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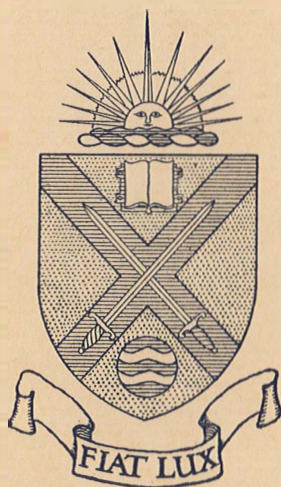
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THE FLAMINGO

MAY, 1940



ROLLINS COLLEGE

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

THE FLAMINGO

ROLLINS COLLEGE



Vol. 14

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

No. 3

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PINK AND TRIMMED IN WHITE

SALLY McCASLIN

THE onion bed was long and flat and brown, and one end was picketed with tiny stabs of yellow green. It was where the hard bright shoots left off that the woman sat groping in the sorghum bucket and burying the small crisp smelling bulbs with blunt hands. Across the bed, Mabel worked too, carrying the bulbs in the short skirt of her dress as she scraped along on her knees. She reached the center of the bed. She worked more slowly than her mother, meeting her mother's hands before they reached the center of the bed. She was more relaxed, digging the holes deeper, patting the warm clean dirt firmly, leaving the prints of her hands on the round hard base of the shoot. The hard tense features were relaxed. When her lap was empty, she said in a low eager voice:

"Will you finish it, Mamma? Can I wear it tomorrow, Mamma? What kind of sleeves is it going to have?"

The woman did not look up as she answered, "I don't know Mabel. I don't know how much goods I got. If Elbert gets to coughin'—"

"I'll tend to 'im. Really, I will. Reckon you can finish it? And Mamma, please, just this one time. Oh please, Mamma, let me have short sleeves. You know like I told you about — those little round sleeves with some of that white stuff on 'em." The grey eyes glistened with feeling.

Still the woman did not straighten the crumpled angle of her back. "You know it's too cold to be a-wearin' short sleeves. You're a gittin' your death of cold right now, scootin' along on that damp ground. Now quit a botherin' me."

"But I done took off my unions, Mamma. And we're a plantin' the garden. It's Spring, ain't it? The butter cups is up. And anyway them town kids wear 'em all the time. They wore 'em all winter. Oh, please, Mamma, please."

"Shut up," the woman answered fiercely. "You ain't goin' to have short sleeves if I got goods enough to make 'em long. Now hush. Them town prissies can wear 'em if they want to. They don't hafta walk to school." Then lowering her voice, "And they ain't got what you got. You know your arms ain't cured. Now hush!"

Mabel felt the great deluge of tears come and form the tight band around her throat. She whined hurriedly, "They

are cured too, Mamma. Please Mamma. That poke root cured 'em. Look, Mamma. I wisht I could have some short sleeves. Look, Mamma, please."

The woman hardly looked up as she sent the long arm out from her body with unexpected swiftness. The hard palm caught the thin sharp cheek, and the child's head jerked back with a snap that popped the bony neck. A gasp of surprise preceded the great shuddering sobs that lifted and settled the small body in the dirt of the onion bed.

There was pain in the woman's eyes as she looked down at her handiwork, but her voice held the same emptiness. "You told me yourself them health doctors was goin' to be at school all week. You don't wanta hafta miss do you? I don't care if it is cured, if they see one bump on my youngans, they send 'em home. Anybody else's youngans can have it, and they call it something else and they go right on, but not my youngans. You don't want 'em sendin' you home with the itch, do you?"

As she talked, she buried the onions automatically, paying no attention to her work, speaking her bitter words o herself. When she came to the inert form of Mabel stretched across the onion bed, she said, "Move, Mabel" in her heavy tones. Mabel rolled silently over into the middle between the onion bed and the radish row and continued her sobbing, her nose turned a little out of the dirt for breath.

Stiffly the woman rose and poured the dirt out of her hard shapeless shoes. She did not look at her daughter as she said:

"Now hush that bawling and git up from there and finish this bed out. I've got to go see to Elbert and hunt up them other seed." She moved toward the gate, a hardened, battered figure, forced on by necessity.

When the back door had slammed, the child lay quietly, forgetting to cry, her mind moving with the softness of the sunshine against her back. It was a pretty dress, all pink with the little white stuff sewed around the hem. Soft pink and white, like the picture on the package of radish seed. Like the young radishes when you rubbed the dirt away with your thumb. Mamma had ordered it from Sears and Roebuck. She was going to get some new shoes too, later on, if Elbert didn't have to get any more cough medicine. There were rows and rows of shoes in the catalogue, brown ones and white ones and shiny black ones with red tops. It was a pink dress trimmed in white. It was for Spring. Like she heard Claire and Josephine talking

about their new Spring dresses. Her new spring dress. It was spring. She wriggled deeper into the dirt, forming a shallow trough. It was spring, garden planting time. The butter cups had come up with their cool hard points. There had been great droves of black-birds flying North, lighting in the oak trees, walking on the ground, chattering in shrill voices, blue lights glinting from their black wings and sleek heads. There was a patch of green moss on the gate post. It was Spring. It was pink and white and shiny and smelled new. Again, her sorrow returned. If only it was short sleeves. Claire had said, "Is yours having short sleeves, Jo?" And Josephine had answered, "Of course, idiot."

Maybe the goods would give out. Mabel turned over on her back so she could look up into the heaven as she prayed. "God," she prayed, clenching her fist, "Please, please, God, make the goods give out. And God we thank thee for this beautiful day and all our opportunities," as Mr. Foster said in Chapel, "and please, God, make the goods give out so Mamma'll make 'em short. And God, don't make Elbert have to have some more cough medicine." She clenched her fists and tried to see her prayer rise higher and higher, above the oak trees, above the high white clouds, higher and higher, right up where God would hear it. Then her face relaxed and she sat up, suddenly alert, wide eyed. Quickly she pushed the dirty sleeves above her elbows, tearing her cuffs in her haste. She viewed curiously and carefully the two arms lying so stiffly in front of her.

They were a strange color. The burnt red of summer had in its period of hibernation faded into an odd yellowish grey. The wrists were long and below the line where the cuffs came, the hands were white and chapped. The elbows were much too big. The skin hung dark and wrinkled when she straightened her arms. Everywhere, everywhere, the surface was dotted with tiny red scars rimmed in blue. Gingerly she touched one with a dirt stained finger. It was not sore, but with the rough contact, a delicate tingling ran over her arm. She lowered her sleeves quickly and scratched gently through the cloth. "God, she prayed again, "If there ain't enough goods, don't let Miss Margaret think I got the itch. I'd rather Elbert had to have some more cough medicine, God." And then thinking she might be asking too much, she said rapidly as she scratched, "And, God, thank you for all our blessings and opportunities."

The back door slammed again. The woman came out, hung

two wet diapers on the clothes line and came through the gate into the garden, a sack of seed in her hand. Mabel turned to her work, digging the holes swiftly, not looking at her mother.

It was early, not quite light, when Mabel took the pink dress from the back of the chair and slipped it over her short grey slip. The mirror had spots in it which didn't reflect, but she grinned happily as she straightened the skirt and fluffed the short gathered sleeves. "God," she remembered suddenly, "Thanks for making the goods give out." She was always forgetting to thank God after he gave her what she prayed for. Last night, Mamma had straightened the long sleeve pattern with careful hands and laid it on the pink. It had been too long. She couldn't even piece it. Mabel felt again the same thrill of delight she had experienced when the hands had laid the pattern back into the pasteboard box and groped for the smaller one. She had whispered to the rats romping behind the chimney, "Short sleeves." She dipped her hands into the pan of milky water sitting in the chair, and smoothed her short brown hair. The woman came in and caught her arms in strong hard hands. She found a dirty packed powder puff, dipped it into the box of coarse powder, and coated the child's arms until they were a ghastly white and smelled strongly of the heavy soap-like perfume. Mabel gave one final twist in front of the mirror, then picked up the worn arithmetic book. The woman spoke from the side of the cradle, "Did ja git your luch?" Mabel turned back with a happy apologetic smile, took the small stained parcel, and skipped out the door, the sole of one shoe flapping as she skipped.

She hadn't worn a coat. She didn't want to wear the old coat over her new dress. The lining was out at the bottom. Mabel was happy, happy in the way she was happy when she was alone in the fields, driving in the cows, breathing in the spring, seeing the soft pink of the peach blossoms jutting out from the hard limbs, seeing the ground white with the delicate fuzz that floated from the wild plum bushes. Pink and white. Smelling the wild onions coming up where the water stood in winter, smelling the night, the spring, the damp ground.

She skipped up the narrow dirt lane and turned out on the highway. Goosebumps stood out on her arms and legs. It was cold. Her wet hair was stiff against her ears. It was earlier than usual. She was happy. She felt free. This morning she didn't feel the usual fear, the shyness, the embarrassment, at

the prospect of being hemmed in by four walls, of being seen by people. She had on a new dress like Claire and Josephine had; and maybe the girls would come and tell her to stand up and show the skirt like they told Josephine, and maybe Miss Margaret would tell her she had on a pretty dress, like she told Josephine, and ask her if her mother made it. It was fun going to school in a new dress. She stopped skipping. She wanted to make it last a long time.

When she came to the big Coca Cola sign with the girl and the boy sitting in the drug store, she stopped and carefully unrolled a dirty worn handkerchief to disclose a tarnished tube of lipstick. It was the tube she had found in the junk pile where she had gone looking for things to put in her play house. Mabel had never worn lipstick, but Sue and Claire and Josephine had put some on in the basement one time, and today she had on a new dress.

She reached the school, standing stiff and proud with its concrete pillars. Up the steps she walked, down the long newly oiled hall, then darted into the door with the plate which read "girls." On tip toe she painted a red uneven mouth on her colorless face. She gave a quick look at her arms. Rough with chill bumps, the blue rings seemed bluer, the red scars rougher. Again, the old fear caught at her breath but she dismissed it and fingered lovingly the short pink sleeves.

The knob on the dark heavy door turned noiselessly. Miss Margaret looked up from the careful dusting of her desk. She said, "Good Morning, Mabel," as her eyes flitted over the shy hesitant figure.

"Good Morning."

Two girls were playing "tit, tat, to, round I go" on the blackboard. They turned around and stared curiously as Mabel slid unobtrusively into her seat. She opened the arithmetic book and stared at it with unseeing eyes. With a sweet blush of embarrassment, she felt their eyes slip over the new dress, the soft pink with the white braid. Slowly the room filled, the chatter increased. Someone brought Miss Margaret an armful of buttercups, someone else went to fill the vase with water. They came in groups of twos or threes to look at Mabel's new dress. Brown eyes, grey eyes, blue eyes. They were a little annoyed that Mabel had a new dress, that she had stepped out of her role as a unit of measure for their egos.

