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Trapped

Theodore Rovinski

Have you ever felt the presence of death, or have you ever found yourself in the reality of a nightmare without certainty of returning to the world you live in? I have. A long time ago I found myself on the brink of eternity, surrounded by death in the depths of the sea. I remember quite well, even though it was a long time ago.

It was mid-afternoon and our barge, looking like an overgrown water beetle, rolled on the swells of a wind-swept sea. A fluid pattern of lacy white-caps frolicked upon breakers that raced recklessly toward the shores of a nearby island. Banded by sand shimmering beneath a blazing sun, the island was a picturesque mound of green verdure. A few graceful palms, outlined against a cerulean sky, interrupted the smooth contour of the mound. Skirting the beach, crystalline waters merged into a carnival of colors which were reflected by the underlying coral reefs in a magical display of delicate and varying shades.

Then the helmet slid over my head, striking the breast-plate with a metallic sound that reverberated within the copper globe. I watched my tender make the final adjustments to my diving gear. Soon he completed his checkup and slapped my helmet, informing me that I was ready for the dive. My mission was to locate a sunken ship, examine its interior, and report my observations.

Rising from a crude wooden bench, I lumbered across the deck, grasped the ladder, splashed my feet into the water, and slid silently beneath the surface. One fathom! Two fathoms! Four fathoms! Seven fathoms! Ten fathoms! I reached the ocean floor, engulfed in an eerie, liquid space—cold, alien, and mysteriously vague. It extended into an infinity of nothingness, yet I knew there was a world of activity there, and danger too, lurking in this void. Sharks and barracuda constituted an ever present threat to the diver who trod in these waters.

Sloughing through the sand which swirled like clouds about my feet, I saw a school of fish streak past and vanish as suddenly as they had appeared. After a brief pause I resumed my search, convinced that they were not pursued by a larger specimen. A young ray, foraging for food, hovered above a patch of sea-weed, then skittered away as I approached, spasmodically flapping the wing-like exten-

sions of his body. A horseshoe crab patiently crawled along the bottom. Its spiny tail creased a furrow in the smooth sand, but the furrow soon disappeared as a powerful current shifted the sand above it. The current pressed against me as I advanced, its mysterious movements revealing the blackened edges of clam-shells protruding from their watery graves. Above me, the surface ruffled by waves was a blurred, gigantic mirror reflecting the distorted outline of the bottom of the barge.

As I gazed at my surroundings I had a strange feeling. I was an insignificant intruder here in the recesses of this primordial realm. I was invading the ancient mystery—the sea.

A jumbled mass of coral reefs loomed ahead. Their slopes were clothed with a profuse growth of vegetation—ghostly white plants bristling with brittle spines, clumps of purplish-red reeds twisting and turning in soft green moss, and large colonies of sea-anemone and polyp revealed in vivid contrast to their coral foundations. Over a thick mat of seaweed innumerable species of small fish swarmed about, flashing brilliant colors.

Suddenly I was able to distinguish the wreck in front of me, its bow tilted at an angle upon a coral ridge. I signalled my discovery to the surface, and advanced toward the submerged ship. Upon reaching it, I inflated my suit and rose to a low railing extending completely around the main deck. Swimming over it, I landed on deck and proceeded to enter a hatch leading to the lower decks. I had to work fast. The tide would be in within a few hours.

I moved ahead, but my progress was retarded by the darkness of the hatch. I inched slowly forward, just like the horseshoe crab that I had seen before. It was darkness and time; the darkness was here and the time was forgotten. When I completed my examination, I retraced my steps to the main deck. Suddenly I realized the tide was already in motion. At least two hours had passed. Dark sediment, stirred from the ocean bottom, began to rise through the water. The sea became ugly.

Then it happened. Half-way out of the first hatch, I felt myself being lifted by a terrific force, and I slid perilously toward the edge of the ship with the surging current. Suddenly I stopped moving. The brass toe-casing of my shoes had hooked onto the pipe of the railing. Fearfully I held my breath, grasped the railing firmly, and pulled myself behind it. The railing afforded me a temporary security

behind which spread another world of black, whirling waters. Crouching, with my helmet placed against the sturdy metal pipe, I inched myself to a corner. There I wedged myself between the railing and the broad supporting pillar. I became panicky. First I tried the phone, but it didn't work. My pleas and shouts were unheard. Desperately I tried to get through an emergency signal for help on the lifeline. I yanked the line repeatedly, counting the seconds between each interval with years of patience. No response! My shoulders ached. My throat was hoarse from yelling. Sweat trickled down my face and stung my eyes. I began to pray. All I wanted was to see the light of day again. A drowning man asking for what? Where was heaven anyway? Was I deserving?

My lines were fouled. I knew that because I couldn't signal the top. The phone didn't work. If I moved I would be swept over the side. If that happened and my line was wrapped around a sharp piece of steel, it would be cut. And I would die . . . I would squirm on the bottom and drown. "Died in a diving suit." Some obituary!

Nothing. Nothing but hours passing. One, two, three hours! And nothing. Nothing but the ceaseless hiss of air entering my helmet. It was an odd sound, almost hypnotic in effect. Little lights like sparks whizzed past my faceplate. I remembered that my instructor had told me about forms of plant life that glowed when they were agitated. Sparks, and blackness, and hours! And maybe an ocean bottom for a grave!

I raised my back an inch. Suddenly through the hissing of the air, I heard the voice of my tender. The telephone was working! I yelled back. I told him I was not hurt, but the tide had me pinned against the railing and my lines were fouled. I wanted help, and I wanted it quick. He assured me that a diver was working to clear my lines. Soon I would be free!

An hour passed. The tide had spent its fury, and I managed to extricate myself from the painful position I had huddled in for six endless hours. Once more I heard the voice of my tender. My lines were clear. It was all right to come up. As the air rushed into my suit, I felt myself rising. And seconds later I burst upon the surface. Soon I was stamping my feet on the solid steel deck. A breeze caressed my cheek. The sun hung low in the western sky, tinting small breaths of clouds with a soft yellow. The sea was silent. And I was glad to be alive!

America Symphony

B. Richard Rutkowski

See it go
Marching by,
Marching — Marching
Ever onward.
Step to the roll of the heated drums,
Strut to the blare of the sounding brass.
A big brass band
Marching by
On parade,
On review.
Hear the beat of the rolling drum,
Hear the pound of the throbbing heart?
Heart of America!
Song of America!
This is America
Marching by!
Marching! Marching!

Down the boulevard
Strutting high

A crowded confusion,
A deafening roar,
A roar of a city,
High, high!
Steel and concrete,
Genius and labor,
Achievement!

A hurrying people, all alike, all
Intent on each one's purpose which
Is the only purpose and is
United into the will of the
People!
Madly revolving doors on conglomerate stores,
Swallowing people, throwing forth an
Endless stream of madly revolving
People.
Madly revolving streets,

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MANUSCRIPT

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Revolving city,
Turning,
Turning.
A whirlpool of twisting confusion
Mounting high, high —

Everyday melody
Of tuneless brass.

This is main street, America.
A little square town
Which suddenly sprang up
Out of nowhere alongside a
Railroad track.
No purpose.
Yet leading a peaceful, purposeful life.
The quiet, shaded streets,
Wide, flanked by undramatic houses.
And a grain elevator, /
Key to the endless, endless
Flat fields which gave
Birth to the flat town.
Mainstreet.
No drama?
Plenty of life!

