



ACME

AT FIRST the shells went over: you could hear the thud as they left the Fascists' guns, a sort of groaning cough, then you heard them fluttering toward you. As they came closer the sound went faster and straighter and sharper and then, very fast, you heard the great booming noise when they hit.

But now, for I don't know how long—because time didn't mean much, they had been hitting on the street in front of the hotel, and on the corner, and to the left in the side street. When the shells hit that close, it was a different sound. The shells whistled toward you—it was as if they whirled at you—faster than you could imagine speed, and, spinning that way, they whined: the whine rose higher and quicker and was a close scream—and then they hit and it was like granite thunder. There wasn't anything to do, or anywhere to go: you could only wait. But waiting alone in a room that got dustier and dustier as the powdered cobblestones of the street floated into it was pretty bad.

I went downstairs into the lobby, practicing on the way how to breathe. You couldn't help breathing strangely, just taking the air into your throat and not being able to inhale it.

It seemed a little crazy to me to be living in a hotel, like a hotel in Des Moines or New Orleans, with a lobby and wicker chairs in the lounge, and signs on the door of your room telling you that they would press your clothes immediately and that meals served privately cost ten per cent more, and meantime it was like a trench when they lay down an artillery barrage. The whole place trembled to the explosion of the shells.

The concierge was in the lobby and he said to me, apologetically, "I regret this, Mademoiselle. It is not pleasant. I can guarantee you that the bombing in November was worse. However, it is regrettable."

I said yes, indeed, it was not very nice, was it? He said that perhaps I had better take a room in the back of the house, which might be safer. On the other hand, the rooms were not so agreeable; there was less air. I said of course there wouldn't be so much air. Then we stood in the lobby and listened.

You could only wait. All over Madrid, for fifteen days now, people had been waiting. You waited for the shelling to start, and for it to end, and for it to start again. It came from three directions, at any time, without warning and without purpose. Looking out the door, I saw people standing in doorways all around the square, just standing there patiently, and then suddenly a shell landed, and there was a fountain of granite cobblestones flying up into the air, and the silver lyddite smoke floated off softly.

Street Scene, A. D. 1937, Madrid. When the shells begin to burst in your street the thing to do is go somewhere else as quickly as possible

This is Madrid, a large city, a modern city. People are living here and doing business. Elevators run; children go to school (hurry at the next corner; it's a bad crossing). And men drink beer, pausing occasionally to listen (you can tell how close a shell is by its whine). You spend your days and nights in waiting—waiting for the shelling to begin or waiting for it to stop. Miss Gellhorn shows you what life is like when death stalks the streets—and frequently comes indoors



ACME

You take your chances, for there is no shelter anywhere from the death that screams through the night and spreads destruction where it falls



You have been through many bombardments; you have learned that you can tell, from the shriek of the oncoming shell, where it will land—sometimes

twisted iron and stood upright and silly against the wall.

"Oh, my," the concierge said miserably.

"Look, Conchita," one of the maids said to the other; "look at the hole there is in 219 too."

"Oh," one of the youngest maids said, "imagine, it has also spoiled the bathroom in 218."

The journalist who lived in that room had left for London the day before.

"Well," the concierge said, "there is nothing to do. It is very regrettable."

The maids went back to work. An aviator came down from the fifth floor. He said it was disgusting; he had two days leave and this sort of thing went on. Moreover, he said, a shell fragment had hit his room and broken all his toilet articles. It was inconsiderate; it wasn't right. He would now go out and have a beer. He waited at the door for a shell to land, and ran across the square, reaching the café across the street just before the next shell. You couldn't wait forever; you couldn't be careful all day.

Later, you could see people around Madrid examining the new shell holes with curiosity and wonder. Otherwise they went on with the routine of their lives, as if they had been interrupted by a heavy rain-storm but nothing more. In a café which was hit in the morning, where three men were killed sitting at a table reading their morning papers and drinking coffee, the clients came back in the afternoon. You went to Chicote's bar at the end of the day, walking up that street which was No Man's Land, where you could hear the shells whistling even when there was silence, and the bar was crowded as always. On the way you had passed a dead horse and a very dead mule, chopped with shell fragments, and you had passed crisscrossing trails of human blood on the pavement.

