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Fall 1948

Flamingo, Fall, 1948, Vol. 24, No. 1

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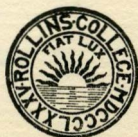
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Found in the Lake County Jail House at Tavares, Florida. It was on the third floor of the jail, in the rather dingy, woman's cell; dirty mattresses lay bare on the iron beds, a screen (perhaps to hide the occupants from the prying eyes of the jailors) hid an antiquated bath tub. On the wall were scribbled names of former occupants, the usual obscenities and crude drawings, and this—well, call it a poem:

*If I only had the wings
Of a beautiful dove,
I fly away to the one I love.
Who is Clint Warren.
They may keep me here for a while,
But not always, darling,
I see you again,
True love never fails.
I'll stick by you
Until parts us.
Yours forever
Estelle Meckles.*

Flamingo

VOLUME TWENTY-FOUR NUMBER ONE FALL 1948

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AN APPLE, MAYBE

by NOAH GENZ

OPTIMISTICALLY attempting to balance the covered food basket, a blanket and two pillows against one hip, he cautiously let the thermos jug slide down to the sand from under his other arm. Then followed the large blue and white beach umbrella. As he spread out the blanket on what appeared to be almost the last available spot on the crowded beach, he smiled contentedly in anticipation of the coming hours of rest. Elsa, he thought as he closed his eyes, should be down from the dressing rooms in a few minutes.

"Oh, Max, No! Not that way! Get up, honey, and spread the blanket the other way around."

Max carefully opened one eye and looked up at his wife. She is still beautiful, he thought, even if she has become a redhead.

"But, why, dear? It's very comfortable this way. Here, sit down and have an apple."

The new red coiffure, Max noted, harmonized beautifully with the equally new bathing suit, and obviously neither had been intended for the water.

"I don't want an apple and I won't sit down until you get up and turn that blanket around. Why must you always think only of yourself? If that's the way you feel about it, I'm going for a walk."

After rearranging the blanket he leaned back for a moment, resting on his elbows, and admired the slim grace of

a group of young men playing leap frog at the water's edge. Glancing down at his own protruding middle, he raised his eyebrows and sighed reflectively. After all, he reasoned, I'm old enough to have a paunch if I want to. God knows I've worked hard to get money enough to afford one! If only Elsa could see that appearances don't really count for much after all. Sighing again, he reached into the basket and groped for another apple.

"Max, honey, would you mind moving the blanket? There's a wind here—I'm sure it would be much warmer over there, by the man in the yellow trunks. And it looks like more of a slope too, so it would be much more comfortable."

Max' eyes opened very slowly this time. Would he never get to rest? Suddenly he was so tired it seemed he couldn't possibly lift his head off the pillow.

"But, Elsa, it's so nice here—I—"

"I told you to call me 'Elise,' Max. You know I don't like 'Elsa'—makes me sound like an old German 'frau,' or an ad for a milk company."

"All right—'Elise' then. But honestly, darling, why don't you just sit down and relax? Take a little nap, or—would you like an apple, maybe?"

"No! I would not like an apple, maybe! And if you're too lazy to do anything for me, all right! I'll sit up here and be uncomfortable."

As she made no move to carry out her threat, Max heaved himself lugubriously into a sitting position.

"Where is the place you want to move to, dear?"

"Right over there—see that open space?"

Since the desired location was only eight feet distant, Max decided he could make it. He folded the blanket and picked up the food basket, thermos jug and a pillow. He hesitated a moment, then decided to make another trip for the umbrella and the other pillow.

Seated again, he let himself fall back onto the sand. This time he must rest. He thought about Elsa and their life together. They had been madly in love once—he still loved her—but his love was no longer a riotous, pestering thing—rather it was a deep and essential element of his life. He decided he had never really understood Elsa. Never had he seemed to be enough for her—and though he thought she returned his love, he was never quite sure. She had always craved—and usually

found—excitement of one kind or another, beyond what he could give. She could no more refrain from flirting with men than she could stop being a woman.

Inwardly he braced himself for what was sure to happen next. He had seen it so often that he could have told her, ahead of time, every pose and gesture, every move she would make. His mind recoiled from the memories. He closed his eyes and closed his mind and sought for rest.

Elsa completed the elaborate rite she made of the simple act of sitting down. Then she raised her arms in the graceful, timeless motion of arranging already perfect hair. As she did so, she threw her head back in an attitude carefully calculated to display her profile to its best advantage, glancing out of the corner of her eye to gauge the effect on the young blond god in yellow trunks. As expected, he had raised himself up and was watching her appraisingly. She flung her arms wide and smiled at the sky. This was going to be almost too easy—who said she was getting old? She raised her heels off the sand and stretched, catlike. She looked as if at any minute she might begin to purr.

Suddenly a puzzled, almost a horrified look came into her eyes, her carefully shaped brows drew together and her painted lips formed a muted question. She made a frantic dive for her hand bag and gazed steadily for a long moment into the small mirror attached to its cover. What did she see? Surely the same face which had returned her smile for—how many years? She sat quite still then, staring out over the deep green of the water, for once oblivious to the people milling around her. Never had she felt so alone, so lonely. Then she remembered—there was still Max—she was not alone—not yet.

“Max—Max, darling. Are you asleep?”

“Uh? Oh, no, Els—Elise, I’m not asleep. What is it now?”

“‘Elsa,’ Max, from now on. And, Max—is there an apple left yet in the basket?”

As he turned to open the basket Max saw the young blond giant in yellow trunks, stretched out on the sand—asleep.

MIDNIGHT ON LAKE MAITLAND

by HAMILTON HOLT

(The editor of the *Flamingo* asks me to submit an original poem, "serious or humorous." As this is the first time I have been honored with such an invitation, I gladly comply. The reading of modern typical magazine poetry not long ago drove me, not to drink, but to Welsh rarebits. Under the latter's nightmarish stimulation I composed this "pome." Realizing the English faculty of Rollins might flunk the editors of the *Flamingo* for committing the literary sacrilege of printing a sixteen-line sonnet, I grant the editor liberty to cut out any two lines. I doubt if any reader will suffer thereby or note the difference!—H. H.)

*As one who fresh from Lybian meads
Methinks th' ethereal hosts of dawn a-blushing,
And pulsing still the jejune waves onrushing,
How sweet it is athwart the stilly vault
Of sable night, in effervescence dight,
To whiff the fragrant moon.
While round about, within, without
The amorous sphere, now there, yet here
Lingers adown the gloom.*

*Oh, Maestro, may we filch again this hour,
Midst Delphic vales and valleys.
And hear the umbrageous sallies
Round molten Luna's bower.
Yea, quaff again this eve's seraphic bliss.
Life's not to hold amiss.
Ah me! and oft betimes, Ah me!*



EYES ARE TO SEE WITH

64 DALLAS WILLIAMS

THE five-fifteen express was almost ready to pull out of the station when Miss Emily Banks reached the platform. Breathing heavily, she joined the last straggling group to climb onto the departing train. Her face was flushed, and at the steps she paused for a moment, pressing her free hand to her chest. The tightness she had felt there of late had an annoying way of returning just when she was in a hurry.

Well, it was her own fault, she guessed. She'd had no business stopping so long to look at that dress display in Mason Barton's window. Her father would have been concerned for her if she admitted having run for two blocks to make up for it. Still, the train ride home should rest her enough.

Emily rode the five-fifteen to Meadow Hills every weekday night. She always secretly hoped, but never actually believed, that one trip at the end of a routine day might be different from the others.

As always, the lurch of the starting train caught her off balance as she started down the aisle. Clutching knitting bag and purse in one hand, she steadied herself with the other, trying without much success to avoid bumping the other passengers. Two of these looked up, *i r r i t a t e d*, as her elbow brushed their hats, but the majority were far too occupied with the evening paper to give a thought to the slight figure advancing hesitantly down the row of seats.

Noticing a vacant one near the middle of the car. Emily moved in that direction. When she reached it, a youngish-looking woman had sat down next to the window. The large brim

on her hat covered her eyes, and her gloved hand rested upon the suitcase that lay on the other half of the seat.

Emily coughed politely. "Would you mind moving that?" she ventured, gesturing timidly with her knitting bag. The woman raised her head and regarded her thoughtfully.

"Would you mind sitting in the next seat? No one there, you see," she added.

Emily looked up and was chagrined to see that it was quite empty. Moving forward without a word, she smoothed her coat in preparation. Her palms were damp with perspiration, as they always were when she felt embarrassed.

The conductor waited until she was settled, then put out his hand for her ticket. After a fumbling exploration of her purse she rewarded his patience with a shy smile, and the stub of yellow paper. He continued up the aisle. Emily lost no time in shifting bags and taking out her knitting. Mentally she checked off the number of rows she would finish before the end of the ride. Meadow Hills was the last station before the terminal. He father used to ask, in her solicitous way, why she didn't get a job closer to home. That's a bothersome ride for you, Emily," he would say.

She had sighed and admitted that it was, but she liked being in the city in the daytime. And commuting wasn't so terribly hard. "I always get a lot of knitting done," was her standard reply.

Tonight, however, this was difficult. The yarn twisted in her hands, and twice she had to stop to untangle it. The second time, after delivering a particularly determined yank, she became aware that someone was watching her. The feeling gnawed at the fringes of her consciousness and grew until not looking up was unbearable. The yarn snapped in her hand. Wasn't that a good enough excuse?

Yes, she had been right. There was the man, a tall, heavily built man, riding in one of the reversed seats at the front of the cart, facing all the passengers, but he was certainly staring at her. It was so unusual for her to be returning a man's gaze that Emily lowered her eyes immediately. The moisture of her hands made knitting impossible now, and the stitches seemed to swim beneath her.

