out with his framed passport photo.

## **White Moccasin**

He stared at her solemnly as she recalled one of her poems:

I'm going to see  
an old lady  
with twenty-seven cats  
in a three-storey house  
of antiques  
and odors.  
Goodbye, my dear  
I will see you  
tomorrow.

She found her letter of acceptance from the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa, and the story she submitted:

### **Episode from a Book Begun About Them**

“Hi,” Jimmy said. “Let’s go for a walk.”

## M.B. Goffstein

It was 4 a.m. when Viki dressed and put on her winter coat.

Jimmy came up the block, his dark eyes shining. “Where should we walk?” was his greeting. They hadn’t talked for a week.

They came to the benches on Spring Street, sat down, and looked at the moon. A truck went by. “New York,” sighed Viki.

“This city has changed you already,” worried Jimmy. “Let’s walk some more.”

On Vandam Street he said, “You don’t know most of my friends.”

“No,” said Viki.

“Tom and I may dig fossils in Mexico this summer.”

“Who is Tom?”

“A beautiful cat,” Jimmy replied. “Let’s ride the Staten Island Ferry.”

## White Moccasin

Down the stairs, along came the subway. They sat in silence.

“I went to Coney Island last night,” Viki said.

“Wasn’t it closed?”

“No.”

Up the escalator to wait for the ferry. “Who did you go there with?” asked Jimmy.

“Someone you don’t know.”

“Oh,” said Jimmy. “Who?”

They stayed outside until he got cold. They got coffee and muffins and looked out the window. “That’s the Statue of Liberty!” said Viki.

“I know it,” said Jimmy, and they went upstairs and stood out on the top deck until the ferry docked.

Along a narrow walk they went, out into the street.

A bus went by. “We should get on and explore this island,” said Jimmy.

## M.B. Goffstein

Suddenly he began to smile, leaping up on to a little wall and dancing down. "This is where you should live!" he said. He ran up a hill and came down. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "I want to rent an apartment here. I wonder if they are expensive."

They came to a diner. "Let's have breakfast."

Sliding into the booth across from Viki, Jimmy said, "I want to get married and have a family."

"But you're not ready to now."

"I guess I'm not."

They discussed how a year ago she had rejected Jimmy.

"So now I fear you," he said.

"I wish I could tell you not to, but I am still very dangerous."

A pigeon rode on deck with them. Water slapped the sides of the ferry, and gulls flapped beside her. The new

## White Moccasin

unfinished bridge stood tall. “I want to build bridges,” said Jimmy.

“Then you should,” she said, her head on his shoulder.

They came closer to Manhattan and could see dirt in rings around it. “We breathe that in,” he said sadly.

He pointed out a little gray fort. He opened the gate when the ferry docked.

They walked through the station slowly and stood looking out the window. “Now we should go to the fish market. I wonder if I should drive a taxi. That red building is the army recruiting station, and there is the park I walked in after it was over. It was a year ago,” said Jimmy.

Mildred’s boss at Columbia took her to films by Akira Kurosawa, Jacques Demy, and Jean Renoir.

Pat, who looked like a model, was putting herself through film school.

## M.B. Goffstein

She cooked dinner for Mildred one night, in her tiny galley kitchen up near Columbia.

She told Mildred she could audit any class and encouraged her to take poetry writing.

The professor read her poems and told her to read *The White Pony* and *Greek Lyric Poetry*.

He advised her to go home and get the free education she was entitled to.

He would write to his friend Berryman about her.

Bernard mailed her a ticket. She left from Idlewild. It was her first plane trip.

Jimmy Francis, Pat Fulmer, and Professor Roseboom had been angels set in her path.

Back then there were fewer people, and three angels could have been assigned to her.

Roseboom lost the little poetry notebook she made for him.

It still bothered her that her old poems were out there somewhere.

## White Moccasin

•

“Yeah.”

“Nicky?”

“Yeah.”

“You wuz in the house?”

“I told you.”

“Violetta Lamartino. You know how she’s related to me? She’s Great-aunt Blanche’s daughter.”

“She’s gone.”

