

Mask for Danger

By DONALD HAMILTON

Young had been in combat before, and now he was in combat again. He'd have to fight this battle, even though he didn't want to—even though he didn't know if he had enough courage left

The Story: LIEUTENANT DAVID YOUNG was hitchhiking to Norfolk to report for duty with the Navy. He'd had one war, and taken quite a beating in it. A man who identified himself as LAWRENCE WILSON picked him up, slugged him, dressed him in his own clothes, wrecked the car, and left him for dead in it. Young woke up in a Maryland hospital, his face covered with bandages. Everyone assumed that he was Lawrence Wilson.

But there were people who knew he wasn't. One was Wilson's wife, ELIZABETH, who came to the hospital and took him to Wilson's house overlooking Chesapeake Bay. Another was DR. BOB HENSHAW, who was conspiring with Elizabeth to maintain the deception that Young was Wilson. A third was BONITA DECKER, whom Elizabeth described as the girl Wilson expected to marry. Henshaw and Elizabeth told Young he must impersonate Wilson for a while because they had killed him, and they threatened to expose Young as a Navy deserter if he refused. Young bided his time. He was convinced that Wilson was still alive.

Wilson, according to Elizabeth, had been fired from his Navy Department job because he was considered a bad security risk. Young saw no reason not to believe her—except that he had no reason to trust her about anything. He knew she could scarcely be called friendly toward him, even though she seemed at times to like him, and he knew she was involved in a love affair with Henshaw and had slipped away from the house several times on mysterious errands that involved boats in the Bay. Young couldn't trust Bonita, either. She knew he wasn't Wilson, and yet she hadn't exposed him as an impostor; maybe she, too, had some part in the conspiracy.

Young got a big surprise from Elizabeth. She drugged him, but before he passed out she told him to call the FBI when he came to and tip them off about a rendezvous of spies in the Bay. Bonita came to the house, and she and Young boarded Wilson's power cruiser. There they found Elizabeth and Henshaw waiting for them—and Young realized that the man he had assumed to be Wilson had been Henshaw all along.

CONCLUSION

DR. HENSHAW spoke a low command. Elizabeth closed the door to the cockpit, and suddenly it seemed very quiet in the deckhouse; the silence broken only by the distant murmur of traffic crossing the highway bridge a mile up the river, and by the occasional creaking of a dock line, or the splashing of a wave against the boat's planking. Bonita was the first to stir.

"But—I don't understand." She looked accusingly at Young. "You said you'd seen—Where's Larry?"

Dr. Henshaw laughed. "Why, I'm Larry, Miss Decker," he said. He sounded rather proud of himself. "I'm the only Larry the lieutenant has ever met. He made the natural mistake of taking for granted that the man who introduced himself as Larry Wilson—who was driving Wilson's car and had Wilson's belongings in his possession—must necessarily be Larry Wilson. And when a man offers you a lift on the highway you don't repay his kindness by staring at him, do you, Lieutenant? And modern dashboards don't give a great deal of light."

The red-haired girl turned on Young again. "Oh, I don't believe it! Why, I know you saw Dr. Henshaw in the hospital; he even came up to the house

to treat you, didn't he? You *can't* pretend you didn't recognize—"

The doctor said, "Lieutenant Young's confusion is really quite understandable, Miss Decker. One night he is knocked over the head by a man he never really gets a good look at. A day or so later, sick and in pain, he is introduced to a reputable physician, vouched for by the hospital authorities. Is it going to occur to him that these two individuals are one and the same person—particularly when all circumstances seem to indicate that the second man is twenty years older than the first?"

"But—but he claims Larry shot at him last night! He says he even saw him doing it!"

Henshaw said pompously, "That's really a very interesting psychological phenomenon, Miss Decker. You see, as long as I maintained, shall we say, my aura of respectability—as long as I was just an old, bald fog of a general practitioner being, uh, made a sucker of by one of my patients' wives—it never occurred to the lieutenant to think of me in the proper terms. And when he caught a glimpse of me on the lawn as an armed, threatening, conspiratorial figure dressed in the coat and hat—particularly the hat—'Larry Wilson' had worn that night, his mind identified me *not* as the respectable Dr. Henshaw, but simply as the man who had tried once before to kill him. As a matter of fact, I hadn't any intention of hurting you last night, Young," the doctor said.

Young did not speak. Bonita Decker asked, "Then why—"

"This particular development was wholly unplanned," Henshaw said. "I was merely waiting outside to speak to Mrs. Wilson last night, and the lieutenant's appearance caught me by surprise. Having inadvertently attracted his attention, I shot out the flashlight in the simple hope that he wouldn't recognize me at all. It didn't cross my mind—I was as surprised as anybody—almost as surprised as Mrs. Wilson, although I didn't take refuge in hysterics—to learn over the phone this morning that Larry Wilson had been seen alive. Naturally, I wasn't going to discourage the idea! The lieutenant's mistake worked out nicely for me; and tonight I put on the same hat and coat in order to deliberately trade on his illusion that Larry Wilson was at the bottom of all his troubles."

Something about the choice of words seemed to strike the doctor as unfortunate, and he stopped talking. In the silence Young thought he could feel the minds of the other people in the cabin making the same association, at the thought of Larry Wilson being at the bottom of anything.

