

IV.

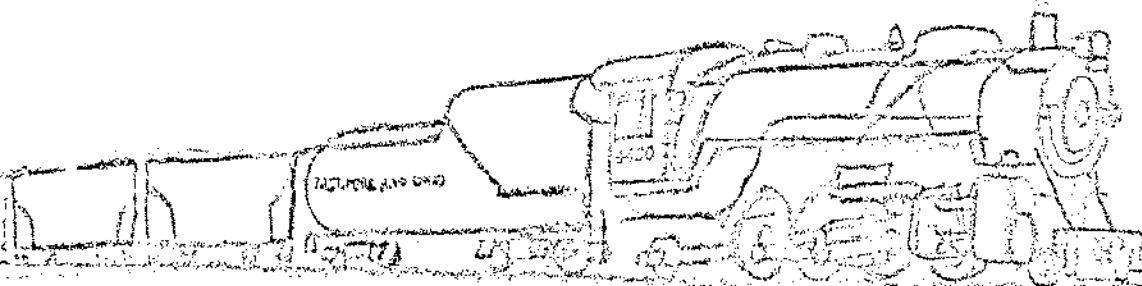
It was fall. Emma's father would have shown her how the leaves were starting to turn and how the poison sumac, which she was never to touch (it was worse than poison ivy), was starting to turn to the deepest of reds.

"I hate to see the summer go," her father always said. He had never adjusted to the cold winters of Maryland, even though they weren't very cold (it hardly ever snowed enough to be any fun) and even though he'd gone to school in Boston where he had met Emma's mother, and where the snow lay in piles as high as a man's head, from October to April -- so Emma thought. And holding her father's hand she would comfort him. "But fall's pretty too, Daddy," she always said, and, of course, he always had to agree.

But this year Emma's father was in Europe at the war and she had to notice all by herself the leaves changing.

"Tommy," said Emma (she was curled up on the end of his bed and they had been listening to "The Lone Ranger" but it was over now), "What is Europe?" She had a dim impression that it had something to do with going to the bathroom but that didn't seem like it could be true.

Tommy looked up from the picture he was drawing with a finely sharpened number 1 pencil (a picture of a train, of course) and said, "If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less."



Emma sighed and selected from her box of crayons an orange one. That was the color of the carrot the rabbit was eating in her coloring book. Tommy did talk such nonsense. He was so strange, always reading Trains magazine, always looking at maps for no reason (it wasn't for school, school didn't start until next week), never noticing anything important -- like puppies, babies, Emma herself. What did Tommy think about as he lounged on his bed, neither sitting up properly nor lying down? Emma's father said he'd ruin his spine by doing that but still he did it and did it more than ever now that Emma's father was away and her mother never ever tried to make Tommy do anything he didn't want to do. So all he did was lie in bed drawing pictures of trains with the fine thin point of his number 1 pencil which he sharpened whenever it wore down with a pencil sharpener shaped like the Statue of Liberty which Emma's mother had bought long ago in New York City. It was a souvenir.

Probably, like a grown-up, Tommy never thought about anything interesting. Probably his mind was neat and orderly and filled with difficult words and wheel arrangements of locomotives and, like a grown-up's books, had no pictures in it -- or only tiny pictures of trains. Not like Emma's mind in which all sorts of odds and ends were stuffed helter-skelter

so that she might look through it for one thing -- say, what had happened to her mother's good fountain pen which Emma had borrowed to do finger painting with, and yet come up with something altogether different and not at all what was wanted -- the sunshine glinting on the orange feathers of the bird Emma and her mother had seen in the pasture, for example. Now Tommy looked in the "Europe" part of his mind and found something about washing so that must be what Europe was, even if it made no sense to Emma.

Tommy cleared his throat which meant he was going to quote. He said: "'No man is an island, every man is a piece of a continent, part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. Wherefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'"

Tommy got his quoting from their grandfather in Boston. He always quoted things when you asked him a question.

Emma put down her orange crayon, having finished the carrot. The rabbit wore a round little cap. The cap should be blue. Emma hunted out the blue crayon. But it was all worn down and rounded off -- blue was her favorite color -- and you couldn't use it to color the cap, which was rather small, without going outside the lines.

He would probably say "no" but it was worth a try.

"Can I use the pencil sharpener, Tommy?" she said.

"What for?" He looked up, his perfectly pointed number 1 pencil stabbing the air.