She felt those eyes burning into her with an intensity that made the color rise until she must be crimson. Without looking up she tried to remember the man's face. A broad sort of face

it was, with features too strong to be pleasant, and yet not exactly ugly.

It should be flattering to be stared at in such a way, she told herself. Long ago Emily had realized that hers was not the particular type of beauty that attracted men. Quite admittedly, she was mousey, with her colorless hair that hung limply around a narrow face whose thin lips seemed to bear an habitual apology. "Smile more often, Emily," was what her father advised. "People admire a cheerful disposition." She paid little attention to this. It occurred to her that if people thought about her at all, it was hardly fair to deceive them.

But deception or no, anything would be better than being the object of those untiringly relentless eyes. Self-consciously she glanced out of the window and forced herself to appear interested in the changing scenery. The buildings of the city were fewer now, and soon would give way to the smaller, tree-bordered houses of the outlying towns. Ordinarily this sight was vaguely comforting, but today everything familiar was overshadowed by whatever it was in the cold eyes of the stranger. From time to time they narrowed until he was watching her through two slits which might have been carved in a face of stone.

"Why, why should he stare at me, of all people?" she asked herself fiercely. "He must want something, certainly he wouldn't be above robbery, or worse—probably would dare anything, even right here—" She had thought of slipping off the train at the next stop, but dismissed the idea hastily. Better to stay here, one with the crowd. Not that any of these remote individuals buried in their newspapers would put out a hand if he pursued her. How could they be so oblivious to her danger? And the conductor was nowhere in sight. He hadn't been around since taking up the tickets, although his voice sounded through the car at each station.

A sharp gust of wind caught her at the back of the neck, and a fine shower of cinders fell across the seat. Emily twisted abruptly to see who had opened the window. The woman behind her was peering out into the fading light.

"How many stops before we come to the end of the line?" she asked.

"Well, I've never gone past Meadow Hills," Emily heard herself saying. "But it's the last one before that, so the end would be about four stops."

The woman pulled down the window with an effort, and Emily turned around. "I won't let him know I'm afraid," she whispered to herself. That would be the worst mistake of all. She would stare right back at him. After a second of brave attempt a worse thought came to her. What if he should try to sit with her? Hadn't he moved as if to rise just then? Hastily spreading her knitting bag over the adjacent empty seat she eyed the other passengers wildly.

Where was that conductor? She would have the man put off the train. That faint bulge under his coat could mean only one thing. She would be lucky if he didn't decide to use it first. Emily shuddered as she pictured her father waiting in the chilly November evening for a familiar form that never appeared at the station door. Two people can be lonely together, she reflected but one of these lives alone would be unbearable. Emily was alone now, completely in the power of his pair of eyes.

Were they black eyes? Brown or blue they could never be. Her father's were blue; pale and puffy at times, but a comforting shade from which she never read anything except mild approval or gentle reproof. There was nothing mild or gentle in this gaze that seized upon her every move at every moment. When she tried to draw a breath, it was strained through cramped lungs as she shrank closer to the window pane. The last slanting rays of the sun shone without warmth through the dingy glass, the particles of dust in its shaft dancing crazily.

Emily's eyes darted in similar patterns around the train. It's load was thinning out now, as passengers got off at their respective stops. She tried to recognize the few heads visible in the gulf that separated her from that overpowering form ahead, but everyone else looked just alike.

The train jerked to a stop and two men and a girl got up and walked to the door. Emily's heart leaped as she saw the conductor appear from nowhere and take the girl's arm as he helped her down. Couldn't he help her, Emily, as well? He even knew her name, for hadn't she ridden this train for twelve and a half years without missing a working day?

Her mouth formed the words to call, but she stopped as soon as she felt her lips begin to part. He might not believe her. "Now Miss Banks," he might say, "haven't we been seeing too many movies lately?"

No, it would never do to call out. This was real danger, but only to her father could she explain its reality. She thought of the account of a robbery they had read about in the paper that morning. Something about an attack on a woman's life as well had caused them to shake their heads despairingly.

She must stop thinking at all, Emily told herself firmly. The train stopped again. Four more people got off. She watched them silently, a quiet terror rising in her throat. The idea that she was no longer what could be called young, and never had been beautiful, was cold comfort. There could be nothing but dread under that solitary stare reading her innermost thoughts.

Silently the train began to move again. A few lights shone through the graying twilight. In the mortuary gloom, pin-pointed by the never faltering eyes before her in the car, all Emily could hear was the throbbing of her heart.

Suddenly and without warning the man rose and started toward her. In the wave of panic that swept her into a sea of darkness, she felt her hand rise to her throat.

Reaching the seat behind Emily, the man stopped, and stood looking down at the woman who wore her hat over her eyes. Very quietly he said, "Don't go, Nell. I don't know what else to say. Just—please don't go."

Slowly Nell raised her head and relief flooded her face, softening the lovely but weary features. "Why didn't you say that before?" she pleaded.

The man shook his head. "I didn't know what I was doing," he said, his voice catching a little. "But I just had to follow you on this train, and I couldn't take my eyes off you for a minute. . . . Where do we get off and turn around?"

"Meadow Hills," the conductor's call sounded hollowly through the car. It had stopped again, and he walked toward the little group. "Doesn't someone get off here? Oh yes, Miss Banks; this is her stop. Looks like she had a hard day." He talked on as the other two watched him shake her gently by the shoulder. "Wake up, Miss Banks."

Her knitting bag slid to the floor and he bent to pick it up. In trying to place it in the hand that clutched the throat, he saw her eyes. Straightening abruptly, he stared down at Miss Banks. She isn't asleep, he said to himself, and won't be needing her knitting bag any more.

LAST POEM

by Edwin L. Clarke

*He is not dead, as one lamp lights another,
Till many shine to make the night like day,
He lives in men who loved him as a brother,
And saw through him the life, the truth, the way.
He lives in souls aflame with faith he kindled,
In minds he filled with thoughts for human good,
In feet inspired by him to speed for kindness,
In tongues he moved to plead for brotherhood.*

*Live on, dear friend, in hearts you woke to justice,
In hands you taught to guide the weak and blind,
In spirits stirred to build a glad tomorrow,
Where peace and joy shall dwell with all mankind.
Live on and serve, so long as truth has power,
And faith, and hope, and love of man endure;
Thanks be to God, though tears dim this sad hour,
You live and love and grow forevermore.*

—Edwin Leavitt Clarke (1948).

WINTER

*The sky becomes a frozen lake
And stars are jagged chips of ice.
The wood is winter stacked, and mice
Have burrowed in the bags of grain.
The smoke that rises in the west
Is colorless, no sound will break
The dormant time of quiet rest.*

—Joan F. Leonard.



OKEECHOBEE CITY

by PAT MEYER

AS befits any self-respecting town, Okeechobee City owns a fire engine. That its dubious age and condition prevent any mad dashes to scenes of conflagration does not alter this important fact. Yet Okeechobee's fire engine has not always been disreputable. Local inhabitants recall ruefully the days when they possessed a machine to be proud of. The ultimate in modernity, this achievement of the Boom served the city for several months before being reclaimed by its makers, whose annoyance at a succession of unpaid installments was understandable, if regrettable. For it had soon become apparent that Okeechobee was unable to finance her glitter, that her dreams of greatness lacked material foundations.

That was in 1923, when Okeechobee's turbulent population numbered around 2500; the same year that a Baptist missionary, getting off the train to face his new pastorate, was greeted with the words, "You are now in the Chicago of the South." That was when people actually believed that Okeechobee might become a new Chicago, when the lavish planning of streets and parks and buildings reflected the general conviction that here was a potential metropolis of astronomical importance. But the story of its fire engine is symbolic of the story of the town, whose chamber of commerce still reiterates wistful claims to being "The Hub of South Florida" and "The Best Place in the World to Live", but whose more realistic cowboys comment, "Oh, it's just a place that holds a few people together."

Located just three miles north of the lake whose name it bears, on the main highway through central Florida, Okeechobee City (Pop., 1,435) lives in the memories of most casual visitors only as "That place where we stopped for lunch on the way to Miami." To those who pass through too quickly to sense its frontier-town charm, there can be little of interest

in a place whose lengthy streets are virtually deserted, whose impressive courthouse has an air of being set down there by mistake, whose grandiose, half-hidden city hall seems on the verge of collapse. It is just another bit of mileage checked off, to the tourist who doesn't realize that a bona fide hermit inhabits that dilapidated house over there, or know the story behind the highly respectable edifice of that Baptist church; hasn't heard of the colorful criminals who inhabit the county jail, of the most colorful of all, who concluded a career of spectacular wickedness by becoming county sheriff.

The town has always been a trifle unconventional. Only last year a local couple, who might be called Fritz and Matilda Brecker, created a mild stir of interest in Okeechobee, as they had done periodically for the past 30 years or so. Since the early days of the settlement, the Breckers had lived out in the scrub country to the north, existing precariously by indeterminate means. Perhaps they had a few cattle; no one seems to know exactly. At any rate, everyone in town was acquainted with them, for they made weekly trips into Okeechobee. And there was another reason. Every now and then, Fritz gave a party, and large groups of men congregated out in the woods to drink beer, returning to their homes late and uproarious. It was a well-known fact that Matilda was quite often also present at these "stag" parties", and everyone knew, too, that she flirted with every man in town. The women gossiped about her, of course, and wondered why her husband put up with it. Last year one day the two of them came to town as usual, but this time they went to the county courthouse. When they left, the judge had sensational news to tell. Fritz and Matilda Brecker had just got around to being married.

