

All Quiet On Porcupine Ridge

by

Miss Madeline Field (1901-1973)

Harrington, Maine ~ 1925

For the first time within the memory of man, Joe Casey had been sick. His usually reliable interior had been acting up all that spring. No amount of Dr. Hemingway's Perfect Panacea had the slightest effect upon Joe's personal civil war.

The other men at the Melvin Brothers' lumber camp kidded the life out of him. How, they asked him, did he expect them to thrive on his cooking when he couldn't take it himself. Then they tried to outdo one another in suggesting fearful and wonderful remedies ranging all the way from swamp water to kerosene. Sam parried their thrusts, swam in patent medicines, and suffered in comparative silence.

One week-end he came down to stay at the home of his sister, Elizabeth Martin, in Coleboro, and she insisted upon his remaining with her until he felt better. Stout, florid, dark-haired Mrs. Martin usually could manage her brother Joe as efficiently as she had managed the late Mr. Martin during their thirty years of married life. However when she remarked that her brother looked "real poorly" and should have the doctor, Joe proved very unmanageable indeed. "I ain't never had a doctor," he declared, "and I ain't never goin' to. The idear of a grown man havin' a doctor for the belly-ache. Think I'm a fool? No, ma'am, no doctor for me."

"Might as well try to reason with a mule!" sighed Elizabeth. "You don't eat nor sleep well, and you do look terrible. Now, please, Joe, let Dr. Graham find out what ails you." But coaxing was of no avail, either, and Elizabeth had to admit defeat.

Not long afterwards, a day came that Joe would remember all his life, -- a day of shivering, nausea, and pain that was past concealing. Terrified, Elizabeth sent for the doctor. He made a brief examination. "We've got to get him to the hospital " See heard him say, "and there's no time to lose, I'll get the Melvins on the phone. They'd be glad to send down one of their cars. Sam had been with the Melvin Brothers for twenty-five years. He had hazy memories of being wrapped in blankets and carried out to Dan Melvin's big car. It was thirty miles to Steventon. Not even Dan's skillful driving could entirely protect the sick man from the roughness of the road. The pain grew worse and worse, then suddenly ceased, and Joe very nearly ceased with it. From

away off somewhere, he could hear Elizabeth crying, could hear the words "ruptured appendix" and something about not having a ghost of a show. There was blackness, then a yellow fog through which he saw little and heard not at all, then blackness again. Over and over, tough little Joe fought his way up an endless hill, fell back, climbed again.

Five weeks later, they brought home what was left of him. Joe had had every complication in and out of the medical books. Lean and wiry in his best days, he was now a skeleton with sallow skin drawn tight over the bones. When the Melvins and Elizabeth came to help him into the car they were too sympathetic to comment.

Although Joe was, as he expressed it himself, an Irish Yankee, he had been all his life mistaken for an Indian. In his earlier years, he had used this chronic error as the basis for horrifying yarns which he concocted for the benefit of nervous tourists and the younger and more gullible woodsmen.

"You look like a dead Indian now," remarked Dan Melvin

Joe had been back from the hospital a long time now; but somehow or other, he did not feel in the least like himself. Physically he was all right; but he had no interest in eating or in anything else. They had warned him at the hospital that he could not hope to go back to work for six months. He could see those six months stretching ahead out of sight, and he was beginning to wonder just what was at the end of them.

The fact was that Joe was discouraged. Sickness costs money and Joe's bank account was almost as thin as its owner. He had never had any practice in being an invalid. Enforced idleness was giving him a feeling of supreme uselessness. He had plenty of spare time to devote to brooding over his troubles and he gave himself wholeheartedly to the pursuit of this new hobby. It wasn't that he had not enough friends for company. He knew every one of Coleboro's seven hundred inhabitants, so there was always someone to talk to. But he had discovered that a man can get awful sick of talking. People said the same things over and over.

Then there was the business of keeping quiet "Now, Joe, "Elizabeth would say, you remember what those doctors told you about taking it easy and keeping quiet." Keeping quiet, Joe learned, consisted of never doing anything at all that you wanted to do.

