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# Not Without Dust

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# Not Without Dust

A NOVEL

Seginald Chantrelle

*Exposition Press / New York*

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# One

THE WHOLE STATION was agog with hurried excitement. Amazing how anyone could slither his way through this sea of surging restlessness and still maintain his equilibrium. The vast confines were packed to overflowing as a seemingly motionless crowd, in typical American fashion, politely jostled one another through the gateways to the platforms below.

A remarkably gay party had assembled before Gate 18, in Pennsylvania Station, New York, the more to be wondered at since one of its members was about to entrain for Camp Stewart, Georgia. Lieutenant Roy Raymond, in trim khaki uniform, with the dental caduceus on one side of his collar and a bright silver bar on the other, had no illusions nor was he disillusioned concerning his assignment to the Deep South. To the casual passer-by, he was just one more soldier. To the more observant, the too easy smile that wreathed his thin-lipped mouth, the excited glow in otherwise roguish oriental eyes, which twinkled merrily beneath heavy black brows, betokened thoughts and feelings which of necessity were far-removed from the moment's hilarity. One more spring. Another leave-taking. Once again adrift from family and friends. So similar and yet so vastly different from that parting almost two decades ago when he had run away from

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his native Jamaica. The conversation with his boyhood pal, Eric, was etched for all time in the recesses of his memory.

He had been just venturesome enough then to cast aside the needed security of mother and family, to reach out for the promised opportunities of that blessed new land which beckoned him as a Utopia. Had he been older than seventeen, he might have reasoned that a light-brown complexion together with straight black hair could be definite assets in a country where those not typically Negroid were enterprising enough to utilize Nature's gifts to their own advantage.

So many things had happened in the interim. The jobs that Roy had held during the three years that he had struggled to adjust to the congestion of New York's Harlem were too various to enumerate. It is never easy for an immigrant to swallow the jeers and contempt that are heaped upon him during the period of orientation and acclimatization, especially when people become aware of his struggle to step into another social stratum. For a man as slight, boyish and sensitive as Roy, the struggle was well-nigh unbearable.

Ofttimes, feeling at the very end of possible human endurance, beside himself with destitution and despair, he had an aching longing for the soothing calm of his Caribbean Sea. Just as the weary traveler slowly wends his way toward the beacon that offers succor from afar, so in all this misery did one thought give him sustenance: he wanted to be a doctor. There was no groping to find his milieu. He knew what he wanted and each year progressed steadily toward his goal. His ambition, like the Hound of Heaven, gave him no respite. So firmly entrenched was he in the desire to get ahead, to be somebody, that he closed his mind and heart to the normal yearnings of adolescence for companionship with the opposite sex. Marriage —and subsequent parenthood—had to be postponed indefinitely. That could wait, he felt.

In the midst of running elevators, dishwashing, mopping floors, he forged a philosophy that became the mainstay of his life. Desolate, lonely, weary, flat on his back at the end of a day

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of drudgery, he could still repeat the litany even when driven from one form of servitude to another: "If I have come this far, I can go farther."

Roy looked over the crowd. Here and there, he spotted other colored boys in uniform. He looked at and through his friends as he thought, "How far can I go in Georgia?" His mind shifted quickly back to Jamaica. His mother's tired hands, his father's haggard, peasant face were there before him. He recalled his father's death shortly after he had obtained a job with the United Fruit Line, unwittingly providing the means of escape. Persistent thoughts of Mother took precedence over all others. As an only child, he had vowed to better her lot. From his nothing, he had remembered to send her a pittance across the years. Even when he was hungry, homeless, he had always contrived to provide something, never revealing how precarious was his plight. What now? "How far can I go in the Deep South? Will I get back? Will I ever see home, the British West Indies?" By nature easygoing and cheerful, Roy's keen sense of justice had cost him many a job in the formative years when he refused to be downed by a domineering employer and persisted in defending other workers' rights. Could he speak up now? How far can one go in the army by way of an organized, concerted drive? He had struggled too hard to lose anything whatsoever. Undernourished, ill-clad most of the time, he had spent twelve years earning a degree in dentistry. He most certainly would have to count the cost before he tossed it aside to champion a cause that could very easily reduce him to a state of disrepute.

He surreptitiously fingered the dental caduceus. "Mine," he said to himself. "To this minute I have come." The friends were a symbol of civic and social recognition. He had reason to be proud. He had far greater reason to volunteer to serve a country which deserved his eternal gratitude. He experienced a brand of pleasure peculiar to his type of personality in winding up four years of practice and accepting a call to duty. Far too intelligent to be modest, in all humility Roy deeply appreciated this display of sincere good will. All manner of people, both black and white,

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had come these last days to wish him Godspeed. The hospital where he had served as the only Negro in the field of oral surgery had tendered him a cabaret party and presented him with a military kit. What a glorious week it had been, one grand round of festivities, culminating in this merry gathering.

The redcap who was attending Roy's luggage discreetly touched his elbow and nodded significantly to inform him that it was train time. A tense hush in keeping with the moment's solemnity ensued. Roy rose to the occasion with his customary continental air of nonchalance. He kissed all of the ladies, some on their cheeks, others on their lips, according to the degree of intimacy that existed between them. One by one, all of the men grasped his hand. As though everyone were suddenly devoid of speech, they stood silently as he squared his shoulders soldierwise and with rapid strides disappeared through the gates.

The redcap delivered Roy over to the pullman porter. His smile in departing bespoke his pleasure in receiving so unusual a gratuity. Roy was generous to a fault. Impossible for a man of his temperament to have struggled with the underdogs of society for an overly long period and not reach out, as a kindred spirit, to those who bore the yoke with humility.

The porter suggested that Roy go to the smoking room at the end of the coach while he made his berth. Because of the drawn curtains and air of silence, Roy assumed that all were abed. To his surprise, on reaching the smoking room, he found two white men engaged in quiet conversation. The room was small and rectangular. A mirror and washbasin occupied one wall. A built-in couch, upholstered in leather, ran the entire length of the wall opposite. Facing Roy was the entrance to the lavatory.

Still feeling the delightful glow of a last Scotch and soda which one in the party had jokingly said was "for the road," Roy made his way cautiously across the room toward the toilet. Just as he was about to grasp the handle of the door, a sudden lurch of the train sent him sprawling on all fours. With the

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dignity typical of the slightly inebriated, he picked himself up, opened the toilet door and disappeared behind it. Emerging shortly thereafter, he approached the sofa where the two men were seated at the extremities. As neither made the least attempt to move together, thus providing room for him at either end, he sat between them.

The older man, weather-beaten, rawboned, reclined languidly with the back of his head in the crook of his arm, while in his free hand he held a cigar. The younger man, ruddy, blue-eyed, blond, dangled a freshly lit cigarette from the corner of his mouth, his legs stretched out before him, his hands clasped loosely in his lap. Seating himself, Roy reached into his pocket for a cigarette. He was fishing in his pocket for a match when the older man flicked the ashes from his cigar and extended the lit portion to him, drawling in a deep, southern accent, "May I, Lieutenant?"

"Thanks very much," Roy accepted cheerfully.

"I suppose you are on your way to rejoin your regiment," he continued in a friendly, interested manner.

"Join would be a better word. I have just been commissioned."

"Since most of the troops are being trained in the South because of weather conditions and the wide, open spaces, I take it that that is your destination."

"True. Georgia."

"Then," remarked the other traveler, "you and I will be trainmates for another twenty-four hours. The skipper over there leaves us in South Carolina."

Looking more closely at the "skipper," Roy ventured to say, "No one asks too many questions in wartime, and I realize that smoking-room companionships are brief. May I presume to ask whether you are a sea captain?"

"Not at all. I used to be but now I pilot ships through the tricky South Carolinian waters. Our other smoking-room companion, as you label us, is a seafaring man also. He's a Canadian, going to the coast to pick up his ship."

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"That gives us something in common. I too went to sea. I never made the deep sea. It was only coastwise stuff."

From that point, conversation became general and cordial. Matches were passed, cigarettes lit. The "skipper" switched to a pipe. An air of camaraderie pervaded the room, mixed with the aroma of tobacco. Anecdotes were exchanged. While all three had different theories as to the outcome of the war, they all agreed that America would be victorious.

The train sped through the night. Like some wild animal with fury unleashed, it shrieked as it gathered momentum. The three men conversed far into the night, in a rambling sort of way, going off at tangents, in the typical fashion of men who know that they should be in bed but who do not wish to retire.

Roy had been accustomed to an interchange of ideas and points of view with white people. His previous contacts gave him every right to feel perfectly at ease. It might almost seem that subconsciously, for the minute, he questioned convictions that had been deeply rooted from early youth. It just never occurred to him that he had anything to fear—yet. As the train plowed its way into Dixie, he had a sense of being at peace with the world, ensconced as he was with these two men in the smoker.

Then suddenly, completely without warning, after a lull in the conversation, the southerner remarked, "I've been up North for over three weeks. I hope none of my niggers has gotten into any trouble. As a matter of fact, one of them came damned near getting lynched a few months ago."

Roy was stung by the epithet but showed no emotion. That poker face had served as a mask for deep emotional disturbance on many occasions.

"How was that?" inquired the Canadian quietly.

"Oh, he was browsing around town when he noticed a group of people in a huddle, so to speak. Instead of minding his business, he got nosy and edged toward them to see what it was all about. It turned out that some nigger had tried to rape a white girl. Well, in South Carolina, we waste no time on that

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kind of thing. The natural thing happened. If I had not been passing and recognized his voice, he would have been strung up."

"Well, I'll be damned. Is there no law or order in your neck of the woods?" Roy asked incredulously.

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Didn't you say that the man would have been lynched had you not happened along? What kind of society exists down your way when a private citizen has to exercise his personal prerogative to save a man's life?" Roy inquired with contempt.

The weather-beaten face became puckered with furrows. The stern but well-shaped lips were rendered ugly by a sneer. With slow, deliberate steps, the erstwhile charming traveling companion strolled to the door and, with his hand on the knob, hissed, "Where did you say you were going, Lieutenant?"

"Georgia," was the crisp reply.

A faint, sardonic smile crossed the southerner's lips as he countered, "Don't let that uniform fool you. Gene Talmadge takes care of your kind." Then, jerking open the door, he slammed it behind him.

Roy snuffed out his cigarette and lit another. He gazed into space as he watched its ashes gradually form. Then, looking directly at the Canadian, he commented, "Funny how a leopard never changes its spots."

"Really," the Canadian responded indifferently. "Sorry I can't agree with you. I think you took advantage of your uniform. I know nothing of the race question except what I read in the papers. But I hardly think you would have spoken as you did if you were in civilian clothes."

Roy laughed mirthlessly. "For a man who knows nothing, you're remarkably well informed. As for exercising rank, I haven't had this rig on long enough to execute a decent salute. Furthermore, I never let that kind of talk go unchallenged even if I'm in pajamas. Let me tell you a story. When I was working my way through college, I had a good job as a waiter in a country club. One day, the German manager lined us all up in

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the yard, the dining-room crew to his right, the kitchen crew to his left. He strutted through the line of men shouting at length, 'There's a thief among you.' He went on to explain that the yard foreman had found a slab of bacon and a chicken hidden in our dormitory. Suddenly, in his prancing, he turned and collared one of the kitchen crew, a boy who had just arrived in New York from the South, demanding, 'Why did you steal those things?' The poor fellow was so frightened that he almost fainted, protesting his innocence the while. The manager released him, paced up and down and repeated the dramatics, this time the victim being the busboy. The reaction was the same. Then, suddenly, the third cook broke from the column and fled to the nearby woods. The manager laughingly announced, 'I knew it was he all the time. I wanted him to confess.' He was about to leave when I said, 'Mr. Koenig.'

"'Yes?' he asked, wheeling around.

"'You forget one thing,' I replied. 'This is America, not Germany. Here, a man is always innocent until he's proved guilty. You've reversed the procedure. It's not American.'

"The manager dismissed the entire matter with the typical Teutonic '*Ach*' and walked into the dining room. Now, tell me, where was the rank? I could have been fired and I needed the job."

The Canadian looked at his watch and rose. "Interesting, but it proves nothing. This kind of thing could go on all night. Well it's getting late and I must be turning in. Good night to you."

Left alone, Roy cupped his face in his hands, shaken to the core. He found it difficult to believe that an apparently friendly attitude was just a veneer which masked a well of bitterness, hate and callousness. He felt adrift in a sea of hostility. He listened to the train, in the blackness of the night, racing from a civilization he understood into another which was completely unknown to him. He thought of the readiness with which the Canadian sided with the southerner and wondered what would happen to him when, instead of two, he would have to cope with multiples of two. For the first time in his adult life, a sense of

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insecurity bordering on fear took hold of him. He had quit many a job when conditions were intolerable. He could not quit the army, another job, no matter how reprehensible conditions became. He could grapple with things of substance—the tangible, as it were. He always had. This thing lacked form. It was utterly without substance. Its very intangibility gave it an advantage, a superiority that put it beyond the pale of ordinary individual ability. The puzzled, strained look on his face was indicative of the depths of his disturbance. He reflected upon the manner in which each man had departed. He shook his head in non-acceptance, as though thoughts were audible. More things are wrought by the use of common sense than is generally supposed. Reasoning that on the morrow he could think better, when his emotions were subordinate to his mind, Roy too went to bed.

Sleep, blessed as it is reputed to be, did not steal readily over him. As he tossed restlessly in the narrow bed, listening to the wheels grinding on the tracks, the pillow became increasingly hard and lumpy, the mattress a piece of board. He lay there in the dark, turning and twisting. It was then that a long-forgotten incident of his high-school days stole stealthily across his memory like an interloper. It caused him to come to a quiet position. Lying flat on his back, he relived an episode of fifteen years past when, during the summer vacation, he had shipped out of South Street, New York City, as a mess boy on a freighter. The trip was for a month's duration, from New York to Tampa, Florida, thence to Sienfuegos, Cuba, and back again to New York.

The highly mixed crew was most congenial. After the ship had docked at Port Tampa at dusk, Roy decided to stretch his legs ashore after supper. Port Tampa itself was of no particular interest except that it was the terminal of the streetcar which went to Tampa City.

Roy boarded the empty car while the conductor was reversing the seats for the return trip. He sat in the middle of the car and took from his pocket a copy of Cervantes' *Don Quixote,*

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the original of which he had previously started to read in a third-year Spanish class in high school. He immediately became absorbed in the book to the extent that he was unaware of the conductor collecting the fare or of the starting of the car. Neither did he raise his head to notice that, as the car progressed toward the city, it was gradually filling up.

Suddenly, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Looking up, he noticed the conductor for the first time towering above him. Roy asked himself the question, "What's this, I wonder?" He eyed the conductor quizzically as he remarked, "Well, boy, you'll have to get up and go where you belong." The spoken word with its intonation did not immediately register. He just continued to gaze at the man. Then, suddenly, the gleam in the small, piercing, sardonic eyes, the indignant look on the reddening face, struck a chord in his mind. He groped for it. What was it? Instantaneously, in a flash, it registered. Yes, he got it. He had blunderingly seated himself in the middle of the car when he should have been in one of the last three seats.

But why had the conductor permitted him to sit there in the first place? Why had he collected his fare? However, that was of no importance now. The present was what counted. Must he degrade himself by rising and going "where he belonged"? How could he so unwittingly have wandered into a position of which he would have hesitated even to be a spectator. He was jolted back to reality by the hissing voice of the conductor demanding belligerently, menacingly, "What the hell is wrong with you? You're a nigger, aren't you?" That only made matters worse. He sat there, rooted to the spot, staring at the man, speechless, petrified with fright. He realized that his life was at stake but he was powerless to move. Finally, he glanced around the car and saw in a blur a sea of expressionless faces staring at him. They meant nothing to him. His brain had become numb, calcified.

He was vaguely aware of the conductor leaving. He realized that the car had stopped and that the conductor was returning with the motorman. The latter carried a crowbar in his hand.

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Roy's heart began to thump. He felt that all matter which represented his body had vanished, leaving only his frightened, exposed heart beating violently against his ribs. What had once been feet had melted away. His brain, though conscious of what was going on, refused to function. Why didn't he go to the back of the car as ordered? To this night, he had never been able to fathom it. Was he trying to be smart, to thwart the laws? No. He was too callow, and not at all brave.

Through the fog, he heard another contemptuous, arrogant, withering voice, that of the motorman, bellowing, "By God, you damn nigger. If you don't go to the back of the car, I'll smash your blasted head in." It might have been the Spanish he was reading. It might have been atavism, a return to some long-distant Spanish relative in his ancestral tree calling to him in his emergency. But still paralyzed with fear, he heard himself saying, "*Que dice usted, Señor, yo no hablo engles.*"

Both men looked at each other in disgust. The motorman snarled, "Oh, hell, the bastard is just a damn greaser."

It was some time after his tormentors left and the car had started before Roy returned to some degree of normalcy. Still dazed, he automatically left the car with the others. Using the trolley tracks as a guide, he retraced his steps to the ship. His gait was that of a drunkard, his brain was clogged to capacity. The fragrant countryside, the cool breeze, the starlit heavens were wasted on him. His only aim was to get home to the ship. He groped along the deserted road until he finally saw the lights of the boat.

The ship was deserted except for the night watch. Roy got into his deserted cabin and, because he was very young, he flung himself across his bunk and broke into weeping. As the salty tears trickled into his mouth, his taut body cringed as though it were being horsewhipped. Over and over again, he heard the words repeating themselves like a refrain: "Aren't you a nigger? If you don't go where you belong, I'll smash your head in." He finally fell asleep wondering what the difference was between a greaser and a nigger.

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After all the intervening years he again fell asleep, this time without tears but with fear of the dark specter of apprehension.

Roy awoke the following morning to find the sleeper almost deserted. Most of the passengers were either at breakfast or on their way thither. After a hurried toilet and a change of uniform, he made his way to the diner, passing through several cars. Two couples were on line waiting to be seated. When they had been serviced, the waiter motioned to Roy to sit at the first table near the door. Whereupon he promptly drew a curtain on either side of the car, leaving the middle aisle free for passage of diners and waiters. Seated on the left, Roy could look diagonally across to the right beyond the curtain at the white passengers. He chuckled to himself over the stupidity of this Jim Crow arrangement. He thought how he had slept the previous night in a dimly lit pullman, in the company of passengers of both sexes. Yet, in broad daylight, he was not permitted to eat in open view.

The experience, being a new one, could not be dismissed casually with a shrug. The underlying reasons behind it had to be explored. Roy had long realized that the over-all philosophy was to humiliate and degrade the individual. To try to discover why one should care to perpetuate such a nefarious practice stimulated his thoughts, even though he was the victim. A few years later, when Myrdal in his *An American Dilemma* pointed out that breaking bread in the South is a sacrament even though the fare is a far simpler one than it is in the East, Roy was to speculate whether or not perversity was behind it all.

Roy finished his bacon and eggs and was sipping his coffee. He looked through the window of the fast-moving train at the tall pines and barren hills. He wondered how this excursion would affect the future course of his life when and if he returned to a mixed practice of both Negro and white patients.

In the midst of his confused thinking, a white couple seated themselves without hesitancy opposite him. If they were annoyed because of necessity they had to sit in a segregated sec-

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tion of the diner, it was not evident. Their greeting was cordial. Conversation followed the usual trend of picayune chatter across a breakfast table in a public place. The absence of condescension was marked. As Roy indulged in his third cup of coffee, his emotions were more confused than ever. This couple was undoubtedly southern. He thought of the previous night's episode and wondered if he would ever understand these people and the attitudes which so definitely labeled them as southerners.

Roy finished his coffee leisurely and rose to leave. Back in the pullman, despite the desire to delve further into this enigma, he decided to peruse *The Officers' Guide*, a book on military courtesy, discipline and conventions. He realized that his knowledge of the army was nil and that a ten-per-cent margin for error was not enough.

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# Two

THE TRAIN CREPT into Savannah, Georgia, like a spent animal. Aboard, everyone was making preparations to disembark. Savannah, second city of Georgia, noted for its Old World charm and cosmopolitan flavor, is affectionately known to its residents as "the Forest City."

As he alighted from the pullman, an elderly redcap approached Roy and mutely, respectfully offered his services. His only gesture was raising his hand to his cap. It was part salute, part salaam. On the long platform, flanked by two trains, Roy felt strangely uneasy. He subconsciously contrasted its smallness with Penn Station. Lack of hustle-bustle almost to the point of inertia was the dominant note. This was certainly no melting pot, no crazy quilt of nationalities. An absence of facial types labeled it American, all southern American. Recognizing his luggage, Roy directed the redcap to it, inquiring at the same time when the next train would leave for Hinesville, the location of Camp Stewart.

"Your train's right over there, sir, on the next track," the redcap softly pointed out. "It leaves in twenty-five minutes. I'll pile your baggage on the seat of that coach over there, so

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that if you want to look around, you'll see it just by looking through the window. You can't miss them, sir."

Roy thanked him and gave him a coin. Glancing at his watch, he strolled toward the exit. On entering the broad terrace which separated the waiting room from the tracks, Roy stopped dead in the middle of it. Stunned, bewildered, he removed his cap to wipe the perspiration from his brow as he read the two signs which confronted him: "White Waiting Room," "Colored Waiting Room." He knew that this system existed, but this was the first time that he had come face to face with it. It is one thing to read of the South's institutions in one's living room in the East, but quite another to meet them squarely, especially when you're on the short end of the stick.

Rooted in his tracks, he looked through the open door into the white waiting room. It was well appointed, restful, with its large, revolving electric fans and chrome and leather furniture. Numerous magazine racks and neon lights completed the furnishings. He could not see into the colored waiting room easily as it was placed somewhat at an angle. Curiosity prompted him to seek it out. Amazed at its dilapidation, he entered it indignantly. The place was small, foul-smelling, its furniture outmoded. Over the entrance to the lavatory, he noticed that someone had chiseled off the "gentle" from what was intended to be "gentlemen," leaving only "men."

