

# HOTEL BERLIN-1943

BY VICKI BAUM

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL BLOSSOM

## The Story Thus Far:

MARTIN RICHTER, a young German soldier who has joined the underground working against the Nazis, makes his escape in Berlin shortly before he is to be executed. He is given refuge by two Frenchmen employed at the Hotel Berlin.

Among the guests at the Berlin is Lisa Dorn, Germany's most popular young actress. She is having dinner alone in her room when police come in, search the place. They tell her they are looking for Martin Richter. As the door closes behind them, the waiter who has been serving Lisa's dinner falls in a faint. When he recovers consciousness, he tells the girl that he is Martin Richter. He tells her his story, throws himself on her mercy.

Heretofore fanatically loyal to der Fuehrer, Lisa is strongly attracted by the young fellow and deeply moved by his story. She knows that old General von Dahnwitz, one of Germany's heroes, is down below, attending a state banquet. She knows that the general—in love with her—may come to her room at any moment. Nevertheless, she decides to protect the fugitive. . . .

The banquet ends. The host—Baron von Stetten, a high official—informs von Dahnwitz that he is in Hitler's bad graces (the general has been plotting with other military leaders to seize the government) and he suggests that the general kill himself

Leaving von Stetten, the general goes to Lisa's room and (while Richter hides in the bathroom) implores her to fly to Sweden with him. Lisa respects him but does not love him. Besides, she has her own career to think of. She refuses. The general leaves sadly.

By this time, Lisa Dorn realizes how deeply she is involving herself. But she permits Richter to spend the night in her room. The next day she has to leave him there, going, as usual, to the rehearsal of her new play.

Adolf, a pageboy at the hotel who, at fifteen, has already spent fourteen months in Nazi prisons is also in the underground. He helps Richter hide in an unused elevator shaft; he tells him that he will get him out of the hotel. Then he can go to Adolf's home, where he will be safe, for a time at least.

Unfortunately Tilli Weiler, mistress of crooked Gauleiter Plotke, sneaks into Lisa's room to get a peek at Lisa's fabulous wardrobe. She finds among the gowns a man's dress coat! It is the waiter's jacket, discarded by Martin. The woman decides to report this to Joachim Helm, Gestapo commissar. . . .

Baron von Stetten informs von Dahnwitz that he must not leave the hotel; he offers to send him a lawyer so the general may leave his effects in good order. The general thanks him; he says that he has a luncheon engagement with Fräulein Dorn, other matters must wait. The baron murmurs, "You lucky fellow!"

## IV

THE general stared with his unmonocled eye at the blurred figure of Doehneke, the lawyer. "I would prefer to sign the will today. It is possible that I will be called away before tomorrow," he said.

"I will try, I will try, your excellency. Shall we say this afternoon at four? If I can't come myself, I'll send it by one of our clerks."

"At four. Good," said the general. He took a breath after the lawyer had left and looked at himself in the mirror. Until four, then. It was not quite one o'clock. More than three hour's postponement. It seemed like a very long span of time as he looked down its stretch. Sometimes a battle was decided in less than three hours. He intended to spend every minute of it with Lisa. He picked up the telephone and asked the desk: "Has Fräulein Dorn returned from the theater?"

"Not yet, Herr General," the desk informed him.

"Will you be kind enough to ring me up the moment she comes?" he said and hung up, but his impatience mounted from minute to minute.

Three hours with Lisa, that was all that was left to him, and here he was waiting for her, and the time passed and could not be stopped, and passed and passed. At last he could not bear it any longer and went down to the lobby to intercept her there. He could not see any guards watching him, but he knew they were there.

A man in a tight blue suit who had been reading a paper near by, dropped it, took out a huge white handkerchief and blew his nose. Two guards in SS uniform suddenly materialized out of nowhere; one took his place next to the door, the other went outside on the street. It was at that moment that the general was hit by the full impact of the realization that he was a prisoner—a man sentenced to death. Suddenly he felt strangled, suffocated. As if the sawdust were running out of me, he thought unexpectedly. He left a message for Lisa at the desk and went into the dining room.

Time passed. Twenty-four minutes past one. Time chewed big hunks of happiness out of the bit of life that was still left. Gauleiter Plotke walked past, saw the general and stopped.

"Heil Hitler, General. How's your toothache today?"

The pox on you, thought the general. "Thanks. Much better. You must excuse me," he said, and got up. "Here's Fräulein Dorn. I'm having lunch with her."

