



Doctor Louis Bambas loves flowers. When he has any free time, he spends it in the laboratory rose gardens

## PLAGUE FIGHTER

BY J. D. RATCLIFF

PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY INTERNATIONAL NEWS PICTURES

Since Biblical times, leprosy and tuberculosis have been two of the world's most deadly diseases. No known drug could cure them. Then a couple of chemists started playing around with some second cousins of the sulfonamides—known as sulfones

IN a weather-beaten old building on the banks of the Detroit River, two men were talking. One was Doctor Leon Sweet, director of chemical research for Parke, Davis & Co.—one of the first industrial research laboratories in the country. The other was Doctor Louis Bambas, a young, rather droll research man. Sweet, 35, took chemistry at the University of Nebraska and has made a career of it. Bambas, 36, started out as a chemical engineer, then he studied a little more and became a bacteriologist. Then he switched back to chemistry. His specialty

is stringing atoms together to make new chemical compounds.

It was a rambling conversation these two men were having, a limping one that stopped all the time, while both men gazed out the window at ore boats and freighters bound down the river to Lake Erie and up the river to Lake St. Clair. Certain it is that thoughts of two of the major plagues that affect the human race—leprosy and tuberculosis—never entered their heads.

Known since Biblical times, the two killers have yielded virtually no ground to research scientists. Efforts to discover either a preventive vaccine or a cure for tuberculosis have failed. Researchers have been unable to pass leprosy to experimental animals, have run into an equally blank wall in their search for a cure. The feeble best that physicians have been able to do is to recommend rest and a good diet to sufferers from the twin scourges.

Yet tuberculosis kills 60,000 persons a year in the United States alone, sickens five times that many. Leprosy ravages three to five million persons all over the earth. Sweet and Bambas knew these facts as they knew the vital statistics of all of man's

major killers, but were not concerned with them at the moment.

Sweet was saying that so many people are hunting medical gold nuggets among the sulfonamides but, strangely enough, no one is paying much attention to a group of related compounds—the sulfones.

Why didn't Bambas get busy with the sulfones—see if he couldn't find one which would fight the streptococci, the microbes which poison blood and infect wounds? See if he couldn't find a sulfone which would be better and less toxic than the well-known sulfa drugs?

True, Sweet said, it was pretty blind searching. It might take a lot of time and energy and, in the end, not be worth a cracked test tube. There was no assurance that the sulfones had any curative power. But—well, let's try it anyway.

This is hard-bitten, practical science—not the idealistic kind you see in the movies. The object is to find a pill or a hypodermic shot which will cure disease—and which doctors will buy. This kind of success will dress up the financial report of a pharmaceutical house at the end of the year. But don't curl your lip. It's this kind of science

that gave us sulfa drugs in the first place. It's a kind of expensive blind searching that hardly any private investigators and very few universities can afford.

Bambas went back to his laboratory and started work. It was work that was deadly dull, horribly monotonous. It followed a set pattern. First, you spend weeks creating a chemical new to the world. Then you shoot a little bit of it into a mouse. If the mouse topples over dead, that chemical is out. Too toxic.

If the mouse doesn't die, maybe you squirt a little of the chemical into a test tube full of microbes. Then you watch and see what happens. If the chemical kills the microbes, that's fine. If it slows their growth by wrecking their digestions, or ruining their reproductive apparatus, that, too, is good.

After you've found these things, the next step is to shoot microbes into a rat or guinea pig. Then give him a shot of the drug and see if it will save his life. It's all perfectly cut and dried, with no romance about it whatsoever—unless you're lucky.

Bambas had been plodding his way through this weary business for months. Then

(Continued on page 46)



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"Money," Grande Tante said, "is not enough. We must build morale. And we must start now! Ethel Ann, where would we find a lot of servicemen at this hour of the day?"

"At the Blue Stallion Inn," Ethel Ann said with a perfectly straight face. "Having their tea."

"Good! We will repair to the Blue Stallion at once!"

Ethel Ann stopped enjoying herself in nothing flat. "The Blue Stallion doesn't really serve tea," she explained hurriedly. "It's a joint—I mean, a sort of tavern—where the servicemen drink."

This threw Grande Tante for a second; then, "George Washington drank," she announced curtly. "And surely if he could—" Aunt Petty gave a gasp and put her hand against her heart. "Petunia! Breathe deeply and count ten. This is no time for a heart spell."

"I was just thinking . . ." Aunt Petty quavered palely.

"Well, stop it!" Grande Tante ordered. "You don't know the details and you could never imagine them, so don't try."

"I was just thinking about Ricky," Aunt Petty was paper-white. "And how we would feel if he were over there—"

Grande Tante's cane quivered ever so little in her grip. "Ricky has nothing to do with this," she said evenly. "Ethel Ann, bring the War Loan bank roll, as usual. Petunia, go put on your warm underwear."

Ethel Ann stamped her small feet savagely into her fur-lined boots. "Ricky has everything in the world to do with this," she thought furiously. "Those poor stubborn darlings wouldn't be so hell-bent on doing their full duty by the war if they didn't feel that Ricky was shirking his. What a mess—what a blankety-blank mess! Darn—Darn—Darn!"

Life had been simple—or comparatively simple—as long as the Aunts Cartwright had been isolationists: Aunt Petty mildly so, Grande Tante belligerently unequivocal about the matter. When the Japs did their little back-slashing on December 7th, her reaction had been typical—and funny, if anything about that horrible business could ever be classified as funny.

It had dawned an unpleasant day, gray and lowering, with a threatening snarl in the wind from the sea. Ricky went down to the boathouse and brought his nets in early. He and Ethel Ann were mending them, in the living room, and the air was full of dust as they worked. Grande Tante, in her great chair by the fire, kept sniffing as she scanned the morning paper, and Aunt Petty, crouched on a low stool reading Superman, sneezed twice. This was the peaceful picture when the news broke over the radio that fateful day.

AFTER the first stunned silence, Grande Tante was the one who found her voice and delivered herself of this classic: "What in the name of tunket and tarnation is the Navy doing at Pearl Harbor, anyway?" she roared furiously at Ricky.

He had been holding the net needle, poised and motionless, and now he laid it down carefully, and shook his blond head like a man waking from a nightmare. "We've got a Navy base there," he said. "We have to protect it."

