



MOUNTAINEER

Published by Students of Montana State University

FALL, 1949

VOLUME 8, NO. 1

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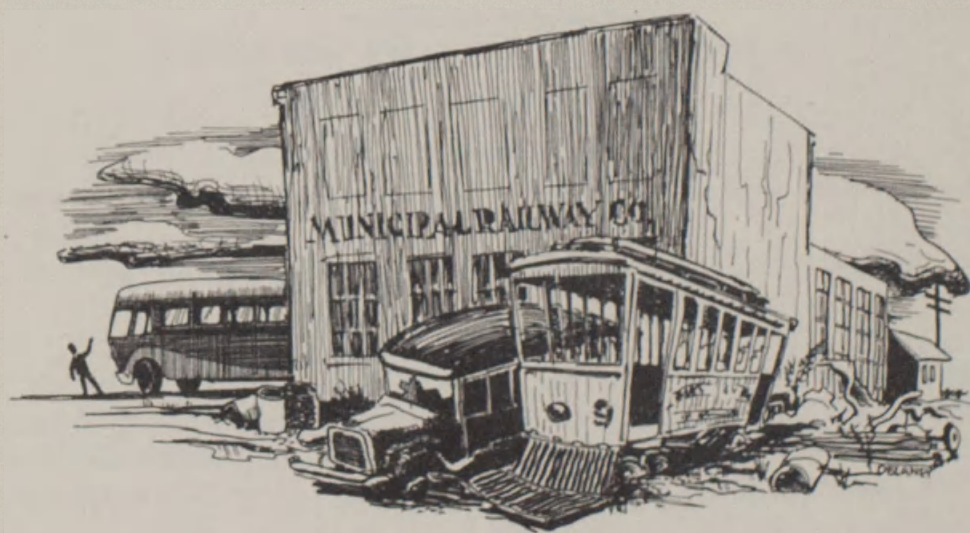
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The Institution

By REID COLLINS

Illustrated by BOB DELANEY

Mr. Evro could not understand why he should not have his radio, but he didn't say anything. Lying there, a wasted bird in the heaving cage that was his life, he watched benignly as the little table model whisked from the view of his overhead mirror. He turned his head as if to see the last possible glimpse of it and turned back again. Maybe they wanted it for some other patient, some other patient who was desperate for something to do or listen to.

Lying there alone in the panting iron that kept him alive, he remembered now, during the first few months of his captivity, he had searched so desperately for diversion from the monotonous world that lay neatly bordered in the mirror above him. Then he had frequently turned his head from side to side, hoping for something new to see. He soon found that there would be nothing to see at all. The spotless room never afforded anything different, no waste or untidiness to fasten his mind to, and visitors always took the chair behind him in deference to the mirror.

So he lay there, stretching his shrivled neck occasionally so that the cotton around it could press on a new spot—that even became diversion, the sensation of gentle touch in a new place along his neck. He had grasped at such straws for seven years, hanging there, juxtaposed to nothing save his prison and his life thread, the machine that breathed for him. His thinning hands had explored his body now and then, keeping familiar with that wretched thing beyond the metal hatch. And he noted passively that there gradually became less and less to explore; year by year the bones came up to meet the skin and taunt the twy-like fingers until he lost interest in the obvious process and turned to the prophylactic existence of the room.

Mr. Evro was cheerful, though. Perhaps it was because he had grown into the habit of being that way. The little man of seventy-three seasons had been the operator of the town's only trolley car for ever since it had been; in '29, when they tore up the tracks, he had naturally fallen heir to the eminence of driving the bus that succeeded it. Children's hero, business man's confident, youth's arbitrator, elderly lady's last identification with chivalry, Mr. Evro had seen the cinema of Scottstown, Nebraska, from the beginning. He had been a part of it; along with the statue at the end of main street where the depot was, he had represented Scottstown, becoming more of an institution than an individual in the microcosm of the small town. Perhaps that explained, in part, why no wife came to see Mr. Evro; the day Millie Rockwell married Thomas Brown explained the other part. That day when the banker drove his pair of matched bays down the dusty street on a Sunday entombed with the rest of the days marked the beginning

of Mr. Evro's renunciation of martial felicity. His life took on the aspect of a public property when he assumed the position of mail carrier and guardian of the post. "Government work"—that's what he told Millie at the reception. He was going into government work, and he indulged himself slightly in the martyrdom. Other men might have said, "Foreign Legion," but for the cautious nature of Mr. Evro, 'government work' was sufficiently self-abnegating.

The quiet stream had carried him of a matter of course into the driver's seat of the trolley where he assumed the poise and dignity befitting one engaged in such precariously modern pursuit. The trolley was his life then, as it was the mechanical analogy of the town. He could accelerate or decelerate as the situation might call for, but the course was set. Like the friends he knew, he could control but slightly the direction of progress; the gentle urge and flow of social current kept all in their appropriate path.

Lying in the hospital, he sometimes amused himself in trying to recall the faces that he knew, faces that always began in his consciousness as bowed heads coming up the steps to appear on a level with him. That was how it had been, a hat, a forehead, then a face; faces with smiles, faces with frowns, faces which, like the trolley, would follow the course set for them and never deviate. Sorrow, gladness, numbness, awareness, he had seen all the emotions, known all the vacillations. Yet, from all these experiences, Mr. Evro had selected no philosophy to present the townsfolk. That was not his way; to be cheerful, interested, and dignified without imposing—that was his way and he followed it without thinking about it.

Winters when the cold-rubbed faces sat stiff and chisled behind him, he would be cheerful. If anyone cared to disregard the admonition, DO NOT CONVERSE WITH OPERATOR, Mr. Evro would automatically prophesize a break in the 'snap.'

There were times, though, when nothing could be said. Times like the morning Thomas Brown trudged wearily up the iron steps and fixed a haggard, benumbed countenance on Mr. Evro. There had been nothing to say except, "I'm awfully sorry, Tom. If there's anything I can do . . ."

Thomas had thanked him and walked back to dutifully receive the sympathies of the other passengers. Even on that day the memory of Millie declined resurrection. Mr. Evro was sorry.

Summers, when comparatively new faces, smudged with brown or cherry, bobbed up the steps, Mr. Evro would assist their embattled bearers with, "Ho, ice cream, eh? Well, watch that you don't muss those white pants." He would smile and wink at the reticent females of like age and accord their mothers an understanding and admiring smile until they disappeared.

Summer and winter he partook discreetly of such gossip as was confided to him, the unimportant and the momentous, the choice and the mediocre, all were his in the course of a day and, when the day was done, he would shut off his consciousness until the next dawn. Life was his only

when he drove the trolley to work or to market or to play. It began in the trolley barn and it ended there.

And now, lying in the white room, he watched the evanescent sunlight play on the Templar Building in his mirror; he listened to the machine breathing for him. Time and change; the Templar Building illuminated by the pale light had been the trolley barn and the bus garage before it was torn down and five stories took the place of one. Seven years.

A ripple of sound on the edge of his room told him that it was time to eat, a difficult process now that he could not survive for a moment outside the metal machine. Miss Eller's rotund figure blotted out the building across the street.

"Oh, good evening, Miss. Is it that late?"

"Yes it is, Mr. Evro. An awfully good meal tonight." With that began the arduous task of replenishing his body, an embarrassing process because Miss Eller would sometimes stroke his white hair and croon, "Don't hurry, now." But it didn't make much difference to him whether he hurried or not, whether he ate or not. He somehow secretly regarded eating as a perfunctory habit which had long since become obsolete in his world.

As she wiped the residue from his lips and chin, he asked, "Uh, Miss Eller, hasn't the Evening Star come yet?"

She paused, holding the cloth irresolutely above his face. "I—I'm not sure." She dropped the cloth and added quickly, "I'll ask Dr. Irving."

It was too late to tell her it wasn't necessary, so he licked his lips and listened to the noise in the hall. Someone must be having company, for there was an undue amount of activity instead of the occasional padding of nurses' feet.

A step separated itself from the scuffling and walked into his room. "Hello, Jim. How's everything?"

"Just fine," replied Mr. Evro, adding an afterthought, "the meal was very nice."

"Well, fine. Miss Eller tells me we haven't gotten the paper. The boy must have forgotten again." The doctor's voice sounded tired and far away. "Perhaps . . . perhaps you'd like Nurse Eller to read to you for a while, Jim."

"No, no, you needn't do that." He wondered if he should invite the doctor to sit down. He always wondered that, thinking in the next moment that they all must be very busy, too busy to coddle him. He was a little surprised when the tired face of the doctor came voluntarily into the mirror. The face matched the voice, weary and almost confused, completely unlike the cheerfully confident one Dr. Irving usually wore.

Mr. Evro smiled at the image. "Did you have a hard day, Doctor?" He was sorry he said it when the doctor's face left the mirror.

"No, not too bad. I . . . I hear they borrowed your radio. Well, don't you worry. We'll have it back soon."

"No, doctor. I won't worry."

Dr. Irving made a swift survey of the gage readings and he and Nurse Eller left the room. Mr. Evro thought of calling after them and asking that the door be shut, but then, they were probably busy.

The moribund panting of the machine dominated the room once more. In the mirror Mr. Evro could see one light burning in the Templar Building, a dentist, perhaps, doing some evening work. That being pure conjecture and nothing to occupy his mind, he let the breathing machine take hold. Strange, but he no longer felt its sucking and pressing on his chest. It had almost terrified him the first day when they introduced him to his cage. For weeks he could not adapt himself to the peremptory manipulation of his body. Gradually he had succumbed to its iron will, realizing that it would do its job despite him.

He even laughed at that first day when Dr. Irving explained the thing to him, what this gage did and that needle indicated. It wasn't important; the city bus driver was not on the job, and that was important. He had resisted going to the hospital until the aches and strange sickness had frightened him into it. He was a little charginned at being told that his illness was usually reserved for young people and that he ought to feel proud, at that. It had been humorous, if a little grim; over the seven years the thing was forgotten. Over the seven years he had lived with it without understanding or compromising with it. He didn't have to. He didn't compromise with the automobiles when they began making their presence felt on the main street; there was no need to compromise, for they were there. Neither had he compromised with Nurse Eller or Dr. Irving. Had he thought about it, he might have concluded that they were his friends. But they were like the rest of the world had been and, had they ever conflicted with him, he would have genuflected to them also.

There he had lived and would live—. Prompted by nothing, his eyes left the mirror and swept the room. Angles, angles where the moldings met at the corners, angles where the wall corners went up to meet the moldings. That was all, clean white lines, coldly reassuring. He had rested assured of many things; the pension took care of the expenses, the kindness of the city that was forgetting him would have taken care of them anyway when he first entered.

When he first entered, he had often speculated about who would replace him, consciously as the bus driver, unconsciously as the epitome of the village. With a tinge of precocity he envisioned another taking the driver's seat, usurping his position. But that also passed after the power failure. He remembered the power failure because it was the one time in seven years of incarceration that peril had come from behind the masks of white cleanliness to meet him frankly, starkly.

Of all the nights, he recalled most unpleasantly the night when the room flickered in his mirror for a moment and went into blackness. He had

been drowsing after dinner and the dimming of the light might have passed for sleep had it not been for the mortal silence that followed it when the man-made respirations ceased and left the room quiet, terribly quiet. For a moment he could not understand and then, when his body began the growingly insistent cry for oxygen, he knew—the power must have failed. In that brief instant of silence he knew fear, but, strangely enough, another emotion vied for his attention—what would THEY think? His petulant jealousy of the usurper coalesced and, for a brief, purging moment, it dominated his mind. Then, in the next instant, his electronic life holder found nourishment and resumed the monotonous pressing and releasing of his chest; the hospital emergency plant had saved him.

Still, the memory wasn't particularly graphic. The things had happened. The doctor had hurried to his room to begin the explanation over again; the dials the gages, the principles and problems. The reiteration seemed to reassure the professional man more than the patient of the strength of science's tenuous hold.

