



Now You Are Free

By Vereen Bell

The black cloth was around Juan's eyes, but the picture of the prison yard lingered

HERBERT MORTON STOOBS

Four lives for one, in a land where only the dead were free

HE WAITED, far enough from the window so that he could not be seen. The rifle lay upon the bed, ready. He drew on the rubber gloves.

An elevator door clanged. Voices grew, but there was no sound of footsteps on the thick carpet of the hallway. Somewhere a radio crackled.

He looked at his watch. Again he forced his gaze to wander carefully and objectively about the hotel room to make sure nothing had been inadvertently disturbed. The window was open, the screen raised. The metal sidepiece had been removed from the window frame, exposing the dark, waiting hollows of the building tile, and now leaned against the wall. The screws lay on the floor, beside the screw driver.

Down the hall, a clear, round voice began speaking.

He closed the transom. The Plaza Montenez seemed a thick sea of color upon which thousands of straw hats floated. On the flag-draped balcony gathered men in tropical whites and in scintillant uniforms. Beside the microphones stood the little man with the round voice, talking.

Then a surge of sound came up from the human sea that flooded the park and streets as an erect, cotton-haired man appeared on the balcony; and shouts of "El Padrino!" shrilled above the roar.

He ran into the bathroom and turned on the lavatory and tub spigots full. Returning, he carefully opened the rifle's bolt and looked at the beautiful shining metal thing that slid halfway out the cham-

ber. Then he sat in one of the chairs near the window, and rested the rifle on the back of the other chair. In the telescope, El Padrino leaped into clarity.

El Padrino was speaking now, his voice flowing like syrup from the amplifiers, and from the radio.

The cross hairs wavered off the target again, shaken by a little paroxysm of violent hate. His rubber-clad finger tightened imperceptibly around the trigger. The rifle stock felt cool against his cheek. He inhaled deeply, and held his breath. The blood pounded in his neck. The cross hairs were perfectly steady now. He began squeezing the trigger.

Because of the contrivance at the rifle's muzzle, the shot was muffled, flat; hardly audible above the rush of water in the bathroom. Immediately he worked the bolt and watched, cheek frozen to the rifle stock, finger ready on the trigger. The figure of the dictator sagged.

He relaxed, and for one brief second gave himself over to a surge of exultation that transfigured him. Then he stepped quickly to the windows and drew down the shades. With one hand he reached around the shade and pulled down the screen and window.

Coolly, almost detachedly, he disassembled the rifle. The stock had been sawed lengthwise almost to the loosened butt plate, so that only a tiny section of walnut held it together; this split easily. At the window he shoved the disassembled parts of the rifle and the ejected shell far down into the hollow tile of the wall and replaced the framing.

That left the tiny screw driver, and the gloves. He put the screw driver in his pocket. When he had smoothed the bed and placed the chairs against the wall, he went into the bathroom and cut off the water. He stripped off the rubber gloves, dropped them into the toilet and flushed it.

Holding a handkerchief over his hand, he raised the window shades to their normal positions. The group on the balcony, he saw, had closed about the fallen dictator. From the park, the first quick silence had given way to a wild confusion of sound.

He opened the door with the handkerchief, and stepped out into the hallway. It was quite empty. He opened the staircase door, and looked down the dizzily narrowing slot to the bottom, and then went down the steps unhurriedly.

IN THE lobby, people jammed the door, craning their necks, shouting and trying to get out.

"The president had a heart attack!" a woman said.

Finally outside, someone seized him by the arm. It was Blasco, of the Private Police. His automatic pistol was drawn.

"What is it? What is it? Do you know?" Blasco shouted.

"They said Flores had an attack," he answered.

"He is shot," Blasco said. "I'm sure he is!"

"I didn't hear any shot," Juan Pelayo said.

At that moment an incisive voice cut through the meaningless cacophony of sound in the amplifiers: "Attention! Private Police report here at once! Attention! Private Police report here at once!"

"See? Come on." Blasco said, and began beating and clubbing his way through the mob. Juan Pelayo drew his own pistol and followed. At the corner he dropped the screw driver down the gutter grille.

