

waiting, at the breakfast table.

"Thank you," he mumbled absently as he unfolded the print-fresh pages. He shook and creased them, complaisantly. Lora poured coffee into cream-colored cups. The sleepy routine of breakfast flowed along uninterrupted. Juice, cereal, eggs, bacon, toast, the folding and unfolding of her husband's newspaper punctuated evenly the passing of time. The man sipped from the coffee cup, and broke the silence of the meal, reading to Lora in a loud, annunciative voice:

"Nearly a thousand German soldiers, boys and men, were slaughtered in the

latest siege outside Stalingrad." He paused, to read on silently, more rapidly, greedily savoring each detail.

Lora felt the physical shock in her body. She stared at her husband. She watched him drain his coffee-cup, pat the ends of his trim mustache with his napkin. She saw the lines of smugness etch firmly in his face. She stared, and did not speak. In a moment she felt his customary good-bye kiss, and vaguely knew he left the room.

As he pulled the front door shut behind him, she turned to the kitchen faucet, to wash her hands.

Conversion

JACK DEVINE

Mary Anna opened the door and saw her man. Her man was a hobo, looking for a bite to eat and possibly a pie which had been set on some ledge to cool.

Rambling Joe looked at the little girl and in his most polite manner, doffed his hat and said, "Little girl, I wonder if you would ask your ma if she could spare a man a bite to eat."

"My mother isn't here," Mary Anna replied, and puffing up with importance said, "if you will come in, maybe I can find something."

Mary Anna had just come back from a revival meeting at her church. She had decided that her career was to be a missionary and here was a poor lonesome,

"Sit down here, please, and I'll make you some coffee. Daddy says I make very good coffee and Mother likes it, too. And Tom, he's my brother, says it ain't—" she

hastily corrected herself, "isn't much good. But you know boys."

Taking his manners out and dusting them off a bit, Joe said, "I'm sure it will be fine."

"Oh — ah — what church do you belong to?" Mary Anna asked hesitantly.

"Well, I ain't been much of a church man. I've been so busy, you see."

"The reason I asked you is that we have been having a revival at our church and I've been thinking about being a missionary. Oh, the coffee is done now! You sit over here and I'll get a cup for you. Would you like some rolls? Mother has some sweet rolls here. They have jelly inside of them and when you bite down into them—um-m, raspberry jelly. I'll get you a couple." She placed the coffee and rolls before the man, then hurried over and sat opposite him. She sat very primly with her hands in her lap and very

cautiously, but directly and emphatically, she said Grace.

"Eh?" said Joe, looking up, very surprised, "what did you say?"

"Say Grace," she answered.

Joe said the word "Grace" and started to drink his coffee.

"No, you don't understand," she interrupted, with infinite patience.

"I guess I don't," Joe replied.

"You see, you say a little prayer saying how thankful you are for what you have to eat. That's Grace," Mary explained. "Now you just bow your head and close your eyes and I'll say Grace for you because I don't guess you have had much experience."

Joe bowed his head but he did not close his eyes. That coffee looked too good. He was a little suspicious about this Grace business.

The child murmured a few undistinguishable words. "Now," she said "you can eat."

"Thank you, ma'm. Say, this sure is good coffee."

"Do you really like it? Daddy says I can make very good coffee." She twitched around in her chair, the way children do, then said, "I'm going to be a missionary."

"Oh yes, tell me about this missionary business," said Joe.

"Well, you see — missionaries are people who go off into far-off places where there's cannibals and things and they save the cannibals—"

"What do you mean—they save them?" Joe interrupted.

"Oh, they convert them. I'll show you."

She got up from the table. "I'm the missionary standing here preaching, you see. Then here come the cannibals, uh, stalking me." She went over and picked up the broom, holding it like a spear and whooping up a bit, not a little unlike an Indian. Then she put the spear down and was a missionary again and started preaching some more then went over and started stalking herself. This process continued for quite some time until finally, with a dramatic gesture, she showed the conversion of the cannibals.

Joe applauded heartily.

"Oh, you don't applaud sermons," she admonished him.

"You don't?" asked Joe, very much surprised.

"No, I never seen — saw anybody applaud a preacher."

"Maybe the people didn't like his preaching," Joe replied.

"Well, I like Reverend Naylor's sermons very much."

For the first time in many years a mischievous twinkle came into Joe's eyes. He patted the child on the hand. "Honey, the next time you hear that preacher-friend of yours give a good sermon, you just bust right out and start clapping." He arose to leave. "Just bust right out and applaud him." Then after a moments pause, he reached into his pocket and took out his last dime. "Here, honey, here is a dime for the collection plate."

