Spring 1953

et cetera

Marshall University


Etc
Spring 1953

Contents

Staff

EDITOR-in-chief: Cassie Caltabiano
MANAGING EDITOR: Marilyn Putz
ART EDITOR: Nancy MacPherson
BUSINESS MANAGER: James Binns
ASSOCIATE BUSINESS MANAGER: Phylis Christian
PRODUCTION STAFF: Lois Collins, Anne Hutchison, Pat Harlan, Bob Willis, Kathryn Thompson, Homer Alley, Conrad Ripley.
EDITORIAL BOARD: Judy Carter, Lois Anne Greene, Betty Berisford, Nick Hadzekyriakides.
FACULTY ADVISOR: Ruth Flower, Associate Professor of English.

Marshall College

Huntington, West Virginia

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

April 27, 1953

I extend best wishes to the staff of ET CETERA. You have overcome many difficulties and trying problems in launching this new magazine. It is my earnest hope that the faculty and students will support and encourage this infant publication.

Stewart H. Smith

Stewart H. Smith
President

Forsythia

You seem to have caught up
Brief sunshine of Winter
And held it secret in your boughs
'Til now you blazen forth
His chary gift that you have hoarded
To flourish as a banner
Signaling gaily his defeat.

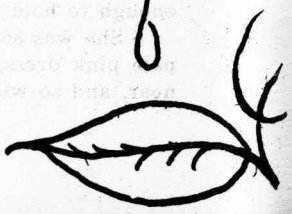
V. Cohen

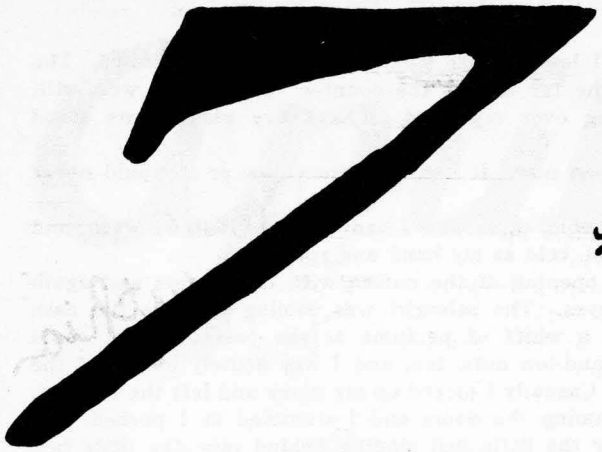
May

May, come dry sad April's tears
We weary of her weeping
Too much, too much of this year's
Space has April in her keeping.

May, come tint sad April's dress,
We weary of her mourning.
With every color you possess,
Be lavish to her adorning.

For April wears her life away
With untimely weeping while
All living things 'wait you, O May,
To come make April smile.





The store was crowded. It was nearly five, closing time, and the aisles were jammed with late shoppers. They pushed me and bumped me and stepped on my feet without apology. They screeched over my head and reached in front of me, waving their hands at the tired salesgirls. They surrounded me and they ignored me, for I was only seven.

I was glad they didn't notice me. Even though my hands were cold and numb, I could feel the perspiration gathering on my upper lip. I could feel it on my scalp at the roots of my hair. I could feel it under my sweater, trickling from my armpits. Soon the store was going to close and I would be outside the heavy glass doors marked "push."

The gilt paint seemed to sparkle with life. It shone with a dazzling brilliance and I had to blink my eyes to be sure it was paint. I had to open my eyes wide to be sure there was a counter in front of me—a counter crowded with tiny china dolls. They were little china dolls with golden hair and bright blue eyes. They were white china dolls that were never meant to lie, neglected and unnoticed, on the varnished counter of a five and ten.

No one would ever count the dolls. There might be a hundred of them, I thought, and they would never count them. It was nearly closing time and they would never stop to count white china dolls. They would never, never know.

"Hurry up, they're closing," a feather-hatted woman screeched to her friend across the aisle. She brushed past me, the clerk following her along the other side of the counter.

She's gone now, I thought. The woman's gone and they're getting ready to close. They're almost ready to close and nobody's watching me. Nobody's watching me at all.

Cautiously I moved my red wool mitten to the edge of the counter. My hand was cold and the mitten would have warmed it, but I didn't think of my stiff fingers. The mitten was empty and large enough to hold with ease a little china doll.

She was so near, the one whose hair looked real, the one in the pale pink dress, the one that lay closest to my fingers. She was so near, and so willing to be mine.

For a second I let my gaze steal upward, over the crowd. The clerk was still at the far end of the counter. The people were still rushing and talking over my head. The heavy glass doors stood open, still.

It had to happen now. It had to happen now or it would never happen at all.

The china was cold. Somehow I had expected it to be warm and soft; but it was cold, cold as my hand and rough.

I covered the opening of the mitten with my fingers and again slowly lifted my eyes. The salesgirl was coming back to the cash register. I caught a whiff of perfume as she passed me. I could smell the hot five-and-ten nuts, too, and I was acutely aware of the people around me. Casually I picked up my glove and left the counter. Shoppers were jamming the doors and I stumbled as I pushed with them. I could hear the little bell ringing behind me—the little bell that meant the store was closing.