September spread its blue haze over the great forests of spruce and hemlock around Coleboro. October came. Across the river, the New Brunswick hills blazed with scarlet and gold. It was wonderful hunting weather. With the opening of the partridge season, Joe's condition had taken a distinct turn for the worse. Moping gloomily around the house one day, he saw his old rifle, forlorn and neglected on the rack in the hall. Carefully he took it down and tried the sights on an enlarged photograph of Elizabeth's departed husband.

Elizabeth chose that moment to come in and catch him. "You put that gun right down!" she ordered, tenderly dusting the outraged portrait. "The idea! You needn't think you're going hunting this fall. Why, just a little while ago, you almost died."

"That's the whole trouble," agreed Joe bitterly, "I only just almost died."

Tomorrow the deer-hunting season would open. It was a clear, crisp, cloudless day. Tomorrow would be just like it. As Joe trudged home from the store with a loaf of bread for

Elizabeth, he felt very low indeed. The street ran parallel with the river. His mind rode the river down th the meadows, miles below the town. There a man who knew where to look could always find birds or a deer or two. This very street ended on the shores of the Rodnic Lakes in whoses blue waters the river began and the shadows of Maine and New Brunswick met. All around those lakes was some of the finest hunting country a man could ask for. Yes, sir, some of the very finest. Joe revived a little, thrilled by the memory of his adventures in those woods. Then he recalled that for him there would be no more such adventures. He was all through. He had to keep quiet and take it easy from now on.

"I ain't a man anymore," he told himself. "I ain't nothin' but an ailin' old woman. All I got to look forward to, if I got anything, is standin' over a hot stove tryin' to keep a mob of lumberjacks in vittles. I can't even do that till I've rested a lot more and I'm all wore out from restin' now."

Bowed down by weight of woe, he did not see his friend Hollis Burns until he almost collided with him. He and Hollis had worked together for years; but recently Hollis and his family had inherited a small farm near Coleboro, and Joe saw him only occasionally. "Well, well," shouted Hollis, his red face beaming as he smothered Joe's bony hand in his own huge paw, "I declare if it ain't Joe Casey! Just goes to prove that you can't kill the Irish. "Haw! Haw!" and he nearly knocked out his old crony with a hearty pat on the back. Then he looked Joe over critically. "You sure are a hard-lookin' ticket, Look more like a picked sparrer than ever you did,"

"A man that's been as sick as I been," protested Joe indignantly, "Can't get up a stummick like yours in no time at all."

"Lord sakes," argued Hollis, "you ought to be puttin' on a little weight by this time. Don't you take any exercise?"

"I can't do that," replied Joe firmly, "Not worth callin' exercise. Fact is," and he looked woebegone once more, "I can't go traipsin' around the woods and climbin' over things, and this'll hurt me or that'll hurt me. I can't do nothin,'" he finished miserably I just set still and think. I guess I'm never goin' to get better."

"Aw, rats, all you need is cheerin' up. Say, look here," Hollis clapped a hand on Joe's skinny shoulder. "Open season begins tomorrow, Let's you and me drive out to Porcupine Ridge and see if we can't get us a couple of good, fat deer."

"Oh, my gosh, no!" gasped Joe. "Elizabeth'd kill me, if the didn't. And Doc Graham wouldn't stand for it neither."

"There's Doc comin' now," remarked Hollis, "Sure it is; that's his car. Let's see what he says, and if he says yes, Elizabeth won't have any argument."

"He'll say no," declared Joe, but he had brightened visibly in the last few minutes.

"Hey, Doc!" Hollis waved at the approaching car.

Dr. Graham stopped. "Morning, boys," the doctor greeted them.

"Morning," they replied in a sort of duet.

"Sam here," began Hollis, "would like to go huntin' with me tomorrow,"

"He certainly can't do any such thing. He's in no condition for any strenuous walking or climbing."

"I told you it'd be no!"

"But look, Doc," Hollis was a persistent soul, "we're goin' in my car, and the road's good and everything. He needn't do no walkin' at all."