But the really sensational days of Okeechobee were around 25 years ago, when the Boom was beginning. It was in 1923 that the imaginative editor of the weekly *Call* sold the newspaper in order to buy red velvet curtains with his initials on them and return to the stage as a magician. This was the time of Fingy Connors, the dock worker who bought most of Okeechobee, decided to build a highway, and did it; of Pogy Bill, the ex-outlaw sheriff, then coping with the intricacies of supervised rum-running; of Laura Upthegrove, "Queen of the Everglades," and the notorious Ashley gang; of the building of the city hall.

It was also the time of the building of the Baptist Church. In 1920 the Rev. E. M. C. Dunklin arrived, well-equipped with Baptist faith and fervor, but received little enthusiasm. His first collection plate contained 30 cents, two pieces of gum, two buttons, half a match and two bullets. Three years later came Rev. Edward L. Shuler, and it was under his leadership that \$22,000 was raised for a new church building. It was started too late, though, and the crash, which came in Okeechobee around 1927, stopped work on it. Then the hurricane of 1928 all but devastated the partially completed building. Shuler, however, gave evidence of a staunch philosophy in his attitude toward the affair. Telling about the church, he remarks: "It was torn down during the latter stages of the depression, but, no doubt, could have been reclaimed if the Lord's will had prevailed." Then, in a belated flare of caution: "But this is just my own feeling."

It was around then, too, that the welfare of the Okeechobee school was presided over by an extraordinary man: a certified public accountant, minister and lawyer, who also held M.D. and Ph.D. degrees. An individual of considerable learning, he possessed somewhat erratic convictions, and was always willing to deliver himself of lengthy dissertations on the subject of health. His own pursuit of the good life took the form of keeping his head shaved and wearing his trousers a size too large, all in the interests of health. He also refused to wear a belt—it cut off circulation, he affirmed. Local citizens remember him as the best principal the school ever had.

For the spectacular Indian stories interspersed through the history of Okeechobee, it is necessary to go back a little farther. One of the most dramatic of these episodes is now so entwined with legend that the accuracy of some of it is highly dubious, but much of it is authenticated with eye-witness accounts.

It all happened around 1907 or 1908, or so the story says. A gigantic Seminole named Big Tom Tiger, reportedly seven feet high, held the real power in the small band of Indians at Cow Creek, near Okeechobee City. Using an adze one day to shape the canoe he was building, he was struck by lightning and killed. Naturally, this tragedy was the occasion for more than usually elaborate funeral ceremonies among the Indians, who concluded their celebration in the usual man-

ner, by placing their leader's body under his canoe and leaving it on a knoll surrounded by his possessions.

It was a few months later that a scientist from the Smithsonian Institute arrived, looking for Indian relics. He stayed at the home of Peter Raulerson, Okeechobee's first settler, who was known to be a good friend of the Indians, and seemed to be the logical person to lead Mr. Flourney, as local residents recall him, to the site of Seminole relics. The Raulersons helped him search around their home, accompanying him to the nearby site of the Battle of Okeechobee, an important engagement of the Seminole War, but he was not satisfied merely with the arrowheads he unearthed there. He inquired further: was there by any chance an Indian burial ground nearby?

So the Raulersons found him a guide, one Barley Barber, and sent him to the spot where Tom Tiger had been placed. That was more like it; there Flourney found a rich source of souvenirs. And then he turned over the canoe, saw the skeleton of this huge Indian—and decided he must have it for the Smithsonian Institute.

Those who knew the native customs and psychology tried to dissuade him, but he proceeded nevertheless, taking his trophies with him to Washington. The canoe was replaced, and local citizens remarked hopefully that the Indians wouldn't disturb it themselves, so they would probably never discover the theft.

But it wasn't long before a furious delegation appeared in Okeechobee, and soon the townspeople knew what had happened. The Indians had found out, and were not to be pacified. This was desecration, sacrilege; that their friend Peter Raulerson had connived at it made matters even worse. The bones must be returned, immediately. Otherwise

The news spread throughout the countryside. To settlers who remembered the terrors of the Seminole War, this threat was catastrophic. Many of them, living out on the scrub land, were well-acquainted with the Indians. They knew, for example, that at any outbreak of hostilities the warriors considered it kindness to kill their friends first; they realized the extent of their isolation, and feared there would be no chance for escape.

Many remembered the Seminole wars, and around their firesides they told tales of it. Soon the stories were alive in

everyone's memory how the Indians burned and robbed and murdered; how they retreated to the swamps, where white soldiers could not follow; how dreadful were the panic flights to safety. Fear permeated the land around Okeechobee; many expected a new outbreak of the interminable and dreadful wars. They knew that the sheriff, Dan Carlton, had written to Washington; they knew that every effort was being made to calm the enraged Indians—but slowly they began moving their possessions and their families into Okeechobee.

W. I. Fee, the undertaker who later buried most of the Ashley Gang, was living in Okeechobee then; he has some rueful reminiscences of his own business acumen in the matter. "While we townspeople were not worried," he relates, "I thought I'd be smart and utilize the opportunity for some advertising [sic]. So I inserted an ad in the paper, 'Indian Uprising Threatened. We have arms & ammunition.' The tourists in the hotel across the street left on the first train."

But the local agitation apparently communicated itself to Washington, for one day, says the story, a package of bones arrived by express in Okeechobee. Whether or not they were truly the remains of Big Tom Tiger nobody cared to inquire. With due ceremony and fervent apologies, they were placed reverently under the canoe and left to rot undisturbed. The Indians stopped talking of war, the settlers returned, somewhat shamefacedly, to their outlying homes, the tourists began to come back to Okeechobee.

THE PUPPETEERS

*Without our hands to pull the strings
These dolls would be but lifeless things.
And when we make each one to stand
And move his painted head and hand
They are as men to hate and love
And we are as the gods above.*

—Tom Snow.

FOR ANY NATIONALIST

*Consider, if you choose, the American Dream;
drawn intimations of its nobility
as the fast freight
trembles the darkest hour,
westward bound from Caribou
through Wild Horse, Colorado.*

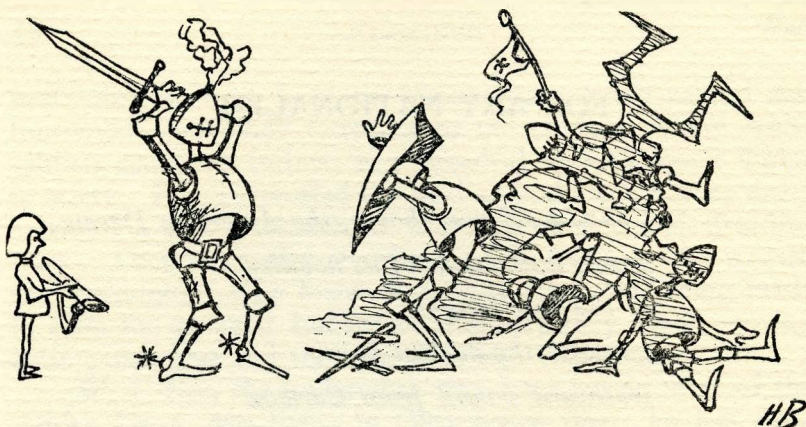
*But forget not the promise implied to those
who wake to the lonely thunder
of the Siberian Express:*

*Sing the bright anthem
as the sun probes
the Atlantic shoals
and the eight o'clock whistles
stride hourly across the continent.*

*But hear, too, the beauty
of the cry from the minaret.*

*Remember the names of the Dream
all have their mornings and their midnights—
but the Dream remains.*

—Gordon B. Clark.



ELAINE, MAID OF ASTALOT

by JIM ANDERSON

Editor's Note: In the rush and hurry of this gay society in which we live, there moves a quiet and sober person who is little noticed by those of us who are occupied with the brilliant and the spectacular. He seldom moves beyond the Center where, in the midst of the jocular socialites about him, he sips his coffee in an absent-minded, unassuming fashion, except to spend long hours in the library surrounded by the books and the silence which he loves. There in the library, he plods steadily in scholarly pursuits, reading strange and forgotten tales and reveling in queer by-paths of antique lore. From these lonely studies comes the story which he now unfolds; it is a story which he has recovered from ancient annals, and which he has translated for us in his superb and scholarly style. He is J. Anderson, and his story is a true one from the days when Britain was yet a child . . .

ELAINE, MAID OF ASTALOT

I, J. Anderson, shall tell a story, but it is not fiction. The events which shall unfold themselves concern people who lived and loved; it is a story of tournaments, of sparkling diamonds, of gentle knights, of fair ladies. It tells of forbidden love, of heart-break, and of death. I shall begin it; it is called . . .

ELAINE, MAID OF ASTALOT

Long, long ago King Arthur ruled over Britain, a country of fair fields and quiet forests, a country of which Camelot,

the fabled city was the capital, and in which was a castle called Astolat. It is of this castle that I speak.

High in a remote tower of Castle Astalot, Elaine, the maid of Astalot, guarded the shield of Sir Launcelot. It was wrapped in a casing of silk of her own fashioning as it hung suspended from the wall. Why was it that the maid guarded this shield, when she knew not even the name of its owner? Ah, there is the tale! And the tale begins with a diamond which was a prize at a tournament.

It was a diamond that had been found by Arthur, long before he had become king, which he had thriftily saved to give away at a tournament. He had found it in a shadowy glen in Cassell Forest near Baker-on-Chester-near-Worcester, England. In this dark and dreary glen, two brothers, one of them a king, had fought to the death. The one who was a king had worn a crown that contained nine diamonds. Arthur found this crown, but since he was not yet king he had no use for it, so he picked out the diamonds and threw the rest away. Then when he became king, he inherited a crown resplendent in diamonds, and not only that but rubies and sapphires and garnets and pearls, too. By and by, he got tired of carrying around a pocket full of diamonds with him everywhere he went. Besides, they got aggravating; if he wanted to get at his matches, they were under the diamonds, and if he shifted the diamonds to the other pocket, he was sure to want his pocket knife which sure enough was under the diamonds. He fretted and worried no end about this, until finally he decided to give them away. So he made a proposition to all his lords and peers that there should be for that day forward an annual tournament every year, and the winner should win a diamond. None of the others knew what trouble a pocket full of diamonds could put a person to, so they were all eager for it. The tournament went on for eight annual years, and it so turned out that Sir Launcelot won all the diamonds, and he had given them all to Queen Quinevere, Arthur's wife, with whom Launcelot was conducting a little affair.

