

Good Friday

By MAZO DE LA ROCHE

Illustrated by A. C. VALENTINE

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Good Friday

The story that won one of the \$125 prizes in MacLean's short story contest

By

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

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Looking critically at Bull Evans, it was difficult to believe that anyone could love him, and still more difficult to believe him capable of a great love for another. He had a lowering, heavy, ferocious face, a thick neck, and a body so powerful, so free in its movements, that it seemed made for violence rather than sober work. Even the whirring lawn-mower seemed in his hands a weapon of destruction rather than a simple garden implement. He drove it down the long velvet stretch of the warden's lawn, with a fierce precision that left no unshorn ridges, and sent a grassy spray whirling high above the wheels.

Yet, though it was difficult to think of him as loving and being loved, he was at this moment basking in another's love as he was bathed in April sunshine, and nursing love for another in his heart as the mellowing earth was nursing the spring flowers.

It was Good Friday, and on Easter Sunday he would be a free man. His two year sentence, following a drunken fray in which an officer of the law had been badly injured, was over at last, shortened by several months for good behavior. For some weeks he had been allowed to work in the warden's garden, and it was the next thing to freedom to be there among the budding shrubs, the gay daffodils and hyacinths, and the stretch of blue sky above the lawn. Another day, and he would step from this garden out to real life and Jenny! The thought of Jenny sent a thrill of joy through him.

He thought of his young son, Tom, and of what a big fellow he must be now. A nice, quiet-tempered boy, like his poor dead mother. It was a lucky thing Tom hadn't inherited the wild temper that had twice landed his father in the "pen." The first time had been a six months sentence for assault. That had been years ago when Tom was only five. Bull shivered in the warm sunshine as the recollection of the first month in prison came back to him. . .

It had taken a long time to live down that prison term. Tom's mother had never lived it down. She had had a different look in her eyes ever after, a look that had roused a dull rage in him, rage at the prison, rage at himself, and rage at her for not being able to get rid of the look. It was as though the prison had thrown a shadow over her from which she had never emerged. It was almost a relief when, two years later, she died from typhoid, and there was just little Tom left.

Now here was Jenny with the shadow of the prison over her. But Jenny was different. Her face smiled out through the shadow: plucky, trusting in him; above all, loving him. A country girl, very respectably brought up, out at service. And the catastrophe had happened just a fortnight before they were to have been married! Not a week of his term in prison had passed without a letter from Jenny. The letter always seemed to bring the very presence of the girl into the prison. Bull wished with a poignant wistfulness, as each one was handed to him, that he could have read it himself. But the chaplain read them to him beautifully, and told Bull that he was lucky to have such a girl, and to try to be worthy of her.

On Monday they would be married.

The sky poured down its sunshine like a caress. The earth seemed to press upward to receive it. It was fine to be out here mowing the warden's lawn instead of working inside the chill, dark workshop where he had spent so many months. . . It made him laugh to think of Jenny. The laughter rumbled away in his inside and then sputtered between his lips. He had a sudden desire to throw himself on the young grass and roll. . . The bright head of a dandelion stared up at him out of the grass. An instant later and the sharp knives had whirred over it. It flew into the air in the midst of the grass spray, and then fell face downward. Bull stopped the mower and picked the little gold head up. It was funny, but he wished he could have stuck it on the stem again. A sheepish grin softened his face as he held the flower on his thick palm. Curse it all, this freedom just around the corner was making a fool of him! But the silly flower had seemed so darned glad to be out of its dark prison into the sunshine. Just like himself.

A shadow fell across the grass beside him. It belonged to Mr. Stacy, the chaplain.

"Good morning, Evans," he said. "So they have given you an outdoor job for a change. I'm very glad of that."

"Yes, sir. I'm goin' out so soon, I'm hardly worth watchin' I guess."

“Oh, yes. I remember. I hope you’ll get on very well, Evans. You’re going to be married, aren’t you? The young lady who wrote to you so faithfully.”

Bull grunted, not so much surly as embarrassed.