"Well, in that case..." Dr. Graham considered. He pushed his battered felt hat back from the heavy thatch of gray hair that rose above his ruddy forehead." In that case, it would be all right. You're a good, careful driver, Hollis, Sam's been a mighty sick man. He's lucky to be alive. He wouldn't stand an awful lot of hard jolting, And, Joe, don't you go and get over-excited. You've got to save the strength you have, if you ever want to get back to work again."

While the doctor was speaking, a thick pall of gloom had settled down once more upon Joe. "Didn't I know it? Didn't I tell you it wasn't any good to ask?" He demanded as soon as the doctor was gone. "Now won't that be a huntin' trip? Just ridin' around in a car settin' on a plush sofy, doin' nothin'! I won't have as much to look at as I got to home."

Hollis turned on the brand of eloquence which he usually reserved for Town Meeting. At least, he told Joe, they could get out in the fresh air. Joe could sun himself on a rock somewhere while Hollis did the hunting. The day couldn't possibly be any longer than it would be at home; and you never knew what you might see in those woods Might even scare up a few bears just for the excitement.

Poor Joe's sales resistance was at a very low ebb. No matter how hard he tried, he could not turn an entirely deaf ear to his own wishful thinking. Finally, he agreed to go on the trip. A few minutes later, he entered his sister's kitchen and put the loaf of bread on the table. Elizabeth, looking anxious, came out of the hall where she had been putting on her hat.

"For pity's sake, where have you been?" she demanded. "You just about frightened me to death. I thought something dreadful had happened to you. I was just going to see where you were." She decided not to break the news just yet.

"Never heard of such foolishness," he grumbled, "anybody'd think I was a young one about five year old. Why I ain't been anywhere but to the store."

"Took you pretty near an hour to get there and back. I know mighty well it didn't take them that long to wait on you."

"Well, I didn't think you was in any hurry for the bread, so I kind of refereed an argument and one thing and another."

"Must have been an awful long argument."

"Oh, not so long. And, there now I declare I meant to tell you right off," Joe took a deep breath and raced on, "I met Hollis Burns down the road a piece and he wants me to ride out to Porcupine Ridge with him tomorrow and we ast Doc Graham and he says it's all right," Want of breath placed a period at the end of Joe's speech, and he averted his eyes from the fearful gaze of his sister. Elizabeth did not retreat without a preliminary struggle but even her determination was not proof against the combined forces of stubbornness and medical opinion.

In the darkness of early morning, the hunter arose. Elizabeth was bustling around the kitchen. She set a place for her brother at the neat, oil-cloth covered table. "I already ate," she explained, "Now do, for goodness' sake, try to eat a good breakfast. It'll probably be hours before you have another bite. There's your toast and your eggs. I scrambled them so's they go down easier... and there's some nice, fresh doughnuts and your coffee. And don't you go just pickin' at your food, or I sha'n't let you go, Dr. Graham or no Dr. Graham,"

"What you complainin' about? I am eatin' a good breakfast," And comparatively speaking he was doing just that. It was not one of his lumber-camp breakfasts, and the toast and eggs required floods of coffee to sluice them down; but it was more than he had eaten for a long time. The sight cheered Elizabeth. Maybe the trip was a good idea, after all.

Joe drank the last of his coffee, pushed back his chair, and stood up. "I'll go and put on my leather-top rubbers," he said. "You certainly will not," snapped his sister, "You'll wear your old shoes." "Aw, now Elizabeth," he pleaded, "It's a huntin' trip, ain't it? A man's got to wear huntin' clothes to look right. Them rubbers is just the thing."

"I know you!" and Elizabeth leveled her forefinger at his nose, "Once you get those hunting boots on, you'll be tramping all over the state of Maine, and that Hollis Burns won't raise a finger to stop you. You wear your old shoes, or you don't go,"

"Might's well be naked," growled Joe as he went in search of the despised shoes.

