

THE FIVE DOLLAR GUY

(Continued from page 19)

trampled hard. It was bare. There were rows of broken and dead bean plants in the packed ground. At the back was a shack where one might shed chickens or, after them, a Ford. The Ford, flat-tired and written on the sides with witticisms half rubbed out, ROLLS ROUGH, the door hanging open, the hood of the engine flapping like a loose cap, the seat busted in and the stuffing showing—the Ford stood with the off wheels in the garden, sunken, abandoned. High in the air above, on a line, floated eight whitish squares of cloth, too small for sheets I thought, but sheets I suppose for all that; and there a wild cherry tree, with green and brown leaves, half stripped by the November wind. Rubbish had been pushed up to the sides against the low fences, if such they could be called; everything had been pushed sideways to the edges to make room in the center for—what? The ground was trampled. The dog was asleep.

Thirty-two is not old, I said. They're too quick when they're young, I said. She laughed out loud excitedly. I sure am going to take a ride some day soon, she said. Believe me, I'm going to get a truck myself, I answered her. Go on, she said. Who are you going to get to ride with you? I'll pick up someone, I said. Yea? You think that's easy, do you? It'll cost you something, if you've got the price. I thought she was going to ask me why I didn't use my own closed car, but she didn't. She only kept on saying: You think it's easy. They'll get to you right for it. I laughed and she did too. I've got to sit down, she said. I get dizzy. Then she went on, confidently but more for fun than anything:

I was walkin' down by the Mex Pet one night with this one, pointing to the silent child with its accusing eyes be-

side her—and he kept looking at her. Who do you mean? I said. The Boss. He lives in the old house back there. I knew what he was up to,—he kept making up to the kid but I knew he wanted to make up to me. Yea? I said. Pretty soon he says to her, Do you want to see the monkey? They got an ant-eater in a cage back there, they got from Mexico. Good night, I thought, with a thrill, An ant-eater! It's a pet. So he took us back of the garages where they keep the trucks. It was dark, imagine—he had to use a flashlight. He showed us everything. He showed us where they pump the oil in, all the valves, and all over the place. Then he says to me, Come on in the office, will you? What for? I says. I'll show you what for, he says. But I only laughed at him. What, I says, with the kid here? Aw, forget the kid a minute, he said. No, I got to go home and get supper for my old man, I says. Forget your old man, he says. Nothing doing, I said. I got another kid home now sleeping. Come on, he says. I'll give you five dollars if you'll come in. But I only laughed at him. We call him the five dollar guy. He wouldn't let me go. He kept on begging and pleading me to go in but I wouldn't do it. I tell Ma any time she wants five dollars to go down there and she can get it.

How old a man is he? I asked her. He's forty-five, the old fool.

What does he say to you when you see him now, I said.

Oh, he don't say anything. I don't think he even knows who I am. If it had been a nigger he wouldn't have cared. It was so dark he couldn't even see me. He walks right by me and doesn't even notice me.

Attaboy, I laughed.

Go on home, she answered, shaking her apron at me and laughing.

GRASSHOPPER

If a poor man go down a road singing,
With pleasure in every note,
There are many that would be wringing
Such music away from his throat,

Thinking, what joy can he find,
When we are all so sad
For money-troubles, or those of another kind?
Thinking, how dare he be glad?

It's a rank bad place to hold carouse
To show what one's a-feeling,
In the big house that isn't a house—
The home with the blue ceiling.

For many there be to say that he's lazy—
Old ones in carriages and cars;
And the men in the fields will call him crazy,
And wish he were behind bars.

It's a hard, hard time he'll have with his larking,
If he gets out from under the yoke:
Constables staring and dogs barking—
The whole weight of a sad folk.

If a man from Mars were ever to stand
Observing from each high steeple,
He'd say this was a hell of a land,
For this is a hell of a people.

George Sterling

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