On this last year, though Launcelot got mixed up and misunderstood something which Quinevere told him one day. He thought that she didn't want him to join the tournament that year, so in her presence he informed Arthur that an ancient old wound of his would prevent him from jousting that year. As soon as Quinevere got a chance, though, she informed

Launcelot that he was a stupid oaf, and that since she had eight of the diamonds, she wanted all of them or none. In view of the recent lie to his liege lord, this presented somewhat of a quandary to the rather simple Launcelot. Quinevere however, with the natural deceitfulness of woman, counseled him to go to the tourney in disguise, and as an excuse for doing so, to tell Arthur that in the past so many of his opponents had quailed at the sight of his shield, he had decided to relieve them of their fears of his prowess; therefore he would use a disguise.

Launcelot acquiesced, but forgot to inform Arthur of the latest developments. Instead, he gat him on his horse and hied him hense to the Castle of Astalot in order to move the plot of the story along. There he met the Lord of Astalot, and his two sons, and the maid of Astalot. Elaine, having never seen other knight than the two boys, was greatly impressed to say the least.

Sir Launcelot hung around Astalot until time for the tournament and then, having begged a shield off one of the brothers in order that Elaine might have his to guard, he set off with the other brother for the tournament. On his helmet he wore a favour given to him by Elaine. It was a sleeve she had torn from one of her old evening dresses, embroidered with pearls, crimson, and quite fancy. Launcelot could not figure far enough ahead to see the complications which would ensue when Quinevere found out about the favour.

The tournament was going full blast when Launcelot arrived, but as soon as he entered it business really picked up. King, duke, earl, count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But Launcelot's own team, not knowing who he was, of course, because of the ingenious way in which he had disguised himself by swapping shields and wrapping an old red sleeve around his head, were greatly angered that they should be beaten on their own home diamond. So they bare down on him, the whole push at the same time and, surrounding him, beat and hacked at him with right good will and staunch hearts, he being but one, and they many; until one of them thrust his lance blindly into the melee, and by chance an inch or two of it went into Sir Launcelot's side, and brake off. This attack was not quite chivalrous, and one of them paid for it too, because Launcelot's buddy, Lavaine, rushed in behind and smote one of them on the helmet so that he had a severe headache for the rest of the week. Seeing that there were

now two instead of one to fight, the Knights of the Round Table broke and fled.

Arthur forthwith sent to Launcelot, telling him to identify himself and come around to collect the diamond; but Launcelot, being slightly ill because of the block of wood in his side, offered his apologies for not being able to appear, and rode off into the woods to lie down and rest.

Arthur, being quite honest, called one of his knights, Sir Gawain, who was good for practically nothing, and commissioned him to carry the diamond to Launcelot. Gawain filled the position of messenger boy reluctantly, but he filled it. He carried the diamond to Astalot, of all places; where he put up for the night and remained for the week-end. There he found out about the budding Launcelot-Elaine affair, and gave the diamond to Elaine to hold for Sir Launcelot. Then he hastened back to court where he spilled the beans to Queen Quinevere, and anybody else who would listen. The Court was quite angry, because everybody knew that Launcelot was Quinevere's man, when the King was not around, and regarded Launcelot's affair with Elaine as almost bordering on immorality.

Elaine, meanwhile, hunted up Launcelot, gave him the diamond, and nursed him back to health. Then the two of them wandered back to Astalot, Launcelot to get his shield and she to get Launcelot, if she could.

Launcelot retrieved his shield and immediately began to make preparations for the return trip to Camelot. These preparations consisted in saddling his horse, so Elaine realized that she hadn't much time. She, according to classic procedure, declared her love. Launcelot, being a bit on the thick side, hadn't realized what was in the wind, and so was caught off balance. He tried to tell her that he couldn't marry her as she was only the maid and didn't make enough to keep him up in saddle-soap. She burst out crying, whereupon Launcelot mumbled something about "having to go pay my taxes", and, clamboring clumsily onto his horse, cantered off. This left Elaine peeved not a little bit.

The affair having been her first, not knowing what else to do in a situation like the one in which she now found herself, she repaired to her tower and died.

Her brothers wept over her, and set about arranging the funeral. But they had lent their shovel to the Duke of Nor-

folk, and so could not dig a grave for her. Taking counsel, they decided that Launcelot had caused her death, so he could jolly well bury her. So they loaded her on a flat boat and shipped her to Camelot.

When she arrived, Quinevere and Launcelot were the first to see her. They had been having something like a quarrel, and Quinevere had just thrown the diamonds into the river. Launcelot was stupidly staring at the splashes and wondering what was wrong.

The whole Court wandered down to the river to gaze at the corpse on the flat boat. They gazed for a while, and then someone asked Arthur what he was going to do with her. Arthur held a hurried counsel with Merlin, and announced that they would bury her in the Royal Vaults, since there was plenty of room in them because they had been thoroughly tidied up and cleaned in the spring house-cleaning.

The funeral turned out to be the social event of the season. Quinevere and all of the other court ladies shed innumerable tears, and Merlin delivered a smack-up sermon on Druidism. It was quite impressive, and it ends, quite conclusively, the story of the maid of Astalot.

*Her feet tapped a tune on the silver cement
The grasses caught it with glee,
Not a soul knew how gladsome she went
To offer her ripeness to me.*

—Sidney Lanier.

GROWTH

by JACK E. TEAGARDEN

I WATCHED a little boy die, this afternoon.

The sense of death is with me still, and I ache to the core of my old-maid's heart. See if you feel what I felt when I tell you how Jimmy Taylor died.

There was destruction in the air. I should have been warned. Days of beauty are always ageing, and this day was Florida at its best.

It rained while I was at the post office. I didn't notice the rain when I set out for home, for I had in my hand an acceptance and a check from the Pacific Weekly. I suppose I felt as good as a middle-aged female poet can expect. But as I walked, the heat of my body, confined by a raincoat, made me perspire. The last quarter mile, my skirt hem got soggy and slapped against the calves of my legs; my hair wisped from beneath my hat and dripped like the towering oaks beside the road. I was uncomfortable, and tired. Consequently, I was unprepared for the shock when beauty hurled itself at me, blaring like trumpets, making me want to run away before it—or I—faded.

The wind had been high, and clumps of spanish moss lay soggily in the road—or pointed out force-patterns in the water. Suddenly, the sun stabbed through the rain, turning it to silver slivers. One ray plummeted through the branches of a huge oak tree, and something screamed triumphantly, "*Look!*"

There in a puddle in the black asphalt—a puddle shot through with threads of white sand—balanced by wisps of gray-green moss, lay two green oranges. They were the purest, deepest, most vibrant green I have ever experienced. They glistened in the sun and water, vibrating through dimensions and shades of their own. Even when the sun waned a bit, those globules sent heavenward a light they seemed to have accumulated.

If there had been a live rattlesnake in the road, I could not have been more transfixed. So, I didn't hear the school bus. I wasn't aware of his presence until Jimmy Taylor spoke.

"You sick, Miss Scranley?"

"What?"

"You look funny, Miss Scranley."

"Oh! Jimmy! No. I'm not ill."

I cast about in my mind for conversation. "Is school out, Jimmy?"

"Yes 'um. Can you go swimming?"

"Will your grandmother permit it, Jimmy?"

"Yes 'um. You know she always lets me go when you go with me."

"Jimmy: did you notice . . . ," I asked hopefully—motioning toward the oranges.

"Notice what, Miss Scranley?" Jimmy said, kicking one of the oranges across the road.

"Oh, that it has stopped raining," I said weakly. I had forgotten that he was only a little boy.

"Yes, 'um. I'm sure she'll let me go."

"All right. Come to my house in about half an hour, Jimmy. Now, don't be late: you know the sun sets early this late in the year."

"Yes, 'um," Jimmy said over his shoulder, and he dashed down the road.

Jimmy's foot had addled the composition, the sun had moved, and my shaking knees were the only memorial of the scene that had affected me so.

* * *

I changed my clothes. When Jimmy came to my door, I was waiting for him.

By tacit agreement, we solemnly made capes of our towels by the simple process of tying them about our necks. As usual, we found pictures in clouds as we took the sand road to the lake, and perhaps we dawdled on the way.

At any rate, the sun was making the clouds change color, even before we reached the shore. Jimmy, feeling no chill in the air, dashed into the water and began the frenzied splashing that accompanied his swimming. I watched his slender, tanned arms flay the water, and felt the glow of affection this orphaned child always occasioned.

How old was he? Eleven? Twelve? Or more I didn't know. It had never mattered to us. We were "pals."

All the colors of the evening sky were mirrored in the water. Jimmy's energetic churning only made the reflected colors swim together in easter-egg-dye mixtures above the blue-green depths.

I swam fitfully, noticing the way the trees, hung with festoons of moss, stood black and lacy against the lovely sky. The water was cool, and the air warm. Just then, death seemed far away.

And then it began. Jimmy swam to my side and said: "Let's swim tandy, Miss Scranley."

"'Tandem,' Jimmy. All right."

He put his hands on my waist from behind, kicked furiously, and I pulled strongly with my arms. It was an old game of ours, conceived at a "Tarzan" movie, as I recall.

