

Suddenly flame whipped over the "Bonaire's" forward deck. I had a brief glimpse of Brandwine's eyes at that moment

S. S. Monotony

Mr. Stinky Pendarvis has a black eye. Stinky has nothing to do with this story; but his eye is another matter. It is a tribute to heroism in a heat-ridden hole, and a slight memento of the hero's reward

By **CARL RATHJEN**

Author of "Fairweather Skipper,"
"Crash Man," etc.

Bayonne, New Jersey
September 15, 1939

Mr. John Stewart,
Tanker *Cabello*,
Oranjestadt,
Island of Aruba,
South America.

DEAR UNCLE JOHN:

I saw in the papers how you and Captain Brandwine and Mr. Williams from your tanker was all heroes and are going to get medals from the oil company.

And me and the gang that swim together

in the Kill van Kull and hang around the oil tanker docks here in Bayonne would like to know all about it because we want to grow up and be like you.

You see the reason I want you to write a letter and tell he how you was heroes is because Stinky Pendarvis (he's in my class at school, I'm in the sixth grade now) is always belittling and he says you ain't real heroes because you ain't real sailors.

Real sailors he says are always going to differunt ports all around the world like his father does who is on a rusty old boat, and Stinky says you and Captain Brandwine and Mr. Williams can't be sailors because you always are in one place.

Your letters and birthday presents for me (thanks for the catcher's mitt you sent me the last time, I'm hoping Ma or somebody will give me a catcher's mask to go with it for Xmas) always come from the same place, Oranjestadt, Aruba.

So Stinky says how can you be sailors or heroes at sea when you never go sailing anywhere.

So I'll be watching for your letter, Uncle John, and the gang too, so we can tell Stinky he's all wet and that we ain't crazy in wanting to grow up and go to Aruba and be heroes like you and Captain Brandwine and Mr. Williams.

Your neffew,

ALBERT

P.S. Ma read this and said I shouldn't always hint what I want you to send me. I wasn't hinting about the catcher's mask even though I would like one. I'll be watching for your letter. Tell me all about the medal and what you did.

Oranjestadt, Aruba
September 30, 1939

DEAR ELLEN:

I'm writing this to you in care of your brother in Brooklyn because I don't know how to answer Albert's letter. He's a good kid, any boy of yours and my dead brother's would be, and I don't want to do anything that would hurt or disillusion him.

This hero business, for instance. I know how important such things are to a kid his age. A growing kid like him has to keep his aims high, so if I told him the truth of what happened down here at Aruba . . .

That's why I'm writing to you, Ellen. Maybe you can pick out the good from the bad and give Albert a story that will satisfy him.

I'VE never told you much about Aruba, have I? It's a port of lost seamen, Ellen. Men like me who lost good berths when the depression hit the shipping business.

All we do aboard the tankers, there are twenty-eight of them here, is sail at dusk

with full tanks from Maracaibo in Venezuela out to the Dutch island of Aruba where there's the world's largest refinery.

We arrive at Aruba at dawn. At dusk we sail empty for Maracaibo, arrive at dawn. At dusk we leave again for Aruba. Just a lot of lost seamen, marking time on an endless track while we wait for better times to come again so we can get better jobs with a future.

That's why I've never come home, Ellen. Why I've never sent for you and little Albert the way I promised I would when I left two years after Al died.

It might have been a different story if I were a refinery engineer like some of the men on Aruba. They're doing something, building, progressing. They've got their wives and children, some of them, and that's partly one of the reasons why I can't write and tell Albert about this hero business.

You see, Ellen, for every twenty men on Aruba there is only one unmarried woman, and she doesn't stay unmarried for long. That's how the trouble started with Jack Williams and Captain Brandwine.

Brandwine had sent for a girl he'd known in better days to come here and marry him. He's British and he'd last seen her ten years ago in England, but he'd heard recently that she'd taken a position as governess with an American family who had brought her to New York and then changed their minds without giving her passage money home.

So Brandwine had asked her to marry him and sent her passage money to Aruba. The oil company would provide them with a six-thousand-dollar stucco bungalow and supply all their needs. It was an offer Brandwine's girl accepted readily.

I was down on the wharf in the glaring afternoon sun with Brandwine when the tanker from Bayonne arrived with his bride-to-be. The tanker, by the way, also brought fresh water, the only way we can get drinking water on Aruba.

And it also brought Jack Williams who was to be the new first mate a board the tanker *Cabello* under Brandwine.

I was doubtful about Williams before I ever met him. He was American, and Americans don't seem to be able to stand the monotony down here unless they have the high posts like captains of a tanker or an important post in the refinery. Most of the men are British. There's something in the stolid British make-up that suits them to the tropics.

Well, the tanker arrived and I went up the gangplank with Brandwine. The girl, rather good-looking for the usual bony type of English girl, was waiting on deck to meet us, and nearby was a lean tall fellow with a devil-may-care look in his black eyes. I assumed he was Williams, for he wasn't in uniform like the crew and he appeared to be the only passenger besides the girl.

