



Paramount

Heavy grease paint is prescribed for mechanical sandstorms

The Big Punch

By Rob Wagner

It raises your hair. But maybe it burned the star's off! For there's more drama in the movies than meets the public eye—and a thrillmaker's lot is not a happy one. Herein a member of the hardy tribe gives you—through Mr. Wagner—a confidential peep behind the punch. . . .

I LEARNED my fate from an astrologer. Not one of those long-whiskered old birds wearing a star-spangled nightie and a pointed hat, but a clean-shaven man of science named Astro—"Professor" Astro—located next to the shooting gallery on the Santa Monica Pleasure Pier. I wanted to learn why my life had been marked by tumult and terror, and I thought the professor could explain matters.

Here was my record: I was born during the terrible blizzard of '88; at four years of age I was shipwrecked on Lake Erie; I went through the first St. Louis cyclone; I nearly lost my life in the Baltimore fire; and darned if I wasn't sailing into the Bay of Tokyo when the earthquake wrecked the works.

And now, by gad, here I was, reproducing all the terrifying cataclysms of God and man just to put big punches into motion pictures. The question was: Why should I, who craved nothing more than a book of verses underneath the bough, a jug of wine—good wine!—and an amiable Thou, have been picked upon by the gods for a life of chaos and confusion?

Well, Professor Astro figured it out in five minutes. After first taking down the date of my birth, he turned to his zodiacal chart, showing a nude man shamelessly agape at the abdomen, and surrounded by bugs, fishes and Gemini—whatever they are. Discovering therein my numerator, he began to do some fancy figuring from a wonderful chart of the heavens. The quotient was my complex—or simplex, as it turned out to be.

It seems that I came into the world under very disturbing influences, for on that fatal day Uranus was skidding down the Milky Way, Aries (the Ram) was butting Neptune, and Mercury, crossing the path of Venus, had stopped to rubber—with disastrous results!

It was something like that. In any event, I have no more chance of attaining peace and quiet on this earth than the proprietor of a cat-and-dog hospital. Even my name, "Buster" Bangs, seems entirely lacking in repose.

The joke of it is, I came to California to get away from the rough stuff, but after experiencing what they modestly call a temblor—realtorese for earthquake—I saw there was no chance of my beating the game, so I deliberately went in to capitalize my cataclysmic adventures. I got a job on the technical staff of the old Fine Arts Studio in Hollywood.

Ain't Nature Grand? No

My first chance came when they were making a cyclone story. After seeing the rushes, I went to Joe Aller, my boss, and told him the technique was blah-blah.

"Buildings aren't blown over in cyclones," I said, "they explode! It isn't the push of the storm that lays 'em flat; it's the vacuum caused by the storm passing over them. In St. Louis there were whole streets where the houses had dropped down one story. You could step right into the second story from the lawns. That was because in the



Universal

Fifteen pounds of black powder raise ructions in *The Trail of the Tiger*

heat of the day they closed the downstairs windows but left those upstairs open. When the storm came the upstairs air could escape, but downstairs it had to blow the walls out in its effort to fill the vacuum."

The next day I was on the set directing the first cyclone in pictures that was ever made right. Since that day I have been technically directing nature's most spectacular convulsions, as well as concocting human dastardies that nature would be ashamed to pull.

Curiously enough, our bosses have forbidden us to tell this end of picture-making on the ground that it will destroy the illusion! But at last they are beginning to realize the high price they are paying for this naïve decision.

The fans, realizing that we could not possibly arrange our shooting schedules to be present at an earthquake or cyclone, know that such scenes are artifice rather than realism. The worst part of it is, these blasé meal-tickets of ours are firmly convinced that everything we

do is trick-camera work. They yawn at our grandest punches.

In this article I shall try to restore the kick, for, believe it or not, brother, there is more drama in the making of some of our big punches than ever shows on the screen.

Not Genuine Enough

Take the ship stuff. Did you ever take a snapshot of a real storm? If so, you know how flat and tame it appears upon the photographic print. Furthermore, the bigger the storm the less light there is to shoot by. No: real storms are utterly blah in motion pictures. As in every other art, we have to create impressions and compensate for nature's deficiencies.

It is true that we may shoot the long, establishing shot at sea or in a miniature, but the real rough stuff aboard ship has to be done on the lot. The deck and superstructure of the ship are built upon a huge rocker surrounded by high

trestles holding aloft immense tanks filled with thousands of gallons of water. Wind machines and lightning gadgets complete the equipment.

