The letter came in the mail on Tuesday with a big red smiley-face and HAVE A HAPPY DAY THE R.V. DIBSONS stamped on the back of the envelope. I made an involuntary noise in my throat and opened it. It said: “Dear Ali,”
(a contraction from Alice, my real name, which Mrs. Dibson feels is too formal), “Hi! The five of us were just saying tonight at dinner, why, David and Ali haven’t been over for just ‘eons!’ We’d love to have you over sometime soon! How about this Saturday thirty-ish?? Maybe Davey could ‘finalize’ it by phone?? We’ll be waiting! Love and kisses,
Davey’s Auntie Do.”

Saturday evening, “six-ish” I sat waiting for David to pick me up. Not eagerly, just ready. The idea of going didn’t thrill me, but these social functions were funny in their own way. David’s relatives especially, but these social functions were funny in a way I could help her mother. To Joanne’s right across from me (so that we could gaze into each other’s eyes I suppose), and John, whom everyone always referred to as “the baby of the family,” sat next to David, also near the kitchen so she could help her mother. To Joanne’s right sat Robert, who reminded me of one of the seven dwarves with his red face and flappy ears. He was married to Joanne. I had to constantly remind myself of that, and the fact that someday they might have their own family, because they were always here, even a few times when David and I dropped in unexpectedly. Not only that, they struck me as being too childish or naive to be married, or at least Joanne did. She still called her father “Snoopy” (or more like “shnoopy”) and talked baby talk to her brother John who was eighteen. Robert just took it all in and acted grown up.

Well, anyway, I found my seat next to Robert (and consequently around the corner from Uncle Roger). David sat across from me (so that we could gaze into each other’s eyes I suppose), and John, whom everyone always referred to as “the baby of the family,” sat next to David.

Dinner was much like the other dinners we had had here. Uncle Roger teased, and Auntie Do winked. “Come with us,” she said after the last pot had been returned to its proper corner and every spot whisked away from her Antique Gold stove.

I followed them to a bedroom at the end of the hall and they looked around the room for some clues and saw nothing but a bed with a flowery satin spread, a dresser and four ghostly mauve walls. “It sounds suspicious,” I said.

“Well,” said Joanne, looking as though she had a speech prepared, “we know you and Dave don’t have much, well, money, and...well...Mother and I decided that if you wanted to you could wear my dress.

“Your dress for what?” But they didn’t need to answer. Out of the closet came a shiny white wedding gown, and two beaming faces stood on either side to accompany it. I bit the inside of my mouth. “David and I haven’t made any plans to...”

“I think it will look just lovely on you Ali!” Auntie Do wasn’t listening, of course. She could see me wearing it already in her mind, complete with a bouquet of sprayed carnations I’m sure. I tried again.

“We’re not even thinking of...”

(Continued, p. 6)

FOOTNOTE
This year’s Fine Arts material was chosen by Dr. Stan Wiersma who was on campus a few weeks ago. Both first place items, Rebecca Peter’s story “The Encounter” and Bonnie Kuipers’ poem “The Last Birth” appeared in our last issue. This issue contains the runners-up: “Saturday Evening Out” placed second; “A Walk down the Block” third from the stories. Among the poems “Trilogy” was second and “The Garden” third. The other material deserves Honorable Mention.-ed.
A Walk Down The Block

As the bus pulled into Baronn View, Mary Anther had the oddest and most distinct sensation that she had never left this town of her childhood days. Back in New York she had read of the terrible, burning drought and the stunted crops but the drought had somehow seemed too far away.

"The land is a sterile waste," the newspapers said. But to Mary, the year she was 15 was the worst the drought had ever been. The people in New York did not know that, however, nor did they care. Most of them had never seen an Iowa cornfield, they did not understand the stark and awful tragedy of a field full of dying, half ripened stalks of corn, or what it did to the pride of the farmer. They could not see how the sun was sometimes a merciless god and the land a willing sacrifice, because they themselves had never gotten away from the city long enough to find out. But Mary remembered—even the pleas and prayers for rain that had gone unanswered in the old brick church.

