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Behold the Brown-Faced Men

By JOSEPH L. KELLER

"BETTER dig it a little deeper," I said. "I feel safer in a foxhole that's plenty deep."

"Aw, hell, that's deep enough," Arnold said. There's no artillery in this damn jungle."

"Don't fool yourself, wiseguy," Sergeant Roth interposed, "them yellow bastards are all over the place. They've got us spotted. take no mistake about that."

"Yeh," Corporal Slater agreed, "I bet they're watchin' ya dig that hole right now. They give me the creeps."

"It wouldn't be so bad if they came out to fight," the sergeant said, "but the yellow-bellies just keep watchin' us. I can feel their fant-eyes watchin' us. Then they come sneakin' around at night—".

"Yeh, and they knife a guy when he's asleep," the corporal aid. "They give me the creeps."

Sergeant Roth and Corporal Slater were in charge of our section of the front-line perimeter. they were digging-in directly to the right of Arnold and me. Two men in a fox-hole: that was the rule experience had taught us. One to remain on guard while the other slept.

Digging-in directly on our left were the two rookies, Slim and Curly. We called them rookies because they had arrived as replacements only the day before our last jump-off.

"How deep do you dig 'em?" the rookie we called Curly asked.

"Jeez," Arnold said, giving me a sly sidewise look, "we dig 'em five-six feet most o' the time."

"That's plenty deep," I commented, as I noticed the hole the rookies had dug for themselves. "I generally dig mine two-and-a-half-three feet at the most."

"You think ours is three feet?" Curly asked.

"Cripes," Arnold said, "yours is deep enough to bury ya both in."

"Yours is about four feet," I said. "That's plenty deep."

Editor's note: The following story, printed with permission of The Atlantic Monthly, is an early-draft version of the entry which won first prize in the 1946-1947 Atlantic Story Contest for College Students. The story also won the Bread Loaf School of English Scholarships awarded to the best paper in the Atlantic Essay, Story, and Poetry Contests. One scholarship was awarded to the author, Joseph L. Keller, and one to his instructor, Dr. H. G. Merriam.
"Don't make no difference if it's too deep, does it?" Curly asked.

There was something almost pathetic about Curly. He was a kid of nineteen or twenty perhaps. I sensed a deep uneasiness about him. Slim never said a word; he remained a stranger to us.

"Well, now, I don't know about them deep holes," Arnold said, "them yellow bastards like to throw grenades into them deep holes. I don't like to dig my hole too deep."

"You think ours is too deep?" Curly asked.

"No," I said emphatically, "yours is just right."

Darkness settled rapidly. Arnold and I gathered leaves and threw them into our fox-hole. We spread blankets over them. Then in the dim outlines we noticed the rookies: they were throwing dirt back into their fox-hole.

"Look," Arnold said, nudging me, "they're afraid their hole is too deep. Well I'll be—."

"You shouldn't scare the kids like that," I said.

"You know," he finally resumed after a pause, "that Slim's a funny guy. He don't say much. He sorta does things quiet-like."

"Yah," I agreed, "he seems to be a nice guy—the quiet sort all right. You never know for a long time what to make of 'em."

"But that darn Curly," Arnold continued, as though I had never said anything, "he can ask more questions—he's always askin' some fool question. Seems like he's scared or somethin' an' he don't wanna let on."

"Oh, well," I said, "he's just a kid. Give 'im a chance."

"Everybody pipe down," the sergeant commanded, "and get into your holes." He walked over to the rookies as though they hadn't obeyed his command.

"Listen, you guys," he said, "just in case you haven't heard—nobody moves at night and everybody stays down in their holes. Anything that moves is shot."

The rookies mumbled something in acquiescence and the sergeant turned and stalked back in the direction of his fox-hole.

"Jeez, Sarge," Arnold quipped as the sergeant walked by our fox-hole, "You're scaring the daylights out o' them rookies."

"Pipe down, wise guy," the sergeant said and settled down in his fox-hole.

Silence settled into the thick darkness. It grew ominous, important. The rustle of leaves held significance; so did the crack of a twig, the cry of a bird, the squeal of an animal, and most of all, motion. I sat deeply hunched in the fox-hole, my M-1 rifle loaded and locked, bayonet fixed, and peered into the blackness. Beside me Arnold began to snore, sometimes rhythmically in cadence with the jungle, drowning out tiny noises I strained my ears to catch. Walls of thick blackness appeared to split and let through huge objects, moving now to the right and now to the left. I gripped my rifle tighter. The huge objects appeared to merge into the black wall out of which they had come. I am looking too hard, I thought, my eyes are deceiving me. Suddenly, I heard a distinct scratching movement, a sliding along the ground, and I nearly leaped upright in my fox-hole. The noise appeared to be directly behind me and almost upon me. Then, with enormous relief I noticed that Arnold was turning over in his sleep on the dry leaves. I relaxed my grip on the rifle.
“Thank God!” I whispered.

For a moment I felt weak, almost faint. Suddenly I realized that I was tired, extremely tired, and very drowsy. I looked at the illuminated dial on my watch and noticed it was time for Arnold’s guard. I shook him gently and he sat bolt upright.

“Anything wrong?” he asked.

“Quiet,” I said, “everything’s OK. It’s time for your watch.”

“OK,” he said. He checked the bolt on his rifle and put on his helmet.

I hit the blanket and sank into sleep almost immediately. How long I slept I don’t know. It seemed I had scarcely lain down when Arnold shook me.

“Wake up,” he said, “there’s something wrong.”

“What’s the matter?” I demanded.

“I don’t know,” Arnold said, “It’s the rookies. Someone’s hurt over there.”

Then I heard it. Arnold need scarcely have told me. I had heard it often before, but never at night and now it sounded strange, awful. Coming obviously from the rookies’ fox-hole, but ten yards to our left, was the groaning gasping, gurgling moaning of a dying man.

“What happened?” I asked Arnold again.

“I don’t know,” he said, “a Jap musta got into their fox-hole. they were fighting over there before I woke ya.”

Then suddenly loud and clear, shattering the silence, there was a cry of “Help!” A moment’s pause and the cry was repeated. How often I don’t know nor could I ever remember afterwards.

By this time I had put on my helmet and firmly seized my rifle. I peered over the edge of the fox-hole. The moaning appeared to become more intense, more drawn out and frightening. Then I heard a distinct sobbing, hopeless, gasping. I thought at first that the sobbing must belong to the dying man, but it was interrupted by an occasional jumbled garble while the groaning of the dying man continued uninterruptedly.

“Oh, my God!” was all I could make out of the garble.

I rose to my knees and elbows and began to crawl over the edge of the fox-hole, but Arnold immediately seized me by the leg and pulled me back.

“Where’re ya going’?”

“Find out what’s wrong.”

“Are you crazy? You’ll get blown t’hell the minute you get outa this fox-hole.”

“What’re we gonna do? Someone oughta help ’em!”

“There’s nothin’ we can do; we gotta wait till mornin’.”

The sobbing suddenly became hysterical jabbering: “Speak to me! For God’s sake, say something! I thought you was a Jap. I didn’t hurt ya, did I? It was a Jap, wasn’t it? Answer me—it was a Jap! Answer me! Say something, for God’s sake.”

“It’s Curly,” Arnold whispered. “Slim must be hurt.”

The voice broke into loud hysterical crying, and again became broken gutteral sobbing with occasional wailings and mumblings. Eventually, after what seemed an eternity, the sobbing and mumbling suddenly ceased. I became aware for the first time that the moaning of the dying man had ceased long since and a pall appeared to shroud the silence now. It was colder and presently a light rain began to fall. I wrapped my poncho about my shoulders, and
then I noticed that Arnold had fallen asleep.

"Well, sleep," I said almost aloud. "I'll stay on guard; it must be nearly morning anyway."

The black jungle wall became streaked with shades of grey and suddenly dawn appeared between trees and overhead. Sergeant Roth made the first move.

"Hey, over there," he called, "what happened?"

"I don't know," I said, "it's the rookies. I think one of them got hurt."

"Let's go and see," the sergeant said.

He came out of his fox-hole. Arnold stirred and sat up, rubbing his eyes. I joined the sergeant and we went over to the rookies' fox-hole.

There on the edge of it sat Curly, hatless, soaked from the rain, a dumb look on his face. There were dark blotches of blood on his clothes and his trousers were caked with mud, dripping red as the rainwater ran off. Slim was lying in the bottom of the fox-hole, a patchwork of blood and mud, his face turned downward, his hair a mat of gore.

"What happened?" the sergeant asked.

Curly sat immobile and expressionless, apparently oblivious of everything about him. He wagged his head without coming out of his daze.

"Go back to the CP and get a medic," the sergeant said to me.

The company CP was about two hundred yards behind the front line perimeter. Glad to get away from the scene, I went briskly.

"It's no use," the sergeant said when I returned with the medic, "he's dead."

"How did it happen?" the medic asked.

"It was an accident," the sergeant said.

Some of the men were rolling up their blankets; others were eating K-rations. Arnold had started a fire and was heating concentrated coffee in the mess cup.

"Come on 'n' have some coffee," Arnold said.

We washed down brittle biscuits and hash with coffee. The lieutenant in charge of our platoon had come up. He walked over to Curly, who still sat in a daze, apparently unconcerned about the activity around him.

"You'd better get something to eat," the lieutenant said. "We'll be moving out in a minute."

Curly came out of his daze for a moment, "I ain't hungry," he said.

The lieutenant walked over to Sergeant Roth and had a conference with him. Presently the sergeant waved at me.

"Hey, you," he called, "come here. You better help Curly," he said as I came up, "and see that he gets a move on."

"OK," I said.

I went back to my fox-hole and had Arnold help me put on my pack. Then I went over to Curly.

"Better get your stuff packed," I said. "We're gonna move out."

Without a word Curly went into action. He rolled up his poncho and stuffed it into his pack.

"Is this your knife?" I asked, picking up a bloody jungle knife in the bottom of the fox-hole.

"Yeh," he said, in a whisper. "Beter take it," I said.

"I don't want it," he said. I stuck it into the scabbard on his belt.

"Better leave your blanket," I said. I noticed that it had been thrown over the dead man.

Curly suddenly stopped his ac-
mountaineer

Tivity and looked at me. "What about Slim?" he asked.

"They'll pick him up later," I said. "We've gotta move on."

Curly stared dumbly for a moment; then he resumed his packing, at first listlessly and almost nonchalantly and then faster and finally frantically. Activity seemed to relieve him. I could see that he felt better.

"Let me help you with your pack," I said, as I went about fastening his pack-straps onto his belt. He looked at me. He reminded me of a dog that had just been beaten and felt grateful for a bone I had tossed it. I looked at him and had to turn away. I felt sorry for the kid. I wanted to tell him that this was war and that accidents happen in war all the time and to forget it, but I couldn't say anything. I wanted to tell him that our own field artillery had knocked out six of our men in one operation, that our bombers had dumped their loads right in the middle of our perimeter and nearly knocked out the whole company in another operation, and that loaded weapons discharged accidentally innumerable times and killed our men. But when I looked at Curly I couldn't say anything. The dumb look on his face made me feel silly trying to tell him these things and I could feel the hurt in his eyes.