However, they stood with their arms slung loosely around one another and said in sticky condescending tones:

"It's so cute, Hon. It's so pretty. Stand up and let us see the skirt."

Mabel stood up, smiling shyly, trying to appear nonchalant. Miss Margaret spoke too in honeyed tones:

"A new dress, Mabel?"

"Yes'm."

"Did your mother make it?"

"Yes'm."

"It's very pretty."

"Thank you."

Oh it was fun having a new dress. With a warm rush of feeling, Mabel suddenly loved them all, loved the school room with its yellow walls, yellow shades, and the geranium in the window. Loved the picture of George Washington with his pink skin, loved the long new sticks of chalk at the blackboard, loved the girls, telling her her new dress was beautiful.

It was fun going to school in a new dress. For the first time, she felt the thrill, the excitement of being the center of attention. She squirmed in her seat, stared at the dull page of figures until her eyes hurt. Unconsciously her fingers were feeling their way over the blue ringed arms, scratching, rubbing, soothing the tingles, retracing their steps to the elbow, then to the wrist, first with one hand, then the other, tingling, itching, incessantly. The grey eyes of Miss Margaret under the perfectly arched brows swept the entire room as she announced a five minute study period before they had spelling.

Mabel reached eagerly in the desk, brushed the lunch smelling of greasy fried potatoes and brought out the flat speller. She had already studied her spelling. It was so much fun coming to school. She opened her book to make sure she knew the sixteen words. She mustn't miss any today. Separate, separate, separate, separate, she said the word in her mind. That was a hard word. She glanced across the room. Connie was stealthily writing her words on her desk so she could copy them when Miss Margaret gave them out. It used to make her mad to hear Connie say she made a hundred when she knew she copied. Today she glanced quickly away. Connie saw her, looked up, winked, and grinned. Mabel blushed and ducked her head and grinned to herself. Today she was in on things. Connie was a sight. Oh they were so sweet. It was

fun coming to school. This time she remembered as she started to scratch her arms and she stuck them inside her desk and scratched thoroughly and slyly before she brought them out. That powder Mamma put on them made them worse or something. She must remember, she must remember.

After spelling came arithmetic. It was with a nervous start that Mabel heard Miss Margaret's voice, cool and commanding. "The seventh, please, Mabel." She had to put the seventh problem on the board. She rose quickly, bumping her knees on the desk, smoothed down the wrinkles in the back of her dress, and walked stiffly up the aisle, her thumb marking the place in the brown arithmetic book. It was when she passed by Miss Margaret, swinging the pink skirt to avoid the desk, that Miss Margaret spoke in a surprised and rather horrified voice:

"Why Mabel, what happened to your arms?"

It was with a shock that her senses relayed the question. Through a cloud of horror, Mabel looked down at her arms which seemed far away, and hung her head, shriven by the wave of curious hostility that surrounded her.

"It's . . . it's Eczema. I, I had it a long time ago. It's cured now," she said in a voice harsh with tears.

"Really, how terrible!" The voice was solicitous and unbelieving, the eyes rapid in their scrutiny. There was a short moment of silence before she spoke again. Mabel did not hope. She was beaten. She knew it. She had always known it. She had known it in the back of her mind when she came. Mamma had known it. "Just let one of my youngans have a bump on 'em and they send 'em home." She had known it. That was why the joy had been more precious. She had known it couldn't last. That was why the blow was more crushing. She had known it would come.

Miss Margaret spoke again, like a teacher in a play, kindly: "Well Mabel, suppose we go down right now and see the doctor while he's here and see what he can do about your . . . your eczema." She assigned some problems for the others to be working.

Then she was walking, walking down the long hall, the floor rising to meet her, the walls far away and shimmering, pictures of alumni students swaying drunkenly, the heels of Miss Margaret clicking beneath her ear. Walking, walking, walking a long way. Then the smell of the small room. Shining metal,

glass tubes, white sheets, white towels, white cloths, lukewarm hands, shining glasses, grey eyes, warm breath, cheery tones. "Well it looks like a case alright — pretty well cured though — Give her a prescription — hate for her to miss school — she's a good student, can catch up alright — well, send her home — come back in three days, follow directions."

Back again down the long hall, running the gauntlet of their eyes as they turned from the board to stare curiously or lifted their eyes from their papers. Hurry, hurry to get the books, the lunch, the pencil. Hurry, hurry out the door, away from their eyes burning her back, away from the walls, away from Miss Margaret telling her what to do to keep her work up. Away from the shame that bent her back, away from their faces, their stares, their whispered conversation. She did not speak, she did not cry. Only her eyes expressed the bewildered agony. Her mouth twisted a little. Out the heavy front doors, letting them swing back on noiseless oiled hinges. Down the long slope of the lawn, and out on the white highway stretching away between the fields. Passing the hedge, she clutched a leaf. It was a green leaf, tender and green. She crushed it in her hand, getting strength from its smell of spring, from its greenness. It wouldn't hurt her. It was growing. It was green. It wouldn't hurt her. As long as things were green it was alright. When the fields were green, the cows had something to eat. When the corn was green, the rains had come. When the buttercups were green, she could take the sack out of the broken window at night and thrust her feet down to the end of the bed, and breathe in the spring. There was protection in green things. She rubbed it in bits with her fingers, still hurrying, still twisting her mouth, still dry-eyed, her back bent a little, all feeling paralyzed but the shame which flowed over her in waves, and the memory of their eyes. That was still there. She could still feel them on her back. Hurry, hurry away from their eyes, away from the walls, from the lukewarm hands of the doctor, the clear voice of Miss Margaret, those black brows.

That wagon had stopped. That man . . . it was Mr. Cole. He had seen her. He was talking to her, chewing and spitting and talking to her. "Whatcha doin' way out here, Mabel? Air you a-playin' hookey?"

A lie, a lie, a lie. The first lie, she had to go home and tend to Elbert. Mamma was sick. He had seen Mamma when he passed the house. She was out in the front yard. Oh she wasn't

much sick. Just sort of puny. She had to tend to Elbert. God, make him go on. Make him stop chewing and talking. Make the grey mule prick up his ears and go on. He was gone, God. He was gone, the wheels grating on the concrete. He was gone. She had to hide. They would see her. They might see her again. She had to hide. Go home across the fields. She had to hide. They'd see her. They'd look at her arms. They'd ask her why she wasn't in school? They'd know she had it. Go home across the fields, down the steep bank, tripping in the cold tough honeysuckle vines. Tripping, falling into the cool tough vines beside the fence. She must hide. In the broom sage. Somewhere, she must hide. Rolling desperately, under the fence, a barbed wire fence. Long shiny barbs. It was too low. The fence was too low. The new cloth sang as it ripped. God, I tore it. I tore my new dress, God. I tore my back too, God. The pain, the sweet pain, that unlocked the tight mouth, the band of tears. The sweet, sweet pain that let out the low moans from her teeth that loosened the tears. God, I tore it. My new dress. I tore it bad. My back's bleedin' on it. Get up and go home, across the fields, walking carefully, setting the feet down gently not to jar the back. It was bleedin' on the new dress, turning the pink red. It was tore bad, clear to the hem, the skirt flopping. The white stuff dangling, tickling the back of her leg.

SEASON'S BREAK

February's stars are wheeling low,
Crisp the moon within the evening's glass.
The latent filigree of sleeping spring
Is etched in future sweetness on the grass.

My love, my love! Ah, do not come this way.
Do not follow where the dusk-tide starts,
For I would hear the quickened season's break
Unburdened by the swift beat of our hearts!

PEGGY HUDGINGS

PEACE IS THE SHADOW

Peace is the shadow
Of the strong
Keen-taloned bird
That floats along

And broods above.
Peace is the shade
That his sun-circling
Wings have made

Upon the earth
(As, likewise, faith
Is the shadow of
Approaching death

And joy of fear.
Even love
Traces the hate
That flies above.)

Where no bird is
There is no peace.

ELIZABETH MILLER

IF THERE'S A WAY, THERE'S A WILL

JESS GREGG

THE living room in the home of Mrs. Morrow. It is tastelessly decorated with tasteful antiques, but there is rather a warm charm to the room which reflects the personality of the owner. Exorbitance of rococco — too much of muchness — still charm. A stairway center leads to a landing where there are two doors. Mrs. Morrow's room and a guest room. As the curtain rises, Mrs. Galbraith, the cook, is squatting beside the keyhole and all is silent. At length, Laura, the maid, standing beside her, whispers.

Laura: What they saying?

Mrs. G.: Shhhhhh. (Silence as she listens on.)

Laura: Lemme listen. You had your turn.

Mrs. G.: Shhh. (Then, in disgust) Oh, yuh can't hear now anyway. The doctor says the old lady ain't even scratched.

Laura: I thought she was real hurt.

Mrs. G.: The doc says that, besides them cuts on her face, she's as good as new.

Laura: And me phoning all her relations that she was on her death bed!

Mrs. G.: Now, did you really? (noise inside the door) Shhhh, here they come. (They hurry downstairs and are industriously dusting and humming as the doctor comes downstairs. He is dark, young and fine looking with his rimless glasses.)

How is she, doctor? How is the dear sick-a-bed lady?

Doctor: As if you didn't know!

Mrs. G.: What are you inferring, I should very much like to know?

Doctor: You have no cobwebs in your ears, have you?

Mrs. G.: Well — come, Laura. We have other things to do than listen to insults. (Heads high, they march out grandly. The doctor puts on his hat and is about to leave when Carol enters. She isn't beautiful, but she has made the most of a good set of features.)

Carol: Trying to sneak out on me? (runs into his arms)

Doctor: A fat chance I'd have! (Being quite a receptive lad, he kisses her fondly)

Carol: What in heaven's name have you done to Mrs. Galbraith? She just swept by me, the personification of out-

raged American womanhood. Darling — you didn't make a pass at her, did you? What are your intentions, sir, in respect to our cook?

Doctor: I'm intrigued by her beautiful soul.

Carol: (Kissing him playfully on both lenses of his glasses) How is auntie?

Doctor: She's fit as a fiddle. except for some facial cuts. (There is a long silence, then the doctor lets her go and turns away.)

Carol: What's the matter, Bill?

Doctor: Oh, I'm sick of it all, Carol. I'm tired of telling myself that the time hasn't come for us to get married. Because I know damn well the time is now.

Carol: How long? How long must we wait?

Doctor: I told you we mustn't even think of it until I can support you in the style I'm accustomed to — and with the institute barely able to keep its head up, I wouldn't be able to keep you in a pumpkin shell.

