



Scarecrows

The strangest thing happened to me today, I don't think I've had such a good laugh since this cursed war started. We were a few clicks out of Rouen and at the end of a long recce when we started to take heavy mortar fire from some Germans bunkered down in the woods over the brow of a hill. I don't know if they knew we were there or if it was just some dumb-luck training exercise. Either way, it don't matter to Shuck Jones. Nor his widow.

Anyway, once the clouds had stopped raining shells, we found ourselves off course and laying down on the outskirts of some farmer's wheat field in the middle of goodness-knows-where. Honestly, the ears shone with such a golden hue in the dusk light, for a minute I fooled myself into thinking I was back home in Kansas. I half expected to hear Pa hollering in the distance or Ma ringing the dinner bell. It was the first time since I shipped out that it struck home just how far away I was. Like Miss Garland said, "We're not in Kansas now."

We were crouched down there for a long time, feeling like we were trapped in a golden jail. When we did finally pop our heads up above the stalks, and what a sight that would have been for the farmer, we immediately wished we hadn't.

"Fire!" Tommy was normally the quietest amongst us, but seeing the dozen or so German troops dotted around the field, he suddenly found his voice.

Tensions are always high amongst soldiers, but they're never more so than when you've just come under attack. None of us hesitated. I reckon we probably spent a couple of hundred rounds in all, aiming in all directions. All our training back in Georgia went out the window. I know I hit at least three of them, but they wouldn't fall, and they never returned fire. Helmets pinged and flew away and their uniform - already tattered and torn - fell to pieces. From every wound we inflicted, golden, yellow straw fell in abundance...

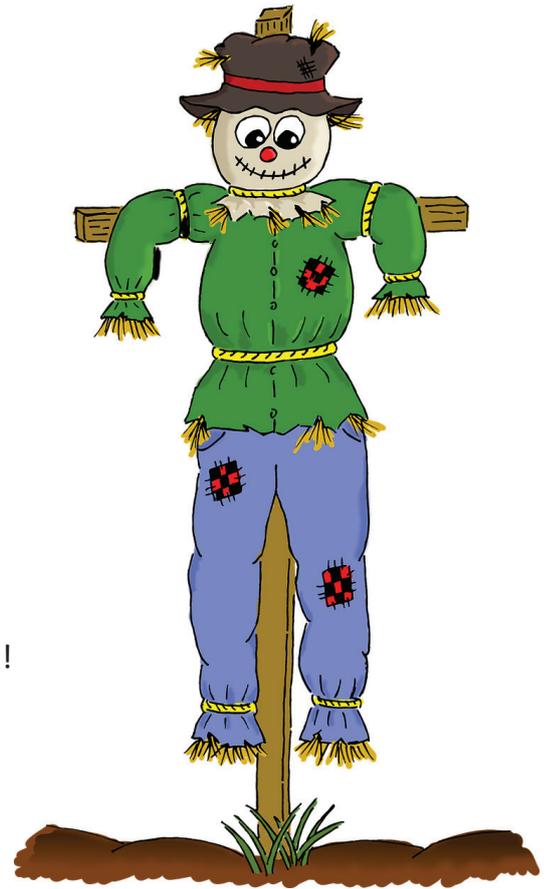
"Cease fire!" I called over the ruckus. I suddenly realised what we were doing. I couldn't help

myself; tears filled my eyes, and I fell to the floor in fits of giggles. You know how it is when your best friend starts laughing, and you can't help but join in?

This was worse. Like I said before, I don't think I've had such a good laugh since the war started. "They're scarecrows!" I wheezed through aching cheeks. "Nothing but scarecrows!"

That was it, then. The entire company fell about laughing. What a sight we were! Sure enough, probably alerted by all the gunfire, the farmer had come bustling into his precious field and stood to our left with his jaw about to scrape the mud off the floor!

"You'll be paying for all that, I assume?" he said, only to be met by fresh howls of mirth! I haven't stopped laughing since!



VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the author mean by "cursed war"?
2. What is the "brow of a hill"?
3. Use a dictionary to find the definition of the word "hue".
4. Find another suitable synonym for "hesitated" in the fifth paragraph.
5. Using the context in the story, what do you think "ruckus" means?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

What happened to Shuck Jones? How do you know?

R

Where is the soldier from?

R

Who did the soldiers end up shooting?

I

How did the farmer feel towards the end? What makes you think this?

E

Explain how the soldier knew that they were shooting scarecrows and to cease fire.

Answers:

1. It feels unlucky and miserable, like it will never end
2. The top
3. A colour or shade
4. Waited, stalled etc
5. A fight or commotion

I: He was killed. It referenced his widow.

R: Kansas

R: Scarecrows

I: Angry and shocked - he wants them to pay and his jaw is scraping the floor

E: Golden straw was falling out of the wounds