"Please, God," I said in a silent prayer inside myself, "help the poor guy! He's just a fool kid and he don't know what it's all about. Please give him a break, Lord, and help him understand this goddam war!"

When I looked at him again he was figeting with the buckle on his gun belt. There were tears running down his face and he was biting his lips to keep from burst-
vance guard while we were to fall in with the remainder of the company when it came up. The leader of the patrol, a second lieutenant, talked to the lieutenant in charge of our platoon and then the patrol moved out along the trail which was supposed to lead to an enemy airfield in the jungle.

Arnold and I strolled over to the sergeant and the corporal, who were talking to the lieutenant. Curly followed us at a little distance, stopping at the same distance when we stopped in front of the sergeant.

"Are you all set?" the sergeant asked us, ignoring Curly.

"All set," I answered.

"Our platoon will be on the left," the sergeant said, talking to Arnold and me, "and you two guys will be security guards on our left flank. We'll get you another man yet," he said looking around for a third man and continuing to ignore Curly. "Move out about fifty yards."

"Can I go?" Curly asked, stepping forward, squirming self-consciously.

"Well, I don't know," the sergeant said, "you'd better stay here with the platoon."

"That's all right," the lieutenant intervened, "let him go."

"OK," the sergeant said, "be sure you keep spread out."

The company was coming up and our platoon moved over to the left of the trail. Arnold and I moved out to the left flank, Curly following like a dog at our heels. Arnold took the lead first and I followed at a distance of about ten paces.

"You stay about fifteen yards behind me," I said to Curly, "and watch the trees. The sons-of-bitches like to snipe from the trees."

We moved cautiously. Arnold picked out a spot that offered cover and concealment and then dashed for the spot while we remained stationary and covered him. Then I moved to the spot Arnold had vacated; and after I got there, Curly moved to the spot I had left.

It was the customary method of advance whenever we expected the enemy to pounce on us from concealed positions at any moment. We had proceeded in this manner for only a short distance when suddenly I found Curly at my elbow.

"Listen," he said, "let me go out front and let Arnold drop back."

"What the hell?" I said. "What the hell for?"

"I'd like to take Arnold's place," he said lamely.

"Christ Almighty," I said, "are you crazy? You don't know how to pick positions. Arnold and I have done this hundreds of times. Arnold can smell a Jap from a mile," I exaggerated. "You drop back like I told you."

Curly remained behind without another word, reluctantly, I thought. The kid's crazy, I decided. What does he want to go out front for? He'd get it sure as hell. But I felt guilty because I didn't let him go. I knew that he wanted to go badly and I knew that he would have felt better if I had let him go. I knew that he wanted to go badly and I knew that he would have felt better if I had let him go. I felt sorry for the fool kid. Maybe sometime I'd have to give him a talking to. He needed a talking to all right and I was just the guy who'd give it to him. I'd talk to him first chance I got and I'd tell him straight out this time.

"Listen, Curly," I'd tell him, "why the hell don't you quit tryin' to be a hero?"
"Who's tryin' to be a hero?" he'd say, perhaps.
"You are tryin' to be a hero," I'd say, "and you don't even know it."
"What do ya mean?" he'd say, perhaps.
"That's just what I mean," I'd say, "you're tryin' to be a damn fool hero."
"I don't getcha," he'd say, perhaps.
"Listen, Curly," I'd tell him, "Slim's dead, isn't he? And when a man's dead in combat you forget him. I'm not asking you who killed him and it don't make any difference who did. The important thing is that he's dead and you gotta forget him! Combat is like that: when a man's time is up in combat he gets it, and if the Japs don't get him something else will. You can't do anything about men getting killed and no matter who kills 'em it isn't anybody's fault. The only thing you gotta worry about is your own skin. You can't bring a dead man back to life no matter what you do. When you're dead you're no good to anybody."

I'd have to tell Curly first chance I got, or he'd get himself killed sure as hell.

Arnold was on the run to a new position when the first enemy sniper opened fire. Arnold dropped, apparently hit, his rifle falling out of his hands and down in front of him. He dropped face down on his rifle. Suddenly the air was full of sniper fire. The sharp whack of shells bursting above our heads made it difficult to say what direction most of the fire was coming from. I hugged the ground behind a little mound of earth near a tall tree. The Japs had apparently allowed our advance guard to pass by and had opened-up on the main body of the company. I felt safer out on the flank than I would have felt nearer the trail. If the Japs hadn't seen me get into my position, I might have a good chance if I remained motionless.

The shells cracking overhead sounded pretty high and were obviously directed at the men farther on the right. I had to remain perfectly motionless, that was the important thing.

It was as easy to tell the difference between an M-1 and a Jap rifle as between a bass and a tenor. I wasn't worried about the Jap fire. It continued to crack high overhead. But the M-1's were beginning to worry me. They sounded mighty close. I hoped everybody in the company knew they had security guards out there. I felt I'd better get the tree between me and the company, but I didn't know how I could do it. I knew that if I moved I might get it, either from the Japs or the M-1's. I'd better stay where I am, I thought. It's my only chance.

I was beginning to feel better. Apparently nobody was shooting directly at me. I must remain perfectly motionless. Suddenly my heart stopped, and then beat loud like a hammer. Directly behind me I heard the scraping sounds of someone crawling along the ground. I was sure it was a Jap. I forgot to remain motionless and turned swiftly, my gun pointed in the direction of the sound. Somehow I didn't pull the trigger. There, lying behind the tree, panting heavily, was Curly.

"Hey," he said between pants, "Arnold—got—hit."

"What the hell are you doing here?" I demanded.

"I'm—going after Arnold," he said, "He—might be bleeding!"
"Are you crazy?" I said, "lie flat and keep quiet!"
"I'm going after Arnold," he insisted. "He's hurt."
"Don't be a goddam fool," I said. "Arnold's OK; you just stay where you are."
"Listen," he said, "I know what everybody thinks! They think I killed Slim 'cause I was scared. It wasn't my fault! Slim was outside the fox-hole when I woke—."
"Christ Almighty," I said, "what a time to tell a story. Lie down and shut up."
"I'm going after Arnold," he said.

Before I could reply he had slid from behind the tree and was crawling in the direction Arnold lay. When he emerged from behind the mound, he rose and ran, hunched over. The rifles whined and cracked, and Curly dropped.

He was lying about twenty yards in advance of my position. I lay completely motionless, how long I don't know. Finally I heard the boom of artillery down on the beach behind us, and then the explosion of shells out in front. The explosions came closer and farther to our left and then hard on our left flank. Then came white phosphorus shells and soon protecting smoke was drifting back over us. I sat up and looked about. A form emerged from the smoke. It was Arnold.

"I thought you got hit," I said.
"Just a scratch," he said. "I knew the bastards wouldn't waste a shell on anybody they figured got hit."
"Curly got it," I said. "He tried to go in after you. He thought you were hit bad."
"Cripes," Arnold said, "I'm glad he never got there. He'd a made a target of us both."

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**Fir Tree**

By JAMES D. McMULLEN

High on a lonely ridge,
Away from the trail of man,
Too far for the cutter's axe,
Too high to speak with me,
Whisper to God, fir tree.
Feast or Famine?

By RICHARD VICK

THERE is presently raging a controversy so far-reaching in its implications and future effect on the Montana economy that the ultimate decision may determine whether Montana shall subsist as an independent, virile member of the United States or be delegated to the unenviable status of a colonial possession. The decision as to whether the Missouri river basin shall be developed in line with enlightened social principles for the benefit of the entire nation and those who live on its watersheds, or shall continue to be exploited by a few corporations motivated purely by a profit motive with the assistance, unwitting or intentional, of the old-line federal agencies will intimately affect every resident of Montana.

Yet, probably ninety-nine per cent of Montana citizens could not describe either of the two major plans now being offered as the solution to what may eventually be our greatest single domestic problem. In the area most vitally concerned by the consequences of action on that problem, the average person seems to be as sublimely disinterested as though the canals of Mars were under discussion.

Only the broadest outline of each of the two plans involved is possible in this article. Some idea of the scope of the controversy may be gained from the fact that hearings on the MVA bill occupied seven hundred pages in the records of one subcommittee alone. However, a broad idea of the basic provisions of the competing proposals can be encompassed in even as restricted a space as this.

The two plans currently proposed are the Pick-Sloan plan and the Missouri Valley Authority. The Pick-Sloan plan is a "shotgun marriage" of plans prepared separately by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers. The Missouri Valley Authority is the brainchild of Montana's senior senator, James E. Murray.

The Pick-Sloan plan arose with magical suddenness when Senator Murray first let it be bruited about that he was preparing to submit a plan calling for the replacement of the Bureau and the Engineers with a single authority presumably not so prone to juvenile argument and tantrums. Prior to the announcement of the senator's plan, the two agencies had long been engaged in a covert
warfare which occasionally erupted in sharp skirmishes in the press and in the halls of Congress. Reclamation asserted irrigation should be the prime consideration for water use practices on the Missouri and its tributaries, whereas the Engineers were emphatic in their belief that navigation and flood control work should take precedence. With the Bureau largely in control of the upper reaches of the river, the Engineers were obviously faced with a difficult problem.

It was as though two small boys stood at the side of a long chute, down which there was a constant flow of marbles. Each of the boys had a supply of moulding clay with which he could divert or, indeed, stop the flow of marbles down the chute. However, one of the boys stood on a stool nearer the top of the chute in such a position he could dam up the flow and prevent any marbles reaching the boy at the lower position. The mere fact that the boy at the top had the means of completely stopping the flow of marbles might be presumed sufficient grounds for suspicion on the part of his playmate.

Then suppose another, older boy arrived on the scene with a proposal that the children submit to the supervision of a third person who would equitably distribute the marble flow, and perhaps find a means of increasing it. But the boys, horrified at the interference with their play, ran to their mother where they got such comfort as can easily be imagined.

Thus, when Murray proposed a unified Missouri Valley Authority to undertake irrigation, flood control, navigation, power, and other development of the river proper, as well as a comprehensive social program for the basin as a whole, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers lost no time in scurrying to their congressional friends and advisers and with them splicing together a bill from old rag-tags of plans and fragments of oratory.

The plan was American political genius at its best. Simply divide the river approximately in half at the ninety-eighth meridian and let the Reclamation Bureau irrigate everything west of the dividing line and the Engineers control floods and dredge boat channels in the river east of the dividing line, and you have successfully compromised an essentially irreconcilable controversy—what more could any politician ask? That is precisely what was done, and the end result was labeled the Pick-Sloan plan after two personalities in the Engineers and Reclamation Bureau respectively. In that summary and capricious manner an argument of thirty years standing was resolved and the fate of an area comprising one-sixth of the land area in the United States and an undetermined but large percentage of the mineral and agricultural wealth of the nation was determined.

The Missouri Valley Authority was proposed as a means of eliminating the ludicrous spectacle of one government agency busily irrigating one segment of the river while another just as busily built diversionary flood control dams and dredged out the channel of another segment with neither daring to encroach on the territory of the other.

According to the plan called for in Senator Murray's MVA bill, the MVA was to be set up as an
independent government corporation, patterned generally on the Tennessee Valley Authority. Under the President's direct supervision and responsible to Congress for appropriations, the authority would be headed by a three-man board of directors and autonomous of any existing bureau or department, thus eliminating the waste and inefficiency characteristic of bureaucratic control. The MVA could, as planned, operate with the efficiency and speed of a private corporation.

