Psychosis

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The six men marched in two's led by a seventh. Their leather and gaberdine looked slick and shiny and new. They marched down the road toward the airfield. They were joined at every crossing by seven—by seven, by seven, until there were seven thousand—and more, looking slick and shiny and new. They marched—.

5:32 was chalked behind our relay unit number. 5:32 p. m. my watch said 5:19. a glance at the big chrome clock above the hangar door showed 5:18. I turned my watch hand back, feeling that I had won a small battle over time. I had five minutes more to smoke and breathe before swinging into the bomb seat of my metal bird and becoming one of its organs.

motors whined, purred, snarled, obeying their masters. relays of three had left every four minutes since five o'clock—three bombers—three pursuits—three bombers—three— uniforms moved quickly and calmly, zipping, buttoning, snapping leather garments about them.

"hand me a screwdriver."
"what'sa matter, sir?"
"get me a new bulb here, will you?"
"think you'll need it, sir?"
"get one, damn it, and shut up about it."
"okay, sir, okay, sir."
the heel plates made little sparks as they scuffled along the cement towards the shop.
"this every-night business gettin' on your nerves, Herby?"
"no—only that damn mechanic should have checked these panel lights before now."
"who's fillin' the flank on unit 12?"
"new bunch, I guess."
"from Randy, I spose?"
"I spose."

[18]
I FELT a creeping impatience like one has when he waits for a bus. nothing more—nothing less. bombing the tyrant was work. one slept, got up, went to work. the last three months had been long years. I wore veteran's stripes now—a three-month's veteran. three months—three years—three hundred years—three thousand. men slept, got up, and worked. men had bombed the tyrant for three thousand years.

—5:32—5:32—5:32—

I dropped my cigarette and ground it, my watch said 5:23. I grabbed the slick handle and pulled up and into the padded seat. I felt the cool leather of the head rest on the back of my neck just before pulling on my sheepskin helmet.

"one—two—three—" I tested the telephones.

"three—two—one—" came the answer.

I settled and yawned and moved my hands over the slick shiny bomb sight. I never looked at it but what I remembered how we used to listen to the radio and hear that England had obtained it—then heard it denied—then admitted—then denied. I opened the shutter, felt the handles and examined them. I had obtained my bomb sight, that was a cinch, and no denial for me. a beautiful bombsight.

ahead of us, I could hear the 5:28 relay bite into the wind and roar away. my great silver bird trembled patiently.

"check" said my phones.

"check."

—5:29—5:30—

I MOVED my hand fondly over the bomb release levers. I enjoyed their subtle cunning efficiency. subtle death and bloody. that first leave when I got to go home for three days—that tight feeling I had all during the trip—starting up from my stomach, through my lungs and finally wedging tight in my throat. I smiled when she met me at the station—the tight feeling stayed—and we went out to the house and tried to live for three days. and we slept together—her warm body pressed against mine. her soft round shoulder pressed familiarly under my chin and hard against the tightness in my throat. I roughly pushed her away and slapped her across the face—and the tightness relaxed in my throat, but how could I explain as I felt her fingers go limp with hurt? why had I wanted to hurt her—to cut her tender mouth—to make her sob? why was I longing
now to trip my smooth polished release levers again—looking forward to my job?

—5:31—5:32—

my bird jerked and made a running leap into the sunset. southward, eastward, onward.

“check” said my phones.

“check.”

I watched the sunset. it slowly purpled as some unseen god squeezed grape juice over the watercolor sky. in the east, the moon rose plump and peachy behind the curved sea line. underneath, the long white lacy surf stretched and retched.

home on a summery evening like this was the smell of iced tea and potato salad and sticky pages of cold meat. later—a drive through the country to dry the day’s sweat—playing the car radio—stopping at Homer’s Inn for a beer and a good political argument. but bombing the tyrant had changed these things. home—what was that? playing the car radio—what was that? politics—all screwed up now with international complications.

three hundred miles per hour slipped off the shiny feathers of my metal bird.

three hundred miles per—I yawned and stretched nervously.