You would be walking down a street, hearing only the city noises of streetcars and automobiles and people calling to one another, and suddenly, crushing it all out, would be that huge stony deep booming of a falling shell, at the corner. There was no place to run, because how did you know that the next shell would not be behind you, or ahead, or to the left or right? And going indoors was fairly silly too, considering what shells can do to a house.

So perhaps you went into a store because that was what you had intended doing before all this started. Inside a shoe shop, five women are trying on shoes. Two girls are buying summery sandals, sitting by the front window of the shop. After the third close explosion, the salesman says politely: "I think we had better move farther back into the shop. The window might break and cut you."

Women are standing in line, as they do all over Madrid, quiet women, dressed usually in black, with market baskets on their arms, waiting to buy food. A shell falls across the square. They turn their heads to look, and move a little closer to the house, but no one leaves her place in line. (Continued on page 64)

A little Spaniard with a lavender shirt, a ready-made bow tie and bright brown eyes was standing in the door watching this with interest. There was also no reason for the shells to stay out of the hotel. They could land inside that door as well as anywhere else. Another shell hit, halfway across the street, and a window broke gently and airily, making a lovely tinkling musical sound.

I was watching the people in the other doorways, as best I could, watching those immensely quiet, stretched faces. You had a feeling you had been waiting here forever, and yesterday you felt the same way. The little Spaniard said to me, "You don't like it?"

"No."

"Nothing," he said. "It is nothing. It will pass. In any case, you can only die once."

"Yes," I said, but without enthusiasm.

We stood there a moment, and there was silence. Before this the shells had been falling one a minute.

"Well," he said, "I think that is all. I have work to do. I am a serious man. I cannot spend my time waiting for shells. *Salud*," he said, and walked

out calmly into the street, and calmly crossed it.

Seeing him, some other men decided the shelling was finished too, and presently people were crossing that square, which now was pock-marked with great round holes, and littered with broken cobblestones and glass. An old woman with a market basket on her arm hurried down a side street. And two boys came around the corner, arm in arm, singing.

It's All Very Regrettable

I went back to my room, and again suddenly there came that whistle-whine-scream-roar and the noise was in your throat and you couldn't feel or hear or think and the building shook and seemed to settle. Outside in the hall, the maids were calling to one another, like birds, in high excited voices. The concierge ran upstairs looking concerned and shaking his head. On the floor above, we went into a room in which the lyddite smoke still hung mistily. There was nothing left in that room, the furniture was kindling wood, the walls were stripped and in places torn open, a great hole led into the next room and the bed was



Business will resume at this Madrid street corner tomorrow, when some of the litter is cleared away



Home from the wars is this Spanish fighter—but only for lunch. His fighting front is just around the corner

THE wall in front of me was painted a muddy shade of brown and there wasn't anything on it but a couple of white streaks where the plaster had cracked and a sign that said all extra talent must be hired through Central Casting. I wondered if they deliberately made those offices that depressing so you'd be discouraged and go away. Then I got up from that hard bench and walked around a few times; it was better than sitting down forever. I tapped on the glass panel and the girl at the switchboard slid it open.

"Hey, Irene," I said, "give Howard a ring again, will you? I've been here for hours."

The way she looked at me I knew she didn't think it would do any good but she pushed a plug in and pressed the key a couple of times. "Bob MacAllister's still here," she said and listened. Then she jerked the line out and let it drop.

"He says you'll have to wait a while or else come back in the morning." The board buzzed and she flipped another cam. "Casting," she said and slid the panel closed.

Well, it certainly didn't sound promising. Howard had been telling me for a month I was a cinch for the part but, after all, it's the director who has the final say. This guy Sterner was new and I didn't know him. And they'd been shooting for three days; it was about time I had an interview if I was going to work in the picture at all. It was getting late in the afternoon but when I got as far as the door I turned around and sat down again. Maybe Howard really was busy. I'd better wait.

The bench was getting hard enough to make me think about it when the door opened and a girl came in. She was a nice-looking kid even if she wasn't exactly the type to make producers start jumping around waving contracts. Her hair was pale yellow, like new corn silk, but it wasn't bright enough to photograph and she had that very fair skin you only begin to describe when you call it translucent. Well, that wouldn't photograph especially either. But she was slim and graceful and she had a little straight nose with a flock of tiny golden freckles around it. I especially liked the freckles.

