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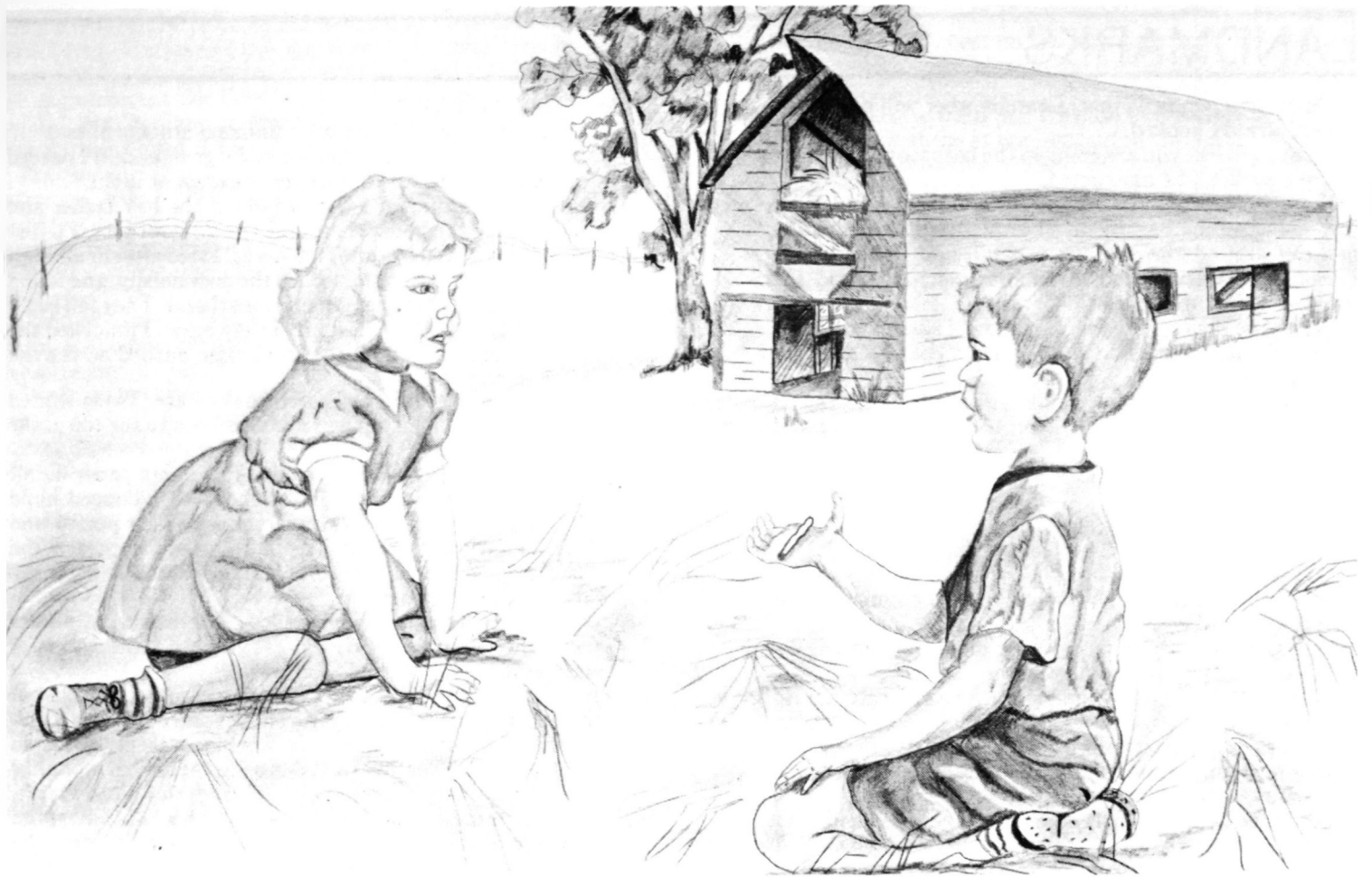
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*(fiction from a definite Western Oklahoma source)*

## August Smoke

*by Yvonne Carpenter*

Black flies mingled with the watermelon seeds on the chipped porcelain table. Glade kicked me without looking my way. I pulled my feet up under me in the red wagon where Kay and I were seated. Glade was sitting on one of the metal stools carried out from the kitchen. He kicked me again. As I opened my mouth to howl my protest, he interrupted, "I have something to tell you after while, a secret." He looked meaningfully toward his sister beside me.

Weaver's helmet dipped with each bite of the messy treat. I watched as he put a large piece of melon in his mouth, chewed, and then spit the seeds on the new-mowed lawn. Glade imitated our grandfather's efficient style, but his seeds were aimed closer to the wagon. A maze of intricate tunnels laced Kay's melon. Looking at it, I could visualize the comic book world discovered by Mary Jane and Sniffles in the ragged book which Kay had read to me.

