

Drawings by Tom Lee

Dying in Carcassonne

by NATHAN ASCH

I

IT WAS BILL'S theory that if one has no money, and doesn't know when one is going to get any, one should choose a good hotel rather than a bad hotel. If the money arrives, one is well fixed in either case; and if it doesn't, the jail one goes to is very uncomfortable anyway. Especially a French jail, especially in a small French town, especially if one is American.

So at the station we picked the most luxurious hotel bus, with a big sign, "Hotel de la Cité," with a little sign, "English Spoken;" with balloon tires, and blue upholstery, and a uniformed driver who looked at us superciliously and did not open the door. We decided we did not speak French and that our bags were coming later. We had not shaved because we had not cared to, and did not wear hats because that was an American custom. We spoke only English, and the little sign was a lie, and finally the guard opened the door and we climbed in.

We did want a cigarette, but credit had to be conserved until we reached the hotel. I was doubtful of the whole proceeding, but the situation was my fault, and Bill had said he'd get us out if only I kept my nerve, and my mouth shut. I had no business gambling with the Catalans, no right to play poker anyway if I didn't know how; if it weren't for me, we'd be on our way to Paris and money and decency. As it was we were in Carcassonne, with fifteen centimes in our combined pockets, sitting in the bus of the only hotel de luxe in town . . .

and I was nervous. I was very, very nervous.

Bill didn't seem to be. He looked to the right, to the left, apparently not a care in his head, smiled at two American maiden ladies sitting in the rear of the bus, holding tight to hand bags that probably contained their passports and letters of credit. The ladies smiled back, both of them, and I began to take courage. An American couple came in also: a gentleman with his daughter — she very pretty, although I was not in the mood for prettiness. Bill smiled at her, too, but she did not notice him, and the gentleman grumbled, and in a loud voice, very Middle Western, said:

"This is a good bus, made in Detroit, and I hope the hotel is comfortable, but you, Gussie, must realize this is not America, and you cannot know who is riffraff and who is not."

This made me feel very bad again. Gussie looked around to see the riffraff, and saw us. She looked away immediately again, and things had come to a pretty pass. And in the meantime the bus started and the driver — in English that he had learned by heart — said this was not the real Carcassonne, but only the lower town, and the Hotel de la Cité was the only hotel within the walls, and a former bishop's palace, and it was beautiful, and Carcassonne was beautiful, and "See Carcassonne and die" — he said that. I felt like dying. Then Bill whispered to me: "I feel like dying."

I looked at the scenery. You've got to have courage, I said to myself, or you're lost. Day

by day, in every way . . . I began, but couldn't go on. Do or die, I said. It was of no use. Bill sat next to me, looking miserable. Gussie's father said in a loud voice: "Even this bus won't last long on cobblestones."

Bill said: "I think it will."

Gussie's father said: "Young man, I manufacture auto busses, and I know my business."

Gussie looked at her father admiringly. The doomed bus got off cobblestones and went into mud. From around a hill appeared the walled city of Carcassonne. The sun was setting. Gussie said: "Ah!"

One of the maiden ladies said to the other: "All of my life I've waited for this moment."

Bill whispered to me: "I can't help it. This is the way I feel," and said in a loud voice: "I consider the Château of the Ducs of Brittany, in Nantes, much better."

The other maiden lady said: "I saw it, and it isn't."

Bill's ear became pink. Gussie's father said something about people staying home when they couldn't appreciate sights that others had waited all their lives to see. Gussie looked very angry.

