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Freshman Jim Gallant, from Delaware, Ohio, writes of a father who enlists with General Hoosh.

PUNK DAYS

By JIM GALLANT

"Goodnight," says Pete, the little mustached guy who drives the bus I ride twice a day, Monday through Friday. I usually say "Goodbye Pete" but I get away from the bus as fast as possible tonight. Better to say nothing—and so I walk toward home.

It's been a punk day. It was drizzling and dreary when I got up at eight this morning—a half hour late. I didn't have time to shave and the coffee was scalding hot, leaving a blow-torched feeling in my mouth until lunchtime. Things went from bad to worse after that.

I learned that Lucy Anne, my new secretary, can't read sixteenths of an inch on a straight ruler. The specifications for all twenty-eight engravings on the rush order were incorrect, stemming from the fact that she can't read sixteenths of an inch on a straight ruler. Old Man Steele (he's the vice-president of Allied Hardwares Co. of Chicago) came into the office today and found that we would have to delay his ad for another week because of the engravings. He puffed away on his cigar and shouted and looked upset. I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Steele," and he just stood there glaring at me, his hands behind his back and the cigar fuming. So, he's mad at us and the boss will probably call me in tomorrow morning, as he does in such cases.

And then Ted Johnson told me this afternoon that the firm selling the new breakfast cereal decided to give the advertising account to some other New York firm. Ted worked hard preparing the presentation. I told him that he would have had trouble trying to be very clever with a product "guaranteed to solve, at last, the nation's constipation problem," anyway. He didn't seem much heartened by what I said. Maybe I shouldn't have said it—he was pretty upset about the account.

I'm home. I walk up the lane, turn the door handle and go in. There's a light in the kitchen. It comes from the doorway leading from the kitchen into the sitting room.

"Anyone home?" I say.

A small voice—Joe's (he's eight)—comes from the kitchen. I'm glad that Joe is here. Usually he comes running to meet me, though, some new adventure to relate or some new teasing device to try out or a hint about a surprise. (Helen has discontinued her practice of giving him advance information about my Christmas and birthday presents.) Tonight, he doesn't come running to meet me. I had rather expected and hoped he would.

I take off my coat and hat and hang them in the closet in the hallway and walk into the kitchen to look for Joe. He will probably be hiding in some corner, prepared to shock me with a great, "Boo!" as I walk through the doorway. I walk through the doorway. No "Boo!" He is sitting at the kitchen table, a piece of paper and one of his picture books before him. He is drawing with a pencil. He is, perhaps, somewhat small for his age, red-cheeked, blue-eyed. And he looks happy all over when he smiles. His face is resting in his cupped right hand, supporting his elbow on the table. He is wearing blue jeans, a white sweat shirt that isn't very white and tennis shoes which show the effects of an active day outdoors. He looks up at me.

"Hello, General Hoosh!" I say.

"Mom's getting groceries. Bob's at basketball practice," he says sullenly.

"And tell me, what did the Hooshes do today?" I inquired solicitously.

"Nothing," he mutters, staring at the paper.

"No battles against the Corbels, nothing at all?"

"Nope." (Doodling with pencil, eyes downcast.)

"What happened at school?" I sit down at the table beside him.

"Nothing," he says without changing his expression.

"Ah, come on now. Anything wrong? Your math problems—were they OK—the ones we did last night?"

"Three were wrong," he says, squinting to add some minute detail to his sketch.

"What's wrong with them, pal?"

"Not much."

I observe him as he ignores me.

I jump up suddenly and grab him, carrying off my screaming, kicking captive to the sitting room. I throw him roughly on the divan and he smiles up at me, both irritated and teasing.

I stand at attention in the middle of the floor and say, "General Hoosh, attention!"

Now his face brightens. General Hoosh scrambles up from the couch and marches over to me, straight-shouldered, his lips pushed forward after the fashion of one sucking on a lemon (all Hooshes have lips like that). He is taking preposterous goose steps, Nazi style, and when he reaches my side, he says in a wheezy, nasal voice which he uses in playing the role of General Hoosh (who, as leader of a band of somethings called Hooshes, has existed for two or three years): "Captain, atten-shun!"

I stand even straighter than before and General Hoosh looks me over.

"Might I request an account of what has happened today in military headquarters?" I say.

