

BLOW ME BLUE



THE car pulled off the road and parked on the sunburned grass at the top of the bank. Ed took one look at the young man who got out, and said to himself: No sale. The car was wide and low and the top was down. No customers for fish bait out of a car like that.

The young man fooled around in the back of the car for a minute and then came up with a big leather-covered case of some kind. Under his other arm he had something in a canvas sack.

"Mama," Ed called softly, without turning his head, "get out your overalls. Fella's comin' to take pictures."

Every so often, in the summertime, people would come to take pictures of Ed and his wife and the houseboat. They'd fuss around the deck, fooling with their cameras, and when they were through they'd give Ed a dollar.

"Nope," she said. "Too hot to wear those old overalls. I'm comfortable."

Mama was really a neat woman; she dressed better than most that lived along the river, and she kept her hair in a net and her face scrubbed. But the tourists always liked it when she put on the filthy overalls and pulled the straw hat down on the back of her head, sitting beside Ed while the two of them looked solemnly at the round glass eye of the camera.

"Well, we could use a dollar," Ed said. "We sure could."

"Then you just seine some more minnies," Mama said comfortably. "I'm too easy to go fussing around."

The young man seemed doubtful about the plank that connected the bank and the boat; he walked across practically on tiptoe, holding the leather case carefully in front of him.

"You Edward Baussier?" he said. Ed nodded, looking him over. He wore glasses with heavy black rims; he wore sand-colored pants and a coat the color of a claybank, two-tone shoes, a yellow shirt, and a blue satin necktie tied in a bow. The man was chubby, but it seemed to Ed that his coat was a little too big—but it looked too nifty to be a hand-me-down.

The young man took off his hat and held it against his chest and looked at Ed with wide round eyes.

"The Bifty," he said. "The blowin' man himself, amen." He put his hat back on, put down the case, and grabbed Ed with both hands. "You know I been looking for you for four months? I'm Joey Kelp. Shake hands, shake hands."

Mama stood in the door of the houseboat, looking curious. It was a narrow door and she was a comfortably wide woman; she filled it.

"The missus," Ed said, disentangling his hand. "Man here says his name is Kelp. Kelp, is that right?"

"People thought you were *dead*, man," the young man said. He was grinning with excitement. "Mrs. Baussier, it's a gracious thing to meet you." He grabbed the case again. "Listen, lis-ten, have I got something for you!"

"We don't want to buy anything," Mama said warningly.

Joey Kelp laughed.

"Listen," he said, "I didn't come to take your money away; I'm bringing you money. By the hat-ful."

He unsnapped the case and lifted the lid, and Ed saw that it was a phonograph. Joey arranged it on an upended box. From a folder in the top of the lid he took a record, turned it lovingly in his hands, and blew dust from it. He wound the machine.

Hazel had a terrific case of the shakes. She fluffed some of the words and finally, in her desperation, she turned and sent the chorus right to Ed

Collier's for November 1, 1947

BY WILLIAM PORTER

Biff Baussier had to find out if the blues still had meaning for him. It had been a long time since he'd been with jazz men—or with Hazel

"Now, listen!"

The music was jazz; it was a Dixieland blues, slow and smoky, the Farewell Blues. The musicians all took the opening chorus together and then there was a slow, easy trombone break. The record had been made a long time ago. The music sounded muffled and hollow, but the beat was there. Joey Kelp got very excited.

"Now!" he said suddenly. "Listen, that's you, remember? That's you, Bifty!"

He was talking about the trumpet that had just come in solo. It was only a short break; the trumpet blew a piece of the melody, growled a little variation, and then rode out on top of the driving final chorus. Joey Kelp quivered as he listened and then, at the finish, threw his arms over his head.

"Tremendous!" he said.

The woman looked at Ed. "I never knew you played for records," she said.

"Some," he said. "Only it was a long time ago. Sure," he said to the young man, "I remember that. That's ol' Cryin' Smith on the trombone."

"Made in the Diadem Studios in Birmingham, June 2, 1924," Joey said. "You know these things are twenty bucks apiece—if you can find them?"

"Some people," Mama said, "sure throw their money around."

"Play it again," Ed said.

