

In Barcelona, at Dusk

By *Barrie Stavis*

BARCELONA.

IN Barcelona the loveliest time of the day is dusk. The light turns mellow, the sky is a gray purple, and the sharp edges of buildings melt into soft curves. But last night the dusk hour here was filled with anguish and death. Italian planes which had flown in from Palma de Majorca began bombing the workers' quarters down near the bay. They had come in very high, escaping detection, and sailed down on the city with motors silent. Three bombs struck the unprepared city before the sirens shrieked. Warning! Take cover! Bombers! The power plant shut off the current. Below, the streets of Barcelona were dark—above, a sickle moon and the fingers of the great searchlights streaking the sky with darting bands of blue.

This morning I look at the report. Twenty-four dead. Fifty-three injured. Women—children—old men. No young men—they're at the front. Then I go down near the bay to see the damage done.

I walk with difficulty. Great holes ten to fifteen feet deep and as wide across cut a gutter and sidewalk in two. I look down into a bombhole. Cobblestones—gravel—dust—fragments of a water-pipe—human excrement—garbage. A dog painfully thin—I can count every rib—poking his nose in the garbage. I move on. But slowly. Wreckage everywhere. On corners, already gathered for collection, chunks of cement, brick, plaster-covered lathes, and hunks of wood. Clustered around these mounds of rubble, heart-breakingly skinny children with burlap sacks bigger than themselves, searching for wood. Barcelona is cold. The coldest winter in thirty-six years. And there's no coal to be bought. All of it goes to the hospitals and factories.

I walk on. The occasional cat I meet flees at my approach. This is their jungle. Many of them have been captured. Cats don't make bad eating in a stew. Old Barcelenos, connoisseurs by now, say that the cat stew tastes much like rabbit stew.

I pass a refuge. Might as well go in and see what it's like. Sandbags packed tight and as high as a man. Underneath, below earth level, many twenty-foot-square dirt chambers connected by narrow dirt passages, all shored with timber—just like a mine deep in the bowels of the earth. A couple of wooden benches on the side and a wooden table in the middle. An old lady, old before her time, with a thin black shawl hanging around her skinny body, is mumbling to herself. There's a man there, and he says, "Go home. There's no bombardment now." She looks at him with empty eyes and says nothing. He says, "Go home. There's no bombardment now." She doesn't see him. She doesn't hear him. Her eyes are empty.

In one of the bleak chambers a couple of

bundles of filthy bedding are rolled up and in them a family's entire possessions.

I go outside. The sky is blue and calm. Off in the west a few clouds scudding along. I look down again into the black hole, the entrance of the refuge. I feel like puking. I say, "God damn you, Mussolini. God damn you for a crazy louse."

Finally I come to the place of the bombing. Only the shell of the house is left; more than three-quarters of it has been blasted away, just as if a great knife had cut it jagged from roof to cellar. A five-story building. A top-floor room with a rosy-tinted wallpaper and below it, the room wall-papered in blue. But it was the third floor, the middle one, that gets me. The room empty except for a single chair crazily leaning against the twisted wall with one of its legs smashed off. And there is a colored glass chandelier making tinkling sounds. And on the wall a calendar. One of those loud-colored lithographed affairs with a page for each day and thick with the leaves of days yet to come. I read the date. January 8. That was yesterday. Yesterday someone had ripped off the January seventh page to begin the new day. I turn and go away.

"To hell with it," I say to myself, "to hell with looking for the second building. It'll be the same as the hundreds all around me."

Two blocks off the street ends, and the

sandy beach of the Mediterranean begins. "I'll take a walk on the beach," I say to myself. I work my way across a plank slung over a wicked gap and walk toward the sea. Suddenly I hear a bird's song. Two beautiful golden-yellow canaries in a rusty cage wired to the outside of a window. "That's not so bad," I say to myself. Then I look at a pulverized building across the way, and I say to the canaries, "Hey dopes, don't you know there's a war going on?" And just as I say that I hear a woman's voice singing. I say to myself, "What's anyone got to be singing about? Who is she anyway?"

I trace the song. It comes from the ground floor of a house half bombed away and the other half still inhabited. I look inside the paneless window. A lady is on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor and singing a beautiful song. My shadow on her floor. She looks up and I feel ashamed—caught peeping into someone's house.

