

# *Draughts of Old Bourbon*

## **Wartime Patriotism**

### ***In Williamsburg, Va.***

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF  
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER  
JAMES MONROE MADISON,  
USNR



AT WILLIAMSBURG, Virginia, of course, I met some real, old-fashioned American patriots. I expected to find them there. Williamsburg, to a Southerner, is twice blessed. It's the restored cradle of democracy; its people have the blood of Patrick Henry in their veins; Yorktown is nearby; and it is also Confederate. I was glad when I drew Williamsburg for my six weeks of basic training in the Navy: a man named Jim Madison would enjoy meeting the home owners of Williamsburg.

I arrived on a Monday morning in 1943 and my first concern was to assure myself whatever privacy money or influence could command. If I value anything above liberty or life it's privacy — particularly a private bathroom. I'm vulnerable on this point; to my ideological enemies I concede that I can be

destroyed simply by having my privacy destroyed. Without at least a degree of privacy I'm incapable of physical existence.

The only hotel had been taken over by the Navy for officers, but men with wives were given preference so there was nothing satisfactory there for a bachelor. I went then to the Lodge where a room clerk gave me a confidential report on the situation.

"There are three applicants for every room in this town," he said. "So it's tough. Every night there are women with babies who sit on benches all night long. I can't let your baggage stay in any room in the Lodge for more than four days. I'll do the best I can for you. I'll store your baggage on the nights you don't come in. When you're coming in let me know as early as possible, and on most nights I'll

take care of you somehow. But there'll be some nights when I won't be able to take care of you — especially on weekends.”

“What about private homes?”

“Well, they're your best bet. But here's what you'll run up against. The OPA lets them charge three dollars a day for a room without bath and four for a room with bath. But the weekly ceiling on a four-dollar room is twenty dollars. And the monthly ceiling is seventy dollars. In other words if they let one tenant keep the room they can't charge him more than twenty dollars for a week or seventy dollars for a month. If one tenant stays in the room five days he's paid twenty dollars — the weekly ceiling rate — so he's entitled to the next two days free and the owner loses money. So on every fifth day the owners have to get a new tenant so they can keep charging the daily rate. Not one of these old bitches will let you stay the fifth day. If she did and you could produce a receipt showing that she had collected the daily rate from you for six consecutive days, you could throw her ass in the can.”

“So the trick is to convince one of them that if she'll let you stay on and pay the daily rate you won't report her?”

“Yeah. It won't be easy. They sort of watch one another. But you've been around. You might get away with it. Some of them are pretty lonely.”

I thanked him and got a cab and began canvassing the houses. Many of them displayed rooms-for-rent signs, and I had been turned away from six or eight before I stopped in front of the home of John F. Marshall. It was an average-sized, two-story brick veneer, and as I walked in and noted the name on the mail box I said to myself: “Surely James Madison can make a deal with Mrs. John Marshall.”

Mrs. Marshall was a stout, graying blonde about fifty; I guessed from her rimless glasses that she was a member of both the Daughters of the Revolution and the Daughters of the Confederacy.

“Mrs. Marshall, I'm James Madison,” I said. “From Georgia. I'm sure you have some place where you can keep me for a few days.”

She smiled. “Do you have a wife and children?”

“Neither. I'm alone. And if I have any bad habits they aren't noisy.”

“Well, Mr. Madison,” she said, “you're in luck. I do have a room that has just been vacated. It's my best room. A room with private bath. But all my rooms are on reservation and I can't possibly let you have it for more than three or four days.”

“I understand. I'll take it.”

There were four rooms upstairs with two baths. Mine was the large back room with the private bath. It was comfortable enough; clean; the

bed was satisfactory. There was cross ventilation and this was important because it was June and hot. I paid her \$16 in advance for four days and she insisted on giving me a receipt. I unpacked, set up my Swiss portable typewriter on a bridge table, and made a note to buy some 150-watt light bulbs. Like most of the world's rentiers, Mrs. Marshall expected her guests to read by 60-watt bulbs.

