Heat

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Abstract

EAT lies like a sticky hand over the little Nebraska town. The last drop of moisture has been wrung out of the barren earth, and with nothing left to hold it, the dust whirls before the wind...
why he was calling this weazed old man “Sir.” He commanded no dignity, had probably never even thought of serving in the Army.

Ben felt the clipped reply from Old Garret bounce off the concrete walls. The old man rose impatiently from his worn swivel chair. The interview was over. Ben had the feeling the old man had known all along what he was going to say about the job. But he still wants to argue, Ben observed. “Well, I’m old enough to know my own mind.” Old enough! The word had slipped up to the surface again and in his private mind embarrassed him.

Ben let himself out the door quietly, carefully but with a definite twist of his wrist. He was already at home, his uniform fitted over his trim body snugly, orderlies hurried about obeying his beck and call, his car drew up at the curb for him and far off on the parade ground some poor, dumb sergeant was worrying over the new recruits. Well, Major Marrow would have it easy.

—Beverly Muckler, H. Ec. Sr.

HEAT

HEAT lies like a sticky hand over the little Nebraska town. The last drop of moisture has been wrung out of the barren earth, and with nothing left to hold it, the dust whirls before the wind. It sifts into the cracks of the wind-slanted houses and coats the tabletops in the town’s one restaurant, where the elbows of ranchers and farmers make islands in the greyness. The hands and faces above the elbows are like the land—eroded into deep crevices by the eternal wind. Dry, dusty voices float on the waves of heat, patient and resigned, but still tinged with the hope that makes the farmers plant again each spring after a crop failure.

“Ain’t seen such a drought in forty years. Reckon the last time was in 1909 when the grasshoppers came.”

“Think it will rain, Cy?” Even the young voices crack.

“It always has, and I reckon it will agin, Bob, but I don’t know when.”
“The water holes are drying up, and my stock are gettin' thirsty, Cy.”

“It can’t last much longer, I reckon,” says Cy.

But it does. The cattle die, and the corn dries up, and the good black earth blows away. The houses slant from the wind, and the dust on the table-tops becomes deeper, but the voices never give up. They get drier and dustier and the dust turns to mud on swollen tongues, but it never turns to mud on the road outside.

The days blow past, and finally there are clouds on the shining metal of the sky. And the rains come. The grey houses turn black, and there are islands of mud on the restaurant floor, but the voices are as dry and dusty as ever.

“Think we’ll get a crop, Cy?”

“I reck’n,” says Cy. “If not this year, we’ll get one next year for sure.”

The houses slant, the earth blows away, but the voices go on, and because of them, the little Nebraska town lies under the sticky hand of heat, season after season, year after year.—Laura Collins, H. Ec. Jr.

FAITH

PAIN! Pain! Pain! Hot, furious, molten streaks of pain flooded from his chest, down to his front paws, each time he breathed. An iron fist clamped him in a mighty grip and contracted sinking steel knives into him, every breath he took. He could see the peculiar angle his hind legs made lying in the dust of the road, and knew something was wrong with them, but the world-filling pain in his chest crowded, and shouldered out lesser hurt.

If only the God would come, he was sure everything would be all right.

He couldn’t understand it. He’d crossed the road lots of times before, waiting at the side until all the cars had passed, but this one had suddenly swerved toward him. He remembered a great wheel rushing down upon him, shiny