The people's attitude had been one of extreme sadness and despair, Mary reflected. It was not as if they had been reduced to a diet of soybean soup and potatoes, but the loss of thousands of dollars in terms of bushels per acre of corn dealt a damaging blow to the spirit of competition between the farmers. In truth, they were all equal now and the people complained bitterly when the drought did not touch the entire state. It seemed that the Almighty had decided to shut up his crystal water fountains and move to a more favorable community.

"The land is a sterile waste," Mary said to herself as she looked out the window at the men leaning idly against the country store. It was as if, in the saying of it, the words took on a deeper significance for her.

When Mary stepped off the bus on the edge of town, the first thing she saw was not the Fructus O'Ferre Cemetery sign but the sun, glaring with an intense red, almost bronze-white light, in an otherwise perfectly calm and medium blue sky. She closed her eyes and saw little red suns chasing each other up and down in a crazy, dizzy "W" shaped pattern across the strange blackness. But the red flashing sensation was soon gone and Mary's eyes adjusted rapidly to the noon day glare.

Mary looked at the sign again and and the letters of Fructus O'Ferre came sharply into focus. It was the name of the man who had donated the land for the cemetery—a rich, fat, balding little man who sat on his riches the way a hen sat on her eggs. He fit her image of him the way a drawing fits a pouch and he was, it was rumored, just as tight.

Nothing was allowed to "go to seed" in this cemetery. The caretaker had an impeccable taste when it came to chasing the cemetery by herself. As her father had always had a way with words. He was short and to the point and the people complained bitterly when the drought did not touch the entire state. It seemed that the Almighty had decided to shut up his crystal water fountains and move to a more favorable community.

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Nothing was allowed to "go to seed" in this cemetery. The caretaker had an impeccable taste when it came to choosing flower and shrub arrangements and the lawn was the greenest it could possibly be for nine months of the year. There may not have been one drop of water in the whole town but there was always water for the cemetery, Fructus had the money and Fructus bought the water. It simply would not do to have a poorly kept cemetery. That would not even be respect for the dead but would reflect on the townspeople. It was the custom.

Mary sighed. No, Baronn View had not changed very much. Not even its observance of Memorial Day. Even now she could see from the sidewalk that many tourists were strolling casually among the gravestones as if they were guests at a picnic.

When tourists passed through Baronn View they were usually on their way to the famous Grotto of Redemption, a Catholic shrine made entirely out of rocks and stones of many different colors and sizes. Fourth of July picnics formed in her mind at the thought and she remembered the artificial red, white and blue crepe paper flowers that were thrown into the crowd by Miss Independence, before the mayor gave his annual opening address dealing with the town's gratitude for America's religious freedom, political freedom, and civic responsibility that the townspeople were all to exhibit. The people responded well with cheers and claps and then the Rev. A. J. Anther was called up to the platform from the crowd to deliver the closing prayer.

It was a good prayer and Mary reflected that her father had always had a way with words. He was short and to the point and he was, she just realized now, the pinnacle of the town's people's beliefs, the beacon of the townspeople's faith. He was short and to the point and he was, she just realized now, the pinnacle of the town's people's beliefs, the beacon of the townspeople's faith.

Through the fence, Mary noticed the tourists' Memorial Day ritual of placing artificial flowers on the graves. It was a typically tourist thing to do simply because artificial flowers on the graves. It was a typically tourist thing to do simply because artificial flowers on the graves. It was a typically tourist thing to do simply because artificial flowers on the graves.

She remembered her father explaining it to her the year she was 10. It was the first time that she had ever seen inside the cemetery by herself. As her father had explained to her they were paying their respects to all the veterans who had died in the wars and to the people who had died in Baronn View.