When I got to waist-high water, I stood up, and Jimmy pirouetted to face me. Somehow, the water dragged my bathing-suit strap down, and my right breast slipped out of the suit. I adjusted it quickly, more angry than embarrassed.

Then I looked up. Jimmy's eyes were fixed on my chest, and there was a strained look—an animal look—that twisted his face. I felt myself blushing. For a minute there was an awkward silence, during which Jim looked away quickly.

* * *

Oh, we got home all right. We carried our towels in our hands, though, and Jim scuffed at the sand with his foot. There was an uncomfortable silence between us, and I know not what whispered school-yard conversations he was recalling.

When we parted at my gate, Jim didn't hint for his usual cookie. He seemed glad to get away.

I watched his slender figure retreat down the road; noticing for the first time that his bones suggested the large, stocky man he would become.

* * *

Now, the sky is overcast. The light of the few stars I can pick out is blurred and depressing: looking heavenward is like peering through dirty water. Intermittant flashes of lightning are like sharp words in the dialogue of earth and sky. The insects drone and buzz tiredly; some of them are trying to commit suicide by beating themselves to death against the screen. There is no moon. And I sit here in the dark, bored with the radio, unelated by my poetic success.

I can't forget that I watched a little boy die, this afternoon. To say that I saw the birth of a young man is no compensation.

I think I shall cry.



BY THE MEDALS THEY WEAR

by STUART JAMES

HE LEANED against the dull bar of the Pub and poked idly at the foam on the glass of bitters before him. Then slowly he raised his lean, strong face and looked squarely into his own eyes that gazed back at him like points of blue ice from the mirror behind the bar. He stared in the mirror for several moments, then a dreamy look appeared in the deep set eyes. In the reflection his dull, khaki jacket took on the sheen of an American officer's blouse; on his shoulders appeared the gold leaves of a Major. The reflection moved; on the left sleeve was stiched an Eighth Airforce patch, while across the breast, beneath the wings, were four rows of ribbons. Slowly the Major straightened and, carelessly tossing six pence on the bar, walked leisurely from the Pub. Outside he paused for a moment on the sidewalk. He was young, for a Major, and strikingly handsome; the eyes in the lean face were the eyes of a fighter, pale blue and clear as ice. And now, from long habit, he swept those eyes over the morning sky. It was one of those rare days that October sometimes brings to London. The usual low ceiling of ragged clouds had swept out into the North Sea on a balmy southwester, and the barrage balloons over the city hung, fat and lazy, against the soft blue of the sky. Through the narrow streets the low rumble of army traffic drifted like the sullen roar of a distant storm.

Down at Westminster the hour hand on Big Ben was creeping toward eleven as the Major moved across the sidewalk in front of the Pub and turned north up Oxford Street toward Hyde Park. He made his way swiftly through the crowds with long, youthful strides, returning easily and gracefully the salutes of the lesser military personnel that brushed past him.

When the Major was four blocks from Hyde Park, suddenly, knifing the soft blue of the morning, came the low, fitful

wail of an air-raid siren. It was quickly joined by others and the wail became a frantic scream. Far to the south the flak guns began their sullen pounding; the low rumbling sound crept northward over the city like the lip of a wave moving up a beach. The Major stopped by a low doorway and looked upward. High in the sky a JU 88 twisted crazily amid the flak blossoms; it banked sharply and headed eastward for the safety of the North Sea. Gracefully, almost lazily, the bombs arched earthward. Three plummeted harmlessly into Hyde Park, but the fourth crashed into a block of buildings almost directly opposite the doorway in which the Major had taken refuge. Huddled against the door, he watched the roof of the nearest building lift slowly from its walls, hang languidly in the air for a moment, then fall back with a sickening crash. The whole front face of the three-story structure leaned outward and crumpeld into the street in a chaos of dust and sound. For a tiny, frozen moment, while the sunlight glinted on the settling dust, all was still, save the withdrawing rumble of the flak guns and the dying whimper of the sirens. Then, at the base of the jagged, open face of the building, a tiny flame flickered, went out, caught again and licked hungrily at the torn walls.

The Major stepped out into the street and swept his eyes over the wrecked building. It was deserted except for a dazed old woman, who half sat, half lay in the middle of the ground floor room, staring dully at the approaching flames. The Major acted instantly. He sprinted across the street, scrambled over the mass of rubble in front of the building and, protecting his face with his arms, leaped through the growing wall of flame into the room where the old woman lay. Ripping off his blouse he quickly covered her head and shoulders, and lifting her in his arms, plunged out through the crackling flames into the street just as the ceiling of the room crashed down behind him in a mass of flaming wreckage. A cheer broke from the gathering crowd as he bore the woman across the street and placed her gently on a make shift stretcher to await the coming of an ambulance. Slowly the Major put on his blouse and, brushing carelessly with his handkerchief at a small wound on his temple, smiled graciously down at the frightened old woman.

"Oi there, Corporal, ya owe me six pence."

Corporal Bucknell jumped: he stopped brushing at his temple with his handkerchief and a look of mild shock appeared

on his face. His eyes moved from his reflection in the dirty mirror and focused on the little Cockney barkeep who was eyeing him with good natured suspicion.

"Huh?" said Bucknell, embarrassed, moving the handkerchief from his temple to his nose and pretending to blow.

"C'mon", said the barkeep, "ya hain't 'ad that much t'drink, Corporal, let's 'ave th' six pence."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Bucknell, "I must have been thinking about something else." He laid six pence on the bar and reached for the glass of bitters. He was a relatively young man, around twenty-eight, an American, broad-shouldered and strikingly handsome; the eyes in the lean, strong face were the eyes of a fighter, pale blue and clear as ice. On the left breast of his neat uniform he wore the E.T.O. and the Good Conduct ribbons. Beside him at the bar, sprawled dejectedly against it, was another uniformed American; a somewhat older man with a pasty, bilious-looking face, whose nose was about the shape and color of a sun-ripened Mackintosh. They were the only two customers in the small London Pub.

"What th' hell are ya dreamin' about now?" asked Pfc. Drinkwater. He took a great gulp from his glass of bitters; the liquid slopped over the corners of the glass, ran down his chin and dripped on his tie.

A look of disgust flickered for a moment in Corporal Bucknell's eyes. He studied his glass of bitters intently for several minutes, poking at the largest bubbles in the foam with his finger. "I was just thinking", he said, speakly slowly, almost sullenly, "how many men this army has buried away in some rotten, thankless job and left them there to rot, men just as good as the next guy, the only difference is they never had the brass pinned on 'em."

"Yeah", said Drinkwater, "I guess you're right. It ain't the men in this army that counts, it's the uniform they wear."

Bucknell stopped poking at the bubbles in his glass and slowly clenched his strong, sinewy hand into a knotty fist. "In this damn army there's no connection between what a man deserves and what he gets. Luck sticks the brass out front and they get the glory. We've got just as much guts as they have, but where did luck stick us? In a goddamn office job." He sipped thoughtfully at his bitters for a moment. "Take our Old Man; in a week he'll be a Lieutenant Colonel and wear the D.S.C., and why? Luck, by God. Luck. He got *his*

chance, but what the hell can we do stuck away in a stinking office run by a damn panty-waist."

Pfc. Drinkwater looked very sad. "Yeah", he said, "we're licked before we start. Nobody gets decorated fer cleanin' a latrine." He focused his eyes with some difficulty on the glass of bitters before him. "Gawd", he muttered, "this bilgewater would put ulcers on a Model T Ford."

Bucknell appeared not to hear but stood for several minutes staring at the tiny electric sign back of the bar. When he spoke his voice was low as though the words were meant only for the tiny sign and himself, "It isn't the best men who get the promotions and wear the medals; mostly it's luck and the breaks of the game." Suddenly he straightened. "Christ, it's stuffy in here", he said, "think I'll step out for a while. See you later."

Pfc. Drinkwater looked crestfallen. "What's yer sweat", he whined, "you ain't even finished yer drink yet."

"Use it to clean the Major's new fur-lined commode", replied Bucknell. The door closed on his broad back. Drinkwater stared stupidly at the bar for a few moments; then, first glancing slowly around the empty room, he reached over and lifted Bucknell's glass of bitters to his lips and drained it.

Outside the pub Corporal Bucknell stood for several minutes breathing the city air and watching the small London taxis as they dodged crazily about like water-bugs in the stream of army traffic. Then, turning north, he walked briskly in the direction of Russell Square.

It was one of those rare days that October sometimes brings to London. The usual grey, dirty clouds had streamed away on a fair wind from the Straits and now the mid-morning sunlight glinted on the barrage balloons as they hung like stubby sausages against the blue of the sky. Three blocks from the Square Bucknell stopped at an intersection, took out a cigarette and lit it. As he held the flaring match in his cupped hands he paused for a split-second and listened.

Far to the south, cutting through the dull rumble of army traffic, came the first tiny wail of an air-raid siren. In a few moments hundreds of others had joined it and, riding on the low, pounding roar of the flak guns, the sound swept northward like a curling wave over the city, driving the people from the streets. Bucknell moved north from the intersection, then halting at the corner of Russell Square, he looked upward.

High overhead three Ju 88's twisted in ragged formation among the dark splotches made by the exploding flak shells. From one of the planes came a thin trail of white smoke.

Suddenly a voice cut through the roar of sound like a whip-lash. "Bucknell!" Startled, Bucknell wheeled about. Standing there as far back as he could get in a doorway was a little, bandy-legged man dressed in an American officer's uniform. He wore pilot's wings and the gold leaves of a major; it was the Old Man. The Corporal slowly raised his arm in a salute.