"Why?" Grande Tante thundered, pounding the floor with her cane. "Why should any full-grown Navy waste its time hanging around that hula-hula paradise? What are they protecting? Pineapples—or grass skirts for tourists? Nonsense!"

"I'm afraid it isn't nonsense, Aunt Honey," Ricky said.

"You will not enlist," Grande Tante declared.

"I may be drafted," Ricky said. Ethel Ann said, "Oh, Rick!" urgently. She scrambled up from the floor and came to perch on his chair arm. Her throat felt choky.

"Nonsense!" Grande Tante snapped. "You're a fisherman. That's a vital industry. People have to eat. We've no business with a Navy base out in the middle of the Pacific anyway. Revelations! Bring the backgammon board."

That seemed definitely to take care of the situation, as far as the Aunts Cartwright were concerned. But Ethel Ann looked into Rick's

## Semper Paratus, Ethel Ann

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blue eyes and knew better. She slid down on his knee and buried her black head against his chest. He held her close. His heart thumped evenly under her ear, but her own was far from even. "You have to stand between them—and things, sweet," Ricky whispered in her ear. And then, after a little silence: "I love you very dearly, Ethel Ann."

WHEN Ricky came home two weeks later and announced that he'd turned his fishing boat over to the government to keep them from taking it, and joined the Coast Guard, because eventually he'd have to join something or be drafted, the aunts nodded approval. They knew the Coast Guard well.

"Captain Allsworth is such a nice man," Aunt Petty beamed. "We must have him to tea again real soon."

Grande Tante glowed. "That was very clever of you, Ricky. This way you can be home every night. There now, Ethel Ann! You've nothing to worry about, have you?"

Ethel Ann got up and said, "We'd better go and stake out the Christmas tree, Rick."

They went out into the bright blue coldness of the late December afternoon, and plowed along the frozen shore, the dogs

rumbling and bumping at their heels. And when the rambling old house was well behind them, Ethel Ann stopped and said: "All right, my smart young Nordic! Let down your long blond hair for mamma."

"You're such a suspicious wench, darling," Ricky's blue eyes were as blank as sea water.

"That's right," Ethel said. "And I know darn' good and well you didn't join the Coast Guard to run a cutter around the bay and have tea with Captain Allsworth. When are you leaving?"

"I'll be around here for a few weeks," Ricky said. "Then there'll be training at Curtis Bay—but I'll get home for the week ends—and then—well, your guess is as good as mine, darling."

"Ricky, you're not going to be guarding our shore line!"

"I think we're going to have to make new shore lines in this war," Rick grinned. "And you know the Coast Guard—Semper Paratus, Ethel Ann."

"But the aunts!" Ethel Ann recalled in sudden panic. "They'll die."

Rick nodded soberly, "Grande Tante's pushing eighty-three—and Aunt Petty's got a bad heart—they couldn't stand the strain."

"Then how in the world?" she gasped.

"So long as they think I'm having tea with Coast Guard captains up and down the eastern seaboard, they'll be all right. They live in an unreal world—they'll fool easily. Set a candle in the window, my lass, and carry on."

It had been easy at first. When the war news was bad, which was constantly, the Aunts Cartwright turned it off as of no consequence, and went back to their backgammon, secure in the knowledge that it could not touch them nor theirs. But then there was Wake Island and Bataan and the Marshalls and Gilberts and Coral Sea and Cape Esperanto and finally Tulagi and Guadalcanal.

Rick was in the Gulf of Mexico when that happened. And Ethel Ann had gone south to be with him, because the time left was very short for them. She came back primed with more stories about the wonderful teas she had had with Coast Guard captains. But she found a subtle change had taken place in the aunts in her absence.

They no longer gloated to each other slyly about their smart young nephew who had put one over on the government. In fact, they seemed to have lost interest in Ricky and his doings. They sat with blank faces while Ethel Ann explained how nice and safe everything was in the Gulf of Mexico; then they dropped the subject. They listened to the war news now, but it was being censored rigidly on account of Aunt Petty's heart. She always repaired to the kitchen until it was over; then she came back for Grande Tante's summary, which usually omitted all gruesome or upsetting details.

It was several weeks before Ethel Ann discovered that isolationism had gone by the board; the aunts were buying War Bonds! And several months before it seeped in on her consciousness that the reason they asked only perfunctorily for news of Ricky was because they were ashamed of him and the soft job he had grabbed off for himself.

That had been hard to take, and harder to live with. She wrote Ricky rather desperately for permission to spill the beans as to his real whereabouts, but weeks went by and no answer. The Pacific seemed to have swallowed him up.

As time dragged on, Ethel Ann discovered that Ricky had been right when he warned her she'd have a tough job on her hands. The taking of North Africa, the invasion of Italy, and the bloody victory at Tarawa made it even tougher. Because the aunts stopped asking about Ricky at all after that.

"DARN, darn, darn, darn!" Ethel Ann muttered again. She reached into the top bureau drawer and took the War Loan roll out from under her last pair of nylons. Then she stomped out to the garage.

Revelations had the skid chains on the car. His face was a dark exclamation point of disapproval in the dimness. "Whut come ovah Miss Honey?" he demanded. "She ain't had her tea yit."

"We're going out to tea," Ethel Ann said grimly.

"Whut Ah tell Miss Stuart when she git heah?" he asked. "She comin' to dinnah."

Ethel Ann clutched at the chance for reinforcement. She was going to need it. "Go right in and call up the Red Cross, Revelations," she ordered. "Tell Miss Stuart to join me at the Blue Stallion Inn as soon as she can."

"You mean Miss Honey and Miss Petty goin' to dat place?" Ethel Ann nodded. "Great hebenly halos!" he breathed in horror.

"With stars," Ethel Ann said piously.

Stuart Canfield was a slender blonde with an eternally startled look of inquiry on her lovely young face, a look which always gave men ideas—usually the wrong ones. And she had never been nearer to the Blue Stallion than the Post Road limits, which ran past the place. Stuart was the sheltered-flower type.

Ethel Ann was up at the cashier's desk buying a hundred-dollar War Bond for Aunt Petty when Stuart blew in at the front door with a flurry of snow, cheeks aglow, violet eyes more startled-looking than ever, her red mouth an eager "Oh!" of excitement.