"Hold on," he said as Brandwine stepped toward the girl. "She's my wife."

Ellen, I didn't know what to expect from Brandwine. Ten years in the monotony of Aruba and its hellish sun is a long time for a man to be thinking of the woman he loves and then to get a blow like that.

I JUST stood there, waiting and watchful. There was a sultry haze over the sea, a poised cloud of smoke over the gleaming aluminum-painted works of the big refinery, and a glassy glare from the water around us.

Brandwine never moved. His blue eyes were as glassy as the sea. His big ruddy face was as motionless as the sun-baked coral island. He never so much as twitched a finger.

The girl looked scared.

"I'm sorry, George," she stammered. "But—but ten years is a long—I—I didn't realize I'd—changed until coming down on the boat I—"

"She met me," said Williams. "I know just how you must feel, Captain, but—well, these things will happen you know." He extended an envelope. "Here's the passage money you sent. . . ."

He became a bit uncertain himself, the way Brandwine just stood there.

"Can I buy a drink or—"

Brandwine stopped looking at the girl then and turned to Williams.

"You'd best be getting your things ashore," he said. "We sail for Maracaibo in two hours if you expect to be aboard."

He turned expressionless and trod down the gangplank. Williams stared at me.

"Is he my skipper?" he demanded.

"Yeah," I answered curtly. "I'm Stewart, chief engineer of the *Cabello*. There's a tanker sailing back to Bayonne in just—"

He turned and handed the girl a bill.

"Will you give this to the steward, hon," he said; and when she had gone he turned to me.

"I know you hate my guts, Stewart, but things are as they are, and there's no use moaning about them. I feel kind of guilty about this myself, but there are some things which just take a grip of a guy and make him act without stopping to think matters over."

"Yeah," I said. "Brandwine's had ten years to think, and now—"

"Forget the tanker to Bayonne," Williams interrupted. "I haven't got a cent of dough to carry me back to New York. I've been on the beach too long."

He looked along the wharf after Brandwine, then turned to me and held out his hand. "Well, what's the setup down here?"

"If you mean what kind of a future, shuttling a tanker," I said, "I'll give you just about three months. You're an American."

"So are you," he said, "so where's the difference?"

"My job keeps me busy. I'll never be more than a chief engineer. But you're a guy who likes to be going places, doing things in a hurry. I'll give you three months, wife or no wife, before you chuck it all up, thinking you can do better elsewhere."

"I just came off the beach," he snapped, pulling back his hand. "So you and Brandwine think I'll crack by myself, is that it?"

"It's happened before," I remarked. "We sail in two hours. So you'd better get

your wife settled ashore if you're staying. The company hasn't any hotel. There's not much in San Nicholas that's outside the company compound, so unless you find someone who'll put her up temporarily you'll have to take her to one of the Dutch hotels in Oranjestadt."

He looked at me. "Two hours isn't much time. You wouldn't—"

"I live in the bachelor quarters," I said, and left him there in the midst of his luggage.

HE WAS aboard at six bells when we cast off for the run in to Lake Maracaibo. I stayed up on the bridge, just in case, leaving my assistant, a big Dutchman, in charge of the engines.

Aruba isn't so far from the Line, and as we went out the sun dropped from sight with a flash of red that tinged the turbid waters. Nearby, a big sea-going tanker, loaded with the world's best aviation gasoline, was casting off for Bayonne. Williams met my gaze briefly.

"Steady as she goes, Mr. Williams," said Brandwine impersonally and left the bridge. His eyes caught mine slightly. I sauntered down to his cabin a little later. He handed me his revolver. "Take care of this for me, will you, John?" he said.

I paused a moment. "Williams is wearing a gun, or didn't you notice?" I said.

"Goodnight, John," was his only answer.

"You'd better keep this," I tried to insist, "because there's no telling what he'll do when Edith has time to think and realize she was talked into—"

"Goodnight, John," he said sharply.

I left, swearing.

I was standing the engineroom watch from midnight to four. Along about three, Hans, my big Dutch assistant who came from Pennsylvania and whose lost name I never could remember or pronounce, came down.

"You're an hour early," I said.

He nodded. "Maybe you better go the bridge up. Villiams is there still, yet, und the captain he soon goes the bridge up to take the ship the bar over."

"We'd never get over the bar if he sailed the way you talk," I remarked, and Hans chuckled.

I went up to the bridge. It was hot there; the northeast trade was behind us and it didn't cool things off much. The second mate was on watch and Williams lolled against the rail of the port wing as the *Cabello* steamed through the dark Gulf of Venezuela.

"It doesn't pay to learn your job too quickly in this country," I remarked. "It doesn't give you enough to do."

He lit a cigarette and looked at me.

"Is that advice or a hint?" he asked.

"You still think I won't last three months, eh?"

"That's up to you," I said.

