



A tongue of flame had leaped high above the bow of the vessel, suddenly illuminating the chaotic scene. "They've ignited the oil stores," Ramey said

Cargo to Wanping

By LaSelle Gilman

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE HOWE

An ammunition-loaded ship plows a midnight course to destruction—and to an even more exciting love story

WITH the coming of evening, the sea grew still and mirrored the green hills softly in its depths. No wind stirred the banyans along the water front, and in the west the sky flamed sudden scarlet, long after the sun had set. Watching it from the vantage point of his perch on the iron rail that guarded the bund, Clancy thought it the sun's farewell until he heard the belated rumble of the explosion in the distance. He sighed.

"There goes the Bridge of Infinite Tranquillity," he said to Celia Anlage, and his lips under the stubble of new beard twisted wryly.

She nodded. "I hope it's that and not my mission they're blowing up," she said.

She sat beside him and stared in silent fascination at the growing glow of flames above the jumbled plain of rooftops beyond the city. Now and then the sound of scattered rifle and machine-gun fire drifted to them in the quiet air, but the fighting was too far away, near the North Gate, for them to hear distinctly.

A unit of very weary-looking and dusty troops went thundering past in a brown army truck and swerved sharply into one of the narrow, tortuous streets leading from the bund to the north wall of Tahchow. But beyond that there was little sign of life, for the populace had long since evacuated into the surrounding hills and the streets were still and deserted. The refugees had fled in such haste that now the cobbles were littered with the boxes and bundles and miscellaneous debris they had dropped as they ran in panic when the unexpected attack was launched. That morning the invaders' planes had bombed the city. Now among the pitiful confusion of the streets, half buried in the rubble of blasted buildings, lay the bodies of the dead. No one had the time to pick them up. Not even the soldiers.

Clancy glanced sideways at Miss Anlage. It never ceased to be a wonder to him when he looked at her; he had known many missionary women in his lengthy and precarious career on the Coast and while he was not one to generalize on matters of such small interest to him, he had always been able to pick a female soul-saver out of a crowd in the treaty ports. It was the look in their eyes, the clothes they wore, the way they wore them, the way they walked and the set of their shoulders. But Celia Anlage had never conformed—except for the look in her gray eyes. He had known her for the three years she had been with the station in Tahchow, and every time he saw her or talked to her—which hadn't been very often—he marveled.

He was worried about her. She was alone now. She sat beside him on the rail, elbows on knees, small determined chin in hand, watching the fires. A little,

fragrant breeze loitered across the harbor and gently stirred her very fair hair and shook the silk scarf at her throat. All day she had been trying to help the battered victims of the bombs, yet her white linen suit was still neat and clean, or it looked clean in the gathering dusk. She had worked frantically in the heat and stench for hours, yet now she remained calm and detached. Her young face was grave, and he saw sadness etched in it. She seemed hardly more than a little girl, but he had seen her doing work that day that was not for any woman.

"Tired?" he asked. She nodded soberly. He wished he could put her to sleep on his shoulder—the shoulder that didn't have the bandage on it. He was unutterably tired himself, and hungry. Perhaps he'd better get out and scrounge around for something in the ruins.

"I wish I had a drink," he said absently.

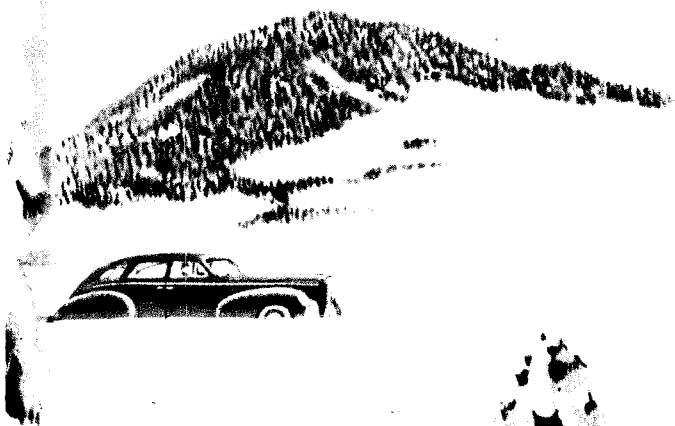
She chuckled, and the quiet mirth astonished him. "I wish you did, too, Brian," she said. "I wish I did myself. I've had only one drink in my life. Of course when father and mother were alive we never had anything in the mission; that would have been outrageous. And when I was back in school in the States we lived a rigorous life—no boys, no smoking, no drinking. You could hardly expect anything else in a boarding school for missionary children sent home for training from the field. But I had one drink of beer once. . . . It was pretty good."

He grinned. "I had some beer, cold, in my bungalow," he said. "They bombed it along with me and the house this morning."

HE WAS trying to be casual, but he was very upset. They were the only white people left in Tahchow, he knew, indeed practically the only civilians left. And even the troops were now preparing to retire before morning; he had heard that they had received the order from headquarters and tonight were only fighting a covering action as the invading land column pressed closer on the city. They were blowing up roads and bridges preparatory to a quick dawn march south. By daylight the battalions of their enemies would be swarming in the wreck of Tahchow. And what then would happen to himself and this girl? He had already counseled her against flight into the hills, and the only alternative was to wait.

He suddenly started up and turned to stare out into the darkening harbor. She had also heard the sound—the familiar rattle and splash of an anchor chain.

"Damme if it isn't a ship," Brian Clancy muttered. He peered, disbelieving, and could discern the faint bulk of a vessel out there, looming silently in



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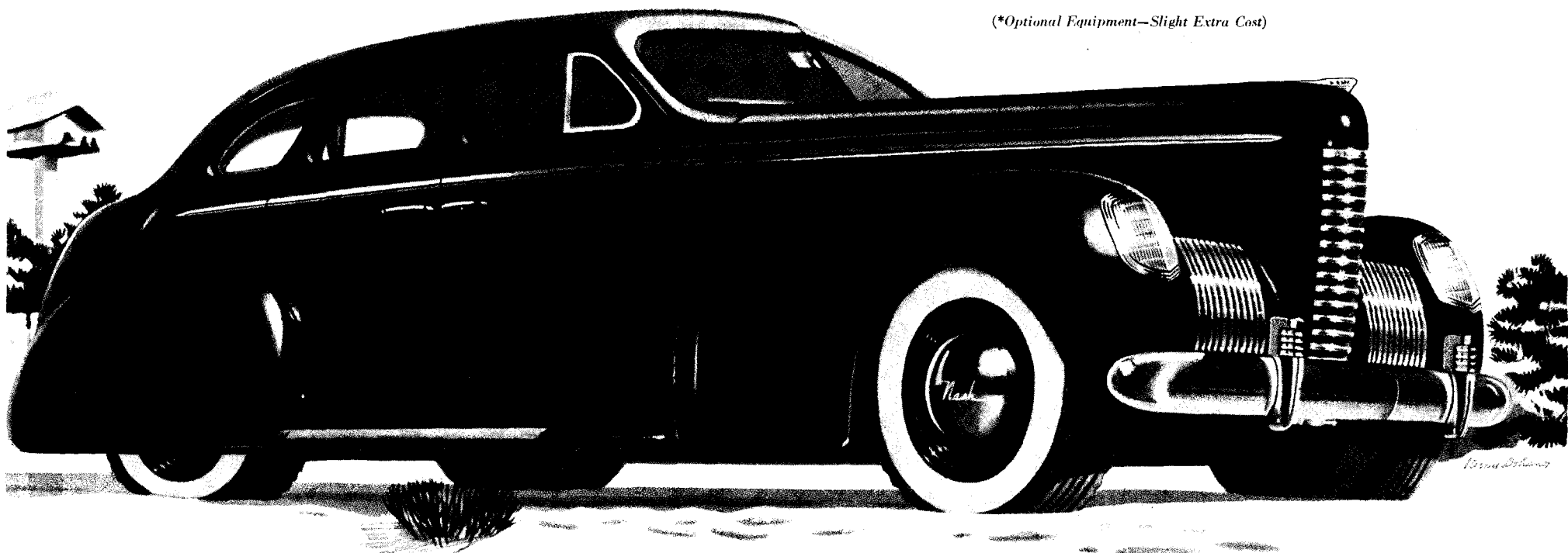
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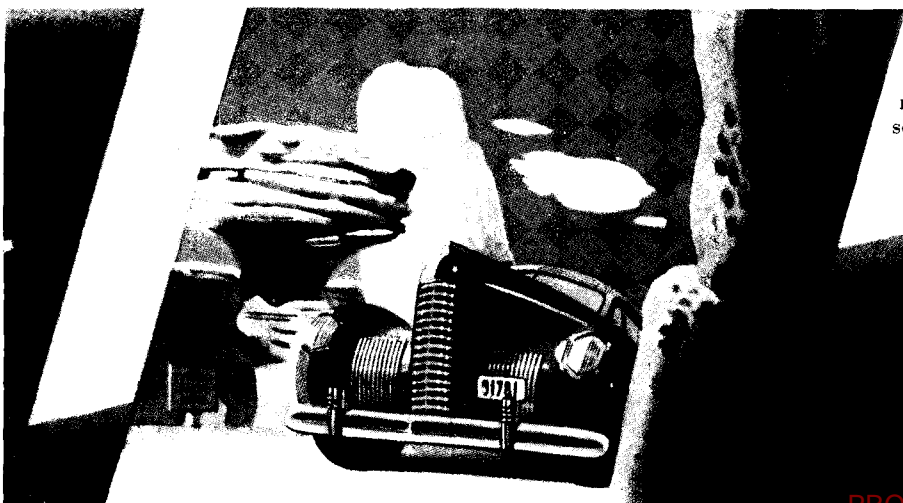
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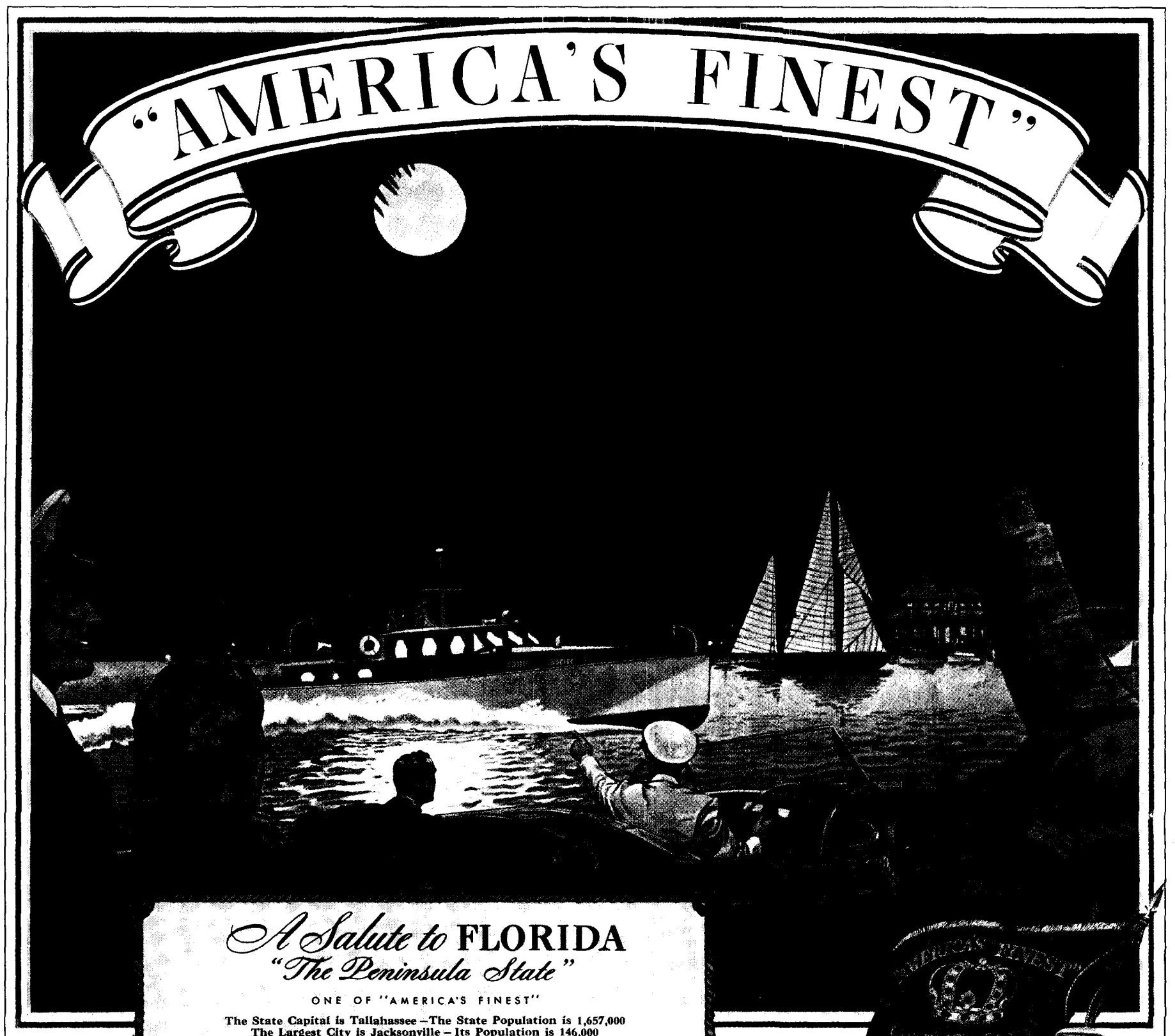


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the gloom. He could see the dim lights in her cabin. Since the departure of the last refugee ship a week before, the harbor had been barren of any craft; even the junks had fled.

"It's a ship," he said. "It's a dirty little coaster, but it's a foreign vessel, because the native boats have been swept from the coast by the blockade." How the devil, he wondered, had this craft been able to run the barrier of the navy patrol outside?

He grabbed Celia Anlage's arm. "Come on," he said. "Problem's solved as to food and bed anyway—and maybe that drink."

She laughed, her voice suddenly shaky with relief, and they started to walk along the water front.

IN THE sampan Clancy located near the stone steps, they moved out into the dark port toward the lights, and when they hailed her a native member of the crew told them to come aboard. Her deck was buried in a litter of gear and unstowed bales and she smelled of oil and fruit and lumber. The Hsin Fang was not a pretty ship, nor, Clancy noted, was her skipper pretty.

He sat before a table in his cabin, huge, perspiring and unkempt. He fixed Clancy with red-rimmed eyes and waved a welcoming hand. He was very drunk.