Contrary to the Pick-Sloan plan, the MVA set-up provides for a complete and comprehensive social program including studies of living conditions, recreational facilities, and means of integrating the economy. The advantages of having all planning and construction executed under a single agency are transparently obvious.

The Authority would be structurally the same as a private corporation, and its relationship to Congress would be that of a corporation management to the board of directors. The Authority could sue and be sued in the courts, which is not true of the Reclamation Bureau or the Engineers. If a farmer's cow is killed by a Reclamation Bureau truck, the farmer must have a special bill passed by Congress to obtain relief. In the case of MVA, however, he could negotiate directly with the authority and, if he failed to get satisfaction there, he could sue for the value he demanded.

The Authority would have its headquarters in the basin, where the likelihood of correctly gauging public needs and demands would be appreciably greater than that of an agency with headquarters in Washington as is the case with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers.

The chief difference of opinion, then, is one of administration. The Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Engineers, now so strangely wedded, assert that multiple management will assure the fullest development of the Missouri basin compatible with the principles of a free enterprise system. Proponents of MVA argue that only through use of a single, unified agency can the valley ever attain full economic and social benefits through the regulated exploitation of the basin's natural resources. They say the efforts of several agencies, conflicting at several points, may in fact forbid even partial realization of the possible development of the Missouri basin.

Montana citizens will do well to acquaint themselves with the facts regarding this fundamental clash of ideologies. After a defeat in 1945, Senator Murray is preparing to bring the Missouri Valley Authority before Congress again. The Pick-Sloan plan has been in operation for over two years. The issue is not one for the politicians alone—it is one for every citizen of the Missouri Basin. If the Pick-Sloan plan is unworkable—and there seems to be much evidence pointing in that direction—another ten years will be too late to effect a change.
NOW HIGH up in the shadow of the Bighorns is the town of Judson, slumbering peacefully in a death imposed on it by the worked-out coal seams to the east of town.

When contract mining ended, the strongest left first, and when the railroad cars started to pull away from Judson empty, the others left, carrying their kids, cabbage cutters and stone crocks on trucks that climbed the hill near town and pulled away to Rock Springs and the Union Pacific.

Then the company houses were torn down and the sides of the hills near the tipples took on the look of a cemetery with the squares of cement the houses had rested on, bringing up the memories of times past with corroded carbide lamps, whiskey bottles turned purple in the sun and copper-toed boots cracked and drying.

What else left in Judson fell asleep and rarely woke to anything but death. The false fronted buildings that lined Judson’s one hundred yards of cracked paving sagged in protest against the symmetry imposed on them by men long since dead, while others were torn down until the street had the gaping look of an old man’s mouth.

What men built retreated and the sagebrush began to creep up on Judson cautiously, slowly. The old men who stayed behind took over the time-varnished bench in front of the Buckhorn Bar while Danilo, the owner, played his game of solitaire in front of the soap-scudded mirror that was the back bar and scowled at the player piano that had died mysteriously some twenty-five years ago. And the old men sitting on the bench in front of the Buckhorn Bar dozed and nodded at the silence around them.

Now in the spring of every year, when the Popoagie to the west of town still carries some of the muddy tumultous virginity of mountain streams and the two huge cottonwood trees in front of the Buckhorn Bar spread their benevolent shade over the old men, the town has a gentle restlessness about it, and the old men loosen their memories, bringing up old lies about fights seen and coal dug.

On the first of June, the Serbs among them pull out their pocket knives and cut notches in the bench on which they sit, one notch for each day in June and when they have cut the twenty-eighth notch, they fold their knives and rise from the bench to walk into Danilo’s, rapping on
the one green-topped table as they do, and pointing out of the fly-fouled window at the path that leads up from the river. Danilo looks at the path and then gathers in his cards to wait for old Uncle Marco and the day of Kossovo.

Once very long ago there occurred a battle on the Plains of the Blackbirds in Serbia, and it was there that the Serbs battled the Turks, and it was there that Milosh Obilich slew the mighty Murad who dreamt of hearing the Muezzin’s call in Paris. The Serbs were defeated, but Murad lay dead in his silken tent and I saw nothing that day.

What the guslari sing of is not the defeat, but of the Te Deums that were sung all over Europe that day for the Serbs and for the slaying of the mighty Murad by one Milosh Obilich.

Out of the defeat and travail came the songs of the Serbs and their deaths that day magnified into the sorrowful songs that made tarpaper shacks and black damp more endurable. And nowhere are there guslari who sing as loudly as does Uncle Marco, for in his veins flows the blood of this Milosh Obilich who slew the mighty Murad. And here, in this bar on that day, the old men who sit on the bench feel their blood thicken, and as the night draws over Judson, they listen to the songs of Uncle Marco as he sings of the maidens who mourned their lovers lying sightless on the Plains of the Blackbirds. And for that one night, Kossovo swirls over the heads of the old ones in the thunder of hooves and the clash of steel. For that one night, the old men forget the tomorrow and the day after, and for that one night they are the men who once swung into a bar with healthy shoulders and strong backs. All through the night Uncle Marco sings his songs and tells his tales and in the morning, as the first thin bands of light on the horizon thicken into day, he stumbles toward his womanless house near the river to wait for another spring and another day of Kossovo.

As he staggers down the path to his house, a thousand Turks bar his way and he fights and swings like one possessed. He fights the Turks until he comes to his house and then he falls into bed to sleep and dream of the Turks and of one Turk who dared to laugh at Milosh Obilich. Uncle Marco lets out a grunt of satisfaction and falls asleep. Here-in lies the tale of Uncle Marco’s revenge...

In all of Judson there was no man like Uncle Marco. That’s what they said to him, those that tried to outwork or outdrink him. He could shovel more coal than any man in town, he could drink wine and the way he held it was a surprise to even Danilo, and eat! Uncle Marco was known to have eaten a whole pig at the wedding of Milutin many years before. The kids at Stoya’s boarding house would watch in fascination the working of his jaws and when he crunched down on his food, they promised themselves that someday they would be like him.

The women of Judson looked at him and swore at their husbands, for not in the whole of Wyoming was there a silk shirt as fine as his and when Uncle Marco walked into the Buckhorn Bar, the gaslights shown on his elk’s tooth mounted on a heavy gold chain on his vest and even Danilo hid his for shame.

There were some men almost as good as Uncle Marco in Judson when it came to eating and drink-
ing but when it came to singing, not even the *guslari* in the old country could equal him. He knew all of the songs of Kossovo and he sang them at every Saints' day and all weddings. Stoya said that he sounded like a goat bleating but she was from *Lika* and everyone knew that the *Licans* could not be relied on to say anything of wisdom.

On Christmas and Saints' days Uncle Marco was powerful of voice, but there are some who say that his voice was the squeaking of a sparrow compared to what he did on the day of Kossovo. On that day, Uncle Marco would dress up in his finest silk shirt and walk to town polishing his elk's tooth on a new handkerchief and all of that day he would sing of Kossovo and Milosh Obilich, the slayer of Murad the mighty. That night he would come back to the boarding house and his breath would be rich with wine but he sang as he staggered. And even the coyotes in the hills stopped their howling and yipping when Uncle Marco walked home.

There are not many now that remember when Alija Vuk came to Judson and those that do remember try to forget, for, as God or fate would have it, a blight settled over Judson with his coming, a blight that made all Serbs shout at their children until the cords in their necks stood out red and strong.

Those that remember the coming of Alija Vuk saw him step from the wagon in front of the Buckhorn Bar and they remember with a shudder. When they saw the swagger of this man and his darkness they knew him for what he was, and when he walked into the bar of Danilo's and turned his head from the bar to the green-topped tables they were sure.

**Alija Vuk was a Musliman!**

One of those from Banat who wore a fez and dreamt always of deflowering Serbian maidens. To this day those that remember shudder at the coming of Alija Vuk and what happened when he and Uncle Marco met.

Alija Vuk was a big man, admitted grudgingly, bigger than Uncle Marco. Everybody waited for the trouble to start between the two and, as God or fate would have it, it came, slowly at first, but it came. Alija Vuk went to work at the Number One mine and it was whispered about that this man from Banat could dig coal like no other man, and then it was whispered that he ate at one meal what Uncle Marco ate all day, but some tried to detract from this by saying mutton and rice were not food for men. What everybody feared came true in the Buckhorn Bar one night. That was the night that Alija Vuk walked in with an elk's tooth that was twice the size of any in Judson including even that of Uncle Marco's.

Now it was as if fate itself arranged the clash between the two, the same fate that brought the Serbs and Turks together that day at Kossovo. It started one night when the two of them were at Danilo's and some still argue over it. There are those who say that it was the remark of Alija Vuk about Milosh Obilich sounding like kobilic. Now kobilic means horse or inelegant one and no one used it except when talking to children and wives, and to Serbs, only curses against their saints are worse.

When the two met in the middle of the floor the two cottonwood trees in front of the Buckhorn Bar
shook from the force of it. Danilo reached for his bungstarter when they started and after he watched them fight, he dropped it and prayed to his saint to protect the player piano in the corner. They fought long and hard, using hard knuckles and scarred heads. The green-topped tables crunched under their feet and the floor splintered when they fell, and Danilo watched the mirror on the back bar as it trembled with the impact of the two.

That was a sad night in Judson and Stoya’s kids, hiding behind the Kalamazoo stove in her kitchen, wondered at her swearing, but in all of Wyoming, there was no one as sad as Uncle Marco as he walked home feeling his defeat and thinking of his elk’s tooth that lay on the floor in Danilo’s under the foot of Alija Vuk. Uncle Marco had been defeated by a Musliman that dark night.

The shame that came to Uncle Marco was the shame of all the Serbs. Danilo, tight fisted as he was, closed the Buckhorn Bar the next day and sat in the kitchen of his house drinking the wine he never served over the bar and swearing at Danny, Katie, Eli, Mikie, Sophie, and Janko if they dared lift their heads to their father.

Uncle Marco’s defeat rolled down the one street that was Judson and into the two camps and then spread over the valley, and those not Serbians laughed. Uncle Marco sat in Stoya’s kitchen and nursed his wounds, shaking his head as he did. He sent little Georgie, Stoya’s boy, to the Buckhorn Bar to see if Bollicker the swamper had found his elk’s tooth and little Georgie brought it to Uncle Marco in silence. Uncle Marco wiped it off carefully and placed it among his lodge papers in his trunk.

That night he walked to town to seek out the Musliman and it was the same again. The two met in front of Ben Abel’s barber shop and fought hard but the Musliman was stronger. How many times they met is vague and what caused Uncle Marco to stop is dimmer. Some say it was his broken ribs, others insist that it was youthful tactlessness of little Georgie who laughed at him.

With the defeat of Uncle Marco, Alija Vuk spread his evil over Judson like the foul blankets he slept in and no one was safe from his cursing, and being from Banat and a Musliman, his swearing had the sting of the wind that swirls around the tipples in the winter. He reigned over the town and over Uncle Marco like a fiend.