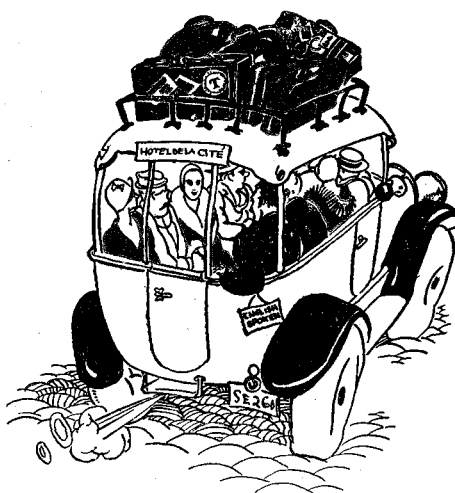
The bus rolled on. The driver rhapsodized about Carcassonne. I pictured the scene that would be held when we were in the hotel registering. The glib things Bill was to say somehow became not credible, or believable. The clerk would be impudent, would call in the manager. This one would not even look at us. "Out with them," he would murmur, and there we would be, stranded on the cold and ancient ramparts of Carcassonne.

"You've got to buck up, Bill," I said.

"Yeh?" Bill asked. "And where's the drink?"

We had the fifteen centimes; not even enough for a *vin blanc-vichy*, certainly not enough for the two or three cognacs that were necessary. Darkness descended, death came upon the world, chaos reigned.

The bus rolled over the drawbridge, turned two dark lanes, went toward an ancient church, and stopped before the ivy-colored door of the Hotel de la Cité.



II

BILL SAT on the edge of one of the two swell beds in the room and looked disconsolate.

"I can't go down," he said.

"All right," I said, "but I'm going to eat."

Bill said: "You have no feelings; you have really no refinement. You are really a boor."

"What's wrong now?" I asked.

"I can't go down without a shave," Bill said.

"And you call yourself a man." I was scornful. "I have even heard you call yourself a superior man. And look at you. Gone to pieces

completely. I, a weak, spineless, creature — that's what you called me — who can't control himself when he sees a pack of cards, I had to save the day, insult the manager downstairs, browbeat him until he gave us a room. Bill, if I didn't know you, I'd think you were just a windbag. What's the matter, Bill? Are the surroundings too magnificent?"

"No, Harry."

"Does the American gentleman make you feel insignificant?"

"No."

"Has the maiden lady's knowledge of French architecture disconcerted you?"

"Not that."

"Is it Gussie?"

A sigh went up and pervaded the room.

I said: "She's a cute kid."

Bill said: "If you say one word about her, I will beat you to a pulp."

"Harry," Bill said, "It takes a real man to go to pieces at the right time. Harry, it's the real thing this time. It's wonderful, Harry. It's beautiful."

"Yes," I said, with enthusiasm, "I'm very hungry; and not being in love, I can't feed on it. I'm going down."

Bill said: "I'm going with you."

"What, without a shave?"

"I must see her. I can't wait."

The dining room was large, paneled, and empty. Not a sign of Gussie.

"I'm not hungry," Bill said.

"Neither am I." Then I said to the head

waiter, "One wants two dozen Maraines, and a bottle of champagne nature; and later two *Châteaubriands* — thick, do not forget — a little water cress, and *Clos-Vougeot*. And if the *Clos-Vougeot* isn't chambered, one will send it back."

"Yes, Monsieur," said the head waiter. "And a sweet?"

"One will tell you later."

The head waiter was very respectful.

"Harry," Bill said, "you know we haven't any money."

I became indignant. "Whose idea was this anyway? Didn't I say for us to stay in Perpignan and write to Paris for money, and didn't you say there was a good hotel in Carcassonne, and you didn't like Perpignan anyway? We had enough money to get to Carcassonne and you'd find a way out. And haven't you now become weak-minded and timorous?"

"Shut up," said Bill. "There she is."

Gussie was very pretty, and the way she held her head would have turned any weak-minded man's head. Not to say that Bill was weak-minded, although I was getting suspicious. Gussie entered the dining room as if a thousand people were there all anxious for a chance to see her. She entered it like a queen, and the sight was wasted on a forlorn-looking waiter, on me, who had other troubles to consider, but it was not wasted on Bill. He became green, then purple, and then very, very pale. The bus-manufacturing father came behind, and bowed to us. They sat down near us and ordered the table d'hôte dinner and sparkling Burgundy.

I said to Bill: "You can't love her if she drinks sparkling Burgundy."

Bill said to me: "I'd love her if she drank lemon phosphates."

