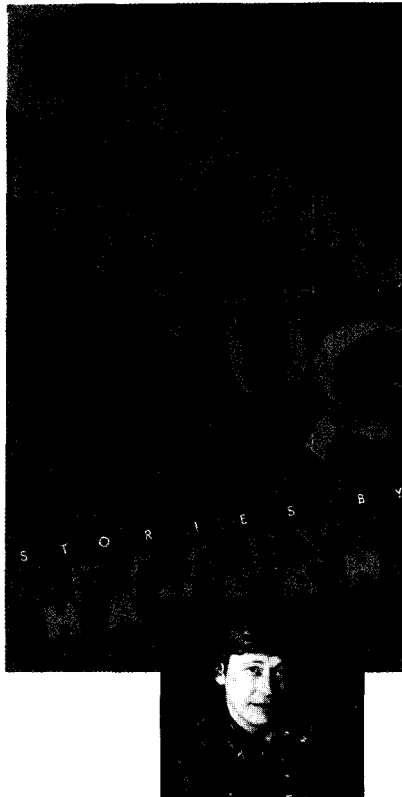


BOOKS

run sound systems; their gods are named Marley, Hendrix, and Dylan.

Mr. Cheung is a middle-aged musician who clings to the artifacts of civilization by memorizing documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. His one-hundred-year-old grandmother is the only survivor from before the bomb, but, much to his frustration, she can't speak or write. (Author Johnson grants the reader access to her fascinating interior monologues, however.) A young boy, Fiskadoro, finds a clarinet and approaches Mr. Cheung for lessons and subsequently forces him from his cloistered existence. Johnson interweaves the thoughts, memories, and actions of his three protagonists to create a world of bewitching power—a world where knowledge is a shattered mirror and no one has more than a couple of pieces.

—Bruce VanWyngarden

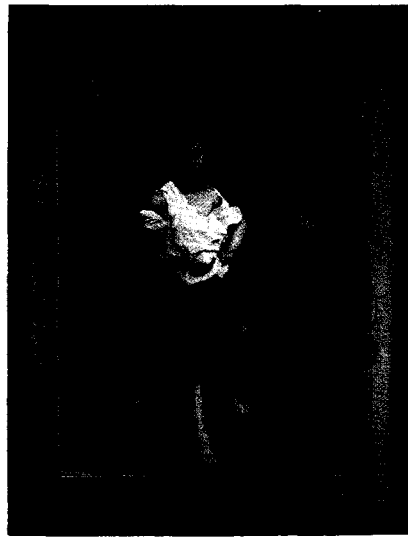


Captain Maximus

by BARRY HANNAH

Knopf, 128 pp., \$11.95

THIS UNUSUAL AND EXHILARATING BRIEF



GO ASK ALICE

It has been suggested that the camera served Lewis Carroll as an introduction to two kinds of people whose acquaintance he valued: "celebrities and children." This isn't altogether fair; Carroll practiced photography assiduously for twenty-four years (he gave it up the summer "his Alice" was married), all the while fascinated by the complex technical demands of the art in its early stages.

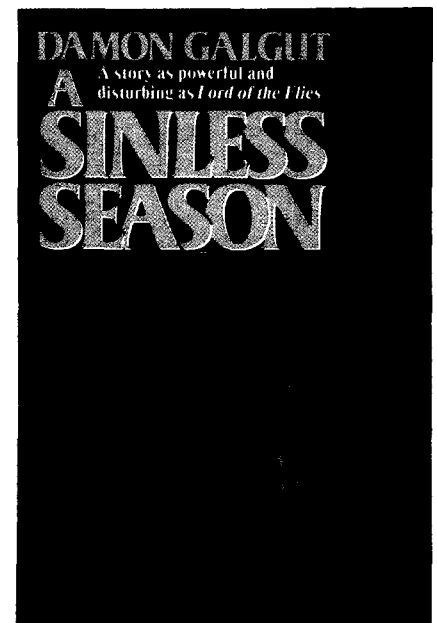
Still, he clearly relished photographic sessions with his child-friends, and over time built up a wardrobe of costumes for them to wear. His own favorite model, however, was not a little girl dressed up in finery, but a "natural" child, with tousled hair and beggar's rags—or, better still, a nude. This picture of a rather sultry Alice Liddell disguised as an urchin was hand-tinted by Carroll himself, and was probably taken in the summer of 1862. Alfred, Lord Tennyson thought it the most beautiful photograph he had ever seen.

This photograph of the original Alice in Wonderland is from the extensive collections of the New York Public Library.

collection offers three different kinds of stories. There are hard, gemlike tales of obsession: "Getting Ready," about the weird self-destruction of a fisherman who travels everywhere and gives up everything hoping to "land the big one"; or "Fans," about a small community's helpless adulation for a football hero who runs the gamut from violent cretin to born-again Christian. There is "Power and

Light: An Idea for Film" (written for director Robert Altman), a kinky dramatization of American energy, moral confusion, and paranoia set in Seattle and somehow concerned with women electrical workers, labor agitators, and (probably) spies. And there are five presumably connected stories that express the manic grief of a deracinated Southerner adrift from his disapproving wife and family ("wild in my sorrow and my separation from my children"); he's a "drunk, raving with bad attitudes," hooked as well on crazy revenge fantasies, propelled by his infatuation with a beckoning golden woman who's undoubtedly unattainable. A world of emotion and suggestion is packed into these trim, tense stories. Even when they're so spare that we can't take in all their details, we can't shake them off; they're like heat lightning occurring out of season—arresting, and frightening, and God-knows-where they're coming from. "The Deep South might be wretched," we're advised in one story, "but it can howl." Barry Hannah can howl with the best of them.

—Bruce Allen



A Sinless Season

by DAMON GALGUT

Penguin Books, 172 pp., \$4.95

THIS IS EASILY THE BEST NOVEL BY A seventeen-year-old South African that I

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have ever read. It is also easily the worst novel by *anybody* I have read in the last seventeen years.

I am reminded of the walls in my high school art class. They were covered with mountain scenes, seascapes, ships, and the occasional self-portrait. Since the nearest mountain or ocean was hundreds of miles away from our small Midwestern town, we students made do with our imaginations. Except for ourselves, nothing around us seemed particularly worthy of our artistic endeavors. Consequently there was nothing of life in our "art."

Galgut has fallen into the same trap. Using only his imagination, he has attempted to write a gritty novel of life among boys in a reformatory—and failed miserably. His prose is simply embarrassing; he strings metaphors together in an unending torrent. His dialogue is . . . Oh, hell, read the following and you'll get the idea:

"He thought that he had not seen anything so beautiful in distress: the flowing black ripples of her tangled hair, streaked with blood, were a shadow of furious autumn, and the deep molten pools of her eyes were silver moons of dripping tears."

Galgut may well have a future as a writer, but the publisher has done him a grave disservice by printing this mess and comparing it with a straight face to *Lord of the Flies*.

—Bruce VanWyngarden

The Old Forest: And Other Stories

by PETER TAYLOR

Dial/Doubleday, 356 pp., \$16.95.

THIS COLLECTION OF FOURTEEN STORIES, Taylor's first since *In The Miro District* (1977), has been sifted from the work of forty years, a period during which he has earned a reputation as a master of the once neglected and now again fashionable short story. He would not be mistaken for the new hard-bitten breed of storyteller—Anne Beattie, say, or Raymond Carver. Taylor writes in a deliberate, even leisurely manner, with a strong, moralizing narrative voice. He has a Southerner's way of *talking* a story, not just telling it.

These stories restrict themselves to a

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