

## Before the Day and After the Clouds: A Work of Short Fiction

By Peter E Bozic

The five and twelve men, down in the coal mine, watched as the birds fell in the cages and could not laugh at the fate perhaps deeper within the dirt and the mud and that the lamps of between their eyes had been only prepared for days and not months and that even those in the old and rusted shacks could have been pink and never red and white and blue.

Randall and David, now spoke of the years between and above ground, that the five and twelve cages had been of the yellow birds and the black birds and not even to mention that in the past Indians had been never fond of cowboy hats and boots and even such movies to mention posters and fear of religion.

Randall, of the shacks above and now perhaps built above and high on the hill and mountain sides remember to speak of shame and the far off trenches of never China and always Europe and even to fear that the other men whose names he could not speak had been perhaps from Mexico and Poland.

That, once past the dead birds in the cages and to remember that letters from some Civil War had become in his memory the only history of any Civil War and even that to listen to music became fear of life and fear of quiet.

“We stuck, down here?”

“Seven birds down and three left.”

“What happens if?”

The man, in command and his name being Canary Red, and that he was fond of whiskey and stools and even to grab through the walls this or that woman who and never had been to indicate any love and respect for him that Canary Red had been not present at morning and when the men and Randall and David became lower and lower into the ground.

And that colors like pink and red were only left to what birds had been past and to travel lower and lower and into the ground and speak of the air and the clouds and that Canary Red and his family had been to perhaps claim the dirt and the cages as property and that being decades and decades previous.

“Nothing wrong with, Dino.”

“What?”

“Rio Bravo.”

“What?” Canary Red had spoken between short sips and vomit of whiskey and stools.

The movie, and of that, to mention how above and that to witness from what point of view and that even the falling glass and the paintings of Jesus and Mary on the walls and that of history.

“Nothing wrong with, Dino.”

“Sure, and that means something.”

After the last of the birds, had been legs up and not of their own children and even that buildings had become ash and dust and flags had been not happy to become ash and dust and that men and women from not China had been to work in the mills and speak of fighting in actual wars and in actual trenches that Canary Red and his family had been protected by way of not education.

And only to have been a fifth and third generation in what nation and what Civil War and to speak of class rooms and other places and that Alex Red had told his son to use the name “Canary” and perhaps of that to never fight in a war.

To mention, that a brown robe, and to descend down a staircase and to speak of movies and posters that had existed to dream of other nations and people and that Civil War had become in the family of Canary Red and Alex Red – but that memory became of that brown robe and to demand of the first and second generation that religion become not only cross but also color.

“Dino?”

“Yes, Dino?”

“Do you mean? What do you mean?”

“Rio Bravo.”

“Sure, like that means anything.”

“You know, out of the corner of his eye.”

That, and the dead birds, in the cages and above as the clouds and sky became an ugly purple and an ugly blue and even that rabbits ran inside when the buildings and the

clouds became not China but also an ugly pale and even black to speak of religion and Civil War and of that the cages now to count fifteen and twelve and the men now trapped as Canary Red and his family sat up on the mountain and hill side and spoke of music between Germany and Poland.

“Did, you finish school before any war?”

“No.”

“Did, you learn anything in classrooms?”

“No.”

“You see, when our family, came here and that even the latest generations have too much school and too much learning. That, was, when perhaps the flag had five and not how many stars and even to mention history was so blind a pursuit that even the dead could not speak of it.”

Randall and David, now that the earth had become a possible tomb and of that to look at and remember the dead birds in the cages and to speak of platters and food gone perhaps to rust and fear, that Randall and David had to remember what they could even of bad movies and escape from the dead birds.

And the perhaps miles of earth above and lead who and whom they could past the dirt and even to halo that not China had become the dead birds and friends of the steel

mills and lost years and to have been sent of to fight in a war and that even to vote after eighteen had become not the stool and the color.

“If, we can get, up to that level of higher ground.” Randall said to David, and to look at the men and that even on his back one of them had spoken of Jesus and not China and to have swollen ankles and broken knees and to remember his family to have been sent to fight in war.

“Two hours?”

“Five hours, maybe.”

And, the men began, to use what light they had against Canary Red and the fine alcohol of the above ground and that even to mention Canary Red would have been a wasted but not last breath and that perhaps to emerge from darkness to the blue and white clouds and speak not of pink and black and blue – that past the cages with dead birds and to remember the days and months years of before any Civil War and that perhaps what punishment of above and now was only the last of any two and five hours.

Later, when Canary Red and his two daughters and one blond son, with what blue eyes could not bury enough of the men and the birds in the cages spoke of those years and to remember that to have fought in an actual war was not to run fast and of what machine down a highway and to speak even of school and not of religion.

That, and, to have stood before time itself and against the lower and perhaps younger who and whom had fought in what declared war and to speak of that as perhaps heresy and not belief.

“How, many dead birds down there?”

“One left, and he was at the top. Clementine, what song!”

And, that of Canary Red to have to watch and as even the man of broken knees and swollen ankles and his family to have fought in wars and that back through decade and after decade, perhaps of belief.

“Rio Bravo.”

“Nothing wrong with, Dino.”

And, that as well, of flags with five and thirty two stars and even that the Indians had known of what cave and what canyon to laugh at men like Canary Red and what screens behind and not China and not fear.

Now, to walk past that poster, and of that to remember family and portraits and even black white space and that the moon and the stars not blue and white above the men once trapped and almost dead with the birds and what cages and to have spoken of Civil War. Also, of that, for Randall and David to have been of the steel mill and also of the barber shop and of the clouds and of the beauty salon and of the wars.

To arrive, now at the shacks and of that school, for perhaps the lost and lonely children to call upon and of them life and hope.

“Nothing wrong with, Dino.”

Canary Red and his family, now that to look at a cross, had been of shame and fear and to look back from the roads and travel that the shacks and dwellings of those men had been what little roof and comfort between wars and Civil War and of that to know perhaps of what generation could have been of more promise and less fear and not China and also of songs.

“My Darling Clementine, who wrote that?”

“I thought, Jesus, did.”

“No, more of a ballad, maybe.”