Carol: Darling, I don't care.

Doctor: You'd begin to soon enough, though. Love couldn't keep fresh and beautiful when the pocketbook was suffering from malnutrition. (Voice from Mrs. Morrow's room — "Carol, Caroooooooo! I want you!")

Carol: Bill, I've got to go. Come over later tonight. Bye, dear. (They kiss again and at that moment, Mrs. Morrow opens her door and stares down at them. She is a big woman, her figure resembling an inverted pear. A fabulous dressing-gown of ruffles doesn't help much. Her face is covered with bandages and though her voice is strident, it is good-natured.)

Mrs. M.: So! This is what I pay you for, doctor? (She marches downstairs. Silence as she faces them.) Well?

Carol: I—I didn't mean for you to know just yet, auntie. I —

Mrs. M.: As if I didn't know already. I didn't think all the doctor's visits were for the benefit of my health. Huh, doctor?

Doctor: Mrs. Morrow, I must insist that you return to bed.

Mrs. M.: Doctor, I will have to ask you to mind your own business. Your job is to give me advice, not to enforce it. (A voice is heard outside. Mrs. Morrow looks out the window.)

Oh, Lord, it's my niece Althea and that husband-thing of hers!

Doctor: If that's her husband, why the widow's weeds?

Mrs. M.: I suspect that's for me. Laura telegraphed all my relatives that I was dying and I guess the vultures have begin to descend. Well, I'm going to be here to watch it. (Doorbell rings. Mrs. Galbraith goes to answer it.)

Mrs. G.: Why Mrs. Morrow, I thought you was—

Mrs. M.: Mrs. Galbraith, go up to my room and if any of those vultures try to see me, tell them I'm dead.

Mrs. G.: Tell them you're—

Mrs. M.: Do as I say. Prop up the pillows in my bed and cover them with a sheet. Hurry! (Bewildered, Mrs Galbraith goes.)

Now, Carol, go answer the door. I'm going to hide in this chest.

Doctor: Mrs. Morrow, this is no time for one of your tricks. I can't allow this!

Mrs. M.: Now, you listen here, Dr. Bill Waring. You took away my pleasant illusion of dying, but you're not going to deprive me of hearing my own obituary.

Carol: Darling, she'll be quiet in there compared to what she'll be if she faces those relatives. She gets so wrought up when she sees them. Let her stay.

(Mrs. Morrow lowers herself into the huge chest and props open the cover so that she can breathe and hear. Carol opens the door and Althea Lane enters. She was born with long eyelashes and never got over it. The result is a faintly reminiscent potpourri of Garbo, Cornell and Miss Bankhead. Behind her is George Lane, her husband, a suggestion of living indecision. He carries all the luggage, while Althea, swathed in black crepe and a long rosary about her neck, poses at the door. She is the epitome of tragedy.)

Althea: (in sepulchral tones) Darlings — how is she?

Carol: Resting quietly.

Althea: (wistfully) She's not dead yet?

Doctor: (dryly) Sorry I can't oblige you!

Althea: Doctor, this is no time to jest. (Leans against the doorway) My poor, poor aunt! Why, if you only knew how we suffered. But *suffered!* George, carry those bags

up to the room. I'm too fatigued. (George goes upstairs.)

Carol: Let me show you the room, George. (She follows him.)

Althea: Doctor — Doctor, tell me — how is she really? How long has she — what I mean to say is — is *everything* taken care of —

Doctor: What do you mean?

Althea: You wouldn't know whether she has made — er — her will yet, would you? Not that I care particularly, but my husband heard that I was made heir and wants to be sure all is in order — (she smiles with magnificent artifice.)

Doctor: I'm sure I wouldn't know.

Althea: Doctor — I don't want you to think I care. I'm an actress and to us — spirit is all and money but an evil, sordid necessity. I didn't — (the bell rings). Oh — answer it, will you?

Doctor: (bowing low) At your service.

(Enter Lavinia and Olive Forsythe, two sweet-faced old ladies whose eyes show such sympathetic intent as to be utterly terrifying.)

Lavinia: Are we too late? Has she gone yet? Why, Althea — you here, too? Althea is here, Olive.

Olive: Heh?

Lavinia: I say Althea is here.

Olive: Yes, so I see. (They both smile grimly.)

(A telephone bell rings. Mrs. Galbraith enters.)

Mrs. G.: For you, doctor. (The doctor goes to the next room.)

Olive: (to Lavinia) What's she here for? Althea, I mean.

Lavinia: If it's what I think — she's going to try to squeeze into the will.

Olive: She'd better have another thought, if she tries to do us out of that which is rightfully ours.

(Doctor enters.)

Doctor: You must excuse me — I've had an urgent call and I must leave immediately. (The top of the chest rises perceptibly.) If I'm needed, I'll be at this phone number. (Hands a slip to Althea) Goodbye. (He exits.)

Lavinia: Don't like that doctor. Never trusted a doctor without a beard.

Althea: (at window) Guess who the doctor just bumped into? Millicent Donner.

Olive: Who? Millie? What's she coming here for?

Althea: And that hat! My dear, she could make a Schiaparelli look like a mistake from Klein's bargain basement. (The bell rings. Millie Donner enters. She is plump and dowdy without being fat and sloppy. She has the ability to wear a hat at any degree but the right one and her dress looks as if it were thrown on her with a pitchfork.)

Althea: Millicent, ducky! How frightfully gay to see you again!

Millie: Althea—my, how you have changed! Why, I haven't seen you in two — no five, eight months. And aunties — what are you doing here? Well, this is a surprise! Almost a family reunion.

Olive: How-do-, Millie.

Millie: How is my dear auntie? I went to bed with a case of nerves when I heard of her fatal accident. I must run up and see her.

(honking of a horn outside.)

Oh dear, that's Jeff. He went to get our luggage.

Carol: (descending the stairs) Luggage?

Millie: Hello, dear. Yes, our luggage. We decided to stay here until dear auntie — (she flutters her hand wistfully, sadly) 'till dear auntie passes. (She goes out to the car)

Althea: Millie shouldn't wear sweater suits, just as a matter of form. (her gesture indicates Millie's form.)

Lavinia: Millie *has* gained weight, hasn't she?

Althea: My dear, gained weight? Why, the only way I recognized her was by that dress.

Olive: Yes, that same old dress.

Althea: One might as well be out of the world as out of fashion.

Lavinia: Isn't that from a movie?

Althea: (cough) Well — it may have been.

(Millie, loaded with bags, enters again, followed by Jeff Donner, gruff, red-faced and oh, *so* friendly.)

Jeff: Hello, folks! How's things, Althea? Keeping your chin up? Hey there, Carol. How's the old lady?

Millie: Hush, dear. Take those up to the guest room.

Carol: I'm afraid that's full.

Millie: Full of what?

Carol: Althea.

Millie: Oh, well, we'll have to move into one of the maids' rooms.

Lavinia: Why, my dear, Olive and I had planned to move into that.

Carol: Here, I'll see what I can fix up for you. (Exits)

Jeff: Well, honey, your aunt musta had some place here for us, since she's giving all her money to you — (Noting the immediate agitation, Jeff senses he has said too much.)

Lavinia: Olive, let us prepare our room. Hurry, dear, there is so much to do. Do excuse us. (Olive hurriedly follows her out)

Althea: Chickies, you must pardon me, too. I'm afraid Georgie is having trouble with the luggage. (She runs upstairs)

Millie: Something's going on here, Jeff. Did you notice the way they acted when you said that? I bet they think they're going to get the money. I'd like to get a look at that will. (Goes to the desk and starts rummaging in the drawers.)

Jeff: Shall I set the bags here? (Indicates chest)

Millie: (preoccupied) Ummmmmm.

Jeff: Where do you suppose she got that? In a graveyard?

Millie: (reading a scrap of paper) What, dear?

Jeff: I said, where do you 'spose your aunt got such a great big chest?

Millie: (still rather vague) Oh, darling, I guess it's heredity. Her mother was like that, too.

Jeff: Nooooo, no, Millie! I mean this trunk here. You're not listening. Shall I set our bags here?

Millie: No, put them on the floor. You may have to sleep on the chest. (Noting his disfavor) Well, there's no room for us, is there? We'll have to take what we can get. Ohhhh! It just makes me boil when I think of the way they sneaked in here before us, trying to play up to auntie so they'd get included in her will! (Althea opens her door quietly. Millie opens bottom drawer of desk.)

Millie: Those grasping old sisters! Old harridans. And that Althea, with those terrible clothes and her talk of the big people she knows. I wonder if they know *her*. An "Aktress", she calls herself — (looks up and sees Althea on the stairs.)

Althea: All settled, dovies? (Jeff, horrified, darts out the side door)

Millie: (hysterically sweet) Quite, darling, quite. Just looking in the desk here for a cookie recipe. Jeff — (but he's gone) Oh, was that Jeff that just called? I think he called me.

Althea: I didn't hear anyone.

Millie: Oh, yes, I'm sure — pardon me, darling — (She runs out)

(George comes downstairs.)

Althea: Hurry, George. (Starts in on desk where Millie left off. Finds a black tin box which she picks open with a hairpin.) We've got to work quick. Millie will be back here with the aunts to see that we don't loot the desk here. Evidently she isn't so sure that she's the heir, either, any more. Help me here. (Scans a piece of paper) George! The old bitch has crossed us! It's all going to Carol. To Carol! (Stuffs will into her purse) I've got to get up and talk to the old fool and see that she changes it. Look through the rest of the desk, and call me if you find one of a later date. (She hurries upstairs into Mrs. Morrow's room. George scatters the papers right and left. A few minutes later, Althea hurries down again. There is silence, then she whispers breathlessly.)

Althea: George—George, she's croaked! The maid said she died a few minutes ago — she had her nerve, dying before—

George: Maybe there's a more recent will up in her room. (Noise of approaching people)

Althea: You go look. I'll stay here and hold off the mob. (Just as George closes the door, the aunts and the Donners enter. Althea is immediately gargling with the milk of human kindness.)

Althea: Bunnies—I just remembered the dearest game. Everyone in New York is utterly mad about it. But *everyone*! We played it over at Kit's — Kit Cornell's — one evening. You'll howl. You'll simply scream.

Lavinia: Later, Althea. We must see Cousin Genevieve now.

Althea: Oh, but chickies — er — she's resting now and this is such a dear game. It's called my Eccentric Granny. Now, you ask me questions and I'll answer them. Then you tell me why my Granny's eccentric. See? (Obvious—

ly no one does.) Well, I'll give you an example: Now, let's see — oh yes. (Nervously, she glances up at the sick-room) She loves books, but she hates to read. Simple?

Millie: Simple is right.