“Evans, I hope you’ll remember some of our talks. You have good stuff in you, I am sure of that. Keep it on top, and, in time, the bad. . . If ever I can be of any help to you, don’t be afraid to come to me. I’ll give you my private address.” He took out a card in his slender white fingers in such contrast to Bull’s blunt ones, grimy, grey, with the pallor of prison. As the card changed hands, the dandelion which Bull had been trying to conceal, fell to the ground. He pocketed the card, with an incoherent mutter of thanks, and moved on with the mower. But Mr. Stacy moved by his side.

“Because I saw you pick up that flower before you saw me, Evans,” he said, in a low voice, “I am going to remind you what a beautiful time of the year this is for you to make a fresh beginning. To-day is Good Friday, the day when One gave his life that we should live. Easter is the time of resurrection, of hope, of a new start for you. . .”

A kind man, but Bull was glad when he was gone. Such conversations embarrassed him horribly. Religion was all very well in its way. He had listened, very civilly, to a good deal of religious talk in the past two years. He had even tried to find out, when he was in his cell alone, whether he believed in God, but he always got rather rattled when he thought about Him.

He preferred to think about Jenny.

A little filmy cloud that had been drifting across the sun, passed by, and the sunshine was more golden and warmer than ever. A plump little brown bird flew across the lawn carrying a strip of cotton rag, too heavy for it. It fluttered and bobbed, but would not be defeated in its purpose. Then up under the eaves of the warden’s house it flew triumphant. Going to build its nest next door to the prison, eh? Another little bird waiting under the eave for it, exclaiming at the size and quality of the rag. Both of them busy by now, lining the nest. . .

The lawn-mower whirred, the feathery spray of grass flew from the wheels. Bull began to sing very softly a song he had learned from a negro cook, when he had been stoker on a lake boat.

Nature which had denied him gentle looks, had given him a voice of singular sweetness and beauty. If it had been heard in his youth by a

philanthropist with an ear for music, what a different life Bull might have had! But he did not even know it was good. He knew, however, that there was a queer power in it, for women always showed kindness to him when he sang for them. Now the refrain came sweetly muffled from his lips, over and over again. He moved, gently swaying, like one in a dream. The figures of the gardener, of the guard by the gate, of a group of other prisoners just passing from the warden's garden into the prison-yard proper, were like figures in a dream. It was wonderful to be allowed to work out in the garden these last days, almost free. He wouldn't feel so strange, so unaccustomed when he went out with Jenny. Some of the prison smell would blow off him.

As he reached the end of the lawn near the warden's house, he noticed that two prisoners, under the direction of a guard, were wheeling barrows of bricks along the gravelled walk that led to and circled the lily pond. This 'pond' was a bricked-in pool where exotic lily growths were encouraged by the warden. A small fountain played in the middle. Bull had heard that the wall was in need of repair.

He glanced casually at the two prisoners. One was a feeble looking fellow who sagged under the load of bricks. The other was a tall straight youth not yet out of his teens. Bull threw a second look at the boy as he turned the mower to go in the other direction, then a shock of recognition made him stop stock still. His heart missed a beat, then began to pound heavily against his ribs.

The tall youth was his own boy, Tom, wearing the prison garb, slouching steadily along before the guard with the air of an old timer.

It was like a nightmare. It was like the mad dreams he had had when he first came, when his brain had conjured one horror after another to torment him. Could it be Tom? No, it could not be Tom. Such a thing was impossible. He was a good quiet boy who could never get into trouble. He mowed the length of the lawn, then turned back, moving with calculated directness towards the group by the lily pond. Just as he reached the graveled walk he stopped and bent over the mower, apparently tinkering at the knives with his fingers. Under his shaggy brows his gaze rested apprehensively on the taller convict. He was squatting with his back toward Bull. Just then the guard and the other man moved away towards the prison yard, leaving the boy with MacWhinney, the Scotch gardener, who stood looking down at him with the unfailing curiosity he had for each new prisoner.

Bull rose and went over to MacWhinney's side.

"Mower's on the blink," he said, keeping his back to the youth. He had pushed a pebble into the cogs.

"Weel," said MacWhinney, "it's no right to be, for it's almost brand new." Frowning a little he went to examine the machine.

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The kneeling boy lifted his face to Bull's. It was Tom's face, pale and sullen, and it went suddenly dark red at the sight of his father.

