

THE three topics in a Maine fisherman's conversation are: the weather, the fish, and the church. The first two are business matters, for storms and poor catches can ruin a fisherman. The church is a social topic; it houses not only religious services but political and social meetings as well. "Patrolling the Nets" (top) shows the men at work. "Ridge Church" (bottom) pictures a quieter side of the life.



The Love Pulps

THOMAS H. UZZELL

*Magazines that sell glamour
for a dime . . . the escape liter-
ature of three million maidens*

BACK during the winter of 1920-21 a young woman was placed in an oak-paneled room of an old office building in New York. She stayed in that room for six months, alone, living with stacks of dime novels, coming out only for meals and sleep and now and then a breath of fresh air. Finally, around spring, about the time Mr. Harding took his oath, Miss Amita Fairgrieve opened her door and stepped out with the magazine she had been told to develop. It was built around one of the favorite four-letter words of the English race and was in essence a combination of that word, *love*, with a twenty-five-year-old publishing term, *pulp*. Miss Fairgrieve's *Love Story Magazine*, dated May, 1921, was the first love pulp in history. It began as a quarterly, changed quickly to a semi-monthly, and then became a weekly. It has had dozens of imitators, and today leads a field of eighteen magazines which sell more than three million copies a month.

The love pulps are among those hardy, violently colored perennials which form the background of most American newsstands. The covers displaying sheriffs with guns exploding in both hands, Oriental killers with ratted mustachios and dripping daggers, gangsters being plugged in the very nick—these are the wood pulps for men. Only eighteen of 137 are pulps for women. Of the pulp readers in this country less than ten per cent are women. Woman's passion for fashions, greater interest in colors, and possibly sharper nose for a bargain induce her to seek reading satisfaction from the five-and-ten-cent big-circulation slicks.

The stigma of "pulp" has become attached to magazines on the lowest grade of newsprint, paper too rough for half-tones. Since literary magazines with no need of illustrations are sometimes printed on rough paper, the term "pulp" is not altogether accurate. Some pulp editors resent it. They prefer such terms as "all fiction" or, simply, "action" or "love" books. The pulp differs from other magazines also because of its standardized seven-by-ten-inches format, because it prints only one type of story and, paradoxically enough, because more than any other type of magazine it succeeds or fails by reason of what it prints. Literary magazines are supported by advertising and subsidies; big-circulation illustrated magazines are, if they

succeed, triumphs chiefly of advertising and special promotion devices; but when the pulp gets by, it is by giving the reader what he or she wants.

Especially is this true of the love pulp. Run through any one of them and you will find in 128 pages less than a dozen devoted to advertising. You may at first be disturbed to see that most of the ads offer the maiden readers radio jobs, cures for piles, rupture, lost manhood, and weak muscles. This "lost circulation" is a result of the common practice among pulp publishers of selling advertising space by bulk, *i.e.*, by grouping several magazines, generally from one house, adding their circulations and selling circulation as a unit. In any case, the advertising appeal to the female pulp reader is small indeed, and little effort is made to stir her buying instincts. She has no money to spend. The most profitable appeal is a glittering display of cheap jewelry (engagement- and wedding-ring Queen of Love Bridal Ensemble, exquisitely matched, thirty dollars, one dollar down) which she can show her boy friend.

Born in 1921, the love pulp had its origin in the lavender-scented literary mists of the 1870's. In those days the maiden dream of love was sold to our clinging female ancestors in the pages of paper-backed books and of weekly newspapers with pages as big as bed sheets. The transition from dime novel to dime magazine was largely the result of a law passed in 1897. This law (Section 394 in Postal Laws and Regulations) provides that second-class matter "must be issued at stated intervals . . . and bear a date of issue and be numbered consecutively. . . . It must be formed of printed sheets, without board, cloth, leather or other substantial binding, such as distinguishes printed books for preservation from periodical publications." To enjoy low postage bills, the dime novel widened, lengthened, used smaller type, and emerged as a pulp magazine. The leaders in these moves were Frank Munsey and F. E. Blackwell of Street & Smith—the house which in 1921 put Miss Fairgrieve into that oak-paneled room. Before then some of the pulps had occasionally run love stories, but she was the first person to put a love pulp to press.

