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SUN DANCE
And
Other Stories

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Montana State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Robert Powers Struckman
April 1947

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INTRODUCTION

The twelve stories in this collection were written over a period of twenty years. That means, come to think of it, that I was only twenty years old when the earliest of them was written. That earliest one is The Hunter. The newest story is Return by Night, finished just this spring.

The Hunter is short on form, and is much better in form now than it was in its original state. Return by Night is full of form right up to the end, and then it limps. Except for form, I cannot be sure that Return by Night is a better story than The Hunter.

My purpose in this introduction is to go through the stories one by one, in the order here presented, and to say something of the sources of each, of the circumstances under which it was written, and published or not published. I intend to give my preferences and opinions of the stories.

The first six stories in the collection have been published; the second six not—at least not yet.

Sun Dance is surely one of the best of the twelve stories. It was published in The Frontier and Midland for May 1934. The setting and the dance are fairly authentic. The town is Harlem, the agency is that of the Assinaboine and Gros Ventre Indians five miles east of Harlem. I saw the Sun Dance and had it explained rather sketchily by a young Catholic missionary who was working with the Indians. The important thing—the psychology of the breeds—I gathered from contacts with half-breed waitresses in the restaurants of Malta. They seemed a group apart, to me;

not Indians and certainly not whites. They were not fully accepted by either group, but came closest to acceptance in the mixed white and Indian group of the boys and girls they went to high school with in such a town as Harlem. Note the date of publication of this story. It was written in the period between wars and during depression, when to wish aloud that there would be a war was practically blasphemy. There was impact to that ending when the story was published. History has come full cycle and there is almost the same kind of impact to it again, with even fuller implications.

The Orphan is another real favorite of mine. It was written in 1940 and sold to Household Magazine after being rejected by Esquire. In 1927, thirteen years before, a classmate of mine from Twin Bridges told me of finding a lost orphan from the Home there, dead in a field of wheat. In 1933 I saw a small boy struck by a car and left unconscious in the roadway. Thus I know what a small boy looks like, on his face in the dirt. I constructed this story on the theory that three events is just the proper number in a story. Three things were found--the rabbit, the black man, and the orphan. I like the end of this story. It isn't much of an ending--goodness knows if the two men can do anything for the orphan, but they mean to try. Perhaps the orphan should have been found by the school superintendent, and adopted, and all would have been a happy ending, but he wasn't. He was found by the two rather waify characters who did find him, and so the end has to be such as it is.

Children's Crusade is my favorite of all the stories. It has a simple, straight-line form that goes forward as inevitably as a

chip over a waterfall. The first-person boy—the I—is myself at that age, in that country school, which is Glasston, in Sweet Grass county. The boys are as primitive and direct as young animals. I think they don't make a move or have a thought which is out of character. There is no allegory intended in the story. It is an account of a force of nature as simple and as complex as a thunderstorm. As to sources, I once helped tear the shirt off a friend of mine. I assure you that it is a rare and primitive pleasure. I believe this has the best title I ever put on a story.

The Hunter started life as "Godson of Pan" and as such was published in a literary supplement to the Kaimin away back in 1927. It was considerably longer and had not even the vague thread of plot which the hunting brothers now furnish. I rewrote it a few years later and sent it to Household Magazine. Nelson Antrim Crawford, editor then and now, liked it but sent it back with a note saying that it needed a bit of plot. I wrote in a plot, sent it back to him, and sold it as a short-short for \$35. That was my first sale to Crawford, and it was followed by a happy succession of sales which continues to this day. Again, I am the Hunter, and the location is Glasston. For all I was a little horror in Children's Crusade, I could be something else again as The Hunter. I did kill a rabbit that way, and I did hear that music in the sound of the tractor.

Honey-Colored Hair should follow Return in the Morning in point of time, both as to writing and publishing, and as to the continuing line of the story of the Mansfield girl, Claire, which continuing story I wrote out rather fully. However, I want

them in the collection this way.

I knew a girl who had honey-colored eyes. I knew a girl as pretty as Holly Van Ten, but her hair was black. I put the two together to make Holly, who is a minor character after all. Claire Mansfield is the chief character. In many respects she is my sister Marion—four years older than I. I let Claire grow up as the series of stories progressed, and she grew out of the age which most interested me when I was writing these stories. In fact, she became engaged to Benny in the last story I wrote about her, and since that was before I was married, she moved faster than I did and I lost track of her as story material. I was sorry about that, because I sold every story I wrote about her. Now that I know what happens following engagement and wedding, I may go on with Claire some time.

Return in the Morning is the first of the Claire stories. The family is drawn out of thin air—or out of a lot of people, because I know no people just like them. I detect a little of one of my University English teachers in Claire's father, but actually not much more than the fact that the teacher liked Dickens, and so do I. The town is the same in both these stories—a combination of Big Timber and Missoula. I had an Aunt Beulah but she was nothing like this one. I am certainly Brother James, but he is a minor character indeed, and not much like me except in times of stress.

These first six stories were published. The following six have not yet been published, and I suspect that some of them never will be, but you never can tell. They are still in the business of going the editorial rounds. Return by Night is

probably the soundest story from a sales point of view, but that ending still needs tinkering. Unfortunately it may be years before I get the right ending to it, and I'll tell you why, later on.

Mo: Neuter was written because I had a lot of what I thought were funny things to say about pigs. It is the result of a spurt of off-center thinking which sometimes results—I don't know why. We once had a litter of pigs on the ranch and we named them as these pigs are named, and Mo was the biggest one of the lot. But he never lived in our house. Now, after the writing, I believe I can tell why I wrote it in the person I used—a sort of "first person once removed," in which I used direct quotes all the way through, but had an audience which showed up at the beginning and the end. I never ask myself why I use first person rather than third person while I am writing the story, but I think I wanted witnesses to this story to make it more believable, and yet I wanted it told substantially in the first person to avoid the implications of judgment that might result from telling a story which is at least in part obviously untruthful. In the first person you are right up close to your story—you can look so closely at the trees that you can ignore the forest. In the third person you are set back away from your subject, and can see the whole picture, and you can ignore some of the finer details without difficulty.

In Sun Dance and Children's Crusade I used first person—omniscient as far as that one character was concerned, but definitely not omniscient as to the rest of the characters. I wanted to see things up close, through the eyes of my principal char-

acter—to be as blind as he, and as discerning as he, and no more. I believe that it also adds plausibility to the story if First Person finds it necessary to admit things about himself which are not entirely praiseworthy.

In Honey-Colored Hair and Return in the Morning I wanted to be farther away from my characters, and to be omniscient at my pleasure with any and all of them.

The Hyena Laughed is a slight, rather contrived story which is pleasant for its humor and the idea of a hyena that laughs when it hears people lie to each other. I once saw a circus loading out at night. I once saw a hyena in a cage. I once saw an elephant push a circus wagon on command. The rest is just a pleasant little story, which I rather expect to sell some of these times.

Waltzing Mice is a result of hanging around the ground floor of the Natural Science building with Willie Negherbon when we were both undergraduates. It has a nice, contrived little plot, and is probably salable, if I could just find the right magazine for it. I wouldn't swear as to the scientific accuracy of the material about rats, or waltzing mice, or plague germs, or any of it, but the people are authentic, and that is what matters to me.

Triple Trouble is another contrived story, the slightest one in the lot, and yet the effect of the bones of the plot sticking right out before the reader gives it a certain humor, I hope. The characters are at least well enough realized to stand in the setting I have given them. The plot clicks along like a dollar watch. The effect of three is used here again—three incidents,

no more and no less. Three minor household calamities happen and three minor crises turn out quite happily.

Return by Night has been in the process of being written for a long time. The ending isn't right yet, but it will be in time. My usual practice with successful stories is to write a complete first draft in one sitting. I usually start getting ready to write about 11 o'clock at night, and by 3 o'clock I am tired enough so that my mind starts to work somewhat by itself. Then I can pound out a very rough first draft before sun-up. After some six rewritings it is licked into shape, but the main framework has usually not been changed. In this story I wrote the first three-fourths one night, and tried to finish it the next, and have been trying ever since. The first is so good that I can't bring myself to ditch it and forget it. Perhaps another full night's work is what it will take. I think that first three-fourths is as good a writing job as I have ever done. I think it will be humorous when it is rightly ended.

The last story is The Quiet Man. The story strikes me as having a lot of quality. I feel for the nasty little braggart who tells the story. Again I had to tell it in the first person in order to give it authenticity, to get close to the character, and to avoid the necessity of third person moral judgments. He can say as many unkind things about himself as he wishes; I don't care to say any of them. He is a vastly troubled man—so tied up in the net of his unfortunate personality that he will never get out—but I don't care to pass judgment on him in my first person. I find that this last is the only non-humorous story in the unpublished group.

* * *

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Sun-Dance 1

As soon as I heard there was going to be a Sun Dance and that Johnny Quillfinder was going to be in it, I told my father I wanted to be one of the dancers. My mother went wild, and said No, but my father was glad and said he would ask the Old Man. I rode out to my uncle's place on the day the Old Man picked the dancers. When he was through he came out and said to me: "John Azure, only Indians will dance. You must become a man by your own means."

That meant I was out. I was born next neighbor to the Old Man and I didn't like to have him say "only Indians." No one ever said it to me before. I don't know what I will do now; there is no war, and I will probably have to wait until I am thirty years old and then anyone can look at me and call me a man. I am seventeen now and that means thirteen years to wait. I may get married, because if I don't I will be lonesome.

Anyway, I had never seen a Sun Dance and I didn't see how it could mean anything real. If Johnny Quillfinder hadn't been in it I wouldn't have cared so much, but he was my best friend and I hated to lose him. After the dance he couldn't go around with me. He would be a man then, and go around with men. If it had been like the old times I would have been sorry to see Johnny in the dance. He couldn't have stood it; he has something the matter with his bones. But things have changed and

1. The Frontier and Midland, May, 1934, Pp. 310-316. Copyright 1934, by H. G. Merriam.

don't amount to very much any more. Only it seems undignified for the old men to pretend; it seems comical, as if they were fooling themselves and no one else.

Joe Warrior wanted to have the dance. There had been no rain the last part of May nor all through June and the hills were dry and the grass was dusty. Some Indians coming through from the mountains said they were planning a Sun Dance but it had to be different from old times. For many years the government has been against these dances on account of the brave-showing part that used to be in them. The boys who wanted to become men and be in the tribe had tabs cut in their back-muscles, and at the dance green buffalo heads were tied to the tabs with strips of buckskin. The boys ran out over the prairie dragging the heads until they jerked themselves loose. That was just part of it, and everybody was proud of the boys, but it was the part the government didn't like.

No rain came for us and the water holes were drying up. Every time a bunch of clouds came along old Joe Warrior ran out of his house and shook a rattle at them, but the wind blew the clouds over and no rain fell. Warrior, who is the chief of our nation, and Little White Bear and my father went to see the agent, and got permission to have a Sun Dance to make it rain. They had to promise to leave the buffalo part out, but I don't know where they could have found a buffalo anyway. I never did see one.

They decided the dance would be held about a mile from the agency, and Joe Warrior, who is my uncle, took a stick and traced a twenty-five foot ring on the prairie where the Sun Dance lodge

was to be built. The Old Man had his tepee brought over and set up right away, and they left him alone to make medicine for the dance. Five other nations were invited to watch the dancing. There would be Blackfeet, Crees, Gros Ventres, Bloods from Canada, Assinaboines, and our own people. I say "our own people" but my folks don't live on the reservation. We live about five miles from the agency. My mother doesn't like Indians so very well except my father.

I rode down to where my uncle, Joe Warrior, lives, and watched the old men sitting around the pipe. I had to be friends with a bunch of kids younger than I because most of those my own age were going to be in the dance. Three of us sneaked out into the woods by the river and hid ourselves up in a tree, and about an hour later I saw Warrior come running, all alone, dressed in his feathers and some long underwear. To do it right he should have been almost naked, but the agent made them wear long underwear and just pretend they were naked. If they wanted to paint themselves they had to paint on the underwear. That's what I mean when I say there was too much pretending to the Sun Dance. But there is never anything comical about my uncle, Joe Warrior. He is six feet tall and has never married anyone.

When he got into the trees he stopped and took the underwear off, and sure enough, he had his body painted with circles underneath. I could see the scars on his back from an old-time Sun Dance. He ran through the woods as fast as he could go, striking trees now and then with a hatchet. He hit one

that he must have located before, because that was the one with the big fork, and it must have taken a lot of choosing to pick it out. He was supposed to be guided by the Spirit to the right trees. I kind of doubt it. He came back after while and put the underwear on again and went back to the house.

As soon as he got out of sight we crawled down from the tree and sneaked out of the woods. Then we followed the young men who did the chopping back in again. There were fifteen of them, dressed in underwear, and some bold ones without underwear. They had axes and they found the trees my uncle had struck with the hatchet, and chopped them down.

That was the last day of June, and it should have taken five days to build the Sun Dance lodge, but they had to hurry and get it ready before sundown of July second. That was because the Fourth of July is a celebration day, and a Sun Dance is not a celebration. The time to be happy is when a Sun Dance is finished.

I couldn't watch them build the lodge because I have a job at a filling station and can get off only when I sneak away. But my father stayed at Warrior's place and helped with the ceremony, and that made my mother angry because she doesn't want him to act like an Indian. My mother is very pretty and has blonde hair, and so has one of my sisters and one of my brothers. It is something about Mendel's law. My sister doesn't like it but my brother does.

My sister told me how they did; they left the fallen trees in the woods that night and all the men prayed and took baths. The next day the tops and limbs were cut off, and the notched

log for the center-pole was carved by the Old Man. It was about twenty feet long with a big fork in the top. He cut the bark out just below the fork to make the shape of an eagle. Then he peeled a long strip out in the shape of an arrow. Just below that he carved the head of a buffalo. The idea was that the Sun Dance should continue until rain flowed down that arrow-groove to the ground. Of course that depended on the rain because the agent only allowed the dance to last twenty-four hours.

The boys who were to be in the dance carried the forked log on their backs, running more than two miles with it, to the circle my uncle had marked on the prairie. They set it in a deep post-hole and tamped the dirt in around it. It stood about fourteen feet high. Smaller holes were dug and posts set in them around the circle, and poles along the top of them, with poles from there up to the fork in the center log. The walls and roof were laid over with cottonwood boughs, and one wide doorway was left open facing the south. All around the back of the inside there was a partition about half the height of the boys, woven of small boughs. The dancers were to stand behind that. In front of it were logs for the old men to sit on.

The Indians were coming by the time that was done; from all directions and with all kinds of outfits. Our own people mostly came in wagons so their dogs could come along. We could see them coming for miles around, driving along beside the gravelled highway and some coming right over the hills. The

other nations came in cars and trucks, and in school buses that belonged to their reservations. There is no timber nor oil on our reservation and the people are poor. They try to be farmers.

There was a fine ring of tepees east of the lodge when everybody got there. More than a hundred tepees, and a string of wall-tents to the west. All the dogs running around, and the children, and women visiting, and the horses being herded around on the hills made me want to sneak away from the filling station. We didn't move out to the camp because my mother wouldn't live in a tepee, and my father, in his position, could hardly live in a wall tent. He stayed with my Uncle Joe, and was busy most of the time anyway.

The Sun Dance started at sundown on the second of July, to continue, in the old days, until it brought a rain. This one had to be finished before the Agency Independence Day celebration. I couldn't get away to see the dance begin, but I went out at night after the filling station closed.

The encampment was all dark except for the headlights of cars coming in and swinging around. The tepees were fine. I was surely proud of them. The Sun Dance lodge was big and black with its newly-cut cottonwood boughs, and I could hear the drums and singers above the noise of the cars. There was a crowd around the opening at the south side of the lodge. People of our own nation were coming out and going in, and whites from the agency and Indians of the other nations were looking in and talking to each other. No one could go inside but full-blooded, or nearly full-blooded people of our own nation.

I got through the crowd and leaned against the door post. It was much darker inside. There was a small fire going just back of the center-pole; hardly enough to light up the faces of the people. The singers were sitting around the drums on one side, singing things I had never heard before. A lot of squaws and children were beside them, helping with the songs. Some starlight came through the holes in the roof and my eyes got more used to the darkness so I could see dimly the line of dancers against the wall. They were standing behind the low partition, dancing up and down in one place and peep-peeping on little wooden whistles up toward the center. There was a long medicine bundle up there, tied in the fork of the center-pole. It was the medicine bundle of willows, and I don't know what-else, that my uncle and the Old Man had made and put up there. I couldn't see my father but he must have been with the old men in front of the partition sitting with their backs to the dancers.

My sister, the blonde one, came along and stood with me. She called to a friend of hers who was sitting with the squaws. This girl came out; it was Mary Velvet, who went to high school with us in town although she is a full-blood. She is my sister's best friend, and a very nice girl. I would like to marry her, and I think she would like it.

The three of us stood and watched for a while but we could see very little because it was dark inside. The fire flared up a bit once in a while and we could see that the dancers wore no underwear. They were painted all over, and the sound of their whistles peeping together was like a flock of birds that

was going somewhere. Mary said that she had never seen Indians painted all over in solid colors like that, and neither had I. My sister said the dancers had been taught secrets of the tribe, and of the Sun Dance pattern, which as far as she could find out, was something about destiny.

We stood at the door for a long time, and if the Indians crowded against us hadn't been strangers, it would have been very nice and comforting to be packed so close together.

We got out of the crowd and decided to wait until later when the white people would go away. Homer Jones, a white kid, asked me why I wasn't in the Sun Dance.

We went around to the side of the lodge and listened to the singing a while. We couldn't understand the words and had never heard the songs before, but it wasn't hard to let go and sing along with them. Indian singing is all in falsetto and is very intricate. I never knew of a white man who could sing Indian songs, but those who yodel might be able to learn. If you don't understand the words it sounds a little like bagpipes because they always come back to the same note.

Someone called my name from one of the cars. My sister told me not to answer, but I went over to see who it was. My brother was in the car with some white kids from town and he wanted me to go with them to a dance. He had Lois Myers, and wanted me to go with Lola, her sister. He gave me a drink and I said I would go. Lola Myers was no bargain; she went out with everybody, and she claimed to hate full-blooded Indians. My brother, the blonde one, went steady with Lois, so I went along with Lola to oblige him. Anyway, I did like to dance, and I

surely felt like having a drink after the Old Man wouldn't let me be in the Sun Dance. I used to go out with Lola because I thought it was smart to go with a white girl. My brother says I ought to marry her and forget about the reservation. She would do it, too, because I have a job.

We went about fifty miles to a town where this dance was held, and during the evening I fell down and hit my head on a bench and spent the rest of the time in the car.

Going back very late I woke up as we passed the Sun Dance camp, and I made them stop and let me out. I walked over the prairie to the lodge and found the crowd of watchers much smaller. The dance was still going on of course; that doesn't stop at all except when the dancers are down behind the partition for talk to the Spirit. It was still dark in the lodge although a small moon had come up. There were no more car lights flashing around outside and there were no sounds but Indian sounds. The tepees were fine in the moonlight.

My sister had gone home but I found Mary Velvet and tried to be nice to her. She didn't like me when I had been drinking, and pushed me away. I went around to the side of the lodge and sang by myself. I tried to do a Sun Dance but I didn't know how. I felt like taking off my clothes and jumping and yelling. Mary Velvet found someone who was driving in to town and they came and hit me twice and took me home.

The next day my mother and my boss made me work at the filling station. I learned to be a mechanic when I was away at reform school, and I am quick at changing tires. I managed to sneak away in the afternoon though, and caught a ride out to

the Sun Dance. I was feeling very tough after such a bad night, and I thought I must be as tired as the Sun Dancers.

The place looked very gay, with lots of dust and dogs and children all around. When I got through the crowd at the opening to the lodge, one old man who was a dance-leader, was standing up giving the first part of a song. The old men were still sitting on their logs in front of the low partition, looking hollow-eyed and tired, and none of the dancers were in sight. My father was sitting next to Uncle Joe, who had on his ordinary clothes and a big war-bonnet. A few of the others wore beads or bonnets, but all had on their ordinary white-man's clothes. A new bunch of singers were coming in and changing places with those around the drums. Finally they started the new song. The sight of fat old Harry Pretty sitting there, wearing his colored horn-rim glasses, and singing songs that he didn't know the meaning of, made me feel self-conscious and ashamed of the whole business. I wished the white people weren't there. The dance began to seem like a lot of hocus-pocus to me. I hate it when I begin to think that way; that the old men are silly and only pretending that things mean a lot. They had Spirit flags tied to the poles of the Sun Dance lodge, and they were nothing but dirty old red and blue rags. I had to laugh.

Then the dancers started coming up from behind their partition. The first one was Harry Newman but it took me a while to recognize him. He was naked and painted all over with bright orange color. His head was draped with braids and whisks of blue sage, and there was one of those small, downy eagle feathers, called breath-feathers, stuck to each cheek.

They came up slowly by twos and threes all around the back of the lodge. There were twenty-four of them altogether, all painted, and all different. John Deer Hunter was painted the most vivid purple I have ever seen. It was show-card purple, and so intense that it seemed to float out away from him. They were all hung with things that didn't seem to be for ornament. It all seemed to mean something but I didn't know what. Each one had the wings of a hawk or an eagle in his hands. Sometimes when the song was finished they stood still and covered their faces with those wings until another song started.