Color and pageantry
March across the land —

The land.
The land, the land, the land.
Basic, fundamental,
So dreary in function,
Toil, labor, strive, struggle.
Sometimes a failure
And sometimes a success
Which is so meaningless
That it is, after all, failure
Too.
But here is drama!
The pulse is
Slower
But
Stronger!
Hear it, hear it?

Slowly rolling hills
 Worn down but still living
 And giving life to
 That little farmhouse
 And little farmer
 Who plows
 And gains
 A little harvest,
 But is glad and content that the rocky
 Hills give him life!
 The hardened man and worn-out woman,
 Who came, many years ago, from Europe,
 Stand in the doorway of their poor
 Rough-stone and plaster house
 And look at their poor rough-stone farm,
 Speak nothing but Polish,
 But it sounds strange with its
 Americanisms.

He changed this farm into something of
 The old.
 The farm has changed him into
 Something of the new.
 And he is glad,
 Having known worse.
 And the flat, flat land,
 Land that does not end,
 Just diminishes.
 Land as wide and as empty as the sky.
 Just soil — and crops —
 Mostly soil.
 But far off, so stark in the
 Distance for not being obstructed
 By something nearer to measure it by,
 Is the clump of trees
 Which protects the farmhouse,
 Lonely with its barn and silo
 And sheds and coops
 And its vacant fields to wall
 It in.
 A nucleus of the vibrating
 Protoplasm which is the
 Living soil around it,
 Flat, flat land.
 Big farmer,

Little farmer,
 For both know living
 And life
 And hear the distant blare of
 The marching color.

And the music grows stronger
 And the rhythm increases.

Here is industry.
 Roaring red flames
 Silhouette the blast furnaces
 In the night,
 Consume the curtains of the night,

Industry!
 Turning, turning, day, night —
 Day, night—, night, day,
 The busy hum of machinery,
 The slapping racings of the countless belts,
 The whine of the strained lathe
 And steam of hot, turned metal.
 Steel shavings curling thick,
 And men in coveralls—
 Secure with lunch buckets
 And white smiles in dirty faces,
 White, happy eyes,
 Caps on the backs of their heads—
 Wait for the last minute
 And punch the clock
 And rush into the machines,
 Idle only seconds,
 And start them in again by
 Throwing in the levers.
 Men as endless as the belts
 That drive their machines and
 Their lives.
 And industry rolls on
 With a metallic cry
 And a working roar.
 Hot and fast,
 On, on —
 Big,
 Always more,
 Always faster,

Industry rolls on
 At a furious pace
 And the distant buzzing of machines
 On nightshift
 Grows to the clear-cut clanking
 Of machinery by day.

Discordant brass
 Grows to stirring music.

See it go
 Marching by,
 Marching — Marching
 Ever onward.
 From ocean to ocean many tunes
 Blend as one, America Symphony.
 Stirring music
 Fills our hearts,
 Melody
 Of our hearts.
 See the soul of the living people,
 Hear the pulse of the living song?
 Soul of America!
 Song of America!
 This is America
 Marching by!
 Marching! Marching!



The Truth About Hollywood

Thomas R. Jenkins

Last week I had the pleasure of reading one of the "voices" of Hollywood, *Scintillating Stars*. I must confess that I have been laboring under a number of misapprehensions concerning the "Movie Capital of the World." It is amazing the amount of propaganda I gullibly accepted without question.

The divorce rate in Hollywood cannot be so appallingly high as the reformers claim. A number of typical film

colony families were treated in *Scintillating Stars*. Each one was a "perfect picture of matrimonial bliss."

I should like to quote bits from an article concerning that "perfect married couple of Hollywood, Tessie Notrump and Bob Baldspot." These two people were married the day before the reporter interviewed them as to their formula for the happy married life. I quote:

I was warmly received by Bob Baldspot himself at the door of their cozy little twenty-room honeymoon cottage. He graciously led me into their palatial living room where I was introduced to his beautiful young wife, the glamorous Tess Notrump.

Needless to say, I was extremely nervous in the presence of such great personages. However, they immediately made me right at home. I felt that I had known them all my life.

I immediately struck at the heart of our discussion and asked Bob and Tess their formula for a happy married life.

Bob replied immediately, flashing a boyish grin that revealed his extreme youth, 'Raise a family. Best possible thing to do. Marriage will always be successful if there are children to hold it together.'

He then extended a brawny, muscular, sinewy, tanned arm and patted five-year old Algernon, his son by his fourth marriage, on the head.

Tess immediately agreed with Bob. She gave a shy smile as she tousled the hair of Lucretia, her daughter by her fifth marriage; and said that love should be the basis of all marriage. 'Bob is really and truly my first and my only love.'

I departed from this happy home with a warm glow around my heart. 'This is truly a typical family,' I said to myself. 'It will last forever.'

After this testimonial, who could doubt that Hollywood families are the happiest in the world? The high divorce rate must be the propaganda of a jealous foreign power struggling to discredit the film industry.

You men will have to give up the idea that film heroes are sissies. This is far from the truth. All male stars have bulging biceps, sinewy forearms, and rippling muscles as standard equipment. Some are ardent devotees of the manly sports of hunting and fishing. Let us look in on Harry Harelip as described in *Scintillating Stars*:

As I entered the den, Harry had a well worn briar clamped between his even white teeth. He was cleaning his twelve-gauge, semi-choke, pump action shot gun. At his feet were his two Pekinese hunting dogs, Shawawa-Shawawa and Bob.

Who could ask for a better picture of an outdoor man? According to the author, friend Harry just lives for the day when he can chuck this life and go to Africa to hunt elephants with his twelve-gauge, semi-choke, pump action shotgun.

After reading this magazine, I can easily see why the movie stars are so easily swayed by Communism. They are tired of their artificial life. Away with those three Cadillacs! Away with the swimming pool! Away with the twenty-room shack! They just want to go back to the simple life of the farm and the ten cent store from which most of them seem to have come.

"Why don't they go back?" you ask. My friend, you underestimate the sacrifices of the film stars. They would, but they know that the people want them. They know if they left the screen, they would cause untold heartbreak among the screen public. The public is you, my friend. It is for you that they struggle on in their life of dissolute luxury.

I was also highly pleased to notice that Hollywood is producing a much better grade of pictures lately. Of sixty-seven pictures reviewed by *Scintillating Stars*, forty-seven were super colossal, nineteen were colossal, and one was excellent. It seems that the last picture was made by some producer who had fifty dollars he wanted to be rid of.

I'll never be able to repay *Scintillating Stars* for what it has done for me. I at last know the truth. No one can ever convince me that Hollywood is a bad influence in America for I have read *Scintillating Stars*, "The Magazine That Gives the Facts about Hollywood."



The Web

Leonard J. Shetline

It is a few moments before midnight. At the far corner of a deep hollow in a half-rotted oak, a lean black spider watches and waits. His web sags lightly under the weight of minute drops of moisture blown in from a recent rain-storm. His many tiny eyes stare curiously ahead, trying to solve the enigma of a thin beam of moonlight. A few minutes before, he had pounced on that strange yellowness which had dared to invade his little kingdom and had stabbed fiercely with his two small chelicerae, trying to paralyze his enemy with a stinging venom. But his careful pounce came to nought, and he retired to his dark corner, bewildered and angry. And now he sits and waits, a wary and wise philosopher. He is hungry but very patient, for he knows that fate is generous.

