

## The Blond Nurse

By Thomas Walsh

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL CORDREY

**Detective McCoy was the first to believe the girl innocent. From that point on, things went from bad to worse for the kidnapers**

**I**T WAS the first house she had seen in ten minutes—a small white building set fifty feet in from the road on their left, shaped out palely there against the dim starlight in a glimmer of walls and dark, narrow windows. The man who called himself Collins saw it as soon as she did; in neutral, with his foot on the brake, he let the car roll to a stop by the driveway.

"I guess it's the place," he said. "A white house, ain't it?" He peered out. "They told me at the agency to pick up another nurse here—one this Mrs. Magnussen wanted. We ain't far from Lake Orchard now, lady. Would you get out and see if she's ready?"

In the back of the car, with the bit of paper she had been folding over and over between her fingers for the past fifteen minutes still clenched in her hand, Paula stared out at the house. She could see no lights.

"Yes," she said. "I'll go up. I'll see."

He half turned to her as she opened the door, his eyes narrowed to a bright stare of sardonic and ugly mirth. The expression—she barely caught it—touched a vague warning in her mind. It was the first time during the ride that she had thought of anything but the boy. She got out, wondering about it, and moved a few uncertain steps toward the house; then she saw the sign almost at her feet, set crooked on the weedy lawn: "For Sale, 40 Acres. Six Room—"

No, she started to say; no, this can't be the place. But before a word came out gears meshed at her back, and the car was twenty feet away, gathering speed, when she turned. She stared after it confusedly, watching the tail-lights dwindle and vanish, hearing the motor sound fade to nothing around her. A joke, she thought—a strange joke, surely. But he would come back. Of course. He—

He did not come back. For a time she waited foolishly for him, her hands

"There was somebody with you," he said. "A cop, wasn't he? Somebody that followed you here?" "Yes," she answered



in the pockets of her jacket, her dark, young eyes clouded by worry. It was a little over an hour then from the time he had touched her arm, knifing deftly through the crowd that was leaving the movie with her—a slim dark man she had never seen before, very dapper in a dark gray whipcord uniform and a visored chauffeur's cap. Collins was his name; he was from the Standard Auto Rental Agency; he had a car waiting for her just around the corner. The

Bannister boy—the kid she was taking care of—was sick; he'd got sick after she put him to bed and went out to the movies. An hour ago they had taken him out in an ambulance to his aunt's place in Lake Orchard; then they had called the agency and told them to pick her up here. Would she come right along?

Paula had not questioned him; she had thought then, as perhaps he had known she would, only of the child. A month ago she had nursed three-year-

old Joel through pneumonia at the hospital. She had gone home with him, when he was well, because he was a delicate child, and for a month or two Dr. Holborn had wanted him carefully watched. Tonight Mr. Bannister—Bannister Steel, Bannister Mill Lathes—was out on the coast; with the boy in the big house on River Drive there had been only the Hansens, the old couple who had been there with his father for thirty years. For a year then, since an auto crash last winter, there had been no Mrs. Bannister.

As soon as Collins spoke, Paula had all that in her mind; instantly she saw it happen, clearer and more detailed than his words described it. A pain, a sudden fever, Dr. Holborn deciding on his aunt's place in the country—it formed itself in flashing pictures across her mind. She had thought then only the things a woman would think: that if she had stayed with little Joel tonight, if only she had not left him—

NOW, in the quietness, the pale starlight, with the empty house at her back, the questions that she should have asked him filled her mind. Why his aunt's place, and not the hospital? Why had not Hansen come for her in the car, instead of him? Why—The questions were all useless now. They came too late, as they always come. But as she thought of them, something vague, a soft and oppressing weight, filled her heart.

No cars passed on this unmarked road; after fifteen minutes she gave up waiting for one. She walked back along the road, knowing the man Collins had lied to her, not seeing why—past empty fields, past dark and barren stretches of tobacco land. He had chosen his spot well; it was after three before she came to a main road and a compassionate truck driver gave her a ride back to the city; it was almost five before she got out of a taxi before the big gray house on River Drive.

