

A Sudden Switch

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Instructor: Dr. Joan Faust

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There was a hawk in the night. This is unusually rare for an apprehensive town like Albany. Something began that night in Albany that would leave an everlasting experience in my mind. It all started somewhere around the beginning of the winter season. In fact, it was on a Saturday night during choir rehearsal. The choir was going over the final song when Derrick stopped by the church. He asked me to ride with him and a friend down to New Orleans. Well, this was an opportunity that I could not miss out on; after all, I was an inquisitive teenager, daring to experience life at all cost. At any rate, rehearsal had come to an end. So Derrick and I got into the car and headed out to Hammond to pick up his friend, Sharon, and then headed on down to New Orleans. With each mile of the way, I could only think about what I had gotten myself into by taking this trip without letting my parents know where I was going. The journey from a small quiet town like Albany to a major city like New Orleans had become a sudden switch to a risky atmosphere.

It was mandatory that Mom or Dad always knew where I was whenever night appeared; this was a rule I lived by growing up in their home. On the contrary, here I was with Derrick and a total stranger as we headed down to a city that was known for violence, New Orleans. However, as if that was not enough, Derrick and his friend Sharon brought along some marijuana cigarettes that he had already rolled to smoke along the way. Since I did not smoke marijuana, Derrick brought a fifth of vodka and a bottle of orange juice along just for me. This mixture

would get my head all messed up, like theirs, leaving me floating in a cloud without a worry in the world. He wanted me to enjoy the same sensations as he and Sharon. As we cruised on down to New Orleans, Derrick and Sharon smoked the reefer as I drank the vodka mixed with orange juice. We wanted to be on cloud nine so that by the time we reached the big city of New Orleans, our heads would be ready for adventure, and we could do anything, or so we thought.

We reached our destination at last. There we were, right down in the heart of New Orleans on St. Bernard Street. There stood in front of us a little old storefront building that was used as a bar room. It faced the street where the car was parked. After we had parked the car, we then went into the club to help get the party started. Finally, after traveling many miles, the hawk that so surprisingly appeared in the night back in Albany was now standing clear in our sight. There she stood more beautiful than ever, and the most gorgeous disk jockey one could ever lay his eyes upon. We danced to the music that she played, and I quickly forgot that I would have to face my parents once I got back home. It appeared to me, because of the way I was feeling, that nothing would spoil my night. Little did we know that trouble was lurking around the corner waiting for the right time to turn happiness into sadness and the joy we were experiencing into sorrow. Then all of a sudden it happened. Sharon, Derrick's friend, could not find the keys to her car, and she started going crazy. She pulled a gun on us and threatened to kill us if we did not find her keys. We were looking everywhere and, all of a sudden, we thought to look in the car. Low and behold, there were the keys still in the ignition where Derrick had left them after he parked the car and locked the doors. Sharon still was not satisfied, so we began searching for a clothes hanger in order to open the door to the car and get the keys to calm her down. As a result, we walked into the most dangerous area of town, the Saint Bernard projects. With fear and trembling knees, we approached one of the apartments where a man stood outside of his

apartment building. Not knowing what to expect, I nervously asked the man for a clothes hanger and at the same time explained to him how we had accidentally locked ourselves out of the car. To our surprise, he gave us the clothes hanger, so we headed on our way. Then things began to settle down, but by this time my night was already ruined.

In spite of the way I was feeling, Sharon wanted to stay until the party was over. After the party had come to an end, Derrick and Sharon convinced the disk jockey, Night Hawk, which was her professional name, into letting us come over to her place since the night was still young. She agreed to let us come by for a little while, but Derrick and Sharon had other plans in mind. So Derrick pulled one of the wires from the engine so that the car would not start. They set up this scheme so that we could stay the entire night at Night Hawk's apartment, as if I was not in enough trouble. Although that was not a bad plan, I just was not up to it after the incident with the gun. My mind was only on getting back home and if we would ever make it. At that point I did not know what was going to happen. Anyway, the plan they put together did work, and so we spent the night at Night Hawk's apartment. Early that morning we got up, washed our faces and headed back to Albany.

For the most part, that night was an experience that will forever be in my mind. We did find the hawk, but I wonder if it was at all worth it. We weighed all of the things that went on that night. First of all we left a spiritual environment to go rumba with the devil, in other words, I left a good rehearsal back in Albany to go to New Orleans to party with Satan himself. Secondly, I defied the rule that had been set by my parents for many years: leaving home without telling them. Thirdly, I had my life threatened with a gun. This all could have been prevented. If only I would have been where I was supposed to be, all of this could have been avoided. Once again, as I look back, the question comes to my mind, "Was it at all worth it?" Well, if I had to do it all

over again, and I knew then what I know now, I believe that I would have gone home and left the hawk to Derrick and Sharon. I have never seen another hawk in the night in Albany since that journey to New Orleans. Last night, incidentally, I walked outside and smiled, for the town was calm and inapprehensive, as it had never been before.

Charles E. Hart is a Social Work major. Dr. Joan Faust was his professor.

Dr. Faust's Comments: *Besides his good use of specific details in recounting his apprehensions and actions, what makes Hart's paper admirable is his almost symbolic use of the hawk image that ties the three parts of the paper together: the departure, the night in New Orleans, and the return. He could have improved this paper with the use of dialogue and with more sensory details.*