This autumn night is quiet. A few stars shine dully in the sky, and a long slender cloud, a remnant of the recent storm, stretches rigidly before the full moon nestling on the low Appalachians. The gray sparrows, huddled on the rain-swept limbs of the maples and elms lining the country road outside the State Prison, are silent. They are waiting—as if they know that at midnight the Kid is going to die.

The Kid gripped the bars of his cell window. He stood tense and erect, and drops of cold sweat beaded his forehead and formed into rivulets which streamed down his cheeks to the collar of his gray garb. Suddenly he shivered. He felt a chill of apprehension crawl up and down his back. He wanted to shriek that he didn't want to die, but no sound came. The stillness of his cell shouted that there was no mercy to be bought by pleas or prayers. "Go ahead, Kid, try to bend those bars, stamp on the floor and pound on the walls as much as you like. There is nothing you can do now. Shout and pray as much as you want to; tell God you are sorry and maybe he'll forgive you. But you are still going to die. You are a murderer. You deserve to die. This is the Show, Kid, the Big Show, Your Show. You're the main actor. Do you know your lines? This is the drama, entitled 'Death.' Get ready to go on stage. Just a few more minutes. Then you will walk down that long, black corridor to that big door. It will open and you will see that the stage

is ready. That stage will be the electric chair. Then you will say your lines, your final prayers; and the Father will bless you as they strap you tightly. Your lips will move as they never moved before. And a flood of electricity will applaud through your veins. The climax of the Show will be the end of the Show, your last breath."

The Kid was praying. He knew that there was no hope, but still his lips moved ceaselessly. In his mind he listened to the slow ticking of the clock on the corridor wall and he shuddered with alarm. It was ticking "Soon! Soon!" He clutched the bars tighter. From the black well of his past came a low plaintive cry and a long deep moan. It was not a strange sound to him. He knew it well. He had heard it before and he had laughed at it. It was the cry of his victim. But now he did not laugh. The sound raged in his mind like a babbling nightmare. It leaped, it clawed, and it pounded. It grew in naked frenzy and coherence. "Yaaa-aah—eeyeyaaaah—yaaaaaaaaauhhhhhhh!"

Suddenly the sound ceased. Silence filled his cell. The Kid trembled with relief. The sound was gone. He felt like laughing, but he was afraid, afraid that his laughter would disrupt the silence. Then he heard a new sound. From the shadowy corridor came the unmistakable shuffle of approaching footsteps. The keepers were coming! Closer! Closer! The door clicked open.

The spider darted forward. With amazing swiftness he entangled his prey, a struggling fly, injected his poison into the quivering substance, and sucked the life from it. And now he sits in his corner, waiting. He is still hungry. He knows that fate is generous.

The air is filled with the sudden nervous twitter of gray sparrows as they flutter toward the distant horizon. Their tiny black eyes are glittering. Their wings whisper in the night. They know all the answers.

It is a few moments after midnight.



Phenomenon

Dolores Matelski

Cherry blossoms
Through my bedroom door,
Above the lattice on the porch.
Below, they are vague, indistinct
Tiny pin-point dots with splashes in between.
Above, they are resplendent in a haze of glory,
A white bouquet for some celestial bride,
A bank of angel down for dreaming on.
The whole is one of your painted pictures
That stops short
Just when you want to see what lies beyond.
The breeze wafts in a faint elusive scent.
Gardenia? No, just/the merest, doubtful hint of it,
A perfume that Diana might have used.
(For all she was a goddess, she was a woman too.)
That does it now. I must get up to see
The entire.

There they stand,
Six in a semi-circle.
Talk about your winter wonderlands!
Here is something warm, living.
Earthly?
— In a way.
But if you've ever doubted heaven,
You'll have to see
A cherry tree in bloom.



My Grandmother

Anita Janerich

My grandmother had a serene philosophy. She never put it into words, but acted it out in everyday living. Years later, reminiscing on her life, I found it embodied in one sentence. She lived for the day and made the best of everything at hand. I have often tried to live up to that code, but realize that she must have been made of sterner stuff. But her example has often come to my assistance. Grandmother also accepted people as they were. In other words, I suppose, she compromised. She learned to accept her limitations, those of her fellowmen and her environment, gracefully and without distaste. For surely few had fewer material possessions than she, but not many accepted life with less prejudice.

She emigrated from Poland to the United States with my grandfather and their four children in the year 1902. The family came to join relatives who were refugees in the Land of Promise. The immigrants at that time were the poor people, peasants who owned no land and city workers whose earning power in the old country was so meagre that it kept them hanging on the verge of starvation. My grandparents wanted to escape the persecutions and limitations instigated against them by the Tsarist-Russian government. So they came to settle in the little mining town of Miners Mills, Pennsylvania.

Many of the original residents of that town were guilty of intense anti-Polish prejudice. The unjust objection against the "greenhorns," as they were commonly called, was partly responsible for my grandfather's determination to earn enough money to go back home and buy a piece of native Polish soil. But whatever his plans were on arrival, he never returned, because he was hurt in an accident that prevented him from earning a decent livelihood for his family. Years later he admitted that if there was a lot of prejudice in America against the Polish immigrants, there was also freedom, more than anywhere else in the world; and there was opportunity for those willing and able to work and ready to stand up for their rights. In America you could fight it out; and if you tried hard enough, whether you fully succeeded or not, you won the respect of decent

and honest people, the majority of Americans. In the new land you could "come up in the world," which was more than could be said for tyranny-ridden Poland. You could become an American citizen and vote and run for office, which was wonderful. But my grandfather's great handicap was in not being able to converse in the English language; it made it harder for him to find his way around and to get a decent job.

The family would probably have starved to death with what little my grandfather was able to earn, for there was no government assistance at that time, but, I am quite sure, my grandparents would have scorned any outside financial help. They had very little but were determined that it would have to do.

My grandmother's struggle against poverty and failure was something to cherish. The family settled in a crudely built house situated on a narrow dirt street, so near the cow-pasture that the clanging of the melancholy cow-bell was a constant source of irritation to them. But the shabby little house immediately became a shelter for foreign refugees. They never thought of it as a boarding house, because the boarders who came into it stayed on as part of the family. But it was a far cry from the city apartments and cathedrals of Warsaw. They kept remembering the bands that played in the beautiful parks on summer Sundays, the "whips" they formed with their friends on the ice skating rinks in the wintertime. My mother said she shed many nostalgic tears for the old country, but grandmother would not put up with any such nonsense. She accepted the challenge the new country offered her and at once began making the best of a difficult situation.

She managed her home, children and boarders with amazing skill. She reared not only her children, but many grandchildren into a normal and secure maturity. The result was a happy if not a very prosperous family. My grandfather, despite his inability to provide adequately for his family, was the loveable master in his home; she never let anyone forget that, for she adored my grandfather.

My grandmother was a little woman whose stature measured about five feet two inches. She looked frail but her frailty was deceiving, for she possessed a bottomless well of energy and strength. My mother tells me that she carried a heavily framed mirror, measuring several feet in width and length, on her back from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to her home, a distance of about four miles, because

there was a delivery fee that she wanted to save. I hated myself for remarking that it must have looked very undignified, but my mother reassured me that it was quite all right in those days. She recalled a neighbor who had to carry a bale of hay on his back, which the grocer tied securely to the man's body with heavy rope and then had mischievous boys set a match to the hay. The man was forced to jump into the creek to extinguish the blazing hay which he could not unbundle.

