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THE CRUCIBLE

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MORRIS AND THE FROG-DOG

Kenneth Zellefrow

I hate French poodles.

Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you, buddy. I just figured I'd sorta start a conversation.

Hi, Alfie. Give me the usual, root-beer soda and a glass of water.

Root-beer sodas make me thirsty. Like I was saying, there is no love lost between me and these French poodles. I have a certain dislike for them—not exactly hate though—which comes about on account of what a certain member of this species did to a very profitable relationship I had built up. You know what these poodles look like. You know, like a rug unraveling or an old shaggy sock that somebody quit knitting on. Don't get me wrong now; I like dogs but I don't class this brand of mutt with dogs in general. Like I said, I got my own special reason for hating these poodles. Relax, have a coke on me, and I'll enlighten you.

It all started down South four years ago, where I was trying to catch on with the Louisville Colonels. That's a fair ball club what was taking their spring training in Mobile. I considered myself a natural in the outfield, but my hitting wasn't exactly cause for rejoicin'. In fact, Spike Dawson, he was the manager—still is, I guess—confided to me one day that if I was standing at Atlantic City Beach and was to spit, I couldn't hit the ocean. We never did see eye to eye. So as a result me and Spike parted ways. He stayed with the Colonels and I headed north with a suitcase and a thumb. Someplace in Alabama—I was by this time pretty weary of hitching—I sits down for a break under this shade tree, when I hears someone say, "Didn't make the team, huh?" I sits up with a start and jerks around. There ain't no one in sight, just a black and white mutt sitting up against the tree and looking right at me. Now, this was a hot day like, and I was pretty tired, but still that ain't no cause for a mutt to speak to me. I shrugs and goes to lay back down when he says, "Don't get excited; it was I who spoke." He said it just like that, bad English and all. I looks at him and swore off drinking immediately. He sorta grins and walks down the bank to me, on his hind feet. "I saw your glove tied on your bag," he says, "and I think you're just the fellow I'm looking for. Happen to have a ball with you?" It so happened I had a few new baseballs I had borrowed from the Club, so I gets one out. "Throw it here," he says and trots off a ways. Like I said, it was a hot day and I was in no mood to play catch with nobody, let alone a talkin' dog, so I lobs one at him. He catches it in his mouth, and before I know

it the ball is smacking me square in the bread-basket. "I said throw me one," he shouts. I'm sitting there completely dumb. This dog catches a ball, fires it like Johnson, and talks yet. So I lets one go at him. I got a pretty fair arm, but he handles it easy and whips it back at me. Know what he was throwing with? His ear! I sits up and takes a long, slow look at this freak. He's a big dog with a stubby tail and long flappy ears, no particular breed, just plain dog. He trots over to me, on all fours this time, and stretches out and starts talking. It seems he has a life-long desire to play baseball with the Colonels. He had been hanging around camp and had seen me when I left; so he followed me until we were this far from Mobile. He comes right out and tells me he needs me as his promoter, since everyone he talks to goes pale all over and starts looking for butterflies. All I got to do is get him a tryout with the Colonels by explaining the situation clearly and I get 75 percent of his salary. All he wants is a can of Red Heart daily and an occasional bone. I says, "Let me think it over." And then it dawns on me, how does he hold a bat? He tells me with his ears, naturally, and I feel like a half-wit. I kinda just steal away and start racing down the road as fast as I can, but he sticks right on my heels. I'm pooped pretty fast and sits down again and he just stands there and grins. Then he says that we'll sneak into town early one morning and I can give him a work-out before anyone shows, so I'll know what he can do. Well, I figure I got nothing to lose except time, so I agree, and we head for a nearby bar for a drink to clinch the deal. Morris immediately demands that I give up not only drinking but smoking also. He says that I must lead a clean life like him and stay in shape if we are to continue in our present capacity. I ain't hardly touched a drop since then either.

Funny, did ya ever notice how the paper off soda straws uncurls like a snake when it gets wet. I always like to watch it—come in here every day and have a soda, root-beer, and a glass of water. It kinda relaxes me.

Well, to get on, me and the dog—his name is Morris I find out on the way to Mobile—sneak quiet-like into the park one morning and I proceeds to try him out. Now, don't look at me that way, mister, I'm telling you the exact truth, so help me. This dog could talk and play good ball. He says he expects to play outfield and hit at least .320, figuring on his speed for a few leg-hits. Well, I hits him flies, clothes-liners, and dribblers, and he fields 'em perfect and ear-whips 'em to the plate on the hop. Also he don't play the outfield from one position; he plays the whole field. He's really sensational in the field, so I says to him to try hitting a few while I pitch. I goes to the mound with

about twenty balls and starts firing them over. He grips the bat with his long ears and stands on his hind legs and then proceeds to park four in a row over the wall. Concedin' I wasn't putting no stuff on the ball, that was still hitting in any league. I says for him to ease up some, so he uses only one ear and sprays line-drives all over the park. That was enough for me. This mutt can hit like Willie Keeler, field like Tris Speaker, and had an arm—or an ear—like a slingshot. I was convinced, but curious as to where I was to come in. Morris then tells me that he will talk only to me and no one else, and therefore I am necessary if we are to be successful in convincing Spike Dawson that Morris is really great. With a touching show of sentiment that I never thought a dog could display, Morris tells me that he'll take care of me from now on. So it was to be up to me to get Dawson to agree to a tryout. This proves to be the hard part. I figured I'd best break it kinda easy to Spike and then be ready to make a dash for it if he started winging bats. It took me two days to get up the nerve to even show at the park, and then me and Morris just watched practice from way out in right field. Early every morning I was giving Morris his workout to keep him in shape, but other than that we were just drifting along. Finally, I gets up enough nerve and casually saunters over to Spike, who is a reincarnation of Muggsy McGraw, and starts to make some light conversation. He is not one to be fooled and right away says how much do I want and to keep the dog out of the way of line drives. I just sorta laugh this off and give him a friendly clap on the back, which he doesn't approve of very heartily, then clearing my throat and bracin' to duck, starts to tell him about my pal, Morris. At first I thought Spike was going to laugh. Then he looked like he might kick or swing, then he gazed back and forth at the sun and my barehead, and finally he just stood there with his mouth hanging open and his eyes bugged-out. Spike musta thought this was the limit in gags 'cause he finally grins, calls the press-boys over, and tells me to send Morris to the outfield. Well, naturally the whole team stops to watch, along with the dozen or so spectators, and Spike himself. I hits Morris a few fungoes, which he fields superbly and fires to me on one hop. Then I pitch a few and he slaps them all over, including one which scatters the press and Spike in all directions. After this performance, everyone is talking at once. I shrug off all questions, and me and Morris retire to the clubhouse, along with a speechless Spike Dawson, the peerless leader. I try to act nonchalant and indifferent and almost drive Spike nuts, but I finally agree to let Morris play for the Colonels, providing I'm carried on the roster as agent for him. Spike wants

to keep Morris as a surprise until the season opens, but naturally the press-boys give the whole affair a big play, so we are forced to unveil Morris in the next exhibition game, a game in which he really comes into his own, making three beautiful catches, nailing a would-be run at the plate, and going four-for-five including a homer and two doubles and, on top of that, stealing home twice. Naturally, all of Mobile is walkin' on air and rival teams are tearing the door off the league president's office trying to outlaw the use of dogs in regular competition. The president admits that the rules say nothing about using dogs, but then again, nothing against using them. So he is powerless. Well, we goes through the exhibition season with Morris burning up the league and our rivals using big bones, assorted sizes of cats, and even a mechanical rabbit in an effort to distract Morris, but no soap. Morris is really dedicated to his profession and will let nothing distract him.

"Say, buddy, I hear you suckin' on that empty coke glass. Want another? I guess it's okay to hit the bottom once, ain't it? Seems I read somewheres that Emily Somebody said it was acceptable if one could not possibly ascertain if the bottom of the drink had been yet attained. Always remembered that statement, used to quote it to the guys when we hung around Gus's down in Mobile. That was a saloon where I used to frequent before I met Morris. I guess I'd best finish my yarn, huh?"

Well, as you can imagine, I'm feeling gay and Morris is content and waiting for the Big-League scouts as we pull into Louisville for the season opener. Then it happens. Me and Morris is cooling our heels in the park this morning and up walks this dame with a poodle on a leash. This dame has real class, a fact Morris and me both recognize, and then Morris spots this white mutt and flips his cracker. He even whistles shrilly, and the dame gets all set to hang a haymaker on me. While her and me are hedging, Morris is making time with this French import. Me and the doll—her name is Marie—finally get things settled and I drags a reluctant Morris away to get ready for the game. Well, as you probably have already guessed, Morris is washed-up as a ball player. In fact, he don't even make a show at the park; and Spike Dawson, three-fourths the population of Louisville, and eight members of a dogless ball club chase me beyond the city limits. Well, I was really in the dumps. So I drops into this gin-mill for a bracer, my first one in over five or six weeks, since I figures I got nothing to lose. If Morris lets down on his end of the deal, why shouldn't I have a good time? I am on my second one when the bartender says there is a call for a guy by the name of Solly Finks. This happens to be me and the call is from Morris, who has watched the action from a safe distance.

I am about to hang up on the ungrateful mutt when he tells me that he has me all set up with this dame with the poodle. While making time with the poodle, he has also fixed it up with me so well that I am to come over right away. Overcoming a desire to call Spike and tell him about Morris, I decide to try it out anyway. Well, everything works out like Morris plans it. Me and Marie fall in love and get married, and I am really in the bucks.

You may wonder why I hate poodles and I'll admit I got no reason to complain, but still I kinda wish me and Morris coulda made the big-time. I get to thinkin' what we would have done to the record books and, boy, it's a pretty sight. Of course, I couldn't ask for a better set-up. Marie is all set for life, what with a cabin-cruiser, summer home in the Poconos, and me. All I got to do is exercise her two dogs, a job I am due for right now. Well, I'll see you around, buddy. Oh, I almost forgot, one of the dogs is a white poodle and the other is a goofy mutt what talks, only to me of course.

See ya aroun'.

