



The Forage Cap

By HARRY SYLVESTER

THE gray day for which Amy waited did not come until just before the September equinox; in it she went to walk at low tide. Far out on the sand flats which here went fully a mile into the great bay, she felt as though she were walking under water. What she had remembered best and most wanted to see in the four years she had been away from the Cape was the light. It was elusive, difficult to paint, almost as difficult to describe. A gray day found it there most fully, at low tide when the sand flats were bare and the tide pools reflected the sky and informed the air, so that what seemed at first two or three shades of gray were really fifty, a world dedicated to the color, whose sole inhabitants, the gulls and birds of the shore, were made for it.

September, as often on the Cape, was a time of sun and water warm in the shallows, of starfish, horseshoe crabs and seaweed of twenty different shapes and colors. So that she had these and—the summer people mostly gone—the beach almost to herself. There were, too, the warm yellow sun, the smells she loved, at night the sound of the waves—and the sunglasses. These she wore rather distastefully, the only thing to remind her strongly of the place she had left.

Now on the outermost edge of the flats she paused, and raising her eyes from the rippled sand, the shells, the weed, she viewed the old freighter anchored off the Wellfleet shore. During the war it had served as a target ship for planes from the training fields of Hyannis and Quonset Point.

As she watched, several small motorboats emerged from the far side of the ship and began to cruise westward toward the mainland. The striped bass were still running and the boats were those of the professionals who trolled for the fish and who had waited in the lee of the ship until the tide turned. The little boats could not be

taken down the creeks later than half tide, but the bass did not usually bite until tide's turn.

Watching the little vessels as they batted a way through the waves, Amy found herself looking for one with an orange pennant. As yet the boats were too far off to distinguish anything but shape and varying shades of white or gray. She took off the dark glasses—after all there was neither sun nor people here on this ultimate reach of the land—to see the better. Although she had not answered the letter, she now found herself preoccupied with it.

It had arrived two days before, the only piece of mail not forwarded from her home, and read: "Dear Miss Barker: Jack Pearce was in my squadron. He often spoke of you and now that you are on the Cape I wonder if I may call on you. I've been here most of the time since being mustered out of the service, trying to get up my courage to go back to teaching. If you see one of the little bass boats with an orange pennant anywhere near you, that would be me. Send up a rocket or something and I'll put ashore. If that sounds too spectacular, perhaps you would call me at Eastham 17, ring 3. I know you're on the Cape but not exactly where. Josh Armitage."

It was quite a combination, she thought at the time, the name of Joshua and the reference to being mustered out instead of discharged. She wondered if the letter were as guileless as it seemed. Even if not, she thought she might like to see him. She remembered Jack's reference to Armitage in one or two letters as being a former instructor at MIT.

Distracted, she began to walk again along the edge of the outermost flat. A gentle, almost delicate surf curled, and from the surf the flats sloped downward into deep water. She was reminded of the character of the flats, part sand, part water, a half

The forage cap fell to the floor. Amy found she was crying. Almost without her realizing it, she bent to kiss him.

world indeed which she had traversed to this edge. Now that she had smiled at herself, some tension was eased; she wondered if the change were associated with walking out here. Pausing she looked at the boats again. Two of them were closer, and on the smaller of the two she could detect an orange pennant. When she half raised an impulsive arm, she found the doubts, the lack of interest in people still strong. As though made vulnerable by her indecision, she could envision Jack Pearce, barefooted, wearing only a pair of rolled dungarees, standing on the bow of a Wianno-class sloop. . . .

DISMAY followed the memory: She had not thought to be still that vulnerable. Helpless, she found all she could do at the moment to express her feelings, her small anger, was to determine that she would wave to no boat, this or another. But apparently whoever was in the small craft had seen her half gesture, for the boat was heading toward her. Her impulse was to turn and walk away. When she continued to move along the edge of the flat she knew it to be a ridiculous compromise.

She did not glance seaward, even when she could hear the slap of small waves against a bow. "Amy—Miss Barker," someone called. When she turned, it was as though she had freed herself from indecision and the pain of memory.

All she could see of the man addressing her was a head above the boat's small cabin, a head covered by some sort of nautical peaked cap, as it emerged above the small cabin. Now that she turned and looked, she must pause by the water's edge, but she tried to appear as though not waiting for him.

"I'm Armitage," the head said, loudly.

"So I gathered," she said.

"I can't hear you," the head said. "This motor—" The head bobbed sideways and the motor died on a diminishing whine of gears. The boat stuck its nose in the sand, and the head emerged again above a body lean and wide-shouldered. Armitage came forward across the roof of the cabin and jumped onto the sand. He wore red rubber hip boots.