"Babka" as we called our grandmother, which translated from Polish meant "little grandmother," could neither read nor write, but she had an insatiable desire for knowledge. My grandfather would sit every evening reading to her, while she sat and mended. Later my mother took over the reading, while the children sat on the floor absorbing the contents of romantic novels that were hardly meant to improve the mind and would certainly be frowned upon by our modern child psychologists.

She had committed to memory a number of poems herself. Among these was a family classic that we children would coax her to recite over and over again. It was the way in which she recited it rather than the poem itself that fascinated us. The name of it was "Dziat I Baba." It was about an elderly couple who sat in the evening of their life in front of their fireplace, contemplating their eventual death. Each told the other that he (or she) would like to be the first to die, for he could not live without her, and she said she could not go on without him. This polite and pleasant deceit went on until one night there was a knock on the door and DEATH asked to come in and claim one of them. At this point both the old man and the old woman dashed under the table, each pushing the other to open the door. It was from my grandmother that we learned that death was as natural as birth or marriage or any other big event in life.

I understand that in her youth her hair was quite red and very curly. I remember it only as gray, but it has showed up in a dozen of her progeny. She refused to wear a hat and always covered her head with a shawl, much to the chagrin of her family. I wish she could see the young girls of today wearing the babushkas that her daughters decried. She wore at least three lace-trimmed petticoats, stiffly starched and always showing when she ran up and down stairs, for she never walked; she seemed to be forever in a rush. The sleeves on her house-dresses were leg-o-

mutton, and her tiny, pinched-in-waistline was as trim as a little girl's. Her style never varied; she wore the high ruffled boned collar to the end of her days. She was the gayest-hearted woman I have ever known, loved by young and old. Everything interested her and children flocked about her like chickens wherever she went. She never pushed them away or was in any way impatient with them. She just loved them and often remarked, patting a grandchild on the head, that the interest brought one more enjoyment than the principal. The greatest malediction she ever uttered against anyone in anger was "May a goose kick him."

When my grandmother was in her late fifties my grandfather died. Between that time and her death at the age of eighty-five, she lived with us. My vivid memories of her begin at the time of my grandfather's death. I remember the morning of the funeral. She was up early in the morning, preparing huge quantities of food for the mourners who would come in after the services, her grief well-hidden, although I sensed the depth of her irreparable loss. There were four varieties of meat cooked to tender perfection, for she was well-known for her good table. There were inexpensive cuts of meats that modern house-wives would be baffled by, but more palatable than many of the expensive cuts found in today's pots. There was hot slaw with dried mushrooms, which she had picked the previous summer in the woods and strung to dry over the top of her coal stove. The pyrogi and kielbasi were prepared the night before. The ingredients that went into this food were inexpensive, but the long hours that went into their preparation were well worth it. All this food was ready before we left for the funeral mass at church.

We all walked to the little cemetery in the back of our town. It was spring and the great trees were feathery green in the morning sunshine, yet the atmosphere was filled with the cold and strange loneliness of winter. I watched my grandmother as she solemnly passed the iron gates, her shoulders for the first time sadly drooping. Her eyes looked dark and lost and there was a look about her of a little girl who tried to conceal the fact that she was badly frightened about something and did not want anyone to know it. It was she who tried to console her children rather than they her. Yet her loss was greater for she was truly alone; the only man she had ever loved was dead.

When we were re-entering her home I rushed in front of her to open the door. I saw her flinch, and for one brief

moment I saw her stricken face and thought she would turn away and run down the steps again; instead, she squared her shoulders and entered the house.

After she served the dinner she excused herself and went up to her room. She locked the door and I did not see her again until the next morning when she was burning all of my grandfather's belongings in the back yard, his few clothes, his many books, which I wish I had asked for at that time, and whatever else reminded her of him. It was always so with her. She did not brood over the past, but wrenched herself completely from it. She never again spoke of him, except when directly asked; then she would answer softly "yes" or "no" and did not comment further.

She was quieter after my grandfather's death, but there burned within her that youthful zest for life which overcame all handicaps. She never ceased to marvel at the new and improved discoveries to lighten labor. In later years she was a devotee of the movies and radio.

When she was seventy she went out and bought her wardrobe "na smierc," (for death). She was just as fussy about the fit of the dress as if it were for some party. The morning she bought the black satin sandals to match her funeral dress she packed everything away carefully in tissues and proceeded to prepare for the annual Charity Ball given that evening at our local parish hall. Men, women and children of all ages joined in the dancing of the lively polkas. She "disgraced" the family by winning first prize in dancing after two partners relinquished her to an elderly gallant. Nevertheless the grandchildren took great delight in this Terpsichorean exhibition.

When she died at the age of eighty-five I cried not so much for her as for myself and the great-grandchildren that would never know her.



Jennifer Pratt

Sidney Jack Weissberger

It was many and many a year ago,
In a tiny three-room flat,
That a maiden lived whom you may know
By the name of Jennifer Pratt—
And for more than a month in that simple flat
Alone I lived with Jennifer Pratt.

She was a girl and I was a boy,
In our blessed three-room flat,
And the love that came from the depths of my heart—
'Twas all for Jennifer Pratt—
'Twas a love that ever escaped
From our cozy three-room flat.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In our tidy three-room flat,
Her mother stepped off a train one night
To visit Jennifer Pratt;
And along the rest of her family came
To crowd our three-room flat,
Her brothers, her sisters, and even an uncle
Came to visit Jennifer Pratt.

The devil, not half so crowded in hell,
Moved into our three-room flat—
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
Who live in a three-room flat)
That my in-laws stepped off a train one night,
Lunging
And sponging on Benjamin Pratt.

Not one word did I say to her brother, Pat,
To her sister Ann or her uncle Don—
To her sister Nan or her brother John—
Who came with her mother to our three-room flat,
"To visit for a day or two," they said,
But stayed for fifteen years instead!

The doctors say that I'll soon be well,
And here I sit in my padded cell.

But, waiting for me is Jennifer Pratt,
 Waiting for me in our three-room flat.
 And the sun never dies but I think of the cries
 Of my darling Jennifer Pratt;
 And the stars never glow but I think of the blow
 To the pride of Jennifer Pratt.
 Oh, will she forgive me, my Jennifer Pratt,
 For the dastardly deed in the three-room flat?

When I hurled her brothers through a stout, wooden door?
 And banged the head of her mother on the hard-wood floor?
 And her sisters and uncle with a baseball bat
 I chased 'round and 'round our three-room flat?

Can I return to Jennifer Pratt,
 A victim of anger and spite?
 Can I return to our three-room flat,
 As it was before that fateful night?
 When off a train to our peaceful flat,
 Stepped all the relations of Jennifer Pratt?
 "To visit for a day or two," they said,
 But stayed for fifteen years instead!



Escape

Ethel V. Snee

All summer the huckleberries have been ripening on the hills, the berries growing plumper and bluer each day. From July until August, most of our mornings will be spent berrying on Penobscot Mountain.

