

Legend of the Jackalope

Private First Class Bernice Powers kept her hands on the wheel and her head aimed straight ahead as she drove the 1941 army jeep up the mountain.

“Has anyone told you about the jackalopes?” Sergeant Andrew McPhearson asked.

“Imagine a demon jackrabbit with antlers. They appear just before a thunderstorm.”

She came to a stop just outside a new outpost on the far side of Pole Mountain. It was an hour drive west of Fort Warren, Wyoming, where they were stationed. The Sergeant arrived in Wyoming just a week earlier. He had been in North Africa before returning stateside to oversee the German POWs.

“You’re a quiet one, aren’t you. Well, I won’t be long.” Sergeant Andrew got out of the truck and disappeared inside the recently built structure.

Sunset in Wyoming was nothing like the ones she’d seen in Ohio. It was bigger and brighter and contained shades of pink and orange she hadn’t known existed. When Sergeant Andrew emerged from the outpost carrying a large olive drab duffel bag, the pink of the sun made him look otherworldly.

Bernice smiled before she could stop herself.

“I assume you are fine driving in the dark?” He returned her smile.

“Of course,” she said, guiding the truck back onto the isolated road. It didn’t take long for the sun to fully sink behind the mountain and for the trees’ shadows to overtake the landscape.

“Pull over here and turn off the car.”

Bernice steered the truck to the side of the road, regretting her smile. They were off the mountain but still surrounded by hills.

“Turn off the headlights,” he said. Sergeant Andrew reached into the truck’s cab and pulled a large rifle out of the duffel bag he’d picked up at the outpost.

“Sir?” It was all she could think to say.

He held up one finger to silence her then cocked the gun. “Turn on the headlights.”

Bernice did as instructed and let out a gasp. Dozens of jackrabbits stood, their small round eyes glossy and fixed straight ahead. Sergeant Andrew leaned out the window and started shooting at them. One, two, three.... Some of the jackrabbits ran off, leaping away as quickly as the bullets came out of the rifle. But more of them lay, bloodied, on the road ahead of them. Bernice hoped they were dead and not in pain.

He put the rifle back in the duffel bag. “Well, let’s get on, now,” he said, without a word about what he’d done.

Bernice turned the ignition back on and for a moment the rev of the truck’s engine matched the thump of her heartbeat.

“So, tell me about the Mediterranean Sea,” she said, after turning the truck onto a wide straight lane where the only thing you could see is what the headlights illuminated.