The minute Ethel Ann saw her cousin, she realized that her appearance on the scene

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BY GWETHALYN GRAHAM



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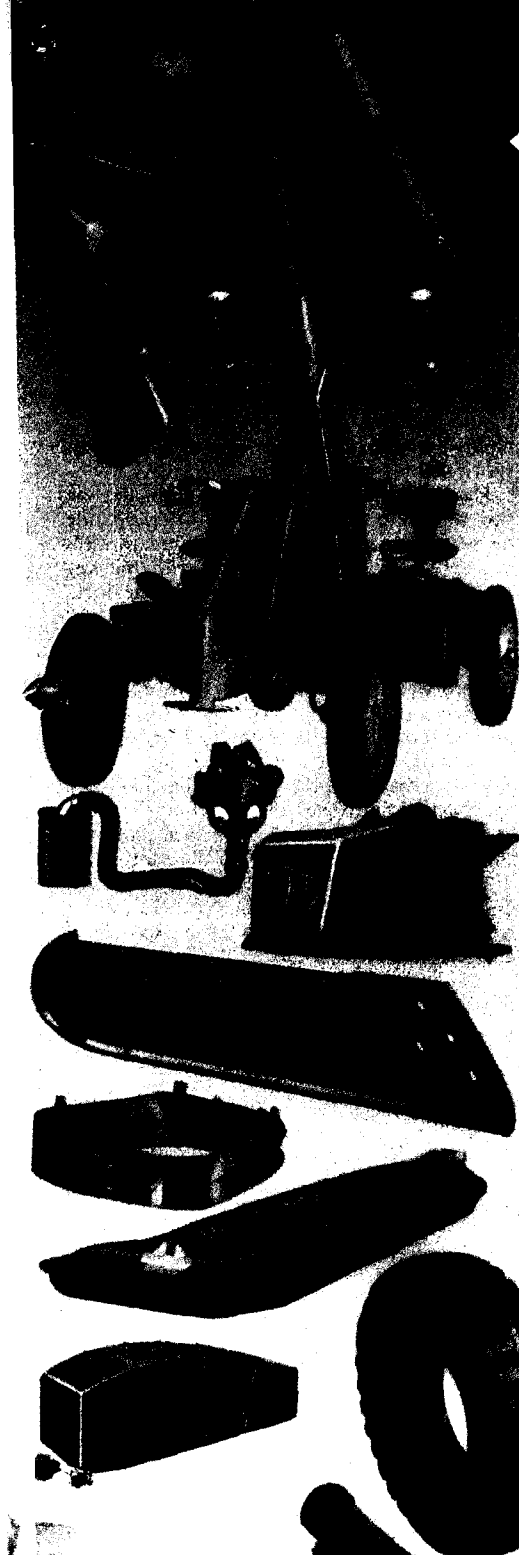
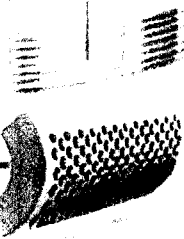
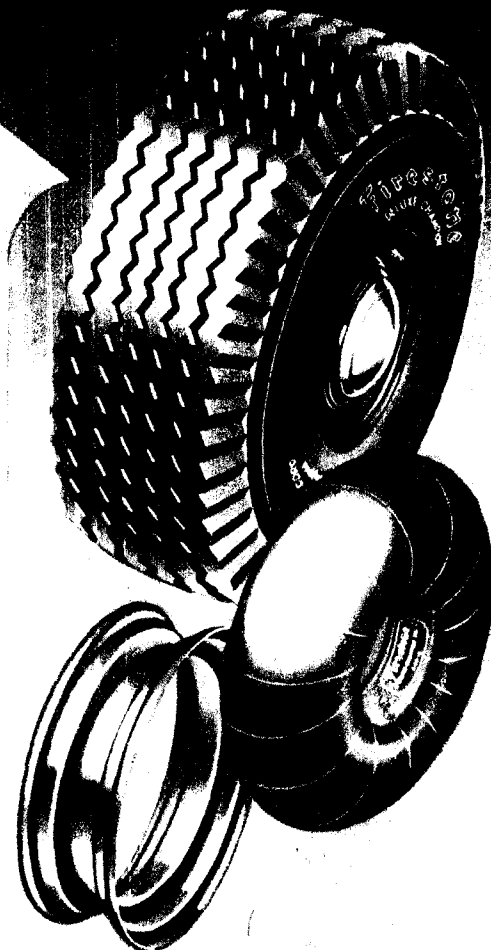


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**BEST  
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definitely did not constitute reinforcement, but only an added complication. And things were already bad enough.

"What in the world?" Stuart demanded. She looked over the assembled masculine contingent with horrified delight. "Whatever are you doing here, Ethel Ann?"

Ethel Ann gestured toward the table where Aunt Petty and Grande Tante were holding bacchanalian revel with a Marine, a sailor and two soldiers. "I'm with General Hooker and his adjutant," she said. "You and I constitute the camp followers."

"General Hooker?" Stuart stood tiptoe and scanned the assemblage. "Which one? The aunts!" she gasped. "Oh, my gosh!"

"It isn't enough that they're running the War Loan Drive," Ethel Ann said bitterly. "Now they've taken on the national morale."

Stuart looked more startled than ever. "But whatever are they doing here?"

"Lifting it," Ethel Ann said. "They start in a small way, of course—with a squadron."

"You don't make sense!"

"I would to your namesake, Jeb Stuart," Ethel Ann said.

"I just don't get it," Stuart said.

"Well, that soldier does," Ethel Ann said grimly. "For the past hour I just know he's been thinking that those two sweet old ladies were out drumming up trade for me—and now when he sees you!"

"You mean the cute little one with the mustache?"

"I mean the tin-faced one with the eyes," Ethel Ann said. "Look, Stuart, you'll have to help me."

"Why, of course, sugar!" Stuart touched her hair and fluttered her eyes expectantly. "I'd adore to!" She swung away toward the table.

"Heaven help a sailor's wife on a night like this!" Ethel Ann muttered and started after her.

"Wait, Miss!" the cashier called. "Your change." Ethel Ann was wrapping the small bills in with the War Loan roll when she reached the table. The Marine and the sailor with the mustache were already on their feet, smiling at Stuart. The other soldier had his eyes on Ethel Ann. He seemed to come to with a start and get to his feet reluctantly.