"Is it?" he demanded.

I didn't answer, but I thought of that revolver in my cabin. I didn't know how to answer for the moment.

There were the running lights of a ship approaching ahead to port.

"The *Caracas*," I said. "Tanker just like this. In a few minutes we'll pick up the lights of the *Maracay*, then the *Asuncion*, after that the *Ocumare*, and then—"

"Just like clockwork," he said.

"And as devilishly monotonous," I declared, thinking of Brandwine, "until it gripes you inside and you're ready to tear things apart unless you've someone, or a thought of someone, to hang onto to keep your head steady.

"Williams," I said suddenly, "I've got a little dough socked away that I haven't been sending up north. There'll be a cruise ship putting in at Aruba in a couple of days and—"

"You'll finance a honeymoon, is that it?" he snapped.

"I'll pay your passage with something extra to boot," I said, "if you'll go. Alone."

He swore and swung at me. I hadn't expected that and I caught the blow hard and hit the deck heavily. I was charging to my feet when—

"Belay that!" barked Brandwine's voice.

The three of us stood silently a moment.

"You'd better go below, John," said Brandwine.

Williams flicked ashes from his cigarette.

"Mind if I stick around?" he drawled. "I'd like to learn the passage over the bar. It must be tricky if you need shallow draft tankers like this."

I DIDN'T get a chance to speak to Brandwine alone until morning when we were moored by the oil wells in Lake Maracaibo. Some of the wells are out in water a hundred feet deep.

"You shouldn't have broken it up last night," I said.

"I'll have no brawls aboard my ship," he said.

"What does that mean?" I demanded. "What are you going to do about—"

Another tanker captain was coming on our bridge. Conningsby of the *Bonaire*. Sloppy Edward we called him. He was the opposite swing of the usual Britisher you'll find in the tropics. His chest had sunk to his beltline. His clothes always looked as if the cook had used them to mop up the galley, and they reeked of every *cantina* in San Nicholas and Maracaibo.

He hadn't yet been caught drunk on duty, but he'd been up on the carpet more than once for letting his crew slop up the *Bonaire's* decks with oil. He'd been a good skipper though, before he'd got caught in this endless track of lost seamen.

"Say, Georgie, old boy," he said thickly to Brandwine, "what's the inside on this blarsted double-cross of your bride-to-was? I mean, old boy, about Williams. How long do you give him?"

Brandwine's eyes were stony.

"Better get back to your ship, Edward, and sleep it off," he said curtly. "But before you go below, stop your crew from messing up the deck or you'll find yourself blown sky-high one of these days."

Sloppy Edward scowled.

"Listen," I said, "you'd better get back to the *Bonaire* and—"

He swayed and caught Brandwine's coat.

"It's this way, old boy. Some of us're layin' bets. Y'know. A bet on anythin' to kill the blarsted monotony of this blarsted hole. Some're bettin' five months for Williams. Mine isn't down yet, and—well, Georgie, old boy, I been thinkin' you might drop a tip if you've any personal plans to—"

Sloppy Edward was a big man, and heavier than Brandwine by a good forty pounds; but Brandwine grabbed him by the collar and the baggy seat of his pants and literally carried him off the bridge and tossed him on the narrow pier. Brandwine stalked back and faced me.

"Does that answer your questions too?"

I suddenly decided it would be a lot more comfortable at the moment down in the blistering furnace of the engineroom.

Hans was out on deck for a bit of air when I went aft. He shook his big blunt head.

"Worse it gets yet, even. No?" he muttered. "Two years ago when the captain three months vacation got, he should in England married her then."

"In the first place," I growled, "she wasn't in England then. Some place down around the Mediterranean. In the second place, instead of taking time to go and see her, he spent all his time in England trying to land a better berth because he didn't think it right to ask her to come down here to live. But it was different when he heard four weeks ago she was stranded in New York."

Hans grunted. "Very different it vus yet, even. No?"

We sailed at dusk for Aruba, and arrived at dawn.

WE KEPT on sailing at dusk, arriving at dawn. Back and forth. A dozen times a month. And the next month a dozen more. Aruba to Maracaibo. Maracaibo to Aruba. Dusk. Dawn.

No new ports. No new peculiarities of tide and current to be bucked. Just Aruba and Maracaibo. The same faces. The same orders from the same men until you knew

what those orders were going to be before they were ever spoken.

No variation to break up the monotony. Not even in the weather. Always it was those cursed northeast trades. No matter where or when you stepped out in the open you always knew just which side of your face the wind would strike. Even the trees of Aruba reminded you of how the wind blew. Every last one of them was bent sharply in the same direction. They were like warped, stooping old men.

Williams had gotten his wife and himself settled in one of the company bungalows inside the compound. He was pretty well set; a married man usually is on Aruba. No bills to worry about if he goes along content to let the company supply him with the things he needs. And there are always parties and social affairs among the married set.

