

sore," he said kindly, "because he can't take it. He thinks I'm prejudiced. No one can help it if he's born that way. I don't blame a nigger for being a nigger. His father and his mother. His grandfather and his grandmother. All the way back to Africa. Naturally. You can't blame a man for that. I don't blame you, mister," he said to Heller kindly.

The broad little man turned in a swift movement. He grabbed the tall, thin man at the back of his neck, at the point where it was most pathetically fragile and childish, like an undernourished boy's. He held it between thumb and forefinger, bending the tall man over, who was made speechless, his eyes dark and sad. Like an ant dragging a leafy splinter, the husky man pulled him to the backdoor, chucked him into the alley.

He glowed silently at the bar. The bartender stared at him, turned to polish a counter. From the radio, a soprano voice soaring through "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life."

A new perplexity welled up in him now, made out of the voice, the words of the tall man. He felt suddenly an obscure need for self-defense. He leaned on the bar, somehow like a heavy, anguished animal without a voice, he played with the bow-tie.

"I believe in this country one hundred percent," he said dully. "I wouldn't live in Europe if they paid me. I'm an American right down to my toes. I was born here."

The bartender stared at him, rubbing a bald spot on the top of his skull tenderly.

"A dinge! He compared me! I was born here,

where did he get that stuff? Don't I speak the language?"

"When we had the war I was all lined up to go just when it ended. Two more months and I'd've been with the boys over there. If there's anybody I hate it's a slacker. I can't stand a slacker and a doublecrosser. But how about those guys in the Market? How about those guys who were dumping stock two years ago and selling the U. S. A. down the river? Everything going to hell. Yellow! They ought to put them on one of these garbage boats and dump them out at sea. They don't belong here."

He looked up at the small American flag behind the bartender, with despair flooding his face.

"I'm an American right down to my toes. Where do they get that stuff? I was born here. . . . Doublecrossers," he said. "You don't know who is and who ain't doing you dirty these days——"

He went out. Why didn't he kill that tall bastard, he should've cut his heart out and bounced it against a wall. Oh, the doublecrossers, the goddam, reneging, dirty, lousy doublecrossers in this world!

Third Avenue dark in the shadow of the Elevated, a tiny little girl, with one stocking torn, twisting in and out of the "L" pillars in a secret game of her own. In an upstairs window, a spot of light, a woman's face. Queen Marie maybe. A signboard facing him, showing a blue-shirted workman with hands outstretched: The American Family Is in Danger! The blue workman ran bluish in the rain.

Oh, Dixie!

## My Grandfather

By Arnold Manoff

**R**AZOR, shmazor—my grandfather, Laizer, never took a shave in his life. His beard crawls, dirty white, down to his belly button, and if he did not trim it now and then, it would be sweeping the floor like his pants. And the pants—he likes them that way, big and roomy, like potato sacks. Better than buying his own are these he wears, hand-me-downs from his sons who are all a foot taller than he. And as he never learned a word of English during his thirty years in America, so too he never sees the loops for the belt and the buttons for the fly. Like petals from a flower the tops of the pants fold back over the belt, and believe him, what does he need a belt for altogether when a rope would do just as well. His jackets—well, never mind his jackets. What are jackets for anyway but to hide soiled shirts and to keep him warm like an extra blanket while he takes a sweet little afternoon snooze.

Now it happened one Friday that he came home from work as usual some two hours before sunset so that he would have time to prepare for the Sabbath. Apparently, everything was as it should be. In one glance, in one sniff, he absorbed the household to his

complete satisfaction. The candlesticks shining bright, the furniture polished and smelling of lemon oil, the old woman busy in the kitchen from which streamed the mingled odors of freshly baked *chaleh*, fish, *tsimas*. Nothing to do but change his shirt and skull cap and lie down until the lighting of the candles. And of course, a little snifter of whiskey could well be used to warm up that old soul of his for some extra-heavy meditation. He gulped easily, one . . . two . . . three, and several more. He smacked his lips, wiped his beard, and lowered himself with a sigh onto the couch. Soon it was all mellow and he was floating in a warm liquid sort of space that closely resembled Paradise.

"Laizer! Laizer! Get up! The house is burning!" his old woman suddenly screamed.

Thirty years in America, ask him what street he lives on. Ask him who is the President. The street, he'll say, is a street like all streets. No? So why worry about its name. And the President. Well, seventeen years ago was a Mr. Tannenbaum, a fine man if ever was one. But because his old woman got sick and . . . and . . . and now is the president of the synagogue, a Mr. Feinstein, not so ay ay ay, but good enough.