The boy had been gone hours then—probably since eleven, when the Hansens, expecting her back, would have gone to bed. On the pillow, in the depression his head had left, the kidnapers had pinned the ransom note. The boy, it said, would not be hurt; not if fifty thousand dollars, in small, used bills . . .

She called the police even before she woke the Hansens, before the words in the note that had warned her not to call them conveyed any meaning to her mind. They came almost instantly, two men in a squad car first, others in civilian clothes after them. They questioned her in turn all that day—questioned her till her mind was numb and the questions they asked were meaningless. It was late, after dark, before she understood why they did—before the thought came, quiet at first, that they did not believe her.

At nine that night they questioned her for the last time, in the little study behind the dining room. She never found out what the fat man's rank was; he might have been a plain-clothes man, or a detective sergeant, or even an in-

spector, but all she remembered afterward was his name—Monahan—and the way his eyes fastened on her, low-lidded, dull black, the moment she came in from the hall.

"I'm no delicate guy," he said, slowly, deliberately, in a deep voice that filled the room without effort. "I don't work up to things nice. That's what I wanted to tell you before we started. Before—close that door, McCoy."

The other man—a younger man, with a lean, broad build and sandy hair—moved around the desk and closed the door. As he did Monahan dropped a hand on her shoulder and rested it solidly there.

"Remember this," he said, "that me and McCoy ain't here to listen to the song and dance again; we've had enough of that today. You got that straight now in your head?"

He did not frighten her; he had no effect on her at all. It was nearly forty hours then since she'd slept.

"We're gonna look at your story," Monahan said, bending so close above her that his breath was hot on her cheek, "we're gonna look at it now and put it together just the way you told it. Check me all the way. A guy picks you up last night—a guy you never saw before. He picks you right out of a crowd and calls you by name; he gives you a screwy story you don't question, and puts you in a car you can't describe. He—"

"A black car," she said, watching him with glazed eyes. "A black sedan."

"With four wheels maybe," Monahan went on, in a tighter voice. "He takes you out to a road you can't locate for us now, dumps you off there and drives away. Two hours later a guy in a truck takes you back to the city. What kind of a truck? You don't know. What was it haulin'? You can't tell us that either. A guy, a car, a road, a truck—that's what we got so far. And nowhere, not even one thing, can you tell us about any of them."

"There was a cop outside the Bijou last night when it let out—but he don't see you, or the guy in the chauffeur's uniform. Why?"

She said unsteadily, "There were a couple of hundred people around us."

THE thick fingers dug deep, painfully now, into her shoulder.

"Listen to me," Monahan said, with grating softness. "Listen hard, you lyin' little tramp. Don't you think I know the way it was? That you stayed out all night, sure—the way you'd stayed out lots of nights before. Bannister was away on business—everything was fine. A night out with the boy friend—who was goin' to know about it? Who was goin' to catch you?"

"There was only the Hansens here last night, wasn't there? They never knew when you got in—you had your key. So the little punk that picked you up one night in some dance hall planned it all; you was nuts about him and you'd do whatever he'd say. He kept you out while his pals grabbed the kid—don't you know that now? Don't you see that's all he bothered with you for? Tell us where he took you. Tell us or—"

His eyes, small and savage, glittered over her. His fingers wrought dim agony in her shoulder. He was talking now of Joel—of the kid that loved her, that cried for her last night when they got him out of bed. The kid they had somewhere now—hungry, sick, scared. Because a tramp like her was trying to cover up. Because—

He was sucked back from her—his voice, his face, the pressure of his hand—by something deep and soft, enormous, that blanketed her senses with swirling whiteness. She sank down through it wearily and slowly, into

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"I've got to help," she said. "It's the only thing that will save me. If I had stayed with Joel nothing would have happened"





# Yankee Wings in Britain

By Quentin Reynolds

RADIOED FROM LONDON

Collier's correspondent visits the most secret hideaway in England—where American fighting planes get a final grooming before their deadly work begins. It's a reassuring picture of how our aid to Britain is working



WIDE WORLD

THESE are the best airplanes in England," the lad with the Southern accent said. "In fact, they are the best airplanes in the world. I've flown them all. Sure, I'm a ferry pilot but I've spent a lot of time at airdromes with the fighters and the bombers. I know all the lads who fly these airplanes in combat. They like them mighty well."

