

He hacked his arms with the knife and stood watching the blood run down. It was little enough to do for Pretty Calf, for little Freedom.

Now there is nothing to keep me, he realized. When I get home, I must not let them see the scars.

He looked at Greasy Hand, hideous in her grief-burdened age, and thought: I really am free now! When a wife dies, her husband has no more duty towards her family. Pretty Calf had told him so, long ago, when he wondered why a certain man moved out of one tepee and into another.

The old woman, of course, would be a scavenger. There was one other with the tribe, an ancient crone who had no relatives, toward whom no-one felt any responsibility. She lived on food thrown away by the more fortunate. She slept in shelters that she built with her own knotted hands. She plodded wearily at the end of the procession when the camp moved. When she stumbled, nobody cared. When she died, nobody would miss her.

Tomorrow morning, the white man decided, I will go.

His mother-in-law's sunken mouth quivered. She said one word, questioningly. She said, *'Zero-oshay?'* She said, 'Son?'

Blinking, he remembered. When a wife died, her husband was free. But her mother, who had ignored him with dignity, might if she wished ask him to stay. She invited him by calling him Son, and he accepted by answering Mother.

Greasy Hand stood before him, bowed with years, withered with unceasing labour, loveless and childless, scarred with grief. But with all her burdens she still loved life enough to beg it from him, the only person she had any right to ask. She was stripping herself of all she had left, her pride.

He looked eastward across the prairie. Two thousand miles away was home. The old woman would not live forever. He could afford to wait, for he was young. He could afford to be magnanimous, for he knew he was a man. He gave her the answer. *'Egya,'* he said. 'Mother.'

He went home three years later. He explained no more than to say, 'I lived with Crows for a while. It was some time before I could leave. They called me Horse.'

He did not find it necessary either to apologize or to boast, because he was the equal of any man on earth.

Uneasy Homecoming by Will F Jenkins

Connie began to have the feeling of dread and uneasiness in the taxi but told herself it was not reasonable. She dismissed it decisively when she reached the part of town in which all her friends lived. She could stop and spend the evening with someone until Tom got home, but she didn't. She thrust away the feeling as the taxi rolled out across the neck of land beyond most of the houses. The red, dying sun cast long shadows across the road.

So far, their house was the only one that had been built on the other side of the bay. But she could see plenty of other houses as the taxi drew up before the door. These other houses were across the bay, to be sure, but there was no reason to be upset. She was firm with herself.

The taxi stopped and the last thin sliver of crimson sun went down below the world's edge. Dusk was already here. But everything looked perfectly normal. The house looked neat and hospitable, and it was good to be back. She paid the taxi driver and he obligingly put her suitcases inside the door. The uneasy feeling intensified as he left. But she tried not to heed it.

It continued while she heard the taxi moving away and purring down the road. But it remained essentially the same—a sort of formless restlessness and apprehension—until she went into the kitchen. Then the feeling changed.

She was in the kitchen, with the close smell of a shut-up house about her, when she noticed the change. Her suitcases still lay in the hall where the taxi driver had piled them. The front door was still open to let in fresh air. And quite suddenly she had an urgent conviction that there was something here that she should notice! Something quite inconspicuous. But this sensation was just as absurd as the feeling she'd had in the taxi.

There was a great silence outside the house. This was dusk, and bird and insect noises were growing fainter. There were no neighbours near to make other sounds.

She turned on the refrigerator and it began to make a companionable, humming sound. She turned on the water, and it gushed. But there her queer sensation took a new form. It seemed that every movement produced a noise which advertised her presence, and she felt that there was some reason to be utterly still. And that really was nonsense too.

She glanced into the dining room. She regarded her luggage still piled in the hall near the open front door. Everything looked exactly as everything should look when one returns from a two-weeks' holiday and one's husband has been away on business at the same time. Tom would get home about midnight. She had spoken to him on the telephone yesterday. He would positively get back in a few hours. So it would be absurd not to stay here to greet him. The feeling she had, she decided firmly, was simply a normal dislike of being alone. And she would not be silly.

