

WHAT IS A MAN?

SEE PAGE 66

81

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

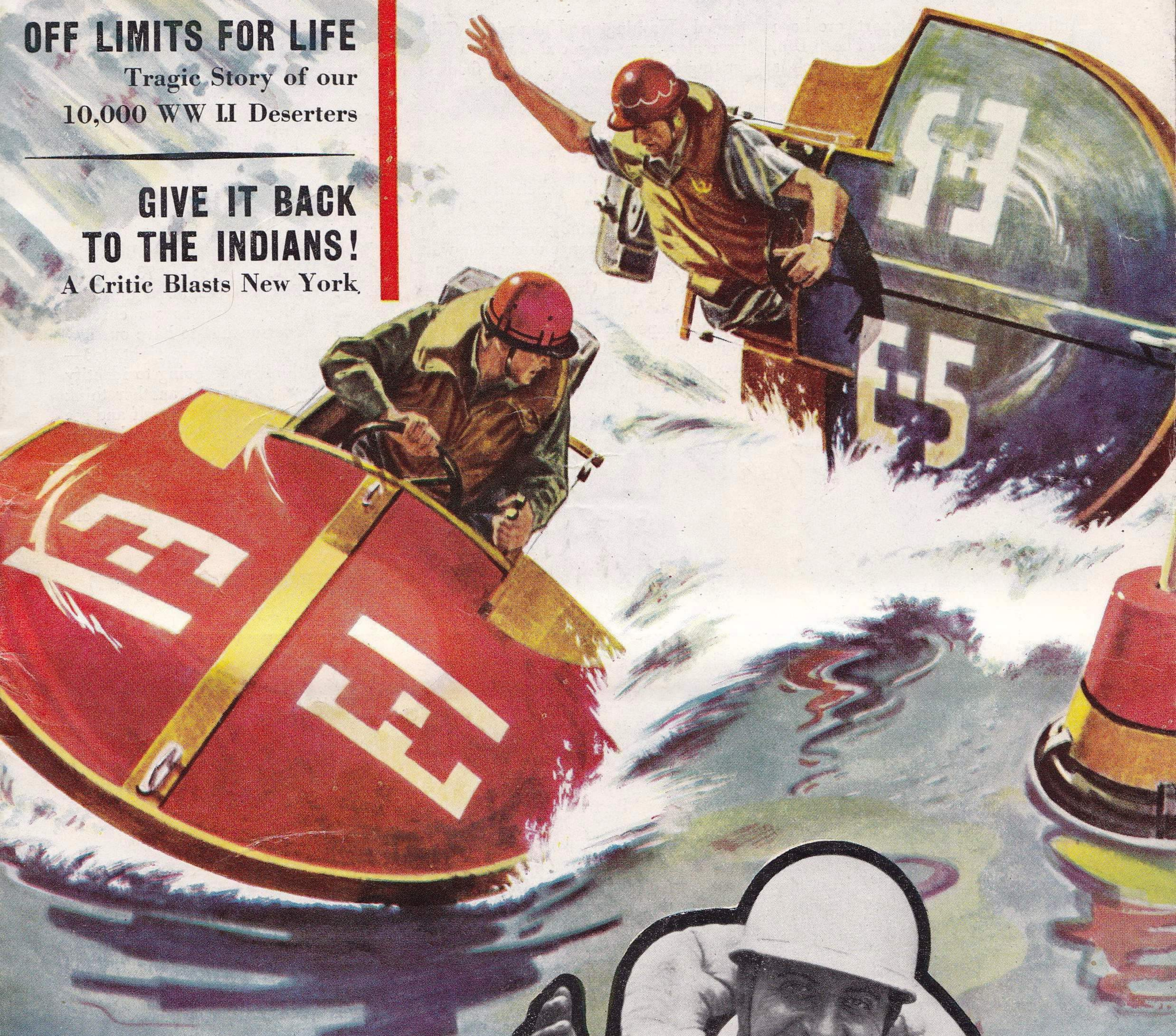
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AUGUST

OFF LIMITS FOR LIFE

Tragic Story of our
10,000 WW II Deserters

GIVE IT BACK TO THE INDIANS!

A Critic Blasts New York,



I RACE WITH DEATH!
BY GUY LOMBARDO

SEE PAGE 50!



Who wrote what
in this month's
Bluebook

Purely Personal

Authors, for the most part, are born in such unromantic towns as Sheep Dip, Ida., and South Cupcake, Tex., which is one reason we're happy to introduce Michael Fessier, who wrote "The Sireen of Sacrifice Shoals" (pages 90-95). Mike's birthplace is, of all things, Angel's Camp, the California mining town familiar to all readers of Bret Harte.

Despite his literary origins, however, like first tried his hand at prize-fight-



ing, before going on to a whirl at writing short stories and, at the same time, reporting for papers in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The stories were so successful, he soon dropped reporting and concentrated on his typewriter, and the result has been a spectacular writing career. The author of more than 150 short stories, two novels, and more than 25 motion pictures, Mike's now once more in thrall to Hollywood, working on a picture for Paramount. As such, he lives in San Clemente, Calif., with his wife and daughter, and they claim to have the most spectacular front yard in the country—the Pacific Ocean.

* * *

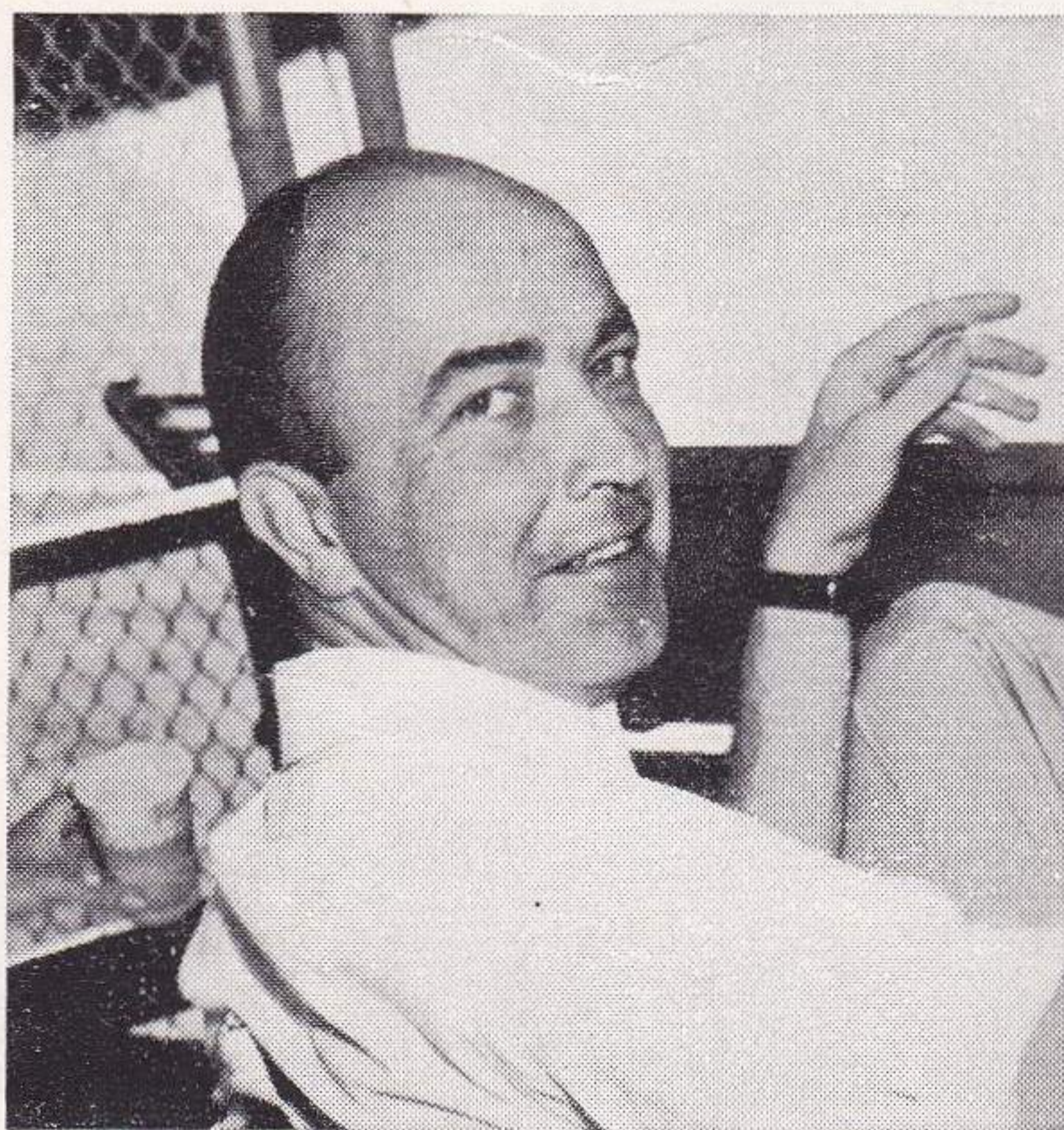
"Loophole," Lawrence Goldman's book-length thriller on the activities of the U.S. Customs Service (pages 96-128), is the writer's fifth novel. The first three were written "for practice," he says, and, when the fourth sold to a publisher, Goldman quit his job as an examiner of drivers' licenses in Los Angeles to concentrate on his typewriter.

A native of St. Louis, where he at-

tended Washington University, Goldman also is an ex-social worker whose writing has been mainly in the fields of radio, television and the movies. He now can add magazines to that impressive list of triumphs.

* * *

Quick to label his penetrating story, "Portrait of Lilly" (pages 55-59) as fiction, Doug Kennedy admits that "I did meet Lilly in France during the war, both before and after the shearing, and I married a Red Cross girl in Paris—although she was *not* Lilly. Also, before anyone leaps to any conclusions, I'm from Massachusetts, not Vermont, and live in a Manhattan apartment, not the Waldorf-Astoria."



Doug says "Portrait of Lilly" is his second fiction piece, although the first one to sell. A former sportswriter, he now is sports editor for *Time*, and *Bluebook's* editor can testify to Doug's statement that *Lilly* is not, by any means, a portrait of the author's wife. Mrs. Kennedy and the editor once shared adjoining desks on a magazine both probably would like to forget.

* * *

Harold Keith, who wrote our baseball novelette, "Iverson's Idiot" (pages 36-49), is Director of Sports Publicity at the University of Oklahoma and a part-time fiction man on the foibles of the arnica-and-pulled-muscle set. "The idea for 'Iverson's Idiot,'" he writes, "came to me mainly from listening to

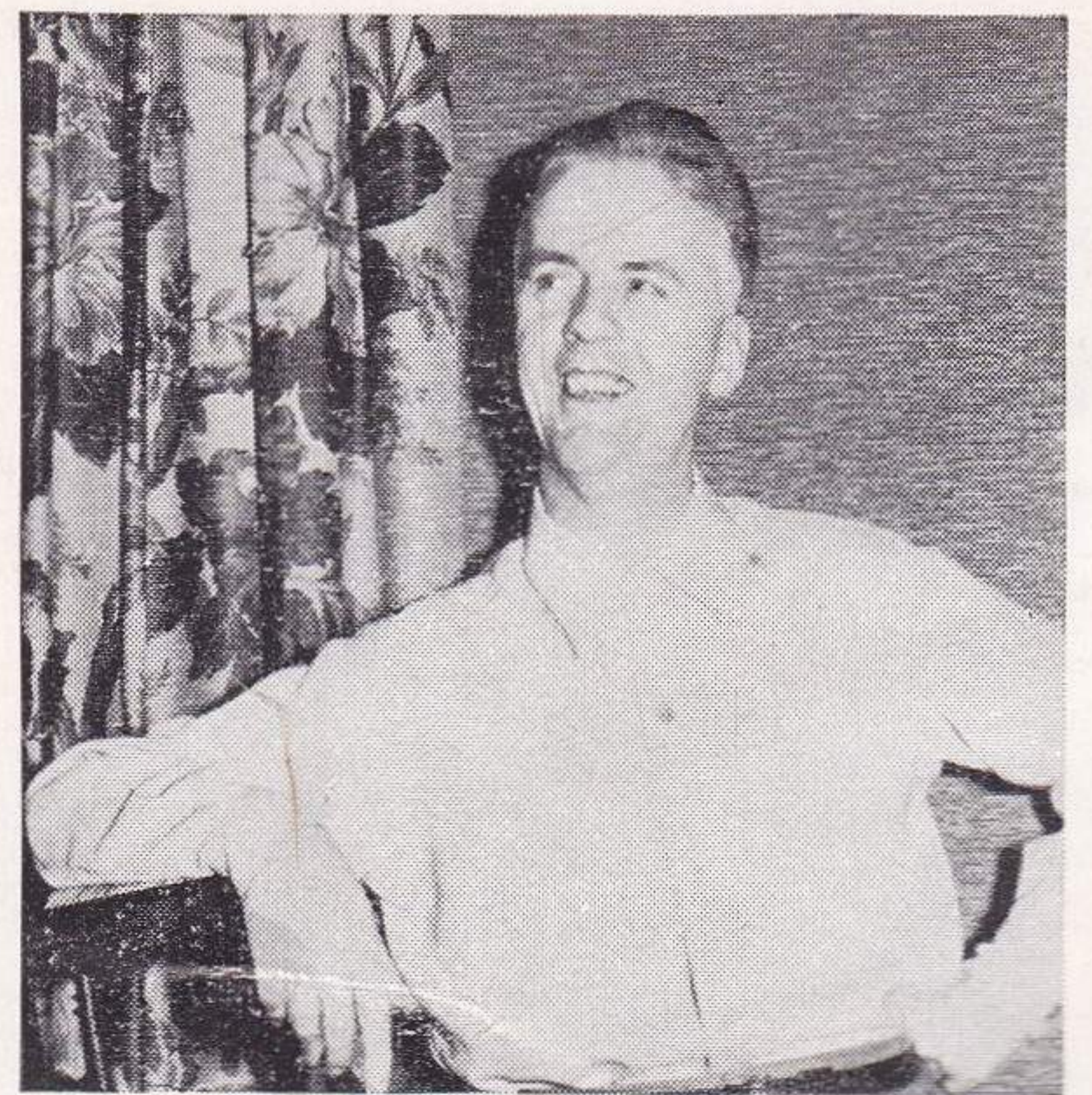
Jap Haskell, the Sooners' baseball coach in the early 1930's, reminisce about his adventures as a player in the old Oklahoma State League. Some of Jap's stories about the rhubarbs the old-time players had with umpires were so amusing I felt they'd make wonderful fiction."

They have, Mr. Keith.

* * *

When we first read "Sucker Bait," by John R. Pederson (pages 73-83), we got the feeling we recognized the town he was writing about, so we checked with Mr. Pederson just to have our suspicions verified. We were right, too—but if you think we're going to identify the city here, you've got another think coming. Read the yarn yourself and see if you can spot Mr. Pederson's phantom metropolis.

Author Pederson says: "I have been around a while, as anyone can plainly see. Probably I am the only 39-year-old

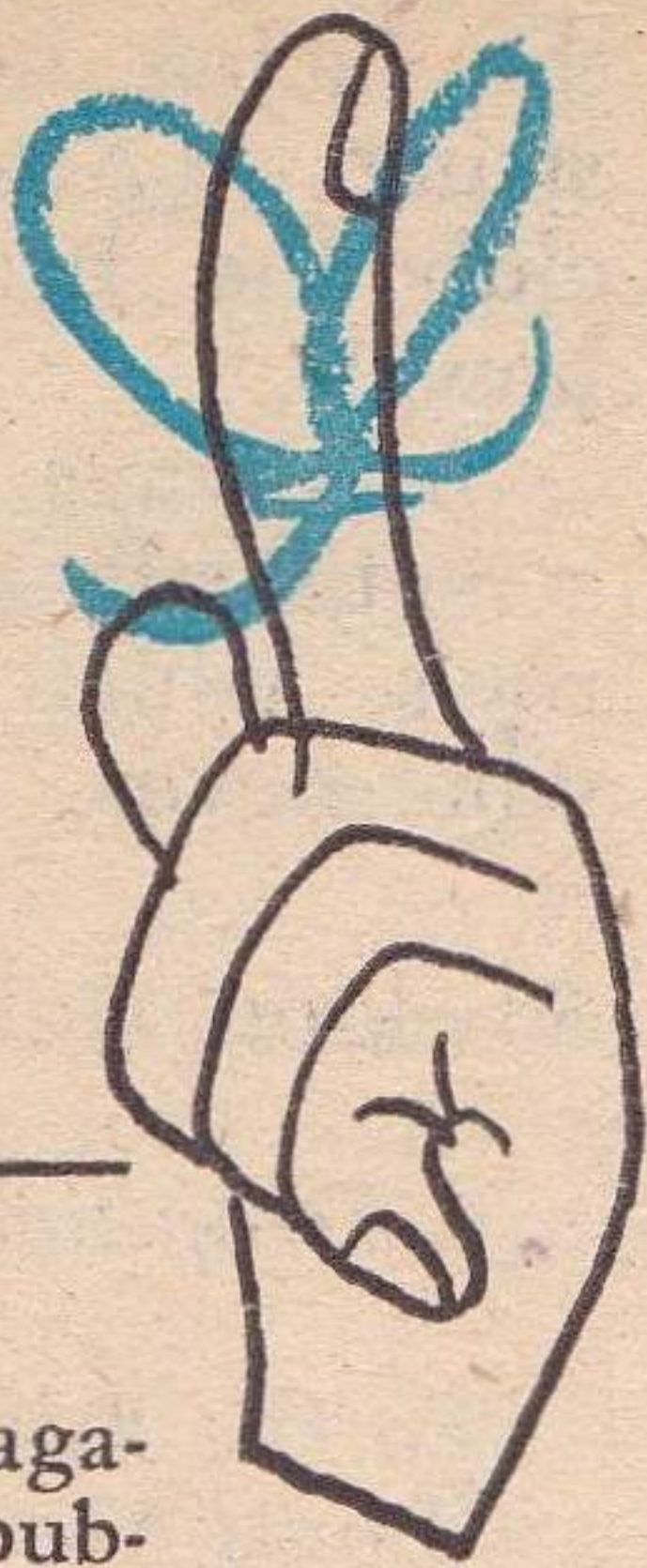


guy in the country who has been mostly gray-haired for 21 years.

"The story is the result of several forays I made into — during and immediately after the war. I had fun, but the price of craps and blackjack came pretty high, and once or twice I wound up hocking my watch for eating money. They tell me the town has been cleaned up since, but it doesn't interest me, since I no longer come running whenever a man rubs two dice together."

Other than that, Mr. Pederson is married and stays out of trouble.

**COMING
UP**



If you were editing a magazine which was about to publish an article that would make them rewrite all the history books, geographies, dictionaries, geographical dictionaries and biographies, you'd really be doing cartwheels, wouldn't you?

We are doing cartwheels.

For, in the September issue, we will have just such an amazing story as that. It is, in fact, just about the most important fact article ever published in *Bluebook*. It will, we predict, cause a sensation in quite a number of high places, and copies are certain to become collectors' items. So you won't miss yours, we'll tell you now that the piece will be called:

THE GREAT WHITE LIE

Also, in this same terrific issue of *Bluebook*, will be found these other thrilling morsels:

AMERICA'S WORST DISASTER

A gripping account of our country's most destructive catastrophe.

EIGHT AGAINST THE ENEMY

Just released by the Air Force, the thrilling report of World War II's most amazing true-life adventure.

SONG OF THE REED

Voodoo and jungle drums in the backwaters of the Amazon.

I, TOO, WAS A BASEBALL MAGNATE

A man who bought a baseball club, and what it did to him.

SPEAK, BOY! by H. Allen Smith

A very funny guy and his experiences with a talking dog.

INSIDE STORY, by William Byron Mowery

A murderer in the death-house—and his deep, dark secret.

DECISION BY GUNSMOKE

A Western, with a surprise ending.

IF A MAN ANSWERS . . .

That marvelous invention, the telephone, and what to do about it.

DON'T SELL BUGGY-WHIPS SHORT

The newest source of revenue for the man with ideas.

THE HOT ICE BLUES

Another fast-paced Milo March adventure by a master storyteller.

PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT

Behind the scenes in the State Department, with a top diplomat.

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

August, 1953

MAGAZINE

Vol. 97, No. 4

Trademark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

PHILLIPS WYMAN, *Publisher*

• MAXWELL HAMILTON •
Editor

LEN ROMAGNA
Art Editor

SUMNER PLUNKETT
Assistant Editor

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The short stories and novel herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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PRO and CON



Address all letters to: THE EDITOR, Bluebook Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. All letters must be signed. None can be acknowledged or returned.

Bowed Down

To the Editor:

In the article "Bows Are Best" (April *Bluebook*), the author states that "successful hunters are those who wear khaki clothing, paint their equipment olive drab, and smear their faces with grease-paint "to make them blend into the background." This is absurd, since *deer are color blind*, and wouldn't know a hunter from a stump no matter what he was wearing, so long as he didn't move.