ILLUSION

John Jurick

You know, it's an awful feeling when you finally realize that you don't have something within you that you felt certain was there. I don't mean something physical or something you can see. I mean something deeper, an imagination maybe, or some special mental ability — or how about writing? Yeah, there's a good one, writing. You'd think that this realization wouldn't be much of a shock because it's not something that you realize over night. Anyway, as it turned out, it was a gentle process, but still pretty shocking in the end. Maybe you had just a little something, but as you dug a little deeper you found that what you had was just a shell. The core was missing, and this core is something which you can't manufacture or install. It's gotta be there at the start. This is the thing you have to build around.

In your case it was writing. Funny how a little vocabulary and a few brainstormers can perk you up. Pretty soon you think you're a big leaguer. Sure, you get compliments all over, and your roommate liked all your stuff. So did a lot of the guys from down the hall. Even managed to bring a few tears with a short story now and then. Just picked out the saddest thing you could think of and wrote about it. Wasn't hard, a lot of sad things happen to a lot of people. All your stuff reeks with sentiment. Man, you really think you're hot stuff. Hey, now you're even getting braver. Gonna try poetry. You try a few. Not bad, corny, but

they say something, you tell yourself. They have an "inner" meaning. You're really beginning to enjoy the stuff. Now you figure you'll go back and knock out a few brainy short stories, something with a lot of symbolism. They've gotta be something religious, or devotional and sad.

Yeah, you got an idea, something that oughta fill the bill. No problem, just sit down and type away. It doesn't sound bad, at least for the first two pages. But there's a little problem here. You're up a dead end. You'll have to start again. So you start again — same result. With a vicious swipe you tear the material from the "writer." You go to bed, but you don't sleep much. You're pretty P. O.'ed and plenty disgusted. But — what the hell, tomorrow's another day. You'll try again. Besides, maybe you've been trying too hard. Take it easy. Tomorrow comes and as you look out the window, you think about how silly you were the night before. You're as good as the next guy, and damn it, you're gonna prove it. At the dinner table you pick out a few general gems and start a discussion hoping to get an idea. Believe it or not, it works. Some joker tells you about how sleepy he is and you ask him why. He tells you about a kid down the hall getting a phone call and finding out his dad had had a heart attack. He's got no way home, so this guy drives him almost a hundred and fifty miles. Old routine, sympathy, sacrifice. In fact, to make it more perfect, the kid didn't even ask him to do it, but he knew the kid was broke so he ups and drives the kid all that distance after midnight. He doesn't get back till almost seven-thirty in the morning and that's why he's so sleepy.

Now here it is, you think. Nice angle. Oughta make a cute coupla paragraphs. You start. Everything is going fine. The ancient typewriter is rattlin' and shimmyin'. You can even feel the smile on your face. A couple hours later, you drag the last sheet from the machine and start checking for grammatical errors. You find a few, but still it's not bad. Even when you read it, you like the tone. You finish your proof-reading and type it up nice and neat. At the top of the title page you put your name — without capital letters yet, to make it look more professional. You go to bed and this time you sleep, sleep like a log.

Next day you grab it up and thumb through it quick-like. You sit down and read it through thoroughly. Something's missing. Doesn't even sound as though you wrote it. The words look foreign, and there's no unity at all. You slap the now-wrinkled sheets together and begin to read them again, a little bit angry by now. When you finish you are sure. As you leave the room, the waste basket is bulging with a mangled mass of erasable bond. This same situation repeats itself many, many times. You're really sure now.

Yeah, it's a miserable feeling when you discover something missing, something you were sure was there. It's almost like losing a friend. Here was this thing which gave you so many pleasant moments, dreamer's moments. What happened to it, you wonder. Then you discover that nothing really happened to it because it was never really there. You never really knew how to put the stuff on paper. Some people say that a good writer can write anytime, anywhere, and about anything. That kind of goodness isn't in you. The vague exhilaration you experienced wasn't genuine at all. In fact, you are even guilty of deceit because somewhere along the lines, there are a few people who think you can write well. You know now that you cannot. It was just an illusion brought to life through fervor. Such a thing cannot but be temporary. It sure was an awful lot of fun, but all the fun in the world wasn't worth the finding out.

THE IMAGE

Lorraine Gitch

The alarm rang at seven as usual; and as if she had been waiting for its signal, Madge stepped out of bed, smoothing back her long, straight tri-colored hair, and walked quickly toward the window. The air in the room was stuffy from stale cigarette smoke, and Madge winced her face in discomfort as she hastily turned both handles of the casement windows and opened the bottom panel, fumbling through Sally's souvenir collection of bottles and glasses arranged in a display on the sill.

"Sally, get up!" she called methodically to her small friend asleep on top of the bedspread, curled into an awkward position as if to keep warm inside the large football shirt she wore.

A box of stationery, an unfinished letter, and an ashtray were spaced around her.

"Her pen must be on the floor somewhere," Madge thought searching.

She shook her head in disgust, not expecting Sally to wake up until she was called a few more times. She felt superior toward Sally, who too frequently burned the midnight oil to get her lessons done. Both girls attended night school at the nearby university and held secretarial positions during the day in the city. Yet, Madge had little difficulty.

"What day is it?" Muffled sounds came from the pillow.

Madge was almost dressed, standing in front of the mirror and shaping her long hair into a bun. Her face was plain, but with emphatic features in harmony with her straight, stoic figure.

"You're trying to freeze me out, you minx!" Sally grumbled and rubbed her back as she rose to close the windows Madge had

opened. "Must have fallen asleep, huh? Oooooooo." She yawned. "I was writing to Jim — had to tell him I couldn't take the early train. I did tell you that Simonne Legree wouldn't let me leave work early, didn't I? We would have had Friday afternoon and night, till Saturday, and Sunday afternoon. But, oh, no!"

She lowered her voice and drew her mouth downward in the corners. "She says, 'Work to me is just as important as a spring weekend.' And there she goes, pulling out of the garage in her limousine at exactly 7:30. Come here to the window and look at her, Madge! Every morning. She's like a human alarm clock! And why couldn't I ride to work with her? It makes me ill."

"Probably because you'd never be ready by 7:30."

Sally began her dramatic gestures again, in a mocking voice.

"If it may help you girls, there's a lovely little vacant apartment in the family house across the street from me — not far from the University. However, it's my policy not to become familiar with my employees.' Well, it's little, all right! Kitchen, living room and bedroom — i.e., a hot plate, lounge chair, two beds, and a dresser. Bath across the hall when you can sneak in before the patter of little feet."

She began finishing her letter, writing hurriedly.

"When I'm rich I'm going to buy her out."

"You'd better get dressed."

"Yep. In a minute. Would you mail this at the post office this afternoon, please? Then he'll get it by Friday. You go by the post office every afternoon, don't you? This afternoon I want to pick up a pair of Bermudas. Also, did you see my blue shoes?"

Madge took the shoes out of the closet and began making her bed.

"Madge, what are you going to do this weekend? I hate to leave you all alone again, honestly I do."

Taking a bottle of nail polish out of the drawer Madge began touching her perfect nails, avoiding the eyes of her friend.

"They're bringing new merchandise into the store. I promised I'd help stock it."

"Okay. Steal me a new suit, will you? Pink. Did you ever notice the suits she wears? She buys them all at Graden's, you know. Madge, do you know what I think about at work — especially when I type her name and 'Director, Child Guidance Clinic'?"

She blotted her lipstick on a tissue and threw it toward the basket with a faulty aim. Madge bent to pick it up.

"I see the day," she continued, "that I get my doctor's degree in psychology and have some experience. After she has taught me all her secrets of office management and the profession, I come back to this office. She's old and withered, gathering her

personal possessions. I come in dressed in a chic suit from Graden's. I simply sneer and say, 'Don't forget your lamp,' or something like that. What a life! No obligations except to yourself. Go wherever you please, when you please. And spend your money for whatever you want. And all the while some plebe is typing for me and taking shorthand notes of those hours of analyses."

"But she's all alone, Sally."

"So?"

"The nights are long. And at Christmas there aren't any stockings hanging on the fireplace — or laughter. Children's laughter."

"Or crying. Listen, remember last year when I was debating whether or not to get married? I told her I might be leaving, and for the first time in my life, I thought that she was human. She said, 'I hope you're doing the right thing. I'd like to tell you to wait, but don't do what I did.' I thought, 'Well, here goes — the Rock of Gibraltar is going to crack.' I said, 'You were looking for perfection, huh?' She said, 'No, all the men I knew made the same amount of money as I did.' Think of that! Oh, well."

She slid a comb through her short wavy hair hurriedly.

"There. I'm dressed before you. Let's go."

"Don't forget your key."

"No, I have it."

As they walked together down the hall, a small boy dressed in light blue flannel pajamas that covered his feet stood shyly, looking through the crack of an opened door.

"Boo!" Sally bent down toward him with her hands on her knees. "You're supposed to be in bed."

The little boy answered earnestly, widening his blue eyes.

"I has to go to the bathroom."

"Well," Sally snickered, "it's that door way up there." She pointed.

"But I can't do the back buttons!"

"Call his mother." Madge spoke impatiently.

"Oh, she's probably in the basement doing diapers. And this is a national crisis! He's trapped. You go ahead, Madge. I'll run to catch up. I'll make it. Come on, Johnny. Where there's a will there's a way." She took him by the hand. "Oh, Madge, here's my letter."

Madge stood there watching them — Sally chattering motherly nonsense as they hastened up the hall.

"You foolish little girl," she thought. "How I hate you — for being what you are and wanting what you think you want. You'll never know what it's like to be like her. Thank God, you'll never know."

MAN ABOUT TO DIE

Kenneth Zellefrow

Jenkins should be coming out of the drugstore any minute now. Al fingered the automatic in his pocket, such a small thing, and yet it held instant death there in the clip. It would, in the space of seconds, spit out the ending of the existence of a respected citizen and erase the sunshine for a wife and two kids. Funny, thought Al, Jenkins had just been a name to him until two weeks ago. That was when he got the order from the boss.

Jenkins, an obscure city clerk, had unknowingly stumbled onto some very embarrassing information, information that could make things uneasy for a few racket bosses. He had taken the information to the right man first, the right man for the syndicate, the wrong man for Jenkins. Jenkins had been persuaded to keep the matter confidential until the big expose in two weeks. Two weeks, the time Al had required to arrange this little meeting and Jenkin's safe, quiet removal. Now the night before the time for "the big expose" had come, and Jenkins had to be cancelled.