"Damnit, man", snapped the Major irritably without raising his arm, "don't stand there saluting, get in here! You can't tell where those bastards will lay their eggs." A faint smile played about Bucknell's lips as he moved into the doorway.

"By God", said the Major in a high, petulant voice as he made room for the Corporal, "you'd think those Kraut sons-of-bitches would leave a man alone on the first pass he's had in three months. Gimme a cigarette." He stood fidgeting nervously in the doorway, a little scare-crow of a man dressed in an ill-fitting uniform; the blouse was scarred with stains and the shoulders sprinkled with dandruff. A look of contempt drifted across Bucknell's clean-cut face as he reached for his cigarettes. At that instant a five-hundred pounder, jettisoned from the smoking JU 88 overhead, landed directly in the center of the street just across the Square.

Corporal Bucknell didn't remember hearing anything. Only a wrenching convulsion seemed to pass through the Square as though a huge, titanic wave had rushed by under the surface of the earth. The buildings across the street rocked crazily before his eyes; then a great soft hand crushed him violently back against the door and battered him down to his knees. Dimly he was aware of the Old Man crumpling up in a heap beside him. The smell of cordite bit into his nostrils as sheer terror seized him in a strangling grip.

The paralyzing concussion lasted only a split second. Grey with fright, Bucknell lay sprawled in the doorway. He gazed stupidly at the Major, who slowly drew himself to a sitting position, blood welling from a wound over his left temple.

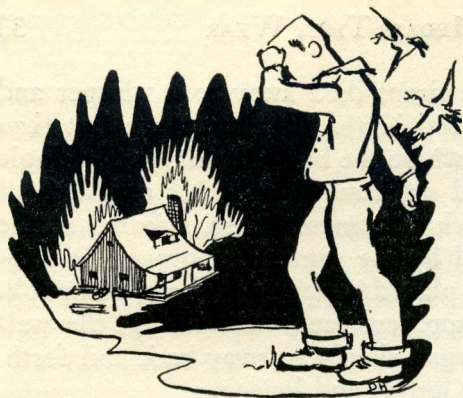
The terrific explosion of the bomb had purged the air of sound. Outside the doorway the dust settled gently over the

Square, the scream of the sirens died away to a whisper and only the coast guns throbbed in the distance, more felt than heard. Just off the street where the bomb had landed, a single wall supporting a wrecked staircase was all that remained of what once had been a brick apartment house. Seated at the foot of these stairs, spared by the sometimes strange benevolence of war, a small child played happily with an old rag doll. Then, abruptly, without apparent cause or warning, the wall towering over the child began slowly to sway back and forth. The arc of the swing grew longer and longer.

From the doorway at the end of the Square Bucknell and the Major both saw the child in the same split second of time. Braced on his hands and knees the Corporal made no sound, but pointed hysterically to the swaying wall. The Major acted instantly. Staggering to his feet he lurched out into the street and wobbled drunkenly across the Square, his bald head bobbing in the sunlight. Stumbling over the mass of wreckage in front of the wall, the Major swooped down over the child and, seizing it by the collar as though he were picking up a puppy, bore it out into the safety of the street as fast as his sand-piper legs would carry him. Thirty seconds later the wall collapsed, bearing the staircase down with it in an avalanche of bricks and sound.

In the narrow doorway Corporal Bucknell got stiffly to his feet, picked up his cap and brushed himself off. He stood for a moment and watched as a small crowd gathered about the Major and the child; then, pale and shaken, he stepped out into the street, turned south and headed for the Pub.

An hour later he stood alone at the bar, his lean, strong face calm and composed, the broad, muscular shoulders relaxed under the neat blouse. On the bar before him stood a glass of bitters, and, as he poked absently at the foam with his finger, a dreamy, far-away look appeared in the pale blue eyes. Slowly he lifted his head and gazed at his reflection in the dingy mirror behind the bar. On the shoulders of the blouse glinted the gold leaves of a major, across the left breast, beneath the wings, were four rows of ribbons. Slowly the Major straightened . . .



THE SEAL

by GORDON B. CLARK

JIMMY Potter had hurried to finish his chores. This morning he wanted to reach his spot on the bank of the river before high tide. Now he lay on his stomach, still breathing rapidly from his run down past the barn and hill to where the river curved in close.

He hadn't even stopped for his customary inspection of the narrow valley with the river winding down it tightly like a snake. Distantly he heard the sounds of the men working in the field around the farms along the road. The pine-covered hills opposite him were still and secret. A few high, white clouds dotted the warm, blue sky of summer.

Propping his chin on his hands he watched the crow perched on the dead limb of the birch across the river. It clucked chidingly as he leaned forward and inspected the deep but narrow channel with the water flowing swiftly in. It was dim and cool and he could smell the faint aroma of the sea it brought from twenty miles away. The water lapped steadily at the perpendicular, muddy banks.

A cloud covered the sun and then he saw the eels. There were thousands of them, forming a silvery undulating shadow as they swam past with the tide. A thrill of satisfaction ran over him. Yesterday there had been none. This was the first day of the run. Now he would have something to tell Ted and the others.

As he watched them curiously, he reflected on the fact that nobody he knew was ever much interested in what he saw. To them the animals and birds of the woods and fields were just ordinary things. The older people just smiled when he mentioned things he had seen and the other fellows didn't

care about them at all. He knew, though he never mentioned it, that there was a bond of friendship between him and the wild creatures. That was why he had so many pets and friends among them; the deer he had fed secretly all winter for fear someone would shoot it; the gray squirrel and all the birds that would come close to him.

Then he remembered he had not taken a look at the red wing blackbird's nest today. He stood up and pushed cautiously through the grass to the thicket at the foot of the hill. Both the birds were there, the mother on her nest not even scared when he lifted the branch and looked down on her, the three gaping mouths protruding from under her. The father blackbird fluttered on a nearby reed. The markings of his wings were like blood they were so bright.

Letting the branch fall back in place carefully he returned to his spot by the river. King was barking up by the barn. He didn't like to bring him here because he scared everything.

As he lay down again to scan the water he saw that something strange was happening. At first it seemed as if the water was flowing more swiftly. Then he saw that the eels were swimming so fast that they were just a gray blur in the water.

Aware that something was causing their fright he rose to his knees and peered down river to the bend. He saw a heavy swirl of water there and wondered that the eels could create such a disturbance.

Bending over again he tried to see into the depths of the water to find out what was scaring the eels. There was a soft splash accompanied by a sound like a person breathing. It came from right in front of him and when he looked up Jimmy was so startled he nearly fell from the bank.

A big black head with whiskers was there. Even as his heart pounded violently he noticed its short fur, but most of all he was aware of its brown eyes regarding him intently. They were larger and softer than a deer's, it seemed. For moments the animal was motionless. Then it disappeared. There was nothing before him but clear, empty water.

Jumping to his feet he stared at the spot where the animal had vanished. What was it? He frowned in thought. Then he remembered. It was a seal. Once he had seen one at the beach.

Yes! It was a seal!

He broke into a run through the high grass along the bank. All the time he was thinking: *A seal in my river! A seal in my river!* And it was bigger than a man, too.

As he reached the first bend the seal surfaced. Jimmy stopped and whistled. To his delight the seal heard, turned its head toward him and then moved perceptibly closer to the bank. For a moment he saw the warm friendly eyes on him. Then it was gone, still heading up the river.

He wanted to shout with joy. This was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened. Eagerly he followed the winding course of the river. Three times the seal appeared before it reached Hatch's Pool. Each time he whistled and each time he saw that it heard him.

As Jimmy reached the side of the pool the seal came to the surface and swam in with its head above water. This was as far as the seal could go. The salt water ended here. Beyond the river was fresh and shallow.

The tide would be high in half an hour now. He watched the seal swimming about the pool, gliding beneath the water and turning its head toward him each time it emerged. He realized that the seal would return down the river as the water ebbed and grew shallow.

He glanced up at the hills above him, hoping he would see someone to whom he could yell. There was no one. Then it occurred to him that no one would believe what he had seen.

Now Jimmy knew he wanted someone else to see it, not only so they would know he had really seen a seal, but also because he wanted to share with them the wonder of this mysterious and exotic visitor, so far from the sea.

Lingering only a moment for a last look he turned reluctantly from the pool and ran through the grass toward the hill.

Cutting up the slope and through the fields he came out on the road just above his house. As he hurried along, perspiration running from under his tangled brown hair and over his tanned face, he saw Ted up in the orchard above the road.

"Hey, Ted," he called, "come here. I got something to tell you."

Ted slid down from the tree he was in and ran down to him. He held out one of the apples to Jimmy, who took it without looking at it.

"Guess what I saw?" Jimmy panted.

Ted shook his head. He didn't like guessing games.

"I don't know. Whatcha see?"

"A seal"

"A seal!" Ted laughed loudly. "Yer sure crazy. Seals is in the ocean. You didn't see no seal."

"Yes I did," Jimmy maintained.

It was just like he knew it would be. Even Ted, one of his best friends, didnt believe him.

"I saw it down in the river," he explained heatedly. "It's up in Hatch's pool now. I think it's eating eels. The eels started coming in today."

Ordinarily the discovery of the eels alone would have been something to talk about. Now the seal had made him almost forget them.

"Come on," he cried, as Ted stood eyeing him skeptically, still chewing on an apple, "let's go down to my house. I want to tell my mother. Then we'll all go down and watch it."

He started down the road at a trot. He would have to tell someone older than Ted. Then Ted caught up with him.

"What's it look like?" he inquired.

"It's big," Jimmy itemized. "It's sort of black with short fur and bigger than a man. It's got whiskers on its mouth and its eyes are brown and pretty like a deer's. It's tame, too. It swum right up close to me. I almost touched it."