“I wuz gonna tell you she bought a bike shop in Seattle.”

“A bike shop?”

“Yeah.”

What’s the name?”

“Augie’s Wheels.”

•

High above Fifth Avenue, Eddie poured himself another scotch. He couldn’t move to Seattle. His wife wouldn’t like it.

Sky High would want to go, too.

## M.B. Goffstein

He and Mildred were partners in a bookstore called Boiled Rice.

Wouldn't Fried Rice be better?

•

"I hear you rented it. What's it gonna be?"

"I don't feel so good. Just a tall cappuccino."

Ed Raven realized he was taking Augie to Starbucks. "What kind of shop is it going to be?"

"Oh say, I didn't mean to make you treat me! It's a poetry bookshop."

"So the wheels will still be turning."

"Don't tell me you like poetry!"

"I do," Ed said after awhile. "Who's renting it?"

"A woman from Minneapolis. Certain people have been asking about her.

"I was going to give you a heads up, and now it turns out you like poetry."

Ed wasn't doing much since he retired from the police force.

"What does she look like?" he asked. He was also a widower.

## White Moccasin

“There’s nothin’ wrong with her. How come you like poetry?”

Chief Raven thought for a while. “I like thin books. Want a croissant? I feel like you did me a good turn.”

•

Mildred’s furnished apartment looked out on the Pacific Ocean.

She hung up her clothes and, opening her notebook at the blond wood table, wrote:

Boats, boats

Poets in boats

Baby poets

Rocking

Angry poets

Rowing

Serene poets

Floating

Old poets cry,

No shore!

## M.B. Goffstein

•

Boiled Rice Mountain had freshly sanded floors and new steel bookcases.

Mildred was taping a handwritten sign to the window when a gray-haired Native American knocked on the door.

“Good name,” he said. “On Boiled Rice Mountain I met Tu Fu wearing a big sun hat.”

She sold him her copy of *Walking to Namba*, but wouldn't let him see what else was in the cartons.

Laughing at some comment he made, she locked the door after him.

## The Future

When Mildred Vikla died, having made a claim for brief immortality with her much anthologized poem, “Boats, Boats,” most of the gang from Mound was in heaven.

Her mother, Lillian, asked, “Why didn’t you leave the bookshop to Herbie’s grandkids?”

“Sky High was my partner for twenty-five years!”

“I didn’t know you liked poetry.”

“I never saw you pick up a magazine, much less a book,” Mildred retorted.

Suddenly “Non-Existence yielding to Existence” [*Dream of the Red Chamber*, tr. Chi-Chen Wang], Lillian was gone, leaving a brightly lit trail.

“It’s not so simple,” Bernard kept saying. It’s not as simple as it looks.

“There’s a man here looking for a woman who he says had a big bomba.

“He said he used to drive a big bomba, so I got the picture.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

“The police chief who shot up my car had a big bomba. Here you don’t see a big bomba.

“You see with the heart, not with eyes.”

Everyone was a soul, a spirit, a colored glow with a little light in its center.

Xillions burst and were gone.

It was like the ocean. There was no ceremony, no punishment, no judgment.

There was no recourse when a light went out.

There was no pain, no pity for a feeble light with very little gas. New lights flicked on.

Lillian was back in a flash.

She had been born, grown up, gone to college, majored in English Literature, veered into late 20th-century art history, earned her doctorate with a thesis on the sculpture of Daisy Summerfield, and had the honor of cataloging Summerfield’s papers at Princeton.

Lillian’s writing was lively for an academic.

## The Little Notebook

Describing Summerfield's last year in Mound, she referred to her as "the glamorous eighth grader."

In one sealed carton she found valuable old ceramics, bronzes, and dime-store junk collected by Summerfield.

Summerfield's favorite books included *The Hurricane of 1938 on Eastern Long Island* by Ernest S. Clowes, Bridgehampton, 1939, and *Blonde Like Me* by Natalia Ilyin, New York 2000.

They ranged from *Geraldine Belinda Marybelle Scott* by Marguerite Henry, pictures by Gladys Rourke Blackwood, New York 1942, to *And I Shall Dwell Among Them* by Neil Folberg, New York 1995.