The way they danced, standing in one place, made me remember how I tried to dance the night before and didn't know how. I had never seen a dance like it; they stood in one place, bending their knees and jogging down and up with a one-two motion as if they were riding a trotting horse. Each one had in his mouth a willow whistle about three inches long with a breath-feather tied to it. They pointed those whistles up, and looked up steadily at the medicine bundle in the center-pole fork, and peeped with the whistle at every jog. It was peep-peep, peep-peep, along with a steady jog-jog, jog-jog, and their eyes never moving from the medicine bundle.

My uncle, Joe Warrior, was the fire tender. He carried a big thick braid of prairie grass in his hand and broke off a little now and then to sprinkle on the fire. He picked up embers with a carved stick and put some at each side of the center pole; on the south and on the east and west. The fire itself was on the north and he added sticks of cottonwood now and then to keep it going. He was very dignified; there is

nothing comical about my Uncle Joe.

Some of the cottonwood smoke drifted around to me. It had a smell that was like supper cooking in a tepee. It was like the sound of the drums and the singing, and it made me feel lonesome. Although we talk in either our own language, or in French, or in English, I was sure no one knew what the words meant that were in the songs. A word now and then stood out; all of it sounded familiar and still it didn't. It was like hearing plain talk from far away.

The smell of that cottonwood smoke made me very lonesome. My sister and Mary Velvet came along, hanging on each other's necks. They said the dancers hadn't stopped all night or all day, and had eaten nothing. I took a look at the sky and there was no sign of rain; the Sun Dance didn't seem to be working. I thought it ought to rain the next day because it always rains on the Fourth of July.

I watched the dancers again. Several of them wore their colored glasses, but Johnny Quillfinder, whose eyes are very weak, had left his off. He was painted brown, and wore a small folded blue cloth on his shoulders, like a shawl. It was a clean blue cloth with the store creases still in it, and it looked very nice on his shoulders. He had squares marked out with white dots around his eyes, and the inside of the squares was painted dark. He kept looking up steadily at the medicine bundle while he danced, and the solemn, sober look in his eyes didn't seem comical to me any more. His face looked tired and his eyes were big and hollow-looking. The eyes of all of them were religious and tired-looking; I could see it now. That was

what made me lonesome--they looked so tired, and yet they looked satisfied. They looked as if they had been told something that was true and they believed it. I could see how that if the dance lasted long enough it would bring rain.

One of my little sisters tried to get in to my father, but Uncle Joe made her go out again. Harry Pretty's little boy was in there, and all the full-blood kids, but my sister had to go out, and she was less than two years old. Her eyes and hair were as black as anybody's and her face was as dark as mine, but Uncle Joe wouldn't let her stay. It made me lonesome again to think of Johnny Quillfinder's eyes, and of my own sister being chased out of the lodge by her own uncle.

The dancing and the singing went on and I walked away by myself. I couldn't think what to do. I felt like telling them all to go to hell. I can get a job in any garage. I can get along without any of them. What difference does it make if you have been in a Sun Dance? What can you do when you get to be a man? Really, for myself, I wish to God there would be a war.

* * *

THE ORPHAN 2

I was sitting in the pool-hall half asleep when Bud Moriarity, who works up at the State School, came in. "Hey, you guys, come on," he yelled. "We've gotta go orphan-hunting. Two little kids got away."

I'd been orphan-hunting before. Everybody in a town like ours, with a state orphans' home in it, has been orphan-hunting. The poor little devils do run away once in a while. You can't guard 'em as if they were convicts--all you can do is watch 'em close and count 'em often. If it was big kids that ran away, the school just notified the sheriffs and police around the state to pick 'em up, but if they were little devils, you had to find 'em right away.

Like I said, I'd been orphan-hunting four or five times, and once I happened to find one. It was while I was in high school, and one little one got away, and people hunted three days without finding him. They turned out all us kids from high school, and we walked in a wide line up and down through a thousand-acre wheat field where they thought he might be hid.

Well, we walked along slow, keeping our distance in the line, and looking hard around us, and it happened I found him. He was lying face down in the wheat--a step or two from a ditch--as though he'd played out and crawled in there to hide. He didn't look any bigger than a rabbit, sprawled out sort of on his face, with his arms bent above his head, and his legs bent.

2. The Household Magazine, February, 1940, Pp. 8,9,34. Original title: "The Black Man, the White Man and the Orphan."

It was as if he was sleeping on his stomach, but his face was right straight down in the dirt, and no one would sleep that way. He looked no bigger than a rabbit. I called the other high school kids and they all looked, and they called the men, and the men took him away.

Naturally I wasn't keen to go orphan-hunting again, but I went. There's nothing else you can do.

And then, there was no reason to think these kids would be dead. Moriarity said they were only missed an hour ago, and they couldn't have gone far.

All the men in town turned out for a hunt like this; strangers and all. The strangers wanted to get lanterns, and we had to explain how you do it. A lantern is no good for outside hunting. The kid is running away, see, and if you have a lantern he can spot you and stay out of your way. This is what we learned we had to do: First, everybody gets all their cattle and horses and pigs rounded up and puts them in their stables. The men generally use a lantern then, to be sure the kid isn't hiding in the barn or around. Then they put all the dogs inside the houses, and then they start out hunting, just as you would hunt for a strayed calf.

Whoever is running the hunt tells you the section you are to work. It may be a section of the creek-bottom, or one side of the railroad track for a ways, or something like that. You hunt alone.

That night Moriarity gave me a section of willows along a creek. I had from the highway bridge to the railroad bridge. It was a good section, with lots of cover, and out of range of

any barns. A dozen of us started out of town along the road together, and just as we got close to our sections all the lights in the town were turned off.

It's better that way, with no lights shining in the distance to bother your eyes. At first it seems mighty dark, but as soon as your eyes get used to it, then you're glad for no stray interference. There was no moon this night. It was in the fall and there were a few leaves on the ground, sharp and crackly. It was a good night for hunting.

The dozen of us came down the road talking, telling each other our sections, and the password, which was "Buzz." If you're hunting through your section and you see something move, you spot it good, and then you say, "Buzz." If it's another hunter, he answers you, "Buzz." Then you go on about your hunting. It saves a lot of explaining and keeps things quiet. You don't have to say, "Who is it?" and he doesn't have to say, "It's me. Who are you?" You just say "Buzz" to each other.

We left four fellows at their starting points. They headed out from the road at right angles, away from each other, and they worked until they met someone from another section, then they came back. Anyone who found a kid would bring it in, or if there was only one lost he would just yell. The town was always so quiet during a hunt that you could hear a good yell for miles.

We came to the bridge where my section started. Two of us stopped there--this other fellow to go up the creek and me to go down, toward the tracks. We got down under the bridge and squatted there in the dark until our eyes got good and open.

We got so we could see pretty well, even in the dark under the bridge. Then the other fellow started out, but I crawled around under the bridge a lot, and felt in all the corners, clear up into the beams of the bridge where they went into the bank. I didn't want that kid to be hiding in there and fool me to start with. I wanted to be sure of that bridge before I left it.

When I was positive he wasn't there I crawled out and started down the creek a little. Moriarity came down the road and called to me. "One of 'em came in by himself," he said. "There's just one lost now. They got separated, and this kid got panicky and ran right into Joe Finch's barn while Joe was in there putting his stock away, and the kid ran right between two horses and tried to hide in the manger."

"Joe Finch's--that's on this side of town," I said. "The other one may be close."

"This one kid," said Moriarity, "he didn't know where he left the other one, but he said he'd come a long way alone."

Moriarity went on then, and I started hunting again.

This is how you do it. You go along as quiet as you can, and if you know the ground you can be mighty quiet. You go a step or two and then you listen, and then you go a step or two more and then you listen. You go on that way for ten feet or so, and then you listen a long time--a minute or so. You go out to the right that way, and then you go out to the left, keeping watch on all sides, and then you go on. You ease up to every willow bunch, or anything that's big enough to look black, and you feel all through it with your hands. You feel the ground and you look around, but mostly you listen. You can

cover an eighty-foot swath that way so well that not even a mouse could move without you knowing it.

You've got to cover a lot of the ground on your hands and knees, so you won't loom up taller than the kid. You want to see him against the sky if he's standing, rather than to let him spot you that way. Well, I went on that way for a long time, hoping all along I'd hear someone yell "Found." Always before on other hunts someone else finally found the kid, or else nobody did and they called it off until morning.

Twice I spotted something moving across the creek, and I got all set to jump across, and then I said, "Buzz," and someone said, "Buzz" back at me. It was the same guy, I reckon, each time. I think it was Mr. Homans, the principal of the high school.

Finally I heard a sound. It was ahead of me, where one of the hunters would have any business to be. I worked over toward it quick and listened for a long time. Finally I heard it again; a stick scraping or a leaf moving or something. I sneaked in that direction four or five feet right away, and I saw something black in the brush, about ten feet farther on. It looked like a man--not a kid--but I took no chances. I got all gathered together to leap and grab and then I said, "Buzz."

I got no answer, but I saw it move, and I knew it was alive, and I knew all the stock was in the barns so it couldn't be a cow or something. It was pretty well hidden in the brush. I said, "Buzz" once more and got no answer, and then I upped and dashed at it.

It was a man. He stood up and turned to run, but I was on

him just like that. He dropped to his knees and lifted his arms in front of his face, as though he expected me to hit him. "I didn't do nothing," he wailed, scared to death.

I had him by the shoulder. I was plumb surprised, and some mad at him for being there. "What are you doing here?" I growled at him under my breath.

"Don't turn me in, boss," he said, and his voice was almost gone with fright. "I didn't do a thing. Must be somebody else they're looking for. I didn't do a thing."

"We aren't looking for you," I said, real quiet. "We're looking for a little kid that's lost."

"I didn't do nothing with him, boss," he said. "I didn't see no little kid."

I squatted down beside him to see who he was, and did I get surprised? He was the blackest man I ever saw in my life. His eyes were rolling and his shoulders were quivering where I still had hold of him. I thought it was funny for a second, but then I saw his face better, and it's never funny to see such a terrible fear as that poor cuss had on him.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked him. "What do you think this is?"

"I saw all those men coming down the road," he said. "It looked like a lynch posse to me. I heard 'em say they was looking for somebody. It looked like a lynch party I seen once. I thought they was after me. I been trying to keep away from you clear back from the bridge."

"No, listen," I said, "don't be scared." The look on his face--the fear he had in him--was something I had to try to

smooth down. "No, listen. It's a little kid we're hunting. An orphan. We don't want to lynch anybody."

"I was just waiting down here by the tracks," he said. "Just waiting for a freight to come along. I wouldn't hurt no little kid."

"I know you wouldn't," I said, as gentle as I could. "Sure, nobody would harm a little kid."

"What you hunting him for then?" the black man asked. "Why you hunt him so slow and easy this way?"

"He's an orphan," I said again. "We've got a state orphan home here, and this little kid ran away, and we're just trying to find him and bring him back."

"Why he run away?" the man asked.

"Don't ask me," I said. "You never know why they want to leave. The folks at the school try to be good to them, but the poor little devils make a run for it just the same, ever once in a while."

"Whyn't you let 'im go if he want to get away so bad?" he asked.

"You can't," I said. "You just can't. They've got to have some place to live. They might die if you don't find them. You've got to get them back."

"I guess that's right," he said after a while. Then he turned to me, "But if you ain't looking for me, then maybe you let me go now, can't you?"

"Sure," I said, "you can go. But, listen, why don't you stay with me and help find the kid? If you're good enough to get so far from that bridge without me hearing you, you could

do a good job of hunting."

"But why you hunt 'im so quiet like this?" he asked again. "Why don't you all just call 'im? If he's lost he ought to answer quick enough he hear you call."

"It don't work that way," I said. "They don't want to be found. It isn't that kind of lost. They have some sort of idea about getting away. They're full of nerve--those little kids. All they want to do is get away."

"But you gotta find 'em," said the black man, "or they maybe die, huh? Even if you got to scare 'em to do it. Like you scared me."

"If they get that kind of scared you can hear 'em cry," I said, "but I never did hear one really cry."

So he said he'd help me, and I told him how we did, and about "Buzz."

"I didn't know what that 'Buzz' was," he said. "I just didn't know about that at all."

We went a little ways together and I was feeling around in a big clump of willows when my hand touched something. The hair stood up on the back of my neck I was so startled--it was so sudden, in the quiet that way. I grabbed, and there was a thump and a jerk and I almost let go. I'll be darned if I didn't have hold of a rabbit--a live rabbit.

The black man came crawling over and looked at it. I was holding it out at arm's length and it began to struggle. All of a sudden in made my blood run cold again. It squawked. You don't expect sound from a rabbit.

The black man jerked back. "Let it go," he wailed. "Please

boss, let it go. Ain't nothing deserves to be as scared as that."

I let it go and it dived into the brush. We started out hunting again. We hadn't gone more than twenty feet when I heard more sounds. "I've found him," said the black man. "Here he is."

I sneaked over that way. I didn't know if the kid was really caught yet. There was the black man on his hands and knees beside a big old fallen log. I got down close and looked. Just the kid's back was showing--he was almost crawled under the log--almost hidden, but he couldn't get his back clear under with him. You could hear him whimpering a little under there. Not fear so much--just miserable. The black man was patting the little kid's back as though it was a pup's back. "Don't be afraid, boy," he was saying softly. "We won't hurt you none. We're your friends. We'll help you."

I put out my hand and touched the kid's back too. He was a little fellow--wouldn't weigh more than forty pounds. His back flinched, but I left my hand there steady and easy and he eased up again, and just whimpered a little bit from his misery.

I should have stood up and yelled, "Found," right then, instead of letting the others go on hunting, but I didn't want to yell so loud. It seemed like it would scare that little kid too much. "Haul him out a little," I said. "Haul him out real easy. He knows we wouldn't hurt a spunky little kid like him. We like him too much."

The black man got a grip on him and began pulling him out. It was like pulling a kitten out of a basket. I had to reach

down under the log and loosen his hands from the stuff he was hanging to. I found his hands and loosened them real easy, one at a time, and then we pulled him out. He was all tight with fear and his eyes were closed as though he was still hiding, but he didn't fight back. The black man gathered him up and hugged him and rocked him. He pried the kid's face up and looked at it. "Now," he said, "there's a boy for you. That's what I like to see a boy look like."

I looked at him and I sure felt the same way about that kid. He was a homely little cuss, and dirty of course--just dirty no end from digging around under that log, but he was just what I would want a boy to look like--kind of homely and spunky. The black man pried the kid's face up again to look, and this time the kid opened his eyes.

Maybe it was the first time the kid ever saw a black man. Anyway, he was scared to death. He jumped away, but I caught him. He looked at me and he saw I was white, so he grabbed his arms around my neck and almost strangled me.

"Little boy," the black man pleaded, "don't be afraid of me. Don't be afraid of Jim. Jim wouldn't hurt you."

His voice sort of broke. "I like you, little boy," he said. "I like you. I wouldn't want to scare you." He put his hand on my shoulder and one on the kid's back. Dark as it was, you could see tears rolling down his face, and his hand was trembling. "I wouldn't want to scare you, boy. Didn't you ever see a black man before?" He was trying to sound funny. "A black man's funny. You ought to laugh at a black man--not cry."

I sat down on the log then and Jim knelt in front of us.

The tears stopped coming from his eyes and he was holding one of the kid's hands. The kid was quieting down. He wasn't trembling any more. Finally we got him turned around and he was looking at Jim.

"What's your name?" said Jim.

"Burgess McClann," said the kid.

"That's a fine name," said Jim. "How old are you?"

"I'm four years old," the kid said, still looking at Jim.

"Where were you going?" I asked him.

"I was going away," he said, so quiet we could hardly hear him. "I was going to find somebody to live with." He looked us both over warily. "I suppose you'll take me back to the school now." He sighed a great, wavery, weary sigh. "Well, I won't stay."

"Oh, we won't take you back to the school," said Jim.

He said it before he thought, I guess. He just looked at me as if he was surprised at what he said. "What can we do with him?" he asked.

"I'll live with you guys," the kid said quickly. "I'd just as soon."

We were all quiet for a while--all sort of holding hands together.

"What you have to do to adopt one of these kids?" Jim asked.

"You have to be married," I said, "and have a good home for them, and be able to support them right."

After another pause Jim said, "And you ain't none of them things, huh?"

"No," I said, "I'm not."

"I could help support him," Jim said. "I could come see him sometimes. I could work around, and help him get started."

"I sure wish I could," I said.

"You know anyone who might marry you," Jim asked, "any good woman that would take right care of this kid? Any real good woman that might marry you?"

"I been thinking about one lately," I said. "I could ask her."

"Would you go back to the school and wait a while?" Jim asked the kid. "Would you wait a while and trust us, until we'd be proper folks to adopt you?"

"Yes, I'd wait," the kid answered.

"Then let's do it," said Jim, standing up. "Let's go and do it."

CHILDREN'S CRUSADE 3

It seems as though we always acted like a pack of dogs in those days, but of course I was small then and I may have forgotten. Nobody ever used to think--it wasn't necessary; we just went ahead and did things. There was a dance in the school house Saturday night, and then a Sunday School picnic all day Sunday, and the next day was the Fourth of July, and there was a dance again that night. Now that I remember, people must have thought in those days, because we all thought it was good music.

The stranger was an ignorant-looking kid; six feet tall, and too round; like rank grass, or weeds that grow too fast. He didn't have any business at the dance (he just wanted to celebrate the Fourth of July, I guess) but we didn't care about his having no business there; we just went after him like a pack of dogs.

All the people came early. It was a dark night--nights were dark in those days; no moon, and the stars not doing anything. We seemed to cast our own light from our faces. When there was a bunch of us together we made a good light to see by. We all stood in the cloak-room and watched the people come to the dance, and we shoved each other around, and tried to get into the farthest corner, and still we watched into the school-room. The women were on one side and the men on the other, all

3. Frontier and Midland, Autumn, 1934, Pp. 59-61. Copyright 1934, by H. G. Merriam.

dressed in their best. We were dressed in our best, too, and that made us jerk each other around all the more.

The stranger was standing against the wall. It seemed dark now but we could see him. We acted up a lot, wrestling with each other; we got to feeling loose and wooly and silly. Then the music started. Two kids grabbed each other and started scraping around, like a dance. They turned into a wrestling match right away, and others tried it until they wrestled, too. They shoved one kid in through the door. He came back and we shoved him again, right out into the dance floor. He came back and started dodging around. He got behind the stranger, and stranger nearly fell down. Stranger stood against the wall again and grinned. He wouldn't talk to us; we didn't really say anything to him. He was nearly twice as tall as we were, but we were on our own ground and he was a stranger. He tried to grin nice at us but he didn't have any business to grin at all.

Some grownup kids came out and took a drink out of a bottle and got me to fighting. I didn't like to fight--not until someone hit me; but when I got started it was all right. I just swung in hard and it felt good to hit and be hit. Some men came out then and stopped the fight. Stranger was standing straight up against the wall, grinning. He looked afraid.

The next grownup kids that came out, we got them to give stranger a drink. "Give us some," and they wouldn't, so "Give him some," and they did. Stranger took a big drink and the grownup kids looked at him as if they didn't like him. It was dark in the hall but we made our own light somehow from our faces. Stranger made a lot of light from his face. Inside,

kerosene lamps made a path of light through the door; a yellow path on the boards. We kept out of that. If we stepped into it we stepped out quick.

Time went fast in those days; the minutes were long but the hours were short because we didn't think. We went around and around in our heads like dogs. We tried to get stranger to go in and dance. He wouldn't say anything, but one of the kids said he was going inside and ask a girl to dance with stranger. The kid walked right in and around to the back of the room where the girls were. Stranger kept looking in for him--trying to see past the dancers. Two girls came by just then to go outside--one of them was my sister. We pushed stranger against them. They shoved him away and slapped him, and ran outside giggling.

We all laughed to beat the band. We shoved him around, and he tried to stay back against the wall. One of the kids managed to kick him in the seat of the pants, and we pulled him away from the wall and did that a while. He tried to keep his back against the wall but we pulled him away. It went on for a long time, and I remember I stopped once and looked up at him. He was standing on his tiptoes, trying to hold his arms up away from the kids--he was leaning back into the corner, white and scared. His face was putting out more light than all the other faces yanking around by his knees. They pulled him out again and kicked him and he managed to get back into the corner once more.

It wasn't much fun, but there wasn't anything else to do. Usually we followed drunks around, but that night all the drunks were dancing.

Finally he slapped one kid and kicked at me, and we lit into him then for sure. Some more grownup kids came out to drink and they watched us for a while. Stranger tried kicking back at us only once, and then started grinning again, standing back in the corner as tall as he could, when he could get away from us.

We got him pulled off balance and shoved him out in the path of light on the floor. One kid kicked up high at him and fell down on the floor. Stranger tried to get back into the corner and one of the grownup kids tripped him. He fell right in the light where people inside could see.

He got to his feet and ran outside. We all followed, yelling as hard as we could. He ran down the hill toward the horses but we ran around and headed him off. He went out toward the swamp, still down hill, and we jumped along after him. We had a lot of wind those days; it felt like we could fly--jumping into the air down the hill chasing him. We knew the ground; it was our own ground, and he had to be careful, and couldn't fly.

We didn't let him go in one direction. Some of us headed him to one side, and then along the hill, and the others ran down on him from above. We kept him going around and dodging through us. We didn't need to rest; we could run past him downhill and head him off. He had to run up-hill part of the time, and kids waiting up there came down at him. Then he had to get through us below. We didn't think about it; we just did it that way--like dogs chasing something.