Al smiled to himself over his intended victim. I must be getting soft, he thought. I almost wish I didn't have this job. If only Joey hadn't been called West! Joey wouldn't mind killing a nice guy like Jenkins at all. Jenkins was a typical mouse of a guy, real good to his kids, probably true to his wife. You could tell a lot about a guy just from the way his kids acted when he was around. Take Jenkins' kids; they'd race down the walk to meet him at night, then walk hand in hand up to the house, all chattering like squirrels. He always brought them something from the drugstore. Tonight was no different; he was in the drugstore now. Probably getting a couple candy bars. When the guy comes out of the store I follow him down the stairs, into the subway, along the platform to his usual waiting place by the gum machine, and then as the train approaches, I blast him. The train covers up the noise of the shot well enough for me to walk idly up the stairs and get away. Real smooth like. Al smiled. Jenkins had even made it simpler, always doing things right on schedule, even standing in the same spot every night, right by the gum machine, like he knew what was up and was making things easier. Nice guy, thought Al. Tough it has to be me that cuts him.

Shrugging his shoulders slightly, Al followed Jenkins as he left the drugstore. Down the steps, just like he was a robot on a conveyor, mused Al, as he followed the figure into the subway entrance. There he stands right by the machine, just like always.

"Excuse me, buddy."

"By all means, help yourself."

Real polite guy, mused Al as he moved away. He hadn't been able to resist the impulse of looking into his quarry's eyes and hearing him speak; so he had made a pretense of getting a stick of gum just to satisfy his curiosity. His eyes aren't any different, thought Al. I guess he doesn't know he's about to die.

"Shine, Mister?"

Al looked down at the small negro boy who was pleading with his eyes more than with his voice.

"Later, kid," he answered roughly, looking at his watch. The train would roar into the station in exactly thirty-five seconds. Passengers began to congregate on the edge of the platform, Jenkins among them. Nice guy, sorta hangs back from the crowd so as not to push anyone, real nice of him, thought Al. Tossing the unwanted gum to the floor, he withdrew the automatic slowly from his pocket. Damn, he swore under his breath; Jenkins had dropped one of his candy bars and had to move to retrieve it. Al would have to hurry now. He sprang forward to get a clearer shot, not seeing the little brown figure at his feet snatching at the piece of gum. A woman screamed shrilly as the stumbling man hung awkwardly on the platform edge, then fell abruptly into the path of the noisy train.

THE CAPTORS AND THE CAPTIVES

Paul Higgins

The day was hot and dry and never-ending,
The road was stony and rutted,
Our pain-racked bodies swayed in unbroken rhythm
Through low clouds of dust . . .
Our faulty minds were still, like broken compasses
Our gaunt captors
Walked watchfully at our side—
Ever ready to give a bruising rifle-blow.
Together we marched,
They and we,
The captors and the captives,
On and on
Through clouds of dust . . .
No one asking any questions.

BORDER INCIDENT

John Jurick

Johnson and Reilley had worked their way inside the Soviet Sector, not deep, just a few kilometers the hot side of the Czech-German line. Their assignment was a complicated thing which had been worked out to the letter, or almost to the letter. In their work, as in almost any, unforeseen occurrences could bog down even the most efficient, and these men were efficient. Theirs was an efficiency of experience. They were competent military intelligence agents.

And so it was that they awoke some six kilometers inside the zone. The rumble of engines startled them as they lay asleep in a stench-laden, antique irrigation ditch. Johnson scrambled up the side and peered through the early-morning fog. His eyes watered as he searched the terrain ahead. "Holy Christ," he muttered. He turned to beckon to Reilley, who was already crouching in the mud beside him. Reilley whistled softly as he surveyed the Russian tanks lumbering down the roadway. He could see four of the steel monsters clearly, and there was the sound of clanking metal treads beyond what he could see. Kevin Reilley slid back down into the ditch. He lay on his back for an instant, brown eyes staring up into the moving mist. Readjusting the peasant cap atop his unruly brown locks, he pushed himself upright. "Hey, Eddie," he called lightly to the prone Johnson. Eddie Johnson, the smaller of the two, immediately came sliding down beside him. He didn't wear a cap and continually brushed the coal-black hair from his eyes. He was stocky, and much more mature than his appearance indicated. Reilley's voice droned, "Eddie, we'd better get the hell out of here while the gettin's good. We've got a long way to go."

"Let's go," said Johnson, extending his arm in the direction they were about to take.

The tanks continued to clank along the roadway behind them. Both men mounted the opposite side of the ditch, looked back, then began to crawl over the top of the embankment. Almost instantly they froze, as their eyes came to rest on the column of Russian armor parked in the field some two hundred yards ahead of them. They lay motionless, absorbing as though in a dream the movement in front of them. There were eight tanks and more than twenty recon-cars. A little beyond these they could see mechanized artillery and troop carriers. A bivouac area lay off to their right. The sound of voices, Russian voices previously hidden by the clanking of the armor, now came to

them. Gently, ever so gently, the two men edged backward into the ditch. Reilley had no sooner reached the bottom than he began climbing the other side. He looked for a little while, then worked his way quietly down to the anxious Johnson. "What are they doin'?" asked Johnson tensely.

"They're just starting to set up. We'll have to wait and see."

A short while later, he again clambered up the side where both men had originally seen the tanks. Upon coming down, he said, "There must be at least a dozen tanks and probably double everything we saw on this side. They're just starting to bivouac. Must have been traveling all night. You know where we've landed, Eddie? Right smack in the middle of an armored maneuver. They're busy settin' up a directional antenna right now. Probably for battalion headquarters. How does that grab ya?"

"Holy Christ!" Johnson spat out the words. "How in hell did we let this happen? We better start followin' this ditch. We gotta get out of here!"

"Let's go," answered Reilley, starting to make his way along the ditch. The two men had crawled about fifty yards when a coughing sound caused them to stop and hug the meager shelter on either side of the ditch. Reilley motioned for Johnson to stay where he was. Slowly then, he moved ahead. The ditch turned sharply to the left. Reilley peered cautiously around this bend. He jerked his head in suddenly, then crawled toward the waiting Johnson. He motioned for Johnson to start back. Together they crawled to the spot from which they had started. "What was it?" asked Johnson.

Reilley answered slowly, still struggling to get his breath, "Must be a company bivouacked back there. They're using this ditch for a latrine. There were two of the monkeys squattin' over the side."

Johnson laughed quietly. "What's so funny?" asked the surprised Reilley.

Johnson stopped his snickering and said, "We sure caught them with their pants down."

"Nice time to play funny man," said Reilley perspiring from his efforts. "Let's try the other way."

This time Johnson went first. They had crawled more than a hundred yards before they heard the voices. They listened for a while, then again retreated to where they had started. "Did you hear 'em, Kev?" spoke Johnson. "The lingo's Ukrainian. They're puttin' up a mess tent."

"Yeah, nice place for one in the middle of this cabbage field."

"What do you think we oughta do?"

"Start diggin' some sort of cover in this goddamn ditch."

Reilley's eyes were already busy searching the sides of the

wide trench. Finding a soft, comparatively dry area, he removed a small knife from his shoe-top and started digging. He scraped the dirt out with his free hand. Looking back, he saw Johnson still perched on one knee looking in the direction of the voices. "What are you doin'?" he asked.

"Thinkin', Kev, just thinkin'."

"About what?"

"About the last time we used these knives to dig with — about the grave we dug for Nicholson — a grave fourteen inches deep."

"Eddie, will you forget that stuff and start digging!" Reilley's voice sounded a little strained. He had been thinking the same thing, and he had caught himself wondering if the miserable hole he was digging might serve yet another purpose. Johnson moved upward toward him, knife in hand. Reilley looked up, their eyes met for an instant. Johnson laughed nervously, then both men began to dig. Clumps of brush provided good cover as it was, and it did not take much digging before the receding crevice took the shape of a small cave. Reilley hacked off some roots protruding from the side of the ditch. These he used to form a skeleton framework over the front of the hole. Johnson was already busy pulling down hanging patches of thick sod. With these, he filled in the root skeleton. Both men then climbed a little above their newly constructed cave and sent showers of dirt down upon the sod front. One end they left open so that they could enter. After touching up their handiwork, Reilley sent Johnson in one direction along the ditch while he went the other. Their purpose was to erase the prints which they had made in the mud. Both men retraced carefully. When Reilley returned, he found Johnson curled up in the cave. Reilley had taken the longer stretch of prints to erase. He brushed about the cave with a stick he had picked up, then climbed in alongside Johnson.

"Dinner is served," snapped Johnson pulling a head of purple cabbage from underneath his head. Reilley looked stunned. "Did you go out —"

"Relax, pal, relax. I just reached over the top; they're practically growin' in the ditch. Good stuff, too. Try some." He handed the vegetable to the smiling Reilley after pulling off a few leaves for himself. Together the two munched cabbage leaves.

It was a long while before either of the men spoke. Finally, Reilley broke the silence. "This outfit will probably pull out of here in a couple days. Then we can get the hell out of here and get some good chow. I've been thinking, though. We can pick up a

lot of valuable info here. Break out your camera; we'll photograph some of that armor."

Johnson answered quickly, "I already thought of that, but it's still pretty dim. Wait'll around noon. The sun'll help."

"Now you're talkin'," spoke Reilley softly. "It's a cinch we can't follow through on the original assignment, but we can sure as hell make this caper worthwhile." He poked his head out through the opening. "Hey, it's starting to rain," he said.

"Good," retorted Johnson, "it'll wash away a lot of the mess we made out there. Now be quiet for a while, will ya? I want to get some sack time. Besides, you've got my pillow." He pulled the cabbage out of Reilley's unrestraining arms, plopped it in the far corner of the cave, then curled up, turning nonchalantly away from the bewildered Reilley.

The surprised look left Reilley's face. He smiled, then stretched out and rested. The pelting rain sounded soothing and the minds of both men let it suggest pleasant things.

They remained that way for what seemed a long time. Finally Reilley noticed that it had stopped raining. He looked out. "Hell's bells, Eddie, wake up. We've got ourselves a rainbow. Things are looking up."

"Man, I'm hungry," responded the stretching Johnson.

"Let me have the camera, Ed."

"Wait'll I fix my hair."

"Give me that goddamn thing."

"Dear, you've been so moody lately - -"

"Are you gonna give me that thing?"

