

# BOMBER'S MOON

BY MONA WILLIAMS

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL CORDREY

Scotty was gone, gone to England, and her love was gone, too—but the moon shone white and showed Lou the path back to her heart's desire

IN THE beginning of his absence, she couldn't have borne coming to this place; she had walked blocks out of her way to avoid passing it. And it had been the same with the little waffle bar where they used to have breakfast on Sunday mornings, and the church where they had been married, and Doctor Kent's office, where they had learned she wasn't going to have a baby after all.

That was the day she couldn't stop crying, although in her mind she had been relieved. But a mysterious spring of tears had gushed up from somewhere, and she had stumbled home blindly, clinging to Scotty's arm. He couldn't understand it.

"I can't encourage this," he kept saying, and patting her shoulder with his square, freckled hand. "This is absolutely and purely nuts. Crying about something that never was. If you've got to cry, Baby, cry for me. When I'm gone, at least you'll know what's missing. I hope."

But the day he left, she hadn't cried at all. Now it seemed like an omen.

There were so many places that meant Scotty and their life together, but in a way, this held more memories than any other. It was a ridiculous place, especially for a dignified city like Boston, with a tiny, crowded bar, and close-set tables, and the walls covered with pictures of swooning maidens and mustachioed lovers, plucking daisy petals. Not the kind of background you'd naturally associate with Scotty.

Yet here most of their courtship had taken place, when she lived in a girls' club around the corner, and they had nowhere else to go. They used to sit at that table by the wall, in comparative privacy, and drink red wine all evening. And the wandering violinist, who played Gypsy music, would come and yearn over their table, fiddling tenderly. Because, even with Scotty elaborately reading the menu, and pretending he didn't know what it was all about, anybody could see that they were in love.

Last week she had come here and sat at the very same table, but even that hadn't done any good. She couldn't fool herself any longer. The truth was—Scotty no longer really existed in her life. Scotty had become an idea—not much more real than the baby had been. Nothing had taken his place—there was only a vague emptiness, a hollow ache.

Sometimes she woke up in the middle

of the night, scared—because she couldn't remember Scotty's face. The separate features—yes. His brown eyes that always looked merry, even when he wasn't smiling, the short, wide, fighter's nose, the freckles on the back of his hands. But she couldn't put them all together any more. His image kept getting smaller and smaller, like something seen from the rear of a speeding train.

IT MADE her feel a little desperate. Now she had taken to walking by the church, and the waffle bar, and even coming here in the evening. What she wanted was to find Scotty's face again, and hold onto it tight until he came back.

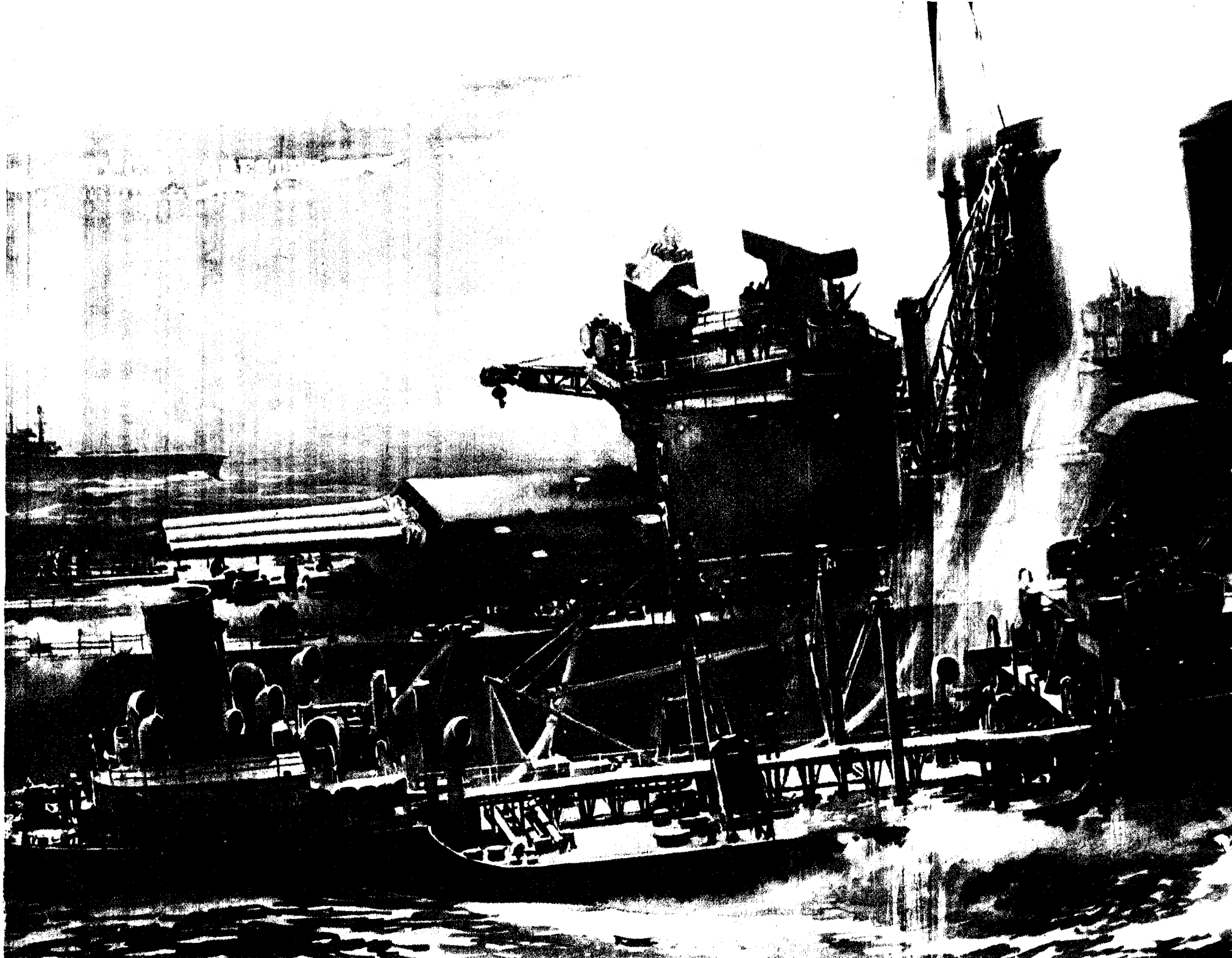
Tonight she couldn't sit at the table against the wall, because it was occupied. A man in an R.C.A.F. uniform was sitting there alone. She always noticed men in the Air Forces because Scotty was a flier, too. But this young man was his opposite in appearance. He was very fair, with long limbs, and a thin, sensitive face. He was drinking quietly, and watching a noisy group of people at the bar.

