

Bull Run

By Sid Fleischman

Colonel Oliver Brattle

The booming jerked me out of sleep, woke the dishes and set them chattering, and sent Clara dashing through the dark to the children. "Must be the Lord comin'!" cried one of the servants. I realized I'd been dreaming of Mexico. Strange.

I lit a candle. The clock read four thirty. All of Charleston seemed to be in the streets. I dressed, stepped out the front door, and was embraced at once by a teary-eyed stranger. "Praise the day!" he shrieked into my face. "They're firing on Fort Sumter!"

We gathered on Judge Frye's flat roof. The cannons rattled the very constellations. Shells sailed, their lit fuses tracing caliper-perfect arcs, then exploded. Each illumination of the bay was greeted with appreciative oohs and hurrahs. You'd have thought that the crowds were enjoying a Fourth of July display. Some brought baskets of food to the rooftops and raised glasses in toasts to South Carolina, Jefferson Davis, and General Beauregard. I was silent, though I shared their allegiance. I'd fought, however, fourteen years before from Veracruz to Mexico City. I remembered well what shells do to living flesh, and felt in melancholy mood. Amid all the cheering, the Negroes were similarly glum--suspiciously so. If they rejoiced that a war that might break their bonds had begun, they dared let no one discern it. By a bursting shell's light, I eyed Vernon, my body servant. He caught my glance and the slimmest of smiles fled his lips, like a snake disappearing down a hole.

Lily Malloy

Minnesota is flat as a cracker. Rise up on your toes and you can see across the state. Scarce even a tree in sight but for a few willows beside the creeks. Father said God put willows here that man might have switches to enforce His commandments. Father was a grim-faced Scot and a great believer in switching. Each morning he put on his spectacles, without which he was all but blind. And each evening all six of us were whipped for whatever failings he'd noticed that day. If no fault could be found, we were whipped just the same for any wrongs committed out of his sight. Wee Sarah was not spared, nor Patrick, seventeen and tall. Father was taller still.

One chill April Sunday in 1861, we rode in to church and found a crowd before the door. Mr. Nilson was reading from a newspaper. Fort Sumter had been attacked. The gallant defenders had surrendered the next day. The President had called the Union to arms. That such a far-distant doing should, like a lever, shake Crow County amazed me. Mother wept. The men swore, despite the Sabbath. There was talk that a regiment of one thousand soldiers was being raised in Minnesota. Patrick's eyes glittered like diamonds.

Reverend Bott railed against the Rebels that day. His sermon's subject was "A man's worst foes are those of his own household." Father repeated the line at supper, his eyes fixed upon Patrick. That night, Father gave him a terrible thrashing. Afterward, Patrick asked the reason. "You're thinking to scamper off shouted Father. "Don't think I don't know it! And don't think you'll succeed!" He stood his full height. "I can see fifty miles! I'll hunt you like a wolf, and skin you like one!"

I didn't think I'd sleep that night. At dawn I woke to find my hand holding an old willow whistle Patrick had fashioned. I knew then he was gone and began to cry. We were five years apart but dear to each other. How I did fear that he'd be caught. Then I heard Father roar, "And the stone-hearted rogue took my spectacles with him!"

Shem Suggs

Horses have always served me for kin. The first time one looked back into my eyes, I knew that I was no longer alone on this earth, orphan or no. Never had one of my own to care for. The folks I lived with kept mules. But we'd put up wayfarers crossing Arkansas. Their horses trusted me straightaway, as if they'd known me from before. I'd feed 'em and wash 'em and brush 'em and we'd talk. An hour after arriving, they'd come to me sooner than to their owners. I felt among family with 'em, and forlorn as a ghost when they'd gone.

I was boarding at Mr. Bee's when a traveler told us about Fort Sumter. He left us a newspaper from Virginia. I was nineteen and couldn't read a lick, but I spotted a picture of a horse. I asked Mr. Bee to read the words below. They called men to join the cavalry. Mr. Bee hated Yankees the way a broom hates dirt, and he started in again on Lincoln and the sovereign states and the constitutional right to secede. I just nodded my head like a wooden puppet, thinking about the newspaper instead. It said they'd give me a horse.

Gideon Adams

Though my skin is quite light, I'm a Negro, I'm proud of it, and I wept with joy along with my brethren at President Lincoln's call for men. How we yearned to strike a blow in the battle! Though the state of Ohio refused us the vote and discouraged us from settling, we rose to her aid just the same. No less than Cincinnati's whites,

we organized meetings, heard ringing speeches, sang "Hail Columbia" and "John Brown's Body." All recognized that Cincinnati was vulnerable to capture. We therefore proposed to ready a company of Home Guards, its numbers, training, and equipment to be provided by the black citizens of the city and its services offered to her defense. At last the nation's eyes would behold the Negro's energy and courage!