SHE looked around the office as if she were scared and then she crossed to the window and tapped on the glass at Irene. She tapped very gently. "Please," she said, "may I see Mr. Bello? I'm Miss Reyburn and I think he expects me."

The way she said it nobody else would think so. Certainly not Irene. Girls trying to crash pictures weren't new to her.

"Casting's between nine and twelve," she said. "You'd better come back then."

"But I'm sure he's expecting me." Sure, she probably had a letter from her home-town exhibitor. She was the type to make a big hit playing Grazia in *Death Takes a Holiday* in the local Little Theater. I heard Irene ringing Howard but evidently he didn't answer.

"He's stepped out of his office," Irene said. "You can sit down and wait if you want to." She didn't sound hopeful.

"Thank you." The girl sat down on the bench facing me. She opened her bag and I could guess she was looking for a cigarette. She didn't find one.

I thought I saw her look over at me but I was in a spot. I had only some loose ones in my pocket from that pack I'd split with Jerry and they were a little battered. Then I turned so she couldn't see me and investigated. A couple of them were pretty fair so I pulled them out as if I were fishing them out of a pack and stuck one in my mouth. Then I held up the other one to her and grinned. She smiled back and I walked over and handed it to her.

"I knew that was what you wanted,"

I said. She was leaning over when I held out my lighter for her and I could see the back of her neck. There were little golden freckles there, too.

"Thanks." She blew the smoke out as if she hadn't had one for a long time. "I just ran out."

Yeah, I thought, ran out of cash. I sat down on the bench alongside her and said, "I'm glad you came in; I was getting lonesome. I've been waiting for Howard an hour myself."

"Oh! Do you always have to wait?"

I decided her eyes might come over all right with a good make-up, they were a nice clear blue. "Sure," I said, "unless he wants to see you. Mostly it's a way of telling you no business. But nobody ever says that right out in Hollywood; it's against all precedent."

She looked serious for a minute. "Yes," she said, "so I've heard. And other things."

"Other things?" She was looking for a place to drop her ashes and I reached over and tapped them off on the floor. "Like what?"

"Oh, people saying what they don't mean and making promises they don't keep—things like that."

"Well, I guess they do that everywhere," I said, "but I'll admit there seems to be a high percentage of it here. I ought to know!" I was a little sore at the world right then.

"I'm sorry." She looked as though she really meant it. Then her face brightened up as if she'd found a gold mine. "Ooh!" she said. "I thought you looked familiar! Didn't you play in *The Lancer*? The young lieutenant who gets killed? Why, you were marvelous!"

"That was quite a while ago," I said, "and I only wish a few directors had as good a memory as you have." But I couldn't help grinning the way she got excited about it. It made me feel good to have her remember.

SHE was wrinkling up the clear skin between her straight eyebrows. "Of course, I wouldn't remember your name," she said. "I'm embarrassed."

"You shouldn't be," I told her, "it isn't that important. And it's Robert MacAllister—Bob to you, please."

"Mine's Ann Reyburn." She was having trouble with the cigarette again and then she dropped it on the floor and stepped on it. "See? I'm getting used to Hollywood customs already. No doubt of my being a success!" She leaned back on the bench and laughed. She was completely natural about it, kidding herself, and I thought she was swell. Much too good to have this town ruin her. I dropped my cigarette and leaned over to her.

"Look," I said, "this is none of my

business but I can't help saying it. I'll bet you come from some nice small town and you've got a family there and people that love you. Right?"

She nodded her head so the blond curls shook.

"All right," I said, "go on back there. Go back there before you find out what it is to bang your head against concrete walls and get nothing for it but the bruises. Before you find out how rotten people can be to you—and before you learn the things you'll be asked to do to get a job." I was pretty well wound up by this time. But she was listening.

"I'm saying this to you because I think you're sweet. Well, you won't stay that way long if you try to earn a living around the studios from the outside looking in. You won't—"

The door from the inner offices opened and a little black-haired guy came out. He looked at us and walked through to the outside corridor and opened the door to the street. I looked at Ann and grinned. That broke it.