Waking at five o'clock, we cast a calculating glance at the sky to quiet our anxiety about the weather. Only the smallest of clouds dawdle before a light east wind. After a hasty breakfast, we take our berry pails and set out. The air is still chilly, and a light mist hovers over the valley. As we follow the railroad track, coal dirt sifts into our shoes and settles on our hands and faces. At the edge of the woods, we stop to remove our shoes and shake out the coal dirt.

The particles cling persistently, and even repeated shakings fail to dislodge all of them.

In the woods, dew beads the grass and the trees, soaking our shoes and anklets and falling on our shoulders. The path twists upward, rocky, cushioned with moss. As we climb, the maple and oak are replaced by a tangle of scrub oak. The thin, rocky soil rejects all other growth, but the oak is tough and neither asks nor gives quarter. Stubbornly disputing our passage, the trees viciously tear at our clothes and scratch our hands and faces. Fallen oaks bar the path, still unyielding even in death. Wet and breathless, we pause at the timber line. The sun, climbing faster than we, has dried the bushes in the open. Black and yellow-banded honey bees weight the lemon-colored flowers of the indigo. A vivid orange lily accentuates the dull green of the moss and the waist-high sweet fern. Tall, spiky cornflowers sway in the slight breeze. In little hollows beside the path grow clusters of golden cowslips. Higher still, near the crest of the hill, the huckleberries begin. Massive granite boulders, covered with scarlet lichens, afford the only shade.

We pick industriously at first. The berries rattle into our pails until they form a solid layer on the bottom. Toads and crickets converse in a monotone interrupted by the buzz of an angry hornet. "Drink your tea, drink your tea," chant the peweews. Far below, a boisterous crow heralds his flight from one tall oak to another. The plaintive whistle of a passing freight train echoes through the valley.

Heat waves shimmer above the ground, emitting a tantalizing fragrance of sweet fern, moss, sandy earth, and huckleberries. As the sun grows hotter and hotter, perspiration plasters the clothes on our backs. Stiff from the cramped posture of picking, I rise and, stretching lazily, look down on the valley.

Distance lends charm to the dirty little railroad town, roses and honeysuckle mask the ugliness of the smoke-blackened houses, and the smoky railroad becomes a silver band twisting through the curving hills. The little people scurrying about their chores give me a curious sense of freedom as if petty cares are bound to the valley, but on the hill I am as free as the chicken hawk gliding effortlessly through the air above us. The smoky breath of an engine becomes a magic carpet floating me into the world which I have never seen. The hill is a gateway into the land of daydreams.

Why Are You Blue-Bird?

Harold D. Smith

Johnny was different. No matter how much you tried to analyse him you were always struck with a certain quality which set him apart from the rest of the bluebirds. He was not big, as bluebirds go. His feathers were arranged a little more neatly perhaps and they were a shade bluer than the rest of his buddies', but even without these physical differences you could not help pointing to Johnny and saying, "Some day he will be flying high in the world."

I remembered when Johnny was first hatched. It was a little more than two years ago. I was sitting with Johnny's mother around the loosely woven grass nest underneath the limb of a blue spruce. This was a good omen in itself, for according to superstition a bluebird born in a blue spruce will be bluer than the bluest skies above or waters below. I was looking at the egg from which Johnny would soon appear. It wasn't large but it had a certain quality of shape, fineness of proportion, and excellence of texture. Johnny's mother was saying, "I wonder what my children will be like. The last brood was so sweet and they sang so beautifully. I hated to see them take it on the leg.* Oh, well, I'll have my new birdies to look after."

"That's life, I suppose," I philosophized. "Sometimes I envy the sheltered life of the humans. For one thing they don't have to fly south for the winter. I get so tired just flapping my wings day after day, sleeping in any old tree, not knowing the background of any insects I eat. But what for? We fly back in the spring anyway. One of these days I'm going to stay here all winter even if I freeze to death. However, I'll miss those sweet worms we used to get in Alabama."

"I wish that husband of mine would get back soon," Johnny's mother said anxiously. "He's probably out chasing 'flying saucers' again. Those men! Every new novelty that comes out he has to bother with it. Then when I need him for a couple worms he won't be anywhere around. He'll . . ."

* This bit of bluebird slang corresponds to the human phrase, "Take it on the wing."

But before she could finish what she was going to say, a slight movement of the three eggs arrested her attention.

"They're ready to hatch. Oh goody!" she chirped.

I watched the egg which was to be Johnny. Something strained inside and then, like the upheaval of a geyser, a head broke through the soft shell and Johnny came into the world whistling the aria "Le Reve" from Manon.* It was most unusual for a freshly hatched bird to whistle at birth. But then, Johnny wasn't an ordinary bird. I wasn't wrong about my calculations for great things to come from him. Johnny never cried. His two brothers wailed and wept like lonesome robins while Johnny nestled in the nest humming a snatch or two of "Why Are You Blue-Jay?" from the score of the current picture, "Bill and Co." At the age of three weeks Johnny was able to fly, get his own worms and dash off the song "Chicory Chick," a feat in itself. At four weeks he began to read mystery stories. "The Canary Murder Case" was his favorite. Johnny completely hurdled the comic book stage and plunged with abandon into "The Republic" of Plato and soon tried to organize the local birds into an experiment to see whether Plato was talking through his birdseed or not.

Johnny's parents were proud of him. They would bore all their friends with descriptions of what Johnny was doing. How Johnny got a job for his brother working for Bluebird Records. How Johnny thought of using bluing instead of water in Turkish baths for recuperating the faded looks of old bluebirds. How Johnny's song, "The Bluebird of Happiness," had made number one on the Bird Parade and how pretty was the new one called, "I'll Chirp At Your Wedding." Yes, Johnny had already begun to make a name for himself. His fame had gone out through out all bluebirddom. His name was on a thousand tongues. His songs were whistled from the most lavish to the poorest birdbaths. Even the humans were influenced by the happy songs of the bluebirds by putting out more crumbs and changing the water in the birdbaths more frequently. Johnny wasn't a fly-by-night.

Then he met Robinette. Her mother had been in love with a clumsy robin and she had carried this love over in the name of her daughter. Robinette was a bluebird who knew what side her wings were buttered on. She was a smooth article from her downy chest to her pudgy tail-feathers. Her eyes were of the deepest black, unfathomable. Her chirp had the expectancy of a hundred worms. Her

* Not to be confused with the aria by the human, Massenet.

peck was such that a bluebird would never forget, and what self-respecting bluebird wanted to. It was love at first sight for both of them. There was no period of falling in love with each other. One look at Robinette was enough for Johnny and he immediately set out to make her his bride.

However, Robinette's family did not approve of their relationship. Johnny was not good enough for Robinette. Her ancestors were all blue-blooded-bluebirds-from-Back-Bay-Boston. Robinette's grandmother had been quite a bird and had such songs as "The Bluebird on Nelly's Hat" written about her, in addition to "She Was Only A Bird In A Gilded Cage," . . . composed after a quick marriage with a fast canary of despicable character.

Finally, Johnny and Robinette could not stand being separated from each other any longer, so they eloped, or whatever bluebirds do to marry without permission. When Robinette's mother found out they were married, she repented and presented them with a sizeable dowry which was quite a nest egg, to say the least. The rest of Johnny's life was uneventful. His children did not measure up to the high standards he had set. Some of the neighbors were heard to remark when a rather dumb bird was born to Johnny that someone had given him the bird. However, I shall never forget Johnny for he will always stand head and feathers above any other bluebird in the world.



