

Cabin Nineteen

By Philip Clark

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL BLOSSOM

Comedy, adventure, romance—there's never a dull moment at Bert Stillwell's motor camp

I'M BERT STILLWELL. Me and my wife Clara, we run this tourist camp in the mountains, about a hundred miles from the California line. The camp is about ten miles from the town of Lastrap, which isn't much of anything to be ten miles from. But business is fair, and we make out all right.

This evening I'm thinking of we was in the kitchen behind the lunchroom. Clara was making some dough for pies, and I was leaning up against the sink and sort of keeping an eye on the cabins, especially on Number 19, where the two youngest Armisted kids was playing in front of the steps. They wasn't up to anything much right then, but that was no guarantee that in five minutes they still wouldn't be.

Then this old wreck of a car come over the grade from Lastrap. It was Luke Armisted. He was grayish, and thin, with a stoop to his shoulders, and he held onto the steering wheel like it was something heavy he might have to pick up sometime soon, but was putting it off as long as possible.

He turned his car in off the road, and run it behind 19, which is the last cabin on the row. He always kept it there, sort of apologetically out of sight, like he knew it didn't add much tone to the establishment.

Clara stopped working the dough, and looked round at me. She said: "Was it that Armisted?"

"Well," I said, "it looked like him."

Clara straightened up from the dough board. She stood there looking at me, with meaning in her eye. She said:

"Well, then, Bert Stillwell, what are you hanging around here for?"

I said, "I'm looking at the view."

She said, "How much longer do you figure to go on looking at it?"

"Quite a while yet," I said. "It's still a good time to sunset."

"Bert Stillwell," Clara said, "you got to do something."

"Tonight?" I asked. "You want me to turn 'em onto the road tonight?"

Clara said, "You can tell them tonight, can't you? They don't have to go till morning."

I said, "Where could they go? They ain't got no place back East, nor money enough to get there if they had. And they can't go on to California. You got to have a hundred dollars in your jeans before they'll even let you across the line. You know perfectly well that Armisted ain't never seen a hundred dollars anywhere but in a movie."

"I know that all right," Clara said, "but I ain't interested. What I want to know is, will you or won't you?"

I said, "Maybe in the morning."

"All right, then," Clara said. "If you ain't man enough, I reckon I'll have to be."

I didn't say nothing. Clara shucked the dough off her hands, yanked off her apron, and marched out of the door.

I stayed by the kitchen window and watched. I'd seen this happen more'n once in the past few weeks, and the plot didn't change much. Luke Armisted had come around from in back of 19, and was sitting on the steps, his shoulders stooped, his big, knuckly hands hanging down between his knees, and his jaw just barely working on his tobacco. The two youngest Armisted kids were playing in the dust with a bunch of piñon nuts laid out like armies. They looked up at Armisted and pointed at one of the nuts that was out in front like a general.

Armisted didn't even twitch his jaw, but a little bullet of tobacco juice shot out and hit that head nut and knocked it west from Sunday. The kids laughed and kicked the casualty off to one side and began to set things up for a sham battle.

I wondered what Luke had been working or trading at in town. He went in most every day, to ask at the telegraph office if some money had come from his brother in Little Rock, that he knew wasn't never going to be there. He was handy, and sometimes he picked up an odd job at this or that.

BUT he done best at trading. When he first come, he didn't have nothing to work on but a three-bladed jackknife, two of them broken. Now he's got a knife with two whole blades, and along the line he's had a double-action tire pump, a slide trombone, a stamp collection and samples of most of the livestock that's natural to this climate and altitude.

I watched Clara bearing down on him. He didn't see her, and neither did the kids, and for a moment I was almost afraid. Then Armisted's daughter Milly come to the door of the cabin, and I relaxed. And in spite of herself, Clara did too. A lot of the oak-ribbing went out of her back, but she kept on.

Milly stood there in the door, straight and slim in her cheap print dress. She had honey-colored hair, and the prettiest, nicest face that ever looked out of that or any other cabin door. She seen Clara coming, and spoke to her father.

Luke Armisted looked up, and then rejoined himself section by section, and ended up standing on his feet. He took his hat off to Clara like he always does, and stowed his quid somewhere in his back recesses. Then he smiled. It was a smile that says he'd be pleased to ask Clara to come in and set, and even if it's just a tourist cabin that he hasn't scarcely ever paid the rent on, he's offering his welcome for what it's worth.