There may have been scientific developments in the bows of today, but as far as I'm concerned, they are just novelties. Tubular steel, aluminum, magnesium, fiberglass, plastics and laminated bow materials will never replace or equal the smooth shooting

of a good all-wood yew longbow. The reason for the production of these novelties is that they can be turned out on a mass-production basis, with little handwork involved; in fact, some of the larger bowyers have called back all of their glass bows due to imperfections.

Wayne Williamson.

Utica, N. Y.

To the Editor:

I hope that bear on your April cover enjoyed his man-steaks!

Advice to novice bow-hunters:

1. Always wear a nice flashy armguard of polished, hammered silver, to warn game of your approach. (Only dubs try to be inconspicuous.)

2. Always wear an armguard that laces underneath and inside, so the

lacing can catch on the bowstring, and the lacing hooks can cut the bowstring. (After all, you always can club the bear to death with your bow.)

3. Always use Artist McDermott's scientifically-designed broadhead arrows, which have no cutting edge whatsoever.

Larry Snider.

Stockton, Calif.

4. Drop dead. —Ed.

To the Editor:

"Bows Are Best" was a bit confusing to me. In the first part of the story, Roy Hoff tells of throwing his rifle away because he was unable to get his buck with it, and he says he never shot a deer until last year.

Later, in the same story, he says, "I used to get my buck during the first few hours of the season, when I used a rifle."

Can you clear up these conflicting statements for me?

Richard Olson.

Ephraim, Utah.

Read it again, Dick. What Roy said was that he never shot a deer with a bow until last year; he shot plenty of them with his Springfield.
—Ed.

To the Editor:

I've just finished "Bows Are Best" and would like to extend my congratulations to the writer and to *Bluebook* for a splendid article.

It might interest readers to know that not all of America's 75,000 archers are in the States. At the present time, a few of us are here, trying to organize an archery club on Okinawa. The "Torii Archers of Okinawa," as we'll be called, will have field meets and hunting trips, just as would any such club in the States. Our field meets will be just as rough, too, and one handicap the archer here will have to contend with—not encountered elsewhere!—is retrieving his stray arrows from the rice paddies.

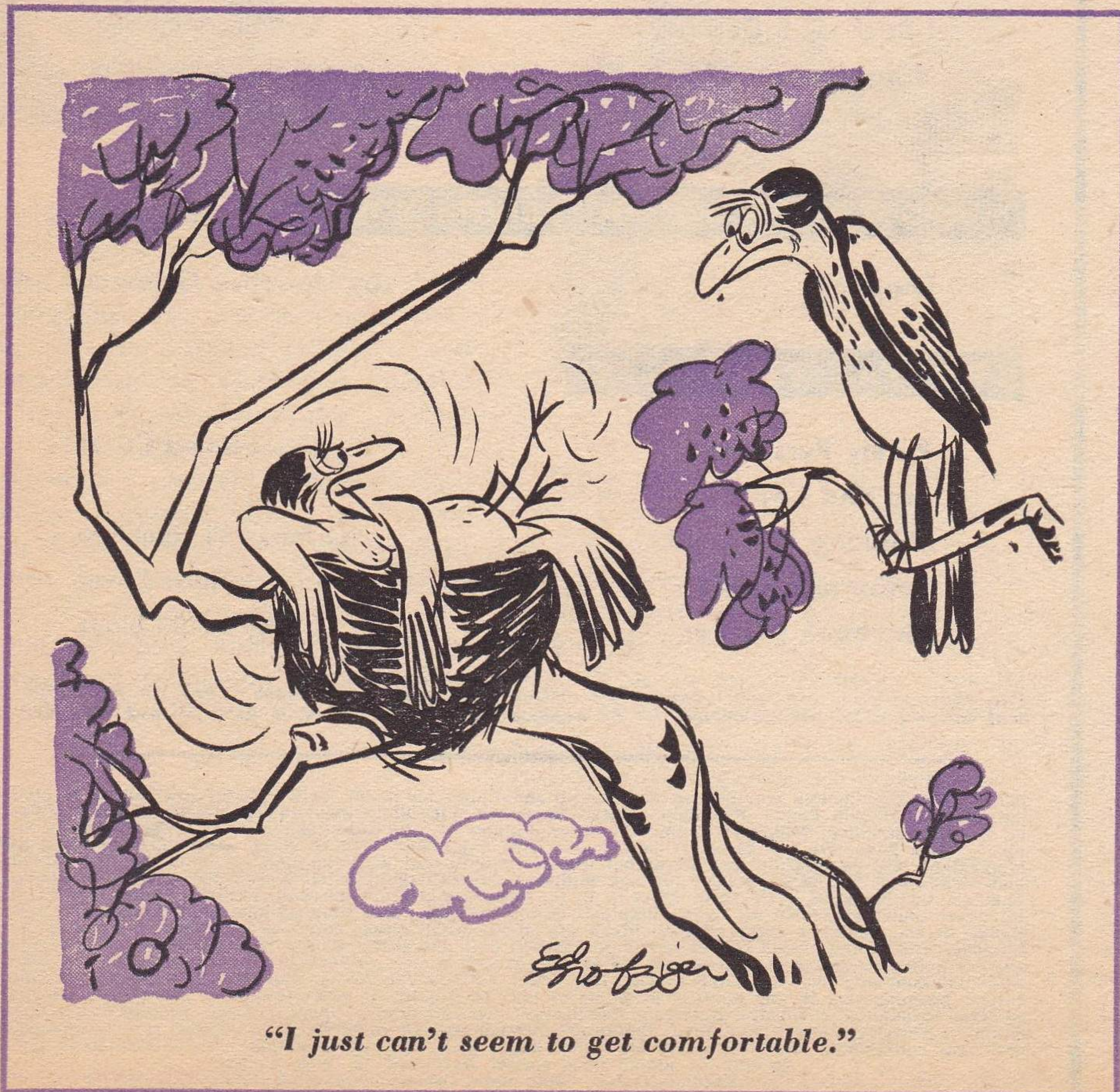
Our hunting, of course, is limited to a small number of boar and small deer, but, because of the scarcity of game, bowhunting is even more of a challenge to the craftiness and wit of the archer.

Again, my congratulations and those of the other archers of Okinawa, on a fine article.

M/Sgt. Robin S. Hood.

U. S. Army.

Bob, you the same Robin Hood we used to know in Sherwood Forest, when we had the Sheriff of Nottingham on the run? If so, nice to hear from you again. Where you been?
—Ed.



"I just can't seem to get comfortable."

Good Sport

To the Editor:
Congratulations!

Just thought I'd let you know how much I enjoyed "Sports Aren't for Sissies," by Lionel White (May *Bluebook*). I wanted to tell you this because you'll probably receive letters from a bunch of old fogies saying they don't want any articles like that in *Bluebook* because they can read hot-rod magazines any time they want.

I have kept every copy of *Bluebook* I've bought since the first one, and I have enjoyed everyone of them.

W. H. Luff.

Annapolis, Md.

To the Editor:

So now we're seeing articles on sports cars in what once was our favorite magazine for men!

Next thing you know you'll be running pieces about hot-rods. Well, all I have to say, as a veteran *Bluebook* reader, is that, when I want to read that stuff I'll buy a hot-rod magazine.

Sidney Carlin.

Portland, Me.

Patriot

To the Editor:

As a constant reader of *Bluebook*, I would like to make a suggestion.

In honor of your editor's namesake, the great Alexander Hamilton, I would like you to print, in these trying times, the Constitution of the United States. I mean the Constitution in full—the prologue, Bill of Rights, Preamble, the Articles, and the Amendments. At these times, when so many are being called upon to fight for their country, you would render a great public service if you printed the Constitution in its entirety.

There seems to be a campaign on now to make the Constitution a "lost document." I have written to several places to try to obtain a full copy of the Constitution, and finally managed to obtain from the Government Printing Office a so-called copy. It consisted mainly of the amendments to the Articles, and about six of the Articles themselves. No Preamble, no Bill of Rights!

Why the Government should resort to such subterfuge, I don't know. I asked for a full copy of the Constitution, and I sent them the dime required. And I'm writing to your magazine because I understand sometimes pressure is brought to bear on editors by advertisers, and I know your magazine carries no advertising. I shall continue to read your magazine, even if you don't print the "document."

But it is my opinion, judiciously found, that if Hamilton were alive

today he'd print this document. And the Government be damned.

Would you?

John Oliver.

Boca Grande, Fla.

John, we would, sure as shooting, because no advertiser we don't have is going to push us around. But our boy there, he's got a history book, with the whole Constitution printed right in it, and we guess we don't want to steal from another book. But it's mighty worth re-reading. —Ed.

Alabamy Bound

To the Editor:

After reading "Alabama Divorce—Cafeteria Style" in the May *Bluebook*, I'd like to say a few things about it.

It so happens I lived in Alabama for 25 years—and two of those 25 I spent in trying to get a divorce. No two-day legal divorce has been going on in Alabama for years.

Like any other State, Alabama has money-mad lawyers, and they will tell you almost any kind of a lie for \$250. Unless there's been a big change in the past year, though, you have a 30-day waiting period after both husband and wife have agreed to the divorce, before it's final. And a 60-day waiting period after that, before you can marry someone else.

All I say is that anyone who'd spend \$250 for a divorce like that is

a fool. He can leave his wife more cheaply than that, and use the \$250 to forget her with.

It's a lot easier to get married in Alabama than unmarried. I know; I got married there.

E. Marshall.

Leavenworth, Kans.

Showed your note to Tom Roan, Mr. Marshall, and he repeats our usual advice in situations like this: read the story again (we sell a lot of extra copies this way). As for your statement that you lived in Alabama 25 years, Tom says you're a tourist; he's been a native almost 60 years. —Ed.

Delayed Reaction

To the Editor:

I have just finished reading the September, 1952, issue of *Bluebook*, and I think I should have been reading this magazine a long time ago. It has everything in it a real man could want—good articles, good fiction, and plenty of it for a long and solid evening's enjoyment.

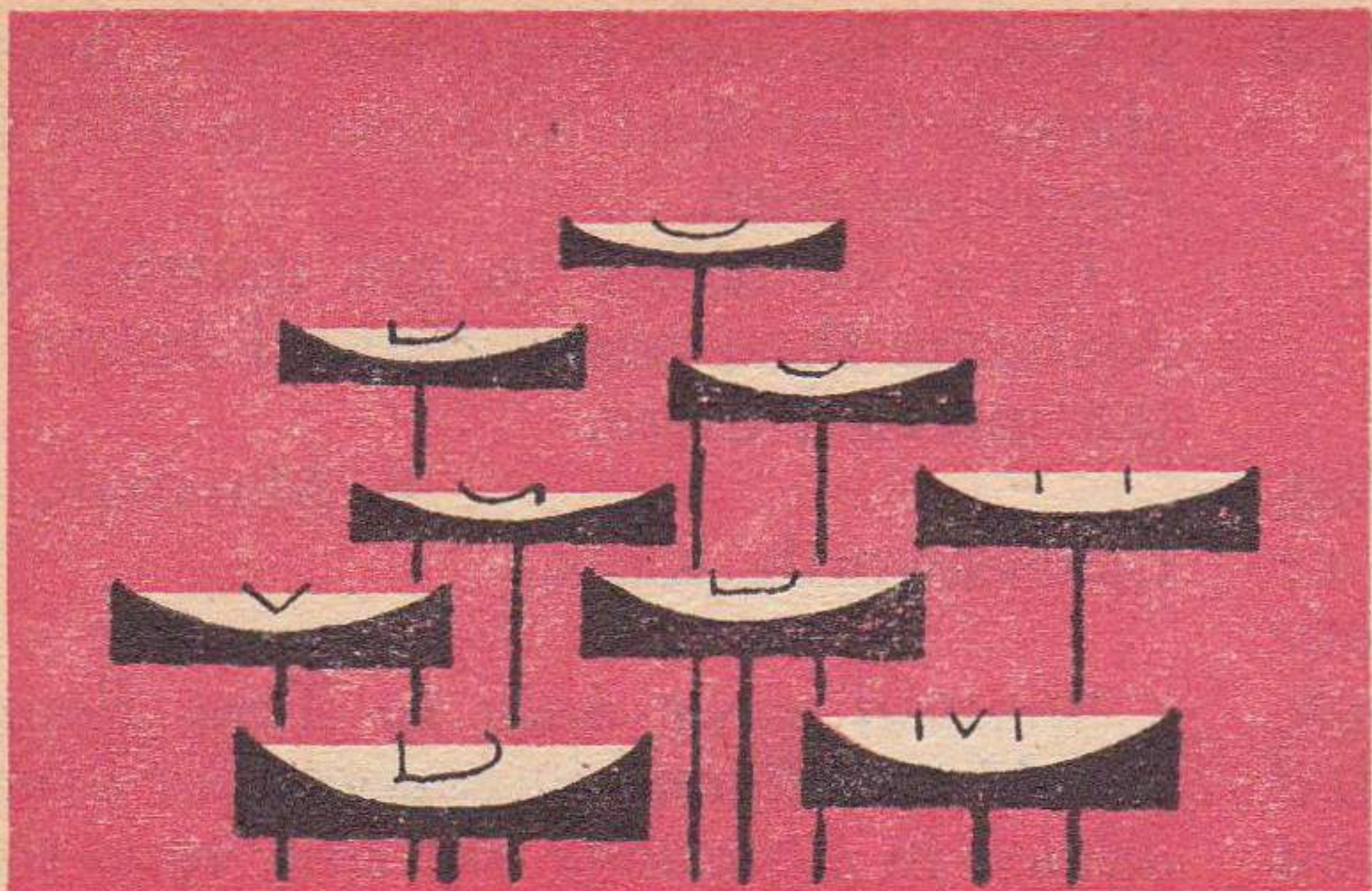
Why haven't I seen it before?

Wayne Thomas.

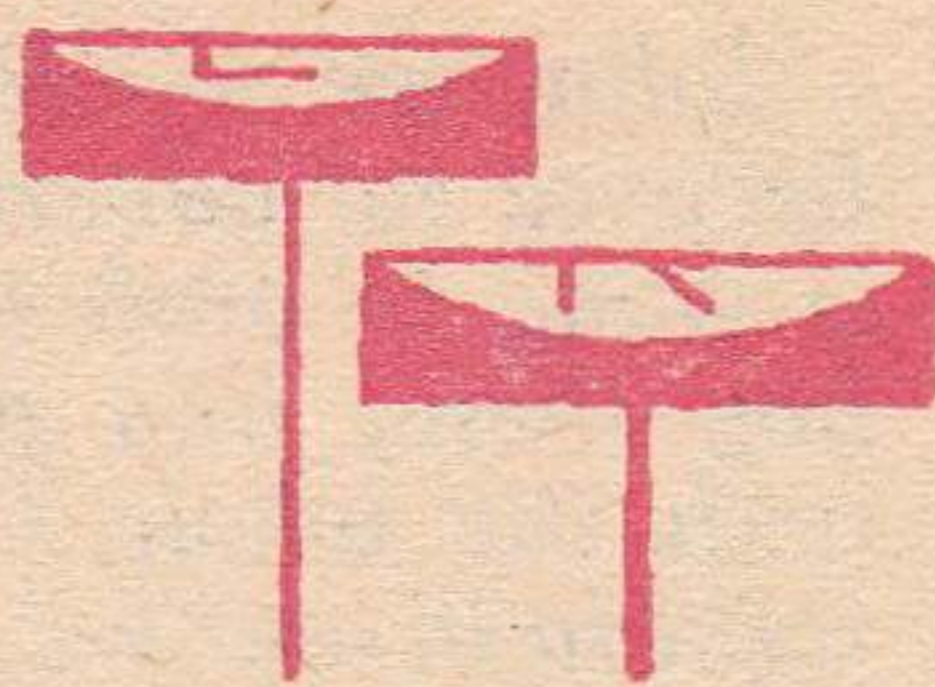
New Orleans, La.

Never mind that, Wayne. What we want to know is, how come you're just getting around to last September's issue? You been away somewhere or something? —Ed.





Thinking Out Loud



A Mr. Wallace Redman, of Portland, Oregon, who though he has red in his name prefers green ink in his pen, has written this corner a note which in almost every respect is pleasant and gentlemanly. He has been a reader for a long time, he avers, he enjoys *Bluebook*, and he can't think offhand of anything he'd like to complain about. The same, he states, goes for his wife, who also prefers our little pamphlet. There now will be a moment of quiet and restful contemplation.

All set?

"Now, then," Mr. Redman says, "for a long time we've been puzzled and intrigued by the illustration that appears at the top of your Thinking Out Loud page. What is it? I have my own ideas, of course, but, just to simplify things, why don't you tell us? Please!"

At about which point the art editor normally would be summoned front and center and told of still another reader who apparently never saw black and white water lilies before, and didn't he think it was time for a change? But the art man's off on a temperament binge this week, and won't talk to anybody except his bartender. So it's up to us non-artists to explain the drawing up there to Mr. Redman, his wife, and anyone else who's been troubled.

What those little things are, see, is typewriter keys. And don't write and say, What!—no typewriter keys ever looked like *that*. Trouble with you is you've never looked at your typewriter from a prone position, which is the way editors and writers see the damn things all the time. You start to work, and the words won't come, and you get lower and lower and lower, until, all at once, sure! They look just the way the artist drew them.

In fact, I can see them now . . .

* * *

Still another subscriber, a Mr. Henry Coleridge, of Los Angeles, writes to bring up the old business about our paper again. It's pulp, he says, and don't give him that old routine about it's not the paper but what's written on it that counts. It's still pulp, he grunts.

So, it's pulp. And, again, what's wrong with that? It seems to me this differentiation between magazines that are "slick" and those that are "pulp" has progressed to the silly stage. "He writes for the pulps," someone will say, in a tone that automatically consigns such a workman to third-hand used cars, once-a-month haircuts, beanery breakfasts and shirts with frayed collars. But a slick writer—ah, there's a man with a Cadillac, an apartment on Park Avenue, custom-made suits, and a yacht.

on exactly the same type of paper—maybe not even so good a grade of paper—as *Bluebook*.

They call it *The Reader's Digest*.

* * *

As for the readers who've written in about our piece on Alabama divorce, in the May issue—well, there are just too many of them, not to mention the phone calls and telegrams, to list in this small pocket. All I can say, girls, is that you better take another look at your old man; the kid seems to be getting itchy feet.

We have been asked to recommend Alabama lawyers, suggest hotels and boarding-houses, look up bus, train and plane schedules, and even serve as witnesses for the plaintiffs. And one guy was in such a hurry to shuck his mate he had to be restrained forcibly to prevent his hitch-hiking to Birmingham within the hour.

And there's a rather significant sidelight to the whole mess—every communiqué we received was from a male. Not one single, solitary dame showed even the slightest interest in getting rid of her gentleman friend, either quickly or otherwise.

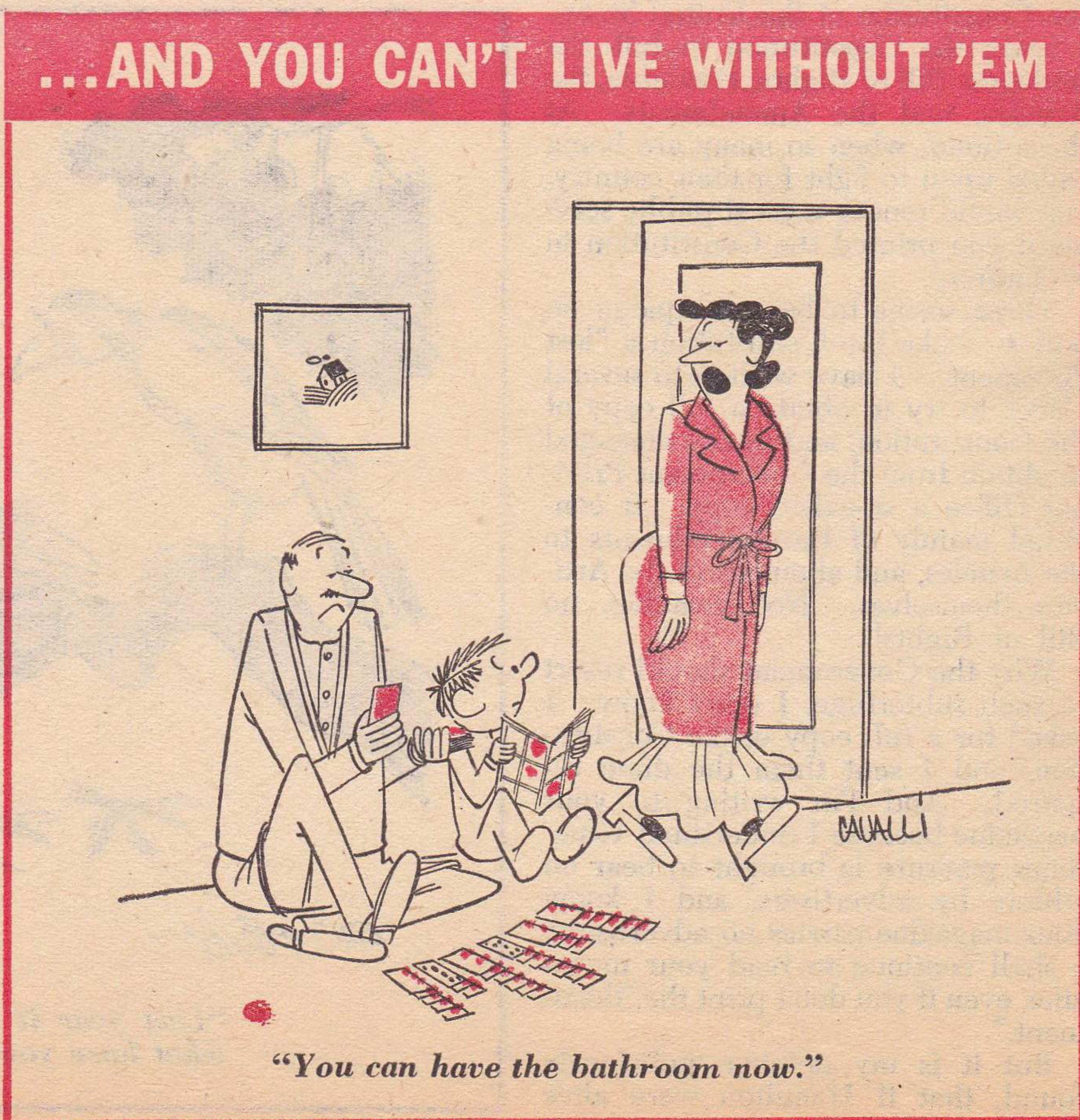
Is there a moral there some place?