These storm scenes are almost invariably shot at night for the double reason that a night storm is more menacing than one made by daylight and that the darkness forms a huge cycloramic background which blocks out the rest of the lot. There may be a street or a temple set within fifty feet of the ship's deck, but it is lost in the mystery of the night.

A while ago the DeMille studio was shooting *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, and the action called for the crashing of the mast to the deck. The complication lay in the fact that Virginia Bradford, in the character of the skipper's daughter, was lashed to it.

It would have been a simple matter to arrange a breakaway mast that would fall over with a dummy, or even a double, lashed to the top side. But the director wished a more sensational scene. The mast must make a complete turn in falling, and in so doing swing close to the camera so that there might be no doubt that Virginia was indeed making the scene; then, finishing the turn, it must fall so that she would be on the top side.

That was where the technical staff came in for a bunch of headaches, for obviously we could not rehearse such action and smash up a perfectly good and expensive set. Furthermore, we were responsible for the bones, and possibly the life, of a valuable and charming star.

For several days we figured our stresses and strains and the pitching and rolling of the ship, and then finally arranged our guide and tensile wires. As there would be no chance of hearing directions shouted, in competition with

the roaring of the wind machines, we had to work from pantomimic signals given by the technical director, who stood beside the camera with a spotlight full upon him.

On the night scheduled for the shot we were all as nervous as wire-haired fox terriers, but we didn't dare show it for fear the courageous little star should feel the contagion. After the usual preliminary shots showing the fury of the storm, at a signal from the T. D., a bolt of lightning struck the mast and gradually it began to fall. Then with a lurch of the ship it started to swing around in its prescribed circle.

Not So Easy!

For an instant it looked as though it had got away and would fall straight over on the camera crew and kill a lot of others besides the star. But a signal to crew No. 4 pulled it back into place. Gradually it swung around past the cameras and both Virginia's identity and horrified expression were beautifully registered. Then it crashed to the deck, with Virginia on top! Oh, brother, we were glad when that scene was finished.

Perhaps you can visualize the corrugated brows that appeared in the technical department of the Lasky studio when handed the script of *The Ten Commandments*. The Biblical sequences, as you may remember, were from the Old Testament, and the Old Testament, as you probably don't remember, is just one grand procession of cataclysms.

The crashing of the heavens on Mount Sinai was enough to give us pause, but Pharaoh and his host swallowed up by the Red Sea! It's easy for these scenario birds to write such scenes into the script! But do it!

Well—there are no buts in our game. If they want a set of Heaven on Stage Three by noon on Thursday, we have to deliver in spite of Hell.

The Mount Sinai storm was, up to this time, the biggest punch we had ever staged, both in the immensity of the set and the number of people employed. DeMille was directing the whole scene; "Hezzy" Tate, his assistant, was directing the crowds and mechanical effects; Pomeroy, head of the technical staff, was in charge of the crews of ten wind machines, ten lightning gadgets, dust throwers, prop boys, grips and juicers. So complex became the cues for the various crews that their signals had to be worked from a keyboard like a typewriter.

At certain counts wind machines Nos. 1 and 7 must be turned loose, then lightning gadget No. 3 must flash, followed by more wind machines, dust and flashes. Finally the bolt that strikes the Golden Calf must be fired and—oh, oh, oh!—if Hezzy should strike the wrong key!

As a rule, when such scenes are begun we go right through with them and depend upon the cutting in of close shots in case anything goes wrong with the main action. On this occasion we had barely started when, for some reason or other—perhaps to try out his new amplifiers which he was using for the first time—C. B. called, "Cut!" Nothing stopped, for nobody heard him.

"Cut! Cut!" he yelled into the microphone. But on went the action with well-rehearsed precision. "Say, Hezzy, can you stop the damn' fools?" he cried to his assistant. Hezzy jumped up and began to wave his arms like a windmill. Still the show went on. C. B. next turned to Pomeroy. The technical chief raised his hand, and the storm was over! His crews—responsible for the tumult—were watching their own director.

That scene was comparatively easy. But the Red Sea! Not so easy! Naturally there was a lot of trick work in the long shots, but when it came to the close stuff of Pharaoh and his horses being overwhelmed we had to use real water. The script called for a running shot showing the horses tearing ahead of a wall of water that was about to engulf the whole works. Rather than shoot the picture from an automobile "dolly" we decided it would be better to have the cameras standing still and the horses running on a treadmill.

The Big Splash

The set was built, and for six weeks those horses actually lived on that treadmill. During the first weeks we walked them; later on they cantered; finally we got them to run like mad. And they loved it! Then in the sixth week we began to dump a little water on them—gradually at first—until they were used to their daily ducking.