One of the grownup kids from the dance heard us yelling. He was drunk and got on his horse. He chased the stranger out

on the flats and we all followed close behind. Stranger dodged the horse, and somehow the horse got its feet tangled and fell down. It made an awful thump, and the grownup kid rolled away ahead of it. The horse got up but the kid stayed there, cussing mad.

Stranger was running straight now. I was the only one to see him and I yelled, and started after him. He was making a noise with his mouth as he ran, and thumping his feet hard on the ground. He was tired and I caught him first; I was quite a ways ahead of the other kids. They were coming along as hard as they could. I grabbed stranger's coat and shoved him from the side. He fell down and drew his legs up. He held one foot in the air to guard himself. His face was glowing light and the grin was still there, as if he didn't dare take it off. He was panting so hard I felt sorry for him.

The other kids got there and stranger tried to get away. I shoved him down again but he got to his feet. The kids pulled him down and he fought like fury. Someone got hold of his shirt and ripped it.

I never thought less in my life than I did for a while then. We couldn't tear his coat but we managed to grab up under that for his shirt. I got one good hold on the back of it and ripped and jerked and swung around, with things clear black to my eyes. We got all over him and ripped the shirt clear off. He yelled once and tried to stand up when someone choked him with his necktie, then he went down again.

When he got so he wouldn't struggle any more, no matter what we did, we went back to the dance. He came blubbering

along quite a ways behind us. It was midnight and supper was being handed out, but he couldn't come in and get any because his shirt was gone.

* * *

THE HUNTER 4

The boy's name was Padraic and his two huge brothers called him Pad. He sincerely believed that his full name was Paddy-Whack, because his mother called him that, and it was the name of a character in a comic opera. His brothers had spent all the evening getting out their hunting equipment. The smell of gun oil clung to the rich-looking stocks of their shotguns; the acrid smell of sage drifted from their hunting coats. Padraic had a nasty intimation that he would not be allowed to go with them.

"I'm going to take Bess out digging gophers tomorrow," he announced.

"Bess is going hunting with us tomorrow," said a brother.

"She's my dog," said Pad reasonably. He knew he must not be impudent about this.

"Not during hunting season," said his mother.

"May I go hunting with you?" he asked his brothers respectfully.

"You're too young," said a brother.

"You can't go running around with a gun," said his mother.

"I'm seven," said Padraic, "and I've hunted a lot."

"You're too young," said his father, and that was the end of that. Padraic could still hope for miracles, but it was a sad blow.

The next forenoon he was sitting at one end of a long field that his father was plowing with a tractor. A half-mile away the drone of the engine was rising and falling, and the boy

could hear it. In his mind, which was peculiarly his mind, he could hear a great orchestra in that drone if he chose. It was playing something of a remote symphony to him and the melody was going well in his head. It rose and fell with the tractor sound, bound in high and low limits by the limits of the drone.

Pad decided to sleep. He lay on his back and watched the clouds. A curlew was flying around so high above him that Pad had difficulties in imagining himself flying with it. Pad held his wings out leisurely, as he saw the curlew do. He dipped and swung, and glided about in the cool upper air. He looked down and saw his father on the tractor, far below him in the field. This field was on the Shane place. Old Man Shane had never even built a house. He had boarded with neighbors, and never shaved. Pad found that he was no longer flying. He turned over onto his stomach.

By holding his head very close to the ground he could look through the forest of brown grass stems. He saw a beetle sitting on a rock, rubbing its hands. He stalked it, and found the ground very rough for stalking. Pad thought of a friend of his, a man named Lord Greystoke, and wished that he could do the things that Greystoke did. Still, Mr. Vanderbeek was very nice, and could play the piano so hard that it rocked. Mr. Vanderbeek could certainly read Tarzan wonderfully.

Slowly Pad realized that he could hear his mother vocalizing. His mother's vocal exercises were the means of his gentle awakening each morning; his familiar alarm clock. He sat up with an effort. He had nearly slept.

Pad saw a jack-rabbit loping past. He thought of hunting season and the thought filled him with cunning. He leaped to his feet and shouted alarmingly. As often happened, (he had discovered this), the rabbit stopped quickly and huddled close to the ground. The rabbit didn't know how to run away from such a sudden scare. Pad picked up a sharp rock. He always threw at jack-rabbits. He had never hit one, but always hoped he would. He threw the stone flat-wise, and, to his sudden delight, hit the animal close to the ear. With the primary instinct of the hunt strong in him, Pad ran to the stunned rabbit, and hit it again on the head with a large stone. The glory of the kill filled him and he drew a deep and satisfied breath.

Then the rabbit moved a hind leg, (and Pad saw how soft its fur was), and it opened a bruised eye. Terrible sorrow and agonized tenderness struck the glory from the boy. He kneeled by the warm animal. He would take it home. He would nurse it back to life and wholeness again. He picked it up in his arms and saw to his horror that the other side of the head was badly damaged. It was broken. The rabbit was broken. It was suffering. He would have to kill it. Quickly, quickly. He must not let it suffer. A jack-rabbit is knee-high to a small boy. Pad worked. His eyes were wide and their depths were black, and he worked hard, and as terribly fast as he could. His heart was too torn for him to cry. He gasped and jabbered in his agonized wish to get the terrible act done.

When the rabbit was almost unrecognizable Pad put it by a fence post. He turned away, his face twisted as if he were in

pain. He sat on the edge of a furrow, pushing thoughts from his mind as desperately as if he wanted to keep it forever blank.

His dog, Bess, came wagging toward him, followed at a distance by his brothers. "Have you been hunting, Pad?" one of them asked.

"Yes," said the boy unsteadily.

"Did you get anything?"

Pad went over to the fence post. He took the rabbit by its hind feet, and, with a grunt, swung it out and dropped it at their feet. For a moment no one spoke. The distant drone of the tractor intruded into Pad's mind, and he could hear the sobbing, droning orchestra again. It would not stay out of his mind, and the melody it played for him was the Funeral March of the Marionettes, which Pad had heard.

* * *

HONEY-COLORED HAIR 5

That night at dinner Claire suddenly felt pretty. She threw her head back and opened her mouth and laughed with joy. Mrs. Mansfield looked at her uneasily, and so did Aunt Beulah. Mr. Mansfield was silent as usual; deep in his own thoughts, and hardly seemed to notice his daughter's exuberance. Uncle Terry sighed with regret that he was no longer young.

"You can laugh and bellow if you want to," snapped her brother James. "I don't know what's so funny. And when you feel so horribly good at dinner you generally squall before you go to sleep." That was exactly why her mother and aunt were uneasy, but they said nothing.

"Will you dance with me tonight, James?" Claire asked.

"Ask me when we get there," James growled. "And don't wear that fool yellow dress. It's too extreme." He bumbled away upstairs to get ready, and everyone smiled and forgave him, for his girl was due in town that night with the college crowd, and he was completely upset.

The dance was to be almost a society affair--it was designed to welcome the college crowd back to town for their short vacation. All the old high school crowd would be there, and at ten-fifteen the high-spot of the evening would be reached when the college people came from their train. Claire's brother was completely nervous because his girl was coming to

5. The Household Magazine, October, 1935, Pp. 2, 26, 27, 28.
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visit his family for the first time, and because she was almost a stranger even to him. Claire was bubbling so only because she felt good, and because she would be wearing new bronze slippers, and the yellow dress.

And at the dance Claire left her coat in the dressing-room, and looked at herself in the mirror and was still well pleased. She smiled at herself, and touched her brown hair and felt very pretty. Then she went out, and Benny was waiting for her like a faithful dog.

Around and around the floor swirled the couples-- the good old crowd that had grown up together--that had always lived in the town. Benny Black danced Claire away and cast protective scowls around--good old Benny, who had never been anywhere, nor done anything famous, and who had always adored her. Claire smiled calmly and wore a dignified mood now and hardly laughed at all. She walked fine and tall, and carried her shoulders wide, and her high spirits continued to simmer inside her. She felt so good that even her feet seemed small enough to please her in the new bronze slippers.

Claire steered Benny a little bit and he danced her over toward James, who was moping in the stag-line. "You remember me," Claire called. "I'm your little sister. You know--the little Mansfield girl."

James came over right away and cut in, and even smiled at her through his nervous frown. "You seem to be busy enough, kid. Your old Benny still hangs around." He leaned back and looked at her, with surprise in his worried eyes. "You look kind of pretty tonight, kid. You'll be growing up one of these

days. I'll have to see about you."

"I'm eighteen, you know, James, and lots of people try to see about me now. I'm grown already, but of course you didn't know that."

But James hadn't been listening to her. He looked at his watch in alarm. "Hey! Wait! It's nearly time to go to the train. Excuse me, kid." He left her in the middle of the floor and ran for his coat, nor did he look back, and Claire stood laughing where he left her.

Benny came edging along, with the adoring look in his eye, and Claire put on her air of high royalty and danced away with him, her shoulders wide and fine.

At ten-fifteen the crowd from the train charged in; hats and overcoats and grips flying; full of the importance of arrival--full of heroic flurry; glad to be back, and glad to have been gone. The high school crowd faded out before the fiery elegance and verve of the collegians; and the center of all attraction was one small blond person. This was Holly Van Ten, and all the antics were performed in the hope she would see. James Mansfield was hovering at the side of this lovely creature--boosting her about by the elbow, and acting completely absurd and fierce.

Claire was swallowed by the roar of greetings. One would have thought the new-comers had been gone six years instead of six months. "Hi-yah, Claire," shouted Joe Bates, who wore a hat with a small feather in it.

"Hello, Joe," said Claire, but apparently she didn't say it loud enough to please, for Joe came charging over with his

smile opening wider. "Hi-yah, Claire," and he slapped her on the back with a great good will. Claire tried to preserve her calm radiance. She walked smiling over to meet Holly Van Ten, but she found that the crowd was thickest just where Holly was. She managed to struggle up closer, still smiling, and saw that the innermost ring around the girl was composed of her brother James, three great college seniors--at whom James was smiling and glaring, and her own Benny Black. Benny had forgotten to take off his adoring look. It suited him poorly beside the great nonchalance of the seniors.

Claire was pushed aside, still smiling and ready to be introduced. Then she saw another girl who was sitting along, hoping someone would ask her to dance, and wearing the same sort of left-over-looking smile. Still Claire smiled but no one saw her.

"Come and dance with your old friend Joe Bates," roared a voice at her shoulder. Claire tried again to catch a glimpse of Holly Van Ten. She turned to dance with Joe Bates. "That brother of yours," said Joe; "does he talk in his sleep? Because I'd surely like to know how he catches a stunner like Van Ten, and gets her to come see him from college."

"Is she so very pretty?" Claire asked.

"The best-looking dame I ever saw," said Joe. "She's the stunner of the campus, but she's much too handsome for the likes of me. Why, she doesn't even know my name." He beamed down at Claire. "Now I like 'em like you. This Holly looks too expensive--too much like a doll. There's too much competition with a dame like that. I like 'em more on the ordinary side--I mean,

just plain people--I mean I've known you all my life--I mean I like 'em not too good-looking. Not so much competition with girls like you."

Claire kept her eyes down and let Joe bungle on. She wasn't radiant now--she just danced. She was glad when she saw Benny and could signal for a cut-in.

"Say," Benny stuttered as they danced away, "that Holly Van Ten is the prettiest girl I ever did see." Claire glanced at him. "They just don't come any more beautiful than her; even in the movies."

"I would like to meet her," said Claire humbly enough.

"Sure. Sure. I met her. I'll be glad to introduce you," said Benny. He plowed a way through the ring of men and started to mumble something. James ignored Benny when he noticed Claire. He took that opportunity to step in front of the college seniors. "Miss Van Ten," said James, "may I present my little sister Claire?" Holly lifted her eyes slowly and Claire felt a ridiculous desire to curtsy to this small person. Claire saw the honey-colored hair that peeped out from beneath a smart green hat; she saw dark brown eyes, and clear skin, and red lips. It was a fox-face, full of sharp fire, and seeming to know and conceal some secret.

"How do you do, Holly?" said Claire. "Brother James has been losing sleep for the last week, planning your visit." That was revenge for "little sister," and it made James's eyes flash with anger.

"Shut up, you brat," he rasped in genuine fury, then smiled furiously at Holly to show that it was all a play between

brother and sister. But Holly didn't see the smile; she was looking at the crowd of men who had gathered around for introduction. She looked them over appraisingly. Some got the merest glance and those wiggled hard and tried to merit another glance. Others got a longer look that made them goggle and gulp. Holly couldn't see beyond the men to appraise the girls, so she directed her hot glance at Claire.

"James never told me he had such an attractive sister," she said sweetly.

"James has never noticed it," Claire answered, just as sweetly. Then to James: "Why don't you take Holly's coat, James? Don't you think she might be warm?"

James turned red and glared at Claire, for surely he had bungled, and Holly was still wearing her coat. "Let me take it, Holly," he said, and Holly emerged in greater brilliance, wearing a ball-gown that made Claire shiver and the men all wiggle again. "You said we would go to a dance when we got here," murmured Holly, coloring a little, "so I put on this dancing dress before we left the train."

The dance rather went to pieces from then on. All the men were trying to dance with Holly, and gesturing and posing in front of her. The girls wanted to look at her and the dress she was wearing. The punch-bowl was soon empty--the high school crowd could think of nothing else to do as they stood in the background and let the collegians take the place over. Punch went trickling down high school throats and the floor was changed into a cheering section and a hand-shaking arena.

At midnight there was a great crowd in the dressing-room.

for hats and coats. Claire caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and stepped back to glance again at the wispy girl she saw reflected. She marveled that she had thought herself pretty earlier in the evening--this bleak, uninteresting girl. It was a face both very young and very ignorant of venom.

And when they got home from the dance every one was still up at the Mansfield house. Benny Black didn't go home after delivering Claire; he hung around to watch the colorful Holly. Uncle Terry was in his purple smoking-jacket, hanging in the background and grinning at the swirl of life. Uncle Terry hadn't seen a girl like Holly for twenty years; not since the days when he was a successful and self-sustaining man.

"What a lovely name you have, Holly," said Aunt Beulah, who rarely said anything in company, since she considered herself only a guest in the family.

"I once knew a girl whose name was Clover," said Mr. Mansfield dreamily. Then he looked embarrassed and Claire realized that he had been thinking about Holly's name for a long time.

"My mother named me Holly because I was born the day before Christmas," the girl said.

"I once knew a girl named Easter," said Uncle Terry.

"I once knew a man named Lark Wilson," said Beulah humbly. "He was a big handsome man, with black hair and a beard."

Mrs. Mansfield came in with a pot of chocolate and a pile of cookies. "Why, James," she called, "help Holly take her coat off."

James glared at his mother, for he had been trying to get the coat off but Holly seemed to want it on. It came off now,

however, and Holly made, as it were, another grand entrance. The ball-gown was a great sensation again.

"You're just a little thing, aren't you?" said Uncle Terry. Claire loved her Uncle Terry, but this fatuous statement made her wince.

"You must come up and see us again this summer," murmured Claire's father. "Have a cup of chocolate," he said, taking it from his wife's hands. "Everyone have chocolate--makes you sleep--keep you young--and beautiful . . ." He lapsed into silence, afraid that he had gone too far. It had been a great burst of speech for Mr. Mansfield. Now he picked up a book and walked away to lean against the wall.

"Holly," said Benny Black to himself dreamily. "She has a good name. Holly . . . Jolly . . . Golly." Claire glanced at him and blushed for him.

Then Holly took off her little hat, and achieved another sensation almost as good as her dress. "What lovely blond hair," murmured Beulah in spite of herself.

Claire discovered that the family was standing in a semi-circle before Holly's chair, watching her drink chocolate. They were talking to each other and nodding to Holly as if she must understand each family move. Even Claire's father looked up from his book, but without speaking.

"What are you reading, Mr. Mansfield?" Holly asked, and drew him into the adoring circle. "Should I read it? I read all the time."

"Pickwick Papers," grunted Mr. Mansfield.

"Is it good?" Holly asked. "Should I read it?" Claire's

father had merely been standing with his shoulder against the wall, reading his book and bothering no one. He could have stood that way for hours without bothering any one. Now he had to come over and look at this girl who asked about Dickens.

"What do you use on your hair?" Mrs. Mansfield asked suddenly.

"My hair is naturally the color of honey," said Holly, casting her eyes down.

Benny Black swayed and his eyes bulged. He turned to Claire: "Her hair is the color of honey," he repeated, as if he had made the discovery.

"You're just a little bit of a thing, aren't you?" repeated Uncle Terry. Brother James stood with his hand on the back of her chair and tried to touch Holly with his finger.

"Holly had better look out for bees with that honey-colored hair," said Benny. Claire saw a glint of anger snap into James's eyes. Her father and mother looked embarrassed, and Uncle Terry looked sorry he hadn't made the remark.

Claire broke the hypnotized circle and earned another flash of anger from James. She took the stricken Benny Black by the arm and piloted him toward the door. "Why doesn't everyone go to bed?" she cast back over her shoulder. "You can come back and look at Holly again tomorrow," she told Benny. She couldn't resist the perverse impulse to invite him. "She's lovely, isn't she?" said Claire.

"Yes," said Benny, seeing her with difficulty out of his moon-struck eyes. Then her words pierced his mind and he glittered at her gratefully: "Yes, isn't she? She's the loveliest

girl I ever saw."

There was the business of beds to be talked about. It had been settled once, but Holly must hear all the arrangements. James insisted that since she was his guest she must have his room, which meant that he must sleep in Claire's room, which meant that Claire could sleep with Aunt Beulah. All the family conducted Holly to her room, and said good-night with every good wish known to hospitality. Claire left while the others were still at it.

Claire in pajamas took one frantic glance at herself in the mirror before she turned out the light and climbed into bed with Aunt Beulah that night. In the dark she tumbled around, seeking a comfortable nest for herself in the strange bed. Her foot touched Aunt Beulah and she jerked it away instantly, but the spell of silence was broken. Claire contorted her features and burrowed her head into the small pillow.

"Your brother James has picked a beautiful girl," said Beulah raptly. "So full of life, and such a high color. I'm sure she had been biting her lips to make them so red."

"Just like holly berries," said Claire with forced calm. "Her hair is like honey, and her mouth is red like berries, and her eyes are deep brown, and her skin is white."

"That lovely gown," said Beulah, "and such shoulders and arms, and how she can wear her clothes!"

"She's a little bit of a thing."

"I once had a lovely form," Beulah permitted herself a memory. "But we wore stays in those days--they made us feel so snug. There's nothing like a lovely form. And apparently she

reads a great deal, too."

Claire began carefully on something that was rushing up in her: "Everyone was quite stricken with her at the dance." There was a long pause. "I was glad of it, because of James. Everyone here thought she was lovely. Benny said she was lovely."

"I once was lovely too, but she is the loveliest girl I ever saw." Beulah turned her face to the pillow and trembled.

"Dad seemed to like her very much," said Claire. "But she had never read Pickwick Papers, and I have, and no one ever thought it very wonderful of me."

"She is the loveliest girl I ever saw," Beulah repeated maddeningly.

"That's what Benny said." There was another long silence. "The fool!"

"Claire," said Aunt Beulah suddenly. She got up on her elbow and looked down at the dim face of the girl beside her. "Claire, you know how I love you." Claire made no move. "You know, Claire, that I had no daughter of my own--that I don't even mind that any more--that I love you more than . . ." Words were useless, and it was a matter beyond the reach of tact. Beulah tried once more however: "We have never told you, Claire, because we didn't want you to be conceited, but you must realize that you are getting to be a very beautiful girl yourself."

"It won't do," said Claire, ominously quiet. "I know what you are thinking, but it won't do. Of course you say I'm beautiful, but you love me." She gripped her hands hard and went on. "It's not that I'm jealous--I'm glad she's pretty--and I don't care about Benny, but everyone made such fools of them-

selves--and my own folks too--and everybody . . ."

Beulah couldn't find words for the pounding in her heart. She wanted to touch the girl beside her but she didn't dare, for Claire was making bitter wisdom with her own heart. Beulah tried to think of a word to say, but the pounding and ache of her love was too great and she began to cry softly.

"I hadn't thought so much about looks before," said Claire. "I thought about being nice to people, and that was always enough. But looks count more than anything else; looks, and flash, and clothes." Claire tried to remember what she had seen in that glance at herself in the mirror, and she remembered only a girl's face, and no flash or dash.

Claire reached the solid bottom of bitterness. "I won't do it that way," she stuttered. "I won't go around trying to be pretty. I don't care to enter that sort of competition. I'll look just as I am, and they can take it or leave it."

The silence lasted a long time, broken only by the helpless weeping of Aunt Beulah, who could think of no word to say, and who guessed all the thoughts as Claire thought them, and who could do nothing to make it easier. Claire felt miserable enough to cry, but she wasn't alone, and she wasn't in her own room, so she couldn't cry. "I'm going to get a drink of water," she said, and slipped out of bed quickly.

Claire sat on the edge of the tub in the bathroom. She looked at herself in the mirror, and snapped the light out angrily and sat there in the dark. It was good to be alone, and make faces in the dark, and she screwed up her eyes until tears formed back of the lids. So busy she was with her own thoughts

that she didn't hear steps coming down the hall, and she jumped with alarm when the light snapped on again.

Holly was just as alarmed. "Excuse me," said Claire. "I was just sitting here in the dark." She stepped toward the door.