"Father, why didn't we bring any flowers like the other people?"

Mary gazed curiously about and noticed all the Memorial Day strangers. They were tourists on their way to the Grotto, her father had said.

"Bringing flowers is a sentimental waste of your time and money," her father added, nodding towards a tourist. "They don't understand the true value of love. It's not in the deed but in the seed. If you don't understand the sacrifice they made,"

and he pointed to the grave of a soldier, "then you won't have the right kind of love to bring a

"Oh," she said, not understanding. They looked at a few stones and she guessed she was bored because that was when the silly, childish game began.

"Father, how did he die?" she wanted to know, pointing at a large and rather prominent gravestone. "How did he die, Father? Was it poison, or was it suicide?"

A pause for a breath, and then the game went on. "Or was it—liverwurst!"

The very idea of the hated liverwurst killing off someone plunged Mary into helpless giggles and shouts of laughter. Mary remembered the laughter, and the hand that with one sharp, swift slap, had cut it off.

"Father!"

"No one, and I repeat no one, laughs at death. It was said sternly and coldly so that Mary would understand that people do not laugh in cemeteries."

"But Father, the people are dead. They can't hear me.."

The unfairness of the slap made Mary cringe inside.

And now that she thought about it, it was the laugh and the slap that she remembered more than the thrill of being with her father. Why had they both not understood?

The whole thing was one of those small tragedies in life that you never think much about when you are actually living through it. But later, when you had the time, and the years to think on it, the understanding came, and with it, the pain. You listened to the pain because it had happened and you had felt it, but that was all. Life simply went on as the well worn chicle so aptly put it.

Lost in her thoughts, Mary opened the wire gate mechanically. She went in, forgetting the other people until she heard a deep voice intone irately behind her, "Where shall I put these flowers, Margaret?"

"I don't know, Steve, anywhere I guess." sighed the woman called Margaret. "Does it matter really? I mean, it's not like we have to know the person, do we?"

There was a slight pause.

"I should think the most important thing would be that we remembered, and stopped."

"Well, if you don't make up your mind pretty soon, then I'm going," he said. The impatience he felt for Margaret's slowness was all too apparent.

"Ha," said Margaret scornfully, "That's

—Sandy Van Den Berg

CREATION

Born on the potter's wheel—
it dances to His tune—
summer skies and sun
were on His mind
and He could find
no other way to express it.
It should bring you joy
to know you were created
from the swiftness of His hands,
and you are the smile
on a child's face,
having the strength
of a mountain stream
falling over itself
in an imaginary race—you are a separate sun.

—Bonnie Kuipers

(con't p.3)
"Surely God's Grace is big enough to cover Mrs. O'Toole."

"Of course He does," he snapped impatiently.

"Then Father, I don't see your point." She put the mixer on low for one last minute to make sure that the peaks were stiff enough. "Surely God's grace is big enough to cover Mrs. O'Toole if it is big enough to cover me."

The eggs were whipped now and Mary glanced outside at the brick of the old church. It was almost suppertime. The clock on the wall ticked loudly in the silence. She was thinking about how new and wonderful a kind you gave when you understood the sacrifice, knowing you would get nothing back in return. Her father interrupted her and it seemed to her in the silence that his words came out like a worm inching its slow way over an upright razor blade, into her heart.

"I'm older and wiser than you are, my dear, and I've seen a great deal more of the world than you have. Stop and think before you talk, Mary. Only a very naive person would say what you have just said."

She turned then from her cake, pouring out through her eyes the full intensity of her bitterness.

"And whose fault is it, may I ask, that I happen to live here in this town, and that you will not let me associate with the one heathen here who is 'the world.' I'd rather be Mrs. O'Toole's friend and go to hell with her if I must, than burn in your sterile hell here."