Althea: Now, ask me a question, Millie. (No answer) Well, I'll give another example. She loves to sleep, but she hates to go to bed. (Glances nervously up at the door again) She loves to make merry, but she hates to have fun. See? Now, ask me a question, Jeff, dear.

Jeff: Well — does she wear — garters?

Althea: Nooooo no, Jeff. You ask me if she likes this or that. F'rinstance, does she like — to smoke?

Jeff: Oh — well, does she like to smoke?

Althea: No, she hates to smoke, but she loves cigarettes.

Olive: What is this nonsense? Hates to smoke — likes cigarettes?

Millie: I think she's just trying to keep us out of Aunt Genevieve's room. Eccentric Granny! Why, I bet there isn't any such game.

Althea: There most certainly is! Just because you don't understand it — she's eccentric, because she likes everything with double letters: C-i-g-a-r-e-TT-e-s, s-l-E-E-p, b-O-O-k-s. You see? She loves coffins, but she hates to — (George's head pokes out of the room, sees the people and guiltily jerks back in.)

Millie: (suspiciously) There's someting very funny going on here. I'm going up to see my aunt and I just dare you, Althea Lane, to try and stop me! (Pushes Althea aside and strides up to the room)

Althea: (calling) Here she comes, ready or not!
(Millie goes into the room, slamming the door. There is some rather loud talk. Then George comes out hurriedly. Silence. A few seconds later, Millie rushes out, pale-faced and trembling.)

Millie: She's dead — and you knew it! And you're to blame. Oh, you hateful people!

Lavinia: When — ?

Olive: Was there a will?

Millie: The maid said she died a few minutes ago. I don't know if she left a will, but she once hinted that I was her heir.

Olive: Why, she told us — well, sort of told — that we were her heirs!

Althea: Yes, she told that to a lot of people. But she ended up leaving it to Carol.

Millie: I don't believe it. She wouldn't dare.

Lavinia: Carol is a very distant niece.

Olive: This is just another of your tricks, Althea Lane.

Millie: Yes, just another trick.

Althea: Okay, my pets. Pull your eyes over this. (She tosses the will to the group. They read it. There is a gentle silence. A very gentle silence.)

Millie: Why, the dirty old hag! — (bursting with rage) The double-crossing old — how did she dare?

Lavinia: I always knew Genevieve was a spiteful, bitter old wretch —

Olive: I'm her blood cousin. I'll take this to the Supreme Court — Carol, indeed!

Jeff: The trouble is, that will is valid. It's good.

Althea: Are you sure, Jeff? Can't it be broken?

Jeff: (Looking it over again) I sincerely doubt it.

Millie: Is there anything that we can do to counteract this will?

Jeff: Only the appearance of a new will.

Althea: Then, a new will must be found.

George: That's impossible. I've looked. The place upstairs is barren.

Millie: And I — rather WE — searched the downstairs.

Althea: Then a new will must *be* found.

Olive: What are you planning to do, Althea Lane?

Althea: Look. Genevieve had her face plastered with bandages, didn't she?

George: Yes, but —

Althea: Shut up. Well, if some lawyer came over and a woman bandaged and doddering, made her last will and testament in his presence —

Lavinia: That's sacrilegious.

Millie: Utterly horrid.

Althea: All right. Let Carol have the money. I was just thinking that if we all swore it was Genevieve, then the lawyer wouldn't know the difference. Then, this phony Genevieve could split the estate four equal ways.

Jeff: But how about the signature?

Millie: Yes, how about that?

Althea: Well — well, she could pretend to die just as the pen was dipped into the ink. And we, being the nearest relations, would accept it as the legal and final will. Could we do that Jeff?

Jeff: It might work, but why not just destroy the old will. Then the estate would be divided among you, anyway.

Millie: You fool, there might be a copy. Besides, there are sixty or seventy relatives. By the time it was divided up, we should have nothing.

Althea: George, call a lawyer. There's one on this block and I don't think he ever met her. (George goes.) Now, Millie, get me some tape and bandage and I'll begin to get ready.

Millie: You? Why you? Why couldn't I play the part?

Althea: Darling, I've had the dramatic training. Besides, you aren't the shape of Aunt Genevieve.

Millie: Neither are you.

Althea: I know, but they can build me up into the right shape here (indicates her chest) but they can't slim you down into the right shape there (indicates Millie's waist). (Olive enters with the bandages. They begin to pad Althea with a pillow, then plaster her face with gauze and tape.)

Lavinia: I just went in to see Carol. She's fixing up the maid's room for us. She's well out of the way.

Millie: Better put a quarantine sign on the door to keep away the other relatives. I happen to know that Kate Robinson and her brood are coming here.

Althea: And the doctor — we must keep him out. (purring) Jeff, Jeffy boy, take this number and phone the doctor. Tell him that the institute wants him. By the time he gets there, someone will probably want him anyway.

Jeff: Okay, Allie. (Exits)

Millie: (to Olive) I wish she wouldn't speak to my husband that way. It's like someone using my toothbrush.

Althea: Someone change the clock. Put it back an hour, so everything will be right.

Lavinia: What's the difference? That clock is all wrong, anyway. He won't be able to read it, because when it strikes five and points to eight, you know it is approximately eleven o'clock.

George: (Coming downstairs) I just locked Auntie's door so Mrs. Galbraith can't get out and queer the act.

Althea: Good fellow. Now, we need two witnesses. Get Laura and — Jeff can be the other one.

Olive: Here's one of Genevieve's horrid bathrobes for you to wear.

Millie: What ghastly taste that woman had!

(By this time, Althea is fairly mummified by bandages. The excess bandage Millie has tied into a rather voluptuous bow on top. Just then the bell rings. There is a general hubbub. Althea is hustled into a negligee, characteristically like Mrs. Morrow's. They sit Althea down in an easy chair.)

Althea: No—No! It would be more dramatic if I had an entrance. (Unceremoniously, she lifts up her skirts and scrambles upstairs two at a time. At the top of the steps she pauses. Dramatically:)

Remember, our futures are at stake. Let's give our all. The show must go on. So, on with the show.

(The people downstairs manage to quiet themselves and act rather calm. In fact, several of them are humming hymns. Olive opens the door. J. Edgar Curfew enters. He is dowdy, but proudly so. He is in the last rounds of middle age.)

J. Edgar: Good afternoon, ma'am. You phoned for a lawyer.

Olive: No, I didn't. Er — that is — George — Mr. Lane did.

Lavinia: Do sit down. My dear cousin Genevieve will be down soon.

Millie: She wants to make her will.

(J. Edgar seats himself and opens a brief case)

J. Edgar: Have you the necessary witnesses?

Millie: Oh — I'll go call Laura. Just one moment.

(She goes to the door and reappears almost immediately. At that moment, the guest room door opens, at the top of the stairs, and Althea, weak and swaying, supported by Jeff and George, enters. At the top of the steps she pauses to blow them all a kiss, for which effort she nearly falls downstairs, so weak is she. The people downstairs are silently grief-stricken. The aunties dab their eyes. Millie is being very brave, but a sob escapes her lips.)

Millie: (tragically) Grev'yously hurt in an automobile. Grev'yously.

Olive: Do let me aid you, dearest cousin.

Lavinia: Let her take my easy chair. Do be careful with her, Jeff.

Millie: Isn't she being brave? Every step must near kill her. (Laura enters and is put in a conveniently distant chair.) (Althea is assisted into the easy chair. There is an awful moment when her padding begins to slip, but she boosts it up without Curfew seeing.)

Althea: (her voice an atrocious imitation of Mrs. Morrow's) My children, my beloved, blessed children.

Laura: Whassa matter with her voice?

Millie: Her — er vocal cords were hurt also. Grev-yously hurt.

Olive: Cousin, dear, this is J. Edgar Curfew. (They pantomime talking as George goes over, planning to sit down on the chest. The lid is propped up with a book. As he starts to take it away and lifts up the lid, he sees Mrs. Morrow. George's frame becomes jello for a minute and it is rather evident that he experiences something akin to surprise. In fact, he collapses into a chair beside the chest, barely alive.)

Mrs. M.: (hissing) If you so much as signal that I'm here, I'll disown you — I'll ruin you. Now sit up and look cheerful, or they'll suspect. (George obeys like a zombi, but it is obvious his heart is not in it.)

J. Edgar: Last will and testament of Genevieve Belle Morrow. I, Genevieve Belle Morrow, by grace of God of sound and disposing mind and memory, etc. etc. etc. Very well, proceed. (George attempts to signal Althea, but she does not pay any attention.)

Althea: I hereby expressly revoke any and all wills heretofore made by me. (Suddenly, there are thumps and cries from behind the locked door upstairs. No one pays any attention. However, it continues through the scene.)

J. Edgar: (taking it down) Yes, yes, go on. (George tries to hum, to whistle and to wave, but all for naught.)

Millie: Go on, darling aunt.

Althea: To my niece, Millicent Donner, and to my cousins,

Lavinia and Olive Forsythe, I give and bequeath all of my lovely bathrobes, my old clock and my photograph albums respectively.

(They arise furiously, profanely, but J. Edgar pays no attention)

I further give and bequeath one dollar to each of my relatives.

(For a moment, all are stunned to silence.)

The rest of the estate I give and bequeath in whole to my beloved niece, Althea Lane of Broadway.

(The knocking and crying from the upstairs room has increased so that Althea is forced to shout the last. The family is raging, except for George who is now past all human emotions. J. Edgar pays no attention to anyone but the lady of the will. Exaggeratedly, Althea lifts the pen, then gives a dramatic cry—)

Althea: It's growing dark. Turn up the gas, mother mine. It's getting darker. I can't see your dear faces any longer. Where are you, dear family? I'm frightened. It's so — so dark. So very dark. I'm going. I'm going, Mother. Mother!

(She gives a piteous wail)

Ohhhhhhhhh. Lawyer, carry out my will. I leave it to you. Carry out my will. Ohhhhhh, I die.

(She reels about gracefully, preparing to fall. She backs up a bit to heighten the effect, prepares to fall on the chest when up rises the lid and there stands Mrs. Morrow. There is a gasping silence as the two identically bandaged women stare at each other. The other people rush out of the room. Then the strain is too great for Althea. She keels over. Mrs. Morrow breaks into laughter and, stepping out of the chest, sinks into a chair. George is over beside Althea. Carol rushes in.)

Carol: What on earth's going on here? I was fixing the aunts' room when they rushed in, picked up their grips and dashed out the back door. They looked as if they'd seen a ghost.

Mrs. M.: That's no lie.

Carol: (She sees Althea) My God, what's that?

Mrs. M.: That? That, according to Althea, is me.

(George attempts to drag Althea out.)