"Blast me," he said, "if it isn't foreigners. Didn't know any were left here, on my honor. Have a drink. I'm Ramey."

They sat down on his bunk in the dirty cabin; Celia Anlage gingerly accepted the offered glass, wrinkled her small nose at the smell, closed her eyes and swallowed; then she kept her silence, looking thoughtfully at Captain Ramey.

Clancy drank and as he drank he pondered upon the name, and then he had it: Ramey, to be sure. The name had as bad an odor to it as the man's whisky. Gun and drug runner. Once lieutenant, H. B. M. Navy. Busted out years ago. Something to do with a captain's wife and blackmail. The fellow was as no-

torious as he was mysterious. No one ever saw him, except perhaps for an occasional fleeting glimpse of the large untidy figure in the crowds of the water fronts in coastal ports.

"I'm Clancy, American Tea Company agent—until they blew up the agency today. This is Miss Anlage, of the local American mission. Also bombed out of house and home. We're all that's left here. In case you don't know, the troops are pulling out. The other fellows will be in here tomorrow."

Captain Ramey sat up abruptly. "The devil!" he said. "I've got a cargo for those chaps. Ordered by the army from Canton for the garrison here. Not that it's any secret, now I'm here. Arms and munitions, worth fourteen thousand dollars of the realm."

He became quite sober almost immediately, a feat that won Clancy's guarded admiration. His admiration grew when Ramey added, absently, that he'd been a little worried about it, running the blockade outside that afternoon. "A shot over our bow might've been disastrous, considering their vaunted marksmanship," he grinned.

But he ordered the steward to rustle up food for his guests. They ate curry and rice at his table. While they were at it, a deckman poked his scarred and ugly head in at the door and stated that "one-piece shoreside soljah-masta have come wantchee see masta."

"My consignees, no doubt," Ramey said. "It's not private. Everything too mucked up for that now. You're invited to the conference." He poured himself a fortifier.

The man who was ushered in was tall and thin and very young. He wore a dirty and ill-fitting army uniform. One hand was bandaged. He saluted stiffly with it and bowed. In halting English he announced himself as Lieutenant Hsu Fan-li. Then his sharp black eyes turned to Celia Anlage and they widened slightly in his broad face, and he smiled.

"How you do, Miss Anlage," he said.

"You no savvy me, no doubt? You little girl Tahchow Mission before, I think. Then I belong student Dr. Anlage, you respected father. This my native place. My father have got jade shop Lang Ching Road."

She shook his hand, forgetting the bandage, and he winced. She did not remember him. But she remembered his father's shop. She had seen it today. It was spread, smoking and blackened, in fragments across Lang Ching Road, and in the shambles had been the twisted, unrecognizable remains of a man. She asked him hastily where he had been since leaving the mission school, and he said in a university in the north, and later in the army. It had only been luck, he added, that he was assigned to the brigade garrisoning Tahchow. His tongue had slipped unconsciously into the vernacular; she and Clancy understood him and saw his eyes hardening. Captain Ramey fidgeted; his dealings on the Coast were conducted in pidgin.

Lieutenant Hsu apologized. Ramey wasted no time in exchanging amenities. In his hold was the cargo ordered; where was it to be discharged, and how? And in what currency and by whom paid?

HSU nodded. That was why he had come here, he explained. It was now impossible to unload in Tahchow. The city was being abandoned to the enemy. The garrison was withdrawing down the coast fifty miles to Wanping, which was more strategic and more easily defended. The cargo should be taken to that place, and when it was unloaded there Captain Ramey would be paid in cash. This was by order of the commander of the garrison, who, Hsu said, had sent the lieutenant and a guard of six men to accompany the shipment by sea.

Ramey listened in stony silence.

"Let's see your bona fides, or whatever you've got," he demanded finally. Celia Anlage translated, and the lieutenant produced papers. The skipper



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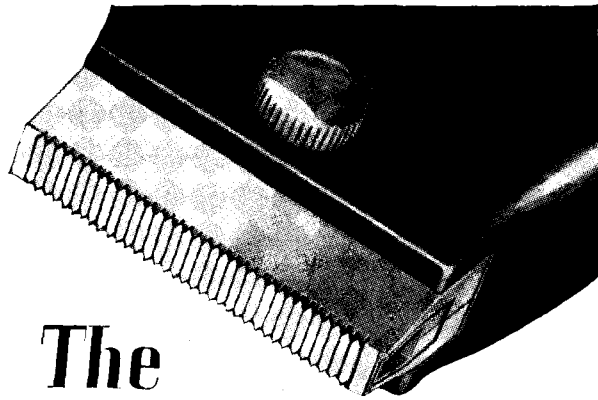
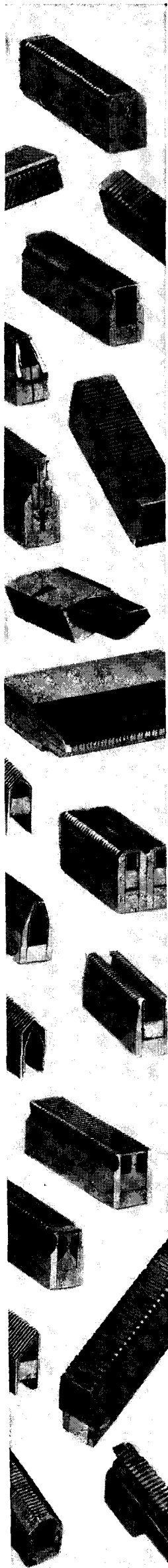
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gazed upon the incomprehensible characters scrawled thereon and passed them to her without a word. When she saw that they were apparently genuine, she nodded.

Ramey grunted. He sat a little longer and pondered. Then he said: "Right. If we can get into this damned place in daylight, we can get out even easier in the dark. We'll sail chop-chop for Wanning."

He sent the steward scuttling with orders to the native chief officer. Lieutenant Hsu went aft to bring aboard his squad, waiting below in a sampan.

Clancy went along, and discovered that although the Hsin Fang had not been in harbor an hour, already it was surrounded by a swarm of small craft crammed with voluble refugees. He was astonished; he had not thought there were that many civilians left in Tahchow. They must have burrowed deep in their houses all day, panic-stricken. Word had got about that, by a miracle, a foreign ship had come in. And here they were, clamoring desperately to be allowed aboard, willing to pay anything they had for passage anywhere, so long as it was a spot far from those they most feared. They were a miserable sea of pleading, upturned faces in the darkness, ragged men, women and children with the small belongings they had rescued.

CAPTAIN RAMEY came up to the rail and peered over. He muttered irritably. Clancy tapped him on the shoulder.

"Look here," he said. "I know the situation's pretty bad. But you've got space enough for some of them. Why not let as many aboard as we can carry to Wanning? It's only human. Theirs is a hard fate if they stay here. You know that."

Ramey looked at Brian Clancy. "It's bad business," he said. "Who knows, perhaps there's cholera among 'em. Or even pirates . . ." He shrugged. "Do as you like. I've got enough troubles. Let two hundred aboard, then pull up the gangway." He walked forward toward the bridge.

Clancy supervised the disposal of the fortunate. They came in a rush up the

ladder and for a period the crew struggled desperately to stem the hysterical tide. Then the gangway came up with a crash and Clancy heard the engine-room bells jangling, and felt the throb through the deck as the screw began to turn. The anchor chain rattled again. The dim mass of staring white faces of those left behind faded back into the murk, but their wailings followed the Hsin Fang over the water, faint and fierce.

In the night, the flames leaped above the ragged silhouette of the remains of Tahchow, which had once been a famed and prosperous tea market on the Coast.

The Hsin Fang thudded softly down the harbor, and a little new moon was dropping behind the brow of the Hill of Lions, which stood at the gateway to the sea.

Celia Anlage came out of the captain's cabin to stand at the rail beside Clancy. The refugees had been herded forward and now squatted, a chattering crowd, on the well deck under the stars. Clancy wondered if they knew that under the deck beneath them were munitions; tons of steel and iron and explosives destined to be hurled against the same troops that had driven these destitute folk from their ancestral homes. Probably not, or if they did know, they wouldn't care. They weren't soldiers. War was only a bitterness in their mouths, and it didn't matter who was winning. They only knew that they lost. The centuries had taught them that.

He had lost too. It didn't matter. Perhaps if he could get to Shanghai, the company would find something there for him. He doubted it. They had kept him in Tahchow, out of things, for too many years. But he knew a chap in Shanghai, old Rankin, the independent tea merchant, who would have a place for him. The same man who had been Clancy's major at Ypres, where they had first learned about war. War had done many things to both of them: it had sent them East; it had indirectly brought prosperity to old Rankin, and resignation to defeat for Brian Clancy. And now it would bring them together again.

He stopped thinking about it. "What



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TONY EARLOW

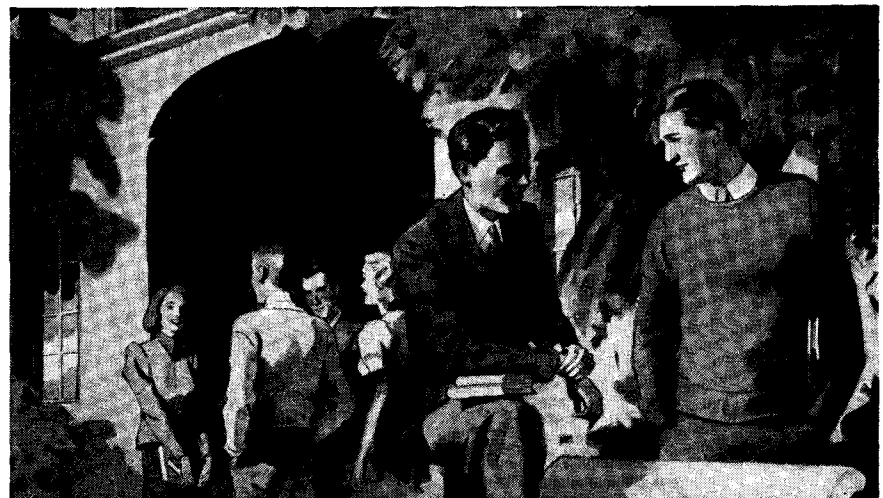


Baltimore, Md., November 24, 1852

RECENTLY DISCOVERED in the archives of New York Life was a letter from Mary B. . . . of Baltimore, dated November 24, 1852. Even in those early days it was not unusual for the wife to take the initiative in matters concerning the husband's life insurance. Writing that she wished she could afford to "increase the amount of insurance to the utmost limit," she added, "it costs much self-denial . . . but what is self-denial to the Mother of two noble boys whom even this sum may aid to educate?"



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will you do?" he said to Celia Anlage. She didn't ask him what he meant. "I don't know," she said after a moment. "Everything's gone. The mission headquarters people will take care of me, of course. I don't know. . . . Perhaps I shan't go back into the field again. I'm not sure if this thing hasn't made me realize more fully that perhaps this isn't my real work at all. Perhaps I followed too easily the pattern Father laid out for me. I never questioned it before he died. I've wanted to do the medical and hygiene work here, but sometimes I feel that that's practically the extent of my interest. . . ." She paused. "I suppose I tell you this because I'm at a loose end all of a sudden, and upset, and awfully tired."

He put his arm about her and drew her head down on his shoulder. It chanced to be the bandaged one, the one she had bandaged, and it hurt. It didn't matter.

After a time Captain Ramey stumped past them, and then paused. Even in the dark Clancy fancied the mockery on the man's lips.

"In a bit," Ramey said dryly, "we'll be well out and getting near the blockade patrol lanes. Managed to get by coming in today because there was a spot of fog. We'll just douse all lights and ride through." He strolled off toward his cabin.

Before midnight the crew shuttered all portholes and even the navigation lights blinked out. There was some commotion forward when those refugees who had been fortunate enough to have got small charcoal braziers aboard were ordered to throw the glowing coals overboard. They had been brewing tea, and the good strong aroma of it drifted back over the ship as she rolled south in the blackness, with only a vague outline slightly blacker off to starboard marking the line of bleak coastal hills.

"We should be in Wanping by mid-morning," Clancy said at length. He spoke abruptly, brushing aside his thoughts. "The skipper's rigged you a cot in the chartroom. We've had a rough time of it today; you'd better get some sleep."

She hesitated and pressed his hand, and then left him alone at the rail. He stood watching the dim white foam breaking along the side, bracing himself a little against the lurch of the vessel.

The Hsin Fang was small and heavy-laden, and he noticed that the wind had sprung up sharply. Most of the refugees were asleep, their voices stilled save for a drowsy murmur.

He thought of what Celia Anlage had said about her mission, the mission she had inherited from her father. It no longer served so much as a dispensary for the Gospel as it was a dispensary for medicines, and she had also made of it a shelter for a horde of homeless waifs. Such as herself, he thought. Now, perhaps, was the time for her to make a decision. If she wanted to go on with the work in which she had never felt any deep conviction, beyond a strange Oriental sense of filial duty, her mission headquarters would later send her to some other inland district, even if her orphans were now scattered. But she could free herself, if she desired, now.

A shadow passed him in the gloom, and he saw it from the corner of his eye. He turned. Another shadow went by silently. A third came. He could see them against the white iron wall of the cabins. Refugees, coming up from the well deck. He thought: Ramey wouldn't allow that; they should stay forward of the grill. Then suddenly they were gone, and he knew they had entered the skipper's cabin. A light flashed up from the open doorway, and Ramey was sleepily cursing the intruders and then Clancy heard the scuffle of feet and a muffled shout. He ran for the door.

BUT when he entered, there was nothing he could do, for Mausers were suddenly pressing against him and he was surrounded by silent men in ragged coolie clothing, and Captain Ramey was on the floor with his scalp laid open where they had efficiently slugged him. More of the coolies pushed into the cabin; Clancy was backed up hard against a wooden locker, and he thought grimly that all that had been necessary was a good piracy to make the day and night complete. But they were talking rapidly among themselves and it wasn't the speech of the Coast at all. He couldn't understand the language of the invaders, except for a few words, but he knew its clipped accents, and he looked into their faces and realized with a shock that these weren't pirates after all, these short, broad, dark, stocky men with flat faces and bristling black hair.



"She says there's one coming from that way!"

ADOLPH SCHUS

One of them approached him. "You are the first officer?" he said, and bowed formally and very slightly. His English was precise; he spoke it carefully.

Clancy shook his head. "Passenger," he said. "Businessman."

"Ah," the man said pleasantly. "So. I am Lieutenant Tomada, of the Imperial Army. Please be seated. You are in no danger if you do nothing. I will explain."