"All right, all right, wait'll I assemble this miniature mess. There, here ya are."

"Thanks, sport."

Reilley climbed the bank, careful so as not to be seen from the other side. He made his way upward nicely, edging underneath a pocket of overhanging grass. Johnson could see him looking for a long while. Finally, he put the camera to his eye. Johnson could not hear the click, but he saw Reilley turn the film knob and knew he was recording the stuff. After about half an hour, Reilley came down and climbed inside the hole.

"What's new, Kev?" asked the curious Johnson.

"Plenty, young soldier, plenty. They've got a cannon out there that would make Big Bertha look like a piker. Damn barrel must be thirty feet long."

"You mean - - -"

"Yeah, nuclear stuff."

"Holy Christ."

"I got about twelve shots. Five of the gun and the rest of

anything that looked interesting. Man, they really seem to be organized."

"Well, let me have a go at the other side. Maybe they brought some women along." Johnson took the camera and mounted the opposite bank.

"Careful, kid," cautioned Reilley.

Johnson lay for a long time staring out over the field. Finally, he too began using the camera. He lay there for what seemed an eternity to the waiting Reilley. "Wouldn't be surprised if the bastard was sleeping up there," he thought.

"What did you get?" he asked anxiously as Johnson climbed back into the hole.

"Anything you can do, I can do better," replied Johnson.

"Another one?"

"You guessed it."

"What else?"

"Armor, armor up the ass. Two heavy tanks, six light, twenty-two recon jobs and a funny type of troop carrier. People in white coveralls climbing all over the gun. Oh, yeah, another bivouac area off to the left."

"Did you photograph it?"

"Naturally."

"You know something, kid?"

"What's that?"

"I think we've got 'em surrounded."

"You're about as funny as a crutch. How many pictures can we get on this roll of film?"

"Thirty-two. I can see that you pay attention at the briefings."

"Well, you see, Kev, it's like this. This is supposed to be a brilliant boy's outfit, and I can't stand being in that category. You Harvard bastards don't show me a thing. You remember the time I had to pull your educated ass out of —"

"Seems to me I've heard this story a few hundred times before."

"Reilley slipped off his watch, wound it, then slipped it back on his brown wrist. "It's gonna be a long day, kid."

"Yeah."

The conversation seemed to die as both men sat Indian style leaning against the damp dirt wall. Johnson began cleaning the camera lens with his handkerchief. He stopped suddenly; Reilley's head jerked up. Voices. Two knives slipped silently from shoe scabbards. The voices came nearer. It seemed that they were almost over the shelter. A harsh laugh sounded and the voices began to fade. Reilley looked at Johnson, then replaced his knife.

Johnson did likewise. They continued to sit silently. Hours went by. Finally Johnson crawled to the opening and looked out. Carefully he left the shelter and climbed snail-like to the crest. He could see the trampled path amid the cabbages. Moving his head slowly, he looked to where it led. His eyes widened and he retreated quickly down to the shelter. "Hey, Kev," he whispered sharply, "that mess tent we heard them talking about — it's feedin' time and there must be a couple hundred of them gathered down there. You can smell the chow way up here. "Maybe we can move in and steal a little tonight, huh?"

"Nothing doing," answered Reilley. "We have to get that film back."

"But eventually we're gonna have to get some food."

"I think we'd better let it ride for awhile. They might move off this ditch soon. Besides, I want to get a few more shots of those guns from different angles. With this lens, these pictures are priceless."

"Yeah, guess I should have known better. Toss me the cabbage." Johnson tore a few leaves from the diminishing head, handed them to Reilley, then began chewing on one himself. Between them, they finished the head of cabbage.

"Better pick up a few more of these tonight, kid. Don't pick them all from one spot, though," spoke Reilley.

"Okay, but I'm getting awfully tired of cabbage. That's all we've had for the past two days now."

"Don't remind me," said Reilley, leaning back against the wall.

Johnson took off his heavy woolen button-up jacket, folded it and placed it beneath his head. He stretched out as best he could in the cramped hole, then closed his eyes. He dozed for a while, then finally managed to go to sleep. He had slept for some time when a voice awakened him. He whirled quickly. It was Reilley coming through the opening. He had a cabbage in each hand. Johnson looked at his watch through the semi-darkness. It was six-thirty. "Thought that was my job," he said.

"You were really sawin' it off. Thought I'd let you sleep. Anyway, we're gonna start posting a watch. All kinds of things happening out there. Looks like they're having night problems. If any of them happen to wander down here, we'd better know they're coming."

"I guess you're right. I'll stay with it till midnight, then you're on. Okay?"

"Deal," answered Reilley, taking off his jacket and arranging it as a pillow.

"Pleasant dreams," chirped Johnson, huddling in the entranceway.

The night passed uneventfully with Reilley relieving Johnson at one-thirty. Johnson awoke of his own accord at five-fifteen. Reilley was lying on his side, chin in hand, looking out.

"Okay, Kev, I'll take it. Anything happen?"

"Not a soul till about fifteen minutes ago. First Russian reveille I ever heard. They like their whistles. Wake me at noon, kid."

"Right."

Johnson waited until he was certain Reilley was sleeping, then moved up the bank. The early fog gave him plenty of cover. He looked out across the field, but could see very little. He could hear the tinkle of mess gear and assumed that the troops were having breakfast. "Breakfast," he thought. "I'm getting good and sick of cold cabbage."

Slowly, he crawled down to the shelter. Reilley woke up, then went back to sleep. Time passed monotonously. He ate a few more cabbage leaves, then sat by the entrance until noon. He woke Reilley. Both men drank some of the stale water from the ditch. It moved downward toward the latrine area, and this was some consolation, but it was hard to tell what was being thrown into it from the mess tent. Nevertheless, they drank, then ate a little more cabbage. It was the third day with nothing to eat but cabbage, and both men were considerably weakened. Their beards were long and coarse. The stale water could not wash the red from their eyes. Johnson spoke softly. "Kev, we had better get what pictures we can today, then get out of here tonight — if we can. What do you think?"

"I guess you're right, Ed. Let's have the camera." Reilley took the tiny mechanism and left the shelter. He mounted first the side within which the cave was located, then crawled up the opposite bank. Johnson watched as Reilley took picture after picture. When he came back, Johnson asked, "Any change, Kev?"

"I don't think so. I shot some more, anyway."

"We move tonight, huh?"

"Tonight."

"The latrine side?"

"Looks best to me, Eddie. What do you think?"

"Same here."

"I've been trying to think of some way to cut the film in half, then separate and go both ways. I don't see how we can do it, though. We might just play around and ruin the film. No, I think we'd better both go tonight — toward the latrine."

Reilley unbuckled his cloth belt and pulled his trousers down around his thighs. He pulled the knife from his shoe and cut the piece of tape from around his leg. Replacing the knife, he pulled

the .25 caliber Beretta from underneath the tape. Johnson did the same. They buckled up their trousers and flipped the weapons in their jacket pockets. Then they sat - - - silent - - - and watched the sun move across the sky, watched it go down.

Reilley looked at his watch. "Seven-ten," he said.

"Better wait another hour," Johnson replied.

"Okay, kid. At eight we go."

The tension mounted in the darkness. "It's always the same, isn't it, Kev? No matter how many times, it always feels the same."

"I guess so, Eddie, I guess so."

The darkness lay heavily upon them. They had long since learned to regard it as a friend.

"Kid," Reilley whispered.

"Yeah?"

"Time."

Johnson could hardly make out the hand extended to him in the darkness. He reached for it. The two hands clasped, a formality both were accustomed to. It served to say good luck, and possibly good-bye. They never knew which.

They moved out. Slowly, they made their way, walking quietly, bent over, along the ditch. Johnson felt the camera in his pocket. They reached the bend near the latrine. There was no one there. They continued. They walked well up on the bank so as not to step into the stinking waste which had accumulated there the last two days. They were still up on the slope when they spotted the light. It was moving toward them. A Russian soldier, carrying a small lantern and a rifle, was almost directly above them. Both men pressed tightly against the embankment. The man was about to make his toilet; the light shown up into his face as he squatted. Reilley could see that he was a Mongol. He was short; his eyes glared with the reflection of the lamp. Reilley was no more than two feet from him. The soldier finished his toilet, then stood and began buckling his trousers. It was then that Johnson's foot slipped sending a small landslide cascading into the ditch. The soldier grabbed the lantern and wheeled toward the sound. Reilley lunged, and pulled viciously at the man's foot. Both men tumbled into the ditch, the Mongol still holding the lantern. Johnson buried the knife in the man's throat. The intended scream never left the twisted mouth. Blood spurted up into Johnson's face. The Mongol's eyes stared horribly for a moment, then rolled back into the sockets. The lamp glared on the white orbs. Reilley put it out quickly. "Let's get out of here, kid," Reilley whispered sharply. He started down the ditch, then looked back. Johnson was still kneeling beside the dead man, his

hand still on the knife handle. Reilley went back. "Eddie!" he said, "Eddie!"

Johnson looked up slowly. His moist eyes shone in the darkness.

"I'm okay now, Kev, let's go."

Reilley helped him to his feet, reached down and pulled the knife from the dead man's throat. He wiped it on his jacket, then gave it back to Johnson. They proceeded once more along the ditch. Both men were weak from hunger. They went along some two hundred yards before they stopped. Both were puffing from the exertion. Johnson was trembling violently. Reilley climbed to the top of the bank and looked about. It was dark, but he could make out the tent forms on both sides of the ditch. Things looked bad. The ditch would serve as a perimeter patrol area for sentries on both sides. Softly he slid down to Johnson. He looked at his watch. It was nine-twenty. In a few hours it would be almost four days since they had eaten anything but the cabbage. "How do you feel?" asked Reilley.

"All right, I guess. It was bad for me back there, Kev," Johnson began to tremble again.

"I know, kid, I know." Reilley rubbed Johnson's shoulders with a massaging movement. Johnson reached inside his jacket. He handed the camera to Reilley. You had better take this, Kev. I have a bad hunch about this one."

Reilley took it and placed it carefully inside his jacket. "Look, kid," he said, "we're both getting out of here, see. You have to believe that, or we don't stand a chance. Remember some of the other rough ones we've been on. What did we always say? Together we're hard to beat. Right?"