She glanced around the kitchen. Afterwards she remembered that she had looked straight at the back door without seeing what there was to be seen. She went firmly down the hall. Then she went out of doors to look at her flowers.

The garden looked only a little neglected. The west was a fading, already dim glory of red and gold. She could not see too many details, but the garden was fragrant and appealing in the dusk. She saw the garage—locked and empty, of course, since Tom had the car—and felt a minor urge to go over to it. But she did not. Afterwards the memory of that minor urge made her feel faint. But it was only an idea. She dismissed it.

She smelled the comfortable, weary smells of the late summer evening, which would presently give way to the sharper, fresher scents of night. There was the tiny darting shadow of a bat overhead, black against the dark sapphire sky. It was the time when, for a little space, peace seems to enfold all the world. But the nagging uneasiness persisted even out here.

There was a movement by the garage, but it failed to catch her eye. If she had looked—even if she failed to see the movement—she might still have seen the motorcycle. It did not belong here, but it was leaning against the garage wall as if its owner had ridden it here and leaned it confidentially

where it would be hidden from anyone looking across the bay. But Connie noticed nothing. She simply felt uneasy.

She found herself going nervously back towards the house. The sunset colours faded, and presently all would be darkness outside. She heard her footsteps on the gravelled walk. Occasional dry leaves brushed against her feet. It seemed to her that she hurried, which was ridiculous. So she forced herself to walk naturally and resisted an impulse to look about. That was why she failed to notice the pantry window.

She came to the front of the house. Her heels made clicking sounds on the steps. She felt a need to be very quiet, to hide herself.

Yet she had no reason for fear in anything she actually had noticed. She hadn't seen anything odd about the back door or the pantry window, and she hadn't noticed the motorcycle or the movement by the garage. The logical explanation for her feeling of terror was simply that it was dark and she was alone. She repeated that explanation as she forced herself to enter the dark front doorway.

She wanted to gasp with relief as she felt for the switch and the lights came on. The dark rooms remaining were more terrifying than the night outside. So she went all over the ground floor, turning on lights, and tried not to think of going upstairs. There was no-one within call and no-one but the taxi driver even knew that she was here. Anything could happen.

But she did not know of anything to cause danger either. Connie had felt and fought occasional fear before. To bring her nameless frights into the light for scorn, she had talked lightly in the past of the imaginary Things towards which women feel such terror—the Things which nervous women believe are following them; the Things imagined to be hiding in cupboards and behind dark trees in deserted streets. But her past scorn failed to dispel her terror now. She tried to be angry with herself because she was being as silly as the neurotic female who cannot sleep unless she looks under her bed at night. But still, Connie could not drive herself to go upstairs or to look under her own bed right now.

It was an unfortunate omission.

In the lighted living room she had the feeling of someone staring at her from the dark outside. It was unbearable. She

went to the telephone, absolutely certain that there was nothing wrong. But if she talked to someone—

She called Mrs Winston. It was not a perfect choice. Mrs Winston was not nearly of Connie's own age, but Connie felt so sorry for the older woman that when she needed comfort she often instinctively called her. Talking to someone else who needed comforting always seemed to make one's own troubles go away.

Mrs Winston's voice was bright and cheery over the phone. 'My dear Connie! How nice it is that you're back with us!

Connie felt better instantly. She felt herself relaxing, she heard her voice explaining that she'd had a lovely holiday and that Tom was coming back tonight and—

'Mrs Winston said anxiously, 'I do hope your house is all right, Connie. Is it? It's been dreadful here! Did you hear?'

'Not a word since I left,' said Connie. 'What's happened?' She expected to hear about someone having been unkind to Charlie, Mrs Winston's only son. He gave Connie the creeps, but she could feel very sorry for his mother. He had a talent for getting into trouble. There'd been a girl when he was only sixteen, he had been caught stealing in school when there was no excuse for it, and he'd been expelled from college and nowadays wore an apologetic air. Mrs Winston tried to believe that he was simply having a difficult time growing up. But he was already twenty, and at twenty a hulking young man with an apologetic air and a look always thinking of something else—one could sympathize with his mother and still feel uncomfortable about him.

