

英語の短編小説

「Hakumon ちゅうおう」に短編小説を掲載して頂くのはこれで5回目です。毎年そうですが、特に昨年は、多くの方々から面白いコメントを頂き、とてもうれしかったです。さて、今年の物語は、ある意味では怖いものですが、多分それよりも一人の人間の「テスト」と言えるでしょう。このストーリーには Ku Klux Klan (KKK) というとても怖い組織が出てきます。ご存じの方もおられると思いますが、簡潔に説明すると、アメリカでよく知られている反黒人・反クダヤ人など極端に排他的な秘密の白人集団です。現在ではメンバーは昔よりも随分少なくなったようですが、残念ながら完全に消えたわけではありません。

それでは、読んだあと、何か感想や意見などありましたら、私のメールアドレス(gwarren@tamacc.chuo-u.ac.jp)までお送り下さい。どうもありがとうございます。

ゲイリー・W・キャンター 経済学部助教授



Down the Hill

by Gary W. Cantor

It was noon, and John Archer felt good. He left the hardware store where he worked, and as always, started out on the walk that he took before eating lunch. Looking up at the blue, cloudless sky, he felt refreshed, and his sense of refreshment was further enhanced when he inhaled deeply and fresh air filled his lungs.

As was always the case, in the first few minutes of his walk he passed a large number of people. He knew some of them, and as he walked, a few of the passersby called out his name. He always responded to those who greeted him, but in fact this was the one part of the walk that he rather disliked, for he knew that the greetings that he received were devoid of any affection, and merely reflected the fact that he had lived in this town for all of his twenty-seven years and had become a silent fixture at *Hobson's*, the one and only hardware store in town.

After walking straight for three blocks, there was nobody else to be seen, and John felt the peacefulness that he loved. The area that he was in now was an old residential part of town, and he loved to look at the large gray and white wooden homes that lined both sides of the streets. If he had enough money, he always thought, he would love to live in such a house. Of course, he knew that on his salary, and with his lack of prospects, this was but a pipe dream. Still, he liked to walk past those elegant structures, and for that reason, he always slowed down during this part of his walk.

After looking at the houses and dreaming a bit, John turned left, just as he always did, and started to walk down a long hill. The houses that lined the streets in this area weren't very big, and some of them weren't even very nice. However, even in this working class area of town, John usually found serenity, and as there was usually nobody on the streets at this time of day, this part of his walk served to heighten the feeling of isolation that he yearned for prior to eating a quick lunch and scurrying back to work.

John was about halfway down the hill when he heard some voices, followed by a sight that made him stop in his tracks. It was both frightening and surrealistic. Five men, dressed in white robes, masks, and hoods turned a corner and started to walk in his direction. They were still about 100 yards from John, but it was obvious to him that

these were members of the Ku Klux Klan. It all seemed so strange. John pondered the situation for a few seconds, but couldn't figure out what was going on. What in the world are they doing, he wondered...It's the middle of the day and here they are walking around in their strange garb...Where are they going?...Could there be some sort of rally?...In the middle of the day?...In this town?...

As he stood there thinking, all of a sudden another figure came into view, and this almost made John choke. It was a black man, and John could see that he was turning a corner, unaware of the group of Klansmen that was slowly heading in his direction. Sensing danger, John thought about calling out to the black man and warning him. However, the words failed to leave his mouth. Then he watched as the black man, whose head had been down, looked up and saw what was heading his way.

John heard one of the Klansmen yell something, but he couldn't make out exactly what was said. Then, he heard the black man's voice, again too distant to be understood. And after that, all hell broke out. One of the Klansmen approached the black man, and the latter crouched down, as if in a boxer's stance. However, before he could throw a punch, the Klansman pulled something out from under his robe and slammed it into the side of the black man's head. The black man slumped down, but then got up again and tried to defend himself. However, by now it was futile. Several other Klansmen started hurling punches in his direction, and eventually he fell face down on the sidewalk.

As John watched, he edged a bit closer to the group, but still there was quite a distance between him and the others. He wanted to yell out, but fear stopped him cold in his tracks. If he said anything, or was even noticed, he thought, he might become the next victim.

All of a sudden, to John's complete surprise, the black man started to get up, at which point one of the Klansmen kicked him in the stomach. Nevertheless, the black man still somehow managed to struggle to his feet, and then, after shoving a Klansman away, started to walk weakly away. John thought that the others would pounce on him again, but instead of that, he found himself to be the object of the Klansmen's attention. One of them, looking straight at John, was yelling at him. At first, John, now shaking, couldn't understand what the robed figure was saying to him. But then, the following words reached his ears. "You better be quiet about this. We know who you are!"