"Then you *do* love her," I said. He kicked me.

Bill didn't eat. I did. I was going to fill up for a long time ahead because I had the feeling something serious would happen. Gussie played with the hors d'œuvres, with the fish, with the chicken wing. She didn't drink much of the sparkling Burgundy. She had a far-away look in her eyes. The father and I were the only two who were enjoying ourselves. I began to like him, even if he didn't know wine.

The two maiden ladies came in. A French family came in. One of the maiden ladies came to our table and asked if we played bridge. Bill

had the presence of mind to say that I didn't. Gussie's father said they did. We all announced our names. His was Tilley. The two ladies were sisters and their name was Wendell. We all had coffee in the lounge.

Bill sat at one end and Gussie at the other, oblivious of each other's presence. We spoke of English hotels and how cold they were, of French hotels and how small they were, of Swiss hotels and how expensive they were. Bull fights were mentioned, prohibition was touched, and then bridge was suggested, and Gussie and Bill had disappeared, and "I didn't play bridge," and Mr. Tilley lost his temper, and he and the Misses Wendel played cut-throat bridge at one centime a point, and I smoked hotel cigarettes till I thought my heart would break, and my throat became dry and dusty.

About one-thirty the next morning I awoke, just as Bill was coming into the room.

"Of course," I said, "the sense of responsibility doesn't mean a thing to you, does it?"

Bill didn't answer.

I continued: "By the way, have you thought of the fact that you are falling for a girl while stopping at a hotel under false pretenses, fraudulently?"

Bill was undressing.

"And," I said, "admitting that this is a very good hotel, and the meals are excellent — although I don't much like their brand of cigarettes — how do you suppose we are going to get out of here?"

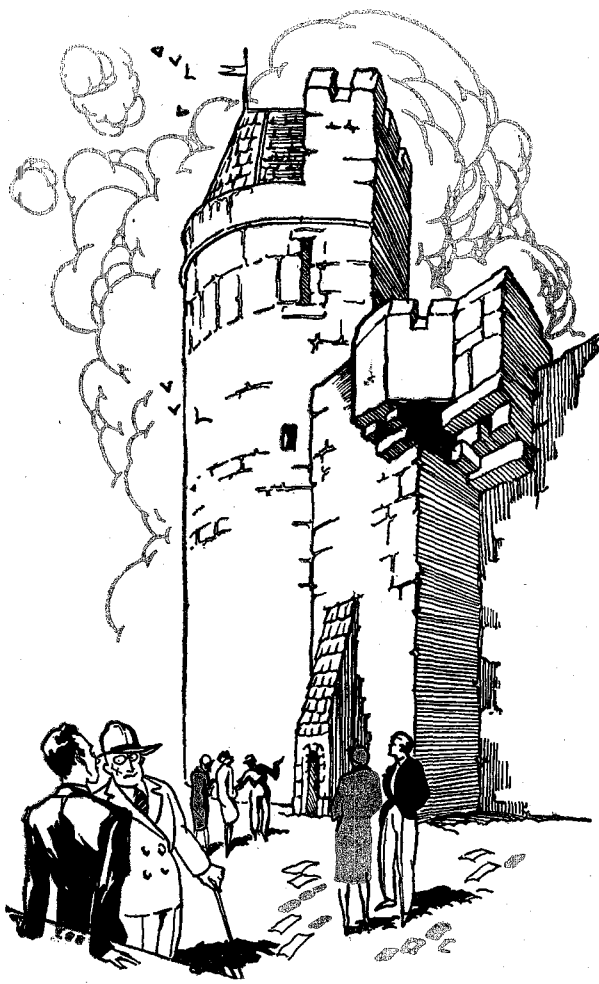
Under his breath Bill was humming the song, "Marchéta."

III

THE NEXT MORNING we had breakfast on the terrace overlooking the walls. There were a million little lizards crawling everywhere, and the coffee was putrid. Bill did not speak, did not seem to worry, but sang "Marchéta." There was a mist over the lower town. I had lost all feeling. I had given up. I did not care. I would never play poker again so long as I lived, and never again would I spend my vacation with self-sufficient young men who were susceptible to pretty young girls; but it was too late.