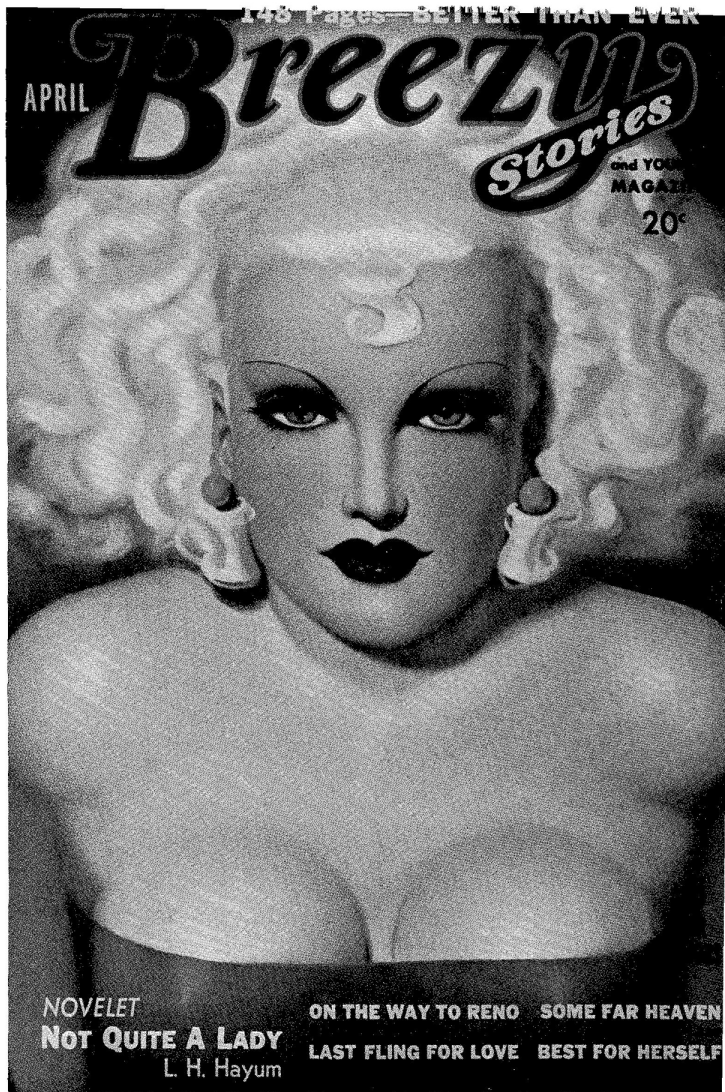
In 1933 Street & Smith switched distributors; they took their books, including *Love Story*, from the Independents

and put them in the hands of the American News Company. So the Independents went to a publisher by the name of A. A. Wyn who promised them a love pulp. Several days later he hit upon the title *Love Fiction Monthly*, and a week later the book was headed for the presses.

In 1936 the love-pulp field hit a special little boom of its own. Popular Publications, another young house, under the editorial guidance of Harry Steeger, felt the call and hired Jane Littell, a successful love-pulp writer, to edit *Love Book Magazine*, which sold at once and is still selling. Meanwhile Munsey publications had turned their general pulp, *All Story Magazine*, into a love pulp with the same pioneering Amita Fairgrieve as editor. (She had left *Love Story* in 1923 to edit *Cupid's Diary*, now *Sweetheart Stories*.) These four magazines, *Love Story*, *All Story*, *Love Book*, and *Love Fiction Monthly* are the leaders in the field today.