But before he explained, he gave rapid orders and his men went out in haste, guns still drawn. Taking over the bridge, Clancy supposed, and telling the crew what's what. Tomada put his own weapon into a holster under the torn blue-cotton peasant jacket. Then he saw Ramey's half-empty bottle of whisky on a shelf and smiled at Clancy, and poured two drinks.

THE vessel, Tomada said, was being confiscated. She belonged to his enemies, she sailed under his enemies' flag irrespective of the nationality of her skipper, and she carried munitions for his enemies. Therefore he undertook to turn her over to the first of his own people's patrol ships he could find in these waters. He was sorry the captain had been injured, but he had been indiscreet in resisting.

Lieutenant Tomada looked thoughtfully at the prostrate Ramey, who was now beginning to stir and groan, and he sipped his whisky neatly and remarked that perhaps the man should be made comfortable. Without comment, Clancy helped him put the skipper on the bunk.

After a moment Clancy said shortly, "There's a lady aboard. A missionary. She can give him first aid." He paused. "There's one point that interests me, Lieutenant. How did you and your men get aboard? Your army hasn't yet even occupied Tahchow."

"So," Tomada grinned. "We ten entered this morning disguised as farmer refugees. It is important to know what the enemy does and this is our ordinary work during the advances. Today I am told by an informer—one who has been in Tahchow many months, preparing for this day—that this cargo is expected, so we have waited for the ship, in case she is able to pass our own ships off the coast. When we saw she was to sail again, we came aboard with the refugees. Very simple."

He poured another stiff drink for both of them. Clancy noticed that already the motion of the Hsin Fang had changed; they were on another course, with their captors in full control. Then he suddenly remembered Lieutenant Hsu and his six men somewhere on board. He had heard no shots, no commotion. Obviously the vessel had been taken over without any fuss. Had Hsu surrendered so quietly? Perhaps discretion had saved him. He wondered what the fate of those soldiers would be after they had met the patrol ships.

One of Tomada's men entered and spoke for some time. Tomada set his glass down hard and by his answer Clancy knew he was angry. But the lieutenant quickly turned to him, smiling again.

"The enemy guard on the ship," he said, "is refusing to—ah—co-operate. They have barricaded themselves in the hold. There has been no trouble, however, and as long as they stay there everybody is all right. They cannot stay there long—not after we find the patrol."

He sent his man out with orders to escort the missionary lady aft. She came after a time, bewildered and still drugged with sleep. Clancy explained quietly. She heard him in silence and began to dress Captain Ramey's battered head.

"There is nothing to prevent you from leaving the cabin," Tomada told Clancy.

"You are not prisoners. As soon as possible you will be put ashore in some safe place . . . But not at Wanping." He bowed and went out toward the bridge.

Later, Captain Ramey, his heavy head swathed in strips of torn shirting, sat on the edge of his bunk and lit a cigar and fingered his head ruefully. "First time I've ever been pirated," he said, "and even now the blighters aren't actually pirates, you know."

"What's the difference?" Clancy said. They waited, resigned. And resignation, Clancy mused, was a valuable asset to pick up in this country. Much better, sometimes, than money.

The door opened and shut quickly, and Lieutenant Hsu, his face streaked with grime, was suddenly there, locking it from the inside, and in his bandaged hand he held a heavy revolver. He listened for a moment to see if anyone had followed him, and then nodded.

He started to speak to them in English, but his urgency required his own tongue, and he talked fast to Celia Anlage and Clancy.

"I'm getting only about one word in ten," Ramey growled. "What's up?"

Clancy's face had grown grave. "The guards," he said finally, "are barricaded in the hold. This officer, Hsu, declares that they have been entrusted with the job of bringing the cargo safely to Wanping, says it's the same as though they were sent out to hold a piece of the lines with a machine gun, and they're not going to surrender."

Ramey snorted. "Doesn't he know we're bound to meet a patrol boat sooner or later?" he demanded. But Hsu was shaking his head stubbornly as Celia Anlage talked to him. Suddenly he broke in, and his words were short and sharp and determined, and then he was unlocking the door and had slipped out onto the dark deck again and was gone.

CLANCY drew a deep breath and he looked at Celia Anlage and their eyes met.

"They're going to blow up the ship," Clancy said in a level voice, "and he warns us to get off in a small boat immediately. He says they aren't going to allow the enemy to seize these munitions, and they aren't going to surrender."

"But what about those poor beggars forward?" Ramey shouted. "There's two hundred of 'em!"

"I tried to argue with him," Celia Anlage said, "but he wouldn't listen. He said he knew only too well what his enemies did to refugees, and they would all be better blown up with the ship than taken aboard a patrol boat."

"The man's mad," Ramey said. "He's a balmy fanatic . . . But p'raps I might've done the same, once, under the circumstances. . . ."

He spoke in a flat voice. Clancy looked at him. The captain's massive body seemed to have settled, the wreck of the man gaining substance by it. His blood-shot eyes were fixed on the door. He has, then, some compassion for those miserable people, Clancy thought. By the tales told on the Coast of Captain Ramey, R. N., discharged, he had never allowed human suffering to interfere with his current career.

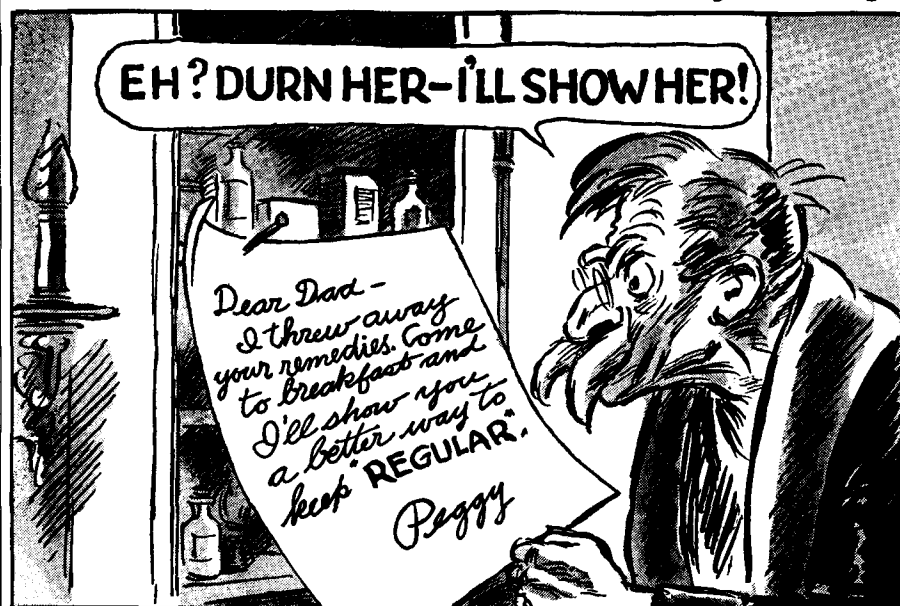
"They're desperate," Celia Anlage said. "And Hsu won't stop. He insists it's his duty to his country, and he only came to warn us."

Ramey rose abruptly. "No doubt about it, he's going through with it, and probably as soon as possible. Only one thing to do and that's get the boats overside and as many of those people forward into them as they'll hold."

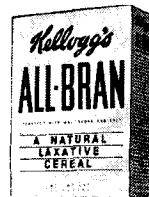
Clancy and Celia Anlage followed him onto the deck. The wind had dropped off again and the Hsin Fang plowed into a wall of blackness. The stars were ob-

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—by C. A. Voight



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scured. But they could see that the sea was not rough now.

"There're only three boats," Ramey said flatly, "and I'm damned if I know what's become of the crew."

"I'll bring a boatload back as quick as I can," Celia Anlage whispered to Clancy. He looked down at her in the darkness and saw her eyes shining. He bent over and kissed her. She went away toward the well deck.

They worked feverishly, and got the first boat swung out free on its davits, hoping that none of the men now in control of the ship would discover them. Sooner than they expected she was returning, herding a mass of dim figures before her and soothing them with soft words in their own tongue. The refugees were terror-stricken and silent, and climbed into the boat obediently. They lowered away. Then the boat was gone swiftly and without sound, slipping astern into the murk.

AFTER a half hour they got the second boat free. "The boats'll take about one quarter of them all," Ramey muttered.

There was a muffled shot below decks. It was followed by half a dozen more in quick succession. Then they heard men pounding along the decks, and much shouting, and more shots. Wordlessly they struggled with the last boat. But the remainder of the refugees forward were awakened now, and a confused hubbub rose and mounted in volume, for the refugees were in panic.

Celia Anlage clutched Clancy's arm and pointed. A tongue of flame had leaped high above the bow of the vessel, suddenly illuminating the chaotic scene.

"They've ignited the oil stores in the fo'c'sle head," Ramey said after a moment.

The refugees came like a wall along the narrow deck. The three were swept aside against the rail. And a machine gun had begun its deadly chatter somewhere below them.

"Sooner or later," said Captain Ramey, "one of those bullets is going to hit something important in the hold. You two had best be on your way. They're going to put up a fight before sacrificing themselves. The guards have broken out a gun from the cargo, and it's foolish to stay any longer. You can't do anything more, and we're in the hands of lunatics on both sides."

The refugees saw the third boat. A swarm of men descended on it, fighting one another, struggling with the ropes. Others, halted in their flight along the deck, joined them.

The bow rope snapped under the strain and the boat plunged down, throwing a screaming blur of men and women into the dark sea.

The fire was growing rapidly. Clancy looked at Celia Anlage. She stood with her back pressed against a cabin door, watching. Her gray eyes were wide, but he saw no fear in them. Above her loomed the black outline of the stack, and the red glow spread above and around it. He took her hand.

Inside the cabin he saw a tall, wooden locker. It was nailed against the wall. Ramey helped him wrench it free, and together they hauled it to the rail.

"Can you swim?" Clancy asked her. When she nodded, he said, "We'll shove it over and you jump after it. Grab hold and hang on."

There was no use waiting. Some of the men below decks had come up the forward companionway, and a shot ricocheted off the steel wall beside Clancy, singing past his ear. Ramey staggered. The men were firing steadily. "Heave ho," Ramey grunted, and they pushed the locker across the rail.

As it dropped, Celia Anlage put her arms around Clancy's neck, but he seized her and swung her out into the darkness

and let go. "Come on," he said over his shoulder to Ramey, and jumped.

The water was cold. When he came up he was facing the black wall of the ship's side as it rushed past him, and churning foam was buffeting his face. Above were light and noise. He struck out, and saw Celia Anlage's head bobbing in the void, and then his hand struck the wood of the locker and he clung desperately, reaching out blindly to catch her arm and hoping they would not be swept into the propeller. The heavy locker was thrown upward on a crest in the wake of the Hsin Fang. Clancy pushed the slight weight of the girl up out of the water, so that she lay along the side of the locker. It did not sink under her, and it held the weight of his supporting arm.

He glanced over his shoulder, shaking water from his eyes. The flames rose high above the ship's bridge, crimson in the night, the vessel outlined starkly against them. He saw Ramey's stocky figure at the rail, sagging strangely against it. "He hasn't jumped," Clancy said. He wondered if Ramey had been hit by that stray shot.

There was splashing in the darkness near by and then a head appeared. A man was swimming easily. He put his hand on the locker and Clancy saw his white teeth gleaming.

"I saw you go over the side of the ship," Lieutenant Tomada said, his shoulder close to Clancy's. "It is necessary that one of my party report to our fleet, but, as my men were engaged, I took the duty of saving someone upon myself."

The Hsin Fang was swinging in a wide circle, still under a full head of steam. The wind caught the flames and swept them back over the superstructure. Small figures fled before them.

Then the vessel blew up.

The concussion rolled the locker over and threw Celia Anlage into the water, but Clancy lifted her slim body back on top of it again.

The blast was preceded several seconds by a thin blue banner of flame that rose a hundred feet above the ship and puffed out at the top in a white, clear ball. The Hsin Fang exploded beneath it. She disappeared so completely, so rapidly, that no light showed on the sea where she had sunk, in bits, but afterward for almost a minute there were submarine explosions that blew out at the surface in golden glows and numbed Clancy's body. Debris rained into the water around them.

THE locker drifted quietly in the sea, and Clancy had no way of knowing how long they had been there. But when Lieutenant Tomada pointed his arm, Clancy could see on the horizon the thin, bright pencils cutting the night sky, on and off, weaving and flashing.

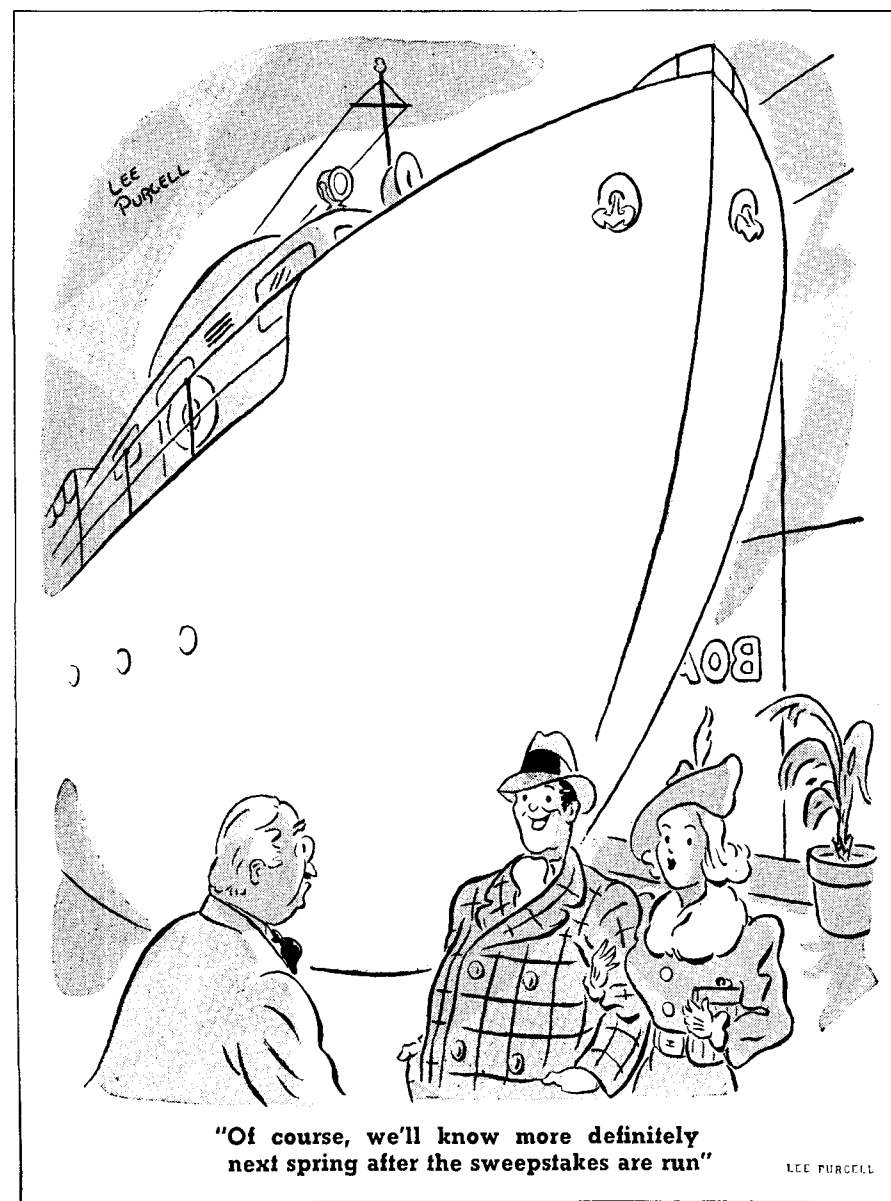
"The patrol," Tomada said. "They have seen the flash of the explosion."