The air outside was cold. It was growing dark and the lights inside the buildings looked warm and comforting.

I stuffed the bulging mitten into my pocket, letting my finger rest reassuringly for a moment on the rough china.

Suddenly I was hungry, cold and hungry, and home was blocks away. I began to run.

April

Rosebud, dogwood, spicebush gold,
Cardinal, whippoorwill, catbird bold—
That's April.
Clear creek laughing, rain drifting down,
Willow-tree sighing, mud sticky brown—
That's April
Silver sunrise, storming noon,
Scarlet sunset, diamond moon—
That's April.
Blue lake nestled in mountain's folds,
Violets, sneezes, and early spring colds —
That's April.
Heart-stealing beauty of a daffodil bud,
But hard to admire for feet in the mud—
That's April!

A. Greene

threeferez

H. D. Rowe

He stood deserted in the cultural ash can of his mind
While the tides of human dullness ebbed about his knees,
Then he thought in terms of good for all mankind
And incurred the wrath of those he would not please;
He sought a place where men could just be men
Without some special creed and ready flail,
But the means he took to usher heaven in
Betrayed the fact he knew that he would fail;
For, as the weary cynic turns to the church for rest,
He accepted the hardest canon the age embraced,
And in a flood of bitterness gave up his quest
To see by wilful hate his dream erased;
A dream that Man would give to men their due
In a time when gods and men alike were true.

II

Now you may collate his rare editions in the lull
Between the midday lecture and the evening game of bridge,
And make your footnote in his footsteps so another gull
May saunter blindly in the valley and avoid the ridge;
Yes, explain his erudition, make all vague points clear
Tho those who sit so silent and as witless as the dead,
But never, never point to what it is you fear
In all the things he said and left half-said;
Be content to chant whatever timeworn attribute
That history has allowed for what he did;
Remember, you must prove him destitute
In art and at best, a literary invalid:
Then when night comes pray in your blank verse monologue
That he may die ere you complete your catalogue.

III

Yes, bury his lean and withered body deep
Within the darkest vault yet built by man,
But don't expect for long that he will sleep
In peace; for with the passing of this caravan
The bureaucrats will fade and he will rise
To more sublime acclivities than even he supposed,
For with your very scorn and hate you prove him wise,
And with every lash another chapter's closed
In the book he bought with laughter and with bread.
And as you curse him now for what you call his crime,
Behind those gray stone wall he shakes his head
As he writes the prologue of another, better time:
A day when merit shall in its own small wonderous way
Decide who shall be flayed and who shall flay.

proud flesh

The doctor's reception room was a cold green cavern of green carpet, green walls with three confused-looking green landscapes hung on them above the green-tiled fireplace, and green furniture. Only the two leather couches, russet like the earth in springtime, and the magazines heaped on the little tables broke the monotony of green.

"Green, green, I want you green Green the wind and green the boughs," Alice quoted to herself. Too much green. She glanced at her watch, the little rose-gold watch given her for her fifteenth birthday a year before. Forty-five minutes. It had never taken this long before. An operation for skin cancer was the simplest of all surgeries; it never took more than half an hour. Mother simply walked into the surgeon's office, was stabbed with novocane, flicked with a scalpel, her hands wreathed with gauze, and then was sent away. Presently she would take the gauze away, and there would be another tiny scar on her hand. Soon there would be more scar tissue than skin, for nothing could halt the insidious, malignant growth of cancerous cells; but frequent skin surgery would prevent their infiltration into the bloodstream.

But it had never taken this long before. There must be several cancers. Usually the operation was over in fifteen minutes.

Alice picked up a magazine. The pages slithered and rustled as she turned them. She began to read an article, finished it, went on to another. She read the whole magazine, but still mother did not come. The magazine slipped from her shaking hands; she placed it on the table.

The reception room was empty. She walked across to the windows, staring through the snow-clouded air at the fantastic geometry of Landon's business area. As she returned to her chair, the padding of her footsteps across the green carpet sounded like muffled thunder.

It was too still. She began to listen carefully, consciously. Somewhere water was swishing through pipes; twelve stories below the vague sounds of traffic echoed. The tiny click-click of her watch and the sound of her heartbeat were as loud as pounding voodoo drums. An hour. What was wrong? She was afraid now. Click-click, tick-tick, said the watch monotonously. Two o'clock, gestured the slim gold hands indifferently.

She stood up and static electricity snarled in the folds of her woolen skirt. As she walked toward the door of the examining room, it opened softly and shut with a sigh. Her mother came out, her hair like fire around the pallor of her face. They starred at each other as if they were strangers suddenly met in a strange land. Alice looked at her mother's hands: there were no bandages there, no blood-flecked wreaths of gauze.

"Mother, Mother, what's the matter?" Alice cried.