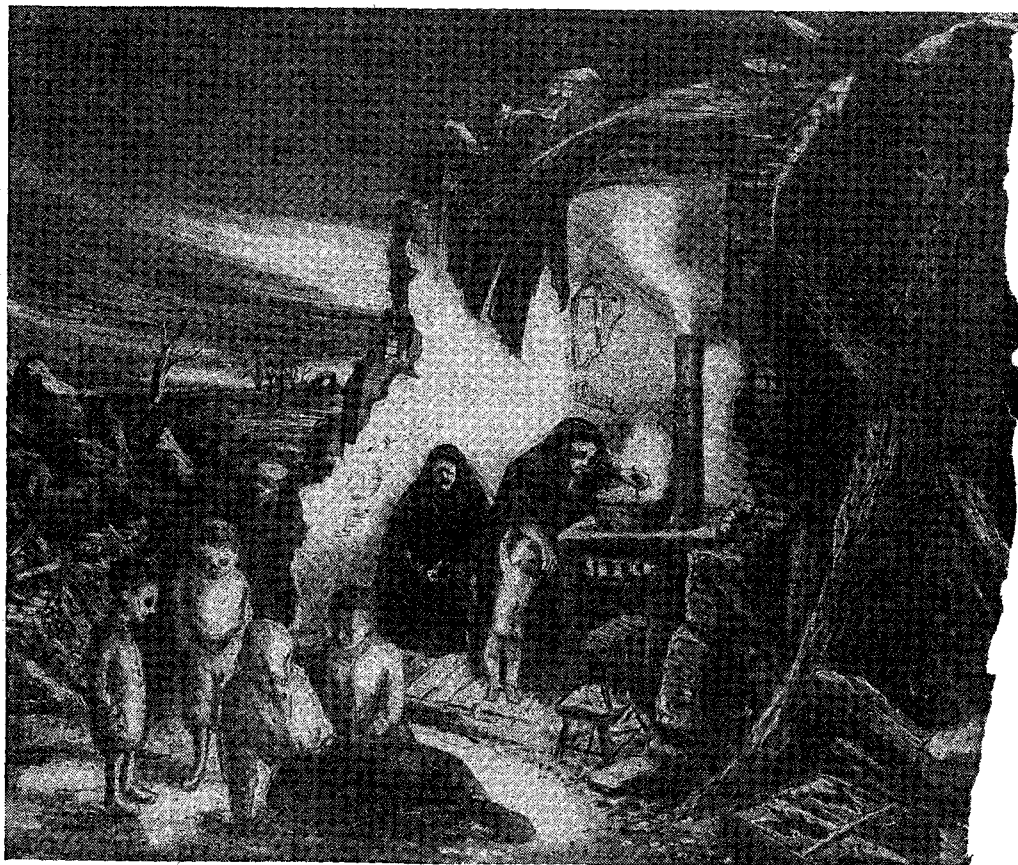
She says, "Buenos dias."

"Salud, Camarada."

"Salud."

She's awfully gray and peaked. I'm sure she's not had a decent meal in a month.

I walk on. But still I hear her beautiful song in my ears. I reach the beach. I sit down on the sand and look out toward the Mediterranean.



Lithograph by Maxine



The Farmer

Lithograph by Nicholas Panests

Five Minutes, Oleo

By H. H. Lewis

Ole Olson, .

"Prominent farmer of this community,"

Paused at the bottom rung of the ladder leading from the hallway of his barn, up through the loft, up toward a rafter. Many a time he had mounted that total height to throw hay down from a crammed harvest.

But now—

His purpose very different.

Forty rungs in that ladder,

Worn glossy by the callouses of as many years:

To climb now,

Pausefully,

Reluctantly,

Was to epitomize it all . . .

Never had he been called lazy.

In Minnesota, across the flat visibility of the Swedish township, his woman's kitchen-light had always been the first to appear at morning, his lantern the first to go swinging barnward;

Five miles away some Erik prompting, "Greta, Greta, time to get up, that Olson's at his cows";

All the local Knutes pillowed conveniently beside windows that faced the center:

Ole the free alarm clock,

Ole the pace-setter,

"Pushing on the reins."

Never had he been called extravagant.

"Oleo" becoming "Alarm Clock's" other nickname after a gossip neighbor discovered him selling all his butter and eating oleomargarine.

Never had he been called a poor manager—

"Keeping books" for the Extension Service of the State College of Agriculture, filling the blank spaces in big annuals, achieving more than a mere-factive ledger, a heartfelt diary of his heydays

From the World War to the World Depression,

Till loss became too remindful.

Now once more upon the ladder,

Up to the crossbeam holding the framed parchment MASTER FARMERS OF AMERICA, his own name gorgeously calligraphed hereunder as one of the 48 so honored for 1927—

He extended a gnarled finger,

Fondlingly,

Tremblingly,

Rubbing away some fly-specks . . .

Up to the roof at last,

He opened his eyes again, facing the cowed hay-entrance, and peered out upon the familiar landscape shimmering in earthlight real;

And he gripped the rung tighter,

Holding on,

Holding on,

And he rested chin upon it, looking . . .

Could Heaven itself be dearer?

But could Hell be worse than banishment alive from *this*?

Ole Olson,

Not praying to God and Frazier-Lemke any longer,

Removed a coil of rope from his shoulder, tying one end to a rafter and the other around his neck.

II

Scratching like a mole,

Dusty old soul,

Oleo, Oleo-Ole."

*"Ole, Ole, Oleo-Ole,**

Longest-houred clodsman in the country whole,

Worst to hirling roustabouts from Pole to Pole;

Had he jumped,

Was he dead?

Satan taunting him with that old ditty?

No,

Worse yet,

Sounds like Nels Nelson!

Mortification at death's door—

His former hired man, the belly-aching Bolshevik, the organizer in the Farmers' Holiday Association,

That fellow at just *this* time

Popping into the hallway below!

III

Two hundred pitchfork-men waiting yonder,

Tines sharp as the logic of Lenin,

Courthouse-bound to prevent a number of foreclosures by threat of low bidding:

Nelson announces,

Palming his timepiece with a flourish toward the one who has stopped trying to de-noose himself quickly enough.

"All right now,

If you can decide to be saved by 'damn Reds,'

Five minutes, Oleo" . . .

* Concocted years ago by a Yankee harvest-follower, this being doubly vicious because Ole does not rhyme with whole, the mispronunciation still parroted by certain local Swedes for pure damned meanness.