The kneeling boy lifted his face to Bull's. It was Tom's face, pale and sullen, and it went suddenly dark red at the sight of his father. All the blood had gone out of Bull's face. He said, in a choked voice:

"How the hell did you come here?"

"Motor car," muttered Tom. "Jimmy Biggar an' I pinched one and took two girls out. There was an accident and an old lady on the street got hurt."

"Were you pickled?"

"I guess, a little."

"How long are you in for?"

"A year."

MacWhinney called out: "Look here, you men, no gassin'! You get on with your work you new fellow! Bull, there's a stone somewheres in the mower but I can't locate it. Take it back to the yard. It's noon, anyway."

"Mr. MacWhinney," said Bull, "this here boy's my son. Can't I have a word with him, please?"

The gardener, fired by curiosity, came towards them at once. "Weel, I never! It's a strange meeting for ye. I don't know that I ever saw such a meeting in the nine years I've been here. It's quite an occasion. The one just goin' oot, and the ither just comin' in. Weel, weel". . . He looked eagerly from Bull's face to that of his son. "Your boy doesn't favor ye, Bull."

"No," said Bull heavily, his soul very sick within him, "he doesn't. Mr. MacWhinney, might I have a word with him alone, please? I just want to have a word with him before I go out."

“I daresay I could fix it up with the deputy to let you have a few minutes conversation with him in his office.” He became very important.

“I only want a minute now, before the guard comes back,” said Bull, trying to quiet the devil of ferocity that was stirring in him.

“Ah, weel,” said MacWhinney, good-naturedly, “have your little chat, and I’ll tak’ the responsibility. It’s an occasion, sartainly. Just a *littie* chat, now.” He backed a few yards away, still keeping his eyes on them.

Bull stood staring into young Tom’s face, so innocent with something of the womanish look of his mother. He had to look up at him, Tom was so tall. What a hell of slime he would wade through in the coming year! Never be the same again. If it was joy-riding this time, what would it be next? Safe cracking, hold-ups, perhaps murder. A year of the teachings of that place and Tom would have nothing left to learn. And not only the talk of crime but the other talk—the horrible whispers that would make him toss in his cot all night in a fever of sick imaginings. . . Bull glared up at him, wishing with all the might in him, that he could by some magic word or act, spirit the boy over the prison walls, far away to safety. His glare was so ferocious that it roused resentment in the boy. He muttered:

“Well, what can you expect? You’re in here yourself, aren’t you?”

By the paling of his father’s flushed face, he saw that the thrust had reached home. His short upper lip curled in a malicious smile.

Bull might have stood the words, though they cut him to the quick, but the malice in the smile was too much. His arm shot out, and the next moment young Tom was flat on the gravel from as hearty a cuff as father ever gave son.

“Here now! here now! None o’ that!” shouted MacWhinney, running over. “We’ll attend to the lad without your help, Bull. Mebbe if ye’d done more chastisin’ when he was a wee ‘un, he wouldn’t be needin’ it now.”

“Mebbe,” agreed Bull, heavily.

The guard came trotting up from the gate.

“What’s up? a fight?” he asked.

“No, no,” said MacWhinney, rubbing his nose, and staring down at Tom; “but number eighty-six has just discovered his young son here, and he’s put out about it. He’s knocked him down.”

Young Tom lay sobbing on the gravel, his nerves, already strung up, completely broken by the shock of the blow. He wanted to lie there and howl, as he had as a five year old, and beg his father to pick him up and take care of him. He wanted his thickset strong father to pick him up and carry him out of the prison yard. He didn't want to be a prisoner. He wanted his father to take him away, to save him, to protect him. He lay, utterly demoralised, the sun beating down on his tear-blurred, blubbering face. Bull's heart was wrung by the appeal in the look.

"I'll report you," said the guard. "This kind of thing ain't allowed. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. If there's any knockin' around, the boy ought to knock you, for bein' such a father. What's he in for, hey?"

"What are ye in for?" asked MacWhinney, giving the boy a prod with his toe.

Bull's eyes flickered, but he held himself in. The moment had not yet come.

"Get up, you young lubber, and answer when you're spoke to," said the guard, and he, too, gave him a prod.