But after about six weeks I noticed he was beginning to get a bit grim about the eyes. He was brooding, snappish. There was the evening we cast off for Maracaibo.

"Slow astern," Brandwine ordered, and Williams manhandled the telegraph and jangled the bells as if it were an emergency.

"Half ahead," said Brandwine when we had backed clear of the slip. And again that manhandling by Williams. I saw the helmsman glance at him briefly. Brandwine said nothing.

Then Williams rang for full speed ahead before Brandwine gave the order. Still Brandwine said nothing, though it was a bad breach on Williams' part.

I surmised then that Brandwine was playing a waiting game, avoiding open trouble while he wanted for the monotony to break Williams who was beginning to act just like the American crews that once manned these tankers. The company had to can them and put in the Britishers. The same monotonous routine day after day in the blasting heat had too often given the Americans the inclination to fly off at tangents.

A man's got to do something to break the monotony here. Take, me for instance.

I've made engines my life. There isn't a sweeter running tanker in the whole outfit than the *Cabello*. And it takes most of my spare time to keep her that way. I'm always taking something apart and putting it together again. At first Hans used to get sore at me.

"Dammit," he'd say, "you the pump take part to see if the pistons they are there still."

But he knows now I do it to keep from taking myself apart. A man's got to have something like that down here. I have my engines. Sloppy Edward has his binges and gastric ulcers as a result. Brandwine had his hopes for the future, until Williams came along and destroyed them.

Or were they destroyed?

That's what none of us knew. Had Brandwine put Edith out of his mind? At first it seemed so. He had plunged deeper into one of his hobbies.

It seemed strange that a burly two-fisted man like him—I saw him once single handed break up a six-man brawl in a Maracaibo *cantina*, scattering men like ten-pins—should have reading as a hobby. He was an avid reader, subscribing to half a dozen magazines and always getting books from New York.

If you could get him started there wasn't a subject he couldn't talk about with an air of authority. He would have fitted in swell on a big luxury liner where it pays for a captain to know more than seamanship when he sits down at mess with the passengers; but here he was on this endless track of lost seamen.

And how endless was it for him now without Edith? Had he put her out of his mind? He hadn't attempted to see her. Or was it part of the waiting game he was playing with Williams.

THEN one day he met Edith outside the post office when he had gone there to get a new shipment of books. I wasn't near enough to hear what was said, but my glimpse of her wistful expression was enough.

Williams appeared. He gave Brandwine

a sharp look, but said nothing. He and Edith went off together toward their bungalow. Brandwine started for the *Cabello*, then he saw me.

"John," he said kind of thoughtfully, "toss these in my cabin for me, will you?"

He handed me the package of books and turned away before I could say anything. He went back inside the post office and I saw him starting a letter.

I wondered about that. And I wondered more when it suddenly dawned on me more than a week later that every time we were at Aruba he was going ashore and disappearing for a good part of the day. I overheard island gossip that Edith wasn't always at home either, though her name was carefully not mentioned with Brandwine's.

Then one evening when we sailed from Aruba I caught Williams several times staring hard at Brandwine when Brandwine wasn't looking. I made it a point to stay on the bridge. Later that night Williams got me alone on the port wing during his watch. He spoke like a desperate man.

"Stewart," he said abruptly, "you made me an offer once to pay my passage away from here."

"Yeah. You were broke then," I said.

"I still am," he snapped. "I've been paying off some debts up North. If your offer to lend me the money still holds, I'll take it."

I didn't answer him right away.

"You'll go alone?" I asked.

"Did I ask you for passage for two?" he retorted.

I scowled at him in the starlight. To tell the truth I was disappointed in him. He didn't seem like a quitter to me. I know, I'd said I'd give him three months; but that was because I was sore at him and wanted to side-track trouble between him and Brandwine.

I'd had a feeling all along, which I wouldn't admit to myself, that he had it in him to lick the tropics and the monotony of this job; but now I saw I was wrong.

"Well?" he demanded.

"All right," I said. "I'll give you the dough when we get back to Aruba."

I didn't say anything about it to Brandwine. That was a mistake: I should have told him.

WHEN we got back to Aruba, I was busy on board for awhile helping Hans get hooked up with the pipe lines to the refinery.

In the next slip across the narrow arm jutting at right angles from the pier was the *Bonaire*, and Sloppy Edward's crew as usual was messing up the decks again with crude oil. They weren't getting their connections tight enough.

Finally I left Hans to watch things aboard the *Cabello* and beat it ashore to get the dough for Williams. There was a cruise liner that would stop by the next morning and he could take it if he didn't sail with us that night. Brandwine and Williams had gone ashore almost as soon as we got in.

I saw Brandwine coming out of the post office with some letters and I still didn't tell him what was afoot. He paced past me as if he didn't see me. I went on through the hot sun to get the dough.

I telephoned Williams. I didn't want to go to his house. He said he'd meet me in half an hour in San Nicholas. I strolled out of the compound in the hellish sun.

