

Sleepwalking · *Ruth McCollum*

NAP

I WANT BACK the long afternoon naps which I resisted so angrily then: my grandmother's voice trailing off as she walked away from the room where I had been "put down" for the afternoon, a pool of quiet surrounding me, the strains of the theme songs to "Days of Our Lives" and "The Secret Storm" muted by the walls between me and the kitchen where she and Es-dale ironed, the creak of the iron on the board, the hiss of the steam and the smell of hot, clean cotton wafting back, the rhythm of the trucks in the distance whooshing like waves, the immediate silence of my room washing over me, drowsiness overcoming will, eyes closing, whisper-breathing and sleep.

A WALK

"We'll walk," my grandmother Noby insisted, and no amount of arguing from me would dissuade her: it's too far — she needed the exercise; it might rain — not likely; it'll take too long! — she had all day.

We walked.

Our destination was Es-dale McCurdy's house. Es-dale was my grandmother's maid for about eighteen years — my first eighteen years. Although it is less than a mile — no problem for my eighty-six-year-old grandmother who walks routinely, smartly attired in lilac jogging suit and white, spanking clean "Rest-a-bout" tennis shoes — it is still a substantial piece of ground to cover in Bay Springs, Mississippi, in March, 1988.

"There are blacks, and then there are niggers," the grown-ups would say over our heads. As kids, my sisters and I talked this over every once in a while, and after some discussion we usually agreed that Es-dale was definitely not a nigger.

"Blacks" (my parents' term) were good; they were educated, like Martin Luther King, who got shot during the middle of "Hogan's Heroes." My