Mrs. M.: Just a minute, boy. Before you drag that out,

search her and return something of mine from her blouse.
I'll take it, if you don't mind.

(George hands it to her. At that moment, Althea revives.)

Althea: Auntie, duckie, I assure you it was all a joke — we knew you were there all the time —

(Mrs. Morrow shakes with laughter again. Althea slaps George across the mouth.)

Why in hell didn't you tell me, you squab-faced half-pint?

(She stalks out. He follows. At the door they meet Dr. Waring)

(Bewildered, he looks from Althea to Mrs. Morrow.)

Mrs. M.: The party's over, doctor.

Doctor: I returned as soon as I could. Somebody phoned me up and said I was needed at the Institute immediately. Right then I suspected there was funny business over here.

Carol: How, Bill?

Doctor: It seems I was at the Institute at that time.

Carol: But how did you know the call came from our house?

Doctor: I've met your relatives before, so I hurried over.

Carol: And arrived in time to hear the Lanes' exit line.

Doctor: Darling, judging from that horrible example, do you still want to get married?

Carol: I expect I do.

Mrs. M.: Well, why in God's name, don't you get married then? I'm sick of the suspense.

Carol: We feel we can't afford it yet.

Mrs. M.: I don't know why not. I'm going to instruct my lawyer to donate a large sum to the medical institution run by young Dr. Waring. This, of course, will put him at a much higher salary.

(She starts upstairs)

Carol: Auntie —

Mrs. M.: Shut up! There is one string attached. I have no liking for bachelors, so it will be necessary for this young Doctor to be a married man.

(Mrs. Morrow opens her door. There is a cry and a thump from inside where Mr. Galbraith has been key-holing.)

Mrs. M.: Mrs. Galbraith, there's a time and a place for everything. This looks like that time and place. Let's leave 'em alone.

(She closes the door and the two embrace as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SUMMER COMES TO A FRESHMAN DORMITORY

It's all over.

Vacation begins tomorrow.

No more calling up the stairs, "Does anybody want a date?"
No more waiting for mail to be laid out on the hall table,
No more typewriter-radio medleys in room after room,
No ordering cokes between classes.

And the girl downstairs
banging on the piano
always playing, "If You Ever Change Your Mind",
she can stop.
Tell her to stop.
"Tell her it's Long Distance on the phone,
and I can't hear."

And the girl upstairs
can just close her trunk,
the trunk she never quite got down to
unpacking.

Marian,
Marian with the red eyes,
red from crying,
can go home.
Marian, whom no one understood,
goodbye.

Tell them they needn't wind up that phonograph.
Don't put in a new needle.
We can go.
It's all over.

Those quick thin feet
of the colored maid
don't need to go again after the mail.
Not till next year.
And when she has finished her sweeping
she too will have a summer.

Tell the girl who said all
 she wanted in life was fun and the chance
 to go after anything she wanted
 that she can go.
 Let her try.
 Here's her chance, a whole summer.
 Maybe she'll find it.

Don't light that cigarette,
 it's summer.
 Note how the bugler,
 Gabriel to 350 students,
 has let the last note linger.

The poor black boy, white-aproned,
 bringing a tray of cokes and cigarettes
 may ring four times
 instead of three.
 There will be no one here next time he rings.

Do the boys waiting on the porch know?
 We can go home now.

Now that we're broke.
 "Dammit, my check didn't come."
 Now that the days are getting longer.
 (Should it matter that there is more daylight?)
 Now that we know each other
 and just whose voice
 is calling what fraternity
 saying to whom with
 a come-and-get-it-ness,
 "Bill, I haven't seen you for so long.
 Have you forgotten me?"
 That can stop.

The alarm clock has no more nerves to jangle.
 Not for a while.
 No classes to make by 8:30.
 Let day always
 come upon us as softly,

as slowly
 as summer has come.

It was exciting.
 Somehow life with fifty girls
 is exciting.

It was a lot more fun
 than we'll ever say it was.
 There is a bond between us
 stronger than we'll let ourselves believe.
 Ours is a smug and desperate luxury.
 And it will be forgotten.

Conversations on beds
 at night
 have been forgotten,
 and bets.
 "I'll bet you fifty cents
 we won't be in war
 till after June."
 Pay up.
 Then let it be forgotten like the girl
 who went home because her mother died.
 We can leave as she did.
 Goodbye.
 Don't look back.
 Goodbye.

Of course next fall it will all
 start again.
 There will be a new group.
 Not that it will matter.
 Always there are the same kind of girls.
 The ones saying:
 "Let's move her trunk out
 onto the front lawn,"
 the ones wanting to serenade
 at two in the morning;
 the same popular ones,
 the studious kind,
 little hordes and cliques

and the one
in tears.

We can forget it easily, though.
It will go fast,
the names and faces
and just what happened.
Don't look back.
Goodbye.

JANE BALCH

EXECUTION

Attendants, cull
The dark and hanging hair.
For swifter path
Of stroke the neck prepare.

Protect who — though
Mistakenly — defend
The old impure
From any sorry end,

And see that when
Flesh and blade collide
No gentle-hearted
Looker turn aside,

And make their blood
With that blood spurt and swell,
And hold no member back,
And wish that fountain well.

Destroy by blows
The staunch and seated will,
But leave intact
Their deep intention still.

ELIZABETH MILLER

THE SCENTED HANDKERCHIEF

LYNN GOLDMAN*

JUDITH walked quickly down the steps of the tenement on 72nd street and Third avenue. When she reached the sidewalk she paused a moment and looked at the small gold watch on her wrist. It was late — 5:30, and she still had another house to visit. She shifted the small basket that she held, from her left arm to the right, and started to walk briskly down the street. Some of the dirty, watery snow on the sidewalk splashed on her stocking and trickled down into her shoe. It was queer, the snow still being on the ground here. All the snow had been swept away around her house. But then it was such a different district. If she just turned around and walked five blocks in the opposite direction, in less than ten minutes she would arrive at Fifth avenue. Her clean, lovely Fifth avenue. In a way she regretted having been persuaded to take this job. Of course, she was eager to help out the poor unfortunates of the city, but she had to spend practically half of her time in the tenement district. She was supposed to deliver an average of seven Christmas baskets a day. That meant visiting seven houses, speaking to seven families, acting pleasant and kind to all the people in the families. It wasn't that she didn't really enjoy helping these people, for she did. It made her feel sort of warm and glowing inside when she'd see their faces light up and their eyes widen as they inspected the baskets. It was wonderful, she thought, to be able to give. But then again when she had finished her afternoon's work and was back in her apartment on 70th street and Fifth avenue, she had immediately to take a bath and change to fresh clothes. Her mother made her do it as she was afraid of the contagious diseases that were so prevalent in a district such as this. And of course there were the awful smells. Whenever she entered one of the tenements, it seemed that the smell of stale grease and dirt and bad plumbing filled her nostrils and mouth. It was so intolerable that she always had to keep her perfume scented handkerchief to her nose for fear that she would become ill. She had to sneeze and blow her nose in it too, so that the tenement men and women would think she

*LYNN GOLDMAN, making her first appearance in the *Flamingo* is a freshman from New York City, which forms the background for her story.

had a cold. It would be so very cruel, she thought, if I let them know the real reason. God, to think that they have to breathe in that air every minute of the day. Warm sympathy flowed through her and she knew that she felt and understood the problems of these people. The narrow columnists who ridiculed debutante charity work were themselves ridiculous in thinking a debutante utterly inhuman. She felt for these starving, poverty stricken people. And what she felt was a real, human desire to help them in some way. She looked up suddenly at the numbers on the houses that she was passing. Twenty, twenty-two, twenty-four, and the next, twenty-six, was the house she had to visit. She started to walk hastily up the steps, opening her bag meanwhile, and extracted the little, white handkerchief. Then she stopped. There was something strange about the house. She couldn't identify what it was. Then she saw that the shades were all pulled down and it seemed to be entirely still inside. She frowned, puzzled. She continued walking up the steps and when she reached the top she knocked softly on the door. There was no answer. She knocked again, loudly this time. She heard the footsteps approaching the door from the inside and quickly she lifted the handkerchief to her nose. The door opened and a woman appeared in the doorway. She was short and thin and her face, Judith thought, looked like a shriveled fruit. She stared at Judith, her eyes empty, dumb.

"What you want?" she said and her voice was a curious, flat monotone. Judith smiled hesitantly.

"I'm from the charity organization that is distributing Christmas food baskets to all the people in this neighborhood. May I come in?"

The woman did not change her expression, but she moved aside to allow Judith to enter. As soon as she was in the hall the smells were all around her again. Filling her with their fetidness, making her press her handkerchief quickly to her nose. She turned to the woman.

"Where do I go?" she asked. The face that looked at her was dead, blank, frightening in its dumbness.

"Up." The woman pointed up towards the narrow wooden staircase. Judith started to walk up. The boards started to bend and creak beneath her foot. When she reached the first landing she paused. She could hear the woman's heavy breathing behind her. Close.

"Up." Judith went on. The steps were getting steeper

and narrower. She found it hard to keep her balance. The soft sound of the woman's slippers as they fell from her heel and hit the stairs seemed to intermingle with the sound of her heavy breathing. Judith felt fear rising in her. She pushed it down. "Silly," she thought, "this is like all the other houses you've visited." But she knew somehow that this was not like the others. There was something strange, almost ominous. There was no sound save the woman's breathing, the creak of the stairs, and the sound of the slippers hitting the floor. At the third landing the woman slid in front of her and led the way down a long, dim hall. Judith could see the thin boniness of her body beneath the shapeless dress. The woman opened a door and they were in a room. There was nothing in the room except a bed with a bundle on it. Judith bit the handkerchief hard. It wasn't a bundle—it was a person. A child, a boy. She turned to the woman, fright in her eyes.

"Your son?" she said. The woman nodded dumbly. She stood before Judith. Little, bent over, with her hands hanging loosely at her sides.

"Is he ill?" Judith asked. There was no answer. "She is Italian," Judith thought, "and she doesn't understand."

"Sick?" she asked again. The woman nodded her head once, quickly.

"He cough." For the first time there was a change in her voice. "He cough. Ver' bad. Blood. He spit blood." Her mouth drooped a little. Judith realized she was trying to smile.