Later, the lights of the first cruiser grew bigger before them against a sky now gray with dawn.

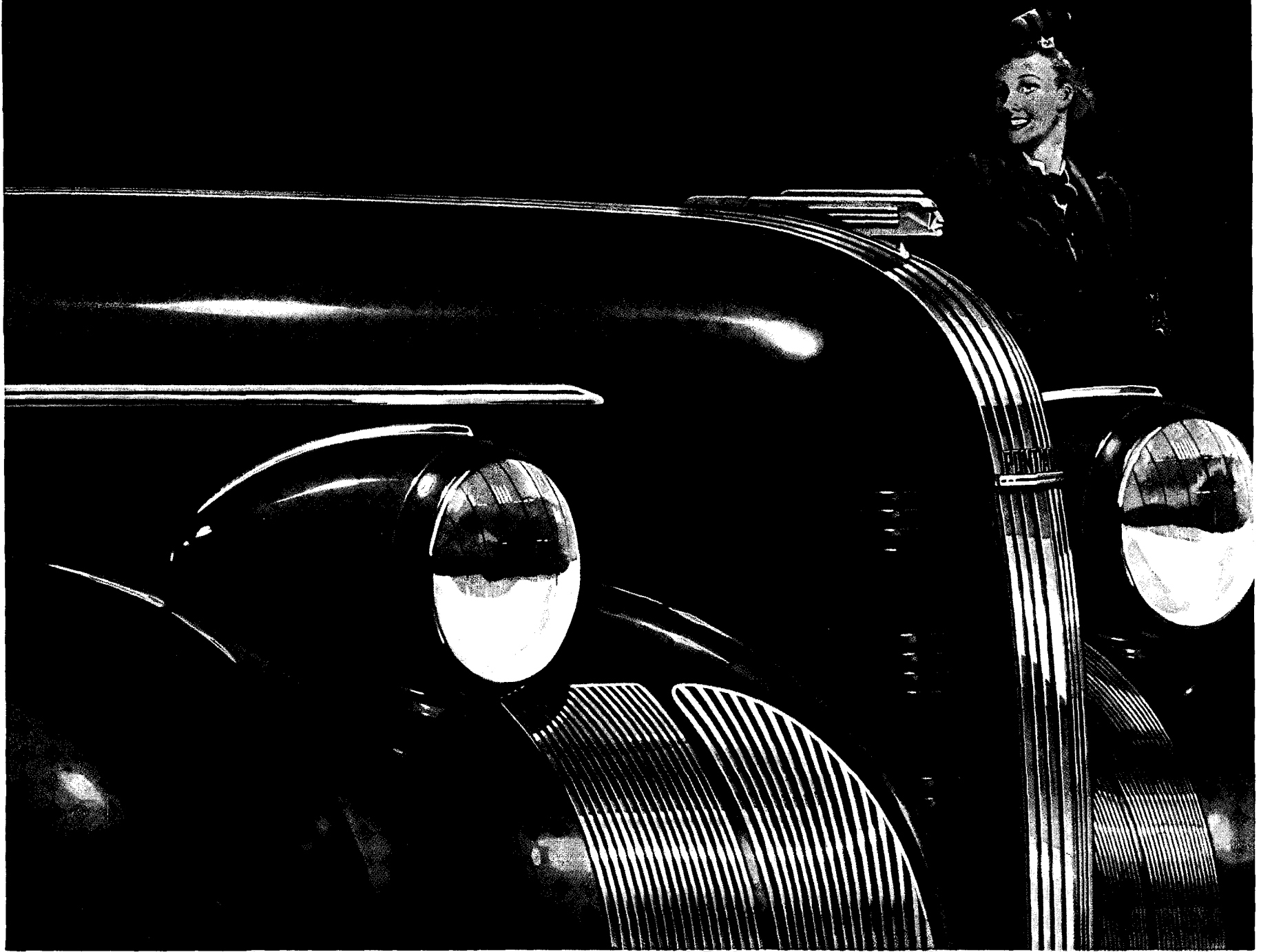
"We are fortunate," Tomada said, nodding. "But it is very logical. This was none of your affair; why should you drown? One is sorry for the captain—and those refugees, perhaps. But that could not be helped. Our enemy accomplished their purpose, but so did we also succeed. And I must make my report. . . . It may be some days before you can be set ashore. Perhaps at Shanghai. I hope it will not inconvenience you."

Clancy shook his head and looked at Celia Anlage. "Anywhere," he said. "Miss Anlage and I are going into the tea business, but we aren't in any hurry. Are we?"

"No," Celia Anlage said.



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Blizzard

Continued from page 17

had quit feeding and were slowly bunching together; the instinct of danger made them do this. Woolly darkness moved toward him as he rode the edges of the small herd and put it in motion, driving it slantwise toward the Silver Lode side of the range. Back of him now the shape of the faraway rider became distinct for a moment and afterward sank into the strange-forming mist. It would be Bois McLean's rider, he decided.

He had moved the cattle perhaps a mile when a forerunning notice of the storm hit him in the shape of a half gust of dry wind that plucked up the loose soil and broken sage stems and made small clouds of dust all over the desert, like gray steam springing from the earth. He took off his hat, pulled out the chin strap, and thus anchored his headgear; and turned the direction of the beef a little to correct its inclination to give with the wind.

WHEN the edge of the storm struck him, it was like a solid object; he felt the pony give with it and saw the cattle swing. He went around the lee edge of the herd, singing out as he rode, at once realizing that the wind was taking his words and throwing them away. There had been, all this while, the distant glimmer of his ranch lights; suddenly those lights vanished and it was dark.

He had his quick thoughts and made his quick decision. It was eight miles to the ranch, and only three back to Hub Weston's log hut. He knew then that his particular problem had changed, becoming a matter of safety for himself rather than of driving the cattle. Swinging about, he headed east for the log hut whose shape had died to the dimmest and grayest shadow in this pulsing dark. He put his horse to a run.

He had covered perhaps half the distance to the log hut more or less blind; now he saw it through the snow flurry considerably south of where he thought it to be, showing him how much the pony had drifted. Making a point on the hut, he trotted ahead; in the back of his mind was a shadow of worry over the lone rider he had seen eastward.

Wind and snow grew greater and the shape of the hut faded behind the increasing screen of snow; he knew then that this would be a tough day and a tough night. The cattle had figured it out quicker than he had; it was just one of those faint warnings that animals get sooner than men. This snow had a cut to it and the increased chill of the wind was almost like the sensation of extreme heat on his cheekbones. There was, so far, no depth of snow on the ground. The wind swept it up in great ragged sprays and threw it forward; the wind boiled like water and whirled together great white columns of snow and then broke those columns apart, this thick mass driving across Bill Post. He had lost sight of the hut again and turned his horse to compensate for the force of the wind.

When next he saw the hut—and he saw it as a fugitive and bodiless shadow—it was almost directly south of him. He had, he discovered, missed it and would have gone by had it not been for the temporary pocket of visibility in the storm. Hauling around, he ran at it and lifted its shape out of the dizzy weave of the blizzard; coming hard by the hut, he followed its wall closely, reached a small outhouse, and sighted the lean-to farther on. The lean-to's closed side was on the windward side, making shelter. He left the horse here, walking toward the outhouse again. From this distance the hut was barely visible, though only

fifty feet away; the snow kept driving in, denser and denser. In another hour, he realized, a man wouldn't be able to see his hand before him, and this thought turned him back to the hut.

When he closed the door the partial silence was a tremendous letdown, so steady had been the drive of wind against his eardrums. A rat scurried over the dirt floor and vanished in a crack; the place was clammy cold and held the rank odor of a passing skunk. This hut was a kind of emergency station for traveling riders and had a tin stove, a bunk and a table, a coffeepot and an old skillet, and usually the tag end of a few dry groceries cached in a big lard can.

Post lighted the lantern he found on the table, built a fire from the half-burned chunks of a fencepost, and put his back to the growing heat, realizing he was here for the duration of a storm, which might last a day or a week. His ears burned a little. Taking up the coffeepot, he opened the door—bracing it with his shoulder to keep it from blowing back on its hinges—scooped the pot full of snow and returned it to the stove; when the snow had melted he threw in a small fistful of coffee from a half-filled can on the table.

He had placed the coffeepot on the stove and was in the act of bending to collect the fragments of an old newspaper when he heard through the slap and rush and increasing snore of the blizzard a faint, wind-thinned sound—the sound of someone calling from a distance.

HE TURNED to the door, opening and sliding through and closing it behind him. Wind nailed him to the door; it choked him and made him drop his head to get his breath. The hard snow rattled against the side of the hut like the strike of hard-driven grains of wheat. All he saw before him was a woolly, streaming wall of snow, solid and whitely opaque. At this stage of intensity a man could buck into the teeth of it for a little while before wearing himself out; in another hour or less it would be a force no man could face. He drew in his breath and let out a long yell, and afterward felt faintly embarrassed for having done so silly a thing; in this weather his voice had about as much effect as a lighted match. He reached inside his coat—the wind whipping it away from his legs when he unbuttoned it—and got his gun and fired twice. The two reports were thinned and smothered and carried away the moment they left the muzzle.

For one moment a crosswise current of wind broke the steady northerly sweep of the blizzard, whirling the snow upward from the immediate earth and giving Post a fragmentary view of the roundabout prairie. The shape of horse and rider stood out there, about a hundred yards off, the rider crouched low, the horse turned away. Immediately Bill Post yelled again and fired the gun. The shape on the horse roused and swung around and then the snow closed in and Post no longer saw it.

Post had to brace himself against the wind and he had to put a hand over his nose to breathe. After a half minute of waiting he fired once more; he kept this up at spaced intervals until the hammer fell on an empty shell, and got inside the hut to reload, and went out again. There was no blur in the white smother, no materializing shape; visibility was cut down to a mere arm's length, no more. Probably this was Tom Nelson, Bois McLean's line rider. Nelson was an old hand, smart enough to know what the

blizzard was doing to him and smart enough to try to figure a way of reaching the hut. But this was bad. If Nelson missed the hut he was a gone coon.

Post sent out his gunshots at longer intervals. The bitter cold got at his feet; he kicked them against the ground. The ice-hard snow blasted against the exposed areas of his face like driven sand. Between periods of firing he shouted, more or less to keep active than for any other reason. It was tough to stand here with a man out there within hailing distance but he knew that if he stepped a yard away from the hut he would be blind and lost, as good as a thousand miles from shelter. When the snow lifted the next time, for one brief interval, he saw nothing of the rider. Nelson had missed the cabin and had drifted on.

He sent one more shot into the wild-racing smother. He had taken part of a step away from the wall of the hut and suddenly the wind got treacherously behind him, catching him off guard and throwing him out from the wall. It had that tremendous force. He tried to dig his heels into the hard ground. Wheeling like a vane in the wind, he saw the hut fade from sight and short fright



hit him in the pit of the stomach and he fell flat on the ground, anchoring himself. He could not see the hut but he kept his eyes pinned to the one spot where he knew it must be and crawled forward, never daring to let his eyes drop. When the wall materialized he stood up and seized the latch of the door. He had his taste of that howling emptiness then; and mentally said goodbye to Tom Nelson.

He had lifted the door latch to go inside when he heard a voice again. It was straight upwind from him and broke against him and fled by, one clear high call of distress. It was clearer and nearer than before and, suddenly, turned back to face the weather, he knew something he had not known before: it was a woman. The voice was high and sharp—and within short yards of the hut.

Post fired at the sky and whipped into the hut. He seized his rope from the table, ran out and tied one end to the door latch; and with this as an anchor, he walked into the blizzard, paying out the rope. When he reached the end of the rope he stood momentarily still, stretching it as tight as he could in the hope that if the woman missed the house her horse might hit the rope and stop.

He waited long enough to know that she wasn't on this side; the wind was driving her on at another angle, or else

she had done the fatal thing of dismounting. Still hanging to the rope he walked forward, the arc of the rope carrying him partly around the hut. There was nothing here. Returning to the hut he untied the rope from the door latch, crawled around the hut with his hands pressed against its wall and made another tie at the back door, searching the area as thoroughly as he could. He fired a shot and walked unexpectedly into the side of the outhouse; he struck his head against it before he saw it. Here he tied the free end of the rope, walked back along it to the hut and untied that end, and marched into the smother, making a complete circle of the outhouse with the rope as his only security. He used his gun again and caught a faint, a thin, a quick-dying fragment of a cry.

Post dragged the rope's end into the blankness again and stumbled against the hut wall. He tied the rope here and went inside, wrestling with the door. The storm died out of his ears and for a little while he could hear nothing at all; the wind had tightened his face so that when he moved his lips the surrounding skin seemed to crack. He took off his gloves and scrubbed his cheekbones, standing against the heat of the stove with his head down and his mind alive. Apparently she had sighted and over-shot the hut, and had sighted it again, or had heard his gun. She had made a second effort. That would be about all in the teeth of this steadily increasing blizzard; horseflesh wouldn't stand up against another try.

NOR would this girl. Nobody could keep clearheaded out there very long. So she'd just go along with the push of the storm, and end up against the drift fence. There wasn't much chance for her after that unless she knew the country mighty well and could figure out where the drift fence led; even so it was a small chance. By the time she got to the drift fence she wouldn't have much strength left, and fear would do the rest. The edge of this weather cut through anything. Well, he thought carefully, she really had no chance at all.