"For nothing," said Emma, craftily, and she pushed the stubby blue crayon under a fold in the bedspread. Tommy sat up in bed, straightening out his ruined spine, and looked at her. Her crayons had fallen out of their box and were all over the bed; several were trying to slip in between the bed and the wall where they would never be found.

"Are you kidding?" said Tommy. "You must be crazy. I'm not letting you get crayon glop all over my pencil sharpener."

"Pig," said Emma.

"Well, go to your own room then," said Tommy. "Who asked you to come in here anyway?"

"I'm sorry," said Emma meekly. It was true she seldom got to come in Tommy's room, or even see inside it (he kept the door closed all the time, even when he wasn't there), and it was only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to hear the Lone Ranger that she was allowed in, and on Sundays for the Great Gildersleeve and Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Anyway the cap would look almost as good olive, she thought, and the olive crayon was still pretty sharp because she didn't care much for olive.

"I don't understand what you mean about washing and islands," said Emma.

"You're too young to understand," Tommy said. "I'll show you on the map." And he got out of bed, hitching up his pajama bottoms which kept falling down because the elastic was broken by his being too fat.

Emma wore the pink nightgown her father had given her. It was beautiful although her mother said she would wear it out. She wore it every single night except when it was being washed and all Sunday morning because then they didn't have to get dressed for breakfast and besides now they didn't go to church anymore because Emma's father was the one who liked church so much, and because Emma's mother had decided to put the car up for the duration. The "duration" meant helping all the little children in Europe who were starving. All the unusual things they did now, like not eating bacon or anything with sugar in it and taking the bus all the time, all that was because of the duration.

Emma missed church. She loved the flowery smell of the church and how the sun came in through the stained glass windows and lay about in pools of color on the dark suits of the men and the pale dresses of the women. She liked to look at the ladies' hats which were covered with fruits and flowers

and strange yellow and pink things which looked like decorations on a birthday cake and made Emma hungry in spite of the six silver-dollar pancakes she had had for breakfast with maple syrup on them. And she liked the way the minister talked and talked and talked in his stately southern voice, the words proceeding slowly and with dignity like the way Aunt Sally, who was her father's sister, had walked down the aisle of the church in Louisiana to marry Uncle Lewie, and Grandmother Corbrey had cried but only because she was so happy.

"This is a map," said Tommy in the special voice he used for teaching Emma things like how you figure out what wheel arrangement a locomotive has or how you move the knight and the castle on the chessboard. Tommy spread the map out on the bed, over the crayons and the coloring book, upside down from himself so it would be rightside up for Emma. (Tommy could be nice when he wanted to. It was just that he didn't want to very often.)

The map was all creased and the creases were nearly worn through because the map had been unfolded and folded so many times. "Now look, this is the ocean," said Tommy, pointing to the big blue parts of the map.

"Like Avalon?" said Emma.

"Yes, like Avalon. But this is what is on the other

side of the ocean from Avalon."

"Okay," said Emma, just to keep things going. Since the ocean at Avalon went on forever she didn't see how there could be an "other side" to it but Tommy got mad if you asked too many questions. Anyway it was always nice to think about Avalon. Avalon was the best place in the world. They hadn't gone to Avalon this summer. That was also because of the duration.

The sand and the birds and the smell of the ocean so salty were Avalon. They always stayed in the same place, the big white house with the white steps on the outside, going up to the third floor which was their's, and Uncle Richard and Aunt Anne stayed on the second floor and so did Uncle Bill. And Uncle Bill and Emma's father took her swimming, holding her in arms made slippery by the water, and they jumped up high when the big wave came, growling and roaring, with a great white crest on top, and Emma was afraid and shrieked and held tight to Uncle Bill but up he jumped so only the light sea spray, tasting of salt, brushed her face, and she did not drown like a little girl had the summer before, caught in the undertow because she had been left by herself, and Emma's mother said somebody should have been watching her, she should not have been left alone. Then Emma walked with her

mother by the ocean before dinner and for some reason Emma's mother had to go away for a minute, and she said to Emma, "Now, do not go near the water, Emma, do you hear me?" and Emma would not go near the water, no, she wouldn't. Her mother wore her floppy white hat and a red and white polka dot dress which she had made, and Emma wore one just like it, only small and with a ruffle on the bottom of the skirt. What a beautiful dress it was and how the sea breeze blew it around Emma's legs and went underneath and felt very cool and nice underneath the dress because Emma had forgotten to wear underpants though her mother had also made red and white polka dot underpants with ruffles around the legs to go with the dress. They were very nice underpants but Emma had forgotten to wear them.