"I couldn't sleep," said Holly, and Claire saw that she was near tears. "I wish you would stay and talk to me a little." Without high heels Holly was even smaller. She looked like a child in her dressing-gown. "I never slept in a room alone before," she said. "At home there were so many of us, and at school there was always a room-mate or someone."

"I'd crowd you out of bed if I slept with you," said Claire half angrily. "I'm so much bigger and clumsier than you."

Holly turned unhappy eyes up at Claire. "Do you think your folks like me?" she asked imploringly. "I didn't know how to act, and I said such foolish things. That about my hair--I'm afraid your mother thinks I bleach it, or something. I'm afraid she doesn't like me; but I didn't mean to say such foolish things."

"The men liked you very much indeed," said Claire.

"That's just it," Holly wailed in her sorrow. "I tried too hard, and the men all jumped around. I don't want to go around just being pretty."

Claire said nothing. She tried to understand this queer flash of sorrow.

"You don't like me," said Holly slowly and with conviction, "and your mother doesn't like me, and your aunt won't like me tomorrow. And Claire, I just don't know how to do. This is the first time I ever visited people."

"I came in here to cry," said Claire, with a queer malice in her eyes, "because I just discovered that I'm not pretty. That's the way we Mansfields do. Some people think we're all crazy."

"I just don't know how to do," said Holly.

"Just don't worry," said Claire. "Think about me. How would you like to be as not-pretty as I am?"

Holly couldn't think about anyone but herself:

"I was horribly overdressed at the dance, and horribly overdressed here at the house. That's why I wanted to keep my coat on."

"It was a lovely dress," said Claire. "Much nicer than my yellow one."

"And I tried to make your father think I had read a lot of books."

"Just wait," said Claire. "You may read a lot of books some day."

"And who was that boy? That Benny person? I didn't know him, and I didn't like him, and I'm afraid he'll make James jealous and I don't want that to happen."

"Benny was just a foolish kid that followed us home," Claire said. "I'll 'phone him tomorrow and tell him not to come again until you're gone."

"I went around looking mysterious because I didn't know any other way to look." Holly lifted her eyes miserably: "Will you like me, Claire?" she asked.

Claire had to give up thinking about her own problem in the face of Holly's need. "I'm beginning to like you already," she

said. "You just be yourself, and we'll all like you."

"Well then, will you come and sleep with me maybe?" Holly asked. "Because I couldn't sleep--because I never slept in a room by myself before, and I do want to sleep so I'll look good tomorrow."

"Sure, I'll come." Claire put her arm around Holly. "You just be natural tomorrow. Don't try too hard, and everyone will like you fine."

"But what about my looks?" said Holly desperately.

"What about them? What about mine?"

"I'll not try to be pretty any more," said Holly firmly.

"Neither will I," Claire laughed.

"I'll not try to be pretty. I'll look just as I am, and they can take it or leave it."

"So will I," said Claire.

* * *

RETURN IN THE MORNING 6

There was no freedom for Claire Mansfield now that she had turned sixteen and needed freedom. "I can go anywhere I please," she told her friends, but that wasn't true. She was chained as tightly as any slave. She was watched from all sides.

Claire took her slippers off so as to make no noise, and paced up and down in her room feeling like a caged animal. The window shades were all drawn, changing the evening sun and filling the room with an even, amber light. She pulled the shades open at the edge and looked out, and they were all there.

Her bedroom had more windows than wall; each window an avenue of escape, but below, back of the house, she could see her Uncle Terry walking with his head bent down, planning and planning. And at the side, in the rose garden, was her father, who asked the gardener questions and forgot to listen for the answers. In front of the house walked James in the dignity of oldest son. On the porch sat Aunt Beulah, wondering and wondering, a figure of apology.

These people weren't actually watching her; they were just waiting for dinner. There were no literal chains. Claire had not even asked for freedom. Claire heard the dinner gong from below, and saw everyone perk up and move toward the house. Then treason slipped into her mind and she made a plan. Claire unlocked her door and went down.

Because she had a plan leading to escape, she entered the dining-room with sweetness and light stamped on her face. She

sat at the table beside her father--Lownes Mansfield, her puzzled father. Life went on without much help or manipulation by Mr. Mansfield; he even managed to earn respect, and it puzzled him. All day he went about thinking of such abstract things as the tang and music of words; individual words, like azure, and mellow, and lilac. He had a notion that other people were much more clever than he. He thought about Tahiti, and Brahms, about ships, and ivory, and Dickens. Yet he managed to make money in the hardware business, and when he thought about that, it puzzled him.

Next to Claire sat Terence Pinard, her too-often-defeated Uncle Terry. He had carried his troubles; he had borne up well under the straw that breaks the camel's back. Terence had carried that straw, and a dozen others, and a brick, and a stone, and then another straw sent him to his knees and he couldn't get up.

Across from Claire sat Beulah Mansfield, Her Aunt Beulah, now in her ninth year of spinsterhood; still thinking it must be an oversight that no man had asked for her. Still there was nothing to do but wait, and once in awhile to get up late at night and look at herself in the mirror.

Beside Beulah was Claire's brother James, home from college and gone to work for his father. At the other end of the table was Claire's mother, who was not defeated, nor puzzled, nor overlooked, nor did she seem to be in chains, nor to lack freedom.

While she ate her dinner, Claire thought about her plot. Once she ventured to think beyond the plot; to wonder what would

happen if she were found out. But she stopped thinking about that; she couldn't imagine what would happen. Fate could be trusted with the details of punishment. Anyway, there was to be no slip. Claire was going to a dance that night; a public dance twenty miles out at Centerville Pavilion. No one at the table knew it but Claire. She planned only this far ahead: once she was in the car with Benny and the others she would then surely go to the dance. That was being free. Claire's father didn't know she was going. If she had asked him, he would have said No. Then she couldn't go. There was no use in asking him.

The other members of the family would have denied her, in various tones and for various reasons. Claire's mother would have given excellent reasons; she would have convinced Claire that No was the proper answer. For instance, Centerville Pavilion was not a highly respectable place. But there would be a full moon that night. And the Pavilion crowds were none too well behaved. But the music was wonderful, and there would be a moon. There would be no delegated chaperone, and there would be no one else there as young as Claire. Ah, yes, but Claire's gang would be there; three other couples and Claire and Benny. It was against family policy--Claire would give people an opportunity to gossip about her--twenty miles is still a long ways to go at night. And gossip can well pick out a brown-haired girl in the moonlight. But she would go to the dance in a lovely sedan. Four sets of hips, if they be young ones, can be fitted side by side in the front seat of a sedan, and four sets in the back seat. Perhaps not for years would Claire's Benny have the sedan again, with no one home at his house to ask questions.

The pines smelled so like pine trees at Centerville, and there would be a full moon. These were reasons enough.

Technically, Claire told no lies and broke no promises. She said good-night to the family at nine-thirty. Fifteen minutes later she saw the light go off at Aunt Beulah's window. She knew the habits of her mother and father well enough to be sure they were still sitting on the front porch. Uncle Terry's light was on; he would read most of the night. Brother James didn't count. He wouldn't be home until midnight.

Claire put on her light coat and tucked it up around her waist so that it wouldn't trip her. The new green dress, which nearly touched the floor, she gathered up. In order to have both hands free, she bent far over and gripped the hem in her teeth. Then in the inky darkness just before moonrise she stepped out through her window to the rose arbor. Expertly from there she reached the garden wall. From there she reached the dog kennel, and so to the kitchen garden. Claire opened her mouth, straightened up, and her dress fell back in lovely folds. She straightened her coat. Claire walked across the alley, and through someone's driveway.

Three slim figures got out of the front seat of the parked car. No one spoke as Claire joined them. They got into the seat again, Claire with them, all standing and leaning forward. Then when the door was closed they sat down together, as neatly as four dominoes on edge.

There was a full moon when they reached the pavilion. There was even a chaperone for them, and Claire was a little bit glad. One of the girls had been conservative; she had asked permission

to come to the dance. Permission was given, and arrangements made for a chaperone.

Claire kept asking Benny what time it was, but it was nice dancing through the crowd, never doubt that. The lights were dim, like candlelight, showing the big, slow whirl of people. Men with tanned faces and black clothes; women with white faces and hands, and colored dresses; all seemed free and excited and assured.

Claire's bunch reached the dance at eleven, so they must stay until one o'clock. Claire kept asking Benny the time so that she would know if it were one o'clock yet. For long periods she didn't even ask him; she just wondered, and thought about her folks.

One o'clock came. Benny had trouble with the car, and when he got it started the lights wouldn't turn on. It was moonlight, however, and the chaperone car drove in front to light the way. Then it was that Claire was most gay; then there were songs, and screams, and laughter, with the sedan windows open and a stiff breeze blowing pine wind on them. With no lights on the car, they could see the moonlight. The chaperone car took a wrong turn while they were still in the trees. That was all right until the chaperone car tried to cross a culvert two feet wide and two feet deep; and that culvert without planks to cover it.

It took them from one-thirty to three-thirty to get the car out. That was the simple fact. Everyone helped, and everyone was cheerful. It was altogether pleasant out there, except that it took two hours to get the car out. That got them back to town at four o'clock. They saw a beautiful dawn, but they

had been out all night, and they didn't get home until four o'clock.

As they drove through the bright, deserted streets to take Claire home, a weight of remorse grew in her. She decided never to act again without full consent and advice. A conviction of treason grew in her. She decided to look into their room and see if her mother and father were all right. She decided to help her mother more, and not to ask for new clothes for a year. She decided to become quiet and refined, and to grow pale and thoughtful.

Mr. Mansfield heard the car drive up and stop at the house. He got up and put on his dressing gown and slippers. Mrs. Mansfield followed him to the front door. She made him wait until the car had driven away before she let him go out on the porch. These two had done no sleeping since two o'clock, when the mother of one of the girls telephoned them not to worry.

Claire's brother James heard the car drive up. He looked out of his window, heaved an angry sigh, and started taking his clothes off to get some bit of sleep. James had been out since two, driving to Centerville and back, looking down every embankment for a wrecked car full of boys and girls, and for a wrecked chaperone car.

As Claire came up the walk and met her father out there in front of the porch, James stuck his head out of his window. "If that was me, Dad, you'd give me a thrashing," he bellowed. "I'd like to get at her; I'd give her a lashing she'd never forget." James's eyes snapped. "I'd beat some sense into her before she does something worse . . ." James withdrew his head. Long

worry and loss of sleep turned his righteous indignation into such a savage mood that his hands trembled. Then he relaxed. He dropped to his knees in front of the window to see what would be done below. "Oh boy," he breathed to himself fervently. "I'll be glad when she's grown up safely and married so somebody, and off my hands."

Claire's Aunt Beulah heard the car that brought Claire back. Beulah sat upright in her bed, shivering though she wore a bathrobe. So she had sat since three o'clock when Mr. Mansfield had prevailed upon her to go back to bed. Beulah slipped out of bed and knelt at her window to see what would be done below. As she had done so much since she passed thirty, she kept up an internal conversation; a desperate, fervent conversation, in which she both asked and answered herself.

"Oh, I'm glad she's back safe." Beulah caught her breath. "Don't let them be mean to her now. She doesn't need punishment. Look, she's crying right now; she has punished herself enough for anything." Aunt Beulah's face twisted as no one, not any one, had ever seen it. "She's so little, and it's such a nice morning. She's only sixteen years old. She's less than half as old as I am."

Beulah searched her own conscience. "I should have told them last night that I saw her on the garden wall. But I'm no informer. This isn't my house. She isn't my daughter." Beulah's teeth chattered from the breeze. "I envied her--that's all. I wouldn't have spoiled it for her if I had known she was sure to be killed in a wreck. I wish something like that had happened to me. I wish I had gone to a dance, and got killed

in a wreck on the way home; killed with a green dress on." These thoughts were a flash in Beulah Mansfield's mind as she knelt at the window to see what would happen below.

Claire's mother saw her daughter coming up the walk, looking like a part of the dawn. Then she saw that her daughter was crying. She saw Claire's father advancing on the girl in uncertain anger. Mother and father had decided when they heard the car: "Shall I spank her?" asked Mr. Mansfield. There was a moment's hesitation: "Yes, yes, you must spank her."

Now the woman saw her husband waver. She stepped out on the porch as the two came back together. Claire was clinging to her father. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she wailed. "I don't know why I did it, but I wanted so much to go." Claire rushed up the steps and threw her thin arms around her mother's neck. "Oh, Mamma," she wailed afresh. "Oh, Mamma."

Mrs. Mansfield stood firmly. She tilted a questioning brow at her husband until that man had to raise his glance and see it. Mr. Mansfield's ideas were in a tumult. "I ought to spank her," he told himself weakly. "I ought to . . . No telling what she might do next if we don't spank her this time." He looked at his sobbing daughter. "She's getting pretty big to spank. But she's not too big yet. Another week and she might be too grown-up to spank, but not quite yet." Mr. Mansfield knew his wife was looking at him. Slowly he brought his gaze upward to her face. He saw that questioning eyebrow. He saw his daughter's shoulders hunching up and down as she cried. Below her coat he saw his daughter's long green dress (it nearly touched the porch floor) hunching up and down. Mr. Mansfield looked at

his wife and shook his head miserably. "No."

Claire's Uncle Terry had been watching the proceedings from his window. He looked up at the shining dawn sky and wondered what would be done. He looked into the rose garden, and along the garden wall. There a spruce tree shaded it; a shred of night seemed to hang on in the shadow. That was just beyond the kennel, and Terry might have seen a shadow on that wall the night before.

Uncle Terry heard Claire stop crying. He heard a scratching on the porch floor, and a rustling. Then slop, slop, slop, slop; someone was being spanked with a slipper. "Oh, Lord," said Uncle Terry. "I wish I could take a spanking and be forgiven. I wish I could get a spanking for my mistakes. I wish I could be even, and paid, and forgiven, and I could start over again like new."

"Oh, Lord," said James, "they're licking her. I hope it doesn't hurt the kid."

"Why didn't I go down there where I could fight for her?" wavered Aunt Beulah. "If they hurt that child . . . But I'd have no business down there. I only stay here. This isn't really my home . . . I'm only waiting . . ."

"I hope she stops now. I hope she stops now," said Mr. Mansfield over and over to himself.

"It must be four spansks," whispered Mrs. Mansfield desperately. "It must be four spansks--or she'll be miserable over this for weeks. Now don't start to cry until she's out of sight."

Claire stood up, her eyes sparkling with tears. "Go to your room," said her mother. Claire went wearily toward the stairs. "I'll send some breakfast up to you."

In her room, Claire threw herself down on the bed. "Well, I'm glad it's over. It was fun," she said, doubtfully, "at the dance."

* * *

MO: NEUTER

"I like pigs," said Henderson. "I like them fine, same as I like a cat. They're a selfish beast, and when a pig likes you--that's a real compliment."

"Who started him?" yelled Moany Duncan. "I can't bear one of his stories tonight. They haunt me. This jail is bad enough without Henderson talking nightmares."

"This ain't no story," said Henderson mildly. "This is just about a pig of mine named Mo. He got to be terrible big. He got to be as tall as the kitchen table."

"There's no pig that tall . . ." Moany stuttered. "Anyway, how tall was the kitchen table . . . Anyway, what was he doing in the kitchen?" Then he caught himself. "Comrades," he yelled --he was always calling us Comrades; "Make him stop, Comrades. I don't want to hear about it."

"He'll tell the story," said Bode Hammer from his cage-like cell above Henderson. "You might as well let him talk."

"Pigs are a dirty, evil beast," wailed Moany. "They'll eat their own children. They'll kill a man, and eat him, too, if they get a chance."

"I know it," said Henderson. "This pig of mine's mother--she helped kill old man Plouf . . ."

Henderson was quiet all day, chewing tobacco, but at night, after the lights were out, he turned into a gabby old man. It seemed to hurt him to keep his mouth shut. He looked like a depraved farmer, and a farmer looks out of place in a jail. The stories he told made us all dream--there was something big and distorted, like a nightmare, in them--something swollen and

monstrous; I was apt to rise up out of one of those dreams and there I'd be, yelling in the middle of the night and trying to get my hard skull through the side of my cage--and the holes in that steel lattice so small you couldn't stick a pigeon egg through them.

"How come you got in jail anyway?" Moany asked him. "You don't act like you had brains enough to get in jail."

"I'm serving a longer term than you are," boasted Henderson. The sheriff put me here because Mike Munro told him to. Mike was sweet on my oldest daughter Delilah because she came sixteen years old that year. Well, Mike used to laugh at that pig Mo around the house--and not a friendly laugh, either. The girls didn't like that, and Mo didn't like it, and I didn't like it, so Delilah slapped his face and told him not to come courting again. So then Mike hated Mo, and Mo hated Mike. And Mo saved my life, and the girls', and my wife's, and died a martyr-like to save everybody. And here I am in jail, and Mike married the youngest Plouf girl after all.

"Mo was a fine pig," he said thoughtfully, "even if his mother did help kill old man Plouf. She was ready to have a litter of pigs and she needed lime or something in her diet. I mind the time before that she ate three chickens and a cat."

There was a long pause while Henderson got a grip on the story. We listened like a bunch of scared rabbits, fascinated by the fatalistic sadness in his voice. "I mind the night, because our little Sarah was born then," he said. "I traded a bull calf to Mrs. Plouf for this pig because she ate Mr. Plouf, and she farrowed a litter of fourteen pigs, and Mo was

one of them.

"Well, I was so wrought up with little Sarah being born that same night that I wasn't out at the barn and the boar got to the litter and ate five of the little boar pigs before I drove him off with the ax."

"I told you they'd eat their own children," said Moany.

"So will a tomcat," Henderson snapped. "So will any male-beast with a spark of jealousy for the love of the female. I ask you--what is the greatest sporting-animal of the world if it isn't the pig, and spearing him in India and all. If you don't believe that you can ask my wife because she married a man from Baltimore once and he used to spear boars in India when he was there. He was a sailor, like, and died at sea from eating black-eyed peas, and that must be twenty years ago because I've had her for twenty years.

"Then during the night the old pig rolled on four more little ones, and that left only five, and one of them a runt. There's always a runt in a big litter. I mind our little Sarah was a runt as long as she lived.

"So the girls named them five pigs that were left--Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Mo, and the runt was Catcha--and we made a pet out of one of them, and that was Mo, and he was the same age as Sarah. I mind our Sarah never had the right diet, like Mo's mother, but she never ate anybody. She never rightly developed the bones in her legs. She was an awful bow-legged little tike, and her legs kind of sprung when she walked.

"Before the little pigs got very old the old mother got another mean streak and tried to eat Mo. I shut her in the

root-cellar and she nearly tore it down trying to get out. She couldn't tip over no cellar, though, nor she couldn't dig out, and she nearly chewed a hole through the door with her tushes. We watched her through the vent hole and she was so ugly we had to keep her shut in there for a week, and when she came out she would have killed me. So I killed her instead, and we ate her, and it seemed to do Sarah good to eat meat. All the girls picked up on it.

"Well, Mo was a little sickly after his mother tried to eat him, so I took him up to the house and put him in a box by the stove. He was so sick he almost died, and when he was all limp and loose and almost dead that way he made a fine doll for the girls to play with. He must have weighed no more than five pounds, and the girls all carried him around. None of them ever had a pig before and they petted him and loved him so much that he didn't want to leave them, even when he got well.

"He was a nice clean young pig. People think of a dirty animal when they think of pigs, but so would a person--a woman even--get dirty if you put her in a little pen and fed her corn until she couldn't walk with the rolls of fat. Mo was a black pig with a high forehead and purple eyes. None of those snub-nosed Berkshires ever got on my farm, and I wouldn't have a blue-eyed pig, nor one with a color that would show the dirt. Mo had a nose that was as long and tapering as a hound's, and there was a neat pink snout on the end of it as big as a dollar watch. He could wrinkle that nose and follow a trail as good as any dog I ever knew. He could smell out those little girls and track them down two hours after they went. He could track me, too,

even when I wore shoes.

"I didn't have the heart to throw him out of the house after he got older and started getting tall. I'd call him and he'd come clipping up on his little trotters as quick and spry, and the girls all started roaring when I'd make to kick him out to the barn. He was as neat and clean in his habits as any of the girls, or as any dog or cat, and he didn't howl at night, and he didn't catch birds. The little girl Opal, next youngest to the baby she was then, she made a bed for him back of the stove with her, and they'd go and stand at the door when they wanted to go out of a night, and they'd root and talk around outside as plain as a magpie when they wanted to come back in.

"So Mike Munro used to come over and court my Delilah, and he'd bring a bottle of his own stuff over for my wife and me, and after Delilah slapped his face for laughing at Mo, then he wouldn't marry her. Some people think a pig is funny, just because he's a pig. Mo had better sense.

"The little girls used to ride him, and I mind one day Fidelia got on his back and scooted along with her feet on the ground on each side of him. Well, he ran between an older girl's feet and her dress caught on the hump of his shoulders. Fidelia was shoved off at the back and the older girl--it was Pearl--had to run for her life to keep from falling. Finally she jumped into the air and tried to come down on top and flatten him, but he jumped clear and left her sitting hard on the ground. I swear he laughed at her when he looked back at her there.

"He did that once to my wife when he was full grown, and she nearly tanned the hide off him with the churn stick.

"I mind one time he lost the curl in his tail. The littlest girl--little Sarah it was then--the same age as Mo, got laid on by a cow and died. The curl went out of his tail for two weeks and we couldn't hardly forget about poor little Sarah until Mo got to feeling better. There was ten girls left then, and there's been two more since. It's a dreadful thing to be the father of twelve girls and be in jail, but I've got my heart set on a boy for to carry on my name.

