

# Lights and Shadows

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Volume 15 *Lights and Shadows* Volume 15

Article 23

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1971

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### Recommended Citation

Holman, J. R. (1971). A Slice of Bread and a Cup of Water? Oh, Good Grief!. *Lights and Shadows*, 15 (1). Retrieved from <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol15/iss1/23>

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James Ronald Holman

A Slice of Bread and a Cup of Water? Oh, Good Grief!

Reba may have been just a girl, but I was scared to death of her. I was in the third grade when we moved into her neighborhood. I quickly became friends with the two boys in the new suburb. We played together everyday, but as school days came closer, their talk of Reba became more frequent. It seemed that Reba would be back the week before school started and the neighborhood would no longer be ours.

The Sunday Reba was supposed to return the three of us hid in the woods across the street from her house. About three o'clock Reba's family station wagon drove in. Her parents were first to emerge, then Reba. She was about three feet tall and although she wore her hair in bangs, you could see (as Powell and Mike had said) the formation of two small horns on her head. She quickly reconnoitered the neighborhood and spotted us across the street. In a voice that would have made a drill sergeant tremble Reba yelled: "Get over here!"

We slowly walked over, she looked me over and dubbed me "Frog." She told us to wait until she changed clothes and then we would engage in a game of war. When Reba disappeared into the house Powell assured us that his mother knew Reba was coming home today and that she would eventually come looking for us. At the time I didn't realize the importance of this announcement.

Reba emerged from the house completely decked out in Army fatigues. She even had a canteen. She quickly gave the orders: We were the "Jerrys" and her one mission in life was to capture us. She also informed us that the kennel would be the POW camp. On her command we all dispersed while she counted to one hundred—by tens, of course.

Mike was the first one captured and incarcerated. Next Powell, then I. I had almost made it home at the time she got me. She was quite upset, saying I had broken all the rules; therefore she would have to use handcuffs on me. The three of us were locked in the dog house. Reba, however, proved herself a humanitarian: She furnished us with a slice of bread and a cup of water.

After we had spent about two hours in the Stalag, Powell's mother came looking for us. Reba was inside her house eating supper. Her father came out to unlock the kennel gate. He was very apologetic, saying he had no idea that we were inside. Reba had lost the keys to my handcuffs so her father had to cut them off with wire clippers. As we were getting into the car, Reba came to the front door. She was eating an apple. She yelled: "See you guys tomorrow", then she ate the core.

The rest of the week proceeded like the first day. The only variations were that on some days we were outlaws, not Germans, and Reba was the sheriff. On one of the most memorable days Reba played her academy award winning role of Tarzan and we were the terrified natives.

Finally the first day of school arrived. It was the first time in my life that I was delighted to go. In the afternoons I was not permitted

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to go out until I had finished my homework. I worked slowly and finished just at supper time. After supper I was not allowed to leave the house. So, from Sunday evening until Saturday morning I was relatively free from stress. Come Saturday morning, however, Reba appeared at my front door with Powell and Mike. In a matter-of-fact tone she said "Come on Frog. We've wasted half the morning already." With a defeated voice I told my mother good-bye——perhaps forever——and left. She had most of the day and subsequently she tracked us down and imprisoned us many times.

The following weeks passed too quickly and the weekends lasted too long. Christmas finally arrived. I had one day of fun within two weeks of jail and Reba.

I got a horse for Christmas. Of course Reba knew all about horses. She walked up to him. The horse, meaning no harm, snorted. It scared Reba so badly that she jumped over three new Christmas bicycles and ran for almost half a block. Naturally, Mike, Powell and I were delighted. It was our first victory over her. The victory was short lived though. That afternoon Reba informed us in typical non sequitur that her grandfather had bought her the most beautiful Pinto stallion, and that her mother was at one time the reigning Miss America. I doubted the first statement and discounted completely the latter for her mother still had lumps on her head where Reba's father had used a club to get her from a cave.

Just before school reopened we were all wondering where Reba's horse was, not that any of us believed she was really getting one. At any rate,

I was feeling a little braver than usual so I decided to confront her with the question. Mike, Powell and I went to her house together, as no one ventured those lands alone. I was dressed in my new cowboy suit, complete with hat hanging down my back from a string around my neck. Reba was in her yard acting out Ma Barker's last stand. I stepped up and asked her when she was getting her horse. We caught her off guard for she said, "What horse?" When we reminded her she said, "Oh, my grandfather left him out in the rain. He caught pneumonia and died." I couldn't help laughing. This effrontery made her so mad she started after me. I ran so hard my hat flopped against my back. I thought the hat was Reba's fingers and that she almost had me. I have never run so hard and fast. Reba had stopped chasing me long ago; and, was now after Mike and Powell. Powell had somehow made it home, but Mike made the mistake of climbing a tree.

Now there were a lot of things at which Reba was good, but tree climbing was her forte. She could climb faster and higher than anyone. Reba reached for Mike and he jumped, crashed to the ground and luckily broke his arm. He was free of Reba for six weeks.

For three years Reba was the undisputed master and leader of our neighborhood. We paid her ransom in the form of cokes, candy and occasional movies. In the sixth grade Mike moved away. Powell and I firmly believed that the move was because of Reba and not the job offer Mike's father received.

In the seventh grade both Powell and I went away to military school and for three glorious years we never saw Reba, although she was hardly absent from our thoughts.

When Powell and I came back home to start high school, we joked about seeing Reba again and said our military training might come in handy. The night before school started Reba called and asked if she could have a ride to school. Swallowing hard I said we would pick her up at eight o'clock. After I hung up Powell and I laughed, but said we could hardly wait to see her wear her fatigues to class.

We pulled into her drive the next morning and blew the horn. As Reba walked out the front door echoes of "Get over here" rang in my memory. The only thing I now recall about the ride to school is staring at Reba the entire time. This Tarzan of the trees, the neighborhood Attila the Hun had somehow changed into a gorgeous creature. It would be fun to play war with her and especially to be captured; but, alas, la belle dame sans merci has stopped calling us to arms!