

# MAGENTA

BY THOMAS HORNSBY FERRIL

ONCE, up in Gilpin county, Colorado,  
When a long blue afternoon was standing on end  
Like a tombstone sinking into the Rocky Mountains,  
I found myself in a town where no one was,  
And I noticed an empty woman lying unburied  
On a pile of mining machinery over a graveyard.

She was a dressmaker's dummy called Magenta.  
I named her that because, all of a sudden,  
The peaks turned pink and lavender and purple,  
And all the falling houses in the town  
Began to smell of rats and pennyroyal.

The town was high and lonely in the mountains;  
There was nothing to listen to but the wasting of  
The glaciers and a wind that had no trees.  
And many houses were gone, only masonry  
Of stone foundations tilting over the canyon,  
Like hanging gardens where successful rhubarb  
Had crossed the kitchen sill and entered the parlor.

The dressmaker's dummy was meant to be like a woman:  
There was no head. The breasts and belly were  
A cool enamel simulating life.  
The hips and thighs were made adjustable,  
Encircling and equidistant from  
A point within, through which, apparently,  
The woman had been screwed to a pedestal,  
But the threads were cut and the pedestal was broken.

I propped Magenta into an old ore-bucket,  
Which gave her a skirt of iron up to her waist;  
And I told a mountain at some distance to  
Become her lilac hair and face and neck.  
It was the fairest mountain I could find,  
And then I said, "Magenta, here we are."

And Magenta said, "Why do you call me Magenta?"

The sky no longer glowed rose-aniline,  
So I looked at the town and thought of a different reason.

"Magenta's a mulberry town in Italy,"  
I said, and she said, "What a very excellent reason!"  
(I said no more though I was prepared to make  
A speech a dressmaker's dummy might have relished,  
About a naked Empress of France,  
And how she held her night-gown at arm's length,  
And named the color of her silken night-gown  
In honor of the battle of Magenta,  
The very year, the very day in June,  
This mining camp was started in the mountains.)

The sun was low and I moved to a warmer flange  
On the pile of broken mining machinery,  
And Magenta said "It's always afternoon  
Up here in the hills, and I think it always was."

"Why always afternoon?" I said and she answered:

"Mornings were crystal yellow, too hard to see through;  
The realness didn't begin until afternoon;  
We both are real, but we wouldn't have been this morning  
Before the blue came up. It was always so:  
Nothing real ever happened in the morning,  
The men were always digging for gold in the morning;  
They were dreaming deep in the earth, you never saw them,  
But afternoons they'd wake up and bury their wives."

Magenta stared a moment at the graveyard.

"These women wanted me to be their friend.  
I spent my mornings with them making believe.  
They'd sit around me talking like far-off brides  
Of things beyond the mountains and the mines;  
Then they would get down on their knees to me,  
Praying with pins and bastings for my sanction.

"Then they would look into mirrors and come back,  
They'd look out of the windows and come back,  
They'd walk into the kitchen and come back,  
They'd scratch the curtains with their fingernails,

As if they were trying to scratch the mountains down,  
And be somewhere where there weren't any mountains.

"I wasn't what they wanted, yet I was.  
Mornings were never real, but usually  
By noon the women died and the men came up  
From the bottom of the earth to bury them."

"Those must have been strange days," I said, and I tossed  
A cog from a stamp-mill into a yawning shaft.  
We listened as it clicked the sides of the mine  
And we thought we heard it splash and Magenta said:

"The men would measure in cords the gold they hoped  
To find, but the women reckoned by calendars  
Of double chins and crows-feet at the corners  
Of their eyes. When they put their china dishes on  
The checkered table-cloth they'd say to themselves  
'How soon can we go away?' When they made quilts  
They'd say to the squares of colored cloth 'How soon?'

"They could remember coming up to the dryness  
Of the mountain air in wagons, and setting the wheels  
In the river overnight to tighten the spokes;  
But by the time they got to the mountains the wheels  
Were broken and the women wanted the wagons  
To be repaired as soon as possible  
For going away again, but the men would cut  
The wagons into sluice boxes and stay.

