Sketches From Life

Sketch Sketch

*Iowa State College

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deeply, spilling it out around the corners of his mouth in his eagerness.

He dropped the cup, wiped his chin with his hand and started back to his rack. When he passed in front of his team, the off horse, a big roan, shied and reared on his hind legs, tangling the harness. The man lunged at the reins and jerked savagely at the bit, bringing the horse back down on his fore-feet.

When he released his hold on the rein and turned to go around the other horse the roan bared his teeth and, stretching his neck, bit viciously at the man's shoulder. Strips of blue shirt and bloody flesh came away in his teeth, and the man screamed. He whirled, and struck the horse full on the nose with his clenched fist.

The roan snapped at him again, and the man turned, seeking a weapon. His one arm hung limp at his side, wrapped from the elbow down in a sleeve turned scarlet with blood. He ran to the side of the barn and picked up a single-tree. When he brought the thing down on the roan's head, squarely between the ears, there was a dull, sickening thud, and the horse's eyes rolled wildly.

He expelled his breath in a long sigh, and his legs buckled beneath him. He fell beside the other horse in a tangle of straps and chains. The other horse stood shivering with fear and excitement.

The men, who had stood fascinated during the fight, gathered around the dead horse. "Jesus, he's dead," one of them said in an awed voice.

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Sketches From Life

(Gleaned from a thousand pages of best Freshman themes of Spring quarter are the following "Sketches From Life." Typical of the best of Freshman work, they tell simply and briefly of a student's day and his dreams.)

Black to grey. I was awake. Slowly I became aware that it was very early. The stillness was something one doesn't hear at another time in the twenty-four hours; it was a part of the greyness.
A raucous bird-call rang out, and it seemed a signal for a babble of twittering voices. My room seemed dim and unfamiliar, but the light was growing all the time. The noise and light wakened me still more. I stretched out in bed. How cool and fresh the early morning air felt! I kicked off the covers. Relaxing, I began to wonder why I had wakened so early. No clock had struck. I had a vague feeling of excitement, all the more pleasant because I knew no reason for it.

The cool air began to be a little chilly, so the warm covers came up again. With the warmth, drowsiness. The chime struck the half hour. Still drowsier, I mused, “Half-after what?” The chatter of the birds receded. Even the increasing light became dim to my eyes. Grey to black. I slept again.—Betty Keith

It was a lazy afternoon with the minutes crawling by in an endless chain. The blue and white vapors of a hundred experiments were condensing to a single cloud, swirling about the columns of the room, and slowly flowing out the windows. As each experiment released a larger cloud, the room darkened, only to light itself again as the obstruction to the sun's rays drifted on. From the smoke came mingling odors of irritating hydrochloric acid and ammonia, neutralizing the rotten egg smell of $\text{H}_2\text{S}$, and making breathing even less natural. All this was accompanied by a lullaby of tinkling test tube racks and clattering broken glassware shattering into the waste jars, dulled by the hiss of Bunsen burners and the whine of water taps.

Suddenly a brilliant light tore apart my drooping eyelids. A subconscious reasoning warned groping hands of a magnesium fire. Groping blindly for an extinguisher, those hands ripped the towel from my apron. Then, before my mind had yet completely recovered, the dazzling rays were smothered. With the branded impression of that brilliant flame torturing my eyes, and pulses throbbing to the fingertips, I surveyed the results of my Monday afternoon laboratory.—Robert Schwandt

It was late afternoon of a windy November when I was out husking corn. I had forty rods yet to go, and even then the sun was slowly creeping down behind the trees at the far end of the field. Although I was shielded from the wind by the wagon, each time the horses pulled forward a cold gust hit me...
and penetrated my clothes like an icy knife. My dog, who had frolicked about all day, had deserted me and had gone to the barn where he could find a decent place to rest—I was alone.

At the house a fire was crackling in the old kitchen stove; the cat was curled contentedly beneath, and "Sis" was making ginger cookies, but I wasn't there—I had forty rods yet to go.

With every step, the mass of trash and mud about my overshoes grew larger, and every few feet I had to stop and kick myself loose from that chilling, sticky mess. As I tore the shucks from the water-logged ears, a shower of liquid ice oozed through my saturated mittens. Then the ears had to be thrown into the wagon. With my bulky clothes this was an almost impossible task.

Slowly the team plodded forward dragging their heavy load along in the axle-deep mud, stopping now and then to allow me to catch up. "It's only thirty more rods," I mumbled, as I glanced at the grotesque shadows of the bent, twisted, and broken corn stalks.