He took his knife and caught up a chunk of the fence post and shaved out a double handful of sticks. The coffeepot had begun to boil. He took a drink of it, scalded his tongue, and set the pot aside as he meanwhile dropped a handful of coffee beans into his pocket. Now he blew out the lamp, unscrewed its top and spilled part of the kerosene over the kindling he had made. He wrapped the kindling in a piece of old paper and jammed this small bundle into his pocket. Taking the coffeepot, he started to leave the hut, but one more thought turned him back. Screwing the lamp together, he lighted it and got another piece of paper from the floor and searched out the stub of an old tally pencil from his pocket. He stood over the table a little while, figuring the thing through his head and at last writing this enigmatic phrase on the paper: "Drift fence—girl—Bill Post." By the time the blizzard died out, there would be ten feet of snow banked against the drift fence and it was better than an even chance both of them might be underneath. It was just a thought in case a search party later came over the desert; it might save the search party some trouble.

He blew out the lamp, still paused by the table thoughtfully, listening to the stiff whining of the blizzard around the corners of the log hut. It was a scream, an actual yell. Back of this sound was a deeper one—an immense, overpowering drone. At this moment it seemed as though all the wind in the world rushed over this desert, drowning it in fury. Bill Post lifted his shoulders and settled them—shrugging these thoughts away.

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He left the hut and had to brace his feet to haul the door shut. He untied the rope and followed it to the outhouse, made another tie at the back side of the outhouse and thus guided himself into weather as thick as a solid stream of oatmeal, as thick, as stinging, as suffocating. At the end of the rope he saw nothing and worked the ground slowly, back and forth.

When the gray column of a lean-to post came before him he saw how badly he had drifted in the space of a fifty-foot walk. He tied the rope end to the post, left the coffeepot here and followed the rope back to the outhouse; freeing it, he pulled himself to the lean-to again, rolled up the rope and attached it to the saddle. The coffee in the pot had cooled down; now he took a long drink, emptied the pot and tied it to a saddle thong. After that he climbed to the saddle.

The lean-to's covered side broke the sweep of the wind and for a short while he sat in this dark cell of shelter scooped from the heart of a blank bitter world. The corner posts of the lean-to were well buried in the ground but the blizzard, racing up a hundred miles of open desert, hit the lean-to with tremendous impact, bending the boards, shaking the posts.

AS SOON as he left the lean-to the wind hit him in the back like the end of a plank. He had expected it and had braced himself; nevertheless it was worse than he had imagined. He had to grab the horn and bend down to take some of that pressure from his frame. The horse felt it, moving at a driven, running walk. The force of the blizzard boosted him head on toward the drift fence three miles north; he had no worry about riding past it, since the fence was fifteen miles long, yet he did have a problem in guessing the course of the girl, once she reached the fence. Now and then he inclined the pony toward the right in order to hit the fence well eastward, in order to intercept her if she had turned that way. As soon as he released the pressure of the reins the pony straightened again, refusing to quarter the wind.

The way it was now he could hear nothing save that steady, high-above roar and whistle and scream of the wind. It was a sound a man could not describe—like an avalanche coming down a mountain, like the trembling rush of millions of gallons of water through a tunnel, like almost anything the imagination might catch up. At times during this unrelenting howl something happened to the wind above him, as though crosscurrents hit each other, and at those times it seemed that thunder burst on top of his skull. He could make out the notch of his horse's head, this silhouette growing ragged because of the forming ice on his eyebrows; a steady, painful cold ate its way through his coat and came up his legs. The heavier snow had begun to stick to the ground; he could not see it but he felt it rise around him when quick explosions of wind raked it up and threw it at him, slapping the sleety sheets against him like the stinging, salt-sharp spray of breakers. Far distant in his mind was a casual, colorless thought: "Be a damned good man if you make this."

He hit the fence long before he figured. He didn't see it, but the horse nosed into the wire and wheeled and stopped dead and for a moment it was pretty tough to have the feeling that the pony had given up. To the right lay maybe fifteen miles of fence, to the left less than six or seven, this western end breaking into the badlands. If the girl had reached the fence and had turned east, she might have passed him; otherwise she was somewhere down the western line. This was his way of looking at it. It was a gamble when he turned west,

following the fence. He could not afford the time spent in tracking eastward.

The wind drove at his flank; it pushed the pony into the fence, time and again, Post's legs now and then striking the top strand of wire. Each time Post hauled the pony away it drifted back; broadside, this way, the traveling was tougher. Perhaps two miles down the line he rammed a cow; it stood motionless, rump to the wind and as he bent over he saw the hard crust of sleet on its back. From this point on he began to pass cattle singly and in clusters. He had it figured out he was four miles along the fence when he came to what seemed the main bulk of the herd he had started off the desert at the beginning of the blizzard; they were in a motionless, tight bunch—the sight of them a vague blur. He went around these, passed a cow down on its knees, and faced the opaque screen of weather again; but here he was arrested by the tag end of a memory and wheeled and backtracked. In that blur of cattle there had been something



standing above the dark line of their backs.

When he reached the edge of the herd he put his horse through, the cattle stupidly giving to the pressure, and he was directly beside the girl before he saw her. Her horse was trapped here and she was bent over, as if trying to sleep. She didn't see him or hear him and he had to reach over and pull at her arm. Her face, even at arm's length, was a small white blur in the gray. He saw her lips move but couldn't hear her speak. He caught her reins and worked his way out of the herd, but he stopped when he observed the way she held both mittened hands to the saddle horn. The cold had gotten at her.

He bent over and shouted: "Hold tight," and dismounted. His feet hurt when his weight went on them; his legs felt a little strange. Hanging to the reins he had some difficulty fishing out his gun. He walked over to the nearest cow and shot it point-blank through the head and gave it a push so that it fell with its belly to leeward of the wind. He had to remove his glove to get at his knife, and the sharp sting of the weather on it

warned him that the contrasting dullness of his feet was a bad sign. Kneeling in the snow, still hanging to the reins of the horse, he slashed open the cow's belly; and got up again and handed his reins to the girl to hold. Back on his knees, he scooped out the dead animal's entrails, cutting recklessly. A little blood flowed and was frozen; the warmth of the cow's belly was very rank. He turned to the girl and pulled her from the horse, shouting in her ear: "Crawl in."

She went in feet first. He slashed the back quarters, giving her a little more room. She got part of her shoulders in, and lay this way, with the raw edges of the cow's belly half sheltering her. The heavy awning of ice on his brows blurred his view of her face; he knocked the ice away, bending down until her eyes were a foot away. It was the schoolteacher from Belding's, a girl who knew the country as well as he did. Looking up at him, she suddenly smiled.

He bent back, thoroughly astonished at that smile. He had caught her in time, for the cold had got at her, numbing her and making her a little light-headed. He stood up, steadily kicking his feet against the crust of snow. There was a deepening drift against the fence; the cattle were blurred all around him and would be dead by morning. He held the reins of the two horses, cool enough to measure his own resources. Maybe they could get out of this, maybe they couldn't. It was perhaps three miles to the end of the fence and a little more to the line cabin at the entrance to the badlands, hard by the fence. From the fence to the badlands was blind going, though it would not be hard to strike Donner gulch which intercepted the fence. If the snow had not drifted too deep in the gulch and if they could make these last three miles—it might be done.

He had given her ten minutes; it was a break, maybe taking the chill from her, but this was the end of it. The blizzard battered at him and when he crouched down to call her he felt the oncreep of slowness, in muscles and thinking. He helped her up; he stood by her horse, bracing her as she crawled to the side-saddle. He yelled: "All right?"

THE wind tore her answer away. For a moment he debated switching his overcoat to her, regretfully decided against it. It was just one of those choices a fellow had to make; he needed the coat to live. If he didn't live, she would be dead that much sooner. When he took three tries to get into the saddle he knew then it would be a close call. He held the reins of her horse and thus with the girl beside him, he set off broadside to the full slash and venom of the blizzard at a run. Neither horse wanted to move this fast. He had to kick his own pony to it, and he had to yank at the girl's horse; there was no other way. He no longer trusted his senses completely, as to direction or as to the passage of time; because of this he now and then let the wind take them into the fence so that he might be sure they still had it by them. Even so, he misjudged his distance. Coming out of the last run, he drifted with the wind and found no fence. They had ridden past it.

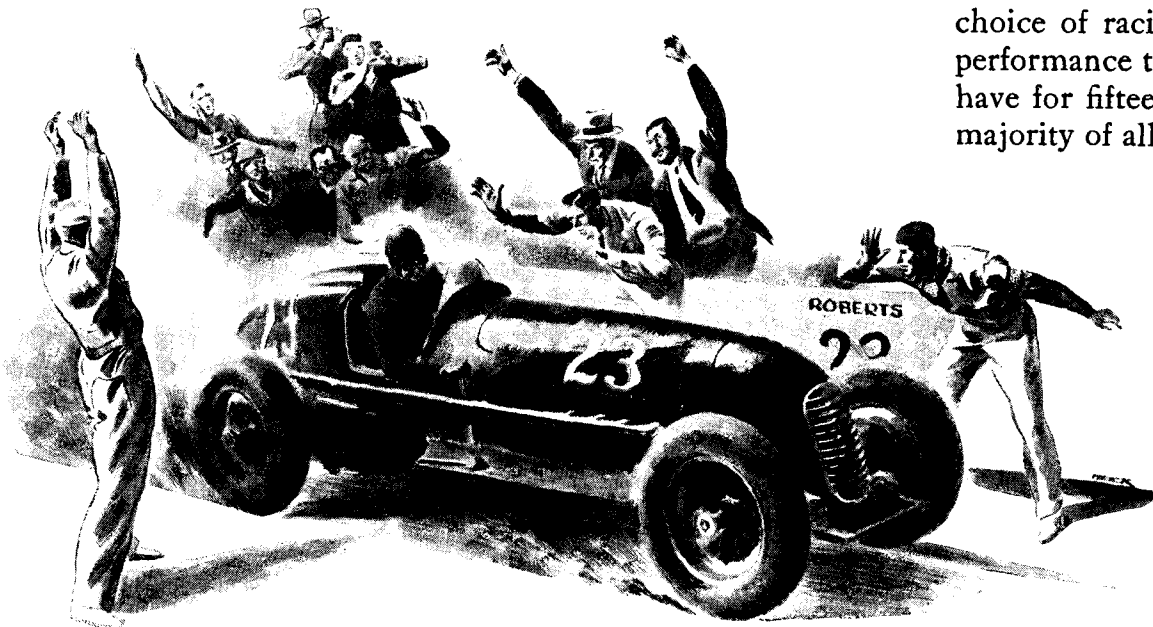
He stopped in the streaked, solid, stinging race of snow; he bent near the girl, shouting: "All right?" He didn't hear her answer. He was more and more suspicious of himself and took time to tie her reins about his wrist, and went on. There was a limit to all this and the limit grew nearer. They had no longer any kind of guide in this howling blast, and his head was a little bit light. Somewhere in front lay the gulch; somewhere, within a mile, lay the line cabin at the head of the gulch.

He said to himself: "I'm gettin' soft. Be careful now," and he repeated certain instructions to himself, so that they



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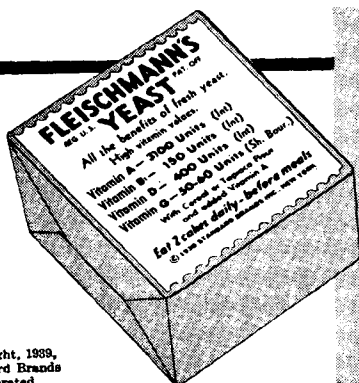
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would be deep-fixed in his nerves should his head betray him: "When we get to the gulch, we turn left. We turn left." Momentarily he seemed to be afloat in this overwhelming wind. They were drifting north with it; at times he checked his pony around but always the wind carried them. He felt the horse stumble and sink and he thought he was falling, yet when the wind's force no longer pressed like a pitchfork against his ribs and when he heard it howling more distinctly overhead, he realized they had dropped into the gulch. He said doggedly aloud: "We turn left," and made the conscious swing with his arms and legs.

THE horse didn't turn; it kept going straight. He didn't try a second time, realizing the pony had probably made the turn out of instinct. Somewhat later he realized the pony had stopped, and shock revived him when he realized he had been sitting dumbly in the saddle for several moments, staring at the dim wall of the line cabin. Both horses had their heads at it.

When he slid down he held to his stirrup a moment, taking no chances with the kind of dreams a man got in this coldness. He steadied himself by the head of the horse, seeking the line cabin's door and pushing it open; turning back, he pulled the girl from the off side of her horse and propped himself against her weight. He pushed her through the door and shut it and halted in the cabin's darkness, still holding her. He said, distinctly: "All right?"

"Yes," she said.

He got his gloves off, slapping his hands violently together. "There's a lantern here, I remember. My matches are in my right-hand pants pocket." He had to remind himself of these things as he jerked the front of his big coat open by force. He had been so fearful of losing this girl in the storm that some of that fear still remained, even in the small room. He said, "Stay right there," and stepped across the unnatural stillness. He came up against the stove and scratched a match across its surface; the glare showed him the lantern, but it took him three matches to get the light going.

She hadn't moved from the wall. He said: "Kick your feet against the floor until you feel something." He pinched his own legs, and caught a delayed sense of pain. He opened the stove and shoved in the nest of kindling he had soaked with kerosene; when he bent behind the stove to catch up the wood in the box, he was careful to bend from the hips instead of the knees. He was still anxious, still suspicious of his luck until he saw the kindling catch the light and begin to burn. When he turned around he found her standing in the middle of the room. She had a long riding coat on, with a kind of cowled top that came over her head; all he saw was the white round surface of her face and the sparkle of the lantern's light against her eyes.

He said: "Don't sit down and don't get near the fire." He dredged the coffee beans out of his pocket, spilling them on the table, and got his knife; he walked around the room, feeling the stinging nerves in his legs and the odd kinking of muscles and the good sensation of weight on them. He faced the door, pretty reluctant to go out. But he went out, cut the coffeepot from the saddle thong and scooped it full of snow, and brought it back to the stove. She had dropped to the room's single chair; he walked over and pulled her up. He shook her by the shoulders until he saw her face change. He put his fingers against her cheeks and deliberately squeezed in. Her head jerked back; he saw the resentment in her eyes. He said: "Just wanted to make sure."

"I'm a little tired," she murmured, and sat down again.