John thought for a moment. Something about the voice sounded familiar to him. It sounded like a voice that he had heard a long time ago. But, he couldn't be sure.

Realizing that this was no time to stand around trying to figure things out, John turned around and started to walk back the way he had come. After a few seconds, his walk turned into a trot, and then, when he felt that there was plenty of distance between himself and the Klansmen, he started to run at full speed.

John was still running when he got back to *Hobson's*, and after slowly opening the door, he looked around the store. There weren't any customers; there was just Bert, a part-time worker who was now standing next to the cash register.

When Bert saw John, he looked a little bit surprised. This, John realized, was probably because of the time. John almost always took the full hour that he was given for lunch, but now he was back after only about thirty minutes. Nevertheless, Bert didn't say anything. He was the type of person who tended to keep things to himself, and that's one reason why John liked him.

John nodded to Bert, and then immediately found some work to do. He went to a room in the back of the store, opened up a box of tools that had just arrived, and started to take them, a few at a time, to their designated places in the store. But, of course, while he did that, his mind was on something else. On the one hand, he thought, it would be best if he called the police immediately and told them about what he had seen. However, on the other hand, he wondered if that would be worth the trouble that it might cause him.

The "trouble," as John saw it, could come in two different forms. On the one hand, he was more than a little bit concerned about what the Klansman had yelled at him. Given the scene that he had just witnessed, John realized that these were not people to toy with. However, fear of reprisal wasn't the only thing that concerned John. Almost as much as that, he dreaded the thought of being dragged into the middle of an investigation and losing his privacy. He knew that if he went to the police and gave them information about what he had seen, it probably wouldn't be long before everyone in town knew that he had been a witness to a brutal attack, and everyone would be asking him about what he saw. In a sense, he could very well become an instant celebrity, and that was the kind of thing that he knew he couldn't cope with. John had spent his entire existence struggling to stay out of the spotlight, and though he realized that this hadn't done him any good, he also knew that even the slightest bit of attention made his heart race and his palms sweat.

One other thought also contributed to John's reluctance to call the police. That was the thought that, for all the trouble that it might cause him, giving information to the police might not even help them catch the perpetrators of the attack that he had witnessed. After all, he hadn't seen anyone's face, or even any distinctive clothing. So he couldn't identify anyone as having definitely been involved in the attack. All he knew was that there were five Klansmen. That's all the information that he had... Except for the voice, that is. And that's what really troubled him. Where had he heard that voice before? Who was it?

As such thoughts whirled around in John's head, time flew by and soon it was five o'clock. John walked over to Mr. Hobson, the owner of the shop who had returned from an errand a little while earlier, and told him that he was leaving. Characteristically, Mr. Hobson nodded and said nothing, and John walked out the door and ambled over to his car.

After driving home, John changed his clothes. Then, he jumped onto the sofa and took a short nap. When he woke up, he looked at the phone, and thought about calling the police. As he thought, he remembered the beating that he had witnessed, and he winced as the image of the black man being struck in the head flashed before his eyes. Mind you, the color of the victim didn't matter to John, and neither did the politics of the situation. John didn't have any special fondness for black people, nor did he hate them. To him, people were people. He thought of himself as just a regular guy who was "trying to get through life," and thought that everything would go more smoothly if everyone else thought the same way. Nevertheless, the brutality of the attack left no doubt in John's mind about what he *should* do.

He got up and started to walk ever so slowly over to the telephone. But then, he abruptly stopped. Maybe I should think about this some more, he thought. First and foremost in his mind was the threat that he had received. The person who had threatened him had said, "We know who you are!" If that was the case, John realized, they also obviously knew where he lived. So, if he did tell the police what he saw, and the Klan found out about it, they might take it upon themselves to pay him a visit and bash his head in just as they had the black man's. John imagined himself being beaten by a group of Klansmen and could even see his own blood running down his face. Then, he backed away from the phone and returned to the sofa.

John wanted some time to think, but he didn't have any. This was Wednesday, and that meant that it was bowling night. He looked at his watch. It was seven o'clock, and his friend Pat would be over soon. The two of them had been in the same league for over five years, and they took turns driving each other to the bowling alley. Tonight was Pat's turn, and as always, they would stop off for a quick bite to eat at a diner before bowling.

A few minutes later, John heard the blast of a horn coming from the street, and

walked out to Pat's car. Pat, as usual, yelled out "Hey, how ya doin'?" as John got in his car, and then stepped down hard on the gas.