No, she would not go near the ocean which, because it was late in the day, had run down and was gentle. It lapped softly at Emma's toes like a big puppy, but she would not go in, no farther than to let the cool water run over her feet and tickle her ankles, and it was perfectly all right to go in as far as her knees, Mommy hadn't meant not to get her knees wet but there, that was bad, the bottom of the ruffle getting wet. That was being bad. Mommy wouldn't like that. It was better not to go in at all, or not this far in, where

the water bounced up beneath her skirt, splashing up to where she wasn't wearing underpants and touching places that had never felt the water like that, so soft and cool and nice, because those places were usually covered up by the bottom of her bathing suit. Mommy didn't make her wear the top sometimes but she always made her wear the bottom.

Then Mommy came running over the sand and down through the water, and Mommy was mad. Oh she was very mad, and she grabbed Emma up out of the water and said, "I told you not to go in the water!" and she carried Emma away from the lovely soft cool ocean, and Emma couldn't explain how she hadn't meant to go in, hadn't realized she was going in at all, had only gone in up to her knees and without really meaning to -- she couldn't explain because her mother was carrying her, Emma, over her arm like a baby, bouncing against her hip and looking down at the sand, a crab, a shell all whizzing by because Emma's mother was going so fast (being so mad), and Emma could hardly breathe being carried like that, let alone explain. But it was only because her mother didn't want her to drown like the little girl had the year before.

"Hey, stupid," said Tommy, "you're not paying any attention."

The map was like a puzzle with the jagged shapes all

different colors and lots of blue everywhere, and the blue was the ocean at Avalon. Now Tommy pointed to two little pieces on the other side of the ocean and said, "These are islands. Remember, I said 'no man is an island'? Well, these are what islands are, all surrounded by water. This one --" he meant the larger pink one -- "is England. We are fighting for England."

"Why?" said Emma.

Tommy sighed but said patiently, "We're fighting to save it from Hitler. You know who Hitler is, don't you?"

"Yes," she said but only because he was so sure that she didn't. "I saw him in the movies when we went to see Bambi."

Tommy snorted. "Bambi," he said, "how dumb can you get?"

But she had seen Hitler in the movies, in the newsreel before Bambi, and he had a funny little moustache and jerked his arms about like a puppet. She'd seen him do that right before the man who ate the razor blades. And she'd heard of him long before that. She remembered the first time she'd heard of him. She'd thought they were saying "Hitter" and that they were talking about baseball, but of course they weren't.

"Hitler is the fuehrer -- that means leader -- of Germany. This one is Germany." Germany was the orange puzzle piece to which a yellow and purple finger-shape seemed to be pointing.

"Hitler is trying to take over all of Europe. He already has occupied Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and France," said Tommy pointing to piece after piece of the puzzle map.

"What is he going to do with them?" She tried to imagine what Hitler would do with all the differently colored puzzle pieces. She saw him grabbing them out of the map, leaving big holes in it.

"Listen, I'll try to explain in simple terms that you can understand," said Tommy. "Suppose Willie Jarvis came over here and said 'I'm taking over your backyard, Emma. You can't play here anymore.'"

Stretching her nightgown out and folding it over her toes which were cold, Emma said, "Mommy wouldn't let him."

"If he had a gun, she'd have to."

"She'd take it away from him," said Emma, feeling a little uneasy because it was just the kind of thing Willie might do if he was feeling mean. They always had to play what Willie wanted to play and once he had taken a tiny china animal Aunt Sally had given her, it was a little raccoon (Emma still almost cried to think about it even now and it had happened a long time ago). Willie had grabbed it and wouldn't give it back and then he had dropped it and broken it on purpose. Emma's mother said it was an accident but Emma saw him do it on

purpose. How she had cried to see the little raccoon's head broken off, poor little thing, and though her father had glued it back together it was never the same again.

"He'd shoot her and kill her," said Tommy.

That was going too far. Emma said, "Willie wouldn't do that." After all, even Willie had been sorry and had cried when he threw Moppet over the fence and she hadn't flown at all but just lay there on the ground, squealing. Then Willie had started to cry and he had run as fast as he could, while crying, to bring his mother to help Moppet. And of course Moppet was all right, she was fine now. She didn't even remember it.

"You don't understand, Emma," said Tommy. "Willie is just an example. Of course he wouldn't really do that. But that's what Hitler wants to do and he's going to do it unless we stop him."

