

Must Be A Killer Loose

by Mary Penly

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SOMETIMES my mind gets kinda confused, and things ain't too clear. Usually during them times I go to the mountains to sorta clear my head. I just kinda roam with all the pretty, wild animals. They're my friends. I like 'em better than most people I know, cause they never laugh at you or call you names. I don't reckon I'm too sure about how long I've been gone this time. A few days, I 'spect.

From up on this hill I can see most of Prior's Place pretty good. Seems to be something wrong, far as I can tell. Hardly no people at all on Main Street, and that's pretty strange for Prior's Place. Jake Johnson and Matt Henderson is toting guns. Must be a killer loose. Jake's just kinda standing out in front of Old Man Wilky's store, looking kinda casual, and Matt's pacing the north end of town. He sure looks grand down there, toting and pacing. You sure can tell that Milly gets her looks from her pa's side. Most folks say Milly Henderson's the prettiest girl in Prior's Place. I say in the whole country there's none that can beat her.

I first laid eyes on Milly when we was in the country school. Them were the days when the kids called me "Crazy Joe," probably 'cause I was always fooling around. I didn't like school much, or the kids neither. They sometimes laughed at me, and sometimes were downright mean, but Milly liked me right off. She was special, being so pretty and all, but she wasn't stuck up like some of the others. No, not Milly. She used to smile at me, and say, "Hi, Joe" just pretty as you please, right in front of everybody, and I knew

she thought I was pretty special too.

Well, that was some years back, and Milly and me is both still in Prior's Place. Milly works nights at the Cozy Inn Cafe, and she looks so pretty in that white uniform. She wears it pretty tight, though, and all the truckers and even some of the townsmen are always giving her the eye and trying to talk to her. She smiles real sweet to 'em, but not like she smiles at me, of course. Most every night, I wait for Milly after she gets done working. She comes out of the Cozy Inn at ten o'clock, and she sees me and smiles. "Hi, Joe," she says, just pretty as you please, and I know just like I knowed at the country school that she thinks I'm pretty special.

The last time I seen Milly was last Thursday, I think. She was getting done work at the Cozy Inn, and I was waiting for her, same as always. Well, Milly came out of that cafe looking like some sorta angel with that blond hair swinging and that white uniform clinging kinda tight around the hips. She said, "Hi, Joe," just like always, and then she looked right at me with that pretty smile and said, "Isn't it a lovely night, Joe?" Then she just kinda skipped off whistling some silly tune, and I followed her down the street. It was pretty much dark on Main Street, but I could see Milly's blond hair shining in the glow of the street lamp. "Hey, Milly," I calls to her, "why you walking away without me?" And I'll be darned if she didn't just keep walking faster than ever. Well, I decided that it must be she just didn't know it was me behind her, so I started hurrying up my pace in order to catch her. "Hey, Milly," I said, putting my arm around her, and I'll be darned if her face wasn't white as a ghost. Why that pretty little thing was a-trembling like a new-born fawn! "Hey, Milly," I says again, "It's me, Joe."

"Get away from me, you crazy idiot," she screamed, pushed me away, and took off down Oak Street. Well, if it

wouldn'ta been for that blond hair and white uniform, I woulda likely never even found Milly on Oak Street it was so dark. When I caught up with her, she was screaming those things about me being an idiot. Now that's something I ain't talking from no woman, not even someone as special as Milly Henderson. So I slaps her to sorta get rid of the hysterics, and grabs her so's she knows I'm ready for some loving. Well, I'll be darned if she didn't struggle and fight like a wild colt about to be broke in. You woulda thought she'd forgot I was her fellow or something. Well, I didn't let her foolish struggling get in the way of my love making. We was down on the ground behind one of the big oaks, and I just held my hand over her mouth to stop her crazy crying. It seemed to take a while, but pretty soon she saw things my way 'cause she finally stopped fighting and went kinda limp. I figured she was wanting me just like I was wanting her, so I took my hand off her mouth and kissed her, and took her right there 'neath the oak just like I remember doing every other night after Milly got done work at the Cozy Inn. It didn't take long, and I got up and said, "Come on, Milly," but she persisted on laying there, and pretty soon I got fed up. "Silly woman," I thought to myself, if she wants to be that way she can just walk herself home, and I left her there.

I took to the hills that night, 'cause I needed time to think about things, and besides I felt like hunting. Almost shot me a big buck yesterday, but the thing was so pretty, I couldn't do it—and I was only about twenty feet from him, too. Haven't seen Milly since that one night, Thursday it was, I guess. Suppose I'll be heading into town now, seeing as how the Cozy Inn's just about ready to close. Hope Milly's not upset with me for leaving her there alone that night. She'll probably be pouting and not want to talk to me, but at least I'll see what all the stir's about in town. Must be a killer loose.