A thickset, red-faced man seemed to be host to this bar group—mostly younger people, and he kept moving about, and urging more drinks on the others. As Lou watched, his roving eye caught the young officer. He left his guests and sauntered

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The lieutenant pulled Lou into the curve of his arm. She felt cut away from everything—past—future. "This is the way it should be," he whispered against her ear. "This is what should happen to people"





Actually this story is fiction, but it lies so close to fact that it had to be shown to the Navy censor. Certain technical details were scissored out, but the essential story remains—and it is a record of dogged heroism, by one of our great writers of sea stories

**N**EITHER the Fleet oiler, at anchor in the bay, nor her warrant bosun, could be called good looking. Ships of war generally have a functional beauty, resulting from the wholehearted efforts of their designers to make them fighting vessels, and nothing other than fighting vessels, but this ship was only a self-propelled oil tank, and the guns she carried had the appearance of being stuck on as an afterthought—as indeed they were. Furthermore, she was disfigured by great cliffs of cargo on her cargo deck amidships, stacks and stacks of cardboard boxes, wooden boxes, steel boxes.

The curious eye which read the labels on those boxes would be mildly surprised to see what they contained: the candy bars which the American public were learning to do without; peanuts and canned fruit; evaporated vegetables; and along with these packages were others of deadly

weapons, of clothing, of tools, seemingly higgledy-piggledy, but actually laid out on the deck in a definite scheme which had cost the supply officer a good deal of thought, and which had cost the crew much labor to execute.

The crew and the warrant bosun were at ease now, reaping the reward of a day of severe toil. A few were on watch, manning those guns and telephones which even in a protected anchorage are never left unmanned by day or night. A few were sleeping; but all the rest were gathered in the darkened mess hall.

Across the center of the hall hung a screen, and on this screen was being projected a motion picture; half the men had to see the picture back to front, because they had to look at it from the back of the screen, but nobody minded that very much. A motion picture was a luxury from any point of view.

The warrant bosun put a fresh stick of chewing gum into his mouth and prepared to enjoy himself. He was on the right side of the screen, he had an excellent day's work behind him, and in two minutes' time he would hear Bing Crosby sing. After that would come a whole night in bed and an easy day tomorrow. All was right with the world.

Yet while the warrant bosun was unwrapping that piece of gum, a light on shore suddenly trained itself upon the ship and began to wink and flash in a staccato Morse code.

A signalman upon the bridge recorded

the message and slid down the ladder with it to the captain.

In the mess hall, an opened door let in a shaft of light which blotted out the motion picture, and a voice came bellowing in to drown Bing Crosby's: "Go to your stations, all special sea details."

Switches clicked, and light flooded the mess hall. Bing Crosby's song came to an inglorious end.

"Hell!" said the warrant bosun, getting to his feet along with everyone else.

The bosun's mate who had brought the message caught sight of him, blinking in the light.

"Cap'n says to prepare the ship for fueling at sea."

"Hell!" said the warrant bosun again. He pushed out through the mob in the alleyway into his cabin and switched on the light there. On the bulkhead at the foot of his bed were stuck a couple of pictures of nude women; on his desk stood a photograph of his wife. He reached for his sheepskin coat, struggled into it, plunged out of his cabin onto the cargo deck and made his way forward along the catwalk.

Darkness was closing in; the wind was cold, causing the warrant bosun to turn up the collar of his big sheepskin coat as he took his post on the exposed forecabin. The light was still flashing from the shore station, and while the anchor was actually being hove in, a motor whaleboat ran alongside, and an officer, the gold cord of the staff around his shoulder, handed a final packet of orders to the captain.

Clearly, something out of the ordinary was in the wind, some important strategic move, but the warrant bosun did not care about that. Strategy was something for captains to worry about, and admirals, and the staff at Washington. His own affair, now that the anchor was in and the ship was heading out into the bay, was to prepare for fueling at sea.

There can be gunnery specialists and radio specialists, engineers and torpedo-men, but they are newcomers to the sea, while the boatswain traces his descent straight back to Noah. Everything that makes a ship a ship is in his department; it is not his concern whether she is a fighting machine or not, but it is his business to make sure that she is efficient for sea. All ropework and cordage are in his province, all blocks and tackle, cables and anchors. Your skilled specialist rating may go all his life at sea without having to tie any knot except in his shoelaces, but the bosun has to be able to knot and splice, to be familiar with the foibles of Manila line, to know how to reeve a block, just as did his predecessor in the days of Paul Jones.

The warrant bosun took his station under the break of the forecabin while the pipes went squealing through the ship.

"Rig all fueling at sea gear. Rig all fueling at sea gear."

Men came scrambling through the darkness to take up their stations and, as they did so, the ship reached the open water outside the bay and made her first