As Dr. Irving detailed the functioning of the lung, one little detail seemed to pervade Mr. Evro's mind, sticking there for no better reason than a feeling that he should take an interest. "These two dials show the respirations per minute. And these two corks, you can feel them from the inside; well, these two corks serve as release precautions, in case the pressure should go haywire. Of course, it won't, but if it should, it will push these corks from their holes and destroy the vacuum. . . ." As the doctor started an explanation of the bellows, Mr. Evro felt up around the casing and rested his fingers on the corks. He didn't bother investigating the possibility of their falling out. They were there, and they would presumably stay there.

But that was in the past. The light across the street was nothing to fasten thought on; he wondered if he should go to sleep. It was always that way after dinner. He was seldom tired, but going to sleep was one way of evading nothingness. Perhaps the absence of the Evening Star had upset the ritual; anyway, he wondered if he should sleep or if he should wait and see if the tardy delivery boy would show up. He had never been late like that before.

Not an advocate of schedules, he had nevertheless grown used to the gentle regularity of confinement. Even before, he had meekly disapproved of change. When the transit company decided to tear up the tracks and buy the bus, he was mildly disturbed. Of course, the job of driving the new vehicle would be his, but still, things wouldn't be the same. That first day when he coaxed the shining conveyance from the barn, he felt uneasy, not sentiment for the trolley (he hadn't even given it a name), but apprehension for the new sensation. Even that passed by the end of the day when business men remarked that it was certainly a step toward civic development and the ladies complimented the comfort and seating capacity. The children;

awed and interested, they gathered it in with their eyes at first and finally became familiar with eversticky fingers.

A new sign was up: DO NOT TALK TO DRIVER WHEN COACH IS IN MOTION—not the formality of the past, but quite as peremptory. The flow hadn't altered. The faces still materialized in the same way, the amenities were the same.

Of course, 1929 saw some new currents: styles took on the look of the coquette, Henry Ford had new competition in the garage talk, and some business men looked over their papers to confide that they were going to liquidate a trifle. Thomas Brown was among the bus contingent now and then, usually when necessity demanded that he forsake the town's biggest automobile for the proletariat mode. Had Mr. Evro taken particular notice, he might have seen Mr. Brown an old, uneasy man. The lines around his eyes had deepened and joined forces. In '30 they hung deep, withered caverns.

1930, a year to end all years. It did end them all for Thomas Brown, or it induced him to end them. There was no scandle. The weight was too much and the power too small; man's natural devices being not so far removed from his mechanical ones. This time, when tragedy struck the Brown



house, there was no one to console, a provident fact, perhaps, for the idle chatter on the bus did not have to cease when a new passenger ascended; this time there was no one to offend. Had the graying driver been given to introspection, he might have termed Brown's passing the end of a chapter. Mr. Evro was genuinely sorry.

The next few seasons saw many faces on the sidewalks instead of in the bus. A few, on regular salaries like the bus driver, were not so drastically affected. Mr. Evro understood and nodded when the transit company cut his pay, though. He knew the condition of the country; he knew it from the talk of the day, from the desultory discussions of world and national politics. And he read the papers, not hungrily, but assiduously. It was his duty to prophesy fair weather, and he sometimes needed facts or figures to explain the optimism. He was even optimistic about the snow atop his head, grinning good-naturedly when the business men chided him about it, smiling sheepishly when the old women insisted that it distinguished him. It was not his mien to be distinguished—reserved, perhaps, but not distinguished.

He was not aware of old age. Like the night, it did not fall, rather it welled up from within. In '34 he didn't do so well on the check-up, but

he dismissed the fact with another fact—it was cold and his eyes were watery. The company didn't mind; they told him he was still the best driver they'd ever had. And he laughed with them when the joke dawned.

With the bus, as with the trolley, life began and ended at the garage. He still slipped and called it the "barn" now and then, but so did quite a few people.

The familiar faces, all a little older, began to frequent the bus again. He smiled with them when Chrysler-DeSoto came out with the "turtle cars," and he agreed with the general opinion that they'd never last. When the prediction proved itself he smiled again, not vindictive, just satisfied.

Still the talk went on, carried by the subtle flow. He took to whistling now and then, catching at the more provocative phrases and using them till they died. F. D. R. and Social Security—they were facts, and nothing so remarkable. They excited comment, though, discursive, short opinions from the women, long, involved dissertations from the business men. If he were forced to choose, Mr. Evro probably would have favored the women's approach, the protean treatment which allowed for rapid disposal of such things in favor of new and varied subjects.

So it was when Scottstown became aware of other people's exigencies. The yellow people of China had been pitied for many years. For a time there was talk on the bus of not buying anything from the other yellow people. This subsided and was buried with the rest of the panaceas.

The late thirties saw a change in values, however. The bus heard more discussions of Europe, more doubtful conjecture. Obviously 'he' was a hog and Chamberlain had better realize it; or, it's another trick of imperialism and there's nothing to worry about. Mr. Evro, threading his way through the traffic preferred the latter view, explaining that the kind of thing that was the first war would teach people not to fool around again. This was a brave statement, for someone, usually a high school boy, would inevitably ask him if he had fought in the last one. Mr. Evro would have to smile and explain about his arches, concluding the discussion with the assertion that he had tried, but what could he do? And he had tried, not with the zealous fervor that some had, but dutifully and thoroughly. Besides, if he wanted, he could always say truthfully that he was too old.

The idea of being too old would have been untenable ten years before but, with the coming of a new decade, it didn't seem too bad. Some young children, still sticky and smudged, regarded him as something antideluvian. When the practice first started he had been stultified at the thought, but the current soon soothed that tiny ruffle and he was ready to be called old. When he looked into some cherub's face and answered, "Yes, of course I remember Washington," or "How I got out of that whale is my own little secret," the cherub's owner would flush for a moment and then chuckle with him. Now the owners' of children were no longer familiar. Some resembled the old friends in some ways, as indeed they should.

In the beginning of the last decade subtle, disturbing things began happening to Mr. Evro. The remaining old friends would remark that they were tired or that they were planning retirement; the young would inquire about his health. One day two men whom he recognized as aldermen got on the bus and rode from the garage to the train depot. He saw them walking back up main street on his next run down. Old? The thought never occurred to him, but he was angry with himself for an occasional mistake in change, or a hesitant dissemination of directions. Anyone could err in clicking the coin dispenser, and the town was growing, that was all.

Then came the day and the year, December 7, 1941. He walked down to the depot to hear what the others thought. He stayed for a while and began walking home, back up main street to his room. It was seldom that he took a Sunday stroll of late and some of the new buildings and new fronts on old buildings fused and irritated him. The town was growing, all right. And now it would need him all the more. The threat, if it ever existed, of his losing his job was abolished now that we must fight. The strange young faces would disappear and he would carry on. The town must have been expanding; he had never felt so tired from walking home before.

The next few days bore out the fact that he was needed. The company gave him a medal for his service and told him that he was doing valuable work, and he felt good about the whole thing. As he wheeled the bus along the thoroughfare he was anxious to see one of the old faces—they would be glad to know about the medal, glad to know that he was needed and would continue to be a land mark.

But the old faces failed to bob through the hissing doors and, when he shut the other door, the one on his life, he felt a trifle stiff and sore. A good night's rest might help.

A good night's rest lingered and became a long, seven year's rest for Mr. Evro. He had wanted to stay in his room, but they would have none of it. That's what the hospital was for—that's what his pension was for. And so, when he became worse, he regretfully allowed them to take him.

The first year wasn't bad. He stayed in bed a great deal of the time. Well, now and then he would get into the lung and let it rest him, but he could still sit up and see an old, nervous face once in a while. The once in a while meant longer whiles the second year and gradually, insidiously, the metal cavern called him more and more. With the third year the new doctor, Dr. Irving, explained to him again the workings of the machine, the bellows, the gages, and the corks, concluding that Mr. Evro would not be able to leave the intricate thing again.

And so it was that Scottstown's institution surrendered to time's ravishment. With the war nearing a close, another man succumbed also, this

one completely, and Mr. Evro read about it in the Evening Star. He was sorry.

The Evening Star and the radio kept him distant company, although they never said much of great importance to him. Perhaps it was because he had heard it all before with different names and in different guises. They existed and that was enough; they had existed that way for seven years.

Mr. Evro stirred from his thoughts and moved. There was really no sense in waiting for the paper. The light in the imaginary dentist's office flicked out and left a square portrait of black nothing on the mirror. The good meal had worked down to some place within the casket and began its lotus work. He should call and have them shut the door. He listened and noted that the unseen hall was its usual quiet self—but no, some one's door opened far down the corridor and a nurse was talking over a voice on the radio. It might be his radio, the table model that he had lent.

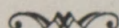
He listened attentively when some one said, "Shhh," and the nurse stopped talking. The radio voice drifted distinct and hollow down the hall. . . "and, according to Dr. Irving, the tragedy may reach epidemic proportions. As you know, Scottstown is located in an isolated sector of western Nebraska, and efforts are being made to contact hospitals in the hope that emergency equipment may be flown in. Until the time of this broadcast, there are but three stricken children in need of the lung. Again, according to my phone conversation with Dr. Irving, there is but one such machine in Scottstown and it is in constant use. More reports will be aired when they come in. Now to the weather . . ." The nurse's voice drowned out the radio for a moment and then the door closed.

Mr. Evro turned back to the mirror. The exact angles, the same intersections, all were there in the spotless room. The machine heaved and sighed in its relentless monotone, dominating the white cubicle save for the thoughts of the driver. He crossed his palms inside the machine and let realization seep beneath his white head . . . Dr. Irving . . . Scottstown . . . the lung . . . It wasn't a pre-sleep fancy; it was real. He twisted to look at the spot where his radio should have been. At this time of night his Evening Star would have been there also. Once more to the mirror with its black square and depressing, precise angles.

Seven years, a good night's rest. The town's institution, along with the statue down by the depot. Gages, dials; the bellows and metal, heaving, pressing, sucking, sighing. The old faces that remained but in memory. Did the lights dim? No, no power failure. Would the doctor come? Probably not. The voice again, crisp and clear from down the hall . . . " . . . but one machine in Scottstown . . . in constant use . . ."

Another voice, not so recent . . . "the corks . . . in case the pressure should go haywire, but it won't . . ." Mr. Evro uncrossed his palms and felt

them slip along and up the interior perimeter of his cage. ". . . you can feel them from the inside . . ." The withered fingers found their goal and rested there. Mr. Evro adjusted the cotton to a new place along his neck. His arms ached; he stared in mortal fascination as he pressed gently upward and outward until his fingers suddenly burst forth from the cage, defying its sighs and freeing its inmate.



Regret

Fantastic

Old, grey ghosts

Of battered dreams

Pick out a desolate refrain

On rosined strings of memory.

Then heckled

By the mockery of hopelessness

The song is whipped into

A raucous cry

That wails away

To die

In loneliness.

Donna Coster

Ten Bucks a Day

By DONALD F. GRAFF

Illustrated by NANCY FIELDS

The steady click, click, click of the wheels tickled off the long minutes. The train had picked up little speed since it left the yards, making its way down the dew-shiny tracks hesitantly. Alex, squatting dumbly on a shapeless potato bag, lit his second cigarette since they had pulled out of the loading area.

He spat, fingered the cold rifle at his side, and stared at the other occupants of the boxcar. Most were dozing, a few nervously shifting position and grumbling to themselves.

The click of wheel on rail continued. Through the half-open door a leaden horizon formed a backdrop for grey, leaf-bare scrub trees, passing slowly by like mourners at a funeral. Inside, the car was shadow-ridden and indistinct in the dull, drifting light of early morning. The click of wheels, protesting groans from bales, boxes, and bags that came with each lurch of the car, and the murmurs of the men punctuated the stillness.

Alex was nervous. The shops ahead and the men outside. Spitting on his own people, maybe worse.

"Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio," said Deno, over and over and over. He began to whimper. Deno was a dago and a coward. Fired up at making 10 bucks a day ferrying supplies through unarmed strikers into besieged shops—and he had a gun. Look at him now. Dago coward.

