

# *Sketch*

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*Volume 15, Number 3*

1949

*Article 2*

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## One Globe, Many Worlds

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# One Globe, Many Worlds

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## **Abstract**

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# One Globe, Many Worlds

*One Globe, Many Worlds*

**D**AWN is a thin, gray line of half-light, dividing the earth into two parts. The bright half men call day and the dark half, night. As the earth swings in its circle about the sun, the great continents and seas, the mountain ranges, the broad valleys, the little towns and the cities slide through the band of dawn from darkness to light and back to darkness. At any instant some towns and cities are bathed in the new light of dawn, others in the glare of the noonday sun, and others have already moved on into the edge of the night.

At 8 o'clock, Pacific time, George P. Morton—G. P. to his business associates—finished patting flesh tinted talcum into his flabby jowls, knotted his tie, and turned away from the mirror without bothering to switch off the light. As he descended the thick-carpeted stair, he heard the big clock in the living room chime eight. He carefully moved the hand of his watch up one minute.

"Good morning, dear," Mrs. Morton said, reaching over to fill his coffee cup. It was a routine as old as their twenty years of marriage. "Did you sleep well?"

Lay awake until 2:15. Stomach again." He reached for a slice of toast, buttered it thickly, then laid it down to dig into his grapefruit.

"Well, it's no wonder, the way you stuffed yourself last night, his wife said. "A man of your age——."

"Now Millie," G. P. said defensively. "Eating is my one pleasure. And Swiss steak with mushrooms!" He shoved aside the grapefruit shell and attacked the piece of toast. "What's Dora got for breakfast?"

"Wheat cakes," Mrs. Morton said. "She's keeping them warm in the kitchen."

G. P. gave a grunt of satisfaction, thinking of Dora's golden brown wheat cakes, stacked high, with butter melting down the sides, and Vermont maple syrup. He reached for the bowl

of cereal in front of him. "Did you pay the bills yesterday, dear?" he asked, pouring a liberal quantity of thick cream into the bowl.

His wife sighed. "Yes, and it's just terrible, the way things cost now. Our light bill was four dollars more this month and we owed Goodman's Department Store \$147.50 and all I bought there was a hat and a pair of shoes and some little things. But you just have to pay that to get good things now. And that raise we had to give Dora! And the food bill!" Mrs. Norton made a helpless gesture with her hands. "Almost three hundred dollars."

"I know, I know," G. P. growled. "It's the same way at the office. Labor wanting raises all the time and materials high, when you can get them." He seized another piece of toast, took a savage bite, and waved it at his wife. "It's this damn Marshall plan and things like that," he said. "No wonder things are high when we're sending all we have to Europe. Wrong, that's what it is. All wrong. No sense making good people in this country do without, so we can feed a bunch of foreigners. They started the war in the first place."

"That's just what I told them at sewing circle the other day," Mrs. Morton said. "And most of them agreed."

G. P. pushed back his cereal bowl. "Dora," he called, "We're ready for those wheat cakes." He reached for the morning paper, glanced at the headlines, and picked up the financial page.

"Hmm, I see Senator Barker speaks at a chemical and dye manufacturer's dinner in New York tonight," he remarked, sipping his coffee. "Barker has the right idea on tariffs. Should be running our foreign policy instead of these crackpots. He'd know how to handle these beggars. Haven't heard much from him for several years now.—"

At 11:15, eastern standard time, Senator Horace M. Barker buzzed for his secretary. Time to get started on the last part of his speech, he thought, leafing through his notes.

"Get your pad and pencil, Miss Rogers," he said to the thin, nervous girl who had appeared in the doorway. "I want you to take the rest of my speech."

As she disappeared, the senator raised his bulk from the chair and began to pace heavily about his office. He stared at the thick carpet. It was a good office he had here, but nothing like the one he had had in Washington. Those had been good days, until the Japs had struck at Pearl Harbor. He had been a leader, a spokesman for his kind. And now here he was, back home practicing law. After December of 1941 his kind had not been popular. Isolationism, they said, was as dead as an Egyptian mummy. And they had elected another man in his place.