The red-haired woman tried to speak. She moistened her lips and sat down in a green chair, pulling the girl down beside her on the arm.

"Alice, listen carefully," she said. "Go home—you have your key?—and do these things: telephone your father—he's at the Claremont Hotel in Fredericksburg—and tell him to return quickly as possible, to fly, not to drive; then pack a suitcase for me with things I'll need for a hospital stay and bring it to me at St. Stephen's Hospital."

Alice stared dumbly at her as she ran one small scarred hand through her tumbled hair.

"Have you some money?" her mother demanded.

Alice nodded dazedly.

"First, then, go to the Bookshelf and buy your brother some books—Oz books, or Tarzan, maybe. Send him to Cousin Margaret's tonight. Don't tell him anything unless you must."

Alice found her voice, or a frog's voice living in her throat. "Tell him what, Mother?" she croaked. "Tell Daddy what, Mother What's the matter, oh, what's the matter?"

Aimery Allen stared through her daughter at something terrible beyond. Her voice was low and hoarse. "You are to tell your father . . . that I am to undergo surgery early tomorrow morning for removal of a malignant tumor. Tell him no more than that; try not to frighten him. —I suppose you had better know this, my dear: I dont have an even chance to live. But, of course, you will not tell him that." She smiled. "Conspiracy between womenfolk, that's what this is. Now, I'm off to the hospital. Phone your father, get your brother's books, pack my suitcase and bring it to the hospital. All clear?"

"All clear," Alice mumbled. "Mother—"

"Let's go."

They rode down in the brown elevator and no one spoke a word, not the girl with the dazed green eyes, nor the tiny woman with the scarred hands, nor the elevator operator. There were three taxis in a row at Severn Street. Mrs. Allen stepped into the first and smiled, "Okay, Babyface?"

"Okay. I'll be at the hospital at six."

"No—later. You have to fix dinner for young Chris, remember? Make it about seven-thirty. See you then." As the taxi hurtled away from the curb, one green-gloved hand gestured goodbye with a motion like that of a leaf falling.

Alice went into the lobby of the hotel to telephone her father. She felt dazed, as if someone else were telling her to do this and to do that; as if there were a little voice in her head that said "See how the telephone booth fills up with murky yellow light as you close the hinged dark door, hear how the coin clangs and rattles, hear the voice of the operator come from the bright metallic world of the telephone office. Look, this golden, smoky light; it is the color of the world when you open your eyes under the sliding waters of the Rappahannock. Look, this topaz, misty light; it is the color of the cat Diablo's eerie eyes!"

"Number, please," repeated the operator. "Number, please." The words ran together in her head; the little voice chanted them: "Number please number please number please." Alice shook her head to drive away the little voice. She ran her tongue over her lips, cleared her throat experimentally.

"I want to make a person-to-person call to Mr. Christopher Allen at the Claremont Hotel in Fredericksburg," she said. She waited while the call went through, and sometimes the little voice came back and whispered: "She doesn't have an even chance to live . . . not an even chance . . ."

"Hello?" Her father's voice; the call was through. "Hello?"

"Daddy, this is Alice." Strangely, her voice was calm and steady and normal. "How are you?"

"All right; I'm quite all right. Did your mother have one of her worry-fits? Or is anything wrong at home?"

"Yes, Daddy. Mother would like for you to fly back tonight; can you make it? She has to have an operation in the morning and I think she wants you to hold her hand."

"What kind of operation?" he snapped. There was sudden fright in his voice. "What kind of operation?"

"Oh, she has to have some skin cancers taken from her hands, and there's a tumor to be removed." Alice tried to keep her voice calm. "If you take that six o'clock plane back, you can be here fairly early this evening."

They talked on for a minute, then broke the connection. Alice sat in the telephone booth, and the hazy yellow light swirled around her. A man tapped impatiently on the door and she hurried out and across the street through the thick-falling snow to the bookstore. She selected three books for her brother and handed them to the saleswoman to wrap.

Suddenly she felt her face crumple under the sliding indecent warmth of tears. She lifted her head, prisoning the tears in her lashes. "I am a Shreve and an Allen; the Shreves don't cry," she said to herself. "The Shreves and the Allens don't cry; they show no emotions. Mother never cries. The Shreves don't cry. Never, never, for any reason." But here were these indecent tears rolling fatly down her cheeks. The saleswoman asked if she were ill, so she asked the woman to call a taxi.

She took the books home to young Chris, fixed his dinner, and sent him to their cousin Margaret's. Then she took the suitcase and some magazines to the hospital. St. Stephen's Hospital was really three old houses connected by echoing corridors, wings, and annexes. Her mother had been placed in a tiny dark room across the hall from the main office. It was a little cube filled up with shadows and the light was hazy and yellow again. Her mother was in bed; she looked little and lost, and her hair was a fan of flame against the flat white pillow. They talked about nothing at all, about anything at all—shoes and ships and sealing wax and cabbages and kings. And all the time Alice could see the shimmering, shifting devils of loneliness and panic in her mother's eyes. Their tongues, their lips made conversation; their eyes, the Shreve green eyes, had mute terror in them. Alice wanted to cry out, to hide herself in those arms that had comforted her so often—but now it was her mother who needed to be comforted and Alice could do nothing save babble.