It was just about sunrise when Hollis Burns' car stopped in front of Mrs. Martin's door. At the first note of the horn, Joe came out laden with the lunch which Elizabeth had put up for him. Her admonitions followed him all the way to the car. "Remember you're to stay in the car and be quiet. The ride will be good for you, and real enjoyable, I should think. Now, Hollis, you take real good care of him, won't you? He ain't got a mite of sense about taking care of himself. Don't forget to make him eat his lunch by ten o'clock. He'll probably just drink that malted milk that's in the thermos bottle, but at least that's nourishing. And don't let him overdo. It's real bad for him."

Joe and Hollis were on their way. In five minutes, Coleboro was behind them and the big woods rose on either side. "Where you plannin' to go first, Hollis?" asked Joe, loading up the asphyxiating briar pipe which he particularly cherished.

"Think I'll go straight out to the Ridge. Them CCC boys built a real good road that cuts across country there. That's great country for game, because till they put the road through there last summer it was just a big wilderness."

"I wonder if there'll be many out there."

"Many what? Oh, hunters? No, Joe, I don't think there will be. It's too new to be known about much. Most everyone in Coleboro, I guess, is plannin' to go up the lakes or down the river. Shouldn't be surprised if we had the place pretty much to ourselves."

For a moment they were silent, then Joe spoke. "Huntin' without a gun ain't much like huntin', is it? When a man's sick...and old... about all he's good for is just settin' down. Oh, well, I kind of like lookin' at the woods, anyway." His voice was husky and his eyes were fixed on the

road ahead, as though he saw there a long succession of empty years. His old friend saw that he had dropped back into his former despondency.

"Old!" roared Hollis, "I like that! Anybody'd think you was ninety. Why, me, Why, Joe Casey, you're only two, three years older than me and I'm nothin' but a colt. I suppose we'll see Walt Hammond around somewhere pretty soon.

The game warden's name restored the patient considerably. "Oh, him!" he exclaimed, "He'll be all over the place,"

"Whatever have you got against Welt?"

"Not a thing, not a thing," replied Joe hastily, "He ain't a bad feller at all. Just does his duty. I never said he didn't. But I do think," he added righteously, "that there's a limit to how much a man ought to do."

In Joe's bosom still rankled the memory of a time when Game Warden Hammond had made him sweat blood as the illegal and un-willing possessor of some deer-meat. He could still see that venison roast as it looked in its grave out behind the camp, just before the panic-sticken Joe had laid it to rest under a mixture of wood ashes and chloride of lime. He had other memories of the warden, too. do?"

"He never arrested you, did he?" inquired Hollis

"He sure did! "

"Arrested you, did he? Well, I never knew that. What did you do?"

"It was for somethin' I didn't do."

"Oh, come now, Joe. That don't sound like Walt. He may be strict but he's awful fair and square."

"I ain't sayin' he done anything wrong. He had a right to arrest me."

"Had a right to arrest you for a thing you didn't do? Joe

"Casey, you can be the aggravatin'est critter....What was it you didn't do?"

"I din't have no license," said Joe with the first real grin he had worn in a long time.

Hollis subsided in utter disgust. Presently they turned off the main highway to the now gravel road that ran along the bristly side of Porcupine Ridge. The sun slanted down through the trees. The sky was beautifully clear.

"Say," remarked Hollis before they had gone any distance, "There's an everlastin' lot of cars on the road for this time of day,"

"Yeh, I thought so all along, " agreed Joe." There's a lot of shootin', too. Keep hearin' it every few minutes."

"Sounds louder, don't it, since we turned in here," Hollis seemed puzzled, "I don't see how..."

Joe had been leaning with his arm on the top of the door and his head out the open window. Now he sprang back with a howl, in'i

"Holy jumpin' " he exclaimed, " That couldn't been much closer!

"Huh?" Hollis put his foot on the brake and stared at Joe.

"A bullet! " Joe told him, " Honest, it just missed my head,"

"Aw, go on," Hollis' voice was incredulous, " It's nothin' but your imagination,"

"My imagination don't sing like that. Think a man that's been shot at for goin' on a hundred year wouldn't know a bullet when he heard it?"