The senator smiled, a thin smile and a bitter one. So the isolationist was a thing of the past, was he? He knew better. After the first war, he had watched the feeling of international good will in the minds of the people die as the wranglings around the so-called peace table went on. And it would happen again. The only way to do business with these foreigners was to run them all out and build a wall high enough so they couldn't get back in. Then let them squabble and fight if they wanted to.

The thin girl appeared in the doorway again, pencil and pad in hand, and he turned sharply on her. "What have you been doing all this time, Miss Rogers?" he asked, frowning. "Got to get this speech down this morning. It's important."

"I was just answering the phone," she began, but the senator cut her off.

"Excuses, excuses. That's all you youngsters know how to do—make excuses. In my day we had to produce. No alibis then. He snorted and began his pacing again.

"Sit down, Miss Rogers. I'll stand. Always think better on my feet. Have to if you're a politician." He paced in silence for a while.

"Let's see, where did I leave off yesterday? Had we come to the part about how increased tariffs would help keep the German dye companies in their place?"

"Yes sir," Miss Rogers said. "You'd just finished that."

"Oh yes. Well, next I want to hit this European aid business. Not too hard, you understand. Not yet. But I want to let them know where I stand." He cleared his throat.

"How does this sound? 'Gentlemen, when I was a lad of six, in a one-room school house like the ones that many of you started in, I learned that two plus two added up to four. And

it still does, to the best of my knowledge. But some people in the administration today just can't add.' "

The senator strode up and down in silence for a while, smiling, pleased with himself. Haven't lost the old touch, he thought. Raising his voice, he went on. "Gentlemen, this idea of sending our raw materials and foodstuffs to Europe to help them build up industries that will soon be competing with us for world trade,—this idea just doesn't add up . . ."

His back pressed flat against the cold stone of a shattered wall, the boy stood peering out of the alley toward the lighted window of the bakery shop. It was nearly dark in Berlin now, the early evening darkness of winter in northern Europe, and a fog was moving in, gray and wet and cold. The dampness heightened the smell of burnt wood from the charred ruins around him.

The boy shivered as the chill seeped through his thin gray jacket. The war had not twisted and stunted his body, as it had those of so many of his kind. And because he was tall and strong and clever, he hunted alone, instead of in a pack. The danger was greater, but so were the rewards.

Why didn't the baker lock up? It was past time. For three days he had watched him as he left, timing him. Soon the police patrol would get here. Hunger gnawed at his stomach. He couldn't wait. He would have to go ahead, police or no police.

The lights in the shop suddenly went out; then he saw through the fog the dim shape of the baker as he locked the door and moved away down the street. He waited two long minutes, counting off the seconds to himself, then crossed the street. It was quite dark now. At the shop front he felt his way down the wall toward the rear, searching for the window. His fingers touched it, and he stopped and looked back. The street was silent, deserted. He took the bar of flat steel from under his jacket, put it under the window and pushed down hard. Inside, something snapped and the window slid up easily. He put the bar back under his jacket, sliding it under his belt, hoisted himself up, and wriggled through the window.

Inside, it was black, and the air was warm and fragrant with the smell of fresh-baked bread. He closed the window behind him, afraid suddenly that the smell of the bread might drift out and give him away.

For a long moment he stood staring into the blackness, waiting for his eyes to accustom themselves to it, but it was too dark. The fog and the wall of the building across the alley shut off all light from the street. He felt for the wall and began to grope his way along it, probing the black void ahead with his foot before each step. At the corner, he still had found nothing.

For the first time since he had crossed the street, the feeling of apprehension returned. The patrol would soon be here. He felt his way long the second wall, one hand outstretched into the blackness before him.

Halfway down the hall he found it—the shelf with the long loaves of hard-crust bread, ready for the housewives who formed their long line in front of the shop each morning. He seized one of the loaves, still warm from the baker's oven. The crust was soft, and the smell of it was overpowering; for a moment he felt dizzy as the hunger pains gripped him. He dug his fingers into the loaf, tore off the end, and began to stuff it into his mouth in great bites. In the stillness of the room he made little animal-like sounds as he ate.

