

LITERARY PAGE

Moving Day

By John Logan

Shortly after noon on a spring Saturday George Maddon drove his small two door car down Chalmers street and headed toward a square block of buildings that had mushroomed there in the last months. In the back of George Maddon's flimsy car the shade of a lamp was perched on the scratched top of a small radio. A wicker basket filled with dishes was on the floor. George Maddon, auto worker, 35, negro, was moving.

There was the usual city noise over Chalmers street but another noise also was there as George drove toward the square, brick buildings. It had sounded there when George had first come there looking for a new home.

George Maddon was almost to the buildings. He was looking only at them. He knew what would be on the other side of the street and he did not want to look that way. He looked at the new squareness of the Chalmers Settlement Project and he did not look across the street. But he could hear the noise, hear it above the noise of the street car and the other passing autos. It was a low murmur but George Maddon could hear it very well.

George's wife, Susie, had looked at him that morning as he sat heavily on a kitchen chair eating his breakfast. She never interferred much with what George did. But that morning she said, "I don't know if we ought to do this, George," and her liquid, negro voice was thick and low.

"We got as much right as anyone else." George didn't look up from his food. He was a heavy, black man, short and with large shoulders.

"But we might get into trouble." Susie didn't like trouble. She was a small, meek wife to George, kept their inadequate house clean, and didn't like to bother with other things. She wanted to be left alone.

"No one never stays clear of trouble by running away from it," George said. "I'm not going to be pushed around by anyone and if I want to do anything like this I'll do it. In this here country folks

can do what they like about things like this."

So now George Maddon was driving along Chalmers street, slowing his car now as he almost reached the walk leading to the side entrance of the Project. As he did so a large rock crashed through the right window of his car, flaying glass in all directions, and hit George's large shoulder, making him give a shriek of pain as he dropped his hands from the wheel and the car skidded to a stop against the curb.

The low murmur that George Maddon had heard was gone now and in its place were yells, shouts of rage, bitter taunts that came from that side of Chalmers street that George had so studiously ignored. For on that side of the street was no mere collection of small shops and two-family flats. These were there, yes, and other things were there too—the crates of apples before the grocery marked Johnathan S. Buburelli on its grey awning, the two stacks of Spike Muron's daily papers with the rocks on top of them, one of which was now gone, resting instead beside George Maddon on the cheap auto seat as he clutched his shoulder in agony. But Spike and Johnathan Buburelli were joined now, joined with all the inhabitants of the west side of Chalmers street plus a swelling crowd that had gathered as crowds gather, like whistled notes in the night, meeting to form a harsh overbearing discord. The murmur that George had heard had come from the ranks of that crowd and now it was more than that. The rock that had left Spike's hand had started a hail of missiles through the air, striking George's car, bouncing off the tinny hood and fenders, shattering the headlights, and going through the now-broken windows, striking George Maddon, hitting on his hard, close-cropped head and beating against his large shoulders as, with low moans, he slumped over the steering wheel.

Above George's car the brick Project towered, its windows, empty of curtains, staring down at him with disinterest. The place that George had selected for his new home was still empty of any evidence of his possession. The three windows that would be his among the many windows in the large building had their sills free of the two geraniums that Susie had nursed so carefully. The lampshade was still in the back of George's car, ripped and torn now, instead of peaking through one of those windows from behind the cheap curtains still on the car floor, covered now with sticks, tin cans, apples from Johnathan Buburelli's crate, and other handy missiles.

Now the crowd no longer murmured, no longer stood and stared but it moved, surged forward with threats on its lips, and it surrounded the car where George was crying now, sobs breaking through his chest and tears mixing with the blood on his black face. Violent hands opened the left door of the car and pulled George Maddon out and shoulders strained at the car, lifting its left wheels from the ground and tipping the car over on its side so that it struck the walk before the Settlement Project with a shattering crash. Fists were hitting at George now, arms were flying, and he went down, slumping down to his knees, to his hands, and finally laying flat as heavy shoes kicked at his chest and body, and blood flowed from him and collected in little pools in the middle of Chalmers street.

