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"A Date with the Hangman"

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"ODE TO T.V. PRODUCTION!"

The lights are on.
The stage is set.
The cameras wait in ready.
The Director sits in the highest seat,
Nervous, hot and sweaty.
The floor manager awaits his first command,
just to give the signal.
The actor's raving to go, yet
pale and green and dismal.

Oh, the dream of a perfect take,
the master gives his directions
But then, one small unexpected mistake
and all are in a mist of rejection!

But try and try again say we.
I know we'll win out in T.V.

— Sharon Murphy

"A Date with the Hangman"

by Scott Tomkowski

As of this moment, I share a prison cell with five rather large rats and a colony of cockroaches. It has been six sweltering days since the U.S. marshals threw me into this wooden lockup and I can't wait to get out. Even so, I'm a doomed man. In about thirty minutes, I, along with five other shackled men will face the gallows and the devil. From my small barred, window I can see the hideous con
tection that will transport me into the next life. Outside, I view wagonloads of townspeople, settlers and other hangers-on to watch this event. My God, there must be over a thousand people out in that field!

Thoughts race around in my head quicker than the fastest stagecoach. Maybe President McKinley will grant me a last minute pardon to set me free. If that happens, I might croak anyway. Regardless, this isn't a fairytale. Pardons for scum doomed man. In about thirty minutes, I, along with five other men before the noose finds its way around their necks.

The local preacher has just entered and he is asking God to

The questions have certainly popped into the heads of many men before the noose finds its way around their necks. It is a strange and nauseating feeling for me as I look at the clock above the deputy's desk. It reads 6:40.

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Now the local sheriff and his assistants walk in with handcuffs and legirons in their hands. My hands are secured behind my back, while my ankles are chained together with just enough play for me to walk. In a few minutes, I'll be walk
ing that last mile.

I ask that I be left alone for a minute or two to write something down for my brother in St. Louis. Just a few lines of scattered thoughts is all I can think of. Perhaps he will understand, if he cares at all.

My heart skips a beat when I realize it is time to go. The blood pressure in my body rises, and my head feels like it's aflame. For the first time in a week I am in the morning sun.

We are now in the midst of the throng.

"Get ready to meet you maker!" cries a voice from the mob.

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"Get ready to meet your maker!" cries a voice from the mob.

"Hanging them isn't brutal enough! Guillotine them all!" shouts another.

About fifty feet from the platform stands the U.S. marshal who first arrested me.

"I'll satisfy my pleasure to see your filthy carcasses hanging from the end of that rope, you bastard!" he beams.

With my hands and feet bound, I have no other choice but to spit in his eye and laugh sarcastically. We're all hustled up the stairs and onto the platform.

The ritual begins. The six of us are asked if we have any last request or words we would like to say.

"Let's just get the goddamned thing over with," bellows one prisoner. "I am just as eager to get out of this world as you are to see me go!"

Next, black woolen bags are placed over our heads and the nooses are fit snugly around necks. The hangman, about 50 years old, is a short man with a walrus mustache and wire glasses. A very homely fellow.

With the preacher saying the final rites, my mind is wandering. My life has been nothing more than cattle drives, drinking sprees in strange towns, and affairs with nameless women. What words will be inscribed on my epitaph?

"JOHN BURNS. Drinker, gambler, vagabond. Born, January 5, 1869 — Died, August 13, 1899."

I can literally smell the lillies on my grave and can see the mountains and the skies. For a man who is about to die an unnatural death, the sights are breathtaking.

My feet are on the trapdoor, ready for it to suddenly give out on the orders of the executioner. Any second, I'll be ten feet under the platform.

"READY..."

I can hear the heavy breathing of the man next to me. It sounds as though he has water in his lungs.

"SIT."

He's going to spring the trap now! I can hear it creaking! "Goll!"

It gives way!!! I'M FALLING AND...