Mr. Tilley came out.

"Good morning," he said. "Are you going to see the walls?"



We hadn't thought of it.

"Well," said Mr. Tilley, "considering that this hotel is as expensive as any at home, and there's nothing else to see, I should think it would be advisable at least to see the reason for Carcassonne."

"Yes," I said, "we'll probably see the walls."

"I've hired a guide," Mr. Tilley said, "and if you want to join us, you're welcome. The Misses Wendell are coming along, too."

Gussie came out, and the two sisters. Bill stopped humming and began biting his nails.

"Good morning," said the one who had waited all her life for this moment. "The hot chocolate is very bad here. I'd try the coffee."

The guide appeared. He knew it all. He spoke the most offensive English I had ever heard.

As we went through the narrow gates that led to the walls, I had the feeling I was dancing at my own funeral. The view was wonderful, and the walls impressive, and every now and then I would forget and enjoy what I was looking at, and then I would catch myself and remember facts. At times nothing seemed to mat-

ter, and then the precipice that yawned before me would look inviting, the high smooth walls, the jagged ends of rocks hundreds of feet below would beckon, call. Just jump below, they would say, and all your troubles will end.

The guide spoke his rigmarole, the two sisters pored over their guidebooks, and Bill and Gussie looked at nothing, not even at each other. Mr. Tilley seemed to take an interest in me.

"Young man," he said, "of course this is very educational and broadening, and young men ought to see the world a bit before settling down to business. . . ."

"Yes," I said, not knowing what he was getting at.

"And," said Mr. Tilley, "I have nothing against foreign countries in their place, as a relaxation, to show us how right we are in the way we live, but. . . ."

"Oh," I said, "you want to know what we do. Well, my friend writes novels, bad ones, while I'm a newspaper man."

"Oh," he said.

"We'd gone to Spain to see the bull fights, and. . . ." At first I thought I'd tell him our troubles, but I stopped. I didn't know what stories Bill was telling Gussie.

Bill is terribly bashful about being a writer. He never got over his first novel having been a best-seller, and thinks everyone suspects him of an unmentionable crime. When asked, he says he sells insurance, or real estate. Bill works at night behind closed doors. In Paris he poses as a loafer, in America he stays in his hotel room and is afraid to go out of doors.

"What's your friend's last name?" asked Mr. Tilley.

I told him. "Oh," said Mr. Tilley, "so that's he, is it? That explains it."

I could not discover what it explained, because Mr. Tilley left me and joined the Misses Wendell. We came to the torture chamber, then we came to the chamber from which they poured boiling oil on their enemies, then we came to the amphitheater, where the Comédie Française plays *Hamlet* in the summer, with the Ghost descending from real walls. It was very interesting.

"If I were a writer," said Mr. Tilley, "I would describe this for the folks at home."

One of the Wendell sisters asked Bill: "Oh, are you a writer?"

Bill gave me a dirty look.

"No," he said. "My friend is. I'm just his secretary."

"I don't like writers," said Gussie. "They wear their hearts on their sleeves."

"That's what I think," said Bill. "That's why I'm a secretary."

The Wendell sisters wanted to know the names of my books. I picked out good ones. Then they asked if I used real people for my characters or did I just imagine them. I said: "I just copy my dreams."

"Oh, they're dream characters," they said.

"Yes," I said.

"It's not he who's the writer," said Mr. Tilley. "It's the other. That one is bashful."

IV

WE CAME BACK to the hotel, had lunch, and everyone retired for a rest. Bill and I were in our room, not saying anything, when the manager came in. I began to feel cold all over.

The manager was apologetic: "Forgive me," he said. "One did not know one had a celebrated writer under one's roof. Is the Monsieur satisfied of his room? One could change him."

"Throw him out," Bill said. "He bores me."

The manager said: "The cook is aware of Monsieur's presence and prepares a special dinner. A dinner of gala."

