

*Prize Winning Story  
in The Battalion's  
Short Story Contest*

DEAR TO  
HIM



**I**N THE SPRING OF THE YEAR Marlene Baggibold rode into the county seat from the Baggibold ranch, which was twenty miles back in the country. The Baggibolds kept pretty much to themselves, and so none of the people of the town were surprised at the absent minded way in which she replied to their greetings. She took her horse to the town corral and walked back to the New Antlers House. Half an hour later, when she came out of the hotel she had changed her half-male attire of the saddle for a blue polka-dot dress and a hat with black cherries on it. She carried under her arm a package wrapped in newspapers. Later, they remembered that her manner had been that of a sleepwalker.

She walked to the office of Sheriff Davis, who at the time was over at the postoffice. She waited until the Sheriff came back, sitting in one of the wide comfortable chairs in front of his office.

"Hello, Mrs. Baggibold," cried Davis. "It sure is good to see you again. And how is old Trigve?"

Marlene unwrapped the newspaper bundles. From it she took a steel kitchen knife and laid it on Davis's desk.

"I killed old Trigve," she said. "Better arrest me, I reckon. I did it last August. I just couldn't stand it any longer."

An undersheriff rode back to the Baggibold ranch, which huddled deep in a snadowy canyon. He found old Trigve's body buried under a gnarled black apple tree; a shining saddle studded with silver nails to form the initials "T. P." on the rail in the bunk house; and an empty shell that would fit a thirty-thirty carbine.

Folks of the Lazy Sleep country recalled many incidents that had been dismissed and forgotten in the wide range of Trigve Baggibold's eccentricities. Marlene, when she went to court, told a good deal that Sleep folks had guessed, and a great deal more that they hadn't.

Trigve Baggibold would have been sixty in the spring of

the year when Marlene rode into the county seat. He was as tough and as gnarly as the black trunk of the apple tree. He smiled with half his mouth and said rankling words with the amused chuckle of a malicious old man—words about things that people cherished.

Old Trigve was not popular in the Lazy Sleep country, but there remained an ancient vision of him that demanded respect. He had been one of the builders of the state, one of the builders who had made its construction profitable to himself. Long before the railroad had stretched across the desert—he took a part in that, too, but with a plump contract instead of a pick—Baggibold had marched with the pioneers. He had become a back-room dictator of politics, and in the state capital was known as a man of Borgian gesture—unpitying, relentless, and always a bit sardonic. He had been a wild one, even in his later days at the state capital. His clothers were miracles of fashion, neat but gaudy. His drinking had been terrible, and there had been noisy brawls in his big house on the hill, embarrassingly near the governor's own mansion.

Then Baggibold had come to the Lazy Sleep country. This was never explained, except that once, when he drove his buckboard into town for provisions, he had told Sheriff Davis, whom he had known in the capital, that he was weary of looking at people's faces. That didn't explain why he had brought Marlene to Lazy Sleep with him—or why she came.

"I was very young," she said in court, "and I had always lived in the city, and had always wanted to live where there were trees and hills and little streams." Her voice was calm as she said it, but she closed her eyes and two tears seeped under the lids and rolled down her cheeks. They were the only tears she shed during the trial. She was thirty then.

It had been ten years since old Trigve had brought her to the Lazy Sleep country. There were hills, magic hills, that gathered pools of lavender in their cool canyons while the sun, still going down, lacquered their peaks with gold, and friendly,