Mary ran from the room crying. She had thought the words that had come from her heart and now there was nothing left to say. She had only wanted to be free, to love the way God loved her. But something had gone wrong in the saying of it. It was one thing to love those who didn't know the truth. It was quite another to love those who did. The difficulty lay in doing both. Lost in her thoughts, Mary did not hear the woman until she spoke directly at her elbow.

"Excuse me, but is it alright if I put my flowers here?"

Mary looked up. It was the woman called Margaret.

She looked curiously at Mary and then spoke, pointing at the gravestone. "How did he die?" And then noticing the tears, "I presume you are a relative?"

"He was taking a walk down the block."

Mary replied mechanically, "when a drunken teenager hit him from behind. He might have lived, you know, but he had a heart condition, and the shock killed him."

"What a tragedy!" murmured the woman. "What a waste," she said, her eyes taking in the freshly watered grass and the exquisite flower arrangements around the gravestones. She held her handkerchief to her eyes and dabbed lightly.

"Well, here," the woman offered. She laid on the grave of the Rev. A.J. Anther a bouquet of perfectly formed, luscious, pale pink, plastic flowers, and then walked away.

But, Mary thought, she had not told the woman the greatest tragedy of all. Her father had died with a copy of her now famous short story, "The Heart of a Living Flower," in his hands. He had been on the way, her mother said, to Mrs O'Toole's house on Beacon Street.

""Why would you say that?" he demanded. "Why, father, why, she begged to the heavens."

It wasn't that she really hadn't known what she was saying at the time. It was just that she had to say those words. She wanted so to experience all of life. At the same time she also sensed it was her responsibility to make people think about life. The words would not go away. She had tried but when she did not get the words down on paper she was like a prisoner caught in her own jail.

Mary felt the tears even before she knew that she was really crying. So many years...why, father, why, why, why, she begged to the heavens.

"The image of her father in his angry gravestone plot. Why wouldn't you let me stay?"

She had tried but when she did not get the words down on paper she was like a prisoner caught in her own jail. The image of her father in his angry righteousness rose sharply to her mind. His voice echoed in the kitchen like a bolt of lightning splitting a tree in half.

"So, now you're hanging around with prostitutes, is the story I've been hearing from all my parishioners."

She was referring to Mrs. O'toole, a recent widow, and by the town's definition, one of "loose morals." But that was not the only thing wrong with her. When it came to church her performance left much to be desired, not having attended a single service since the first time she had attended 5 years ago.

"And where have you left the nuns in your story? At the Grotto of Redemption?"

His voice couldn't have been more sarcastic. He would have sworn that Mary had heard the woman until she spoke directly at her elbow.

"I'm sorry, Father."

"You're sorry, you say. Is that all? You should be spasming!"

Mary, the townspeople are laughing. They're hinting that I know how to preach a good sermon but I don't know how to control my own daughter."

Mary said nothing.

"Well, what do you have to say for yourself?"

He took a step forward.

She had made sure that the eggs were all beaten together and now they stood in stiff little peaks when she lifted the beater out of the bowl.

"Father, does God love me?"

Her father was purpling with rage at the idiotic question of his fifteen year old daughter who ought to have known better.
I stopped our battered pickup at the field where my husband Dave and son Rag were working. It was a fresh May afternoon, the sun lightly toasting me but the air still cool enough to give goose bumps. The fields being planted with corn and soybeans were still dark brown, but the oats and hay fields were a fuzzy green.

When the men were working in the fields I always brought them a lunch about three or four o’clock, and it was like a picnic for me, I’d bring a blanket and we’d sit in the ditch along the gravel road. Being outdoors always made me feel clean and I like to feel a part of the work.

They were planting corn that day. Rog would go over the ground with the disk first, the circular blades chopping the ground into fine little pieces. Dave would follow with the planter on which four V-shaped pieces of metal pushed four straight, even grooves in the ground. Small seeds would drop from tubes into the grooves, and when the last piece of the planter covered the seeds again. The men stopped at the end of the rows and walked toward me.