NEVER had Lisa gone through a torture like this lunch. Never had the general known that being with the woman one loved could be such a hollow, aching pain. They went bravely through all the motions, smiling with their lips only, talking, choosing the dishes, selecting the wine, lifting their glasses and clinking them together and looking into each other's eyes as if they meant it and falling into sudden depths of silence and crawling out again with some bright remark between their teeth. And while they did all this, they were as lonely as oysters in their shells, each one locked tightly in an impenetrable casing of anxiety and despair.

The elevator was still out of order. As the general walked up the stairs behind Lisa's lithe figure he was suddenly overcome by a furious, brutal storm of desire such as only a soldier knows coming out of battle or going into it. He took the key of her room from his pocket. Lisa, walking down the corridor in front of him, heard the faint sound and turned around.

"May I come in with you for a little while?" he asked, his voice thick with excitement.

"Not now, dear. The chambermaid is cleaning my room," Lisa said as a desperate excuse.

"Then let's go to my room. I haven't been alone with you in months. I need you. You have no idea how much I need you. What has happened to you? You're holding me off at arm's length. Don't you care for me?"

Lisa didn't know what to answer. "Of course I care for you. Don't be so possessive," she said, trying to sound whimsical like the girl she had been yesterday.

The general put his arms around her and pressed her against his hard, solid body, the body of an old cavalryman. It was not like him to make love in a hotel corridor. Not when he was sober, in any case. Before she knew what she was doing, she had pushed him away. He stared at her with an expression that frightened her. She laughed a little.

"You are not going to beat me up," she said, so afraid of him that it made her impertinent. "Not here. This isn't Kharkov, you know. You have to act civilized."

The general stepped back, struggling hard for countenance. "Forgive me," he said. "Forgive. I might not see you again."

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Martin went toward the revolving door, and nothing happened. Pageboy Number 6 was standing there. Martin gave him a little jab, saluted him and walked out



"Don't be nasty," said Janet quickly. "I don't feel like answering questions now." Corey ignored the danger signals. "I suppose Sunday's his other night"

## THE GIRL ON THE PORCH

BY THOMAS BELL

ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY L. TIMMINS

The way of a man with a maid—the way of a turret lathe with a man—somehow Janet Stowe got them all mixed up

COREY walked right into her. This part of Hillside Avenue was roofed with great trees that drowned the street lamps in foliage, so it was easy enough to run into someone, especially if the runner-into was feeling low, and the someone appeared as suddenly as though she'd stepped out from behind the nearest tree.

For a moment he held her, warm and pliant in his arms, and then he was backing away. "Gosh, I'm sorry! I didn't hurt you, did I?"

She patted herself here and there and said he hadn't. Corey hardly heard her

because he was realizing with a little shock of pleasure that she was The Girl on the Porch.

To make sense of this, it is necessary to explain that about halfway up Hillside Avenue there was a very pretty little house, compact and painted white, with a white picket fence all around it; and most afternoons when Corey passed by on his way to a night's work in the plant, there was a very pretty girl indeed sitting on the porch steps.

Waiting for the bus at the foot of Hillside Avenue, Corey would think up possible ways of meeting her, but only one, so far, had the neatness, efficiency and dispatch with which Corey liked to do things. That was to march through the gate some afternoon and say, "Darling, I want you to know that just passing here every day, and seeing you, makes me feel good. On the other hand, not knowing you makes me feel bad. Couldn't we do

something about it, like making a date for Sunday night, which is my only night off?"

Just what the girl might reply to such a proposal, he couldn't imagine, which was one reason he hadn't yet tried it.

So now, having not only met her but held her in his arms, he blinked a little, trying to regain his bearings.

"What did you say?" he asked vaguely.

"I said I didn't think you'd hurt me."

"That's good. I guess I was so busy thinking that I didn't watch where I was going. I'm sure glad I didn't hurt you."

"I don't bruise easily." Her face was a small oval touched with lipstick, as she looked up at him. Corey was a good head taller, and lean to match. "What were you thinking about?" she asked.

Corey smiled; and somehow it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should fall into step and begin walking very slowly up the dark street.

"To tell you the truth," Corey said, "I was thinking that the worst part of going to the movies alone was walking home alone afterward—especially if you had to walk along a street like this."

"It's a nice street," the girl said. "I think it's just about the nicest street in Jefferson."

"That's part of the trouble."

"You're from out of town, aren't you?"

"And I guess that's the rest of it."

Cornfields had once bordered the western edge of Jefferson; now an immense war plant sprawled across the acres there, and Corey was one of the thousands who had come to tend its machines. Six nights a week he stood over a turret lathe, turning out precise and beautiful bits of stainless steel and aluminum, the ultimate use of which was no secret to anyone; the seventh night, Sunday, was his to do with as he pleased.

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