“check” I said to the phones.

“check.”

three pursuits ahead—three pursuits behind—as three hundred miles per hour skimmed off our glistening bodies.

—7:02—7:02—7:02—

as it became darker, fat Miss Moon ran along with us to light our path. goddess of love guiding our way so we can drop our lovely gifts on our lovely friends. but we know you are a traitress, too, you faithless bitch, showing the way for the other guy as he comes to call on our folks back home. we don’t like your prostituting, Miss Moon.

my bird jerked and made a running leap into the sunset. southward, eastward, onward.

“check” said my phones.

“check.”

three shiny birds in a silver V. moonlight trickling over their metal feathers. three more—three hundred more—three thousand more. across space and back again like a bright buzzing bicycle chain pumped by a merciless god.

we left the coast and flew over black water being sawed by a
strip of jagged moonlight. I drew my knees up a little tighter. I didn't want to get my feet wet except in my own white bath tub. my watch hands glowed their radium tips out of the darkness. 7:30—only twenty more minutes and I could flip my pretty shiny levers.

from the bird's brain, up forward, came the terse command. "watch for factory smokestacks on the far side of Caraca. it's munitions tonight."

"check."

munitions factory. so we got to set off firecrackers tonight, did we? just like the Fourth of July at home—fried chicken and all the trimmings. the factory was probably full of women and girls. tired haggard women and girls who should be warming the beds of their husbands. we'd fry some chickens tonight all right. we could even set off tiny lady-fingers in bunches like the good old days when we were kids. lady-fingers—those insignificant harmless firecrackers that our sisters used to pop off.

three hundred miles per—three hundred miles per—

far ahead tiny fires trickled. our pals had done their job well. I was hoping they had left some lady-fingers for me to blow up. soon the fires were below us.

the flames were too far down—no acrid smoke smarted our eyes—no heat blistered our hands. to us it was a delicate jewel—a blazing opal—a fire opal lying in a soft black velvet jewel box.

a ring of flashing twinklets. they were firing up at us, hoping to smash this metal bird.

"check—factory smokestacks—24 degrees 2 minutes and 36'3"."

"check."

I HAD three seconds after sighting to flip my lovely levers. I felt them slick in my hands. the steel was chilly but smooth to feel. the sight moved silently between my knees, finding its doomed object.

we swooped lower so my bird could strike hard.

"check" said my phones.

"check."

the road moved like a white string in my sighting glass—then the wall around the factory crossed the glass horizontally. one—two—three so easy like, so silent like, so damned funny. funny. fried chicken for everyone now, you babes, taste it,—how you like, no?
“check” said my phones.
“you betcha.”
around we go, around we go, only half done, Woplino! the road—the wall—one—two—three—.
lighter now, much lighter, three thousand pounds lighter—up, up, up and away from the smell of fried chicken and burnt lady-fingers. Nero had nothing on me, he was small time, so was Alec the Great and Ivan the Terrible. they left charred stubs of bodies behind on their bloody pages, but I blew hand from arm, arm from shoulder—and plastered them against the battered brick buildings.
my watch said eight bells—home by ten if all goes well.
“just picked up that unit five lost two planes.”
“which two?”
“didn’t say.”
“Bill was in the lead crate,—do yah suppose—?”
“didn’t say, I hope not.”
“jeese, I wish these eagles could carry hostesses to go along and help celebrate the glorious victories.”
“yeah, who don’t?”

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Seven men—seven hundred men—seven thousand men—and more, have reached the airfield. They stand at stiff attention. In long rows, straight as sticks, they are all alike, in slick leather and gaberdine. They stand in the purple dusk, looking straight ahead with waiting eyes.

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**Monk’s Creed**

Frances Foster
Chem. T. Sr.

Achieve the silent strength of days
Devoid of unexpected things.
Stop up your ears when down the ways
The echo of a memory sings.

And lock behind a thousand stays
The pain of half-remembered springs.