* * *

Before going on to other things, suppose we clear up a brace of clippings which have come in from readers with strong bifocals.

The first of these is from our favorite

To all of which there seems but one logical, sensible answer: there are pulp magazines and slick magazines, and there are good things and bad things, wonderful writing and not-so-wonderful writing, in both types of books. But the magazine that sells more single copies than any other in the world, the magazine that virtually any writer in the business would give his typing finger to make, the magazine that is read by people all over the world, in a dozen different languages, is a magazine which is printed



"You can have the bathroom now."

newspaper, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and it brings to mind that old wheeze about the first mate who wrote in the ship's log that "the captain was sober last night," just as if it were news. The clipping from the *Trib* says:

MRS. LUCE PUTS IN FULL DAY
AT EMBASSY AS U.S. ENVOY

The other one comes from Tom Roan, who swears he cut it from a Florida newspaper, and I am inclined to suggest that Thomas better see his pastor about his lying ways. His cut-out, an alleged advertisement from a funeral establishment, reads:

HOW CAN YOU AFFORD TO WALK
AROUND HALF-DEAD, WHEN WE CAN
BURY YOU FOR AS LITTLE AS \$49.50
(plus tax)?

* * *

All of which has nothing whatsoever to do with the many fine confections to be found farther along in these pages (and how can you afford to sit there doing nothing when we can entertain you for only 25 cents, *including* tax?)

We are particularly proud of Mr. Lombardo's having gotten down from his bandstand long enough to tell us about the joys and sorrows of speedboat racing, and we shall all be out of town for the entire month during which New Yorkers boil and seethe over our blast at their city in "Give It Back to the Indians!"

An even more significant piece, however, is Arthur Winston's "Off Limits for Life," an account of what's happened to the more than 10,000 GI World War II deserters who still are on the lam somewhere, and who face a pretty bleak future as the result of their having come to the abrupt conclusion that they'd had about all they wanted of that particular war.

Probably most enjoyable to this bystander, however, was Harold Keith's baseball novelette, "Iverson's Idiot," probably because it brought to mind the wonderful old Brooklyn Dodgers' outfielder, Babe Herman, the one-man daffiness boy.

Especially did it recall the story of Babe's wife having told him, one day, that she had to go shopping and he'd have to take care of their six-year-old son. So Babe took the kid to the ball park, sat him in the stands, and told him to stay there till Poppa picked him up. And Poppa proceeded to go play ball, having a fine afternoon and hitting 3 for 4, including a homer.

He was telling Mrs. Herman of these sensational exploits at supper that night, when the missus rudely interrupted.

"Where's the boy?" she asked.

"What boy?" Babe said. Then: "Oh, my gosh! He's still in the park!"

He was, too.

MAXWELL HAMILTON

What Next!

EXPERTS . . . In Chicago, at a convention of 500 top radio and television executives, a meeting had to be halted until an electrician was called in to repair a microphone that suddenly went dead and baffled the executives.

IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE . . . In London, after the president of the Royal Academy panned a modernistic painting as being "not even a good poster," the young artist found that the resulting publicity enabled him to sell the canvas for \$1,000.

NO SAD SONGS WANTED . . . In Goondiwindi, Australia, when Frank Pforr ran for the post of alderman, he campaigned with the slogan, "Pforr he's a jolly good fellow," finished last in a field of 13 candidates.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING . . . In Rome, Vittorio Fedelis pleaded in court that he had looted 16 apartments "simply to try out my invention of a new kind of master key."

HOME, SWEET HOME . . . In Kashanakamak Lake, Ontario, a man who had traveled 1,500 miles from Youngstown, Ohio, to fish caught a 15½-inch pickerel and discovered it was wearing an Ohio tag.

HIGH COST OF BEEF . . . In Greenville, S. C., the menu of the annual banquet of the Greenville County Beef Cattle Assn. included fried catfish, fried chicken and deep-dish chicken pie. No beef.

RIGHT THE FIRST TIME . . . In Falmouth, Mass., Frank O. Ingram, Jr., heard the fire alarm ring while he was at work, called home to ask where was the fire, was told, "Here."

TURNABOUT . . . In Prescott, Ontario, Mrs. Percy Webb allowed her cat to drink from the goldfish bowl and had no trouble until one of the fish took the offensive and bit the cat.

BASIC TRAINING . . . In Boston, Tom Plummer returned home after 18 months at sea on a round-the-world sailing voyage to find accumulated mail that included orders from the Navy directing him to report for active duty at sea.

WANNA BET . . . In London, a bookie has been taking bets at 11 to 10 odds against the selected sex of any expected child.

BITE THE HAND . . . In Englewood, Colo., an enterprising customer at the Spencer Sporting Goods Store asked to be shown a pistol, examined it, loaded it with his own bullets, aimed it and said quietly, "This is a stickup."

UNDERCOVER . . . In Seattle, after a housewife phoned the Sheriff's office to report prowlers outside her home, two deputies investigated and found the woman's husband and brother-in-law sneaking away on a fishing trip.

CONSCIENTIOUS . . . In South Bend, Ind., a reporter explained to his editor why he had so little information on a lodge dinner he had covered, said he had volunteered as a subject for hypnosis and slept soundly through the whole affair.

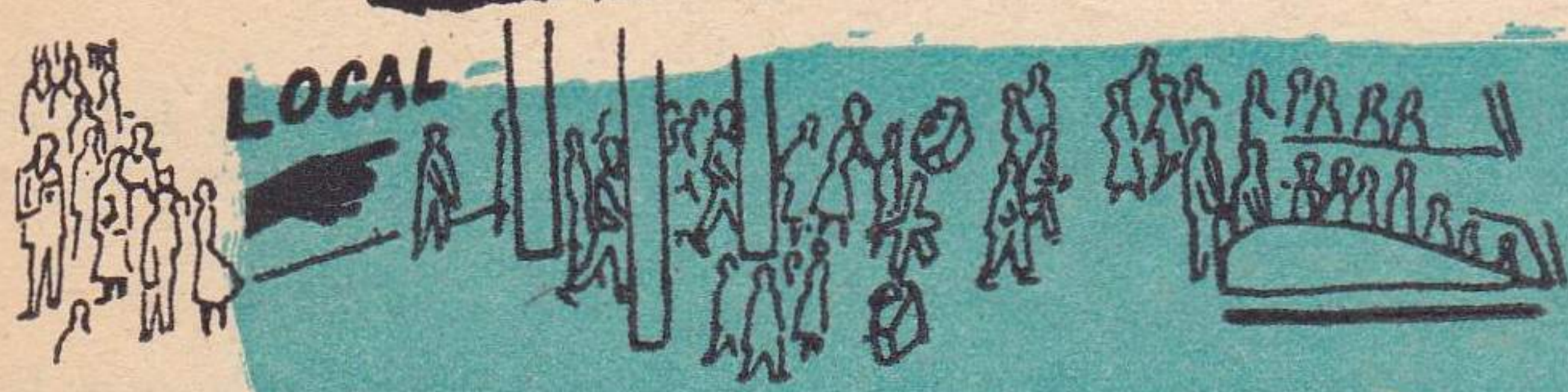
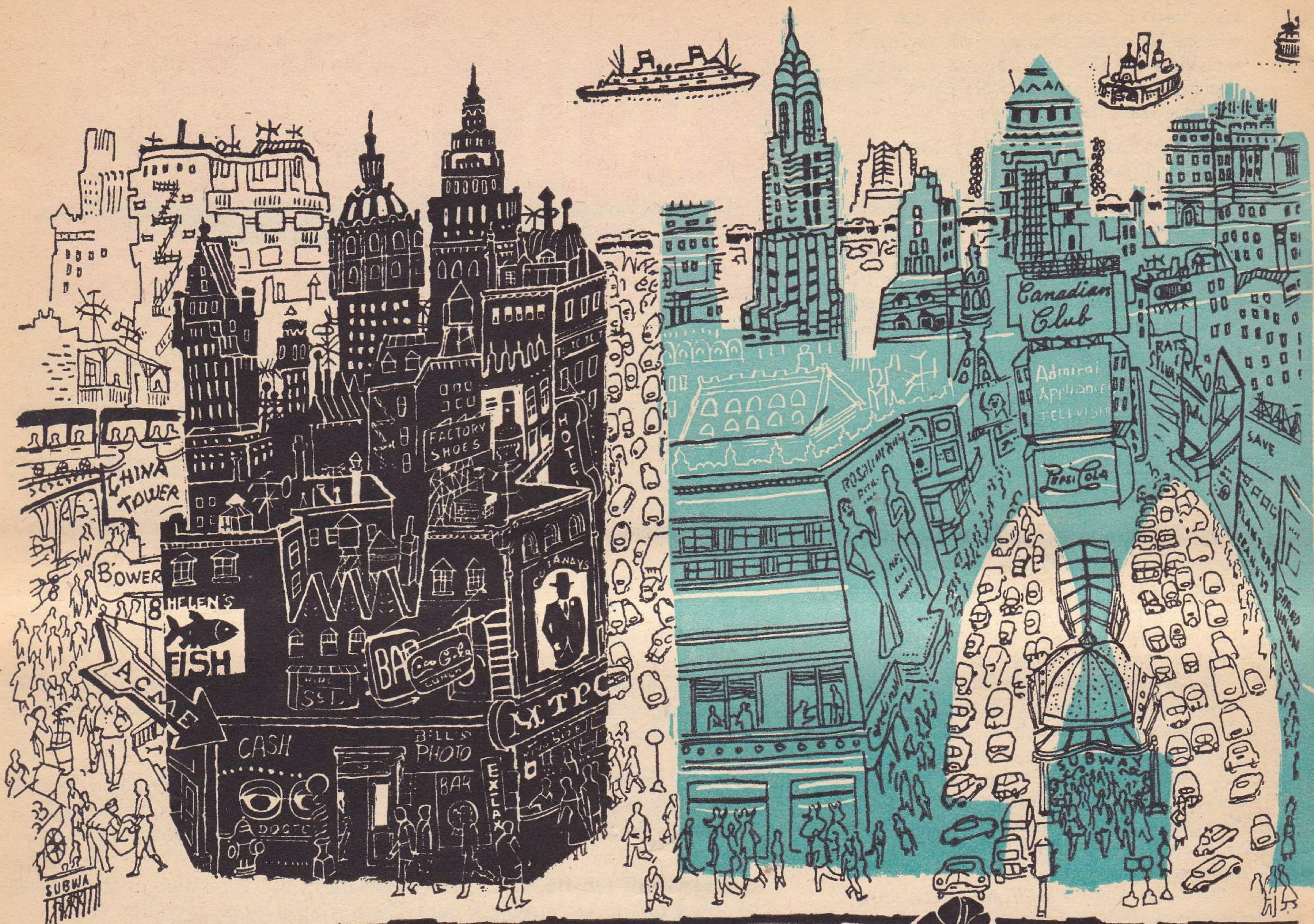
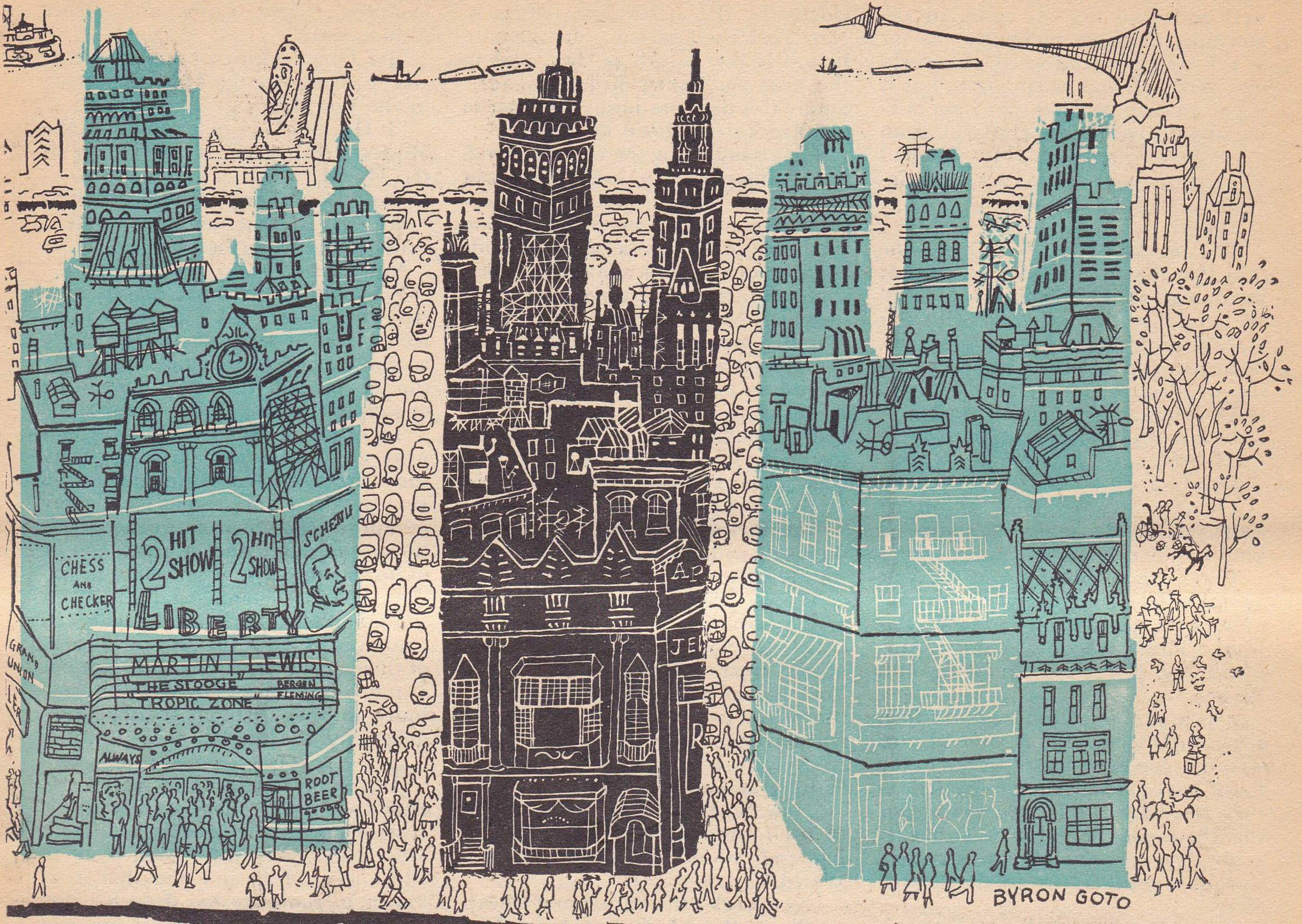


Illustration by BYRON GOTO

A distinguished, and anonymous, ex-New Yorker winds up and really lets fly at the city of his birth. And he's anonymous only because he still has relatives in "The Big City" and he fears reprisals.





Give it back to the Indians!

► BY NED DEVLIN

NOT TOO MANY YEARS AGO, a really bright boy on the island of Manhattan found himself one day without a lunch date, and he promptly used the time to great advantage: he wrote a book. Being a New Yorker, he titled his masterpiece—when he could bring himself to stop laughing—"The World Ends at Hoboken," and his theme was that anything which took place west of the Hudson River was

about as important to civilization as the information that there is moisture in raindrops.

The fellow's book naturally was a success. The New Yorkers bought it because it contained words right off the tips of their tongues, and the folks in Iowa bought it either because they wanted to see how mad the book's premise could make them, or because—never having been to New York—they figured it might be true. After all, it was written in a book, wasn't it?

Yes, it was. And that ought to be just about enough free plugs for a book with which at

least one writer, whom I know very well and who ties my shoes in the morning, disagrees violently. As far as this writer is concerned, the world may very well end at Hoboken, but it is best to keep in mind that I am talking about coming into Hoboken from a different direction. My personal viewpoint about New York does indeed take a different tack.

Attend:

The big lie about New York, the one that has victimized the author mentioned above and from which all the subsidiary lies derive, is a dilly. It is stated in terms at once so sonorous, dogmatic and utterly without meaning or documentation as to stop a crack defense lawyer in his tracks:

New York Is the Greatest City in the World.

Think of it.

There is an even more adroit re-statement of the same affirmative, a kind of sub-commandment:

There are no other cities but New York, not in this country. There are only municipalities. This, baby, this is it! This is the Big Town. Anywhere else you're only camping out. Period.

It is approximately there and then that *Ausländers* of any and all description are expected to throw in the towel, especially when confronted, as they are, with the certain knowledge that the population of New York City is in fact considerably greater than that of any other city in the United States.

True enough—and that (so gaze on it well) is the last concession of any import this article expects to make. On the contrary, it now becomes our duty to itemize and explore the major tenets of the preposterous foundation on which New York has erected its right to swagger and patronize; to dismantle the city's claims without any fear whatever of successful contradiction, and to proceed to the recommendation that a moratorium be declared on New York until such a time as it can measure up to its civic responsibilities, repine of its boastings, and rejoin the national community in a spirit of humility and good will.

It gives us no great pleasure to do this. The New Yorker himself is a pathetic fellow rather than otherwise, caught in straits that are none of his doing except by negation—his record as a voter and citizen is plainly a raffish one—and he is consequently as a whole not a worthy target. But to correct a condition, one must first disclose the correctible defects in the distorted state of mind that tolerates it in the first place. And here the evidence is all too clear.

As a witness in her own defense, Father Knickerbocker is a pushover.

(You will note in that sentence, incidentally, the ambivalent nature of New York's self-esteem. She refers to herself in one breath as "her" and in the next as "Father Knickerbocker." Surely this does not imply a schism in old Knick's emotional drive?)

That is not to say she will take kindly to being pushed, or suffer it without resistance. New York is as thin-skinned as any bedizened trollop, and furthermore regards herself as outside the pale of common morality. Worse than that, the insular point of view, of which New York's is a glaring example, is notoriously difficult to combat, rooted as it is in bigotry, bucolic prejudice, and a maudlin regard for tradition as noble in its fiber as the beery snufflings of a native barfly mourning the demise of a vicious traffic hazard known in its time as the Sixth Avenue El.

Nonetheless, we shall present our indictment without fear or favor, and a starkly simple one it is:

New York's a dump. Give it back to the Indians.

Let us review for a moment a few of the creaky pillars on which New York has so assiduously built its own rotten and fantastic myth. Surely you will recognize most if not all.

"New York Is the Center of Art and Culture in America."

"New York Is a Magnet, Drawing to Itself Irresistibly the Most Charming and Stimulating People in the World."

"New York's the Easiest and Cheapest Town there Is to Get Around in, or Where Else Can You Ride 26 Miles on a Dime?"

"For any Young Person with Talent and Ambition and Who Wants to Get Anywhere, New York's the Place to Come—because That's Where Everything Is."

"There's Something about the Air, You Can't Describe It; as Soon as You Get that First Whiff of It, You Want to Go Places and Do Things."

"No Matter Where You're from or Who You Are, Doesn't that Skyline Do Something to You?"

"New York Is the Shopping Mecca of the Universe and (sic) Its Women the Smartest, Most Beautiful and Best-Groomed Anywhere."

"New York's One Place You Can Live Your Own Life; Nobody Knows You're There, or Cares; You Mind Your Business and They Mind Theirs."

"New York's One Place that Has Something for Everyone."

"New York's One Place that Can Give You Any Kind of Cooking You Like, (for, indeed) Its Restaurants Are the Most Cosmopolitan in the World."

And—"Its Legitimate Theaters Are the Best and Most Numerous in the

World, Not to Mention Its Television Facilities, Night Clubs and Other Amusements."

"Its Opportunities for the Young and Aspiring Are the Most Staggering in the World."

"It Has and It Is, in Summation, the Mostest and Bestest of Everything in the World."

"And Don't Forget that Skyline!"

We will pause a necessary moment while you get your breath.