It was Danilo who first tried to avenge Uncle Marco. This he did by smearing lard on the sliced beef at the free lunch counter, but Alija Vuk failed to eat there. Little Sava Bosic rubbed the handle of his shovel with bacon and for this, Sava Bosic lost four teeth and five days of work.

If Alija Vuk was mean to the Serbs, it was paradise compared to what he did to Uncle Marco when they met. When Uncle Marco played cards, the Musliman would crack his knuckles and laugh at him. Not even the Saints were safe from his tongue. Those that remember shudder at what passed for justice in those days.

As the star of Alija Vuk rose high and bright like the carbide sputterings in a dark room, so fell Uncle Marco’s and it was pitiful. No longer did he wear his silk shirt at nights. He stayed at the boarding house to play dominoes with little Georgie. In the
end Uncle Marco’s star had fallen so low that he was seen to be slinking behind Ferd Wise’s grocery store whenever he came for tobacco.

It was at this time of Uncle Marco’s deepest shame that Big Red came to Judson. Now to those of us who like our women weak and small voiced, Big Red would have been an abhorrence, but by the standards God gave lonely men she was beautiful. She was a big woman with fat arms and legs as big around as the timbers in the Number One mine. When she laughed or talked, her voice boomed like the breaking of the ice in the spring, and her breasts, huge breasts that smelled of cooking and cigar smoke whenever she came close to a man, shook from the power of her laughing. Her hair was the color of the copper wire found in Model T coils. When Big Red smiled, she showed three gold teeth that made Danilo close his mouth in shame when he saw her.

With the coming of Big Red to Judson, there came some of that which had gone with the defeat of Uncle Marco and the lights seemed to burn brighter in the Buckhorn Bar. To the women who muttered when they saw Big Red and promised no good end to her, their husbands would explain with unshakeable and unanswerable logic that such women were needed by the lonely men in Judson who were not as lucky as they, their husbands.

As the beauty of Big Red came to be talked of in Judson, Uncle Marco listened, interested for the first time in many months. When Sava Bosie told him of the way little beads of sweat stood out on her upper lip when she drank whiskey, he nodded, and when Sava told him how Big Red swore, Uncle Marco dug the silk shirts out his trunk and looked at them. Three nights later, Uncle Marco went to visit Big Red, and for the first time in many months he wore his silk shirt.

Old women clucked knowingly when they heard of this and shook their heads wisely when they heard that Uncle Marco had been heard singing. For six months Uncle Marco visited Big Red, and far into the night they could be heard to laugh. It was hard to say which of the two laughed the loudest, for Big Red had a voice to be proud of.

The seriousness of the visits to Big Red burst into realization when Uncle Marco announced to every one in the Buckhorn Bar that soon he and Big Red would be married. For the second time in the life of Judson, Danilo bought drinks for the house, testifying to the popularity that still lingered about Uncle Marco. Even the player piano felt the emotion of the night for it played louder than it had ever played before.

With the announcement, Judson prepared for the wedding. The women eyed Big Red as she passed them and mentally gauged the distance between her hip bones, admitting to themselves that there would be many children born to the two, while the men slapped Uncle Marco on the back and told him of things that he already knew.

The preparations made for the wedding have never been equaled in Judson and all work stopped as the wedding drew near. Uncle Marco sent for the Popovich brothers and their tamburatizas, he bought a new suit, and he engaged Dave Badley, the photographer in Lander, to take pictures. The day before the wedding, he saw Big Red and gave her the three thousand dollars that he had saved.
The day of the wedding came and Lefty Sutton gave the day shift the day off, to which Uncle Marco replied with a glass of first wine. Stoya opened the doors of her boarding house wide and the smells that came from her kitchen that day still linger over the valley. There were young pigs stuffed with apples, chickens glazed with garlic and butter and huge kettles of Sarma on the stove, while Sava Bosic stood over the barrels of beer and jugs of wine in the cellar and sampled each of the wine jugs to be sure that Danilo had not managed to slip in some second wine.

As the time of the wedding drew near, the guests arrived in the splendor of broadcloth suits and uncomfortable collars, enduring them only for the sake of Uncle Marco, as they said to themselves. One minor disturbance was snuffed after Sava Bosic and Danilo got into an argument over the length, and duration of weddings that they had attended. When the justice of peace arrived, little Georgie, Stoya’s boy, was sent to bring Big Red and he was given a dollar by Uncle Marco, who felt the excitement of his day keenly.

What happened when he came back to the house is best forgotten, for it renews old rages. Little Georgie had run so fast from Big Red’s place that he was crying when he came into the kitchen and only after his mother had clouted him behind his ear did he tell what had happened. Big Red had left that morning, left with Uncle Marco’s three thousand dollars, but worse yet, she had run away with none other than Alija Vuk, the man from Banat!

Once more a blight settled over Judson and the Serbs mustered all of their Saints, exhorting them to bring blindness and everlasting sleeping with pigs to this Musliman. Sava Bosic, in his eagerness to minimize the victory of Alija Vuk, said that there would be no deflowering of the conquest, but it fell in silence among those there. No one saw Uncle Marco as he left the boarding house. The food and wine that was to go in sending Marco and his bride on their way to a happy life was spent in indignation by those who swore heartily as they ate. Far into the night Alija Vuk was reviled and condemned. Far into the night the guests shook their heads and mourned the thing that had happened to their Marco.

For three days no one saw Uncle Marco. On the fourth day Sava Bosic and Danilo walked down the path that led to the house Uncle Marco had bought for his bride and here they found him sitting at the kitchen table smoking and playing solitaire. They pleaded with him to seek out the two and Sava was rich with suggestions of vengeance. He showed Uncle Marco the thin knife he had bought in Vienna and swore that this would be the proper method of avenging himself. Danilo, always the smoother of the two, told Uncle Marco of mixing some carbide with the food that Alija Vuk ate. Uncle Marco said nothing to their pleas, and the two friends walked back to town shaking their heads and saying that the tragedy was too great for even Uncle Marco.

Somewhere that black Musliman laughed at Uncle Marco and spent his money, but here in Judson the victim of his cruelty stayed in the house he had bought for his bride and played his game of solitaire, playing red Queens on black Kings over and over again. Judson settled back after its indignity and...
soon the rawness of the hurt disappeared. Uncle Marco would come to town for his tobacco and food, nothing else. He walked by the Buckhorn Bar without looking inside and Danilo shook his head sadly.

What passes for time settled over Judson and as it settled, it blanketed all of that which was so rich in the memories of the men of Judson. Through all of it Uncle Marco worked and said nothing of his disgrace. The first year went, and the second and the third and the fourth but still he worked and gradually even the dull pain of indignity faded from the minds of those who had been at the wedding.

In the fifth year Alija Vuk and Big Red came back to Judson. It was little Georgie, Stoya's son, that brought the news to Uncle Marco, eager to see if he would pull down the gun over the picture of King Petar, but he was disappointed for Uncle Marco only asked questions about Alija Vuk and Big Red.

The first people to see Uncle Marco walking up the path from his house were surprised, for this was the old Uncle Marco, the man who wore the finest silk shirts in Judson. He walked up the path from his house and his shoulders were straight and his head high. When he walked into the Buckhorn Bar, the gaslights fell on the elk's tooth hanging from his vast. To this day no man has ever pounded the bar in Danilo's as hard as Uncle Marco. With his first drink, he saluted the Musliman's god with an unprintable word. The second drink gave birth to his first song in many, many years and it was a song loud and proud.

He was singing of his Milosh Obilich when Alija Vuk and Big Red walked into the Buckhorn Bar and Danilo reached for his bungstarter, but Uncle Marco still sang loudly, his voice richer than it had ever been before.

Danilo closed his eyes then and waited for the meeting of the two, and eyes closed he waited. There was no sound when Uncle Marco stopped singing of Milosh Obilich and Danilo opened his eyes not believing what had happened. Alija Vuk, the man from Banat had stepped up to the bar and ordered a glass of whiskey. A Musliman drinking whiskey! What had been faith in Alija Auk was now craven. What had been swaggering was now a slow shuffling walk. What had been a loud voice was now the whispering of a woman. This was not the Alija Vuk who had beaten Uncle Marco.

Those that wondered at the man from Banat found their answer when Big Red spoke. The beauty of her voice had dissolved in the whiskey she drank and what came out was the scraping of rusty shovels. They listened as she talked and her shrill swearing made even the ears of Bollicker the swamper quiver. What a voice she had! She swore at her man Alija Vuk long and hard and then pushed him aside to drink his whiskey, belching as she did. Alija Vuk moved away from Big Red and closed his eyes to the sight of her and for that, no one in the bar could blame him, for the beauty of Big Red had faded along with her voice. When Alija Vuk opened his eyes, the men in the bar saw that Uncle Marco had his revenge on this Musliman from Banat.

Alija Vuk's eyes were those of a child's and his hands trembled. His shirt hung from his shoulders loosely, the sleeves dirty and frayed. He had lost his black moustache and grey hairs crept
over his temples, marking him as an old man.

What Uncle Marco could not do with his fists, Big Red had accomplished with her voice. Alija Vuk was no longer a man, he was the plaything of this woman who should have been sold to the devil.

If there had been *guslari* in Danilo’s that night, they would have sung of the cunning of this Uncle Marco and the way he revenged himself. They would have sung of the wooing of Big Red and the stupidity of the Man from Banat, the stupidity of running away with her. Uncle Marco’s eyes and mind saw her for what she was and thus he laid his elaborate plan.

All that night, Uncle Marco reigned supreme with a voice rich and eyes flashing. He sang loudly and happy in his revenge. While this Alija Vuk shuffled out of the bar, behind Big Red, he sang of one Milosh Obilich who had slain the mighty Murad that day at Kosovo.

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**Brush Strokes**

*By JEAN GLENN*

I wish I could do brave, impulsive deeds,
Bold brush strokes across my life.
Instead I lightly sketch my plans,
Measuring with a hesitating eye,
Before I dare to place the final line.
HE THANKED the driver for the ride and closed the car door, and as he walked along the dirty, wind-swept street of the little town, he knew how the lunch stand would look. The dismal similarity of lunch stands all over the country, in large cities and in small towns, disturbed him. He was disturbed because he felt that he shouldn’t be concerned about them at all and because he wanted to know the meaning of them. Yet he knew these lunch stands thoroughly. Underneath their indifference was this meaning which he could feel, but to feel it and know it was not enough. He wanted to put it into words, if only to be able to tell them to himself. And he was disturbed and angry, because he knew that those words, whatever they might be, were not important.

The winter ground was hard and crusted with patches of ice, and all day grey clouds had shut out the sun. Now, in the late afternoon, the greyness thickened and soon would turn into night, and he would be glad to have the night instead of the grey day.

On the short length of street that was the town, he saw but one figure, an elderly and motionless man who sat on the bench in front of the general store. There was something artificial about this small town. It didn’t belong out here on the prairie, and there was no reason for its existence. Even though he could see smoke from the wood and coal fires coming from the few houses, it didn’t seem as if anyone really lived in them. And he knew that if it weren’t for the railroad, there would be no town here at all. The lunch stand was different; it could belong anywhere. It was a separate entity, independent of the town.