Grande Tante made the introductions with an air. She had a half-empty glass in her hand, and she waved it nonchalantly at Ethel Ann. "Pink Ladies," she beamed. "Non-alcoholic. Royal ordered them for us. Pay the waitress, my dear."

"Oh, no!" said Royal. He was the one with the eyes; he made them smile at Ethel Ann and they looked like bright, empty windows. "That was on me, Miss Cartwright."

"Nonsense!" Grande Tante snapped. "This is our party, young man. My niece will take care of it. You can order the car now, Ethel Ann. And phone Revelations. Tell him there will be four extra guests for dinner."

THERE wasn't a darn' thing she could do about it, except call the state patrol—and for one minute she was tempted. That was when the four servicemen went into a hurried huddle at the foot of the bar while she was paying the bill. Then they came out of the huddle and beckoned the bartender. The Marine had a fistful of small change. He exchanged it for a paper-wrapped package, which he thrust in his pocket. They were bringing their own refreshments!

Well, Ethel Ann thought, if you start rough-housing it, laddie-boys, I can still call the state patrol. And don't think I won't!

The next few hours were nerve-racking and chaotic, because Ethel Ann, as acting hostess, tried to be everywhere at once, a feat the four guests seemed to accomplish without trying. They took over the old house.

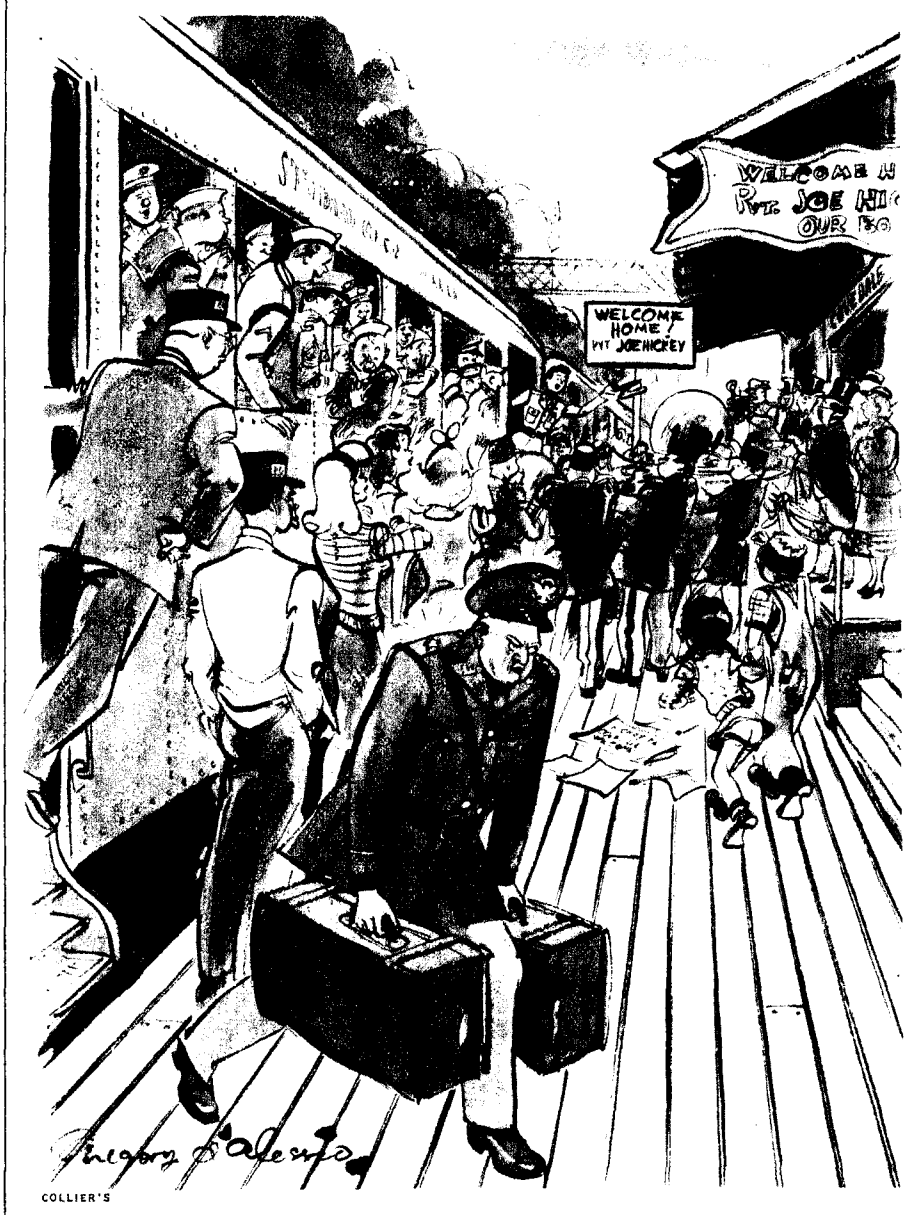
She found the Marine in the kitchen mixing up a bowl of Montezuma punch, under Revelations' disapproving glance. The paper-sack parcel bulged on his hip. "For after dinner," he told her, pouring in grape juice lavishly. "We can't fly on one wing all evening."

In the living room Ethel Ann found the sailor had pushed back the rug and was teaching Stuart a dance routine, which he explained blandly to Aunt Petty and Grande Tante, was known as The Salt Water Waltz.

"Because the ship rolls so, I suppose?" Grande Tante said brightly.

## WELCOME HOME!

by GREGORY D'ALESSIO



"Sure," said the sailor, jitterbugging away, his bell-bottom pants flapping around Stuart's ankles. "Keeps us from getting seasick."

From the ease with which Stuart was mastering the steps, Ethel Ann began to have serious doubts as to her cousin's continued state of being a sheltered flower. Aunt Petty said wistfully, "We used to waltz—slower, of course—but I loved it."

"We will waltz then, Miss Petunia," said the soldier with the mustache, a little grimly. He dug out the Blue Danube and put it on the phonograph. Pink-cheeked as a girl, Aunt Petty went into his arms. The Blue Danube slowed down the sailor's style but didn't entirely throw him. After all, he still had Stuart. Grande Tante sat and beat time with her stick and beamed on everyone.

Ethel Ann looked around for Royal. He had disappeared. She found him in the library pitching darts with vicious accuracy. "I don't dance," his eyes were darkly opaque. "And I feel like a fool in there."