Now:

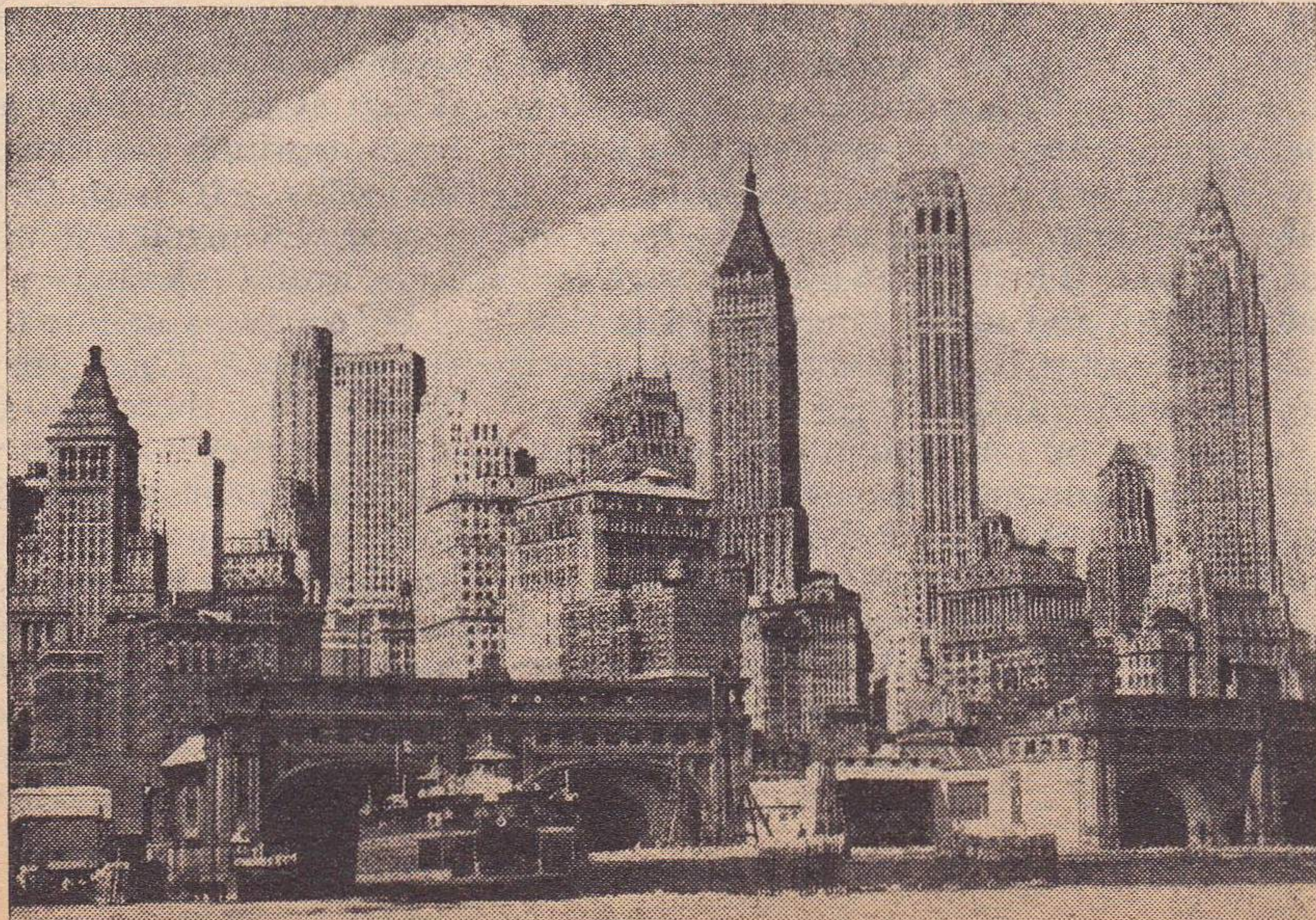
We count in the above agenda, barring the intentional repetition, thirteen pieces of separate and generally accepted dogma, of which every one can be proved distorted, misleading or simply false, in whole or in part.

To begin at the top of the list and work our way down, "art" and "culture" are words elusive of definition. If by *art*, New York means merely any person or office engaged in the perpetration of magazine stories, TV or radio shows, plays, or graphic illustration, whether commercial or otherwise, then New York undoubtedly has a number of these, the proficient hacks of their trade, shackled to the city not so much by choice as by needful proximity to their arbiters—editors, producers and the like.

THIS is not a tribute to New York, only a sad commentary on monolithic entrenchment, the tenacity of habit. *Once* New York was a good place to edit and publish, and now that it no longer is, roots are too deep for easy transplantation. But they are not implacable. Few magazines, due to ruinous union scales, print in New York any longer, and these few are fast diminishing. Some editorial headquarters are seeing the light and getting out while the getting is good—following, incidentally, the example of heavy industry, which logically enough has decided it cannot endure being taxed beyond endurance.

As nerve-center for radio and television, New York may as well throw in its hand right now: Hollywood will assume that pleasant burden within a matter of months, if it has not already. Most commercial illustrators—those who do not employ the mails—come to New York purely to dump their produce in the editors' laps and then flee. These free agents in the talent market may exercise a choice in their place of dwelling, and their choice is to stay clear of New York. The city's captives, less fortunate, still are coming to understand that they, too, have a choice, that New York is an artistic backwash, by-passed in the surge westward and doomed to become in the end little better than a grimy atavism.

As to "art" in its more precocious sense, New York has no case at all. The more prominent of the country's



Frank Lloyd Wright, by general common consent the nation's foremost architect, has long gaged over New York's samples of his own special craft. A look at the skyline, over which the city brags endlessly, may explain why he feels that way.

littérateurs shun it as they would a virus, and those of the past that have not done so have had occasion to regret the fact publicly. Nor has New York ever been productive of much genuine ability, whatever its touts may have to say in the matter. Mr. Ernest Hemingway (of Oak Park, Ill., now resident in Cuba) has expressed his distaste for the city in emphatic language. Mr. William Faulkner (of Oxford, Miss., now resident in Oxford, Miss.) drops in only under some valid pressure, such as money. The late Mr. Thomas Wolfe (of Asheville, N. C.) did spend a bit of time there, and once paid the town his respects in a passage we will quote presently. Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald, also deceased, of Baltimore, Md., dissipated some of his priceless strength and talent in the old bawd's sterile embrace, but went miles away from her to do the best of his writing—an imminent swatch of which is likewise apropos our subject. Another author, Miss Edna Ferber, not long ago planted a nosegay of her own on New York in a widely quoted utterance. "The dirtiest city in the world," said Miss Ferber among other things, ". . . degraded, blowzy . . . a scab on the face of our country." The streets, she went on, are covered with garbage, by which, Miss Ferber made clear, she *didn't* mean dirt.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, by general common consent the nation's foremost architect, has long gagged over New York's samples of his own special craft, and the more serious among the country's painters—discounting the precious few fascinated by the pictorial appeal of ashcans, bums and harlots—keep their shuddering distance from the city that professes to appreciate them most.

In truth, New York's affectation as, at least, a discerning connoisseur and patron of the arts is perhaps her most vulnerable masquerade. Ballet suffers at her hands, music bogs down in apathy and despair, and annually she refuses to support her Metropolitan Opera House, sending that hallowed institution out on the street with its hat in its hand, begging for money to keep going. (Just as annually, she demeans the Met as well, forcing it by the strength of her alms to hold still for that much-publicized spectacle of archaic snobbery, social ignorance and drunken bad manners, known to all of affronted America as "first night at the opera.")

It can be said of New York's stuffer museums, not to mention its stuffer shirts, that they control quite a hoard of art treasure. It can just as easily be said of them that by so doing, they are exercising a provincial monopoly and depriving the *real* United States of its rightful interest in the public domain.

When New York speaks of culture, it presumably alludes, in measurable degree, to its educational institutions. These include three major universities—New York, Columbia and Fordham; City College of New York, and Barnard and Hunter for women. (In the case of another, Long Island University, no serious effort ever was made to correct, until quite recently, an impression that it was not a university but a basketball team.)

On the one hand, New York's better schools could and do show a rather impressive academic background. On the other, they have spawned an alarmingly-disproportionate number of intellectual misfits, who lately have gone to ground behind the First and Fifth Amendments of the Constitution and defied Congressional authority to get them out. One can do no more than guess why New York "culture" has made so massive a contribution to Communist thinking (or to pogroms, race hatred and other cute manifestations of Fascism), but several students of the question have pointed out that love for a collectivist society is like as not to be the product of an unhappy and frustrated environment.

That may well apply here. New York campuses are, by and large, unlike most in their propinquity to the city itself, and it is difficult to achieve pure college spirit 'neath the elms of the Nedick's stand down at the corner, or in the ivy-covered halls of Nick's Bar & Grill, on 112th Street. This became painfully clear not too long ago when fresh-faced youngsters from the South and Midwest brought their basketball talents to a New York campus annex and school gym called Madison Square Garden. Here they were bribed and disgraced, induced to juggle point spreads by campus characters peculiar to New York, and, in a manner of speaking, corrupted by the city's fetid atmosphere. Will New York make rebuttal? Let us say only that it didn't happen elsewhere.

That seems to dispose of the Center of Art and Culture. We turn now to the most charming and stimulating people in the world—the second of New York's accolades to itself, and one almost impossible to regard with anything but goggle-eyed disbelief.

Whom does New York have in mind? The subway traveler with foul breath and fouler language, who runs you down from behind in his blind, molelike rush to go nowhere, then curses you for having been in his way? His thousands of counterparts who, brutalized beyond thought or feeling by the impact of Manhattan's juggernaut, sit swaying and gape-mouthed while the Interborough Rapid Transit System bears them in its narcotic, poisoned thrall from one oblivion to another?

Stimulating is not precisely the word. Does New York have reference to its swarms of gray-hatted, gray-faced ciphers who lounge, complete with *acne tarica*, against its corner stores? Or does it mean its millions of lonely and dispossessed, who long since have been drained of the vitality to affect another living person in one way or another? No, quite apart from the gratuitous slur on the social gifts of 140,000,000 other Americans, New York's generous appraisal of its own charms is silly.

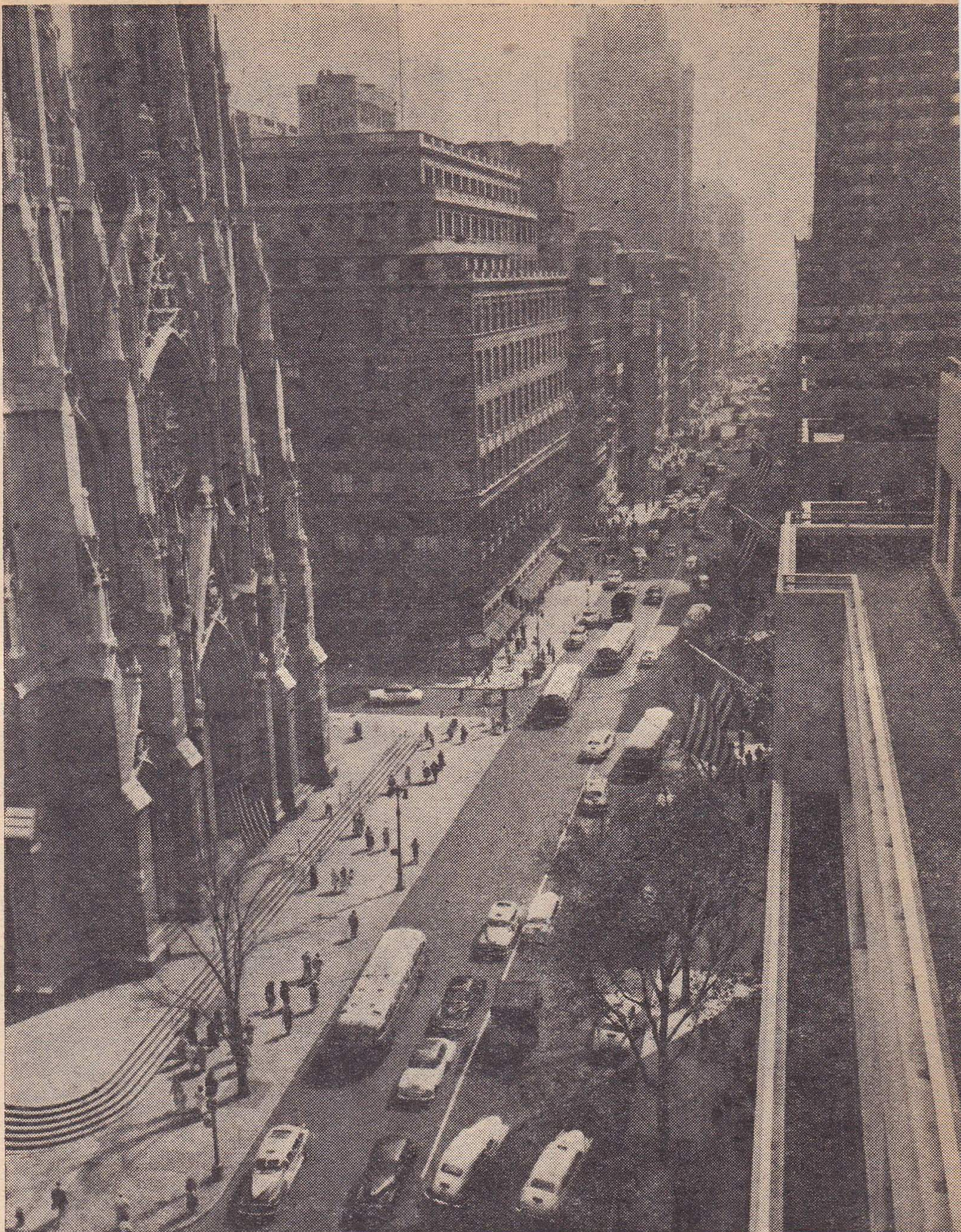
EVEN more drastically so is New York's fondness for its transit system, a multiple monster adequately previewed by Dante several centuries ago but since then beyond description by less obsessed chroniclers. For most New Yorkers, it means the subway, an authentically-hellish contrivance which probably more than anything is responsible for the steady nervous depletion of the breed to the point where it no longer can summon resilience to a task more involved than staying alive. The gas chamber stifles a man quickly and with mercy. The New York subway takes years. Then it has not the simple grace to complete the job.

The subway cannot be discussed accurately without recourse to epithet. It is stinking, nauseating, unhygienic, undermanned and overcrowded (overcrowded!), uncomfortable and dangerous—it is no trick at all for the mob's surge from behind to push overboard a person standing at the platform's edge. It gets the passenger reasonably near where he wants to go, but at an incalculable cost in physical attrition.

True, it costs but a dime—but for not much over that, one could enter Coney Island's House of Horrors and buy himself a half hour every bit as wretched. And, if you want to bring New York's shameful municipal administration into this, that same dime fare is doing its part to drag the city down into its impending bankruptcy. New Yorkers not only have to put up with their fearful subway but pay its deficit as well through all the hidden taxes of which they have been milked for years. It is a form of double jeopardy which few if any other Americans would tolerate.

Of course, you don't have to take the subway. There are taxis in New York. Yes, there *are* taxis in New York but they'll not get you anywhere fast (though at the cost of an appalling amount of money) because no vehicular traffic in New York gets anywhere very fast. And the reason for *that* is that New York blocks its cross-streets (the width of a standing broad jump for any healthy Olympian) by using them as loading areas for trucks.

By "shopping Mecca of the world," New York means Fifth Avenue, "an over-expensive area of frosty and forbidding elegance where New Yorkers regrettably cannot afford to shop." Contrast it with New York's slums, "one huge, gigantic Stink, a symphonic Smell, a stench."





If there is error in the contention that "New York is a nice place to live, but I wouldn't want to visit there," there also is something to be said for the contention that "it's a grim place to live, but it's even worse to visit." Yet thousands visit it every year.

It uses them as loading areas for trucks because New York does not have loading *alleys*, as other cities have, and New York doesn't have loading alleys because it doesn't. Never has had, and now is not just the time to begin because it would mean razing most of downtown Manhattan.

Moreover, New York believes alleys breed slums and that slums breed a condition loosely comparable to the condition New York is now in, although conceivably not quite that bad. Otherwise, the specific disadvantage of taxis over, for instance, one's own car is the presence of (a) a driver, (b) a meter. New York cab-drivers are feral, predatory and churlish (discount any simpering New Yorker's fable of wit and homely philosophy absorbed from hackies; they are full of anything but that). And New York meters suffer from a disease of the phrenic nerve that sets them to hiccuping nickel charges at an unparalleled rate.

THE third and fourth prongs of New York's transit set-up are bus and streetcar, not infinitely worse than those of other cities, and the fifth is the human feet. Provided you have not too far to go and are well insured, they are by far your best bet.

If New York, as previously hypothesized, is for sure the only place for the able and ambitious to locate, then you will have to forgive the doubts of a certain Mr. Trimble, an imaginary bucko who is no more imaginary than brick or mortar or lime.

Mr. Trimble is a more-than-representative New Yorker. He's a pretty successful one. He makes \$15,000 a year; make it \$17,000 when he pads the swindle sheet. He gets that as a junior executive of an engineering firm that controls a utility in Pennsylvania via stock holdings. Mr. Trimble, now 42, has a wife, two children, suffers not too badly from nervous debilitation, and lives in a Long Island suburb we'll call Bellton, just 45 minutes from Broadway — which would be nice if Mr. Trimble happened to work on Broadway, which he doesn't. He works on the other side of town.

But that is trivial. Mr. Trimble's problem is a dual one. He doesn't make enough to live the way he wants to in New York, and if he lived the way he wanted to somewhere else, he wouldn't make as much as he does here. Ambition has really sunk its teeth into Mr. Trimble. Good man, too—but with a certain feeling he's not going much further.

Couple times a year, Mr. Trimble goes back to the utility's home office in Effidge, Pa. (pop., 3,045), where he has noted that his friend Joe Sloane, assistant general manager and Mr.

Trimble's underling in all respects, has a house on a quarter-acre, on the best residential street in town. Joe makes \$750 a month, as Mr. Trimble happens to know damn good and well. It's a nicer house than Mr. Trimble's, and it's almost paid for. Joe looks well, besides, and it takes him just nine minutes to cover the distance from home to office and back again—on foot. Takes Mr. Trimble an hour and a half each way, including time served on the Long Island Rail Road, one of the most excruciating common carriers in existence.

In New York, well-shod as he is, Mr. Trimble can't afford such super-luxuries as night clubs and mink stoles, but Joe and the Mrs. can take an occasional fling at both. Something is out of whack; Mr. Trimble, able and ambitious, came to New York from Effidge many years ago, and considered the chance one hell of a deal.

Mr. Trimble is dimly aware of a remark once made by an American naturalist and writer, a man who had pacifically found all he wanted of life or death in a New England pond named Walden, and who later ascribed to most other men lives of quiet desperation. But only recently, looking about him at himself and other reasonably prosperous prisoners of New York, has Mr. Trimble been able to make a modicum of sense out of Mr. Thoreau's writings.

THERE'S Something about the Air, You Can't Describe It.

Well, yes—we can, within the limits prescribed by good taste. It is too hot and humid in summer, too cold and raw in winter, and redolent at most times with the odor of a swamp situated in near-by New Jersey, and lovingly called The Meadows.

Due to an unexplained meteorological phenomenon, the wind in New York blows against you whichever way you're walking, and it carries with it cinders, dirt, hail, rain, sleet, snow, and a wickeder substance believed to be abandoned arrowheads. The scent on calmer days features carbon monoxide, but was more exhaustively analyzed by Mr. Wolfe, whom you will remember, in a literary go at the Gowanus Canal area.

"It is," rhapsodized Mr. Wolfe in "No Door" (Scribner's), "one huge gigantic Stink, a symphonic Smell, a vast organ-note of stupefying odor, cunningly contrived, compacted, and composted of eighty-seven separate several putrefactions. . . . There is in it . . . the smell of melted glue and of burned rubber. It has it in the fragrance of deceased, decaying cats, the odor of rotten cabbage, prehistoric eggs, and old tomatoes; the smell of burning rags and putrefying offal, mixed with the fragrance of a bone-

yard horse, now dead, the hide of a skunk, and the noisome stench of a stagnant sewer; it has as well the—" Mr. Wolfe broke off here, ostensibly gasping. We thank him for a felicitous and indispensable assist.

A SPATE of congratulatory nonsense has been written about New York's skyline, virtually none of it taking into account the proposition that there may be no great merit in the raw sight of real estate so congested it has had to be stacked perpendicular to civilization. This jagged silhouette is by no means lovely to behold, and in the atomic age unquestionably should be leveled, and carted off piece-meal.

But, even allowing that there is something momentarily majestic in the sweep of mid-Manhattan's profile, we enlist the services of another escapee, Mr. Fitzgerald, also published in his lifetime by Mr. Scribner, to investigate the shabby total of its meaning. In a haunting story titled "Absolution," Mr. Fitzgerald dealt with a priest harassed by visions of material beauty and sham. To a child penitent, he strives to make his vision clear.