"Unbeatable," smiled Johnson. He stood. "Let's go."

Once again the men started down the ditch. Reilley checked the top periodically. They were well into the bivouac area. Twice they had to freeze as a sentry moved along the top of the ditch. Johnson's trembling had almost subsided. They continued to move. Another half hour went by. They were almost out of the area now. Just a few yards to go.

Suddenly a livid scream ripped the quiet night. Both men knew immediately what had happened. Reilley cursed himself for not taking time to hide the Mongol's body. Some diarrhetic fool had stumbled to the latrine and found the body of the Russian soldier. "Let's get out of here, Eddie. This place'll be a hornets' nest in a few minutes. Both men were up and running now. Their tiny Berettas were in their hands. They were beyond the bivouac area. Suddenly a guard loomed on the bank almost in front of them. His rifle had just started to come up to his

shoulder when both Johnson and Reilley fired. The tiny weapons sounded like small firecrackers. The man tumbled into the ditch. With his last effort, he swung the rifle. The butt swept down across Johnson's cheek and crashed against his shoulder. Reilley saw Johnson go down. He turned him over immediately. "Get out of here," winced Johnson, "my shoulder's broken. I can't run." He was in sheer agony as Reilley dragged him to his feet. The ragged edges of his collar bone meshed as he tried to walk. He had to fight to repress the groan as Reilley put his arm around him. His arm dangled limply around Reilley's shoulder. Slowly they made their way along. Reilley looked back continually. Lights were going on. Men were shouting. Occasionally a motor would start. Finally the ditch entered a wooded area. Still they moved as rapidly as they could. Johnson was in a semi-conscious state now. Reilley kept to the ditch even though it was much shallower here. Eventually, he half-dragged, half-carried Johnson up the west bank and started through the woods. Briars tore at their clothes. Swatting tree branches cut their faces. They continued on. The noise and clamor had died out. They couldn't even see the lights. Reilley labored beneath his burden. Johnson struggled to help, but was almost completely dependent on his friend. Reilley drove himself mercilessly. Occasionally he sobbed aloud. He cursed the darkness, and slapped viciously at the briars. Both men were bleeding. They were haggard and weak from hunger, but they dared not stop. Reilley glanced at his watch. It was twelve-forty. Suddenly he dropped Johnson to the ground, then lay beside him. He had heard a vehicle. They must be near a road. He saw a pair of headlights moving about fifty yards in front of him. He watched intently as the vehicle came to a stop. It was a recon-car. He listened to the commands and saw the troops disperse past the headlights, rifles at port. "There must be at least six," he thought. He turned as Johnson lifted his head from the ground. "Kev," he started. Reilley's hand quickly clamped over his mouth. Johnson understood. Reilley put his mouth against Johnson's ear and told him his plan. The lights on the vehicle had gone out. They could hear the soldiers thrashing on both sides of them. Six lanterns blinked through the brush. Slowly the two men crawled forward. The brief rest had helped Johnson, whose shoulder sagged grotesquely. Slowly, carefully, they moved. The noise of thrashing men on both sides gave them good cover. Soon they were within ten yards of the road. Reilley took the knife from his shoe, then began to inch his way forward torturously. He snaked his way onto the road. He was some fifteen yards behind the vehicle. He continued to move forward. He was almost behind the car now. The figure in the driver's seat stirred. Reilley froze. He waited until the man had settled

in the seat. Again, he moved in. He was directly behind the car now. Slowly he stepped around behind the left rear tire. He rose to his knees, knife ready. The figure sat, one foot propped over the seat, turned angularly toward the woods. Reilley stood, hesitated for just an instant, then slipped his left hand over the man's mouth; the right plunged downward. Reilley's five-inch blade dug deep into the subclavian area just inside the clavicle. The driver slumped backward, and Reilley lowered him to the ground. Instantly, he turned and ran back for Johnson. He found him just as he had left him, covering the action with his tiny Beretta. He helped him to his feet and together they staggered to the car. The sound of the thrashing was still far away. He supposed it was part of a hurried plan to surround the ditch. Quickly he helped Johnson into the car. He felt for the starter with his foot. He groped for an instant, then flipped the knob ignition and tramped hard on the starter. The motor caught quickly, and they were off. He ground the gears badly as they tore down the road without lights. He drove this way until he could no longer make out the road, then flicked on the lights. The small road cut across a larger hard-surfaced road and Reilley swung left. A sign told him he was four kilometers from the border. Johnson collapsed beside him. Reilley pulled him toward him until his head rested on his lap. He sped through the night. Faintly, he could see the lights of the tiny check point ahead. The vehicle responded to his gentle braking and he slipped it into second gear. He pushed Johnson down on the floor. In this manner, he approached the gate. The wooden road barrier stretched across the highway. As he approached, a guard stumbled sleepily out of the tiny guardhouse. They were about fifty yards away now. Another guard stepped out. Reilley could see the sub-machine gun cradled in his arms. He slowed down even more as the recon-car grumbled against the restraining second gear. They were getting close, awfully close. Reilley's heart was in his throat. He was ten yards from the men now. The guards relaxed a little as they saw that it was a military vehicle. Now! He slammed the gas to the floor, the car roared ahead. It splintered the roadblock amid a hail of bullets. Reilley slouched sideways in the seat, his head hanging out the angular doorway to see as he steered. With a sweeping motion, he turned out the lights. He continued to hang from the doorway and steer. He heard the windshield shatter.

As he careened down the road, he flicked the lights on. Straightening up, he was surprised when his left arm failed to respond. He had been hit and in the excitement hadn't even noticed. The arm began to throb and suddenly his whole body ached. He was trembling, and his vision began to blur. He shook his head, but the blurring continued. Vaguely, he saw the entrance to a

town ahead. He came up on it fast, too fast. The vehicle side-swiped the walled archway and caromed wildly inside the ancient wall. It tore over an embankment and slammed into the side of a house.

Reilley saw the people around the car. Everything was hazy. He saw the M. P.'s and the G.I. ambulance. Courageously, he struggled to maintain consciousness while he squeezed the film inside his jacket pocket. Seconds after he had turned it over to the Counter Intelligence Colonel, all went black.

Two days later, he woke up in the hospital, with Johnson in the bed next to him. He looked over and heard Johnson say, "You educated bastards never could take it."

He smiled weakly. "Seems to me I've heard that story before." Reilley rolled over and surrendered to the blessed sleep.

SHOWDOWN AT SUNDOWN

Kenneth Zellefrow

SUN-DOWN, directed by Hugh Splicer, who also directed APACHE PASS, EAGLE PASS, and FORWARD PASS, is another superb western in the Splicer tradition. The story centers around Tex Dango and his efforts to live down his reputation as a gun-slinger. As the story opens we see a lone rider, away off across the plains, slowly riding toward us to the accompaniment of Rex Ritter singing "Bullets for Grandma," a tune that will undoubtedly rank with "High Noon." As the rider approaches, we see it is our hero Tex heading to Crow's Nest, a real rough town he has heard about and intends to tame. He halts his horse front-and-center and gazes intently at the acres of nothing, probably figuring this is a good site for an airport or an eighteen-hole golf course. Sighing deeply in time with the music, he pats his faithful old horse and they continue on.

Crow's Nest is run by Jonathon Slick, a smiling, friendly man who is really the villain of the whole deal. His hired gunman, Tico, dressed entirely in black, says almost nothing at all, only puffs on a brown cigarette that looks as if it has been rolled out of corn silk and wrapping paper in a blinding snow storm. When we first meets this nefarious pair, Slick raises his eyebrows and nods to Tico saying, "Get Dango." Tico smiles evilly and patting his pearl-handled 44's watches our hero Tex approach. There's going to be a showdown as one can plainly see, the only question is when.

Other characters include Mary Arkwright, the rancher's daughter, who is engaged to Jonathon Slick; her father Samuel Arkwright, a widower, who is rubbed out by Tico early in the

picture, thereby cutting down expenses. There are several minor characters such as the gang in the saloon, the gang in front of the general store, and the gang that appears to "head him off at the pass!" This same gang was also seen in EAGLE PASS when they shouted "Lynch the dirty horse thief!"

To sum up, Slick has Arkwright killed because he wants his ranch so when the railroad goes thru the land he'll be able to sell at an immense profit and also be able to marry Mary because Arkwright doesn't approve of the union (Read this twice if you get stuck). Tico is hired to kill the rancher and he succeeds except that our hero Tex sees him. Tex follows Tico into the Last Chance Saloon, and we know that now there will be a showdown since the music steps up to a feverish pitch. Tico is waiting for Tex as he enters and a great gun battle erupts with Tex fanning twelve shots from his six-gun, hitting Tico, two stray cats, and a red Bull Durham sign. Tico dies with a smile on his face; and making his play for the Academy Award, he gives with his only sentence in the whole play: "Slick paid me."

Shrugging off the many offers of assistance, Tex looks heavenward saying, "I started this job and I'll finish it." Disregarding his wounded arm, shoulder, thigh, and ankle, he staggers out of the saloon into the night in search of Jonathon Slick. He finds Slick in his office smirking over the ranch deed and, despite a hidden gun which Slick draws while Tex is studying the TV guide, kills the villain. A crowd immediately gathers, led by the sheriff Bart Tin Star, and they begin shouting, "Lynch the dirty horse thief," probably from force of habit.

Tex attempts to explain the situation but neither the crowd nor the sheriff gets the idea. As the rope is placed about Tex's neck, a cloud of dust reveals Mary Arkwright riding breakneck into town. Summing up the situation she screams, "Lynch the dirty horse thief." So they do. Tex dies a martyr's death and Mary runs off with the sheriff, who is really the director, Hugh Splicer, in disguise.

All in all, the picture is a great western, and the surprise ending will send people away muttering to themselves.

Our Rating: A two-bell-and-a-whistle picture.

DISGUSTING

James McHenry

Don't gossips bother you?
Me too.
They talk and talk
And hardly ever say anything
You haven't heard.

(24)

IT CAME WITH THE STEAKS

Janet Whiting

Four silhouettes darted down the bank onto Mirror Lake and shuffled across its snowy surface, leaving a zig-zag path behind them. Four college girls plowed through the nine-inch snow in a duck-like regiment, heading for the opposite bank and the small town that lay between the lake and a range of the Adirondack Mountains.

