The sudden autumn shower danced across the rickety bridge spanning Town Creek at half past five in the afternoon, transforming the dirt yard of the small frame house into a quagmire. The droplets beat against the wooden side of the house with such ferocity that splotches of the peeling gray paint were flaked away.

The sun which had returned within the hour was now slipping away to the west, leaving Kate Stiving’s rotund bulk in the shadows where she sat on the square slab stoop. Her rainbow colored sack dress sang out in sharp contrast to her rattan chair’s dinginess.

Kate dozed. Behind her in the sparsely furnished house could be heard the prattle of her five daughters as they prepared for another Saturday night. Kate dozed, and as she dozed, she smiled for she enjoyed eavesdropping on their conversations.

The boards of the bridge rat-a-tatted. Kate opened her eyes dreamily. A sleek black Cadillac was snaking its way down the damp asphalt.

The car stopped across from Kate’s stoop. The man in the El Dorado lighted a cigarette, and in the flash and burn of the silver lighter, Kate glimpsed his profile. He wore a black tux and a large ring. He had a pencil thin moustache.

The lighter snapped shut, leaving only a glowing ember that bobbed like a firefly in the car’s interior.

Kate’s youngest daughter Angel pushed open the screen door. “Is THAT my man, Momma”?

Kate closed her eyes and wrinkled her nose. “No. Tell Regina her date is waiting.

Tell her to hurry.”
“Yes, Momma.”

Moments later Victoria Regina, the oldest of Kate’s kids, stood on the stoop for her mother’s inspection. “How do I look? This dress is new. Does it make me look fat?

Will he like it?”

Kate eyed her sternly. “Go. He seems to be an important man.”

“Good night, Momma.”

Regina tiptoed carefully across the mud-pitted yard. Her black satin evening dress foretold the coming darkness; the silver sequins on her purse starred the artificial night of her outline. She navigated the slushy yard, crossing to the Cadillac, where she was swallowed up.

Kate dozed. My Frank was so excited, she remembered, at the news that we were having a child. He was so thrilled when she was born. “She is a queen,” he laughed, “so she will have a queen’s name. Victoria Regina. Queen Victoria.”

Yes, Kate mused in her dreaming, times had been good back then. She had been a pre-med student at Vanderbilt, had so wanted a career in medicine, but she had given up all her aspirations for the handsome Frank Worthington the Fourth.

Soon the whump-whump-whump of the bridge announced another young man, a knight who rode a white Fairlane Ford. He turned on the interior light when he stopped so that Kate could see him clearly. He was handsome in his madras sports jacket.

“Is THAT my man, Momma?” Angel asked, peeping from behind the screen door.

“No, he has come for Kayanna. See if Kayanna is ready.”

“Yes, Momma.”

“What is she wearing? Is she wearing the yellow dress or the new red one?”
Algie Ray Smith

“The yellow one. She said the red one was wrinkled.”

The night was warm; Kate’s eyes were heavy. She let her thoughts travel to the past again. “Princess Kayanna,” Frank had exclaimed. “We have a queen and a princess.

I have you Kate and two beautiful daughters. How could life be any better?”

Kate had merely shrugged. She was about to say that life could, indeed, be no better, for this was heaven on earth. But Frank had answered his own question. “I wish a son,” he said; his eyes bunched, his body trembled. “A son to blend with our two daughters.

A son to inherit the throne of my little kingdom.”

SHHHHBOOOOM. SHOD DA DA DA SHHHBOOM! Jerked Kate back to the present. A brand spanking new candy apple red 57 Chevy convertible announced itself. The rain had stopped; the sky had cleared. A lover’s moon was up.

Kate could discern three teenage boys in the car. One, of course, was the driver; the other two sat in the back seat. All three were clad alike, from their greasy ducktails to their red letter sweaters which sported large white R’s.

The driver sounded the horn impatiently. Angel ran onto the stoop. The screen door banged behind her. “MY man, Momma?”

“No. They are chums of Fairy Belle, from her school. Tell her to hurry. I don’t like their noisy radio.”