Revelations announced dinner, and then the Marine served the punch. After that, morale building really went into high. But everything seemed under control, the punch notwithstanding. They were nice young men; high-spirited, but gentlemen withal, and they behaved that way. Ethel Ann had misjudged them.

It was almost midnight when Revelations escorted the guests rather firmly to a taxi. It had been a nice evening, everything considered. But somehow, Ethel Ann felt distinctly relieved when the cab rolled away.

Grande Tante mounted the stairs to her room wearing an aura of righteousness. It was obvious she had seen her duty and done it and found it rather pleasant. Stuart went up, yawning and glowing. She was going skating in the morning with the soldier with the mustache. The last to climb the steps was Aunt Petty, who had been to the kitchen for a last-minute snack. She waved a chicken leg airily as she went past. "A lovely evening,

wasn't it, my dear?" she trilled. "A lovely, lovely evening!"

"Yes, darling," Ethel Ann said. "Good night!"

The curve of a car's headlights outside on the drive waked Ethel Ann. She lay still in her narrow bed and let the doorbell ring. Revelations, out in the servant's house, would never hear. She waited. Stuart purred gently in the other twin bed. Finally, the car motor roared and the headlights veered away. It was dark and quiet in the old house.

Then the doorbell rang again and again. Let it ring, Ethel Ann thought savagely. Just let it! Nobody's going down. She heard Grande Tante's cane tapping the stairs. When she came back up, the tin-faced soldier was behind her. I knew it! Ethel Ann thought. I knew it all the time!

"This dear boy couldn't find a single place to stay in Watertown," Grande Tante explained in the doorway. "He can sleep in Ricky's bed, if it's changed."

FROM under the security of the covers, Ethel Ann looked out and up at the eyes peering at her over Grande Tante's shoulder. She did not like the eyes; definitely, she did not like them. "I'll fix the bed," she said. "If you'll shut the door first." She shook Stuart awake. "Go into the den and get Ricky's gun," she whispered urgently. "Quick—while I'm making up the bed—and be sure it's loaded."

His smooth aluminum-colored face reflected the lights. "It's a shame to wake you up," he said. He kept watching her as she moved about the bed, tucking in the sheets, puffing up the pillows. "But your aunt is so hospitable, I knew she'd take pity on a guy."

"Of course," Ethel Ann said. "Of course, no trouble at all." She went out of the room hurriedly, not looking at him as she said good night. Her back felt prickly from his sustained gaze as she closed the door.

Stuart had got the gun, and it was loaded.

But impending danger had raised no hairs along the back of her soft white neck; she was sleeping sweetly. Ethel Ann started to lock the door, and then thought better of it. Perhaps Aunt Petty might have a heart spell; perhaps Grande Tante would need her in the night. She laid the gun on the floor between the beds and snuggled the covers over her shaking shoulders. And perhaps you're just being melodramatic, she thought. It is hard to get rooms in Watertown—or any town—at this hour of the night. Shut up and go to sleep! She did. . . .

HE WAS standing between the beds, his bare feet almost touching the loaded revolver on the floor, when she awoke with a start. He had on his G.I. shorts, and he was swaying a little in the early dawn, staring down at her with those funny, opaque eyes. Ethel Ann yawned and stretched her face into a smile. "Hello," she said gaily—or as gaily as a girl could under the circumstances.

"Hello," he said. He kept looking at her. Stuart was still purring gently; otherwise the house was silent as a tomb. It would be hours before Revelations would wake up and come in to build the fires. Hours! The eyes continued to stare at her. He looks frightening without the uniform, Ethel Ann thought. He looks crazy without it—like taking some sort of stamp of approval off of him.

"I wonder—could you get me a cigarette?" she smiled brightly at him.

"Sure," the man's face reflected a faint facsimile of her smile. "Sure." He went away, weaving a little. Ethel Ann leaped to lock the door. Then she took the gun in her two hands and sat on the bed and aimed it at a spot on the middle panel.

He came back softly, like an animal. She saw the knob turn and twist. After a while he went away and she let out her breath. But he came back again, this time with the key to Ricky's room. He pushed it in the lock. He was trying to push her key out!

Her hands were shaking; the heavy gun wobbled about in them. She mustn't scream—there was Aunt Petty's heart to consider. But what if he got the key out—what if he opened the door! Ethel Ann breathed deeply and called, "Grande Tante! Grande Tante!" with increasing volume. Finally, in sheer agony of fright, she was shrieking it; even after the knob had ceased to turn, she was shrieking "Grande Tante!" to the rooftop.

The cane tapped hurriedly across the hall; Grande Tante tried the door. Ethel Ann let her in. "There was someone at the door," she chattered, "Trying to get in . . ."

"My heavenly days!" Grande Tante said. Stuart sat up in bed. "There was nobody at the door, was there, Stuart?"

"No, ma'am," Stuart yawned. "I didn't hear a thing till Ethel Ann started yelling."

"It was the man in Rick's room," Ethel Ann chattered. "It was him!" She was scared enough to be ungrammatical and not give a hang.

Grande Tante tapped across the hall and swung the door back. The soldier slept peacefully, quietly, under the down comfort. He even snored a little. Grande Tante shut the door. "You had a nightmare," she said. She came back and saw the gun on the bed. "Good gracious," she snapped. "You might blow somebody to glory with that thing, Ethel Ann!" She took it and went away. Ethel Ann locked the door and crawled back in bed. It was gray daylight outside. Stuart was already asleep. But she did not close her eyes again until she heard Revelations below splitting kindling for the morning fires.

Breakfast was over when she went downstairs. Stuart had already gone skating with her soldier. The aunts and Royal were having coffee before the living-room fire. He jumped to his feet when Ethel Ann came in, and then sat down stiffly. He hadn't looked at her at all.

Aunt Petty said, "You scared the living daylight out of me last night, yelling around."

"I'm sorry," Ethel Ann said. She took coffee black. She needed it.

"Why, you might have killed somebody with that gun!" Grande Tante said.

"Yes," Ethel Ann said, looking at Royal. "I might."