Mrs Winston's voice went on explaining. And the feeling of terror came back upon Connie like a blow.

There had been a series of burglaries in the town. The Hamiltons' house had been ransacked while they were out for an evening's bridge. The Blairs' house was looted while they were away. The Smithsons'. The Tournays'. And Saddler's shop was robbed, and the burglars seemed to know exactly where Mr Saddler kept his day's receipts and took them and the tray of watches and fountain pens and the cameras. And poor Mr Field—

Mr Field was the ancient cashier at Saddler's. He had interrupted the burglars and they had beaten him horribly,

leaving him for dead. He had never regained consciousness, and it was not believed now at the hospital that he ever would.

Connie said from a dry throat, 'I wish you hadn't told me that tonight. I'm all alone. Tom won't be back until midnight.'

'But my dear,' Mrs Winston exclaimed, 'you mustn't. I'll locate Charlie and have him come for you right away! You can spend the evening here and he can take you back when—'

Connie shook her head at the telephone. 'Oh, no! That would be silly!'

She heard her voice refusing, and her mind protested the refusal. But Charlie made her flesh crawl. She could not bear to think of him driving her through the darkness. Baseless terror was bad enough, she thought, without actual aversion besides.

'I'm quite all right!' she insisted. 'Quite! I do hope Mr Field gets better, but I'm all right . . .'

When she hung up the phone she was aware that she was sick. But it was startling to discover that her knees were physically weak when she started to move from the instrument. She could telephone someone else and they would come for her. But Mrs Winston would be offended and take it as an affront. And Connie was still sure that her fear was quite meaningless. It was just a feeling.

She moved aimlessly away from the telephone, found herself at the foot of the stairs. Then she looked up at the dark above and wanted to whimper. But a saving fury came to her. She would not yield to groundless fear. She was in terror of—she called it burglars now, but actually it was of Them, the unknown men women are taught to fear as dangerous. 'Ridiculous!' Connie told herself.

She got a suitcase and started for the stairs. It was deep night now. If she looked out—say, at the garage—she would see nothing. Somewhere there was a dismal cooling. Doves.

She climbed the stairs into darkness. Nothing happened. She pressed a switch and the passage sprang into light. She breathed again. She went into Tom's and her bedroom. There was dust on the dressing table. There was an ashtray. She put down the suitcase and was conscious of bravery because she was angry.

Then she saw cigarette ends on the rug. Scorched places.

Someone had sat here in this bedroom, smoking and indifferently dropping cigarette ends on the rug and crushing them out.

Connie stood with every muscle in her body turned to stone. A part of Connie's brain directed her eyes again to the bed. Someone had sat on it—only sat—and smoked at leisure. But a corner of the bedspread was twitched aside. What was under the bed? She found herself backing away from it, into a chair which toppled over. The noise made her freeze.

But nothing happened. There was no change in the companionable hum of the refrigerator downstairs. No reaction to the sound of the overturned chair—which seemed incredible. If one of Them—the nameless Things of which she was in terror now—was under the bed, he would come out at the noise.

Presently—her breathing loud in her own ears—Connie bent and looked under the bed. She had to. None of Them was under it. Of course. But there was an object there which was strange.

A very long time later, Connie dragged it out. It was a bag with bulges in it. Her hands shook horribly, but she dumped its contents on the floor. There were cameras. Silver. Sally Hamilton's necklace and rings. There were watches and fountain pens. This must be what the burglars had taken from the Hamiltons' house and the Blairs' and the Smithsons' and the Tourneys'. The cameras and pens and watches came from Saddler's shop, where Mr Field had come upon the burglars and they had beaten him almost to death. The burglars had nearly killed him.