When the end of the loaf was gone, he turned again to the shelf and took loaves, shoving them under his left arm. He retraced his path, moving surely this time, the fingers of his right hand just brushing the wall. At the window he stopped to adjust his load, then he climbed over the sill.

The drop to the ground was not a long one, but he lit awkwardly, burdened down with the bread, and dropped one of the loaves. He picked it up hastily and moved back up the alley toward the street. At the edge of the building he paused. It was clear. He stepped out from the building.

“Halt!”

The rough voice stopped him midway in the road and waves of fear traveled up his spine. The patrol! To his right he could see two shapes advancing through the fog. He was caught, he thought in terror. Caught.

He was not conscious that he had begun to run; animal-like, his instincts took over. He sprinted for the alley on the far side of the street, grasping the loaves of bread with both hands so they would not slip.

“Halt!”

Again the voice rang out, harsh and brutal, and then—the report of a gun and the crack of a bullet just above his head. He

ducked and swerved. He was almost in the alley, almost in its shadow. They hadn't caught him yet. They—.

There was a smack, as if a great whip had lashed out, and a stunning blow on his side that spun him half around and knocked him to his knees. A wave of dizziness came over him, and then he was on his feet again running. The blackness of the alley swallowed him as he ran, lifting his feet high to avoid tripping on the rough cobblestones. He had been hit. He could feel a warm wetness creeping down his side.

Behind him, feet pounded in the alley. His legs wobbled as he tried desperately to force more speed from them. He had dropped all the loaves of bread but one, which he gripped in his left hand. His right arm hung limply, swinging by his side. Something seemed to be pressing in on his chest, cutting off his air. He had to stop. Had to rest.

Suddenly he saw a faint light through a hole blasted in a wall on one side of the alley. He dodged through it and staggered a little way before he fell. Behind, he heard the feet of the two patrolmen as they stumbled on past. He was safe.

He was in a small courtyard behind the ruins of a large apartment house. The shattered walls towered over him as he lay on the ground and a loose shutter creaked as it swung on its hinges. He could not hear the patrol now. The fog had swallowed up their footsteps. He struggled to his knees. There was a small shelter over in the corner, piled up from loose bricks by some homeless survivor of the war. It was empty. He crawled awkwardly with his one good arm, pitching forward each time he moved it. At last he reached the shelter and half-fell into it.

For several minutes he lay there not moving. In the distance he could hear the voices of the two policemen calling to each other in their foreign tongue, searching for him. He turned to face the open side of the shelter, like an animal at bay.

He remembered the bread, the last loaf. Out there in the courtyard. He had dropped it when he fell. He struggled to his knees again, but he could not move. He would get the bread later.

He felt for his arm, then his side. His jacket was wet and sticky, but there was no pain. Only a great numbness was seeping slowly over the rest of his body. If only he could breathe.

All at once, he was shaken with a great spasm of coughing that convulsed his whole body. He choked and gasped, arching

his back and clawing at the collar of his jacket as he fought for air. A trickle of blood ran from the corner of his mouth. He stared out at the darkness, his eyes wide and frightened. As he stared, the black became blacker, and he felt himself slipping down and down, until there was nothing but blackness, velvety soft blackness.

At noon, having just finished dictating his speech, Senator Horace Barker stepped out of his office. It had been a good morning's work, he thought, as he started briskly down the sidewalk. And now he was hungry as a bear. A steak would hit the spot, with some French fries perhaps, and a salad of juicy sliced tomatoes. And then for dessert—.

At 9 o'clock, Pacific time, George P. Morton shrugged himself into the heavy coat which his wife held out for him, and dutifully pecked her on the cheek. "Don't worry about those bills, dear," he said "We'll make out somehow. Things will get back to normal sometime. By the way, what are we having for dinner tonight?"

Against the ebony blackness of space, our earth shines with a cool soft glow as it spins its way about the sun. As you move away from it, you can no longer see the towns and cities or the mountains and valleys. Even the great continents dwindle and disappear, and finally the light and dark halves of the earth are gone. All that remains is a tiny luminous seed pearl, our globe, lost in the terrific silence of the universe.

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