Everything had been fine. They were sleepy when they got on the train. Didn't give a damn one way or another about what lay ahead. A guy had to eat and when no work was in sight, running a load in strike-bound shops was okay. Better than okay when you considered the 10 bucks a day. Nothing to worry about. Get the train into the shops and out again and you were 10 bucks richer. And they had guns just in case there was any trouble.

Not much thought given to the men around the shops. Mind their own business and cut out the fuss and most of them would be inside working, getting paid. Their own damn fault a train had to be run in. Their tough luck if they started any trouble.

Those in the car had been sleepy, wanting to finish the business and collect the 10 bucks. Nothing to worry about.

And then Georgie had opened his fat mouth.

"You wanta know what Al told me?" he asked.

Nobody gave a damn what Al told him—rummies, both of them.

"I'll tell you what he told me." Georgie would tell anything. "He

said he heard where maybe they got guns too. Told him I didn't believe it but he said that's what he heard."

They had growled at him, wanting to disbelieve, not much concerned yet. And Georgie had gone on yapping, nobody could shut him up. He got more excited as he talked and started hopping around. The lurching of the car made it look like a comic dance but what he said wasn't so funny.

"Al's always got it straight. Besides, how do you know they ain't got guns? No reason why they can't have 'em. Makes these babies of ours not so pretty don't it? I mean if they got 'em too might be a little trouble. Bunch of 'em hanging around there. And jeez, if they got guns too!"

No comment, they just lay on the floor and on the bales but you could see what they were thinking. Deno was the worst. He had started to sweat even though it was so damn cold. He shook a little and then he started it. "Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio," over and over and over. A dago and a coward.

Alex looked at Deno, squatting, all hunched over and shaking, his hands twitching, like he wanted to keep crossing himself, a gun beside him. Looked like he had forgotten all about that. Alex wanted to hit him, kick him in the face, teeth splattering all over, tell him to shut up with his goddamned crying. He wanted to pitch Deno out of the car, shut him up, and he wanted to beat the wall with his fists again and again and again. SHUT UP THAT GODDAMNED CRYING!

Scab! Dirty scab! But 10 bucks a day when a thousand guys would welcome hell for 50 cents. Scab! What did a mob of crazy strikers mean to him? Scab! He had himself and a family to look out for. Rotten scab! But 10 bucks a day—and a gun.

Alex fumbled for a cigarette and lit it jerkily, burning his finger with the match. He swore intensely, profusely at the irritation, got up, and walked the length of the car. Anything to get away from Georgie. Loudmouth gave him a pain, always had but more so now. Shooting off his mouth like that. They were all edgy. His teeth wanted to grind together. And God, what if Georgie was right? That loudmouth even had him jumpy. DAMN HIM!

Half hour out and 10 minutes to go. The car lurched on through the grey morning. Wheels clicked on rails, monotonous and meaningless. The sky was getting lighter but the car was still in shadow. Just a few minutes and they would pass the strikers, the big doors of the shop would open, and they'd be inside. Guns, hell.

Georgie might be right. Alex knew those men, grew up with most of them. Now he was scabbing. Friends, out there by the shops and he was going to run this train right through them. And maybe they had guns and then friendship didn't count for a hell of a lot.

Georgie said, "Betcha they ain't got guns an' even if they got 'em they're too gutless to use 'em. Don't ya think so Alex?"

"Can't tell," coldly. He didn't like the loudmouth, never had and worse

now. Can't pick your company when you go scabbing. A pool-room tough anyplace didn't sit well with him. All talk, all guff, and no guts. Scab!

Georgie kept it up, hopping around and asking if anybody thought they really had guns. Kind of jittery. Nobody gave the mouthy one any reassurance.

No one trying to sleep now. Everybody shifting around, fingering rifles, coughing, and he knew what they were thinking. Used to be friends, now maybe they had guns. Why did he keep thinking of silver? What the hell? He was getting as jumpy as the rest. Silver . . . SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!



Alex turned away but Georgie was going to talk.

"I know that kind. Sod-busters, once removed. No nerve. Think they got lots of stuff when they're in a mob. Be different when they see us comin'. They know we got guns. They'll back up like beat dogs when they see us. I know that kind. Sod-busters."

"Can't tell." His own people. Sod-busters, got no nerve. Damn Georgie! MY GOD! What if there was shooting and he killed someone. Who? Christ, anyone. What if he killed someone? What if someone . . .? No, no, no, no. They didn't have guns. All a damned lie. What if he had to shoot . . .? My God!

He was sweating now and his feet and hands were icy. The moisture oozed out all over his body, ran down his back and chest and it was cold. The rifle was repulsive to touch. He jammed his hands into his coat pockets and picked at the rough lining.

The mourning trees still marched by the door and the sway and lurch of the car had a steady rhythm. Click, click, click of wheel on rail and each turn of the heavy wheels cut down the distance to the waiting men. Silver, silver, silver . . .

They'll rush the train. Grimy blobs of men pouring out on the track, rushing the boxcars. They got guns and they'll shoot. Too many for the guys on the train. We'll have to shoot and what if I have to . . .? What if someone . . .? Friendship, blest be the tie that binds, running with the gang. They got guns and they'll use them. No, they won't. It's just like Georgie says. They're gutless. They'll back off as soon as they see us. They know we got guns. We're protected in the cars. They're out in the open. They haven't got a chance. Like hell they haven't, they got guns!

He was sick and wanted to heave. The smell of the boxcar, the bales, the men, his own stench made him sick. He wanted to heave and cry. He sat on the potatoes, picking the lining of his coat, and sweated and sweated and got sick.

Everybody was sick. Silence except for the coughs and scuffling of boots. But he knew they were sick.

Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio, Madre de Dio. The click, click of the wheels in the background, like the click, click of beads on some massive rosary. The mourning trees marched by against a grey and chilling sky. They marched slower and the clicks were farther between.

They began to move around now and he picked up the rifle in his clammy hand. Everyone was jumpy, no one felt like talking. He wanted to be sick someplace all by himself. Only he was in a boxcar and had a gun in his cold hands and they were nearing the shops. My God, if there was shooting someone might get killed. He might . . . Oh, God, NO!

Georgie stuck his head out the door (wish a tree would take off his fool head) like a corpse climbing out of a casket to trade stares with the passing mourners. They were passing slower now. And they didn't look like mourners, just trees by the track, passing slow, slow. Almost there.

"Jeez, looky there, looky there," Georgie breathed. "Must be a millyun of 'em. I can't see no guns. God, they look mad. Engine's almost up to them now. They're just standing there. Must be a millyun of 'em."

"Shut up, Mouthy, and get your head in before someone improves your looks by letting a little air in. Get in here and get your gun."

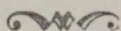
They crowded to the door and stared into the hostile grey. The shop loomed up through the mist, seemed bigger than it actually was. Denim ants crawled over the concrete apron in front of the big, barred doors and the engine was almost on them.

The escaping steam was the only indication of life in the motionless engine. The cavernous shop was near silent now that the doors had swung shut, muffling but not silencing the primitive sounds outside. The current of many subdued voices underscored, did not disturb, the profound stillness of the shop.

In the shadowy interior, a few men drifted like wraiths across the floor. Some were sleeping on boxes and waste bales, others staring disinterestedly out the grime-thick windows.

The tenuous white rolls of steam hissed insinuatingly from the engine as Alex dropped to the floor of the shop, leaving his cold, useless gun behind. Others followed him out of the car and moved away from the tracks.

Alex stood for a few minutes, shivering, by the yawning door, then leaned against the sooty-red side of the boxcar. God, he still wanted to be sick someplace all by himself.



Reflection

Did you ever notice
a pattern of green leaves
and think how perfect it was
and refined;
and then wonder
if those leaves
really enjoy being so much alike?

And do you think
they ever grow tired
of staying there so patiently,
scarcely moving
except when an angry wind
heaves gusty sighs,
and a sulky, grey sky weeps;
wringing each tiny heart?

And do you suppose
when Fall moves in,
they struggle with Time
because they are afraid
to release their grasp
on the little branch,
and turn brown,
and dry
before the rest?

D. Coster



The Rendezvous

By JOSEPH E. L. GIONET

Illustrated by NANCY FIELDS

Walking by the ghostly ruins of the Saar village, with the moon giving the silhouettes of shattered roofless walls the lonely atmosphere of death, Peter Becker felt the old smells of battle that had long ago been washed away by four years of the drizzling rain that had not stopped with the end of the war. He walked down the silent street, by the longhandled pumps, the troughs, the manure piles, the wood sheds. He tucked a lapel of his trench coat to his throat, against the chill of the night, and walked slowly with the shadows forming ominous patterns before him, toward the light mist that marked the river bank. He could see the mist through a break in the row of houses where a shelled building had been cleared away. The street turned gently toward the river and the descending moon. Turning with it toward the moon, a pale moon in a cold breathless sky, Peter felt the shadows draw away from the street to let him pass. The shadows withdrew and let themselves be swallowed by the stone of the houses, by the black windows and the old gaping shell holes, inviting him to go on. He stopped in the street and looked back toward the small GASTHAUS, the village hotel. The street behind was a mass of dark that pressed him on, on into the light with its silent, non committing invitation. And the mist of the river bank ahead

Peter passed the last house. The fields were clear in the moonlight and the shadows of the hedgerows were sharp. He breathed the smells of the frost-thawed earth with the coolness of the night. Across the river were the black masses of the hills where the grape grew. By the side of the road was a stone grotto. Peter stopped and tried to make out the statue in its hollow. He remembered the statue, a small one of the Virgin, and he remembered that he had prayed as he passed it that morning his patrol had gone down this road. He had prayed hard. Just a short prayer, it had been, but hard. That's how he used to pray when he was afraid. He had been very much afraid that morning. He remembered. All winter long he had not known real fear. He had felt confident and safe. He had felt that because of a few fragments of poetry that had kept going through his mind—"I HAVE A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH . . . IN SPRING . . . AT SOME DISPUTED BARRICADE . . ." They had been just lines like those that must have run through the minds of other doggies. Fragments, just fragments. No author. No rest of the poem ever came. Those lines had been close buddies and sometimes in the quiet of a night behind the front they would take him into the future and there he would see a road block—blasted trees across

the road, mines, the cracking of machinegun fire, the screaming and bursting of shells and the bodies sprawled on the road. And one of those bodies he saw was his. But that was not due till spring. And that morning he had realized that spring was only a short time off. He was jumpy and felt sick. He felt that his time was running out. The shell holes became ugly scars on the earth, scars that he turned his eyes away from because they made him feel sick. That's how he had felt when they had gone down the road, an eight-man patrol in two jeeps. He had prayed, squatting there behind the light machinegun in the first jeep.

Looking back at the village, a cluster of black, broken by moon reflections on the slate roofs, Peter felt that lost, melancholy, restless feeling that had haunted him so long. He had thought the village might cure it, but it had not. He had tried to lose that feeling. God knew he had. But that feeling was still with him, the same feeling that had made his life in the States since the war a series of dull, disappointing episodes that tasted as flat as beer from a bottle opened the night before. Then France again, and Paris. A week in Paris had been enough to dim the lights for him. Finally he had decided to come back here, to this village in Jerryland that had seemed to beckon to him to return, whispering a call that he had not realized before and, therefore, had not answered. This is where it had all started. Four years ago the restlessness had started here. He had strained his mind and this was where he had found that things had changed. Somehow, that morning life had taken a turn which he had not been able to keep up to. And here he was, the first night in the village, leaving his room where he could not sleep and walking down the road to the river.

Peter studied the hillside and their patterns of vineyards, where the moon shone on them. On this side of the river the hills were grey, marked with paths and occasional hedgerows. Beyond the river the shadows hid the vineyards but Peter knew they were there. The road was clear and now it turned straight for the river. The mist was just ahead.

As he approached the river the mist dissipated to his sight and the bridge appeared in outlines and took form. The same old bridge. The solid stone rails held in the road and, below, the water flowed, black and silent.