The little red-haired girl licked her lips, looking up at Dr. Henshaw. Her freckles were quite noticeable. "You were driving Larry's car that night? Then—where was Larry?"

Dr. Henshaw smiled sympathetically. "Why, where he has always been, since early that evening, Miss Decker. Out beyond the mouth of the channel, wrapped in several fathoms of heavy chain, with a bullet through his head."

Bonita looked at him without moving. Her lips were a little parted. Her tongue came out to moisten them again; otherwise there was no sign that she understood what she had just been told. Then she spun around, threw her shoulder into Elizabeth Wilson, slammed the sliding door back, and was gone into the darkness outside. A moment later they heard her racing shoreward along the dock.

Dr. Henshaw took a step aft, as if he were going

to follow her. He checked himself and reached over to raise the Venetian blind on the starboard side of the deckhouse. He leaned close to the glass to peer out, apparently hampered by the reflections of the cabin light. Outside, the running footsteps faltered, slowed, and came to a stop. The doctor straightened up and walked out into the cockpit.

THROUGH the deckhouse window, Young could see the small figure of the girl halfway down the dock; she was backing slowly toward him, away from a man blocking the shoreward end of the dock. The man moved slowly forward, driving the girl back toward the moored boat.

"Miss Decker," the doctor's voice called softly from the boat. "Miss Decker, please don't be—"

Bonita looked around desperately. Seeing herself trapped between the two men, she hesitated, then turned and flung herself off the dock and started swimming. Dr. Henshaw strode into the cabin and jerked Young roughly away from the window.

"Start her up, Lieutenant."

"What?"

Henshaw gestured toward the boat's instrument panel. "Start the motor."

Something unpleasant happened inside Young at the thought of taking the controls. He said breathlessly, "But I don't remember—It's been years since I—"

"You're stalling while the girl gets away!" The doctor took a step forward. "I said, start it!"

"But I—" The taste of fear was in his mouth. He backed away, and heard himself saying childishly, "Please, I don't want to—"

There was a scuffle on the dock. Then somebody half stumbled and half fell into the Amberjack's cockpit. The doctor turned and hurried aft. A man's voice spoke from the dock:

"There she is. You'd better watch her; she swims like a seal."

"Give me a hand with the dock lines before you go."

"Play with your own ropes, Doc; I'm soaking wet and I've got to get back to Washington. Oh, all right, if you're going to get sore about it."

"That's better," Henshaw's voice said.

Henshaw put his head through the door. "Now, start the motor, Lieutenant."

Young drew a long breath and turned and walked to the helmsman's seat. He felt a little dizzy as he seated himself, tested the wheel under his hand, checked that the clutch was disengaged, and turned the ignition key. When he pressed the button, the engine started beneath the deckhouse floor. The illuminated dials told him there was gas in the tanks, pressure in the oil system, and that the battery was charging. A ship had more stuff, but it was all part of the same thing, he thought; something he had been running away from for over six years. He felt the forty-foot cruiser roll gently beneath him.

"Ready, forward?" he asked softly.

Henshaw heard him. "Ready forward."

"Ready aft?"

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ILLUSTRATED BY HOWARD FORSBERG





Irene Mason—Librarian for Arkansas

Collier's COLOR CAMERA

LIBRARY LADY

TO a great many Americans, librarians have been typified as dull, stuffy people with about as much fire as a bucket of paste. That the reputation is a complete canard is attested by the presence in U.S. library systems of ladies like forty-two-year-old Irene Mason, Executive Secretary of the Arkansas State Library Commission. An accurate model of modern American executive librarians, her mission is to help fill the nation's ever-increasing need for books.

During 15 years with the Indiana State Library, Miss Mason—for a salary of \$4,500 a year—has been doing just that with the energy of a steam fitter and the devotion of a monk. From her book-

crammed headquarters in Little Rock, she advises town and county libraries; helps them buy books; aids in establishing new facilities; supervises the annual expenditure of \$178,000 largely in state aid to local libraries; oversees the lending of some 500 books daily by mail; and in co-operation with local units, circulates thousands more yearly by Bookmobile.

Energetic Miss Mason is an ardent cook, hostess and clubwoman, belonging to local chapters of the American Association of University Women, the Business and Professional Women's Club and the Pilot Club International of Little Rock. A member of the Southwestern Library Association, she is

presently serving on a committee seeking ways of improving library service throughout the region.

Busy as she is, Arkansas' librarian will be in Chicago this week for the 75th-anniversary meeting of the American Library Association. The A.L.A. guides the destinies of more than 7,500 U.S. public libraries, which circulate some 100,000,000 books annually. But for librarians like Irene Mason—who holds several important posts in the A.L.A.—even this is too little. Traditionally, book people may not have big muscles, but they will fight for what they believe is important. And for them, the battle to put more books in the hands of more people grows ever more urgent. SEY CHASSLER

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY FRED LYON

Malvern, Ark., a typical town without its own library, is served by the county-and-state-supported Bookmobile

In Little Rock headquarters, Miss Freddy Schader, circulation librarian (center standing), sees that personal mail, school and Bookmobile requests are filled