" . . . go and see an amusement park," he said. "It's a thing like a fair, only much more glittering. Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it in a dark place—under dark trees. You'll see a big wheel made of lights turning in the air, and a long slide shooting boats down into the water. A band playing somewhere, and a smell of peanuts—and everything will twinkle. But it won't remind you of anything, you see. It will all just hang out there in the night like a colored balloon—like a big yellow lantern on a pole." The priest pauses, then adds his warning: "But don't get up close—because if you do you'll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life."

Does that suffice?

By "shopping Mecca of the world," New York means Fifth Avenue, an over-expensive thoroughfare of frosty and forbidding elegance where New Yorkers, regrettably, cannot afford to shop, and which many times every year is paralyzed by a foolish, inexcusable parade, costing appalling amounts in taxes that New Yorkers will pay later. It is also the site of the Easter Sunday shambles, not actually a parade but a coagulation of exhibitionists for newsreels.

You'll find Gotham's "supremely beautiful women" here, too—angular parties with granular complexions, geared and constructed to chase mechanical rabbits but not to entice. You can live your own life in New York, yes, and without obtrusive interference—but your wish to do so is

tantamount to a craving for barren loneliness, a cowardly avoidance of society that is characteristic of misfits who seek refuge in chill anonymity. New York's contention that it has something for everyone is an admission that it has *nothing* for anyone, as semanticists will be glad to tell you.

And New York's restaurants will come as news to the vast majority of New Yorkers, who eat at home like anyone else, both from honest preference and a proud disinclination (plus inability) to court the stupid level required of any householder willing to pay twenty dollars for dinner for two.

New York's rightful claim to being the last (as well as the first) stronghold of the legitimate theater in America is unhappily nullified by the condition of the theaters themselves (old, creaky, small, drafty, outmoded and willing to remain so), the manners of their attendants, from ticket-seller to usher (insultingly disinterested where the attraction isn't much, downright inviting a broken nose where they have a hit), the unholy scalping you take if and when you do manage to wangle tickets on the outside to something you truly would like to see (count on a \$40 per-seat mark-up and pay with a smile.)

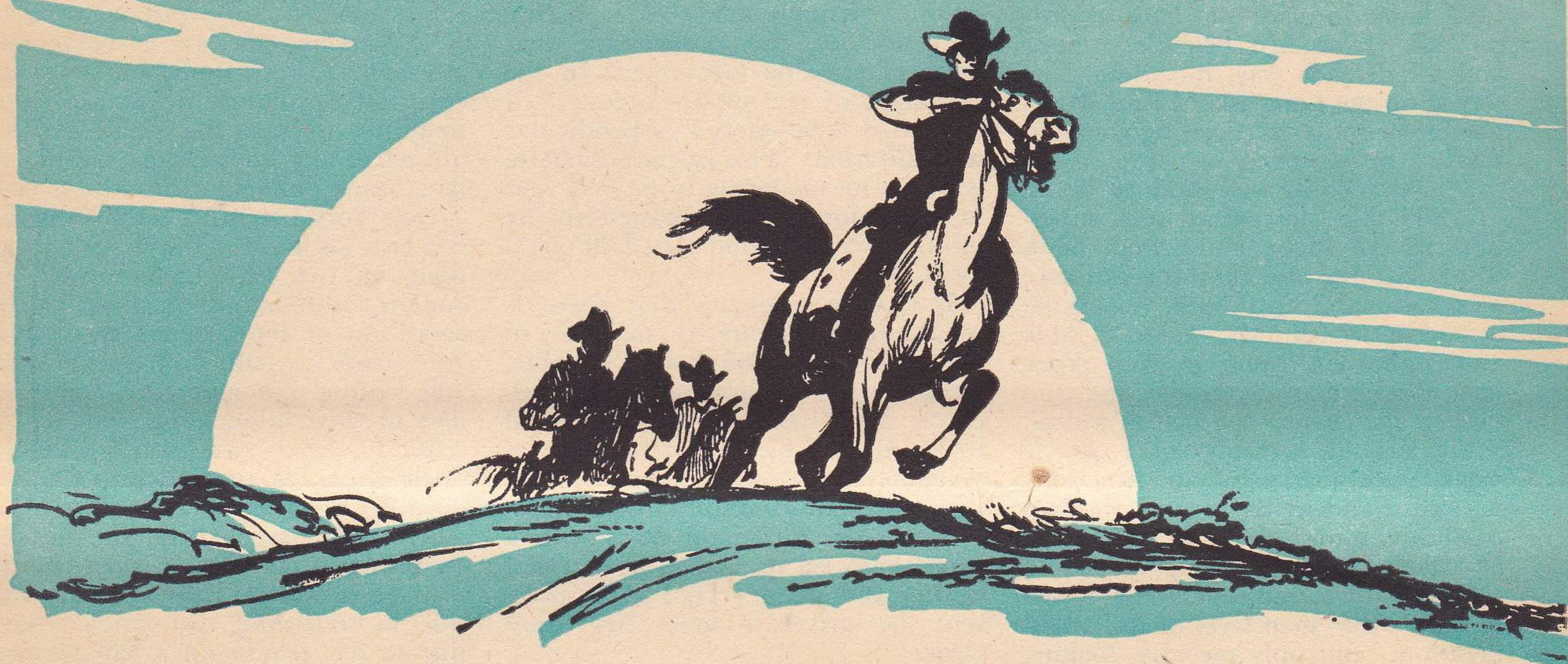
New Yorkers have not an undue amount of acumen, as you have seen from the way they permit themselves to be victimized, but they do have sufficient savvy not to go into a New York night club. Drinks are thimble-sized or exorbitant or both, the food either miserable or priced on a ratio of calories to carats, and the entertainment, aside from the very top bracket, execrable. And you don't have to worry about the very top brackets: they won't let you in.

IT GOES without saying that there is a choice of opportunities for the young and aspiring in the amiable jungle of New York careerism. Always presuming you have not one of the requisite attributes of destiny's tot-beauty, amorality, hyper-thyroid dynamism, genius or fur-lined contacts—you can either leave your name in the outer office or not. But don't call them, they'll call you.

In short, we have our own summation for New York. It's too bad you won't see it here. The dictionary has provided the words but the postal authorities have banned them.

There is a single note of cheer. If Mr. Trimble was half in error in his contention that "New York is a nice place to live, but I wouldn't want to visit there," he was half-right, too. New York is all we say as a place to live in—but it's even worse to visit.

As for the Indians, they are an intelligent people. There is no sane reason to believe they'd *take* it back. •



Showdown at Sunset

It should have been an easy trade to make—a strip of grass for his son's life. But pride is a precious thing to a boy just becoming a man.

By J. L. BOUMA

EXCEPT THAT IT WAS his son's eighteenth birthday, there was nothing to indicate to Jess Murrow that this Sunday morning at the ranch was different from all the others. And if he noticed that Dave was more silent than usual at breakfast, he put it down to a wakened sense of maturity in the boy.

Now, as Dave rose from the table and stretched his lanky frame, Jess felt a rush of pride. "You've sure grown in the last couple years," he said. "You must be an inch taller than me, and I guess about as heavy."

"He's still all hands and feet," said Jane. She glanced quickly from the table to her son's face. "You haven't finished your breakfast."

"I'm not hungry." Dave yawned at the ceiling, then picked up his Stetson and opened the kitchen door. "Guess I'll take a ride around the place."

Jane frowned. "Aren't you coming to church with us?"

"Not today, I guess," the boy answered vaguely. "Might ride over and see Natalie later on."

He clamped his hat on and was heading for the corral, when Jane rose and went to the door.

"Dave," Jess heard her call, "did you and Natalie have a fight?"

The boy said something Jess didn't catch, and when Jane turned back to the kitchen he grinned at her. "It won't hurt 'em to fight once in a while. Get 'em used to each other."

"He said it wasn't that. But he's upset about something, I know."

"Probably just thinking ahead to his responsibilities," Jess said. He stood up and rolled himself a smoke. There was a Sunday feeling in him, and he was content. "How long will it take you to get ready?" he asked.

"I'll be ready by the time you hitch up."

Jess put an arm around her waist and hugged her affectionately. "Still worried, honey? You needn't be. Remember the fights we had when I was courting you? There were times when I wanted to ride a thousand miles and maybe never come back."



"And there were times I wished you would have," Jane said. But her smile was close to laughter as Jess went out.

The early sun lay warm against the rough boards of the barn as Jess crossed the yard. He saw Dave riding his sorrel at a trot along the trail that followed the slope of the hill toward Honeycomb meadow, and he remembered that next week he'd have to renew his lease on that stretch of grass, before Jake Feeney beat him to it. Jake Feeney was a comparative newcomer in this corner of New Mexico, but he'd grabbed a lot of range in the few years he'd been here. Jess knew he'd tried more than once to break the Honeycomb lease.

Jess opened the barn doors and pulled the buggy outside; he was turning to the corral when he saw a rider coming up the lane. It was Marshal Tom Bender.

Jess grinned, waiting for him to rein in, then said, "Must be quiet in town for you to be out riding. How are you, Tom?"

"Can't complain," Tom Bender said gruffly. He swung a leg over, dismounted, and stood holding the reins, a chunky man in a black suit and black hat. "As to it being quiet in town—" he began, then broke off as Jane came outside and stood on the back steps.

Tom Bender took off his hat, and a smile flashed across his square face. "Morning, Jane," he said.

Jess saw anxiety on his wife's face. She said, "Anything wrong, Tom?"

"No, no. Just out for a ride and thought I'd stop by."

"Oh!" She smiled then. "Coffee's still hot."

"I'll have to pass it up this morning, Jane. Got to get back to town."

She hesitated. "Has Dave gone, Jess?"

"Yeah. You better get ready."

She hesitated a moment longer, then with an abrupt movement entered the house.

TOM BENDER looked at Jess with expressionless eyes before walking slowly to the corral, leading his horse.

"What's up?" Jess asked.

"Plenty," Tom Bender said gruffly. "And it doesn't look like Dave told you. You know he was in town last night?"

"He always takes Natalie to the dance Saturday nights. What are you getting at?"

"Dave had a fight—"

Jess grinned faintly. "So did I, when I was his age. But the one you're talking about couldn't have lasted long, because he hasn't got a mark on him."

"It didn't last long. This fellow was making too much over Natalie,

and Dave didn't like it. They had words, and the fellow made a pass at Dave. Your boy hit him just once and that finished it." The marshal paused. "For then, anyhow."

Jess felt his mouth stretch tight. "Who is this fellow?"

"Name of Whitey, that's all I know. He blew into town a day or so ago. Been hanging around the saloons. You know the kind I mean, else I wouldn't be here."

Distant fear coiled in Jess' stomach. "You sure?"

"I've met too many of 'em to make a mistake," the marshal said flatly. "He didn't offer to fight after Dave knocked him down, but he had his say and Dave called him. It's set for six tomorrow evening, and I'd say your boy has about one chance in a hundred to come out of it alive."

"You got a no-gun ordinance in town. You could arrest—"

"They're meeting at Larmon's bridge. That's outside of town limits. Nothing I or the sheriff can do until it's over and done with, and then Whitey'll get away with it by claiming self-defense. We've both seen it happen, and you know it."

There were blurred images in front of Jess' eyes as his mind grabbed desperately at stray thoughts, tried to clamp onto a way out of this trouble. His eyes narrowed. "Is this fellow Whitey in town now?" he asked softly.

"I don't know," Tom Bender said. He looked straight at Jess, then added flatly, "Dave has got to live here."

Jess stared at the ground. He knew what Tom was thinking, and he knew Tom was right. This was Dave's fight. His father could take his place, and whether he was killed or not didn't matter. What did matter was that Dave would be a marked man after it was over. He and everyone else would remember. Dave was eighteen and pushing into manhood; it was a time in his life when he either did or didn't fight his own battles. If he didn't, he might never get to the point where he could, no matter his age.

"It's a tight," Tom Bender said, "and if I knew of a way out I'd tell you."

"Dave didn't say anything."

"I figured he wouldn't."

"Dave is all right," Jess nodded. He felt empty inside, yet somehow proud that Dave hadn't come running to him with his troubles. "He figures to go through with it," Jess said, and knew it was true.

Tom Bender put a boot in the stirrup and swung up. Jess saw the closed look on his face, and knew the marshal was hiding his feelings behind it. He had seen and lived through many a

gunfight, and had killed more than one man, but he couldn't help in this tight that Dave was in. He looked at Jess and said, "If it wasn't you, I'd say send the boy out of the county."

"Thanks, Tom."

Tom Bender nodded and reined out of the yard, and Jess walked slowly toward the house. Then he stopped, shook his head and turned back to hitch up.

HE drove faster than necessary, and made an occasional remark to fill what he felt was an awkward silence. He dreaded the thought of Jane's hearing of the trouble. Yet he couldn't have kept her home without a reasonable explanation, and he wasn't sure that he'd wanted to.

But now the closer they got to town, the more dismal he became at the knowledge that she would find out in church. Someone was bound to tell her—and if not, she would gather quickly enough that something was wrong. She had sensed it this morning where he hadn't, and she sensed it now.

So maybe it would be better to prepare her a little, so that it wouldn't hit her all at once. But his throat tightened as he was about to speak, for he was suddenly remembering what she had told Dave last evening. The boy had been dressing to go to the dance, and Jane had teased him about his birthday being on Saturday, not Sunday.

"You were born so close to midnight," she had said, "that we weren't sure at first whether August the 21st or the 22nd was your birth date. The doctor's watch said a minute to, and Jess' two minutes after." She had laughed. "Anyway, that's when he said he heard your first howl. So we decided on the 22nd, and I'll stop teasing now, for tomorrow is really your birthday."

Now Jess stared straight ahead, aware suddenly that Jane was watching him. And he heard himself saying roughly, "If you're still worried, Dave had a little trouble last night. A fistfight. Didn't amount to anything."

"Oh," she said in a low voice. "I knew there was something."

She wanted to say more, he knew, but she was a sensible woman and not one to yell before she was hurt. They passed the first scattered houses and entered the town; as he turned the team south up the short hill to the church, he saw Jake Feeney talking with Tom Bender on the opposite corner. The marshal smiled and removed his hat for Jane, but Jake Feeney looked at the buggy impassively, as if he didn't really see it.

Three or four buggies were parked in the shade of the oaks, and a few men and women were visiting below

Illustration by HOWARD WILLIAMSON



The congregation moved out of the church into the sunshine, and Jess hurried Jane to the buggy. Then a voice stopped them, as he had known it would. It was George McDonald and his wife. Worry showed plainly on their faces, and they stood silent. There was nothing to say now.

the church steps. Jess parked. "We're early," he said as he helped his wife down. She gave him a close look, then smiled and joined the others. And as he tied the team he found himself remembering that it had been on such a sunny morning as this that they brought Dave to be christened. This was Dave's home town, his part of the country; and at the thought Jess turned abruptly and strode down the hill into town.

Main Street was quiet with Sunday, and only one saloon was open this time of morning. A few horses were at the tie rail. Jess did not want a drink, but he headed for the saloon nevertheless, feeling that if the man Whitey was inside he would recognize him. He had no plan, no thought other than to look into the man's face.

Four or five men were at the bar, and Jess placed them at a single glance. Jake Feeney sat alone at a table by the window, absent-mindedly shuffling a deck of cards; he pushed his chair back and wandered over as Jess started to leave.

"Nice day," he offered. He held the door open, waited for Jess to pass him outside. "I heard your boy had a little trouble last night."

Jess looked at him. "Were you in town?"

"Playing poker. But I heard about it."

Jake Feeney was a big, bony man, and he hadn't shaved in a couple of days. He was a rough man, with an assured boldness in his black eyes, and talk was that he ran his outfit with a hard hand. Jess wondered vaguely what the man was doing in town, and then he said, "Did you see this fellow Whitey?"

Jake Feeney smiled faintly, jerked his head at the doorway. "In the saloon yesterday. He was nothing much to look at: soft face, soft voice—you know the type." He grinned. "But take a look in his eyes, and you know he ain't soft."

Jess felt his spine stiffen, and his teeth clenched tight. A helpless fear gripped him. He did know the type. Dave, who had fired a Colt at nothing but fenceposts and tin cans, wouldn't stand a chance with this Whitey.

Jake Feeney leaned his back against an awning post, his hat casting a shadow slantwise across his face. He glanced along the quiet and empty street and said softly, "Might be I could help you out."

"How do you mean that?" Jess said quickly. "What can you do?"

"The boy's as good as dead if he meets Whitey," Jake said. "I guess you know they set it for six o'clock, don't you?"

"How's that?"

Jake Feeney nodded. "Six o'clock. If one or the other don't show up by six, the fight's off. Heard that part of it was Whitey's doings, so he can say your boy is yellow if he don't show."

"He'll be there."

"I figure he will be," Jake Feeney said dryly. Then he lowered his voice and said, "But suppose now Whitey don't show up. Wouldn't that be worth something to you?"

Jess looked at Feeney and said nothing. He could be wrong. "What are you after?" he asked finally.

Jake Feeney scratched his whiskers with his fingernails. "I hear you're not taking up your lease on Honeycomb," he said casually. "And I figure since that's so, you and me could go over to the station and telegraph the owner at Santa Fe. I know he's a friend of yours, so you could put in a word for me about taking over the lease. That way there won't be no misunderstanding."

Jess didn't want to think it, but there it was, and a slow and murderous rage growled within him. Jake Feeney had studied him pretty carefully, and had made his move by hiring a killer to frighten Jess into releasing Honeycomb.

Jess took two steps toward Jake Feeney, grabbed the man's shirtfront and jerked him close. And through

the red haze of his rage he heard the man say, "This is not doing you any good, Murrow. I got a pat hand: Hit me just once, and I turn Whitey loose. Talk about this, and I do the same thing. Make up your mind damn quick."

Jess saw the man's face through the red haze, and it was only with an effort that he lowered his hands and stepped back.

A strip of grass or Dave's life. . . . There was no doubt about his choice, but still it rankled. He heard his own voice as if it were coming from a distance.

"I'll notify Jackson—but not today."

Jake straightened his rumpled shirt, tucked it inside his denims. He breathed hard through his nose. "You'll do it," he said finally. "All right. Could be Whitey leaves town today. But just in case, the boy had better show himself at the bridge."

"He won't know about this deal, and you won't tell him."

"Suit yourself on that score," Jake Feeney said. "But remember one thing I said—talk before or after, and it's all the same. I can always get Whitey or one like him to come back. Is that clear?"

If it was *me*, Jess thought. But it wasn't—it was Dave. He said hoarsely, "Make damn sure your hired gun isn't there." Then he turned and walked rapidly away, feeling less a man than when he had entered town.

THE congregation moved out of the church into the sunlight, and Jess hurried Jane to the buggy. Then a voice stopped them, as he had known it would. It was George McDonald and his wife, a comfortable couple in their forties. Worry showed plainly on their faces, and when they came up George McDonald gave Jess a brief glance and looked away.

"Sorry I didn't get to talk to you before the service, Jess."

There was nothing to talk about, but that wasn't it either, Jess thought. These two were Natalie's folks. For almost two years now they had been pleased that Dave would one day marry their daughter, and he knew they would stand by the boy. But all that could be done had been done, and there was nothing to say.

They stood for a moment, the two ranchers and their wives, surrounded by a little cloud of strained silence. Then Jane said, "Dave is with Natalie." She said it as if to draw comfort from the words, and Jess wondered how much she knew.

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that," Mrs. McDonald said suddenly, and flashed an artificial smile. "Come along, George. Jane, you'll be in town for the meeting Tuesday, won't you?"

There was a fine-drawn look on Jane's face, Jess noticed, but she managed a smile, and a quick, "Of course." Then they turned to get into their buggy.

They were halfway to the ranch when Jane said in a flat voice, "You lied to me. There's more to it than a fist-fight."

"It's going to be all right."

"I heard about it, and it's not going to be all right!"

Her voice was sharp, and there was a tremor in it, and when Jess looked at her he saw her closed eyes, and the way her lips were pressed tight together. Abruptly he stopped the team and turned to her. He gripped her shoulders.

"I said it's going to be all right," he said in a rough voice. "Now stop your worrying."

She looked at him; she searched his eyes, her own moist. Then she took a long breath, as if reassured. "All right, Jess," she said. "I'm sorry."

He picked up the reins and drove on in silence.

IT was dark before Dave got home. Jane was in the kitchen with the dishes, and Jess sat on the porch steps when his son rode in. Jess heard the creaking of leather as the boy unsaddled; a few minutes later his lanky shape appeared slowly out of the darkness. He said, "Nice night," and sat down beside Jess, his elbows on his knees. "I guess you heard about what happened," he said finally.

There was an edge of despair in the boy's voice, Jess noticed. That, and acceptance. He had spent the day with his girl and his thoughts, and it wasn't hard to realize what his thoughts had been about.

"I heard," Jess said.

"Does Mom know?"

"She knows enough."

"Oh, Lord," Dave sighed. "It's a mess." He paused, then added dully, "But it happened, that's all."

Just then the door opened behind them, and Jane came out in her apron and sat down beside her son. No one spoke, and Jess had the queer feeling of drifting in a haze; he felt as he had the time he left home. That was in Ohio, when he was sixteen, and he had left his elderly parents with the feeling that he would never see them again. And he hadn't—nor had he ever forgotten the feeling.

