

REYNOLDS PRICE

Author of BLUE CALHOUN

THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

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Three Stories

THE
FORESEEABLE
FUTURE

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藏书章

Reynolds Price

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"The Fare to the Moon" first appeared in *The Southern Review*; "Back Before Day" in a limited edition from North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Macon, North Carolina, in 1933, Reynolds Price attended North Carolina schools and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Duke University. As a Rhodes Scholar he studied for three years at Merton College, Oxford, receiving the Bachelor of Letters with a thesis on Milton. In 1958 he returned to Duke, where he is now James B. Duke Professor of English. His first novel, *A Long and Happy Life*, appeared in 1962 and received the William Faulkner Award. It was followed by *The Names and Faces of Heroes* (a volume of stories); *A Generous Man* (a novel); *Love and Work* (a novel); *Permanent Errors* (stories); *Things Themselves* (essays and scenes); *The Surface of Earth* (a novel); *Early Dark* (a play); *A Palpable God* (translations from the Bible with an essay on the origin of life of narrative); *The Source of Light* (a novel); *Vital Provisions* (poems); *Private Contentment* (a play commissioned by American Playhouse for its first season); *Kate Vaiden* (a novel that received the 1986 National Book Critics Circle Award); *The Laws of Ice* (poems); *A Common Room: Essays 1954-1989*, *Good Hearts* (a novel); *The Use of Fire* (poems); *Clear Pictures* (a memoir); *The Tongues of Angels* (a novel); *New Music* (his trilogy of plays that premiered at the Cleveland Play House in 1989); and *Blue Calhoun* (a novel). He is a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and lives in Durham, North Carolina.

“EXCELLENT . . .

Graceful and spare in his prose style, Price has written three long stories of unusual intensity and emotional depth. He focuses clearly, intimately, on finely drawn characters whom we meet at the moment they are challenged to move beyond the past by making difficult choices. . . . Price skillfully explores a volatile landscape of emotion and memory as his characters make their way toward an uncertain future.”

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*Please turn the page
for more reviews. . . .*

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Newsday

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Milwaukee Journal

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Also by Reynolds Price:

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THE TONGUES OF ANGELS*
THE USE OF FIRE
NEW MUSIC

**Published by Ballantine Books*

FOR

HARRIET WASSERMAN

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THE FARE TO THE MOON

O N E



AS EVER, SHE WOKE SOMETIME BEFORE LIGHT. IN the fall of the year, and with war savings-time, that meant it was just before five o'clock. The nearest timepiece in the house was his watch; and that was under his pillow still, still on his wrist. His brother would be here in half an hour; his overnight satchel was already packed—a clean pair of drawers, his toothbrush and razor, a Hershey bar she hid in a pair of his mended socks. There was nothing for her to do here now but make the coffee and watch him walk through the door, down the slope to his brother's car and then away.

She had halfway dreaded the news all summer; but when the letter came three weeks ago and he said "Well" and left it open on the table to read, she knew this morning would be the last. No way the Army would turn down a

Reynolds Price

man as strong as him—not scarce as men were, this late in the war. When he had seen her pick up the letter, he stood at the screen door, watching the woods, and told her the ways you could beat the draft—all the foolish dodges he'd heard from scared boys. His favorite seemed to be vinegar and prune pits. The night before your physical exam, you drank a tall glass of white cider vinegar and swallowed three prune pits. Then you told the Army you had stomach ulcers; they X-rayed your belly, saw the dark shadows and the shriveled lining and sent you home with a sympathetic wave.

Without a word, she had bought the prunes and left them out on the shelf by the stove; the vinegar was always there in plain view. But he never mentioned the plan again, and last night she knew not to bring it up. Every bone in her body guessed he meant to leave. It made good sense, though it hurt like barbed wire raked down her face. She even guessed it hurt him as bad, but he never said it. And she wouldn't force it from him, not that last night. That was up to him.