*She Sells Seashells* by Veronica Parker Johns, New York, 1968, inscribed, "To Daisy, who always buys the little ones," opened to a passage lightly marked in pencil:

I remembered a perfectly darling girl, an anthropologist, who comes to the shop once a year to buy little cowries. These will be gifts for her hostesses, the older women in the African villages she will visit on a field trip. The

## **M.B. Goffstein**

women played games with them, she told me, rolling a specified number of them out onto the earth, then making up stories plotted in accordance with the way the shells lay.

“Sometimes,” she said, “they come remarkably close to the truth.” This sounded much more like soothsaying than game playing to me, though I suppose the scientific mind does not recognize the difference.

“Like reading tea leaves?” I asked.

“Something like it, but it’s a happy thing.”

This and many editions of the novels of Henry James seemed to prove the young doctor’s thesis that Summerfield had a strong interest in narrative.

Among the papers, she liked a 1953 news clipping congratulating Summerfield on winning a state-wide drawing contest for the Minnesota State Bird, the goldfinch.

She also liked a manually typed letter from Pocket Books, dated June 22, 1954:

## The Little Notebook

Dear Miss Summerfield,

Your letter written to Jim Kjelgaard, the author of BIG RED, has been forwarded to us by the Teen-Age Book Club as we are the publishers of Comet Books.

We agree with you that the illustrations of the Irish Settlers could have been very much better, and we appreciate your taking the trouble to write to us of your opinion. Unfortunately, we are no longer publishing Comet Books, so the chance that BIG RED will be reprinted is highly unlikely.

Thank you for your interest,

[signed]

A manuscript book of early poems by White Moccasin (Mildred M. Vikla) opened new avenues to scholars.

And Lillian—or Sonia, as she was called—was thrilled by a slam book made by Summerfield c. 1996.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

It was a new primary source for Alan and Daphne Kodaly, Jack Katz, Lulu King, and other art world figures.

In Vikla's papers at Cambridge, Sonia found a brown spiral notebook, 8 1/2" by 7", written in purple ink in a well-developed backhand.

Summerfield had tried several handwriting styles in her youth. Could it be?

We were leaving for the airport at six! Somehow we got ready, and somehow we got into the cab, and to the airport. There we checked our baggage. We were only 35 pounds overweight! Then our flight was called, and we went into our plane, a stratocruiser. We sat there for at least half an hour before the signs went on and the men began to turn the propellers. Then our huge plane began taking off on the runway. We were going to Chicago and from there we would board a super constellation and make a non stop trip to Miami. The trip to Chicago was uneventful. We were

## The Little Notebook

flying 12,000 feet above ground and our plane had a 14,000 horsepower motor. But our trip to Miami was different! Our non stop flight became a one stop flight, and we landed in Atlanta, Georgia. From there we took the first plane we could get, a DC 4, that wasn't pressurized. My ears hurt terribly and neither chewing gum nor cotton helped. So after that terrible trip everyone was very relieved and happy when we made our last bumpy landing in Miami Beach! We checked our baggage, only to find that one suitcase had been left behind in Atlanta, and would be here tomorrow.

Today we visited the glass blowers. Their demonstration was very interesting! Bohemian glass blowing is handed down through the family from generation to generation. You can either be born, or marry into a family of glass blowers. There are no books or lessons on the art of glass blowing, so I'm very disappointed in my father and grandfather for not being glass blowers! They make all their objects over a small fire. If

## M.B. Goffstein

the object is taken from the fire before it is finished, it will  
break!

“Excellent!” said “M.M.” in a sharp blue pencil on the last page.

But this vacation assignment had been written by Paula Nathanson,  
whose grandparents sold their summer home to Bernard Vikla.

The Osgood and Paula N. Conrad Bequest at the MoMA included  
three Summerfields: a limestone Witness, “Gettysburg,” and two  
Dwellings, “Haunted Room with Blue and Black Plastic and Metal Chair  
and Rusty Dotted-Swiss Curtain,” and “Sandstone Ark with Cotton  
Curtain (Red Flowers on Turquoise Ground) and Maroon and Blue Velvet  
Covered Stones.”