The car rolled along, and as it did, Pat, as always, talked and talked. He loved sports, and since this was baseball season, he went on and on about the previous night's game. As he spoke, John occasionally chimed in with a "Yeah!" and a "No kidding!" But, for the most part, his mind was on his problem. "What in the world am I going to do?" he kept saying to himself.

As he thought, of course, he did consider telling Pat about what he had seen, but then he thought that that might not be a good idea. For one thing, Pat was a talker, and he knew that if he told his secret to Pat it wouldn't be long before a lot of other people also knew about what he had seen. But, more importantly, a rather frightening thought haunted John. What if Pat was one of them? Who knows, he thought, maybe even Pat could be a Klansman. This seemed on the one hand to be ridiculous. Pat had always seemed to be a friendly kind of guy, and was real popular down at the bowling alley. But on the other hand, John really didn't know that much about him. They were friends, but not really close friends, and besides bowling, they really didn't do much together. So John had no idea what his political beliefs were. And as he thought about Pat, it occurred to John that he had never seen him talk to any of the black guys down at the bowling alley. So, John looked up and wondered.

"What are you thinking about?" said Pat.

The sudden question startled John.

"Nothing," he answered, but he was more confused than ever.

At that point, Pat looked up at the sky for a second or two, and his expression seemed to John to have turned rather serious. But then, seemingly unperturbed, he returned his eyes to the road and continued rattling on about baseball.

In a few minutes they arrived at the diner where they always ate, and like usual, Pat ordered fried chicken and John ordered a hamburger and French fries. They were so predictable that Nancy, the waitress who always worked on Wednesday nights usually didn't even bother giving them menus. She would just scream "the usual?" to them, and then, when they nodded, she would yell the order in to the cook.

This night went like that, too, and as they ate Nancy walked past them and said, "You guys are great. Just like clockwork. And you even leave a tip. I love ya both."

"We love you too, Nance," yelled Pat, and then he let out a big howl of a laugh.

That's the way Pat is, John thought...Just a big, jolly guy...He couldn't be a Klansman, could he? He couldn't beat up some poor defenseless guy, could he?... John began to think that he was being stupid, and should come right out and tell Pat what he had seen. Maybe he'll know what I should do, he thought.

But still, something in John made him hold back, and as they ate he hardly said anything at all.

When they got to the bowling alley, a strange feeling seemed to grip John. He suddenly felt that nothing was as it should be. "What in the world am I doing here?" he said under his breath. He stood at the entrance and looked around and saw carefree men and women bowling and chatting, and he felt a distance between himself and them. It's okay for them to have fun, he thought, but I shouldn't. He felt a sense of shame that made him quite uncomfortable, and thought about turning around and going straight to the police. But he didn't. Instead, he followed Pat to the front desk and then after that to the lockers where the regulators kept their bowling equipment.

John took out his bowling ball and shoes, and as he walked over to the lane where he was to bowl, he took another long look at the people in the bowling alley. This time, though, the people didn't seem as carefree as they had earlier. He noticed more sternness in the faces of many of the men that he glared at, and when a few of these men looked back at John, he felt a sudden chill. In particular, one man looked long and hard

at John, and John wondered if this might not be the second time the man had seen him that day.

When he started bowling, though, slowly but surely John's mood changed, and though he couldn't put his concerns about the incident completely out of mind, he did manage to have a reasonably good time. And as the evening wore on, he began to believe that maybe, just maybe, he had been concerned about nothing at all. After all, he thought, he hadn't witnessed a murder. So it's possible, he reasoned, that the police wouldn't even be interested in what he had seen.

That night, John bowled about the same as he always did. In a league with thirty-nine members, his average was twentieth from the top, and that evening, he was just under his average of 160. Pat and a few other guys in the league sometimes ribbed him about his mediocrity as a bowler, and on occasions Pat called him "M.A.", meaning "Mr. Average," but that didn't bother John. He accepted his mediocrity in bowling, as in everything else, and thought that he understood it as well. He figured that he had the ability to be a better bowler, but that something inside of him made him miss occasionally just so that he wouldn't stand out. And, as if to substantiate this theory, John was quite conscious of the few tournaments in which he had led, only to fall apart near the end. Winning, he thought, would be even more uncomfortable to him than losing, and so he figured that, whatever the mechanism was, something inside of him made sure that he didn't win.