The exact circulation of these magazines cannot be learned because of the grouping of the circulations for advertising purposes. This bulking of circulation, moreover, enables the publisher of a sudden success to keep it dark—until he has a jump in the field. So tight has been this censorship at times that even the editors of the magazines don't know their own sales figures. Daisy Bacon, editor of *Love Story*, at one time regularly learned her weekly circulation at a cocktail party attended by the representative of a distributing company. Another editor learns her circulation by figuring one thousand to every seven letters from readers. Roy Barnhill, manager of a New York agency for pulp advertising space, reports that even he cannot learn the circulations of the separate magazines. "The only way to get the figures for a magazine is to get a job on it and be put in charge of deliveries."

No enterprising pulp publisher, however, need be kept very long in the dark as to his rival's successes. He can, and he does, check on rural circulation at strategic points with the help of local distributors. The distribution men report on the number of sales and number of returns of any magazine the publisher may want to keep an eye on. Every publisher has this espionage service, and so circulation is no secret to the top men in the trade. But to the outsider it is an impenetrable mystery. In any case, it is well known in the business that *Love Story Magazine*, published for seventeen years by Street & Smith, tops the field by a fairly wide margin. Various estimates place *Love Story's* circulation at figures varying from 92,000 to 350,000. The latter figure is probably nearer to accuracy, but even that is far below the boom heights. Back in the 1929 era, when the price was fifteen cents rather than



today's ten, *Love Story* sold thirty million a year, close to 600,000 a week—probably the highest circulation ever attained by any pulp magazine. The monthly sales of *Love Fiction Monthly* and *Love Book* are undoubtedly over 100,000; *All Story* falls short, but can afford to be because of its fifteen-cent price.

Each of these four is edited by a woman. Only one man editor—Leo Margulies of *Thrilling Love* and *Popular Love*—competes with them, and he is not far behind. Daisy Bacon of *Love Story*, Amita Fairgrieve of *All Story*, Jane Littell of *Love Book* and the bimonthly *Romance*, and Rose Wyn of *Love Fiction* and *Ten-Story Love*—these women know their jobs. Their magazines follow the ever-shifting editorial styles as deftly as their clothing changes with the tides of feminine fashion. They exhibit a feminine thriftiness, too, in getting stories at half the rates the men's pulps pay.



iron fence. Here, for three-quarters of a century, the house of Street & Smith has conducted a solid business built upon the sale chiefly of two commodities—melodrama for men and glamorous romance for women. At the moment, the Street & Smith detectives, cowboys, and Indian scouts are not doing so well, and the modern young things in the love pulps who get their men are stepping forth as the breadwinners.

Miss Bacon dictates her letters to the experts of glamour as she sits before an old-fashioned roll-top desk across the top of which parades a number of cats and elephants. Several gaily colored, ardent magazine covers are framed on the wall behind her. She is a New Englander, blonde, unmarried. On an informal inquiry once as to the best-looking editorial staff in New York, Miss Bacon, with her half-sister, Esther Joa Ford, her only editorial assistant, also a spinster, came off with top honors.

Miss Bacon has few editorial tricks unknown to others in the same business. All love-pulp editors collaborate freely and generously with their writers. Miss Bacon has assets in the title of her magazine and in the reputation of her house. Facing the task of editing bad stories—bad in the literary sense—she knows unerringly what kind of badness is needed. She likes to print stories built around headline news of the day. She attains the utmost in variety of situations without varying the uniform quality of glamorous romance. She avoids stories in which the average girl could not picture herself, such as plots involving contact with violent criminals; she understands the naïve code of conduct which is the only religion left to many of her readers; and finally, she knows what makes

No effort by an analytical male to understand the editorial processes of these women editors will succeed. They arrive at their decisions, as a woman should, by intuition. Jane Littell comments on Daisy Bacon: "I believe she could separate a stack of manuscripts into two piles with her eyes shut and in one pile would be the only copy worth her reading." Says Miss Bacon herself: "I trust my personal judgment. I pay no attention to what other magazines print; I read but do not heed my fan mail. Some of my competitors make a big mistake, I think, by imitating my magazine and trying out new formulas. I know what I want and I do not count on having the luck to find it among the manuscripts submitted. I write a good many letters to my authors."