In San Nicholas a half-hour went by, and no sign of Williams. I went looking for him, thinking I'd been mistaken about our meeting place. I bumped into Sloppy Edward and his first mate, a young Britisher. The mate was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"C'mon, Stewart, old boy," invited Sloppy Edward. "Join the farewell party."

"What farewell?" I asked.

"Mine," grinned the mate. "Just got my three-month vacation. Four months ahead of time at that. I'm flying up to Miami at noon and sailing for England from Jacksonville tomorrow. Three years I've been here. Boy, am I itching to get out of this damn clear weather and get myself lost in a London pea-soup!"

"C'mon, Stewart, old boy," said Sloppy Edward.

"I've got a farewell party of my own to arrange first," I said.

Sloppy Edward stared at me. "Didn't think you thought that much of Williams, old boy, to give him a party when he transfers from your ship to mine."

"What!" I exclaimed.

The mate grinned. "Williams is taking my place aboard the *Bonaire*."

"That's what Williams thinks," I snapped. I started grimly for the compound and Williams' bungalow.

I'd gone only a short distance when I came face to face with him.

"Never mind the money, Stewart," he began, "I won't be—"

"You're leaving tomorrow just as you'd planned," I told him.

He shook his head. "I never had any intention of leaving."

I hit him then and I hit him hard. He went down and rolled over and stared up at me blankly.

"You're a worse rat than I thought you were," I snapped. "So you were just going to take my dough when all the time you knew you weren't going to leave. Well, get this, guy. I'm seeing to it right now that you're leaving tomorrow. Tried to pull a fast one on me, eh?"

"Maybe you've got plans for Brandwine too. If you try anything against him between now and tomorrow, so help me, I'll—I'll—"

I LEFT him still lying there dazedly rubbing his jaw. I went looking for Brandwine. He wasn't in his bachelor quarters ashore. On his desk I saw an envelope with the return address of a New York detective agency.

I remembered Williams had come here from New York. There wasn't any letter in the envelope: Brandwine had taken it with him, wherever he was.

I beat it up to the bungalow where Williams and his wife lived. She was alone.

"Do you know where Brandwine is?" I asked her.

"I haven't seen him since that one time we—"

"We'd better find him then," I interrupted hurriedly. "He got a letter from a New York detective agency this morning and—"

She just stared at me with big frightened eyes.

"Did you talk Williams out of leaving the island?" I asked her.

"I?" She stared at me.

"No, you wouldn't have reason to," I said. "If you see Brandwine, tell him your husband's up to something."

I started for the *Cabello*.

The refinery hulked over the inlet like a big mass of white-hot aluminum in the glaring sun. I ran out on the pier and turned down the narrow arm that reached between the *Cabello* and the *Bonaire*.

Williams was standing there, scowling up at the oil dripping down from the *Bonaire's* scuppers. He started to go aboard. I called to him.

"I know now why you're planning to stay," I warned him. "Brandwine knows too much and—"

"Knows too much?" he snapped.

"Yeah. Take a tip." I started bluffing. "I saw that letter Brandwine got this morning from the New York detectives."

"What the devil are you talking about?" he demanded, glaring at me.

"You know as well as I do," I retorted. "So if you try anything you'll only be sticking your neck out because Brandwine isn't the only one who knows about you now."

I turned my back on him and crossed the narrow pier and went aboard the *Cabello*. I saw Brandwine pacing up on the bridge.

"What in tarnation are you up to, John?" He frowned, staring across at the *Bonaire* where we could see Williams pointing at the messy decks and laying down the law to Sloppy Edward's men.

"Listen," I said. "Williams was going to take an offer of mine to leave, alone. He changed his mind suddenly this morning. He must have found out about that

letter you got and now he's out to get you."

Brandwine stared at me.

"Letter? How do you . . ." He felt his coat pocket.

"I only saw the envelope," I said. "I bluffed him on the rest of it."

"Bluffed more than you thought," he muttered. "He doesn't know a thing about it. He couldn't."

"Well, he knows now," I stammered finally. "What's in that letter? Can we use it to make him leave alone and—"

"There's nothing in it we can use against him," Brandwine muttered, staring across at the *Bonaire's* oily decks.

"This changes everything around," I said, scowling. "If he didn't know about the letter . . . Then the only reason he could have for staying is that lucky break he got getting transferred to the *Bonaire* where he'll be as good as in command."

BRANDWINE still stared at the *Bonaire*. Heat shimmered from her decks and you could smell the dangerous reek of oil fumes.

"I had him transferred to the *Bonaire* this morning," Brandwine said slowly.

"You had him transferred!"

Brandwine nodded. I looked uneasily across at the *Bonaire's* sloppy decks just waiting for something to touch them off. Williams was hazing some of the crew to work cleaning up.

"Why?" I asked softly. "Because of Edith?"