He put the coffeepot on the stove and scooped in the beans. Going back to the girl, he saw her eyes lift and almost beg him to let her be still; but he pulled her from the chair, hooked her arm into his arm and walked her along the far wall of the room, back and forth. When he hit the floor with his boots he felt the shock of it in his heels; needlelike currents ran strongly up his legs and his cheeks were burning. The coffee had begun to boil when he let the girl go.

"Sure you're all right? No dead places?"

"I'm all right."

He faced the door, dead-beat, yet knowing he had another chore to do. He went out, closing the door behind; and unsaddled the horses, throwing this gear and the saddle blankets inside the hut. He took off the bridles and watched the horses move into the riot and whirl of snow. There would be a kind of shelter for them under the cut bank. He re-entered the cabin.

She stood by the stove, holding an empty can she had found in the cabin. She stood there, waiting for him, with her eyes holding to him as he crossed the room, with her body caught in thorough stillness. When he was quite near she turned to fill the can from the coffeepot, and held it out to him. It was the way she held it—upward in both her hands—and the way her eyes—black as night—rose and remained on him, that hit him solidly under the heart.

He said, "Go ahead and drink it."

"No," she said in a soft, indrawn voice. "You're first." The blackness of her eyes seemed to break, and a light showed through; and then the blackness returned. "Do you know what I mean? This is as near as I can say it."

The coffee was rank; it was hot and took the chill out of him. It made him cheerful and sound again, the old vigor running smooth and strong through him. Looking back over the past hours, he found it a little difficult to remember how tough it had been.

HE GAVE her the can, watching her refill it and stand by the stove, warming her hands and slowly sipping the coffee. She had removed her coat and he saw that she was a tall round-armed girl and that her lips were long and red by the lantern's yellow light. She closed her eyes when she drank; her hair was heavy; it was a brilliant dark shade.

He said: "How'd you get out in this?"

"I went to the dance last night. It didn't look bad early this morning when I set out. It caught me halfway. I heard your shots from Hub Weston's hut. I went around it twice. Then I just said, 'So long,' and drifted."

"Well," he said, "it's the long way home."

She came by him, taking one of the blankets. There was an upper and lower bunk in this small room. He watched her settle into the lower bunk and curl up like a small child and spread the blanket over her. He went back to the stove, slowly soaking in the heat; he bent his head over it, closely thinking of all this—of how it had been, and of her. It was pretty hard to talk about. Probably neither of them would ever say anything more about it, but the memory was there and it would stick. Suddenly he removed his heavy coat and carried it to the bunk. He laid it over her and took her hand as it came out to catch his heavy fingers. The wind had loosened her hair; it lay around her head, softening her face, and she was smiling and her black eyes held him completely.

"The long way home," she murmured. Standing there, holding her hand, he watched her features sweeten and soften, until she was asleep, with a half-smile remaining on her lips.

Beautifully and Bravely

Continued from page 15

Automatically, Garcia glanced toward her box and her handkerchief waved but he was too annoyed with himself, with the Indian, with life in general, to respond.

Later, below the stands before they went to their hotels, the Indian said: "Today you were good, kid. You made only one mistake, not dedicating a bull to the lady. However, I will think of you tonight when I see her."

"You had better think of how to treat bulls. You work as though each one was like the one before it."

"In most ways they are," the Indian said and shrugged.

Garcia turned away. You could curse at a man but you couldn't tell him he was unsubtle.

The papers the next morning made him angry. There were the usual good write-ups, this time favoring the Indian slightly because of his "daring." Garcia's own work had been "esthetic but

"Tell the truth," Garcia said, "but then I suppose you would lose your job." He went out for a walk. The market place was crowded and there was the smell of new leather, of burning charcoal and of food cooking. In the thin crowd of faces, he saw Felice Del Vayo. He would have passed her when one of the two men with her hailed him.

The men were Americans and talked very little Spanish. Garcia did not let them know that he talked good English. They were ten or fifteen years older than he and he saw that Felice Del Vayo was also older.

"Yesterday," she said, smiling, "you were most shy. I attributed it to the difficulties you were experiencing in the ring. Today you seem equally shy."

"I had no difficulties. My bulls were all difficult ones, however, and required my concentration."

"I am not used to being put aside for anything."

"In any other place but the bull ring you would not have been." It was not himself talking, he felt. Her face became less archly amused, took on even a strange, vague quality of eagerness. From the blank smiles on the faces of the Americans, Garcia knew they could not follow the rapid Spanish of the talk.

"I should like to talk to you," she said.

"I am fighting here next Sunday. I shall be here all week."

"And José Gomez will be fighting in the north."

"He will return the following Sunday," Garcia said gravely. With his mind he knew he should dislike her, but he could not.

"Meanwhile, I think it would be nice if you were to get for me those vases." She indicated plum-colored ones of glass in a near-by shop window. As he moved almost automatically toward the shop, Garcia heard one of the Americans say it was too bad no photographer was along.

"It'll make a good release, though," the other one said. "I'll get it on the wires tonight."

Anger flickered once in Garcia but he bought the vases.

"They are very beautiful," she said. "They will remind me of you. So graceful, so fragile."

The anger was all inside him. With her so near it could not come out. "You will be leaving soon?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I will be here for some time yet."

"I will call you," he said and again felt it was not himself speaking.

"I shall hold you to that," she said. He had seen that look in the eyes of many women since he had become one of the best *matadores* in the world, but none of those women were as beautiful as this one.

HE SPENT a bad two days trying to make up his mind whether to call her or not, and was sitting in a café Wednesday afternoon when Chucho Saenz came in with a newspaper under his arm.

"Qué tal, hombre?" Garcia said.

"What do you say, man?"

"Nothing. The world is becoming a bad place to live in."

"What's the matter now?"

Out of the folds of the newspaper, Chucho took one of the magazines devoted to bullfighting and spread it before Garcia. It was a good write-up, but near the end it said: "And so, while we would rate both these great *matadores* among the best of our time, still we can find room for regret that José does not know and Luis does not dare."

Garcia pushed it slowly away from



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A. JOHN KAUNUS

conservative," he learned, and cursed. The interviews with Felice Del Vayo were what made him angry. "El Indio was wonderful," she had said. "So brave, so daring, carrying his life in his hands. Yes, Luis Garcia was good, too. But not nearly so brave as El Indio."

Garcia did something he had never done before; he called up the bullfight critic of one of the large dailies, Fermin Lopez. "Listen," Garcia told him, "since when do the opinions of movie actresses mean anything?"

"They mean very much," Lopez said. "They sell newspapers."

"But why do you agree with her? To be polite?"

Lopez hesitated. "No, you are really very brave. I suppose I am reflecting the vulgar taste of the public today. They want the sensational. You are an artist, not an acrobat like the Indian. You should have lived in another generation and fought when Gaona or Belmonte did. You are an anachronism."

"Why don't you say so?"

"I have, but not too often. After all, I must hold my job and I cannot go on indefinitely telling people their taste is vulgar."

"That is very consoling, I am sure," Garcia said.

"But what can I do?"

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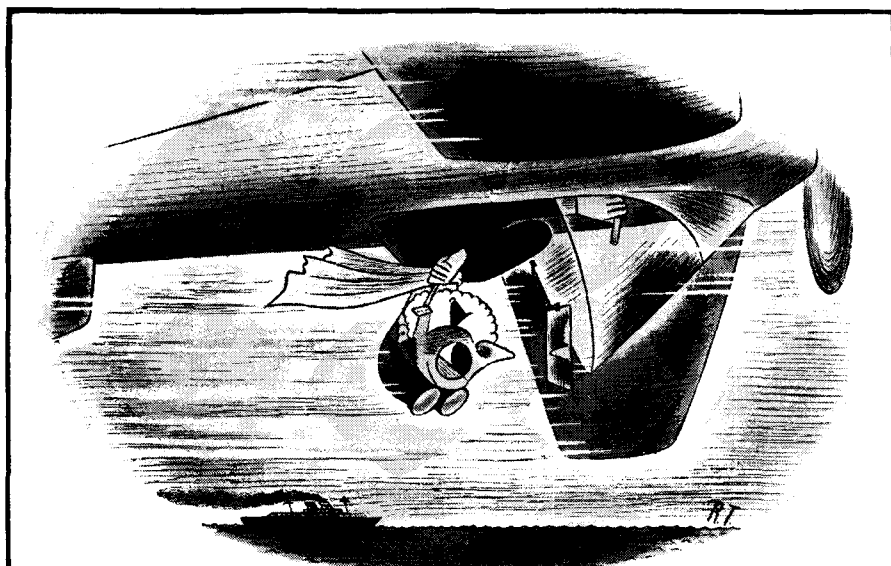
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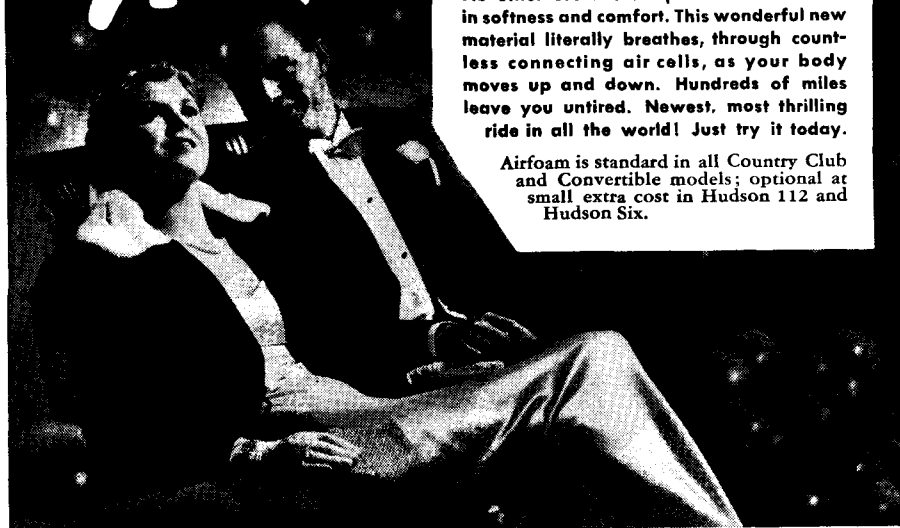


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pounding of his own heart. The bull pulled away sharply to the left as Garcia placed the short sticks and one of them fell out of the hump. The crowd didn't like it.

The trumpets sounded for the last third of the fight, the kill, and Garcia took the scarlet muleta and sword over the *barrera*. The blade, dipping near the point, took the afternoon light in glancing lines.

"Kill him quick, Chief," Chucho said.

Garcia walked out to where the bull watched with lowered head. He cited it and brought it past him in the *pase de la muerte*, the pass of the death. It was a simple pass, in which he stood erect, his heels together, and let the bull charge the muleta, he himself not moving. He saw the bull's charge swerve and then he felt the warm flank brush his belly. It was too close. The sweat started suddenly over his body.

"Kill it quick!" Chucho yelled. Garcia made two more passes. He saw the bull was tired but not tired enough for the kill. He took the sword out of the muleta and sighted along the dipping blade. Now, to bring the bull's head down, following the muleta in his left hand and to cross with the sword, putting it into the little spot between the shoulder blades.

The crowd began to yell: "More! More!" "Pass him some more!" "El *pase de la muerte*!" "Luis is afraid!" "The bull has Luis afraid!"

A thrown seat cushion struck his back, an empty bottle and a small bunch of onions sailed toward him.

"To hell with all of you!" he said. He passed the bull five times in a brief but brilliant *faena*, then killed it cleanly with the first thrust. Coming out after putting the sword in, the flat of the bull's horn caught him in the ribs. It was like a blow in the belly from an expert boxer, but worse. He wanted to crumble.

"You are hurt!" Chucho said. "Show these cattle that you are. Let me help you!"

Garcia waved him away and stood watching the bull's forelegs crumble. He turned away, walking slowly but without heroics. It is customary among the poorer bullfighters to make a great show when they suffer a slight injury.

"You all right?" the Indian said. Garcia nodded.

"Now I will fight like you do," the Indian said, "gracefully and intelligently."

GARCIA shook his head slightly. He was trying to get his breath without making a fuss and he couldn't speak. The Indian got by because he was brave, not graceful. He was standing in front of Felice Del Vayo's box, one arm outstretched, the hat in that hand. Garcia went under the stands, letting his weight come on Chucho's arm as they got out of sight of the stands. A little groan escaped him.

He recovered quickly and drank a little water. Outside he could hear cheers mingled with laughter. He stood up and, over Chucho's protests, walked toward the ring.

The fight was in its final *tercio*. The Indian was like a slugger trying to box. He moved in an unconscious burlesque of Garcia, the subtle movements of arm and leg exaggerated. Some of the crowd laughed but the coolness returned to Garcia. It was not funny. He drew a deep breath to call sharp advice to the Indian. The Indian was trying to pass the bull without giving ground a little. His feet were together fairly gracefully, and he was trying to compensate for their nearness to the bull by leaning back. He didn't lean back enough.

His body was black against the low sun as the bull tossed it and it came down twisting. Garcia swore softly. He vaulted the *barrera*, seizing a cloak from a *banderillero* as he ran. The bull was

butting wildly at the Indian's body, but missing with the horn in its haste.

Garcia made the *quite*, taking the bull away from the Indian. With one eye he tried to follow the Indian, being carried away, but the bull was smart, though tired, and took all his attention.

It would be a hard bull to kill. It had learned how to use its horns on a man. Garcia passed it with the cape. From its uncertainty he knew it was tired but also learning to charge the man instead of the cape. That was why bulls who came out of the ring alive were not allowed to be fought again. They were too smart.

He called to Saenz to take the bull away from him and he walked to the *barrera* to get his muleta and a sword. Then he began to pass the bull, brilliantly, endlessly in his mind, but the bull was tired. Garcia didn't know the crowd was beginning to applaud, louder and louder. He profiled, going in on the bull, putting the sword in to the hilt, feeling the blood on his knuckles. He knew it was as good as dead. He turned his back on it and walked across the ring.

He hurried to the infirmary below the stands. The police at the door made a way for him to go in. A priest was there. "I shall need your blessing, padre," Garcia said. He knelt to the swift Latin, then rose and walked to the operating table.

HE KNEW that the Indian was going to die. His face was dirty and the teeth were clenched.

"I am sorry, José," Garcia said.

"It is all right," the Indian said. "Ayee, I am in much pain, but it is all right. Now I shall see God." He tried to smile. "Do not forget to dedicate a bull to—the lady."