He knew that this was stretching it a little. Well, maybe he hadn't almost touched it, but it had come right toward him.

They burst through the gate in Jimmy's drive. His father and some other men were working on the tractor at one side of the house. They paid no attention to the two boys until Ted announced importantly:

Jimmy's father snorted, looking up from the wheel he

"We got a seal down in the river."

"A what? A seal?"

was lifting to the axle. He set the wheel on the ground. Matt and Archer, the big Hatch boys, released their weight on the timber they were using as a lever.

"You didn't see no seal," Matt stated. "Seals is in the ocean."

"That's what I told him," Ted chanted, suddenly reversing sides.

"Yes I did, Pop. Honest I did," Jimmy asserted. "It's right in Hatch's Pool now."

"Tell us what it looked like, Jim," Mr. Peavey said.

He stood upon the other side of the tractor. Ronnie Ligget rose beside him.

Jimmy hesitated, looking sharply at Ronnie, his eyes growing hard. He hated Ronnie.

"Come on, son. What did it look like?" his father prompted.

He told them what it looked like just as he had told Ted.

"That sure sounds like a seal to me," Mr. Peavey said. "But I sure never heard of one being up here afore."

"There was one once," Jimmy's father observed. "Just recollected it. When I was a kid. My paw caught one. He didn't know what to do with it so he let it go agin."

"Seems like I heard there was a bounty on them seals," Matt said thoughtfully.

"By God, yer right!" Mr. Peavey said loudly. "Was readin' 'bout it just a short spell ago. They said they're gettin' after the fish somethin' fierce."

The men looked at each other eagerly.

"You say the seal is in Hatch's Pool?" Jimmy's father asked.

Even as he nodded Jimmy felt a coldness creep over him. He could feel his hands beginning to shake and his legs go weak. He had come to tell them about his seal. He wanted to lead them to it, let them see how strange and wonderful and beautiful it was. And now, now he knew what they wanted to do.

"What are you gonna do?" he cried in a high-pitched voice.

Nobody seemed to pay any attention to him anymore.

"Matt, you and Archer come with me," Mr. Peavey directed, nodding toward his truck parked down in the field. "We'll get our guns and come back here to Ed's and go down that way."

Jimmy turned in desperation to his father who was looking down on the river below them.

"Tide's about to turn," he said. "It'll probably go out with the tide. Make it snappy."

The three men hurried off to the truck.

"I'll get my twenty-two," Ronnie yelled excitedly.

Jimmy's father smiled and started toward the house.

"Wisht I had a gun," Ted said mournfully.

Jimmy stood staring after his father. He hardly heard Ted speak. Everybody was against him. He ran after his father, catching him just as he swung open the side door.

"Pop, Pop," he pleaded, "please don't shoot the seal. It was just swimming in the river. Please don't kill it."

Tears filled his eyes. The roar of the departing truck filled him with a desperate sense of terror and panic.

"That seal will be worth some money to all of us," his father said shortly, pushing open the door. "I can use some money. 'Sides, it eats the fish."

But it wasn't that, Jimmy knew. It wasn't that at all. It was something else. He knew and felt and could see the real reason. He saw it in the look on the faces of the men when they were going to kill something. They would make any excuse in order to kill.

"Pop. Pop," he screamed, running after him.

He burst into the kitchen. His father had his gun down and was looking through the barrel. His mother came out of the pantry.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, what on earth is wrong with you?" she said softly. "Shame on you for screaming like that."

"Kid saw a seal in the river. Up in Hatch's Pool now," his father informed her. "Me and the rest of the boys are gonna git it. Peavey says there's a bounty on 'em. Jim here thinks we ought not to shoot it."

He picked up some shells from a red cardboard box on the table.

Jimmy looked at his mother. She could see the fright and pleading in his eyes. She turned to Ed, engrossed in cleaning his gun, then frowned and patted Jimmy on the shoulder.

"Those seals are bad, dear," she said, trying to soothe him. "That's why they have to be destroyed."

He jerked from under her hand. She was like the rest. No one was really telling the truth. They just wanted to kill things for the fun of it.

He stopped crying and watched his father silently. Now he knew that it was up to him to help the seal escape. They weren't going to kill that seal if he could help it.

Walking casually to the parlor door he pushed it open, closed it quietly behind him. Then he ran across the room

softly, into the front hall and out the door. It wasn't used much and squeaked loudly as he closed it. He waited a moment to see if anyone heard him. Then he ran to the corner of the house and peeked around. Ted was sitting on the grass waiting for him.

Down the road he caught sight of a figure running up toward the house. It was Ronnie with his gun. He really hated Ronnie. He was four years older than Jimmy but only one grade ahead of him in school. Last week he had killed the two blue jays that he fed in the woods across the road. Killed them with his sling shot. He stared vengefully at him now, then turned and ran down the path back of the house toward the barn.

King must have spooted him. He came bounding and barking, catching up with him just past the barn. For a moment Jimmy thought of sending him back, then changed his mind. Together they ran down the hill to the river.

First he went to his spot. The water was very high now. He sighted on a stick floating near the middle and saw that it was inching down stream. The tide had turned. He had no time to lose.

As he hurried along the bank he tried to think what he should do. Somehow he had to scare the seal so it would stay under water. If he could do that until the seal was safely past his spot and that bend in the river then it would be all right. Beyond there the valley bottom was wide, with high grass, and soft and muddy. Not safe for walking.

As he walked he scanned the river carefully. Hearing voices he turned and saw the knot of men and boys coming down the hill back of the barn. His heart beat violently.

His eyes raced over the surface of the river. The sound of water bubbling came from upstream. Then he saw the seal, swimming slowly down toward him. When it saw Jimmy the head became still, the eyes gazing calmly at him. Jimmy advanced to the edge of the bank.

"Here King, here King," he called softly.

The dog, searching through the grass, came bounding up. He grabbed him by the long hair of his neck, quieted him, then forced his head toward the seal. He could feel King stiffen as he spotted the strange animal.

"Go get it, King. Go get it, boy!"

He slapped the dog sharply on the flank. King growled low in his throat, then leaped. Before he had struck the water the seal disappeared.

Jimmy made his way slowly back along the bank. King swam excitedly in circles, then returned. Jimmy pulled him up, carefully watching the water. Maybe already he had scared the seal enough so he wouldn't come up until he was on his way down the river.

The men and boys were just reaching the side of the river. There was one sharp bend before he would be walking straight toward them. King set up a frantic barking along the bank and he scanned it hopefully. He was just rounding the bend when the seal appeared again.

This time Jimmy pushed King from behind. The seal disappeared with a big splash as the dog hit the water.

He could hear the men calling to him.

"Have you spotted him, Jim?" Mr. Peavey yelled.

He shook his head and walked more slowly along the bank toward them. He kept saying over to himself again and again: "Please, seal, don't come up. Please, seal, don't come up."

Halfway to where the others had gathered by his spot he caught the swirl of water as the seal rose to the surface. With a gasp he snatched at a stick and hurled it into the river, at the same time calling loudly at King.

The dog went obediently after the stick and Jimmy breathed more easily as he saw the water toss as the seal dove.

"You threw that stick on purpose," a voice accused him.

Jimmy whirled to see Ronnie standing behind him. He had sneaked up through the grass. He cradled his twenty-two importantly in his arms.

"I know you," Ronnie went on. "You're tryin' to fix it so's we won't git it. Well, we will. I'll show you."

He turned and ran toward the others, calling out to them. Jimmy hurried after them, his heart pounding furiously. Only a few more seconds now and the seal would be around the bend and away from them. If it came up right in front of them they would get it for sure.

He approached the group, still watching the river.

"Sure, it was just coming up and he threw a stick and made his dog go in after it," he heard Ronnie repeating.

As he reached the others his heart was light. The seal was surely past them now. There was no sign of it. He didn't care what they did to him.

"You come here, Jim," his father commanded.

He walked to him and stood almost defiantly, looking up at him.

"Ain't no use tryin' now," Mr. Peavey said in a disgusted voice. "Seal's gone by us underwater by now."

"He did it," Ronnie said. "He scared it so's we couldn't git it."

"You march yourself up to the house," his father ordered very sternly, "and git there fast. And take your dog, too."

Three rifles fired almost simultaneously, followed by loud exclamations.

"He came up there," Matt said, pointing down the river beyond them. "We didn't get a decent shot. Sun's in our eyes."

"We ain't lost him yet," Jimmy's father said easily.

At his words Jimmy felt his heart start pounding again. It was always that way. They always found a way to do what they wanted. He stopped in terror.

"We'll all go in the truck down to the bridge," his father told them. "Channel's narrow there. Should git him easy."

For a moment they all turned, looking down the valley. One small hill blocked a view of the bridge but the steeple of the church which stood near it shone brightly in the clear, morning air.

"I thought I told you to git up to the house, fast-like," his father boomed.

He grabbed Jimmy by the shoulder, set his face toward the house and propelled him in its direction. Then Jimmy was forgotten. In their eagerness they all passed him as he climbed bitterly up the hill.

Just as he came around the corner the truck backed out of the yard with a great clash of gears and went off down the road trailing a cloud of dust.

The minute it was gone he knew what he would do. He didn't care what happened. Back down the hill he ran, only pausing once to send King back with sharp words. This was a job for him alone.

Plunging down over the slope he set out straight through the deep grass for the bridge. It was less than a mile to it this

way. It was over three by the road. If he could find the boat in time there was still a chance to save the seal.

He plunged on until his breath was coming in tearing gasps. It was a good thing he was light, for he sank up to his ankles in the mud with each step.

It was only a short distance now to where he was sure the old, square-ended punt lay that the men used in fall for duck hunting. It was kept at a place where the river came close to the side of the valley. As near as he could figure he had caught up with the seal now, the river was so twisting.