For a moment they stood facing each other, the man's dark wide-set eyes frank and faintly amused, the girl's curious and with their own amusement. Then both of them broke the gaze almost simultaneously.

"Aren't you going to have trouble getting off the bar?" Amy said.

"If I do, the tide will float me in half an hour. You look different."

"Do I? It happens that way sometimes. I wanted to give my face a rest from make-up, all of it, let alone what we use in the studio." She had also hoped that so doing she would be less easily recognized.

Armitage shook his head slightly. "I don't mean differently from in the movies."

She wondered what he did mean. By now a comparison with Pearce was unavoidable. Armitage was a trifle less tall, less urbane and more troubled than she remembered Jack. Of course there had been eleven months before his death when she had not seen him, and she conceded that in that time he, too, might have grown troubled. Nor had Armitage, she felt, the usual awe most men felt for her.

Amy didn't give him her hand but continued to look at him, letting curiosity show in her face a little more than was needful or kind.

"How did you know it was I here?"

"You waved your arm," he said. "I mentioned that in my note."

"I didn't realize I did. But even so. It could have been another girl."

A grin etched his face. "Even so—who am I not to respond when a lady waves to me?"

Her smile, Amy knew, was rather wintry. When his face moved she saw under the dark skin the strong lines of the bones, and she was troubled more than she liked to be. For a moment she did not know what to do and she thought for a moment of leaving him there like a beached seal and turning toward shore. She noticed that his cap was not nautical, but resembled nothing so much as the forage caps seen in pictures of Union soldiers in the Civil War. This amused her and lightened her mood. She decided to stay because it would be a chance to talk to someone about Jack Pearce.

"What were you in Lieutenant Pearce's squadron?"

"Same as Jack. A jaygee. Later, I got blocked up to be a two-striper. He would have, too."

"I know." Again neither of them could look at the other.

"Why don't we sit down?" Armitage said.

"Oh, I want to go back to the shore soon."

He glanced over her shoulder; whatever he saw amused him and again Amy was not sure she liked him. "And you," she said, "must want to get back to your fishing?"

"The fish can wait." His eyes changed again, a questioning look that, in dismay, she thought might indicate scorn. Even the emotion was an anachronistic one, she thought; it went with Joshua and "mustered out" and the forage cap.

"Where," she asked, with deliberate brightness, "did you ever get that Civil War cap?"

His face lighted again, restoring to her not so much any happiness as confidence in her powers. "Oh, that," he said, as though he had not thought about it in months. "I had a granduncle who was with the 24th Massachusetts and this was his cap. It's been recovered. I used to wear it on missions in the Pacific."

"Why did you wear it?"

His face darkened and he shrugged too elaborately. "You had to wear something." He apparently noticed her face, more uncomprehending—even she knew—than it need be, for he went on after a pause: "I mean there were those who wore religious medals, and those who carried rabbit-

WINNER OF THIS WEEK'S
\$1,000 FICTION AWARD



**He wanted to help her, but
she could not allow that—
first, she had to help him**

feet, and those who carried something from a girl, a handkerchief or—" He colored slightly. "I wore this."

"A kind of charm or token."

"Maybe more than that, maybe less. Let's say, something to cling to."

"You know," she said, "when my family used to come down here real early in the season, we children would watch the Decoration Day parades and follow them to the cemeteries. It just occurs to me now that in no place do they pay quite so much attention to the old graves as here—a kind of ancestor worship. And you are a New Englander, aren't you?"

"Oh, you're very clever." He had looked away from her and his voice carried a bitterness as faint as bayberry on the wind. Looking down in a kind of embarrassment, she saw the tide wetting one sandal.

"You're going to have trouble getting back to the shore," he said. Turning, Amy saw water in back of her. The bar on which they stood had become an island. A needless alarm touched her. "Oh, I think I can wade through it."

"You might have to swim before you're done," he said. "Why don't you let me run you back to the shore? I can get the boat up Taine's Creek in a little while."

Unable to account for her hesitation, Amy said that he could. "Do you want me to carry you to the boat?" he said.

"No. I can make it." She bent and loosened her

sandals. When she kicked them off he stooped and picked them up. It was easy for her to climb into the boat. Armitage backed it off the sand bar and turned it, heading out into the bay's gray light. Now the wind became more searching and Amy was forced to stand in the shelter of the cabin, only her face exposed, and aware of Armitage close to her right arm. It took a few moments to clear the shallows, during which time he kept his hands on the wheel. When the waves became small swells he—rather casually, Amy thought—put his left arm around her waist. Her reaction, she found, was something less than automatic. Consciously she had to decide to remove his arm. "I think you're being more than average silly," she said.

"I know," he said, lugubriously. "I've never been able to do much about it."

She almost smiled with him. "Aren't you going the wrong way to put me ashore?"

