The Trust of the Medics

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The small city bus coughed and lurched forward, causing passengers who were standing to scramble for the hand holds on the seats. The rain-drenched crowd jostled back and forth as the bus struck the breaks in the old brick pavement. Helen relaxed in her seat; she was tired from her long day's work. The rain was still beating against the window at her elbow, and she wondered how much mud Paul's division was plowing through on their inland drive. Maybe it wasn't raining there. Brushing her hair back from her forehead, she strained her eyes to see the neon signs. Two more miles and she would be comfortable at home. She sighed. How many more miles for Paul before he would be home? He's probably sitting upon the fender of his truck, proudly exhibiting my miniature in the little brown leather case, she thought. He might be carrying his admiration a bit too far, but she enjoyed being "his girl." With a start Helen came back into the reality of the steaming bus. There it was again — that wild, boisterous laugh. She turned around and saw in the seat behind her a glassy-eyed woman with disheveled hair, who was convulsed with laughter. "We'll be rich tonight after the paymaster comes," she said to the man who accompanied her. "Joe's place will stay open to cash them for us. Then we can burn up the town." "I won't do much splurging," he said. "I'm saving for the big crash that's sure to come." He had taken off his hat and was brushing the water off the brim with his leather glove.

"Today's important. Let tomorrow wait. You'll not lose your job with..."

"Not lose it? I'll lose it before the peace is signed. There'll be a monkey-nut of a veteran without a leg or minus an arm who'll be sitting at my bench and drawing my money." He turned his head to look out of the window, and Helen shifted in her seat. She noticed that people were staring at him. "You'll already be rich," his companion continued. "Anyway, the company will call you back."

"I won't come back even if they do call. I don't want to spend my time keeping an invalid from ruining the machinery, and that's what it'll be. Looks like the medics would give those broken guys an overdose of morphine. That's all it would take. Save us the worry. Just put them out of the way."

The woman leaned over to him and whispered, "Quiet down... watching."

"I'll take care of myself," he boasted, tapping his leather jacket. "But you wait and see how many pieces of veterans we're going to have to support."

Helen stood up and jerked the buzzer cord. It flew back into place with a crack. "Sorry, I'm getting off here." She wedged through the crowd of passengers.

When she stepped off the bus, the rain had slackened to a slow drizzle. The lights from the windows of the tall apartment houses flickered through the damp haze. Square patches of dark hung in most of the windows. She wondered if a service flag hung in the window of the boaster on the bus. He would feel different. Why didn't I say some-
thing then? she pondered. If Paul were wounded ... No, I must not think about it. She quickened her steps, but again the question came back into her mind. If Paul ... No, it wouldn't make any difference. I can work all of my life. Helen stopped in the entrance of her building to pick up the mail. She found the V-mail from Paul, and she tore open the envelope. Her eyes dropped to the last two lines. "I may be home on furlough soon. I've had a little bad luck ..." She rubbed her eyes to clear the blur, but the words still stood out black and foreboding on the gray background.

The Valley

Usha Good

I stood alone and looked across the valley;
The trees whose roots were far below made webs
Of yellow lace through which the smoke of fall's
Gray fires was spiring to the gentle push
Of wind. The near was indistinct, the far
A furry mist that hung upon the earth
And made me feel infinity I could not see.