The young man was delighted. He played it again, and Ed leaned against the cabin and put his

hands in his pocket and listened, his face blank.

"Well," he said, when it stopped, "can't stand here in the sunshine all day. You want to come around to the stern and set?"

Joe Kelp said he was the jazz historian for some record company and also a talent organizer and right in his pocket he had the paper that would give Ed four hundred dollars per record for making three records. He said that bottled-in-bond jazz was doing a big comeback and all the companies were reissuing their oldies and that people like Bunk Johnson and Kid Ory were back in the business and cleaning up. And that people were talking about the great Baussier, and most of them thought he was dead. He showed Ed a piece from a magazine about him; the piece was written by Joe Kelp. Joey made it sound as if the whole U.S.A. was running around yelling, "Whatever happened to Bifty Baussier?"

MAMA listened to only a little of this and then went back into the cabin. She slammed the door, and Ed knew what the trouble was.

Ed didn't keep very good track of the talk himself, because his mind kept wandering off in the track started by the music. That is, he was thinking about a dark-haired woman. This woman and jazz music went together like the nail and the meat of his finger. First she had waited tables in the place in New Orleans and then one night they heard her

sing, and she kept on singing. The boys used to say that she was the first white woman who ever really learned to sing the blues. Ed wondered if any more white women had ever learned. He hadn't heard jazz for a long, long time.

Mama knew about the dark-haired woman. She was reminded every day. Mama was a fine, broad-minded woman, but that's why she slammed the door.

The heat lay on top of the Black Warrior River like a carpet. The five-pound yellow catfish he'd caught that morning fought against the stringer for a moment in a wild flurry of excitement, kicking up the water, and then took it easy again. The yellow cat was for supper.

"There'll be just five of you," Joey Kelp said, spreading his fingers. "You and ol' Obie and Harry Kentuck and Hammerhead Kelly—hey. Hey, Bifty."

"Yeah?"

"You listenin', man?"

"I'm listenin'."

"What made you quit blowin'?" This Joe had a funny way of talking, like a Dixie accent put on; he hadn't been raised to talk like that. It needed Ed to hear him talk.

"It's been so long I forgot. I just stopped."

"A man who made the kind of sounds you did? Man, I got ears; I can hear those records. The way you blew it was like religion. (Continued on page 78)

"Mama," Ed called softly, without turning his head, "get out your overalls. Fella's comin' to take pictures." "Nope," she said. "Too hot. I'm comfortable"



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Inefficiency, stalling and bureaucratic delay in our government held up the rescue of thousands of Hitler's victims. . . . And the British Foreign Office was more concerned with politics than with mercy

Conclusion

AMERICA has no cause to be proud of its handling of the refugee problem. We knew in Washington, from August, 1942, on, that the Nazis were planning to exterminate all the Jews of Europe. Yet, for nearly eighteen months after the first reports of the Nazi horror plan, the State Department did practically nothing.

Officials dodged their grim responsibility, procrastinated when concrete rescue schemes were placed before them, and even suppressed informa-

tion about atrocities in order to prevent an outraged public opinion from forcing their hand.

I do not make these statements lightly. The Treasury's responsibility for licensing monetary transactions abroad meant that we had to pass on the financial phases of refugee relief plans. This gave us a front-row view of those eighteen terrible months of inefficiency, buck passing, bureaucratic delay and sometimes, what appeared to be calculated obstructionism. With sinking hearts we battled for action against the eternal stretching out of memoranda, committees, conferences—all devouring precious time while innocent people perished miserably in concentration camps and gas chambers.

The fight was long and heartbreaking. The stake was the Jewish population of Nazi-controlled Europe. The threat was their total obliteration. The hope was to get a few of them out—a few women, perhaps, a few children and babies—before the gates of the concentration camps and the

doors of the gas chambers clanked shut.

At times, it seemed as if we were just battering our heads against a stone wall. But in the end we got evidence which we were able to take directly to the President in a dramatic White House interview. In the end, we succeeded in getting the refugee question out of the hands of the State Department, which had kicked it around for so long, and into the hands of a special Presidential commission—the War Refugee Board.

