

An impulse to run after him surged in Will's mind, but the turmoil in the air above restrained him. He lay there, his teeth clenched in helplessness, knowing what was going to happen.

Golway scrambled on wildly, apparently unseeing, and floundered into a row of sandbags. At that moment the charge there was set off. Tommy screamed in a high woman's voice and leaped to his feet, reeling a bit from the force of the blast.

He took three steps, leaning forward, forward with his arms before his face, and then there was a breaking, popping sound as a bullet struck. He stopped, frozen.

Will watched him stand a moment, and then collapse, spreading on the ground like a half-empty sack of grain.

The roar of sound stopped as if someone had turned a switch. The dust drifted in the quiet wind and olive drab figures, mouths and eyes rimmed with dirt, began to get slowly to their feet.

Will started toward the unmoving form, but a whistle blew and the Sergeant's voice called hoarsely.

"Charlie Company! Fall in here."

Will turned, seeing the Sergeant standing with upraised arm, and walked off the course, almost thankful for the chance to lose his crawling emotions in the anonymity of the Company.

As he took his place in the ranks, he saw an ambulance, marked in red and white, driving off the field. Beyond, Dog Company was entering the trench, preparing for its indoctrination. Polished boots flashed in unison.

\* \* \*

The machine gunner was loading his weapon. The snap of the bolt mixed with the soft rattle of the cartridge belt as it was drawn from the ammo box. The gunner's movements were accurate and swift, automatic. When he grasped the handles, they became an extension of his arms and the gun a part of him. When he bent forward and lined up his sights, there was no longer a gunner and a gun, but a single weapon, a single machine.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Ritual

Betty Winn Fuller

THE heavy doors closed noiselessly behind him. The thick carpet whispered quietly beneath his feet. For a moment the sickishly sweet odor of flowers almost overpowered him. As he moved on into the bouquet-banked room opposite, he was conscious of the hushed voices, the covert looks—curious, sanctimonious, the faces composing themselves into uncomfortable masks of sympathy.

Approaching the casket he came upon small groups of people talking quietly, laughing occasionally and then looking guiltily around—suddenly conscious of their whereabouts. The masks were hurriedly composed again as inscrutable eyes measured his grief. It's strange how detached from it all I feel, he thought. It's as if I stood off and watched myself, going through the expected motions, the bizarre ritual required by society. A somber attendant whispered softly to those surrounding the casket and they moved away slowly, reluctantly. The curtains were unobtrusively closed behind him so that the curious watching eyes were shut out.

He forced himself to notice the flowers—the intricately arranged masterpieces of the florist's art—the stark white cards hanging conspicuously in front—mementos of people who cared or half feared or felt called upon to make a gesture. His hand brushed the moist satiny smoothness of rose petals, fingered the stubby carnations. His eyes surveyed them, row on row of color, vivid, beautiful, meaningless now. He gazed at the little face beneath him, nestled in the silky opulent interior of the casket. The curly hair was perfectly arranged—in itself convincing of death in a four-year-old. The skin no longer had the clear translucence of healthy childhood—it was like the skin of the doll in her arms—real-looking, yes—but not lifelike. The hands were not the dimpled busy fingers of Cathy, but still, lifeless replicas. A waxen image: this phrase went through his mind. He leaned to kiss the cheek—this too was ritual rather than desire. The flesh was not cold as he had expected but not warm either. It was simply death beneath his lips. It's true, he thought. Now I know, now I am convinced. This then is what the ritual is for—it leaves no doubt—no gay, laughing, elusive shadow to torment the mind. Death must be faced. The ritual forces the mind to face and accept it. It is done. Slowly he turned away.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NIGHT THOUGHTS

Maurice F. Kenny

The bird aims for the sky  
 To dart, and soar, to sing;  
 The moth seeks out the lamp  
 To warm its frozen wing;  
 The night waits on the dawn  
 If only to sleep . . .  
 But I, awake, seek what  
 Beyond my daily keep?  
 I can not reach the sky.  
 My wings are clipped, lamp-light  
 Is dull to me, and dawn,  
 O dawn is out of sight.