Plenty of Time

Leonard J. Shetline

There is plenty of time.
The years like grains of sand
Trickle through the hourglass
And find no bottom.

The dust of people dead
Fertilizes the soil
And gives food to hungry mouths
And gives bloom to delicate flowers.

There is no hurry.
In the next room Homer sings
Of the glories of Greece
And the beauty of Helen.

Alexander's soldiers yet curse
The weight of Persian gold
And dream of Grecian skies
And long for Grecian women.

Blood still drips
From three bodies on three crosses
And Roman soldiers cast dice
For the garments of the dead Martyr.

Imperial Caesar tosses in sleep
And caresses his pillow
And dreams of the silent Sphinx
And the soft arms of Cleopatra.

The past is not distant.
It is in the next room
And people do not die.
Even in the dust the atoms whirl.

There is no hurry.
There is plenty of time.

Four Kings and A Joker

Robert T. Mikulewicz

It was customary for a select few to gather at Bernie's Cafe on Sunday afternoon to play cards, drink, and have a general discussion. On such a day, before the others knocked at the back door of the cafe, Bernie, the fat, red-faced bartender, was reading the Sunday papers. As Bernie laid the comics aside and turned to the sports section, someone knocked at the back door. Bernie glanced over his shoulder at the large electric clock on the cash register. "Two o'clock," he muttered, "time for the boys to show up." He waddled to the back door, peered out from behind the drawn curtains, and recognized the person who had knocked.

"Hi, Harry," he said, as he opened the door.

Harry Dorrance, the local undertaker, came back with a lazy, "Lo, Bernie." He stepped inside. "Guess I'm the first here to-day."

"Yep, but the others'll be in soon."

Bernie locked the door and the two men walked to the bar. Harry sat down on one of the high bar stools, and Bernie placed a glass of beer in front of him.

"Let me see the obituary column, will ya, Bernie?"

"Always looking for business, aren't ya, chum?" said Bernie, with a smile. He leafed through the paper, folded a section, and handed it to the undertaker.

"Nope, I got all I can handle. Just want to show you some business I picked up last night." Harry took a pencil from his coat pocket, circled a name on the obituary list, and handed the paper back to Bernie. "You knew him."

Bernie found the section circled in pencil and read: "Frank Kovac, 55, of 281 East Main Street, died at his home last night of a heart attack. The deceased was a native of the Ukraine, but had lived in this city for the past thirty years. No known relatives survive."

"The body was taken to the Dorrance Funeral Home. The funeral will be held Monday morning. A requiem mass will be celebrated at 10 in St. Stanislaus' Church, and interment will be in the parish cemetery."

Bernie placed the paper on the bar. "Well, what do ya know! Old Frank, the ash-man, dead."

"Yep. Doc White called me about eleven last night and said to pick up the body." Harry drank some of his beer and continued, "Ya know, Bernie, I told those guys at the newspaper, time and again, that it's 'The Harry Dorrance Funeral Home' and look the way they write it up, 'The Dorrance Funeral Home'."

Bernie was not listening. He mumbled, "Holy smokes, Frank was in yesterday afternoon for a couple beers. Every day he stopped in when he got through hauling ashes."

Harry drank some more beer. "Well, he won't be in any more."

"We never know when our number will be up," Bernie said, and sat down on a stool behind the bar.

"He was a screwy bird with his high falutin', phony . . ."

Harry's comment was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Hold it a minute, Harry, and see who's at the door, will ya? My feet are killin' me to-day."

"Well, tell those dogs of yours to keep up the good work," Harry called back as he walked to the door.

"Stop drooling, soft-hearted Harry. I ain't about to cash in," Bernie said and once again picked up the obituary list.

Harry opened the door after he saw it was John Majajkas, a miner, who had knocked.

"Hello, Harry, how's business?"

"Fine, John, just fine. I always got customers." Harry bolted the door.

"Yeah, you're always there in the last inning, ain't ya, Harry?"

"Hi, John. Now what were you saying, Harry?" Bernie asked, as the two men reached the bar.

"Oh, about that crack-pot with his high falutin' airs. Why, I bet that accent of his was as phony as one of those paintings I saw at his place last night."

Bernie looked at the undertaker for an instant and placed a shot of whiskey and a beer in front of the miner.

"Who ya talkin' about?" John asked and reached for his drink.

Harry finished his beer and pushed the empty glass toward Bernie. "Frank Kovac. He kicked the bucket last night. I'm going to plant him to-morrow."

"Oh, I wouldn't say he was a phony," John said and gulped down the whiskey.

"Maybe not, John, but in the obituary notice it says Frank came from the Ukraine, and if he did then, how come that English accent? And him an ash-man." Before the

wiry little miner could answer there was another knock at the back door. "I know, I know," Harry continued and looked at Bernie, "your feet are killing you. I'll get it," and once again went to the door. John and Bernie watched him as he peered out. "It's Doc White and Willy," Harry called back and opened the door.

Willy, the mailman, was the first to enter. "Well, if it isn't kid sympathy," he said. "How are things at the morgue—pretty dead, bub?"

"There's more life down there than I've seen here today," Harry replied and locked the door behind them.

When the three men reached the bar, hellos were tossed back and forth. Doc and Willy sat down beside John. Bernie placed a round of drinks on the bar.

Willy lit a cigar and asked, "What's new?"

"We were just talking about Frank Kovac," Bernie said.

"Yeah, too bad. Doc told me about it on the way over. Ya know that guy puzzled me."

There was a slight lull in the conversation, broken by Bernie. "That accent you mentioned, Harry, if it was phony don't ya think he would've made an error now and then?"

John immediately turned to Harry and asked, "Yeah, what about that?"

Harry shifted his weight about on the stool, looked at John, then at Bernie. "Practice," he said. The word seemed to ring through the small low-ceilinged cafe. Harry removed his elbows from the bar, threw his shoulders back and thrust his arms forward to get his shirt cuffs below his coat sleeves.

Nobody replied. Harry selected a cigar from his breast pocket, removed the cellophane wrapping, bit off and spit the end of the cigar on the floor. He was lighting the cigar when Willy spoke, but more to himself than to the others.

"Wonder if it was a gag."

"Wonder if what was a gag?" John asked.

Willy emptied his glass and replied, "Why, some of those letters I delivered to Frank's place."

Harry got off the bar stool and walked over to Willy. "What letters?" he asked.

"The letters addressed to 'Professor Frank Kovac.'"

"It musta been a gag," Harry snorted and returned to his seat. After he perched himself on the stool he continued, "That guy was as odd as a three-dollar bill. He came from the Ukraine, he had an English accent, and now letters addressed to 'Professor Kovac.'"

"Give us another round here, will ya, Bernie?" John asked.

Bernie gathered up the glasses, and as he was filling them, he said, "Harry, you're a stubborn bird. Let the guy rest."

Harry took several quick puffs on his cigar. "Since you guys seem so willing to defend him, what about all those books, books in different languages—how about them? Frank had lots of 'em." Harry paused, drank some beer, placed the half empty glass on the bar and was about to continue when Doc commented, "So the guy liked to read. What's the harm in liking to read, just because you never read past the obituary column...?"

Harry interrupted with, "Oh, so now the defense breaks out in a new place."

"No, Harry, I'm not defending the guy, but I know Frank was no dummy."