At last everything was set for the big splash—which, of course, we couldn't rehearse. At the call of camera the boys started to crank.

On came the horses with Pharaoh lashing them to greater speed. Closer and closer they were allowed to approach the cameras, with more and more water being dumped on them.

Then, at a flash from Pomeroy, the technical chief, the triggers of the big tanks were pulled and tons of water came tumbling down in an engulfing and terrifying torrent. It's nobody's business how Pharaoh and the horses were saved from complete annihilation, but just tell any one of them that that scene was made from a miniature, and see what happens.

Perhaps you remember Doug Fairbanks riding a phantom horse across high heaven in *The Thief of Bagdad*.

Well, it took over a month to train that horse for his high and lofty flight. The first week he walked up an incline carefully guarded by fences. The next week he galloped. The following week he galloped with one fence removed, then with both fences removed and finally with the blinding lights turned on. One minute on the screen and one month to make! Do you wonder that pictures cost money?

And oh, the grief in fire scenes! This also is stuff that can't be rehearsed, for production managers would never O. K. the rebuilding of expensive sets just to let us technical hounds have a chance to practice. No, we've got to anticipate every possible contingency and then prepare for it. But with all our care accidents are always turning us gray.

The scenario department has a habit of giving us forest-fire scenes. They seem to think that all we have to do is to go up into the high Sierras and set fire to a couple of square miles of virgin pine or redwood. The fact that the Forest Service spends its time protecting the trees from just such holocausts is not even guessed at. When we explain this they say: "That's your problem. If you can't get a forest, build one." So we build a miniature for the long shots, but we've actually got to build an acre or two of real forest to shoot the close stuff.

A Real Cataclysm

Last summer, however, we had a bit of luck. I got a letter from a forest-ranger friend of mine that they were going to burn a long, wide strip, up in the mountains back of Big Bear, as a clearing for the Edison high-power line running down from Lake Elizabeth. Dropping everything, we secretly gathered our cast and crew together, and the next day beat it off 150 miles into the mountains to grab some scenes before any of the other picture companies heard the news.

Well, it was grand stuff. But as we were not in charge of operations, Harry Garson, who was shooting, had only two hours in which to frame our big punch, which nearly spelled curtains for our handsome and husky star.

The big scene was to occur when the hero came staggering through the burning embers into the foreground, just as a huge blazing tree fell across his path and all but crushed him to the ground. Of course the tree was intended to fall in front of him, and he was instructed to fake the fall.

Great stuff! But how to get it? Sure, the rangers could knock over the tree in any spot we indicated. "Set your stake where you want it to fall and the tree will drive it in," said the chief ranger proudly. Harry marked the spot, and while we were rehearsing and timing the action the rangers went to it. First studying the perpendicular of the tree and the center of gravity of the foliage aloft, they began chopping in their peculiar way. Finally it was notched and wedged until one or two hard blows would start the monster over. The rangers then withdrew to watch us do our stuff. We hopped right to it and immediately squirted the tree with gasoline as far up as our hose would reach. Nature's cataclysms are too tame for pictures!

Everything was now set, and Garson called for action. Two blows started the tree slowly falling, and the actor came forward, timing his action to arrive about three feet back of the stake just as the tree came crashing down. Bang-o! What a beautiful spatter!