The dogs whined at the front door and he



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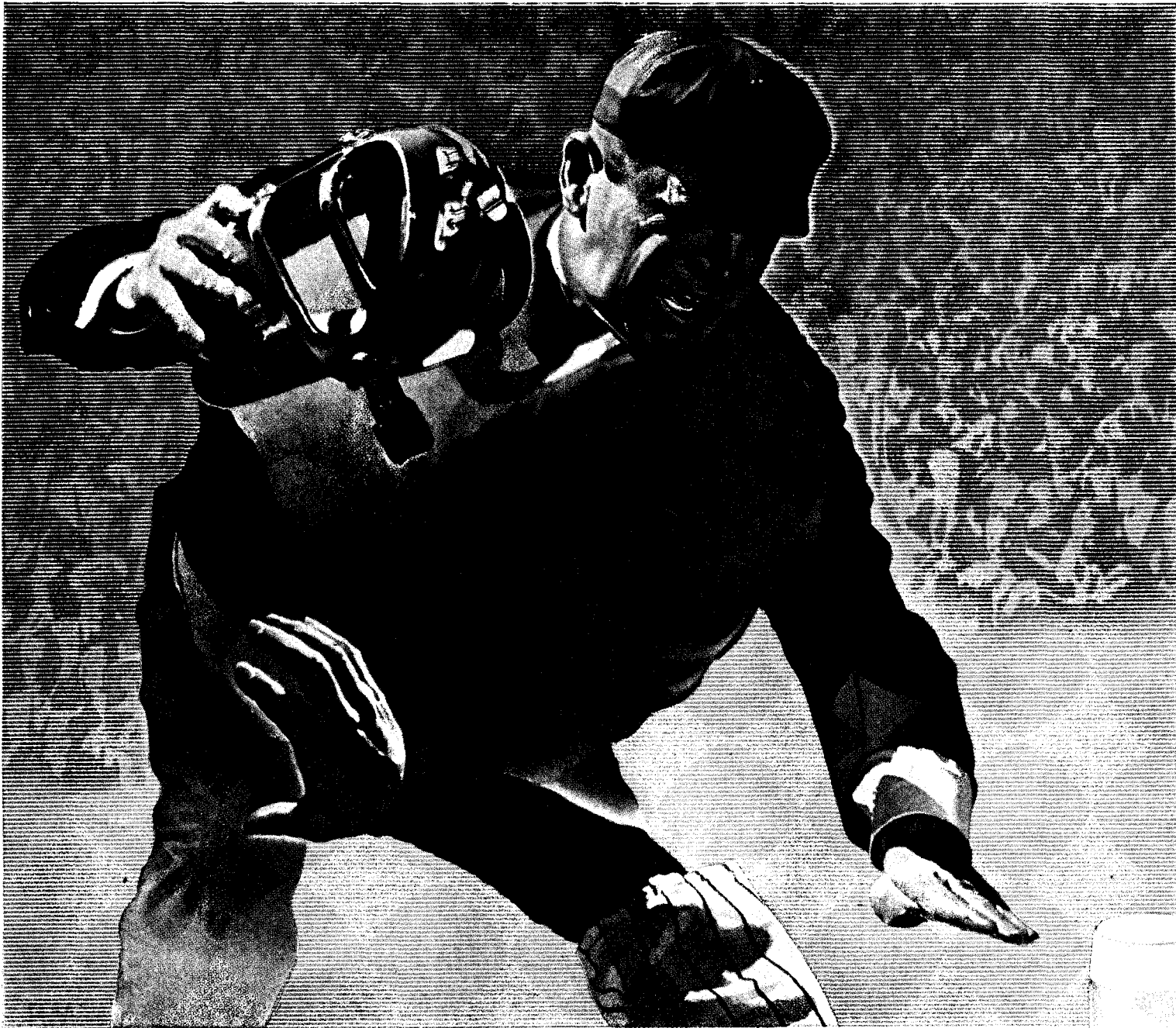


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JUST THE *kiss* OF THE HOPS

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the bitterness*



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THE BEER THAT MADE MILWAUKEE FAMOUS



arose and said, "I'll let them out, Miss Cartwright." He still hadn't looked at her.

"When is Royal going back to camp?" Ethel Ann asked when he had gone out.

"He's on a ten-day furlough," Grande Tante said.

"And he's an orphan," said Aunt Petty.

"You didn't!" Ethel Ann said sharply.

"Darlings, no!"

"It's a big house," Grande Tante said.

"And it's nice having a man in it again," Aunt Petty said.

A fine how-do-you-do! Ethel Ann set down her cup and arose.

"Finish your coffee," Grande Tante ordered.

"I've got to telephone—"

"You can't," Aunt Petty said. "It's deader than a doornail this morning."

"The postman's here," Royal stood in the doorway, stamping snow from his feet.

"Shall I go bring in the mail, Miss Cartwright?"

"No," Ethel Ann said. "I'll go. I always go."

She threw on a coat and ran past him. Maybe she could catch the postman. But his car was already crawling down the Post Road toward Watertown.

Ethel Ann watched it grow smaller and smaller on the white highway. "Now what do I do?" she said out loud.

Her stomach felt as if field mice were scampering around in it. Automatically, she went on to the postbox and took out the mail.

A letter from Ricky lay on top of the pile! She tore it open with shaking fingers.

The sprawled words were like Ricky's voice, speaking to her, his mouth crinkled in a grin.

He'd been ill—But not from wounds, thank God. "Nothing so stirring as that, my lass," he wrote.

"My session in the hospital was for the sole purpose of being de-wormed. Apparently, every manner of parasite and bacteria in the South Pacific found its way into my intestinal tract. So they have decided to ship me home."

"I can give you no more specific data, sweet, than that I am at X place and will leave here on X transport and arrive in the U.S.A. at approximately X date, and be with you at X time, when I will personally make the aunts eat dirt. Carry on till then, my darling. I love you, Ethel Ann."

The field mice were gone from her stomach with Rick's letter in her hand. With the warming knowledge in her heart that he was safe and coming home, the problem of the unwelcome guest became ridiculously simple.

She would just inveigle him into the car, and then drive him to Watertown and dump him out on the sidewalk.

SHE shoved Rick's letter inside her dress and flew into the house. Aunt Petty was alone by the fire. "I'm going into town to take the laundry," Ethel Ann said.

"Where's Royal? Maybe he'd like to go with me!"

"He went to help Honorah upstairs," Aunt Petty said over the morning paper. "Such a lovely boy. So well bred."