He walked in and placed his small leather bag at his feet and sat down at the counter, that same counter with its paper napkins, heavy sugar bowls, salt and pepper shakers, and greasy, eternal menus. He ordered a cup of coffee and a hamburger, then lit a cigarette. The smoke rolled around on his dry tongue, and he drank some water. As the waitress set his coffee in front of him, he looked at her and felt as if he had always known her. That same sallow complexion and blank face concealing boredom and fatigue, the soiled white uniform serving as both a dress and apron. He couldn’t picture her as having a family, as living in a home, as doing anything except waiting at a counter. She was immortal.

The counter, booths, and walls were painted in red and cream, a futile attempt to add brightness to
the place. The colors merely shared the monotony and were lost in it.

The customers, too, he had known for a long time. He had eaten with them from coast to coast, and he had lived this same space of time over and over. Their weary expressions and tired, unseen eyes stirred a slight feeling of pity in him. He felt that he was fortunate in having someone else to pity.

With a mingled feeling of boredom and interest he watched the endless routine of the waitresses and the customers, who one by one, sometimes in pairs, finished what was on their plates, wiped the grease from their lips, paid and wearily walked out. Others came in and took their places. Others whom he knew. No one seemed real. They were all fixtures, as much a part of the place as the stools and the counter. Even the cook, who prepared the food, seemed to be merely a mechanism. There was no such thing as individual identity, only a constant mass in suspension. Yet he felt his own individuality, a vague restless thing with motion but no direction.

He bit into his hamburger, and blood and grease dripped onto the plate. The coffee had little aroma and a strong, bitter taste. He scalded his tongue as he sipped it. The tune coming from the gaudy juke box in the corner was absorbed, like the colors, by its drab environment. And the blank expressions at the counter did not tell him who had played it.

A car drove up outside and parked. A young man and woman stepped out, and their laughter sounded strange and far away. It sounded like the laughter he remembered from his childhood, during those rainy days inside when he and his playmates had tired of their games and played them in reverse. It gave him a melancholy feeling.

When the man and woman stepped inside they glanced around. They stopped laughing and quietly sat down to look at the menu. The hitch-hiker knew that they were headed in his direction, and as he looked outside at their coupe, he thought of asking them for a ride. But he saw the engagement ring as the woman pulled off her gloves, and he judged that he would be unwelcome company and that it would be wasted effort even to ask them. He paid his check, picked up his little bag and walked out.

He walked until he was well out on the highway where drivers could see him two hundred yards away. Far off, in the direction he wanted to go, he could see faintly through the haze and dim light the snow-capped peaks of a tall range of mountains. Grey, flat prairie country was behind and on both sides of him. Above the western horizon a small patch of pale sky was uncovered by an opening in the clouds, and the half-light gave an eerie, feeble glow to the otherwise dull landscape. As he continued to look at the patch of light, he realized that it, too, was one of those indescribable things, something which could only be felt. It was neither a very pale blue, nor a grey, nor any color, and its only color was in its translucence and depth.

The wind sighed across the lonely stretches, and he turned up the collar of his mackinaw and pulled his hat farther down.

His destination was almost three hundred miles away, a distance which appeared as only a few inches on the road map. He felt as if he should find comfort in the
fact that he had been on the road four days and he didn’t have far to go. But he knew that the end was never really the end, and he would derive little satisfaction from reaching the big town. He would reflect upon the trip, a vague, disconsolate dream, and find it in some way attractive. Then he would get up and go again.

The hitch-hiker could see no sign of traffic either up or down the highway. The dark asphalt parted the grey prairie with a straight line and merged into the darkening horizon behind him and the mountains before him. He looked back toward the lunch stand. Its red neon sign was more a cry of anguish than an advertisement. The man and woman came out, got into their coupe and drove toward him. The hitch-hiker didn’t bother to use his thumb, and he was mildly surprised when the car stopped beside him.

“We’re going as far as Prairie City,” the man said.

“Fine. That’ll leave me only another hundred miles or so.”

“You can put your bag behind the seat.”

The hitch-hiker sat down next to the woman, and the man drove on. He drove fast and steady. From experience the hitch-hiker knew that it was best to offer no conversation unless they wanted to talk. And after their Sunday drive they appeared tired and in no mood for conversation.

In the west, the little patch of light grew gradually dimmer as the night and the clouds closed in. All the human loneliness in the world seemed to be wrapped up in that last bit of light. It also seemed to hold a last spark of hope, and out there he felt as if there should be a meaning, through the clouds. He watched the clouds slowly close the hole, until finally the patch of light was completely gone. Then he couldn’t picture at all how it had looked.

Night threatened to close in, yet looked as if it never would, and the car sped on down the highway. During the very gradual change from dusk to darkness the clouds parted overhead. A few stars showed through and a slender slice of moon hung in the sky. The moon seemed to hold a constant position in relation to the car, cancelling all motion. He could no longer see the mountain peaks in front of him, and except for the headlights and the moon and stars, everything was darkness. Then the clouds covered the moon again. The car seemed to hang in space as if it were propped up on blocks with the wheels spinning. Movement and fixation. It was as if they had come from nowhere and were going nowhere.

A fast passenger train went by, going in the opposite direction, but it didn’t seem as if it were really going anywhere. The squares of yellow light that were the windows rushed by, revealing a blur of faces, and the train’s whistle shrilled and faded far away into the vast darkness. It was as if that whistle had made the one and only sound in all existence and there would never be another. Then after the train was gone, it seemed as if it were merely an illusion. There was no reason for the train’s being here, and the blur of faces weren’t actually people going somewhere.

In front of them a faint glow of red and yellow light grew until it became quite large and began to move toward them. Then within the glow were other lights which gradually increased in number
until they revealed buildings. And soon the light absorbed and held them for a few moments, then released them and slipped quickly away behind them. During those few moments the hitch-hiker had seen the bright lights of the small city and its people who moved about in cars and walked on the sidewalks. They were people who seemed to make a desperate attempt to appear happy. But they were like puppets moved by strings, and the city was a gaudy toy city with less reality and meaning than the small town. He didn’t look back to watch the lights disappear, and he soon forgot them. They were propped up on blocks again with the wheels spinning.

The woman grew sleepy and her head dropped forward as she slumped back against the cushion. The driver kept his eyes fixed straight ahead, looking for patches of ice on the road, and no one talked. The hitch-hiker tried to picture the woman as she looked at the lunch stand, but he remembered her as a very plain, young woman with a face and figure too common for his imagination. Then he wondered about these two, what sort of life they led, when they would be married and how they would live after that. But he could not think of them as real people. They too were puppets.

When they reached Prairie City at last, he saw that it was a town much like the one where they had picked him up. It was slightly larger but also looked as if it didn’t belong there. The driver stopped and let him out on the far edge of town, then the car drove up a side street. There was something very lost and lonely in the way the car disappeared. It was nine o’clock, and the only life in town was represented by the blinking on and off of three neon signs.

The next time the hitch-hiker looked at his watch, it was nine-thirty, and he had not seen one passing car. He didn’t mind particularly, however, and thought that he could have been waiting five minutes or two hours, that it meant no difference one way or the other. Just to be doing something he walked another hundred yards down the highway. Then after another half hour he walked another hundred yards. He saw a pair of lights coming toward him. He hesitated for a moment, then crossed to the other side of the highway. As the car came nearer he put up his arm and thumbed toward the direction from which he had come. And he thought, “Does it really make any difference, which way I go?”
Poems

1947 Is Autumn

By MARY B. CLAPP

Now warmth and promises that blessed the air
Of early peace have sunk to after-glow
That must be gathered in like a displaced person
And helped to make cheer within the shelter walls.

Now must no shiverer, sharing the world blight,
Withdraw to brood upon his personal chill,
But in himself as on a family hearth
Kindle new warmth and light, that, so, some rays
May reach across a time of cold and dark.

Let it suffice to know a gleam here, there,
Is leaven to vermiculate the gloom
Enough for some to see the darkness moves.

Autumn is not forever; winter is not,
But a time for inventory and revision
When plans slow-tested brighten under bleak resolve
To redeem the storm-blocked fruitfulness of the world.

Here Is Our Crowded Room

By DAVID PERKINS

Here is our crowded room: the music; the lights
Diffused and colored; the slender goblets; the laughter
Low, controlled; the dancing girls in tights
Ticking the floor in sharp staccato—after
Applause, an encore; now the floor again
Massaged and soothed by many sliding feet:
We sway to music of a violin
That may bear us beyond these incomplete
Patterns of shadows where our bodies drift.
We this way onward through the morning move,
While tall flames on the candelabras lift
Our ghostly, sacrificial prayer to love:
O Love, give us more passion than we have!
We see our crowded room a crowded grave.
Bittersweet

Your love—
Palest gold as the closed
Berry of the bittersweet
Becomes
The glorious scarlets
Of fulfillment after frost.

Imagery

Aspens—
Gold lace against
The opaque greenness of pines.

Aspens—
Gay, gilded discs
Bright-burnished by sharp fall frosts.

Aspens—
Glittering doubloons,
Gleaming in wood-pirates' hoards.

Aspens—
Polished fretwork
Of design in the forest's church.

Quiescence

The Butte—
A lonesome old Scot herder,
Tending the hills as flocks of grey sheep
Beneath towering trees of mountains—
Defies the problems
Of a troubled world as he
Serenely awaits the impending dawn.
Poems

By MARJORIE RYAN

Escape Mechanism

There is a certain pride in loneliness,
In making of identity a face
To mask conveniently the awful stress
Of one day's living, one day's time and place.
The hurt man arms himself with self, and coils
Around his isolation, shuts a door
To any groping ache of mind; he foils
Or thinks he foils, the need in his heart's core
And is content with this bypass of pain.
How will he face the depth of pain to come
When his proud soul shall fight itself in vain?
When need is shattering, he will be dumb,
Knowing the anguish in another's call—
To find his guarded self an alien walk

Still Blow, Dark Night

Still blow, dark night, and wrap me round with cold!
Be icy on my face, black to my sight.
Remind me of the chill of growing old,
Of aching sorrow lurking in delight.
For now my joy burns with a flame too bright!
Oh, teach cool reason to my giddy mind,
And show the solemn beauty of your might.
It is no use: I only laugh to find
A star flung out of place, a silence warm and kind.
HAZEL Bartell watched the dark cloud approaching on the crest of a strong southwest wind as she shooed the squawking chickens into the coop. A thunder shower at this time of the year was likely to be a wild one. The hens would stand in the rain until they were soaked; then it would be weeks before they would lay eggs again. John was always annoyed when he had to buy eggs in town. It wasn’t that they couldn’t afford them, but that he thought it an extravagance when they had chickens at home.

She ran to catch a wayward hen that was attempting a dash for freedom; then, breathless from the exertion, chased the last clucking ball of feathers into the coop and fastened the door.

“The rain always comes at the wrong time of the year,” she thought. The wheat in the field north of the house was ready to combine, but, if it got wet, it would be too tough to cut for days. The wheat would bleach, lowering its grade and value; then John would sulk all winter, thinking constantly of the dollars he would not be able to add to his already large bank account. Or, if it didn’t rain, it might hail, which would be worse. The hard ice-stones would beat the grains out of their shells and cut the straw so that the heads would fall on the ground. Combining would yield little but straw and chaff.