Since during the first week in camp I could come to town only every other night, I knew I had to work fast to keep from having to move. So next morning as I was hurrying to reach camp before eight I stopped suddenly on the stairs, dashed back, pulled copies of two of my novels from a bag, and tossed them on the bed. I also found a copy of *Reader's Digest* which contained one of my articles and tossed it beside the books.

"That ought to do it," I thought.

In the taxicab I swore at myself. "Goddam!" I thought. "You sonofabitch! You call yourself honorable, yet you'll display your trophies in order to seduce a frowsy, old frump into letting you stay in a four-buck room. You'll sell your goddam soul for privacy and convenience and plumbing!"

It was early evening of the third day before I got back to the house, and Mrs. Marshall was sitting on the lawn with another woman, a neighbor. I saw that she had taken the bait.

"Why, Mr. Madison, please come and sit with us a few minutes. I'd like you to meet Mrs. Sparkman. I didn't realize you were *the* James Monroe Madison. Why we've read one of your books and your pieces in *Reader's Digest* and we've heard you on Town Hall of the Air! Why didn't you tell me! We didn't realize we had a famous man in our midst!"

I sat with them for half an hour until the other woman left; then I moved closer to Mrs. Marshall and told her how tired I was of chasing around the world, how I dreaded each movement of my baggage, and how I appreciated her sacrificing her home to the comfort of the boys in the service.

"Yes, and I do so hate to make people move," she said. "Almost everyone I take begs me to let him stay, some of them offer me big amounts of money, but you know there is a war on and our obligations are so heavy and we feel that we must divide the rooms among the greatest number possible. There are women with children who sleep on the street every night."

I would have bet that Mrs. Marshall had never rented a room to a woman with a child. She sat there on her lawn each afternoon and rented her rooms to single men and made sure that she collected the maximum OPA daily rate. She could make each roomer move on the fourth day with no risk of a vacancy because the street was full

of customers. Because she thought I was a famous man she wanted to keep me in her house, but she wanted me to suggest a plan whereby she'd lose neither money nor face. She reminded me of a girl who wants to be laid and paid but who insists that you do it in a manner whereby she won't feel like a whore.

I lowered my voice almost to a whisper and said: "Mrs. Marshall, I'd like for you to share a little secret with me. I don't usually tell strangers my business but you are the sort of person who will understand. I'm trying desperately to finish a book before I have to go back overseas. With all my papers and books and typewriter I can't finish it if I have to move every four days while I'm here."

She stiffened and started to object, but I went on. "Now here's the secret. My publisher in New York pays my expenses. He allows me five dollars a day for lodging, and when I don't spend that much — well that's just money in his pocket. Your rooms are worth at least five dollars a day. The OPA is forcing you to take less, but you deserve more. Also I need a few extras like more electricity and perhaps another bridge table on which to spread out my work. So why don't I hand you two hundred and fifty Yankee dollars in cash for six weeks lodging and the two of us forget it. It won't be a penny out of my pocket; in fact if you don't take it you'll just be

saving that Yankee publisher money. And you can tell anybody who wants to know that in order to help me finish my book you are letting me stay on the monthly OPA rate."

She swallowed. "Well . . . uh . . . but my reservations!"

I had to find a way for her out of that lie. No one, of course, had been granted a reservation in Williamsburg since Pearl Harbor. "Maybe one man with a reservation will be delayed," I said. "They don't all get here exactly on time, do they?"

"No, not all of them," she conceded. "As a matter of fact one of them did wire that he might be a few days late. I'll tell you what I'll do. If he don't show up by the time you are supposed to leave, it's a deal. But we'll have to be quiet about it. It'll have to be just between you and I."

She expected me to be pleased; instead I was crestfallen. "I had so hoped you could decide tonight. I probably can't get back tomorrow night, so I won't know whether I have a room or not. By the time I return you may have moved me into the street."

"Oh, no!" she said. "But . . . oh, well . . . I guess I can say yes right now. But it's all between you and I."