"Where?" he queried, seeing and smelling only the smoke which was curling in through the door. "It's only smoke," he assured her. "Open wide the windows and it will go out." And so saying, he turned his back to the frantic woman and sought to resume his interrupted snooze.

In a moment there were screechings in the hallways, distinct, electrifying. Fire! Fire! The old woman, distracted, did not know what to do first. She pulled him. She ran to the door. Back to the kitchen. The smoke was pouring in heavier now.

My grandfather Laizer growled disgustedly and rose from the bed to see for himself why such a commotion.

Buildings grow to towers, horses vanish for motors, out of a city emerges a great metropolis; the world breathes fire and energy, and my grandfather Laizer steps sedately into a traffic-roaring avenue, his head high to heaven, his beard tucked safely in his vest, and strolls across while the world waits and curses. And he hears them like he hears the Devil.

"Come outside! Laizer! It's a fire! Hear everybody! Come on!" the old woman implored.

If, until he was seventy-one, he never missed a work day as a cabinet maker, 'twas only a common incident like breathing. His lungs breathe for him. Right or not? So please understand that his hands likewise worked for him. Witness how absorbed he is in everyday phenomena, that when he had to travel to work the first day in America, his son described for him how many subway stations to count off and from then on for thirty years it was simply a question of waiting out five stops and then proceeding after the right side of his nose for two blocks.

"Nonsense, where do you see fire? I see smoke, not fire. Smoke does not mean fire. Smoke can mean a kettle boiling. Look how she stands there shaking. What are you shaking for? Do you see fire? I don't." And having bawled her out for her misconceptions, he proceeded to investigate the cause. Opening the door he was staggered by a rush of heavy yellow smoke. He slammed it shut and with a little more speed walked to the windows and flung them wide open. There, below, he saw a mass of people gathering and gaping almost directly at him, and mingled with their cries was the approaching wail of a siren and clanging bells.

He stared for a while and then sat slowly down near the window to think it over. The old woman had run out into the hallway, and he got up and shut the door after her.

Of matters universal, of fire and water, of the sun and the moon, of God and the universe, of the carnate and incarnate—ask him, ask Laizer Koptzen, by God's grace seventy-eight years alive; seventy years a student in the words of God, and the Talmudists, father of eight, grandfather to twenty-one, and watch his eyes light with pride. And sit down to listen while he deliberates in soft even tones with expression owl-wise and cocksure, naively positive as only a living anachronism can be.

For quite a while my grandfather Laizer couldn't make up his mind. In the meantime the engines had arrived, and the clamor from the hallway had ceased, and all the noise now came from the street. Yet he

could see no fire, only smoke so dense now that his eyes were tearing and his lungs stinging with every inhalation.

Until the flames finally ate their way into the house so he could see them and feel sure they were flames as are flames, he sat and pondered, and then as if he had known all the time that he would have to leave, he quickly gathered up his best silk skull cap, his long shawl, his philacteries, three of his books, and made for the door where he was met by two charging firemen. They grabbed him. He closed his eyes, stopped breathing, and for a time it seemed as if he were being carried through hell itself. So hot it was. He didn't dare look. Not, please understand, that he was frightened. No. Just taken by surprise.

That's how it is with him. Viewing the material from the spiritual pinnacle, my grandfather Laizer fears nothing of matter in any of its forms, man-conceived or nature-fashioned. And for such elemental trivialities as temperature, time, language, location, speed, height, and taking baths, he has an indifferent shrug.

"He who trusts in God and awaits with true faith," he says, "the coming of the Messiah, has of worldly fears, none."

Now he was sitting, the motion ending. Cool, a pleasure. He opened his eyes and beheld with mild concern a burning building, and a mass of people all around him, shouting, laughing, gesticulating. He thought of his Sabbath being so crudely interrupted but like a true philosopher sighed it away, rose to his feet, and walked to the edge of the crowd. There he found a box, and adjusting his skull cap he sat down, and glancing once at the sky to see how far the sun had gone down, he opened one of the books and began to intone softly, detaching himself from earthly things as only he could.

But the immediate world around him was fully enjoying a rare treat. The roof of the building was ablaze like the head of a match stick, and the firemen were putting on a great show of ladders, hatchets, and spouting hoses. More engines arrived and now a news-photographer. Reporters, too, were running about, their press cards in hat ribbons. The story of how the old man was carried out by two firemen went the rounds and soon died out with each new excitement, each new fireman's helmet. Someone suggested finding him. A reporter was interested. But no one bothered to look.