Hazel felt as bad as John when something went wrong, but she couldn’t grieve endlessly about it. There wasn’t anything you could do about those things; you had to accept them. Farming was a risky business. You took a chance in everything and the knocks were as much of what you got as the rewards. At any rate, there was no sense in being miserable about it, nor in making everyone else share your misery.

“I’d better turn the windmill off,” she thought. “This wind will have the troughs full. There’s no sense in letting the water pour on the ground.”

Thunder rumbled in the distance as she started down the gentle hill south of the farm buildings. She never walked down to the well without thinking of that awful day the prize Jersey fell into the open cellar where the first house built on the farm had stood, just a few feet from the well. John had turned the cows out of the pasture to drink before he went to a neighbor’s farm for some seed grain that morning. When Hazel had noticed the cows on the hill in the pasture, she had seen that the Jersey wasn’t with them. After
searching the pasture, she finally found the animal on its back in the cellar, struggling to regain its feet, yet too weak to do anything except kick ineffectually. Sick with fear, she had run to the house and telephoned John.

"If you paid attention to what goes on around here, this wouldn’t have happened," John accused her. "That cow is worth three hundred dollars." He called the veterinarian from town and worked with the animal all night. He had lavished attention on the animal as he never had on Hazel or their daughter Leah.

"He can’t sell us," Hazel had thought and then had felt cheaped-en by such pettiness. John’s labors had been to no avail—the cow died before morning. John had scarcely spoken to her for weeks afterward. "I should have left him then," she thought. "But that wouldn’t have been fair to Leah."

As she walked back up the hill she saw flashes of lightning moving steadily closer, while the volume of the thunder increased rapidly. Her daughter, a small-for-her age, dark child of twelve years, was waiting for her on the steps.

"Mother, have you seen my music folio?" the child asked worriedly. "I’ve looked and looked, but I can’t find it anywhere."

"It’s probably wherever you left it, Leah," Hazel answered.

"But mother," Leah answered firmly, "It isn’t. I know where I left it. I looked and it isn’t there. It’s gone."

"You might have misplaced it, dear." Hazel was so worried about the storm that she only half listened to her daughter.

"Mother, he took it." Leah’s face turned pale beneath her tan. "He said he was going to. He said piano lessons were just a waste of time and money."

Hazel tried to placate her daughter. "Now, now, Leah. Why would your father take your music? You shouldn’t say things like that."

"It’s true, though, Mother." Her voice contained a ring of certainty. "He said I was wasting my time, that I should be working. He said he was going to burn my music if he caught me playing again."

Hazel offered no consolation. "You shouldn’t have practiced when he was home." She sympathized deeply with her daughter, but it wouldn’t do after all to criticize him before the child.

"Maybe I shouldn’t have." She tried to hide the sob in her voice. "But if I didn’t do any of the things he doesn’t want me to, I wouldn’t do anything but work. I wouldn’t even go to school. He won’t let me do anything I really want to."

"Well, don’t cry, dear," Hazel said compassionately. "I’ll get you some more music, and we won’t tell your father about it."

"John could be a little easier on the child," she thought. She hated to do anything behind his back like that, but Leah deserved a chance. It was bad enough for a young girl to be out on a farm, with no one her own age around. She had to have a little something. John had never been very understanding with the child. Because of that Hazel had often neglected her work to spend more time with her daughter, but John had been so angry if the work wasn’t finished that each time she regretted it. He had never objected to anything so strongly as he had the music lessons. Hazel
had felt that it was a shame to have that big piano belonging to John’s mother in the living room with no one to play it. When Leah’s teacher offered to give her lessons, Hazel had immediately accepted, never thinking her husband would object.

She stood at the window watching the lightning rip open the sky and listening to the thunder. The wind picked up loose dust and bore it skyward. At any other time of the year rain would be more than welcome. Harvest was the one time when they wanted it dry. The thunder sounded very close now, yet no rain was falling. Hazel felt relieved. Perhaps this was only going to be a lightning storm. Because the room had darkened, she switched on the light and then went back to the window. She saw their team standing bleakly by the pasture fence, their hind quarters pointing to windward, their tails stringing out in the wind. Above their heads the power line crossed the pasture from the south and disappeared toward town.

“I’d better start supper,” she thought. “John will be home before long and his meal had better be ready.”

She called her daughter from the living room where she had been sitting quietly since her mother had come into the house. “Leah, why don’t you gather the eggs while I make supper? You’re supposed to get them before dark, and it’s going to be dark early with all these clouds and dust.”

A breath of dust came into the room as Leah opened the kitchen door and went into the afternoon dusk. Hazel took some potatoes from the pantry and sat at the kitchen table to peel them. Suddenly a brilliant flash of lightning illuminated the room, and when it faded it carried the light from the electric globe with it. At almost the same moment she heard Leah scream loudly above the pitch of the wind.

Hazel ran from the house, screaming for her daughter as she went. Leah was standing a few feet from the door.

“It was the electric post, Mother,” she shouted to be heard above the wind. “The lightning hit it and it’s burning up.”

Hazel clasped her daughter to her bosom, too grateful for her safety to realize fully what had happened. Then, as she awoke to the danger of the burning pole in the wind, she turned to look at it. A tiny trickle of flame was eating its way through the dry prairie grass. As she watched, the wind fanned the tiny fire into a blaze and bore it in the direction of the north field. The ripe wheat was dry. It would make perfect fuel for a prairie fire.

Hazel ran to the house, grabbed a scoop shovel hanging by the door, then ran toward the burning grass by the edge of the pasture. The flames were devouring the grass, speeding by leaps and bounds toward the wheat. Leaping into the path of the flames, she beat wildly at them with the shovel for several minutes, then settled down to a methodical system, beating the flames out inch by inch. The black smoke mixed with the wind-borne dust, choking her, bringing tears to her eyes, while the flames singed her hair and eyebrows. She coughed from the smoke, and tears poured from her smarting eyes, but bit by bit she gained on the fire, making each moment and each movement count.

A truck drove up to the house,
but she was so absorbed in her fire-fighting that she didn’t notice. She was not aware that her husband had joined her until she heard great, racking sobs. She glanced around and saw her husband beating insanely at the flames with an old straw broom, sobbing brokenly and emitting a steady flow of curses.

Disgusted, she returned to her work. She felt as though she had been fighting the fire for hours, yet she knew that not more than a half hour had passed. She lifted the shovel and let it fall half a dozen times before she realized that the fire was out.

Hazel looked at her husband, expecting him to be grateful that the fire was out, that the crop was saved; but instead, he turned on her, his face livid with rage.

“I suppose you would have burned the whole place to the ground if I had stayed away any longer.” He visibly controlled his voice, then let his white-hot rage take its course. “You aren’t fit to be a wife. I can’t leave the place without you do something terrible. You worthless, good-for-nothing. . . .” He was so angry he could only sputter.

Too stupified to speak, Hazel watched him turn on his heel and stalk toward the barn.

“Mother, I know it wasn’t your fault. You didn’t do anything,” a small voice said.

Hazel started. She had completely forgotten Leah in the excitement. Had she heard everything her father said? “He knows it too,” Hazel said quietly, still too exhausted, mind and body, to feel any reaction to her husband’s curses; “he knows it wasn’t my fault.”

“I hate him, Mother.” The child watched her father disappear into the barn. “I hate him awful and some day I’m going to kill him.”

Hazel looked at her daughter, horrified. The child was staring at the empty barn door, her face a mask of loathing. “She doesn’t look like a little girl,” Hazel thought, “She looks like an old woman—a vengeful old woman.”

She grabbed Leah and half-carried, half-dragged her to the truck. After lifting her into the the high cab, she climbed into the seat beside her, turned on the ignition and stepped on the starter.

“Where are we going, Mother?” Leah asked, as the truck rolled out of the driveway.

Hazel cleared the gate and turned north toward town. “I don’t know where we’re going,” she finally answered. “I don’t know where we’re going, but I do know that we won’t be going back.”
WE WERE gathered in the port aircastle — Reed, the boatswain's mate; Rooster, the coxswain; and myself, Marine Corporal of the Guard. The ship was passing through the Windward Channel, between Cuba and Hispaniola. It was not wartime: there were only faint rumblings in the East and our passengers—a unit of the Fleet Marine Force—were concerned only with their annual training maneuvers to be held in and around Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The only thing which somewhat relieved the casualness of the cruise was the wind which characterized this particular leg of our journey. Signal halyards strained into gentle bow-shapes and the canvas ladder guards snapped incessantly. Overhead the sky rolled first to one side, then to the other, like a huge black umbrella punctured with tiny holes, that was being tilted back and forth over our heads. The aircastle was empty except for the three of us, who were standing the midwatch.

Rooster had just returned from an inspection of the weather decks and was grumbling about the passengers we were carrying.

"Bad enough," he was saying, "when the crew sleeps topside. But these damn marines we got aboard.... Christ, it takes twice as long to make an inspection. The bastards sleep any place. You," he looked at me, "you and the Christly Marine Corps. Everytime I make another Marine cruise I swear I'll put in for the Special Service Squadron. Tin cans might be small, but there's fewer sea-soldiers around."

I laughed and moved over to make room for him on the bench. Reed looked at him. "Rooster, I've heard you make that speech about a dozen times since this cruise started. You'd be lost on anything smaller than a battleship."

Rooster bristled like the fowl from which he got his name. "I ain't seen you burn up the deck to get transferred."

Reed knocked the ashes from his pipe into the small brass container on the bulkhead. He cleaned the pipe carefully before placing it in his jumper pocket. "I like battleships, Rooster. They're roomy and comfortable. N'like a big, wallowy woman—they ride easier. Besides, they're less trouble."

Just then the buzzer near the voice tube sounded. It was the quartermaster from the bridge above. While Rooster and I made our reports, Reed walked out on
the forecastle. We had finished
and were sitting on the bench
when he returned.

"I’ve been through this chan-
nel more times than I can remem-
ber, but each time I like it bet-
ter." He took his pipe out and
filled it, carefully tamping the to-
bacco into the bowl. He lit it
before he continued. "Just think
Rooster, there used to be Spanish
galleons filled with cargoes of
gold and silver sailing these very
waters."

"Hah!" Rooster scratched a
match on the deck contemptuous-
ly. "What good’s that do me?"
He lit his cigarette, flipping the
match carelessly toward the spit-
kit. It missed. Reed picked it
up and tossed it into the can.

"Rooster, you missed the boat.
You’ve got no imagination. I’ll
bet I can tell you just what you’ll
do on this cruise. If we get
liberty in Guantanamo, you’ll
head for Boqueron. If we’re
lucky and hit Havana, you’ll
never get past Lorraine alta 6.
You’ve got no imagination—name
any port and I’ll tell you where
you’ll go and what you’ll do."

"Christ Reed, you’re good at
tellin’. How come you know so
much about it? See Marine—
don’t let this old-man-of-the-sea
fool you. Why if I was as old as
him I’d have an imagination too.
I’d have to."

"Rooster, you missed the boat.
You’ve got no imagination. I’ll
bet I can tell you just what you’ll
do on this cruise. If we get
liberty in Guantanamo, you’ll
head for Boqueron. If we’re
lucky and hit Havana, you’ll
never get past Lorraine alta 6.
You’ve got no imagination—name
any port and I’ll tell you where
you’ll go and what you’ll do."