It was there now, and it was there at breakfast, when Dave came in and sat down, his lean face tight-set with inner strain. But still the boy managed to make small talk, as if this were just an ordinary Monday, and when they rose from the table he said, "Well, if we're going to finish replacing that fence wire, we'd better get at it, Dad."

The hazy feeling of Dave's going away on a trip clung to Jess throughout the morning, and Jess wondered at it. Things were going to be all right, weren't they? Then it struck him with sickening force that they would never be all right—he just hadn't thought, that's all. Dave would live, but the day Jake Feeney moved his stock onto Honeycomb, someone was bound to guess the price. Maybe not, though, Jess tried to reassure himself. Maybe it was just because he himself would know.

They came in that afternoon around four; they ate little and spoke less. Every so often Jane would give Jess an anxious look, and when Dave went up to his room, she said, "Jess, I have to be sure. He's going, isn't he?"

"I'll be with him," Jess said. "And nothing'll happen. Believe me, honey."

He went to their bedroom then; he lifted his cartridge belt and holstered gun from its hook in the closet; he hesitated before taking the gun and pushing it inside his trousers. Then he buttoned his leather coat over it, and when he entered the kitchen he found Dave waiting for him. Jane was not in the room.

"Well, I guess it's about time," his son said. Then he added, "There's no need for you to go with me."

"The hell there isn't!" said Jess.

He strode out of the kitchen past his son and headed for the corral.

LARMON'S bridge was a mile from town, a small wooden structure crossing a stream that ran almost dry this time of year. A few cottonwoods lined it at the nearest bend, where it wound round a small hill. A group of men were talking on the town side of the bridge, their horses ground-tied and snatching at the sparse grass. There could be work to spare but some men would always leave it in favor of a fight.

Jess looked at his watch and saw they still had five minutes to wait. Then, as they rode up, his face set into an expressionless mask. The men watched them dismount, and one of them said in a loud voice, "Not here yet."

Jess glanced briefly at Dave and saw the boy's lips twitch, then settle stiffly together again. He looked the crowd over, seeing Tom Bender there; he caught Jake Feeney's eye, the sly wink that at once brought relief and rage.

"Three minutes," somebody said.

Then there was a taut silence. The seconds dragged for Jess, even though he was certain now that nothing would happen. He watched the sun sink, the last slant of its fiery rays across the land.

"One minute!"

The crowd grew restless, and there was grumbling. "Hell, he ain't coming!" a man said. "I got six on the dot."

There was some laughter, a little rough by-play as the men went to mount their horses.

"Glad that's over!" one of them called. "Jess, you and Dave might as well go home."

Jess watched his son draw a shaky breath, and he said, "Well, Dave—" "Here he comes!"

ALL of Jess' muscles tightened. As he turned, he saw the open surprise on Jake Feeney's face, the unspoken protest. Then he saw Whitey riding from the cottonwoods, a slender figure slouched in the saddle.

The crowd drew to one side, and Jess unbuttoned his coat, stepping slowly forward until he was ten feet from Jake Feeney. There he turned slightly and watched Whitey slide down from leather, and when he saw the hired gun's face he knew what had happened.

Whitey had had his deal with Jake Feeney to leave town before six o'clock and he had kept his part of the deal. But he must have looked at himself in a mirror and seen the blue-black swelling on his face, where Dave had hit him. So now the grudge was personal, and Whitey had returned to kill.

The gunman walked smoothly forward. Then he stopped, his gaze on Dave. He said softly, "I hear you've been talking about me, kid."

"Whoever told you that is a damn liar."

There was a little silence. And Jess knew Whitey wouldn't draw first—he would taunt Dave into making a move, for otherwise it would be murder.

It was still the boy's fight, Jess knew. And he knew what he would have to do now. He drew his coat back, exposing the butt of the Colt, and he looked straight and meaningful into Jake Feeney's eyes.

Jake Feeney's eyes dropped to the Colt, then back to Jess' face. His chest rose on a hoarse breath. He took a step back.

"Stay where you are," Jess said, and Jake Feeney stood rooted.

Whitey's gaze shifted briefly to Jess, then again to Dave. He said in that silken voice, "I'm calling you a name, kid."

Jess, looking straight at Jake Feeney, said, "You thought you had a pat hand; if you still think so, play it out."

Jake Feeney said hoarsely, "I'm not in this."

"You're in it up to your dirty neck!"

Fear and hatred rippled across Jake Feeney's face. He had made his plans and they had backfired. Confusion

shook him. He rubbed his side above his own gun, glanced again at Jess' Colt.

Jess didn't take his eyes off the man. He felt Whitey, to his left, sensed tenseness in the man, heard the soft voice saying, "Too much talk! Kid—"

"Feeney!" Jess said harshly. "I guess you know where you stand."

Taut silence. Feeney knew where he stood, Jess decided. He knew that the moment Whitey drew on Dave, Jess would kill him. And Jake Feeney's heavy lips moved slightly before the words came hoarsely. He was looking at Whitey, and saying, "It's after six—"

Now Jess allowed himself a glance at Whitey, seeing the tight little grin on the bruised face, the thin edge of contempt. The gunman turned his gaze back to Dave—and that was when it happened.

Jake Feeney was cornered; and he had to make a move or die. If he pushed Whitey too far, the gunman might talk. And once it was known that Jake Feeney was back of this meeting, he would be driven out of the country.

As Whitey's gaze settled again on Dave, Jake Feeney went for his gun. He wasn't fast, but anyway Whitey wasn't watching him. Even so, he sensed Jake Feeney's move, and had cleared leather by the time the bullet caught him and spun him against the bridge railing. He fell to his knees, saying distinctly, "Why, you dirty—"

Then he choked and sprawled on his face.

Jess said, "Drop it, or get the same." Jake Feeney saw the Colt in Jess' hand. He said hoarsely, "All right," and dropped his gun.

For the first time, Jess looked at Dave. His son stood stiff and straight, staring at Whitey.

Men gathered around the gunman. "Still alive," one of them said. "He's trying to say something—"

Tom Bender put his head close to Whitey's. Finally he straightened and confronted Jake Feeney.

"You get the hell out of this country," he said, "and damn quick. And if you so much as set foot in my town I'll arrest you for murder."

He added, "Any man that will hire another to do his dirty work, is no man. Dave was standing up to Whitey. He is more of a man than you are, or ever will be. . . . Get the hell out of my sight, damn you!"

Jess walked over to Dave, and they looked at each other for a long moment. Then Jess said, "I guess you know now that Feeney was back of this. There was nothing I could do to stop him."

"I understand," Dave said, and they smiled at each other. And Jess knew the understanding went beyond the words they'd spoken.

He said, "I guess we might as well mosey on home. Your mother will be worrying."

They mounted their horses and rode away, and neither man looked back. •



"If it weren't for your spelling, Miss Luca, I don't know what I'd do around here for laughs."

EAU CHAUDE
& FROIDE
SALLE DE BAIN

BEYOND THIS
POINT
OFF LIMITS
AREA

U.S. & BRITISH
FORCES
PM



During World War II,
thousands of men went AWOL and deserted
in Europe. An estimated 10,000
are still men without a country, living
on the edge of poverty—
or in luxury as black-marketeers.

By ARTHUR WINSTON

■ HE WAS WALKING TOWARD THE CORNER of Rue Lacroix, headed for Place Clichy, when he saw them. His first instinct was to run, and he glanced back along the way he'd come. Blocked off—too late to duck. They'd check every place in the block now; that was the way they did it here. He should have kept clear of this quarter.

Around both ends of the camion, crosswise in the street, people began to move. One by one they filtered through the cordon of police as their papers were checked. He fell in at the end of the line, a tall, worried-looking American.

Perhaps the old dodge would work. He felt for the letters to be sure they were safe. How many times had he dreamed of being caught; the long chase over rooftops and through narrow streets, like scenes from an old Hollywood thriller. The end was always the same—waking up drenched with sweat just as he was finally shot or was falling from some high place.



OFF LIMITS FOR LIFE



Deserters can be found everywhere that U.S. troops went during World War II, but the majority are concentrated in southern France and North Africa. And a few are in the Foreign Legion.

As he sweated out the long line, he remembered vividly how it had all started with him.

He remembered the stockade in Lichfield, England, before they had transferred him to Wuersburg, Germany, and the bloody mess that rawhide whips made of a man's back. He heard again the thud of a rifle butt as it was driven into a prisoner's face. He thought of the times he had been kicked unconscious, the last time to wake up in the hospital.

The stockade guards had been told to make it tough, and they did.

"Just don't break too many bones," the commander had ordered.

THE guards had all been court-martialed later, but a lot of good that did him after he'd already broken out. The one that had kicked him had drawn three years and a dishonorable, but at least he was out and back home while his victim was still wandering around Europe. Five of them had made it at one time from the stockade at Wuersburg in July, 1946. Nearly seven years now, ducking and dodging all over the place. Three of the others had been caught. In a few minutes the number might be four. He began to sweat.

He was still listed as a deserter, of course. That's what they'd try him

for, among other things. Things like resisting arrest and breaking out of the stockade. They'd throw the book at him in any case. If he could only get back to the States— All this business of papers and more papers. No matter where you went, they wanted papers.

"Vôtre carte, Monsieur," said the policeman.

As usual, he pretended not to understand. He was the picture of a puzzled and wanting-to-be-agreeable American, and the policeman didn't speak English. At last he let the meaning of their gestures penetrate, and with patience and forbearance for such a strange request, he reached in and took out an envelopé. They were always impressed with letterheads and important-sounding titles, with seals and signatures.

He showed them what he had, what had got him by before. There was a journalist's card—he was proud of that one. It was from an imposingly-titled organization and he had had it made up for just this purpose. It was stamped and had his picture on it, cross-signed by himself and with a seal affixed and a bit of ribbon sticking out.

Then there were the letters, copied after the kind that big corporations use, with the lists of presidents and

vice-presidents down one side. "Any assistance rendered the bearer would be appreciated," in the name of impressive, albeit non-existent organizations. He had others if they insisted, but they didn't insist. He was an "American." They smiled, he smiled; they shook their heads helplessly, shrugged and let him pass.

He didn't look back. He turned right and then left and then right again, losing himself in the maze of streets before he headed for the center of town. Stay in the crowded places, he reminded himself. Stick to the big cafés and stay away from "Off Limits" areas. He still thought of them as off limits even though the war had been over for almost eight years. They were still the same sort of places—dingy and dark and, for a man without correct papers, dangerous.

SUCH scenes occur today all over Europe, where the old, weatherbeaten Off Limits signs are still seen, fading reminders that the U.S. Army once passed that way. Occasionally an American is picked up with false papers, or none at all, and investigation reveals he is a deserter of World War II. Invariably these men think of themselves as AWOL, strange as that may seem to others. Desertion is a charge that has to be proved and something no one admits, even when the truth is obvious.

There is no statute of limitations covering the actions of such men. They can be convicted and sentenced to death if arrested today, although it is the present policy of the Army to reduce such severe sentences, on review, to a term of five years' imprisonment. In July, 1947, a two-year limit was placed on prosecution for desertion, but it applies only to men deserting after that date. During the "period of the emergency" men were listed as deserters after ninety days' AWOL.

All statistics on desertions are considered classified information by the Army and not released for publication, although it is known that the peak figure for AWOLs was fifteen thousand, not all of whom overstayed the ninety-day limit and became deserters. Exactly how many did is not known, but conservative estimates on the total number of deserters in Europe run from twenty to thirty thousand men.

Many were rounded up in a concentrated campaign by the Army before evacuating Europe, although again the figures are secret. Some men turned themselves in so they could face the music and get it over with, and others smuggled their way into the United States. Most of these have been arrested by the FBI, but of the remainder still in Europe, police in-



"There's been quite a shake-up at the office."

spectors there have estimated that only two percent have been captured. If a deserter's papers are in order, he runs little risk from the European police unless his present activities run afoul of the law. Curiously enough, much of the background for this article and many of the contacts with deserters in southern France were made through unofficial help of detectives, who keep a quiet eye on deserters. American police services, of course, no longer have any jurisdiction.

WHAT has caused these men to choose the hunted and haunted existence they are leading today? Or is it a hunted and haunted existence? How have they lived and what do they do? Do they never think longingly of home, of families and friends, some of whom must mourn them as dead?

For several years I was in Europe and the Mediterranean area. Every place I went were indications, not only that "*Kilroy was here*" but that he was still around. Persistent inquiries and the help of journalists, police officials, ex-GI and ex-CID men, among others, make it possible to supply answers to such questions. It should be clear that when a man deserts or goes AWOL, he is making a choice. Consciously or not, he is placing personal desire above his obligations to a duty he has sworn to uphold. He is "looking out for Number One."

The men who deserted were roughly of two types. One type was those men who went into the Army with attitudes of defiance to authority and discipline of any kind. Most of these men already had police records. Desertion from the Army was a continuation of an earlier pattern of conduct. Somewhat different from the criminality inclined were those men who found themselves at some point pressured by circumstances into situations which made them reluctant to return and face the severe wartime penalties. And among all deserters were resentments against real or fancied abuses. Combined with these at times was the clear-cut desire to stay where they had found a personal life more attractive than the one to which they would be returning in the States. The belief that life could be better for them there is alone responsible for well over fifty percent of the deserters still haunting Europe. All but a few of this last group are Negroes.

It is hardly strange that the black market was an irresistible lure to most deserters. Some deserted in order to organize their black-market activities more effectively, and in the war-torn and impoverished towns of Europe and North Africa, it was practically impossible to make money in any way except by means of the black market.

Pete Leschetski was a deserter who went AWOL to work with a French gang; and Pete is still adrift in Europe. For him, as for approximately half of all deserters, his home and the security of his domestic situation was much more important than the Army. The Army came last, if at all.

Pete was from Texas and got his first taste of war during the Normandy invasion where he was made a combat MP. In August, 1944, he was sent to Marseille and there he stayed, patrolling the streets, guarding convoys and picking up AWOLs, until sometime in 1946. Pete was hospitalized for a minor throat infection at the time his outfit began preparations for shipment to the States. He had little to do but think about the voyage home where his wife would be waiting for him. She had been receiving a dependency allotment but she had been working also, and with the money he had put aside there was a nice nest-egg. He had plans for it and was anxious to get going. The war had been over for almost a year and for months he had really been sweating it out.

Pete's plans and speculations were brought to an abrupt end by a "Dear John—" letter from his wife. The reaction was immediate and complete. Pete went AWOL from the hospital the next day.

He lost no time in making contact with a French gang. From his experience as an MP he knew it would be profitable, and from their point of view he was a valuable asset. As a result of two years of guarding and patrolling the city and the Army's supply routes, he knew of possibilities that had been overlooked. He began to cash in on them. With his knowledge of Army methods and procedures and backed by the skill and ingenuity of the French mobsters, Pete showed real talent in his new career. Two out of ten truckloads of Army supplies disappeared before arriving at their destinations. Pete and his friends prospered.

AFTER the departure of the Army, the gang began to specialize in American cars. Pete developed a simple and foolproof method. He would buy an American car and register it correctly with the authorities. Then he would drive around until he had spotted another car of the same make and model. Taking his own car to a garage, he would remove the plates and return to the one he had spotted. When the coast was clear he would remove the plates on the car and attach his own, force open the door and go to work on the ignition. In a few minutes he would drive off, and when stopped he always had the correct papers and the numbers to correspond.

Pete moved about, up and down the coast as well as inland, but Marseille remained as his base of operations until sometime in 1950. He became quite a ladies' man and made his headquarters in the Montmartre, a swanky night club on the edge of the Opera quarter in Marseille. The club was a favorite spot for the better-looking and more successful of the prostitutes of the city. Pete was usually accompanied by one of these ladies of the evening but never for long with the same one.

Pete Leschetski dropped out of sight in southern France in 1950.

The real irony of it for Pete, and others who deserted for similar reasons, lies in the fact that they have cut themselves off from the very things they supposedly cherished by their actions. No matter where he is today, Pete will always ask the question, "Am I safe?" And he will never be sure of the answer.

There are a number of deserters who owe their present security to the protection afforded by foreign gangs. Among those who deserted to cash in on the black market, it is primarily the men who established connections with such gangs who remained uncaught.

IN Europe it is a practice to reward detectives who are responsible for a seizure of contraband with a percentage of its value. To obtain these rich bonuses, detectives want reliable contacts within the underworld. From one gang a detective may learn of the activities of a competing group. The gang benefits at times from the elimination of rivals. Once a good relationship has been established, a detective can count on "his" gang to cut him in on their own successful operations. And, naturally it would be anything but good business for a detective to let his gang be put out of operation.

Frequently another detective will have contacts with the rival gang. It becomes a complicated web of intrigue in which gangs attempt to use the police against one another and the police are informed and able to act in cases of advantage to themselves. In such a picture, an American has a place. He can be used for expediting as well as increasing the scope of the work of a gang by acting as liaison with English and American ships and tourists. He is an asset to both the gangsters and the underpaid police officials. But only as long as he is part of a gang. A lone-wolf American who might, all unknowingly, interfere with the activities of such a gang would quickly be arrested.

The more regulation-minded police see no advantage in arresting these gangster-adopted Americans, although

they may know of their activities. The Americans are not key figures and consequently of small importance to them. When one is picked up by chance in a raid, he is turned over to the U.S. Provost Marshal's office, which is still maintained in Paris.

In the ports of the Mediterranean, such as Tangiers, Oran, Tunis, Algiers, Naples, Genoa, Nice and Marseille as well as in the larger inland cities, deserters have learned how to avoid attracting undue attention. They avoid known hangouts and live in working-class districts where they can take a room with a private family and remain inconspicuous. As a rule the police are thoroughly disliked in such neighborhoods. People are often helpful for no other reason than because they hate the "flics." To most Europeans who have obtained their ideas of America and its people from American films and talkative tourists, the halo of "American" about such men makes for friendliness.

Men who went AWOL in the States often did so because of financial or legal troubles at home. Sometimes it was due to concern for the health of parents or dependents, perhaps a combination of such reasons. Once overseas, however, it was the threat to the emotional security of such men that triggered them into action. In this respect, Tony Perrone resembled Pete Leschetski. Tony was already a racket-wise young man with a New York police record when he came into the Army. Raised in the Italian section of Brooklyn, notorious for its rackets and gangsters, Tony had always known that a man's first responsibility was to look out for himself, first, last and all the time.

TONY was twenty-two and had just been married when he was inducted. The Army seemed to threaten his plans for a fine new home for himself and his bride and he resented it accordingly. But that did not last long. Tony was energetic and quick to act with a highly developed skill at cards and dice. The Army proved to be a rich and rewarding place for one of his talents. It was worth the bother of abiding by regulations to be in on it—temporarily at least.

Tony had gambled and black-marketed his way across Africa and put away several thousand dollars in his postwar kitty at home, all in his wife's name, by the time his outfit came to rest near Naples early in 1944. Life in Naples was proving very pleasant—and profitable—when letters from his wife convinced him that something was wrong at home.

Tony bought some seaman's papers and had them worked on until he was sure they would get him by. Then he arranged to have a messman from

one of the Liberty ships in the harbor delayed so he would miss his ship. Tony put on civilian clothes and went to the ship just before it pulled out. With the papers and a story of having missed his own ship, he persuaded the Captain to give him the messman's job.

Tony had been right about his wife. No doubt it increased his resentment against the Army to learn that it was a young lieutenant in the Air Corps who had taken over at home. Tony made his wife turn over the money he had saved, and headed back for Italy.

Less than two months from the date of going AWOL, Tony was back in Naples, the money he had accumulated folded into a money-belt around his waist. It was a fortune, in war-torn Italy, especially since it was in American dollars. He contacted a couple of the men in his outfit and began to work with the Italian black market once more.

Tony spoke Italian, and he was an effective and successful black-market gambler. He maintained contact with his own outfit until it left for the invasion of France. Through the months that followed and until the end of the war, Tony dug in where he was. Through the help of a girl with whom he finally settled down, Tony changed his name and obtained papers to prove his status. He invested his money in a large bar and several other pieces of property and became a legitimate "business man."

Now Tony is thirty-three years old and putting on weight. He is the father of three children and appears undisturbed about having burned his bridges behind him. He likes to talk to Americans, especially if they come from New York or Brooklyn. Life for him, however, is an immediate prospect of home and business and no matter in what direction it might lead him, Tony will always be "looking out for Number One." To go AWOL and make a two-way trip of the Atlantic at the height of the war, however, was something that required considerable ingenuity. It is an example of the impossible odds some men will tackle when they feel a threat to their own special dreams of domestic bliss.

In the Army, as in any large group of Americans, people of many national origins can be found. Some men with roots in European countries found themselves there during the course of the war. It was not too difficult for such men to fit themselves into some community and blend into the social landscape. For most men, however, it was not so simple.

Wandering about Europe and North Africa today, on the fringes of the law or completely outside it, there are many deserters who seem to be

victims of circumstance. They are men who were reluctant to return when faced with the fact that they were AWOL and due for punishment. They hesitated, stayed on until they were listed as deserters and life had closed in about them.