The executive bedrooms, to which Juan Pelayo had been assigned, were quiet, save for the little clinking sounds of bottles and medical instruments and the strained, whistling breath of the unconscious dictator. No grief could be (Continued on page 66)



Mr. Kitt opened the window and shouted: "Something you wanted, Miss?" She looked up in surprise

No Time to Quit

By Pat Frank

MR. KITT, of the firm of Kitt, Ltd., had been trying to get out of the city all day long. In the morning, the instant complete evacuation had been ordered, he had packed off Mrs. Kitt and his daughters and his grandson to the country place near Andover. Roger, the chauffeur, was in the Territorials and had been called, so Ellen, his oldest daughter, did the driving.

It wasn't until they were all ready that Mr. Kitt had told them he wasn't going with them.

"I'll be along," he had assured Mrs. Kitt, "just as soon as I've closed up the store. I'll drive down in the small car in an hour or two."

"You will please hurry, now won't you, Henry?" she had said.

"Certainly," he'd replied lightly. "Don't think I want to stay here, do you, and be blasted to bits?" Then Mrs. Kitt had wept, and had insisted on kissing him goodby, a most unnecessary procedure, for he'd see her in a few hours, and this last had made him nervous.

When Mr. Kitt arrived at Kitt, Ltd., he found there a great deal more to clean up than he had expected. Some of his older employees had reported for work as usual, and he had told them, quite sternly, to be off, as the evacuation order required. But by noon the store was in order, and the signs prepared: "Closed Until Further Notice."

"I'll hang them myself," Mr. Kitt told Mr. Grimm, the senior bookkeeper. "You'd better run along now."

"Aren't you going, Mr. Kitt?" Grimm asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes. They won't catch me here. Just a few more things to do. Of course, we'll all be back soon."

"Certainly, sir," said Grimm, and Mr. Kitt wanted to shake hands with him, for they had known each other a long time, but he thought he'd best not, for it might embarrass Mr. Grimm.

AFTER Mr. Grimm had gone he sat alone in his office, a wispy little man whose heels scarcely touched the floor as he leaned back in the big chair. For twenty years he had considered installing a more comfortable chair, but this he never did. His father had sat in this chair, and his grandfather, and they had been larger men.

His eyes rested on his desk, and he saw that everything was in its proper place and for the life of him, Mr. Kitt didn't know what else there was to do.

Then he remembered the ARP manual, and skimmed through it. "Strips of adhesive tape," one sentence read, "should be placed across all windows as an aid in preventing casualties from shattered glass." He looked at his windows, and the tape was already there.

It had been there, he knew, for several days.

He walked to the window and looked into the street. It was rather like a Sunday, he thought, in its emptiness. There was a young girl standing in the street. She had a dog in her arms. She seemed uncertain as to where she was going. Finally she turned toward the door of Kitt, Ltd., found it locked and rattled it in exasperation. Mr. Kitt opened the window and asked: "Something you wanted, Miss?"

She looked up in surprise and said, "Oh, you're still open? Do you have masks for dogs?"

"No, I'm terribly sorry," he said. "We haven't handled them. You might try at Bowden's, farther down the street."

"They're closed," the girl said, and hurried away.

There wasn't anything else to keep him now, except to hang the signs. He didn't like the words: "Closed Until Further Notice."

There wasn't any reason why he himself couldn't make a new sign: "Closed for a Short While." It would only take a few minutes, and he had plenty of time.

Mr. Kitt went to the basement and found the paint and fresh cardboard. He was very careful, and very slow, and very methodical in his work, so it was almost dusk when he heard the sound of footsteps on the first floor.

He came up the steps in a hurry, and saw that it was Potts, the night watchman. Potts had been ordered to leave like all the rest. Potts should not have turned up this evening.

But before Mr. Kitt could say anything, Potts asked sharply: "What are you doing here, Mr. Kitt? You ought to be in Andover."

"Why are you here?" Mr. Kitt demanded. "You knew my orders were that everyone should leave."

"Just checking up," said Potts uneasily.

"So was I," said Mr. Kitt.

THEN they both stopped, for they heard the wail of the sirens outside, and knew that, indeed, it had come. From far off came the flat sounds they recognized as the anti-aircraft guns, followed by a series of explosions.

Potts bristled to the sound of the guns, and fingered the sleeve that the last war had emptied. "I'll tell you, Mr. Kitt," he said, "I don't like the idea of running away."

Mr. Kitt smiled then, and his eyes wandered to the front showcase, and picked out the gilt sign, in the old-fashioned lettering, on the pane. The sign said, "Kitt, Ltd. Established 1684."

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Kitt as the floor quivered to a hit near by, "that it's a little late for me to leave now."