The boy began to gather himself up, his long spindling limbs all angles like a colt's. . . That boy, that child, in here for a year! Never, oh never, not while Bull had life and strength to fight for him!

His eyes held Tom's for an electric instant. They said: "Watch me. I'm going to help you. Do what I say."

"Now then," repeated the guard, "What are you in for?"

"Stealin' a auto. There was a smash up."

"What's your term?"

"A year."

"Huh!" He turned to Bull. "I'm goin' to report you, eighty-six, for attackin' a fellow prisoner. And I don't like the look in your eye." He turned petulantly to MacWhinney. "I wonder why Johnson don't come and relieve me. It's past noon. The whistles blew five minutes ago."

But the last words were a gurgle. His arms were pinned to his sides. There was a blinding splash, and he was face downward in the lily pond, tangled in long rubbery stems and slippery undergrowth. His mouth was full of water. He struggled trying to free himself, trying to shout. Another struggle was taking place on the gravel. MacWhinney's face was ridiculous

with astonishment. He gave a shrill yell. Then Bull's hand was on his throat. Young Tom pulled his legs from under him. Then Bull threw him in on top of the guard.

"Now," said Bull, "run for your life."

They bounded side by side down the lawn and passed unmolested through the warden's gate.

It was a narrow street, deserted at the noon hour. After the prison wall ended, it ran between lumber yards, crossed a railway track, and ended in an unused wharf on the lake.

"If only we can get to the lumber yards," thought Bull.

They passed two little boys playing marbles on the sidewalk, and safely reached the yards.

The first piles of lumber seemed to open up to receive them. They ran down a long alley formed by successive piles, then wedged themselves through a jagged opening into the next alley. They ran along it, then, as before, found an opening through which they gained the next. Here the lumber was piled so closely that they had to run the length of the alley to find egress from it. Bull's plan was to reach the tracks and board a freight car if possible, and, failing that, make for the lake front, where among old sheds they might lie concealed till dark.

A lazy noontide silence lay over all, broken only by the slow shunting of a distant locomotive. A sweet resinous smell rose from the pine boards around them. Bull's face was dripping with sweat. The struggle with the two men, followed by the sharp run had almost winded him. He stopped leaning against the lumber. Young Tom stopped too, looking at him inquiringly.

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"Why are we stopping?" whispered young Tom. "Sh. . . listen."

"Why are we stopping?" whispered Tom.

"Sh. . . listen."

The sound of men's voices came from the other side of the pile, and the clink of dinner pails. Some workmen were eating their lunch in there.

“Did you hear anything?” asked one.

“There are some kids playing around,” returned another. There was a gurgling sound as of tea-drinking, then the first asked:

“Did you say she was a light-complected girl. Bill?”

“Yes,” answered Bill, “she was awful light complected. And she’d a kind of snub nose. . .”

A voice called from far down the vista of lumber piles:

“Hi, there! Have you seen anything of two men? Two prisoners have escaped!”

There was a clatter of tins as the workmen jumped to their feet. They ran in the direction of the guards.

There was silence then, and the sound of the distant engine again was heard.

Bull cautiously moved around the pile to where the workmen had been sitting. Their lunch things were scattered over the ground. Some coats were laid together in a heap. He picked up two of them and handed one to Tom. He pulled off his convict’s jacket and dragged the other over his thick shoulders. It was so tight that he looked grotesquely stuffed in it. Tom had slipped into the other.

They emerged on to a rough common matted with last year’s grass. Here and there puddles glimmered in the sunshine. They ran, leaping, splashing, the ground seeming to run like a heaving brown sea before them, the roaring of the train bearing ever nearer. Tom reached the shelter of a shed by the track and glared back at his thickset father laboring after.

“Oh, Dad, run, run, for God’s sake!” he implored.

They stood as close to the grinding wheels as they dared, their bodies tense, then a spring from the boy, a scrambling jump from the man, and they were lying face down on the jolting sand-strewn floor of a flat car. The train moved heavily, thunderously on.

Bull lay clutching the fingers of one hand in the other. He had torn and broken his nails in the scramble. He groaned with the pain. He lay still a long time it seemed, not thinking, just trying to breathe, listening to the pounding of his heart against the throbbing of the wheels.