Grande Tante's door was open. She was sitting in her rocking chair, with the radio turned low for the morning news.

Rick's door was also open, and there in front of the mirror was the soldier—only he was no longer a soldier. He was in civilian clothes—Rick's civilian clothes!

Ethel Ann strode into the room and placed her hands on her hips. She was boiling mad.

"That's my husband's suit!" she snapped.

"And you get right out of it this minute or I'll—"

He whirled and came at her two swift steps. "Shut up!" he hissed. "Shut up or I'll make you!"

His hands were on her wrists, and he jerked her against him. "It's my suit! I'll wear it if I like!"

Her clutched hands felt the hard outline of Rick's gun inside the belt of the trousers. He was glaring down at her, and his eyes were dark, empty windows, with snarling little fires flickering far back.

"They're the eyes of an insane person," Ethel Ann's frightened mind chattered. "Of course—that's it! He's mad. He's mad as a werewolf. . . ."

Aunt Petty's voice faltered from the doorway: "My goodness, what are you two doing?"

He dropped her wrists, and Ethel Ann edged back to the door and reached for Aunt Petty's frail waist, and held it tight to keep her arm from trembling.

# Hard Losers

## THE LOCALES

Point Pleasant, W. Va.

Allentown, Pa.

Indianapolis

Detroit

Atlanta

Louisville

A homeowner protested the state laying a sidewalk in front of his home and stood there until the concrete rose over his ankles.

Baseball fans put four flats on the car of the umpire when the home team lost.

When a traveler was told there was no room available at a hotel, he bit the desk clerk.

Five minutes after paying his income tax a man collapsed and was taken to a hospital.

When a lady could not win on a pinball machine she smashed it to pieces with an ax.

A bridge player threw his cards on the table so savagely that he fractured a rib.

—W. E. FARBSTEN

## THE LOSERS

of tortured tires. Then it did a complete turn. When Ethel Ann stopped spinning, she was facing back the other way, and the snow-covered sailor was picking himself up out of the ditch.

Ethel Ann opened the door and said bitterly, "I'd like to kick your teeth in—but I haven't time. Get in here quick!"

"That was a neat trick," the sailor chuckled, climbing in beside her. "But you could do it better with wings, my lass."

"Rick?" Ethel Ann quavered, staring at him. "Oh, Rick! Thank God!" Then she wilted over the wheel and started squalling like a three-year-old.

Rick pulled her in his arms. "Darling! What's wrong?"

"Revelations is scrubbing the upstairs tub—with the pigsticker," she sobbed, "because they're all alone—and he's crazy as a loon—he's got your gun—his eyes are awful!"

"Slide over," Rick said. "And let me drive. . . . Now! Begin at the beginning, darling. Just when did Revelations start toting a gun and scrubbing the upstairs bathtubs with a pigsticker?"

Royal, replete in Rick's great coat, scarf and hat, was standing at a bend in the road about a mile from the house. He put out his thumb when he saw the car. "Get down, Ethel Ann," Rick ordered. He stopped the car and got out. "Going my way, Mac?" He proffered his cigarette pack.

Royal took one automatically. He was staring at the blue uniform. "I'd do better to join up with the Navy, don't you think?" he said. "I like the uniform."

"Sure," said Rick. "It's a good uniform, Mac." He stepped back and swung out with his fist, and Royal grunted and did a belly flop in the snow. Ethel Ann stuck her pert little face over the back of the seat and yelled, "Get his gun, Ricky! It's inside his belt!"

"What do you mean—his gun and his belt!" Rick grunted, strapping Royal's hands firmly behind his back. He folded him up and stuffed him in the back seat. "Let's get over to the house, my lass."

Revelations was standing guard on the drive, brandishing the pigsticker. "Gemmum jes' up and walk erway," he said. "And Ah lets him." He peered in at Royal's crumpled form and shook his head happily. "Lak a fish in a net, Mr. Rick!" Then: "De aunts still don't know nothin' 'bout nothin'. Dey upstairs playin' backgammon."

"Keep them that way," Rick ordered. "We won't be long."

They were searching Royal in the state troopers' headquarters when he came to. They found his 4F draft card and someone said, "This guy's no soldier!" and Royal started crying. Then they found the nylon hose and the War Loan roll, and Royal lunged against his handcuffs and shouted curses at them, his eyes wild and furious. They took him away like that. The sergeant said, "That's all for now, folks. We'll call you." He went out.

"Well!" Rick said. "Let's go home and watch the aunts eat dirt, sweet."

"My goodness!" Ethel Ann marveled. "I never once thought he was after money!"

"And what did you think he was after?" Rick grinned.

"Me, of course!"

Rick said, "Pride goeth before a fall. Come here, fallen woman."

HE PULLED her inside his pea jacket. Her hands slid up his shoulders and he kissed her. There was a long, ecstatic moment when her senses spun. Then she felt the sharp metal biting into her fingers and pulled back to look. "Rick!" she breathed. "It's the Congressional Medal!"

"Well, so it is!" Rick said.

"They don't give you that for hookworm, do they?"

"Well, no," he admitted.

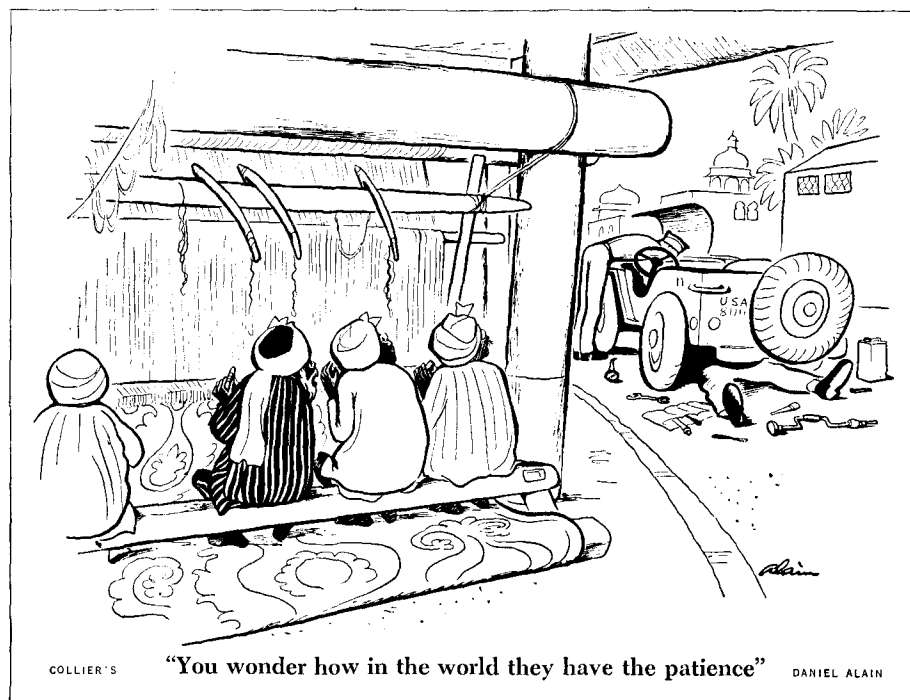
"Rick, what did you do to rate it?"