He looked at me quickly. "You know? I didn't think you—"

"I wish I didn't know now," I muttered uneasily. "Brandwine," I said reluctantly, but firmly, "you can't do it."

He frowned at me. "Do what?"

I motioned hurriedly toward Williams on the *Bonaire's* oily forward deck.

"I know how anxious you are to get rid of him. But you should know murder won't gain you anything. And it will be murder when the *Bonaire* blows herself to—"

"You don't know what you're saying," he cut in.

"Good Lord, Brandwine," I said wretchedly, "you don't think I'd say this to you if—" I grasped his arm. "You've got to go over there and stop whatever you've—"

He braced against my pull on his arm. He stared at me.

"You've been working too hard. How long is it since you took a vacation?"

"You're the one who's let things get you," I insisted, trying to make him come with me. "Ten years you've been planning and hoping. Then you got that blow when Edith arrived married to Williams. You thought the monotony would break him, but it didn't. You thought you'd get something on him in that letter from New York, but you didn't."

"And now you're making a last attempt to . . . I'd probably try it myself if I were in your shoes, but I'd want you to stop me. You've got to listen to me and go over there."

He wouldn't budge. He just stood there and stared at me. I was tempted to yell a warning to Williams and his crew, but that would incriminate Brandwine. I didn't want that.

I wanted to save him. I wanted him to save himself. My voice rose frantically as I tried to get him into action.

"Look," I pointed at the pier where Edith was hurrying aboard the *Bonaire*. "Even Edith," I pleaded, "knowing she was wrong in marrying Williams, suspects what you're doing. You've got to get over there now, Brandwine. Snap out of it, man. I'll go a long way with you against Williams, but not this way."

He scowled at me and grabbed my arm in a grip of iron.

"You don't understand," he began.

"I do, and you know it," I said. "Don't you realize what you're doing? Edith is over there. You don't want to include her with Williams when . . . For the love of Pete, Brandwine, come on before it's too late."

He shook me. His eyes were piercing.

"Give me a chance to explain," he snapped.

But it was too late.

THERE was a sudden shout from the *Bonaire*. It sounded like Williams. The next instant there was a hollow boom, a sheet of flame over the whole forward deck of the *Bonaire*.

I saw Edith's dress flaring and Williams grabbing her as she fell. He dragged her back and wrapped her in his coat. Men shouted. Others cried out in pain. Several with flaming clothes dived off the far side of the ship.

Brandwine let go of me and grabbed the rail for support.

"I'm sorry, damn sorry for you," I shouted at him over my shoulder as I slid down the ladder from the bridge. Hans came dashing along the deck and followed me across to the *Bonaire*.

A seaman carried Edith's limp form down to the pier. A panicky guy with a seared face all but bowled me from my feet as he fled from the flaming tanker. The refinery whistle was shrieking.

I saw Williams barking orders at the pitiful handful of men he had aboard. His cap was gone. So were his eyelashes and eyebrows. His hair was singed white.

Williams grabbed me and yelled in my ear above the din.

"If she blows up here she'll set off the whole refinery. We've got to take her out of here. My engineer and his man dived overboard. Will you—"

"Cast off. Get to the wheel," I told him. "I'll tend to the engines."

Hans was beside us. His big bland face looked like a mass of melting candle grease.

"I go," he called to me. "You on the decks stay. Get someone the valves to shut."

I'd been thinking of those myself. Any tanks that were open would have to be closed off. I wasn't worrying so much about the full tanks. It was the empty ones full of gas that would rip the ship apart.

The forward mooring lines had burnt through. Williams was ordering a man to cut the afterlines.

"And when you finish that," I shouted, "check all valves on your way forward again."

He raced aft. Williams scrambled up to the bridge. I beat it into the nearest cabin and yanked open some lockers. I jammed my legs into a couple of pairs of trousers, bundled myself into all the coats I could find.

Coming out on deck again I saw Williams had the *Bonaire* clear of her berth. Out beyond the breakwater I glimpsed some shark fins. Black smoke swirled about me. I ran clumsily to the men with the fire hose.

"Douse me with that and keep it on me," I yelled.

I picked up a wrench, covered my nose and mouth with a wet towel and started forward through the fire. Roaring flames licked about me. The deck underfoot was like a hot griddle.

I didn't expect to save the tanker. I don't think any of us did. All we could hope for was to delay the inevitable explosion long enough to get the tanker away from the refinery, and long enough—I hoped—so that we could all get off alive.

I could hardly breath through the towel in the heat as I stumbled over the deck pipelines. Everything blurred before my watering eyes. Flames battled the spray from the fire hose.

I remember kneeling at the main valve for the forward tanks. Swearing at the wrench in my clumsy hands. Swearing at Sloppy Edward. Cursing Brandwine . . .

After that memory staggers the way I staggered about the burning deck until a grinding jolt from the tanker's keel pitched me headlong. I couldn't seem to get myself up.

I remember Williams charging through the black smoke and flame. He lifted me. I saw the skin on the back of his hand puff and split. I heard him shout as he carried me back.