We sat in the shade beside a white, two-story house which Weaver had built for his mother in 1910, over 35 years ago. Wisteria vines covered the entire east side of the house. The grass cuttings heaped in piles smelled fresh and clean. We enjoyed one of the few days after the

plowing was done and the hay stored in the barn and before the cotton was ready to pick. Grandmother Stella, never one to let things ride, had organized the entire family to mow and rake her yard. She and the other adults had retreated to the cool of the house. Weaver stayed to savor the last of the watermelon. His presence quieted the constant battle that raged as I sided with first one of my cousins and then the other.

Leaving Kay to delicately finishing her fruit, Glade and I raced to the orange and green hammock suspended from a metal frame. Glade won. I tried to dump him out before settling in beside him to rock beneath the hot Oklahoma sun.

"You know where Weaver keeps his Red Top papers?" asked Glade.

"Sure. Right in the bathroom, on the shelf," I answered.

"If you get some, I'll show you how to roll a cigarette," he offered.

"To smoke? You're gonna smoke?"

"Yeah," he bragged. "I got some tobacco out of the Prince Albert can in the shop. If you get the papers, you can smoke one too."

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# LANDMARKS

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"How am I gonna do that? Grandmother will be mad." I asked, already hooked.

"Just go in like you are going to the bathroom. Put them in your pocket," he instructed.

Doubtful but willing, I pranced into the house. "I am just going to the bathroom," I announced to the adults visiting around the kitchen table. They looked at me curiously. I walked with dramatic nonchalance to the bathroom and closed the door. Inside, I took five thin papers from the red wrapper. I realized I had no pocket on my sundress. I stuck the papers inside the elastic of my underpants.

After flushing the stool, I walked out and announced, "I have been to the bathroom" and fled before they could comment.

"You got 'em?" Glade asked.

"Yeah."

"Let's see."

"Can't. They're hid." I patted my waist.

"Okay. Let's go to the barn."

"Weaver said we wasn't to play there anymore, now that it's full of hay."

"He said we wasn't to chase the pigeons no more. We won't bother the pigeons," he reasoned.

We ran down the short lane to the forbidden structure. The metal barn was stacked to the cottonwood rafters on both sides of the empty center aisle. The bales in varying shades of green and yellow signified the different cuttings made during the summer.

Glade and I climbed up the stack from the open end. The tiers of bales made a rough stairway with hip-high steps. I climbed by swinging my knees up on the hay and hoisting my weight. The hay scratched my bare legs. My nose itched and began to run. The air lay heavy with heat and silence when we reached the narrow space under the roof. The pigeons stopped their garbling noises and fluttered away when they saw their familiar antagonists. I pulled my sundress under me and sat on the rough bales. Glade took a white cotton sack of tobacco from his pocket.

"Let me see. I know how to do it." I reached for the pilloined goods and wiped my nose on the skirt pulled across my knees.

"No, you're too little. You might spill it. I'll show you how," he offered.

I regretfully handed over the papers. He bent his blond head over his work. Glade was seven years old that summer. He was perfect in everything, or so it looked to my adoring five-year-old view. He shook the tobacco into a clump in the center of the thin rectangle of tissue. Weaver always shaped a line of brown in the curve of the bent paper. Wade shook the loose leaves. They fell off of the paper. I began to doubt his claimed expertise.

"Here, you hold the paper," he directed.

Working together, we managed to move the tobacco into position. The paper was brown and wet by the time he declared the cigarette ready to smoke.

"Do you have any matches?" I asked.

"They're right there in the bathroom. She uses them to light the heater," Glade pointed out. "You should've got some."

"Well, I didn't. And I can't go back. They'll think I'm sick."

"If you don't go, you won't get to smoke," he threatened.

"Let's get Kay to go," I suggested.

"No, she'll tell."

"Then you go," I said with unusual stubbornness.

"I can't," he said. "They know I'd go outside if I needed to go. I don't use the indoor toilet except at night."

His logic won me. I climbed down the hay ladder and returned to the house. I entered the kitchen door. "I'll just go to the bathroom while I am here," I said after drinking a glass of water. I went in, locked the door noisily, and found the matches. I put them in my waistband. They fell out. I decided to hold them casually in my hand. I unlocked the door, returned to flush the stool, then dashed across the kitchen and out the door.

"I got 'em," I said as I ran into the barn. Wade waited with his hand held out as I climbed back to the top of the barn.

"I'll light it," he said grandly. The damp paper didn't burn well. Weaver could light one with a cupped hand without a pause in his conversation. Wade puffed and drew, blew and sweated. The pile of used matches on the bale of hay lacked only one match when the cigarette finally glowed faintly.

"Let me smoke," I demanded. The stalks of alfalfa scratched the backs of my legs as I grasped at the symbol of our defiance.

"Be careful. Don't let it go out!" said the voice of experience. I held the limp roll of tobacco in my hand. Flakes fell out the unlit end. I inhaled deeply. I tasted burned paper. That wasn't such a big deal. What was all of the fuss about? I guessed you had to develop a taste for it, like buttermilk. I handed the cigarette back. It fell on the dry hay between us. We scrambled to pick it up before the hay caught fire.