"Oh, nothing much," Rick said.

"Rick Cartwright! If you don't tell me this minute, I really will kick your teeth in!"

"If you put it that way—" Rick coughed deprecatingly. "Well, you see, darling, the Coast Guard had tea with the Japs one afternoon at Rabaul—and I—I—well, I poured!"

THE END



"You wonder how in the world they have the patience"

Collier's for August 19, 1944





Ma Browne and some of the boys: Charley Goldman, Joe Baksi, and 7-foot 298-lb. Big Ben Moroz. Behind Ma is a cutout of her favorite, Lou Ambers

## SLUGGERS'

Prize fighters, says "Ma" Browne, make the best roomers—they always come through with the rent. For ten years she's been mother confessor to a bunch of them

**BY BARNEY NAGLER**

PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY KNOPF-PIX

THE boys in Mrs. Rosa Browne's lodginghouse on New York's West Side all call her "Ma." As such, the calm-eyed, round little landlady spends many a night waiting up until her boarders come home from work. Her self-chosen task is to bathe the wounds collected by the lodgers during the night's work and to help them forget their woes. Mrs. Browne has been doing this for years and she'll be the first to deny that prize fighters are hard to handle. She wouldn't toss them out for a class of divinity students. They're much too peaceful around the house.

There was a time when Mrs. Browne wouldn't allow a prize fighter over the threshold of the three-story establishment. Those were the days when she preferred wrestlers as roomers.

"I was having wrestlers here before prize fighters, but they was worse," she says. "They was all the time fighting in the rooms and knocking down the plaster. And they walked like horses."

Ma Browne, a German-Swiss in her middle fifties, has only one regret. The wrestlers always insisted that she watch them in action. "I all the time was going to see wrestlers and that's worse than prize fights, but now the boys don't want I should see the fights," she explains. "So I listen on the radio."

The Browne house, an old-fashioned, high-stooped brownstone shadowed by towering apartment hotels which rim Central Park, has nine rooms, two of which are occupied by Mrs. Browne and her family. The other

seven rooms house prize fighters, each of whom pays a minimum of five dollars a week.

In ten years Mrs. Browne has never been done out of a week's rental. As a matter of fact, it was her first experience with a down-and-out gladiator which convinced the landlady that fighters aren't half as bad as they're painted, and that they're twice as reliable.

One day, ten years ago, a young prize fighter rang Mrs. Browne's doorbell and asked to rent a room. At first Mrs. Browne was reluctant because he was a fighter; she was even more unwilling when she learned he didn't have the first week's rent. He was training for a fight, he said, and would pay her right after the contest.

Finally she agreed and let the young fighter run up a bill of \$60 before the fight, which he won. The youngster was so happy in his new home and was so convinced that it was a lucky one, that he prevailed upon his manager, Al Weill, one of the top figures in the business, to make all his fighters live at Mrs. Browne's. Business boomed for the landlady and hasn't subsided since.

The fighter, who was the first of his trade to live at Mrs. Browne's, was Lou Ambers and he eventually won the lightweight championship of the world. He stayed there for seven years, even when he earned as much as \$82,000 for one night's work.

Mrs. Browne cleans each room daily, running up and down the three flights of stairs a minimum of twenty times a day. One of her roomers once commented, "Ma Browne does more roadwork each day than all of us put together." Yet, it hasn't taken off any weight. Less than five feet tall and garbed in a scrupulously laundered house dress at all times, Mrs. Browne resembles a garnished butterball. She speaks a form of English liberally sprinkled with bits of French and German.

### "No Swearing"—in French

Once Ma Browne was shocked to hear several of her new tenants, French Canadian fighters, cussing at one another in French. Unaware that she spoke their language, they soon learned, when notices—in French—warning against foul language were posted throughout the house.

The landlady's personal household includes her husband, Frank, and a pretty 23-year-old daughter, Ethel, whom her boarders rarely see. Mr. Browne works in a mid-Manhattan clothing establishment, while Ethel is a bank employee. "All of us work," Mrs. Browne explains, "because we is gonna buy some day after the war a tearoom on the outskirts from New York and live quiet."

Not that Mrs. Browne has been unhappy playing nursemaid to a flock of prize fighters. Nor has it been unprofitable. Ambers' manager, Weill, has continued supplying Mrs. Browne with tenants, and now an ex-bantamweight named Charley Goldman, who trains Weill's fighters, occupies the front parlor and is Weill's spy there.

Goldman has a fine view of the high front stoop and he can spot any fighter who tries to sneak in or out after his training bedtime. The view also makes it possible for Charley to check on boxers as they leave the house in the morning for their roadwork around the Central Park reservoir. When Goldman is out of town with some fighters, Mrs. Browne takes over as a spy for Weill.

"This I gotta do because Mr. Weill is such a fine manager he makes the fighters pay their rent on time," she says.

More than sixty fighters have lived at Mrs. Browne's since Ambers paved the way, but Lou is still the landlady's favorite. In token of this affection, Mrs. Browne constantly wears a pair of miniature boxing gloves that Lou autographed, pinned high on her dress. This fondness for Ambers ties in with her deeply religious nature, for, like Mrs. Browne, he never missed a Sunday at church while he lived in her house.

Nailed to the inside of the front door is a regulation pair of boxing gloves, and one of the roomers, Heavyweight Joe Baksi, a Madison Square Garden headliner, has painted the household slogan on one: "Clean your shoes on the welcome mat, my boy, and keep smiling. The first hundred years are the hardest."

(Continued on page 81)