"Hey, look ahead there!" Hollis pointed over the wheel. "There's your friend," At the side of the road stood a short, square, stocky man in uniform, He held his cap in one hand while with the other he mopped his perspiring brow. Joe regarded him with a jaundiced eye.

"It's him," he sighed, " and I hope you got your license."

"Of course, I have," barked Hollis irritably, " Do you think I'm a fool?"

"I know you are," muttered Joe with a flash of his old-time form. Hollis stopped the car and hailed the game warden. "How's business?"

"Terrible!" Walt gave them a slow, friendly grin, " I haven't made one arrest yet."

"That's an awful pity," agreed Hollis, " But it's your own fault. You've scairt the daylights out of all the natives long ago, and the tourists mostly don't know no better than to behave theirselves anyway."

"That sounds like some of Joe's blarney," said the warden. "You're looking pretty good again, Joe. Let's see your license, Hollis, and don't give me any of that business of looking through your pockets and saying you forgot it," He favored Joe with a sidelong glance which seemed to have some particular significance, for the victim turned brick red and could think of nothing to say. Hollis produced the license with a triumphant flourish.

"Do you hear that?" the warden jerked his head in the general direction of the woods behind him. Sounds of gunfire came from all directions and all distances like an enemy bombardment,

"This place seems kind of popular," remarked Hollis dubiously.

"Look at the cars parked along there. There's more of them out here near the highway than farther along; and the woods are full of greenhorns."

"Not to mention what the greenhorns are full of," commented Joe.

"The ones I've seen so far were mostly sober," smiled Walt. "Wonder what they're findin' to shoot at."

"One another, I guess," Walt told him. " It'll be nothing short of a miracle if I don't have a couple of corpses to lug out before the day's over."

"Oh, cheer up, maybe one of them will be your own," suggested Hollis with a loud guffaw.

The warden shook his head and looked serious for a moment. "I don't know how I've escaped this long. I bet there's a bullet somewhere with my name on it."

Oh, sure thing, sure thing," agreed Joe in whose voice there were distinct traces of joyful anticipation, " Ain't an earthly doubt of it."

"You always were a great comfort to me, Joe. Oh, by the way if you fellows want to take your lives in your hands and get out of the car, there's something I want to show you."

Hollis and Joe got out of the car and walked across to the end of the little wood road from which the nose of the game warden's car protruded. Walt pointed at the radiator and fenders which bore marks of a recent collision. "What do you think was the cause of that?"

"A pulpwood truck, most likely," ventured Hollis.

"What do you say, Joe?"

"A blowout could do it."

"You're both wrong. It was a moose, Cut near Ardvile last night, It was just a dumb, knock-kneed bull calf, and the lights held him right in the middle of the road. I had to take for the woods to save the moose."

"Sure, sure, that's the stuff," declared Hollis. "Close season on game and open season on wardens."

A car appeared, passed Hollis' parked car, and stopped a few yards ahead.

"That's Norman Crandall," said Hollis, "and that must be the sport from New York that he's guidin'." Norman slid out from behind the wheel and came towards them, A moment later the stranger stepped out on the other side and paused to load an expensive-looking rifle. Then he strolled around to the front of the car, leaned against the fender, and gazed idly at the woods. He wore a bright green hat with a bright red feather, a brown suede coat, and perfectly-fitting jodphurs. Joe stared with great interest at these newfangled pants.

"What would them be?" he inquired, pointing.

"Seems to me they call them jumpers," reflected Hollis, "Couldn't do no jumpin' in them," Joe insisted, " Couldn't even bend your knees." Walt brushed away a smile and said nothing. Norman came up to shake hands with Joe.

"It's good to see you around again," he said, " We've been so busy at the camp that I haven't had much time to do any visiting. I kept asking about you, though."

Joe looked at the slim, brown, smiling youngster and felt a glow of flattered pride. "Norman, you always was a real thoughtful youngone. I'm mighty grateful..." Joe began, then suddenly stopped, " Why, what in blazes....?"

