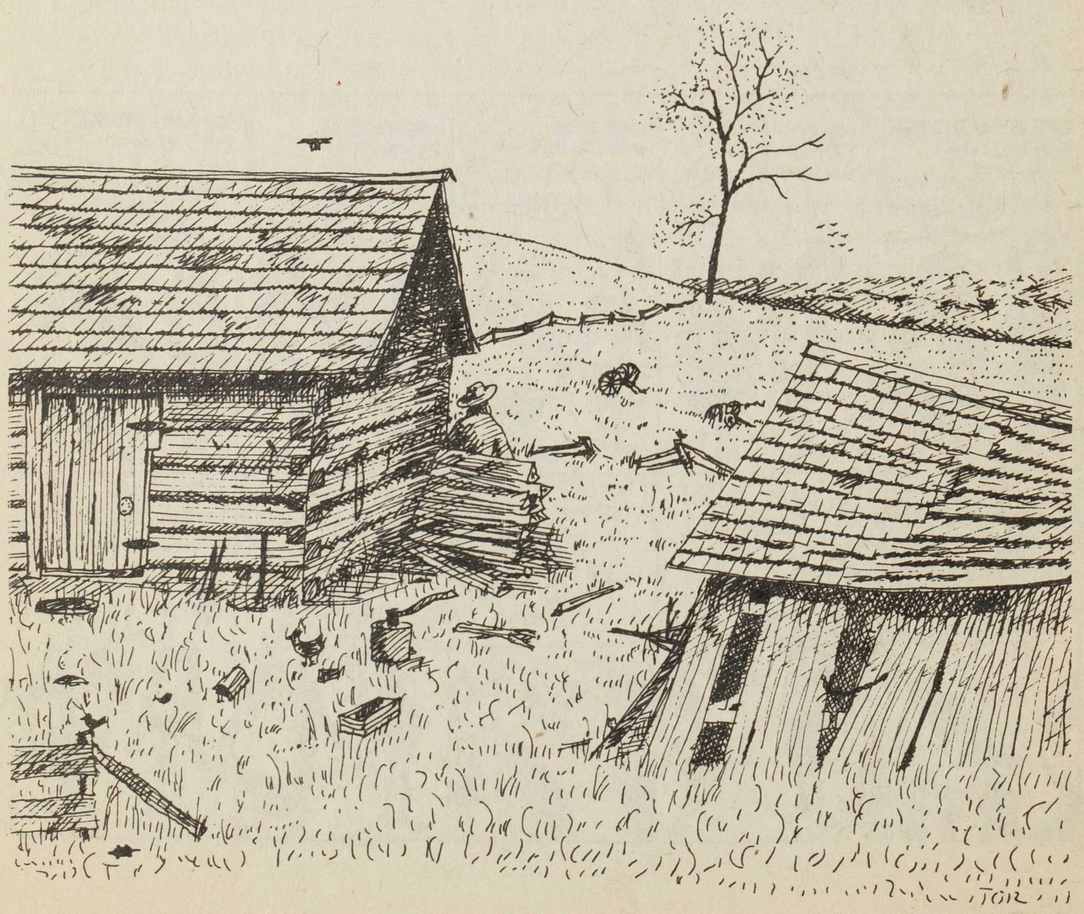
DIRIGIBLE STORY II

PATRICK MURFIN



It passed over the packed-dirt yard, between the listing little frame house and the half-burnt barn, trailing a shadow like a postage-stamp cloud skittering past on a high wind. The even, whirring sound raised the hens to a confused flutter of white wings and fox-fear screams. The dogs ran with tucked-in tails underneath the crumbling porch and howled as if they had seen death itself. My mother, who was 18 then and years away from being my mother, had just finished pumping up a kettle to heat for dishwashing and was cutting a new bar of home-made lye soap from the pan when she heard the dogs, the chickens, and my grandma Mona calling from out by the clothes line.

"Ruby, Ruby," cried Mona, "come here, child! There's something strange in the sky!"

This all happened, I should say, on the outskirts of Kirksville, Missouri, in the middle of a time called the Great Depression, when the heat and the drought of Oklahoma and Arkansas were beginning to creep north into the once-green hills of the "Show Me State". Everybody was poor then, but the Mills family was closer down to the ragged end of starvation than most. The old man – it was widely suspected by most – wouldn't work even if there was any to be done. He was dirty and seldom shaved. He wouldn't even put time into the miserable few acres they had on the edge of town. He let the house crumble, watched his land first get over-grown with weeds that choked his crops and then, when the dry spell came, did nothing to keep his topsoil from being blown into Illinois. When the barn burned almost completely, he was too drunk to get the old cow they owned out, and he never got around to pulling down the ruins and putting up a new one.

It was because the people were so poor and there seemed so little that could be done about their poverty that the United States government had sent the Navy Dirigible *Shenandoa* to cruise lazily over the bankrupt farms and worn out cities, far, far from any oceans, lakes, or seas where a Navy vessel properly belonged. In its wisdom the Department of the Navy hoped that when the people saw the giant airship, the largest in the world outside Germany, they would marvel at the power and the beauty that represented America and grow confident that a country which could produce such a marvel would pass this time of poverty as a child passes a fever in the night.

Of course my mother did not know that. She had never heard of a dirigible in her life, never knew that such things existed. Neither did my grandma Mona. They knew, of course, that men flew. When she was much younger she had seen *Wings* at the county opera house which showed moving pictures on Thursday and Friday nights then. And from time to time the mail planes running from Kansas City to St. Louis to Chicago

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This is the second of two dirigible stories that **Pat Murfin** *has written. The first appeared in the Hyde Parker, a relatively new magazine that appears to be trying to do a N[illegible] Yorker on Chicago. That story saw dirigibles through the eyes of a bunch of socialites. [illegible]ond story was returned by the Hyde Parker, and we're glad to print it here.*

Pat Murfin, *a member of Metal and Machinery Workers Industrial Union [illegible]ly serving time as prisoner 9235 - 147, Box 1000. Sandstone, Minnesota 5[illegible] ing to be drafted.*