Connie went to the bedroom door. Her knees were water. Her house had been used as the hiding place for the loot of the burglars that had taken place in her absence. But now if they found out she was back—

Without much rationalization, she could guess why Mr Field had been nearly killed. He must have recognized the burglars. And now they could look across the bay and see that Connie was home. Wouldn't they know instantly that she would soon find their loot? And that she then would telephone for the police . . . ?

Unless they came and stopped her. Quickly.

Shivering, Connie turned out the light in her bedroom. And in the upstairs hall. Downstairs, she turned out the light in the living-room, went quickly to the front door and bolted it. She was leaving it when she thought to fumble her way across the room and make sure that the window was locked. It was. If the lights had been seen across the bay . . . she hastened desperately to turn out the rest. The dining-room. Lights out. The windows were locked. The pantry. It was dark. Whimpering, she was afraid to enter it. She flashed on the light to make sure of the window.

The window was broken. A neat jagged section of glass was missing. It had been cracked and removed so that someone could reach in and unlock it. It was now impossible to lock; anyone could reach in and unfasten it again.

Connie snapped off the light and fled into the kitchen and made that dark. But as the bulb dimmed she realized what she had seen in the very act of snapping the light switch. The back door was not fully closed. Its key was missing. There was mud on the floor where someone had come in—more than once. The burglars must have made casual, constant use of the house.

She stood panting in the blackness. Somewhere outside, frogs croaked. There was a thump, and her heart stood still until she realized that a night-flying insect had bumped against the window.

The refrigerator cut off.

It was coincidence, of course, but it was shocking. The proper thing, the logical thing, was to go to the telephone now. She could not see to dial, but somehow she must.

She felt her way blindly to the instrument. Her fingers on the wall made whispering sounds that guided her and she became aware of the loud pounding sound her heart made.

Just as she reached the telephone there was a faint noise which might have been a footstep in the garden.

She waited, filled with such fear that her body did not seem to exist and she had no physical sensation at all.

But a part of her brain saw with infinite despair that if the burglars had been near the house at sunset, intending to enter it as soon as darkness fell, they would have seen the taxi deliver her. They would have known that sooner or later she would

discover proof of their presence. And what she had just done told them of her discovery! The light in the bedroom where their loot was hidden turned out . . . Every other light turned out. They would know she had darkened the house to hide in it, to use the telephone.

There was a soft sound at the back door. It squeaked.

Connie stood rigid. The clicking of the dial would tell everything. She could not conceivably summon help.

There was the soft whisper of a foot on the kitchen linoleum. Connie's hands closed convulsively. The one thought that came to her now was that she must breathe quietly.

There was a grey glow somewhere. The figure in the kitchen was throwing a torch beam on the floor. Then it halted, waiting. He knew that she was hiding somewhere in the house.

He went almost soundlessly into the living-room. She saw the glow of the light there. Back into the kitchen. She heard him moving quietly—listening—towards the door through which she had come only a few seconds before to use the telephone.

He came through that door, within three feet of her. But when he was fully through the doorway she was behind him. Again he flashed the light downwards. But he did not think to look behind him. By just so much she was saved for the moment.

In the greyish light reflected from the floor she recognized him.

He went into the dining-room. He moved very quietly, but he bumped ever so slightly against a chair. The noise made her want to shriek. He was hunting her, and he knew that she was in the house and he had to kill her. He had to get his foot and get away, and she must not be able to tell anything about him.

He was back in the kitchen again. He stood there, listening, and Connie was aware of a new and added emotion which came of her recognition of him. She felt that she would lie down at any instant and scream—because she knew him!

He came towards the door again, but he went up the stairs. They creaked under his weight. He must have reasoned cunningly that she would want to hide, because she was afraid. So he would go into the bedroom and look under the bed . . .

Connie slipped her feet out of her slippers. He had not reached the top of the stairs before she stood in her stockinged feet in the blackness below.

The front door was impossible. She would have to unlock it, make a noise. But he had not closed the back door behind him.