Sitting on the stone rail and looking down stream, he took a flask of mirabelle from his coat pocket and after tasting of it took a long, slow drink. He had bought the mirabelle in Lorraine, where he had learned to like it in '44 and '45. He pocketed the flask and lighted a cigarette, looking downstream, observing the flow of the dark water flowing silently under the mist that crept slowly in thin, almost indistinguishable masses over and against the current. Upstream the mist was just as thick. It seemed that the small river was flowing out of one cavern of mist and quickly, lightly rushing to hide in another that wrapped it in as much secrecy as the one from which it came. Overhead the moon easily cut through and looked all the more pale.

Peter took another drink of mirabelle. As he returned the flask to his

pocket his clothing brushed and made a slight sound. But he thought he had heard another sound. He listened carefully. He heard it again, like the shuffle of gravel, like slow, dragging steps on the road from the village. The footsteps were distinct now and he peered into the mist to see who else would be by the river at this time of night.

A dark shape appeared in the mist. As it came into his circle of vision Peter saw that it was a soldier, in American uniform. The moonlight flashed from the gold bar of a lieutenant on his helmet. He walked toward the bridge slowly. The tall, lanky lieutenant wore battle uniform and equipment. He held his head erect but his lightly bearded face, grey and black in the moonlight, was drawn and his set mouth betrayed the fatigue that Peter had known to come from sleepless nights and days under shellfire and the tension in a man's stomach and mind that will not allow him to eat. The officer's uniform was smeared with dried mud. The sling of his sub-machine-gun and the strap of his field glasses crossed over his chest.

Peter stared and wondered whether the occupation troops were holding maneuvers. He had not seen signs of American troops when he had arrived that afternoon. The man looked familiar. Almost at the bridge, the lieutenant



stopped and studied the bridge. Then, as though he had changed his mind about crossing, he stepped off the road and into the field. Peter was about to call when another man in combat dress appeared. He too showed signs of battle. His shoulders drooped heavily and his jacket was badly torn. His head was bent forward under a battered helmet and he looked at the ground as he walked. Crossed bandoleers hung limply from his shoulders. Peter saw that the man was carrying an object in his hand. Peter froze. He gripped the stone of the bridge. The man was carrying a human arm. As the man glanced toward the bridge and turned off to follow the officer's course, Peter stared and felt faint. The man's left arm was cut and only shreds of a sleeve hung from the shoulder. He was carrying his own arm. Peter's stomach tightened and his head felt light and seemed to be spinning inside.

He never should have come back, he told himself. The man was Hunky, from his patrol. And he had seen Hunky dead. The officer was Lt. Casey and he was dead too. Peter was seeing the impossible. He was seeing ghosts. He wanted to run but it seemed to him that running was no better than staying.

Out of the mist four more men advanced. They were bearing another on a litter supported on their shoulders. They limped wearily by. Four worn out doggies carrying their buddy. Hatch, Red, Ginny and Koch, with Laprade on the litter. They seemed to look forlornly at the bridge. And then MacPike, with half his face torn in a mass of raw flesh and white bone fragments, came carrying his automatic rifle in the crook of his arm, glancing to the rear as he had always done as rear guard. They followed the lieutenant's path into the field and faded into the mist while Peter sat frozen, fighting of the terror that wrenched his whole being, hearing the faint shuffle of the boots fading with the patrol.

It was his patrol. He was sure it was. But they were dead. Or were they? Maybe . . . Did such things happen? Or it was imagination. But why had they turned off the road? It seemed that they were intending to cross the bridge. Did they turn off because of him? But it was the patrol. He remembered Hunky's screaming as he twisted on the side of the road, and the arm swinging by what was left of the sleeve, the twisted wreck of the jeep and the mess of blood, flesh and intestines that had been Laprade before the shell had hit. And the others lying on the road, their bodies jarring as tracers buried themselves in them and kicked up dust on the road. All in a glance as he dashed for the hole and was thrown into it by a slug in the thigh.

Peter turned to look at the hill across the stream from which the enemy fire had come. He heard his breath catch. A man stood at the end of the bridge. He was a large man, tall and broad-shouldered, and wore the black uniform of the SS, the Schutzstaffel. Slung from his neck was a sub-machine-gun and his hands held the weapon ready. His helmet was low over his eyes and his face was shadowed, a handsome face with large hard features that showed the lines of fatigue. On his collar was the insignia of a corporal. There was dried mud on his boots. The knees of his trousers were caked with it and there were smears of it on his tunic.

"Who are you?" Peter asked, staring and feeling the weakness of his question.

The German did not answer.

"What do you want?"

The guard just looked intently at Peter. Accusingly, perhaps, Peter felt. He felt panic but the German's gaze held him there.

Now Peter knew why the patrol had turned off. He wondered what this German was going to do. Apparently, now, he meant no harm to Peter. The man's tunic was torn jaggedly, the way shrapnel tears cloth. Peter re-

membered the 105's behind the village firing in batteries as the ambulance went back. This was another of the dead fighting men who walked in the night. Peter fought off his panic. If the man would only speak.

"Please, say something," Peter begged. "SPRECHEN, BITTE."

The corporal took his hands from his machinenpistole and rested his arms on the weapon, bearing on the short sling. He looked exhausted, and he stood there black against the grey mist.

He wouldn't talk, Peter was assured. But why did he stay here? Watching Peter like that?

Peter remembered that SS men had defended this sector. This corporal must have been one of them, and now he seemed to be still keeping the patrol from crossing. But why? It must be something that happened in the battle. He had heard legends like that but had never believed them. Some-

thing beyond living and dying. What is beyond living and dying? In a dough-boy's life, in his existence, there must be something because not everything could stop so suddenly as life on the line. A few ounces of powder can not neutralize all that a doggy has done and felt.

Peter hoped hard that the German would speak. The minutes dragged on, the stream flowing and the mist thickening, dissipating, thickening. Peter began to accept his companion. The man evidently did not intend to do any violence. He must have been killed in that fight, too.



Peter remembered approaching the bridge. It was still fairly dark. As Laprade stopped the jeep before the bridge the lieutenant waved the second jeep to pull up to have a final check with Sgt. MacPike before they crossed the bridge and kept a longer interval and had to use radio. They knew the Jerries were on the other side of the stream and expected them to be dug in on the hills ahead. As the second jeep pulled up the lieutenant told Peter and Hunky to check for mines. Hunky took the mine detector and began sweeping the road and Peter carefully went down to the bank and began to feel the ground and the walls of the abutment of the bridge, searching for a wire, a peculiar mound, soft dirt, anything that indicated a mine or a booby trap. There was a narrow strip of the bank that went under the arch of the bridge. On hands and knees Peter felt the earth in front of him. Suddenly the earth felt soft, a large soft spot. With his trench knife he probed gently into the soft dirt till he struck a hard object. It was not deep. As he moved the point of the knife against it, the object felt smooth, not scratchy like stone. He called softly up to Hunky to tell the lieutenant

he had found something. By small handfuls he removed the sand that he loosened with the knife and uncovered a cylindrical object. A detonator. A bit more and he was touching the shoulders of an aerial bomb to which the detonator was attached. The lieutenant's cautious voice came down to him asking how it was going. Peter said it was an aerial bomb and to stand off, that he was going to disarm it. The lieutenant said OK and Peter heard feet moving back toward the jeeps.

The detonator was of a new type to Peter. He wiped the sand from it with his dirty handkerchief and then rubbed his fingers to make them warm and sensitive. Peter wondered whether it was a time detonator. He put his ear against it and felt something like an electric shock go through him. The thing was ticking. It might blow. He wished to God he were familiar with this type.

Then there had been a flash and the solid jar in the ground and the crash of a burst above on the road. Someone screamed a scream of surprise and terror. Stones and sand splashed in the river. They must have tripped a mine up above. Then Peter heard the flat report of a gun from ahead. It wasn't a mine. It was a high velocity shell. Ambushed by an 88. Machinegun bullets crackled overhead like a thousand bull whips. Peter looked up and saw the streaks of tracer low over the bridge. There were more screams from the road. He was on his feet running along the bank with bullets cracking all around and the sickening smell of powder smoke in his nostrils. He saw a foxhole up the bank and raced for it. That's when he had seen them on the road. Then the blow against his thigh threw him into the hole. Then he lay in the hole watching the tracer against the greying sky as he tried to stop the blood.

Peter looked at the German, questioningly, his face begging for an answer. There was no sympathy in the SS man's face. The German moved, his boots striking the road heavily, to the rail opposite Peter. With deliberate movements he sat there and relaxed, as though he were willing to sit there a long time. Behind him the black water flowed into the mist, the dirty grey mist.

There, under the bridge, Peter remembered, he had just uncovered the detonator. Yet, there was something not quite clear in Peter's mind. Uncovering the detonator. Peter felt there was something missing in his thinking. He felt that he was keeping something from himself. Think. Think hard. Uncovering the detonator. Touching the detonator, Peter felt a tightness inside. It was ticking. His stomach tightened cold. "WHEN SPRING COMES . . ." That's what had happened. Everything had tightened and then everything had seemed to loosen and begin to fall apart and he couldn't hold them together anymore. It wasn't the shells and it wasn't the machinegun fire that he had run from. He hadn't run for cover. He saw it honestly now. He had run from fear. From that ticking detonator. "Mission not accomplished. Ran into blizzard of fear." He had run from fear.

In the SS man's face the lines were deep and the mouth was set in the feelingless set of the weariness of combat. Was that why they were still here? Peter wondered. Now, their reality was no longer a puzzle, these doggies in their grey limbo, in the grey nothing between. Peter got up, stood facing the German a moment and walked to the end of the bridge and down to the water, to the darkness under the bridge.

The space between the water and the abutment was damp, there under the arch. Peter knelt on the ground, knelt where that morning he had looked up to the tracer and the flash of shell bursts. Here under the arch he heard the soft whispering of the water against the bank.

The small stones turned gently and Peter laid them aside. They felt cold and foreign to his touch. He sat back on his heels and rubbed his hands. Now his eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness under the bridge and he could make out the outlines of objects. Looking over his shoulder he saw the German sitting on a stone behind him, calmly observing. He ignored the guard and moved more stones and brushed away fine sand, gently.

His fingers felt something smooth and round. It was still there. He took his pen from his pocket and with the small blade he began to dig sand from around the detonator. He cleared it to the rusty shoulders of the bomb and passed his fingers lightly around the brass cylinder. His fingertips found the screws. Now all he had to do was to remove those screws. Forcing the knife into a chink in the bridge he broke off the point, leaving a squared tip. He found the first screw again. The blade fitted the screw head.

Suddenly, his stomach tightened and he felt cold. His hands drew away from the bomb's nose. Perspiration broke out on his forehead and he felt colder still, like making water, a faint nausea. It might yet blow, as it might have blown that other morning. Peter felt the loneliness of facing death and he looked back to find the German gone.

The mist was getting greyer now. The stars he could see were pale and the sky lighter. Four years ago. Peter dipped his hands in the water. It was cold. He washed the sand away and then rubbed his hands briskly on his coat and his thighs till they were dry and the chill was gone.

Leaning forward again, he found the screw. He set the blade and turned, firmly, holding his breath. The screw gave way. Another turn. Another half. Peter froze. His fingertips sensed a movement in the detonator. Putting his ear to the device he heard the steady, rapid ticking of a clock movement. Then he felt his stomach relax. The nausea left him and he felt the blood flow freely through his body. He felt a familiar something from inside move into his fingers and they felt warm and strong, delicate and

sensitive. His hands were warm again. His fingers had life in themselves. He went on working silently, seeing with his finger tips.

The world faded away. All there was in existence was Peter Becker, the old Sergeant Peter Becker, and an activated bomb. He turned the screw deftly, fingers feeling every scratch, every grain of sand. He removed the first screw, set it by his knee and began to turn the second, freely, confidently, unafraid.



The Poet

Mr. Malachai carves ships
No larger than a dime
With patient, eager hands
And lavish time.
Old Malachai builds ships
Precise and intricate;
So do his bulky days
Become articulate.

