Iowa Crisis

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Abstract

ED JENSEN pushed open the screen door and studied the clouds gathering in the west. His tanned forehead wrinkled as a troubled expression crept over his face...
asleep, because when I opened my eyes again, the day nurse was changing the sheets on the bed next to mine. The bed was empty. I watched her, and a hard, little knot in my stomach grew larger and larger. "Where's the belly-case?" I asked her.

"He died during the night," she said. "We all expected it to happen, but there's something about his death that puzzles me."

"What do you mean there's something about his death that puzzles you?" I asked. My voice must have sounded odd, because the nurse looked at me rather strangely before she answered.

"Cases wounded as he was die rather painfully," she said. "When we found him this morning, there was a smile on his lips as if he had been happy about something."

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**ED JENSEN** pushed open the screen door and studied the clouds gathering in the west. His tanned forehead wrinkled as a troubled expression crept over his face. He had planned to start cutting oats, but ominous thunderheads, ripped by streaks of lightning, changed his mind. His attention shifted to the field across the road. The oats stood straight, then rolled in waves across the field as the dying wind breathed upon it. Ed started to smile with pride as he thought of what that field would yield, but a sharp flash of lightning and the lingering roll of thunder brought an expression of anxiety to his face. There had been hail storms near his farm recently. He had seen the stubs of cornstalks and the battered small grain, and smelled the stench of a year's crop crushed into silage by the fury of wind-blown hail. Now he wondered if his would be next.

"Ellen," he called to his wife as he turned toward the kitchen, allowing the screen door to slam shut. "Are you sure the chickens are all locked in?" He heard her shut the windows in the kitchen.

"Yes," she answered as she pulled down the last open window. "I coaxed them into the brooder house just before dinner."

Ed pushed the door open, chased back the flies with his straw
hat, and walked onto the porch. The wind hardly stirred the leaves now. Above, the odd grey clouds accompanying the wind swirled without pattern. Ed jammed his hat on his head at an awkward angle and strode across the yard to close the garage doors. A wall of dust shifted across the neighbor’s yard half a mile to the west. Ed noticed it as he quickly closed and locked the garage doors. A few drops of rain fell and smothered in the dust. Ed held out his hand and caught a drop of rain. Others splashed against his hat. He wondered how bad the storm would be. The worst would be wind and hail; the best would be a calm rain.

Ed trotted toward the house as the wind began to rise. He hopped up the steps onto the porch and tossed his hat into the corner. After fumbling in his shirt pocket for some time, he pulled out a cigarette. The wind foiled several attempts to light it. He finally gave up in disgust and was content to chew on the end of the cigarette.

“A whole summer’s work could be ruined in the next few minutes,” he muttered under his breath. “Damn, I’d hate to see it hail, but I guess I can’t do anything but hope and wait.”

The wind whipped across the yard now. Leaves and dust filled the air, stinging the farmer’s face, but only a few drops of rain fell. The grain across the road flattened before the wind, but desperately attempted to rise again.

Gradually the wind diminished in fury, but the rain fell harder. Sheets of water obscured the garage from Ed’s view. He searched the ground for hail, which would bounce along the surface and drown in pools of water. He cocked his head to the side, listening for the sound of ice stones being crushed against the house, but only the rain fell, covering the yard with a shimmering blanket of water.

Fifteen minutes later Ed still stood on the porch. A new brightness shone in his eyes, and a faint smile crept upon his face. The air was fresh and clean, and the rain had dwindled to a few stray drops which distorted the surface of the puddles of water in the yard. Across the road the field of grain slumped under the weight of clinging drops of water, but still stood. Suddenly Ed turned, opened the door, and walked briskly through the kitchen.

“Well, Ellen, looks like I’ll be able to start cutting in a couple days if it doesn’t rain anymore,” he said as he relaxed in an easy chair and opened the daily paper to the sports section.