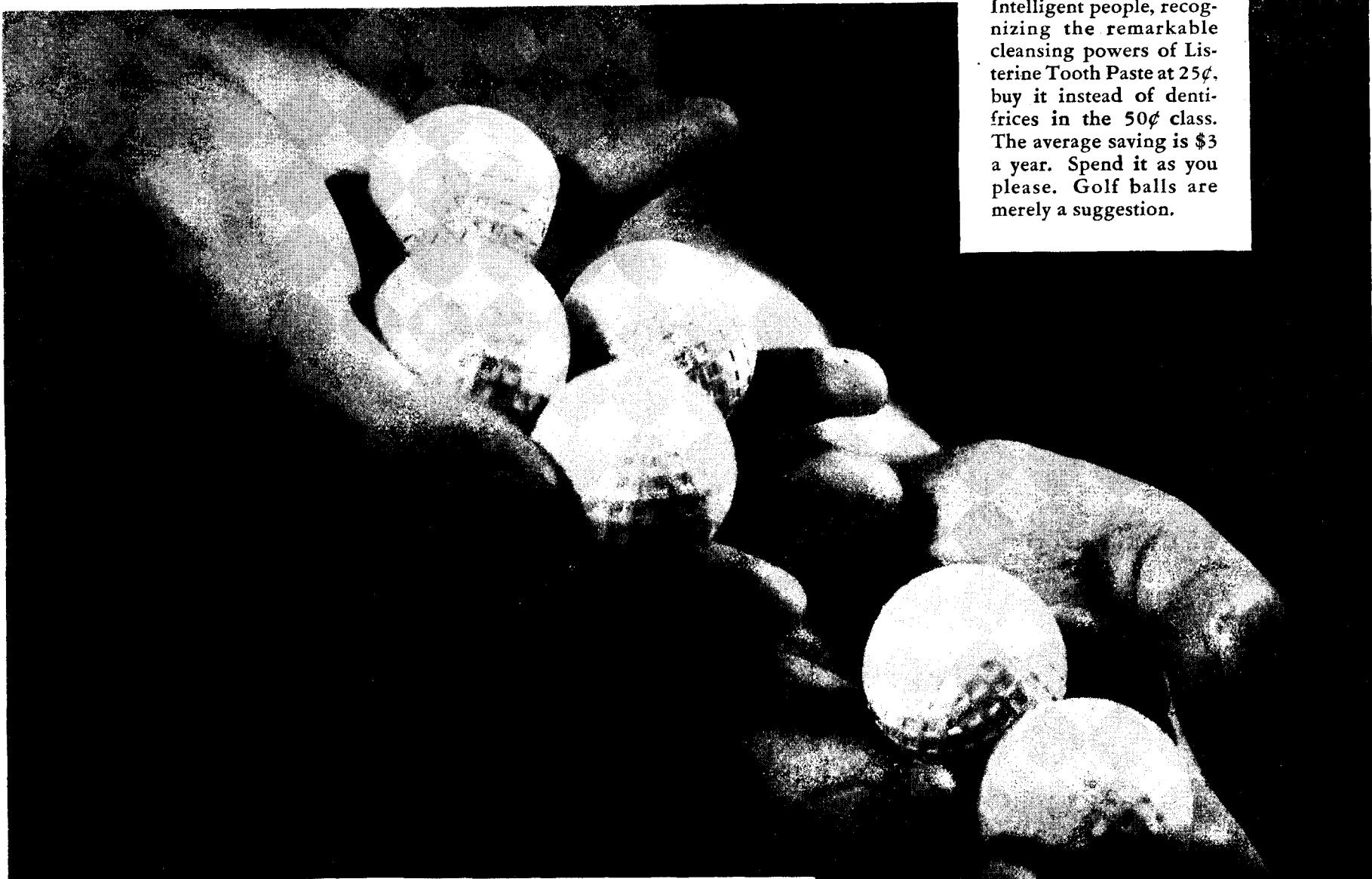
As the smoke cleared we waited for him to stagger to his feet as per schedule. But no hero. Fearing to spoil the scene, we (Continued on page 75)



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LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE

April Escapade

By Kathleen Norris

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Mary Kate's look got no farther than the invalid's face. Her breath rose on a quick gasp. For a second she wavered as if she were going to faint

The Story Thus Far:

MARY KATE O'HARA, beautiful San Francisco girl, is offered a large sum of money by Christopher Steynes, young, handsome, wealthy, if she will pose as his wife for twenty-four hours. Steynes, it appears, is in danger of being dragged into matrimony by a Russian countess; he hopes, by producing a "wife," to escape.

The girl's family is poor. Martin, her older brother (who acts as chauffeur for old Doctor van Antwerp, of Burlingame), needs money to enable him to study medicine in Germany. To enable Martin to realize his dream, Mary Kate accepts Steynes' strange offer.

Telling her fiancé, Cass Keating, and her family that she is going to Sacramento, on business, she journeys to Burlingame, fashionable suburb of San Francisco; goes to Steynes' beautiful rented estate, El Hogar; dines, with her "husband," at the home of Gordon Rountree, her employer, a close friend of Steynes; meets the Russian countess, and effectively blasts her matrimonial hopes. After which, very late, she returns to El Hogar with Steynes, and retires.

A few minutes later, a burglar enters her room. Mary Kate, terrified, rushes to Steynes' bedroom and rouses him. Together they notify the servants and phone the police. After which, Steynes shoots the intruder—one Tony Moody—wounding him seriously. The victim is carried away, and Mary Kate is forced to reveal her true name and address.

The following day, after telling her story to the police, Mary Kate returns to her home. Martin, she learns, is away—driving Doctor van Antwerp to Portland; and she notes, with relief, that the newspapers have not mentioned her. But she is miserable. Steynes is sailing in a few days. She has told him she must never see him again. And she is wild to be with him.