Jean Ann Pocta

I Love You I Love You I Love You I Do

The simpering photograph is to flesh
As my words are to thought. What is real
Assumes awkward postures; the clown
Glares. In the bottle the scents of fresh
(Substitute) violets congeal,
Celluloid blushes turn brown.
Lurking dark among these twisted veins
The spirit-grub creeps and hides,
Whose tender white skin burns in the cold
Fires of itself. Exposed, it writhes and strains
And dies—to shrink in the formaldehydes
Of dictionary sound, and sense grown old..
Columbine's cuckold could explain the joke:
His Tragedy, also, ended when he spoke.

Jean Ann Pocta

What the leaves are to the forest,
With light and air for food,
Ere their sweet and tender juices
Have been hardened into wood,—

Thus to the world are children;
Through them it feels the glow
Of a brighter and sunnier climate
Than reaches the trunks below.

—Longfellow

The Trunks Below

By JAMES L. ROLETTE

Illustrated by JOYCE CLARK

Tonight, while I was coming home for supper, I noticed the flowers. The sun was down but the sky was full of thin, high clouds, all pink in the sunset. It wasn't dusk; the light was soft but bright and full of pink too. You couldn't see it but you knew it was there. The houses seemed whiter and the grass and leaves looked greener; whatever had red in it looked twice as bright as it did during the day. That's how come I noticed the flowers; I didn't remember ever looking at them before, but there they were, big and red and white, growing in Mrs. Skeer's jar. Then I noticed what kind they were and I laughed out loud. It seemed so funny, them having a name like they have and being planted where they were. All of a sudden, I felt good. Everything looked so sharp and clean; the air was so sweet I wanted to breathe it. I thought about George showing us just where he first smelled the cat and my stomach started to shake. I looked at the flowers and laughed out loud again. Then I ran down the alley, did a scissors over our back fence and went in the house to eat.

This is the first time since it happened that I've been able to think about Billy without feeling kind of sneaky, but now it doesn't bother me at all. It all got started the spring Si's no-good brother George got a job on the COURIER. There was a lot of trouble down at the packing plant that year and Betty Hayes, the regular reporter, wasn't the type to cover any rough stuff, so they hired George because he was always hanging around the office anyway. This got Si and me all hopped up because we thought George was

pretty hot stuff in those days. He thought so too. The strike was the biggest thing that ever happened in our town. We used to ask George every night what had happened that day. He'd swell up and blow about what he'd seen and what the strike leaders had said to him. In a dumb sort of way I guess George was a pretty good reporter. He had a knack of always turning up when anything was going on, especially fires and drunken brawls. Then too, the Union had hired a lot of his poolroom friends to keep the strikers riled up so he got tips on when trouble was likely to start and where. Si and me decided to be reporters. After school and on week-ends we ran around the



neighborhood, bothering everybody asking them if they had any news. We set up an office in Si's woodshed and wrote up all our dope newspaper style, just like in the COURIER. Si's mother brought out an old beat-up typewriter she had won in business school in some typing contest and said we could use it, that there wasn't any sense leaving it around the house for the old man to wreck. Si said everytime his old man came home tanked up, which was pretty often, the first thing he headed for was that typewriter. He'd sit down and give an imitation of Mrs. Rollins winning the typing contest, slamming it around and knocking the be-jesus out of it. It burned him up to think that his wife was smarter than he was. Si told him once that that shouldn't bother him, what the hell, practically everybody in town was smarter than he was.

We took some of our stuff down to the COURIER and Sam Jorgeson said

it looked like pretty professional copy. We asked him if it was as good as George's writing and he said it was better, the only word that prominent member of the snooker and short beer set could spell without thinking twice was———. It made us feel like real hot-shots. Writing regular news got to be kind of boring so we started up a scandal sheet too, but we kept it hidden and didn't let anyone read it. We found out lots about people that they didn't want anyone to know and that you couldn't put in an everyday newspaper. We would write up those things for our secret edition. Si said if anyone ever read it we could be sued for libel, but I figured they'd just whale the hell out of us and make us stop putting out both our papers. Mrs. Rollins used to come out and ask us how the newspaper was coming along. She seemed real interested and made all kinds of good suggestions until the time she found the report on what we saw when we peeked in Jackson's bedroom window one night. She told the old man but he thought it was kind of cute and got a big bang out of it; he didn't like the Jacksons anyway. When she tried to get him to make us stop, he told her to stay in the house and mind her own business. After that she quit coming out and didn't seem to care what we did.

One night, George got home all steamed up. The scabs and strikers had tangled and, during the fight, one of the scabs got pushed in the river. The man drowned before anyone but George noticed him. He described it down to the last bubble. We were real excited to think that someone we knew had watched a fellow drown with hundreds of people around and him the only one knowing it. Si and me kept a look out for accidents and things like that but nothing seemed to happen. We wrote an article on how spiders caught flies but Si said insects wasn't very interesting. We didn't have much to write about in that line until Si thought about Mrs. Skeer's jar. Mrs. Skeer was an old lady about sixty who lived across the alley from us. She had a big garden with a brick and stone wall around it about seven feet high. The stones in the wall were for decoration and stuck out from the brick two or three inches which made it easy to climb up to the top. When the acid factory outside of town closed down, Mrs. Skeer bought one of the big jars they had used. It was eight feet tall, bulged out in the middle and then kind of squeezed shut to an opening about the size of a manhole. She had it painted white and set up in the corner of her garden, right next to Boerner's garage. I guess she thought it looked real artistic. Si wouldn't tell me what he had in mind, but we climbed up on the wall and he took the gutter that ran along Boerner's garage and bent it so the spout hung right over the opening of the jar. We checked it all the time and in about two weeks the jar was better than half full of water from the spring rains. One morning I heard Si yelling for me out in the alley so I gulped breakfast and tore out. He was up on Mrs. Skeer's wall. I climbed up beside him and asked what was up. He had Billy Boerner's kitten with its hind legs tied together.

"Watch this," he said. He bent the gutter back out of the way and

dropped the kitten in the jar. We watched it trying to swim with its legs tied together. It did a pretty good job for a while but got tired fast and its head kept going under. It swam around mewling and trying to get a claw hold on the side of the jar but the wall was too slick. Finally its head went under and it sank down to the bottom where we couldn't see it anymore.

"Boy," Si whispered, "now we really got something to write up." We jumped off the wall and ran to our office. We took turns writing up the story. Si's was better than mine. He seemed to enjoy writing about it but I could still hear the damn thing mew. That night while I was going home to supper, I could hear Billy out calling his kitty. He hunted for it until after eight and put a squall when his mother made him go in the house. It made me feel kind of funny to think of him calling and poking all over his backyard looking for his kitten and thinking it alive when all the time it was dead and at the bottom of Mrs. Skeer's jar. Si didn't like Billy and I guess that's why I never paid any attention to him. Billy always said hello to me but he never said anything to Si. None of the little kids around the neighborhood would have anything to do with Si; their folks told them to stay away from the Rollins' on account of the old man being drunk most of the time. Sometimes they would yell at us when we went by, things like "Your old man's a drunkard." Si would catch a couple of them and rough them up a little or maybe pinch them. One time he caught Billy, called him a little bastard, pushed him in the face and set him down hard. Old man Boerner saw him do it and came tearing out of their back yard. He caught a hold of Si and gave him a good shaking and told him if he ever caught him picking on little kids again he'd whale the Jesus out of him. It sure surprised me. I didn't think he swore. After that Si left the little brats alone and they quit yelling at us so much when he stopped chasing them. It made him plenty sore though. He said he didn't need any little snot-noses to tell him his old man was a stew bum. He never liked Billy after that. I guess that's why he caught Billy's cat and threw it in the jar.

About a week after we drowned the kitten, we climbed back up on the wall and took another look. It was floating on top of the water, bloated and slimy. Si fished it out with a stick and cut the string off the hind legs, then threw it back in again. "When they find it," he said, "they'll think it fell in." Just then, Billy came out into the alley.

"Hey, Joe," he said, "you seen my kitty?" He'd been hunting for it all week.

Si threw the string down into Mrs. Skeer's garden and said, "Come on up here. We'll show you your kitty." Billy looked at us a minute and then started climbing up. Five years old is kind of little to be climbing seven foot walls and I thought he would fall and hurthimself sure, but he made it. He came over to where we were and Si pointed down into the jar. As soon as the kid saw the kitten he let out a squall. "You killed my kitty," he yelled and began to kick Si in the shins. Si pushed him away from him and he fell backwards into

the jar. He raised quite a splash. I looked at Si. He had kind of a scared grin on his face. We could hear Billy thrashing around so we looked over the rim of the jar and watched him. He was beating the water with his arms and his legs were pumping as if he were running. He looked sort of funny. He was trying so hard to swim and wasn't getting anyplace. He began to gasp and choke, trying to breathe. I could see he was drowning and got scared. I flopped down on my belly and hung over into the jar to grab him. I couldn't reach him. Everytime he raised his arm to grab my hand, he'd sink under and just miss me. He'd come up coughing and choking and beating the water with his hands, his eyes big and scared. Hanging upside down made me dizzy and it was hard to breathe. Billy's coughing and splashing sounded loud and hollow all around me. I stretched and kept trying to get a hold of him but he wasn't reaching for me anymore. I could see his movements were getting jerkier and slower. He began to sink again, making jerky motions like a frog does when it's just swimming. His mouth was open and so were his eyes. I could see his teeth. They looked white and clean. The sloshing of the water made his face look wavy, like big wrinkles were moving across it. He sank until his face became a dim, white blur and he stayed down there, on the bottom. It was awfully quiet in the jar. I could hear ringing in my ears and the sound of my breathing. The water was making little splashes against the sides of the jar. It had a sweet, stinky smell and I could see the kitten floating and bobbing around. Billy drowned a lot faster than the kitten did.

I was so tired I could hardly raise myself back up out of the jar. My head was swimming and I had to sit down.

"He's drowned." I said. "Why didn't you help me?"

"Hell, I couldn't see anything but your fanny. I thought you had him. Let's get away from here before somebody sees us. Old man Boerner will beat the hell out of us when he finds out about this."

We jumped off the wall and ran down to our office. My hair and T-shirt were damp. Si took a sniff and said, "You smell just like that damn cat."

I felt sick, I was so scared. "What'll I do?"

Si thought for a minute. "I don't think anybody saw us. We'll go swimming. Don't tell your Ma. Boerner's aren't going to come looking for him that far away and we can say we were there all afternoon. You can get rid of that stink, too. If we hang around here somebody will smell you and when they find him they'll know we did it." Si's a pretty fast thinker. I guess he gets lots of practice keeping clear of the old man.

We spent all the rest of the day down at the pool. They had just changed the water so I rinsed out my T-shirt and got rid of the smell. I got to figuring that it was Si who pushed Billy in and I had done my best to pull him out, so if they had to blame anyone, it would be Si. I guess nobody likes to go and tell people that their kid is dead, especially if its someone like old man Boerner. If he hadn't got so mad at us the time Si pushed Billy in the face, we would have gone and told them. I began to feel better and after while

forgot all about it. Si is a pretty good diver and he taught me how to do the jack-knife off the low board. He said if I kept on diving as good as I did that day, I'd be up with him in no time. The water was swell; clean and sparkly and just right.

We got home that afternoon about five. All the neighbors were standing around the alley and talking in low voices. I wanted to sneak by them and get home without anyone seeing me but Si grabbed my arm.

"I don't think anybody saw us. We'll pretend like we don't know what happened. They probably think he fell in by himself. Come on."