I said: "One is here to rest oneself, not for gala dinners. One does not wish to be recognized."

"Certainly, Monsieur," said the manager. "Could one then mount a bottle of champagne for the pleasure of the Messieurs?"

"Oh, but certainly, Monsieur," said Bill, becoming interested. "Make it mount at all costs."

The bottle was mounted, and we asked the manager to stay. We began drinking. The champagne was dry, cold, and good. There was a lot of it in the cellar, and the manager was quite generous. It began to look like a party.

"Could one not make mount the American gentleman?" asked the manager.

"And the ladies, too?" said Bill.

"No ladies," I said. Things were messy enough.

Mr. Tilley was made to mount, and appreciated it. It wasn't his fault he had ordered sparkling Burgundy. It was his education. But for one of his age, he was quite willing to learn

more. The manager and I gave a little lecture on French wines. Bill was looking very solemn.

The manager and I said: "Champagne tastes better from a magnum." Mr. Tilley ordered one to find out. It did taste better, and then there was more of it. I began to like Carcassonne, the manager, Mr. Tilley, and I did not even mind the situation I was in. There really was no situation. What was being broke compared to a magnum of champagne? I even thought of ordering one myself.

Bill's brows were darkening. Suddenly he rose and said: "I am going down," and went out.

Mr. Tilley said: "Artists are queer, aren't they? They're restless."

"Yes," I said, "they're awfully hard to get along with. My friend is full of moods."

The manager said something about poker. "The Americans are good players of poker."

"Did I hear right?" said Mr. Tilley. "Did this frog say something about poker?"

I said: "Yes. Did you ever play poker with a Frenchman? You'd be surprised."

"Well, I might be," said Mr. Tilley, "but I'm not afraid."

I must have been quite drunk. I said: "It's a pity I can't join you two. My friend has all the money."

"Well, we can't play two-handed," said Mr. Tilley. "I'll advance you some until your friend comes back."



The manager rang for the waiter. "Will you mount chips and cards?" he said.

"And another magnum of the same," I added.

VI

THE NEXT MORNING I had quite a hangover. I woke up feeling very low in body and even lower than that in mind. Much champagne produces a depression on the morning after, a feeling of unworthiness, of moral degradation. The conscience hurts, the brain turns over every little action done the day before and judges it harshly. A champagne hangover is very unpleasant, even without the feeling of guilt; but with it, it is ghastly.

Bill was lying on his bed, eyes staring into space.

"I told her, Harry," he said.

"Told what to whom?" I asked. "Don't talk to me in riddles this morning."

"I told Gussie the truth."

"That's wonderful," I said. "I suppose you feel better now."

"No," he said.

"I didn't think you would. Well, what did she say?"

"She said it was a dirty trick to play on a hotel, and she never wanted to see me again."

"I'm sorry, Bill. Did you tell her you had money in Paris?"

"No, what was the use? What good is it to me here?"

"I suppose it's the end."

"It isn't the end."

We lay there for a while. Then I said: "Bill, they know you here. Why don't you tell someone else the truth and see if they won't help you out for a few days? One of the Wendell sisters."

"I did last night."

"What did she say?"

"She said she'd let me have two thousand francs this morning."

"Well, what's biting you then?"

There was a knock on the door, and Mr. Tilley came in.

"Good morning," he said. "That was some session last night."

I didn't remember anything about last night, but I said: "Yes, it certainly was."

"We're leaving on the afternoon train," Mr. Tilley said.

"I guess we are, too," Bill said.

Mr. Tilley was going to leave, when there was another knock on the door, and the manager came in. He looked worried.

"Forgive me," he said. "One is in a terrible embarrassment. One has found the cash box empty."

"What?" cried Bill and I.

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Tilley.

"He says he's been robbed."

"The deuce he has!" said Mr. Tilley.

"What is droll," said the manager, "is that the box has not been moved or forced."

"An inside job," I said.

"And I was the only one with a key," said the manager.

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Tilley.

We told him. "How much did he have there?" asked Mr. Tilley.