Disgusted, humiliated and a bit frightened, Roy strolled out to the nearest street where a Negro bootblack shined his shoes, eyeing him surreptitiously. He obviously had never seen a Negro in officer's uniform before, and Roy's preoccupation did not invite conversation. Roy questioned whether he had already seen the worst or whether this was just a beginning. Knowing that, because of the South's economy, the army was more attractive to southerners than to northerners, he wondered if they had carried their system into the army itself. He felt that they had.

Returning to the platform, Roy discovered the place alive with people. However, he was not prepared to see two lines formed, one for whites, the other for Negroes. He felt that he had almost

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exhausted his emotions with the unexpected, so, with a mental shrug, he began to look for his bags on a seat near the window. If he imagined himself to be blasé, he received a rude jolt. With beating heart, there, of all places, he spied his luggage on a seat in one of the white coaches. What now? He looked around; there were no porters in sight, only two conductors collecting tickets. A sudden anger seized him. Damn it. He had seen and gone through enough in a very short space of time. This could well be the first test. After all, wasn't he in uniform? Thereupon, he boldly got into the white line.

Approaching the conductor, he handed him his ticket unsmilingly. By God, if there had to be a scrap, he'd face it and not run away. The conductor took the ticket, and, after a brief examination, remarked, "Hinesville, eh?"

"That's it," Roy replied indifferently.

The conductor punched the ticket and handed it back routinely. Roy boarded the coach, arranged his bags and seated himself. Then the reaction set in. What if he should be thrown off the train? Negroes had been known to be lynched even when in uniform for minor civil offenses. He had taken a stand which he had to defend. He could not retreat now. What if the conductor realized his mistake on his second round? Roy brooded over his predicament when, praise be to God, a white marine in the enlisted corps entered and sat beside him. Roy looked askance at him, then remarked lightly, "Well, sailor, I would say that you have just had a couple at your favorite bar and grill with your best girl."

"Well, I'll be damned. Oh. Pardon me, sir. But how did you guess it?"

"Tell you the truth, it wasn't hard. You're still flushed, with that faraway look. You understand."

"Quite right, sir. But it beats me. The way you put it, it seems as though I have a sign around my neck."

"Pay it no mind, sailor. You're no different from us of the commissioned corps. We're all men and react in the same way to the same stimulus."

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"Well, sir, I thought I'd heard everything. That's the first time I have heard a woman called stimulus."

Both laughed heartily. At this stage in the conversation, the conductor approached and nonchalantly picked up the tickets. Roy said a silent prayer as he passed on. The marine and he continued the banter until Hinesville was reached. It was necessary to prolong the acting. As the train stopped to take on new passengers, one could never tell what might happen. It was important to be at ease, relaxed, give the appearance that you belonged. God. Could it be that he actually was a soldier of his country, an officer to boot?

Hinesville station was a desolate, local stop. The tall Georgia pines were more conspicuous and numerous than the unpainted houses. Roy entered the station and requested of the attendant that Camp Stewart be notified of his arrival and that transportation be sent for him. The request was granted willingly. Barely twenty minutes had passed when a staff car came blazing along to the station. Out hopped a corporal. He gave Roy a snappy salute, placed his bags in the trunk, held the door for Roy to be seated in the rear of the car and, one, two, three, was off in a flash.

The post was tremendous, sprawling. Its proportions could not be concealed in the gathering dusk. The corporal drove to main headquarters, telling Roy that he would wait until he reported.

Entering, Lieutenant Raymond knocked at the door marked "Adjutant." He walked in quietly, saluted the captain seated behind the desk, handed him his orders. "Lieutenant Raymond reporting, sir," he said.

The captain returned the salute and consulted Roy's orders. Smilingly, he handed them back, saying, "Sorry, Lieutenant. You're in the right church but the wrong pew. Your outfit is located at the northeast corner of the post. Have you transportation?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Then have him take you there. And may I make this

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suggestion? Never report to a new station at this late hour. It complicates things for everyone, especially for yourself."

"Thank you, sir. Good night."

The corporal who knew the post deposited Roy in no time at the headquarters of the 610th Coast Artillery Antiaircraft Battalion. He placed the bags in the hall and drove off.

Repeating the same legend, Roy saluted the adjutant, in this case a second lieutenant, and presented his orders. He took what Roy felt was an unduly long time to read them. Scrutinizing Roy, he motioned him to a chair, saying, "Be seated, sir. I must see the major."

In fifteen minutes, the adjutant returned with the major, a tall, lanky red-faced man, who crisply said, "Make yourself at home, Lieutenant. Smoke a cigarette. I will have to see the colonel."

Thirty minutes elapsed. Roy began to wonder if the major hadn't become involved in a poker game and forgotten him. He had not had dinner while on the pullman. Safety had depended upon each move being the right one. Now he began to feel the pangs of real hunger. Looking around, he spied a Coca-Cola vender in a corner. He procured a bottle and, between sips, stole quick little glances at the adjutant who was engrossed in what appeared to be a novel. A slight turning of the knob of the door leading to the corridor caused him to look in that direction. At long last, they had come. The major opened the door and held it while the colonel walked ahead.

Approaching Roy, the colonel said, "Come into my office, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir," replied Roy, following him and the major.

The office was an immensely spacious room equipped with a large desk, metal files and chairs. Maps, charts, graphs and diagrams adorned the walls. The slight, medium-sized, sandy-haired colonel, imperturbable, gentle-looking, presented a striking contrast to the tall, lanky major whose staid bearing marked him immediately as a man of austerity. The colonel motioned Roy to a chair and began pacing the floor. He paused to light

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a cigarette and retraced his steps. The major, leaning against the desk, was motionless. Roy felt his eyes on him but could not understand what it was all about. He sensed that something was wrong, and that, despite a long absence, no conclusion had been reached.

Finally, the colonel faced Roy. "I'm Colonel Beecham," he said. "It is evident that Washington made a mistake in sending you to my command. We are the only all-white outfit on the post. All the others have white officers and Negro troops. Furthermore, except for two Negro chaplains, all officers on this post are white. Most of them are southerners. I myself am a southerner, born right here in Georgia. Now your assignment here presents a ticklish situation. It's obvious that you cannot be extended officer's privileges, such as the Officers' Mess Hall, the use of officers' clubs and quarters. To be frank, the men wouldn't stand for it. However, as a fellow officer, I'll do all that I can to make you as comfortable as possible and, in the meantime, see what disposition can be made."

Roy dragged on his cigarette. The whole thing seemed ridiculous. In civilian life it was a foregone conclusion that he mingle with white people in the various phases of daily living and have no one raise an eyebrow at his being a Negro. He felt humiliated, insulted. Had he read of this in the newspapers, he would have branded it propaganda. Slowly, he felt angered, bitter. He discarded his cigarette, then replied thickly, "That's fine condescension on your part, Colonel. However, I'm not interested in the race problem at this minute. My immediate concern is a bite to eat, a shower and bed. Failing this, you can put me on the next train headed for New York."

The colonel frowned. "It's not as easy as that, and you're certainly not helping the situation by that attitude, Lieutenant."

Roy blustered, "Well, what do you expect me to do? Go into ecstasy? Do you realize that I gave up a lucrative practice to volunteer into this mess? I took an oath as an officer. Now you tell me that, while I may be one, I cannot be treated as such. I am a man. Your brand of civilization down here prefers not

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to recognize the Negro either as a human being or as a soldier."

The major who had remained silent heretofore broke in hotly, "Do you realize that you are being insubordinate?"

Roy wheeled around and looked him in the face, disdainfully retorting, "If that's insubordination, make the most of it."

"When you speak to me, you say 'sir,'" the major countered with heat.

A half-concealed sneer played around the corners of Roy's mouth. He answered defiantly, "Sir, while I do not know my army regulations, sir, I can assure you, sir, that he who demands courtesies, sir, which, sir, are, sir——"

"Well, you God-damned ————," the major roared, charging at Roy, the blood vessels in his neck engorged, his face as red as a beet.

The colonel who was nearby stepped between them with a commanding, "Enough, gentlemen. At ease."

After both men had recovered their composure, Colonel Beecham with a stern face but calm voice addressed Roy. "Lieutenant Raymond, I will agree that yours is not an enviable position. Were it not for that and your newness to the service, I would take disciplinary action against you. There is a war going on, Lieutenant, and we must win it. Sectional methods of behavior are of secondary importance at this time. As for 'sir,' you certainly must have been a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at college and are well aware of military conventions when addressing superior officers. Your sarcasm to the major was an unnecessary provocation."

"I have never found sweetness in adversity. Neither do I subscribe to turning the other cheek, sir."

"We haven't time to go into all that. There is a guest house on the post for colored enlisted men. You will spend the night there until other provisions can be made." His tone was sharp, final.

"Where do I eat, Colonel?"

"The chaplains have a portion of an enlisted men's mess hall fixed up for themselves. I see no reason why you can't join them."

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Roy smiled wearily. "I could challenge that statement, Colonel, but you have all the aces."

"At 9 A.M. after breakfast," the colonel continued, ignoring the interruption, "a jeep will call for you. You will report to the commanding officer at Dental Clinic Number Two for duty."

"Aye, aye, sir," snapped Roy.

The colonel called the motor pool for transportation, and in a few minutes Roy was on his way.

The colored guest house was a twelve-room structure with an enormously spacious but cozy living room. Furniture was of Swedish maple and two-toned green leather. The curtain arrangement and color scheme had all the earmarks of a woman's touch. At the southeast corner of the room was a compact little office from which all activities could be discreetly supervised. Three soldiers were reading magazines and looked up at Roy's entrance. They followed him with their eyes, but no one spoke. Roy left his bags where the driver had deposited them and walked toward the office.

The hostess on duty rose as Roy approached the office. Colonel Beecham must have notified her of his coming since she greeted him with, "Welcome to our little family, Lieutenant."

"Thanks. I'm Lieutenant Raymond. You have a dainty little place here."

"I am Mrs. Winston, Clara Winston. We try to make this place as homey as possible."

Her voice was that of the cultured southerner, with just the faintest drawl. Roy viewed her with a masculine eye for feminine detail: small feet; well-shaped legs; thighs not extravagant, yet not penurious; waist and stomach doing well without apparent benefit of girdle; breasts just large enough to be cupped in one's palm. A cluster of dark brown wavy hair, which, even though the beautician might have accentuated it, screened a copper-colored complexion in which were embedded the full sensual lips of her African ancestors together with the chiseled nose and receding cheekbones of the Nordic counterpart. Beautiful? Almost. Yet, it was the round expressive eyes rather than the

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physical that attracted. Roy reflected how odd it was that a hungry, tired, upset man could momentarily forget all of his troubles when a striking woman such as this appeared. Maybe, after all that's said and written, hers is a definite purpose in life, like the traveler's palm in the oasis, to give solace and relief to the weary.

"I don't suppose you carry food here, Mrs. Winston," Roy asked, coming back to earth.

"No, we don't, and the servicemen's club is closed at this hour."

"Now I can appreciate that stuff about an army traveling on its stomach. But I've had enough bickering for one day. Furthermore, you were no doubt born and bred down here and would naturally think in terms of 'The Great White Fathers.'"

"The whole house doesn't have to fall in on me, Lieutenant. I can put two and two together. One of the commissioned corps is not usually housed in the enlisted men's quarters. And, believe it or not, I can understand how you feel. You're correct: I was born and bred right here. However, we southern colored people don't necessarily share the opinions of 'The Great White Father.' We dislike and resent the inequalities and injustices. Nevertheless, in most instances, we feel that we can catch more flies with molasses, if you know what I mean.

"White people can never be neutral. They either hate or love. You must either be a white man's nigger or remain a hated thing with the noose only an inch away if you make the first slip or wander into a trap. I have two brothers. Tom gets away with murder because he kowtows to Mr. Richards, the so-called squire of our town. Harry refuses to stoop. Driving around one day, the squire entered Harry's place. He spied a prize sow.

" 'That's a fine-looking hog you have over there, Harry.'

" 'Think so, Squire?'

" 'Sure. And just to prove it, I'm going to buy it from you.'

" 'But, he's not for sale, sir.'

" 'I said I will buy the sow, Harry.'

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"'And I said the hog is not for sale,' answered Harry doggedly, his heart sinking because he knew what he was in for.

"The squire reached into his coat pocket for a cheroot, bit off the end and lit it. With a half smile, half sneer, he took a puff and remarked, 'You haven't learned yet how to live with white folks, have you, Harry?'

"Sullenly, his quiet anger rising up to his throat, Harry replied, 'Have you learned to live with Negroes, sir?'

"The left side of the squire's mouth twitched back. He turned toward the gate. Over his shoulder, he said, 'An uppish nigger, eh? Rather an expensive dish, boy.'

"The next morning, the hog was found poisoned."

Roy's only response was, "You mentioned molasses a while ago. I don't know but that I could use some of it right now."

"Come to think of it," Clara responded with puckered lips, looking Roy squarely in the eye, "I didn't finish the sandwich which I usually bring along when I'm on this shift. If you're not too proud, you may have what's left."

Roy smiled. Viewing her again with renewed interest, he said, "You know what they say about beggars."

Clara led him into the little office. From the desk drawer, she produced a cheese sandwich neatly wrapped in wax paper. Handing it to him, she said, "Hope it isn't too dry, Lieutenant. I'll get you a coke to wash it down."

"Thanks so much. I appreciate your kindness."

"I suppose it's old southern hospitality," Clara responded, as she made her way to the door of the office.

Roy lowered the sandwich which he was about to eat. Without rancor, he replied, "I can see the southern, but, as to the hospitality, you'll pardon my saying I think it's highly overrated."

Half turning, Clara shrugged as she answered, "Oh, well," and left.

In her brief absence, Roy munched on his sandwich and mused how she was among the few women of all whom he had met that he would love to nudge good morning. Just as he fin-

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ished, Clara returned with the opened coke. She gave it to him and, while he sipped, sat across the desk from him, her face cupped in her palms. Neither spoke. Roy drank contentedly.

Softly, delicately, Clara said, "Lieutenant Raymond, one sparrow doesn't make a spring. So don't let your experiences tonight color your life to the extent that they embitter you."

Roy uttered a guttural laugh. He lit a cigarette, took a deep puff, filling the room with smoke, so much so that he could scarcely see the hostess. After a lengthy pause he said somewhat harshly, "Have no fear, Mrs. Winston. Long ago I decided that no individual or series of circumstances would affect my life to the extent that my feelings toward the rest of mankind would change materially. But I thank you for your solicitude."

Clara smiled. Without pursuing the subject, she said, "I must close up now. Here is the key to your room. It's number 9 on the left. Just go to bed—and don't think. I'm sure you'll feel lots better in the morning."

"Maybe," replied Roy without humor. Rising, extending his hand, he gently took hers. Raising her fingers to his lips, he remarked, "Something of the nineteenth century. It's almost forgotten now, but I can think of no other fitting way to say 'Thanks.' Will you please leave a note to have me called at seven-thirty?"

"Sure thing," answered Clara. Deeply touched, she watched him disappear down the corridor with his bags under his arms.

The next morning Roy was dead to the world when a series of taps awakened him.

"Yes? Who is it?" he asked, half asleep.

"I was told to wake you, sir."

"Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Thanks. Is the mess hall where the chaplains eat very far from here?"

"Oh, about a five-minute walk," answered the voice behind the door. "But I can call a jeep for you until you learn your way around."

"Thanks. Please do," said Roy, stretching his legs and flexing his muscles.

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He had no sooner finished his toilet and changed into his uniform than the arrival of the jeep was announced.

In broad daylight, the post was even more bewildering than at night. The place sparkled with cleanliness and order. Roy noticed that everyone whom he passed appeared to be on some definite mission. There was no loitering or idle wandering here. The driver pulled up at the mess hall, a replica of all the other buildings. Signing the route ticket, Roy asked him to return in forty-five minutes to pick him up.

Entering, a cursory glance showed him that a third of the large room was partitioned off with beaver board. A swinging door at the far end allowed passage of the mess attendants. The remaining two-thirds was reserved for use by the enlisted men. A long mess table extended the entire length of the room. A small utility table for the waiters' usage completed the meager furnishings. The two chaplains were already at breakfast. Roy's interest quickened imperceptibly as he noticed Clara Winston among their three female companions.

Roy hesitated on the threshold. The chaplain seated nearest him, a dark, stoutish man with graying hair, rose, extended his hand and said, "Good morning. Welcome to Camp Stewart, Lieutenant. Mrs. Winston was just telling us of your arrival last night. I am Chaplain Lee. My colleague here is Chaplain Brown."

The cordial greeting warmed his heart. Roy accepted the proffered hand and crossed over to Chaplain Brown. Smiling, he said, "Good morning to all of you. I'm Lieutenant Raymond. It's very nice of you to welcome me so—shall I say—so affectionately."

"It's just as it should be, Lieutenant," said Chaplain Brown, "especially in the army, for today you're here and tomorrow you're there. But, pardon me. I'm forgetting the ladies. Lieutenant Raymond, this is Miss Lane, our librarian; Miss Henry, one of our hostesses and Mrs. Winston whom you have already met."

Roy acknowledged the introductions. Then, looking directly at Clara, he remarked, "I had no idea of seeing you again this early, considering how late you closed the guest house."

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She smiled. "In a few days, you will have forgotten many civilian habits."

"Believe it or not," Roy retorted with laughter, "I've begun already."

"Is this your first time South, Lieutenant?" asked Chaplain Brown, apparently to make conversation.

"That's interesting," replied Roy. "I have met many southerners whom I would have taken for northerners. I wonder what makes you feel that I'm not one. Is my accent so different?" He sipped his fruit juice which had just been served and eyed the chaplain playfully.

"It's more than accent," the chaplain said softly. "It's a gesture, an attitude, even though unspoken, an approach."

"That invites discussion, Chaplain. But, to answer your question, yes. It is my first time South."

Roy regarded the speaker intently. A fine-looking man, he thought: a well-formed, strong mouth, lips not too Negroid; a highly arched nose, a trifle broad at the base; dark, searching eyes whose deep sockets failed to conceal their hunted look; a high, intellectual forehead the temples of which were laid bare by the receding salt and pepper hair. His very mien spoke refinement.

"I thought as much," continued the chaplain. "As an older man, I would suggest—and I'm not being rude—that you do not believe all the things you read in the northern papers. Things are not always as bad as they are painted. You see, Lieutenant, we get along pretty well down here with the white people. In fact, I number quite a few whites among my friends."

"I left New York, sir, with an open mind," Roy answered, "but what I have seen and experienced during these last twenty-four hours makes me feel that, had the South been permitted to secede in 1860, it would have been better for all of us. Now, it's my turn to request that you do not consider me rude. But may I ask whether these so-called white friends have ever invited you to dinner, to a visit in their homes? Has the

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relationship been one of condescension, patronage or mutual respect?"

Everyone had stopped talking. Eating was at a standstill so as not to disturb the conversation.

The chaplain frowned thoughtfully. Then, with a wistful smile, he replied, "I admire your candor, Lieutenant. It's a luxury I cannot afford. To digress, you say you come South with an open mind. Frankly, I've failed to see how any intelligent person maintains an open mind on a major issue. We all hold opinions, expressed or otherwise. But, to get back to our discussion, I don't expect my white friends to invite me to dinner. It would embarrass me. You fail to understand that the white people and I live in two different worlds. I'm just as content in mine as they are in theirs."

"Are you content to be eating in an enlisted men's mess hall when there is an officers' club and mess on the post?"

"But I don't consider myself any better than the enlisted men just because I'm an officer," was the gentle rejoinder.

"That's not the point, Chaplain. There's a principle at stake. Men have fought, and so have nations, for that small word."

After a pause, the chaplain replied with resignation, "I think that if you persist in your attitude, you will not only make yourself miserable but be courting trouble as well."

Roy continued doggedly, "As for making myself miserable, I can always withdraw into myself. One of the finer things that eastern schools teach is self-sufficiency. It will not be necessary to look abroad for love, pity, understanding or friendship. With regard to courting trouble, Chaplain, let me remind you that the coat of arms of this country is 'Peace if you will have it, fight if you must.' I know that the white people have the arms and they see to it that we don't. But one can fight and win without bullets. Ladies and gentlemen, forgive me. I think I've spoiled everyone's breakfast by starting this controversy. For one thing, it is certainly not conducive to digestion."

"It's quite all right," the librarian said, speaking for the first

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time. "It's a new slant, even though quite a militant one."

Roy glanced at his watch and began eating his bacon and eggs hurriedly. "I must report for duty at the dental clinic at nine o'clock," he said, "and, to win, one must not be caught napping at the switch."

The breakfast continued with less acrimony. Discreet questions and light banter served to clear the atmosphere. Everyone was in good humor when, at eight forty-five, the jeep arrived for Roy.

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# Three

LIEUTENANT COLONEL SNYDER, the commanding officer of Dental Clinic Number 2, was a small man whose slight boyishness was enhanced by a mass of gleaming gray hair. When Roy entered his office, he rose immediately to shake hands, saying that he had been informed of his assignment to the clinic and that he hoped he would find happiness in his new surroundings. Requesting Roy to be seated, he explained that his duties, together with those of forty-four other dentists, would be confined to fillings, inasmuch as the bulk of the work was in that phase of dentistry. Diagnoses, X rays, dentures and surgery had been delegated to those who had made those fields their specialties in civilian life. The commanding officer further explained that he was aware of the monotony of doing just one phase of one's profession day after day. However, the demands of the service took precedence over personal likes and dislikes.

He then proceeded to lead the way to the ground floor of the two-story structure which buzzed with activity. The lieutenant colonel introduced Roy personally to each operator. That accomplished, he escorted him upstairs where he was presented to Major Rojan, chief of clinic. The colonel then made his departure.

