

WAKE



Carol Akers

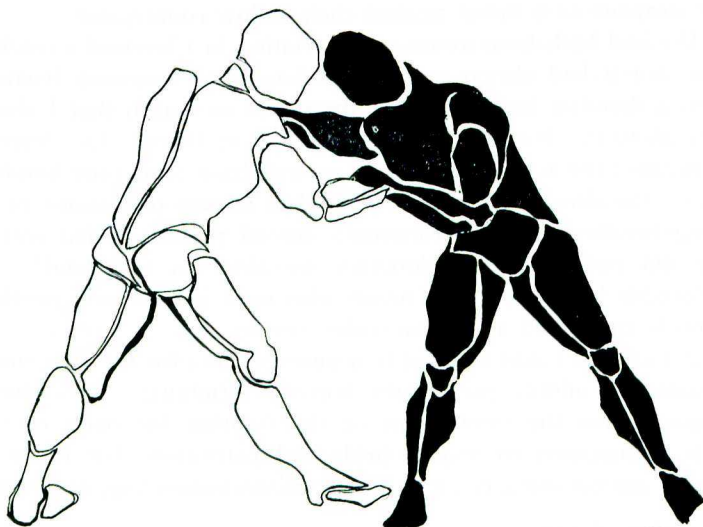
Realization, horrifying, dreadful realization, flashed on our faces. What we were seeing was the National Guard moving into Hough. I examined the trucks in this new light. Each one was packed with soldiers to the point of overflowing. Their sheer number was shocking. Yet, a closer look uncovered something which will forever give me a queasiness in my stomach, a sort of spiritual headache. Each guardsman held a rifle in vertical position, and above each muzzle gleamed a silvery bayonet. Trucks, rifles, bayonets, bayonets, bayonets. I shuddered as I had never before. A few yards from me marched the ammunition that the eighth largest city in the United States found necessary to call in. This was no drill, no practice session. They were on their way to use their weapons as a threat against their fellow countrymen.

We had both been aware of the rioting in Cleveland's troubled sector, but it had always seemed so distant and removed from us. It was a dreadful happening, but there was no reason that I should worry about it. It might as well have been in Detroit, Los Angeles, or Chicago; the forty miles might as well have been four hundred. Besides, the situation could not be so bad as was proclaimed in the blaring headlines and in television's special reports. That sort of thing did not happen in America, let alone in Cleveland! My comfortable house and my friends who were just as well provided for made my world a vacuum-sealed shelter.

All at once I was exposed to a new concept; for the first time I understood a minute part of the horror of fighting. This ghastly procession was the symbol not of the fighting for one's country which is supposed to inspire pride and patriotism, but rather of fighting against one's country. Bias, misunderstanding, and apathy

were the seeds of the misery fellow countrymen inflicted upon one another. When the conflict might have been lessened, if not eliminated, by communication, the two elements of the same city resorted to shooting and knifing. I grasped the extent of this misery; rampant looting and pillaging; shots echoing in dark streets; people—my people!—falling hurt and bloodied; fire seething all around, clutching new buildings, uprooting families and destroying businesses; and everything producing a mistrust and savagery that would scar the participants for life. The convoy rumbled on, a testament to a people incapable of rational thought, the last resort of a hate-poisoned situation. The faces of the individual soldiers were shaded in the night, and their reactions unknown to me. But their glistening bayonets caused me a long, painful blink.

With the window rolled down, I savored the wind as it mused its way through my hair. I poked my head out and studied the awesomely brilliant sky. Judy and I looked at it for a few peaceful moments; its beauty seemed to heighten our already sensitive mood. The funeral service we had attended earlier had caused our emotions to flow openly and unchecked for the remainder of the evening. Now 11:00, both of us emotionally drained and unusually quiet, Judy was taking me home. We rode on, still silent, until coming to a stop at the intersection. As I craned my head to the right, my



eyes caught hold of a strange sight; for about a quarter of a mile down the road, cars had veered off to the side. Quickly, we lowered the radio volume and waited for the passage of what we assumed to be an ambulance or police car. I began to think it must be something else when no siren or flashing light became evident. But what could it possibly be? The village had certainly not scheduled a parade for Wednesday evening, July 21st. Judy and I looked at each other and laughed that nervous laugh that came so easily when we were puzzled. The giggle faded and the uneasiness was almost tangible. The air became still and so did we.

At first it seemed like an ordinary sight; simply an ordinary army convoy. Of course, we had seen them before, and we had always waved or honked. This time, perhaps because of our mood, we did not. The first nine or ten vehicles were jeeps occupied by what we guessed to be officers. They, in turn, were followed by trucks of regular soldiers. Everything seemed quite normal, except for its tremendous length, and we passed it off as nothing unusual until the radio informed us differently. "At 10:00 tonight Mayor Locker ordered the National Guard into the racially torn Hough area. The troops are thought to be on their way into the city at the present time."

*what Agnes Symons said
when they told her it was cancer
Nancy Baxter*

It isn't the gray certainty of it that I mind
No—I've always known He lurked there silent,
Hiding behind the sunroom Boston Ferns.
He inched out just a little at a time
Like that game the children played, Mother May I.
Sometimes he took a baby step
When Papa died; that day the wind blew limbs
Across the pall bearers' path. Rain blurred their tracks.
Sometimes a giant step; Arlen came home
From war his mind a scrambled sewing box.
They closed the door, and he makes baskets now.