She crept out of it, with a passionate care that almost vanished when she was in the blessed night. There were stars. She remembered that she must not step on the gravel on which her feet might make a noise, so she stepped on the grass. And she fled.

There were sounds inside the house. He was opening cupboards, deliberately making sounds to fill her with panic as he hunted her down. He hadn't guessed yet that she was outside.

There were shrubs by the garage, so she slowed her flight to avoid them. And then she came upon the motorcycle. She smelled it, oil and petrol and rubber. It was useless to her. She had no idea how to operate it. But suddenly a wild escape occurred to her—the motorcycle wasn't entirely useless.

Connie fumbled with the machine. She turned a little tap. The smell of petrol grew strong. There was a crash inside the house. But outside the night was full of stars, and the air was cool and sweet—except that the smell of petrol was growing stronger in it.

Connie had a box of matches in her pocket. Quickly she got it out, and in one motion struck a match and dropped it and ran away into the darkness, with the strange feel of grass under her feet.

The petrol blazed fiercely. She hid herself in the shadows and watched, sobs trying to form in her throat. The fire would be seen across the bay. It would plainly be at Connie's house. People would come quickly—a lot of them. And fire engines.

As the flames grew higher, she saw the figure plunge from the house, run furiously towards the fire, try to flail it out. But it was impossible.

And he knew it. Even his twisted mind would tell him that nothing could hide his identity now. The motorcycle would be identification enough, and there was the loot in the house.

Connie found herself weeping. It was partly relief. But it

was also the unnerving realization that the fears she'd had about Them, the men who prey on others, were not entirely groundless.

The headlights of cars began to focus towards the house, along the road from the mainland. The bells of fire engines started tolling and grew louder. And in the leaping flames surrounding the motorcycle, a hulking, desperate figure threw futile handfuls of earth upon the machine. Was he, Connie wondered, trying to create the hopeless pretence that he was the first to help?

Even so, she was quite safe now, Connie knew. She began to cry in reaction from her terror. But, also, she wept heartbrokenly for poor Mrs Winston. She, Connie, could have been murdered. She could have been the victim of one of those twisted men who prey on their fellow beings. But she wept for Mrs Winston.

She, Connie, would not now be one of the women They had killed. But Mrs Winston was the mother of one of Them.

Natuk by George Bruce

I was stationed, at one period of my service with the Mounted Police, in the far north of Canada, on the Porcupine River, some fifty miles north of Rat Lake. Though well on the cool side of the Arctic Circle, we were just then having our short hot summer. The day temperature often rose to eighty degrees, and in the evenings there seemed to be more mosquitoes than fresh air. My cabin stood by a small lake from which a stream ran down to the river, among low hills covered with spruce forest.

I spent many hours roaming through that forest, or sitting still, watching the wild life that filled it. Among bracken and brambles, fallen trees and branches, it was easy to find a hiding place from which one could see all round.

There was plenty to see if a man stayed quiet and kept his eyes open: birds of many sorts, foxes, martens, squirrels, mink, the friendly little chipmunks, perhaps a deer, perhaps a she-wolf with a small cub, a lumbering bear in search of food, or a porcupine stripping the rough outer bark from a sapling spruce, to feed on the succulent inner skin.

One day I had been for a long walk through the woods and was on my way back when I came upon a wolverine trap. It had been sprung, and in it, lying dead, was a beautiful husky bitch. She must have run away from some Indian camp, the call of her wolf ancestors in her blood, and taken to the woods.

The trap had been set for wolves or wolverines, pestilent brutes both, and it was clearly right that I should set it again. I forced down the spring till I could open the powerful spiked jaws, and was pulling out the dead husky when I heard a whimper. Out from under the body crawled a little pup, only a few weeks old. I tucked him into the breast of my coat and reset the trap, after which I skinned the husky, thinking that her pelt would make a good rug for my cabin, and then started for home.

My dogs were tied up, but when I put the pup down and began to open the cabin door they scented him, and a savage