An hour later, the fire was spent, the crowd's interest flickering, exhausted. And in the sky the sun was just beyond the horizon. Engines, spectators began to depart one by one. But one more incident occurred. A giant hook-and-ladder was swinging into the street on its way back, picking up speed, its bell clanging fiercely. Huge, powerful, it charged along, a gleaming red juggernaut, when suddenly with a tremendous grinding squeal it stopped short, the driver, the firemen all cursing a blue streak, their eyes on . . . yes. My grandfather Laizer is crossing in front, his beard in his vest, skull cap shining, his gait slow and untroubled, his eyes toward the darkening sky.

The world waits and swears. My grandfather Laizer, understand me, is well on his way to synagogue.

# Home

By Sam Ross

NICK did not know why his father went away, and without saying a word to him. Of late his father sat around the house without ever talking. He looked like a blowup crumpled paper bag waiting to be banged out of usefulness. The only time he seemed to grow alive was when he coughed. Then his whole body trembled and jerked with what seemed like chains rattling through him. He had gone off one day, his back stooped and round. And he had not returned. Nick had heard him talking to his mother before he had left.

"I'm a dead man," he said.

"You should never have taken that job in the sewer, with your weak chest."

"I had to."

"Every day you worked I saw you getting a hemorrhage in your lungs, and you were gone. It wasn't worth it."

"That was life."

"What do you mean: was?"

"I can't hold out any longer. You'll get some insurance money soon. I took care of that on my last job."

Nick's mother began to cry. Nick was only seven years old and he could not understand why she cried. She had cried a lot lately, and each time he felt himself swimming through her tears, boiling and choking in them.

Nick knew only that his father had a cold. That was why his father always kept him at a distance. But having a cold was nothing to bawl about. Nick had had many. It was practically nothing.

When his father did not return after a week, his mother seemed to wait around the house for something to happen. Whenever there was a knocking on the door she ran to it quickly. If it was a neighbor or a salesman or a bill collector, her eyes lost their expectation and became filmy.

Then his mother began to curse his father when she thought Nick could not hear. It seemed she had been cheated out of something. Nick did not know what.

When the kids on the street asked him about his father he felt bewildered, not knowing what to answer. Finally he said, "He wenna buy me a pony. He wen' far away fum yere for it."

"Jesus!" the kids said. "You got a real ol' man."

He had said that and almost believed in it, he had told the story so many times. But when he had asked his mother, she had yelled, "Don't bother me! Get away and don't bother me!"

And he thought she was going to hit him. He had to stop asking her, because when he did she no longer looked like his mother. She would stop looking big and soft and warm. But he could not help wondering. He wished he was big and knew everything.

One day, not long after his father went away, Nick

was hungry. He had not eaten the day before, except for a couple of apples he had hooked from a fruit stand. He was so hungry he sat at the kitchen table waiting. His mother walked restlessly back and forth from the empty pantry. Nick had said he was hungry, and watched her move silently in her sprawling bare feet. Her heavy black hair was uncombed. She looked very big and fleshy in her apron. There was a wrinkled expression on her forehead, like crying, but she wasn't. She sat down at the kitchen table and her eyes gazed upon him without seeing. Finally she stood up and put on a pair of worn, bulging shoes.

"I'm going to get something to eat," she said.

"I'm hungry, ma."

He followed her into the dank stairway. Creaking down the hollow dampened wood, Nick inhaled deeply the faint lingering smells of cooked food.

"It hurts in my belly, ma."

"Soon it won't hurt, I hope."

Outside the sun glazed the dusty street and the trolley rails looked like rippling cellophane ribbons. Niggy and Tony, both a couple of years older than Nick, sat on the curbstone. They were what Nick called the big guys.

"You play with them."

"Awright, ma."

"I'll be back soon. So don't go away."

Nick walked slowly to the curbstone and picked up a rain-soaked stick on the way. He sat down beside them, with his feet in the gutter.

"Where'd yuh ma go?" Tony asked.

"She wenna ged somepin to eat."

"Why doan she go to duh corner grocery like my ma goes?"

"She doan havva do evvyt'ing like your ma."

"Where's she go den?"

"I dunno."

"You're a dumsock. You dunno nuddin'."

"Yuh pa home yet?" Niggy asked.

"No."

"My ma said to my pa he wen' away an' left you," Niggy said.

"He wen' far away fum yere." Nick said. "It takes a year to go up an' back."

"Go on," Tony said. "No place is a year away fum yere."

"Yeah?" Nick said. "What about heaven? Dat's more'n a year."

"Dat's bushwa," Tony said. "Ain' it, Niggy?"

"Sure. 'Cause now you kin go by airplane an' you go like sixty."

"So where'd yuh pa go a year away?" Tony asked.

"In duh West, see. He's a cowboy dere an' when he comes home he's gonna bring me a pony fum dat hoss he got dere."