Dave had on his baggy blue jeans, Co-op feed cap and an old, white, short-sleeved Sunday shirt. No matter how often the kids would tease him about how awful he looked he still wouldn’t give up his uniform. His face is so familiar to me it is hard to describe, a harrowed forehead, rough, weather-worn skin, square face and two white, new looking pieces of skin where his hair is receding. Rag looks a lot rougher. weather-worn skin, square face and hard to describe, a furrowed forehead, uniform. His face is so familiar to me it’s hard to describe, a furrowed forehead, but he’s taller, about six feet two and none of their husbands are farmers, over when he was just wiggled right out of it and while he was doing that, out popped another little pig! It wasn’t at all unusual, unti there were nine of them and they all got cleaned off on the straw and started suckling on the sow, just like they’d been there all the time.

It took Dave a second to realize what Rog had done. When he did, he shook his head with a look of disbelief on his face. “But I’ve always figured on you taking over when I retire. All the girls are married and none of their husbands are farmers, they can’t take over. What happened? When did you change your mind? I thought you wanted to follow me.”

Sometimes Dave gets carried away by his love for the earth and plants. That was one of those times, “Do you realize what you’ll be missing? Working outdoors all the time, planting the seeds and watching them change from a dead little kernel into a tall green cornstalk. And harvesting in the fall, watching that bright yellow corn come pouring out of the picker into the wagon, seeing so many miracles in just a few short seasons. How can you pass it up?”

There was a look of amazement on Rog’s face as he watched his dad talk. “I didn’t realize how much it all means to you dad. But that can’t change my mind. Even if you do love it so deeply, that doesn’t automatically mean I can feel the same way. That’s almost the same way I feel about animals. And farming is so much work with machinery, and that’s something I don’t like at all.”

He hadn’t always felt that way about machinery. When he was six, it was “I’m big enough Dad, let me drive please.” Dave would let Rog sit on his lap and steer while he shirted, but stuck to his rule of not letting Rog drive alone until the summer he turned nine.

Late in that summer the men were chopping corn into silage for cattle feed that winter. Rog had come home to help haul the loads of silage from the field. They would dump the silage onto a pile behind the corncrib. It took about two days for them to finish by our place. The second day one of the men couldn’t come because his cattle had broken down a fence and were all over his fields, so he had to spend the day looking for them. Dave wanted to get done that day so he let Rog drive the tractor that packed the silage down. Rog would use the rectangular pile, packing all the chopped up corn close together so it wouldn’t blow away or spoil easily.

When I went to tell Rog to come to the house for lunch that afternoon, I was shocked to see how tall he had become. It was dangerous work because the tractor’s outside wheel had to come within a foot of the edge. If the wheel slipped over the side, the tractor would roll and could easily pin Rog.

At the kitchen table I asked Dave, “Don’t you think Rog should quit? The pile is getting so high!”

Glancing across the table at Rog, Dave answered, “You worry too much Jen, he’s big enough. Aren’t you Rog?” Rog nodded his head violently in agreement.

I was still worried when they went back outdoors and kept looking out of the window toward the corncrib, even though I couldn’t see the pile behind it. I noticed one of the men come on the yard with a load and watched it go out of sight behind the crib. Suddenly he came running back into view, his heavy work boots moving as fast as he could make them. I wanted to run and hide because I didn’t want to hear what he was going to say, but I forced my legs to carry me outdoors to meet him. He came puffing up and gasped, “The tractor rolled and Rog’s leg was pinned!”

Frantically, I tried to remember what I had learned in a first aid course I had taken. The only thing that came to my mind was “Keep the victim warm to prevent shock.” Hurrying to the house I grabbed the aftershave and ran to Rog, shouting over my shoulder to call an ambulance.

When I reached Rog, I felt completely helpless. One of the big back wheels had his entire right leg pinned and he was lying face down on the ground. He had his head turned to one side, and Rog’s leg down by him and covered the small part of him that I could.