"Kids, I have a feeling we're going to find some excitement tonight. What do you suppose it will be?" Jane pulled her collar up higher around her neck.

"Excitement?" Marj asked. Don't you realize most of the skiers have left the resorts and the town will be deserted?"

"Yes, we four are the only waitresses left on first floor of the dorm." Just think, tomorrow we'll be bidding farewell to the old place." Karen waved her mittened hands. "No more trays, no more special orders of carbonated water for Mrs. McKlain, no more —"

"Take it easy, Karen; I'm not too sure there aren't little men in white coats waiting for you on the other side of the lake." Laura patted her friend on the back.

"Don't be hopeful, Laura. You know most of the bus boys left today," Jane said.

"That's not what I meant, witty one," Laura said laughing. "But it was a shame all those nice guys left today. They should have waited until tomorrow."

"Yes, but let's hurry, gang. It's mighty dark, and I'm mighty hungry for that steak dinner." Marj took a deep breath. "I sure hope it'll be good."

"I'm hungry too," Laura said. "But I'm afraid we won't find a restaurant that serves steaks at this time of night."

"Oh sure, we'll get our steaks; I have a feeling that —"

"Jane, you have more feelings," Karen said soberly. First you feel as though we're going to find excitement in a dead town, and then you feel we'll get steaks at 10:30 p.m. I really think it's this good cold air that stimulates your circulation and causes you to feel strange."

"Down with the biologist!" Laura cried. I think it's more fun thinking our last night here will be a real celebration."

"I bet if we go to Joe's we'll be served steaks," Marj said. You know, that's a nice little restaurant."

"I think it's nice, too," Laura agreed. "What do you say, kids? Want to go to Joe's?"

"Sure enough."

"It's okay with me."

(25)

They climbed up the bank leading to the little town. The snow made the going slow and tiring. Finally they reached the top and cut across the back yard of community church, coming out on Main Street.

"The place is deserted," Karen whispered as they hurried down the street toward a blinking neon sign.

"I'm glad to see Joe's is still open," Laura said, throwing a neatly packed snowball at a tree across the street.

They entered the restaurant and paraded by the counter to a booth near the back. The waitress stopped talking to the two men sitting at the counter and walked over to the booth.

"Do you serve steaks?" the girls asked.

"Well, we usually do - - it's rather late, though, and - - -"

The older man at the counter turned around on the swivel stool and looked at the girls. "It's not late, Diane; go call your mom." He got up and walked over to the booth. "You don't look like most skiers around here," he said. "I mean, you're not wearin' the bright ski outfit most of them have."

"No, we've been waitressing over at the Club during the Christmas holidays," Laura explained. "Since this is our last night in Lake Placid, we decided to celebrate with steak dinners."

"Oh, you college kids. Well, I'm sure you'll like the steaks. Mom makes 'em just the way you like 'em." He moved to the juke box, slipped a dime in the slot, and pressed two buttons.

Mom came into the restaurant from an inside door at the rear. She busied herself at the small kitchen unit behind the counter, and soon the thick steaks were sizzling in the frying pan.

"Let's have an appetizer," Jane suggested. "I'd like some orange juice."

"Sounds good to me," Laura said, trying to get the attention of the waitress.

The older man took their order. "Diane, get the girls some orange juice." He watched her bring the juice and then walked out the rear door. When she had put down the last glass in front of the girls, she went back to the counter to resume her conversation with Dan.

"Do you want another cup of coffee, Dan?" she asked him.

"No, jus' feel like sittin' here. Say, Diane, how's your brother? Dan leaned across the counter on his elbows. Has he heard from his wife yet?"

"Why don't you ask him? He'll be in soon to take over my place. Come on, Dan, have another cup of coffee. Dad always yells at me when I let customers just sit around without eating or drinking anything."

"Okay, okay, but tell the old man I'm a friend of the family."

Say, Diane, hasn't Jim heard from Jean at all? You know I can't come right out and ask him; it's a sore spot with him."

"She sure is a sore spot! I'd like —"

"Diane, that's enough. Jim needs our help, not mud slingin' " Mom looked at her daughter a few minutes; her lips were pursed in a manner that suggested she might have said more if she and Diane had been alone.

Diane strolled to the end of the counter and looked out the large glass window. "Well, here comes Liz Durf. What sort of trouble do you think she's looking for?"

"Diane, the platters are ready to be served," Mom said, placing onion rings on the steaks.

The door flung open and a dark haired woman wearing a red coat came bustling into the restaurant. She hurried to Mom's side and whispered softly in the older woman's ear. Her purple-pink fingertips worked nervously with a few stray hairs at her temple. Diane watched the women out of the corner of her eye as she served the heaping platters.

"Hmmm! This is delicious," Marj said as she took the first bite of meat and frilled french fries.

"This salad is great, too," Laura added. "What a treat after eating staff food for ten days!"

The small door at the rear opened and a slim man walked past the booths toward the counter. Liz moved toward him, smiling slightly. "Jim, I hope you're not angry — I didn't mean to fly off the handle. You know, it really wasn't my fault; I mean, well, your mom even said I —"

"It's okay, Liz; jus' forget it." Jim put on a big white apron and poured a cup of coffee. He sat on a stool, leaning heavily on his elbow.

"Let's put some money in the juke box," Marj said, looking in her wallet.

"Who has change?" Jane asked. "I have a fifty-cent piece and two quarters."

The telephone rang loudly on the wall behind the booths. Jim moved slowly past the girls to answer it. "Joe's Restaurant. Yes, — where? — Oh, jus' a minute. Mom, its from Jean, collect, is it —"

"Go ahead, Jim, it's okay."

He turned to the phone again, playing nervously with the cord. "Hello, yes, yes I will. — Hello, Jean — Yes, this is Jim. Jean — Jean! What's — What's wrong? Jean — Jean, listen to me — Jean, Jean what's wrong — Jean!"

"What's the matter, Jim?" Mom looked at her son anxiously as she folded her apron.

"I—I don't know," he moaned. "She's hysterical.

"Diane, quick get your dad; he's out back." Mom's face was drawn with fear.

"Jean, answer me, what's wrong? — Jean!" Jim's voice was high and tense.

Joe hurried in the back door. "Here, let me talk to her, son. Hello, Jean, this is Joe. Now tell me what's upsetting you. — Jean, take it easy — Jean! — No, we're not all against you. — Now tell me, Jean — yes, oh the baby got sick. — Yes, and he had a high fever. — The doctor sent him to the hospital? — But Jean, didn't you know he was that sick! — What? — When did he die?"

Jim groaned and clapped his hands over his head. It seemed the pain of the news hit his head with unbearable force. "Let me talk to her." He took the phone from his father and leaned wearily against the wall. "Jean, — Jean! What made him die!" There was a choking sound in his throat. "Didn't you know? — Jean, I — All right, so it wasn't your fault. — Yes, I'll try to get there as soon as I can. — Where are you? Yes, but where in Boston? — What? — You don't remember! Jean, are you drinking again? Jean!"

Liz Durf walked past Dan, steadying herself by placing a hand on his broad shoulder. "Let me talk to Jean; I know what's she's going through." She sniffed into a white linen handkerchief as she spoke. "Jean, this is Liz. Listen, Jean, I know what you're going through — I lost my son, you know. — Jean, you gotta get hold of yourself. — Jean, I'm not tryin' to make trouble. I —"

"Let me talk to her again." Jim took the phone from Liz. "Jean, listen, I'll get up there, but I don't have a way to Albany to catch the morning train."

"I'll take you to Albany, Jim." Dan walked over to the phone. "Here, let me talk to her. Hello Jean, this is Dan — No, I'm a friend of Jim's. Look, I can get Jim to Albany in time to catch the early morning train. — No, he should get there by two tomorrow afternoon. — Look, that's the best we can do. — But I'm only tryin' —"

"Let me talk to her; I gotta find out where she is." Jim's hand shook noticeably as he took the phone from Dan. "Hello, Jean. Now I want you to think; where are you stayin'! — Yes, I'll be up there by two —"

"The roads are bad till you get to the throughway," Joe said to Dan as he walked back to the counter.

"Yea, I know. But I'll get Jim there somehow."

"Jean, are you sure that number is 1823? All right. — How's Susan? — Well that's good. Listen, Jean, you take care

of Susan and yourself. I'll come to your room as soon as I get there. — No, you go to that room and stay there! I don't expect to hunt you in the bars. — Yes, — all right, Bye." Jim put the receiver on the hook and walked slowly to the counter.

"Get 'im some food and then we'll start for Albany. Okay, Jim?" Dan placed a reassuring hand on Jim's slumped shoulders.

"Yea, thanks, Dan." Jim settled heavily on a stool and stared at the coffee urn behind the counter. The restaurant was very quiet.

"Are we almost ready?" Laura slipped a coin under the plate. It clinked against the table reminding them of the juke box, and the songs that hadn't been played.

"The steaks were very good," Jane said as they paid the bill to Mom.

The older woman tried to smile, but her mouth twitched. "Thank you. Good night, girls."

The girls filed out of the restaurant into the cold air. The silence of the street was broken only by the crunch, crunch sound of their feet against the crisp snow. They cut across the backyard of the community church and made their way down the bank onto the lake.

"It was such a shame!" Laura said.

"Yes, I felt sorry for them," Jane said as though thinking aloud.

They trudged through the deep snow toward the small circle of light on the opposite shore. The wind blew steadily toward them, its icy fingers slapping their faces. The lake was dark and silent.

"If only we hadn't been there! It must have been harder for them with strangers around." Marj sighed heavily.

"It was unfortunate, but there was nothing we could do." Karen's voice broke as she swallowed a raspy sound that was between a sob and a laugh. "I guess it just came with the steaks."

GOD'S FAVORITE

Robert England

We are living
In a generation
Where zealots fight
Frustration,
Each with a special
Revelation
That he alone
Is God's chosen
Creation.

