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William Saroyan

The Human Comedy

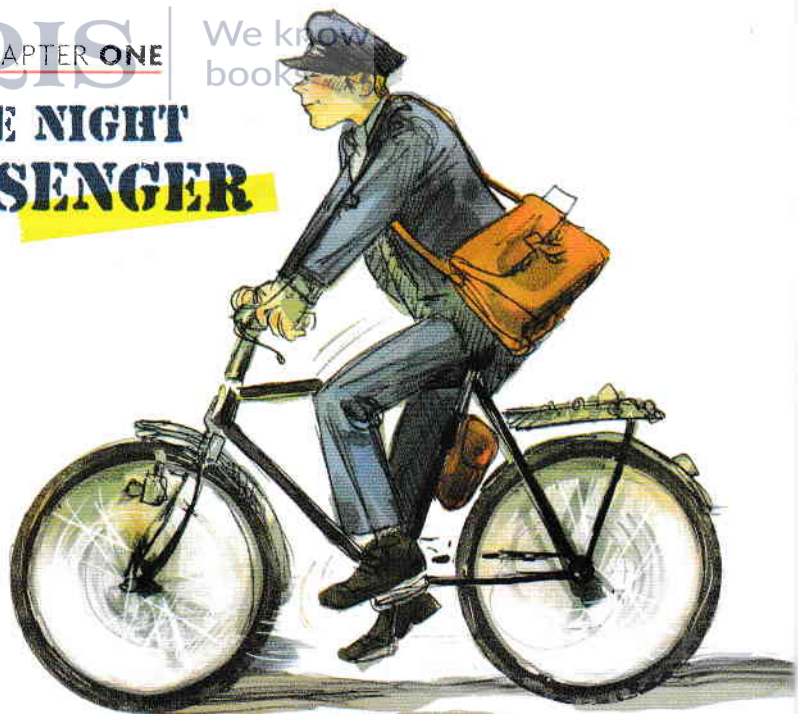
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**'THE NIGHT
MESSENGER'****L**

ittle Ulysses Macauley was standing in the garden of his house on Santa Clara Avenue in Ithaca, California. He was looking in amazement at a mouse that was coming out of a hole in the earth. Suddenly a bird flew into the old tree in the garden and Ulysses looked at it.



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Then he felt the earth under his feet shake and he heard the noise of a train that was passing by. He thought it was the fastest thing in the world. He waved to the engineer who was driving the train but he didn't wave back to him. Then he heard an Afro-American man singing on the train. Ulysses waved to him and the man waved back, shouting: "I'm going home, boy – going back where I belong." They waved to each other a few more times.

The train passed and Ulysses looked at the world around him – it was strange, wonderful, beautiful and lonely. He went back home and as soon as he saw his mother feeding the chickens, he smiled



and ran to her. They walked into their small house together and saw sister Bess and her friend Mary Arena. They were playing the piano and singing happily.

The sun was slowly going down and a peaceful evening was coming to Ithaca. Ulysses's brother Homer sat on his bicycle crossing a dirt road. He was wearing a telegram messenger's coat and cap. He was alone on the country road and he started to sing. At the end of the country road there was a big sign that said:



It was 7.02 p.m. when Homer finally reached the telegraph office in the city center where he had a part-time job. Inside the telegraph office Homer saw Mr Spangler, the manager of the office. He was busily counting the words of a telegram that a worried young man gave him.

"Fourteen words," Spangler said.

"When will my mother receive this telegram?" asked the worried young man.

"It's rather late in the East now," said Spangler. "There's a nine-hour difference with the West, and it's not easy to get money late at night. But I'll send the telegram immediately." Spangler put his hands in his pockets and pulled out some money.

"Here," he said, "take this money, just in case you need it. You can pay me back when your mother sends the money."

The young man looked at the money in amazement. "How can I thank you?" He rushed out of the telegraph office. Spangler took the telegram to William Grogan, the old night telegraph operator, and said, "Send it, Willie. I'll pay for it myself. Poor guy, he has problems."

Mr Grogan began to send the telegram in Morse code, letter by letter:



Homer studied the delivery desk to see if there were any telegrams to deliver.

Mr Spangler looked at him and asked, “How do you like your new job as a messenger?”

Homer replied, “I like it better than anything else! I go to a lot of different places and I see a lot of different people.”

“You really like this job, don’t you?” said Spangler, laughing.

Homer smiled and said, “I’m going to be the best messenger you’ve ever had!”

“Good!” replied Spangler, looking kindly at Homer. “But be careful. Deliver the telegrams quickly but don’t go too fast. Be polite with everyone and take your hat off in elevators. And, of course, don’t lose a telegram.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Working at night is different from working in the day,” said Spangler. “When you have to deliver a telegram to a bad part of town at night, it can scare a young guy. But you don’t need to be scared. Remember, people are people. Don’t be afraid of them. How old are you?”

“Ah, sixteen,” Homer said, nervously.

“You said that yesterday, but we’re not supposed to hire a boy unless he’s at least sixteen. However, I wanted to hire *you*. How old are you really?”

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