I reached for my wallet and in the semi-darkness found five \$50 bills. "This doesn't need an envelope," I thought. "It's money for a god-damed old gray-headed whore, so it

should be passed raw and filthy." As she counted it she licked her lips just like a prostitute counting war-money over a whore-bed.

Upstairs, as I showered and went to work, I asked myself: "Now isn't James Madison just as big a stinker as Mrs. John Marshall? Madison employs his money and his trophies to buy convenience. But doesn't he buy convenience at the expense of the mother and baby on the USO bench? No, for the mother and baby could never secure this room from Marshall. In securing the room from Marshall, Madison is only being prudent and provident. Neither government nor society is opposed to Madison's having a private room for six weeks; the law is only against charging him the daily rate for six weeks. But is the law also against his paying the daily rate — and more — for six weeks? No, I guess not. The woman who sells herself is a whore, but the man who buys her may still be a gentleman. So Marshall is the whore; Madison remains honorable." Then I laughed.

ONE HOT NIGHT I went down to the kitchen to get some ice, and as I groped through the half-lighted dining room I came upon an obscene sight. Mrs. Marshall and her husband whom she called Daddy were sleeping on an improvised bed in the dining room, and in the heat she had tossed the covers off and

her gown was twisted above her fat buttocks.

"Good god," I thought. "So that's what the Marshalls of Virginia are willing to do in order to drain the last dime out of the war to save democracy! Tomorrow night they'll rent the dining room and be sleeping on the kitchen floor."

On another afternoon I talked with her on the lawn and she told me: "Daddy and I never intended to rent rooms, but now we think it's our patriotic duty to inconvenience ourselves. We have only seven rooms but we are renting five of them."

"It's very generous of you," I said. "And it really isn't fair for the Government to restrict your rents. You could get two or three times what you are getting."

"Of course we could. And I believe in the law of supply and demand. But the Government is sticking its nose into everything now."

"Yes. I have some women friends in Hawaii who were getting ten dollars. Now the Government is forcing them to take five."

"Isn't it a dirty shame," she said. "But Daddy and I are doing pretty well. We're not as young as we used to be, and this may be our last chance to get a nest egg. He works for the city, you know. If the war lasts two more years we figure we'll get enough so we won't have to worry any more."

"Wouldn't it be tragic, Mrs.

Marshall," I said, "if the war didn't last two more years? Think of all the people who'd lose profits and promotions they are planning to get!" Then I laughed quickly.

The afternoon I left she told me goodbye, then she found the courage to add: "And by the way . . . about our little secret. Some of the neighbors have been wondering why I'd be so foolish as to sacrifice my daily rate so that you could finish your book. Just so I'll have the record to show to them and to the OPA, I want to give you this receipt and I'll keep a copy of it in my receipt book." She handed me the receipt. It read: "Received of James M. Madison, for one month's rent \$70, for two additional weeks \$40, total \$110. Mrs. John Marshall."

When I read it I had an impulse

to say to her: "Mrs. Marshall, you're being a piker. If you'd bring your daughter back from school and sell her and maybe yourself with these rooms, you could really cash in on this war. You could make \$250 in a single night." But what-the-hell, the woman in her way had been kind to me; why should I be unkind?

"You better be careful," I said. "Be sure you don't deposit more than \$110 in the bank or some tax snooper might catch you."

"I'm too smart for that," she smirked. "I use the old sugar bowl."

As I rode away I thought: "A good slug o' whiskey would'a been mighty welcome on those cold nights at Valley Forge. I wonder if old George Washington didn't peddle a little black market stuff on the side?"

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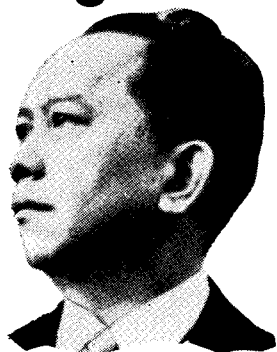
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