Milly smiled too. Not quite like her father, though. A little more trouble in it. A little more of what you could almost call fear. Nineteen's young for a girl's mother to be dead and her father broke, and home a long way back beyond the mountains. I couldn't see



Clara's face, but I was pretty sure there wasn't going to be no eviction that evening.

They talked a little while, and then Clara turned around and come back to the kitchen. And the way she laid into that dough! I kept quiet.

After a while, she slowed up a little, and gave me a look. It was the kind of a look that any married man understands.

I said, "That's all right, Clara. Maybe you can ketch Armisted sometime when Milly ain't by. I understand how it is."

"You!" Clara said. "You couldn't understand anything if your skull was tattooed with it!"

I said, "I can understand how you feel about Milly, because that's the way I feel too. If we'd had a daughter, I'd like to've thought she'd had Milly's disposi-

tion. We'd be askin' too much for the face and figure."

But it was kind of misplaced. Clara reared back and said, "Bert Stillwell, I got a good mind to—"

I said quick, "No you ain't. You're goin' to need that pie to feed the trade with. Look yonder."

SHE didn't believe me, but she looked anyway. There was a car coming in—a big, black sedan with a New York license. They wasn't just after gas, either. I got out there quick.

There were two couples in the car, middle-aged and better dressed than the average run. They looked prosperous, and tired, and sick of each other's company. The fatter of the two women, the one in the front seat, did all the talking.



She looked the place over like she could see unmistakable signs of a colony of lepers just having moved out, and said, "How much are the cabins?"

I said, "We got some real nice cabins, ma'am, with showers and inner-spring beds, for two dollars."

"Two dollars!" she said. "We could stay in a hotel for that!"

"I reckon you could, ma'am," I said, "but it's a hundred and seventy-five miles up the road till you'd come to it."

I see by her face that she'd already had a look at the Nugget Hotel in Las-trap, and anyway, tourists would rather sleep on the ground than go back the way they come from. The woman in the back seat said, "Oh, for goodness' sake, Helen! We can't drive all night long!"

The fat one give her a look that had

words behind it, but before she could get started the man at the wheel shut her up with a husbandly growl and shoved a five at me. She knocked his hand up like it had a gun in it, and said to me, "We'll take a look at the cabins first, if you don't mind."

I said, "Yes, ma'am. You can drive the car right in there between 15 and 16. I reckon you'll find them suitable."

THEY parked the car and clumb out. The Armisted kids had stopped playing at war and was sitting on the steps watching the real flesh and blood skirmish. Luke Armisted wasn't there, but I got a glimpse of him around the near corner of his cabin.

He was acting like he'd lost something, bending down and peering under the

cabin, then taking a cast up the hillside.

I showed the fat woman into 15, and she bounced the mattress, and looked under the pillow for bugs, and asked me if the sheets'd been changed since the last visitors. I said, "Yes, ma'am," and went out.

Her husband give me the five, and the other man wrote in a little black notebook, his wife watching. I saw Luke Armisted sort of drifting along behind the cabins, trying to look under them without seeming to, and I wondered what the hell he was up to.

I went up to the house for towels and change for the five. Clara give me a dollar out of the cash drawer, and said, "Will they take supper?"

I said, "They ain't said yet. But maybe you'd better dish up a mess of

Armisted said, "Dawgone if! I don't know just how he got outen that car. Hogs is certainly the very devil"

ground glass and eightpenny nails, just in case."

Clara said, "Bert Stillwell! Now don't you go making cracks at paying customers!"

I said, "The only crack I got is in my back from bending it. Don't fret yourself."

I took the towels and the change, and went on back down to the cabins. Luke Armisted come out from behind Number 6 as I went by, and looked at me like he wanted to say something. But

(Continued on page 39)



"A sick woman is to be loved doubly," he said, "for she is a woman and a child at the same time"

FLOTSAM

By Erich Maria Remarque

TRANSLATED BY DENVER LINDLEY

The Story Thus Far:

MEETING in Vienna, young Ludwig Kern and Josef Steiner, both exiled from Germany, form a warm friendship. Neither has a passport. But Steiner is clever enough to avoid the authorities. He remains in the great Austrian city. Working in an amusement park, he sleeps in a gypsy wagon.

Kern is not so fortunate. He is arrested, sent to Czechoslovakia. There, in Prague, he meets and falls in love with a charming girl, Ruth Holland, also a refugee. When Ruth's permit to stay in the country expires, she goes to Vienna. Kern follows and Steiner gets him a job in the amusement park. Attempting to protect Ruth from some rioters, Kern is arrested. When he is finally released from prison, he is ordered to leave Austria. He obeys the order but returns immediately, only to find that Ruth, also deported, has gone to Zürich.