One night after working at the Widener, Sonia was hit by a car,  
leaving her parents, husband, and child.

Her singleness of purpose had made her careless in stepping off a  
curb that snowy night.

She was back with more stories.

## The Little Notebook

Heaven is where they come from, for those who spend their time  
on earth listening and writing them down.

Mildred heard the original of her poem, "Boats, boats."

It went,

Live in boat

die in boat

no one knows

spirit boat

or,

Living boats

dying boats

No one knows

spirit boats

## **M.B. Goffstein**

Speaking of Mound, there was so much buzz about Sheriff Bud Craig, a book could be written about him.

When Eddie Ashton lived in Mound, he got an A- for writing this:

Our sheriff is kind to criminals. He washes and irons them himself.

His teacher wrote, "Don't you mean the second-hand clothes he collects for them, Edward?"

He says if you look sharp you feel sharp and then you can be sharp.

I think he is better than minsters ["Spelling!"] who say what their best friend God wants.

"An excellent, thoughtful paper," Miss Helbig wrote. "Bud Craig is kind to everyone, not just criminals."

•

## The Little Notebook

Clutching the handrail, Bea slowly went downstairs, carrying sheets and a nightgown.

She had given Mildred her bedroom and was going to sleep on the sofa.

“Is everything all right?” Bud Craig called through the screen. “You were gone a couple of hours.”

She wearily let him in, and they sat on the porch and looked across the lake.

“I tried to show her some of my art books,” she said.

“Oh-h, oh-h,” they heard.

“Is that an owl?” she asked.

“No.”

“Oh-h, Brian.”

“I thought they said Tu whit tu whoo.”

They laughed, embarrassed by the sounds that seemed so close.

“Do you have a flashlight?” Bud asked, knowing that if she did, she would never find it.

## M.B. Goffstein

He went down to his car, came back up, and went down the hill and all the way to the lake, thinking, Damn that deputy of mine.

When he got to the shore he could just make out a boat being rowed away.

•

The next morning he drove to the drugstore and parked his cruiser.

“It’s okay,” a pretty girl called to him from the perfume counter, “I got over you.”

Everyone could hear her!

“Elsa, I didn’t see you.”

“Thanks a lot!”

“How are your folks?”

He used to see them regularly when he dated her.

Laughter coming from the soda fountain made him cross the aisle and look over the top of the magazine rack.

Ivy Iverson’s face was flushed with excitement.

## The Little Notebook

Stella Hurok was humped up on a stool, her skinny little legs dangling, her big face alive with interest.

Bunny Lasker, as bald and dented as a celluloid doll, said, “You’re only young once.”

The door opened and Brian La Rochelle came in.

Bud took him back outside and said, “I’ll only say this once. Oh-h, Bri-an.”

“What?”

“Weren’t you on West Arm last night?”

“No, I helped my mom clean the garage!”

Mrs. La Rochelle walked out of the dime store.

“Ask her,” he said.

Bud put out his hand, gave Brian’s a shake, and took him back inside.

He said, “Brian wasn’t on the lake last night.”

Bud sipped his coffee, thinking, I know that was Mary Catherine’s voice.

## M.B. Goffstein

Brian, timidly blowing on his coffee, knew someone committed a crime and the criminal looked like him.

He put a nickel on the counter and left.

Bud stayed where he was and soon had the pleasure of seeing Bea and Mildred.

Mildred climbed up on the stool next to him.

He said, "I hear you had an art lesson."

"Art lesson?" She contorted her little face.

"I thought Bea—Mrs. Ashton—was showing you some of her books."

"She's going to get me a comic."

"She's so nice."

"I might get an *Archie Annual*."

"Don't do that," Bud said. "They cost twenty-five cents!"

"I know, but they're funny. Did you hear Mary Catherine Ottie pretend to be kissing Deputy La Rochelle last night?"

•

## The Little Notebook

An article about Bea appeared on page one of the *Mound Sentinel* under a huge grotesque photo.