It seemed quite natural to hear a Southern accent on this particular airdrome. Here in a remote corner of England was a bit of territory about two miles square that was as American as Middletown, Ohio, or Paducah, Kentucky. Attached to the airdrome was a large factory and the one job of this factory was to assemble, repair, recondition and service American airplanes. Every type of American aircraft was here, from tiny Mohawk fighters to the gigantic Flying Fortresses from Seattle. There were dozens of big two-motor Douglas fighters being revised for night work. These have been aptly named the Havoc to differentiate them from the Boston, which is the same airplane specializing in day fighting. There were slim, graceful-looking Vought-Sikorsky Chesapeake, used almost exclusively by the British navy for dive-bombing. There were Brewsters and Grummans and Marylands made by Glenn Martin, all ready to be ferried directly to combat squadrons.

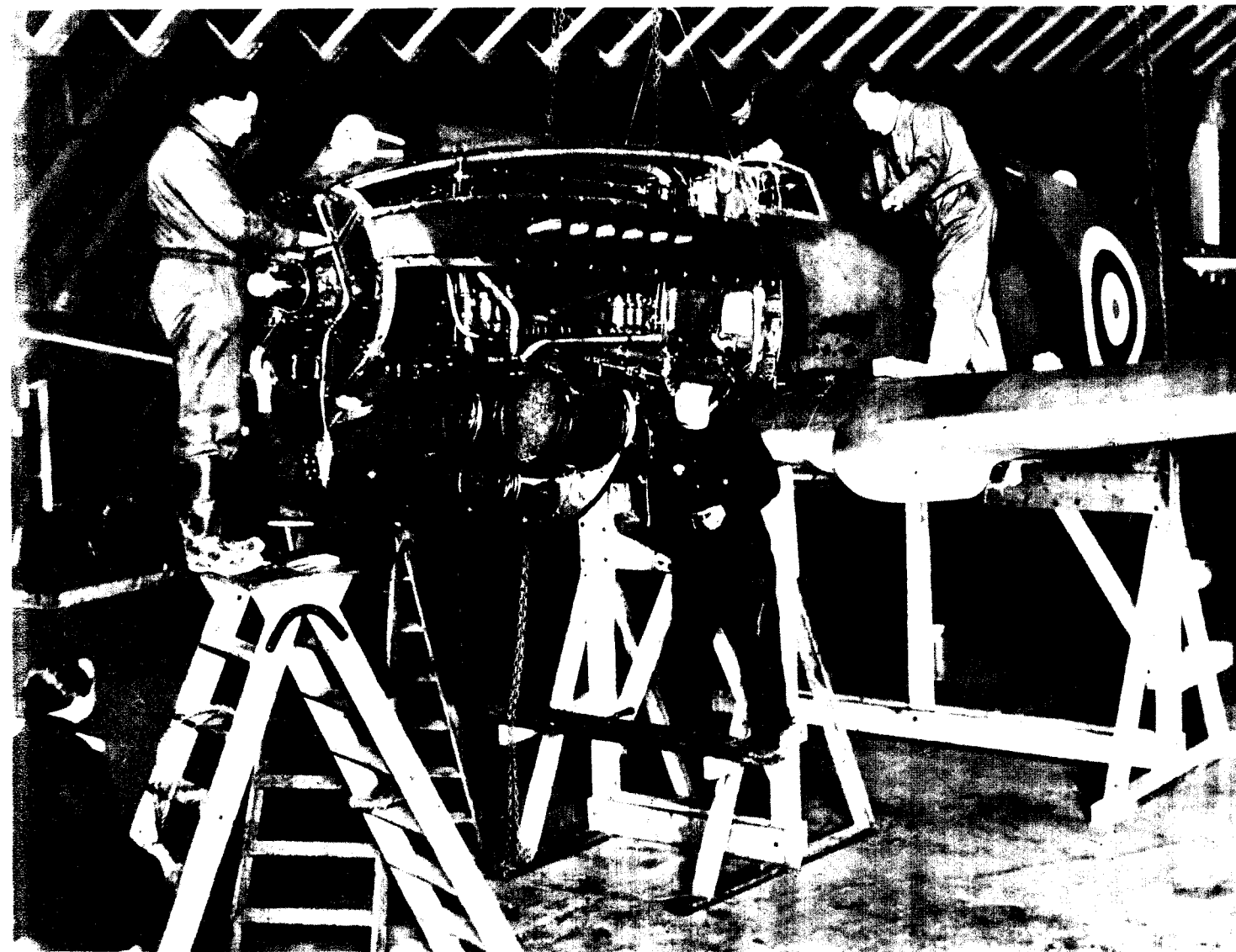
"Say," the boy with the Southern accent said, "I want you to meet Flying Officer Drabble. He's just leaving with a Havoc. That Havoc will be taking care of you in London from now on." Flying Officer Drabble nodded and walked a bit stiffly to where the big Havoc stood. With some difficulty he climbed the ladder to the cockpit and settled himself at the controls. The motors roared. He let them sing throatily a few minutes and then, with a cheery wave of his hand, he was off. That airplane, complete with gun and ammunition, would be fighting if need be within two hours.

