Arky

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Abstract

"Ti-i-ime." the voice of the carpenter superintendent echoed from the walls of the canyon, and all over the dam men set down their tools and picked up their lunches...
"TI-I-IME." The voice of the carpenter superintendent echoed from the walls of the canyon, and all over the dam men set down their tools and picked up their lunches. Al, the carpenter, picked up his sack lunch, which the mess hall supplied all single men, and shuffled along the catwalk to where the concrete crew sat with their backs against the sloping face of the dam. As usual, his snag-toothed grin greeted us all, as he sat down next to me and cocked his ear to my words.

"Yeah, if I don't spray my bed every night with that coal oil mixture those bedbugs cut me to pieces. I'm used to sleeping in a nice clean-smelling bed instead of one saturated with coal oil, but I can take coal oil better than bed bugs. How you doin' with the bedbugs Al?" I turned to Al, and he laid his sandwich down to free his hands for gesturing.

"Man, you should see my bed. Looks like somebody butchered a hog in it. Bed bugs gettin' so big they're turnin' me over lookin' for places they ain't bit me yet." Al was from deepest Arkansas.

"I wish those bedbugs would eat this lousy lunch instead of eatin' me." He threw a beef sandwich that was starting to turn green far out, and it spun down into the roofless shell of the power house.

"I'm getting' tired of this food too, so I bought me a can of Vy-ennies at the commissary," said Al.

"A can of what?"

"Vy-ennies. All us Arkansas boys eats 'em. Here's a can of 'em right here." Al handed me a small round can. The label said, "Vienna Sausages."

"That says, 'Vienna,' Al."

"Maybe that's what it say to you, college boy, but I talkin' pure Arkansas." Al laughed and popped one of the sausages into his mouth. "This store-bought food is pretty good, but it don't come no ways near a good mess of poke and possum."

"What's that, Al?"
"You mean you ain't never eat no roast possum and pokeweed greens?"
"No."
"Boy, you been brung up wrong. I suppose you never had any coon and collards either?"
"I'm afraid not."
"Young folks sure miss out on a lot of things nowadays. Like that shindig, last night. I didn't see you there."
"I couldn't make it, Al. How was it?"
"Boy, it was a sight on earth." Al waved his sandwich in a long arc and widened the grin on his face. "They was a hundred and forty-three men and sixteen women there, and every one of 'em was drunk. That big fat Mrs. Lucas was there a-dancin' with everybody. She had on a pair of slacks, and you shoulda seen her from the rear. Looked like two tomcats fightin' in a gunny sack." The concrete crew roared with laughter.

Al pulled the last piece of food out of his sack. It was a small, dried up piece of cake. "Now ain't that awful?" said Al with mock indignation. I think I'll take this back to that cook and ask him if he's sure he can spare it."

Al leaned back, took a dip of snuff, bit off a chew of tobacco, and lit a cigarette. He was a happy Arky.


TWENTY MILLIMETER

THIS IS the story of O'Brien, a man who fell in love with a gun. He was an armed-guard gunner on one of the merchant ships I rode during the war; the gun was a twenty-millimeter Oerlikon anti-aircraft machine cannon. His love was as strong as any love a man ever had for a woman, but it was a love based on the act of destruction, not the act of creation. He lived to destroy enemy aircraft—a killing the most removed from the physical that any destruction can be. There is no distasteful blood or screaming.

I signed on the S. S. Cape Verde in 'Frisco, a fast freighter