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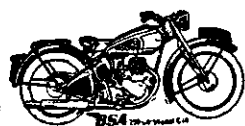
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## SHORT STORY

# The Prisoner

Written for "The Listener"  
by M. W. PEACOCK

THE military truck was bumping along the rutty road that led to Cody's farm. Jim Cody, coming out of the stable, spotted it in the distance, and called out to his wife, who was bent almost double over two iron tubs set on a bench outside the back door.

"'Ere comes our prisoner o' war, Mum!" Mrs. Cody straightened up, wiped her steaming hands on her bag apron, and walked slowly across the drying yard to where her husband stood. She was a tall, shapeless woman, untidily dressed. Dark hair streaked with grey was twisted into a knob resting on the nape of her neck. The skin of her face, arms and neck was reddened and coarse; the expression of her mild, toffee-brown eyes dull and apathetic, though tinged now with a shade of

lot o' good she'd be helpin' me with the ploughin' and the pigs."

"They say they're very capable, just as good as boys," Mrs. Cody defended her sex.

"Well, I ain't 'aving them on my farm," Jim declared, screwing up his ugly weather-stained face obstinately. "You've got the kids to 'elp you in the 'ouse. It's me yer gotter consider." And he made application for a prisoner of war to be allotted to him. Now, after much filling in of forms and the usual governmental delays, the "Wog" was arriving.

Mrs. Cody twisted her bag apron nervously in her hands. "If it's a Jap, I



"And for Giovanni—a mandoline"

apprehension. She looked exactly what she was, a hardworking farmer's wife and mother of seven children.

The two eldest boys were serving their country in New Guinea. Cathie was married and living in Melbourne, where she and her husband earned good money in a munition plant. Johnny, who would have been fourteen now, had been drowned in a waterhole when he was a toddler. She had had a few years' rest from childbearing after that tragedy. Then Mavis, Joan and Bobby had come in quick succession. The young ones were at school now, riding off on their ponies in the early morning, and returning in the late afternoon.

So there was only herself and Jim at home all day, and they both worked like niggers. Ordinary farm labour was unobtainable. Mrs. Cody pleaded with Jim to apply for the services of a Land Army Girl. "She'd be company for me, and help both of us." But Jim had scouted the idea. "Land Girl!" he snorted. "All uniform and lipstick! Fat

won't stay in the house with him," she said belligerently. "And if it's a great hulking Hun, he'll probably be 'Heil-Hitler'-ing all over the place, and murder us in our beds. If we'd had a Land Army Girl . . ."

Jim spat a jet of tobacco juice. "Ah, you make me sick!" he said; but his own hands were trembling nervously as the truck drew near. A Jap or a Hun? He hadn't thought of that!

The prisoner proved to be an Italian named Giovanni Amaferi. His papers gave his age as thirty-five, but he looked younger. He was a native of Sicily. His eyes were live black coals, his manner one of deference and servitude mixed with suffering pride. He spoke English very well, having at one time been a waiter in London.

After the truck departed, Giovanni stood perfectly still, eyeing his employers warily. His possessions in a canvas bag lay at his feet.

Jim flushed with embarrassment, and waved a hand towards his wife. "This