We walked up to where they were standing. George saw us first and started to tell us all bout how he had found Billy drowned in Mrs. Skeer's jar. The way he told it was just the way Si had figured. He said Billy had climbed up on the wall, had seen the kitten in the jar and had fallen in trying to get it out. When Boerners were out asking everyone if they had seen Billy, George was around and helped them look. It was him that smelled the cat. He got nosing around in his usual manner, climbed up on the wall, and found it. I guess that hot afternoon sun kind of ripened the smell. He could see all the water marks on the sides and the rim of the jar from Billy's splashing around and figured that no cat had raised that much rumpus, so he knocked a hole in the bottom and let out the water and found Billy. He even showed us the very spot where he first smelled the cat and kept saying what a scoop it was for him. Si looked at me and winked. He told me later that we might have known George would find the cat. Everytime anything raises a stink, George noses it out. He was always finding out things about people they didn't want known. I was beginning to feel safe again. George was the only one besides my mother that we had never put anything over on. I guess grown-ups aren't so smart as a kid thinks, sometimes. Nobody noticed the kink in the gutter or wondered how all that water got into the jar. About that time, my mother came out of our yard and lit all over me in front of everyone for going off and not telling her. For a minute I thought she knew what really happened, she was so mad, but I guess their finding Billy drowned had started her worrying about me. I told her heck, that I could swim but she shut me up and made me go into the house. I was glad to get out of there anyway. The next day Mrs. Skeer had some men fill the jar full of dirt so that no one else would fall in it. Everyone was blaming Mrs. Skeer for having what they called a "deathtrap" in her back yard. Si got mad at her too. He said that if she hadn't had that old jar, he'd never thought of drowning the kitten. I felt kind of sorry for her because I knew none of it was her fault. She cried when they told her Billy had drowned in her jar.

They buried Billy in a couple of days and after that everyone quit talking and forgot about it. Sometimes at night I would see Boerners putting their car away. For a second, when the car turned in the alley to go in the garage, the headlights shone on the top of the jar and I would think of Billy. I guess that's why they moved. Everytime they got in their car to go anyplace, they'd

see the jar and remember. They moved away about four months after it happened.

Si and me didn't write up anything on Billy for our secret edition. We made a silent secret out of it instead. That's when Si and me find out something that nobody else knows and we figure its too important to tell or even write down. We have quite a few of them and it makes you feel wise when you hear someone talking about something they don't know all about. Like the time Si ate over at my house and my mother was telling my dad what nice people had moved into Boerner's house and what a sweet girl they had. Josie, that's the girl, plays the piano real good and everybody thinks she's wonderful. Si looked at me while my mother was telling my dad how sweet Josie was. His eyes began to crinkle and my stomach began to shake and we sat there and laughed and laughed without making a sound and my folks didn't know we were laughing. They don't know how often Josie comes down to our office or what we do when she's there. All they can see is that she plays the piano. Grown-ups are so dumb. I guess the older you get, the more you find out how dumb they are.

Anyway, now it doesn't bother me when I remember about Billy. I don't think anyone but me has noticed what kind of flowers Mrs. Skeer planted in the top of the jar. It'll make a swell silent secret for Si and me. She planted Sweet Williams and nobody has ever noticed or said anything about them. I guess Billy's drowning wasn't important or meant much to anyone but Boerners and they moved away so it doesn't matter anymore..

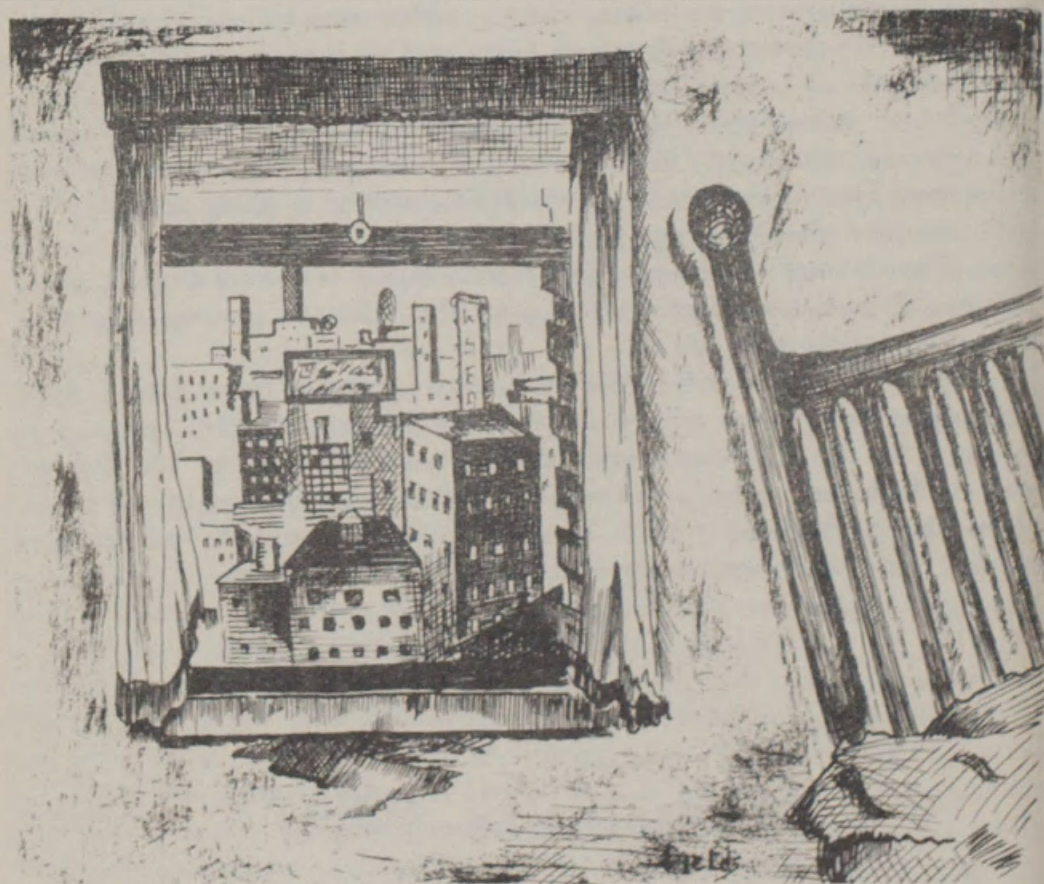


Humanities--1950

Creon

A hero's death is easy, Antigone,
But there are other alternatives . . .
While you accept the bullet and the fame,
The relentless yes or no,
Thebes is gnawed by greasy rats of war.
Do not speak to me of metaphysics
When hopelessness cankers the city's face . . .
For hunger wastes the spirit and destroys the mind
And the price of bread has something to do with the soul.
I am a cook in a smelly soup-kitchen.
Shrouds are God's business.

Jean Ann Pocka



Floyd

By CARROLL O'CONNOR

Illustrated by NANCY FIELDS

From the corner of her eye she watched him as he sat in the open window, his back bowed against one frame, his knees bent up and his feet propped against the other. With his right hand he held the window sill to keep himself from falling five stories to the street.

She wondered if she really despised him. Dave said she did. One night Dave said:

—I get the idea, Gladys, that you despise the guy, so why don't you do both him and yourself a favor by leaving him?

He was leaning out over the street again, working his mouth again to spit down on someone. Gladys closed her eyes. She decided she probably did feel that way about him, but that it was not right, and that it was not right for anyone else to think so. She decided not to talk to anyone about him anymore.

He spit again and leaned far out to watch the wad of liquid as it fell straight down through the hot, breezeless air. It skittered on the back of a blouse and the victim passed slowly on, unmindful of it.

Inwardly he cursed all the victims plodding on the sidewalks through the city's heat. They were unconscious. You could not do anything to them. You could spit on them and they would never know about it.

—God, I hate them, he growled. I'd like to see the North River come over the piers and come through the streets and swamp them. They'd know about that. They couldn't beat the river.

—Better change your clothes, she said. Better take a shower too and cool off.

She was sitting on the bed brushing her hair, blonde hair that fell damply to her shoulders. She wore a blue dressing gown of a light, smooth material. It fell away below her hips from bare, very white legs. Beside her on the bed were things—undergarments and stockings, a white linen skirt and a green blouse. Her eyes were closed as she brushed her hair. The eyelids were moist from the heat. Small lines of perspiration were alive on her neck and wet patches darkened the blue robe under her arms and at the fold of her waist.

—Go ahead, Floyd, she repeated quietly. Take yourself a shower.

—We've got an hour, he said, dully. He was watching the crowded street below, rotating his jaws.

—If you start now, the girl told him, you'll be able to take it easy and you won't be hot when we're ready to leave. Why don't you go ahead, Floyd?

He leaned out and spat. The wad broke up quickly and scattered. He swore. He said:

—Why don't you shut up? I'll take a shower when I want one, and I don't want one now.

The girl shrugged.

—Do what you want, she said. But you'd better get out of the window before something happens and I'll be going out alone.

He turned narrow eyes on her. He said:

—Think I'll fall? Don't worry, I won't. I never fell in my life. I only been pushed now and then.

He paused and watched her as she brushed her hair with long, slow strokes.

—Maybe you'd like to push me, he said.

He waited.

—Well, how about it?

She did not reply.

—Here I am, he said, smiling. A setup. All's you have to do is give a quick shove, and pffttt, you're rid of me.

—Call up the operator, why don't you, and see what time it is.

—I don't want to know what time it is, but I'd really like to know if you'd push me. I really would, baby.

He fastened his eyes on her face.

—I been thinking lately, he went on, that maybe little Gladys would like to be rid of poor Floyd. Maybe she wished he wasn't around no more. Maybe that's why she wanted Floyd to take the job in Jersey, so's he'd be away most of the time so Gladys could trot around with her Jew friends. and bring them up here nights for cards—and maybe some other things. That's what I been thinking, baby, and now's a fine time to find out. Here I am, all set for the curtain. All's you got to do is shove, just once.

She got up from the bed and went to a bureau. She began to pin her hair.

—Who the hell's talking about Dave, he snapped. I'm talking about you and me.

—Do you know Dave's age, she asked, tonelessly.

—Dave is fifty-two years old, she said. And he's got a wife and a girl as old as I am and a boy as old as you. And look at him. Do you think I'd be interested?

She was arranging her hair in a soft roll at the base of her neck.

—Maybe you're not interested in his dough, huh?

—That's right, she said, turning irritably. I'm interested in his dough and what he can do for me. I admit it. He's going to do a television show from

is place and use his best numbers, and I want to be one of them. That's ad, is it?

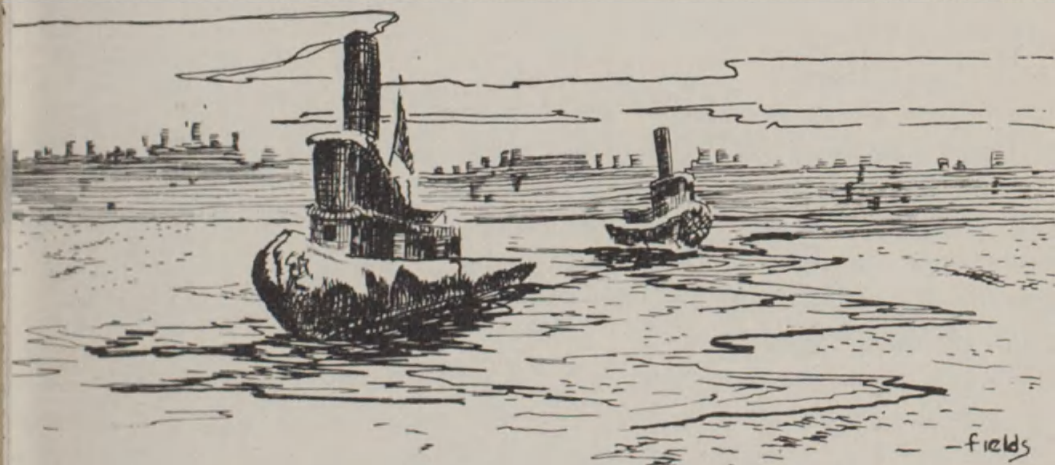
—And he told you you'd go on, huh?

—He told me I stood a good chance.

Floyd snorted.

—Why don't you grow up, baby. Even if your stuff was any good there's a thousand and one doing the same thing, and they're all better. Turn on the radio any night, or go down to some of those other joints around Lower Fifth. Girls who sing and play the piano all over the place. You ain't got nothing new, and what you got ain't too good anyhow.

She faced him, darkly.