She stayed until her father came and then went home, but she didn't sleep that night. The next day was a Friday. She sent young Chris to school with a note for her teachers at the Academy. When Chris came home for lunch, she told him to go to a movie after school. Then she returned to the hospital.

Her father was there. Her mother was still under the influence of the anesthetic. The high hospital bed was bent into angles, and her mother looked like a limp little doll whose body had been crumpled to fit the angles. Her hair was braided; she wore a white hospital gown, the angel-sleeved operating-room gown. Her hands were wrapped round with bandage and gauze. Only her fingers were free.

"Mother?" she said. "Mother?" The limp figure did not stir, but a frown flickered across her forehead and her fingers twitched. Alice's voice could not penetrate her cocoon of drugged sleep. The girl turned to her father.

"How is she, Daddy?—Where's her nurse?"

"She seems to be all right," he said. His tired eyes never moved from the triangular face from which sleep had erased all expression. "We couldn't get a nurse. The hospital is badly understaffed and as badly overcrowded."

"You'd better go get some coffee and something to eat," said Alice. "I'll stay with her."

"All right. I'll be back as soon as I can. If you get . . . frightened, pull this bell cord and keep on pulling. It'll bring a nurse."

When he left Alice took the chair beside the bed. Once her mother's eyes opened, but there was no light in them and they did not recognize the girl. Her lips were dry and cracked; her tongue moved over them like a pink, gliding snake. Alice raised her with her arm and gave her some water. Her eyes opened again; for a moment they were green and clear.

"Thank you—Allie," she whispered; and the gray fog came back into her eyes and the waxen lavender-veined lids fell over them. Her breathing was slow and shallow. She slept briefly, then out of the evanescent mists of her anesthesia-induced coma, she began to murmur. "Chris—Alice—young Chris. Chris—Alice—young Chris," she muttered as if she were saying a rosary. Her hand groped across the blaknet. Alice touched her hand; her fingers closed about the girl's index finger as a baby's hand does.

"Alice?" she whispered. Her eyes remained closed.

"Hullo, Redhead. How are you?"

"I . . . hurt. Give . . . Water."

She drank thirstily. Alice lowered her to the pillow again. "Sing . . . pigeon song," she said

The girl's throat ached. Bitterness was caught there like gall. When she was a baby, her mother had sung the pigeon lullaby to her. Whenever she was ill, she still sang it. And now . . . Alice was to sing the pigeon song to her. She shaped the words on her tongue, let them slide softly through her lips.

"My pigeon house I open wide
And set all my pigeons free.
They fly o'er hills on every side
And light in the tallest tree.
And when they return
From the merry, merry flight
I'll close the door and say
Coo-oo-roo, coo-oo-roo, coo-oo-roo, good-night."

Her mother smiled contentedly. "Again," she whispered. Alice sang it again and again, until she slept.

When her father returned, the doctor had come, but he did not wake her. The doctor and her father went into the hall and talked for a long time; when Mr. Allen returned, his face was still and expressionless.

"What did the doctor say Daddy?"

"He says . . . that she doesn't seem to be recovering very well. She wasn't strong enough to stand the shock of a hysterectomy, but she couldn't have lived with the growing cancer in her. Alice . . ." He turned blindly to the window; the girl could see his shoulders move, but there was no sound of weeping. He straightened and returned to his wife's bedside. Alice spoke to him, but he did not seem to hear. She touched his face, and his cheek was wet.

"I'll come back in a little while," she said. Her voice was gentle. He made no sign of having heard; his head was bent on his hands.

Alice went out into the whirling, swirling, blinding snow. Her feet led her swiftly along Severn Street to the tiny Church of the Holy Trinity. She pulled her scarf over her head and walked through the empty nave, up the chancel steps to the altar. She bent her head, but no words came, only a mute, wordless plea. "Oh, God—have mercy upon her—" She lifted the prayerbook from the lectern. A shudder swept through her as she began the prayer for the dying.

She left the Church and returned to the hospital. Her father still sat beside the bed, his wife's tiny bandaged had lost in his huge dark one.

"Alice, where's young Chris?" he asked.

"At Cousin Margaret's."

"Go get him and take him home. I want both of you there. You can do nothing here."

Alice waited through the night, listening for the telephone. She went to the hospital early in the morning, but the doctor was examining her mother and she could not go in. He talked a long time to her father before he went away.

Alice looked at her mother. She was conscious; her face was flushed and feverish.

"Well, Redhead, how goes it?"

"I . . . hurt. Her voice was vaguely indignant. "I hurt. I want some water. Give me some water."

Her body was like a flame, thought Alice as she lifted her. Her father came in.

"Give her as much water as she can drink, Alice, and rub that lotion into her body. Her skin is badly dehydrated. But come to the lounge for a while; I have some coffee for you."