I plodded on and on; the rows seemed never-ending. Now it was difficult to see the corn, and far off in the distance a light glimmered in the kitchen window. I resorted to snapping the ears; I just broke them off and threw them into the dimly outlined wagon. Now—only twenty more rods to go. The wind was becoming more furious; it was striking me much harder than before. The horses were restless; they were thinking of their warm box stalls, of soft straw under their feet, and the mounds of delicious oats waiting in their feed-boxes. To my mind came thoughts of the cozy kitchen with the supper table loaded down with good things to eat and in the very middle of it a great big platter of fresh fried rabbit. Now, only ten rods more to go.

THAT last lap seemed to stretch out longer and longer; the stalks grew new ears by the thousands. Slowly we progressed. I had to stop the eager horses several times. As I plodded on over the remaining cross rows, my thoughts again returned to home. A warm fire, ginger cookies, a hot supper with fried rabbit, and Joan to tell me about The Wizard of Oz, were all awaiting me. Eagerly I grabbed the last ear and carried it over to the wagon and dropped it in. With a mighty heave I swung my aching body up on to the load of soggy corn; the horses lunged into their collars eagerly. We were going home.—Keith Maddy
“STRAIGHTEN up. Throw out your chest. Come on. Straighten your tie. The lieutenant should have given you a demerit for that.

“Bring your heels together. Don’t you know how to stand at attention? Toes pointed out.”

The corporal was having his own little inspection as he followed the senior cadet officer around. The only time that the senior officer needed his services, the corporal was reprimanding a man for having the tip of a lace protruding from the top of one puttee.

After the inspection of his squad had been completed, the corporal fell in his place in ranks. He was hardly there before he stepped out again. This was uncalled for. He had no more right to be out of ranks than any other man on the squad. He moved around in front of his squad.

“Come on. Straighten up, you guys.” He stopped in front of one man and tucked in the fellow’s tie. He turned another’s belt over and looked on the under side.

“Say, who do you think you are?” retorted the man, whose belt he had just left his fingerprints on. It was all the man could do to keep from pulling back and striking the corporal. All the men in the platoon would have been in sympathy with him if he had done so.

“You will take orders from me and like it,” snapped the corporal. Reaching over and tapping another man’s shoe with his own, he said, “You had better use a little polish on those.”

EVERY remark he made was sarcastic. Every man in the platoon was thinking, “If that guy were my corporal, I would sure fix him.”

The sergeant became disgusted with the corporal’s actions. In a stern voice he ordered, “Hey, you. Get back in ranks.”

The corporal hesitated and made some remark about his rifle. Stepping forward, the sergeant again ordered, “Get back in ranks.”

The corporal hastily retreated to the ranks, ears and neck reddening. “Who does that sergeant think I am?”

The only answer he received was the grins on the faces of the men around him.—Dwight Bilharz
The room was as silent as any freshman's room could be. There was a soft, scratchy sound of pencils and an occasional sigh,signifying the end of another paragraph of a history term paper. I raised my eyes from art long enough to glance at my roommate, who was seated across the desk from me. She continued to write hurriedly, to get the words down on paper before she stopped thinking or got sleepy.

An hour passed before she finally sat up straight and broke the silence by saying, "Want a coke?"

"Uh-huh. Sure."

She stood up experimentally, as if marveling that she could still move. The window groaned as she raised it, and cold air rushed into the steamy warmth of our room, driven by the raw wind that whistled through the white night. She sighed as she closed the window, shutting out the air—pushing it back to freeze in its own breath.

Fizt—Fizt—.

Somehow the silence had not been broken by our words. We drank our cokes, and she rested her head on her hands. Watching her, I almost believed that she had gone to sleep sitting there—until she looked at me. Her eyes were burning as if she could never close them; her face was a mask of weariness.

"Better go to bed, Fran. You can't sit through classes tomorrow if you don't get some rest! I'm turning in." My voice sounded loud and almost harsh through the heavy silence.

She reached out, and her hand was hot on my arm. I wanted to move—to go to bed and sleep forever, but I only sat there looking at her.

"You crawl in," she said. "I'll be through this by morning—gotta copy it over yet—and it's due at ten."

I undressed and turned out all but the desk lamp before climbing into the cool bed. I lay there and listened to the exhausted quiet of a determined silence.

The room was as quiet as any freshman's room could be. Through the haze of an almost unconscious drowsiness I heard the soft scratchy sound of a pencil and an occasional sigh . . .

—Stella Lou Johnson