"Sit down." The woman pointed to a wooden stool in the corner. Judith hadn't noticed it before. The boy in the bed had started to cough. His body under the blankets shook. The woman bent down and lifted a jar from the floor. She held it out to the boy. He took it and spit into it. Judith looked at the floor. But she had seen the bone that was supposed to be an arm. She had seen the thinness of it holding the glass jar filled with half hard, red mucous. The woman's mouth drooped again. She was smiling. Judith looked at her. "She blends into the wall," Judith thought. "She blends into the wall and the room. I can hardly distinguish her body." There was light coming from a window. A pale light, watery, milky, and it made the face of the boy look like a mask. His eyes were closed and it seemed as though they were just plain sockets without eyes. There were no cheeks on his face, but just dark hollows where flesh should have been. She realized the woman

was watching her, waiting, smiling with drooping lips. Judith took the basket from her arm. Her mind was blank except for the one thought to leave. To get out of this place with its foul odors and pale light falling on the two figures—dirty light, washing over them, making them alike. To get away from the drooping smile of the woman and the thin arm holding the jar. Get away, she thought, get away. But as she handed the basket to the woman, the boy started to cough again. And while he coughed blood started to come from his nose and mouth. Pale, thin blood. The woman looked at Judith, her eyes pleading. Judith stared at the floor. She couldn't look. Then the woman moved. She lifted a long, wet rag from behind the bed and held it to the boy's face. She held it until the rag was nothing but red. Then she looked around the room. Her eyes searched every corner of it. Judith stood there, her handkerchief pressed to her nose. She was saying, "A doctor—why don't you get a doctor?" The woman's dead eyes rested on Judith's face.

"Doctor?" Her voice was wondering, uncomprehending. "Doctor. He wants money. You see—" She waved her hand vaguely in the air. Then she held it there. Judith felt every nerve in her body come alive, and every muscle stiffen. The woman's eyes were fixed on the handkerchief. On the clean, perfumed handkerchief. She left the rag by the boy's head and walked to Judith.

"Please," her mouth drooped, "please." She pointed hesitantly to the handkerchief, "could I have—have that? We have no more rag, he bleed." Judith felt her legs moving her backwards, away from the woman. She clenched her handkerchief in her hand. For suddenly it seemed to her that if she gave her handkerchief, she was giving herself. She would never be able to leave this room. She would be here forever with the pale light and the jar of blood. She mustn't leave herself here, nor any part of herself. She shook her head. She dropped the basket on the floor and shook her head. She started to run. The woman was standing there, her face dead, crazy, pathetic. She was trying to smile. Judith saw her look of surprise. She ran out the door and down the steps to the outside. She kept on running down the street. Away, away. And as she ran through the dirty snow she saw the woman standing, small, bent over, and the boy bleeding. Terrified, she ran past the tenement houses towards Fifth avenue.

U. S. INVASION — '44

ROBIN RAE

THE PRESIDENT? Down in Washington you mean? No, no . . . Old stuff, old stuff. Lost his sales appeal long ago. That Old Silver Fireside Stories Series we used him in last year didn't up production more than 40 or 50%. Got to do better than that if we're going to force out Dramadary and have the field to ourselves. Yes, sir, got to do better than that. And we will; but it'll take a program that is a program to do it. That's what we're looking for. Something big; and I mean BIG; the biggest thing radio advertising has ever seen. And with the SBC network lined up with us now we can do it; or I'm not the president of the greatest cigarette company in the United States — or anywhere else."

In the immense ebony and platinum office of the "Chief" president of the Old Silver Cigarette Company, a board meeting was in session. On either side of the glistening council table were two long rows of pale, bald faces, turned as if on a skewer toward one end where the Chief stood, hands thrust in pockets, stomach straining at a somber-grey vest festooned with a heavy gold watch chain; complete with lodge pins and rabbit's foot; feet planted wide apart. His face, lacking any distinguishable features except two small, colorless eyes set very close together, was massive and doughy, webbed with vermillion on the nose and cheeks. From somewhere in his sagging throat came his voice, an indistinct rumble.

"Yes sir, the biggest program ever to hit the ether. That's where bringing SBC into the business is gonna show results. Buying up all their air time and then taking the thing over was the smartest trick we ever pulled. Now, what we're after is a program that'll make anything else ever done over the radio look sick. If we smash through with the right program Old Silver will be the only cigarette company left in America. And that, gentlemen, has always been my ambition."

The chief paused, glanced at his watch, took a dutiful swallow from a glass of milk on the table in front of him and sighed. A look of dreamy reminiscence came over his face.

"Yes, sir, always my ambition; ever since I was a barefoot boy, back on my dear old Dad's farm away out in Iowa. I can remember I used to sit out behind the old red barn and dream about being president — I was a lazy little shaver — yes, sir,

just sit there and dream about being president of the greatest cigarette company in America. Well, Old Silver is the greatest. But it isn't great enough. Nothing is ever great enough. That's what Mother always said, bless her soul. I want Old Silver to be the only cigarette sold in America. America's own cigarette. Say, that's not bad: America's Own; America's Only. Remember that, someone."

Looking behind him as well as he could, the Chief made quick calculations and lowered himself into a huge red-leather chair.

"Now then," he panted, when he had finished arranging himself, an effort which he culminated by clasping his white, puffed little hands on his stomach, "Now then, anyone got any ideas for the new program?"

There was a heavy silence. The two rows of faded faces writhed under the Chief's stare like two gloom-bleached worms exposed to the sunlight by an overturned rock. At length, a small, voice-like sound came from somewhere near the far end of the table.

"Perhaps . . . if the company . . . this may not . . . if the company could hire all the orchestras in the country. Then . . ."

The Chief unclasped his hands and waved one in the air.

"No, no, no. Damn it, Not big enough. No punch. This thing has got to make every man, woman, and child in America think, eat, and sleep Old Silvers. Now somebody get an idea."

Once more there was no sound in the office. As the Chief very slowly prepared himself a cigar, this lack of sound took on an oppressive weightiness. Each deliberate move he made, particularly the thoughtful biting off and spitting out of the cigar end, added unpleasant substance to the silence.

The atmosphere was cleared instantly, however, when a door at the far end of the office suddenly flew open and a young man brisked in.

"Heard the news, Chief?" he called, throwing his hat into a corner and heading up the long polished room toward Old Silver's president, "It's just what the doctor ordered." He was somewhat flushed and out of breath, the young man, yet the smooth black hair, the clean-cut, unobjectionable face with its geometric wisp of mustache, the stiff white collar and the blue pin-striped suit all retained their casually immaculate look. In short, he had the air of a successful radio announcer of nationally advertised products, which, indeed, was exactly what he

had been before the Chief discovered him on the Old Silver programs and upped him to general assistant.

"What's on your mind, Jonson?" asked the Chief, wrestling himself into a more erect position.

"Biggest thing since the Gold Rush."

Jonson perched himself on the edge of the table and leaned toward his boss.

"You're looking for a program, Chief? Well, here it is and it's terrific. You remember the stir that fake invasion made, a few years back?" He spoke in an announcer's quick, cultured honey-tone, tempered now with a little genuine excitement.

"What sponsor wouldn't have given ten years black ink for it; national coverage, audience appeal, sales value, listener reaction — everything you could ask for, and more. Well, that was a fake; now we've got something that's the real McCoy and if we take advantage of it we'll make the biggest killing radio advertising has ever seen."

In the silence following this declaration, the two rows of corpse-like faces showed some faint stirrings of life. They looked to the Chief, however, for official reaction. The Chief was confused.

"Wait a minute here, now, let's get . . . What the Devil are you driving at, Jonson?"

"Just this, Chief. News came in not five minutes ago that Hitstamus' gigantic fleet, with all his land and air forces aboard, has been sighted 400 miles out from Sandy Hook."

"Hitstamus?"

"Yep, Europe's mighty dictator."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Exactly. Hitstamus is attacking the United States."

It wasn't often that the Chief heard of anyone doing anything so big that it surprised him; he usually did the big things himself. So, for the moment, although his sagging, sloppily fashioned features remained fixed, the confidence and authority behind them was gone. But almost immediately the old cocksureness leaped back into his face.

"I get it. I get you now, Jonson. *We sponsor the invasion!* Why didn't I think of that before? *The Invasion's our new program.*"

At first there was nothing but a stunned silence. Then a frightened rustle and a murmur ran around the table.

"You think it can't be done, huh?" roared the Chief, strafing

the pallid rows with his colorless little eyes, "Well, I'm gonna do it. It'll make radio history. There's never been anything like it."

"I knew you'd like it, Chief," said Jonson, pleased. "It'll make history all right. Think of it. The whole nation, the whole world with their ears glued to the radio listening to the most momentous events in history and then comes an Old Silver commercial. You know, something that'll work on their emotions of the moment. This invasion is coming to you through the courtesy of Old Silver, the cigarette with a purpose. The safety of our great nation, the one remaining democracy (can't forget that angle) depends on you, YOU, keeping calm in this crisis. And that's just what Old Silver will do for you, keep you calm no matter what happens. Smoke Old Silvers and save democracy."

Jonson was completely carried away.

"No one can touch it, Chief. It's God's gift to Old Silver. It's the beginning of a new era in radio advertising."

"You're right, my boy," beamed Old Silver's president. "We've hit it." He waved his hand at the "board". "They may say that it can't be done, I say it can. But we can't let any grass grow under our feet. I'll pass it on to the program department right away, with you as special director, and we'll get everything worked out as soon as possible. Can't have any slip-ups. Got to have everything under contract. Exclusive with us. No loopholes for Dromadary. And another thing, this can't be one of those two week affairs, like Poland and Turkey and all them places, it's got to *last*. Now this fella, Hitstamus, he'll probably want plenty for this thing and we'll give him something like what he wants, but he's got to do the thing like we say and make it last. I'm not in the market for any fly-by-night program that's gonna be shot in a week or two."

"That's right. Chief."

"Now you better not waste time gettin' out there and settling things up — in writing . . . if the blasted Indian can write."

"OK, Chief."

"And here," grunted the president of Old Silver, hoisting his hippotomic carcass from the chair, "this may come in handy."

He tugged at his vest pocket for a minute and finally succeeded in extracting a bursting roll of bills.

"Better take along some cash, these foreigners like the looks of good old American money."

He handed the roll to Jonson. The young man pocketed the money, flashed his boss an efficient smile and started off with a brisk, business-like step.

"Remember, Jonson," the Chief called after him, "no loopholes for Dramadary or anyone else. This thing is ours, exclusive. Get this fella Hitstamus under a blanket contract. All broadcasting rights, everything. If you don't we're liable to get stung; these foreigners are slippery customers."

With his hands in his pockets and a grin on his face, the Chief watched Jonson until he disappeared through the door at the far end of the office.

"Smart boy . . . smart boy. Ought to go places. Good man for this job."

He glanced contemptuously at the faces around the table.

"Can't be done, huh?" he muttered, and shunted off to lunch.

* * * * *

A luxurious motor launch, long and laden with sparkling brass, flying the red and gold banner of SBC, rode the swells alongside a huge grey battleship.