“I’m going to be okay, ain’t I mom? Dad’s going to be so mad at me, I got too close to the edge,” Rog whispered to me.

I smiled at him, “Sure, you’ll be all right, just don’t worry. And dad won’t be mad. Lie there quiet, and everything will be okay.”

He made it through that experience with just one break on the top part of his leg and it healed quickly. But it was a long time before he would go near a tractor after that.

Dave was glaring at Rog, now he spoke again. “You’ve had machinery every place you work. And how will you pay for college? I can’t help. You haven’t been getting very good grades. College is hard, and you don’t know how you study, and you never have. You won’t be able to make it.”

“Dad, I’ve been saving money from the calves I’ve raised and sold. Maybe I can find work at college, and otherwise I’ll just have to borrow it. I know it’ll be hard but it’s what I want and you can’t change my mind.” That finished the subject for Rog (cont., p. 5).
TRIOLOGY

Words
Words, like any other paint job
drop, round in ceremony, down
tense and shiverfull of promise
amoebas on the waiting book
then in stupid dribbles slither off
across a barren page, a human soul.

Words, like any other art form
can never tell it all at all.

Words Again
Without our toehold on
the floating rumor that
He’d sanctify a syllable
we might as well
drop dead
(stillborn, past walls of silent air).

The Last Word
lies hidden
and still open
floating deep, deep
and deeply sure
among the souls
of men.

—Ag Vander Wal

UNTITLED!

Bird on the free wind—
I will not be caught
is the sound
burnt into
every grass moving,
every tree branch twitch
that scrapes hard
across the morning sky.

—Bonnie Kuipers

THE GARDEN

At eight
the whole world
is a playground,
and in the big elm trees
there lurks (look hard)
a mission control
for our trip to mars
(the vegetable garden)
So jump on the swing set—
I mean super duper
two seat
shiny red spaceship—
and take off,
Fill-er-up on the moon,
sandbox fuel ain’t too dear.

Moon creature! Here!
Dumb kid nex door,
give me a hand.
Too bad vader seen,
live,
the first landing on mars,
and our rock and plant
collecting expedition
in his garden
because . . .

two brave spacemen
have this strange new disease,
“k l p op de echterwerk.”

—John Suk

Seasons, cont . . .

and he stared right back at Dave with his
mouth set in a hard, straight line.

Rising, Dave walked angrily back to the
tractor. Rog shrugged his shoulders and
followed.

It was about a month ago that Rog left
for school. He went the morning before
school started because he had about a
hundred and fifty miles to travel and he
wanted to meet his roommate and look
around before classes started. Dave and I
stood close together by the fender of Rog’s
old Chev. We’ve never known how to say
good-bye. It was kind of chilly standing
there without coats on in the cool, fall
weather.

Rog opened the car door. “Well, ‘bye
mom. See you at Thanksgiving.”

“Be good, Rog. And write sometime.”

Dave was looking down at the ground.
Rog glanced at him, then looked at me
with those deep blue eyes and a quivering
smile, got in the car and drove off the yard.

“I have to go finish the chores.” Dave
said to me quietly and turned, walking
towards the barn. His shoulders were
sagging a little more than usual and his
steps were slow. The leaves on the tree by
the barn were already starting to fall,
leaving only the bare, dark branches.
Looking up at the grey sky, threatening
rain, I called after Dave, “Next thing you
know it’ll be snowing again.”

The Vision

—Bill Huisken
Encased in liquid glass

dripped
from the sky,
Frail fern, bent bough
imprisoned
to prism the sun's captured beam.
To step would shatter that

crystal quality.
Yet
to free that fettered flash
let it fly
clean, collected
would be an act that children
dare not;

magi
would not.
—Kim Logterman

CLOWN ALLEY

I stood inside a circus tent
and smelled the roaring crowd.
Balloons were flat and money spent.
The lonely cried aloud.
The trapeze artists spent their time
in washing out their rights.
The two-faced man made two-faced rhymes
while tourists snapped the sights.
The clowns stood sad and water-soaked
The lions paced and fussed.
The sweep, who never lost his hope,
wiped bleachers free of dust.