Bud cut his out, put it in a frame from the drugstore, and kissed it every night.

He used to look at her with the kindly eyes of a dog, the devoted eyes of a dog, and the adoring eyes of a dog.

Now he had a dog's hungry eyes.

She couldn't go to her kitchen without finding him at the door.

"Bea," he said through the screen, "I have to talk to you."

•

"Lucky Strike" and "Gumball" did a good job of sanding and painting the old rowboat Bernard had given them.

One of the oarlocks was loose, so they bought larger screws and made it tight.

They oiled the mechanism that held the anchor. For their birthdays, Bea bought them life vests and an outboard motor.

They rode all around West Arm, including Jennings Bay, where hidden from sight, Dean smoked.

## **M.B. Goffstein**

They begged Bea to let them go to Forest Lake.

She said they could, if they turned off the motor and rowed through the channel.

“You don’t have to,” Eddie explained. “You just go real slow.”

“You can do that when you’ve had more practice.”

So they rowed past the Viklas’ and around the point.

It was quiet under the bridge. Smelly green water lapped the cement sides.

They emerged into Forest Lake and brought in their oars.

Dean stepped to the back of the boat, wound the rope, pulled, rewound it, pulled, rewound it, pulled, it caught, and they were off!

They saw trees, lawns, and houses. They saw Marie Krantzas’s mother pinning wash on a line.

Next they wanted to go to Hart’s Cafe. They showed it to Bea on the map, at the far end of Wayzata Bay.

“How about Curly’s?” suggested Bud.

Bea looked angry, and he said, “All the kids use boats.”

## **The Little Notebook**

Bud talked to Bernard, and “Potato Chip,” tied into an orange life vest with a dollar in her pocket, was allowed to go with them.

“There’s something doing between him and Mrs. Ashton,” Bernard said.

Lillian’s eyes flashed and her small mouth crimped. Bea didn’t even wear lipstick!

•

Eddie and Mildred reached for a post, grabbed one, and held on as Dean climbed out.

He tied the boat to a post.

When Curly took their order they told him about a Cris Craft riding very low in the water.

Curly told the water warden, and mobster Sally Lamartino was buried on dry land.

•

## **Drugstore Owner Weds Miss Elsa from Gifts**

•

## M.B. Goffstein

One Saturday night, Elsa's mother excused herself and went to answer the phone.

Coming back to the living room, she told Bud, "It's Elsa. She wants to speak to you."

"Oh, Bud," Elsa sobbed, "Ellery's dead."

Speeding back to Mound, he wondered if she had married Mr. Cohen for his money.

He parked in front of the drugstore next to the ambulance from Spring Park.

"Heart attack," Doc Colby said. "It was only a matter of time."

•

"Someone has to go and get her."

"She'll come on the train with the coffin. "Oh, how Etienne worked!" Etta cried.

"You'll miss him," said Ida.

"Why should I miss him? When did I ever get to see him?"

"Won't he be buried with Helen?"

## The Little Notebook

“She’s with her family in Minneapolis. He’ll be here with us. Now I’ll get to see him.

“Help me with the letter. Kindly buy Sherry a ticket for the train,” she said, writing rapidly. “Tell the conductor to see that she gets off in St. Louis.”

•

“I didn’t know Sherry was adopted!”

“Helen was seventy-six when she died,” Ellery’s attorney, Leonard Zion, told Elsa.

“You figure it out. Funny how she looks like him. You bury him where you want, young lady.”

•

Judge Parks decreed Sherry would live with her stepmother.

“You sent Laura to camp in Minnesota,” Etta accused her sister-in-law.

“So now I’ll know better.”

“What about Sherry’s real father?”

“The sheriff? Poo, poo, poo!”

## M.B. Goffstein

•

Traveling back from the funeral, the two women raved about Elsa.

“What a doll!”

You begin writing a novel by placing two fragments together.

As you find, clean, assemble, put aside, and reassemble fragments, a generation passes.

Suddenly the man who is looking for the woman with the big bomba says, “Here’s my missus!”

He is accompanied by a merry orange glow.