In the main cabin of the warship, Jonson stood easily before the mighty dictator, Hitstamus, who sat painfully erect and motionless behind a modest desk, bare except for the conqueror's inept right fist which rested a little too firmly upon it. There was nothing about the dictator, with the exception of the heavy, jutting jaw, perhaps, that suggested unlimited power; the carefully combed dark hair slanting down over the left eye; the strange hunted look; the slightly hooked nose, and drooping, unkept mustache were all commonplace features.

In pompous, groping English, he addressed the visitor.

"My generals believed you to be an important personage representing the Government of the United States. And now you state that you are . . ."

"Representative of Old Silver Cigarette Company. America's Own; America's Only. And, confidentially, Mr. Dictator, the Chief, the President of Old Silver, is the man to know over here. Yes, sir, say hello to the Chief and you say good-

bye to trouble. The Chief never underpaid or overpaid a man in his life."

"The Chief? . . . you mean to say, do you not, the — how do you say it? — president of your country?"

Jonson chuckled tolerantly.

"No, no, Mr. Dictator, I guess you haven't been keeping up with the times. The Chief is the president of Old Silver Cigarette Company. And it's in his interest, and yours, that I'm here. In plain language, the Chief has asked me to sign up you and your boys for Old Silver's big new program."

With that, the young man looked professionally benevolent, while on the other side of the desk the conqueror's perplexed expression gave way to one of simple astonishment.

"Sign us up . . . why . . . what . . . how do you . . ."

"Sure. Put you under contract. Don't worry, it'll be well worth your while. Some good old American greenbacks will come in mighty handy while you're here. You can't get into the Jersey City World's Fair with flat stones, you know."

For the first time in his political life, Hitstamus was entirely unable to speak.

"And it's more than the money," Jonson continued, pleased at his salesmanship, "it's getting in with the Chief that counts. Yes, sir," he slipped on to the edge of the desk and leaned toward the dumbfounded dictator, "the Chief runs the biggest cigarette business in America. And that's saying a lot. And now he's got SBC — that's the network that combined all the others, so it's the only system in America — now that he's got that, business will be even better. Yes, sir, he's the man to know, all right; right on top of the pile."

His eyes narrowing a little, the dictator leaned forward.

"I am interested. How do you mean, exactly, 'on top of the pile'?"

"I mean he'll be the only cigarette man left in the country. Why, with the radio waves under his thumb, he can sell more cigarettes and make more money than anyone ever dreamed about. Think of it. Th big shots of other industries want advertising time on the Chief's network, and they have to have it if they want to keep going. 'All right,' says the Chief, 'but first you tell your men in Washington to pass a law that everyone in the United States over ten years old has to smoke three packs of Old Silvers every day.' You see, Mr. Dictator, you haven't been over here long enough to know that these big boys

in industry tell the senators and congressmen and all the rest just what to do, because nine times out of ten they've picked them out and gotten them elected. Or else they've lobbied them until they can't see the Constitution for the greenbacks floatin' in front of their eyes. So there you have it; government under industry, and industry under the Chief. Right on top of the pile."

Hitsamus, elbows resting on the desk, pulled gently at his mustache, gently and rhythmically, and with half closed eyes he gazed through the ship's steel hull at something a long, long ways away. Jonson, who knew all about how to put over a big deal, relaxed and waited, with a confident smile that didn't at all disturb the neat geometry of his face.

After a while the dictator looked around slowly.

"I have decided," he said, "I will negotiate with this . . . this 'Chief'."

Jonson slid off the desk and grasped the dictator's hand.

"Great, great." He was hearty, but within limits. "Great thing for everyone concerned; for Old Silver and for you. Now if you'll just sign this contract; just a formality, you know, but very necessary to good business, nothing binding . . . Right there . . . yes . . . that's fine, fine. Thank you. This is something you won't regret, I assure you. Your first experience with the American business man has been a profitable one. And let me give you a tip, sir: When you're dealing with the American business man always remember, he's honest but he's smart; honest but smart. Well, congratulations and thanks again. I'll go report to the Chief."

Jonson started out with a stride that implied important things to be done but stopped suddenly, turned and held out a hand in which a glistening cigarette case had miraculously appeared.

"Excuse me. Have an Old Silver?"

"Thank you, no. I do not smoke."

A ripple of surprise disturbed the smooth surface of the young man's face. Then he smiled his smile and went quickly out.

* * * * *

At the long window in one end of the office stood the Chief, tilted back at a dangerous angle in order to balance his great vest-covered paunch, but at the same time craning his head forward to see into the street far below. There was a pleased,

expectant expression on his face, and on Jonson's who stood beside him.

Poured forth from a concealed instrument . . . the cultured voice of radio pervaded the room: " . . . is the most spectacular event in modern times. Let me remind you late tuners-in that this is your Old Silver reporter bringing you a dictator's eye view of Hitstamus' triumphant march up New York's Great White Way. We're riding right behind the Dictator's tank and trying to bring you all the color and excitement and . . . and . . . well, all the color that's going on here. Resistance to Hitstamus has been very slight so far; in fact there really hasn't been any at all. We understand that the lines of defense are being drawn up some 50 or 100 miles inland. As you know, we are making our way up the big street with the columns of the dictator's famed mechanized army, the roaring of which you can probably hear through our mike . . . perhaps Harry can get some of these sounds for you later on . . . and the thousands of close-packed, high-stepping troops, and overhead, planes zooming and circling . . . As we come up here now, we see on the left the towering walls of the Old Silver building, which reminds *me* to remind *you*, Ladies and Gentlemen, that this invasion is coming to you through the courtesy of Old Silver Cigarettes; America's Own; America's Only. In these times of stress and strain, scientific tests show that wear and tear on the nerves is three and one half times as great as ever before. But you must keep calm. Experts in our independent laboratories have proved that Old Silver Cigarettes bring up your calm-quotient as much as 67%. You owe it to your country to keep calm in this crisis. You owe it to good old Uncle Sam, you owe it to the women and children and the aged. Be patriotic. Smoke Old Silvers and save democracy. And now back to our eye witness account. From where I am standing . . . "

The Chief, listening by the window, raised his head and gazed out over the jagged skyline, a blissful hypnotic gaze blurring his half closed eyes.

"Beautiful," he murmured, " a beautiful commercial. Best ever had."

He turned slowly, dreamily, to Jonson.

"This means a lot to Old Silver, my boy, a lot. No one can touch it. Millions listening in. It'll make history."

Placing his hand on the young man's shoulder, he smiled paternally.

"Remind me to make you a vice-president, my boy."

"Thanks, Chief," said Jonson, who took everything in his stride, "there's Charley now, I think."

Old Silver's mellow president turned back to the window and peered into the street below.

"I guess it is, all right. Yep. But where's our banner? Do you see our banner? I thought . . . Oh, there it is. See it? Right there in front of that little fella standing up in the tank. Yes, and there's Charley right behind him. I knew Charley'd do a good job of it . . . good old Charley."

"Charley's a good man," Jonson agreed.

Meanwhile Charley's voice continued to pour into the room: " . . . rumble of heavy tank treads on pavement. Following directly behind the tank in which the dictator is riding, we are now almost directly opposite the Old Silver Building, which contains the main New York offices of the Company and also the great SBC studios. We want to try to give you some of the . . . wait a minute, Ladies and Gentlemen, there seems to be some delay here . . . Hitstamus has given a signal of some sort and the whole line of march has stopped, halted. Now he's getting down off the tank — Hitstamus that is — and he's . . . he's going into the Old Silver Building, Ladies and Gentlemen, yes, sir, that's where he's going, all right, right into the Old Silver Building. Let me remind you once more that . . . "

The president of the Old Silver Cigarette Company glanced at the young man beside him, looked again at the street below, coughed, fumbled with his tie, turned and waddled over to his desk. He sat down as hastily as he could and picked up the only thing on the desk top, a blank sheet of paper.

"I . . . ah . . . guess you can show him right in when he comes up, Jonson. I'm pretty well tied up now, but . . . good business, you know."

As Jonson brisked out, the Chief arranged himself behind the desk, putting first one short arm on the smooth mahogany, then the other; finally trying both at once. He was thus employed when the door burst open and Hitstamus, flanked by a squad of beefy generals in tight and gaudy uniforms, stalked into the room, stopped suddenly, glanced from left to right, then fixed his intense black eyes on the Chief; who, though a little flustered by the abrupt entrance, assumed his heartiest manner.

"Well, well . . . glad to see you. Yes, sir, mighty glad you

dropped in. Always like to know everyone connected with the business. Yes, sir. keeps it sort of like one big family; good feeling all around. Well, have a chair, have a chair. I guess we can . . ."

At a slight sign from Hitstamus one of the men beside him stepped forward.

"You are the president of the Old Silver Cigarette Company, are you not?" he snapped at the beaming, though faintly puzzled Chief.

"Why . . . why, sure."

His heartiness had taken on a hollow note.

"And you control the SBC radio system, do you not?"

The Chief looked surprised, then thoughtful, then he almost smiled.

"Well, I . . . yes, I guess I do at that," he answered with a hint of pride in his voice.

Hitstamus signalled again and three men bounded forward, grabbed the Chief and dragged him, protesting, from behind his desk.

"Hey . . . what the devil . . . why you . . . leggo, or I'll . . . what's the idea, Shorty . . . if this is a gag, I don't like it . . . you got a good show there but I can get others just as good . . . hey, by God . . . cut the funny business, will you?"

While the Chief sputtered, Hitstamus circled the desk and seated himself in the huge red leather chair. He flicked his gaze over to the stupified Chief.

"You are no longer the President of the Old Silver Cigarette Company. I, Hitstamus, have taken your place. I am now the President of this company and the controller of the radio, the infinite power of which you did not adequately understand. You perhaps did not realize that with the radio one can make the people do many things besides buy cigarettes."

He turned to the beefiest general.

"Announce to the world that the conquest of America is complete."

DEAD ADONIS SPEAKS TO VENUS

Lie still, beloved, do not turn your head
To catch the silverness of evening's thread
Across your cheek. No, do not stir from here
Beneath my eyes. I cannot draw you near
Enough to look as deeply as I would,
Enough to see the yet misunderstood
Solemnity that flutters pinioned wings
Against your temples' whiteness. My eyes sting
From looking on hot fire. Let all your dreams
Keep close around. My sweet, your young face seems
The nearest I will ever hope to be
To love. Lie still, beloved, here by me,
No, do not turn your eyes away from mine,
For I must see the heavy boot-heels grind
Into the tenderness of your warm breast,
Made from the stamping of my heart. No rest
Will I have . . . ever . . . from my pulses' toll
Until I make a deep wound on your soul.