"That Drabble has a wooden leg," the boy with the Southern accent chuckled. "You noticed how he limped."

"How can he fly with one leg?"

"It's a cinch," the ferry pilot said calmly, "I do it myself every day. We're the only one-legged pilots in the service. Of course there's Wing Commander Bader. He has no legs at all, and I think so far he has shot down twenty-eight Jerry planes. You don't need legs to fly."

Six months ago Ferry Pilot Conley Guy Shreve was a private pilot down in his native Orlando, Florida, but he felt the call to war and there he was taking airplanes from the assembling plant to



BRITISH COMBINE

fighting airdromes. Ferry pilots wear neat, dark blue uniforms. They were warming up a Mohawk for him. When it was ready he climbed into it and soon he too was off. Another American aircraft was ready to fight back.

The Ministry of Aircraft Production never announces exactly how many airplanes have arrived from America. The Ministry likes to keep the Germans guessing. Because of this reticence there has been an inclination both here in England and in America to belittle the air assistance given Britain by the United States. Correspondents were not allowed to visit the big assembling plants. It was all strictly hush-hush.

But in reports of air victories won by British pilots mention of American aircraft became increasingly prominent. The public was finally let into the secret

of the Havoc, perhaps the best night-fighting airplane in the world. We heard of what the Glenn Martins were doing in the East. Fighter pilots at airdromes behind the Channel ports told with glee of having knocked down the new Messerschmitts with the Curtiss P40, which is called the Tomahawk here. Suddenly England realized she was getting more than lip service from America.

I asked the Ministry of Aircraft Production to let me visit the hidden spot where the American airplanes arrived; where they were fitted to British combat standards; where they donned their fighting clothes. The manager of the assembly plant was an ace in the last war. Then he went into airplane production. He himself can use every one of the several thousand machines and

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Lockheed-Vega employees gave their own time and money to make the Hudson bomber (at top) and presented it to Britain. Now they are planning to put on a show, with the aid of Director Alexander Korda, for the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund

Below, British craftsmen put the finishing touches on a newly arrived single-seat Curtiss-Wright fighter, which they call a Tomahawk, at a secret assembly shop