"Each woman had seven children of whom two  
Were living, and the two would go to church.  
Sometimes the children went to the opera-house  
To see the tragedies. They can still remember  
The acrobats and buglers between the acts."

I spoke to Magenta of how the graves were sinking,  
And Magenta said, "All this is tunneled under;  
I think some of these ladies may yet find gold,  
Perhaps," she sighed, "for crowns" and she continued:

"Maybe you never saw a miner dig  
A grave for a woman he brought across the plains  
To die at noon when she was sewing a dress  
To make a mirror say she was somebody else."

"I never did," I said, and Magenta said:

"A miner would dig a grave with a pick and shovel  
Often a little deeper than necessary,  
And poising every shovelful of earth  
An instant longer than if he were digging a grave,  
And never complaining when he struck a rock;  
Then he would finish, glad to have found no color."

I didn't know what to say to that, so I said:

"It's getting dark at approximately the rate  
Of one hundred and eighty-six thousand spruces per second,"  
And Magenta smiled and said, "Oh, so it is."

And she said, "Up here the men outnumbered women,  
But there were always too many women to go around;  
I should like to have known the women who did not need me."  
She indicated that their skirts were shorter.

"And so should I," I said. "Are they buried here?"

Magenta said, "I think there were hardly any:  
They came like far-off brides, they would appear  
Each afternoon when the funerals were over.  
Some disappeared, some changed into curious songs,  
And some of them slowly changed into beautiful mountains."

She pointed to a peak with snowy breasts  
Still tipped with fire and said, "The miners named  
That mountain Silverheels after a girl  
Who never was seen until along toward evening."

"This is an odd coincidence," I said,  
"Because I've been using that mountain for your head."

# BUCK DUKE'S UNIVERSITY

BY W. J. CASH

THE late Buck Duke's immediate aim in pouring out his millions to transform an obscure Methodist college in a North Carolina mill-town into the university which now bears his name was simplicity itself. What he wanted was a Babbitt factory—a mill for grinding out go-get-'em boys in the wholesale and un-deviating fashion in which his Chesterfield plant across the way ground out cigarettes. In this, of course, he did not depart from the normal American pattern in such cases. Old Leland Stanford, for example, had much the same end in view in pouring out his millions at Palo Alto. But there was this difference: that whereas, vanity aside, Stanford's immediate aim may be set down for his ultimate aim, old Buck's can not be. What he had in mind in the long run was Profits, and, to the end of Profits, the preservation of the *status quo*.

It sounds sinister. But in reality it was enormously innocent. Everything old Buck ever did was done to the ultimate end of Profits, for Profits was the only thing he ever came to understand in his sixty-eight years on this planet. For all other purposes, he remained to the end essentially what he was at seventeen, a red-headed, shambling Methodist-jake out of Orange county, North Carolina—which is to say, a sort of peasant out of the Eleventh Century, incredibly ignorant, incredibly obtuse, incredibly grasping and picayune. But in this matter of Profits he was a

transcendent genius. I use the words advisedly, for in this realm he saw, not as common men see, not even as a Rockefeller or a Carnegie sees, not with fumbling, slow logic, not with thought as such, but with Bergsonian immediateness—with all the marvellous and intuitive grasp of the Real which distinguishes those astounding wasps celebrated by Jean-Henri Fabre.

Naturally, then, considering his history, it seemed to him that Profits was the only reasonable excuse for the universe, the only rational end of man. And naturally, too, he hated whatever threatened Profits. Above all, he hated Theory.

Theory, he knew, was always raising hell with things. In his youth, he had built himself up a magnificent Profits-machine, the American Tobacco Company. But Theory had hounded him mercilessly and at last it had sicked the Attorney-General of the United States on him, to damage his machine sadly. He had come back South then, back to Carolina to discover the Catawba river and set up a new Profits-mill, the Southern (now the Duke) Power Company. It was a nearly perfect one, far better than any mere tobacco combine. You built a dam for a million dollars, and you sold it to yourself for eight millions, and the accommodating rate commissioners in Raleigh and Columbia agreed that you were entitled to the ridiculously low return of 3% on the millions you had paid yourself, and most of the newspapers