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The major, Roy thought, was quite a young man to hold a field grade rank. He was of that type of masculinity which might be termed passively aggressive. Blond, tall, slender, he addressed Roy in a manner representative of the true southern gentleman.

"You have been transferred to another battalion, Lieutenant. After you have met the men and checked in your instruments, you will be excused so that you can report to your new commanding officer. There you will request a roster of battalion strength. Tomorrow, instead of reporting here, arrange to examine all the men. Examine them wherever you find them: on the range, in the field, in the mess hall—even in the latrine. We have to know just what is to be done and do it. Speed and good work are essential. Within six months, we expect to be going overseas. The men must be dentally fit. Now, if you will come along with me, I'll introduce you to the men."

As Roy accompanied the major around the clinic, the series of introductions was interestingly varied. Many of the men gave firm, sincere handshakes. Some gave a limp kind of clasp which conveyed the impression that they might almost be holding a tadpole in their hands. A few merely bowed, but, all in all, they were not bad fellows to work with as the weeks of close contact revealed.

The only approach to anything unpleasant occurred on an afternoon when those dentists who had a half hour between appointments were smoking in an improvised lounge in the spacious lavatory at the end of the clinic. Roy relaxed with four other dental officers when another entered in a huff.

While washing his hands, he remarked, "Those damn niggers. I've never seen such broken-down mouths."

The others glanced stealthily at Roy but passed no comment.

Flicking the ashes from his cigarette, Roy retorted loudly, "Isn't that an indictment of the South?"

The officer in question stalked out without answering. The incident was altogether ignored.

The checking of his instruments having been completed, Roy

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called the motor pool for a jeep to take him to his new outfit, the 612th Coast Artillery Antiaircraft Battalion. In the absence of the commanding officer, he was received by the second in command, Major Holland. Military greetings were exchanged. The major affably offered Roy a cigarette and invited him to sit beside him. Roy was impressed with his friendliness and complete abandonment of the strict military dogma as he struck a match and held it to Roy's cigarette. The act was trite among smokers. To Roy, it assumed the proportions of a symbol. Looking at the major, he noticed his closely shaven, oval face, his pale blue eyes and somewhat reddish hair.

The major interrupted further scrutiny by saying, "If it will make you any happier, the colonel and I have discussed your case and have decided to help you as much as we can. By helping you, I mean treating you as another officer in this battalion." After a somewhat lengthy pause, he continued, "You are from New York, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"That won't make things any better. In fact, it tends to arouse feeling against you. You will not only be considered a nigger but also a foreigner. You see, I'm speaking from experience. I'm from Maine and even I am considered a damn Yankee foreigner. I want you to feel free to come to me for advice whenever you find the going too tough. But you must remember this: I can give you little physical support. I'm just another cog in this vast machine. Majors can be bought a dime a dozen on this post."

"Now as to the question of your lodgings," he continued, "it has been decided to move you out of the guest house. It is restricted to the visiting families of the enlisted personnel. It is hardly adequate for the strength of this post, so a permanent abode there would deprive an enlisted man from sharing it. There is a large room behind the library which is being fixed up at this moment as quarters for you."

"Is there a shower on the premises, Major?"

"No, but that can be arranged later."

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"In renting an apartment in New York, we never accept promises. The general feeling is that it is wiser to have all improvements completed before occupancy. Now, Major Holland, you have been kind even to the point of being indulgent, but I should prefer to have renovations finished before I move in. The heat down here is equatorial, and with the popular conception that Negroes give off an odor, I must insist—and I hope that you will not think me presumptuous—that the shower be installed before I move in."

"Mmmm. Good point, Lieutenant. So shall it be. With the plumbing for the toilet, the job can be done within twenty-four hours."

"Thanks, Major. This interview has been a liberal education to me. I will no longer subscribe to the tenet that all good white men died a million years ago."

The major laughingly said, "That's a new one." He rose and dismissed Roy.

Outside, Roy felt a sense of exhilaration which prompted him to whistle softly to himself as he picked his way back to the guest house.

For the next two weeks, Roy's military duties kept him so busy that he had little time to think of himself. Inasmuch as dentists received spot commissions and knew nothing about the Army of the United States, classes were held from six to eight weeks to indoctrinate the newly recruited officers into the customs of the service. There were lectures on military correspondence, military courtesy, sanitation, the setting up of an aid station; care, transportation, classification and distribution of the wounded; field reports and a host of other subjects which were both enlightening and interesting.

However, on returning to his quarters, Roy felt a sense of loneliness which was deeper than any he had experienced. It was more destructive because he had met several friendly and charming fellows, men of formal education, and cultural background, men who spoke his language. But they were enlisted

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men, and the army took a firm stand against fraternization between the enlisted and commissioned corps. Even though a standing invitation was extended to visit his room, partake of a drink and hold a bull session, the men were apparently timid because of the long arm of military retribution. Hence, Roy read more than he normally would have, especially since he had easy access to the post library. While at college, he had been told that every educated man should be an authority on some great personality: novelist, statesman or scientist; that he should read his biographies and autobiography, in fact, everything that he had ever written. Roy selected Thomas Hardy. Since he had already read most of his major works, the self-appointed task brought him a measure of joy and comfort.

The librarian, Miss Lane, was a female edition of Ichabod Crane. With the exception of a set of beautiful teeth, Nature had been very niggardly toward her physically. However, her interest in books prompted her to fall in line with Roy's whim of the moment. She therefore secured for him from other libraries on the post and from some in nearby Savannah those books which she did not possess. Had he been able to sit and discuss some of the books with her, more zest would have been added to the undertaking. The library, as one might suspect, was solely for use by enlisted men. To invade their place of relaxation could have been done to display such bad taste was definitely not in order. Then, too, the men were rigidly disciplined regarding their conduct in the presence of an officer. To see an officer cavorting with the librarian, even though not a thing of beauty, would have been resented. While we all admire the peacock, we do not look unfavorably on the crow in her absence.

As the nights pyramided, a feeling of monotony began to seep in. The books became boresome, and, gradually, this lovely adventure into literature began to lose its savor. Finally, one night, Roy reached for his hat and sauntered out aimlessly. Maybe fatigue or the ever-mysterious night would lend respite.

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Approaching the theater of the area, Roy spied a familiar figure. He increased his step to overtake her as he recognized Clara.

"Not a bad sight for sore eyes," he greeted her.

"Thanks," she smiled. "Are you going in?"

"No. But since you left before the show was over, I take it that it was not so good," Roy answered, falling in step with her.

"No. It wasn't the show. I felt restless and moody, so I thought the show would perk me up. Fact is, it made me feel worse."

"Most moodiness can be diagnosed as financial or of the heart."

"I can't agree with you. No emotion is ever dismissed that easily. However, in a sense, it was the heart. I got a letter this morning from my husband who's overseas, and that's what started it all."

"I don't mean to change the subject, but if you're going to the guest house, may I walk you there?"

"You may. It's O.K. with me."

"Now, to resume what we were saying. Do you feel that if you were not married, your emotional life here on the post, restricted as it is, would be different?"

"Yes, I think it would. When a woman marries, she makes adjustments which are hard to unmake, even if she becomes a widow."

"I agree with you. It has always been my theory that a woman's emotions are like a horse who, once having tasted oats, is reluctant to return to grass."

Clara didn't answer immediately. Finally she laughed softly, countering, "What of a man? Why single out the woman? Are our emotions so different?"

"I'll answer you with a quotation: 'Love to a man is a thing apart, to a woman her whole existence.'"

"The conceit of you men has always floored me, and don't forget, Mister Lieutenant, Brother Byron, whom you just quoted,

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was also a man," she answered, turning her head to look into his face.

He smiled. Then they both broke into laughter.

"I think I'll have to go and dig up Byron and have him batttle this out with you. However, that inverted bowl up there which we choose to call the sky is too beautifully lined with stars tonight to be neglected."

"That's a graceful retreat, Lieutenant. I must agree. It is a beautiful night, isn't it? By the by, I don't recall you ever mentioning whether or not you are married."

"Oh, I'm single," said Roy simply.

"I have always felt that marriage is such a great adventure that a person is either a coward or without imagination to run away from it."

"It isn't always running away. Sometimes, you can't when you would, and when you would, you can't."

"Sounds a bit complicated. How about explaining?"

"Well," he said, "I'll be personal. I couldn't get married while I was in school because I couldn't afford to risk the possibility of having a child—and I met some very nice girls. When I had finished and started to practice and was able to marry, the war began."

"Oh, Lieutenant, that reason doesn't hold water. People are getting married almost every day on this post. The guest house is full of newlyweds."

"True. Only I do things differently. I don't think most of these marriages will stand up a year after the war is over. In most cases, they smack of legalized prostitution. If the poor devil gets killed, his newly acquired wife inherits ten grand. What if he returns maimed? Can you expect anyone to be solicitous and loving for life to a cripple whom she married over a glass of whisky or slept with for a night and had it go to her head?"

"That's putting it brutally, to say the least. It bears an atom of truth. But I never cross a bridge until I get to it."

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"That philosophy, my dear Mrs. Winston, has caused more misery than tears can wash away."

They were almost to the guest house. Roy took Clara's hand in his. It was soft and cool. Looking straight ahead, he said gently, "Thanks for the walk and words of wisdom. You'll never know the service you rendered."

"Nor you," she answered almost inaudibly.

"I think I'll turn back here."

"It's best. G'night."

" 'Night."

Roy reached his quarters sooner than he expected, but small wonder; he walked home with his head buried in the star-decked heavens above. His thoughts and feelings could not be described. They had no form. One might liken them to an eerie thing which did not care to be clothed, yet a wanton thing which disdained imprisonment. It preferred to soar into space without the anchorage of the material. It was like the moon, big, round, towering, soft yet fiery. But who could clothe a thing which at one time is half, then full and finally not at all?

After he had undressed, he lay in the dark smoking. He recounted every detail of his conversation with Clara. He lingered over that moment when he had held her hand. He recalled its softness, its coolness. He rememberd the long tapering fingers. He paused to recall that she had not resisted his placing her hand in his, nor had she withdrawn it. It had lain against his palm quiet, still, dormant. He wondered if it were significant yet was afraid to come to a conclusion. He fell asleep taking refuge in the thought that, if he never attempted to brush his lips against hers, he would never know their softness—if there were any. Neither could he be repulsed, not having tried. Perhaps it might be better to remain uncertain rather than suffer a rebuff. Asleep, he dreamed that he had kissed her and that there was softness and nectar in the embrace.

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# Four

ROY MADE no attempt to see Clara the next evening or the one following that. He felt that he didn't have the right to thrust himself upon her without further encouragement. As the nights lengthened their long shadows, his lonesomeness began to play havoc with his emotions. Things came to a head one afternoon when he ran into Major Holland. Roy saluted him in a careless, slipshod manner.

The major stopped, and in a friendly way said, "Try it again, Lieutenant."

Roy complied, this time more snappily.

"The salute, you know, Lieutenant, more than anything else, gives an indication of the soldier's thinking and morale. Yours, I would say, is at its lowest ebb."

"Quite right, sir, and I wish I could do something about it."

"Well, why not ask for a transfer? Your reasons for the request must of course be convincing. There are other camps in the country where there are Negro officers. You would find life more tolerable."

"Thanks for the information, Major. I'll do it tonight."

The major continued, "There is an inspector general on the

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post whose duties are to make adjustments for personnel who, like you, are meeting with difficulties."

"I shall utilize that possibility. Thank you ever so much."

"Forget it. Forget it. Good luck."

Roy returned to his room. After consulting his notes on military correspondence, he began to draft this letter:

*Subject:* Request for Transfer
*To:* Commanding Officer
612th Coast Artillery Antiaircraft Battalion
Camp Stewart, Georgia
1. Officer requests transfer for the following reasons . . .

On second thought, Roy decided to write the letter in the customary civilian form. He felt that the appeal would be greater from a psychological point of view. He hoped that a letter, written contrary to stiff, military convention, would catch the eye—and the hearts—of the higher-ups. Thus, he began again:

Sept. 17, 1942

Col. Richard Scott, Commanding Officer
612th Coast Artillery Antiaircraft Battalion
Camp Stewart, Georgia

SIR:

I hereby formally request transfer from this post for the following reasons:

1. As a commissioned officer, I am denied treatment which is in keeping with my rank. For example, I'm compelled to eat field rations with the enlisted personnel under conditions distasteful to me. The premise is that the white officers would rise up in arms were I to eat under the same roof with them.
2. Being the only Negro with a commission, outside of two chaplains, I have no social or intellectual comradeship whatsoever. The result is that, of neces-

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sity, in order not to remain a recluse, I am compelled to frequent the post exchange and, over a bottle of beer, relieve the strain of ostracism.

3. There are many camps where the Negro officer is not an oddity. I am requesting, sir, that you effect my transfer to one of them. I would like to point out, sir, that I am a New Yorker. Southern traditions are reprehensible to me. I fail to see how, under the above circumstances, I can contribute my small help to the war effort. Permit me, sir, to quote from Training Memorandum #38, dated Sept. 1, 1942:

> Par. 1: The soldier must be treated as a man. Treat him as you would like to be treated.
>
> Par. 29: Our men must be as comfortable as possible. . . . They must have some reward for enthusiastic and efficient training service.
>
> Par. 31: Regardless of race, color or creed, our aim is to produce highly trained antiaircraft units and soldiers. While doing this, we must also make every effort to inculcate in our men pride in being an American citizen, being selected to bear arms against our enemies, impress upon the men not only the advantages of being a citizen of the United States but stress also the responsibilities pertaining thereto.

4. Between the reasons for my petition for a transfer and these quotations, there exists a contradiction which none but the blind could fail to see. Hence, my request.

Thanking you for your indulgence in this matter, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

ROY RAYMOND
*1st Lt., Dental Corps*

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Roy asked one of the men who was in charge of headquarters that night to type the letter for him. Signing it, he placed it on the colonel's desk, feeling quite satisfied with himself. Leaving headquarters, he proceeded to the exchange, where he mused contentedly over his beer.

Next morning Roy got up early. He ambled over to the 612th headquarters where he found the charge of quarters peacefully dozing away. Noticing that the colonel's door was ajar, he crept into the office to learn whether the colonel had returned the previous night and had seen his letter. To his astonishment, there lay the letter in open view. Written below Roy's signature was the following:

> 1st Endorsement. Transfer granted. The officer is justified. I suggest that his transfer be effected as soon as possible before this material gets into other channels, provoking adverse civilian criticism.
>
> R. SCOTT, COLONEL, CA AA
> *Commanding*

Roy smiled and quietly left the building.

Desiring to leave no stone unturned, he sought out the post inspector. Clearing the adjutant, he found himself face to face with a stern, elderly man whose eagles rested serenely on his shoulders. His cold, blue eyes looked unblinkingly at Roy.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I think, sir, that a perusal of this duplicate letter to my commanding officer will tell the whole story," said Roy, as he handed him the letter.

The colonel took it, frowned repeatedly as he read, intermittently glancing at Roy. When he had finished, he handed the letter back, saying, "Where can I reach you by phone, Lieutenant?"

"At Dental Clinic Number 2, Colonel."

"Go back to work, Lieutenant. I'll call Washington and con-

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tact you as soon as possible. Another thing, Lieutenant: don't carry a chip on your shoulders. If this is the only mistake the War Department has made, then the war will be over this week end. Expect my call."

"Thank you, sir," said Roy, bowing his way out.

The morning session at the clinic had not ended when the supply sergeant announced the call. From the other end of the phone, a clipped voice addressed him.

"Lieutenant Raymond?"

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel Gates speaking. Your transfer has come through. Within twenty-four hours, you will receive orders. I hope you will be happy at your new post."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"That's quite all right. You're welcome. Good-by and good luck."

Roy sat in a daze by the phone, overcome by the rapid change of events. He nervously puffed a cigarette, absent-mindedly watching the smoke fade away. All at once, he became aware of Major Rojan, chief of clinic. Roy was always at ease with him.

"Aha. Caught in the act. Not working today?" the major jokingly asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. I have just been transferred. My orders are being cut."

"I suppose congratulations are in order."

"Frankly, yes. Major Rojan, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the fine way you have treated me. I am sincerely grateful. I can truly say this has been the only bright spot in my brief military career."

"I'm glad to hear that. I'm a southerner, so don't think too badly of all of us. Now, don't bother finishing the day. The sergeant will check out your instruments. You still have to pack and attend to minor details such as clearing the field. My very best to you."

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They shook hands warmly. Roy bade the operators good-by, then hurried away to his room.

His packing finished, Roy indulged in his usual habit of lying across the bed smoking. His thoughts strayed to Clara. Closing his eyes, he recalled the dream he had had of her. More than ever, he felt the desire of losing himself in the mysterious pools of darkness that lay deep within her large, brown eyes. Common courtesy required him to bid her good-by; the promptings of his heart insisted that he do so. He shaved, changed his uniform, whistling softly off-key to himself the while.

It was twilight before Roy got started. Clara sat in her customary place on the guest-house lawn. Dressed in a hand-embroidered peasant blouse, with matching ballerina skirt, she presented a charming picture as she relaxed in a beach chair, her shapely legs stretched out before her. She smiled as Roy approached. Looking at him intently, she said, "Well, you certainly resemble the cat who ate the pet canary."

"Could be, but I had no idea that it was so obvious in this dusk. Truth is that I'm being transferred tomorrow and, among other things, I've come to say good-by."

"Good-by. All joking aside, I'm sorry that the prospect of leaving gives you so much pleasure; yet, for a long time, I have appreciated your position. By the way, why pick me for good-by when there are three other hostesses on the post?"

"You know what they say about one rose in a vase."

"Lieutenant Raymond, I have always admired your gift for turning a phrase pleasantly, only when it is used impersonally, however."

"My dear Mrs. Winston, that is a half-truth. Why be prosaic if you can say a thing elegantly? The trouble with most of us is—well, let me illustrate by telling you a very short story. You give the answer, if you will. Two men are in love with the same girl. One is shy, timid. Shall we dub him Mr. Country? The

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other is bold, polished, Mr. City Slicker. The lady is coming downstairs; both men are at the door. Mr. Country rushes to open it. In utter confusion, bathed in perspiration, he can't even find the knob. The lady smilingly waits. Mr. City Slicker walks over, gracefully opens the door, saying with a low bow, 'May I have the pleasure?' The young lady smiles her acknowledgment and makes her exit. Now, according to your line of reasoning, smug City Slicker couldn't possibly be as much in love as clumsy Mr. Country, isn't that so?"

After a somewhat lengthy silence, Clara observed, "That's a farfetched example. Furthermore, I've always felt that too much suavity smacks of insincerity or a vast amount of previous experience."

"So, you care for Mr. Country, eh?"

"Let's not discuss it further. A fine way to say good-by."

"O.K. O.K. Forget it."

They sat in silence on the rolling lawn while the darkness gradually enmeshed them, each smoking, alone with his thoughts. The area was deserted because of a dance at the servicemen's club. Finally, Clara, in her quiet southern drawl, broke the silence.

"Since it is your last night, I suppose I should invite you to a farewell drink. It's not customary to entertain men in our rooms. However, with discretion, we can get around that convention. So, Lieutenant Raymond, of New York and points East, if you will accompany me, I'll perform the honors."

"Spoken like a perfect southern belle. While the scent of jasmine and magnolia is still fresh in my nostrils, I'll follow thee wherever thou shalt lead."

Clara said nothing during all this banter. She entered her quarters without looking back at Roy who followed close behind. The room, a spacious one, at the end of the corridor, boasted of nothing save cleanliness and tricky curtains. The settee was a combination sofa and bed. A screen concealed what could be roughly called a kitchenette. Behind this Clara disappeared to

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return shortly with a bottle of Southern Comfort, two glasses and a bottle of ginger ale. She mixed the drinks and, sitting beside him, offered one to Roy.

In accepting, he remarked, "It's unfortunate that this must be our first and last drink. Still more unfortunate that I have had to dream of love all these difficult weeks and be unable to speak of it. It reminds me of something I read years ago which went something like this: 'To dream of love and not to speak of love has the infinite pathos of an unfinished song.'"

"That's strange. I hadn't noticed that reticence is one of your virtues."

"You give me the impression that you are taking this lightly. Would you have had me speak?"

Clara looked him straight in the eye. "Yes, I would, even though brazenness is not characteristic of me. Yet, who really knows one's self? I'm married to a G.I., now overseas. Until I met you, I'd never been unfaithful to him, not even in thought—not that I consider faithfulness in itself such a towering virtue. I've been satisfied, contented, happy. I love my husband, Roy. He's a good boy. Out there, on the lawn, I wondered whether this attraction I have had for you would have existed had he been here to compete, to protect me from you. I've been lonely as only a woman can be lonely, but, somehow, I managed to adjust to the pattern of life on the post. Then, you came along, destroying an organized, secure life—and tomorrow, you're leaving."

Clara began to sob quietly. Roy folded her in his arms and, brushing her hair aside from her forehead, smoothed it back. He traced with his thumb the arch of her eyebrow; he delicately kissed each side of her nose. Framing her face in the palms of his hands, he gazed steadily into her eyes, searching for the answers to all the questions he could not bring himself to ask. She tenderly put her arms around him, running her fingers behind his ear, caressing the back of his neck. She kissed the corner of his mouth and pressed her cheek to his. Roy held her in close embrace. They had almost drifted into a complete

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reverie when a tightening of his arms prompted her to struggle for release. With great reluctance, he loosened his grasp until she was free.

"Clara," he said, "is the struggle to preserve the chastity of your marriage vows worth the price of eventual mental illness?"

"My dear, it would be comforting to warm myself in the glow of your affection. But I love my husband."

"I know a girl who fought as you are fighting. She became ill. No one could help her, not even the doctors. She went to two or three psychiatrists. Each one advised physical satisfaction. She took their advice. Very soon thereafter, in a fit of remorse, she wrote her husband. In answering, he merely mentioned the incident by saying, 'I've had a wonderful furlough in Australia.'"