"Everyone aft. Lower the boats."

Suddenly I felt him stop.

"... fire's spread, cut us off from the boats," a voice yelled.

"Overside, swim for it," Williams ordered.

"No, don't! Sharks!" We were trapped.

I heard swearing, then cheering. I forced my eyes open. A tanker was edging in toward the *Bonaire* to take us off. It was a risky chance for that plucky tanker captain. If the *Bonaire* blew up before he could pull away, or if his tanker went aground...

The tanker was the *Cabello*! I saw Brandwine on the starboard wing of the bridge. He was bellowing through a megaphone. No matter what he did now, I thought, he'd done his damage.

But I didn't think about that long. I was wondering who the devil was down in my engineroom on the *Cabello*, and would he treat my engines with care. Then I passed out.

I CAME to in the company hospital on Aruba. The next week was just a blur as I hovered between painful consciousness and deep blackness. In one of my waking moments I learned that Williams was still confined to his bed in another room. So was Brandwine who had been struck by a piece of flying metal when the *Bonaire* blew up.

And this morning Albert's letter arrived, asking me to tell him how we had been "heroes."

Heroes! Williams, a man who practically stole another man's sweetheart. Brandwine, an attempted murderer. And as for myself—I haven't yet corrected the impression that the fire was an accident. So that makes me an accessory after the fact. Heroes!

How can I try to explain a story like that, Ellen, to a growing kid like Albert?

But I know you'll understand my part in this, Ellen. You're pretty swell that way, and if I hadn't become marooned on this endless track of lost seamen I could have tried to be to you what my dead brother was.

You'll notice there's a bit extra in the monthly amount I'm sending you this time. Get Albert that catcher's mask for me, will you? Maybe it will side-track his disappointment at my not telling him the story of what happened here. I don't know just what I'm going to do, how it will all turn out, when we're well enough to face an investigation.

As ever,
John

Oranjestadt, Aruba
October 1, 1939

DEAR ELLEN:

I wish I hadn't had my other letter posted so promptly yesterday.

I was wrong in all my assumptions.

Briefly, this morning I was wheeled into another room to find Brandwine and Williams occupying it on the best of terms. And here's what I learned after a decidedly awkward and embarrassing time for me.

The entire cause of all that happened was not Brandwine, was not Williams. It was Edith!

It was she who proposed marriage to Williams on the way to Aruba. He didn't know till after the ceremony that Brandwine would be waiting for her.

And Brandwine hadn't been as disappointed as I'd thought, but he's not one to let on much what he's thinking. He'd given me his revolver though, because he thought Williams, expecting trouble, might try to goad him into action to get matters out in the open and settled.

Then he began to have his suspicions about Edith after that first time he met her on the island. From slips of the tongue she made he suspected she was paying too much attention to other men on the island.

So he not only began watching her every chance he had, but he'd also written to the detective agency in New York to check up regarding her dismissal from the governess job. The wife of her employer had fired her. The reason is obvious after the above.

Meanwhile Williams, who thought

Brandwine had been pretty square toward him, was also on to Edith and knew she was going to make a play for Brandwine again. So Williams, by borrowing money from me, planned to pay her passage from the island to prevent her causing any more trouble for himself and Brandwine. But she wouldn't go.

And Brandwine, when he received the letter from New York, was in a spot. He wasn't sure whether or not Williams suspected Edith, so he decided to play safe and let Williams speak up first, if at all. He liked Williams, so he had him transferred to the *Bonaire* to give him a better post and to give him more work to keep his mind off his troubles if he were on to Edith.

And as for the fire, you remember I mentioned the letter to Edith. She suspected Brandwine had been checking up on her. She knew she was finished on the island then.

She came down to the tanker to tell Williams she had changed her mind, she would leave. Before he could warn her, she struck a match to light a cigarette. When the fire burst into flame, she must have inhaled some of the flames . . .

Sloppy Edward has been discharged, and Williams will get command of the new tanker that will replace the *Bonaire*. He'll make good at it too.

Everything seems back to normal now, the normal monotony of our jobs. I hope times get better soon, Ellen, so you and

I can enjoy them together while we are still young. As ever,

John

Bayonne, New Jersey
October 15, 1939

DEAR UNCLE JOHN:

Thanks for the catcher's mask. Ma got your two letters, but all she said was that you *was* a hero and she wouldn't tell me any more. Know why?

You're soon going to tell me yourself.

I mean, Ma and me are coming to Aruba. We're going to live with you in one of those stucko houses.

I wondered why Ma made up her mind so suddenlike, and she said something about you're only young once whether you're in Bayonne or Aruba and that it's time people stopped waiting for better times and tried to make each other happy right now.