"I knew the conversation would
get down to your level sometime
tonight. So you think I need my
imagination for that, do you?"

"You’re gettin’ old, ‘Boats.’
Whenever anybody spends their
time seein’ Spanish galleons out
there in the black—they’re gettin’
old. All’s out there is water.

N’every turn of the screw puts
less and less of it between us and
Guantanamo—and Boqueron.
Soon’s we get rid of these God-
damn marines, that’s where I’m
headin’." Rooster clutched his
whites suggestively. "Good stuff,
too!"

"It’s out-of-bounds, Rooster. I
heard the exec tell his yeoman to
put the restriction notice on the
dope sheet for tomorrow," I said.

"Hell, I’ll make it. What’s a
little out-of-bounds when there’s
bearded stuff around?"

"You just invite trouble, don’t
you?" said Reed. "Five years in
the Navy and you still invite
trouble." He shook his head won-
deringly.

Rooster snorted. "Christ! Trou-
ble don’t bother me none. It’d
only mean a deck if I did get
caught. That stuff’s worth ten
deck court-martials any day. I
suppose you ain’t never had any
courts?"

"Yes, I have. That’s one rea-
son why I don’t like trouble. I
like things to run smooth—calm
water, that’s me. Had my last
mixup with a court-martial board
back in ’31—haven’t been near
one since. Haven’t put anyone
on report since, either.” Reed ges-
tured toward the low, shadowy
form of number three gun. Its
long, tapering barrel was trained
in until only the thick, squat
breech end was visible. "Navy
justice," he said, "is just like that
gun—all it needs is something to
shoot at." He gazed at the gun.

"There’s very few things that
can’t be settled without that
much trouble if you only take up
the slack slow enough."

"Aw, that’s because you’re
old," said Rooster rising. "Well,
I gotta take another look-see."

I rose too, for it was time for
me to make a below-deck inspection. I walked out on the forecastle with Rooster. We picked our way among the sleeping forms with difficulty. I left him at the first open hatch and went below.

The blue night-lights increased the gloominess of the passageways. I made a quick tour of officer's country, then headed aft. The going was more difficult here, for an occasional hammock slung in the passageway made it necessary to guard against bumping and waking the sleepers. Then too, I was thinking of Reed and Rooster. Calm water, that's what Reed termed himself. Mentally I weighed Reed's desire for smooth sailing against the stormy, rough course Rooster usually charted for himself. I suppose I might have envied Rooster a bit—his apparent disregard of consequences gave a certain freedom to his personality. However, I was inclined to side with Reed. His course seemed the wiser of the two. Then too, Reed reminded me of my father. I couldn't recall ever having heard him offer anything but a "calm water" philosophy. I wondered what he would think of Reed and Rooster.

I checked the two heads aft and climbed up the ladder to the fantail. The sky was still tilting back and forth and I could feel the throbbing of the engines as they drove the screw that churned the black mass of water behind us. Leaning over the lifeline, I watched the heavy black swells rise and fall away into a frothy wake marked by flashes of phosphorescence. There was something fascinating about the sea, and I wondered if any of the crew of those Spanish Galleons had ever watched the wake as I was doing. This reminded me of Reed and I started back to the air- castle. It was slow going over the quarterdeck because of the topside sleepers.

I was just passing the thwartship passageway between the galley and number three turret when I saw the figure. He was leaning against the galley bulkhead. I would have passed without bothering him but I heard what sounded like a muffled sob. I turned the flashlight on and saw clearly outlined against the steel-gray wall, this kid. He looked about eighteen or nineteen and was standing there clutching his white shorts together at the top in one hand, and rubbing his tear-streaked face with the other. He didn't even look up when the light hit him. I walked nearer.

"What's the matter kid?" His skin was white and smooth, almost like a girl's. He didn't answer but just kept turning his head back and forth, sobbing continually. I turned off the light and took him by the shoulder. Shaking him gently, I asked again, "Come on kid, tell—what's up? Are you sick?" He took his hand from his face and looked at me.

"Who are you?" The tears did not detract from his fine features. "I'm the corporal of the guard. You'd better come on up to the aircastle till we find out what's the matter with you." I asked him again, "Are you sick? What's the matter?" He didn't answer and a new flood of tears ran down his cheeks. I lost patience and told him for Christ's sake to come along with me.

Rooster was already at the voice tube when we arrived. He nodded for me to make my report. I motioned the kid toward the bench and went to the tube, won-
dering vaguely whether or not I should mention him. Homesick, I thought, and reported all secure below decks.

"Who's this and what's the matter with it?" asked Rooster, indicating the kid huddled at the far end of the bench, still clutching his shorts but now no longer crying.

Reed came over to me. "What's the trouble? Where did you pick him up?"

"I don't know yet, but I'm gonna find out. He was in between the galley and number three turret. Wouldn't talk. Seems scared, if you ask me."

I walked over to where the kid sat huddled. "Dammit kid, what's the matter? If you're sick you'd better tell us so we can get the night corpsman. If not, you'd better get ahold of yourself and start talkin'." I felt angered because the kid wouldn't talk.

"Here, let me talk to him."

Reed pushed Rooster and me aside and went up to the kid. "Now don't worry son. We're the watch and if anything's wrong, tell us. Maybe we can help."

The kid looked at Reed and started to cry again. Rooster snorted derisively. "Well for Christ's sake, maybe he wants a ninny bottle." He turned to me, "You and the Marine Corps—watta'n outfit!"

"Goddamitt Rooster, shut up! Can't you see he's scared? You two shove off for a minute. Maybe he'll talk to me."

Rooster and I walked over to the far corner of the aircastle. We could hear low voices between the kid's sobs. Soon Reed joined us. Disgust sounded in his voice when he spoke.

"Some bastard threw a fast one into the kid. He don't know who did it. Said he was sleeping alone under the turret when some big guy, that's all he know's about him, took him on. He was too scared to yell—ashamed too, I guess."

"Well I'll be a sad son-of-a-bitch. N' here I am waitin' till we get to Guantanamo. He's a good-lookin' little puke too.") Rooster started to walk over to where the kid was sitting.

"Stay away from that kid. Can't you see he's had enough trouble?"

Reed grabbed Rooster by the arm and whirled him around. "Stay here," he commanded.

"I'd better go up to the bridge and report this to the O.D.," I said, heading for the boatdeck ladder.

"No... wait." Reed beckoned me back. "Wait a minute. Let me get my bearings. Come over here—you too, Rooster."

The three of us gathered by the gunport. I looked out into the darkness. There was no thought of Spanish Galleons in my mind now.

"Look," Reed was speaking, "this could be a pretty serious mess, the book says they're both guilty. What if they decided to hang the kid? Sodomy can be a twenty-year offense if a court-martial board get's hold of it. These Marines will be disembarking when we hit Guantanamo. What's the use of stirring up a lot of trouble for the kid? What's happened, has happened. A lot of officers sitting around a table can't help him now. What's happened, has happened."

"Well let's decide what to do in a hurry. The longer I put off reporting this, the harder it's gonna be to explain the delay. Be-
ides, our relief will be comin' on soon. What'll we do?" I looked at Rooster.

He was grinnin' at Reed. 'Well, if you don't want a lot of trouble, I can always stow the kid away at my place until morning, when the troops disembark.' He laughed, "It'll save me a trip to Boqueron."

I thought of Rooster's quarters on the 'tweedeeck level just aft of officer's country. It was an ideal place to hide someone. You had to climb a half-ladder to reach it. He was seldom bothered by visitors.

"It's a cinch he can't stay with you or me, Reed," I said. "Our compartments are too crowded. There's bound to be questions in the morning."

Reed nodded, "I wonder if... look, you're a Marine like he is. Maybe you can do something with him now. Go over and tell him that we're gonna try and keep this thing quiet. Ask him if he'd be okay until morning," he stopped. "Hell, tell him we just don't want any trouble." I walked over to the kid. He'd buttoned his shorts and was sitting on the bench with his head in his hands. His chest shook with dry sobs. Every third or fourth one broke into a shudder that wracked his entire body. I was startled by the whiteness of his skin. I laid my hand on his shoulder. He trembled fiercely before looking up.

"I'm sorry about what's happened," I said, "but if I report this to the O.D. it could mean a court-martial for you." The kid looked as though he didn't know what I was talking about. I grew angry—scared too. "Look, dammit, will you listen to me?"

He looked at me and I had to turn away. I remembered seeing a girl look that way once, just after... but I had to make him understand. Finally I blurted at him.

"I can either report this to the O.D. and you'll be in a mess up to your neck, or we can try and keep it quiet until you disembark. What do you want me to do? Would you be all right by yourself until morning," I hesitated. ... "or do you want to take a chance with the coxswain? Make it quick, because if you want it reported, I gotta do it in a hurry." All I got for an answer was a pair of big, dark eyes staring at me from a pale, white face. Disgusted, I turned to walk back to Reed and Rooster.

I had taken only a step or two when a flurry of sound caused me to turn again. I shouted to Reed and stood in my tracks. The kid had flopped from the bench to the deck—he was still flopping, with little fish-out-of-water-like movements, when Reed bent over him. That was bad, those funny, inhuman, jerky movements but even worse were the sounds—little bleats and jelly-like whimpers that started a taut, heavily knotted string moving slowly up and down my throat. The swells in my stomach threatened to break over and I turned away in an effort to escape the sounds. Rooster stood before me. He hadn't moved since I shouted. His face wore a curious expression—no concern, just curiousness.

"Why don't you do something?" I said, knowing he couldn't and recognizing my own uselessness clearly for the first time. I walked past him to the gunport and stuck my head out.

The wind and the sound of water as it rushed past the hull of
the ship gradually washed the
other sounds from my mind. I
stared into the blackness as
though it contained the answers
to the questions which were start­
ing slowly to form in my mind.
Days, even years later, it seemed,
they were still unanswered when
I felt a touch on my shoulder. It
was Rooster.

"Reed wants us."

I followed Rooster over to
where Reed was sitting with the
kid on the bench. A cigarette
drooped listlessly from the kid’s
fingers. Avoiding his eyes, I
asked him how he felt and with­
out waiting for an answer, asked
another question of Reed with my
eyes. Reed looked at me, then at
Rooster.

"Son," he said, turning to the
kid, "we’re going to forget the
whole thing. Rooster here’ll take
you down to his quarters. To­
morrow at reveille you can ease
up to where you slept, get your
clothes and by noon you’ll be
ashore. Forget everything that’
happened.” Reed’s voice sounded
flat. He stood up and walked
over to number three gun and
stood gazing out the gunport into
the darkness. He became con­
escious of his hand resting on the
thick breech of the gun. He
turned.

"Well Rooster, what are you
waiting for?"

Rooster took the kid by the
arm. "Come on, you’re Uncle
Rooster’ll take care of you.” He
guided the kid toward the hatch
way.

Reed and I stood watching the
two disappear down the hatch.
Their backs looked white in the
darkness—but the kid’s looked
smooth, like a girl’s.
ELLY lay flat on her stomach, her head substantially pillowed on a slab of sandstone, watching the furry-brown yapping prairie-dogs below. Suddenly she remembered about tonight and twisted round abruptly, her shirt pulling light in places where her body was ready swelling into maturity. Tonight should be special because today she was fourteen and it was her dance.