A short time later, he incurs the enmity of a policeman. Certain that he is to be arrested again, he flees to Switzerland. In Zürich, he at last finds Ruth. Unfortunately, the Swiss authorities pick him up and inform him he must again return to Austria. He shuttles back and forth between the two countries.

But finally, he realizes he must leave Switzerland. Going to Zürich, he telephones Ruth, finds her alone at her apartment. They spend a brief but happy evening together. Later, as a friend of theirs is escorted to jail, in the hope of food, Ruth whispers to Kern, "We must get away from here."

Fleeing through the countryside, Ruth is taken gravely ill with inflammation of the lungs. In desperation, Kern takes her to a hospital, but in attempting to keep in contact with her at night, he is tracked, and once more arrested and deported! At the French border, he reports to the police, and is returned to Switzerland. Again, the weary process of shuttling back and forth between two countries begins. No one will have a refugee. But at last he finds brief refuge in Geneva, and there, putting an end to his anxiety, he finds Ruth, recovered, waiting for him.

IX

KERN and Ruth succeeded in crossing the border unobserved and took a train to Bellegarde. They arrived in Paris in the evening and stood in front of the station, not knowing where to go.

"It's all right, Ruth," Kern said. "We'll stay at a small hotel. It's too late to try for anything else today. Tomorrow we'll have a look around."

Ruth nodded. She was very tired from the border crossing and the trip on the train. "Any hotel will do."

In a side street they found a red electric sign: Hotel Habana. Kern went inside and asked the price of a room.

"For the whole night?" asked the porter.

"Yes, of course," Kern said in surprise.

"Twenty-five francs."

"For two persons?" Kern asked.

"Of course," the porter said in amazement.

Kern went out and got Ruth. The porter glanced quickly at the pair and pushed a police form toward Kern. When he saw that Kern was hesitating he smiled and said, "We don't take those too seriously."

In relief Kern put down his name as Ludwig Oppenheim. "That's all we need," said the porter. "Twenty-five francs."

Kern paid and a boy took them upstairs. The room was small and clean

with a big bed, two washstands and a chair, but no clothes closet. "I guess we can get along without a closet," Kern said, going to the window to look out. He turned around. "Now we're in Paris, Pony."

"Yes," Ruth replied, smiling at him, "and how fast it all happened."

"We don't have to worry much about the police forms here. Did you hear the way I talked French? I understood everything the porter said."

"You were marvelous," Ruth replied. "I couldn't have opened my mouth."

"It's all a matter of getting used to it, Ruth. I'm a seasoned traveler now. You're not angry because I took just one room? We'll save money that way."

"Idiot," Ruth said tenderly. "Do you think I could sleep alone? I'd be much too frightened."

THEY went to a little *bistro* for supper and drank cheap red wine. They had had hardly anything to eat all day, and the wine made them sleepy; they soon returned to the hotel.

In front of the porter's desk in the lobby stood a girl, wearing a fur coat, and a rather drunken man. They were bargaining with the porter. The pretty, well-groomed girl glanced disdainfully at Ruth. The man was smoking an imported cigar; he did not move out of the way when Kern went to get his key.

As they climbed the stairs Kern said,

"Seems pretty elegant here, doesn't it?"

"Too elegant for us really," Ruth replied, nodding.

"But it isn't expensive. In Switzerland we've paid as much in a boarding-house."

He turned on the switch and noticed in the light from the ceiling fixture the deep shadows on Ruth's face. "You must go to sleep at once," he said in dismay. "Come, get undressed. I'll go over to the window while you do."

Ruth could barely keep her eyes open. "You don't need to go to the window," she said. "Help me get to bed."

"Yes, Pony."

They lay side by side in the darkness. Ruth put her head on Kern's shoulder and with a deep sigh fell asleep immediately, like a child. Kern lay awake for a while, listening to her breathing. He thought how strange it was that she should be lying beside him now and yet unaware of him, sunk in the subterranean streams of sleep and borne away by them; then he, too, fell asleep, lulled by her gentle breathing.

Something woke him. He sat up with a start and listened to the noise outside. His heart began to pound; he thought the police had come. He leaped out of bed, ran to the door, opened it a hand's breadth and peered out. Someone was shouting downstairs and an angry, piercing woman's voice replied in shrill

(Continued on page 48)