After they left the bowling alley, Pat and John went to a nearby bar and drank beer. They didn't do this very often, but Pat, who had bowled well, was in a good mood and said that he'd treat. So they drank and drank as Pat talked about bowling and baseball, and after a while John started to feel real good and even told a few jokes, which was unusual for him. Then, at about 1:00 in the morning, Pat drove John home, and within about five minutes he fell asleep on top of his bed with his clothes on.

The next morning, when John woke up, his head hurt. It wasn't so bad, but he often got hangovers after drinking. So, he went into the bathroom and got some aspirin. Then, after he took the aspirin, he sat down on his sofa, took a deep breath, and thought. He had had a dream at night, and he tried to remember it the best that he could. In one part of the dream, he was about ten years old, and was sitting on the grass in his family's backyard. Next to him was his father. His father was pulling weeds and occasionally turned toward his son and spoke. As John tried to recall what his father had said in the dream, he became frustrated, because he could only remember bits and pieces, and he knew that there must have been more. But what he remembered did indeed remind him of his father...

"Son, just try to be a regular guy. You don't have to try to stand out. Believe me, those who stand out, get cut down to size....Just go with the flow....Don't worry about things, and everything will be all right....You may not be the smartest kid in the world, but that's all right. You're good-natured, and that's the most important thing in the world....Don't bother people, and they won't bother you. Understand? Just try to get along with others....Just try to get along..."

Besides that, there wasn't much that John remembered from the dream. However, as frustrating as this was, he was still happy to have dreamt about his father. His father had died ten years earlier, when John was still in high school, and he had never dreamt about him before this. Why now, he wondered.

John looked at his watch and noticed that it was almost eight o'clock. He washed up and changed clothes, and then threw two pieces of bread into the toaster. Then, as he drank a glass of orange juice, he went over to the TV and turned it on. A commercial ended, and then a local news program began.

John listened carefully, and almost jumped up in the air when he heard the first words spoken by the newscaster...

“A man who says that he was beaten by members of the Ku Klux Klan has been upgraded to good condition and is now resting in Lincoln West Hospital...”

The report went on to say that as a result of the attack, the man had suffered three broken ribs and a concussion, in addition to a variety of minor injuries. Then, the newscaster disappeared from the screen and the beaten man was shown lying in his hospital bed.

John looked at the man. The day before, he had been fairly far away and hadn't gotten a good look at the man who was beaten, but just the same he knew that this had to be the same man.

The camera moved away from the man in bed and focused in on a woman who was standing about a foot away from the bed. Then, a microphone appeared in front of her, and she started to speak.

“I can't understand why anyone or any group would do this to my husband, or anyone else for that matter. Anyone who knows my husband would tell you he's just a regular guy. Everyone who knows him likes him. He tries to get along with everyone, and look what they did to him.”

At that point, the woman started to cry.

As John watched her, he thought about what she had just said. Then, he thought of his father...“Just try to get along,” he would always say.... But what did that get him? Fired from his job at 48 and dead at 51....And how about that black guy? What good did it do him?... And what about me?...

John walked over to the TV and turned it off. Then, after looking at his watch he walked over to the phone and called *Hobson's*. Nobody was in, so he left a message on the answering machine saying that he'd be late. Then, he walked out to his car and drove over to the police station.

Before he entered the station, several thoughts rushed through John's head. He was still fearful and confused, and realized that what he was about to do might do more damage to him than good. Nevertheless, he was determined to take step one on the road to changing his life. I can't hide forever, he thought.

He opened the door of the tiny police station and walked over to the counter. There, he was greeted by Paul Sanders, the longtime chief of police. The chief knew just about everyone in town, and greeted John with a cheerful voice.

“What can I do for you, John?” he asked.

“I want to report a crime. I saw the black man get beat up by some members of the Ku Klux Klan yesterday.”

“You did? Heck, you should have come in yesterday. Well, all right. Why don't you tell Jeff over there what you saw, then I'll talk to you again after he gets it all down.”

At this point, a young officer walked over to John with a notebook. He looked at John and then said, “OK, come on over here and sit down,” as he pointed to an old wooden chair.

John hesitated. That was the voice, he said to himself. That was the voice. He looked at Jeff and recalled that he had been a year behind him in school. They had never been friends, but for a year they were both on the school's varsity basketball team. Jeff was a starter, and John rarely got off the bench.

“Is something wrong?” Jeff said.

John took a deep breath. Then, he looked away from Jeff. “Chief Sanders,” he yelled over at the chief, “Can I talk to you alone for a minute?” As the words left his mouth, he was gripped by fear, and visions of a black man as well as a father and a son raced through his head...