Staring down the dusty road which wormed itself over the hills, he traced the bare parallels anxiously through the buffalo grass o the horizon edge for some sign of a car. She wished Mama and Daddy would hurry home, wondering if they had forgotten it was her birthday.

She sighed, jumped to her feet, and ran down the hill towards the a ranch buildings knotted at the pot. The windmill caught its tin purs hollowly in a thin breeze as Jelly leaned over and drank from he round, wooden tank. She straightened up, watching her reflection wriggling in the tiny circles where her nose had touched the water.

Then she skipped reluctantly to the house, pausing now and then long the corral fence to pop puffs alls with her big toe. A rider on a bald-faced bay had drawn to a stop before the door.

"Hi, Jelly," the lean seventeen-year-old said. "Yore pa around?"

"He's gone to town, Rodney. Mama, too," she replied, recognizing the neighbor boy.

The boy sat there on his horse, his face reddening and his big hands fumbling in the horse's mane.

Finally he said, "You goin' to the dance tonight, Jelly?"

"Yes. We're going."

"Well—guess I'll go get a drink."

"D' you want something?"

"No. Just wanted to see yore pa," he said, riding over to windmill.

Jelly watched him swing to the ground, despising his sudden awkwardness; then she remembered that Johnnie Crowder might be coming home with Daddy and Mama. Slamming the screen door after her, she went through the silent kitchen-living-dining room past the faded-orange curtain into her own bedroom.

Furtively she pulled a mirror fragment from under the mattress and examined her face in it. Sucking her cheeks inward from the mouth corners and arching her sandy eyebrows, she studied the effect.

From the pocket of her tattered overalls she took an incredibly small portrait picture which had
been torn from a group photograph. Jelly looked intently at the man’s bent brows, admiring the angry, dark curve of his lips. Even if Crowder didn’t come here, she would see him at the dance tonight.

The unmistakable croak of an old car sounded outside and she shoved both picture and mirror under the mattress, pulling the flat patchwork quilt smooth again.

A woman’s voice called, “Jelly-baby, c’mere. See what we brought you!”

Jelly stumbled over the raised doorsill, rammed the screen door outward, and halted shyly as the man from the picture stepped out of the angular Model T beside her father.

“Come on out, Crowder, and take a look at the mare. T’wimen folks can unload.”

Her father’s big, worn boots crunched in the alkali powder as he strode toward the corrals. The dark man followed, without noticing Jelly.

“Jelly-baby, come help me lift these groceries out. Then I’ll show you the sweet little surprise we brought.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Jelly grasped a crushed box corner.

“What did you do all afternoon, chicken?”

“I was up to the dog town,” she answered sullenly.

“And I’ll bet you’re jes’ as tired as you can be,” the young mother cooed. “Sure you’re not too worn out to go to the dance?”

“Mama, I feel fine,” Jelly snapped, exasperated.

“Here, darling. Open it quick.”

She picked up a knobby, brown-wrapped package and thrust it into Jelly’s arms. Eagerly, Jelly broke the string.

Holding the yellow-haired doll up, she had to open her eyes wide and unblinking to keep the tears back. It was really an incredibly ugly doll, with its bright hair, ruddy, bulging cheeks, and fat, baby-doll hands. She wanted to smash it on the floor.

“Mama, it’s real pretty,” she said slowly. “I’ve always wanted one with hair. Thanks—thanks—”

Suddenly she turned and rushed into her bedroom, clutching the doll fiercely. Jelly wondered, as she sat on the sagging bed, if her mother had ever been anything but perfect. She was so beautiful and nice, but not at all like Daddy. Daddy was an ugly man, but he always understood. He couldn’t have known about the doll. She felt it cold and hard against her stomach where the shirt had pulled up.

“Jelly! Come here a minute.”

Her father’s voice sounded important. She threw the quilt corner over the doll and ran her fingers through her stringy hair.

In the kitchen her father was shouting through the soap smeared over his face, “Crowder, get the grey box in the back seat while you’re out there. Give it to Jelly.”

Crowder grinned as he handed it to her. Her fingers trembling with anticipation, Jelly fumbled at the lid. When she drew it off she saw the red stuff—gauzy and brilliant. Cautiously she picked it up, the red folds cascading from her fingers in long, bright swirls.

“Mama! Mama! It’s a dress!” Jelly turned to her mother, holding the low-cut red stuff close under her chin.

The woman frowned prettily at her husband, “Jim, it’s too awful old for her.”

“Hell, Mary, Jelly’s getting to be a big girl. You’ll wow ‘er tonight, young lady,” Jelly’s father roared proudly, wiping hi
ugh face dry without bothering to remove the soap.

"Jim, I couldn’t possibly get it tidy for her tonight."

Jelly looked down at the gauzy red gauzes, seeing where the red material had caught the color from her other’s hair and turned rust-colored. She stepped back into the shadows and it was red again.

"Mama, it’s all right to wear it this way. It’s awful beautiful, ease," she begged.

"All right, Jelly-baby. If you want it so much. You can take our new dolly, too, if you’d like. Come on, now, everyone, let’s eat. If you must be starved,” she insisted, vivaciously, ushering the man to the wash basin.

Jelly’s father roared suddenly, "You didn’t say doll?"

"Show your Daddy, Jelly."

Unhappily, Jelly brought out a yellow-haired doll.

"What in the Sam Hill do you want with a doll!"

"It’s pretty—kinda," she faltered.

Johnnie Crowder’s lips curved. "Kids gotta have dolls, Jim," he said.

"You tell him, Johnnie," Jelly’s mother laughed, setting the cold fried potatoes on the table. Jelly’s cheeks were hot with undetected tears, and she took the doll back to her bedroom miserably. Then she returned, her father and Johnnie Crowder had started eating. "These spuds are cold," her other was saying as she speared one. "But I didn’t have time to eat them up. Johnnie doesn’t even know the dif—do you, hinnie?"

"Why, man, cold spuds is the st things in the world to go turing on," Jelly’s father said.

"Yeah, Johnnie, you got to remember, no teacher leaves Orange Flat single,’” she said, adding gaily, "This one’s a cute trick, too.

"Not half as cute as you,’” her husband replied, grinning.

Johnnie Crowder’s gaze included Jelly. He countered boldly, "I ain’t having no teacher. Gotta have me a lil’ native girl that can shinny up a peeled pole and top off a bronc like a man."

"Now, Johnnie, that don’t sound like you,” Jelly’s mother reproached. "Jelly, eat your spuds!"

Jelly gobbled the dry potatoes down, thinking about the lovely red dress. Johnnie had practically said—but what had he said? You couldn’t always tell what was under those bent brows. She wondered suddenly whether Rodney Turner would like the dress, and if the admiration would warm his crinkly eyes.

Her mother finished eating quickly, and opened up the red dress again. Jelly shoved her chair back, leaving her half-finished meal.

"Let me put it on, Mama,’” she said, snatching it and running past the orange curtain.

The red stuff slithered down her bare body almost to the ankles. Jelly pirouetted on the splintery cottonwood floor.

"Why, darling, what a pretty color—but how awful for you,” her mother said, stepping past the curtain. "Your Daddy doesn’t know about colors. You’re too brown for this kind of red. It makes your skin yellow as a little Chinaman’s."

"No, it don’t."

"Don’t be silly, darling,” she replied, as she began rummaging through the squeaky bureau drawers. "Oh, dear, you don’t have a one that doesn’t need ironing."

"They just haven’t been washed
for a long time," Jelly ventured.

The husky murmur in the kitchen had hushed, pans began banging around, and her father’s raised voice came clearly through the din.

“Hey, you gals! Get a wiggle on. The old road to the school house’s washed out and we’ll have to go around the divide.”

“Yes, Jim. But hold your horses. I have to iron this child a dress.”

“Thought you said you had to iron yourself one, too,” he growled.

“Oh, Jim! Heavens, yes! Jelly-baby, you’ll have to wear the red as it is, even if it does look awful. I got to iron my blue dress.” With the parting admonition, “Now, wash up and comb your hair,” she ran into her own bedroom.

Three hours later they rolled down the shale divide to the bright-windowed log school building. Tiny spots of cigarette fire punctured the darkness on either side of the open door.

The Model T headlights wavered to a stop just inside the gate. Jelly tried to see past the lights flaring in the windows. “Jim, you old son of a gun!” The owner of one of the fire spots opened the car door and pumped her father’s arm. Then suddenly everyone was talking and laughing out in the darkness and Jelly was alone.

Inside, the fiddler was tuning up to the piano. Jelly reluctantly joined their slent, wide-eyed group. Rodney Turner, a tow-headed little girl, eyed the red dress coolly before speaking.

“You got here, Jelly.”

“Yes, Louisa.”

“How’d you come?”

“Car.”

“Rod and I come horseback. The car broke down.”

“Oh.”

The fiddler swung off on a square dance tune, the piano following several bars behind. Halfway through the first chorus, the piano caught up, and dusty-booted men began sifting in from outside.

“Git yore part’ners and form a square,” the caller shouted, swinging his voice in rhythm to the music.

A few men drew their wives onto the floor. Jelly stared at Johnnie Crowder, who was still arguing with young Barton in the doorway. They were eyeing the women along the wall earnestly. The little teacher was laughing and her dark eyes glistened. Johnnie finally strode over, murmured something in the teacher’s ear, and led her into the dance.

Stunned, Jelly didn’t notice that a tall, sunburned boy came over and asked Louisa to dance with him.

“Lady round gent, and the gend don’t go. Swing yore part’ner and doce-cee—do,” the caller was chanting.

The laughing, stamping dance blurred into a streaked color before Jelly’s eyes. She couldn’t
the difference between her
her, the florid-faced men, and
annie. They were all part of
hateful, spinning blur. She
't want to see Johnnie laugh-
into the teacher's dark eyes,
h her father, or any of the sun-
med boys. Her mother's gay,
nting voice rose within her—
just like a little yellow China-
n. Just like a Chinaman.'

Suddenly Jelly pushed past the
n jammed in the doorway, raced
the cactus-studded slope be-
the school house, and sat
vn, panting, at the foot of the
rocks. The slitted moon hung
and smoky-red against the west
izon and Jelly watched it for
ong time, dry-eyed and wonder-

She could hear the music in the
ance, and she heard old Pete
ing another square dance. Then
saw the a man's figure com-
the hill toward her.
'Jelly,' the man's voice called.
Jelly didn’t answer until the
figure came closer. She saw that
it was Rodney—tall and poised in
the dark.

Gruffly, she said, "What are
you doing up here?"

"Same thing you are, I guess.
Cooling off. I saw you go out."

"It's too hot to dance," she said,
defensively.

"Yes, too hot to dance," he re-
peated. "Jelly, that's sure a pre-
ty dress. It looks real nice on
you."

"Rodney, does it?" The pleas-
ure warmed her voice, and she said
quickly, "I don't look like a China-
man, do I, Rodney?"

The music still floated up
through the wind, but neither of
them listened. It wasn't important
anymore.

"I'm riding the ridge section
tomorrow. Wanna come along?" he said at last.

"I might," Jelly said, smooth-
ing the red dress over her knees.
"Yes, I think I might."
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