"Twelve girls is a naturally funny thing too, like pigs, but I don't mean it as a joke. It'll be no joke when all those girls get grown up and swarming all over the place looking for husbands.

"Well, anyway, when Mo got nearer to being grown up I could see the razorback showing up in him. I knew his mother was part razor. Mo got taller and longer-legged than any pig on the place.

"He was a fine fishing-pig. He'd wallow down in the mud beside the creek and I'd sit on him and fish, and when I didn't feel like digging worms and couldn't talk any of the girls into doing it, Mo would dig worms for me. He didn't care for worms himself, and probably didn't know what he was doing for me, but I'd take him out to the potato patch and turn him loose on a row for a bit, and he'd turn over enough ground for a can of worms in short order. I used to plant a few extra potatoes every year if I thought of it.

"He was an expert at digging potatoes. I got the idea that fall of having him dig the whole crop, and I worked all one morning making a thing to tie over his jaws so he couldn't eat all he dug. I could get only one kind of leather that was strong

enough to hold his jaws, and that was pig skin like they make footballs of.

"Well, I had a fine chunk of uncured pig skin from a side of bacon, and I made a muzzle sort of thing and put it on Mo and turned him into the patch. He sat around and tried to work the thing off with his feet, but I had it so snug against his snout-rim that he quit trying finally. He dug up one hill of potatoes as slick as a whistle and I thought my troubles were over. The little girls were right there and picked them up as fast as he dug them out, but after one hill he wouldn't dig any more. He followed the girls around and all he'd do was squeal and look at the potatoes in their pail.

"Another fine thing about Mo--he loved to eat snakes. Living in a country where there's rattlers, like we do, there's no telling how many of the girls we might have lost if it hadn't been for Mo. He didn't have to be taught that--he just hunted down all the snakes for half a mile around the house, and not a one of the girls ever died from snake-bite, and neither did I.

"Mo used to follow me all over the country. He'd light out and leave the girls as soon as he saw me starting from the stoop, and he'd follow me if I'd be gone clean up till mealtime. So much exercise kept him from getting fat and lazy, and he was as strong as an ox. The only time he wasn't any good was in the winter when the snow was deep and crusted. Almost everything else could get around by walking easy and flat-footed, but when Mo got out on the crust he couldn't go. It was like trying to walk around on little sticks. He'd high-center himself right away and just lay there and yell. Many is the time the girls

had to run out in the snow and get him and haul him back upside down, and then without shoes.

"His chief pleasure was being scratched. The girls would take him out to the woodpile and chop off pieces of kindling and scratch him all over, and he'd lay there and groan with pleasure.

"We had a cat that lived with us too, and it used to sleep next to the pig to keep warm. It used to grab up at the little girls' dresses and scratch to sharpen its claws and the little girls were always slapping it down and yelling blue blazes where it scratched their legs. The cat liked Mo to scratch on, and I saw it follow along with him one day, walking on its hind legs, foot over foot, scratching and sharpening its front claws against his sides, and Mo just grunting with pleasure.

"Having a good pig on the stoop warm days that winter was handy and a pleasure. Delilah, the oldest girl, was sick in bed with pellagra, and she was bellering all the time that she wanted some meat to eat. She said there wasn't any lime in her diet. Well, she was always yelling for meat, so we left her alone whenever we could and went out on the stoop where we didn't have to hear her. If I got there ahead of my wife I got to sit on the pig. I noticed that he was always stretched out in the best spot of sun. He was the best thing to sit on I ever tried--warm and soft, and yet steady. He didn't seem to mind if we sat on him.

"And then come spring and Mo saved my life. I thought I'd take my gun and see if I couldn't kill something for meat. My wife was fixing to make me a father again, and both she and Delilah were yelling for something meat to eat. I figure they

needed lime.

"I went out in the hills, and I had my rifle, and I saw what I thought was an antelope. I swear it looked like an antelope, except I never saw one before except in a picture, and I should have known that I couldn't get so close to one of those. I made Mo stay home that morning because I wanted to hunt antelope, and he wasn't half fast enough to catch them. I sneaked up this draw back of Mike Munro's pasture and there was a bunch of cattle quite a ways off, but then I thought maybe antelope might graze with cattle sometimes.

"I sneaked up this draw, and there was this thing and I couldn't see it very well because my wife had cut the brim off my hat to patch my underdrawers with, and the sun got in my eyes. This thing was close enough, but it was partly behind a pile of timbers from Munro's old fence that was torn down. It was partly behind this pile and I couldn't see if it had horns or was a doe antelope, but it was a good mile from Munro's farm buildings, and I fired anyway, and down it went.

"I went up the draw and came around where I could see what it was I'd killed, and it was a bull calf with a brand on it as big as a sign-board. Well, it was nearly dinner-time, so I left the thing there, and I didn't get around to go back after it that afternoon. I figured that if it belonged to anyone they would come asking about who shot it, and if nobody asked, then it was probably a stray that got branded by mistake.

"Nobody came, so the next morning I went out almost before breakfast and skinned out a hind-quarter and brought it home and dressed it down into steaks and roasts. I noticed that the hide

was all full of gashes, so I didn't skin out the whole animal.

"I was standing over the kitchen table cutting up meat for all I was worth, and the kids were standing around yelling, and Mo was yelling, and my wife was getting some of the meat fried to make everybody shut up, when a guy rode into the yard as hard as he could belt.

"It was Mike Munro, and I stuck the meat down under the kitchen bed where Delilah was. Mike came tearing in and wanted to know if we had cut a quarter off a certain calf on the old Uden place. I couldn't remember for a bit.

"The girls all hid when Mike came in--all but Delilah. Mo nearly threw her out of bed, trying to get at the meat down there. He streaked for the door with a steak in his mouth, and I let him go.

"Mike was all excited. He said he had punched that dead calf full of holes and put strychnine crystals in to kill coyotes. He said as long as the calf was dead he might as well poison coyotes with it, and now he was afraid some human would try to eat that hind quarter.

"It scared me all right. Right then I wouldn't have eaten any of that meat. I was trying to remember if that calf I found had been on the old Uden place, but I couldn't think just who owned that land. I told Mike there was a sheepherder living over that way, and he might have taken some meat. He looked at the steaks frying on the stove, but said maybe he'd better go over and see anyway.

I got the rest of the meat out from under the bed then, and they were fine looking cuts of veal. We would have thrown them

away anyway, no matter how the kids howled, and even Delilah forgetting herself and howling for Mike to come back, and for meat, or something with lime in it, or something.

"Mo saved us, and he gave his life to do it. We heard him squealing and yelling, and I made my wife keep the girls all inside while I watched him die of strychnine poisoning. There wasn't any mistake about it being strychnine that was doubling him up, and he died.

"That proved it was the Unden place where I found the dead calf.

"We threw the meat all away, and we didn't even dare eat Mo. We wouldn't have anyway, I don't think. The girls couldn't have eaten their friend Mo--except Delilah. She still said she wanted some red meat."

Old Henderson's voice tapered off into silence. The jail was completely dark and quiet for a time. "That still doesn't explain why you're here in jail," said Moany Duncan.

"Well, we lived on antelope the rest of that summer," said Henderson.

* * *

THE HYENA LAUGHED

Mary said a very short goodnight to Alfred. She went into the house and left him standing on the porch. She found her father's easy chair in the dark and flopped into it. This was indeed a fine ending for Circus Day. First she had turned down a chance to go to the lake because she wanted to be in town for the circus. Then her Aunt Agnes had wanted to take her in the afternoon, but she passed that up because she had this date with Alfred Beasle for the evening.

"Is that you back, Mary?" her mother called sleepily from upstairs. "Did you like the circus? Did Alfred like it?"

"We didn't go," growled Mary. "We went to a movie."

"Didn't you tell him you wanted to go?" her mother asked.

"He didn't ask me. He said we were too grown up for a circus."

There was a preliminary rumbling from Mary's father upstairs. "Time to go to sleep now, folks," he mumbled sleepily. "Hook the screen, Mary, and leave the doors open so it'll be cool." His voice died away.

Mary sat in the dark and brooded a long time. Alfred Beasle, she decided, was a jackass--and not even a good jackass, because he didn't know how to laugh, or play, or have a good time. She got up and felt her way out to the kitchen. She snapped on the light and opened the refrigerator to see what she could find to eat.

There was some fine cold meat-loaf left over from supper, and a big bunch of celery. She was standing there crunching celery so loudly that she didn't hear what came up on the back

porch. She saw something move outside the screen door, and stopped the movement of her jaws to listen. She heard a lusty scratching and a hungry-sounding whine. Dimly through the screen she could see what appeared to be a large spotted dog. Its ears stuck out like half-moons from each side of its broad face. It had tall, heavy shoulders, a broad chest, wide-set front feet, and it tapered down to small hind quarters. Those hind quarters were waving back and forth in such a friendly wag that she spoke. "Hello doggy, are you hungry?"

The animal wagged feverishly and dipped its big ears and raised them again in a most amiable manner. Mary stepped over and unhooked the screen. The animal pulled the door open with its claws, slipped inside, and looked up expectantly into her face. She held out the bit of meat-loaf in her fingers and the animal gulped it so quickly it almost took part of her fingers. Mary stepped back apprehensively. The animal's head reached up almost half as tall as she was, while its rear half sloped sharply down to dog-size. It was yellowish-tan in color, with dark spots.

The noise of running steps sounded from outside and two pairs of feet landed on the porch at the same time. One pair belonged to a tall, gaunt man--a perfect stranger to Mary. She greeted the owner of the other pair somewhat shortly even though she was relieved to see him. "Hello, Jack," she said. "I didn't know you were back from school."

The strange man opened the screen door and came inside without being asked. "Hey," he yelled, and advanced on the big animal.

"What are you doing with that hyena in the house?" Jack asked accusingly.

"Hyena--?" Mary jumped back. "--laughing hyena?"

"Yes ma'am," said the stranger, slipping a collar around the neck of the animal and drawing it tight. "But it ain't hardly a laughing matter to have him loose in your kitchen."

"I saw him come in here," said Jack. He turned to the stranger. "If he's your animal why do you let him run around loose?"

"Look," said the man, "his neck is bigger around than his head and you can't hardly keep a collar on him if he wants to slip it off. I was taking him for a walk before the train left. He has to have some exercise. He has to stand in a little cage all day and let folks look at him."

"Is he from the circus?" Mary asked.

"He's from Africa, Miss," said the man. "Just now he happens to be traveling with the circus, yes."

"Well, get him out of here if he's dangerous," said Jack.

"Oh he ain't so dangerous as that," said the man, "only you shouldn't ought to feed him by hand that way. He can hardly tell where the eats leave off and the hand begins, that way. You ought to give him something on a plate on the floor. He's hungry, that's all."

"I suppose I could give him the rest of the meat-loaf," said Mary.

The man looked at it hungrily. "Oh, that's too good for him. You can just give him anything."

"There's nothing much else in the ice box but some cold

potatoes," said Mary, peering inside.

"He'd like them fine," said the man. "It'd be a shame to waste that fine meat-loaf on him when he'd like potatoes just as good." He looked hopefully at Mary and Jack and waited for them to make a suggestion. "Humans sure like meat-loaf, though," he added.

Mary held out the platter to him. "Would you like some?"

"Thanks," he said, and took off a large slab in his fingers.

"Will you have some, Jack," Mary asked.

"No Thanks," said Jack. "I've got to be going home."

The hyena was gobbling the potatoes from a dish on the floor. He seemed to toss them back into his throat and swallow them whole.

"Ain't you hungry, boy?" the man asked. "It's awfully good meat-loaf."

"No thanks," said Jack. "I'm seldom hungry."

The night was suddenly torn asunder by a hideous, long yelping laugh. Mary's skin crawled and sprouted gooseflesh at the sound. It was the hyena that laughed. It took one look at her and Jack and laughed one hideous peal of laughter and then stopped.

"What's that?" A voice from upstairs broke into the dead silence that followed. It was Mary's father wakened again. "Who's that laughing? Was that Alfred? It's time for Alfred to go home."

Jack doubled over with silent laughter. Mary worked hard to control herself. It was a comical situation, and yet very humiliating. The stranger looked startled. "Who was that?" he

whispered. "How did he know my name was Alfred?"

"It isn't you," said Jack, still struggling with his laughter. "That's Mary's father, upstairs. He thinks that laugh came from the jackass Mary went out with tonight--Alfred Beasle."

"He isn't a jackass," said Mary indignantly. The hyena lifted its head for another laugh but Alfred, the trainer, cuffed it sharply. "Anyway, Jack, what were you doing, hanging around our back yard tonight?"

"I wasn't," said Jack. "I was in my own back yard. I saw this hyena come up on the porch, and I saw you were nutty enough to let it in the house. I knew someone would have to tell you it wasn't a dog."

"Now what's the matter with you two kids," said Alfred the trainer. "You sound mad. Don't you like each other?"

"No, we don't," snapped Mary.

Another hideous peal of laughter rang through the house before Alfred could throttle the hyena.

"Mary," groaned her father from the darkness upstairs, "can't you and Alfred be a little more quiet? Better say good-night now and come to bed."

"Yes, Dad," said Mary. She turned and opened the screen, but Jack, the hyena, wasn't ready to go. He strained at the leash, his toenails slipping and slithering on the kitchen linoleum. He circled around her and Jack and tangled them in the leash.

"He wants you should come along," said Alfred. "He's very sentimental. You two might walk down to the tracks with us. Lots of folks like to come down and watch the circus load out."

"Sure, that would be fun," said Jack. "Do you want to come, Mary? I'll bring you back--if you can trust yourself out with me."

"Anything to get you out of the house," she said. "I don't want any more noise here. I wouldn't want Dad to know what really happened. He'd think I didn't have a lick of sense."

Alfred looked at them gloomily as they set out down the street. "What's the matter with you two young 'uns, anyway?" he asked.

"Oh, we've lived next door to each other all our lives," said Mary. "Jack is too conceited for anyone to like him."

"I am not conceited," snapped Jack. "It's her fault I don't like her. I've seen the way she's been brought up. She's just a spoiled brat."

The hyena was pacing along quietly beside its trainer. Jack walked next to it and Alfred; Mary walked on the other side. It looked up at the three as they spoke, and seemed to be listening to them and following the conversation.

"Jack spent his boyhood making my life miserable," said Mary. "He used to bring snakes over and scare me with them."

"Only once," said Jack. "I brought it to you as a present--I thought you'd like to have it."

"He used to laugh at every boy I went out with," said Mary. "He made me so self-conscious I hardly had any fun at all when I was a little girl."

"She went out with such sappy boys," Jack explained to Alfred. "But I was the goat often enough. Her mother and mine used to get together and plan, and then I'd have to take her to a party or something."

"Well, I never enjoyed myself," said Mary, "if that's any satisfaction to you."

"Now, now," said Alfred. He glanced at Mary. "I shouldn't think that would be so bad--to take her to a party. She's a mighty nice-looking girl, I'd say."

"You should have seen her then," said Jack. "All arms and legs, and her teeth in wires, and her elbows sticking out so she knocked over all the furniture."

"And you with your stockings always coming down," said Mary bitterly, "and your hair in a pompadour that was always hanging down in your face, and your hands always covered with warts, and frogs in your pockets."

"But you ain't like that now," said Alfred. "You're mighty nice-looking kids now, both of you, and you ought to be friends now."

"Never," said Mary.

"Never," echoed Jack.

The quiet of the tree-lined street was horribly broken, and again Mary's flesh crawled. The hyena had reared back its head and laughed its ear-splitting, maniac laugh. The trainer jerked the leash sharply. "Jack," he said. "Cut out that laughing."

"Jack---?" said Mary. "Is the hyena's name Jack?" She broke the quiet of the night with her own laughter. She kept it up until the human Jack was distinctly annoyed.

"At least its name isn't Alfred Beasle," he said in a nasty tone.

They arrived at the railway siding where the circus wagons were being pulled up an incline by a long cable, which snaked

them one by one along the string of flat-cars toward the head of the train. A tall pipe spouted up from a tank of chemicals, and from the top of this a long flame spouted, illuminating the scene with a wavy, yellow light. They walked around the edge of the lighted area, watching the roustabouts working and the wagons rumbling by up on the cars. Mary almost collided with a huge, dim shape that was patiently stowing hay into itself.

"Look out," said Alfred. "You almost ran into the elephant."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Mary. She peered around her. "How many elephants do you have?"

"Only one," said Alfred gloomily.

"This must be sort of a small circus, to have only one elephant."

"Never you mind, young lady," said an edgy voice from somewhere close. "We may have only one elephant, but she's the smartest trained elephant in captivity. Aren't you, Mary?" The elephant squealed briefly and went on eating.

"Is the elephant's name Mary?" Jack asked coolly. He glanced at the human Mary, but he didn't laugh. He only smiled. And Mary ground her teeth.

"This here," said Alfred, the trainer, "is Madame Frances, my wife. She takes care of the elephant."

As though calling her name had brought her into existence, a small grey shape materialized beside the elephant's head. "How d' y' do," she said. "This circus may be small, but naturally we don't like to hear nobody making little of it." She turned to Alfred. "Did you get anything to eat?" she asked.

"These here folks fixed us up a little," said Alfred. "They

gave Jack here a dish of potatoes, and I had some swell meat-loaf."

"I wish I had some meat-loaf," said Madame Frances. "We didn't have much of a crowd today," she apologized, "and it took most of the money to pay the feed bills for the animals, so we didn't have much to eat tonight. But we're hoping for a big crowd at Rock City tomorrow."

"I hope you have one," said Mary earnestly.

Madame Frances peered more closely. "You two ain't brother and sister," she decided. "Sweethearts, I suppose."

"No," they both shouted. "We hate each other."

Jack, the hyena, lifted his snout to the dark heavens and again split the night with his demon laugh, freezing everyone in sight motionless.

Madame Frances was the first to recover. She threw herself against the elephant's trunk and embraced it. "Don't you be afraid, Mary," she soothed. "That's just old Jack, having his laugh." The elephant, which had shown signs of wanting to run screaming into the night, quieted down. The roustabouts recovered, as if from a momentary dream, and started moving again. The yowling and roaring and thumping that broke out in the moving circus wagons electrified Alfred into action.

"The cats," he yelled. "They're all wrought up because they're kind of hungry. They'll bung themselves up against the cages. We got to quiet 'em." He threw the hyena's leash to Jack and ran off down the train. "You two hold the hyena," he shouted back, "and quit talking like fools so he'll quit laughing at you."

The wagon rumbling past above them on the cars was positively swaying with the violence of its occupants. The cable pulled it steadily along, but somehow it missed the iron plates that should have carried it across the space between cars. It lurched forward and down; the folding side of it wrenched loose and fell, exposing the barred sides of the cages.

The hyena took a frightened run around Jack and Mary and wrapped them tight together in the leash. It leaned heavily against the backs of their legs, as if to gain courage. Large eyes gleamed out between the bars. "It's tigers," Mary shivered.

Alfred came running back and jumped up on the car. All might have been well except that the cable started to pull again and the wagon lurched as though about to fall to the ground. "Stop that cable," someone yelled.

A tremendous yowling from the end cage penetrated above all other sounds. "It's poor old Tabby," called Alfred. "She's afraid for her kitten. I'll have to let her out." He wrenched the cage door open and jumped to the ground. A beautiful head appeared--the head of a tremendous tiger, and dangling from her jaws by the nape of its neck was a tiger kitten as large as a full-grown cat. "Here Tabby," Alfred called, and Tabby looked down at him. With a single flowing motion, as though she were sliding through the air, Tabby came down to the ground and leaned against his legs.

The elephant remembered something from the jungle past and swung over sideways, away from the tiger. She shoved her huge ribs directly against Mary and Jack and the hyena, and they went down in a tangle. She shuffled farther and Mary looked up,

and there was a tremendous foot directly above her face.

"Careful, Mary; stop," came a sharp command, and the elephant's foot stayed right there in the air. Jack managed to get a hand free and shoved that huge foot away and slowly it was put down to the ground. Then slowly and delicately the huge beast stepped on over them and stood quietly behind them as they struggled to their feet.

"Come over here, Mary," came that sharp command again. Madame Frances grasped the animal by the tag-end of a tremendous ear and led it to the railroad car. She crawled up and slapped her hand against the side of the circus wagon. "Head," she commanded. "Push here."

The elephant put her tall brow against that spot and shoved. The wagon groaned and moved. "If I could get up there and help," Alfred shouted distractedly. "Here, you kids, stand beside this tiger for a minute. She's just scared and needs to be near someone. She won't hurt you." He led the tiger over to them, standing huddled together, but the hyena didn't like the new arrival. He leaned against the backs of their legs until the tiger swung around and leaned against the fronts of them, then he struggled a moment with the leash that still tied them together, slipped his head from the collar and trotted off into the blackness of the night.

Jack wanted to shout at Alfred--to tell him the hyena was gone, but he didn't like to disturb the tigress by the sound of his voice. She leaned heavily against them, warm and smooth against their legs. Mary clung to Jack and Jack clung to Mary and they looked down at the huge striped beast. A ripple of

muscles ran along under its hide and Mary's grip on Jack tightened. The tigress looked up at them amiably. The cub was hanging, curled up as though asleep, but Mary saw that its eyes were closed because the skin was pulled back from its face so tight that it couldn't well open them. It looked most uncomfortable, but grimly patient.