—It pays for your groceries, don't it? What are you doing, wise guy. What's your talent. You couldn't even tend bar at Dave's. No. You couldn't lay up to the customers. Had to give them your lip all the time. And when Dave was nice enough to keep you on as a waiter you couldn't do that either. Couldn't lower yourself to wait on people, even if it brought us eighty, a hundred a week. But you can lay around here every day with the radio on, and keep your filthy mind going, and make me sick with you nights. You can do that fine.

She hurried into the bathroom and turned water on full force.

—Okay then, he called to her. Come on and shove me. I'm ready.

He was answered by loud washing sounds.

—Come on and shove, he shouted. "I'm a setup. See, look at me. I'm half out already.

He dangled one leg precariously.

She looked around the corner of the bathroom. Her lips were compressed to keep back sounds in her throat. Her eyes had begun to spill tears on the blue robe. They stared at each other. Then she said:

—Come in out of the window, Floyd, I want to talk to you.

Her voice was husky.

—No, he shouted over the water noise. No talk. Just shove. Make it quick. Then you won't have to feed me no more. Go ahead, baby.

His mouth was trembling and his eyes were blinking wetly and rapidly.

—I can't talk to you this way, Floyd, she said. Please come in and sit down and I'll get you a beer.

—Like hell, he gritted. Come on and get it over with.

—Floyd, she said more sternly, don't act like a baby. I didn't mean all that. I want to talk to you. Please come in and sit down.

His face had become white and the muscles in his neck were straining against tight flesh. His teeth were clenched so that his words came out in a kind of hiss. He frightened her.

—No, he insisted, come on and push. You and your Jew boy'll have clear sailing. Come on.

—Please, Floyd.

—Come on, he shouted, I'll make it easier for you.

He swung his other leg outward in a sudden, impulse movement.

The girl caught her breath in terror, turned and grasped the bathroom door to support herself. He had not meant to do it. His cries as he dropped to the street were the desperate, futile cries of one who wants very much to live, but who will be dead very shortly. Gladys sank, dazedly, to the floor, her body convulsing quietly.

For a while she was conscious of herself and the room and the vacant window. She heard crowd noises from the street below, and a policeman's whistle. The hot, sluggish city had become abruptly aware of Floyd. The persistent horns of automobiles were silent, as if in surprise. For a moment the only sound in the world was the short grunt of a tugboat on the North River as it mastered the powerful current. She put her head on the floor and closed her eyes.

She was awake, but silently delirious, riding in the big sedan through the crowded downtown streets to the tall, cool masonry that housed the shepherds of the city.

She fainted when Dave, his large, rugged face pale and streaming, his body thoroughly drenching a cream-colored tropical suit, tried to help her smoke a cigarette. They revived her with whiskey and iced towels. A nurse came. Soon she was calm.

Dave held her hand and told her not to worry, that it was an accident. That Floyd had not been in his right mind. That she should not blame herself. That everybody was sorry.

She thanked him and told him he was really a wonderful man, and he smiled and thanked her and told her the television deal would work out all right.

A kind-looking man—a detective—came out of an office and asked her if she was feeling better. She smiled weakly and said she thought she would be all right now. The detective took her arm and they went into another

office. She sat on the edge of a leather chair and the detective sat on the edge of a desk. He looked at her with concern.

—Were you quarreling, he asked.

She took a deep breath. She replied:

—I guess we always were. Just the usual thing. I was working and he wasn't.

—You work for Mr. Ross outside.

—Yes, she said, I entertain at Dave's club in the Village.

—Like him?

—Who, Dave? Yes, very much. He's a wonderful guy.

—I guess he likes you too, huh?

The detective was watching her closely. She looked curiously at him.

—Yes, I think he likes me. What are you getting at?

The detective grinned amiably.

—I dunno, he said. I thought maybe you'd tell me.

He leaned close to her and held a sheet of paper in front of her.

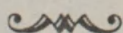
—Your husband, he said, didn't croak until a few minutes after they got him to Roosevelt hospital. Here's his statement.

She stared dumbly at the white paper.

—He said, the detective told her evenly, that you pushed him.

Her hand went to her throat, and the detective started quickly. He caught her as she slipped from the leather chair.

She had fainted again.



The Drifter

By BEVERLY BRINK

Illustrated by GEORGE GOGAS

Clouds trailed across the sky, lacing the moon through their clinging fingers. Across the grey-shadowed sagebrush flat there was stillness—the curious, deserted silence like that of a land devoid of even the lowest forms of life.

In the middle of these moon-blotched hills, a man lay in his bedroll beside the car.

Though it would be an hour or so before sun-up, Jim rose and dressed.

Above the silhouetted hills, the moon paled as it slipped into a thin envelope of clouds. In the dark before dawn, Jim rolled up his bed and put it in the back seat. He filled the radiator with water from an old vinegar jug.

The dawn filtered through the clouds as Jim shoved his car in gear

and headed for Dan Gorman's ranch under the cedar-bristled rimrocks. If he made it there for breakfast, they could start right in breaking the Appaloosa stallion. He wanted to get up into Canada and get a threshing job before harvesting got under way. It was dirty work, but it paid well.

When he quit the Harmon outfit three days ago, Jim had been ready to leave this part of the country. It did something to a man, Jim figured, to



stay in one place too long. It bogged you down. Made you feel just like a fly caught in a flytrap.

He wondered whether Dan ever felt that way—like a fly in a flytrap—now that he'd settled down. When Dan went to town he had to be home by dark because there was his kid waiting for him. Jim recalled with an odd pride that he had never covered the same ground twice.

His trails may have crossed old trails, but they never back-tracked. For a while he watched his headlights scooping shadows out of the hollows with the satisfaction that each was a gully he hadn't seen before and would never have to see again.

The dappled sky streaked with sunrise, and the hills in the East were pregnant now with the brightness. It mirrored in the windshield, its tiers of color contorted by the grime. Jim switched off his headlights.

For an hour he drove northeast, spotting Dan Gorman's sprawled ribcage on a few grazing Whitefaces. Once the motor heated, so he stopped by an alkali creek and filled the radiator with yellow water. A quarter mile from Dan's ranch, Jim came upon a field, summer-fallowed in a neat oval. The road swung wide around the field, but Jim saw Dan's kid digging in one end. When she saw Jim's car, she cut across for the house, swift and awkward as a young antelope.

Kate was a funny kid. You never knew what she was thinking, or whether she liked you or not. Jim didn't think he'd ever seen Kate laugh, and he didn't bring in young prairie dogs or coyote pups as other kids did. She was almost as good at punching cows as Dan was. But Kate didn't fuss over horses, either. With her, horses were like an arm or a leg, useful, indispensable, but taken for granted.

Topping the sway-backed ridge, Jim saw the ranch below—the cabin with its roof scoria-red, the shed—a narrow coulee roofed over with thistle hay—and the untidy corrals between. Dan had evidently left the ranch before sun-up because as he got closer, Jim could almost feel the inertia surrounding it. He saw the Appaloosa hanging its head over the high corral.

The horse withdrew its head, swiveled its leopard-spotted hips, and risked against the opposite fence as Jim drove in. It would make someone a handsome cowpony.

The kid came panting in like a winded colt. "Jim! Jim!" she shouted eagerly, "You're gonna stay now, ain't you? Ain't you, Jim?"

"Hi, Kate," Jim said, surprised at her friendliness. "Where's your old man?"

"You're staying now, ain't you?" she repeated, ignoring his query.

"Yeah, for a coupla days. Then I'll be moving along."

At that, her friendliness seemed to retreat into the hard, little shell of her face, and her voice was suddenly guarded.

"You going to break the Appaloosa?" she asked.

"Just rough him up a little. Where's Dan?"

The kid's jaw muscles stiffened, and she turned toward the cabin. "Daddy's killed. The Appaloosa did it."

"Dan! Dead!" Jim whirled to follow her. "You mean you've been here all alone?"

"Yes. Daddy died a couple days ago. His grave's up there," she stopped and pointed to the near rimrocks.

Jim sat on the stone doorstep. It was funny that Dan had been killed. Nothing ever happened to you if you didn't give a damn whether you got hurt or not. Dan shouldn't have been so careful; he had a kid to care for. Still unbelieving, Jim asked, "How come he got killed?"

"The Appaloosa did it," Kate said doggedly.

"Don't see how he could have."

"He did."

"How'd it happen?"

Kate dropped the water dipper on the floor. Her brown face was yellow when the color drained from it.

"I don't know how it happened," she cried. "Guess things don't gotta always have a reason! The Appaloosa did it. Ain't that enough?"

She rushed past Jim, the tall grass in the coulee riffling past her knees as she ran. Halfway up the hill, she turned and screamed, "If you don't think he's dead, you c'n go dig him up!"

Puzzled, Jim waited for her to come back, but she didn't appear. At last, he got up and went out to the round-coral where the Appaloosa was. Jim could see the shudders that kept going through the horses muscles as he neared. He could see right now where the animal was going to give him trouble. He'd killed a man and got away with it. Any horse would get big in the head after something like that.

Getting his throw-rope from his car, Jim roped the horse and finally got him snubbed around a post in the center of the coral. The rest of the morning, Jim worked with the stud, sacking him out, saddling and re-saddling, until he was too worn out to fight back. He was so lathered he didn't even bother to swell when Jim cinched up again and swung on.

Jim had been too busy to notice the sky before. But by now, black clouds bordered the West hills and were lumbering in on the East. The storm came fast and the wind was already rocking his car when Jim loosed the grey stud.

He moved the car beside the barn for a windbreak. When the rain began to splash on the hardpan, it was only then that Jim remembered about the kid. She was nowhere in the darkened cabin. He leaned back on the army cot and rolled a cigarette, watching the rain tear through the cracked panes. The rain lasted about an hour and then suddenly stopped.

Rainbow-colored shadows slid over the hills while Jim did the evening chores. He gave the Appaloosa a double ration of hay. When he finished feeding the other two horses, he went back to the house and started a fire.

He fried eggs and bumpy "dough-gods" on the hot griddle, and set two tin plates and cups out. The kid still hadn't shown up.

He hadn't seen her all day. Kate was a funny kid. You could hurt her feelings so easy without even knowing it. He wondered if she wanted to do things when she grew up, like other kids did. Looking at her, you couldn't tell. It gave him a strange, good feeling to be able to have the chores done and supper cooked for her. He wondered how she had managed to bury Dan, who had been a big man.

When Kate came in with the milk bucket, Jim was eating. She put it on the table silently.

"You forgot to milk the cow," she said, as she took an apple box seat.

Jim looked up, but she wasn't reproaching him—only reminding him of a duty. Jim knew then that in the kid's eyes he was nothing but a grubline

ider. He flushed. He'd always prided himself on not poaching on anyone. He wished she'd come right out and call him a grubline rider. As long as he did his share here he'd be welcome, but Kate wasn't going to have anything put over on her.

After awhile she said, "Your dough-gods are too lumpy. You put in too much flour."

Jim grinned uneasily.

"What'd you do since noon?" he asked.

"I was digging out the spring hole up the crick. It fills up with silt so the cattle can hardly drink."

When she finished eating, she began piling the dishes in a big tin can.

"I'll heat your dish water," he offered.

"There's enough in the tea kettle."

Jim poured tobacco into a cigarette paper. Then he said carefully, "Your pa didn't really need the money from the Appaloosa, did he?"

"Yes, so I could go to school."

"What'd a strong, little girl like you want with schooling? Seems as if you're learning about everything already."

"Daddy wanted me to be a school-ma'am. This is a good country, he says—he said—and they need teachers. It won't take so much—there's the Appaloosa. And next year's calf crop's gonna be bigger," she said confidently.

Uneasily Jim said, "You'll have more fun taking care of your cows out here. Maybe someday I'll come back and take you over the border with me, if you grow big and husky."

"No," she said. "I'm going to be a school-ma'am. Daddy wanted me to."

"You'd like Canada, Kate."

The little ragged girl looked up. "No," she said, then changing the subject swiftly, "That bunch of wild horses has worked down onto the flats. Water must be pretty scarce in the hills."

The man saw that her grey eyes were almost beady they were so bright with tears, and he didn't answer. He brought his bedroll in from the car and unrolled it in the empty bunk by the stove. Kate didn't speak again and soon she laid down and went to sleep on the army cot.