SOW JENKINS: SCIENTIFICATIONER

Ronald DeWitt

If anyone was ta tell Sow Jenkins he didn' know nothin' about farmin' or much of anythin' for that matter, I s'pose he'd get plenty burnt up, but the fact a the matter is he don'. He don' know absolutely nothin' from — well, he don' even know straight up. I 'member one time they was butcherin' pigs over 'n Sam Lemmy's farm, and they had all the pigs caught 'n kilt 'sept for one. Well, Sam and his oldest boy, Bill, was in the ole pen chasin' the pig around so as they could tie 'er up an' shoot 'er. Ya know what Sow Jenkins was a doin'? He was sittin' on the fence laughin' at the boys an' rootin' for the ole sow to get away. Sow, he got to rootin' an' hollerin' so much that he lost 'is sense a direction an' fell right in on top a the ole sow the boys was chasin'. Them boys an' everybody around there got to laughin' so hard they never did get that sow caught. Sow din' like the way every body was laughin' at him, so he got hisself outa that mud hole an' went on home. Course that was why they started callin' him Sow Jenkins in the firs' place.

Sow was always braggin' 'bout how smart he was an' how he knew so much about farmin'. "Ya have ta be scientific about things," he told the boys one day.

Al Billings steps out an' says, "Whata you know about anything scientific? You hain't never been ta school."

Sow gets kinda mad an' says back ta Al, "I don' need no schoolin'. I got my learnin' the hard way: from esperience. I know twice's much as any book-learnin' fool."

"If'n ya know so much an' you're such a scientific man, why don't ya do somethin' scientific—like inventin' something? Somethin' to make workin' easy round the farm?" says Al.

Sow kinda looks at Al sideways an' says, "Ya know I often thought about somethin' like that, an' now just to prove to you guys how smart I am, I'll just invent somethin'. That's what I'll do." And he turns an' walks away from them boys. Course they was all laughin' an' havin' a good time talkin' 'bout how Sow Jenkins was gonna invent somethin'.

'Bout a week later Sow's over at Sam Lemmy's place lookin' through his shed 'n barn. "What cha lookin' for, Sow?" ask' Sam.

"Lookin' ta see if'n ya got any junk around 'at I can use in my invention."

Sam was grinnin' to hisself inside.

"What kinda invention are ya makin', Sow?"

"I ain't tellin'. I ain't tellin' a soul, 'cause jus' as soon as I do, he'll run off an' try to make the same thing as I'm makin'."

"Okay," says Sam, "jus' thought maybe I could he'p ya fin' somethin' ya could use." Sam, when he fin's he can't do nothin'

to help, he leaves Sow to his lookin'.

Sow fin's a piece a spoutin' an' a generator off an ole Ford an' takes it on home with him. Over to his place he got hisself a shed an' has the windows all boarded up an' a big lock on both sides a the door so as no one can get a peek at what he's doin'. He goes in 'is shed every day an' locks hisself in, an' starts to bangin' an' poundin' away on whatever it is he's inventin'. He stays in there most a the day, don't even come out ta eat, 'sept for supper. He went on that way for a month, not even doin' any of his farm work. His wife an' the oldest boy done that. Then one day 'bout noon, Sam Lemmy saw Sow come outa 'is shed, go down ta the barn, where he hitched up 'is horse ta the wagon. He backs the ole wagon up to the shed an' struggles fer about a half an hour till he got this here thing in the back a his wagon. Sow jumps in the ol'e wagon an' goes into town.

When he gets to town he runs around tryin' ta find Al Billings, an' finally he fin's him in Jake Gerber's hardware store.

"Come on out 'n see what I got in my wagon," he says to Al.

Al knew it was the invention, but he plays dumb an' says, "What's at, Sow?"

"Well, come on out an' see." Al comes ta the door an' walks out to Sow's wagon, an ol' Sow points an' says, "There's that invention I told ya I'd make."

Al looks at it for a long while, then says, "What's it fer?"

Sow, he kinda smiles an' says, "Well, I'll tell ya, Al. That's a Egg-Countin' Machine."

"An egg-countin' machine," says Al an' starts laughin' like a silly fool. "Why, Sow, didn' you know that some one invented a egg-countin' machine a long time ago?"

"I don' believe it," says Sow. "I jus' don' believe it."

"I'll prove it to ya," says Al. "Come on into Jake Gerber's. He's got one fer sale in here."

Sow kinda looks bewildered as he follows Al into the hardware store. "There it is," says Al. "See it there besides the lawn mowers."

Sow looks an', sure enough, there sits a real-fancy-lookin' contraption. He walks over shakin' his head, looks it over good, an' then says, "I guess that's an Egg Countin' Machine, all right."

Course, Sow never did know what kinda machine it was that sat beside the lawn mowers in Jake Gerber's Hardware Store, an' I don't remember rightly now whether it was a cream separator or a corn sheller. It was one or the other, I guess, or maybe it was a sausage grinder. I just don't rightly remember, and it don't much matter. Sow never brings the subject up, an' he don't like us to remind him of it.

YOU COULDN'T LEAVE ME

Kathleen A. Rohaly

Even though it was raining, Mrs. Sutherland stood alone in the cemetery — peering at a freshly covered grave. "Why did you do it, Son? Why?" The tears mixed with the rain streamed down her face. "What will Mother do without her Baby? Last week at this time we were home together. Why did you do it?"

I can remember when you were born. Your father was away as usual. I was so happy because after fifteen years of marriage I finally had someone to call mine. You were a good baby, and you loved your mother from the start. I stayed with you at night, I took you to parties when you were older. I never let a maid feed you or do anything for you. We were so very close.

Remember when we went to the Van Horn's party? You wanted to go, and I didn't, but I went along to please you. You were about seven then, but you were smarter than all the rest. Remember when you played Treasure Hunt, that spelling game? You always won. We didn't even bother staying for the cake and ice cream. You wanted to go home and be with me, didn't you?

Your father came home for a visit from one of his business trips. We had a big argument over you. He insinuated that we were too close, that if I didn't be careful, I'd be sorry later. I told him a mother couldn't be too close to her son. Father said you should be playing with the other little boys, go to baseball games and all other kinds of things. You didn't like baseball, and the other boys were too big and rough. Your father left the next day without saying goodbye to you. We were so lucky to have each other.

Remember when I helped you with your homework. You were on the honor roll most of the time except in fourth grade when you had that horrible Mrs. Collins. I told her a thing or two when I went up to school. She told me she was the teacher, and I told her I was your mother and knew more about you than anyone — including her. After that incident, we changed schools and everything was fine again.

You grew up so fast. Before I knew it, you were sixteen and wanted a car. I always got you what you wanted and what I thought best for you, but a car was too dangerous. You were a little angry with me for a while, but your mother always knew what was best.

Everytime your father was home, we had arguments, but I never let you know. He never knew or loved you the way I did and do. He threatened to take you away with him one time, but he never wanted you the way I needed you. He would not have dared to separate us. After that episode, he came home less often

than ever, and you and I were both happier.

I was so proud of you, my boy, when you graduated from high school with honors. There were some parties after the ceremony, but you wanted to be with me on this important night; so we went out and celebrated alone. Everyone said they never saw a mother and son any closer.

You were so intelligent you had to go to college. I wanted you to commute from the start, but since you got that scholarship you wanted to take advantage of it. I called you everyday and saw you every weekend. I really missed you terribly. It was then I began getting those terrible pains in my chest. You worried about me and promised you would change colleges at semester so you could commute and take care of me. I was so happy. In January, you were home again and were much more satisfied in this other college. Your marks were high that first year.

In your sophomore year, your grades began to drop, and it was her fault—that Emily's. Whatever possessed you or attracted you to date her I could never understand. I didn't even discover you were dating her until you had been seeing her for months. You were spending too much time away from home, supposedly doing research work in the school library. You stayed until quite late, and then I saw you meet that wretch who worked there. She was laughing and giggling, and you two left hand-in-hand and went to the "Hang Out." I even saw her teaching you to dance. I could have helped you learn if you would have asked me. We could even have taken you to a dance studio. But no, SHE was doing it and poorly too. You even walked her to her home, and it was in that poor section of town, practically slums. I knew from her looks she wasn't for my boy, and when I saw her house I was positive. You even went inside that building, but shortly afterward you came out, running to hurry and get home. You beat me home and were getting ready for bed when I came in. I called you out of the bedroom and told you what I had seen. You were quite angry and began yelling at me for the first time. I told you I was only looking out for your welfare. Then I got a severe pain in my chest. The excitement was too much for me. You were so worried and such a dear. I stayed in bed that next day, and you promised you would be home as soon as you could to take care of me.

I didn't feel too strong for several weeks, and you took such good care of me. Your father came home just as I was really beginning to feel well again. He was going to take you on a fishing trip over the weekend. He thought he should get to know his son. I knew you wouldn't want to go, and he got furious and screamed at me. We called you into the library, and your father

asked if you would like to go on a fishing trip with him. You looked at me searching for an excuse, and then you hesitantly said O.K. because you didn't know how to get out of it. I guess you would have suffered and gone if I hadn't had another attack, but then you couldn't go and leave me alone. Your father called it a "fake" attack, and he didn't even wait to see if I lived or died. He didn't care about me, but you did. Yes, Son, it seemed as if we were always together.

Things really went along smoothly for awhile, and I was feeling better than ever. We spent the summers vacationing together and really had a marvelous time — just the two of us. But after you started your senior year, something seemed to be bothering you, and you wouldn't tell me. Mother always knew when something was bothering her baby. This went on for a month or so, and I was really worried about you. I decided to check into your school affairs; so I called the Dean of Personnel. You found out later, but I know you realized I was only doing it for your own good. The Dean didn't know you personally; so he was no help even though he said he would look into the matter. But that would not be quick enough. You were beginning to be late coming home from school, and you even wanted to leave me at night. You always seemed to have something to do. Once you even wanted to get a job working nights, but I convinced you that your mother needed you more than we needed the money. About the first of the year, you didn't come in until real late at night, and I was so worried. You were really furious later when you discovered I had a man following you, but you know I only do what is best for you. I got reports daily of everything that you did. I was very surprised and disappointed when I was told you were again dating that wench Emily. My detective — if you want to call him that — said you called her from Abe's Drugstore and took her to out-of-town places. There you danced and even drank some. I had a difficult time believing all this and didn't say anything to you about it for nearly a week. Finally, I mentioned the subject to you, and you lied to me for the first time when you denied it. That was when I told you I had had you followed. Son, you were so disturbed. I began to feel ill and called after you, but you had already slammed the door behind you. You didn't come home that night. I was so worried. I didn't know where you went or what you intended to do. But everything seemed to be all right when you came home the next morning, even though you were quite cold and formal with me. I was sure my son would soon see things the right way — my way!