Clara rose slowly, freshened the drinks, began to sip hers. With misty eyes, she clinked glasses with him. "Roy," she said, "I'll have to put you out. I'm no prude. I can think of no greater pleasure than sharing this couch with you. But I must think of tomorrow. People say that love is blind. Personally, I believe that love just doesn't care to see. In my case, I see. I've gotten used to these lonely, loveless, manless nights. What would happen to me if I took this moment of joy—with you leaving tomorrow? How would my spirit and body react? What other adjustment could I make? No, dear. I must not destroy the peace of mind of tomorrow for the happiness of this moment tonight."

She finished her drink hurriedly. Standing with his hat in her hand, she waited for him to finish also.

Alone, Clara sat in the corner of the sofa smoking a cigarette in confusion. She wondered whether she had acted wisely. There is no halfway mark between right and wrong, but who is to judge in the final analysis, she queried. Love is an honor. Can one toss it aside and have done with it for all time? She remembered going into his arms as though drawn by a magnet. She had been attracted to him from the first night, in spite of loving her husband. Is it possible to love two men at the same time, she asked herself. If both men were present and were competing for her, would she be indifferent as to who won,

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having cared for both? She wished she could believe that her husband had been as faithful to her as she to him. Perish the thought. Men aren't supposed to be. This is a man's world. Pity the woman who tries to invade it. Her deep sense of loyalty kept her from feeling cynical. Spiritually, she had already been an unfaithful wife. Between the spiritual and the physical, wherein lay the greater sin, she wondered.

Clearing the post is a very practical army procedure. It merely involves visiting every agency where a bill might have been contracted or some army equipment borrowed. The officer can then leave the station free of obligations or debt. In the case of Camp Stewart, the post was so immense that it was the practice to let a non-commissioned soldier do the rounds for you, except for a few incidentals which had to be taken care of personally.

Having received his orders during the day to report to Tuskegee Airfield in Alabama, Roy went to the transportation section to make inquiries of the sergeant in charge of transportation. He was directed to Captain Hicks.

He approached the captain's desk and said, "Captain Hicks, I am Lieutenant Raymond. I would like you to secure me pullman accommodations to Tuskegee, Alabama."

"When are you leaving?"

"Today, sir."

"But, it's already two o'clock. I doubt if it can be arranged. Why don't you go to Savannah and contact the stationmaster personally. I'm sure your comamnding officer would give you transportation there."

"You're forgetting one thing." Roy smiled as he spoke.

"What's that?" asked the captain.

"I'm a Negro. Do you think I can buy pullman accommodations down here, officer or otherwise?"

The captain blushed and replied, "I hadn't thought of that angle. Return in an hour! I'll do what I can to help you."

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"Thanks very much. I have to get a bite to eat anyhow, so I'll kill some time that way."

Custom made it impossible for him to enter any post exchange whatsoever and order a sandwich and coke, inasmuch as most of them were restricted to white personnel only. Paradoxically, the whites used exchanges reserved for Negroes, but it didn't work in the opposite way. In order to expedite things, Roy walked up to the first Negro soldier he saw and asked where he could find a post exchange for Negroes. He proceeded as directed.

Apparently, among those things which produce the subtlest brands of amusement are witticisms and the ridiculous. Roy chuckled to himself. Just fancy a man fighting to preserve democracy even at the cost of loss of life, who couldn't order a pullman to get him to a post to which the government had assigned him, or drop into an exchange to make a purchase. Washing his sandwich down, he looked at his watch, shrugged his shoulders and reported back to Captain Hicks.

"Well, Lieutenant, you're lucky. I succeeded in getting a compartment for you to Montgomery, Alabama. However, you'll have to proceed to Tuskegee by bus, a distance of about forty-three miles. Your train, an express, will be flagged down at Hinesville. You'll have to be there at the station at seven-thirty."

"Thanks a lot, Captain. The next time we meet, if ever, I hope you'll be wearing oak leaves."

"Hm. I have them right here in my pocket, just waiting for the day to come."

They both laughed significantly. Roy took the ticket which the captain handed him and saluted his way out.

The scene at Hinesville at seven-thirty was enough to stir the wrath of the most staid southerner. The train was flagged down. A white boy, burdened down with Roy's bags, entered the coach from which the stationmaster was signaling with his lantern. Behind him strolled Roy nonchalantly, his hands in

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his pockets. The boy deposited the luggage in the train aisle, collected a tip and withdrew.

Seeing that Roy was a Negro, the conductor abruptly asked, "Where are your tickets?"

Without bothering to answer, Roy handed him the pullman accommodations.

The conductor glared at them and said, "Go back there into the coach where you belong."

Roy stared at him in open hostility. He answered, "I suppose you know that these are for a compartment?"

The conductor replied, "I don't know anything about that."

The train started with a gentle motion.

Roy retorted, "I take it you can read."

The conductor controlled his rage with great effort and finally bellowed, "Go back there and see if the boy has anything for you."

Roy managed to carry his three bags with him, not daring to trust the hostile conductor or the sullen passengers who had gathered to listen to the conversation. To his surprise, the porter in the compartment section advanced and said, "I'll take your bags, Lieutenant. You'll find your room on the first door to the left."

"How did you know I had that particular reservation?"

"We're given a list before we leave the station yard."

"Why wasn't the conductor informed?"

The porter merely smiled. Roy understood and smiled also—bitterly.

The trip to Montgomery was without event. On arrival, Roy taxied to the Greyhound bus terminal. He had become sufficiently callous by this time not to be vexed on entering the familiar stench-ridden, filthy waiting room labeled "Colored." He peered in indifferent expectation through the ticket window into the well-appointed room for the whites. However, he was more than amazed when he framed the ticket window for over forty-five minutes while the clerk completely ignored him. Over

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the loud-speaker system, it was announced that the bus to Tuskegee would depart in five minutes. In anger and despair, Roy rapped frantically on the window. The clerk merely glanced around. After another half hour had passed, he stepped to the window.

"What seems to be your trouble?"

"I will say this: you people down here practice a brand of sadism that even Freud would have marveled at." Without waiting for an answer, Roy pushed the ticket toward him.

The clerk fingered it and barked, "Sign here."

In his anger, instead of signing it Lieutenant Raymond, he signed it in the accustomed manner, Roy Raymond, D.D.S.

"Damn it," roared the clerk, "you've spoiled this ticket."

"Nothing of the sort," replied Roy, realizing his error. He boldly inserted Lieutenant and crossed out D.D.S. The ticket was issued without further comment, but Roy had to wait four hours before boarding the next bus to Tuskegee.

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# Five

ALTHOUGH TUSKEGEE, Alabama, was settled by French traders in the eighteenth century, it was Booker T. Washington, ex-slave, who brought it fame and made it a thriving community. Like all southern villages, it is comprised of two distinct parts, one for Negroes, the other for whites. The white area is the business section. There the Negroes must go to shop. There also can be found the town's one moving-picture theater. Two buildings, exact duplicates of each other, for use by the two races, stand side by side. Tuskegee Veterans' Hospital for Negroes, which is nearby, is one of the chief sources of revenue. That, together with Tuskegee Army Airfield, seven miles away, brought all of the war boom which helped to swell the coffers of the tradesmen and merchants of the area.

The Negroes were treated with a relative degree of respect, but if any were found in the section after the theater closed, they were subject to questioning. Notwithstanding, relations between the races were fair until Negro military police from the airbase attempted to assert their prerogatives upon white men. It almost precipitated a riot. The white commanding officer of the base prevented Negro military police from carrying guns

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on their beats thereafter. Night sticks became their only weapons. On the other hand, every white male was reputedly appointed a deputy sheriff with all of the privileges that went with the office.

A comparison of the dwellings of the two sections presented the oddities and contradictions which are so common to the South. While the Negro section where Tuskegee Institute is located could boast of modern, well-designed buildings, those of the white section were for the most part inferior. The institute which has gained world-wide fame was endowed to the amount of seven million dollars. That might possibly account for the contrast in conditions.

The chapel of the institute is a beautiful work of architecture whose stained-glass windows depict themes from Negro spirituals. The Carver Museum, the importance of which stems mainly from a cultural point of view, is constructed along modern lines. It houses the Carver exhibits and is a museum of Negro art and culture with dioramas portraying Negro contributions to world civilization. It also contains a part of the famous Blondiau collection of African art as well as collections of contemporary American Negro art. The museum is named after the institute's greatest teacher, George Washington Carver, another ex-slave, whose work with the peanut, sweet potato and soil conservation brought him international recognition. Since Carver took a mystic slant on life, he gave to the South gratis all of his original discoveries. An unusual lesson in man's ingratitude to man was taught at his funeral when dignitaries from all over the United States paid him homage by their presence, but the governor of Alabama, whose capital was only forty-seven miles away, could only send a telegram.

Tuskegee Army Airfield turned out to be a small post nestled snugly in a quiet Alabama valley. The post itself was unique. It went through the motions of integration without actually implementing them. Its very inception as a flying field for the schooling and training of Negroes as pilots was a pacification of the Negro press and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. There appeared no tangible evidence

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in 1942 that the War Department had any idea of using Negro pilots in combat. Nevertheless, the cadets were thoroughly trained and rigidly disciplined. Unlike the white cadet who, on receiving his wings, was sent into combat after a definite number of flying hours, the policy was different regarding Negroes. They piled up so many flying hours that, from sheer boredom, when unobserved, many began to engage in stunt flying. Some buzzed housetops. Others tried to pilot their planes between two trees. The obvious result was that the casualties began to mount. To complicate matters, the aircraft was antiquated. Some of the planes had been used by Chennault's Flying Tigers in the China campaign.

The Negroes comprised approximately three-quarters of the field officer personnel. The remaining one-quarter white officers held all the ranks and were placed in all key positions. It was commonly asserted that the white officers received their promotions by "climbing on the backs of the Negroes."

All of the Negro officers could be classified into two groups: the ambitious and industrious or the plain parvenus. The latter usually advanced.

Another facet of southern attitude was a chauvinism which recognized no color line. Most Negro cadets and officer training candidates were southern boys. The white northern officers who were opportunists curried favor with their southern brothers by adopting their philosophy in the treatment of Negro troops. Once this Confederate approach was embraced, they became blood brothers and advanced. The few who remained aloof either received no promotions or were transferred.

The field had a splendid theater, a well-appointed officers' club and a bowling alley. However, they were never frequented by the white officers. The latter preferred to remain huddled in a third-class hotel in Tuskegee proper, where recreational facilities were meager or absent. This left the field to be enjoyed exclusively by Negroes after retreat at five o'clock. The command turned an indulgent eye away from the promiscuities of the Negro officers which is not unusual in wartime. Women could

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be entertained in the officers' quarters until midnight. Since the mouse will frequently play when the proverbial cat is away, the deadline was not always observed.

In all the labyrinth of interlocking subcommands, the station hospital presented the healthiest spot. The physicians, dentists and nurses had their separate mess and recreation halls. It was a nice little medical family with the key position held as usual by a white physician. Even here, the lust for rank and power was not absent. It has been the observation of many sincere men that the healing art and the ministry should not share in the echelon of rank. As soon as a physician or a parson becomes a major or a colonel, you can expect neither bedside condolence nor divine humility from either. Each forgets his calling and thinks mainly of the rank he holds and the authority it wields. So was it at Tuskegee.

The dental clinic was small, having only three chairs. The personnel consisted of three Negro dental officers, all first lieutenants, and a major in command. He was an inoffensive mulatto whose preoccupation with becoming a lieutenant colonel left him no time to be bothersome. Life in the clinic was pleasant and unhurried, as is usually the case when professional men are not working in competition. Furthermore, no one had any illusions about promotions since none were being made at this time. Any improvement upon one's civilian training was not to be expected via the army. However, since all three dentists were graduates of different schools, it naturally followed that, by daily contact, each had something to offer the other.

Most physicians at army air bases are flight surgeons. This is a specialized form of medicine called aviation medicine. It has to do with the effects of flying on the pilot. Randolph Field in Texas was the training center. No Negroes were ever sent there. To compromise, the War Department arranged a correspondence course for its Negro medics. Learning of this discrimination, the Negro press began a campaign to have it abolished. Through the efforts of the white surgeon of the station hospital, the War Department finally selected two physicians to

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spearhead the Frankenstein which the department itself had created. The men were selected on the basis of contact with white people, scholarship, poise, evenness of disposition and, most important of all, humility, i.e., the ability to take a slight or an insult without retaliating. In giving his final instructions, the surgeon made it clear that there could be no ten percent margin for error. If they failed, and he reiterated that he was not emphasizing scholarship, then that particular avenue would be closed forever to Negroes. It is a tough assignment to tote the burden of the entire race on one's shoulders. Nonetheless, the physicians succeeded and, in so doing, paved the way for many others.

While Alabama was a wet state, Tuskegee was bone dry. Bootlegging among enlisted and officer personnel was rampant. Considering the traffic, it was astonishing that so few were caught. A fifth of whisky purchased at Montgomery for a little more than three dollars was sold from ten to twelve dollars on the post. Considering the risk, the price was accepted as fair and no one was ever left with merchandise on his hands. When an officer procured a bottle, he usually invited his pet cronies to share it to the exclusion of all pikers. As Fate would have it, one officer seemed to have the nose of a bloodhound. Although there were at least ten buildings in the officer section, one had only to uncork a bottle to have him appear immediately with his ingratiating smile. He always appeared with his "calling card," a portable player and a special recording to which the men had taken a fancy and which they never seemed to tire of hearing. It was a most unfortunate day when he dropped the record and learned, to his dismay, that he would have to provide his own refreshments.

Supper was just over and the hospital personnel were leaving the mess hall when Lieutenant Charles Byfield, the chief of dental clinic, whispered to Roy, "I have a bottle in my room. How about getting together tonight after the first show at the movies for a real old-fashioned bull session? I've asked Frank

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too. You fellows beat up your gums so much in the clinic, this should be your meat."

"Swell," said Roy. "I have a lot of hot air I feel like getting rid of tonight. Where'd you get the bottle?"

"From Jenkins."

"Has he any more?"

"He has just come back from Montgomery. I think he's loaded."

"Fine. I'll hustle over there and get one. From what I know of you fellows, it will take a whole bottle to wash the cobwebs out of your heads and start you gassing."

"O.K., Socrates," replied Charles, walking away. "The more the merrier. See you after the show."

On his way over to Lieutenant Jenkins' quarters, Roy met Lieutenant Merryl Mackie and Captain Blood, supply officer. Hailing them, he said, "Hi, heroes. Are you two in the mood for a bull session tonight?"

"Why not?" inquired Mackie, the medical officer.

"Always ready for one," joined in Blood.

"Frank and Charles will be in on it also. In fact, it's at Charles's quarters. I'm going over to Jenkins to buy a bottle. He was in Montgomery today," added Roy significantly.

"What the hell is this, a military secret? I'm going with you," Mackie declared. "My tonsils are parched for a little alcohol."

"I had mine removed a few years ago," Blood laughed. "But some other part of my anatomy can stand a little watering. So all three of us will see Brother Jenkins."

Charles had a room at the B.O.Q., Bachelor Officers' Quarters, a misnomer complete, since any married officer who resided on the post was entitled to occupancy there. During wartime, the army only allotted a bed, a desk and an improvised closet to an officer's room. Because Charles did not have to depend entirely upon his army salary, he had furnished his room comfortably with secondhand furniture purchased in Tuskegee.

The four men met promptly after the show. They were on

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their third round of drinks when Roy teed off by saying, "Since you guys fall all over each other when the discussion gets too hot and controversial, I think we should let Blood act as a kind of arbiter. For one thing, he's the oldest of us all and his booming voice will make him a sort of vocal sergeant-at-arms."

"What the hell do you mean by the oldest of you all? Since when does thirty-six—?"

"Brother," laughed Frank, "you'll never see thirty-six again. Didn't you tell me once that you had a chick parked in your car on a lonely road and you decided to take her to your apartment? Well, any time a man can't make good use of a parked car, he has long since seen thirty-six."

The laughter which followed was uproarious. Even Blood joined in. When it had subsided, he rested his glass on his chair, saying, "You punks. Is this your idea of a bull session?"

"O.K.," announced Roy. "I'll start. Tell me this, Blood. You've been in the army nearly fifteen years. You know the book backward and forward. Then why don't you fellows who have captaincies assume some kind of leadership in changing the conditions at this post where some white pimp is in control of every department? Why, you even train the bastards when they arrive here as greenhorns, knowing damn well that, in four months, they'll be promoted above you and take over."

Lieutenant Frank Jones, dental officer, was about to say something when Blood laughed sneeringly. "I see, my boy, you don't know anything at all about the army. Well, maybe you've heard the word. What happens when a man draws a courtmartial? I'll answer that one for you. Some salesman or meter-reader in civilian life defends him, but who prosecutes him? I'll answer that too. A trained lawyer and, moreover, one who has been sent to a Judge Advocate General School to learn special military procedures of prosecution. So, I must assume a leadership, buck a system in which I know the cards are stacked against me and find my ass in jail? No, brother, not for me. I know when I'm well off. David and Goliath exist only in the Bible. Another thing: you fellows don't realize that, while

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this country is a democracy, the army is a dictatorship within the democracy."

"I hate like hell to agree with Blood," said Mackie, pausing to take a long pull at his drink. "But when you have a mob of men concentrated in one spot, you've got to have discipline. Of course, I can't understand why the brass must pit a trained lawyer against a layman where a soldier's liberty or life is concerned. However, I believe that a limited degree of democracy is practiced in that an enlisted man can qualify for a commission."

A brief pause to take a sip of his drink permitted Roy to butt in with, "Well, what about discrimination in the entire outfit? This is America, after all, isn't it?"

"Now this burns me up," Charles shouted with some degree of heat. "Why must you damned West Indians think that America is the only place where discrimination is practiced?"

"I'll take that one, Blood," Roy said. Turning to Charles, he answered, "Why must Negro Americans be more American than the whites? Are you an American first and a Negro second, or vice versa? Why do you set up a social barrier, when really, if you examine it closely, the whole thing is a farce? A social barrier is an intangible screen which excludes the so-called superior from the inferior, the respectable from the *déclassé*. Where the hell is the superiority when the number runner and the bootlegger occupy places of honor in the homes of doctors and other professionals, simply because they have money? What is your caste system based on—if you have any? Don't tell me it's just the Yankee dollar. What about family, background, character, nobility? Is this a nation of the *nouveaux riches*? Do we still continue to embrace the frontier concept as we do that of the Puritans?"

"Take it easy, Roy," interrupted Blood. "You're among friends."

"Yes, I know. I just want to get across a few ideas I've had stored away for a long time. Now, to continue, haven't we made contributions in whatever state we live? Can't the West Indian match you in business enterprises and in the professions? Is it

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envy or jealousy which causes the desire to ridicule and belittle? Why do you establish this barrier between yourselves and us?"

"Hold everything," Blood snapped. "Is this a personal feud?"

"By no means," said Roy. "I'm enjoying this immensely. I'm merely trying to show that, for some inexplicable reason, even when a West Indian Negro has made his mark, even if his abilities are equal or superior to those of the American Negro, there exists a contempt, sometimes subtle, sometimes crude, on the part of the native-born Negro. The West Indian is never really accepted. I think this is shown, to a degree, by the infrequency of intermarriage between the two nationals."

"That's begging the question," maintained Charles. "What about the arrogancy of the West Indian? He comes here, for the most part, like every other immigrant, a beggar, yet give him one dollar to match another and he'll tell you how superior he is to you."

"I think it should be conceded that the average West Indian is intelligent," retorted Roy. "But it takes those of above-average intelligence to have the imagination and courage to leave their native land and venture into a strange country. So, by the same token, he cannot be compared to the run-of-the-mill American. The same thing applies to this country. Most successful Negroes are southerners. Why? For the same reason that you apply to the West Indian. Brother, to leave the sunny climate of the South and venture into a cold, uncertain North is not funny. Once you have overcome the fear of the unknown and of physical discomfiture, half the battle is won."

Mackie spoke out suddenly. "You talk as though we Americans have no guts. How many American professionals are self-made? The great majority. By dint of hard work and economy, they make it. Some wait tables. Others redcap, and so on. But they get there."

"Agreed," said Roy. "And it's a two-edged sword. Since the West Indian doesn't have these opportunities, only the sons of men whose financial positions are well established get into the professions. And where do you suppose they generally go?

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I can assure you, not to America. They go to England, France, Canada. Why? Because there they live and are treated as men, gentlemen, if you please. Now be honest. Do you really think that a man who for years has worked as a flunky can throw off the yoke the moment he is declared a doctor with the right to exploit the privileges the degree confers? Isn't there some residue of the redcap, the waiter lurking in him which creates a difference between him and his West Indian brother who has never done menial labor?"

"I think nothing of the sort," replied Frank. "It doesn't necessarily follow that a flunky, a redcap or any other menial is without culture. I have often thought that good breeding is innate. But a pseudo-cultured person in a given situation, with the proper stimulus, and it is entirely possible that he might revert to his true status. It takes more than a few paltry thousands to erase the earmarks of ill breeding."

"Break it up, boys," said Blood.

"Just a bit more," added Roy. "People have always claimed that the West Indian, because of lower standards of living in the islands, can subsist on less, can save more money and thereby lord it over the less fortunate natives. Now isn't it conceivable that anyone in a strange country would have a greater urge to look out for the so-called 'rainy day' than one who has a relative here or there to turn to?"

"Conceded," replied Charles.

"Conceded like hell," broke in Frank. "I won't argue as to the way in which a monkey doctor behaves as compared to the American, because I don't know enough about it. But look at the way a West Indian treats his womenfolk. By God, you'd think he was a prince fooling around with a trollop. We American Negroes show far more respect for our women."