And the crowd had found its battle-cry. The separate taunts that had come from it had resolved into one taunt and the word split

the air above Chalmers street, raised itself above Johnathan Buburelli's awnings and Max Stiner's shine parlor so that it seemed that one gigantic voice cried it to the grey skies over the smoky city. "Nigger!" cried the voice. "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!" And to George Maddon, sobbing half-conscious on a blood-wet pavement the voice was heard. "We got as much right as anyone else," George had said, and so here he was now, lying in the middle of Chalmers street while the dishes from the wicker basket that he and Susie had packed that morning were being thrown into the air and crashing into the curb on the far side of the street. "In this here country," he had told Susie, "folks can do what they like about things like this." So when the Chalmers street Settlement Project had been opened by the government George had applied for an apartment. Before this it had been hard for George to find a new home so that he could move Susie from their small, miserable house. But the Project would be a good place, it would be just fine. So the shoes hit against him and the stones were thrown down and George Maddon learned that Chalmers street itself as well as the government which had built the Project could speak about his intention to move from his tiny house which was surrounded by other tiny houses filled with negro families. Chalmers street was speaking now and George Maddon listened. The Buburellies and the Stiners had lifted their voices and they were saying to George, "Go back, go back to your little, unpainted house. Go back to your negro street and your curly-topped babies playing on the sidewalks and don't come to Chalmers street again. We want no negroes here. We're above you and we always will be above you and we won't have you for a neighbor." That's what Chalmers street was saying now and trying to make George believe it.

Suddenly, like a pile of leaves blowing away in the wind, the crowd was gone. The sirens were raising their clamour above the city noise and the mob noise, and the blue-jacketed policemen were coming out of the squad cars, clubs in hand, and breaking up the crowd with scientific efficiency. The blue-clad arms and the shiny clubs were being raised and lowered over the heads of the inhabitants of Chalmers street and Spike Muron was scurrying back to his paper pile where he scooped the papers under each arm and scampered up the street. The huddled figure of George Maddon lay in the middle of Chalmers street and the little pools of blood collected together and made large pools. George's car lay on its side, its left wheels spinning a trifle in the air and the glass and dishes and curtains were scattered in broken specks on the pavement in front of the Settlement Project. Susie's china teapot was a shattered heap at the foot of a fire hydrant and the lampshade was being carried by a gust of wind down the street. The crowd was gone, the policemen were standing by the squad cars, and an ambulance came to a halt beside George and white-clothed men lifted him inside and the ambulance went off. The empty windows of the Settlement Project were still empty and Johnathan S. Buburelli and Max Stiner and Spike Muron and all the inhabitants of Chalmers street still did not have a new neighbor.

But in a bare, white bed in a bare, white room George Maddon lay with many layers of cloth wound around his hard head and looked at the ceiling while a small girl in white was doing something beside the bed. And George said, "I just wanted to—" when he was stopped by a look from the girl.

Haunted Forest

Last night, when no one was around,
Warm slanting rain the only sound
Against the darkening earth, I heard
A haunting cheerful tune; no bird
Was this—the robins were in bed.
Another singing in their stead

The song I followed, past the stream,
Wherever transient tune would seem
To beckon; through the thick green fern,
Through clumps of trees, whose rigid, stern
Gray branches held me; there before
My searching eyes a forest door
Had opened on a grassy place
I saw the kindly, bearded face,
The pointed hoof and pointed ear,
Heard music only fairies hear.

I looked again, and Pan was gone,
The grass he had been sitting on
Was springing back and echoes dim
Were all that then remained of him.
I know he'll never come again
(I think I was a fairy, then.)

JOAN BECKMAN

But later when the girl was gone
George turned to the pillow and
cried as he had cried while slumped
over the steering wheel of his
car. He cried with large sobs
breaking through his big chest and
tears running over his black cheeks
and between his sobs he whispered
to the pillow, "They don't give no-
body a chance at all."

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