"I will not forget," Garcia said. It was too much and he had to go. "Goodby," Garcia said. The Indian raised a hand. Garcia knew he would be dead in a little while. The hole was too big. The doctor put more morphine pills into the Indian's mouth.

In the ring the air felt hot but clean and the applause beat down in a thick scattering. Garcia worked grimly, beautifully, on the fourth bull. He brought it to the kill tired but in good shape. He himself was tired and there were two more bulls to be killed.

He approached the box where Felice Del Vayo sat and bent swiftly to pick up something from the ground, something the bull-ring attendants had missed when they had cleaned up the bottles and seat cushions. He concealed it beneath his muleta.

"How is *El Indio*?" she asked, stopping smiling for a moment.

"*El Indio* is dead," Garcia said. He saw her face go blank. He knew she had no conception of death. She had never seen or even thought much about it.

"To you, dear lady, I dedicate this bull." He raised his hat. "To you, dear lady, a rose." He replaced his hat and tossed the bunch of onions through the air. They landed neatly in her lap. The laughter spread outward from her in slow, concentric circles, as those who had not seen the gift were told of it by their neighbors.

In Luis Garcia's eyes were tears as he turned toward the bull. And in Chucho Saenz's a deep concern. For Garcia was bitterly tired and there were yet two more bulls to be killed. But he would not die, Garcia knew. Each year he was smarter and he was only twenty-four. It would be a long time before his reflexes became slower. And he was growing smarter all the time. In every way. He saw the huge, sullen bulk of the bull through the drying mist of his own tears. He knew he would kill it. He was in no way afraid of it. He would kill all of them, beautifully and bravely, after brilliant *faenas*.

Buck Warren's Son

Continued from page 18

handle a gun about average—Buck had succeeded in teaching him some things—and he wasn't a sissy, either; but when you live in the shadow of a reputation like Buck Warren left, why, the cards are stacked against you unless you just happen to be a fireball.

It was this way: if Buck had left a son who was a hellion, it would have been okay with Karnak. They'd have forgiven him anything short of murder: they'd have grinned and said he was a chip off the old block. The thing they could never forgive was that George was just a nice, meek, mild young feller. They felt cheated. They even said George didn't appreciate his old man.

But if you knew George half as good as I did, you'd have known that was a lie. And I ain't guessing, either. You see, George hung around my house a good deal. Him and Carol—that's my daughter—seemed to think that maybe some day they'd cut a wedding cake together.

THAT'S how I got underneath the skin of the youngster. I remember one spring night when Carol was helping her ma with the supper dishes and George and me was sitting on the front porch kind of inhaling Ma's garden with its roses and columbine and iris and sweet shrub, and contemplating the long gray Spanish moss hanging down from the branches of the live oak in my front yard . . . that was when George Warren said suddenly, without even looking at me: "It's pretty difficult—living up to a tradition."

Of course that was a fancy way of saying what was on his mind, but I knew what he was driving at. I gave him a grunt so's he'd understand I was listening, and left it up to him whether to go on or not.

He said, "I'd give my right arm if I could be like Dad."

I thought that over for a minute, and then I said, "Hmph!"

"He was everything I admire. Big and strong and vital . . . and he never knew the meaning of the word fear."

"That's right, son. He sho' didn't."

"Folks think I don't appreciate him. But that isn't true, Mr. Verner, honestly it isn't."

"Co'se not, George."

"It's done things to me: not being like Dad. I know what everyone says. But how"—and he turned toward me, his face white and set—"how can a man do things that he isn't equipped for, mentally or physically?"

I looked at him out of the corners of my eyes. The boy didn't know it, but just at that moment there was more than a hint of old Buck Warren in the way he talked. Kind of steely. Except that he was bewildered about things, and his pa hadn't ever been bewildered.

I said, "It's only natural that folks should remember your pa."

George thought that over for a minute. Then he said, "I suppose the only way I'm like Dad is in spirit." Then he laughed, kind of embarrassed. "I'm afraid I'd look rather ridiculous trying to do the things he did."

Just then Carol came out on the porch, and she says to George, "Imagine seeing you here."

They strolled off toward town together, and I started thinking again. Game kid, I reflected. Burning up inside with a fever bigger than him: pretending that he didn't understand what was going on . . . when all the time he knew that no matter what happened he'd always be spoke of as . . . "Yeh! Buck Warren's son. But so different from his old man. . . ."

I finally quit thinking about it, and gave a shrug, because I knew that his life was grooved that way, and all the thinking in the world wasn't going to help much. I was glad, though, that he had talked to me, because it never would have seemed right that Buck Warren's son shouldn't care.

The town always said, "Young George . . . oh, he's all right. Harmless guy. Never will amount to nothin'." They said, "It's funny what kind of sons some men can have." They said, "I bet old Buck Warren turns over in his grave, thinkin' of George." They said, "If anything ever happened to that kid, he



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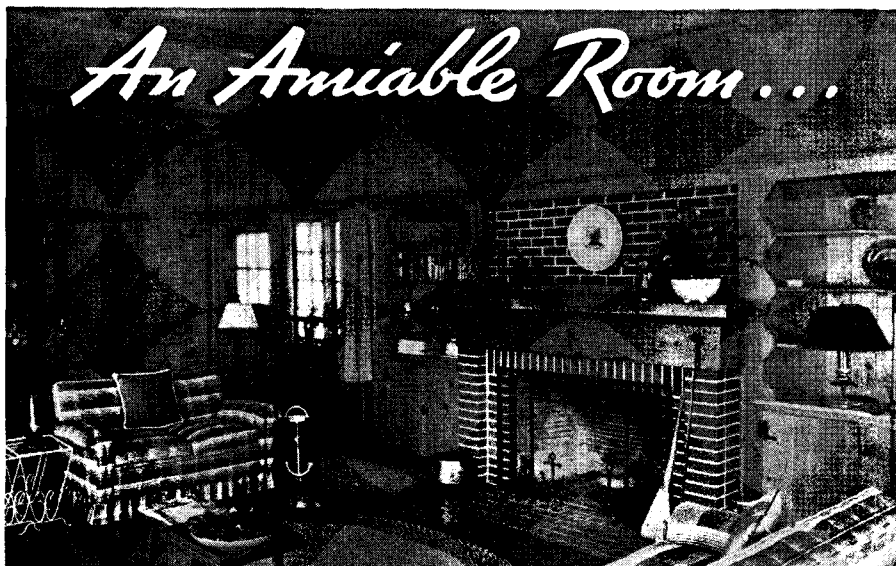
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wouldn't know where to start thinkin'."

Of course there ain't a whole lot of things ever happen in Karnak anyway. Life rocks along kind of peaceful, except for politics, and there usually ain't much to holler about. And that's why, when something does happen, it hits hard. Karnak can get awful stewed up, given half a chance.

Have you ever noticed that when exciting things happen, they happen quick? That was how it was that hot June day when the big green touring car raced through town, hell-bent for election.

It came in from the direction of Four Holes swamp, zipped across the B. & T. tracks east of town, went up Court Street at about forty, made the half circle around the courthouse, and on toward the Pineville road. I was on the courthouse steps passing the time of day with Sheriff Pit Gruber, and I said, "Sheriff, there was four men in that car, and it was painted green."

"You got good eyes," he says, "but your words don't seem to make much sense."

"Well, Sheriff, I ain't right bright and I know it. But it seems I recollect hearing over the radio a little while ago about the Allenville bank upstate bein' robbed and two men killed, and unless my ears are goin' back on me, I thought they said there was four men and they was drivin' a big green car of that make."

Now Pit ain't the dumbest guy in the world, but that don't mean he ain't the second dumbest. An idea has got to hit him with a hammer, but I'll hand him this: he ain't scared of nothing, and when he does find out what it's all about, he does things. He starts for the garage, and says, "By damn! You're right. Those are the guys."

He yells for his deputies, and two of them are there, but he's delayed getting the car out on account they're changing the oil. So we stand around, with him getting highly profane, and before the car is ready somebody drives in from Pineville direction and whirls up to the courthouse. This feller is full of excitement and news. He pops off to the sheriff about seeing the big green car and the four men in it, and he says he bets it's them bank robbers who murdered

the two men at Allenville, and the sheriff says, "Well, so what? They got a bigger and faster car, and they're long gone by now."

"But they ain't," says the newcomer. "Oh, no?" Pit gets sarcastic. "I guess you got telescope eyes."

"That big green car," says this feller, "is smashed all to hell about four miles west. It hit a bad place on the Pineville road, jumped the ditch, turned turtle and pulled up against a live oak. I seen the wreck."

"What happened to the four men?" asks Pit. "Was they killed, I hope?"

"Nope. I seen them runnin' for the nearest house. They had guns and was carrying two little black bags."

Pit's eyes have narrowed and you can see he is glad. He says, "Whose house are they hidin' out in?"

"At Big Cypress. They're in George Warren's house."

PIT GRUBER starts givin' orders for collecting a posse, and I go across the street to the Elite drugstore. I get Carol on the telephone. After a bit of palaverin' I ask, "Where's George Warren this morning?"

"Home," she says.

"You sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I talked to him about a half-hour ago."

"Maybe he went out."

"No. He said he was working on his accounts, and—" I reckon she caught the tightness in my voice, because her own got sharp with alarm and she said, "What's wrong?"

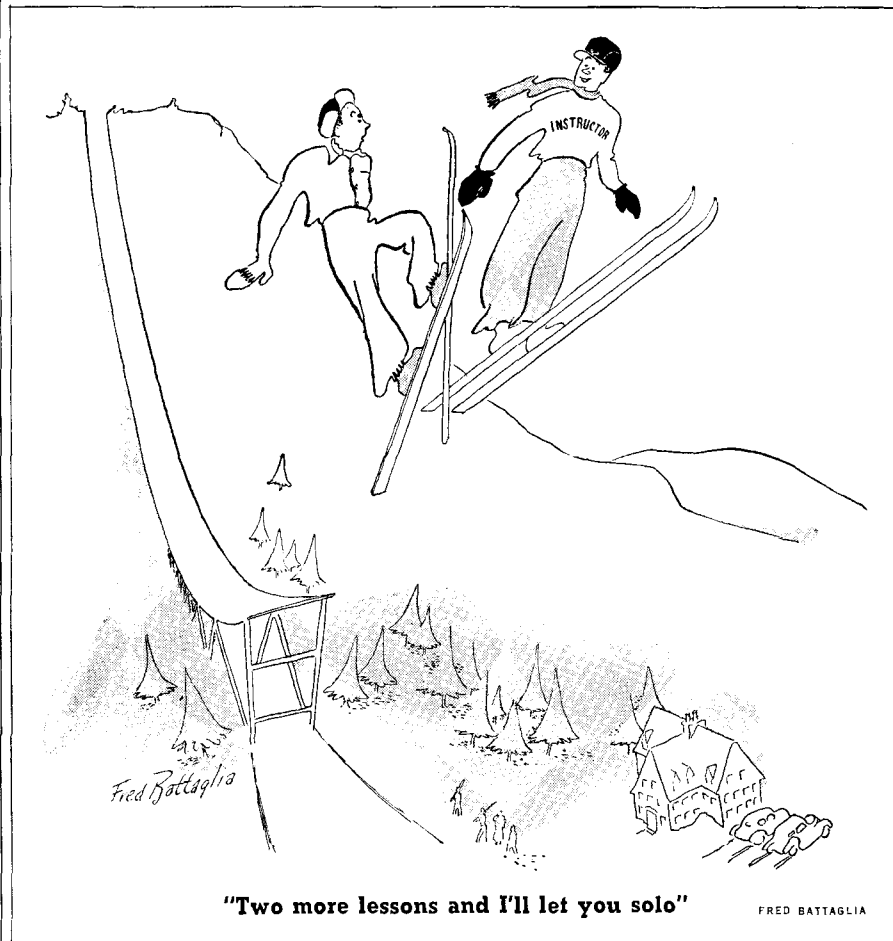
"Nothing, Carol. Honest, there ain't."

"Dad! Tell me . . ."

So I said, "I'll be home in five minutes. Meet me at the curb."

I climbed in my jallopy and started toward my little house on Cypress Avenue. I was glad Carol was goin' to hear this first from me instead of from a lot of loud-mouthed gossips, who would probably tell her George had been killed or something.

But while I was nosin' through traffic, I could hear snatches of what folks was saying. Funny how news travels in a town like Karnak. You'd think it had been broadcasted over the radio. Everybody talkin', makin' the same sort of



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gestures, and lookin' west—toward Big Cypress.

Four desperate men in that house with George Warren. It didn't seem to fit. I found myself thinking, "Here's the first time that young man's life has ever got off the track. Nothing ever happened to him before, and now—this!"

It wasn't nice to think about, and I could see huge hunks of trouble in the offing. Them four desperadoes trapped in a house close to town sort of checked it straight up to Pit Gruber. Not only the county but the whole state would be watching to see what he did. And there'd be no reason for him not doing plenty.

Carol was waiting at the curb when I drove up. Her ma was with her, saying, "Now, honey, don't you worry. . . ." and I knew right away some kind friend had telephoned the news. I started to get out of the car, but she motioned me back and got in.

I said, "Hey! What's the big idea?" "Drive me out to Big Cypress, Dad." "Look, Carol—let's be sensible."

SHE had grown up, all of a sudden. I didn't hardly know her. Her voice was flat and firm. She said, "It's true, isn't it, Dad? They've got George."

"Gosh, honey—nobody knows for sure. They don't even know if those are the guys."

"They had guns and little black bags like banks use for money."

"Maybe George ain't home."

"He's home." You'd think she had been talking to him, she was that positive. "Take me out there, Dad."

Well, I argued. I said it didn't make no sense. I said, "There'll be hell poppin' out yonder." She looked at me steady and said, "I know. That's why I've got to be there."

I looked at Ma for help, but Ma just nodded. She said, "George is Carol's future husband, Pa. She's got a right to be where he is."

I gave up then, but I couldn't understand. Women are the damndest creatures sometimes.

Cutting over to Pineville Road, I ran right into a stream of cars, all headed toward Big Cypress. This was the biggest and most exciting thing that had happened in Karnak since the World War, and folks wasn't of any mind to miss it. There was men with guns and men without guns. And women and children. You'd think it was a political speakin' day, when they picnic at the grove, except that a lot of the men looked grim, and they snuggled the barrels of their guns kind of affectionate, like a man does when he prospects to use it serious.