After she brushed her teeth on the stoop and peed in the bushes, she came back in, damped the woodstove down, then shucked her sweater and dungarees, put on the flannel night shirt and crawled in beside him. She had lain there flat, saying her few prayers quick before he touched her. But he never did, not with his hands. Their hipbones touched and parts of their legs; but somehow the warm space built up between them till she felt gone already, that near him.

After five minutes he said "Remember, I set the alarm." He knew how much she hated the bell; it was one more way to say *You do it. You wake up and spare us.*

She had said "All right" and then "I'm thinking you'll

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live through it, Kayes.” He had said many times that he knew, if they took him, he’d die overseas; and most of the times, he would laugh or sing a few lines of some hymn. But she knew he meant it; she said it to help him face the night, not because she was sure. And as far as she could tell, he had slept like a baby. She thought *I slept like a baby too, a mighty sick child*; but she also knew she had not dreamed once. That froze her as much as the cold dawn air—*If I didn’t dream last night, I’m the corpse*—and she calculated they had the minutes to hitch up, one more farewell time. Her hand went toward him under the cover.

For the only time in the months he had known her, he stopped the hand with his own and held it. In another minute he said “Much obliged,” then threw back his side of the cover and sat up.

It was still too dark to see him move; so before he could strike a match to the lamp, she thought *Except for this war, we’d stay right here. He don’t give a goddamn for nothing but me*. Even without the sight of his face, she almost half-believed it was true. And early as it was in a chilly week, she was more than half right. It had been nearly true for six quick months. He had never admitted as much by day; but he proved it at dusk by turning back up at this door here, living her life beside her in private and sometimes in town and telling her things with his body by dark that, she almost knew, were meant to last.

WHEN HE FINISHED THE COFFEE, HE POURED HOT WATER in the big tin pan, lit the lamp by the mirror and slowly shaved.

She sat at the table and watched every move. All her life, she envied men those minutes each morning, staring

at a face they seemed not to notice, not trying to make it thinner or lighter, just taking it in.

Then he put on the first necktie he had worn since moving here; it had waited on a nail in the old pie safe. He took his change and knife from the shelf and portioned them out into several pockets. He took up the long narrow wallet and searched it.

She thought "Oh Jesus, now here it comes. Like every other white man God ever made, he thinks we can cross this out with money."

But he managed it altogether differently. He came the whole way to the table and sat again, in a fresh cold chair. He said "Please look right here at my eyes." When she looked, he said "You have been too good to me, every day. I will know that fact from here to my grave, wherever I find it. If I don't come back alive in time, remember I said I loved you *true*. I was sober when I said it, and I meant every word." He had still not smiled, but he leaned well forward. "Now give me both hands."

She had no choice but to spread both palms between them on the table, though she watched him still.

He laid two fifty-dollar bills down first; then he took off his watch and laid it on them. He had sometimes let her wear it on days when she doubted his promise to be here by dark.

She said "The money will help me a lot; thank you kindly. But you're going to need that watch overseas."

He understood she didn't mean that; she meant she thought it belonged to his wife, had been his wife's gift to him years ago. So he closed both her hands now, money and watch, and said "I bought that watch myself. It's yours till the day I walk back in here, claiming it again."

She had to nod, dry-eyed as a boy.

He stood up and, before he got both arms in his coat,

T H E F O R E S E E A B L E F U T U R E

a car horn blew way down by the road. He stepped to the door.

She stood where she was.

With a hand in the air, he kept her in place. "Don't let me see you in the cold," he said. Then somehow he melted, silent, and was gone.

It was then that she knew the room was hot and dry as a kiln. She thought she was free to howl like a dog, and she sat there and waited for a moan to rise. But the car door slammed; and she heard it leave and fade completely away toward Raleigh with still no tears in her eyes, no moan. She said his name *Kayes* and waited again. But no, nothing came. So she stood and rinsed out both their cups and set them upside down on the shelf where they sat before he ever came here. Beyond her even, they had been her grandmother's and had sat unbroken in this same room long before she was born to meet this man that hurt her like this.