The roustabouts were all at work now, and the elephant was shoving, and soon the wagon was back on its track again. Alfred looked around for the tigress and held the door of her cage open. "Come on, Tabby," he called.

Tabby flowed forward two steps and then took off from the earth and seemed to float up and into the door of her cage, barely touching the edge of the flatcar as she went past it. She turned around and dropped the cub in the straw. Alfred swung the folding side of the wagon up and fastened it. The last Jack and Mary saw inside there was the eyes of Tabby, glowing out at them. Somehow that glow seemed much warmer than when they first saw it.

Alfred jumped down. "Where's that miserable hyena?" he asked. "He started all this. Or rather, you kids started it-- talking like that, so he had to laugh at you."

Jack waved the leash with the empty collar. "The hyena left," he said. "I guess he didn't like the tiger." He unwound the leash and separated himself from Mary, but he stepped back to her side and she clutched his arm.

Alfred whistled and whistled and whistled, but no hyena answered him. A locomotive hooted in the darkness. "We'll never get him back tonight," said Alfred, "and now it's time for

the train to leave. He's probably gone back to your house for some more of that meat-loaf."

"Maybe we ought to go home," Mary quavered. "What would my father think?"

"You'll find the hyena there," said Madame Frances dryly, "if I know anything about meat-loaf. I'll tell you what you kids do." She came over to them, followed closely by the elephant. "You take the leash home with you and catch him, and keep him tonight, and then tomorrow jump in a car and drive over to Rock City and bring him with you. Will you do that?"

"Yes," said Mary and Jack together.

"Just let him sleep in the room with one of you, so he won't get lonesome and howl all night."

"Yes," they said.

The locomotive hooted again. "Time to load the elephant," said Madame Frances. "We'll see you tomorrow. We'll let you see the circus free." She and the elephant faded off into the night along the railway cars, loaded now with lines of wagons. The flare at the loading platform was turned out. Mary and Jack turned and stumbled away through the dark, still clinging to each other.

"I guess we'd better not fight so much," said Jack unsteadily. "The hyena doesn't like it. I really do like you a lot, really. It sort of makes a difference, now that we've got responsibilities."

"Yes," said Mary. "I really like you a lot too. We'll never fight again anymore."

Far in the distance the voice of the hyena echoed along the streets, laughing again, but rather happily.

WALTZING MICE

There were some pretty awful things going on down in the basement of the laboratory building; you could tell that the minute you went down into the place. It was what we called the rat-room. It smelled to high heaven, of course, and there was the gusty, whispering sound of hundreds of rats scurrying over the wire netting of their cages. That sound swelled up, then died away, two or three times a minute all day and all night as waves of excitement swept over the rat population.

It was a big place. Off in one corner there were some dark-rooms. There were rats in there that had been born and raised for generations in complete darkness. No sounds came out of there. In another dark-room there was a collection of old wooden beams and timbers, sawed in half to expose their colonies of termites. Doctor Ludwig was doing the termite problem.

Along the side of the room was a tier of cages that were draped with heavy red curtains. Ludwig came out of his termite room and watched me working. "Let's go over and look at the waltzing mice," he whispered.

I didn't realize he had been forbidden to look at them.

There was no sound from the cages when he pulled back the curtain. The light was dim. I looked in and presently saw two tiny faces peering out at me. They were amazingly intelligent-looking little chaps, with curious flaring ears, and their brown eyes too big for the rest of them. "Watch 'em go now," said Ludwig. He switched on an electric light in front of the cages. Immediately a look of frantic intoxication came into the faces

of the mice. They reared back and whirled around on their little sitters. They jumped up with another turn of their bodies and stood on their hind legs. They whirled around, running a little at first, on their hind legs only, then began whirling so fast they seemed to be spinning on the toes of one hind foot.

"Watch 'em go," whispered the fascinated Doctor Ludwig.

"I like that first spin."

Presently the mice grew weary and slowed down, and now they might be said to waltz. It was actually a kind of staggering, for they were very tired. "They can't take it today," said Ludwig. "The other day they waltzed around like a bunch of drunks for nearly an hour."

"So," said an indignant voice behind us. We whirled around and Ludwig let the curtains fall into place. I heard the tiny sounds of the mice falling to the floor of the cage, released from their dance by the darkness. "I've told you, Doctor Ludwig, to leave those mice alone." It was Doctor Willie Cowper standing there, like an avenging mouse himself.

"You go to hell," said Ludwig.

"Nevertheless," said Doctor Willie, "you leave those mice alone or I'll report you to the head of the research department. You act like an undergraduate." He walked past Ludwig and snapped the light out, then turned without another word and went up the stairs leading to the offices. He called back to me, "Doctor Joseph, will you drop in and give me some blood this afternoon?" He slammed the door.

"Blood," shuddered Ludwig. "Every afternoon he chases everybody out of the building trying to take blood from them."

Why doesn't he make them get him a horse for blood? The little squirt."

It was too bad those two didn't get along with each other; they could have done wonders of research together. They were both young and rather small, but whereas Ludwig had gone in for boxing in his undergraduate days, Doctor Willie had won the Zeigler poetry award; and whereas Ludwig was as homely as sin, Doctor Willie was what might be called handsome, in a slight, trim sort of way. Both were smart--far, far more brilliant than you could have any idea to look at them. Ludwig was as inventive as the devil. He was a wizard with a camera, and was making remarkable use of the movie camera in research. Willie was the more methodical technician, and most skillful in dinky things. He insisted on tampering with dangerous stuff, such as leprosy and bubonic plague.

I gave Doctor Willie ten cc's of blood that afternoon out of my arm, and helped him take another ten out of his own. The next afternoon he came down and wanted some more. He needed a lot ~~off~~ for serum for his plague germs. I didn't want to give any more of mine. I'd given him thirty cc's in the past week, and had helped him take that much ~~from~~ himself. I was afraid I'd lose my summer tan, and he was getting a bit white too. I asked Doctor Ludwig to give him some.

"I won't," Ludwig said. "Make 'em buy you an animal."

"Ludwig is afraid of the needle," Doctor Willie said scornfully.

Ludwig came over and stood very close in front of him. He held his fist right under Doctor Willie's nose. "I'm afraid of

nothing connected with you," he said. "Would you like to have me give you a licking?"

"That would be a very scientific bit of proof," snorted Willie. "But I still need some blood."

"There's that old spotted-fever-problem sheep," Ludwig suggested. "Why don't you bleed her? They just use her as a host for ticks."

Willie looked at Ludwig and then at me, and grinned. "Of course," he said. That was Ludwig's chief virtue--he had common sense. He thought of the obvious and ingenious things when no one else had an idea.

Now in order to take blood and have it anywhere near clean you've got to get down to bare skin, and you've got to wash that skin with alcohol, and you've got to find an artery that you can hit with the needle or you'd be pulling all day for your ten cc's. And the trouble with a sheep is that they haven't much bare skin. Willie sized up the situation and saw that the sheep's ear was the only place to work on. So we got the sheep down, there in its pen, and went to work shaving and cleaning up the ear.

The sheep didn't like it, and wiggled her head around as much as she could. By the time we had spent half an hour trying to hold her head still so we could hit the artery with the needle we were about ready to go nuts. She kept on struggling and jerking her head until our patience was all gone.

There was an old operating chair in one end of the basement rat-room and Ludwig suggested using that. "Why don't you put her in the chair and strap her head down?" he asked.

Doctor Willie looked at him in exasperation. "You can carry

her over there if you want to," he said. "She's alive with ticks."

"Lead her over," said Ludwig. "She's still able to walk if you let her up."

The idea was simple and reasonable and plain common sense, so we led her over, tipped the back of the chair down, and got the straps ready. Ludwig and I got the sheep by the legs and stretched her out, and Willie strapped her down and buckled her head securely to the head-rest. Our patient couldn't move, and we soon had our blood.

The next afternoon Willie innoculated a healthy rat and a healthy rabbit with some sort of bubonic plague mess and it took them rather badly. When the rat was only three hours into the sickness it began to act as though it had caught the waltzing sickness from the mice. It tried to bat its way out of its cage, and when that didn't work it tried to run away from itself by going around in tight circles inside its cage. The circles got smaller until it was standing upright on its hind feet, whirling like a gimlet.

The rabbit was worse. It found a terrible strength somewhere in its affliction and tore the netting loose on the front of its cage. A rabbit does have long teeth, you know. It got half out of the cage before we got to it with clubs and killed it. We had a bad moment. I would rather be in a room with a dozen mad dogs than with that plague-stricken rabbit. Science can save a man from rabies, but not from bubonic plague.

We put the dead rabbit and rat into the electric incinerator and burned them completely. Willie sprayed the cages with the strongest disinfectant in the laboratory in case there might

have been fleas or lice on the animals. That was the greatest danger. That was how the ancient black plagues were spread.

Doctor Ludwig saw the battle with the rabbit and was glad to take no part in it. He was spending the nights as well as the days in the lab just then, taking movies of the work of his termites. He had a cot rigged up, and every hour during the night an alarm clock brought him staggering up to go into the dark-room and snap another picture.

Doctor Willie and I brought cots and joined him the following night. I had several thousand slides to examine under the microscope and Willie was helping with that. In exchange I was helping him with the obstreperous rats and rabbits. We took turn about; sleeping, and watching the cages between looks at the microscope. Ludwig was up and down every hour, and once while I was watching I heard him go over to the back wall and give the waltzing mice a few whirls under the electric light.

Willie was supposed to be sound asleep, but the tiny whispering sound made by the feet of those whirling mice somehow got into his mind and he woke in a rage. Just then a rat over on the other wall got up on its hind legs in its cage and danced. I did my duty--noted the time it started to whirl, and when it dropped over. A rabbit started rampaging then, and showed signs of wanting to run in circles. "I'd like to see one of those waltzing mice with a shot of plague juice," said Ludwig. "I'll bet he'd whirl so fast he'd bore a hole through the bottom of his cage."

Willie came over, boiling mad. "I wish you'd keep away from those mice, Doctor Ludwig. I've been wanting to inoculate

some with plague, but you keep them so worn out the experiment wouldn't be satisfactory."

Ludwig started to get his temper up, but paused midway and beamed with an idea. "Look," he said excitedly. "You know that movie short they made of a mongoose fighting a cobra? The guy who took that sold it for a lot of money. You know," he said, looking around at the cages, "if we could rig up some sort of a fight like that--if we could match one of those wild rabbits against a hound--I could take a movie of it and we'd sell it sure."

"I do not approve of cruelty," said Willie, stalking off-- Willie, who was killing animals right and left with plague. He didn't approve of cruelty--and it was true too--in his way.

The next night Willie and I were both gone from seven until ten. Ludwig promised to make notes of any of the animals that died. Willie tried to make him promise to leave the mice alone but Ludwig started to get his temper up. "What is one to do with such a person?" Willie asked me. "The only argument he would understand would be a good licking. I wish I could get mad enough to give it to him some time."

"Give yourself a shot of plague and then go after him just before it gets you," I said. "It works wonders with the rabbits."

"I'm hardly a rabbit," said Willie, "even if I'm not a physical match for Doctor Ludwig."

Going back to the laboratory that night he was telling me about the mice. "What makes them waltz?" I asked him.

"There's something wrong in the tubes of their ears," he said. "Something gets tangled up in there where the balancing apparatus is. They're like a man who has been whirled until he

is dizzy. They stagger around because they are simply trying to stand up straight. The plague seems to do the same thing with the rats, and they try to stand on their hind legs and whirl in order to make it right for the bad places in their ears. The rabbits want to fight because they don't know what else to do. It hits them in the ears too, and they go berserk."

When we got to the lab I thought Willie was going to go berserk too. He had innoculated one of the waltzing mice with plague just before we left, expecting it to react some time the next day. The reaction had started half an hour before we got back, and that mouse apparently had turned into a mountain of fury. Worst of all, there was the clever camera-man, Doctor Ludwig, with his movie camera. It was set up and pointed into a large and brightly lighted cage in the middle of the room. He was dismantling the camera and trying to get things back in their places before we got back, but his glee was something he had no wish to conceal.

"The picture of the ages," he crowed, and pointed to the cage. "'Mouse Licks Cat!' How's that for a title? I got the swellest little movie-short you ever saw. That waltzing mouse got fighting mad and didn't bother to waltz any more. And somebody had this big black tomcat in one of the cages. So I put on a match right here in this cage. That mouse had the cat scared to death. It ran the cat all over the cage and the cat didn't know what to do. It tried to fight back and the mouse cuffed it right in the nose. The mouse stood right up and traded punches."

Willie roared with anger. The old black cat looked at him from the cage and licked its chops. "Where's the mouse now," he

asked.

"Oh, cat finally got him," said Ludwig, "but not until the mouse was tired out, and not until the cat took a good licking, right in front of the camera."

"That cat has fleas," Willie yelled suddenly. "That's Mabel Donaldson's cat and she's doing a research with fleas. He's the host, and he'll catch plague from the mouse, and the fleas will give it to us."

Ludwig jumped away from the cage and so did I. None of us wanted to go near it, but there was work to be done, and we had to do it. It was an hour before we were finally ready to switch on the current for the incinerator and to cause Donaldson's cat to disappear entirely from this earth.

Doctor Ludwig put his camera back into the termite dark-room. When he came out there were half a dozen of the little, pale, winged ants sticking to the back of his coat. "Never mind them," he said. "They hate light. They'll find a dark hole to climb into and you'll never see them again."

"I only wish you'd do that too," said Willie. He went over and pulled the drapes away from a cage. "My poor little waltzing mice," he said. A small brown-eyed face peered out at him and I was struck again with the resemblance between Willie and the mouse. He pulled the curtain again and went down to the end of the basement, turning out the light as he rolled up on his cot.

Doctor Ludwig went down there and turned the light on again. "You'll have to be a bigger man than you are, Doctor Willie Cowper," he said, "before you can make me climb into a hole--dark or otherwise."

Willie turned over and groaned, hiding his eyes from the light. "I wish I were bigger," he said. "I don't know of anyone who needs a licking quite as much as you do." The light went out, Ludwig lay down on his cot, and all was quiet.

I sat down at the microscope and went to work, but ten minutes later all hell broke loose down there. I heard a sort of strangled scream and there was Willie up on his knees on the cot, hitting himself on the side of the head with his hand, and shaking his head as though he wanted to snap it off. I could just see him down there in the dim light, looking more like a waltzing mouse than ever. He staggered to his feet, looking at me with that same frantic intoxication I had seen on the faces of the mice.

Suddenly he started beating his head again. He staggered around slowly, and then whirled twice around. Ludwig leaped out of his cot on the far side. "Plague," he yelled, trying to circle away from the frantic Willie. "Just like the rabbits," he shrilled, and I was frozen with horror.

I wanted to get out of that basement and run, and keep on running, but there was something pitiful in little Willie that made me sure he wouldn't hurt me. I wasn't so sure he wouldn't hurt Ludwig, and neither was Ludwig.

Willie stood for a moment, clawing at the side of his head, then whirled around twice more and snapped his neck sideways and fell to the floor. He looked up and seemed to see the horror on Ludwig's face. I ran down and caught him and tried to hold him down.

Ludwig tried to help me. Ordinarily either of us could have

held him with one hand, but now the two of us couldn't control his wild contortions. He was up on his feet, shaking us off and whirling again. Then he lit into Ludwig. It would be hard to say what kind of a fight it was. Ludwig could have boxed him silly with a punch or two, but it wasn't that kind of a fight. Willie seemed to stand up close to poor Ludwig and explode blows and violence in all directions.

It went on for two or three minutes and I couldn't get near them to stop it. Finally Ludwig was down on the floor and yelling for mercy. Willie slugged him two or three more times for good measure, then went jittering off on his hands and knees, running head-on into things.

Finally he got up and was racing all over the basement. "Catch me," he pleaded. "I can't stop running. My head--my ear--it's driving me crazy."

I caught him once but he got away from me. "The old operating chair," I yelled. "Run down past that and I'll catch you and strap you to it."

Willie was down at the far end of the basement. He ran smack into the wall and fell sprawling. Then he got up and dashed over and threw himself into the operating chair. I slapped a strap around him and buckled him down before he could get away.

I got his head under my knee and strapped it to the headrest just as we had strapped the sheep down. I ran for a beaker of warm water out of the tap and poured some into his ear. The pain seemed to stop. Doctor Ludwig heated more water over the Bunsen flame and I got a medicine dropper for a squirt. I

washed the tube of his ear several times, then squirted warm water in again and finally was able to see something. I reached in with tweezers and pulled out a small winged insect. It must have been making a hell in Willie's head while it was alive and beating its wings.

"Ah, God," said Willie. "It sounded like a bull buffalo loose in there. I hope it didn't bite me--I hope it doesn't give me the plague."

Doctor Ludwig came over and looked at it. He snorted, then began to laugh and roar. "Do you know what this is?" he yelled.

I was releasing Willie from the straps on his chair at that moment. He turned on Ludwig and moved toward him. "You stop that yelling," he said, "or I'll give you another licking."

Doctor Ludwig stopped laughing.

"What was it?" Willie asked.

"A termite," said Ludwig. "You know how they love to bore in wood." Then he did laugh, and Willie shoved him and punched him all over the room, but Ludwig couldn't stop laughing. When he finally did stop he turned and shoved Willie. "Leave me alone," he said, "or I'll bat your ears down."

"Ah, me," said Willie, "what can one do?" He left him alone.

* * *

TRIPLE TROUBLE

"Trouble's brewing," said Mrs. Porter. "The cat's unhappy. See how she moves around the house, looking for something."

"There's a thunder-storm coming, if that's what you mean," said her husband.

Trouble's brewing," said Mrs. Porter grimly. "I can tell, and so can the cat. Trouble always comes in threes--just the same as good things."

"Trouble," muttered young Helen Porter to herself, and panic gripped her heart. "That means Joe will probably take Mary Fuller to the party tomorrow night, instead of me. He wants a job in the bank. I suppose," she said to herself bitterly, "he thinks it will help him get the job if he takes the cashier's daughter to the party."

"Trouble," muttered Mr. Porter to himself, and a defeated feeling gripped him. "Hank Fuller will probably get lucky this afternoon and roll me out of my place on the bowling team."

"Trouble," thought Mrs. Fuller, and improvised a hasty prayer: "Don't--please don't--let the troubles be terrible troubles. Don't let anything happen to any of my family."

Helen went to look out the front window. "Mom," she called, "there goes your precious son-in-law Elmer home from work already. I wonder how he got away so early. He must have left the bank at four-thirty."

"Don't let Elmer steal anything from the bank," prayed Mrs. Porter swiftly.

The gathering storm was bringing an early grey evening to the street outside as Helen watched her sister's husband Elmer

stride past. "He walks worried," she said. "I hope he hasn't lost his job, or stolen some money, or something."

"All bank-tellers aren't crooks," snapped Mr. Porter. "He simply wants to get home before the storm comes."

"He'd better get home. There's trouble coming," said Mrs. Porter.

Helen stepped to the telephone. "I think I'll call Claire and warn her Elmer's coming." The phone tinkled just as she reached for it.

"Lightning," snapped her mother. "Don't phone when there's a storm."

Mr. Porter dropped into his easy-chair with a sigh and fumbled with the lamp beside him. "Is this lamp disconnected again?" he grumbled. "Did you plug the vacuum cleaner into this socket again today?"

Helen snapped a wall-switch but nothing happened. "The power must be off," she said. "The lights won't work."

Mrs. Porter didn't hear them. She called from the kitchen, "The lights won't work out here. Something's wrong."

"What?" yelled Helen.

Mrs. Porter stuck her head in from the kitchen. "What?" she asked.

"Nothing," roared Jim Porter, and rustled the paper angrily and tried to read in the dusk.

At that moment there was a resounding crash from the basement. Father and mother and daughter rushed for the basement door just as the cat came hurtling up the stairs, leaving a red trail behind it. Mr. Porter grabbed at it, but it was a mass of

sticky redness. It twisted from his hands and slithered into the front room and dived under the radio. The man looked at his reddened hands. He smelled one of them. He licked it. "Jelly," he said. "Currant jelly."

"My preserves," wailed Mrs. Porter. The three turned and dashed to the basement through the cat's gory trail, as fast as they could in the gathering dusk.

Dim light from the basement windows gleamed on broken glass, and there was a fine spicy smell of pickled peaches in the air. Mr. Porter struck a match and disclosed a shambles. "All my fruit and jelly broken," wailed Mrs. Porter. "Jim, I told you those shelves weren't strong enough."

"You never told me any such a thing," said Jim Porter indignantly.

"Well I meant to," said Mrs. Porter. "You should have known."

"Just how strong can a man make a rack of shelves?" Jim Porter asked. "There's a limit. How many jars of stuff did you have stacked there?"

"Over three hundred jars," Mrs. Porter wailed.

"I wouldn't complain of shelves that could hold that much," said Jim. "And they did hold it, too, for years."

"That miserable cat got up there, I'll bet," said Helen, "and down went the whole works."

"That cat--looking for trouble," said Jim Porter. "Well, she found it."

"She was unhappy," said Mrs. Porter. "She knew trouble was coming, and so did I. And the terrible part is that trouble

always comes by threes."

Helen snorted, indignantly, because she was afraid.

"Nonsense," said her father. "This one trouble is enough."

The sound of the telephone broke in from upstairs.

"Don't answer it," said Mrs. Porter. "It's the lightning."

"We ought to be polite," said Helen, "even to lightning."

