

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

ALFONSE TAPIA

"A Penny for your thoughts."

What could I answer, when, in reality, I had been thinking of absolutely nothing. I was just looking at nature; nature who has always done something to me. I cannot put my finger on it, but I can feel it vaguely with a certain weakness that causes a disengagement from the powers of description. As mysterious as night itself; like the flame glowing in the fireplace, or the tobacco smoke, lazily drifting along to nowhere. It is in that way that I watch the always vanishing 'something' that is forever there in nature.

Even as a little boy I must have felt it when I used to sit up in bed and stare at the vast darkness through my bedroom window as my elbows rested on the window sill. Usually my thoughts were worries. Most likely I had "skipped" school that day and I was concerned only with the punishment that was sure to follow if my secret were unfolded. Yet, in a way, I was happy because I felt that it was worth it. Soon, as the beauty of the night took command, my worries would gradually thin out and presently I could hear the crickets singing their same song over and over again. The tall grass would rustle and moan in the night breeze. Perhaps I would see a rabbit go merrily bouncing up and down as it dodged bits of shrubbery that rose from the damp-smelling earth. Or perhaps the moon

would be at work with her white beam, casting dim silhouettes here and there. Little images of the moon would gently twinkle in the reflection from the smooth and glassy surface of the leaves, which seemed to play with the little glimmering spots of a moonlight night. Or again, a muffled horn of a distant automobile breaking through the grave-still night where the fireflies danced, blinked, and danced again.

Then, suddenly, the slow murmur of voices coming from the porch of the house, which had been taking a back seat during this time, would be interrupted by the scraping of chairs on the tile floor, thus warning me of my mother's approach. And so, I would scamper under my sheet and make believe that I was sleeping as I should have been two hours ago. After a few clickings and shuttings of doors and windows, mother would shyly tiptoe into my room, kiss me on the forehead, tuck the sheet around me a bit cozier, and gently tiptoe out again.

Restful assurancement of the world at peace, sprinkled with the grains of sand spread by the Sandman, came upon me as the song of the crickets grew fainter and fainter; as my eyelids became heavier and heavier . . . as mysterious as the night itself; like the flame glowing in the fireplace, or the tobacco smoke, lazily drifting along to nowhere.

LIBYA

VIRGINIA HURT

As far as one could see stretched the shimmering sands of the Sahara. The fury of the day seemed to beat upon the earth and the burning glare of the desert set

weaving heat-waves into motion above the shifting hillocks, which the scorching wind swept into being and inevitably demolished with its swaying motion.

Not a sound came from the drifting sand, not a whisper from the breath of wind, not a single voice of nature in all that vast expanse, but at intervals the silence was shattered by the echoing empty booms of bombs, and between them, faintly, monotonously, came the beat, beat, beat, of drums. White men may carry on warfare against other white men and great issues be so decided, but the torpid flow of native life persists undisturbed! Magic was being made, or the entrance of another soul into that unknown realm of spirits was being heralded by the insistent rhythm of those drums. A feeling of suspense, of suppressed fear, hovered over the empty world; a sense of impending disaster, soon to arrive,

pressed suffocatingly upon scorched earth.

To the khaki-clad humans, it seemed they were like two tiny ants inside a great brass bowl-trapped, but exposed to what dangers! Yet there was nothing around them, only the weird throb of the unseen drums and the far-off, hollow explosions! The tropical sun traveled higher in its path across the sky, with an ever increasing glare upon the white reflection of sand. Stillness hung in the air like an evil genie.

At last one of the men stirred, yawned, and raised himself slightly to address the other.

"Tsy, Bill, this is a ripping good mystery story in the *Saturday Evening Post!*"

ABOUT DEFEAT

JEAN EBELING

There they lay, slung back in a corner, discarded from any future use, and looking as if every ounce of strength and good will had been wrung from their very soles. Only a few months before, that old pair of shoes could have held up its laces and thrown back its tongue, unshamefully encountering any other pair of shoes—even those of the higher priced class.

At present, this dilapidated footwear, thankful for the secluded refuge, was embarrassed for itself knowing that its once crisp and neat tongue now drooped wearily over the side of the shoe like that of a dog when gasping for its last breath. The rubber heels had taken on a defeated look, worn down at the edges to mere paper thinness from many miles of hard trudging. A small nail, which as a means of revenge had worked its way to the interior of the shoe, had punctured the heel of the wearer

and was now flattened down to sufficient smoothness.

The high polish characteristic of new shoes had been dulled by acute neglect, fall rains, and winter snows. The once strong and sinewy laces lay limp and bedraggled, their length broken at intervals by hastily and sloppily tied knots.

Only the toes had made a last, rather futile effort at being brave and enduring their inevitable fate with some show of courage. As a last stab at the cruel world, they had feebly turned up whether through their own strength or encouraged by an excess of moisture during those final days of drudgery. The creases formed in the dry, cracked leather by this curling up supplied a somewhat whimsical effect to this completely exhausted footwear. Finally they had been freed from their captivity and were content to await total destruction.