"I don't have all the answers," said Roy seriously. "And while I am gradually getting drunk, I'm sober enough to know that the saga of the American Negro woman has never been written. Her labors and sacrifices are too numerous to be brushed aside in one night's session like this. But you fellows will never under-

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stand that the culture in the islands is very different from that here in America, and the basis of the difference is economics. Most women in America work. They have to in order to maintain a certain standard. In the islands, in the class of which we are speaking, they don't because, first, there are no suitable jobs, and, secondly, it is not the accepted thing, which of course could be based on the first reason. However, that is not the point. Whenever a woman matches you, dollar for dollar, the parity, the level, the equality is established. On the other hand, when the man alone is bringing home the bacon, you have a tipping of the scales. But the tipping does not necessarily mean disrespect for the woman. It merely means that you don't have to help with the dishes if you don't want to." Roy chuckled.

"Let's all have another round together and wash away what could easily leave some scars," recommended Blood. "As I see it, we are all Negroes or niggers, according to one's taste. How black is black, anyway? Uncle says we're all black. So fill up, men, and change the subject."

Everyone obeyed without urging, and, as the bottle and coke could be reached without moving, the gurgling sound of pouring and drinking filled the room once again. After everyone had wet his whistle, Blood remarked, "I'm the only layman among you. All three of you are dentists or physicians. Now, tell me this: how is it that while two-thirds of the Negroes are in the South and badly in need of medical care, two-thirds of the professional men are in the North where only one-third of our people live?"

"That's not so hard to answer," replied Roy, placing his glass aside and reaching for his cigarette. "When you consider that quite a chunk is taken out of a man's life preparing for a medical or dental career, it is natural that he should want to spend the rest of his life where he can enjoy some of the things a college education has refined him to. From what I see down here, after a man has bought a fine home, a shining Cadillac and an expensive fur stole for his wife, he has nothing else to do with his money, or any opportunity to cultivate his tastes."

"I've heard that crap before," said Charles, who was a south-

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erner. "Granted that you can go to the Metropolitan Opera, or eat in a swank white restaurant and go to almost any place you want to without the embarrassment of discrimination, last time I was up North I noticed that there were hardly any Negroes in these high-tone, cultural places. Blood is right. You guys are so piled up on one another that you are almost starving, while we almost work ourselves to death down here, feeling good in putting our professions to good use and a damned sight better when we look at our bank accounts."

"It's not a question of not finding the places overrun with Negroes. It's the satisfaction of knowing that you can go if you want to. Take the vote, for example. The poor whites, the sharecroppers and the Negroes are fighting for the vote down here. Up North, we have it. Yet, there is no stampede to the polls at election time. But it is comforting to know that we have the franchise. Then, when a bastard who is too strong for our stomachs is nominated by the machine, we can go out there and defeat him. However, every man to his own poison," said Roy doggedly. "As for me, I prefer to eat hamburgers on the streets of New York than to eat steaks down here. Is there any truth to this? I was told that if you should have a few white patients in the South, the City Fathers compel you to put in separate waiting rooms, even though the same pair of black hands is going into the mouths of black and white."

"I can't deny that," said Charles with feeling, "and since you bums are all getting so blasted erudite, I might as well take a fling at it too. Didn't we render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's? Well, if the Great White Father wants separate waiting rooms, I say give them to him, simply because, in not giving them to him, the damage is greater than in doing as he demands. You see, Raymond, even though you've lived in this country a long time, you really don't get the American point of view. In fact, you're like all West Indians. We American Negroes have a gift of survival. The Indian was proud and haughty. He was exterminated. Now, cities, states and counties are named after him. We're humble—but we're still here. If they want us to

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be a fool, we act the fool. If they want us to clown, we clown. If they whip us and tell us to sing, we give them a spiritual. But in the grin of the fool, in the buffoonery of the clown, in the pathos of the spiritual, is concealed the greatest contempt one race could have for another."

"But don't you think," inquired Blood, "that the dawn is breaking, that things are gradually changing?"

"Like hell they are," said Frank, whose liquor had begun to make his speech halting and thick. "I stopped off in Washington on my leave not so long ago. I secured a pass to the Senate. That guy Bilbo from Mississippi had the floor when I entered. After a long, bitchy harangue against the Negro, he wound up by saying that he didn't blame Joe Louis for knocking the heads off the white boys who faced him because they were fools in the first place to enter the ring with a half-man, a gorilla and a lot of other tripe. When he had finished, an elderly white woman came over to me and tapped me on the shoulder saying that I must pay it no mind, that his type was dying out, that the South had younger, more enlightened leaders. Well, damn my soul if I didn't read about Eastland, junior senator from his state, a man some forty years old, rising some time later to tell the world that Negroes wouldn't fight and wouldn't work. So, tell me, what of your new dawn and changes?"

No one answered. Everyone was feeling the effects of the steady drinking and they had wearied of the talk. Roy poured himself a tall one and in drinking it said, "This is my nightcap, men. While I can still navigate, I'm going to turn in. Before I leave, I want to remind you that Marse Charlie is still ahead. But one of these days, we will catch him, and when that day comes, all hell will break loose."

"Right," said Mackie. "But I'm breaking out of here now."

And while the blind were still able to lead the blind, the bull session ended.

Things remained on a more or less even keel for an indefinite period. Army life was reduced to workaday, humdrum routine. The colored officers were fully aware of the limitations imposed

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upon their capabilities by a subtle network of unjust practices. However, their general level of intelligence was sufficiently high to raise them above the abyss of discontent into which they might easily have sunk. The only place where open discrimination was practiced was at the post exchange restaurant. Since the white officers consistently refused to attend regular mess, a part of the exchange was set aside for their use exclusively. Notwithstanding, no untoward incident was injected into what had become an ominous calm until a brother Negro officer returned from leave bringing War Department Directive against Discrimination in Military Installation No. A.G.353. The pamphlet clearly stated that all army personnel could frequent any and all installations on an army post.

"How's about seeing if this is according to Hoyle?" said the bearer.

"Things have been quiet around here too long," said another. "Let's make it lunch with the Ofays tomorrow at their lily-white restaurant."

A third chuckled aloud. "This is going to be good," he said.

The men were all too willing to co-operate. Consequently, the next day at noon, twelve Negro officers blithely entered the reserved restaurant, appeared to ignore the mess officer who approached them in consternation, and, with an air of abused innocence, found tables and seats. The effect was terrific. Before the man could open his mouth to protest, the army regulation was thrust at him. The actions of the whites were abruptly stopped at the various stages of eating. Some choked and sputtered. Forks dangled in mid-air. Plates of food were rudely shoved aside as the majority rushed to the exit. All stared in sullen rage. But the Negroes were served.

The performance was deliberately repeated for four consecutive days. Whereupon, the commanding officer called a meeting of all officers. The colonel was a young, shrewd southerner. He explained that the restaurant was the only place where the white officers could relax and be alone, since the colored boys had the run of the field. He further explained that, in spite of

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army regulations, it was the epitome of bad taste to intrude where you were not wanted. The Negroes listened in bored silence and continued to interpret War Directive No. A.G.353 literally.

A week later, a second meeting was called. This time, the colonel read the order. He closed the meeting by saying that "the men could damn well go where they pleased except into the women's toilet or the nurses' bedrooms."

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# Six

AFTER ROY had been at Tuskegee for nine months, he was transferred to a newly formed outfit on the field, the Ninety-sixth Service Group, with the title of Group Dental Surgeon. In his initial interview with the new commanding officer, he was impressed with his calm assurance, his sincerity and his innate politeness. The full complement of officers and men had not yet been established. There were approximately thirty officers and four hundred enlisted men. The officers, all Negroes, presented an interesting study. All were second lieutenants fresh from officers' training school. Their education ranged from students in first-year high school to the holders of masters' degrees, some conferred by Negro universities, others by white. Having all served in the ranks, they were proud of their status as officers. Whenever a situation arose which required settling by authority, it was amusing to hear the almost daily inquiry," Lieutenant, what is your date of rank?" the reason for this being that he who had been commissioned first, even though it might be a matter of a bare twenty-four hours, was the ranking officer.

The commanding officer, Major Brown, though a white man, was ideally suited to handle these young blades. On one occasion,

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he called a meeting of all officers. Although the notice was posted on the bulletin board three days in advance, only ten men attended. The notice was reposted immediately with a statement underlined in red to the effect that failure to report at the next meeting would require an answer by endorsement, i.e., if the answer were unsatisfactory, it would count against the officer's record. This time a full roster of men appeared. Contrary to expectations, instead of raving and ranting, the commanding officer merely said, "Gentlemen, I too was once a second lieutenant. If my C.O. had issued an order and I failed to appear, I can assure you I would not be a major today."

Perhaps the greatest misfortune which could have befallen the group was the replacement of Major Brown by a Negro commanding officer, Captain Thomas. The captain was a career soldier. Throughout twenty-five years of army life, he had been an enlisted man. With the outbreak of war and the need for officers, many enlisted men of the three top grades were commissioned. Hence, his captaincy. Accustomed to discipline himself, he insisted upon it. However, he held the bit too closely and the young officers rebelled. Rebellion, of course, was subtle. An order could not be disobeyed but it could be circumvented. The natural result was a lowering of the morale on the part of the officers which gradually seeped into the ranks of the enlisted men.

Suddenly, without warning, the group, which by this time had reached its full strength of seventy-five officers and one thousand enlisted men, was ordered to Selfridge Field, Michigan. The news was received with gusto. What a feeling to be able to shake the dust of the South off one's feet forever. How verdant the distant hills can appear. To Roy, who had left New York with no feeling of malice or hatred toward this region, whose interest in the South was then purely academic, the news brought great relief. He had made friends while at Tuskegee and, despite the discriminatory practices on the post, was not, in a measure, unhappy. Compared to Camp Stewart, it was a haven. Nevertheless, he was amazed to discover within him-

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self such a feeling of animosity toward the South that he wondered what effect it would have on his future. He had always loved his adopted country but couldn't reconcile loving a thing while entertaining hatred for a part of it. He thought of the field and its Negro officers and could well understand it being a nigger heaven to some while to others a Casbah.

Selfridge Field was located in Mount Clemens, on the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan. It was a small, compact, neat post, ensconced between Lake Huron, the runways and aircraft hangars. The troops arrived at midnight and were billeted in a handsome, two-story building overlooking the lake. The rooms were chosen according to rank, and although Roy was only a first lieutenant, he was the ranking officer next to Captain Thomas. He selected a large spacious room on the second floor where each morning he could see the rising sun squatting on the rim of that wide expanse of water, Lake Huron.

With Detroit only a half hour's ride away from Selfridge Field, everyone had visions of enjoying its many night clubs with the added pleasures of women and wine, not to mention the gaiety and sensualities which are natural accessories. However, all of this ardor was dampened when, the following day, the men awoke to find a notice posted on the main bulletin board requesting all officers to report at 10 A.M. to the post theater for an address by the post commander. No one knew where the theater was. But after much wandering over the strange terrain and via inquiries, they finally located it.

They had scarcely found seats when the familiar command, "Attention," brought them to their feet. A squatty, rum-soaked individual, the eagles on his shoulders denoting his rank, strode ahead of his two companions, majors, as it happened, to the platform. Without benefit of introduction, the men listened to a rambling, incoherent talk which, in the main, warned them to abide by the rules of the post. Before he had finished the mumble-jumble, ten Negro officers who had been unable to find the theater entered. The colonel flew into a rage, saying that lateness would not be countenanced and, to impress it upon them, he was

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confining the entire group to the post for two weeks. Silence reigned as he stalked out. The major who had remained behind told the men that a colored officers' club had been improvised and that they could take meals there until the regulation mess hall had been set up in their area. The men stared straight ahead, each afraid to look at his neighbor for fear he might read his own thoughts in the other's eyes. The major then asked if there were any questions.

Under duress, people are often forced into situations which under ordinary circumstances they seek to avoid. It was with astonishment that the group heard the otherwise withdrawn Lieutenant Welles ask, "Are there two officers' clubs on the post?"

The major replied calmly, "Yes, Lieutenant. One for whites, the other for Negroes."

"Sorry for wasting your time, sir," Welles replied with sarcasm. "The mistake is mine. I thought we were in Michigan, but I see we are still in Alabama."

"And for your information, Lieutenant, don't forget that you're still in the army," the major countered crisply. Looking over the audience, with pointed slowness, he daringly asked, "Are there any more questions?"

None answered. Each had heard enough.

He then barked, "Dismissed."

The so-called Negro officers' club was a clubroom for non-commissioned officers from which the whites had been removed to make way for the arriving blacks. While it didn't have the exquisite trappings of the regular clubhouse which was built at the close of World War I, it was clean and spacious. It consisted of a dining room and two game rooms. The dining room offered cafeteria service, the tables seating four or six.

The men, usually a gabby lot, especially at mealtime, were strangely silent. They had the forboding that the morning's incident was just the forerunner of things to come. Captain Thomas who had not attended the theater meeting was on hand to greet them. The expression on his face was such as to dispel

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any anticipation of glad tidings. He promptly called the men to order and came to the point at once.

Choked with emotion, he said falteringly, "Gentlemen, I regret to announce that I am returning to Tuskegee immediately. I had high hopes of continuing as your group commander, but I'm not destined to remain. A white man is on his way here at this moment to take over. Lieutenant Brouse, the senior line officer, will be in command until he arrives. You might have thought me hard, but discipline is the core of the army. Things here will not be as you expected before we left Tuskegee. However, you're all young. You can make adjustments and forget your disappointments. I'm in the twilight of my life and, although I'm army-broken, I'm hard hit by this change. So, fellows, good-by and good luck. Try to leave the army as you entered it, that is, avoid a court-martial."

His eyes were full of tears as he slowly walked through the rows of tables to the exit. Every man stood at voluntary attention as his erect figure disappeared through the door.

Second Lieutenant Brouse then rose from his seat and, standing in the place that Captain Thomas had just vacated, addressed the group. "You fellows know I don't want this assignment and I don't think I'll be in it more than forty-eight hours. So, pace with me. What do you say, men?"

A chorus of, "Aye, aye," filled the room.

"Thanks, men. Remember: in a very short while, I'll be down there with you bitching and griping. Now, how about going down to where the troops are stationed, pitching in and setting up headquarters and seeing that the men keep in line? Those of you who are unit commanders know your men. Try to strengthen their morale. The staff officers and I will choose a building suitable for headquarters. Let's finish breakfast and get started."

Lieutenant Brouse, a small, dark brown-skinned man, was like a young bride in his new task. He was bashful and shy at giving commands, but otherwise resourceful. Because of these very qualities, the other officers liked him and obeyed and ad-

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vised him. During the third day of his command, he called all of the officers into an empty barrack, thanked them for their loyal co-operation and announced the arrival of the new commanding officer. He then joined them to wait. "If you're wondering what he's like," he said, "your guess is as good as mine."

Into this atmosphere of conjecture, a loud voice boomed from the door, "Attention." There was not a stir as a tall, burly, bull-necked man with the insignia of a lieutenant colonel but the bearings of a shanty Irishman stormed into the room. "At ease," he commanded. As the men rested, he strolled among them, summing up each officer. The silence was broken only by the buzzing of a plane.

He began, "I'm Colonel Holmes. I understand you men have been having quite a picnic in the short time you've been here. In spite of being restricted to the post for two weeks, some of you've even been sneaking into Detroit. Well, the picnic's over. From now on, we work. I'll have bed-check every night. It will be to your advantage to be in bed when the check is made. I also understand that some of you have been using government gasoline to traipse all over this post. Just don't be caught. From now on, there will be a call meeting of all officers every day at eleven. I will not tolerate any lateness. Now, if there are any questions, give your name before asking."

After a brief silence, Roy said, "I'm Lieutenant Raymond, group dental surgeon. I do my work at the station hospital, a good distance from here. This group is composed of over a thousand men. Am I to understand that I must interrupt my work, leave my patients, in order to attend this meeting every day?"

"Yes," was the curt reply.

Roy answered angrily, "It's perfectly all right by me, Colonel. I'm not in private practice. I get my nine bucks a day whether I work or attend call meetings. However, if this outfit is going overseas, I don't see how I can put them into shape if my working time is reduced."

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"You heard my orders, Lieutenant," the colonel snapped.

A voice from the extreme rear said, "Lieutenant Matthews, group surgeon, sir. I consider our present facilities very inadequate. We haven't been able to hold a decent sick call. It will be impossible to attend a meeting every morning. Furthermore, I don't intend to open a man's veins under these primitive conditions."

"You don't intend," the colonel almost shrieked. "What the hell is wrong with you medical department officers? Do you think you're running the outfit?"

"The health of this group is a command function, sir. So if you insist, it won't be I who will be liable, but you, the commanding officer," replied Matthews calmly.

"So now you're telling me what to do in the line of duty, eh? This insubordination will stop right now. I see you men have gotten quite out of hand. I'll begin my duties by getting things under control. Meantime, you're dismissed until tomorrow."

The medical officers of the Ninety-sixth Battalion were all younger than Roy. Matthews, the surgeon or top-kick, had just finished school under the Army Student Training Program and had been commissioned and inducted into the army immediately after graduation with the rank of first lieutenant. Jamison, his second in command, had practiced a year before being drafted. However, Matthews was his senior by two months.

Of the two, Matthews was the better liked. He was scholarly, with a keen sense of humor, and was considered a dynamic conversationalist. In order to provoke discussion, he would tackle some controversial issue and champion the less popular aspects of it. While the men argued in heated fashion, he would blandly defend his position until all had exhausted their resources, even to the point of using invectives. Then, he would calmly announce that he agreed with them all the while but merely wanted to see how well they could put their points across, or whether someone might possibly have something to add to his fund of knowledge. Provoking and annoying as this habit was, the

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men found many reasons to admire and to like Matthews.

Like Captain Thomas, Colonel Holmes had been an enlisted man, a master sergeant, before the war. Even though he now wore the uniform of an officer and held a field grade rank, he carried buried within his breast the heart of an enlisted man. It was the same story of achieving greatness or having it thrust upon you. He applied the same brusque, callow treatment to the Negro officers as he did to the privates. He would frequently reprimand a lieutenant in the presence of enlisted men, a serious breach of military ethics. The men were beginning to chafe under his command. Every morning, at eleven, he browbeat the group, finding grievances which were purely fictional. The men showed their resentment by asking no questions, offering no suggestions. The colonel was speaking to a wooden audience. But if he were aware of it, there was nothing in his bearing to indicate it. It was hard to determine the reason for his behavior. Was he anti-Negro? Had his rank gone to his head? Whatever the reason, that too was buried within his breast.

He had frozen the trips to Detroit, knowing full well that a trip to Detroit was the only respite the men had. Detroit, fourth-largest city in America, motor capital of the United States, could boast of a population of three million, three hundred fifty thousand of whom were Negroes living in widely scattered areas. Their night clubs and restaurants were grouped around Hastings Street, branching out to all parts of the city from that original center. In spite of much tangible evidence of culture, unlike Chicago and New York, Detroit was just a sprawling country town. Within this city, one might find twenty racial groups, the Poles constituting the largest single entity.

With the advent of war, Detroit was converted from motor capital of the United States to munitions capital of the United States. Despite its paramount importance to the war effort, the tension between the whites and Negroes was high. Reasons for this were many and varied. Some maintained that the war industries, with their wartime salaries, had attracted thousands upon

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thousands of southern whites who came as war workers, bringing with them their traditional attitudes toward the Negro as well as their unique manner of influencing others to act in accord with them. Others felt that it was the second-generation immigrants, notably the Poles who, in the process of becoming Americanized, aped the standards of deeply rooted racial animosities. Still a third group believed that, desiring to sabotage the war effort, Nazi spies had taken note of the race question and had worked overtime to stir up what at times might seem like dying embers of a fierce antagonism. Whatever the reason, these facts remained indisputable: housing conditions were intolerable. The whites suffered. But Negroes, stepchildren of the nation, found it practically impossible to obtain shelter. Recreation was limited. Since the white man was in the saddle, he reserved the right to extend it or withdraw it.

Negroes were determined to assert their rights. A spirit of aggressiveness extended to all classes among them. They knew they were making contributions to the war effort and resented the lack of recognition of their true worth. This precipitated hate strikes. On one occasion, twenty thousand white workers at Packard struck because three Negroes were upgraded. All this in the midst of a war when hundreds of their kind were dying overseas. During the course of another strike, a white sailor who had recently returned from the war zone jumped into the striking mass to tell them that he had seen Negroes fight and die, had seen many go down when their ships sank. The crowd jeered and insultingly reminded him that the navy practiced segregation and discrimination. So why shouldn't they? The wonder of it all is that the government did nothing in the face of this potential danger and the possibility of the whole thing exploding in the face of the nation like a firecracker.

However great the injury or injustice, Negroes always laugh. And it is not always dark laughter. The gift of laughter has been a priceless treasure throughout the ages. So, in their own quarter, they laughed, they sang, they danced, they flirted, they

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loved, they hated, they back-bit, they went to church, they two-timed, they educated their children, they got drunk—and they resented the white man.

The Negroes of Detroit were unusually friendly to soldiers. In most towns, at the approach of the man in uniform, the civilian hastened to shoo away his womenfolk, pausing only long enough to give him a polite but distrustful nod. Detroit was different. The women's clubs vied with each other to entertain the man in khaki. They were refreshing, attractive and, on the whole, not ungenerous with their "*affaires de coeur.*" Almost every night, some group could be found staging a party. The admission was the uniform; the bill was on the house. Thus, they neutralized Colonel Holmes's bile and unwittingly lifted the morale of the Ninety-sixth.

One day as Roy was about to enter the post exchange, a tall sandy-haired major emerged. Something about his figure was vaguely familiar. Each stared at the other for a moment. Then both rushed impulsively to grip the other's hands.

"Roy, you old scalawag. What in hell are you doing in the army?" The major was so overjoyed that he fairly shouted.