Miss Bacon, who took hold of *Love Story* in 1928, has an office in the same building used by Miss Fairgrieve in 1921. It stands at Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, a seven-story red-brick building surrounded by a high

a story logical and convincing to a mind without logic and convinced of nothing. She does these things well, and unerringly, and all the time.

Jane Littell describes her own editorial policy thus: "Men as women wish they were, girls as they'd like to be, stories you'd like to live." But after all the evidence is gathered, one must admit that the successful love-pulp editors buy stories they like. And if they select the wrong stories, it doesn't seem to matter much either. Miss Littell has seen manuscripts she has rejected picked up and composed into almost an entire issue of a competing magazine which sold as well as the Littell book.

In the familiar fairy tale and in the love pulps of yesterday, we find a heroine, young and beautiful, who is persecuted and suffers, until her dreams are realized in some magical manner and she marries the prince who bestows upon her love and wealth. Sex was missing altogether. Cinderella's loneliness and poverty distressed her

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LOVE STORY
EVERY WEEK MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATED



more than her lack of a mate. The parade of horses, flocks of servants, gilded coach, palace, all indicated that little sister had indeed landed in a pretty soft spot. Her story was neurotic in that she yearned not for a lover but a lover-father. It was moral in that wealth was a reward for her unselfishness and patience, and a fairy tale because of the lucky breaks.

Today Cinderella has been endowed with some sex so that she is no longer so neurotic; she attains her dreams, not because she is a model of all the virtues, but because she does something about it. The obviously Victorian elements are all gone—all but one: the theory of virginity as a sacred endowment (really a bargaining asset in a marriage deal) still holds. Pulp heroines in recent months, Miss Bacon tells me, have become drunk, have disobeyed their parents, have remained over night in young men's apartments, but they have not yet parted with the Big Asset, "though some of them," Miss Bacon says, "are not so sure."

As for the hero, unemployment and the small crop of farm boys who have become multimillionaires in recent years have stripped him of all artificial nobility and most of his one-time fabulous wealth. It is enough today if he prefers the heroine to all others and says so with kisses—if not enough kisses are provided for *Love Story*, Miss Bacon may write them in—and provided also that he has a pair of marvelously broad shoulders and has been asked by the boss to come around Monday morning.

Love-pulp fiction differs from love-slick fiction in only two fundamental ways: (1) it is more highly emotional, (2) it is generally less well-written. And this second generalization is not always true—a reject from *Thrilling Love* recently came out in *Cosmopolitan*. The emotional tone, though, is an almost ironclad essential. Even the gayest love-pulp yarn has an undertone of sadness in it. When the heroines laugh they are generally laughing through tears. In the end, of course, everything turns out happily; but up until then the heroine suffers.

The typical love pulp will contain:

A rich-girl story—with limousine, ermine, penthouses, and all the luxuries calculated to give the reader a vicarious thrill.

A poor-girl-who-makes-good story—Cinderella again.

A Hollywood or radio story—for behind-the-scenes glamour.

A hero-in-uniform story—there's something about a soldier.

Illustrations after the manner of Nell Brinkley, the heroes currently looking suspiciously like Robert Taylor.

A Pen Pals department (which gives the editors head-

aches guarding against mashers and confidence men, and has even had J. Edgar Hoover's G-men embroiled).

A love-lorn column—which offers moderately innocuous advice on real and fancied love affairs.

A column on astrology or palmistry or some similar fortunetelling business that brings in an unconscionable number of dimes from introspective readers.

And, oddly enough, several poems, which are not so bad as you might suspect.