The bell rang again, with a business-like sound not at all like lightning. "I'm going to answer it," she said. "It may be for me." Her heart suddenly bounded. "Maybe," she thought, "it's Joe after all, asking me instead of Mary Fuller."

"Don't answer it," warned her mother. The three of them turned toward the steps. "Take off your shoes before you come upstairs," she said. "I don't want jelly tracked all over the rugs."

"The cat has taken care of that activity already," said Jim Porter maliciously.

The phone rang again, insistently. "I'll answer it myself," said Mrs. Porter grimly. "If there's dangerous work to do I intend to do it, because I have sense enough to be careful."

She rummaged in a kitchen cupboard for a moment and then skipped to the telephone. She put a glass pie-plate on the floor and stood in it in her stockinged feet, looking uncomfortable and pigeon-toed. Balancing herself by clutching the rubber mouth-piece of the telephone, she lifted the receiver. "Hello," she said. "It's Claire . . . Hello, Claire. You shouldn't telephone when the lightning is so bad. Are you standing on something glass? Oh . . . She's standing on a milk bottle."

"How in the world can she do that?" asked Jim Porter.

"It's Dad and Helen . . . They're standing right here. How can you stand on a milk bottle?" There was a pause while she listened. "She says she just stands on it . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Why do you want him . . .?" There was another long pause. Helen and her father could hear angry clicks from the receiver as the lightning interrupted. "Dad will be right over to get him," said Mrs. Porter. "Yes, right away." She was about to hang up when she remembered. "The cat knocked the jelly all down," she said.

She hung up and stepped out of her pie-plate. "More trouble, I guess," she said. "I knew it would come."

"What is it?" asked Jim Porter. His wife looked at him and wagged her head sadly. "What is it? Can't you tell us what it is?"

"It's Claire's husband. The bank called. They want him to come back to the bank. There's something they want to ask him about. He didn't--or wouldn't--tell her what it was. He said he didn't know--that it was just something. Claire wants to know if you can get the car out and drive him down to the bank. The street cars aren't running. The electricity must be off."

"Of course it's off," said Helen. "We know that."

"It's just more trouble, that's all I know," said her mother.

"Elmer's a good, honest boy," said Mr. Porter. "He wouldn't steal any money."

"Who said he stole money?" said Mrs. Porter. "I only know he has to go back to the bank, and right away."

"I'll bet he did steal," said Helen. "I've been expecting it--him counting all that money all day. I think he hides things

from Claire. He Wouldn't tell me how much money people have in the bank that I asked him about."

"Nonsense," said Jim Porter. Elmer's a fine boy. It's just that you don't think anyone is good enough for Claire."

"He makes her cook sauerkraut," said Helen indignantly. "They've got a whole barrel of it in their basement, rotting away there."

"All I know," said Mrs. Porter, "is that there's trouble brewing, and only one trouble gone. Maybe this isn't trouble, but you'd better get the car out. We'll all go with you. I don't want you driving alone with this storm coming. If there's trouble coming I want to be there. I have sense enough to be careful."

Mr. Porter got the car out, and mother and daughter ran out and got in with him. There was still no rain, and the clouds were high, but heavy and black. A becalmed street car was standing motionless and deserted in the street-crossing two blocks away. The air above them was motionless and dead, but high overhead the clouds were falling into place like black curtains.

They turned in at the driveway of the house where Claire and Elmer lived, and pulled up at the back door. Elmer and Claire were waiting for them. The Porters held the car door open as Elmer put on his coat.

At that moment another trouble came. There was a roar of a vast explosion from the basement. It was strong enough to blow loose the basement windows. A vast and powerful smell came pouring from the nearest window. "The barrel exploded," yelled Elmer, and he dashed in and down the steps out of sight.

The family followed him as fast as they could tumble out of the car. Elmer had a flashlight and was shining it around. The planks of the ceiling looked as though they were festooned with melting icicles. The floor was thick with squdgy softness. The walls were plastered with it. Over close to the furnace was the wreck of what had once been a barrel. It was opened out flat like a sunflower.

"You packed it too tight," said Claire.

"You put the head of the barrel on tight, instead of leaving it loose," said Elmer. "All our sauerkraut--all over the ceiling--all over everything."

"You shouldn't have burned the papers in the furnace. You got it too warm."

Mrs. Porter took command. "There's no use crying about it," she said. "Elmer, you take the car and go on down to the bank and see what they want. We'll stay here and help clean up this mess. Maybe you should learn to get along without a dangerous explosive like sauerkraut in the house."

"Maybe I had better go," said Elmer. "I can't imagine what's the matter--why they want me. It's almost five-thirty. I'll put the car away when I get back." He called back as he went out the door: "Still no rain. I don't think it's going to storm."

Mrs. Porter went out to see. The air was heavy and motionless. "It'll storm," she said. "It'll have to storm, now it's gone this far. Drive carefully, Elmer. We've had two troubles. Be careful so you don't be the third."

Elmer drove away and Mrs. Porter returned to the work in

the basement. They raked the kraut down from the ceiling and scraped it from the walls and floor. They scrubbed and cleaned as well as they could, until the heavy fumes drove them outside for a breath of air.

Still the storm waited, but the clouds were coming lower toward the trees and house tops. Flickers of lightning shone through the dense blanket above them. The darkness was turning into real night. "We must run on home," said Mrs. Porter. "Soon it will rain hard, and we should be in our own house."

"Go ahead," said Claire. "We'll bring the car back when Elmer gets home. I'll telephone you if there's anything wrong at the bank."

Mrs. Porter looked at her elder daughter sharply. No one had spoken to her of the possibility of anything being wrong at the bank. Evidently the storm-tense air was troubling her too. "We'll go home and clean up our own basement," said the mother. "We'll have to run to beat the storm."

Lightning started breaking closer as they reached their own door. Thunder drummed in their heads and shook their bones. The wind came up, and whined, and rattled scraps of paper and tatters of things along the pavement. A tall tree standing in their front lawn strained and creaked in the wind, showing the silvery under-sides of its leaves. "Two troubles we've had," said Mrs. Porter.

Helen glanced over at the Fuller's house next door. Candle light shone dimly from the windows. "Joe will ask Mary Fuller," Helen said to herself. "He'll ask her to go to the party with him tomorrow night, and that'll be the third trouble."

Jim Porter's heart was contracted with hot dread, because he too was looking for a third trouble to finish the series. "Hank Fuller will get my place on the bowling team. He almost crowded me out last week, and if he bowled good this afternoon he'll do it."

Mrs. Porter murmured to herself. "Drive carefully, Elmer, drive carefully. And don't be stealing from the bank, or anything."

The family got out candles and lighted them. Father and daughter set to work cleaning up the basement, while Mrs. Porter made supper. They ate in the kitchen by candlelight. "I never knew the current to be off so long," said Jim Porter.

The telephone tinkled again. "Lightning is coming closer," said Mrs. Porter. "I wish the storm would break and get it over with." Once the telephone seemed to ring. "Bad news," said Mrs. Porter to herself grimly. But after placing her pie-plate and answering and getting no answer, she had to decide it was still the lightning.

Finally the storm did break, and the flashes of light from outside made their candlelight pale and useless. The roar of the wind and rain and thunder made conversation impossible. They stopped eating and watched the storm by the glare of the lightning. "Here comes our car," said Helen. "It must be Claire and Elmer.

All three watched the car as it stopped by the kitchen door. They watched as the two inside the car clutched their hats and coats and prepared for the dash to the door. All three in the house turned to open the kitchen door, and so they missed seeing

what happened.

The most tremendous crash of all came from outside. Involuntarily they hesitated--they didn't open the door. Elmer opened it himself, and he and Claire came inside, their faces white and their eyes wide. "That was a close one," said Elmer.

"The lightning struck our big tree," said Claire. "We saw it. It tore a great big limb loose and it broke the bird-bath all to pieces on the lawn, and the limb is lying across the driveway."

"Never mind that," said Mrs. Porter cheerfully. "Dad can clean that up. We're all here now, and everything's going to be all right. Thank goodness it's all over. That's all three troubles done. Now we can get started and straighten things out again." She stepped over and threw the switch and the lights turned on. "Everything all right at the bank, Elmer?" she asked.

"Everything is swell," said Elmer.

"Elmer's the new cashier," said Claire.

"What about Hank Fuller?" Jim Porter asked.

"That was it," said Elmer. "They couldn't locate Fuller. They got word that he got a swell new job and was transferred to a bank in Chicago, so we all got promoted a step forward. We needed a new man right away, and they wanted to ask me about Helen's boy-friend, Joe. So he goes to work tomorrow on the posting machines."

"Are the Fullers leaving town?" Helen asked timidly.

"Mr. Fuller leaves tomorrow. The family is to follow him soon." Elmer eyed Helen. "Joe said he didn't want to phone when the storm was on. He said he wanted you to go with him to a

party tomorrow night."

"Where was Hank Fuller?" Mr. Porter asked glumly. "Why couldn't they locate him?"

"They finally found him still at the bowling alley," said Elmer. "He was howling about how bad his game was. He was taking a bowling lesson."

* * *

RETURN BY NIGHT

All home-keeping people had eaten their suppers and all their chores were done, except maybe feeding the calves and pigs their evening meal of skim milk. Old Joe Sheller, turned eighty years, came along the road and stopped by the mail box. "I should've took that mail box when I left," he scolded into his beard. "That were really mine. I should've took it with me." He read the name on it now--Glen P. Jackson. "Never heard of that guy," he said. He made out the faint remains of his own name underneath the newer paint. "That's my mail box," he grumbled.

Down beside the post that held the box he saw signs of excavation. Dust and pebbles had been scraped into a pile and a child's tin shovel and pail lay overturned beside it. Joe's heart softened. "Of course, if they've got a kid they need a mail box," he said.

He trudged slowly past the house, under the willows that grew between the yard and the road, one hand held against a hip that was in the habit of slipping out of joint. From a little shed built into a rise in the ground there came the cozy hum of a cream separator. "Kinda late to be still fooling around with the milk," said Joe. "Be mighty dark in the spring-house. I'll just ask the feller how he likes the spring-house. Best one in the valley."

Joe let himself into the yard through the lower gate and stumped up to the open door from whence came the sound. It was completely dark inside. He knew about that, though. He had finished separating in the dark many times--in that very spring-

house. It was light enough outside for feeding. No need to get a lantern to finish separating--you got so you could run that by feel alone. He could see a big spot of white inside, where the skim milk foamed out into the pail. He could see a form rising and falling to the turn of the separator handle. He thought of speaking, but he knew he would have to shout to make himself heard. He stood there waiting.

The machine paused and the person made some motions and then picked up the speed again momentarily. "Running water through, to rinse it out," said Joe to himself. The warm milky smell came out to him in a sudden wave, and a vast homesickness washed over him so strong it almost threw his hip out of joint. He lurched and caught himself on the side of the door. A scream of terror rose from the dark interior.

"Oh, Ma'am," he fell back abjectly. "I'm sorry I scared you so. I didn't know it was a woman running the machine. I should've known better. It'd scare anybody if they didn't see a person come up outside. It happened to me once, right in this same place."

The woman came out. "What are you doing here?" she cried, still panting with fright. "What do you want? You get away from here."

"I'm awful sorry," said Joe. "I just came by and I thought I'd talk to the feller that runs this place."

"My husband isn't here," said the woman. "He's--he's up at the house. He isn't feeling well tonight."

A little girl came running down the path from the house. "Was that you yelled, Mom, so awful?" she cried. "It scared me

to hear it." She saw the old man and stopped, then fled to her mother.

"It's all right, Mary, I was just startled," the woman said. "Go back to the house and take care of your brother."

"He's all right--he's asleep," said the girl.

A calf bawled its hunger and pigs set up their doleful squealing. "Go away now," the woman said to the old man--to old Joe Sheller. "I've got to finish the chores."

"Let me help you carry the buckets," said Joe. "I'd sure like to. I'd like to make up for scaring you that way."

"No," the woman said. "Go away."

She backed toward the spring-house and the little girl followed her closely. "I'm afraid of that old man," the girl whimpered.

Joe turned away quickly and limped toward the gate, his heart thumping. "She's afraid of me," he said to himself, and wild remorse shook him. "But I wouldn't hurt her. I wouldn't hurt nobody." He trudged on, holding his wobbly hip. "But sure I did scare her--an old man with whiskers--here in the dusk like that--and she doesn't know me." Joe hurried out to the road and up past the house again, the way he had come. "I never thought the way I'd look to people. Oh Lord, I didn't mean to scare anybody--to scare a little kid--a little girl, that way."

He stopped out of sight of the house, a few yards up the road, behind the willows. "Oh Lord," he said, "I don't want to be going back this direction. I don't want to go back at all. I'd like to see 'em feed the calf. I'd like to see how many pigs they got." He heard the calf stop bawling and could imagine

it thrusting its head into the foamy milk. The pigs stopped their squealing and he could hear the sound of their noisy feeding. It was almost dark. Only the western sky held any memory of day. The dusk was soft and the smell of a hayfield came to him through the sprawling rail fence.

He moved off a few yards farther, then climbed over into the field. "Rails sure need to be set back on this fence," he said. "I never let it get that bad when I had the place. Ain't everybody got the patience and the knowledge to lay rails up just right." He moved over into the field. "I'll just sit here on a haycock for a while," he said to himself. "I'll just hide myself a little so I won't scare those people any." He sat down and snuggled his back into the sweet hay. He pulled a bundle from his pocket, unwrapped a piece of sausage from it and fell to eating. A cat came daintily through the stubble from the house. It looked at him, smelled the sausage, and mewed faintly. He coaxed it to him and fed it the last morsel. Then he dreamed awhile, of days fifteen years ago when he owned this place, and then he dozed.

When he awoke, the night was complete and dark. The cat was gone and old Joe was chilly. He heard repeated the sound that must have wakened him--a thin, high, prolonged gasping--the sound of a small child struggling to draw in its breath. It came from the direction of the house, and almost immediately there was a glimmer of light through the window that faced the field where he sat. The light grew. Someone was scratching a match--lighting a lamp. The gasping, drawn out longer and longer, and thin and high, was louder now, and coming as fast as it well could.

Joe sat up, clenching his hands, and memories of an ancient fear came flooding back to him. He controlled himself and watched the lighted window.

The door flung open, throwing a path of light out toward the barn. The woman came out, struggling into a coat. She stopped to fasten her shoes, but the thin gasping seemed to catch at her own throat and with a wail she ran back in. Joe heard a new sound--the little girl crying. He heard the mother speak, and the crying stopped suddenly. "That's right," he said. "No use her yelling too. Won't do no good."

The gasping sounds continued and Joe had difficulty in holding himself back. "No," he said. "Don't scare 'em again. "They've got enough to contend with now, without you coming up, looking like Old Nick himself."

But a new turn in affairs got Joe to his feet. The gasping got worse because the breath that was fought for so hard was released in high, frightened wailing. "He shouldn't be allowed to cry that way," Joe muttered as he made for the house, pressing his hand against his hip. "Should use all his strength to get air. Shouldn't be allowed to cry too."

Joe climbed through the fence beside the house and circled around to come up to the door in the path of light. "Let 'em see me coming this time," he said. "Won't scare 'em with being sudden."

The woman saw him and cried out. "Something is wrong with Danny. Something terrible. We've got to get a doctor." She ran out to Joe. "Would you run for a doctor," she pleaded. "Mrs. Duncan's--it's only half a mile up the road--she has a

phone. She'd call a doctor for us."

"I'm not so good at running," said Joe apologetically, pressing his hand against his trick hip in order to stand upright.

"I started to go, but I can't leave him," the woman said. She ran in through the door and Joe followed her, over to a small bed against the wall where the boy lay gasping. "He usually talks so much," she said, "but now he can't tell me what's wrong. I was going to send Mary, but she's so little. She's only six." The little girl was fully dressed and was lacing her small shoes.

"Six is old enough," said Joe. "She's the one to go. She can make it better than us."

The distracted woman knelt before the little girl. "Can you, Mary?" she asked. "Can you run up to Mrs. Duncan's and hammer on the door and ask her to phone for a doctor?"

"Sure I can," the girl said, her eyes big and staring. She ran out of the door and disappeared into the night.

The little boy's gasping rose again in their ears now that the girl was gone. He was lying in his small bed with the covers kicked away. He was on his side, his body arched sharply back. He turned his eyes to them, then turned away--concentrating on the lonely and serious business of drawing in his next breath. It was only when his mother cried that he wailed as he let the air out of his lungs. The woman caught him up in her arms but he kept his back arched and looked away from her, and the thin gasping sound filled the room as he drew in each breath. The woman turned to Joe frantically: "Do you think he'll die?"

"No, he won't die," said Joe. "It's croup. I know what to do for croup." He turned abruptly to the stove. "I'll start

a fire. You get pans of water on, and a sheet. You got any turpentine?"

"Turpentine?" The mother put the gasping child down. "No . . . I don't know."

"You get the fire going and the pans on," said Joe. "I'll get the turpentine." He hobbled outside and down to the barn, holding his wobbly hip together with his hand. He went into the dark barn, sweet and warm with the smell of horses and cows, and felt his way with sure memory to a box nailed high on the wall. He stretched himself up and pulled a heavy jug down from the top of it, brushing off dust that had settled there an inch deep through the years. He pulled the cob out of the jug and smelled the sharp odour of turpentine he had set up there more than fifteen years ago. He stumbled out and limped swiftly to the house.

There was a fire snapping in the range, and pans of water on it were beginning to get warm. Joe poured turpentine into each pan. "Now the sheet," he ordered. He draped it over his head. "Now the boy." The woman brought the gasping child in her arms. Joe pulled her close to him and threw the sheet over her head. "I'll show you how it's done," he said. He draped the sheet out and hung it over the pans, carefully keeping it away from the grates of the range so that it would not catch afire. "Water'll be getting hot in a minute now, and you just hold him over so he can breathe those turpentine fumes. That'll bring him out of it."

"He's so heavy," the mother said as she tried to hold the child out. "He's so heavy, and he's working so hard to breathe."

"Here," said Joe. "You hold the sheet out. Let me take

the kid." The water began to bubble a little and the turpentine fumes came up thick and strong. "Just you breathe that in, old feller," said Joe, holding the boy over the pans. "Just you breathe that in good and strong. That'll help you fine."

The woman held the sheet out so they had a little tent in there. The lamplight shone in dimly through the cloth. The boy was clutching at the old man's clothes, clinging to him tightly and gasping in hard as the vapour rose from the pans. "He's three years old," said the woman. "He's been awfully healthy. This is the first time he ever had anything like this."

The gasping became a little less strenuous. "You're sure a heavy little beggar," Joe said to him. "I'm going to switch you around a bit so you'll be easier to hold." He turned to the mother. "First child I ever held--first in my whole life--and I'm eighty years old." He chuckled, "Don't know much about it. Never married. Never was around kids any. Always liked 'em though, what I did see of 'em."

"This is helping him," the woman said. "He's breathing easier. You hold him fine--just as though you were used to it. How did you know about this, if you never had any children of your own?"

"I heard him a-gasping," Joe said. "Made me remember a long time back--must seventy-seven--seventy-eight years ago. My old mother used to do me this way. I used to have it too--croup, like this. Couldn't breathe good. Getting so I can remember stuff like that--long time ago--better'n I can remember what happened last week or last year. Remember just how it smelled--just like this, and how the light looked through the sheet--just

like this."

He shifted the little boy's weight again. "Got to thinking about this farm the other day. I've had a-many farms in my day but this was the last one, and I always liked it best. I thought I'd come out and see if there wasn't a job of work I could get to do. I've done a pile of work in my years and I sort of hate to quit now. I remember there was always so much work an extra hand could do around a place. I could drive a team, or lay fence rails, or chop wood."

"Well," said the woman apologetically, "my husband isn't really here. He had to work a week on some land his brother got--the old Jim Harper place. He had to do it--couldn't hire a man anywhere. But he'll be back tomorrow night. We have to bring in our own hay as soon as we can. We could use somebody, maybe, to drive the hayrack."

"I'd have to see your man," Joe said. "I'd have to hire out to him. But I'd sure like that. I wouldn't want no wages much--just a chance to work. I'd sure like to wait over and see him."

The gasping had all but stopped. The mother wiped big tears away from the boy's cheeks. "It wasn't any fun, was it Danny?" she said.

"No," he whispered, pressing his face against Joe's sleeve. "I didn't like it."

A clatter rose from outside and Mary came bursting in, followed by the doctor. She screamed with fright and tried to dash out into the night again but the doctor caught her. "Dog-gone," said Joe. "We scared that poor little kid again. We

must look terrible, all draped over with a sheet this way." The mother ducked out from under the covering and caught the little girl in her arms.

"Don't be afraid, Mary," she soothed. "It's just us. We're letting Danny breathe turpentine fumes under the sheet there. He's getting better. He can breathe better now." She looked up at the doctor. "I guess Danny had the croup, but he's a lot easier now. This man came along, and told me what to do."

"Why sure," said the doctor. "That's what he needs. Turpentine vapour is the best thing in the world for him." He patted Mary on the head. "You aren't afraid of ordinary things, are you? You were such a brave girl to run all that distance in the dark to telephone. I must admit," he said to the mother, "that it was a weird sight we came in to here. Gave me a start too." He walked over to the stove. "Let's see how we're getting along in here." He ducked in, under the sheet. He examined the boy, without seeing the sheeted face of the old man. "His breathing is cleared up now," he said. "He should be put back to bed and covered up so he can go to sleep."