At last Tom touched him on the breast. “Are you all right?” he asked.

Bull opened his eyes. "You bet," he gasped. "You all right?"

"You bet."

Tom cautiously raised himself on his elbows and looked about. They had passed through the suburbs and were now in the open country. On one side of the track rolling meadows of the tenderest green were backed by young woods. The sky was a great blueness. On the other side of the track the lake rippled radiantly to the horizon. Tom wished that they were sailing in a boat. It looked so free out there.

Bull drew his hand from under him and examined the stubby bleeding fingers.

"Gee," said Tom, "you hurt your hand, eh?"

"Yeh!" He rolled over on his back and stared up at the sky, that sky that had looked so benignly down at him only an hour ago, but that now only threatened his freedom with its light. If only it were dark so that they might be hidden!

His face was caked with sweat and sand, and, where his hand had passed over it there was a smear of blood.

His heart was beating steadily now. He could think. Now that the first dash was effected, there was a bare chance that they both might escape. The object he had set his heart on was to take the boy to an old pal of his, named Dodds. He had stood by Dodds once when he had needed it badly. "If ever I can do you a good turn, Bull," he had sworn, "I'll do it."

Once he had got rid of the boy, there was a faint chance that Bull might escape arrest himself. If he got North to the lumber camps perhaps. . . It seemed strange that he should be skulking about, trying to avoid capture, when, only an hour ago, he had stood on the brink of freedom. A feeling of bitterness swept over him when he thought of Jenny. Jenny who had been so brave and patient for those two cruel years. If he was caught, his second sentence might be pretty stiff, especially if the gardener and the guard were hurt.

Tom had found three cigarettes and some matches in the pocket of his coat. Each lighted one, and they lay puffing deeply. Their nerves were soothed. Neither spoke again until the last possible puff was extracted from the stub, then Tom asked:

"Anything in your pockets?"

Bull produced a large red handkerchief.

“Better clean your face up, Dad. It looks fierce.”

He scrubbed his face vigorously.

After a silence, the boy asked shyly: “Why did you do it, Dad?”

“Do what?”

“Make the break? You’d have been out in another day.”

“I wasn’t going to have you living among that crew for a year. I was willing to take the risk.”

“Say, you’re a corker, Dad! Gee, I wish I’d another cigarette.”

“Take the other, I don’t want it.”

“Sure?”

“Sure.”

But Tom would make him take one puff, so that he would not feel himself greedy. Bull took it slowly, closing his eyes.

The train rushed past two small stations, the men lying flattened on the floor of the car. At the next it stopped with a sudden jolt. They were between bare fields, at some distance from the station, but Bull, straining his eyes, thought he perceived a stir of excitement. He feared the train was being searched. In any case, they could not risk being carried slowly past the stragglers on the platform.

“Here’s where we get off,” he said.

They dropped to the gravel that sloped down from the track to a deep ditch. They ran along the ditch bent almost double. The first cover that offered itself was a rough cedar bush. They crawled under a broken rail fence and entered it. Bull was breathing heavily. His face was blotched purple and white. As he had been the unlucky one when they boarded the car, so he was again when they left it. His legs being shorter than Tom’s and his frame so much heavier he was no match for him in agility. He had slipped and rolled down the gravelled bank, cutting his head on a stone at the bottom. Now he ran, stumbling often, through the wood, holding the red handkerchief to his bleeding forehead.

It was a desolate bush, scrubby, stunted, marshy, the haunt of many crows which circled, cawing above them. If it had not been for Bull, young Tom’s nerve would have left him altogether. He felt like a hunted wild thing. They were tormented by thirst and faint for food.

They walked all afternoon, hoping to come out on a side road which Bull judged would lead them to Dodds'. Twice they lost their way and began to think that the wood was to be a trap for them, but towards sundown they found it and, aching in every muscle they still quickened their pace. They must find Dodds' house before night. They had not gone far when they saw behind them a load of hay, drawn by two horses. They waited for it and Bull said to the driver, an old man:

“Look here, will you give us a lift? We’ve been cutting wood down yonder, and I got my head hurt when a tree fell. I’m goin’ back to my brother-in-law’s.”