With few exceptions, the writers who fill love-pulp pages are women. Among the regular contributors to *Love Fiction Monthly* are to be found three different types. One is represented by Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith, a physically strong, robust woman with tremendous vitality and enthusiasm. As she outlines her stories to her editor, she seems to identify herself with them; she is her own heroine, and writes with sincerity and conviction. Another type is that popular veteran in the pulps, Peggy Gaddis.



All Brides Are Scared

By Rowena R. Farrar

MADELINE SIMMONS, a lovely white goddess behind pale-yellow rosebuds, came through the door into the brilliantly garlanded church upon her father's arm. As she walked slowly down the petal-strewn aisle toward the handsome man waiting at the altar, her incredibly slender, graceful body was trembling with excitement and reverence and fright. Getting married was a terrifying business.

"All brides are scared stiff on their wedding day," one of her bridesmaids had assured her. She clutched at that remark for comfort. But what if she should discover, later on, that she didn't really love Frank Meriwether? Or, suppose he should fall out of love with her? It had happened before, one way or the other, and a wedding ceremony might not prevent its happening again.

So great is her energy and so perfected her technique that she turns out her work like a machine. She refuses to rewrite. With her, the love pulp is a business and she is a success at it. A third type of writer employs a more intellectual approach, and to this group belongs another big name in the love-pulp field, Judith McKay. Although her writing is also well-organized on a business basis, she depends more on method and less on instinct. Her methods carry greater risk of rising above the comprehension of her audience. She polishes her pages with care and as a result her output is less than that of the other two types. The first of these types will turn out the best stories for pulp pages; the second makes the most money; the third is the editor's delight.

A successful love-pulp writer, Lisbeth Walter, who belongs to the third class of pulp scribes, furnishes this account of her art: "The pulp editors advised me, if I would succeed, to throw myself into my heroine's place. I threw

and nothing happened: the result was not pulp. In despair I studied a little Polish maid I had at that time. I tried all my inventions on her, soon discovering that she liked to read about luxurious bathrooms, furs and perfumes, descriptions of clothes, scenes in which the heroine slaps the hero's face, scenes in which the hero was particularly polite and well-mannered. I pondered these revelations. After all, the average boy such girls know is probably a truck driver, and his love-making must leave much to be desired. What was it my Polish maid missed? I figured this out and put it into my next love story. It sold, and so has every word I have written since."

The rates paid love-pulp writers are not high: their editors make money by not spending much of it. In the boom days of the 1920's, pulp romances brought as high as four cents a word, or around \$200 a story. Today, two and a half cents is probably the top; *Love Story*, for instance, averages around one and three-quarter cents. *Love Book* pays two cents, but averages less, while the *Wyns* pay around a cent and a half.

In a single issue, the total fees paid authors for an average of six stories, two installments of serials, and space-filling poetry are from \$500 to \$2500. The ratio of this expense to the total cost of a successful pulp book can be seen in the cost sheets furnished by one of them which totals 128 pages, has a print order of 100,000, and sells for fifteen cents on the newsstands. These other costs are: printing, \$1400; paper, \$1000; engraving, \$230; illustrations, \$175; editorial salaries, \$200; overhead, \$100. The total, including an average charge of \$700 for the authors, is \$3790.

The publisher sells the entire print order to the distributor for eight and a half cents a copy and is credited with \$8500. At the end of the sale period, the distributor returns unsold copies at nine and a half cents each. The sale varies from forty-five to fifty-five per cent. On a fifty per cent sale the net return to the publisher is his credit of \$8500 less \$4750 or \$3750. Advertising space for this magazine is calculated at from eighty cents to a dollar per page per thousand, minus a twenty-five per cent agency commission and staff costs. Allowing \$250 as the net on advertising and a similar sum for resale of the returns abroad, we have a net revenue of \$4250 and a net profit for one issue of \$460.