Fairy Belle fluttered from the house. “Well, Momma?” She twirled about gracefully. She wore oxford shoes and bobby socks, a black poodle skirt, and a pink blouse. She had a black scarf tied loosely about her neck. Her hair was pulled back into a pony tail.
Kate barely looked at her. “Go on. You are fine. The noise from the car is making my head ache.”

“Later, alligator.”

Kate poked at the dying embers of her memory. When Fairy Belle was born, Frank had flipped his head to one side. “We have a queen, a princess, and a fairy. Enough girls already. It’s time we had a boy. He will be Frank William Worthington the Fifth, but I will call him Billy.”

A year and a half later Billy was born, but Billy, too, was a girl. Frank had laughed scornfully. “Call her Billy. Call her anything you like; but I’m warning you, Katherine Rose Worthington….I want a boy to carry my name.”

Billy’s man had arrived in a great rattling, sputtering, shaking mass---a beat up farm truck. He wasn’t much better than his plow horse, Kate thought, when he stepped from the vehicle and leaned against its rusty door. He had an unlit cigarette stuck behind one ear, and he was chewing on a toothpick.

He was illuminated by the street lamp. “Oh, Mother Kate,” he called, “why don’t you go out with me tonight? Beat the hell outta sitting on your porch like a scarecrow.”

Kate didn’t answer him. “Angel? Angel?” she spoke over her shoulder.

“Yes, Momma.”

“Is Billy ready?”

“Yes, Momma.”

“Tell her her man is waiting.”

When Billy presented herself to the hayseed, he gawked and whistled. “Now, ain’t you something!” Billy wore Levi’s, a white faux angora sweater, and ballerina shoes.
Yes, Kate thought; Billy, you ARE something. I had enough love for all of you AND for Frank. I loved him with a love that is more than a love as the poet would say.

I loved Frank and I wanted to please him. We had no more children for three years. I was afraid to; but Frank kept asking for a boy. I did what I thought was best.

Kate dozed, but she was soon awakened by a familiar whistling. She opened her eyes and smiled. Randy Brown, burdened with a large grocery sack, was coming down the street. He’s always whistling, Kate mused, and broadened her smile.

Randy was Angel’s age. He was in her homeroom at the junior high. After school and on Saturdays he worked as a “sacker and carry out” boy at the local Piggly Wiggly.

Randy came right upon the stoop. “Look, Mrs. Worthington, I have potato chips, Cokes, pig skins, and Boston cream pies.”

“You have a feast,” Kate laughed.

Angel appeared in the doorway. “Let me have the sack. Did you bring any Fritos? They’re my favorite.”

Randy dug into the sack and held aloft the prize. “A large package, Angel. Just for YOU.”

Angel took the sack inside and returned. She grasped one side of the chair, while Randy took the other. Slowly, carefully, they pulled the chair inside. The chair squeaked and creaked, and its tiny wheels wobbled, but it made the trip from stoop to the kitchen without incident.

“Now, Mrs. Worthington, what do we do first? Do we play Rook, or do we eat?”

“Whatever you young folks desire,” Kate laughed.
“Well, then, I have come to be company to you and Angel.” He took the worn pack of cards from a table near Kate’s chair and handed them to the girl. “Here, Angel, shuffle the cards. We will play Rook after I get us all some drinks.”

Kate allowed herself one final trip back to the past. Thirteen years ago Angel had been born. My gallant Frank, she thought, turned out to be like all men…after whatever nurtures their egos. My handsome Frank, who had never laid a hand on me in our marriage, kicked me in my spine as I lay in bed, my back to him. I couldn’t look him in the eye. It was not my fault, and I think he understood.

“Another damn girl!” he had screamed in a sudden fit of rage. “Can’t you have nothing else?”

He kicked me, and he went away. He left his girls with me, and my girl, my Angel…I will keep MY ANGEL from the streets.

“Mrs. Worthington,” Randy asked, “shall I pour your Coke in a glass or will you drink it from the bottle?”