The game warden had seized his arm and was pointing in the direction of Norman's car. The other men swung around in their tracks without a word. At the side of the road about fifty yards ahead of the car stood a big buck. He was, as Joe said afterwards, " terrible fat and sassy," and his branching antlers were outlined against a patch of sky. Bewildered by the sound of guns, he appeared to have lost his bearings and stood perfectly still except for an occasional toss of his head.

"I should have known something would happen if I left that guy alone," muttered Norman. The New Yorker sprang into action. He raised the gun, sighted it, and put his finger on the trigger. The four men behind him waited in thrilled expectation. The "sport" did not shoot, "Hey, what's the matter with him?" whispered Hollis

"Must be waiting for a better shot," Norman frowned impatiently, " Boy, is that guy dumb! "

"Better shot!" Hollis choked. "A kid with a bean-shooter couldn't miss that critter. Lemme get my gun.

"No use," the warden's low voice told him, "That hunter's right in the way and there's no telling what he might do." And still the "sport" sighted along the gun barrel. "Ain't he never goin' to pull that trigger?" breathed Joe hoarsely.

"No," said Norman sadly. Like most guides, he had learned to accept without question every kind of human behavior. Suddenly the deer came out of his reverie and took a look at the statue before him as though he were seeing both hunter and gun for the first time. He paused just long enough to do some brief dance steps, gathered himself together, sprang far into the woods, and disappeared.

"He won't stop this side of Fort Kent," sighed Walt, not unhappily, "Well, Norman, you better go over and tell your boyfriend the deer's gone." Norman went silently back to the task of consoling the bereaved hunter.

Joe, Hollis, and the game warden looked at one another for a moment. Nobody spoke a word. Then Walt yanked his cap down over one eye, threw up his hands in disgust, and got into his car. He stamped on the starter and was soon on his way. The Crandall car followed. On the road once more, Joe and Hollis burst into roars of laughter.

"Aw haw haw," whooped Hollis, "Stood right there while the deer pretty near come up and smelled of the gun! And say," he paused in astonishment, "now I come to think of it, that was a mighty funny actin' deer. Seemed as if he was paralyzed or fascinated or somethin'"

"Must have been the feller's pants that upsot him. I never see their like myself. But, Hollis, wasn't that as bad a case of buck fever as you ever met up with."

"Naw, my gorries I've seen all kinds, different times I been guidin'! I've had them faint onto me, and I've had them point the gun at me, 'stead of the game. That's when I fainted. We had fun faintin' back and forth."

"Hollis Burns, I never in all my born days heard such a liar as you." Hollis accepted this tribute with a pleased smile,

"I guided a feller once that always used to pull the ejector instead of the trigger. He'd stand there with loaded shells all around his feet and swear he'd fired every shot in the gun."

"I bet a woman could work up an elegant case of buck fever. You ever guide any women, Hollis?"

"Women is born with buck fever, my boy; and moreover, I ain't never been hard up enough or hungry enough to guide any women."

"Speakin' of bein' hungry," remarked Joe, "Ain't it about time we had the lunch," "The lunch!" Hollis jerked the wheel, and the car went off on a starboard tack. "The lunch, for the Lord's sake! Why, Joe Casey, you only just et your breakfast. And you with one foot in the grave!"

They drove on for several miles until the parked cars grew few and far between, and other indications showed that they had left the firing line some distance behind. They came, after

a while, to a little clearing. "Guess I'll prowls around here a little," Hollis decided, pulling up at the side of the road. "You can spread the robe on that little knoll over there and set in the sun, Won't hurt you a mite. Them woods up back there look like game to me."

Joe took the robe...and the lunch... and waved Hollis a rather cheerful good-bye. Then he settled down in solid comfort on the knoll. It was pretty good, after all, to be out in the sunny woods. Joe alternately dozed, ate, and entertained visitors. Practically all of Coleboro's adult male population seemed to have shared Hollis ambition to have the Porcupine Ridge area all to himself, A scattered but lengthy parade of cars passed up and down the road, many with deer tied on the running board and fenders or draped across the hood. Every once in a while, some Coleboro driver recognized Joe and stopped to talk to him. He admired their trophies, expressed learned opinions on guns and hunting for the benefit of awe-stricken "sports," and generally showed off to his heart's content.