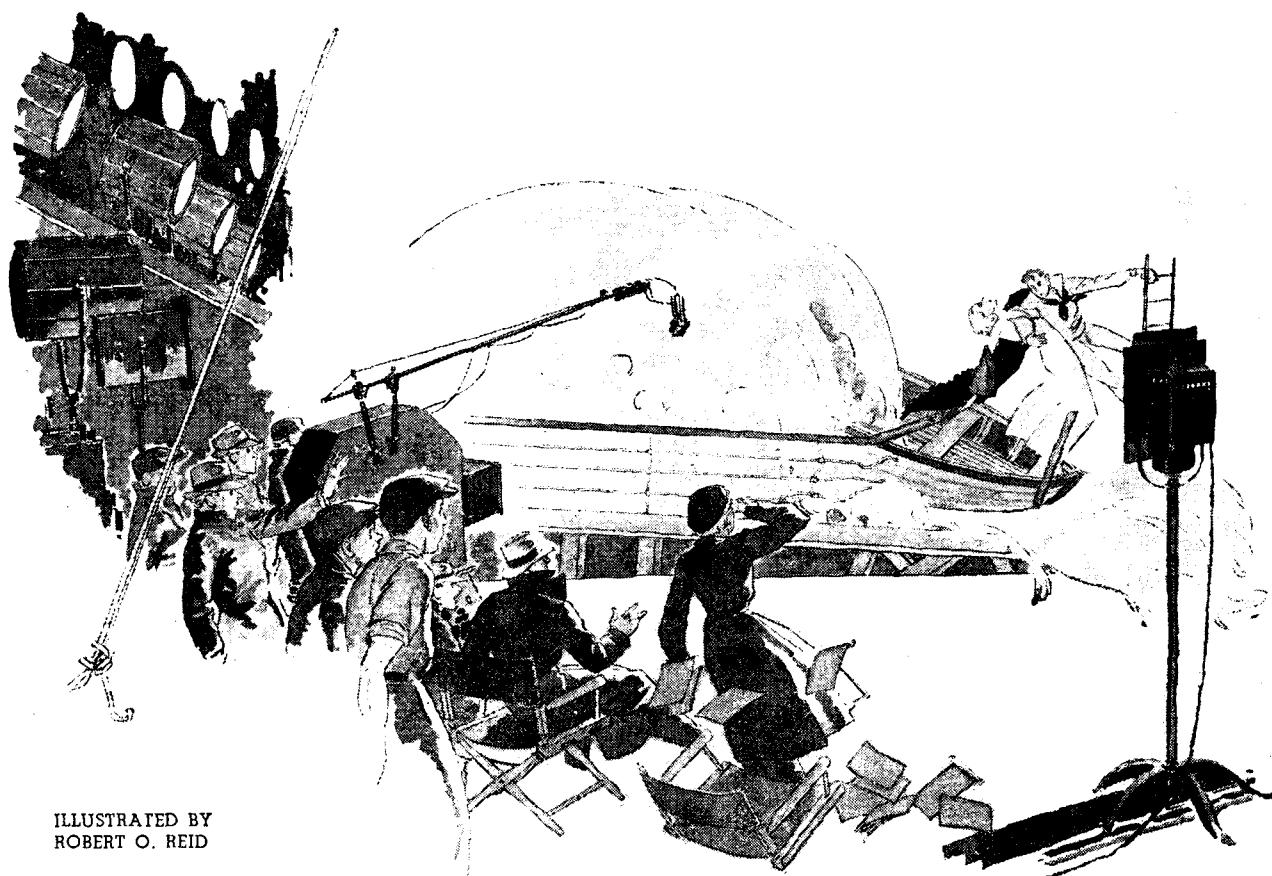
The little guy was calling to the lads that always hung around outside the casting office waiting to pick up last-minute calls on Westerns and action pictures. His voice was so big it surprised you.

"Billy!" he said. "Ambrose, Slim, you other three guys with the boots on. C'mere!"

Shipwreck by Arrangement

By Thomas Monroe

In which a Mr. MacAllister goes to sea against his better judgment. A refreshing tale of love and marine disaster, all of which happens in the magic confines of Hollywood



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