

THE PLOT

By WILLIAM SAROYAN

The plot was as follows:

The L Street Boys would dig the three-foot deep, six-foot long, three-foot wide hole in the middle of the short-cut across Kazakian's empty lot that ran from M Street to the alley between L and M. They would dig the hole at midnight, after everybody in the neighborhood had gone to bed, so that Apkar Popcorn, as he was called, who was the first to use the path in the morning, would not suspect anything. They would cover the hole with plaster-laths, newspaper and dirt.

At half-past five in the morning they would hide behind Kazakian's house and watch Apkar Popcorn fall into the hole.

The L Street Boys were the Shimshamian brothers, Husik and Jaziyre, called Fussy and Jazz; the Melkonian brothers, Arsen and Ardash; Fat Kishmish; Shag Berekomian; Haig or Ike Ardzrooni; and George Vrej. But it was Fussy and Jazz Shimshamian who were the creators of the plot. The backyard of their house on L Street faced the backyard of Apkar Popcorn's house on M Street. Two of their chickens had wandered across the alley into Apkar Popcorn's garden and Apkar Popcorn had captured them, but he had denied it, so the boys wanted to get even.

The other L Street Boys didn't know about the chickens, they just liked the idea of making a hole for Apkar Popcorn to fall into, so they dug the hole and covered it precisely as planned, and at half-past five in the morning they gathered together be-

hind Kazakian's house. Apkar Popcorn left his house on M Street every morning at exactly a quarter to six, and he always used Kazakian's short-cut on his way to town, so the boys knew they would see something unusual in a few minutes.

At twenty minutes to six a tiny woman entered the short-cut on M Street and began to move upon the hidden hole. This was not what the L Street Boys had had in mind, but the woman had appeared so suddenly and was moving with such speed upon the trap that everyone became speechless.

At last Fat Kishmish said to Fussy Shimshamian, "That looks like your mother, Fussy."

"No," Fussy said, "my mother's home baking bread."

"Isn't that your mother, Jazz?" Fat Kishmish said to Fussy's brother.

"Yes, it is," Jazz Shimshamian said. "What's she doing on M Street?"

"That's Jazz and Fussy's mother," the L Street Boys said to one another.

"Well, aren't you going to stop her?" Ike Ardzrooni said.

"How can I stop her?" Fussy said. "She'd kill me."

"You've got to stop her," George Vrej said. "One of you has got to stop her. You just can't let your mother fall into a hole. We dug the hole for Apkar Popcorn, not for your mother."

"Jazz," Shag Berekomian said, "you've got to stop your mother from falling into the hole."

"It's too late now," Fussy Shimshamian said.

The L Street Boys stopped breathing to watch Mrs. Shockey Shimshamian fall into the hole they had dug for Apkar Popcorn. The woman had only two or three more steps to take. They saw her left foot go through the false surface, and then every bit of her plunged forward onto the surface, and then into the hole. They heard a scream.

The trap had been perfectly set and concealed, and it had worked perfectly.

After the woman had disappeared into it, the L Street Boys turned and ran. They ran straight down San Benito Avenue across the Southern Pacific tracks to the outskirts

of China Town, and there, outside Chong Jan's Wholesale Produce House, they stopped to think and talk things over.

It was agreed that no member of the organization would confess knowing anything about how the hole came into being, and there the matter ended.

Mrs. Shimshamian was not seriously injured, but she did go to bed for a week.

The open hole remained in Kazakian's empty lot for several years and was finally filled with garbage from Mr. Kazakian's home.

Every morning at a quarter to six, on his way to town, Apkar Popcorn glanced at the hole. It broke up the monotony of his walk very nicely.

Promise

*On my return home,
They all came around me,
And like loving children
Clung to me,
Asking many questions.*

*"We missed you," said one;
"We love you very much," said another.
"Do not ever leave us again,"
Begged the youngest.*

*Tears in my eyes,
I bent over them,
I kissed them one by one,
Saying,*

*"Away from you I am lost.
I will never leave you again,
My beloveds!"*

NUVER KOUMYAN