The leather chairs whooshed as they sank into them. The coffee was black and bitter, tasting woody because of the paper cups.

"Alice, today is the crisis. If she lives through today, she'll recover. The doctor can't get a nurse. You'll have to stay with her. She'll be in almost intolerable pain in a little while, and they can't give her morophine because she isn't strong enough. Can you take her temperature?"

Alice nodded.

"Check it every half hour. If it rises above one hundred three, give her an alcohol bath. Give her as much water as she can take; force it on her. Keep rubbing that lotion in. I'll be here, but you'll have to help her; I can't. I'm going to try to get nurses from Fredericksburg."

All morning long, Aimery Allen writhed in pain. Alice felt every spasm in her own body, but she knew the final agony was yet to come.

At noon the tiny hands began to tear at each other, until the white bandages were loosened. The fire-colored hair was wet with sweat but the white-faced woman would not cry nor scream. As the pain increased, her body grew rigid until it was arched like a bow.

"Mother, Mother—cry, scream—"

The green eyes flashed suddenly in the white face. "I am a Shreve; the Shreves don't cry." she whispered proudly, and her body arched in agony.

Alice turned away. In the face of this strange pride, what could she do? Silently, she began to rub lotion into the dry, burning hands.

"No-oh, my God!, I cannot—Alice give me your hands—"

Alice felt each convulsion of pain pass through her mother's body. The tiny, bandaged hands pulled at the girl's soft fingers.

"I will not cry," whispered Aimery Allen. She writhed in torment. "I will not cry . . ."

The day passed, each hour an eternity, each minute an eon. At four o'clock the doctor returned. He gave her a sedative.

"She's past the crisis now," he told them. "She'll live." Alice and her father stared at each other. They never heard what else he said.

Aimery Allen was nearly asleep. She blinked sleepily at her husband and daughter. "I didn't cry," she murmured drowsily. "proud flesh . . ."

In the evening Alice returned to the Church of the Holy Trinity, walking through the drifting snow. Her wordless, incoherent prayer of thanksgiving was broken suddenly by tears, and she knelt in the empty Church, weeping silently.

"Proud flesh . . . Proud flesh . . ." She whispered. "So very proud. But is it wrong to cry? I have need of tears."

She went out of the Church. The snow had stopped. A young moon danced among the clouds. The wind dried the tears on her cheeks.

A. Greene

THE

L. Sullivan

MOONTREE

"Will this inward pain ne'er leave me,
nor my fright pass away?"
And the winds howled!
"Through the stormy night I stumble,
and grief makes my head sway!"
And the winds howled!
"God give me strength I pray
to reach the spot of Grace."
And the storm rose.
"It is in sight! My Moontree,
In shame I hide my face."
And the storm rose.
"As a child I fled here when
alone I prayed."
And the thunder rolled.
"Oh Moontree, grave of my mother,
turn me not away."
And the thunder rolled!
"Dear God of nature, can you be
so dismayed?"
And the lightning flashed!
"My husband was cruel, but
I didn't mean to slay."
DOWN THE TREE CRASHED!!

compensation

N. L. Allen

If I were as sensitive to touch
As a blind man,
I could feel the soft, smooth petals
Of the wood violet.

If I were as attentive to sight
As a deaf man,
I could see the smiling faces
Of my busy neighbors.

If I were as silent to voice
As a dumb man,
I could obliterate the needless worry
Of thoughtless words.

Rain

B. Land

Sheets of water o'er the path it throws,
Rushing through the darkness, down the lane,
Whipping at the bushes as it goes,
The blowing rain.

Rending shrieks from out the midnight sky,
Lashing trees and splitting them in twain,
Throwing clouds together till they cry,
The thund'ring rain.

But as the moon breaks through the storm above,
And breezes sing a gentle, soft refrain
The forest slumbers to the rustling of
The quiet rain.

Stone's Bones

V. Cohen

Ole' Man Stone
Worked all his life
To keep his home
And to please his wife.

Plowed his acre
And he hoed his corn;
Prayed to his Master
Since he was born.

When he finally came
To his last day,
Rest was his claim
But not his pay.

Peace to his soul,
Ole' Man Stone's.
Rest for his soul
But not for his bones.

A grave in the ground
Was not their doom.
They rattle around
In a peculiar tomb.

A cardboard carton
In a medical school
Contains this Spartan
As a medical tool.

Each separate bone
Has a separate name
To teach your own
In the human frame

Now ole' Man Stone's
Long since been gone
But through his bones
He labors on.

to the new one

B. Daugherty

To you who, glancing, gave my loved one more
True happiness than my lifetime of trying
Could give, and satisfied her yearning for
Some subtle virtue which my blind denying
Has made more prominent and fine in you,
I wish the happiness I never knew.
I send unjealous thanks, for to love one
Must be to give her all love, wanting none
To keep. Wholehearted love can never brood
Over a moment's blind ingratitude
Or hope to hold forever in caress
A life too dear for one love to posess.

three wishes

B. Land

I want a clear-cut picture
Of life, and love, and death;
The earth's excuse
And Heaven's use
For bone, and blood, and breath.

