Brother

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Abstract

THE DIM evening light, fighting its way through the dusty pane, is almost lost in the drab, boxlike room. It is not reflected by the greasy kerosene stove, the orange crate cupboard on the three-legged stool...
Sketch

a heavy, tired summer day. She went to the other side of the meadow and regarded the men with bovine disgust. The man sat down again.

“What did he do that for?” asked the Young Man.

“What da you tink?” answered the Man from Naples.

“Look, kid, a man he's a not a gandy until he can shoot the bull, moo like a cow, and race on a shovel!

“Why does he want to moo like a cow?” asked the Young man.

The Man from Naples studied him with scorn. “Why goddam, so's he can get by da fence.”

“Oh, you mean so the cow will come close enough to the fence so he can hit it!” said the Young Man.

“Sure,” answered the Man from Naples. “What the hell you tink? Why else you wanta get a cow by da fence? Crazy keed!”

“I don't get it,” said the Young Man.

“Look, kid,” said the Man from Chicago, “Terry's seen a lot of hot and cold days on the railroad . . . he's a gandy from wayback. Sometimes old gandies just get so they like to throw stones at things . . . it's relaxing, sort of. When you spent as many hot and cold days as Terry has, you'll want to relax, too. See what I mean?”

“I guess so,” said the Young Man . . .

—John B. Madson, Sci. Sr.

Brother

THE DIM evening light, fighting its way through the dusty pane, is almost lost in the drab, boxlike room. It is not reflected by the greasy kerosene stove, the orange crate cupboard on the three-legged stool.

Under the tiny window, bending over a rough hewn table sits a huge bulk of a man. Stripped to the waist, the sweat making tiny rivulets on his tensed black muscles, he works feverishly. Slap-tick. Slap-tick. His knotty hands carefully sharpen a stained kitchen knife.

“Yes, suh. Yes, suh,” he rhythmically moans as he moves the knife up and down a broken strip of crocking. “Yes, suh-
tonight will show dem. Tonight we show dat union boss. Dis heah's a free man. No union's gonna make a slave out a ol' Joe."

He holds the glistening edge to the window, tests it with his thumb, then spreads his thick lips as he watches a drop of deep red blood fall to the table. "Yes suh, 'bout time to be a gitten to wurk. You and me," he pats the knife confidently as he slips it in the top of his jeans. "You and me, we alls gonna see dat union man tonight."

* * * *

Sally's student-nurses uniform rustles in the quiet of the hospital corridor. The stench of death seeps from behind half closed doors. "Nigger heaven"—the older girls had told Sally when she had learned that her first floor duty was going to be in the south wing. "They never bring them in till they are ready to die!"

The last door is closed. Sally turns and looks up at the handsome, somberly-dressed Negro who had silently followed her. "It won't do any good, Reverend. The doctor said he wouldn't last till morning. He got a concussion from being pushed off those stairs at the packing house."

The minister's kindly eyes smiled down at her. "I want to pray for him."

"Well" Sally is unsure. "It might help. He didn't cut the guy very badly." She pushes on the door, letting the minister enter first the clean impersonal room.

Sally motions hesitantly at the figure sprawled on the bed. Its huge feet dangles over the end. A forest of grey crinkling hair grows from its massive black chest. Its thick lips hang open, showing rotten teeth and pus-filled cavities. Its nostrils flare with snorting breaths. Its bloodshot eyes see nothing. Suddenly the heavy muscles in the right arm flex and the arm rises. Sally shrinks back against the wall, frightened. "I—I guess it's all right, Reverend." The arm resounds, thud, on the bed. "He's—he doesn't—just a—he's still unconscious."

The minister goes to the bed and puts his long slim fingers over the huge hand that now is limp again.

Sally's eyes are still large with fear. "The records say his name is Joe Smith, Reverend, but I—I heard that was an alias."

The minister glances briefly at Sally, then looks down upon the still figure on the bed. "He is a brother, nurse. We will pray."

—Robbie Cleary, Sci. So.