And high above a snowy dove

carved spirals in the air
and cooed the Big Top full of love

but no one seemed to care.

—Mimi Ernest

Saturday, cont...

But Auntie Do and Joanne were happily
chatting together for the moment,
removing the hanger with the utmost care
and shaping the veil which meanwhile had
also come out of the closet. Down came the
zipper of the white dress, down came the
zipper of my green dress. I didn't feel like
arguing so I submitted, figuring it would
be more of a hassle to get out of it then to
go along with it.

In a moment my green dress lay neatly
across the bed and the white one was on its
way over my head. I thought absurdly, this
is the first time since I was five years old
that I had help getting dressed.

Then it was on. It was about five inches
too short everywhere and my brown suede
shoes and green stockings stuck out
underneath. Too much, I thought, and
felt it. I looked even more bridish. They tried to
shape in the least. She was pushing and
understatement. But Auntie Do wasn't
next to the closet door.

"It's kinda small," Joanne said. An
understatement. But Auntie Do wasn't
phased in the least. She was pushing and
yanking at the zipper to make it go up. I
pushed my ribs out as far as I could but
after a considerable bit of trouble she got it
up anyway. Then she stood back to get a
more objective look at it.

"How about if you step out of your
shoes." This, she must have reasoned,
would make the dress longer and wider.
She looked thoughtful for a moment, then
her face lit up.

"You know what you can do," she said.
"I know a store in town where they have
the most lovely lace. Now, you could
lengthen the dress by adding a panel of
lace to the bottom."

"Yeah!" Joanne was pleased; they both
were. "It does look so nice on you Alice," she
added.

"Hm-hm," I agreed, but I knew it
looked ridiculous.

"And you could do the same thing with
the sleeves," continued Auntie Do who was
now holding up my arm. "You could get
another panel and slip it into the middle
like a band all the way around."

Yes, that would make it longer alright.
"Does it feel comfy?" Joanne asked.
Comfortable! I thought that had nothing to do
with it.

"It's pretty tight," I told them.
Auntie Do knew exactly what to do.
"You can get some of the same lace and
make panels along the side." She looked
around and picked up the veil. "Here, let's
try this now."

It was one made of stiff net that looked
like someone had tried to cut it with a saw.
I looked even more bridish. They tried to
get me to squeeze my feet into Joanne's tiny
satin pumps but I told them I had blisters
on my feet so would rather not.

We all stood quiet for a moment
studying my ridiculous image in the
mirror; at least I thought it was ridiculous.

Joanne broke the silence,

"Well we just wanted you to know you
are welcome to wear it if you want to. It
would save you so much money."

"You're very thoughtful," I said, and
felt a little awkward. "But like I said before, David and I aren't getting
married." Now I felt embarrassed dressed
the way I was. I took the veil off.

"If it's because of money, Alice," Auntie
Do said almost in a whisper, "David's
Uncle Roger and I are in a position to
help." She would not back down: we were
going to get married and we did need money.

"Thank you," I said. "I'll remember
that." And I started the struggle to get out
of the dress. In a few moments I looked
like my plain old self again and felt tired
and ready to go home.

In the living room Uncle Roger, Robert
and David sat watching TV. David gave
me an odd look and I returned one which
meant I would explain later. Then he
announced that he was on a health kick
and wanted to get to bed before ten-thirty.
That was baloney but they all thought it
was marvellous. He had a knack for
thinking of appropriate excuses.

So we left the Dibson family in the
comfort of their living room. As we pulled
out of the driveway and onto the street,
four smiling, happy faces and waving
hands could be seen through the window.