"Steve. My God. Is it really you? And a major at that. I know you must have inherited it," Roy said, grinning.

"Say, this calls for a celebration. Come on up to my room," Steve blurted out impulsively. "No. On second thought, I think it would be better if we took a little ride and had a few drinks in town away from all this. I have my car just around the exchange."

Roy thought he detected confusion in his friend but soon forgot it, believing it to be baseless.

"Why don't you use army transportation instead of wearing out your own car?" asked Roy.

"In the first place, that would be too conspicuous. Then I'd have to fill out a trip ticket and that's too bothersome. Brother, the army doesn't furnish transportation for personal recreation."

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"You're right. I don't see how I could have missed that point. By the way, Steve, mine is the only Negro outfit on this post. How come you're stationed here?" queried Roy softly, anticipating the answer.

By this time, they had reached the car. Major Steven Stewart didn't answer immediately. He waited until they had entered the car. He got her to rolling slowly. Then, looking straight ahead, he almost whispered, "I'm passing." The redness of his face bespoke his embarrassment.

"I thought as much," Roy replied, sympathetically. "But why should you? Why should you?" he continued with resentment. "You didn't when we were at City College. You graduated as a chemical engineer with honors. You had something to sell, and I surely thought the world was your market. I don't get it."

"It isn't just like that," Steve answered thickly. "You know as well as I do how many skilled Negro men are waiting tables, hopping bells or redcapping. Do you remember Jenkins?" he asked savagely. "The very dark chap who also went in for engineering?"

Roy nodded.

"Well, let me tell you a story about him. As you recall, he was a year ahead of me. I ran into him one day, and he told me of an interview he had with the chief of personnel of a large concern. The man was polite, gracious. They smoked while he listened attentively to Jenkins, then had him fill out an application. They went over it carefully together, the man questioning Jenkins as they went along, making notes on his memorandum pad. Finally, he told Jenkins that everything seemed to be in order and that, after the form had been processed, a formality in his case, he would be formally notified when to report for work. They shook hands and Jenkins left, feeling that everything was in the bag. A short distance down the corridor, he felt for a cigarette and remembered that he had left his cigarette case on the chief's desk. He retraced his steps and, on opening the door, caught the man red-handed in the act of tearing up the

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application. Taken utterly unaware, in his embarrassment, he held the pieces of paper in his hand motionlessly while beads of perspiration covered the forehead of his flushed face. Jenkins never uttered a word. He merely stared at the man, picked up the case and, with a twitch at the side of his mouth, left. His anger and bruised feelings at the thought of the deception stayed with him for weeks. He ate it at his meals. He slept with it at night. Finally, he realized the futility of it all. But the spark, the dash, the self-confidence which are so important in an interview dwindled, then vanished altogether. The last time I met him, he was a used-car salesman."

Roy and Steve drove on through the main gate of the post. They rode along in silence for a short distance. Of his own accord, Steve pulled to the side of the road and turned off the ignition. Without any further preliminaries, he said quietly, "Jenkins' story taught me a lesson—a lesson in defiance. I vowed to sell nothing but chemical engineering. One week after graduation, I got a good job with a large firm. They thought I was white and I didn't disabuse their minds. After all, does a Negro have to wear a placard announcing what he is? For a while, I lived in Harlem, but I got tired of making excuses to the other fellows on the job who wanted to visit me. So I moved into a white neighborhood. I made rapid progress on the job, made good money, lived in a swell apartment on West End."

"Oh, I can imagine you enjoyed many advantages," Roy added innocently.

"That's on one side of the ledger," replied Steve with a lined face. "I had to visit my family surreptitiously. I had to swallow the almost daily references to coons and niggers. I had to listen without flinching to the lurid details of how white men enjoy sleeping with Negro prostitutes or near-prostitutes and the dubious honor of being a good bedfellow. Roy, life is very often a paradox—too damn much so. Even though you pass up your own race, instinctively you recoil from the jests and insults aimed at the very race from which you are trying to escape. In spite of the frequency of the insult, you never become

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immune. Every insult is a fresh thrust. There is always a conflict, a war between your physical needs and that which you reject mentally and morally. Yes, the pay was good," Steve continued, gritting his teeth. "I sometimes wonder whether Jenkins would have passed if he'd been able to."

Roy sat there with a puzzled frown on his face. He seemed momentarily burdened. He simply asked, "Then, why did you enter the army as a white man?"

"Actually, I had no choice. On the War Department form, in black and white, was the question, "race." I had to think of my eventual return to civilian status. I had to remain white. I thought it would be a means of release. Actually, I've swapped one evil for another. I never realized the call of race to race could be so strong. They say in this country that one drop of Negro blood in your veins makes you a Negro. Well, I have that one drop, but it dominates the thousands upon thousands of white drops. My instincts lean toward the Negro in spite of close, intimate, enjoyable associations with white people. Oh, what the hell," Steve concluded harshly. "Let's go have a drink."

Steve drove to a rambling, vine-covered house. As they entered, soft indirect lights gave an atmosphere of warmth and cheer to a spacious room which was flanked on each side by numerous booths. Many patrons sat at a large, semicircular bar which spread across the entire end of the room. A few couples were dancing. Most just sat drinking and talking.

Steve and Roy walked slowly to the bar. Roy was aware of the stir which their entrance created. He could feel the hush in the conversations. He sensed something vague but malignant. Two vacant seats near the end of the bar seemed to be waiting just for them. They approached and sat.

"What will you have, Roy?" asked Steve.

"Black and white with water," Roy responded, addressing the bartender.

The bartender looked at Roy significantly, then said, "Sorry, but I think you've had enough."

"Had enough? Enough of what?" exclaimed Roy, amazed.

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"I'm sorry, but I determine that. You've already had enough to drink."

Roy who hadn't tasted whisky in a week was speechless. But he quickly got the idea. Angered, he said, "So that's the way you handle it here in Michigan, eh?"

Without bothering to answer, the bartender turned to Steve and asked, "What will yours be, sir?"

Everyone at the bar had stopped talking. The silence was ominous.

"Why, you dirty son of a bitch," said Steve. "Do you know that there is a civil liberty law in this state to take care of your kind?"

The bartender continued respectfully, "What will you have, sir?"

"Go to hell," snapped Steve. "Come on, Roy. Let's get out of here."

They got up to leave. A man advanced menacingly toward them and sneered in Steve's face, "You God-damned nigger lover."

Steve reared back and, with the back of his hand, slapped the man across the mouth and sent him sprawling on the floor where he struck his face against the brass rail, spattering blood on the blond mahogany bar. The other drinkers rose, some with clenched fists. Roy grabbed a whisky bottle from the counter, struck the bottom against the edge of the bar, sending whisky and glass in all directions. Using the jagged edge as a weapon, he shouted, "Keep your back to the wall, Steve, so you won't be attacked from the rear."

The pack hesitated. A well-groomed, bald-headed man in a blue suit appeared from nowhere. Placing himself between the two officers and the drinkers, he bellowed, "Take it easy, men. Don't start anything. Go back to your drinking."

The man walked the full length of the room to the door behind Roy and Steve. Near the exit, Steve saw one of the lieutenants from his company seated in one of the booths with

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a girl. He stopped and said, "Lieutenant Molloy, you saw this entire incident. Please have a report of the affair on my desk in the morning."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant replied.

At the door, the man in the blue suit asked belligerently, "What in the hell are you two fellows trying to do, break up my place and ruin my business?"

"Why did you give your help orders not to serve Negroes?" Steve asked coldly.

"I didn't. He did it on his own."

"Bull shit," snapped Steve. "And what's more, I'm going to see to it that all military personnel are restricted from frequenting this place."

The man appeared alarmed. In a split second, he recovered and answered nastily, "Like hell you will. I have friends on the post and money talks."

"Maybe," said Steve contemptuously. "We'll see."

The man remained at the door and stared after them until they got into the car. He was biting his lip nervously as they drove off.

Neither said anything on the way back to the post. Each knew the other's feelings. Some things are beyond tears—and words. They were mutually united by a kinship of loathing. It was not Roy's first experience of this type. But, as Steve had said earlier, despite the frequency of the insult, you never become impregnable. Every insult is a first thrust. And, gradually, these thrusts pyramid to the point where one is engulfed in a sea of bitterness, a bitterness tinged not with a primordial bewilderment but rather with a deep-rooted hate.

The next day Steve went to see Major Riggs, chief of Public Relations. He told him in detail of the previous night's skirmish. He closed by saying, "I want that place put off limits, Major."

"Oh, hell. Why are you getting into such a stew over a nigger?" the major asked with calm indifference.

With equal indifference, Steve continued, "By the way, a

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man whom I presume to be the proprietor remarked that money talks on this base." He was looking right at Major Riggs when he spoke.

The change in Major Riggs's mien from indifferent placidity to subtle alertness was barely perceptible.

"Furthermore," said Steve, "I have an eyewitness, an officer whose report substantiating what I have told you is in my pocket."

"The place will be placed off limits, Major Stewart," was the cold rejoinder. "But I would advise you to keep your nose very, very clean from now on."

Steve walked to the door. He said over his shoulder, "And don't forget, Major Riggs. You have a nose too."

A week later, Steve was shipped overseas. Roy never saw him after the night's incident.

One evening, as Roy shaved in the latrine, Matthews joined him, and, after the usual, commonplace chitchat, inquired, "Say, Raymond, how long are we going to put up with Holmes's bull shit?"

"As far as I'm concerned," said Roy, "I've never paid the bastard any mind. His rantings go right in one ear and out the other. But what's on your mind?"

"How about rounding up some of the boys to see what they think? You stay right here. I'll be back in a jiffy. Most of the fellows are in the barracks anyway. I'll hustle them over and just pass up the Uncle Toms."

Roy had just left the shower when the men, with Matthews in the lead, trooped into the latrine. Matthews started, "Dry yourself, man, and let's start this latrine conference."

Roy tied the towel around his middle. Eying the men, he said mischievously, "I don't think we'll accomplish much. But, this I know: some of the greatest decisions have been made in a shit-house."

Lieutenant Mackie, who had been transferred to the group, began, "We all know that Colonel Holmes, since taking over the

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command, has been talking down to us as though we were kids. Now what in the hell are we going to do about it?"

"I have an idea," said Roberts, a quartermaster officer. "Tomorrow, at call meeting, let's tell him we resent his tactics."

"Bright boy," muttered Alexander, a chemical warfare officer. "Shall we all speak together or appoint a spokesman?"

"Suppose you lead off, Roy," said Mackie. "Then, we'll all chime in."

"Just hold everything," answered Roy. "Whose idea was this, anyway? I don't relish the thought of always shooting off my mouth. It isn't so good to be on a soapbox all the time."

"We'll all back you," said Matthews. "You just start the ball a-rolling."

"That sounds fine here, in the john. But how can I be sure that you guys won't get cold feet and leave me out on the limb?"

"Why the hell should we?" demanded Alexander.

"Oh, it's been known to happen," said Roy. "There's little profit in being a martyr to a lost cause. Let's settle it. I'll be the first to stick my neck out, but I'm still wondering why you picked me to tee off."

"It's like this," Roberts explained. "We have five signal corps officers, five engineering officers, umteen supply officers. We're walking over quartermaster officers. Even among the medics, there are three officers with another expected any day now. But there's only one dental officer. So, that makes you 'it.' In your indispensability, aren't you the logical choice?"

"Don't hand me that crap," Roy said amusedly. "There are people who think that even Roosevelt isn't indispensable. O.K., I'll do it, and see that you shines don't let me down."

The following morning at breakfast, the mess sergeant confided to Roy that he had heard, via the grapevine, that all of the officers were to be moved to the area where the troops were housed. Roy thanked him for the information and guarded the confidence.

Promptly at eleven, the men assembled in the recreation

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hall, arranging themselves in the accustomed U formation. A sharp "Attention" announced the arrival of the colonel. He stalked in in his usual rude manner and, true to form, began to gripe about some minor lapses on the part of the men. Roy, who was at the extreme end of the hall, stepped forward.

He addressed the colonel. "Colonel Holmes, may I have a word with you?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Well, those silver oak leaves place me at a disadvantage. Could we figuratively remove our insignia and speak man to man?"

The room was in dead silence. The colonel who certainly was no student of psychology acted as though he were a past master of the subject. Without answering Roy, yet staring savagely at him, he stomped down the room, a distance of some fifty feet. Standing face to face with Roy, arms akimbo, he said, "For your information, Lieutenant, one's rank is tattooed on him. It can't be removed. However, I'll accommodate you. What's troubling you?"

"It's just this, Colonel. Since you have had this command, you have never spoken a kind word to any of us. At your meetings, it has been a series of innuendoes and bluster. You've lost sight of the fact that these men are porters neither here nor in civilian life. Many of us hold college degrees—and from white schools. So there is a natural resentment toward your attitude. The junior officer, as inconsequential as he seems, can break his superior officer, be he colonel or general. The method is simple, just by passive resistance."

"Continue," said the colonel brusquely.

"You've constantly harangued about our using government gasoline to go joy-riding around the post. Yet, on my way to duty this morning, I saw a staff car, with army personnel, delivering a white officer's groceries. Another thing. I understand that you are about to move us down to this mudhole from our present quarters. Am I correct, Colonel, in saying that I see in this move a fine Italian hand?"

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The colonel glared at Roy, then queried thickly, "Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, get this straight, and it applies to all of you other fellows: this is my command and I will run it as I damn well see fit. You, Lieutenant Raymond, are looking at this through civilian eyes. I'm a professional soldier and I see things differently. And as long as things don't meet my approval, you can expect to have your asses chewed out. As for breaking your C.O., you boys are not that smart. With regard to moving, that's an order. You officers are too far away from the men. And with regard to your 'fine Italian hand,' Lieutenant, I'm not blessed with your gift of gab. But let me ask you why in the hell must you people always interpret everything in terms of race?"

"That's an easy one, sir. We have to because your group contrives and resorts to every trick to humiliate, embarrass and lessen my people's sense of manhood. The subtle and generally crude way you people go about destroying our pride leaves us with only one yardstick. It makes me believe that you fellows, to borrow your term, get a kick out of seeing us squirm. If that is true, sir, then the only conclusion is that yours is a race of sadists."

The colonel said nothing in reply but he was obviously fighting for self-control. The other officers apparently felt that Roy had gone too far because no one raised a voice to support him. He felt betrayed, double-crossed. The colonel could now feel that he spoke as an individual, not for the group. Colonel Holmes made no attempt to continue the meeting. Roy's last statement had greatly irked him. He curtly dismissed the officers and walked out of the room.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Roy let loose. He looked at his fellow officers in disdain and shouted, "You liver-bellied bastards. The next time I go to bat for you, you'll remember it."

"Don't worry. There won't be any next time," one of the lieutenants observed. "We told you to challenge him, but we didn't say to have us all court-martialed. Yet, brother, while I might

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have seemed chicken-hearted, I take my hat off to you. That cat will never forget today."

The following morning, Roy received orders to accompany a convoy of nine other officers and one hundred enlisted men to Oscoda Airfield, two hundred miles from Detroit. Blessed with a faculty for accepting each day's eventualities without malice, he shrugged his shoulders and began his packing. He mused over his supposed indispensability. He smiled at the ways of the army. Here was a group of one thousand seventy-five men preparing to go overseas, with one dental officer to rehabilitate their mouths. Yet, the commanding colonel saw fit to vent his spleen by leaving these men unattended except for emergencies which the overburdened station hospital would of necessity take care of.

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# Seven

THE TRANSFER of military personnel from one station to another is perhaps, next to a general court-martial, a commanding officer's most potent weapon. Like the sword of Damocles, it is suspended above one's head, a perpetual threat, to corral you into line. It is, to a degree, reminiscent of the church's power of excommunication.

Oscoda was an outpost of Selfridge Field. While its main purpose was to give troops rigorous and rugged training in preparation for overseas duty, it was a kind of Siberia, a place to send non-conformists and those who strained too hard against the leash. The convoy started at the crack of dawn. As the day slowly reached out its hand to touch the cool, receding fingers of night, the trucks rolled from village to village. The deeper they penetrated the Michigan countryside, the sparser became the houses in the passing hamlets, the more towering the pines and the denser the wooded areas on either side of the road.

It was nearly twilight before Oscoda was reached. There could be found the same type of quaint, sleepy village as had been passed countless times en route, and which are common to any Midwestern state. With the outbreak of war, the village

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had been closed as a summer resort because of the airfield nearby.

In spite of the fact that Detroit had so many Negroes within its borders, none resided in Oscoda or its immediate environs. But, war being war, and the departure from the normal being the accepted thing—at least, for the duration—when the inhabitants of this little town, which numbered at the most three hundred, saw the truckloads of Negroes descending upon them, they waved and shouted a regal welcome. It might have been patriotic or mercenary. Oscoda had taverns, a bowling alley, souvenir shops and a few restaurants which had served the one-time tourist trade. To be overrun with a swarm of G.I.s, who have on no occasion been noted for their stint, was undoubtedly disarming. From what standpoint their reception was genuinely altruistic could not be discerned. The little cottages which dotted the woods, stringing themselves along the shores of Lake Huron, added to the picturesqueness of the village. But they had been vacant too long for the owners' comfort, and were soon to find their walls bursting with the mirth and love play of these descending black men.

Oscoda Army Airfield was not built along the customary pattern of an army post. Instead of large barracks to house as many as possible, there were small huts to accommodate couples. Two officers shared each hut. Furniture consisted of a potbellied stove centrally located, two beds, a desk and an open closet. The well-known adage of not being able to see the forest for the trees might be transposed to not being able to see the cottages for the foliage. Only the station hospital and administration building conformed to army standards.

The field had a small white cadre of enlisted and officer personnel. The station hospital was comfortable and well staffed. There were five medical officers, as opposed to the fact that there were no dentists. Roy's task was to set up a dental clinic in order to care for his men, the station complement as well as for those needing treatment in the village of Oscoda which had no dentist either and which, through a special dispensation

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from the War Department, was permitted to use army hospital facilities.

The only tavern which had accommodations for dancing was a cozy little place hidden among the pines and shrubs, called The Sky Top. There the men drank, played the juke box and danced with the local white girls who frequented the place. This prevailed for several weeks until it came to the ears of the local southern post commander. He visited the tavern and demanded that the proprietor discontinue interracial dancing. Upon his refusal, the commanding officer placed The Sky Top off limits to all military personnel.

The Sky Top might just as well have boarded up its doors. In desperation and in order to stem the flow of trade from the other taverns which were doing a land-office business, the proprietor acquiesced. Business returned to normal. The Negro G.I. would put his nickel in the juke box, sit and sip his beer while his white comrade-in-arms danced at his expense. Military police were stationed at the tavern to see that the ruling was enforced. Peace reigned until a colored officer appeared to dance with his white wife. Prepared for just such an emergency, he was able to produce a marriage certificate, demanding to know what national law forbade a man to dance with his wife. The incident provoked nothing more than a chuckle among the villagers, because the proprietor was a native son while the commanding officer was a stranger. Furthermore, the natives were wise enough to appreciate the free spending among these easy-going, good-natured men.

Meanwhile, the Negroes had begun to send for their wives and sweethearts to share the cozy cottages. An officers' club was hastily constructed by placing three log cabins together, with the unique feature of a double fireplace in the center, giving the structure a homelike atmosphere. Each man contributed his bit toward the purchase of furniture. The women did the decorating. A homemade bar and a juke box added to the atmosphere of ease and comfort.

Something was going on each night. Lawn parties were

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held at the slightest provocation. During off-duty hours, there were boating and fishing on the lake, horseback riding through the woods. So it was that what was intended to be a punitive measure turned out to be an idyll. Everyone was cheerful and pleasure-bent. The term "light-housekeeping" was coined and acquired a figurative meaning. It referred to couples posing as man and wife and sharing the huts for a fortnight or a month. Their emotions exhausted, the women would leave as blithely as they had come.

Other convoys arrived, each man bringing with him a bit of imagination to add to the already large fund. Gradually, the men began to forget that a war was going on. However, they were rudely jolted back to reality one Sunday when, without warning, Colonel Holmes made a sudden appearance and scheduled a call meeting immediately after lunch in the mess hall. All enlisted personnel were excused. After a careful check was made to ascertain that none remained behind or were in the area, the colonel faced his men and began, "Yesterday, we had an unfortunate affair at Selfridge Field. The post commandant accidentally shot and seriously wounded his colored chauffeur. I want you to understand that it was an accident and, when the news gets out, impress upon your men that such were the facts. I can easily understand how a warping of the details can affect this command since the man was a Negro."

The once belligerent colonel had a note of pleading in his voice which did not escape notice. The men said nothing, but it was evident that they were thinking deeply. His mission accomplished, the colonel closed the meeting. He motioned to Roy to remain behind as the others filed out. Remembering their last meeting, Roy was taken aback. Neither did he care to be seen in cahoots with the commanding officer. Such a liaison would create distrust among the men, and he could think of nothing more damnable than to be considered a stool pigeon. However, tacit or otherwise, orders are orders. Thus, he remained.

Eying him with a faint smile, the colonel said, "I understand

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that you have been doing a good job up here, Lieutenant."

"Thanks, Colonel," said Roy, searching for the hidden motive behind the commendation. "After our last conversation, this is a pleasant and unexpected announcement."

"Well, Lieutenant, just for being so smart, you'll have to redouble your efforts. Within a few days, I'm bringing up the entire command and I expect that, in about four months, all things being equal, we shall be going to the port of embarkation." After a pause, he added, "I don't particularly care to have this last information spread around."

"Have no fear of that, Colonel. I'm sworn to guard a secret as a prerequisite of my profession. But since you are in a confidential mood, would it be insubordinate if I said that I feel you withheld some of the facts regarding that shooting?"

"What gives you that idea?" replied the colonel with interest.

"Well, sir, a grown man, especially a career soldier, just doesn't go around playing with a gun."