Emma jumped off the bed scattering crayons, the coloring book, the map, and ran -- just ran -- downstairs to the back room where her mother sat reading, her feet up on a footstool, a glass of milk on the little coffee table. She looked up, smiling, but then worried.

She said, "What is it, baby?" And Emma flew into her arms, crawled into her lap (though she was too big, too hot

and heavy -- still it was an emergency). "Why, Emma," said her mother, "your heart is racing. What is it?"

Emma took a deep breath. Now that she was here in this haven of safety, she didn't know how to begin. Upstairs were heavy thumps coming down the hall, starting down the steps, thump, thump, thump, Tommy was coming downstairs to tell Mommy that Hitler was going to shoot her with a gun. BANG. And Mommy would die, like Bambi's mother, like the little girl at Avalon, like a bird Moppet got once, a baby sparrow, just a little thing, and it shuddered and shivered and would not eat the bread dipped in warm milk they tried to give it, and then it got all stiff and you could see that there were little bugs crawling on it; she would die like the boy who rode his bicycle on the wrong side of the street, and a car came along and SQUISH he was squashed flatter than a pancake. That was what would happen to Emma's mother.

Emma cried. She buried her face in her mother's soft warm body and cried and cried and cried while thump, thump, thump, down the stairs came Tommy.

"I was telling her about the war," said Tommy.

"Oh," said his mother as if that explained everything.

"You did a great job."

And Emma thought dear Mommy, Mommy dead, Mommy never

again saying "Emma, look at the hawk," never making any little pink and yellow dresses with ruffles on them, never laying her cool cheek next to Emma's to make sure she did not have a fever, never again, never never saying, "What is it, baby?" with a laugh so that whatever it was went away and Emma was happy again. No, no, no, it was too terrible.

"Emma, dear," said her mother gently, gently patting her back, smoothing down her hair, "Emma, Daddy's going to be all right. You mustn't worry about him. He'll come back to us."

Emma looked up at her mother. Her mother's face was so gentle but her father was in Europe, swimming or walking on the sand in a place where overhead the clouds were a different color from what they were here. (They were pink in England and orange in Germany and yellow in France.) He was just on the other side of the ocean at Avalon. He was there swimming, like he swam at Avalon, with quick smooth strokes, swimming under the brightly colored clouds while her mother stayed all alone in Bethesda where Hitler could come and shoot her.

"I'm not worried about Daddy," she said, through tears. "He's at the beach."

"At the beach?" said her mother, puzzled. And Emma suddenly saw that Tommy had mixed her all up, confused her with his explanations and his maps and his quotes and his trains,

and that there weren't any places with purple or pink skies, that Hitler was not going to take over the backyard or shoot her mother or interfere in any way with their own lives. In short she saw that everything was all right.

"Mother, let me explain," said Tommy.

"No, never mind, dear," she said. "She just misunderstood, didn't you, Emma?"

Emma nodded and gave Tommy a mean look. It was his fault that she'd made a fool of herself. Now he would have to be specially nice to her for awhile to make up for it. Maybe he would even have to let her use the Statue of Liberty pencil sharpener the next time she asked because he had made her cry.

Then Emma went upstairs and washed the tears off her face and brushed her teeth and got into bed. Her mother turned on the pink horses and sat on the side of the bed.

"When will Daddy come home?" said Emma sleepily, holding onto Mother Cottontail. How tired she was and how happy that her mother was safe, that nobody would hurt her mother, and that her father was so brave.

"Not for awhile yet," said her mother. "But when he does, we'll have a surprise for him."

"A flower surprise?" said Emma. How heavy her eyelids were, wanting to close just now with her mother sitting there,

looking all pink and rosy because of the light from the horses.

Emma's mother leaned over and kissed her cheek and said "A baby."

Magic filled the room. A baby! Suddenly Emma was wide awake and would not go to sleep for anything in the world. Would it be a little sister, she wanted to know, and when would they get it? What was its name going to be, could she push it in a stroller, did Tommy know, was it there in her mother's stomach? (Willie Jarvis said that's where babies came from.) But her mother laughed and said, "We'll talk about it in the morning," and she went out. And for a long time afterwards as Emma lay in bed thinking about the new baby and how nice it would be to have someone to play with, she could hear her mother's soft voice and Tommy's, and they were talking and talking which was strange because Tommy almost always spent the evenings shut up in his room drawing perfect pictures of trains. But tonight the low sound of their voices went on and on until, soothed and comforted, Emma slept.