By the time he reached the spot where the boat was kept he knew he couldn't walk another step. He could hardly breathe it hurt so much. His clothes were soaking and covered with mud. The sound of the truck reached him from somewhere up on the road. It would be at the bridge in a few minutes.

The boat was there, in from the bank and covered with grass. It was small and after he had untied the rope that was looped around an old log he had little trouble sliding it through the mud and grass to the bank. With a shove he sent it sliding into the water. It went so quickly he had to jump without waiting to see if it leaked. When he picked himself up from the bottom he was in the center of the narrow river. The boat was revolving slowly, carried along quite fast now by the receding tide.

The boat leaked a little, though not badly. It was very sluggish and floated low in the water, but it would do. He began scanning the water around him. No sign of the seal.

There was only one sharp bend remaining in the river before it swept straight down to where the men would be waiting. As he was carried toward the other side of the valley the bridge came into view. Standing up in the boat he saw the truck pulled off the road. The men and boys had left it. Some were on the bridge while others were down on the banks beneath it.

He stared ahead at the water for several moments, then without knowing why, snapped his head around. There was a funny swirl of water a little distance behind the boat. He trembled with excitement, for if it was the seal and it was afraid of the boat it would stay under water all the way past the bridge.

Then, a few yards behind the boat, the seal came to the surface. Jimmy sat transfixed, motionless, as the brown eyes

watched him calmly and intelligently. For several moments they drifted this way without a sound, the seal neither gaining nor losing on the boat.

With the increasing ebb of the tide they were coming up on the bend quite rapidly. He could hear the men shouting on the bridge. They would see him as soon as he rounded the curve if they hadn't spotted him already.

Turning back to the seal who still remained in the same relative position to the boat, Jimmy whistled softly. He could tell from the slight movement the animal made that it had heard him. At a renewed burst of shouting from the bridge he stood up and made a violent gesture toward the seal and clapped his hands loudly. The seal sank until just the top of its head and its eyes were showing. They swept around the bend. He yelled and rocked the boat violently. The seal vanished under the water.

Facing the bridge he could see the men plainly, each with gun ready, looking up the river at him. He was scared now. Not by what his father would do to him, but terrified that the seal would appear before it passed the bridge.

He turned his back to them and peered into the dark water, seeing the silvery eels churning against the current. He continued to rock the boat violently as he came nearer and nearer to the bridge.

And then he didn't even see the seal. A gun blasted the air, followed by the sharp crack of the other guns. He whirled in the boat. His stomach tightened sickeningly. Where he looked there was a welter of foam and the water was tinged with blood.

He wanted to cry out, to tell them to stop, but there was no voice in him. The words would not come. He opened his mouth and felt the breath all tight inside him, solid like it was stuck.

The seal had disappeared but the water was seething heavily. Very close to the men it reappeared, this time showing its whole body.

The rifles thundered. For seconds the body was motionless, then it contorted violently. It sank until just the head remained above the surface. Jimmy was too far from it to see its eyes but he knew the seal was looking at him. He remembered how soft and brown they were. Instinctively he stretched out his arms toward it as the rifles clattered again. The head

vanished and then the whole body rose to the surface just before the bridge.

"Quickly, before it sinks again," he heard Mr. Peavey yell.

The men on the right bank waded in and dragged the still quivering seal partly out of the water. Jimmy remained motionless in the boat until his father grabbed the side and pulled it from the current. His face was hard and stony. But Jimmy didn't care. He didn't care. He didn't care about anything any more.

"Hey, Ed, take a look," Mr. Peavey shouted. "Sure is a big one. Must weigh a good three fifty."

Keeping his eyes averted from the dead animal Jimmy watched his father pull the boat high on the bank. He didn't want to look at it, but he did manage one glance before he fled.

He saw the dark, shiny body and the red around the holes in the wet fur. One of its eyes was closed. The other was a big ugly crimson mark. He thought again of how they must have looked at him as the bullets smashed through the black hide. It must have been blaming him. Choking back a sob he ran up to the road and started back across the bridge.

"Hey, Jimmy, don't you want a ride home?" Matt yelled after him.

The men had tied a rope around the seal and were dragging it up to the truck.

Jimmy didn't answer. He crossed the bridge rapidly and broke into a run up the road. When he was out of sight he let the tears come. He didn't care and he wasn't ashamed. He felt queer and empty and the sun wasn't warm any more.

When he heard the truck coming he stepped off the road and crouched in the bushes. After it had passed he continued on his way.

He didn't go right home, though. He left the road before he got to his house and cut down through his father's wood lot and the strip of pines, emerging just below his spot by the river. When his crow, perched on the birch, flapped away cawing angrily, he stopped short. The crow had never done that before.

His place was all trampled over by the men. He could see their heavy boot marks in the mud. A spent shell glinted near his foot. He looked away in distaste.

The water was swirling darkly past now, almost black with mud and very low. He slapped angrily at a mosquito that was biting his neck. The crow had vanished among the distant pines. Pushing his way along the path he approached the blackbird's nest. Before he had even come close to it both birds darted up into the air, voicing shrill and bitter cries of protest. He stared at them in disbelief.

Without bothering to look at the nest he turned back and climbed wearily up the hill toward the barn. He wasn't hungry, even though it was past noon now. The sunlight was thin and filled with shadows. Pausing once he looked down on the dull river. The birch was still vacant.

Something full and magic had gone out from his life and the world was suddenly alien and menacing.

*Yet I must journey far away
Search not for me in rooms, 'tis vain;
But look among the lilac leaves,
And find me in the scented rain.*

—Gloria Everingham.

*Waltz to hell on a pogo stick,
Climb to heaven on a monkey pole;
Ride to home on a clarinet lick:
Cover yourself with a monkey's soul.*

—Anonymous.

SLOBADJIAN AND THE ONION PILE

by MARTIN DIBNER

THERE was this kid sitting by the port side of the crew's galley, manicuring onions; a mountain of onions, and an ocean of tears, and him a dejected blue rock.

"Look," I said, "that's a lot of onions for one guy to service alone." He turns to me his brooding and unshaven face, and mournfully sad it was, and the eyes bugged and brown and brimming.

"I got extra duty," he tells me, looking catty-corner and never leaving off from the work at hand.

"Lay down the knife a while," I tell him, seeing the cuts and scrapes on his palm and fingers, "and wipe your hands. And your eyes." Which he does, reluctant and resigned to authority. "What's your name, lad?"

With that map of middle Europe and the years, excuse me, the generations of suffering written here, I should have known; should have known in spite of the lack of wrinkles and age. Even though he had wiped them, the eyes still brimmed. (I found out later they always brimmed, onions or no.)

"Slobadjian," he tells me, starting in on the onions again. As if I had to ask him! he was a natural.

"Look," I tapped him on the shoulder, "did you ever hear of a guy name of Saroyan?"

He repeats it deadpan after me, and then he says, "Spell it," which I do and he makes with the knife and the onions again. "My cousin," he tells me, and I am astonished.

I say, "William Saroyan your *cousin*," underlining it like that, and he looks up. Jesus Alameda, what a sadness in that homespun face, and he says, "I don't know no William, but Saroyan" (he shook his head), "he's at least a first cousin." Then he feels it needs explaining. (It didn't) "We're all cousins. Slobadjian, Chepoorian, Saroyan, Rambojian. Listen. All of us, we gotta be cousins." There was a small pause before he added, "Sir." Not contempt though-preoccupied, maybe absent-minded. My eyes started to smart.

So we talked, me and Slobadjian (or Saroyan, or Chepoorian, or Rambojian—we're all cousins), and there was an alarming increase in the copiousness of tears. I began to feel

like either the Walrus or the Carpenter, but it didn't matter. He was telling me a wonderful story. He was telling me about why he had to work the onion pile. He had borrowed a jeep, last time we made port, to inspect the island at leisure. The jeep belonged to an Army major. At the time, that is. "We all own it, as Americans, don't we?" explained Slobadjian.

The major was quite upset. Furious, as a matter of fact, and when Slobadjian was collected, several hours later, the major made certain that his punishment would be carried out aboard ship. It mattered not that: Slobadjian was returning the jeep when they caught up with him, that: exercise might have offered surprising benefits and been a refreshing experience for the major, that: he, Slobadjian, was a pitifully thin and underfed and bony remnant, that: the roads were deep slobbering pools of amorphous mud and slime—alas, all this mattered not, Slobadjian carefully explained to me. The cruel thrust was that the major's name was Tashjian. Is this a cousinly act? Is this America? He shrugged his shoulders, and a wry smile flicked his lips and vanished. He talked into the onions again. "Tomorrow I'm being promoted to the spud pile," he said. "That is, if I behave." I wiped my eyes and shoved off.

Of course Slobadjian never behaves. What I have told you happened two months ago, and I have found out since that he was sent to us assigned "to hazardous duty." It is a punishment of sorts—there are worse and better—but he is invariably in trouble, always tending onion piles, always dejected and resigned and delightful to talk with. I don't believe that his misdemeanors are anything more than the harmless antics of a simple, bewildered peasant who cannot become accustomed to having someone else tamper with his rightful liberty, trammel his freedom of movement.

And he has come to accept punishment as a matter of course for anything he does by himself, and I do not believe it ever discourages him. Which is a thing of glory. So I am fond of Slobadjian and his soft and wistful and almost pleading resistance to law and order's demands. And if it is true that an onion pile would appear forsaken without his unkempt yet devoted attendance, so does it lose stature alongside the greatness of him. And if this eulogy has gone too far and lost flavor, at least you have had the rare pleasure of a glimpse of him, Slobadjian, cousin to the whole goddom world and master of his destiny, amen.