The colonel knit his brows, pursed his lips, looked at Roy thoughtfully, then said quietly, "I suppose the whole mess will leak out anyway. This is the story: Colonel Cole, the commandant of Selfridge Field, has a keen dislike for Negroes. He gave specific orders that he didn't want any of the few colored enlisted men on the field near him. Last Saturday night, at the officers' club, he and his cronies were drinking heavily as he always does when he's out for pleasure. When he got ready to go home, he had the motor pool called for transportation. Through an error, a Negro driver was sent for him. As he was about to step into the car, he spied the colored chauffeur. In a drunken rage, he ordered the man out of the car. Then, reaching for his pistol, he deliberately shot him, the bullet entering his groin. At present, the hospital is working feverishly to save the boy's life. For if he dies, Colonel Cole will face a charge of murder. Anyway, I know he will be court-martialed. That's why I'm moving the troops, to prevent a clash between them and the white soldiers on the field. As if that isn't bad enough, the

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Detroit *Free Press* and other dailies are playing up the incident. Headlines are splashed all over the front page. The editorials are full of it."

"Well, Colonel, you'd hardly expect them to give him a citation," said Roy reflectively. "But thanks for the confidence and, incidentally, for your change of attitude."

"As I said before, Lieutenant, it will come out in the long run. Now, regarding my change of attitude, you're an educated and an intelligent man. You realize that men's acts are conditioned by their environment. In the thirty years that I have spent in the army, I have never been closely associated with colored people, especially those of intelligence. So we who have seen them only in menial positions subconsciously tend to view all Negroes as menial. At Selfridge Field, having the only Negro command, I was taunted by the other officers about my 'black brigade.' I struck back at them through the officers of the Ninety-sixth. Your insolent speech"—and here the colonel laughed—"brought me to my senses. After I had transferred you here, I was tempted to recall you, but I'm a practical man, even though I got mine in the barracks. I realize that you can't recall a stone after it is thrown."

"Inasmuch as you admit that you have only known or seen Negroes in menial positions, permit me, sir, to give you a bird's-eye view of the so-called 'White Man's Burden.'

"It was a Negro who penetrated the unexplored regions of the North Pole with Perry. Another Negro, Tanner, famous for his landscapes, has paintings in the Louvre and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Drew invented the blood bank which the American Red Cross found highly useful but had the audacity to segregate Negro blood, as though there were such a thing as white blood. Alexander Dumas, *père*, author of *The Three Musketeers*, and Dumas, *fils*, who wrote *Camille*, were both Negroes. The architect who designed Saks Fifth Avenue, one of the leading department stores in New York City, and many of Hollywood's show places was a Negro. The first successful operation on the human brain was performed by one of my

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people. Yet, I have heard many white physicians say that the only thing a Negro surgeon could do for them was to pare their corns. Marian Anderson, proclaimed by some to be the greatest contralto of our time, had to go abroad to be discovered, but she has failed to make the Metropolitan Opera House. Carver has done wonders with the peanut. It is rumored that the American Peanut Company offered him a million dollars to turn all of his discoveries over to them. Most whites feel that the only thing Negroes are good for are singing and cooking. Despite this fact, Negro spirituals are the sole contribution of America to the world of music. A Negro has conducted the highest form of musical art, the Philharmonic Symphony."

"I have to confess," the colonel replied, "all this is news to me."

"And to millions of other Americans who don't care to face facts. There has been a systematic effort to belittle the Negro by deliberately withholding the truth. A Columbia University professor whose history textbook is used in high schools and colleges all over the United States has remarked that, from time immemorial, the Negro has been a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. Notwithstanding, we find our images on the Sphinx, and Aesop, that delightful teller of fables, was an African. Pushkin, the first great author of modern Russia, was an octoroon whose father came from Africa and was given to the czar.

"Now, in the midst of this war, *Time* Magazine wonders whether the Negro fighting man is equal to his white brother when, as far back as the Revolutionary War, Crispus Attucks led the mob in Boston and, to this day, a monument to his memory stands on Boston Common. Negroes fought on both sides during the Civil War, one gaining the rank of general.

"But enough of this. I know that your time is limited and I wonder whether all this is not water on the duck's back."

"On the contrary," replied the colonel seriously, "I am grateful for all that you have said. I would like you to give me a list of a few unbiased books. I must admit, though, that I am dumb-

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founded at the suppression of all this information. Now, Lieutenant, I must be going. I will have plenty to do moving the outfit up here. When they arrive, I want you to check them dentally so I can tell how soon we can reach the port of embarkation."

The colonel rose. Roy did likewise. Without another word, the colonel left for his plane which was warming up to fly him back to Selfridge Field.

Roy didn't follow the colonel out of the mess hall. Instead, he sat down and surveyed the vacant building, actually seeing nothing. His thoughts and emotions were running amuck. Encircled by the wreath of smoke that settled about his head and shoulders, he wondered why Colonel Holmes had chosen him, of all people, to confide in. Was he born to confidence? Did the colonel feel that he had sufficient influence over the men to guide their thinking into the right channels? If a confidence is a trust and honor, anticipating a reverberation of the shooting, was Colonel Holmes binding to his side a supposedly radical and outspoken individual? Did the crudeness in the colonel mask a deep subtlety?

As if to clear his thinking, with a wave of the hand Roy dispelled the cigarette smoke which seemed to enshroud him. He reviewed in detail his challenging of the colonel at Selfridge Field. The memory still stung him. Perhaps Colonel Holmes recognized the man in him and respected him for his candor and expression of convictions. He must have reasoned that the men had let Roy down. Did he sympathize with him as one is wont to do with the betrayed and abandoned?

Roy smiled. The colonel had referred to his intelligence. Knowing that he was not made of the kind of stuff of which stooges are made, was he flattering Roy's vanity, thereby achieving his aim if he had one? Or was he appealing to his common sense to stave off making an issue of the shooting, fearing that a wave of passive resistance could break him of his command, as Roy had openly hinted, indirectly hampering the war effort as it concerned the Ninety-sixth?

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Unable to answer these turbulent questions, yet wary of the colonel's motive, Roy finally quit the mess hall and went to Oscoda where he could lose himself in the company of servicemen not yet acquainted with the fracas.

Roy was stationed at the field hospital, near the entrance to the post but far removed from the group. Even though he met the men at mess, mainly at breakfast and lunch, there was slight opportunity for anything more than hurried conversation. The shooting was discussed with discretion. Resentment was subdued but apparent.

At supper, on the Monday following Colonel Holmes's departure, an officer seated at one of the long rows of tables, not too far away from Roy, remarked meaningfully, "Well, Roy, I see that you and the colonel have become boon coons."

"Oh, sure," replied Roy, anticipating the thrust. "All roads lead to Rome, remember?"

"Now what the hell does that mean?"

"I tell you what. Round up as many men as you can. Meet me in my hut and I'll be glad to tell you all about roads and Romans."

"I don't see why you have to be so damned mysterious. You must know that the men have discussed this business from every angle. The club has become a graveyard. The men are too preoccupied to pay any attention to the women. They're either sulking in their cottages or playing Pokeno. We're getting nowhere fast. Just what gives?"

Holding onto his patience, Roy said, "Let's get together in an hour and exchange notes."

"O.K. Maybe you know something—and maybe you're playing fox for Roy."

"Hm. I'd be a damned fool not to take care of me. Come if you want to."

Lying across his bed, Roy was browsing through the day's edition of the Detroit *Free Press* when the men entered his hut. Medical officers together with a fair sprinkling of men from all branches of the service were present. Roy rose to make room.

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As there were only two chairs, most of them squatted on the floor. Roy leaned against the window farthest from the group.

Facing all fourteen officers, he tried to sound inconsequential as he began, "It's a good thing I have no vanity. Otherwise, this delegation would certainly flatter me. The fact that so many of you are here tells me that you think I know something or that you're fed-up. All I actually know is that a trigger-happy colonel shot a boot. If you've been reading the papers, you know that Selfridge Field has placed a strict censorship around the post. Newspapers only tell what Colonel Holmes told us. The rest they guess—and their guess is as good as mine."

"All that's true," said Alexander, the chemical warfare officer, "but you're laying a smoke screen, man. A person doesn't call his commanding officer everything but a son of a bitch, draw a transfer and then stay closeted up with him for nothing when something like this happens."

"Well, Lieutenant," said Roy without humor, "are you forgetting that I'm a staff officer and the ranking first lieutenant in this group?"

"Are you pulling rank?" asked Alexander, not giving an inch.

"What do you think?" Roy barked sternly.

There was a pause. Alexander answered, "Sorry. I take that back."

"Thanks," retorted Roy curtly. "And when that time comes, Alexander, I'll kiss your backside in Times Square. I'm speaking solely for Roy now. The whole mess stinks. However, it probably won't be the only one we'll experience before we die. This is as hard as hell to say, but you have to face reality. This is our homeland. A war is going on. Will we fare any better if Hitler wins, as hellish as things are? Home is home. It's better to deal with the devil you know than with the one you don't. Let's forget that drunk and do what we know we should do. Not for Holmes, but for you and yours and the others of our kind to come, be they called Negroes or niggers. What do you say?"

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No assuring nod of approval gave answer as Roy surveyed the room unsmilingly and unflinchingly. The silence was sickening. Then, gradually, the note that he had hoped for rose to a voluminous crescendo as the men boomed in unison, "Bravo."

The officers and enlisted personnel of the Ninety-sixth followed the accounts of the shooting with avid interest. Both day and evening editions of Detroit's leading metropolitan papers reported the incident in detail. While the Detroit *Free Press*, the Detroit *News* and the Detroit *Times* all gave unbiased accounts, the *Press* was favored because it was noted for its liberalism.

The trial lasted seven weeks. It was brought to the attention of the readers that the post reeked of graft and corruption. Because of the expediency of war with the accent on haste, action and production, and the resulting outgrowth of laxity, such a situation was not unusual. However, in this particular instance, it appeared that there had been a complete breakdown in command function because of the weakness in character of the commanding officer. The over-all pattern of chicanery penetrated the ranks from the highest to the lowest. The opportunists believed in making hay while the sun shone, and the glow was that of a midnight sun.

The press created such a furore that Representative Paul Shafer was appointed to conduct a thorough Congressional investigation. Hidden beneath the placid countenance of what seemed to be a routine, workaday military establishment was a situation so scandalous that, in comparison, the fetor of the shooting was like that of orange blossoms. It was revealed that wealthy men's sons were taken off ships at the port of embarkation just as the vessel was about to sail, that they were detained at the fields in so-called essential positions which precluded their seeing combat. One enlisted man was known to have his yacht anchored in Lake Huron, just off the field, where high-

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ranking officers reveled in nightly orgies. The press demanded that the same justice be meted out to an officer as would have ensued had an enlisted man shot an officer.

Colonel Cole finally stood trial. He had to face twenty-seven charges. The army with its chauvinistic philosophy of protecting its own found him guilty on four charges of conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline, and, ironically, of careless use of firearms. The men of The Ninety-sixth Battalion wondered whether carelessness in marksmanship connoted the wounding instead of the killing of the private. There is more mystery in the concepts of military doctrine than can be found in the philosophies of Socrates or Plato. The court-martial board ordered Colonel Cole to be reduced to the rank of captain with no promotions for three years. That constituted his entire punishment.

Once again, newspapers took up the hue and cry. The Detroit papers branded the whole thing a whitewash, pointing out that Colonel Cole actually hadn't been punished since he was merely reduced to the rank he held before the war, his colonelcy being of temporary grade. National publications began to add their pressure to the barrage of local criticism leveled at the War Department until the colonel was finally dismissed from the American Army.

It is an accepted theory in some schools of psychology that the nervous system never forgets. If that is so, then the men of the Ninety-sixth never forgot an unjust restriction to the post for two weeks without tangible reason. Thus, they had sufficient cause to gloat over the misfortunes of one individual.

Colonel Holmes did not pull his men out of Selfridge Field as quickly as he had planned. However, the fault or reason was not his, nor was it surprising that things moved so slowly. At best, removing any large group en masse is a Herculean task.

Moving day in the army is as welcome as a blizzard in August. It is as devastating and demoralizing for the moment as it is with a large family that moves from one residence to another.

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Just as drapes must be taken down, rugs rolled up, dishes and glassware carefully packed, pictures unhung, delicate *objets d'art* wrapped meticulously, furniture covered with blankets to prevent nicking and scratching, and, lastly, the place cleaned for the next tenant, so, in the army, does each and every record have to be filed, carefully boxed and sealed. Confidential material must be cased. Cabinets, desks and other office furniture must arrive at their respective destinations undamaged. Finally, the area must be left in as spotless a condition as possible so that other outfits moving in will not have to clean the departing one's dirt.

Thus, the Ninety-sixth left Selfridge Field. Settling at Oscoda involved counting and rechecking vast numbers of kitchen utensils, gas masks, rifles, ammunition and a multitude of other items which are requisite to the efficient management of any military setup.

With the assembling of the entire strength of the Ninety-sixth in Oscoda, things began to hum. Emphasis shifted from pleasure to training. Colonel Holmes was his same brusque self, but, oddly enough, he had become more human. He praised the deserving and punished the shirkers. His attitude was fatherly: he did not believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the child.

"Light-housekeeping" was still in vogue. Since those who had come up from Selfridge Field first had taken all the cottages, it was obvious then that the bulk of the men were womenless. The lone hotel in Oscoda was small. Reservations had to be made a month in advance. By that time, Milady could have changed her mind.

For want of proper recreational facilities, the men were becoming lackadaisical. The number of enlisted personnel away from the post A.W.O.L. increased daily. Attempting to solve this problem, the colonel called a meeting of all officers. Finally, after many suggestions had been offered, it was decided to loosen the noose by sending one-third of the entire group into Detroit by trucks over each week-end.

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Eventually it became Roy's turn to go on this week-end jaunt. He had some misgivings as to how successful he would be in enjoying himself because he had been away from Detroit for such a long period. He registered at a hotel not far from the famous Paradise Inn, took in a few shows and night clubs but, in the main, had little feeling of being on a holiday. Even though he kept his weather eye open, somehow the men who had recently arrived from Selfridge had all the contacts. Just as he was about to give up hope, it happened.

Roy was having dinner at Paradise Inn, one of the swankiest places in Detroit owned by Negroes. Although he was not a frequent visitor here, he was always able to obtain accommodations. The head waiter approached and asked if he would mind sharing his table with a lady, inasmuch as the restaurant was packed to overflowing with people waiting in line to be seated.

"Don't ask foolish questions," replied Roy jokingly.

"O.K., sir. I'll bring her right in."

"Just a minute, waiter," said Roy, as the waiter turned to leave. "What's she like?"

"Well, sir, I wouldn't kick her out of my bed."

"That's good enough for me," laughed Roy.

He was busily trying to master the claw of a lobster but had only succeeded in cutting himself. He subconsciously stuck his finger into his mouth as a good-looking girl, with grayish-green eyes, seated herself opposite him. He stared in open admiration.

"Lieutenant, don't you think that lobster à la Newburg would be more in your line? At least, you wouldn't do yourself any damage." As she spoke, she settled herself and returned the stare.

"Well, adorable, since you are so well versed in the art, you're just in time to rescue me."

Without hesitancy, she of the green eyes reached over, deftly broke the claw with the nut cracker and teased out the meat. Roy who had had a few at the bar before coming to dinner lost his inhibitions. Egged on by her show of friendliness, taking a piece of lobster up with his fork, he dipped it into the butter

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sauce. Dangling it before her mouth, he said, "Beauty has always fed the beast. Now, we'll reverse the procedure and let the beast feed beauty."

"All this is all right by me," she said, opening her mouth to receive the lobster. "But don't forget. This is a public place and I live in this town."

She ordered her dinner. Quips sallied back and forth. By the time they had reached dessert, they were well on the way to becoming acquainted.

Between sips of coffee, Roy inquired, "Are you on the loose tonight, Mademoiselle?"

"That could be taken as an insult," she replied, seemingly unoffended.

"How would you have it?" pursued Roy smilingly. "Some of the crudest statements are not always insulting."

"Unfortunately, a poor woman has no choice. Would you have me alarm the whole restaurant?"

"I would have you take me to a more quiet place where there would be no necessity to alarm anyone."

"Are all of you men so starved in civilian life?"

"I don't like generalizations or to be coupled with the common herd. I'm one of those rugged individualists," was Roy's rejoinder.

"Just goes to show how inconsistent you men are. If I offered to take you to my apartment, you'd lick your chops, yet feel that I was an easy pick-up. If I took you for a stroll in the park, you'd consider me queer. However, tonight, I haven't a care in the world and I am on the loose, as you asked. So, Sir Lieutenant, your will is my command."

"I know you didn't intend for me to take you up on the first proposition, but, just the same, I will. And you can judge for yourself whether, by my actions, I consider you an easy mark or not."

Roy smoked as she leisurely finished her dinner. He followed every detail with interest as she freshened her make-up. He didn't miss a move as she hastily outlined her mouth with a

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brilliant red lip-brush, worked her lips together to even the painted shape, quickly passed a powder puff over her cheeks, smoothed her brows with nails highly polished in a shade to match the lipstick and finally glanced up for approval. Just as she was about to rise, she said, "You seem to be a nice boy. Let's make it proposition number one."

"Good. Good," said Roy. "It's music to my ears." Over her protest, he paid both bills.

She led him to a neat, well-furnished, two-room apartment. Roy surreptitiously noted that it was furnished in good taste. As they sipped their first highball, she said, "Don't feel uneasy here, Lieutenant. I own the joint. You see, I work in a defense plant."

"Oh, I really feel at home," replied Roy. "As you said in the restaurant, you live in this town. You'd hardly want to jeopardize your security."

After a pause, she asked, "Well, what do you think of me?"

"In what way?"

"Oh, hell. Please don't be a fool," she replied, somewhat amazed.

"This," said Roy, moving closer to her. He kissed her lingeringly on the lips. Hers was the kiss of "know-how."

"Like it?" she asked, as she rested her chin against his shoulder and gazed at him fixedly.

"Good, but too much 'savvy.'"

"You men are really such fools," she retorted good-naturedly. "Had I acted like a country bumpkin and slopped all over your face, you'd have laughed at me in your heart. But because I responded as if I enjoyed your kiss, you have the nerve to say 'too much savvy.'"

"Come, my dear. You're making a mountain out of a little banter. You know, it has always been my motto that a woman should be at all times a lady on the street but a whore in the bed."

"But I'm not in bed yet," she smiled teasingly.

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"You will be," whispered Roy, as he held her in close embrace.

While kissing her, he slowly unbuttoned her blouse from the back. Still enmeshed in the kiss, from her neck to her cheek, then her closed eyes, he held his lips firmly, savagely to hers. He gradually slipped each arm from the garment, exposing her firm brown breasts. He caressed each one, while she feebly uttered, "Don't," tightening her clasp around him. Gradually and completely undressing her, he viewed her standing in her brown nudity. He hastily undressed, picked her up in his arms, placed her on the bed and eagerly snapped out the lights.

It was at breakfast that he asked her her name.

"Sheila," she said with her ever-present smile.

Roy laughed. "Now tell me your real name."

"Lulu Mae, smarty," she said. "Fine clothes and Lulu Mae don't jibe. So I changed it to Sheila. They say that a rose by any other name is just as sweet. So—"

"I didn't mean to press you. You're a swell sport. I'm Roy Raymond, stationed at Oscoda Airfield, some two hundred miles from here."

She had to go to work, so there was no lingering over farewells. It was just as well. Words might have destroyed that nonchalant air of good will that permeated their brief friendship. She had asked nothing, had given to enjoy herself. Likewise he. Neither knew any more of the other than that the night had been well spent.

One morning, two weeks later, just as Roy entered the clinic of the hospital, he was called to the phone in answer to a long-distance call. He couldn't imagine who would be calling him under such circumstances at 9 A.M. Picking up the phone, he said, "Lieutenant Raymond."

"God, I'm glad to hear your voice. This is Sheila. A race riot is raging in Detroit. White and colored people are killing each other right and left. I don't dare leave my apartment. Could you possibly get me out of here, at least to Flint where

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I have an aunt?" She sounded breathless, excited and afraid.

"I don't know what I can do but I'll try. Give me your phone number and I'll call you back."

"Thanks, pal. I knew you'd at least try. The number is Sherry 9030."

Roy who was some distance from headquarters managed to commandeer a jeep to get him back there. Colonel Holmes was ignorant of the state of affairs in Detroit. As Roy dashed into his office unceremoniously, the look of indignation at this rude entrance disappeared as he recognized him. Roy announced excitedly, "Colonel Holmes, there's a race riot in Detroit."

"What? How do you know?"

"My cousin who is caught in the middle of it just phoned me asking for help."

"Just a minute." The colonel picked up the phone, called all unit commanders as well as post headquarters, telling them to restrict all men to the post until the riot subsided. That accomplished, he leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"Colonel, what about my cousin?" Roy asked.

"Tell her to stay put where she is. She's at least safe there."

"I'm not so sure about that. Is that the thanks I get for breaking my neck to come over here to inform you?" demanded Roy somewhat heatedly.

"All right, Raymond," the colonel said soothingly. "Keep your shirt on. I'll phone Selfridge Field and have a truck pick her up to take her out of the riot zone. Write down her name and address. But, don't forget: this is not strictly military."

"Thanks, Colonel. Thanks a lot. I hope you will be a general soon."

"Oh, cut the talk. Write down the name and address and get the hell out of here," said the colonel, apparently not unflattered.