It was that evening that you brought that girl — that Emily — up to our apartment. She boldly walked in and sat down opposite me. You stuttered and stammered, Son, and Emily said

for you to hurry and tell me. You really astonished me when you told me that you and Emily were planning to get married. I remember I just stood there and then I got the worst pain I had ever had. You ran over to me and helped me to the sofa. I told you I needed you and probably wouldn't be around too much longer, anyway. Emily told you she was going to leave and said if you wanted her you had better say so now. You looked at me, then at her, and started to get up from my side, but another pain shot through me as Emily opened the door to leave. You shouted after her that you couldn't leave your sick mother, but she never turned back.

You seemed depressed even though you took good care of me constantly. I knew you were worried about me, but I soon was feeling quite good again. Still you were moody. I tried to tell you that Emily was no good for you and that all she was trying to do was separate us. That's when you told me you loved her no matter where she lived or what type of girl she was. You went to the phone and despite my protest you called her, but she wouldn't talk to you, and her father said she was through with you. I told you, Son, that she was an ungrateful nothing. You didn't say anything and went into your bedroom, but you couldn't sleep; so I brought you my sleeping pills. You took the bottle and asked me to leave and said, "Goodnight, Mother."

The next morning, you didn't get up and didn't get up, and I thought perhaps you had left for school, so I went to your bedroom to see. I couldn't awaken you. I called Dr. Wilson. He pronounced you dead — an overdose of sleeping pills. I couldn't believe it — not you, my only baby.

Your father came home for the funeral and Emily came, but no one misses you the way I do. No one!

Your father blames me for your suicide. It isn't true, is it, Baby? No, it can't be my fault! I always did everything for you. I didn't drive you to it. No — no — it's not my fault.

Then for the first time, Mrs. Sutherland felt an authentic pain, and she fell on her baby's grave. When help finally came, it was much too late. Meanwhile the rain had stopped, and the sun was shining.

GOD'S PORTRAIT

Robert England

How conceited can I be—
Painting an image
I cannot see
And making it look
So much like me?

THE LOVELY PARTY

Lorraine Gitch

"John, do we have to go to the cocktail party? Yes, of course, make an appearance. A little Christmas cheer and Yuletide good will. Well, it's from four to six. Let's go at 5:30. But, John, after meeting your family and having dinner and coloring pictures with your nieces — I've been on guard all afternoon. Let's go to my house and play scrabble.

"No, you say. A flat no. Well, take me home first. I'll have to change my costume for Act Two. No, this is not good enough. The skirt doesn't hang right and my black sheath is much more *sauve*. Come on in and mix me a—what do you call it? A bracer? Yes, while I change between scenes. It'll only take me five minutes.

"What did you say? I can't hear you with the door closed. Someone might think you spiked my Pabulum? What on earth do you mean? Oh, well - - - Hey Jo--ohn? Why don't you take off your tie and not wear your suit jacket, and I'll put on my striped shirt and treader pants. That'll shake 'em, won't it? All right! You don't have to shout. I'm all dressed, but I want to practice that last smile once more. There.

"Here, look Nnnnnnnn. How's that? Stop! You're hurting my face. Now, I can't go with a thumb mark on my nose! No, it is not becoming, and I know it's cold out. They'll just think I've had one too many. That's what they'll think.

"Hey, I could slip and break an ankle on this ice, couldn't I? Seriously, John, don't let me have too many. No, I said t-o-o, not t-w-o. But if I do, I'm afraid I'll say what I'm thinking. Wouldn't it be funny if your thoughts lit up on your forehead like a pinball machine? Oh, John. I forgot something. Okay. Tilt. I mean I don't want to go in. You wait and watch Mrs. Tiddlow check the label on my coat. Well, I've got her fooled. I transferred a Saks label from my mother's old coat. Well, here we go. Curtain going up.

"Merry Christmas, Mrs. Tiddlow. Yes, we finally made it. This coat? No, it's at least a year old. Does it really look like something from My Fair Lady? Thank you. (I think.)

(Oh, here comes Mellowdee plodding along. That's spelled M-e-l-l-o-w-d-e-e, but of course. She hasn't lost a pound. Wish I could tell her I found out she was at the Elizabeth Arden Beauty School instead of visiting her relatives.)

"Mellowdee, I lo-ove your dress.

(Too bad they didn't have it in her size.)

"Well, of course. We wouldn't miss your party for the world.

We'd love a drink. Yes, go take care of your guests. Run along.

(Ha! That I'd like to see.)

(Stage left, the dining room.)

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Tiddlow. What'll I have? Ooooo, let's see. (My, Lord. What is there. Look at all those foreign bottles. Well, Joan Crawford always asks for bourbon on the rocks.)

"Bourbon, will be fine. - - - With or without?

(Tilt. With or without what!)

"Uh, with.

(Damn. John would have to add "with plenty of ice." Now, he's giving me the cue to circulate; and I'm being deserted for stocks and bonds and A. T. & T. I'll have to make the scene alone. Bye, John. Just stand there. Don't move. I want to remember you just as you are.)

(Stage right, and I discover Margaret sitting on a rather simple divan in her Anne Fogarty dress of pure Irish linen. Well, she's certainly getting enough wear out of it. Now I know what it is she reminds me of. A Herbert Tareyton cigarette ad — only discriminating people, etc. I knew it. Now, she's looking at my left hand. No, I didn't make the grade. There's still a chance for retrieval, Margaret; so don't drop your martyr role.)

"Margaret, I haven't seen you in ages. You didn't come down the other night.

(Now, what kind of answer was that? — "No, I didn't.")

"Well, Bill! Hi. Careful. Don't muss my hair. Where have you been lately?

(What an ugly boil on his face!)

"How are the plays coming? - - - You got the lead in *The Corn Is Green*? How wonderful!

(How ironic!)

"Oh yes, I remember your cousin Marge. A New Year's Eve Party last year. Oh, ho. Ha. Ha. How have you been, Marge?

(Hm-mm. Wonder why she isn't married yet. That one bad tooth really spoils her appearance.)

"And, Mary. Came to show off your new Florida tan, I see. Yes, and make us all look sick. Mmm, yes I heard about your new position. That's great.

(Is it ever! She has a flare for picking friendly bosses. A week's paid vacation and only one month's work.)

"Have I finished my socks yet? Oh, no. I got to the toe and had to take it to the courtesy department of the Globe store. They give free counsel, you know. Well, I just wanted the woman to look at it, and she got carried away, tearing it almost down to the heel. It really broke my heart. Well, what was wrong with it? (Now this is the dumbest conversation.) Well, I was decreasing

on the wrong needle. I know I promised them for Christmas, but I didn't say what Christmas. Ha. Ha.

(Now if I keep leaning back on one foot and keep stepping back with the other, I might make a clever exit, and - - -)

"Well, Hi, Joe! Oh, no. Wait. That's your brother. Joe's at Cornell. And you're where? Oh, Carnegie Tech. I knew that. So how's it going? Oh, thank you. I've been dying to sit down.

(Good heavens. He intends to tell me how it's going. Why some people always take you literally!)

"Yes, it might be better for you to major in psychology. Why do I think so?

(Well, my Lord. How should I know! Here I was, just trying to be polite.)

"No, I don't believe I do know what a fetish is. Some people have fetishes for white gloves? And silk? Well, what do you know about that!

(Well, I can analyze him too. He feels unwanted. He's right.)

"And you mean you just go around working at different occupations to study people? Well, this calls for another drink. Would you mind? Thank you.

(Now I feel like Exhibit A. Actually, I might just as well tell him: I had inconsistent punishment when I was a child and lived under constant fear, which wasn't half bad until my father forced me into becoming a baseball player and I took to drinking. I wonder if that's a coaster or an ashtray.)

"Thank you, Joe. I believe your sister needs one over there, too. I must go into the library to say 'Hello.'

"My, this looks like an intellectual group. Hello. Hello. Hello. My brother tonight? Oh, he's either home drinking or out drinking. You college boys are all alike, you know. Ha. Ha.

(If I sit down on this couch, my skirt will hike up, so I'll just perch on the end here like Princess Elizabeth—one foot slightly forward. Next to this radical in the crew-neck sweater.)

"No, I didn't hear the joke about Santa Claus - - - Oh, dear. Not blushing. Just a reflection from my dress - - - The one about Jesus Christ? Well, no. Is that Jerry over there? Oh, Jerry, sit down here a minute while I go to find John - - - In talking to Mr. Tiddlow? Good boy. That's where I left him.

(Now, I've got a straight runway down the hall.)

"Oh, Mellowdee. It's a lovely party. - - - You want me to circulate more?

(And I was beginning to feel like a shuttlecock.)

"Well, I hadn't realized I was doing such a good job, but really, we must leave, we - - - Well, I suppose we can stay to hear Martha play the piano.

(And that was my best smile. Guess I'll have to sit on this ugly Chippendale. Hmmm, that's Wedgewood on that table. Not even a speck of dust on it either. Ha. I think she made a mistake in that glissando. Margaret hasn't moved one inch. It's funny how scenes jump around when you close one eye and then the other. I wonder if that's a coaster or an ashtray. Whoooooo said "encore"? Why, we're being saved by the bell. The doorbell. Whoever it is, I'll know them. I'll run up to them, throw my arms around them, and kiss their hands!)

"Why, it's Fred and Sally! Fred! - - - Sally! It's been so long! Come, you haven't met John. Oh, John. Excuse me. John, this is Fred and Sally Andrews. John Turner. He's heard all about our high school escapades. Sorry, we can't stay and chat with you, but we were just on our way out - - - as soon as we say our au revoirs. Good night, Mellowdee. (M-e-l-l-o-w-d-e-e).

"We've had a wonderful time. Merry Christmas."

INVENTORY

James McHenry

The shelves were weary
From the searching hands
That had stripped them
Of their Christmas
Green and red.
And off,
Alone,
There lay
A scarred Christ Child—
A witness
To the folly
Of his birth.

THE VAGRANT

Robert England

He is as the tiniest speck of dust
Swept by every whim of nature
Through a life he hardly knows or feels.
He will die the common death
And be lowered into common ground.
He will not be the dust
That brings warm tears to misty eyes
Or regulates history's course;
No, his will be but chemicals returned
To the earthy mixture.

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