He pulled the sheet away. "Well, Joe--Joe Sheller. It's you. How did you get out here? I heard you left the farm."

"I came," said Joe. He gripped the boy to him with one arm, clapped a hand to his hip, and hobbled over to the little bed. He put the child down slowly and got a sleepy, drunken little smile from Danny, which turned into a look of fear as Joe backed away. "Whiskers," said Joe to himself. "I must be an ugly old coot."

"How did you know--" the doctor asked, a smile crossing his

face, "how did you know what to do for a child with croup?"

Joe froze under the doctor's look. "I knew," he said shortly.

"You'd better let me take you back tonight," the doctor said. He turned to the woman. "Joe decided to leave the county farm today. Said he was going out to find a job."

"What's so funny about that?" Joe snapped. "There's still work to be done in the world. Look how useful I was tonight."

"We'd be pleased to have him stay a while," said the woman.

"But you're old, Joe, and you're lame," the doctor said. "You've done your work. Let the county take care of you now."

"They'd better," said Joe, "seein' the argument they put up to get me to go to their poor farm in the first place. But I don't think I want to go back. I got me a job here." Joe was arguing back pretty hard at the doctor, and he saw the little girl sidle over toward her mother in alarm. "Seems as though I'm always doing something to scare that little girl," he said.

"That old hip of yours," said the doctor, "that's apt to slip out again any time, and who would put it back for you out here?"

Suddenly old Joe Sheller realized why he had come back to this farm. With insight deeper than the doctor's--with insight as deep as animal instinct--he realized that long ago he used to be alone on this farm, and he had come out here again to be alone. But he had been tricked back into interest in life by the presence of the children.

He was an old man, and the world was too much with him, and he knew that time wouldn't turn back for him.

"Come to think of it, lady," he said, "I guess I'd better go back. This old hip of mine throws out, and I just lay and yell for help, and it takes a mighty careful man to put 'er back in shape. It sure would be a heck of a thing for that little girl and boy of yours to see me laying out somewhere, yelling like that. I reckon you'll understand I wouldn't want to scare those kids again."

The doctor looked at him and caught a glimpse of the old badger that tries to crawl away to be alone in his age and misery, but couldn't find a place to be alone. "Come on, Joe," he said softly. "There's nothing I can do about it. Let's go back to town."

* * *

THE QUIET MAN

A gentleman the other day told me I looked like a hound, with the sadness in my eye and the general droop the years put on my jaw, but, "Who ever saw a hound as bald as myself has got?" I asked him, and the gentleman laughed so hard at my fate he gave me a dollar. So I never laughed a bit until he was gone, for himself was bald as an egg together. And that's the way of it when you travel the world about and tell stories for a bed and a bite for your hunger.

So he learns to tell a story, a man does. A funny story for old men, and a queer wonderful adventure for the women, both young and old. But for the likes of you gentlemen, God save all here, I'll tell you the truth, and it's the dark story of how I came to be a wandering man. Well it's not a funny story, that one.

Bill Dody, a man I had a careful hate for, took me out to a place for seeing a boss-man. "Sure I'll give you a job," said this mean little man of a thing. "You won't keep it long, Windy Dan, but all you have to do is push black mag out of a tank with a hoe-like. You push it all down a trap and then you whoosh out the tank with a hose, and then you go on to the next tank."

"Lead me to it," said I, "for I'm not working these ten months, and my wife Sally giving me out the money for my pipe and carfare and a bit of a riot now and then." So he led me to a warehouse and gave me white rubber-boots that reached to my hips, and a wool coat and wool gloves, and a thing like a rat trap--a wire frame and strings to it around my head and held a great pad of cloth against my nose and mouth.

"A mask for you," said he.

"Who would I be robbing?" I asked him.

"If you don't wear it you won't come to work tomorrow night," said he, "for you'll be home wondering who put a rattlesnake the wrong way down your windpipe."

So I hung the mask around my neck and went bold into a huge building with men working around, and all wearing the mask and looking like some queer wonderful race of snouted apes. First off I smelled something that stung my nose like hornets, and the bit of a boss-man was holding his handkerchief to his face while he led me along. "What's wrong with this job?" I asked, for I saw there was something wicked in it, and that was not the only queer thing. I saw a man with green hair, I tell you. It was the acid fumes or the zinc dust or something did it, and he with hair as green as grass and not ashamed.

So we walked far across the room and it big as a field, with a lot of lights hanging naked and blue in the poisonous haze, and acres of tanks and men working around them. We stepped a bit outside and the night looked black and wet in the air, and the boss-man trailing a long cord and light-bulb. We climbed a ladder and he opened a trap in the top of a big round wooden tank and hung the light through. "Set your mask and go down the ladder inside," he said, "and take this hoe-thing with you. On the bottom you find two feet deep of mag." I looked in, and it was a swimming mess. "Over there," he pointed, "you see a wheel. You crank that and it opens a hole in the bottom. You push all the mag through that. Then you haul the hose down in and whoosh out the tank. Then you close the trap and move on to the next

tank. That," he said, "is all there is to do."

And then I set the mask over my face and down I went, taking time to think of my small wife at home . . . and she loving me all the time . . .

So you gentlemen laugh, because myself has not got the look of one to have ever a wife of his own. But I had one and her name was Sally, and I've still got her though we haven't seen each other in many years, for we stay married--my kind--and we bear with each other to the end of death. But I grin, and we all laugh a snort, and I'm such a story teller you can't know this for truth or lies, though I'm telling you. That's the way we keep our pride--we who travel the world with our tongues flapping.

So I went down the ladder and above my knees in the hot black stuff like thick mud. That was the mag--but what they'll use it for I'll never know. And I waded over to the side and cranked the wheel and the mag started to run out of the hole by my feet. Well I almost fell through the hole myself the way it was slippery and slanted, and it's a good thing I didn't for my life. The mag ran out by itself for just a bit, but the miserable stuff was just proper for meanness--it wouldn't bear the weight of a man, and it wouldn't shovel, and it wouldn't flow by itself, so I put the hoe-thing to it and moved every ton to the hole by personal persuasion.

I had a lot of time to think of my bit of a wife at home, and the black fire in her eyes and hair, and herself in sleep at the time. For she was a smart Sally and worked for a bank in the days, while my new work was all at night. It wasn't good

to leave a woman alone nights like that, but Bill Doody was working nights too, and she and he only honest friends, and each not saying it, but sorry about me and about each other. So they trying to find me work, and what can a man do when it's ten months since a wage. I was glad of a man's work for I was strong, and unhappy with the kind of a lazy, gabby, shiftless man I was.

There in that big black tank there wasn't a sound but what I made it. One light high up, and everything else black as night from the black mag, and I'd look around and couldn't tell if there was a light at all with nothing but black before my eyes. And no sound, and such a light, and my own shadow moving black all around the walls--"Are you working?" said a voice, and I nearly jumped green with the sudden fright.

It was the mean little boss-man of a thing looking down with his handkerchief to his nose. I tried to answer and forgot the mask over my face. I took it off and caught a breath to answer. Lord save all here--it was the worst breath I ever caught. "Gow," I yelled, and put the mask to my nose again. My lungs were that caught I could see blue sparks behind my eyes. The little boss-man snorted and went away. Mag, gentlemen is something black and muddy, and all wet with sulfuric acid, and about that acid I didn't know. That was the sulfur fumes of hell to breath without a mask, gentlemen.

So then I went pushing all the harder because the boss-man looked mean with his face down the hole. So I sweat, and I rubbed my forehead with my hand, and the acid was on my skin. Then I could feel sweat all over, from the hot wool coat they

gave me. I took that off and hung it on the ladder, and that was wrong, for next day when I went to put on my cotton undershirt it fell to pieces in my hands.

And don't hurry me gentlemen, with wanting to know. A story has to be told proper, but I'll tell you now why I'm a wandering man. There's a great fault in me, and my name was rightly Windy Dan. I'd talk the sun up and the sun down with never a chance for any other man. So I used to brag and boast. I told things I had better be ashamed of, and that's my fate. There's something faulty in me, but sometimes I punish myself this way, and bow my humble head with my tongue wagging, and tell the queer shameful things about myself. But it isn't a funny story.

After a long time in the mag tank where I could see I was gaining on it, I got so tired I was seeing double. Then I heard a loud hammering on the side of the tank and I got up the ladder to see what's wrong. One weird shape of a man was waving at me to follow him and I did. He looked like a pirate with his boots and all. He looked like a surgeon doctor with his mask, and like a Turk with the way he had his head covered around with rags. I followed him outside and he took the mask off. It was Bill Doody looking after me. "It's time to eat," he said. "I knew you wouldn't hear the whistle so I hammered on the tank for you."

Well I had reason to have a careful hate for Bill Doody, but what is a man to do when he hasn't a pay-check for ten months and living on the charity of his wife for want of honest work. Bill showed me the way to the big change-house and we got our pails. We sat down and ate on the same bench--me not saying a

word, I was that tired. "How do you like the mag?" says Bill. "Take one tank a night. That's what the day man does." I answered no word and that was a wonderful thing in itself, for my jaw was as weary as the whole of my soul with the working.

I went down into the black tank again and there alone and pushing my heart out on the hoe-thing. I got most of the mag down the sluice finally and climbed up after the hose to whoosh the place out. I hung there with my chin over the edge of the trap for a time--I hated to go back down to the lonesome again for I could see the crews working together in the big room. It was tearful lonely for myself to see men working with their shoulders touching and other men to look at and talk to. They were lifting tanks and pushing carts and shoveling, and all together, and finally I went down lonely and sat idle for a time and then whooshed the tank. When I finished, the shift was off and only Bill Doody left to show me a locker and help me on the street car and home in the grey morning.

I got home before my bit of a wife was out of bed and her so warm and misty and sleepy it made me mad at her--and me spending the night in torment of work and lonesomeness. She got up and cooked me a breakfast and asked me things but no talking would I do with my anger, and I fell off the chair in the kitchen with weariness and had to crawl to bed. "What did they do to you that made you so tired and quiet?" asked my wife. Well, Bill Doody had told me what I did. "I shoved out a hundred and twenty tons of mag," I said. "A hundred and twenty tons, of mag."

Well I knew I had the worst job in the plant. How else could I get a job without bribing or begging? They usually put

a new man on it every night or so when the old one was worn out, but Bill Doody got me this job and I had good reason to hang to the work. Doody came to the house that second night and helped Sally get me out of bed. He rubbed my back and arms a bit until I could get them working again. He helped me to the street car and we went to the job. I went down into a new tank and shoved at another hundred and twenty tons, and the second night was harder than the first. I couldn't eat at the eating-time, but Bill forced me to nibble at a big sausage he had, and it was a fine sausage. I ate it all, and Bill ate the sandwich out of my pail, and he claimed Sally was a fine cook. I was too tired to resent, but I knew he had no business to brag about my wife, she being my own wife and not his at all.

I got through the night somehow and Bill got me home, and up again that evening, and I got through another night. Sally said my hair was turning green so I called for my old wool pants and she made me a turk's turban for myself the way of Bill's and I wore it. Then one morning Bill said, "Tonight is your day off and you've been working six nights and can go get you a check of wages."

He came for me early that afternoon and we went down town to the basement of a bank where the company paid. We went through a line of men and me not saying a word. Finally we got to a wicket and a pale chap gave me fifteen dollars and sixty cents. I took it and looked at it, and I couldn't believe I had been in that black hole of hell a week just for the sake of that much money. I put the stuff in my pocket, and I was so foolish and dopey I let Bill buy me a beer and didn't buy him one.

We went home then and it was after dark already but I didn't have to go to work for once. Bill Doody came in with me, and my bit of a wife asked him to eat with us, but I didn't say anything to encourage him and he went his way and went to work alone. He looked at me funny, but I didn't even change my face so he went away. He knew I didn't want him.

"Did you get paid?" my Sally asked, for I wasn't giving her a word. I found the money in my pocket and gave her the fifteen dollars. "Is that all you got, Dan, for all that work?" she asked with a kind of sorrow.

"Well I'm holding out sixty cents for carfare and pipe money," I told her quick, "so you won't have to loan it to me this once. It's not quite charity I'm on anymore."

She made not to take the money, but I would say no more and she couldn't guess if I wanted her to take it or not. She left it on the dresser and there it stayed for three days. She took it then and put it in her pocket. I made to stand there looking at it and I couldn't think how that stuff had any connection with me climbing in the muck and sulfuric acid. I was mean and wouldn't touch the money, and I was so tired I couldn't talk and tell her how I felt about all the black tank and the lonesome, so she took the money and I was glad when it was gone.

Well not to get ahead of my story--I had that night and the next day off, but my bit of a wife had worked all day and was tired, so finally she wouldn't stay awake and talk to me, and I was mad and wouldn't talk to her, and I couldn't sleep until morning. And so I slept all my day-off, and when it was night I went to work alone for it was Bill Doody's turn for a night

off then.

So it was a habit to work that next week and I couldn't remember the time I hadn't been itching with acid, and on the next paynight I went down alone and got my money and I came home and gave it to Sally. "Take some for yourself," she said. Still I couldn't talk from being so much alone, and I could hardly lift my hand I was that weary all the time, nor even brag how well I was holding a hard job. It was never, gentlemen, that I could ever brag comfortably to Sally, for she'd look at me honest out of her eyes and the boasting could curdle on my tongue, and I'd go out and find someone else and brag my head off.

"Take some for yourself Dan," she said. "It isn't that I'm not glad of the money but we can spare a bit these days." Then I remembered, gentlemen, that she was earning twice as much as me, and she my wife, and she not needing to look to me for any help. So my trouble got into me and I took the sixty cents and put it in my pocket, and took the fifteen dollars to the stove and a fire burning in it, and I threw the money in the stove and burned it up.

You see my trouble, gentlemen? It was more than humble pride in me for I made a big noise with the stove and groaned and waited until I was sure she saw me do it, and then I threw the money into the stove and burned it up.

Well she had a big dismay, gentlemen, and I would like it if she would cry, but she was a person of her own and she wouldn't cry, so I did. And it was a real sorrow and crying, gentlemen, for I was ill-pleased with myself, and with great

sorrow in all, and tired.

So my wife didn't tell Bill Doody about the burning until the next pay-day, to stop me from doing it again. He came for me each night and we went to work together, and he couldn't have kept it out of his voice if he had known about the burning.

The work went easier for me that week. I could do my hundred and twenty tons and get out of the tank without a murmur. My hair was green by that time and that's why I'm bald now and not that I'm an old man at all, being only sixty-eight. I didn't wear my turk's cap like Bill Doody. He kept his hair black and fine, and he was a fine-looking man and quiet and never moaned about himself. That week I began to notice that I was a quiet man myself and talked hardly at all. Bill and I would sit over our pails and eat, and never a word would we speak. I noticed it and liked it and I began to think and hope I was through with my bragging ways. I began to like Bill Doody and I could see he liked me some, and we would sit quiet by each other and not say a word but this and that for night after night. It was something new for me. The old foreign laborers liked me--they looked at me as if I belonged. They said nothing to me for I was known as a quiet man, but they knew I was holding a hard job well and they liked me.

Then the night before third pay-day came, and I knew my wife Sally had told Bill Doody about me burning the money. I knew it from his face. He didn't look at me and I didn't look at him, and it was hard to sit with him and not talk. We weren't comfortable together.

When I woke that evening my wife came home and I got ready

to go after my wage. "Why don't you buy yourself some clothes with your money tonight?" she said, but I didn't even look at her. I wanted to tell her I was a good man now, and quiet and working, and she would stay home soon and keep the house for me like I promised her when we married, and not work in the bank. But she was making twice as much as me, and I remembered my bad fate, and three weeks of work doesn't make a man of a queer crazy thing like myself, and a bad husband I turned out to be.

So I got my money, but I couldn't buy clothes with the miserable unwanted stuff. There was my bad streak and I bursting with being unhappy so I went and got drunk, and I got a lot of other people drunk, and I threw the money around and told them all about myself and my job, and how much mag I could shove, and what a hell of a man I was. I told them about Bill Doody--how he felt sorry for my wife Sally and how I married her away from him--and then about how the two of them were trying to make a man of me.

I remember I spouted out and told a whole bar-room-full about burning the money--how my wife had a great dismay when she saw it done. I told them my wife was making twice the money I was every week, and we didn't need my wage and I could burn the money if I wanted to, and how Doody thought I was a good guy as long as I was too tired to talk to him and brag. Well, I bragged enough that night.

So some other people started bragging, and I heard myself bragging again and it made me sick. I know how bragging sounds and I don't like to hear it. I got away from the crowd but it was too late--I already told them everything there was in me.

I remember I was awfully drunk, and I got to feeling sorry and crying, and I got to thinking about my job, and first thing I was lonesome for it. I wanted to be out there with the old foreigners that liked me and they never seeing me when I wasn't a nice quiet sort of fellow.

So I climbed on a street car and went out to the plant and I put on my boots and wool coat and mask and went around looking. I climbed up on the vat and looked down at the man who was working my job and pushing his soul out on the mag, but I couldn't tell who it was. Then I got to wondering where the mag went after it got shoved out and I prowled around and finally got to a lower level and found where the sluices opened and slid the stuff down chutes into huge open vats. There was a shaft thing in the center that moved two long paddle-arms around the bottom of the vat and mixed the mag with new acid.

There was a vat under each tank and the machine working and the mag was a thin mess again. It was about three feet deep, and hot-looking and awful, and you could see the wave under as the mixing paddle passed. I was drunk and I took my mask off to breathe better and got a whiff of the fumes that drove me running crazy.

So I went above again and looked down at the man doing my work in the tank. He was nearly ready for the hose to whoosh the place out. So I thought to surprise him and I got the great hose and climbed down in with it and surprised him stiff, and when I looked I was surprised too for it was Bill Doody on my job.

"Whatever is it?" he yelled, and I turned on the water and

gave a whoosh. "You're drunk," said he, and I threatened him back in the corner with the hose, just for fun. "Dan, why don't you go home and behave yourself?" he yelled. "Sally will be worried about you."

"And it's Sally you're worried about," said I. "Sally knows me well enough. It isn't the first night I didn't come in at all."

"But she was afraid about tonight, for you were being sober a long time," said Bill. "She told me so. You were working so hard and not saying a word for being mad and tired all the time, and she was afraid she hurt your feelings about the money-burning business."

"That's not your business, Bill Doody," said I.

"She asked me what she could do," said Bill, "and she was so worried she was crying about it."

"She's never been crying," I yelled.

"She was crying last night," said Bill.

Well I'd never seen my Sally weep, and I always wanted to see it, and this made me sadder than ever. "She wept not much, but she cried a little," said Bill, "because you wouldn't talk to her at all and you so gabby most of the time, and she loving you anyway."

I was whooshing out the tank for Bill. I turned the hose on him, right in the face, and it a big strong hose and washed the mask from him. I don't know why I did it--him seeing her cry, or something. I turned the hose on him and he slipped and I turned the hose away, but he slipped and fell, gentlemen, and he fell toward the hole in the tank, and he gave a yell with

the mask off. He just slipped and fell down through the hole and out of sight just like that.

Well, gentlemen, I thought of that mixing vat below and all the acid they put in the mag, and I a man to be a hero and have something I could rightly brag to my wife about. Quick as a wink I set my mask tight and grabbed the hoe-thing and hooked it on the sides of the hole and let myself down along the handle as far as I could. I was brave and quick about it and I've a right to be proud, and never thinking danger to myself, but I wouldn't dive down there like Bill and maybe get fallen in the stuff myself and not able to help him.

So I let myself down and I heard a terrible scream and three men came running and looked in the vat. I saw Bill Doody down there in the mess, half under, with the mixing blade rippling along under the mag toward him. I had to wait until it passed the end of the chute. It didn't move fast, but it passed and swished under Bill and him floundering in the mag and gasping. He tried to stand up and put his mask on but he was tangled down and set crazy like a fly on sticky fly paper.

I let go the handle of the hoe-thing and slid down into the vat feet-first. It wasn't too far and I was careful to keep on my feet when I hit bottom. The mag and acid wasn't over my boots and I managed to stand up and step over the blade of the mixer when it came at me again. I went over to Bill and grabbed him. I held him up and stepped over the mixer-blade again. The men on the side hung a ladder down and I stepped over the blade of the mixer and they hauled Bill up, and I stepped over the blade again and they hauled me out, and I heard the screech of the

first-aid car.

No one knew who I was. I still had my mask on. I remembered that when I was in the back of the ambulance with Bill. The doctor in the first-aid place didn't know me. He worked on Bill and gave me some grease to rub on my face where it was burned by the acid from Bill. "You were a brave man to go along and get him," said the doctor, and then I knew I was a hero and had a right to brag forever, and had power with Bill and my wife forever.

I went to the change-house and the shift was gone. I put on my good clothes and went home but my wife had left for work. So I couldn't sleep that day with the acid burns and the excitement, and I telephoned the hospital about Bill.

Well, Bell Doody died in the hospital that day, and I got to thinking about it and I hadn't seen my wife yet and I got my clothes together and left before she got home from work, and I don't know what she thinks, or what she can guess, for there's no one can tell her the story.

Well, it was a poor thing, gentlemen--a poor crazy story--but I don't want to go back home if I can help it. It's been forty-four years now. I don't want to go home and see my wife. I'm afraid I'd brag about saving Bill Doody's life--and I didn't save it. Sure, I tried, but I didn't save it. I acted like a hero maybe--but Bill died. I don't want to brag about that. Not to her anyway. I don't want to do it ever. It's such a miserable ending to the story.

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