"So the joker wasn't a dummy."

The attention of the others was now centered on Doc and the undertaker.

Doc carried his stool over next to Harry and said, "Okay, bud, now look. I knew Frank pretty good because of his invalid mother."

"How long did you treat her, Doc?"

"Seven years. She was a hopeless case, died three years ago and Frank took it pretty hard. Well, because of treating her I had to go up to Frank's place quite often. How many times were you up there?"

Harry spun around on the stool and faced Doc, "Once. Last night."

"Fine thing. You were there once and you call him a phony for what you saw in his house."

"So it don't add up," Harry said. Then, counting on his fingers, "First, the pictures; second, the books; third, the accent; and fourth, the letters addressed to Professor Kovac. Now, how come all these belonged to an ash-man? If he was such a quiz-guy, why should he break his back to make a living?"

John finished his drink and motioned to Bernie to fill it up and said, "See what the detectives want."

"Yeah, what about you mental giants, ya wanta drink?" Willy joined in and winked at John.

Doc and Harry made no reply but emptied their glasses and pushed them down the bar. Bernie started to refill the

empties, "How about some cards?" he asked. "Cinch or poker, maybe?"

"I'm all for poker. How about you, Willy?" John asked.

The mailman was drinking, but nodded his head and some of the beer spilled over the edge of the glass and trickled down his chin.

"Oh fer . . ." Willy started to say, but was interrupted by Bernie.

"You're supposed to drink that stuff. Maybe ya want a nipple?"

"Or a straw maybe?" Harry joined in.

As Willy wiped his mouth and chin and dabbed at his necktie, he replied, "Very funny, very funny. Well, how about it, Doc, Harry? A little quarter and a half poker?"

"Okay," Doc and Harry replied in unison.

"For the first time to-day we all agree on something," Bernie said, and took two decks of cards from the top of the cash register.

The five men picked up their drinks and walked to a table located midway between the back door and the bar. All but Doc and Harry sat down immediately. The two men took off their coats, draped them over their chairs and then sat down. Bernie complained again about his feet but received no sympathy.

"Now, as I was about to say, Harry," Doc began.

"Go on," Harry said.

Doc got up and turned his chair with the back to the table and then straddled the chair. "First of all, those paintings were not expensive, just cheap reproductions."

"So you're an authority on art?" Harry asked, placing his wallet on the table.

Bernie began to shuffle the cards, and then dealt them face up. "First jack deals, dealer's choice, but leave us not have some brain-child call solitaire when it's his turn to deal."

Bernie's would-be joke went over like a lead balloon. Doc looked at Harry. "I'm no authority," he said, "But I know that reproductions like Frank's cost about five or ten bucks."

"Your deal, Doc," Bernie broke in.

Doc gathered up the cards and continued. "I'll admit Frank was a bit odd, but maybe we seemed just as odd to him. He had different interests in life than we have. With us, it's gather in the dough; our brains are cash-registers. Our lives are just one big price tag, but with Frank it may have been different."

"Don't rub the spots off them stamps, Doc, run 'em, boy, run 'em." Bernie broke in and shifted his great hulk about on the creaking chair.

"Okay, everyone up two-bits for draw, jacks or better to open," Doc replied.

Everyone pushed his ante to the center of the table and Doc dealt the cards. The conversation concerning Frank was dropped while the men examined their cards.

"You open, Harry?" John asked.

Harry tossed his cards to the center of the table. "With that mess? You should deal once more and drop dead, Doc."

John opened for fifty cents. Bernie, Willy and Doc stayed, but John won with a pair of Kings. He showed his openers, flipped the cards to Harry and pulled in the money.

"Bad luck to win the first hand, John," Harry said.

"Well, I hope I have this kinda bad luck all day," John answered.

The undertaker started to shuffle the cards. Doc White placed his arms on the back of the chair and leaned forward until his chin was resting on his forearms. "Maybe I can clear up part of this business about Frank. Like I said, Frank was different. Well, maybe I shouldn't say it, but I think he was a trifle off his trolley. Not a great deal off, just enough to be different."

Harry stopped shuffling the cards, hooked his thumbs in his vest, pursed his lips and looked at Doc. Willy fingered his empty glass; he kept lifting it and placing it on the table to form a pattern of circles. John re-lit his cigar and turned his attention to Doc.

"You mean he was booby-hatch bait?" asked Harry.

"No, not exactly," Doc said, hunched his shoulders and tilted his chair toward the table so that he was looking at the floor. "Now don't confuse what I say. I never had a chance to study Frank, but when I look back I think Frank may have suffered from some mental disorder. Perhaps a grandiose complex or . . ."

"What does that mean in translation, Doc?" John interrupted.

"Yeah, break it up in little pieces," Willy added.

Before Doc could answer, Harry said, "That's a joker who thinks he is someone else, like if Bernie thought he was Napoleon or a brewery owner. Ain't that right, Doc?"

Doc glanced at the undertaker, "Yeah, that's along the right line."

Harry suddenly leaned forward, put his elbows on the table and pointed at Doc. "That could explain the letters. Frank thought he was a fugitive from a brain factory, wrote letters to someone in Europe, through one of them correspondence clubs, and gave his return address as 'Professor Kovac.'" Harry hooked his thumbs into his vest and tilted his chair back. He looked smug.

"That's possible," Doc said, "but I think with Frank, it was seclusiveness. He was able to escape from this world; he had the ability to close his life to the rest of humanity. I wish I could do that sometimes, but I guess I'm cursed with sanity. Now just suppose Frank really was a professor in the old country and suddenly had a mental disturbance which left him with a desire to seclude himself." Doc straightened and looked at the others. "Well, if he continued teaching, that would defeat his purpose. He would be thrown in contact with people."

"That sounds reasonable," Willy said, and erased the pattern of circles by moving his glass over it. "How about a round of drinks, Bernie?"

"No respect for age or achin' feet," Bernie said, gathered the empty glasses and limped behind the bar.

John squirmed about on his chair and said, "Frank came out of his shell. He used to like to talk to me and my woman. She speaks Russian and I can keep up a line of chatter in Polish and Lithuanian. Frank spoke them like a native, and got a big kick outa talkin' to us."

"Maybe that takes care of some of the books, eh, Harry?" Willy asked.

Bernie came back with the drinks and placed them on the table. "No kiddin'," he said, "Could Frank speak Lithuanian?"

John took his shot and beer from the tray before he answered. "Yeah, real good. Every Saturday morning Frank would stop for the ashes and gab with us."

Harry picked up the cards, shuffled them, and started to deal. "Same game, jacks or better," he said.

John peeked at his cards, one at a time, "Lucky for my woman that Frank stopped by every Saturday."

"Why?" Willy asked.

"Well, one Saturday when I was workin', my woman took a header down the cellar steps and busted her leg."

"That was a mighty nasty break, as I remember," Doc added.

"It just happened as Frank was leaving with the ashes. He heard her scream, so he went into the house and down the cellar. He saw she was in bad shape, so right away he called Doc." John said.

Doc White placed his cards face down on the table, "Frank was a big help. Gentle as a woman."

"Then every day," John continued, "until she got up and around, Frank would stop by and ask about her and see if there was any way he could help."

"Now this is all very touching, but do we play poker or do you want I should play 'Hearts and Flowers'? Harry said.

John opened the betting and won the hand with three deuces.