It was a long time, though, before Jim got to sleep. He had promised to help Dan Gorman break the leopard-spotted horse. But Kate sure seemed set on going to school. Jim didn't know how to go about changing her mind. She was stubborn, and that was certain-sure. Turning back on his side, accustomed himself to the unfamiliar softness of the mattress, Jim shut his eyes.

The little girl moaned in her sleep suddenly. "Daddy—daddy—" her voice trailed off as the dream passed.

Jim sat bolt upright in his bunk. What did a man do about a kid? You gave it candy and whipped it, but what happened when it lived with you?

For the first time in his life, Jim stopped taking kids for granted. He realized that Kate must have some feelings, and wondered what they were. He wondered what the kid would do now that its father was dead—where it would go, and how it would live. Then, remembering her stern capability, he was reassured. The kid had the stamina of a boy. She'd make out okay.

Tomorrow he would head north for the Canadian border, Jim decided. Kate could sell the Apaloosa easy now that he had roughed him out.

Pickings were getting pretty scanty down here now that the cattle outfits had sold out to get in on boom prices. Lots of grass and water left if a fellow wanted to take up ranching, but not for him. That's what Dan had done. When Dan bought his little ranch he'd given up his freedom and not got much for it either.

Still feeling sympathy for his friend, Jim went to sleep.

The next morning Kate was up and had the cow milked before Jim awoke. She was trying to start the fire with bunches of dried grass and sagebrush.

"I'll build it. You wash up." Jim said as he pulled on his boots.

Kate nodded and disappeared. Jim built a fire and put on a frying pan. When she came back her brown face was scrubbed pink and her hair slicked back with water.

Helplessly Jim pointed to the hair. "Can't you do something to that? Comb it or something."

"I ain't got a comb."

"Here," Jim handed her a comb from his shirt pocket. Freeing her head of tangles, she dipped the comb in the washbasin and combed it smooth. Critically Jim inspected it.

"Have you got some of that bright stuff to tie around it, now?" he asked.

"What stuff?"

"A long strip of cloth—you know—to keep it out of your eyes. Likely this string'll work," Jim said doubtfully as he broke off a length and handed it to her. "It goes under your hair in back and by your ears, then you tie it up in front," he explained.

Seeing that she didn't understand, he tied it himself, awkwardly, as he had seen town girls tie their hair ribbons.

"There, don't that feel better?"

"It's cooler."

She wasn't grateful—only polite, and Jim knew he was still just another grubline rider to her. No matter how much she wanted to like him, she wasn't making any claims on him, Jim told himself. He found himself trying to please this grubby kid—trying to make her like him.

Later that morning Jim went out to saddle the high-barreled Appaloosa. Morning would be soon enough to head out for the border. The horse snorted and tossed his grey-flecked head at the sight of the saddle. Jim caught his

alter rope and swung the saddle up, but he bucked until it slid off again.

Angrily Jim shoved the Appaloosa's nose down against its chest, pushing him out of the stall. Outside the barn, Jim snubbed the horse to the post again and began once more slapping the saddle blanket across his back and down around his belly. The horse didn't want to take the bit, either, but Jim snubbed him short and forced it in.

Once in the saddle, the keen joy of mastering a horse overcame Jim, and he rode purposefully. At the end of a fifteen-minute workout Jim jerked the saddle from the horse's steaming back and slapped him on the rump.

"That was good," he heard Kate say breathlessly.

Looking up, he saw her perched sparrow-like in the rafters. Almost defensively he said, "You know, I think I'll train this hammer-head for you, Kate. Nothing in him a couple days hard workout wouldn't cure."

A fleeting expression of pleasure came in the kid's face and she smiled at him, not knowing that it was only a man's enthusiasm for a job he knew thoroughly.

"I'll give him a shot of grain," she said, swinging down from the rafters.

The rest of the morning Jim fooled around the house, fixing up the window chinking and putting new bolts in the door. He was still kicking himself for telling Kate he'd stick around. Just as she was beginning to trust him, he had to go and make a promise he couldn't keep.

Jim drained his Model T and cleaned its spark plugs. Kate had gone back to the spring hole. After he replaced the sparkplugs in the head, Jim found her there digging in the black mud, from which trickled a little water.

"Jim, Daddy said he thought the little reservoir was dried up," the barefoot girl said. "He—he was gonna move the cattle to the upper range. Haven't gotten around to it yet."

"I'll check for you. Back Sage Crick?"

"Yes, an' your bay horse is in the wrangle pasture. You can ride Daddy's cutting mare, though, if you'd like."

"No, Rocky needs the exercise. I bet you've been spoiling him."

The child's face brightened as she said, "He's sure a spoiled horse, all right. He can open the corral gate with his nose, Jim. Guess he thinks he might beat me to the grain bin." The child giggled, remembering.

"Cripes, Kate. You didn't need to grain him every day."

"But he liked it so much, and I had to learn him somehow to open the gate."

"You kid!" Jim said, almost fondly. "Well, s'long."

Kate was a kind of a cute kid when you got to know her. Jim could see her watching from the creek as he caught the rangy bay and led him back to the corral.

"Okay, Rocky," he said, as he slipped the rope off.

The big horse trotted up to the gate and nuzzled around until he found the latch.

"Well, whatd'y know," Jim said, loud enough so Kate could hear. "I guess you must've had a smart trainer, Rock, ol' boy. You can sure open the gate."

Jim took his rifle from the Model T and slipped it in the saddle scabbard. For several miles he rode north up the canyon, wondering how long before he would be riding this way for good. Probably two weeks at the least. He looked up at the grisled canyon wall; watched its colors streak diagonally across the rocks; and the old desire to ride on and on, always to new and exciting things, came again. It was a nostalgia for free, open nights on the trail, for the warm wind blowing thick and sweet off the hills at mid-day, and most of all, a longing for things he had never known—sights he had never seen.

What if he didn't go back to the shoddy little ranch at all? What if he rode on over the border now? Herefords were good about rustling for themselves. When a Hereford cow made up her mind to die a man couldn't do a thing about it. She was as stubborn about dying as she was about living but usually she'd find water and grass when even the antelope were dying of thirst.

Rounding a rocky point, Jim came upon half a dozen fat Hereford cows and their spring calves, all gaunt in the flank and panting. Jim started to ride on past them. He hated to leave Kate alone back there, but she'd make out. In two weeks the harvest season would be under way in the North. He'd just have time to make it.

Then he turned, jerked the slack out of the reins, and began gathering the cattle. The least he could do before he went was to move her cattle. He pushed them up a side draw toward the other reservoir, the fine dust foaming up behind them and choking in his throat. Farther on, he picked up a score of yearlings from a dry, hoof-pocked waterhole. It wouldn't delay him much just to shove the cattle up to the upper reservoir.

Suddenly a herd of antelope jumped out of the sage, flirting their white rumps. Jim jerked his rifle from his scabbard. One of the yearlings cut away from the bunch and ran around a red butte. As Jim started after him, the big bay spooked. A shudder passed through his body and on up through that of the man. Jim pulled him in and rode over to the washout. Champing at his bit and trying to throw off the tight rein, the horse balked on the alkali rim.

The entire washout bottom was chucked with white bones and antlers that gleamed in the sun. Jim gaged that it was twenty feet to the base. Out of curiosity Jim dismounted, still cradling the rifle, and dropped the reins. Thin shale chips, surfacing the gumbo wall, clattered down as he slid to the bottom.

Antelope and deer, their waterholes dried up, had jumped down here

drink from the pool and been unable to scale the 20-foot wall again. Irvied coyote leg bones told Jim of the feast some coyote had made of trapped antelope before dying down here himself.

Rocky nickered and Jim started to climb the shattered-gumbo. An unreasonable fear swept over him then. He realized that he, too, was trapped! In a frenzy, he ran to the other side, kicking a path through the dry bones. He clutched at the scrubby sagebrush along the sides, and tried to pull himself to the top. The little bushes came out by the roots and he fell back to the bottom.

Sitting there, he tried to figure how long it would be before he gleamed through that dead whiteness of the animal bones. No more wind on the hills or evenings starlit on the trail. He would see the nights starlit only through a bare-named skylight. He would see it just as the animals had—hopelessly and dying.

Maybe this was how Dan's kid felt back there by herself in the hills. She calmed. He knew he had to get out if only because of the kid. He'd been a fool to think he could leave her there alone. When winter came she'd freeze to death in the first 30-below spell.

He began piling bones up against the bank. By stretching he could just reach a ledge half way up. He squatted on the smooth-plastered gumbo floor and tried to figure another escape.

Seizing his rifle he dug at the gumbo with the muzzle. The dirt came loose in little, grey crumbs and rolled down on the bones. Pulling a cartridge from his pocket, Jim fitted it into the chamber, held the end of the barrel a little way out and fired. Gumbo splattered back in his face.

When he dug the loose dirt out, there was almost room for a foothold. Excitedly he fired more shells and within an hour, dirty and bleeding, Jim emerged.

He looked around for his horse, but found the flat empty of both horse and cattle. Thinking that Rocky still grazed over the hill, he hurried up the trail. He looked down then and saw marks of the reins swiping sideways through the dust and Rocky's widely-spaced tracks.

In a flash, he remembered how easily the bay horse had nudged open the corral gate. The appaloosa was in the same corral. If the stallion ever got out on the range now, it would be days before he could catch up with him. Jim didn't know whether he could ever run him in alone. Looking again through the dust to make sure of the bay's long-running stride, Jim broke into a run.

Half an hour later, panting and hot and footsore, he sighted the squat ranch buildings. Nothing looked disturbed about the place, and his hopes rose.

Then he saw the tall bay come out of the barn, oats and saliva dripping from his lips. The corral gate swung wide in the hot wind. Jim started toward the cabin, hoping the kid hadn't seen what had happened. Rocky whickered

and started toward the gate then reared back and plunged into the barn.

The kid was squatted on the ground outside the corral mending a split stirrup. She didn't stop threading rawhides when she looked up at him, but Jim saw dirty tear stains on her cheeks.

"I couldn't get out here quick enough," she said. "But you can catch him. I know you can. I started out on the buckskin, but my stirrup broke."

"Look, Kate, why don't we let him go? I'll take you with me up into Canada."

Kate stared at him incredulously.

"I can't go to Canada," she said. "Not until I've been to school. I just can't."

"Tell you what, Kate," Jim hastily assured her. "Just as soon as I get a drink, I'll go run him in again. It'll happen so fast he won't even know he's been out."

"Rocky can out-run an Appaloosa any day," she said, but they both knew she was lying. Jim could tell by the way she lifted her chin that Kate thought she'd never see him again.

The cowpony whirled him as he swung up. As soon as they were out of the corral, he put the bay to a dead run and never let up until he spotted the Appaloosa a long way off across the badlands.

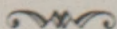
The horse had settled down and was grazing in the scant shadows of two red buttes. Jim circled several miles around downwind into the gumbush washes which separated the buttes.

Half a mile away the grey Appaloosa drew himself alert as he saw the approaching horse and rider. He whirled around and straightened out cleanly limbed into the wind. Jim pushed his bay into a long run, but the grey already outstripped the bigger horse.

Swinging to the left, Jim tried to cut him off from the badlands and turn him toward the open hills. The stallion sensed the plan and turned sharply toward the gap. Jim raked Rocky's flank with his spurs and bent low in the saddle in his eagerness.

Swiftly the grey swung over even with him and easily ran through the gap into the broken land beyond. Jim reined up and stared at the fleeing horse. Rocky was winded, his sides heaving and his chest coated with grey foam.

The sun pummelled over the ugly, streaked-red buttes, and for the first time the man thought with a shock that they were really ugly. This was no place for a kid to grow up in. Yet Kate was a kid only in years, for her body was as tough as rawhide, and branded on her mind were things no kid should have to know—hunger, cold, fear, and violent death. And then, she was a kid, and her dad had been his friend. It wouldn't take really long to get her place in shape. He turned and rode out of the black-scarred badlands, back to the ranch.



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