I long for just one hour
To sit on some high cloud
And deftly search
From this high perch
The humble and the proud.

And lastly, some slight insight
Into God's great plan,
Then I could cease
This search for peace
And learn to live with man.

H. D. Rowe

Staff Sergeant Emler leaned back against the stack of empty parachute packs and watched the bottle pass from man to man in the little group across the hangar. The singing had started an hour ago and had gotten louder as time passed. Now they were singing the same song over and over. There was a bored, indifferent look on the sergeant's face as he toyed with his cigarette, but underneath he was scared. He had been scared for a good while now—ever since he had seen Spade's face last night, and it was worse than the usual fear. It had started earlier, too, this time. Then above the singing he heard the faint drone of the plane coming, and, as the noise grew louder, he walked to the side door to watch the landing. He liked to watch them come in this way. It gave him a comfortable feeling of security to watch the plane glide smoothly down the strip and hear the roaring engines throttled to a gentle idle.

But as he turned back into the hangar, the fear returned. He saw the Indian and Royce passing the bottle back and forth between them. The Indian was already drunk and the sergeant was thinking he would be the only one sober by the time they loaded . . . the only sober one maybe but not the only scared one . . . that was sure, just look at them, they're all scared trying to drink and sing it away but it won't work. I know. Each man's getting lonelier as the minutes pass . . . singing shows it, strained — empty. Loud enough, but not quite as full and hearty as when we sing in the bar at Marty's or on a hike back — yeah, it's always better coming back . . . only this time you won't know about that . . . this is the one way ticket . . . I've felt it ever since Spade looked at me that way last night . . . aw, cut it, you've said that a dozen times before . . . you said it the night before Lae and the morning before we jumped the Rock . . . look at them, why don't you whistle with them, Sam. Yeah, that's what it is — whistling in the dark . . .

He became aware of the damp cold feeling of his hands and he wiped them on his shirt front as the song came to him across the empty packing tables. It made the cold lump of fear in his stomach grow and climb up toward his throat. He could see the old table where he and Spade used to pack their chutes and the refrain seemed to hang over this spot before it came to him loud and clear:

"Airbourne, we fly the sky,
Paratroopers, do or die —
Ski-troops, like the wind we go . . ."

. . . they're more scared than I am, and they think the liquor will help . . . singing won't neither . . . if I don't make it back wonder how'll Mary get home . . . that game must have been rigged . . . I should have quit while I was ahead at least she'd have train fare home . . . what time is it now, what's keeping Peckla . . . at least they must have been pairing up on me . . . got to keep face, though . . . even if I am going to die in a few more hours . . . Spade knew ahead of time too why didn't his dad answer that letter full military honors flag and all, I couldn't look at him but they said they did a good job on his face Mary'll have a pay coming in though she'll make it home all right . . . knock it off, boy . . .

He took the plug of Mule from his shirt pocket and bit into it, letting the sharp sting of the tobacco clear the knot from his throat, and he chewed savagely until the saliva lubricated the tobacco into a soft warm cud. He felt better then until the Indian began to sing again and Royce joined him. When the rest joined in it rang loud and clear across the table and a flood of anger began to well up in him . . . it was a song to be sung amidst a spirit of close fellowship, say, when we're all down at Marty's in Phoenix City . . . but not here . . . not now . . . it's not a song to bolster your guts with . . . it oughta be sung afterwards after this is finished . . .

The few drinks he'd taken had died in him long ago and only made the cold knot in his stomach seem bigger. The lump was rising again as the song with its empty ghostlike quality echoed through the huge packing hangar:

"We're sons-o-guns, we're tons-o-guns
We won't take no for an answer,
Can't stop those paratroops . . ."

. . . Spade used to sing that song too, sad and slow-like though. Not snotty like that smart aleck Royce why did I ever push that rating for him still he's a good man if he didn't talk so much but not before a jump Spade was funny about that singing before a jump couldn't even get him to talk then or drink Mary's home from work now I guess still can't understand why the emergency failed too she quits at 5:30 earlier than that sometimes though I remember seeing him go on past me that day didn't know what it was until later . . .

"Hurtling down into the fray . . .
Oh, it ain't the way it us'ta be
A bigger and better infantry
Comes in by air today . . . . ."

. . . Yes, before a jump he was always quiet said she'd wait at Marty's saw him walking ouside before that last one said she didn't like to wait by herself just walking up and down muttering where the hell's Peckla to himself . . .? well to God, maybe waiting too long gets on my nerves Helen'll be with her I guess Spade sure was a funny guy about things like religion wonder where she'll eat supper tonight got mad at me that time when I told him God didn't have time to care about whether that little restaurant on the corner of Twelfth and McArthur has good food Peckla'd be late to his own funeral or that little place on Central Avenue what do they call it EAT is the name of it I think should have pushed the Indian for those corporal stripes since he the General McArthur Cafe has good shrimp if you like shrimp or maybe Kelley's Spade like Kelley's God her hair is pretty should see what's happened to Peckla especially when the sun shines on it . . .