"Looks like your bad luck is holding up," Bernie said.

John was piling the money in front of him when Willy cracked, "If this keeps up I'll bet Harry makes a wax figure and sticks needles in it tonight."

Harry came back with, "Very funny, chum. Come on, John. What're you waiting for, the mine schedule? Deal! What a game!"

John began to shuffle the cards, "Ah, take it easy, you'll last longer, bub."

Bernie slowly shifted his weight about on the protesting chair. "Ya know," he began, "Frank musta been handy around ailin' people."

"Well, he had a lot of practice, taking care of his mother all those years," Doc added.

Bernie placed his fat elbows on the table, "What I was drivin' at, was the time Louie, the old barfly, flipped a fit here one night."

"There is a first class moocher," Harry remarked.

Bernie ignored the comment and went on with, "Some of the boys were heckling Louie, and he took it okay for awhile. Then all of a sudden he gets excited and flops on the floor, gaspin' and groanin'." Bernie leaned forward, "None of us knew what to do, but right away Frank kneels down and straddles him and with his knees pins Louie's arms to his side. Then he opened Louie's shirt collar, then Louie's mouth and pulled out the guy's tongue. He held him like that for ten or fifteen minutes," Bernie leaned back in his chair and spread his hands, palm up, before him. "Then like if nothin' happened, Frank gets up, helps the moocher to his feet and takes him home. But the look Frank gave

those hecklers chilled this place for a week. Them guys never bothered Louie again when Frank was around."

"Maybe that proves something, but I never knew a stiff could disrupt a card game so completely," Harry said, as he threw his cigar on the floor.

"Don't get carried away, chum. Look at me, I'm dealing. Five card stud, two-bits up." John said.

Harry had a pair of aces back to back, and a grin from ear to ear.

"Oh, man, look at old poker-face," Willy said, and tossed his cards to the center of the table.

"Now don't let a little ol' ace scare ya, friend."

"Look, Money Bags, when you grin like that, and your eyes light up like "tilt" signs, I drop." Willy replied.

Harry won the hand and collected the money. With the broad grin still on his face he leaned back in his chair, "Skill, pure skill," he said, and lighting a new cigar, "I could go for another drink, Bernie."

"Well go for it, Harry. You know where the tap is," Bernie said with a wink at the others.

"May as well bring a new round back with ya, Harry," Willy said.

When Harry came back and was passing the drinks around, there was a knock at the back door.

"You're up, chum," Bernie said to Harry.

"Okay, but it'll cost ya."

"So order me a tombstone," Bernie replied, laughingly.

Harry walked to the back door and peered out, he did a quick double-take, ran back to the table and grabbed his coat from the chair.

"Who is it?" everyone asked at once.

"The fodder! The fodder!" Harry exclaimed.

"The who?" Bernie asked.

"The Father, Father Joe, the priest, the padre, the bishop, the pope," Harry said, and got all tangled up in his coat.

"What! Who, how many?" asked Doc, and automatically put on his coat.

"Father Joe, the parish priest," Harry said and buttoned his coat.

"Well, you dope, why didn't you let him in?" Willy said and walked to the back door and opened it. Father Joe stepped into the cafe. He blinked a few times to accustom his eyes to the comparative darkness after being in the sunlight.

Bernie said, "Hello Father, want to join our game?"

John kicked Bernie in the shins, then got up and pulled another chair near the table. "Have a seat, Father."

"Thank you, John. Please sit down, gentlemen."

"Want a drink, Father?" asked Bernie, and received another kick in the shins from John.

"Well, a small glass of port wine, if you don't mind Bernie."

"Comin' up," Bernie bellowed, and stepped out of John's range.

Nobody spoke and the only noise came from behind the bar, where Bernie was fumbling with various bottles. He picked up several wine bottles, looked at them, shook his head and put them back, until he finally located the brand he was looking for.

Father Joe pulled his chair up to the table. "I stopped at your house, Harry," he said, "and your wife said I would find you here."

"What can I do for you, Father?" Harry asked.

"It's about Frank Kovac . . ."

"A fine man, Father, a fine man," Harry said, and lowered his head slightly.

The others looked at Harry with opened mouths.

"I was wondering if you could possibly provide pall-bearers for the funeral tomorrow. Frank had no relatives and no close friends that I can think of."

Bernie placed the wine on the table and sat down. Harry pursed his lips. He appeared to be in deep thought. Willy grabbed his glass, and drained it to keep from laughing.

"I'll be glad to help out," John said.

"Why, thank you," Father Joe said, and sipped some wine, "Hummmm, very fine wine, Bernie."

"Yes sir, best in the house, sells for half a buck a sl---ah, glass. On the house to you, Father."

Willy and John looked at each other, Willy winked and looking at the Priest, said, "You can count on me and Bernie."

Bernie's eyes popped open. Bernie looked at Willy, and pointed to his feet. Father Joe turned and looked at Bernie; the latter smiled politely and nodded his head.

"I'll go along," Doc said.

"Fine, fine, that makes four; we need two more," Father Joe replied.

Harry straightened up, "Well now, Father, I can act as a pall-bearer, too. Don't usually do it, understand, but Frank was such a fine fellow."

John was drinking his beer when he heard Harry's last comment and almost choked. He placed the glass on the table and coughed violently for a few seconds, until Willy came to his rescue by slapping him on the back. John looked questioningly at the mailman, but Willy just shrugged his shoulders.

Bernie said, "I know where we can get number six, a guy by the name of Louie. Can you fix him up with a monkey suit, Harry?"

"Sure, sure," Harry replied, puffing on his cigar.

"Father, we were talking about Frank this afternoon," Doc said, "and his life is pretty much of a mystery to us. Did you know him?"

"I wish I had known him much better than I did. He was a very interesting man to talk to. I used to see more of him while his mother was alive, when I made sick calls. The last few years I saw him only when I made yearly parish calls, and occasionally I'd meet him on the street."

"Do you know anything of his background—before he came to this country?" Doc asked.

"When he was a young man in the Ukraine, his family was well to do and he was sent to England for his education."

The other men threw quick glances at Harry, who quickly lowered his eyes.

Father Joe continued, "When his education was completed, he returned to the Ukraine to accept a professorship. But Frank was a bit too radical in his teaching to please the Bolsheviks. They confiscated his land and money, and persecuted him severely before he and his mother finally escaped. The worry and strain of persecution, escape, and then his mother's illness affected his mind slightly. He rarely read his books and the only use he put his education to was in writing letters to his friends, who were scattered all over the world. He seemed to have been marking time, as though his life had already stopped when he could no longer teach."

Nobody spoke. Father Joe finished his wine.

"I must leave, gentlemen; it's rather late." Father Joe got up, the others rose and all said good-bye. Bernie walked to the door with the priest.

"Thank you for the wine, Bernie."

"Think nothin' of it, Father. Drop in anytime," Bernie said as he closed the door.

"Oh fine," groaned John. "Bernie, you're about as tactful as a punch in the nose."

"What are ya talkin'? I didn't charge fer the wine."

Doc spun his chair around so that the back was again facing the table. Doc sat down and watched Harry drape his coat over another chair. "Taking off your sheep's clothing, Harry?" he asked.

"Huh, what do you mean?" Harry answered.

"Figure it out later," Doc replied.

Willy and John smiled at each other.

"Two-bits up for five card draw," Bernie said and started to deal.

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