Two hours flew by.

"Hey! What in time are you doin'?" howled the indignant voice of the suddenly returned Hollis.

"Nothin' a-tall," answered Joe idly, "I jest got tired of waitin' and sampled the lunch," "Sampled!"

"Well, I did maybe eat a sandwich..I guess it was two... and a little piece of cake and one thing and another. I declare I never did get around to that malted milk. Set right down and dig in Hollis. There's lots left to eat."

They ate and smoked and Joe drank the malted milk when all other food had gone as though the locusts had passed over Porcupine Ridge. For a long time they lolled happily in the until Hollis finally decided that they'd better be moving along. "Guess I'll go back up country a ways," said Hollis, "There's nothin' doin' around here," he grumbled as they got back into the car.

He had spoken too soon. A moment later, a shot-gun roared in the woods to their right. A charge of buckshot fell like a hail-storm in some nearby bushes.

"Slide down!" bellowed Hollis, But Joe had beaten him to it by at least a second and a half. They cowered on the floor of the car and waited. The next report of the gun was nearer, and shot whistled over the top of the car. High up in a tree across the road, a great-grandfather crow uttered a final " A-a-ark!" and perished in a shower of feathers.

The two men in the car could hear something racing towards them through the woods. Something plunged crashing and grunting through the underbrush. "It's a whopper! " yelled Joe.

"Load the gun, you thick-headed fool! And look out it ain't a moose! "

Hollis frantically loaded the gun, just in case, as he told himself... and got out of the lee side of the car, from which safe shelter he peered across the hood.

"Here he is!" shouted Joe, raising his eyes to the level of the window. And there he was.

He was a stout, middle-aged man with a very purple face, and he was dressed in the expensive, baggy tweeds of the city man. In one hand he brandished a gun of cannon-like proportions. His eyes were wild, his hat was gone, and his hair was festooned with leaves and cobwebs.

"Did I get him?" he wheezed.

There was a long, long silence. Joe mopped his brow. Hollis sagged limply against the side of the car.

"Did I get him?" the stranger repeated.

"You sure did, mister," replied Hollis slowly, I never see a finer crow and you've blowed his spare parts all over the county.

They were on their way home in the gathering dusk. Hollis drown in glum silence but the voice of Joe Casey was heard in the land.

"Oh, an illygant time at the christenin' we had
Of McSorley's most wonderful twins."

Joe's face shone with the ruddy glow of excitement and fresh air. Gone was his hospital pallor. Vanished completely were the clouds of the past months. What the morrow might hold in store in the way of a relapse, Joe knew not, and neither did he care. "Honest, Hollis," he declared, "I ain't had so much fun since I quit drinkin'."

"Fun!" growled Hollis, "I walked about fifty-three mile, more or less, I got two blistered feet, and I never even met a rabbit."

"Look," Joe pointed, "ain't that Walt Hammond's car? Yep that's him. Well, I guess I ain't too sorry to see him in one piece. I wouldn't have his job as a gift, Twenty-four hours a day the year 'round, Stand guard over the moose. Feed deer all winter and chase fishin' licenses all summer.

"Sure it's a tough job. But, say, what's got you to feelin' so good?"

"Who, me? Well, I tell you. I've had enough narrer escapes today so I got fond of livin'. And then I've met two fellers so all-fired dumb they made me feel smart. And on top of all that I got a chance to let loose with all that noise that got bottled up inside me when I had to keep quiet, I been hollerin' stiddy since I got up this mornin', and I never felt better in my life."

"Him, well I done that much by gettin' all the skin tore off my heels and wearin' my legs and arms out."

"Cheer up!" shouted Joe, "We're a couple of them heroes you read about. We're veterans of the Battle of Porcupine Ridge and we both got scars to prove it." He nudged Hollis in the ribs, "Push 'er along," he urged, "I'm goin' to hit up old Melvin for a job."