The singing softened as Lt. Peckla entered the hangar and signaled silently for them to get their gear ready. He stood in the door looking at the sergeant while the men filed by him. Sam found himself regretting that he wouldn't be putting the Lieutenant to bed now when he came in loaded at night from the officers' club and he had CQ. A good man, the lieutenant — a good soldier, he thought —give you a break if you have one coming — aw, hell anyway I won't have to stand CQ no more . . .

* * * * *

Out on the airstrip he stood with his helmet off and let the prop wash of the C47 blow his hair and lay his trouser legs flat against his body. It felt good — a clean, brisk feeling and it cleared the fog that he'd felt in his head back in the hangar. The line of men climbed slowly up into the huge belly of the plane and he watched the lieutenant silently give one a hand now and then. They looked huge and grotesque, weighted down with the equipment and bent under the close fitting parachute harness — like apes, he thought. At last when they were all inside and he was alone with the lieutenant

"Well, Sam, I guess you want the head end?"

"Whatever you say lieutenant. It's quicker that way, and a little easier too, I guess — if you can call it easy."

"What's the matter, Sam? Don't tell me you've got nerves. Old Iron Man Emler? I couldn't believe it."

"Nah, — it's just that I was thinking about Spade, back there in the hangar I was thinking you remember lieutenant, we packed on the same table in that hangar back in 1943. I still wonder why his father never wrote."

"Forget it, Sam. Spade was a good soldier — moodier than most people, but a good soldier. He had an accident, that's all — it happens."

"Yessir, only sometimes I can see his face — at night, I mean— lieutenant last night I saw him as clear as day and it seemed like he was trying to tell me something. After a while I got up and walked it off. Walked it off most of the night, I guess. Listen, lieutenant if anything goes wrong today you see Mary first, O.K.? She'll be waiting at Marty's with Royce's wife."

"Forget it, Sam. It's just a simple demonstration jump. You know that. We hit the island, we blow the bridge, we get in the boats, and we come home. Nothing'll happen, Now, come on. We don't want to keep the damn', Air Corps out all night."

He felt Peckla's hand on his shoulder in a gesture that he would have resented from most people, but he had known the lieutenant for a long time and he knew that Marvin Peckla was about the finest damned officer he had ever known. By the time he had pulled himself up into the plane and had taken his seat at the head of the line by the open doorway the lieutenant was opening the door to the pilot's compartment. He felt the plane swing around onto the runway as the roar of the engines drowned the coarse ribaldry coming from the line of anxious faces.

They had left the Florida coast line behind some time ago and beneath he could see the broad, blue expanse of the Gulf waters. The plane was gradually losing altitude and he knew that there was not much time left. His watch said seven minutes, and he swung up into the aisle and looked down the line of faces:

"Get your gear together! You've got about six or seven minutes," he shouted above the roar of the plane.

It was very quiet now as Sam watched the men adjusting straps and tightening equipment. He stood and watched their shiny boots with the sharp blouse of the trouser legs over them and he thought of how proud he had been when he wore them for the first time. He thought of how they looked on parade in the bright early sunlight of a Saturday morning, and that day at Americus, Georgia, when they had stood honor guard for some damn', Air Corps general whose name he couldn't remember . . . Spaatz, no I don't think so, anyway he said in his little speech from the balcony of the hotel that he'd never seen anything like that parade . . . Mary liked the parades, too. Well, there'll be no more parades for Sam.

He saw the lieutenant come through the door of the compartment and stop to say something to the Indian. Then he turned to wave at Sam and Sam felt a little guilty about what had passed between them back at the strip. He looked out through the open doorway . . . the island was getting closer . . . a couple of minutes now and it'll be all over and we'll be blowing the bridge. Wonder what Mary's doing back in Columbus eating supper maybe in that little restaurant on Twelfth Street almost over the island now time for the light

wonder if that game was fixed guess not just unlucky hope Peckla keeps them moving don't want to have to hunt all over the island but I won't have to worry about the bridge what're you talking about you remember that this is the day that you're going to die don't you Christ ain't it about time for the light . . .

As the first light on the panel board blinked its harsh signal he turned and bellowed down the aisle:

"All right, now, men! On your feet! Stand up and hook up!" It seemed to him he was in one of those crazy dreams where he could watch himself doing foolish things and not being able to do anything about it as he heard the slap of his own static line clasp against the cable. Below he could see the last rays of the evening sun giving a yellow glow to the blue smoothness of the water. Royce, behind him, was fingering a rosary and he could see his lips moving. He was conscious of checking his static line clasp for the third time when the second light began to blink. He heard someone shout above the roar of the plane's engines, "Check equipment!" And it came to him that it was his own voice ringing in his ears. Why does it always seem like a dream, he thought as he checked Royce's break-cord and slapped him on the arm to indicate that everything was all right. Then when the second light stopped blinking and came on full, he slung his static line away and stood in the door. The wind boomed against his face . . . awful low, too damn' low, he thought . . . must be down to four hundred feet . . . stinking Air Corps . . . why doesn't he throttle this thing down some must be doing 140 too damn fast I bet I get blown panels this damn' rifle's fouled up wait a minute there that's better should have slung the thing I guess but too late now . . . by God, I think I could step on the tree tops must think they're dropping rations or something Mary would like this view exciting life she calls it probably thinks I'm brave Spade was brave but Spade worried too much and Spade is dead I'm worried too brave most of the time only right now I'm a little scared hope Mary never finds out and I'd like to be back in Columbus Peckla already knows at Marty's having a cool one Royce's wife'll be with her I hope Peckla keeps them close together . . . He felt Royce's slap on his leg and heard him shout as he stepped out. At first he was not conscious of falling, then, he was falling, falling, and it still didn't seem real. I'm dreaming, he thought. I'll wake up screaming again like I did the other night count, dammit, count where's that ring better pull it too long. Unh! Christ! I think my neck's broke look up quick . . . check panels see! I knew we were going too fast . . . too fast . . .

As he released the ring of the emergency chute and grabbed the risers he saw in the silk above his head the gaping holes where the prop wash had ripped the chute to pieces and he was aware that the ground was coming up too fast . . . He was thinking that it was too late now to pull the emergency when someone hit him in the face with what felt like a two by four and he felt the shock run the entire course of his body . . . the blackness welled up in front of him . . .

going to be sick, he thought . . . got to fight it . . . got to hold on . . . can't get sick or black out now get the boys rounded up before Peckla has a wonder why I feel so light getting dark again . . . sing, that'll help sing and keep the dark away . . . sing something . . .

"Airbourne, we fly the sky—
Paratroopers, do or die,
Ski-troops, like the wind we . . ."

. . . wind's blowing now. And that hill over there . . . all covered with the greenest grass you ever did see and on the point up there, see . . . the big grove of locusts God it's good to be home again the wind's blowing fine now going to be dark soon I'd better head for the house supper I'll be ready . . . wait a minute . . . dark too soon sing, fight it, . . . dear God, help me sing and keep the dark away . . . just for a little while feel so strange . . . wonder if the Indian wired the bridge O.K., got to get up Peckla'll be sore as hell so light think I could float right over to that grove of locusts . . . yes, light . . . right there, see, . . . that's where I shot that gray fox last year . . . was it last year? . . . there's where Mary and I'll build that house . . . what year is this . . . yes, just at the edge of that grove there . . . sing . . . before it gets dark . . . better hurry home, now . . . sing . . . please, don't get dark so quick . . . please . . . O. K., it's all right, now . . . funny, I could have sworn . . . yes, . . . yes, it's Spade sing . . .

It was almost dark by the time the lieutenant and Royce got his body out of the tree and carried it to the beach. As they laid him on the sandy beach they noticed that his head lay in a curious twisted position. It had been hard to get his head loose from where it was jammed in the crotch made by the two large branches of the tree. Along the side of his face from the middle of the jaw bone to the temple there was a deep ugly wound where the barrel of the rifle had gouged him as he slammed into the tree. Down deep in his belly Royce felt sick. He said, more to himself than to the lieutenant:

"I never saw him scared. I jumped with him four times and I never saw him scared once . . . God, it'll kill his wife when she hears . . ."

All right, Royce, all right," the lieutenant cut him off, "Get down there and tell that crazy Indian to get started. We got a bridge to blow remember? Well, what're you standing there looking for? It's a dead man. It happens. Get going, now!"

Back across the sand came something that sounded like "hard-hearted bastard" as the lieutenant knelt down and unstrapped the harness of the sergeant's musette bag. Then he unbuckled the cartridge belt and slid it out from under him so that the sergeant could lie flat on the sand. As he looked out across the water he could see a searchlight that told him the Ducks were comming to take them back to Florida. He waited there beside the body to hear the bridge blow.

Laissez Faire

The man that made a car, The Ford!
Can never make a plant to grow a gourd.
And his intepretation of the Word
Of God to man,
Is plain unbelief in the infinite plan
Of the Supreme Creator.
And when Henry said the word,
"That God made troubles for men
To keep them busy, to experience and only live to gain,"
His mind was wandering, doped and dizzy,
And his brain in the engine of his own Tin Lizzie.

J. Binns

Kyrie Eleison

A. Greene

Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison
Kyrie eleison
Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
upon us all
never think
about your God
nor open your eyes
to look for Him
throughout the universe
for there is nothing
there
save emptiness of limitless
skies and blue inhuman
eeriness of stars
and all the fear
of nothingness falls down
into your eyes
It is better to believe
(close up your eyes
seal them shut
with blindness
close up your ears
seal them shut
with deafness)
it is better to believe
in anything
at all
rather than have
the fear of nothingness
fall down into your eyes.

words
live
on
forever...

while thoughts are gone
in a
moment's
time...

etc...