Roy walked slowly back to the hospital. He was glad to be able to help Sheila. But he wondered why the government hadn't taken steps to prevent this uprising when, for more than a year, it was common knowledge that Detroit was dynamite. It was astounding to see that, in the midst of a world war, Americans

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could take time out to indulge in fratricide. Was the chasm between whites and blacks so great that an ordinary fist fight between a Negro and a white man could precipitate a race riot. Had education and religion failed—or was hate a fiercer emotion than love? It is more or less true that all of our institutions harbor a hate streak, he speculated. Then how could the individual be blamed? The armed forces Jim Crow you. The schools in a great many states Jim Crow you with separate and unequal facilities. Even the church, the last refuge and sanctuary, denies you admittance and sacrament in the major part of our country, he thought. The courts and those who enforce law do not always dispense blind justice. Then, is it not better to fight back, he wondered bitterly, knowing you would die like a man, hoping, perchance, that for every three Negroes killed, at least one white would die—outnumbered, swapping blows, bleeding, reeling, dying, but fighting back.

Roy was so engrossed in thought that he reached the hospital before he knew it. He had read of race riots in the nation's capital, in Chicago, but he never had been as shaken as he was today. Sitting on the steps of a less frequently used side entrance to the hospital, he tried to analyze the cause of his disturbance. It certainly was not Sheila. It was something more deeply fundamental than that. Why? Why must these occurrences take place, he asked himself, and with such frequency? Now, at last, full understanding came to him as the words of Claude McKay thundered through his brain; McKay, Jamaican immigrant like himself, to whom this country had given so much also:

> Although she feeds me with bread of bitterness
> And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
> Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
> I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
> Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
> Giving me strength against her hate.*

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*From "America," in *The Selected Poems of Claude McKay* (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1953); reprinted by permission.

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# Eight

THE BUSINESS of putting the mouths of one thousand men into shape within a limited period kept Roy on his toes. His was a straight eight-hour day. At its close, exhausted from extracting, excavating and filling teeth, and taking impressions, he would share a cigarette with his assistant, a technical corporal. Invariably, conversation centered around the omnipotent wisdom of the War Department which allocated four medical officers to treat the group but, for the backbreaking, digital task of the dentist, deemed one man sufficient. He knew that many men were idling their time away in pools, waiting for assignments which took months, if ever, to arrive, while he sweated away over more than his share of duty. He knew, too, that one-fourth of the entire dental profession was in the army.

It was on one of those days of extreme fatigue that Roy decided that a promotion was due him. Always the type that executed an idea immediately, he directed his assistant to make the appointments for the next day as he expected to be gone for a while. He thereupon made his way to group headquarters. As he entered, the adjutant announced him to the colonel.

Closeted with Roy in his private office, Colonel Holmes was profuse in his greetings. Among other pleasantries, he said, "What are you doing so far from the hospital?"

Roy began, "As you know, Colonel Holmes, I've been working

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very hard to get these men into shape. So I'm taking this little respite to ask if you would care to add another bar to this one I am wearing."

"Sorry, Lieutenant, but I'm not making any promotions."

"Are you satisfied with my work?"

"Most assuredly, but that's not the point. I repeat, I'm not making any promotions."

"Certainly, Colonel, you are aware of the fact that any tangible evidence of appreciation of a man's efforts eggs him on to do more. In the same sense, a lack of appreciation creates an indifference, a lack of zeal, a—"

"Lieutenant, are you trying to threaten me?" the colonel interrupted, looking him squarely in the eye.

Roy countered, smiling, "Now, that's surprising, Colonel Holmes. Since when does a lowly lieutenant threaten a colonel?" With that, he rose and, clicking his heels smartly, continued, "It's only a matter of twelve cents a day difference in pay, sir, so you know it's not a question of money. It's just the sense of pride it gives one. Am I free to go now?"

"Yes. You may go. And while you're on the subject of pride, I shall expect you to continue to show the same pride in finishing the work of this outfit."

"Very well, Colonel," replied Roy as he left.

That evening, after supper, Roy sauntered over to the post exchange for cigarettes. As he enjoyed a coke, a smart-looking sergeant for whom he remembered doing some dental work approached and said in a subdued voice, "Congratulations, Lieutenant."

"Hi. Congratulations for what?"

"Well, I typed up your promotion this afternoon. The colonel has already signed it and it's on its way to Washington."

"Thanks for the information," said Roy, suppressing his surprise. "I know this is confidential, Sergeant, so I will keep it under my hat. And, when it comes through, you can come to my room and toast me with my own whisky."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. All of us think highly of you and believe

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you deserve the captaincy. We all know that Sergeant Wilkes would have lost his stripes if you hadn't given him novocain with each filling. That boy is a brave soldier but the very thought of a dental clinic sends him into a panic."

"Oh, I don't think I did any more than any dentist with a heart in his body would have done. Wilkes has a wife and three kids. He needs his staff sergeant's pay. There was no point in having him busted and then subjected to company punishment."

"It's all right talking about having a heart, sir, but a lot of these officers wear their bars in their heads instead of on their collars."

Roy laughed at this sally. He said, "To show how I feel about that, Sergeant, have a coke."

They laughed and talked about some of the picayunities of the post until Roy took his leave. The sergeant's news gave him much food for thought. He was completely taken aback by the colonel's unpredictability. He felt sure that talking to him man to man instead of groveling had gained his respect and confidence.

Six weeks later, Roy's assistant, Corporal Brown, brought in the afternoon mail. The familiar War Department letterhead caught Roy's eye. Eagerly he broke the seal and read: First lieutenant to captain. He handed the letter to Corporal Brown who beamed as he read.

The corporal said, "I'm surely very glad for you, sir."

"Thanks, Corporal. Now if you want a three days' pass to Detroit, just say the word."

"Do I want a three days' pass? Do I want a three days' pass? Sir Captain, sir, I'll give that cute little number in Detroit a special kiss just for you."

"That's fine, soldier. But don't go away A.W.O.L. just now. I shall be needing you because I intend to see more men daily."

"I don't see how you can, Lieutenant—oh, pardon me. I mean, Captain. You're already crowding in as many as you can during duty hours."

"We'll see. Take it easy until I return."

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Roy walked into the post exchange. He bought six captain's bars and a box of cigars. The enlisted man who sold him the bars grinned and asked, "May I be the first to pin them on you, Captain?"

"Sure. Go ahead," Roy replied.

The private removed the silver bar and replaced it with a twin bar, saying, "If I'm not too bold, sir, seeing that you won't be needing this bar again, I'd like to keep it as a souvenir."

"Sure thing. And I hope that one of these days you'll be wearing it yourself."

"Sorry, sir, but we can't all be officers. I'm always glad to see one of us make the grade provided he doesn't forget me and the thousands of others in the ranks."

"Good thought, fellow. I accept my new rank with humility especially when I think of stout fellows like you. 'By, now."

"Good-by, sir," said the private, gazing at Roy's retreating figure with pride while his fingers fondled the bar.

Roy left the exchange to make his way toward the wooded area which was on the fringe of the post. Just for one short minute, he wanted to meditate alone, with no alien, prying eye to rob the moment of its solemn grandeur. Not since he had received his dental degree had such a feeling of accomplishment overwhelmed him. He sat on a log among the shrubs in a clearing that seemed to have been prepared just for him. He thought back over his army career, of the soul-searing bruises, of the disillusionment as to his place in the American scheme of things. He thought of his open resentment to a citadel, the abuses of which he could never condone. Captain of the Army of the United States of America. Assuredly a signal honor for any man. Deep within his heart he acknowledged it as a reward for courage, a mantle to enfold him as he pursued one set purpose: to continue to fight any further abuses he might experience, since, for the time being, reform was not a part of the pattern.

In recognition of his new rank, Roy was ordered to stand in review of the Ninety-sixth that evening at retreat. He received full instructions concerning the deportment of officers from other

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career soldiers. Retreat is a military ceremony, the simplicity of which is replete with majesty. A group of soldiers, including Colonel Holmes, stood in triangular formation with Roy at the apex of the figure. In the distance could be heard the martial music of the post band. Presently, the entire group rounded the bend of the post road, the reviewing officers standing at attention to receive them. As the companies approached, the command, "Eyes right," was given. Each company dipped its colors as it passed. Roy saluted all.

Before the nine companies had completely passed, wrapped in a wave of patriotism, Roy vowed then and there to take a stand for his country always, be she right or wrong, through hell and damnation, to fight the evils within her, but to betray her never.

As the last company passed, Colonel Holmes smiled at Roy and said, "Well, Captain, for a medical department officer, that wasn't bad."

"Thanks, Colonel," replied Roy with a broad grin, staying close to the colonel so as not to lose him in the dispersement. "And thanks, sir, for the promotion."

Colonel Holmes looked straight at Roy. With sober face, he answered, "It was not a gift, Captain. You earned it."

Roy scarcely had time to reach his hut before the officers returning from retreat converged upon him, extending congratulations. Surrounded thus, he announced, "I had an inkling of this, so I hoarded a few bottles of the stuff. If you fellows care to share a nip with me, come along."

"If you fellows care to share a nip with me," mocked Lieutenant Alexander. "Personally, I think the captain has gone nuts."

"You said it," Roberts joined in. "And with liquor being rationed in Michigan."

Amid jests and wisecracks, they scrambled into Roy's hut, sitting as usual, anywhere and everywhere. Roy produced two fifths of King's Ransom, a fifth of Old Grand Dad and a box of cigars. He opened a carton of paper cups and offered the cigars individually to each man.

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"This is all the service you galoots are going to get from me. The stuff is right over there and it's strictly self-service. Knowing how bashful you are, I'll be the first to lead off."

An outburst of raucous laughter followed. As Roy fixed his drink, the men jostled one another to get theirs.

"Speech. Speech," Roberts shouted, holding his cup in the air. Before long, all the others took up the cry.

"What the hell do you guys want? Blood?" Roy laughed. "You're smoking good cigars, and holding good whisky in your hands. So now you want a speech. Maybe you want a strip-teaser too, eh? O.K. Here's a speech. It's simply this: Now that the ice is broken, other promotions should be forthcoming. But you will have to convince Holmes that you deserve them."

"You're the only man I've ever seen or heard of who browbeat his commanding officer into giving him a promotion."

"Do you really think that that is actually the case?" inquired Roy.

"Oh, hell, I don't know."

"Well, I know. It's hard work. It's a refusal to take an unearned bawling out. It's the ability to sell the fruits of your labor, and, finally, it's the unwillingness to stoop."

The men fell into a silence which indicated that they had taken Roy's statement seriously. Finally, Roy broke the stillness by demanding, "Say, what is this? A wake? Come on. Drink up."

The men returned to their festive mood and filed out of the hut only after they had emptied the last bottle.

Several weeks later, a War Department inspection had the whole outfit on its toes. One of the brass visited the hospital, examined Roy's records, and, finding things in order, inquired whether he had any recommendations or complaints. Roy had two. First, he wanted another dentist to join the group on detached service so that the work could be speeded up. Second, he wanted to go to a service school in order to learn something of his duties under combat conditions. The major, a dentist himself, remarked, "You're very inconsistent, Captain. You want

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another dentist to help you because of too much work. Yet, you want to leave to go to school."

"The inconsistency lies in the consistency of your policy, Major. You consistently overload the dental corps in instances such as prevail here, while, at Huachuca, you have a large dental pool where the men just eat, sleep and draw their pay. The other inconsistency is that I have received no formal military training except for stopgap lectures. Yet, you expect me to accompany this outfit overseas and to function under conditions far-removed from civilian practice. You cannot honestly deny that, except for paperwork, the duties of the dental officer are identical with those in civilian life."

The major frowned, then smilingly replied, "O.K., Captain. Unwind yourself. How can you generate so much heat in this Michigan calm? What you've said is true. But you realize I don't make the policies. I'm only a major. There's some merit in all you've said. So I'll call it to the attention of those in command, and maybe—who knows?"

The major kept his promise. The following week, another dentist was assigned to the group. Roy had no sooner acquainted him with the roster and demands of the group than he received orders to report to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, for a six weeks' training in medical field service under combat conditions. He packed joyfully because he realized that he would be just a stone's throw from New York, that Bagdad on the Hudson. Odd, he thought, as the oft-repeated saying goes, that people who live in New York wonder how anyone can live elsewhere, while those who live elsewhere wonder how people can live in New York.

Passing through the city of Carlisle, none would suspect that it holds such a prominent place in American history. It seems detached, far-removed from the hubbub of excitement and activity that appears to be characteristic of nearby Harrisburg. Maybe it has retired on its laurels or has been gently pushed aside by other communities which follow more closely the pattern of the twentieth century.

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Carlisle was settled as early as 1720. During the French and Indian Wars, it was the supply center of expeditions against the French. General Washington maintained headquarters here during the Whisky Rebellion. Not too irrelevant is the fact that Molly Pitcher of revolutionary fame is buried at Carlisle.

Carlisle Barracks, United States Army medical field service school, situated at the northeastern section of the city, was built by the British before the Revolution but was captured by the continentals during that same war. After the battle of Trenton, Hessian prisoners were kept there. The barracks were later burned down by Stuart's men but were rebuilt by the prisoners and still stand intact as the West Point of the medical department of the United States Army. Here, physicians, dentists, veterinarians, sanitation and medical administration officers receive training in the basic principles of medical deportment as well as training in combat routine.

Roy felt proud to be a part of this vast body of student officers. Here, discrimination and segregation did not rear their ugly heads. If the predominantly southern students resented sleeping and eating beside Negroes, they suppressed their feelings surprisingly well. The attitude of some of the members of the faculty was highly amusing. These officers, professional men in civilian life, had completely lost their identities. Most of them seemed more concerned with barking out commands in close-order drill than with the more gentle and refined art of physical examination of patients. As a matter of fact, Roy, who had never really been regimented, wondered how these civilian-soldiers would readjust to civil practice where persuasion, gentleness, a soft voice and a kindly demeanor are as essential as a major operation or a sound diagnosis.

The six weeks' course was very intense. The following routine was meticulously carried out: breakfast at seven-thirty, formation at eight, classes from eight to twelve, lunch from twelve to one, formation at one to the classroom. From three to four, either calisthenics or close-order drill was included. Occasionally, this might be varied with a hike of from fifteen to twenty-five

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miles or by watching the barracks' full complement of troops simulate combat with the emphasis on the functions of the medical corps men and medical department officers. Supper from four to five, a long period of study followed by "lights out" at eleven-thirty, completed the order of the day from which there was rarely, if ever, any deviation. Those who cared to visit Carlisle proper or to travel in Pennsylvania did so at the risk of failing their examinations. The wiser men learned to reserve their free week-ends for trips to Philly or to the bright lights of New York.

From the point of view of range and the deeper insight they offered into *l'art militaire*, the courses were sufficiently varied to meet the needs of almost any, conceivable military situation. No subject seemed to have been omitted. Logistics, map-reading, sanitation, care and methods of handling the wounded on the battlefield, chemical warfare, intelligence and counter-intelligence, aircraft recognition, close-order drill, military courtesy and discipline, maneuvers in combat, transportation, the control of tropical and venereal diseases, all these were crammed into this brief period of training. To Roy, fresh from the air corps where the accent was not on drill or related activities, the barracks seemed a virtual workhouse.

Discipline was strict to the point where it could easily have passed from the sublime to the ridiculous. Roy had a humorous, though unpleasant, taste of this during the third week of the course.

One day after lunch, he had to make a hurried visit to the latrine. In the midst of defecating, he heard the whistle blow for formation. He hurriedly terminated this physical function. What with attaching his gas mask and seeing that his attire was beyond the keen scrutiny of the platoon commander, he was late for formation. Rather than make matters worse by breaking into the moving column, he proceeded directly to the classroom. He was no sooner seated than he was ordered by the lecturer to report to his battalion commander, Captain Mayo. Still amused

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at his predicament, Roy carelessly entered the captain's office, only to be ordered out curtly.

"Leave this room, Captain, and come in the right way."

Roy obeyed instantly. He returned, clicked his heels with a snappy salute and said, "Captain Raymond reporting, sir."

The captain, a physician, looked at him seriously. "You've been here long enough to know better than to enter your commander's office like that. You were not at formation. Why?"

Unfortunately for him, Roy was in a facetious mood. He answered impishly, "I was doing what comes naturally, Captain."

"Are you trying to be smart?"

"No, Captain. Frankly, just truthful."

"Captain Raymond, you're insolent. If you persist in it, all I have to do is to lift that receiver and call headquarters and you'll be back in your outfit."

This last remark stung Roy. He was always quick—sometimes too quick—on the comeback. He retorted, "My mistake, Captain, in thinking anyone here had a sense of humor. Really, I'm a bit weary of this cult as it is practiced here. You know, I begged for the assignment to this school, but while it is an education that I wouldn't have missed, I sometimes long for the peace and quiet of my outfit. I'm sorry for the rudeness. It wasn't intentional."

Without batting an eye, Captain Mayo replied, "In that event, this is just the training you need. You'll stay here. Consider your week-end pass for the next two weeks terminated. You may go as far as twenty miles from the post, but no farther. Dismissed."

Roy stared at the captain, unable to believe his ears. The week end had already been planned for. A group of friends was to have met him at Penn Station and to have made the rounds of the New York night clubs. Looking at Captain Mayo, a disheartened Roy bluffed it out. "Well, so it is, Captain. That's one way of catching up on my studies."

With that, he saluted and left. Outside, he reflected with bitterness that it is not wise to look a gift horse in the mouth.

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# Nine

IN THE FOURTH WEEK of his stay at Carlisle, Roy and his entire battalion had to locate stakes placed from one hundred to three hundred feet apart. Each student was accompanied by another. They marched to the area for maneuvers in formation. Then, each group of two was on its own.

The night was dark and rainy. Roy and his teammate located the first stake but lost their bearing after that. In trying to recapture their direction, Roy fell into a ditch and injured his knee. Fortunately for him, his companion was a husky southerner. With Roy's arms around his shoulder, amid bellows and shouts, they groped their way to another team. Using flashlights, the men found enough branches to improvise a stretcher and carried Roy to the nearest road where one of them went in search of further help. He returned with a jeep which took Roy to the station hospital. More damage had been done than was evident at first glance. The injury was serious enough to keep Roy hospitalized at Valley Forge General Hospital for almost three months.

The trip from Carlisle to Valley Forge by car afforded an excellent opportunity to see the countryside. It was all through

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Amish territory. Their neatly painted barns and verdant crops, which bespoke constant care and scientific handling, presented a startling contrast to the scraggly, impoverished landscape of the South. The bearded Amish men with their peculiar clothes, especially the odd hats, aroused in one the feeling of receding to a bygone era.

The wards at Valley Forge Hospital were, with few exceptions, semi-open. A tile partition separated each patient from his neighbor. A large, well-furnished porch, running the entire width of the ward, served as a kind of living room where the officers read, played cards, engaged in general conversation and occasionally received their womenfolk. Routines were pursued in an easy, unhurried manner, creating a pleasant, soothing atmosphere. All activities were pitched later than is customary in most hospitals. Breakfasting from eight to ten in the comfortable dining room, securing the morning papers and discussing the news in the wards completed the procedures for these idle forenoon hours. Lunch, or dinner, choice of word depending upon the part of the country from which one came, was always lavish. It was not unusual to be served steak, mushrooms, a luscious dessert and the like. The officers were wont to linger over their teacups, indulging in chitchat or tales of combat experience.

The leisure hours following lunch were spent walking through the neighboring communities or, on the part of the more literary-minded, reading in the elegantly furnished library. Supper was light, consisting mainly of salads and cold cuts. Nor were the nights barren either. The men could always look forward to a U.S.O. show or a movie.

Truly, Roy was enjoying this military country club. What an enigma the War Department was. Segregation was rampant at the army posts. Yet, at the service schools and general hospital, there was definitely an all-out effort to restore to you the sense of manhood and the feeling of being human. It seemed to Roy that the fact that the white officers were genial and comradely tended to prove how artificial was the barrier which

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separated the two races in wider areas where high morale was so essential.

Each week, one or two officers faced a review board of officers whose duty it was to go over the individual's medical record. In the light of their findings, two courses were open to them: either to restore a man to active duty or to discharge him from the service. After a two and a half month's stay at the hospital, it became Roy's turn to know his fate.

The medical board consisted of three officers: the ward officer, a major and a lieutenant colonel. The colonel, who spoke softly, with typical bedside manner, addressed Roy thusly: "The findings of this board, Captain, is that the injury to your knee unfits you for general duty. We could place you on limited duty. However, because we have enough men in that classification already, it is the opinion of this board that you be discharged from the army with thirty percent compensation."

Roy was bewildered. He hadn't set his mind on anything, but he certainly didn't expect this. Any attempt to inquire into the workings of the human mind is futile. One more spring. Another leave-taking. In spite of all the hell he'd caught, he had no desire to leave. He felt cheated. Somehow, he knew that if he had been discharged for injuries incurred in combat, it would have seemed more honorable. Chokingly, he asked, "Is that all, sir?"

"I'm afraid so, Captain," was the kindly reply.

Rising, Roy saluted and, with mist in his eyes, left. He walked at random through the accustomed woods. He tried in vain to analyze his feelings. He should be glad to get out and enjoy the peacefulness of a private practice. It would restore his soul to get back to patients who had assured him they would be waiting for him. What, then, was the attraction? It wasn't money. His practice had always been lucrative. It wasn't rank, for he had always borne the respect and love of his community. Was it the thought of an unpaid debt? Had he fulfilled all he'd set out to do? Did the branches he stepped on as he wandered aimlessly through the woods mock him with the dry rustle of

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disillusionment? Unable to answer his own confused questions, he retraced his steps to the hospital.

As was the custom, he told the men the news. A few extended congratulations. The majority were sorry to have him leave. He received formal orders the following day. It was too late to pay his bills and settle affairs, so he waited until the day after that.

As he stood beyond the hospital gate, his bags beside him, his honorable discharge in his pocket, he watched Old Glory flutter in the breeze. It was a sentimental moment. He was closer to tears than he would have cared to admit. He was the type of person whom only the most discerning would have termed shy. His glance swept the many windows of the hospital and came to rest once more on the flag. He muttered softly as he recalled all that America had given him, "In my own way, I hope I have paid my debt."

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