We stopped about a quarter mile away from the house: you could just about see it through the live oaks. Prettiest plantation house around those parts—or almost. And as Carol and I got out of the car we heard somebody say, "George Warren in yonder. Imagine that." And whoever was with him answered, "Pity it ain't old Buck Warren they got. He could handle all four of 'em alone."

You see how it was. This Buck Warren thing had built up to a tradition. Great as the old man was, no human being ever could do half the things that Karnak credited to him. Poor George never had a chance against the reputation of his old man.

The atmosphere under the oaks was tense. It wasn't like a mob, because a mob is hysterical. The possemen were quiet. They had a job to do, and they knew some of them was likely to get hurt bad. Most of them gathered around Pit Gruber, and Carol linked her arm in mine and shoved me over in the direction of the sheriff. There wasn't no other women there, but of course they let Carol through. I don't know how she felt, but I saw everybody was looking at

her kind of sorrowful, like she was a widow before she ever got married.

Carol took the play right out of my hands. She said, "Is George in yonder, Sheriff?"

"Uh-huh. He sho' is."

"Did they tell you, or have you actually seen him?"

"We all seen him. They made him show hisse'f fo' a minute." Pit Gruber scratched his head in perplexity. "Beggin' your pardon, Carol—but this is one hell of a mess. We got them fellers cornered, and we can't do nothin' about it. And as for starvin' 'em out, there ain't a chance. There's probly enough vittles in that house to last three months."

Yep. That's what everybody was talkin' about, and seemin' to find no answer at all. They couldn't attack the house without either killing George or getting him killed. Pit and the posse knew they wasn't dealing with no babies. These guys wasn't bluffing. They couldn't afford to bluff. They was trapped cold, and they had just one trump card.

That was George Warren.

It did seem kind of odd that of all the folks in Karnak it had to be George Warren who had been caught up this way. Standing out there with the crowd, the summer sun beating down from a clear sky, gray moss drooping kind of mournful from the live oaks . . . well, you just couldn't think of it being George in there.

The sheriff held a conference with the mayor and a lot of leading citizens, and then he palavered with the leader of the gang. The feller came out on the porch waving a handkerchief over his head for a flag of truce. He was thin and puny when you first looked at him, but he had a face hard as hickory and eyes like gimlets.

Pit Gruber explained what they was up against, and that they'd be smart to give up without no bloodshed. The little guy listens like he was amused, and then he says, "Oh, yeah! Now you listen to me. We're facing a murder rap and we know it. We ain't gonna be taken alive, and if we get bumped off, why, this sap we got in here will go first. One guy more or less don't matter a damn to us."

Pit argues some more, but don't get nowhere. The little feller talks again: "We're tellin'—not listenin', see?" He was smiling thin and cruel and you could tell he had doped it out that George Warren was great shakes in Karnak. "We're makin' the terms—not you. You're gonna get us a car, a good one, loaded with gas and oil. We're comin' out of here with this lad in front of us. We're goin' away. One shot and we make a fight of it, but this Warren shuffles off first and complete. And we're taking him with us in the car until we feel safe. So if anybody here telephones other counties to warn the cops, they're just the same as signing off for Warren. Is that clear or do I explain it again?"

PIT says it is clear, and the guy goes back in the house. Carol is standing next to me, kind of tense and white-faced, and she says, positivelike, "They really mean it."

No use tryin' to fool her, so I just nodded. They've sensed that they got us dead to rights. We couldn't rightly sentence Buck Warren's son to death, and that's what a single shot would mean.

The four guys are trapped and surrounded, but so long as they've got George with 'em, they're safe. You couldn't blast the house without hitting George, and if you didn't, why, they most likely would.

Of course we know they ain't gonna start anything themselves. They're taking no chances of setting the posse crazy. They want us to think like sane folks

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think, which means in fear of taking an innocent man's life, especially the son of Buck Warren. Funny, too... in all the talkin' that went on you could hear the name of Buck more than you could George's name. Folks was trying to figure what Buck would do if he was the man they had caught; they tried to dope out what Buck would do if he was standing out there with us, and his son was inside. But we wasn't none of us Buck Warrens, and we didn't get no answer.

"There ain't any answer," I remarked to Carol.

She is just standing there looking at the house. The day is gettin' hotter, and the hands of my watch are moving slow. It would have been bad enough without their having George, because four desperate, armed men in a fine big house like that ain't no child's play to capture. But we'd have got them, because a righteous community can get awful het up if you give it half a chance. I said to Carol, "Relax a little, honey."

She smiled weakly and shook her head. She said, "I'm trying to figure out how George is feeling right now."

"What's the use?"

"It's so I'll know him better than I ever have before. That's important, Dad."

I could see what she was driving at. It was odd discovering that my girl wasn't my girl any more, but another man's woman. And that other man in mortal danger. There was bars up between me and Carol for the first time. I knew better than to intrude.

I felt old, and kind of out of the picture. But downright proud, if you want to know. Carol was being pretty splendid. Lots of women would have yelled and hollered and argued and said stupid things. But not Carol. She stood motionless, staring at the big house until her eyeballs must have hurt... figuring it all out, and knowing there wasn't no answer. And not yelping about it.

It looked to me that the cards had been stacked against George Warren all his life, and now they was stacked worse than ever. If they killed him, the town would say how sorry they was, but there'd always be the tag: that old man Buck would have handled it. If a miracle happened and he got away, they'd say Sheriff Pit Gruber done it. I don't know if folks can think after they pass on, but if they can, and if Buck was looking down on that scene... well, I bet he was feeling kind of sorry that he had been such a big, two-fisted man. He'd built up something that no ordinary feller could possibly live up to.

NOON come along. Housewives sent servants out from town with lunch and coffee. Two colored men set up barbecue stands and sold sandwiches and soft drinks. It was like a truce on a battlefield, except that the tension was gettin' fiercer because nobody knew what to do.

Afternoon. The big house surrounded. Men sittin' down, backs against trees, glad of the shade, and weary in body. Gun butts restin' on the ground, barrels cradled against shoulders. Dust covering corn and cotton fields. Not much conversation any more: folks was plumb talked out.

Me and Carol just sitting there. She had drunk a cup of coffee and nibbled at a cheese sandwich Ma had brung out. Just nibbled. It was like waiting for eternity to happen.

And then it did happen. Happened just like things do, without warning. It happened before any of us knew what was up, or that anything was in the wind. And I reckon it surprised them bank robbers more than it did us. But no, that ain't the truth. We all got a surprise then that Karnak will never live down—ever.

The front door of the Big Cypress plantation house opened suddenly and

George Warren walked out on the porch.

He didn't have a coat or tie on. He looked smaller and thinner than usual. But there was something in his walk, something in the way he held his head, something in his eyes that we could see even from this distance, that sort of made folks forget Buck Warren: to forget Buck and to remember his son, George.

He walked across that porch and down the three steps to the gravel path. He didn't hurry. Every step was slow and firm, like a man walking to his execution. Walking to his death, but not afraid.

He was down on the gravel walk before there was a sound. Then a man's voice come from inside the house, harsh and threatening. It said, "Come back, you damn' fool, or we'll blast a hole through you."

He might as well have been talking to a deaf man. George never turned, never slowed up, never hurried. He just walked straight toward us, like you see pictures of soldiers walking into machine-gun fire. I heard Carol say something, hardly louder than breathing. She said, "He's smiling."

He was, too. No fooling. I heard Pit Gruber say, like he was real distressed, "Oh, the damn' idiot... the damn' idiot..." But it was a tribute, the way he said it.

It was easy to dope out how George was figuring. With him in the house, we didn't have a chance. He knew good and well we'd never sign his death sentence. So he was signing his own. And looking at him—each step seeming like it took an hour—you couldn't help but believe that he was glad of this: you couldn't help but think that the person who had gone into that house was nothing but the son of a great man, but the person who walked out, smiling, to almost certain death—was a great man himself.

There was a commotion in the house; yelling and cursing. Then somebody shot, and you could see George stagger, just a trifle. Stagger, but not stop. And I felt Carol's fingers dig into my arm.

Pit Gruber's voice: triumphantlike. "Let 'em have it! Every door: every window! Don't let 'em get a clean shot at him!"

Then gunfire. Rifles and shotguns, roaring across the landscape. Smoke

and the acrid smell of powder. Men shooting fast and loading fast and firing again: fierce, grim men, suddenly free from the strain they'd been under. Just hell turned loose, and George Warren walking steadily toward us, with that smile on his boyish lips and that proud lift to his slender figure.

And then he suddenly gave a lurch and pitched forward. He hit the ground hard and lay sprawled there. Carol didn't cry out, but she went to him, and I found myself praying that now that they'd killed him they'd quit firing at his body; praying that Carol wouldn't be hit.

The fighting didn't last long. It was terrible for a while, but it was over soon enough. When three of those men had died, the fourth came out, and he was bleeding bad. Some of our boys had been hurt... but it was over, and all the town's doctors were there, and two of them were bending over George Warren and doing things to him, and Carol was sitting beside him, white of face, and all grown up suddenly and forever, and conversation was beginning to hum, and a new tradition was being born.

Even before folks knew for certain that George had a good chance to live, they was talking in awed whispers about what he had done.

HE OPENED his eyes just once before they got the ambulance to take him to the hospital. Pit Gruber was hanging over him, almost crying, and he said, "Son, you got more guts than your old man ever had."

And George made a typical answer. You could hardly hear him when he said, "That isn't so, Sheriff. Dad wouldn't have been frightened, but I was scared to death."

They toted him off to the hospital then. He was hurt pretty bad, but not so bad that he wasn't okay to marry my girl a month later. And at the wedding I heard a group of folks talking, and what they was saying made me very happy, because it summed up the way the whole town felt.

One of the men in that little group in my front parlor said, "This George Warren has got more courage than any man who ever lived."

And somebody else answered, "He sure has." Then he hesitated a second before finishing, "And his old man was pretty good, too."



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"I could shoot him of course," the comandante said, "the ley de fuego, and all that sort of thing"

The Resounding Skies

By Laurence G. Blochman

ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY MORSE MEYERS

The Story Thus Far:

VI

RADIO broadcasts from North American stations are being spoiled by mysterious interference waves in tropical America. While investigating the matter, Bill Bossert, a secret agent, dies of arsenic poisoning, and Walter Lane, another operative, succeeds him.

Like Bossert, Lane goes to work for the Caribbean Fruit Company. Within a short time, he learns that a German—Adolf von Graulitz—is at the head of a group of plotters who are spreading propaganda over the region.

Gerald Stilton, the company's agent in the Capital, is murdered.

Quite by chance, the evidence points to Lane as the murderer. He is, of course, innocent. But the men surrounding him in the little town of Puerto Musa—Dave Perry, manager of the Puerto Musa division of the company; Cecil Holliday, the district superintendent; "Pinky" Hind, one of the overseers; Henry Alcott, an accountant, and Ed Bannister, a company official—all profess to believe him guilty.

Only two persons are friendly toward him: Bill Roland, U. S. vice-consul at Puerto Musa, and Muriel Monroe, Perry's secretary.

Another murder startles the little community. Shortly after Lane pays a call on him, Bill Roland is shot to death in his office. And Lane is arrested, jailed.

In his cell, Lane receives a caller: the comandante of the port. Before the man leaves, Lane notes that upon his wrist there are three parallel scratches. He wonders if Bill Roland made them with his fingernails. . . .

The killer of Stilton had stolen a hundred thousand dollars that had been brought in by the Bonaca, a small steamship. Investigating the crimes, Dave Perry calls on the captain.

The captain refers to some trouble his crew has had with one of the company's overseers—"Pinky" Hind. Perry is interested. "What," he says, "is the matter with Hind?"

FOR one thing, he was three sheets in the wind and sailing lee rail under," said the captain. "He came climbing up my bow hawser like a blasted monkey—Lord knows how he didn't cut himself in two on the rat guards—and hoisted himself aboard over the bow."

"What did he want?" Perry asked.

"Wanted to go back to the States with us, he said. Broke out a wad of bank notes when the quartermaster on watch grabbed him, and said he'd pay a hundred dollars if the quartermaster would let him stow away in the banana bins. Didn't mind the cold, he said."

"You put him ashore?"

"Quicker than that," said the captain.

"He was filthy drunk."

"What time was this?"

"Just before the comandante marched his soldiers on the dock. Damn it, Perry, this is no business for a sailor. Will you tow that square-sterned politico off my ship, so I can get down to Puerto Temor and pick up my bananas? I should have been there this morning, and they got 30,000 stems waiting for me."

"I'll do my best," Perry said.

He went frowning along the deck to Suite B, knocked and opened the door simultaneously.

His Excellency the Minister of the Interior was propped up in one of the big

brass beds that are the feature of all de luxe suites on the Caribbean Fruit Company's steamers. A bulging expanse of pale blue silk undershirt showed above the counterpane. He lifted a pudgy hand to Perry and said, "Dias."

"My respects, Your Excellency," Perry said in Spanish. "I bring you bad news. Mr. Stilton is dead."

"Truth?" said His Excellency. He seemed neither greatly surprised nor moved. His expression was somnolently introspective, as though he were preoccupied with a personally pressing problem of gastric distress, and was only vaguely aware of the import of what Perry had told him. He hoisted his massive torso a little higher on his four pillows, opened his mouth, drew his multiple chins close to his chest and was audibly comforted. His eyes brightened a little. "What a pity!" he resumed at last. "Was his death natural or political?"

"He was stabbed," said Perry.

"A revolution?" His Excellency was fully awake now. He raised himself a trifle higher.

"A sordid matter of robbery. Unfortunately, the money stolen was the sum involved in the transaction for which you came down from the Capital."

"No matter." His Excellency settled back again against his pillows with a gesture of nonchalance. "There is no hurry. I do not have to return to the Capital for another forty-eight hours. That will give you plenty time to get more money. In the meantime, I am enjoying this ship. I have never slept in a finer bed. I—"

THE door opened and the captain of the Bonaca came in, red-faced and sputtering like a damp fuse.

"Pardon me for listening through the bulkhead," he fumed, "but did I hear right—that your friend here expects to stay on my ship another forty-eight hours?"

"Well, Skipper, I—"

"And with me already overdue at Puerto Temor! There's thirty thousand stems of fruit standing on the dock since this morning and I can't even start loading when I do come alongside. I got to unload a cargo of potatoes before I start refrigerating my holds. Perry, those bananas will start to ripen—"

"Listen, Skipper, His Excellency has taken a liking to this bed, and he enjoys your hospitality. . . ."

"Thirty thousand stems. . . ."

"The company loses twenty times that much fruit in a single blowdown," Perry