PEGGY HUDGINGS

INTRUSION

We trampled down the frozen blades of grass;
 Defied the winter wind to chill our hearts
 While moonbeams blazed a checkered path for us,
 Through garden tanglewood and jasmine park.
 And yet, I was alone — for I was stirred
 By voices on the wind you never heard.

For I have got the northlands in my veins;
 The mountains, and the valleys, and the Fall:—
 And here, the weedy sands and soft terrains
 Reveal no more than coral after-all.
 O, why must there be thoughts to make us fight
 To justify our presence in the night?

CAROLYN NAUGHT

FUTILITY

Nobody knows, and nobody shall,
 And nobody needs to know:
 Nobody knows! — but the tragedy is
 That nobody wants to know.

CAROLYN NAUGHT

AIR RAID

EDITH MOODIE

DURING August the three of them went up to Cheltenham, which lies in the West, cupped by the swelling Cotswolds. There, in the sweltering heat, they watched the inevitable bearing down on them, as so many others were watching. When Jean and her father strolled along the dusty roads of an afternoon (mother always rested) they would forget it for a time. Indeed, it was impossible to visualize war between the green hedgerows, or in the fields where men were binding the dry sheaves, or among the thatched stone houses of some Cotswold village, so peaceful that a passing car merely made a ripple like a stone dropped in a still pool. But they always got back to the hotel in time for the six o'clock news, and though they joked about it as they hurried back, they knew that it was the most important event in the day. The hotel boarders clustered round the set, avoiding each others' eyes. "Neville Henderson returns from Berlin" — "Russo-German pact" — "Troops mass on Polish border" — "Hitler speaks." "It's not so good tonight," they would say, trooping into the dining-room, as if it were something unusual for the news to be disquieting. The skies were growing dark that sultry August, and they betokened a storm as surely as the black clouds over the far-away Welsh hills. Step by step, fighting every inch, the forces of peace were driven back, and the slow, inevitable dragging down was worse than any conflict.

They returned to the sea-side town that was their home a few days before war was declared. Jean and her mother went to get fitted with gas-masks and felt a sinister shudder as the ugly little safe-guards slipped over their face. Father refused to get one. "There won't be any raids," he said. As the months passed, and the war tightened into a deadlock, it began to seem as though he were right. The first scare was over, and no raids came, evacuated children began to trickle home again, and the black-out gradually slackened, as air-raid wardens became less particular. Life was slipping back to normal. People said "There won't be any raids. We should have had them before this. There won't be any raids."

It was a Saturday morning, and Jean's mother wanted some potato-flour for a cake she was making. As there was only one shop in the town that sold it, Jean went down by bus to get it.

There was the usual Saturday morning crowd in the streets, and she had to wait some time before she was served.

As she came out into the street, the sirens suddenly rose in a shriek. She felt her stomach turn over, and she knew that the impossible had happened; this was an air-raid. Everyone stopped a moment and looked up; there was nothing to be seen, then the street was full of hurrying figures. A large policeman appeared, and tried to direct people. "100 yards on your left to the nearest shelter," he bawled. "If it's full, don't crowd in, go on to Hinton Road. Plenty of room there."

"I must get home," thought Jean, "I'll catch a bus." Then she remembered there would be no bus, and she pushed her way against the crowd, and tried to run. Faces brushed past her; pale faces, grim faces, expressionless faces. One man made a joke, and the people round him laughed; she did not catch it. "'ere Miss, you're going the wrong way," someone said, and she found herself staring into the eyes of an air-raid warden, and the white letters standing out on his tin helmet. She muttered something and ducked, and the next moment he was swept away from her in a rush of people.

The sirens wailed, rising and falling. Then they stopped, and in the sudden strong silence she was aware of the shouts and cries around her, the rush of footsteps, a police-whistle blowing. All of a sudden, she was free of the crowd, and she began to run as fast as she could. The street ahead was almost deserted; only a few scurrying forms, an abandoned bus, some stationary cars. "Looks like a Sunday morning," flashed across her brain. She ran on, and heard a faint droning far away. Instinctively, she looked up into the crisp blue sky, but there was nothing to be seen, as yet.

She dodged round a corner, and almost knocked down a man hastening in the opposite direction. "Do you want an air-raid shelter?" he gasped, as though he were a traveling salesman. "No," she snapped and hurried past him. She must get home and see what her parents were doing; besides, she would be safe at home.

It was a cold, frosty morning, and her breath was white in front of her, but she was hot and sticky with sweat. Panting, she ran on.

Suddenly, a distant boom. Anti-aircraft. Then another, cutting across the growing hum that was beginning to fill the sky. Her heart was pounding so much that she stopped for a

minute and looked up. The sky was now resounding like a great bowl, but she could not locate the noise. Another burst of anti-aircraft fire, and she suddenly saw the planes. They were Dorniers 17, "flying pencils", great black shapes advancing in V squadrons away over the roof tops, hordes of them, like the locusts in "The Good Earth". All around them the shells burst like little puffs of cotton-wool; the reports followed a second later. The noise in the air made the streets seem too silent, like those in a dead city.

She tore her eyes away from the fascinating sight, and began to run again, slowly and ponderously. There were little groups of people in doorways, all looking upwards. Some even came out into the streets, and gazed into the sky with genuine curiosity.

There was a deafening roar. "That's not anti-aircraft," she thought, and looked for the planes again. They were scattered now, wheeling like great vultures, one or two were climbing steadily. She dropped from a run into a rapid walk, which seemed to leave her standing still. Another roar, nearer this time. The houses on the opposite side seemed to quiver a little. She had only a few more streets to go now, familiar, friendly streets. Then she would be home. Like a child, she felt that once at home, she would be safe.

A terrific explosion in the air made her look up. An aircraft shell had made a direct hit on one of the Dorniers; she just caught the flash and saw the scattered fragments fall apart with a strange, lazy motion, like that of colored sparks from fireworks. "Nice work," she muttered; it did not occur to her that there had been five men in the plane. She did not look down again, for she noticed one of the planes bank, and then go into a dive. She could not take her eyes off it, and she tripped over the curb, and got up slowly from the road, still looking at the plane. For it was diving right in her direction. She stared, fascinated, hearing explosions nearer and nearer; she was aware of some women running down the street shouting to each other, but her eyes flicked away for only a second, she had to look back to the plane. It *was* coming straight towards her. She felt the pilot's eye fixed on her, she could almost see it, impassive and business like. She ran, but what use was there in running? He could see her. The plane was still diving. She ran, and then the earth rose up to meet her and the sky crashed down with a roar so tremendous that it was like a terrific blow on her

ears. In the brief stunned second before the pain clamped down like a vice, she saw the front of a row of houses some distance ahead detach itself, take a few short steps, and fall waveringly. Instinctively she buried her head under her arms as a pathetic safeguard from the flying bricks, mortar, wood. She lay, and felt no desire to raise her head again. But she did, and looked for the women who had been ahead of her. They were not there. The street was a mass of ruins and rubbish, and a cloud of dust was rising like a yellow veil. It choked her, and she coughed violently. Then, gingerly feeling this numbed, unfamiliar thing that was her body she found, although her bruised flesh was tender all over, nothing worse than the great, ragged tear in her knee, the blood slowly welling under the dirt ("the stockings are ruined") and the raw flesh on her hands, grazed on the hard asphalt. The dust was settling slowly, and she dragged herself to her feet. Must get home; it's safe in that little room we've fixed up, and mother will bandage me with cool, clean lint.

She hobbled down the street, stepping painfully over the scattered heaps of bricks and stone. The street was no longer familiar; it was as strange as a street in Pompeii. On one side, it was as though a hand had stripped off the front of the houses, and the rooms were quite naked and bare to the street; it was like looking into a doll's house. She could see the dining-room, the bedrooms, the bathroom, all with furniture knocked over and untidy, and she half expected to see a giant finger reach in and set it up again.

Walking among the bricks, she felt something that yielded in a peculiar manner under her feet. She looked down, and felt her gorge rise. She was standing on the stomach of one of the women who had been ahead of her. On an impulse she began to pull away the bricks, shuddering whenever she touched the warm flesh. When she had uncovered the face she stopped and clapped her hand over her mouth; then she turned and hurried away. She came to the shell-hole, right in the middle of the road. There were pieces of a car scattered about, and a lamppost, snapped in two, leaned drunkenly on the edge of the hole. There was a hand lying beside it.

From a side street a family came hurrying, the woman carrying a baby, the man leading two little girls. "Can you tell us where there's a shelter?" they yelled. She motioned them to come over to her, and they all began to run down the street. The droning was all around them now; they took no notice of it, nor

of the explosions that rocked the houses and made the ground quiver. They ran.

Two wardens appeared ahead and beckoned to them. Suddenly the droning became gigantic, and she saw another plane diving for her. "Oh God," she thought, "this time I'm in for it." She waited for the crash as she ran—she was sure she was screaming. But there was no crash, only a sudden rat-rat-rat, a brittle dry stutter. The two wardens flung up their arms and sank languidly to the ground. "Lie down," someone shouted, and they all threw themselves on their faces. The stutter passed and they all got up, except the woman with the baby. The man went across to her and knelt beside her, bending over and talking to her, the two little girls standing beside him with awed faces.

She left them and continued wearily. Oh to be home, even if it did mean cowering in darkness. She was cold now, but it would be warm there, and father would joke reassuringly, and she could rest and sleep.

She passed houses where a tongue of flame was licking up the shattered, crazily-standing walls. Two ambulances screamed by, white and efficient. Somewhere, someone was sobbing, hard persistent drops of sound. She was aware that the droning had ceased; there was a great white silence in the empty sky, and the streets lay relaxed.

Round the corner now, and home. They'll have been worried; how glad they'll be. She turned the corner, and her eyes looked for the neat house, with its little garden.

There was no house, no garden, only a great hole, the earth brown and yellow, scattered bricks, half a wall, and dust. She closed her eyes, and looked again, but the hole was still there. "The chances of a direct hit are one in . . ." how many was it? She couldn't remember. "The chances of a direct hit are one in . . ."—"the chances of a direct hit are . . ."—"the chances are . . ." . . .

As she stood there the all-clear signal ripped out. There were voices around her.

"They've gone, the dirty sods. Thank God."

"Yes, they've gone. But don't forget, they'll probably come back."

"Yes, they'll come back."

She walked in the frosty air to the edge of the hole, and
stood looking down. She swayed slightly.

The chances are They'll come back.

ANNEXATION

What I have made my own
is mine alone
as drink and food
are subdued
by me to muscle, meat and bone.

I assimilate
exotic trait
all that belongs to me
will gravitate
and I am great
with unwakened possibility.

I am the rolling stone
no moss is safe from me.
The foreign boundary
I look upon
cross and recross and make my own country.

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