Inquiries for any reason or from no matter what source, are regarded with unalloyed suspicion among AWOLs. Some have created fictional accounts to explain their presence that are more convincing than the facts themselves. The general evasiveness, about their present means of livelihood, of those tied in with rackets is easy to understand. In such cases, however, there are always other ways of learning the facts. Examining some of the stories, a pattern emerges. It is a pattern of elaborate precautions to evade arrest and usually executed with the help of others.

EVEN among deserters, there is a distinction between that caused by going AWOL and "misbehavior in the face of the enemy," though it is anything but clear. Some confusion lies in the fact that the charges a man might face depended as much on the way he was regarded by his company commander as it did on what he had done. At times there was a question of divisional policy involved as well, and it became apparent that in punishing offenders a considerable variation existed from one division to another for the same offense. Such uncertainty contributed to the reluctance of some men to return and face the charges against them.

Eddie Tomasi is one of the men who hesitated too long. Eddie was stationed near Oran in the spring of 1943. In Oran, Eddie had discovered Eugénie, a woman separated from her husband. They had found out quickly enough that each had something the other wanted. After seeing her one evening, he missed his truck back to camp. He stayed with her that night and caught a truck the next day, only to find that his outfit had moved on. Eddie was AWOL.

He located his company through his buddy's girl friend, who knew Eugénie. Eddie had had several run-ins with his C.O. but up to that moment had stayed out of serious trouble. He knew he would get from his C.O. the limit the regulations allowed, so before going back he took Eugénie to Algiers on a going-away party. It would help to make up for the restrictions he felt coming.

In Algiers they met Eugénie's husband accompanied by another Frenchman, on the street, and a scene took place. The husband did not like Americans and objected to his wife's being seen with one. A fight took place; Eddie was left lying in the gut-

ter; when he came to, Eugénie was gone. He grabbed the next train back to Oran to find her. He liked Eugénie and the fight had convinced him of the truth of things she had told him about her husband's brutality, the reason for their separation.

In Oran, Eddie found Eugénie and her husband at her apartment. She looked as if she had been through a meat-grinder and Eddie promptly lost his head. He attacked the Frenchman, who grabbed a wine bottle and smashed off the base. With the jagged end he tried to reach Eddie's face.

Eugénie grabbed an andiron from the fireplace and brought it down with all her strength on her husband's head and the fight was over. The man's head was split open—and Eddie saw they had a corpse on their hands. How could he explain a killing like this to an Army court-martial? If he told the truth, what about Eugénie, who had only been trying to save him?

They fled to Algiers where they stayed with friends of Eugénie until Eddie's money ran out. He had been a trucker and he knew many of the men hauling supplies and equipment through Algiers. Counting on this, he and Eugénie worked out a scheme.

Eugénie went to see some of the local merchants, getting lists of things they would like to buy, almost as if she were a saleswoman. Eddie gave the lists to his friends and they started bringing in whatever they could get. In addition they had items too big or awkward to handle themselves and through him they found a way to dispose of many things. Their scheme worked fine and Eddie and Eugénie made a good team. It was a profitable arrangement for everyone but the U.S. Army and the American taxpayers.

Money was coming in wonderfully, when Eddie learned that Eugénie's husband was not dead after all. This was a great relief but the fact remained that he was by now more than a month AWOL. Using all the old familiar arguments women have always used to keep their men, Eugénie persuaded him to stay awhile. Eddie listened, hesitated and postponed deciding.

The Army began to shift farther east and they followed along in its wake, finally arriving in Tunis. They stayed in Tunis for several months and came back to Algiers only when it was not profitable to remain any longer. In Algiers there was always the risk of encountering Eugénie's husband again. He would know that Eddie was AWOL; so they decided to settle in Tangiers.

They are still in Tangiers today. Every American who has been to

Tangiers in recent years for any length of time has probably talked with Eddie without knowing it. For a sizable sum, and with Eugénie to engineer the deal, Eddie has papers that are "in order." He has learned French and enough Spanish to get by. He plays the money market, exchanging any currency for any other, and always at a small profit. Eddie has his fingers in several pies, the chief item being American cigarettes. Acting as a go-between, he arranges matters for some of the European gangsters and black-marketeers. From Tangiers the cigarettes go to all the black markets of Europe, usually by way of France and Italy.

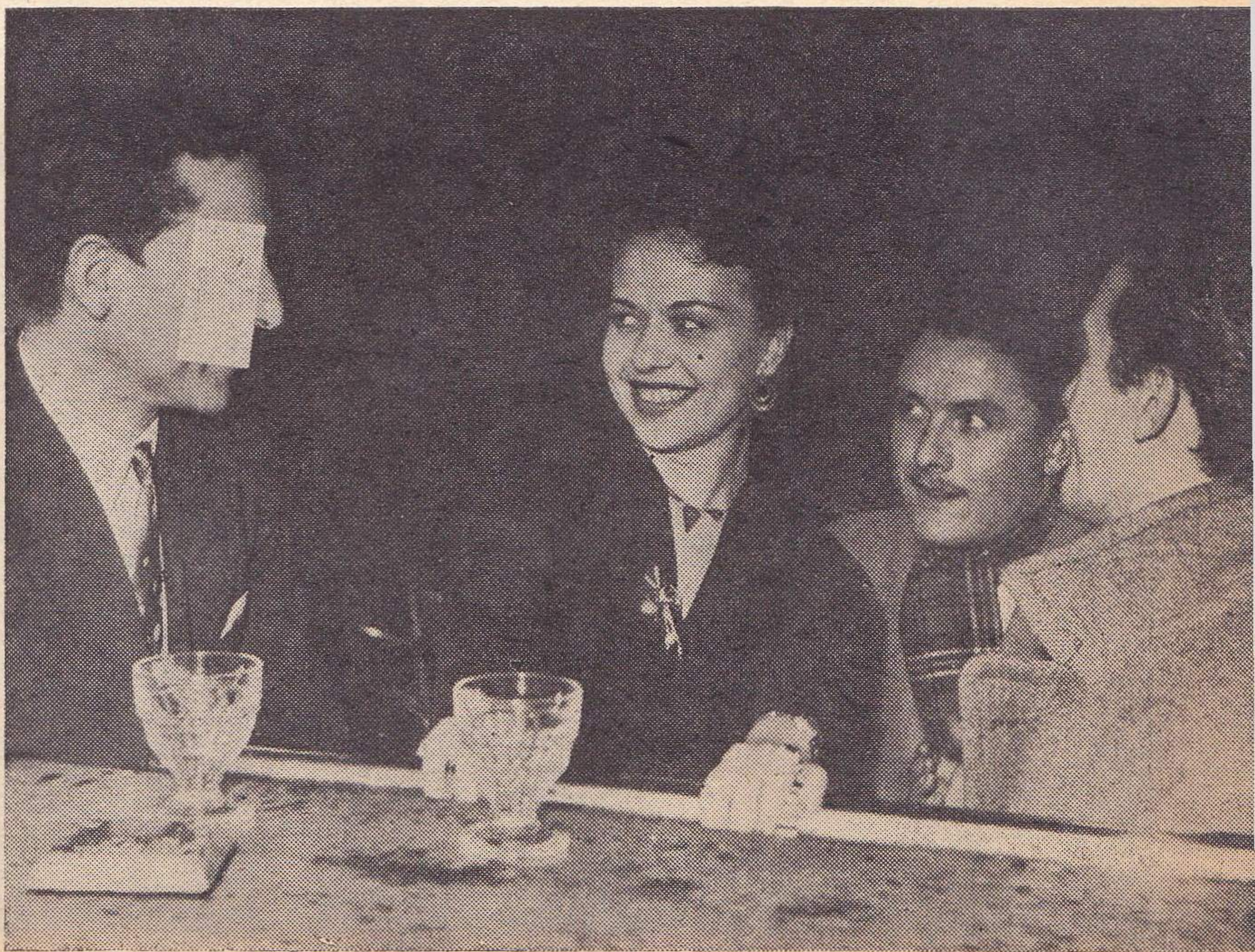
Eddie wonders occasionally what would happen if he were to turn himself in, but this is purely speculation for he is attached to Eugénie and likes it in Tangiers. Thanks in good measure to Eugénie, Eddie is where he is—and also thanks to her, he will probably remain there, exiled from home and country by his own indecisiveness. Eddie's story has all of the things found in varying degrees or combinations in hundreds of cases—a woman, finding himself AWOL, resentment at his C.O. and a reluctance to face punishment. Gradually, Eddie has adjusted to an existence different than any he could ever have imagined for himself before being inducted in the Army. Few men would find it logical to become a racketeer because they happened to miss the bus home after a day in the city. Yet essentially that is Eddie's story today, that of a man who has gone Off Limits for life be-

cause he missed the truck back to camp.

Going AWOL was regarded as irresponsible conduct among the troops while still in the States. This feeling changed once they were overseas. It is especially noticeable among the men who were in combat. For the infantry at the front there was little to look forward to except to being killed, being wounded, cracking up or going AWOL. They did not have the assurance some groups received of being rotated or relieved after definite periods of combat. There was a point beyond which men could not stand the strain of combat, and AWOLs increased in proportion to the number of days of unrelieved action. Men began to resent the privileges of others; even the POWs were envied. At least they knew they were going to remain alive.

War is brutal and it means the killing of men by men. The men who became skilled at killing other men and thus remained alive, often found that those in the rear areas avoided them. They were "killers" and it was true that some men did not quickly readjust to a life where it was no longer a matter of kill or be killed. But the resentment at their treatment back of the lines was sometimes acute.

When such men went AWOL they felt the world was against them, and they were against the world. They preyed on the world at large, hiding in the dingy back streets of big cities, living with prostitutes and restrained by nothing and no one in their attempts to obtain money—money with



One American deserter was caught in a raid on this bar. Wanted men seldom frequent such places in this area. Posed by a friend of one of the men in this article.

which to buy liquor, women and good food, the things they had done without while others had enjoyed life. Such men had to be rounded up quickly. There were few who survived the concentrated attention of the Army and the foreign police services.

For some deserters their thefts from the Army were the sole means of livelihood. Once the Army had withdrawn from Europe, they could not continue for long. Rather than face the charges they knew were being held against them, they joined the French Foreign Legion. Enlistments in the Legion are for five years but no man is released to another country's demand for any charge less than murder. The majority of these desperate Americans giving allegiance today to the flag of France are fighting and dying in Indo-China. They are comrades-in-arms of tens of thousands of the German troops they had recently been trying to kill.

The desertion by these men has taken them out of one army and into another where they fight for "glory"—and six cents a day. They are safe from prosecution but they are still soldiers in an army and it is unlikely any of these men will ever see America again. They have gone Off Limits with a vengeance.

Women were often the principal motive for men to desert. Army routine and red tape which threatened to prevent a marriage was frequently the cause of men going AWOL. In the case of Bob Elliot it seems to have been the principal one.

Bob Elliot met and fell in love with Paulette, an extremely attractive brunette, in September, 1944, in Marseille. It was the middle of January when Bob applied to the Army for permission to marry. He was in the Port Battalion and anticipated a lengthy stay right where he was. Before the two-months waiting period was up, however, he found himself transferred to an Infantry Replacement Center at Compiègne.

Out of the fifteen men sent along with him to the center, nine were men who had applied for official permission to marry.

"The C.O. was an ex-schoolteacher," explains Bob. "One of those do-it-for-your-own-good bastards. And he sure did it to us!"

For two months Bob trained for the infantry and brooded over the rough deal he was getting. Then he received a letter from Paulette informing him that she was pregnant.

"I sure as hell wasn't going to get shipped off to the front without seeing Paulette once more," Bob said later. "I took off for Marseille, figuring to come back in a few days."

He arrived to find that Paulette was sick and his "few days" extended into a week, then into several weeks. The men with whom he had trained for the infantry were shipped to the front, and still he remained with Paulette. He managed to get by in his uniform by forging passes from his old outfit. In order to get money he arranged with a friend in the port headquarters to get passes that would permit him to enter and leave the port area at any

time. He went aboard ships in the port, buying cigarettes, food and sometimes clothing, which he peddled on the black market.

The weeks passed and he kept putting off the unpleasant duty of turning himself in. The routine he had established for himself became normal and his life adjusted to the tasks of meeting expenses and caring for Paulette. A strong reason for his reluctance to return to the Army was the fact that he had been AWOL four times in the past two years. A fifth time meant a general court-martial. His situation was even more serious, in his opinion, because the group he had left had been sent on to the front. The penalty was likely to be a long time in the stockade and then prison. He couldn't bring himself to take it on deliberately when that also meant leaving Paulette.

He decided to wait until the child was born. Life went on in much the same pattern. The war came to an end in Europe that summer and he and Paulette moved out to the suburbs, away from the MPs and the U.S. Army. The child was born in October and without ever having decided it at any one point, Bob knew he was going to stay there. He wasn't going back if he could help it. But how to make a living? And how could he be sure he would be safe? Questions like that disturb the thoughts of all deserters but for Bob they were personal and immediate.

Through a cousin of Paulette's who owned a little photographic studio, a solution appeared feasible at last. In the studio there were photostatic copies of discharges of men who had been released by the Army to enable them to take on civilian status with some other branch of the service. Bob found one belonging to a man who had already left Marseille whose weight and height were approximately his own. The coloration was close enough not to cause question, and the photographer made a dozen copies of it for Bob.

Armed with his copies, Bob went to the French for an identity card. As a soldier who had assisted in the liberation of France, he was entitled to a card that was good for ten years. It came through without any trouble. He was set.

As the Army pulled out of Marseille, Bob began casting about in the furniture line for work he could do. He'd had some experience in it before the war and after considerable trial and error he worked out a routine which he still follows. He visits antique shops, auctions and sales, buying items he knows can be sold. Nowadays he finds out in advance what people want and what they will pay. He carries a list with him of the things people



"Eddie Tomasi" tries to reassure Eugénie that all this talk and photographing doesn't mean anything. Eddie frequently uses this bar as a place to do his business.

have asked for and makes the rounds of the auction warehouses, selecting things to bid on later and making notes on things available to interest still other customers. Today he has a camion and makes deliveries, for which he also charges a fee. He is always busy and is making a decent living. He worries at times that someone may turn up his past but is more concerned with what may happen when he applies for a renewal of his identity card. For that he still has several years to wait.

Perhaps Bob really deserted because he was afraid of getting killed or wounded in the war. He alone knows the answer to that but if that was his intention, he has succeeded. He is alive and even if the Army had permitted his marriage instead of trying to block it, the outcome probably would have been much the same. Paulette was the important thing to Bob and, Army or no Army, he was going to stay with her.

NEGROES make up more than half of all the deserters still in Europe. They had different motives than most GIs for their actions, and the fact that very few Negro deserters were men with previous records with the police or in the Army, a sharp contrast with white AWOLs, serves to underline the difference in motivation.

The question of Negroes in the U.S. Army is a special one in many respects. Already as a result of the experiences of World War II, many changes have been made toward integrating Americans into the Army, regardless of color. For Negroes overseas during the war, however, and especially men from the Deep South, the experience of being accepted wherever they wished to go made a deep impression. After living in a world where color was no bar to social equality, the prospect of returning to the lives they had known in the United States became a strong threat to some Negroes. The warmth and generosity with which they responded to the treatment accorded them overseas made for firm friendships with the people they met. This, combined with the fact that their color served as an advantage in escaping detection, caused a disproportionate number of Negroes to desert.

In African towns, Negroes who chose to remain had no difficulty in disappearing. In Europe and especially in France there were also native groups from the French colonies among whom they could remain quite inconspicuous. The fact of their color was a primary factor in all but a few cases of Negro deserters. Individual details differed but the large common denominators were the same

and added up to a choice on their part to remain overseas.

Jeff Brown, a Negro youth from South Carolina, is a deserter in southern France today, who wouldn't come back if he could. Jeff was only eighteen when inducted into the Army. He was in England for several months, standing by for the Normandy invasion. He made friends with English people and fell for an English girl. He was well received by the girl's family, a novel experience and one which changed a lot of things for Jeff. For the first time in his life he realized the full significance which discrimination had had on his life and the lives of those he knew.

Jeff arrived with his all-Negro outfit to load and unload the ships in Marseille on Thanksgiving Day, 1944. He tried to learn French and liked France even better than England. He explored the towns of southern France and it was in a town back from the coast beyond Toulon that he met Marie-Rose. She and her mother ran a café and he came back frequently to see them.

One Saturday, Marie-Rose came to Marseille to do some shopping and to be with Jeff. He had taken her to a bar where his friends sometimes gathered, to introduce her to them, when the place was raided. The bar was off the lobby of a hotel which was situated in an Off Limits area. The rooms in the hotel above were used by prostitutes, and Jeff knew it, but his regrets came too late.

Jeff had really fallen in love with Marie-Rose, a rather modest and quite strait-laced girl. As the MPs hustled him outside during the raid, Jeff was furious at the indignity of this happening in front of Marie-Rose but he made no protest. Just then an MP came down the stairs from the rooms above, carrying some stolen Army gear. It was marked, of course, and it came from Jeff's outfit. The MP accused Jeff of bringing it there. As luck would have it, the MP was from the South and when Jeff denied any knowledge of the stolen gear, the MP let loose with the kind of Southern talk Jeff had once been used to.

The way Jeff was feeling just then, it was as if someone had spit in his face. But the gear was marked and undeniably it came from his outfit. He could see trouble ahead with that Southern MP. He worried then, but he worried so quickly that his break to get away from the MPs was successful.

He broke away and worked his way around to where he could watch the hotel; when the MPs left, he picked up Marie-Rose and took her to the station. That night Jeff made up his mind. If Marie-Rose would help him he would get lost over here in France.

America was home, but he had only one life to live and one lifetime in which to live it. Some day a Negro would be able to live like a human being in America, but he could do it right now, in France, and what he could make for himself here would depend on him and not his color.

Jeff took off the next morning and is still gone. There was a need for a man in the family, and today Jeff is the man. There is a boy of four and another child on the way. Jeff wrote his folks to be sure they wouldn't be asking questions from the other end. When asked why he went AWOL when his only offense was in being off limits, Jeff says:

"Sometimes a man gets filled up to where one more drop makes him spill over. That Southern MP was the drop—and I had to go. If I'd stayed the way I was feeling, I'd have been in trouble from there on out."

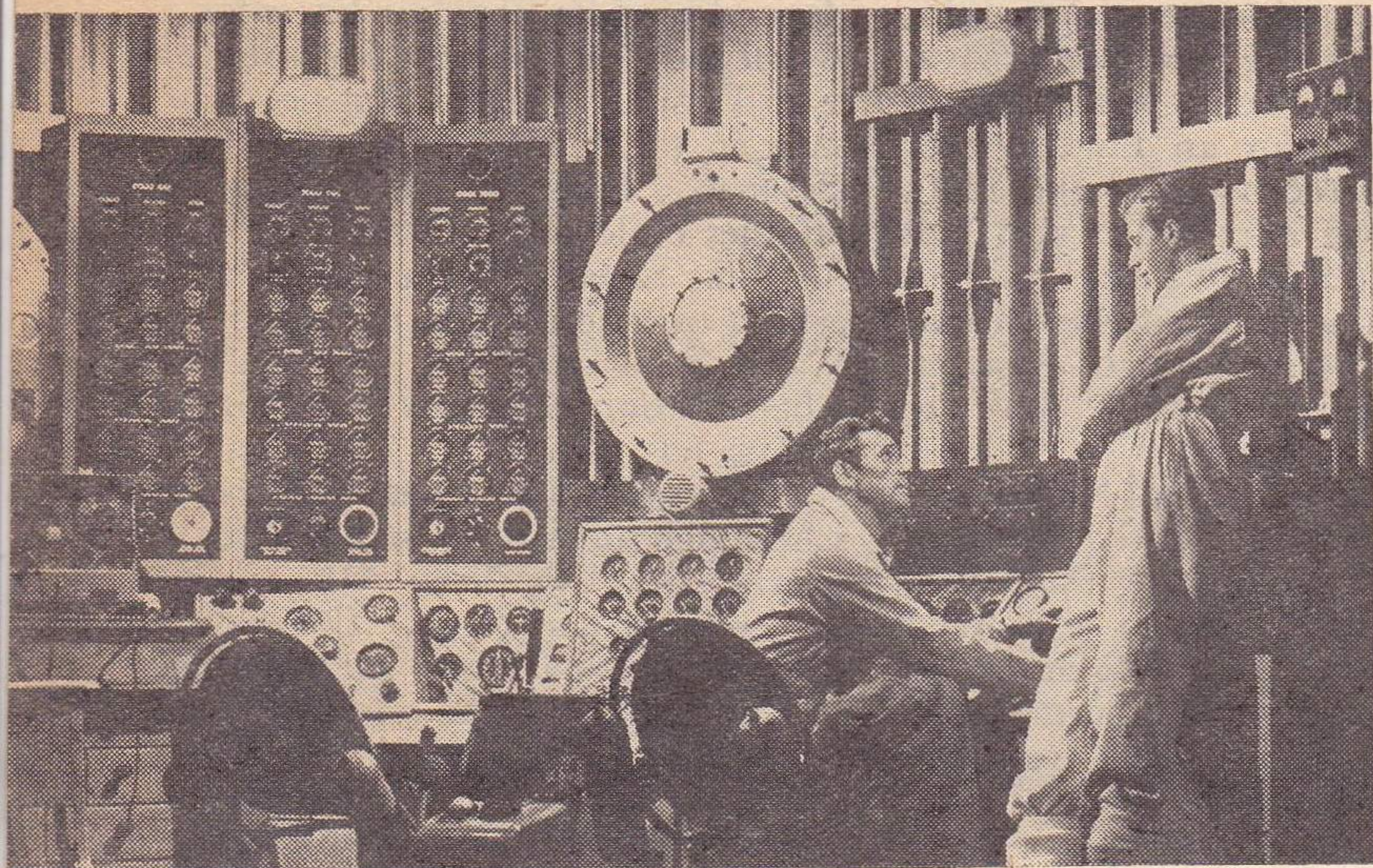
In response to the question of ever returning to America, Jeff replied:

"Not me—not now. I've got me a home right here. I'd rather be here just like this, helping run this little café, than back home with a college education and looking for a job as a shoeshine boy."