"One of the boys at school was telling me he burnt a bale of hay. Set it right afire and rolled it outa the barn. It burnt up completely. His folks never knowed anything about it. Said it blazed like a big match."

"You burn one of Weaver's hay bales and he'll set you on fire."

"He won't know. The bale will burn up and not even leave any ashes. We can bury them."

"Better not."

"Oh, come on, Scarity Cat!"

Not wanting to be the last in line for courage, I reluctantly nodded.

"Here, let's burn one on the edge," he indicated the bales bordering the open space. "We'll light it and roll it out the back to watch it burn." He took our last match, struck it smartly on his overalls leg, and held it to the yellow fodder. It smoked faintly.

"Hurry! Push!" I urged.

We sat down on the hay and pushed the smoldering bale with our feet. Little flames were visible. The bale was wedged fast. It took several tries before it fell 20 feet to the barn floor. The loose straw scattered on the floor began to blaze. That forgotten factor, plus the time required to climb down the haystack, caused the trouble. By the time we reached ground level, the fire circle spanned the center aisle.

Glade danced on the flames, trying to put them out. "Come on! Help me!" he shouted.

I started to cry with fear and jumped on a small flame only to see it reborn as soon as I moved my sandal.

"Go get the water hose," he shouted above the noise of the fire.

A water hose lay coiled by the hydrant at the side of the barn. I dragged it toward the open door, but it didn't reach. Remembering another hose on the lawn, I ran to the house and disconnected the hose without assistance, a task I couldn't accomplish the day before. I raced back to the barn with the hose.

The fire had spread to the stacked bales. "I think we better get help," I said as Glade grabbed the hose. He looked at me with eyes wide and startled. He feared our grandfather more than the fire.

"He'll skin me alive. Tell him you lit the fire. He won't whip you."

I met Weaver on my way back to the house. He was running toward the barn. "Tell Stella to call the fire department!" he yelled before I could explain.

"Call the fire department! Glade didn't do it, but the barn's on fire," I threw open the kitchen door. The men sprang toward me. I stepped aside to avoid their heavy workboots.

"You stay right here," Grandmother commanded as she cranked the phone on the wall. "Hello, give me the Fire Department. Fire Department? This is Mrs. Weaver Myers. Our barn is on fire. That's right. One mile north and a quarter west of the Washita River bridge. Please hurry."

"Grandmother, I can help! I want to help!"

"You have helped enough for one day. Stay right here where I can see you. Yes, that's right. Weaver Myers. North and west. Thank you." She hung up the receiver. "Now let me think. They will need more hose at the barn."

"I already took it," I said. She looked at me.

"We'll get the gunny sacks from the shop then." I didn't understand but decided now was not the time to ask for explanations.

Kay went with us to the shop by the back door. She looked at me with pity as we saw the flames coming out

the wide door of the haybarn. Smaller tongues of fire were licking from the vent on the top of the roof. My dad and uncle had hooked a plow to the tractor and were plowing close to the barn.

"Is it going to burn up? We didn't mean to burn it up."

"Here, wet these at the hydrant in the yard."

I could see the fire truck with its lights flashing as it drove across the bridge. It raced down the road to the corner with a cloud of dust raising behind it. I thought of the Lone Ranger. It pulled into the yard before I had saturated the last burlap bag with water. A neighbor followed in his truck.

Two more pickups entered the yard. Grandmother ran to the first one and threw the wet sacks in the back. Then she led me by the hand to the porch. Some of the men loaded hay onto the trucks from the north end of the barn while others beat the flames with the dampened sacks. The south end blazed steadily. I could see Wade beating furiously with a heavy sack. I envied his part in the action.

As we watched, the south end of the barn crumbled. The pickups pulled away from the opposite end at the same time. The men stood back as the fire truck pumped an inadequate stream on the blaze.

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I didn't see Glade until school started that fall. He didn't want to talk about the whipping. Kay said it was worse than the one he got for spraying oil all over the shop last year with the new oil can. Grandmother never did bring up the subject of the barn with me, and I didn't feel inclined to do so myself.

They didn't take the trip to see my aunt in California that Christmas. Weaver had little time to let me sit behind him and comb his hair. In fact, I don't believe I ever did that again. By the time he had time to relax that winter, I was too big and too embarrassed.

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— CHARIVARI or SHIVAREE — a significant slice of Western Oklahoma history —

## Things That Go Bump In The Night

— by Kerri Beaman and Senea Morris



A shivaree — we explain to confirmed city dwellers — is a commotion, a series of rude noises, a small riot staged outside the bedroom window of newlyweds. The *COMPREHENSIVE ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE* traces the word *shivaree* to the French and Latin translation which means heaviness in the head. Indeed, all this commotion outside the newlyweds' bedroom window would produce a heavy head or a headache. Bells, firecrackers, pots, and pans were all used to wake the newly married couple on their wedding night. In a personal interview Cedric Crink, travel consultant at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, stated, "Married couples of the early 1900's usually expected to be shivareed and they always would make sure to have refreshments the first and second night of their marriage." Refreshments would be anything from candy to cigars. This practice was usually found in rural areas where the