No account of the manufacture and distribution of love-pulp literature in this country could be complete without some mention of the publications put out by the house of C. H. Young Publishing Co. This house, headed by Courtland H. Young until his death in 1931, has specialized for three decades in the sexy, or, as its editors say,

the sophisticated, type of romantic love pulp. *Young's Magazine* was one of the early pulps and has had, if you include its present incarnation, combined with *Breezy Stories*, a longer continuous history than any other. The typical *Breezy Stories* traffics in the love adventures of married rather than unmarried heroines, is the very trade journal of triangles, and in general appeals to older married women. Contrary to the belief of many who never see beyond the covers of *Breezy Stories*, its appeal is in no sense pornographic. Its stories observe the outward proprieties as closely as the more popular love pulps; it differs radically, however, from the latter in that it believes in the possibilities of love with or without a marriage certificate and prefers to detail the illegal romance. The sweetheart stories are told with sugar, the breezy (an inaccurate title certainly) with spice; and the spice is the world-and-reputation-well-lost-for-love. In the former there is no bed and no shadow of one; in the latter the bed dominates every scene.

It is accepted by the editors of the confession magazines that the bed must precede the marriage, as if this were a natural rather than man-made law; and when this law is violated (in the confess story), the evil Fates always get wind of it, and there's hell to pay, including penance. In the breezy story the final marriage is happy just because the bed preceded the ceremony: the theme of the breezy story is the intensity of the heroine's passion. The Cinderella of the love pulps is good and therefore happy; the confession lady is bad and therefore unhappy; breezy's heroines are bad but happy. Most of us will agree, I think, that the breezy editors have got something.

Who are the three million people who read the love pulps? In general, they are women whose lives are cast into a mold of dull routine—factory girls, housewives, domestics, shop girls, office workers. In the love pulps these girls find "life as they'd like to live it."

These readers possess no fertile imaginations; their dreams must be written out for them. The dreams must not be too complex—motivation must be simplified to merely instinct responses. It is this inviolable rule of simplification which gives the pulp story its mark of triteness. The cliché and the familiar complication are necessities, not lapses. They are symbols which the reader can easily grasp; they enable the reader to understand a story without thinking it out.

Only a few years ago the romantic impulse in the young woman in all popular fiction was restricted to the maternal, leading to acts of tenderness and self-sacrifice. Today the mating instinct is coming into its own. Since all

when you are really in love, you know. There are no doubts to stifle, only a desperate longing.

Grimly she looked into the future. This Pauline was after Philip, and she had every advantage. She was

his first love. Under the driving pressure of her beauty and her kisses, Philip would forgive the past. In a few days he



"I'm mad about you! I've fought against loving you until I'm actually limp. Oh, darling, where are your lips?" He swept her into his arms and kissed her the way she had dreamed he would kiss her some day.

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women find it difficult to speak of sex for what it is, it follows that the love life of the Cinderella even of today is set forth most effectively in its simplest physical-psychic aspects, *i.e.*, in terms of embraces, passionate kisses, and sensuous atmospheres.

The strongest trait of all in the sub-mass female reader, however, is not sex or even the maternal, but devotion to convention. What her neighbors, her girl friends, will say of her is still her most passionate concern. Tribal mores hold her in a grip firm beyond the comprehension of anyone capable of intelligent behavior. Passionate princes and "thrilling" heroines who must be brought together without doing anything Grandma wouldn't do—this is the central problem which pulp editors and writers expend their ingenuity trying to solve.

[This is the second article in a series on magazines that sell. The third will appear in the May issue.]

RABBIT FEVER

A STORY BY
WILLOUGHBY JOHNSON

OLD MAN TUCKER shifted his kind ruminatively, crossed his legs, and spat once into the low-burning fire. Then he said:

Course I never done none of this big game hunting like the rest of you fellers, and so I ain't never wrestled no boar contractor nor been clawed by no big cats nor throttled no Arab with my bare hands the way youall been a-telling 'bout tonight. But you know there's some mighty peculiar things can happen to man right here in Boone County.