He is familiar with the terms and replies, "We had a fight with the Corbels today," in an efficient, commanderish voice.

"Oh," I say, "any losses—any loyal Hooshes killed?"

"No," says the General. "We got twenty thousand Corbels as prisoners."

"Twenty thousand! Germinal or tetrachlorides?"

"Germinal."

"That's very good, General!"

"Yes," he says in his special Hoosh language, which makes it sound something like "Ysush."

"General, shall we take a ride to inspect the troops?"

"Ysush" is the answer.

I pause momentarily to remove my shoes, then fall to my knees in the pose of a saddle horse.

With all of the graveness of Lee riding toward Appomattox Court House, General Hoosh straddles my back, digging his shoes into my white shirt. We are off. The ride is moderately paced at first but develops soon into a lilted canter. General Hoosh, losing all graveness, giggles delightedly as I make jerking motions with the hind quarters. After innumerable giggles, hiccups, and digs of muddy tennis shoes into my white shirt, the General is unable to maintain his position and tumbles to the floor. I am immediately on top of him, pressing him to the floor. I assume the role of enemy.

"Now, General, I've got you," I say.

"No you don't!" The General flails me with his arms and legs. I stretch out my arms and pin his to the floor and, after he has kicked me in the side several times, I succeed in securing his feet. With a laughing moan, he succumbs and I let him up. He is red in the face, laughing and breathing heavily. So am I. He puts out his fists to reopen the fiasco but the fight is over and I drag him to the divan and tell him to cool off.

Joe disappears into the kitchen and returns with his writing equipment and his picture book. He perches himself in one corner of the divan and begins to draw. I sit down beside him and peer over his shoulder. The picture is of an alligator with a grin and a coon-skin cap.

"He's trying to catch this rabbit to eat him," he explains, pointing to the book illustration.

"I didn't know alligators liked rabbits."

"He's hungry and there's nothing else to eat. So he's trying to catch the rabbit. Only the rabbit is smarter than he is."

"He doesn't really like rabbits then—to eat?"

"No, but he's hungry. He's got to have something."

"Yep, everybody gets hungry," I say earnestly.

"But he won't catch him. The rabbit is smarter than he is. And he can change himself into rocks and everything."

"Well, the alligator sure can't eat him if he can turn himself into something like a rock."

"Uh-huh," agrees Joe.

He puts a human smile on the rabbit's face.

"I drew one of a Hoosh yesterday—want to see it?"

I do.

He throws the pencil, paper and book aside and gallops into the kitchen and opens his toy drawer. The picture seems to be well concealed. I hear books being thrown aside and toy automobiles being stacked elsewhere. In a few minutes he returns, triumphantly waving the picture of the Hoosh.

He hands the drawing to me and sits on his knees on the divan beside me, peeking over my shoulder to re-examine his sketch.

The creature in the picture is a bizarre mixture of human, horse and Hoosh. I recognize my glasses and my long nose. The ears are Hoosh ears. They have the general appearance of radar screens. Horse-ish features dominate the rest of its makeup.

"Well, that's sure the spitting image of a Hoosh," I say.

He looks proudly at the picture.

"Yes sir, you're going to be a real artist some day."

He chuckles and starts to put the final touches on the picture of the alligator.

"Bob says I don't draw good. He doesn't like my Hoosh drawing," he confides hesitantly.

"Bob's wrong—they're very good," I say.

"I showed the one of the Hoosh to my teacher today," he says, looking intently at the Hoosh again.

"What did she say?"

"She didn't like it. She said draw something real next time."

"She just doesn't know what's real and what good art is when she sees it. You keep right on drawing Hooshes as long as you can," I say, poking him affectionately in the ribs. His expression changes. He pokes my back and another fight is germinating. I end it abruptly by telling him to settle down and draw some more pictures while I read the paper.

I walk to the front door, open it, pick up the rolled newspaper and return to the sitting room. I slide into the armchair, half-sitting, half-reclining, the newspaper spread out over my chest.

The headlines indicate that the business in Morocco is still going on. More race troubles in Georgia, too.

I wonder what the boss will say tomorrow? He *could* fire me. He and Steele are close friends. Impossible. Maybe.

I look over at Joe. He is drawing an alligator with a coon skin cap who wants to eat a rabbit and a rabbit who can change himself into a rock and is smiling contentedly.