Overwrought, full of fears, she confesses (in part) to her fiancé, who is shocked but sympathetic. Then Steynes telephones her. "You've got to lunch with me tomorrow," he tells her. "There've been new developments, and we're in trouble!"

VIII

ALIGHT sweet spring rain was falling next morning, but for Mary Kate the sun of no remembered April had ever shone so bright. The sun was behind the rain anyway, burning and sparkling through it; the acacia trees in people's gardens, and the lilacs at the florist's all sent sweetness into the warm air, and the streets flashed and shone, and were full of good-natured persons in new mackintoshes.

It was a pretty rain; not a deluge with a wind sweeping it about, and gutters running coffee, and umbrellas

crashing against each other, but just a sifting of drops not much heavier than mist, through the air, making the green grass spectacularly green, and beading the first of the year's flowers with thousands of trembling little pearls.

Mary Kate had a blue and green plaid raincoat; Mart had given it to her for Christmas. So she did not even have to carry an umbrella, and reached the office with her face washed rosily and her copper-wire hair curled all about her brow and ears, in a hundred little rebel tendrils.

The office seemed attractive, somehow, as she hung up her things, and settled down to her morning's work. The place was in speckless order, radiator clanking, telephones and typewriters in perfect array, brightness of oak wood and flashing nickel and brass on all sides. And the big windows that looked out over all the city were beaded with rain.

She stood at a window, loving it all; the hotels at the top of California Street hill, and the cable cars gonging and rattling, and the little creeping beetles that were motor cars, slipping and passing one another, in the streets. The traffic in Chinatown was in a hopeless jumble, as usual. Ferryboats, under a low gray sky, cut long gray wakes in a level gray bay. The smoke from a coffee-roasting establishment rose white in the air, and sank again, and clung to the roofs of the buildings.

This was at nine. At ten o'clock she could hardly breathe, and before eleven felt fairly ill with expectation and sus-

pense. Her hands were cold, her cheeks burning, and she kept swallowing with a dry mouth. With her utmost effort she could not keep her mind upon what she was supposedly doing.

The younger Delaney was talking to her seriously about the insurance on a new garage on the Bakersfield place. He thought there should be some insurance on it, and would take it up with Mr. Rountree. Insurance was very heavy on a garage, and at the same time—

"Will you incorporate that in a memorandum, and give it to me before twelve o'clock?"

WHAT on earth was the man talking about? Ten minutes past eleven. Her mouth was salty; her heart beat as if it would tear her to pieces.

Sitting at her typewriter, with her back to the room, she heard his quiet voice behind her, and the whole world split into pieces, and shook and wheeled.

"Will you do that then, Gordy? You're awfully decent—"

Chris's voice. She had to turn. But he was not looking her way. He stood, very tall and broad, only a few feet away from her, wearing an old tan raincoat that was spattered with just as much rain as would fall on a man who had hurried from a taxi to a building's street door.

"Good morning," he said, coming around to face her. Their eyes did not meet.

"Oh, good morning."

"All set?"

Illustrated by
Charles Lassell

"Oh, is it already—" Hypocritically, she looked at the office clock. "It's after twelve!" she exclaimed.

"How 'bout it?"

"Two minutes." And suddenly quite sobered and restored to reason, she was putting on her hat and raincoat. The agonies of expectation were over; here was reality, the perfectly simple reality of going out to lunch with a certain young man. The dream come true was somehow much, much less than the dream had been.

Out in the street, his umbrella over her, and the bright drizzle still falling, he paused at a florist's window.

"Flowers?"

They went in. And the richly scented damp atmosphere that to Mary Kate was associated only with funerals, met them with a rush.

"What do you want? Let us see the orchids—"

"Oh, no, the violets! I like them a thousand times better—"

Chris paid for a great shaggy bunch, dripping with sweetness.

"Shall we go up to the Fairmont Hotel? We've got to talk."

The intimation of affairs in common thrilled her; her face was radiant.

"But we don't need a taxi!" she protested, at the curb. "The California Street car goes right to the corner."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake—" he said patiently. And the magic began to work again, and her senses to swim.

THEY went up the hill in the taxi with only monosyllabic comments on the weather and the traffic, and were presently in the great wide acacia-scented foyer of the hotel. Walking straight through the building to the big dining-room at the back, they were placed at a little table by a window that looked down across wet shining roofs, and the long line of the ferry buildings and the piers, to the gray waters of the bay.

The magic—the magic—the magic. Musicians began to play an old-fashioned German waltz; Mary Kate knew it, played it (Continued on page 29).