The man looked at them without suspicion or interest. “I don’t mind,” he said.

They climbed to the top of the load and stretched themselves on the hay. The horses jogged on. They lay looking at each other. Bull noticed that Tom’s ear was red and swollen where he had struck him. He said:

“I wasn’t goin’ to take any lip from you about me bein’ in there first.”

“But you were, after all,” answered the boy.

“Yes, I was,” admitted Bull. He asked after a little:

“Just how old are you, kid?”

“Eighteen last January. How old are you, Dad?”

“Forty-two.”

“You must ha’ been married pretty young, eh?”

“Yes, pretty young, and your mother was younger still.”

Then Mary’s face came before him. It floated against the blueness of the sky, now smiling in joy over baby Tom, now shadowed by that first prison term. . . Then Jenny’s face came. He rolled over in the hay and groaned.

“Head hurt?” asked Tom.

“You bet.”

Tom grinned sympathetically, but he was done out. He fell into a heavy sleep. The sun was getting low. Bull half-dozed himself but he started wide awake in feverish alertness the instant the wagon stopped.

They were before a brick farmhouse, standing in a treeless space.

“Guess you’ll have to get down now,” said the farmer. His little eyes, as he watched them descend, had in them the first gleam of suspicion.

“Where’d you say you’re goin’?” he asked.

“To my brother-in-law, Jim Parker. Know him?”

“No, never heard of him. That’s a bad lookin’ head you got. Sure a tree done that?”

“What have you got to say against it?” asked Bull, staring hard at him.

“Oh, nuthin’.” But his eyes followed them gloomily as they trudged on down the road.

At twilight they came to the edge of the hamlet where Dodds had his small business. Bull would not venture into the street until it was too dark for them to be seen clearly. They took refuge in a little grove where the ground was starred by tiny pink flowers, and a spring bubbled into a pool. They threw themselves on the ground and drank. It seemed that they would never get enough of the pure cold water. They washed their faces, Bull bathed his cut head, they bathed their burning and blistered feet. Then they lay on the grass listening to the gurgling of the spring and gazing at the dim red afterglow beyond the tree trunks.

“Gee, this is a pretty place,” said Tom. “I don’t mind the country when it’s like this.”

A church bell began to ring.

“Why, say, this ain’t Sunday, is it?”

“No,” answered Bull. “It’s Good Friday.”

“Good Friday, eh? But say, why do they call it Good Friday? It’s something about hot cross buns, isn’t it?”

Bull hesitated, he scratched his head. “Well, no, Tom. . . Why, you must ha’ heard. . . It’s the day when they crucified. . . When Jesus died, you know.” He was terribly embarrassed. He had never uttered a word on the subject of religion in his life before.

“Oh, sure. I’ve heard something about it. But say, if he was God, what did he let them for, eh? Why didn’t he strike them dead or something? You bet I would.”

“Well, the chaplain made out that in some kind of a way he wanted to die to save us. . .”

“Save us from what?”

“Oh—everything.”

“And did he?”

“Sure.”

“But *why* did he?”

Bull considered soberly.

“I guess for the same reason I wanted to save you. To take the risk for your sake.”

Tom was silent for a moment, then he said, solemnly: “And this is Good Friday, too! Gosh, that’s funny!”

He looked into Bull’s face, and Bull saw that he understood something of the sacrifice that was being made for him. He said:

“How long do you s’pose you’ll get if they catch you, Dad?”

Bull tried to grin. “Oh, I dunno. Perhaps five—mebbe more. I thought that if I stood up and told them I done it to get my boy away, they’d let me off light.”

Tom broke out: “Oh, you shouldn’t have done it, Dad! You shouldn’t have done it.”

“Well, I haven’t been much of a father to you, Tom, but you keep straight from now on, and I’m satisfied.”

The last notes of the bell died away the first grey shadow of the evening fell. . .

Less than an hour later, Bull was walking towards the railway station of the next village alone. Dodds had been quite willing to give young Tom shelter, to hide him till the affair blew over, then either to keep him on working for him as his nephew, or try to smuggle him across the line, as seemed expedient, but he showed unmistakable eagerness to get rid of Bull. Not that he was ungrateful for what Bull had once done for him, but he was nervous of risking his reputation which he said meant a good deal to him in his business. There wasn’t much risk in keeping Tom. He might pass

unnoticed anywhere but Bull—he had given an expressive look at Bull’s bulldog head and ferocious face. However, he had given him a hat that could be turned well down, he had given him ten dollars, and got his wife to put up a packet of sandwiches.