"I have to circle some to clear these outermost bars. It'll be about three quarters of an hour before I can navigate the channel."

"I wish you'd told me."

"You couldn't have got ashore by walking. You waited too long. If you want to pass the time painlessly, you can fish. There's plenty of lines."

"No, thanks," Amy said.

"Then you won't mind if I do?" He began to unwind a stout hand line with a barracuda feather-jig on it. Amy sat on the port gunwale and watched him. As he paid out the line with one hand, the other throttled the motor down to trolling speed. The change in the motor's tone enabled both of them to hear that other sound troubling each of them, although neither was aware of it. Armitage glanced upward—that is, he threw his face up in such a way that anyone would have expected it to return immediately to its normal position; but instead it stuck there awkwardly, and Amy heard him say, "Well, here they are again."

Her glance followed his and she saw them, eight Helldivers forming two diamond-shaped patterns against the gray. Dropping her eyes, she felt doubly betrayed.

WHEN Armitage looked at her again, she saw his understanding of what was happening to her today: first to meet him who had known Jack Pearce, and now to see these planes that both men had flown. She even felt uneasily that Armitage knew of her having envisioned Jack standing on the bow of the boat.

More for his sake than her own, she said, "What are they doing here?"

His smile was strained. "Signs of the times, maybe. About two weeks ago they began to use the old target ship again, off the Wellfleet shore. Now they're back again. Green as grass, too. Watch them."

The diamond patterns attenuated as she watched, became a single long line. The lead plane dived, and she waited for some violence but nothing happened. "They're just practicing diving?"

He shook his head, the emotion in him so complex as to be nameless. "They're trying. There!" A tiny lavender flash showed against the vessel's gray-red side.

"What was it?"

"Practice bombs. They can't hurt you unless you're practically standing next to one when it bursts. But they've asked the fishermen to keep away from the ship. We usually moor our boats in its lee waiting for the tide turn at night. They haven't been doing any night bombing. These new kids have trouble enough getting any hits by day." Seeing her mood had not departed, Armitage said, "Here, you want to fish?"

Amy held the rough heavy line, feeling pleasantly through it the move and beat of the water. Armitage let out another line on the starboard side, but no fish struck. The boat moved in a wide circle toward the shore. After several minutes, Armitage fixed his line to a cleat and again put his left arm around Amy.

"You might lose a bass that way," she said.

"It would be well worth it," he said.

"You're very flattering, I'm sure," she said. When he persisted, she took his hand and arm firmly and turned out of his embrace. "Look," she said, facing him; "there's something you'd better know. When Jack Pearce died, it (Continued on page 32)



The Red Sox have taken the hurdles well in baseball's 1948 steeplechase. Here their shortstop, Vern Stephens, throws to first for a snappy double play

The Big Series Scramble

By KYLE CRICHTON

THE 1948 pennant races in the major leagues resembled a steeplechase in which the horses had been thoroughly doped with gin in the paddock. No club was able to keep in a straight line for more than twenty feet; each spurted, wobbled, fell back, picked up again and finally were all running haphazardly in a bunch.

The Boston Red Sox won twelve straight in a home stand in late July, went West and began wandering aimlessly across the landscape like a mule with the blind staggers. The Cleveland Indians had a great spurt in August and topped it by losing three straight to the Chicago White Sox, one of the worst big-league teams in history. The New York Giants' pitchers strung together three shutouts in a row at

one period in July and proceeded to hurl thereafter in such fashion that their lives were in danger from enemy line drives.

The sentimental and actual sensations of the year were the Philadelphia Athletics, who had the look of an old-fashioned jitney held together with baling wire. Connie Mack ruled over this amazing outfit with his usual score card and uttered thanks in his prayers every night for the good fate that had dropped into his lap such pitchers as Joe Coleman, Lou Brissie, Bill McCahan and Dick Fowler.

The best crack about the A's came from Hank Greenberg, who said: "I'm not afraid of them; nobody in our league is afraid of them, and the team that meets them in the World Series probably won't be afraid of them."

The A's pitching suffered a bad sinking spell in late August, the hitting was never much good and the end was inevitably sad.

Joe McCarthy showed his intelligence when joining the Red Sox by arranging for the purchase of Jack Kramer and Vern Stephens from the St. Louis Browns. This represented an investment of approximately \$250,000, but it proved warranted by midsummer when Kramer's pitching was holding the team up almost singlehandedly and Stephens was beating such a tattoo off the left-field wall at Fenway Park that he was leading the league in runs batted in. Since Ted Williams was leading it in almost everything else the Sox were right up there all the time despite a pronounced weakness in the box.

The Cleveland Indians, who never seem happy

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY DAVID AND HY PESKIN