We found out and told him. Mr. Tilley smiled. "I thought you guys knew how to drink." Then, turning to me: "Don't you and the frog remember what happened last night?"

I didn't. The manager was too worried to remember. It wasn't the money, he said. It was the mystery.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Tilley to me. "You look in your pants pocket."

I did. There was a flock of thousand-franc notes and smaller ones, and a couple of traveler's cheques.

"The traveler's cheques were mine," said Mr. Tilley. "And the manager was losing, too, so he made several trips downstairs to get more money. I may not know these foreign wines, young man, but I certainly know what's happening when I have them in me. Which is more than you do. See you on the train." He left.

The manager was explained to, and apologized, and apologized, and left.

"Well, that's that," I said. But it wasn't. There was still Gussie, and Bill was looking like a funeral.

Then the maid brought up an envelope for him. In it there was a thousand-franc note and some writing. He gave a whoop and showed it to me. It said:

Dear Bill,

I can never forgive you. I'll be at the Claridge Hotel in Paris. I hope the enclosed helps you out.

Gussie

P. S. Don't forget — the Claridge Hotel. Ask for Miss Tilley.

The End of an Empire

Memoirs of a Diplomat

IN HIS THREE preceding articles, Mr. Sands told how, at twenty-two, he first came to Korea in 1898 as secretary to the American legation and, two years later, was invited by the Emperor to become the royal adviser. This invitation Sands accepted, though John Hay, then Secretary of State, warned him that the venture would of necessity be a private one and that the United States would not intervene in his behalf, no matter what situation might arise. The Emperor, a storm-tossed weakling, needed advice badly. His backward country was internally corrupt and was being squabbled over by Japan and Russia, jealous rivals heading more surely for war each day. Sands thought he might find the answer to the civil unrest by getting to know the people and their wants, and to this end he made himself familiar not only with the court but with life in the remote provinces. The threatening war between Japan and Russia was an even more serious matter, for if it was fought, the victor would seize Korea. Surrounded by Oriental intrigue and checkmated by Russian stolidity, Sands, a youngster trying to advise a puppet Emperor, found his efforts to save Korea meeting with little success. Already Cossacks were raiding over the northern border, and Japanese interference was making itself felt in all branches of the government. Then, as if the Far Eastern situation needed more complications, the Boxer Rebellion broke out.



Illustrations by Lowell Balcom

by **WILLIAM FRANKLIN SANDS**

THE BOXER outbreak was in full blast. The Allies were slowly fighting their way up from Tientsin and no one knew whether the beleaguered legations and missionaries in Peking were alive or dead. To impress the Koreans as well as Europe with the friendly attitude of the Emperor toward the Western nations, I had made the gesture of sending a steamer with the only things we had to offer — rice and cigarettes — to the Allied troops. I was not at all sure, however, that some anti-foreign spark might not fan Korean feelings to a blaze, and I watched everything that happened.

And something did happen. Returning from an expedition into the country, I learned that a formidable rebellion had arisen on the island of Quelpaert, a Korean possession south of the mainland. Many people had been killed and there was a rumor of a massacre of Christians. This in itself was disturbing enough, but what complicated matters was that two small French gunboats which had happened into Korea's chief port, Chumulpo, too late to take

part in the China operations had set off immediately for the island. I had a sinking feeling that they might want to make up on our people for lost opportunity to bombard the Chinese Boxers, especially if it proved that French missionaries had been hurt.

Quelpaert was a place of mystery, with a coast not easily accessible. Few Europeans had ever been there, and even they had been promptly expelled. What little trade there was — dried fish, mother-of-pearl shell, bitter shattuck fruit — was carried to market mainly by the stout little craft of Japanese smugglers, half junk and half schooner, or in frail native fishing boats. The island was used as a penal colony for political prisoners from Korea, and these exiles along with the fishermen and the smugglers (who buttressed their trade by fostering anti-European feeling on the one hand and grooming the old local desire for independence from Korea on the other) formed the male population. The rest were women, and their domination was complete and ancient.