Young Tom had nearly broken down when they had parted.

Now Bull was trudging the dark road alone, munching the bread and meat as he went.

There must have been a marshy place about for the frogs were piping without ceasing—a strange, sad kind of sound. Above in the deep velvety spring night a few clear stars shone out. “Just as though they were keeping an eye on me,” he thought. His head was a little dizzy but his mind was quiet. His mind indeed had a special kind of clearness. He could look back over his life, seeing it all spread out like a map. He saw his childhood in an orphan asylum; the beatings for those ungovernable fits of temper of his; his hard-worked youth on a farm; his running away to the city; his loves; his marriage; Mary; Jenny.

He looked up at the stars and wondered what it was all about. . . this Good Friday business for one thing. . . being saved by sacrifice, and all that. . . it was too much for his brain. The night grew so dark that he felt a strange isolation. He hungered for companionship. If only Tom were with him. Or Jenny. He pictured himself and Jenny walking under the great velvety sky together, hand in hand, free to go where they willed, whispering sweet things to each other. “My own dear little Jen.”. . .

“Oh, I love you, I love you. You’re the only man for me!”

But he was alone, except for the frogs that piped all about him. He trudged heavily on, very tired and lonely. To keep himself company he began to sing one of the negro hymns he had learned from the schooner cook. There was something about those hymns that he liked, and his beautiful voice, so out of keeping with his ugly face, was rich in feeling as he sang, very softly:

Over and over he sang it, drawing comfort from it, feeling not so terribly alone. The dark immensity, after two years of prison walls, did not seem so overwhelming when he sang.

At last the lights of the village showed in a faint cluster. He found the railway track and followed it as Dodds had directed. He pulled his hat still lower as he neared the station. The platform was deserted. Dodds had told him that he would be just in time to catch the night train going north. He

would go by train to Overton, and work his way from there up to the lumber camps. With luck he might still be free.

He smiled grimly when he had, without attracting a second glance, bought his ticket, and pocketed the silver in change. He sat in a corner of the station, apparently absorbed in an old newspaper he had picked up.

The train was a little late but it came thundering in at last. A man and two women appeared at the last minute and boarded it with him. He found a seat by himself.

As the train sped through the night, hope leaped within him in a mighty bound. The passage through the night was so strong, so swift, he felt that nothing could stop him.

His ticket was collected without question. He tilted his hat forward. It eased the pressure on his cut head, and shielded his face. He sighed deeply, and slept.

He awoke with a start as the train stopped before a station. It was pale dawn outside but the lights still burned within. Two men, one of them in a blue uniform, appeared in the doorway of the car. Their eyes were on him. He knew it was all up. . .

He was very tired when he re-entered the prison. He did not seem to care much about anything. They took him into the deputy warden's office, and there he saw Jenny sitting on a straight-backed chair. He remembered that he was to have been freed this morning. She had come to meet him. They had told her everything and her face was stained with tears. She was young and pretty. The old deputy had been sympathetic.

"Evans isn't worth a pretty girl like you waiting for," he had said. "You ought to just forget him and get some nice boy your own age."

Jenny turned her anguished eyes on Bull. He looked terrible in the sunlight, torn, draggled, dirty, with blood caked on his forehead. The deputy's gimlet eyes were on him, too.

"You seem to like us here, Bull," he said jocularly. "You've come back, eh?"

Bull paid no attention to him. "Jenny," he said, sadly, but with a certain serenity. "I did it for the kid."

“And what about me?” she wailed, wringing her hands. “And it’s Easter time and you would have been free!”

He could not answer, he could only look at her in silent misery.

She turned away from him, but after a moment she came to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

“Oh, I love you, I love you. You’re the only man for me!” she breathed. “I’d wait for you if it was for ever.”

THE END



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by A.C. Valentine have been omitted from this etext.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

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[The end of *Good Friday* by Mazo de la Roche]