I'm minded of the time I and Charlie Cummings had went out a rabbit hunting one morning in the late fall. It was a nice snappish day and we had walked along for some little time just chewing the fat and paying no mind to where we was a-going or how far, till all of a sudden it struck me that we'd been out quite a spell and nary a rabbit had we seen yet.

So I says to Charlie, "Charlie," I says, "don't it seem kind of funny to you that we ain't seen ary rabbit yet?"

"Well, Ed," says Charlie, and he stopped and scratched his head, "I hadn't really give it no thought, you might say, but now you mention it, why it certainly does."

"It just come over me all of a sudden," I says. "I declare I don't believe I ever covered this much territory afore in my whole life without I kicked up a dozen or more at least. It certainly does look funny to me."

"It does that," says he, "especially when they's usually rabbits in this here bottoms thicker nor fleas on a mangy dog. Wonder where in the world they could of all went to?"

"I've not got the least idea," I says, "jessen they've all went down closter to the river, to a convention or something."

"Well, it won't cost nothing to go down there and give it a try," says Charlie.

And so we turned off down towards the river, tromping on ever brush heap and kicking in ever corn shock we come

to till we was so aggravated we was fit to be tied, but without seeing no more sign of a rabbit nor we did of a buffalo. Well, after while we come to a pretty steep knob that we clumb and there we lent on our guns a minute and cussed.

"Dagnabbit," says Charlie, "I'm a-going to get me a dadburned rabbit if I have to follow this durned river all the way to Booneville and back."

Well, by that time I was pretty well burnt out on the rabbit proposition, but I said if he was bound to do it I was dogged if I wasn't a-going with him, and we was just going to set out agin when he sniffs the air and turns and sniffs and sniffs agin, and then says, "Ed, my nose 's done informed my stummick that it's right at dinnertime, if not beyond."

With that he started off over the knob, me follering right behind. And sure enough, right on the other side we come to old Mr. Sievers' place, which was a surprise to me, not realizing that we'd come that far yet. There was smoke a-coming outn his chimbley and the smell of frying meat was all over.

"It would be real unneighborly of us to go on by without passing the time of day," I says. So we went in, and Mr. Sievers was just pulling outn the stove a batch of those big doughy biscuits some folks calls catheads.

"Well, well," he says, looking up, "I was just a-setting on victuals. Draw up cheers, boys, and I'll cut more meat."

Course, we never wasted no time falling to, like he'd ast us. Meanwhile, he poured up coffee and then went over in the corner and pulled a jug outn a tow-sack and set her on the table and says, "Maybe you boys would like to lace your coffee with a drop of this here corn. I know it's good, because I make it myself. And that's real fresh, I run it off just last week."

Now I don't lay claim to being more'n a passable judge of whiskey, but I do know that either his coffee or his whiskey or the two of 'em together made me think for a minute that I had a-holt of



a cup of boiling sheep dip. Though wunst you got it down it wasn't so bad, only it made your stummick feel like it was full of hot light globes a-flashing on and off, with one of 'em exploding ever now and then. And to tell the truth, I doubt if I would of drunk more'n one cup, excepting I was company and couldn't turn it down when he offered it to me. We had several and then Charlie told Mr. Sievers about us tramping around over the country all morning and not seeing a single solitary rabbit.

Mr. Sievers, he never appeared to consider that the leastways outn the ordinary, though, but just set there a-picking his teeth with his pocketknife a minute and then says, "Well, boys, to tell the truth, I ain't the least bit surprised. As a fact, I would of been surprised if you had of seen ary—since this time last week, that is. They's been some uncommon peculiar goings-on around here recently.

"Just a week ago tomorrow," he says, "I'd just finished running off that there last batch of corn and was a-setting right here eating my dinner as calm and peaceful as a hen on aigs. Well, sir, all of a sudden I got as sleepy as a boy in