The agonizing story which lay behind the creation of the War Refugee Board need remain a secret no longer. The board was made up of crusaders, passionately persuaded of the need for speed and action; and only such people could get things done in the way of rescue—as WRB did in the few meager months remaining. The basic trouble with the previous setup had been that the State Department was simply not equipped, psychologically or administratively, for the refugee job.

I have written about the foreign office mentality before. The State Department was not set up for rapid action or for humanitarianism. The typical foreign service officer lived off paper. His instinct was always toward postponement, on the hallowed theory of all foreign offices that problems postponed long enough will solve themselves. Moreover, many State Department officials had small personal sympathy for the humble and downtrodden, as the experience of thousands of refugees in France and Portugal demonstrated during the war. The horrors of Dachau or Buchenwald were beyond their conception.

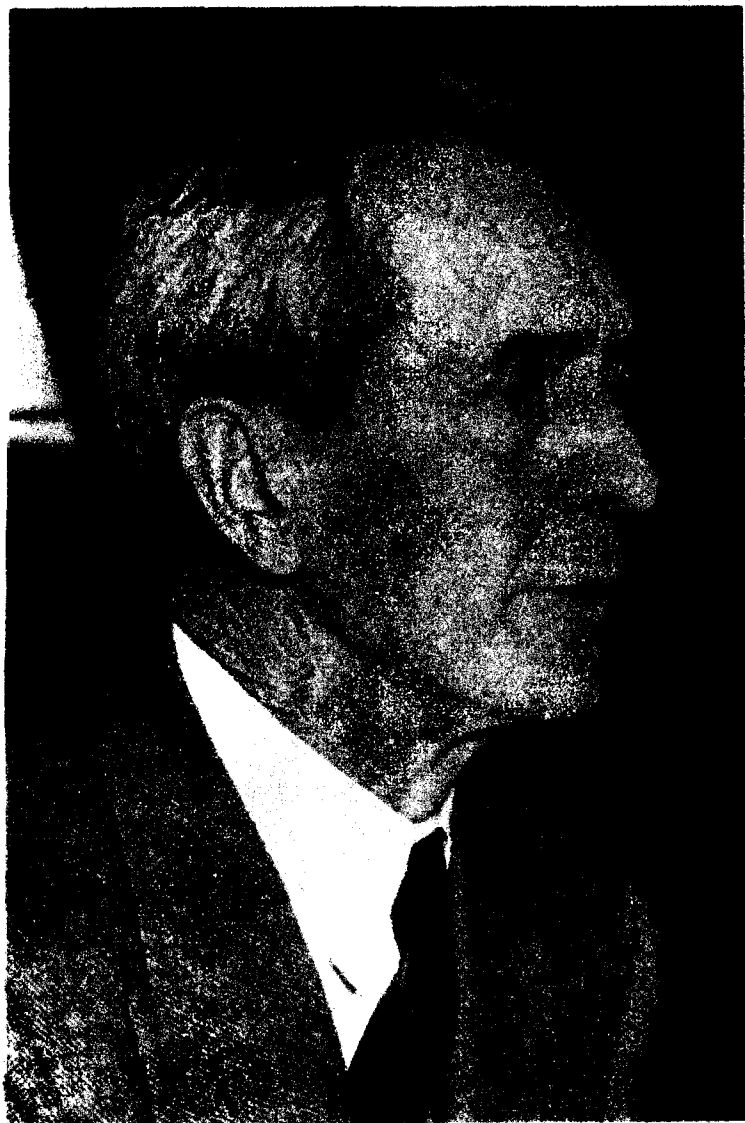
They dealt with human lives at the same bureaucratic tempo and with the same lofty manner that they might deal with a not very urgent trade negotiation.

Hull's indulgence of such men as Breckinridge Long, who did not harass him with perplexing policy problems and with whom he could relax socially, was one of the Secretary's major weaknesses. In this

THE MORGENTHAU DIARIES

BY HENRY
MORGENTHAU, JR.

VI—THE REFUGEE RUN-AROUND



Morgenthau discussed with Breckinridge Long (above) obstacles met in solving refugee problems



The hope was to get refugees out of Germany before the gates of the concentration camps and the doors of the gas chambers clanked shut. Above, a typical refugee family safe in the United States