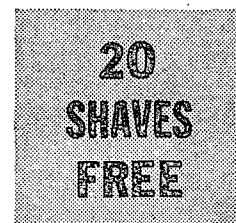
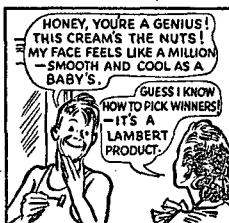
Gee, am I happy. I can hardly wait until the tanker bringing us sails from Bayonne next week, and Ma acts the same, and when she asked me if I'd like to have you for a pop I told her she didn't have to ask.


We'll be seeing you Uncle John, I mean Pop.

Albert

P.S. Stinky Pendarvis, he's the one who said you wasn't a hero because you wasn't a real sailor, says you are both now. And he said it without me having to blacken his other eye.

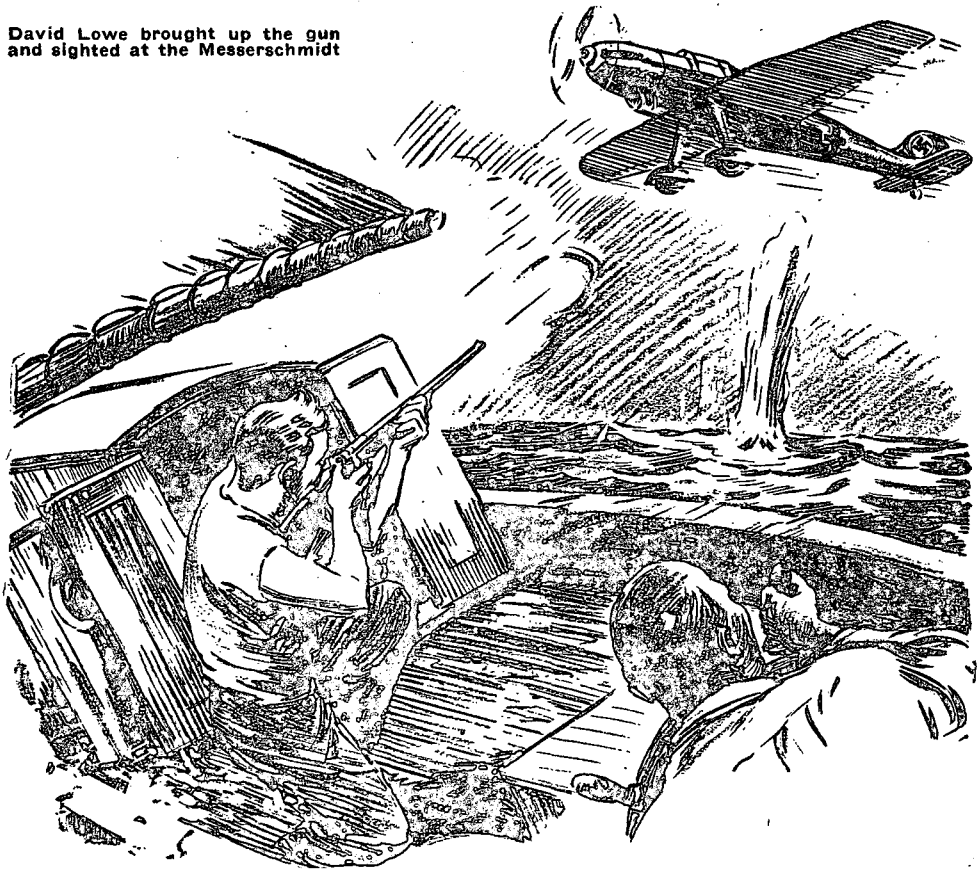
WOMEN KNOW WHY THIS FREE OFFER WORKS!




 Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 117, St. Louis, Mo. Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of ☐ Listerine Shaving Cream; ☐ Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)

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David Lowe brought up the gun
and sighted at the Messerschmidt



Dark Thunder

By ROBERT CARSE

Start now this powerful novel of international intrigue in the Caribbean

DAVID LOWE, foreign correspondent, comes to Paris, exhausted from the horror of the Spanish War. But in the days following his nervous tension and despair are miraculously relieved; he meets a beautiful German girl, and he finds himself swiftly falling in love with her. She is Margett Von Rudvig, whose family has lived for several generations in Haiti; her brother Ernst, a Condor pilot, has been wounded in Spain, and she has come to take him home to Haiti. Her admirer and constant attendant is Colonel

Count Maxim Spelke, a high Nazi officer; he warns David Lowe to cease his attentions to Margett, and finally Spelke's Storm Troop thugs beat up the American.

LOWE returns to Spain for a few months, and then he goes to New York. There, in a bar frequented by *Falangist* Spaniards, he meets Margett once again, with her brother and Spelke. But this meeting has been engineered—by Lowe's two friends, Brick Haneagan, his managing editor, and John Folsom, a major in Army Intelligence. They know why Spelke is accompanying the Von Rudvigs to Haiti; and they must use David Lowe. That night Lowe has only a word or two with Margett before he gets into a fight with Spelke, which eventually becomes a barroom free-for-all.

This story began in last week's Argosy

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