In spite of his remarks, however, Jeff follows the French press eagerly for news of America and especially of Negro personalities such as Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis.

Sometimes on Sundays Jeff and his family go for a visit to relatives of Marie-Rose in a neighboring town. One uncle is a functionary in the city government, and it was he who helped Jeff get his papers straightened out as soon as he was actually married to Marie-Rose. There always seems to be a way in Europe, sometimes legal and sometimes not, but it has worked for Jeff.

AFTER listening to many stories of deserters, black and white alike, some with comparatively secure status at the moment and others just drifting, one finds a sadness and a sameness about them. The years have hurried past, taking their youth with them. The dark clouds of danger and insecurity have dimmed and blacked out the once bright hopes of most of them. Some continue to hope, searching for a break, for security, for roots that have been severed. The numbers dwindle as some join the Legion, a few are arrested, some return home and still others purchase citizenship in one or another South American republic. They are faced with the fact that the world they knew goes on without them. They are alone in a way only they can know, exiled and outcast Americans who share only the dubious distinction of having placed themselves Off Limits for life. •



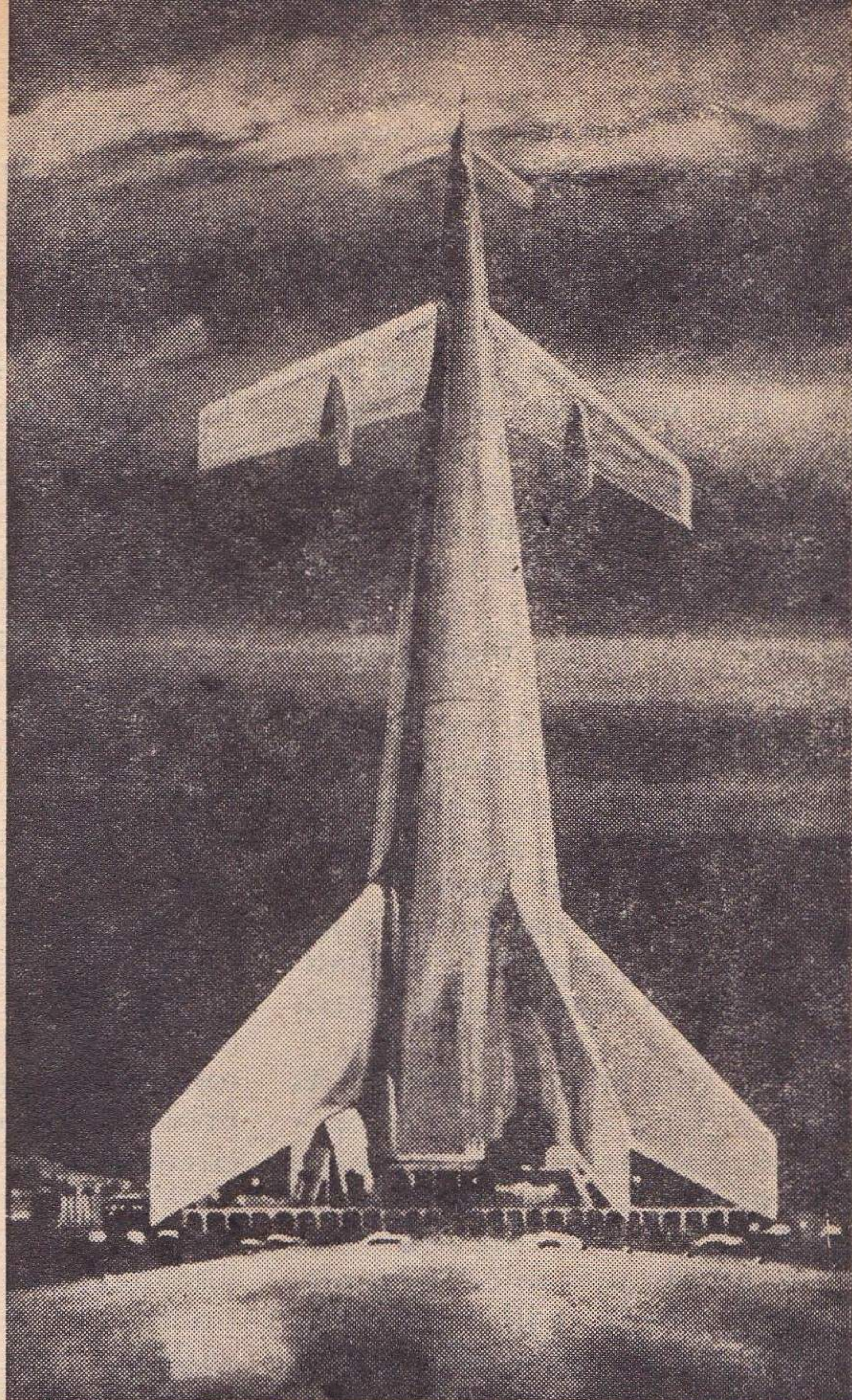
Adapted by **NELSON BOND**

*from the forthcoming
Lippert Pictures release—SPACEWAYS.
Screenplay by Paul Tabori
and Richard Landau,
freely adapted from the radio play
by Charles Eric Maine.
Filmed in England
by Exclusive Films.*

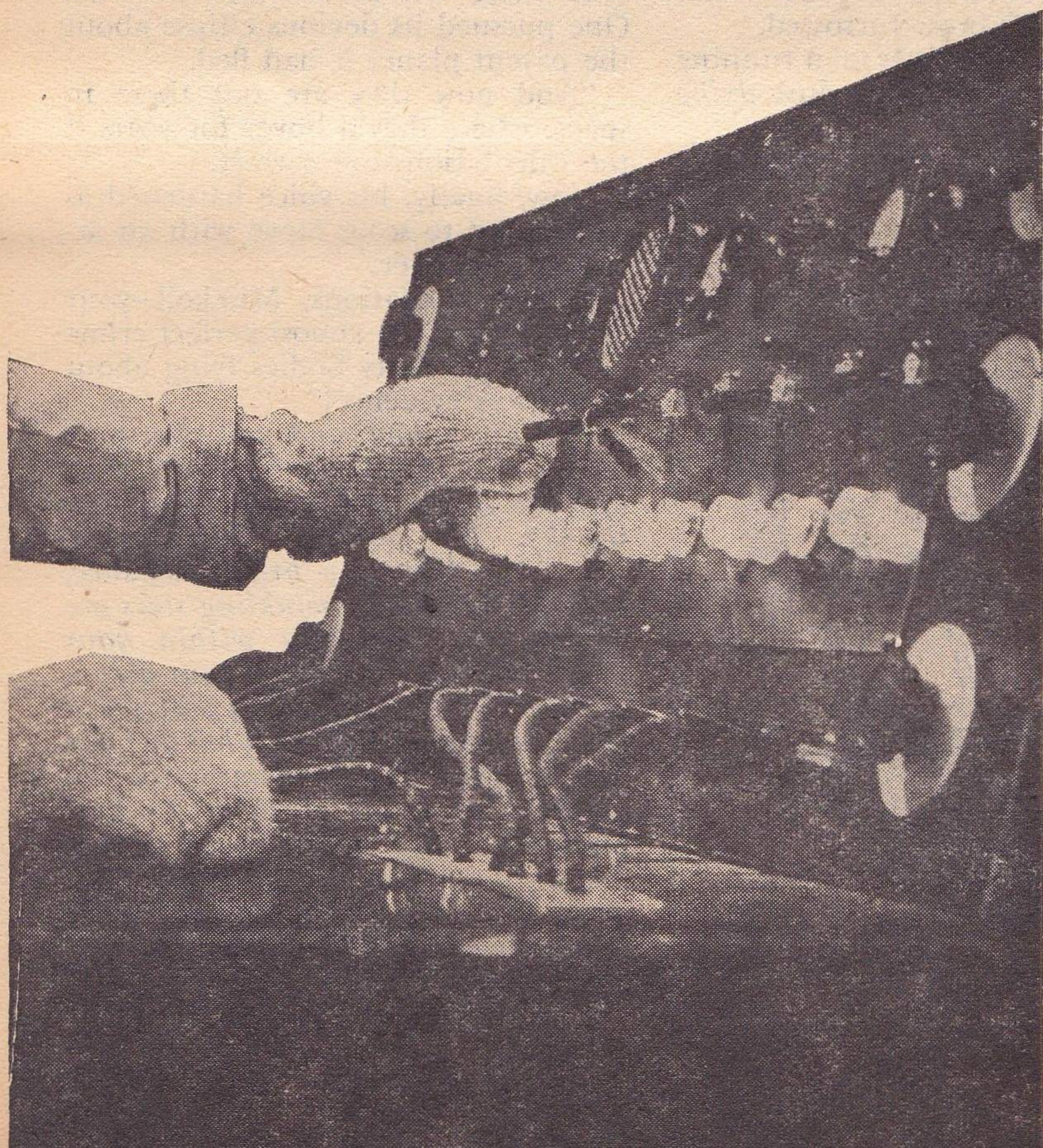


Slaves in white overalls,
that's what his wife called them.

And maybe she was right.
A man will sacrifice anything
to make a dream come true.



SPACEWAYS



Seven successful test flights . . . then a failure. An all-too-brief excursion out of the world of cold, precision fact into the Neverland of bright romance . . . then disillusion. A life's work built on confidence and trust . . . then this . . .

■ STEVE MITCHELL stared with hot, impatient eyes at the pudgy man pacing the floor before him. Across the room Keppler was watching, too, and Colonel Daniels at the desk beside him. Both men seemed nervous, worried, and unhappy. Steve's question, shattering the silence, was like a knifeblade grating on coarse stone.

"You wanted to question me about the launching of A.S. One, Major Smith?"

"That," nodded the Intelligence officer, "and other things." He continued to pace the floor. "But let us begin with the failure of the artificial satellite experiment—"

"Excuse me, sir," said Steve. "The test was not a complete failure. It might more accurately be called a

modified success. A.S. One was a three-stage rocket, which is to say three separate compartments carried its total fuel supply. The first, or tail section, provided fuel for the takeoff. The second stage carried it to forty miles' altitude, then dropped off like the first. The nose section, or spaceship proper, was designed to proceed under the power of its own motors, reaching a speed of 18,468 miles per hour at an altitude of 63.3 miles beyond earth."

"And did A.S. One's flight follow this pattern?"

"Yes. Perfectly. But there was one final step. At an altitude of 1,075 miles a mechanism in the third stage should have turned on automatically for 15 seconds. This would have given the rocket one final booster kick settling it into a perpetual 'free-fall' orbit in which it would circle earth indefinitely.

"Somehow this failed to work. As a result, A.S. One is merely a *temporary* satellite, swinging in an erratic elliptical orbit that varies between 63 and 1,075 miles. In this orbit the satellite is highly unstable. Cumulative friction losses will eventually force it back to earth in a few years. To this extent, and to this extent only, the launching was a failure."

The Intelligence officer stopped pacing, stood for a moment as if collecting his thoughts, then nodded.

"Thank you, Dr. Mitchell. That is very clearly put. Now— You were the last man to enter the rocket before takeoff, is that correct?"

"I believe so. Three hours before takeoff I made my final check of the radar installations and fuel tanks."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"And you secured the airlock when you left?" At Steve's nod Smith persisted, "Did anyone else have access to the inside of the rocket after that?"

Steve frowned. "Well, the airlock *could* have been opened again. But when I left I sealed it for spaceflight. To break that seal would be a long and tedious operation."

"I see," said Smith very softly. "I see." Briefly he balanced on his surprisingly small feet: round gnome of a man, short, chubby, imperturbable, but feral in his smooth placidity. He turned and moved abruptly to a wall-chart: a sectional diagram of the ill-fated Artificial Satellite One.

"I call your attention to the fuel tanks in the nose section of this rocket. They hold—"

"About nine tons. To be exact—"

"That is close enough. Now, Dr. Mitchell—am I correctly informed that the loss of two, or possibly three, tons of fuel from these tanks would prevent the rocket from attaining its circular orbit?"

"Very likely," nodded Mitchell. "If there were not sufficient fuel for the fifteen-second booster kick that I mentioned—" He dismissed the query with a fretful gesture. "But your question is meaningless. I checked the tanks myself. There was absolutely no possibility of any such loss."

It was as if the chubby man had been waiting for this answer. The round lines of his jowls hardened.

"No accidental possibility, that is," purred Smith.

Behind the desk Keppler stirred, opened his lips as if to speak, closed them again as Daniels pressed his arm. Mitchell's brow furrowed.

"Major, there's a little man running around inside your brain just *dying*

to say something. Why don't you let him talk?"

"Very well," nodded Smith. He said calmly, without malice, "He suggests, Dr. Mitchell, that you opened those valves and let two or three tons of fuel escape through the pump line. Is he right?"

"You mean," flared Steve, "that I deliberately sabotaged the launching of A.S. One? Why, damn you, Smith—"

Smith's words halted him halfway out of his chair.

"No, Mitchell. That is not exactly what I mean."

"Then what—"

"My little man," said Smith quietly, "has another theory. A rather ugly one. He thinks your purpose was—to conceal murder!"

Keppler winced visibly. Daniels frowned. "Major," he said gravely, "that's a very serious accusation."

"Murder," said Smith, "is a very serious crime."

Steve found his voice at last—a bleak voice, dark and heavy with distaste. "A lovely thought," he said. "Such a *cute* little fellow!"

"Cute," nodded Smith urbanely, "but shrewd. Do you want to hear what else he believes, Dr. Mitchell? It is this. That you trapped your wife and Phillip Crenshaw together, killed them, hid their bodies in your home, and when dusk fell took them to the launching site, where you partially drained the nose tanks, stuffed the two bodies inside, and—"

He motioned toward the window, up and out to the void wherein—somewhere—the mote which was A.S. One pursued its devious ellipse about the parent planet it had fled.

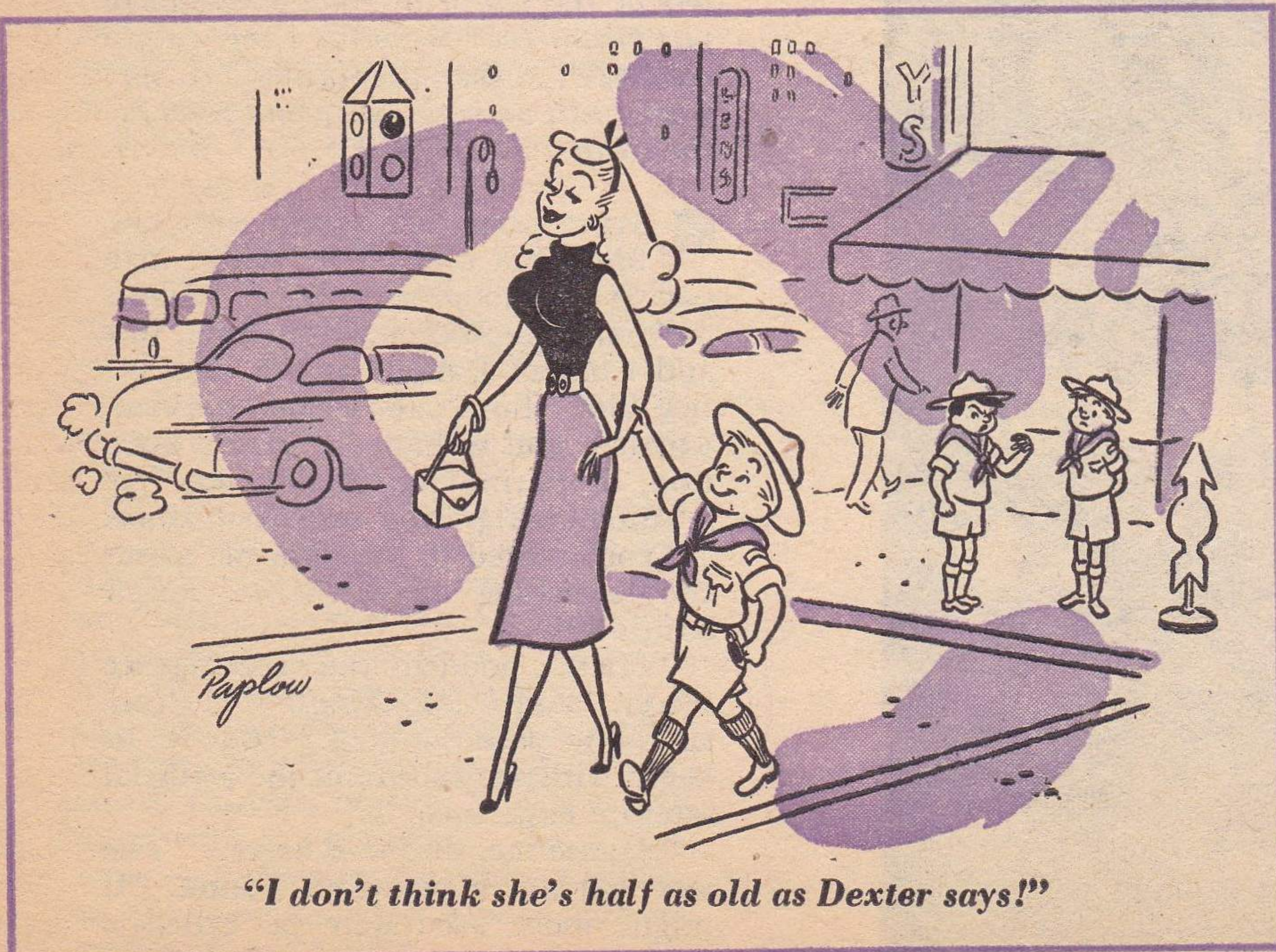
"And now they are out there in space, where they'll hover for years if the calculations are correct."

Now, finally, his voice hardened as he whirled to score Steve with an accusing forefinger.

"Your calculations, Mitchell—your blueprint for the almost-perfect crime . . . with no nasty bodies lying about to serve as evidence!"

You are young, and you cherish a dream. At night when you lift your eyes you gaze with hungry yearning to the sky. The moon is a shining challenge, the planets a bright defiance, and the tremulous twinkling stars are a tiny diamond pain within your heart. So you dream, and your dream is this: that one day Man will reach those beckoning lights. That one day Man will rise in a thrumming roar on a white-hot pillar of flame to hurl himself through airless space to that moon, those planets, the stars; will grope for them and reach them—will reach them . . . and return. One day. Some man.

Perhaps yourself . . .



"I don't think she's half as old as Dexter says!"

For engineer Steve Mitchell, American rocket expert on loan to the British Government's space-station research project, that dream had been a decade in gestation. It came to birth the day they launched Mark VII—seventh in Deanfield Laboratory's series of experimental rockets.

As Steve, in a van with Crenshaw and Andrews, had raced to the site of its landing—smugly within the thirty-mile radius predicted by Lisa Frank—he felt this latest test had been a breath-taking success.

When they had salvaged the precious cargo from its nose: the films that would show them earth from a height of plus three hundred miles; the gauges that would enable Toby Andrews to measure the efficiency of his new superfuel; the mice from whose life-and-death adventure Phil Crenshaw might foretell the hazards to mankind in the uncharted deserts of space; the meters from which Steve could discern the bugs in his latest rocket design . . . when they had reclaimed and interpreted this cargo, Steve had faith that no longer could the Defense Council refuse them the approval they demanded.

And that he was right was proven when, that night, Dr. Keppler, head of the satellite project, summoned a special meeting of his official family.

THE old man beamed with pride on those whom in his heart he held to be almost as much his children as his aides: Chief Engineer Steve Mitchell, who had brought his young bride and brilliant brain three thousand miles across the sea to serve a sister nation. Phillip Crenshaw, biologist, whose pose of languid insouciance thinly veneered a keen intellect and sharply probing mind. Toby Andrews, whose infectious gayety bubbled and frothed good fellowship into the staff exactly as the fuel he had invented infused new vigor to the motors that it fed. Lisa Frank, mathematician, who possessed the gem-rare gift of being able to work with men and still remain a woman; whose quick mind solved abstruse formulæ with the precision of a machine, yet who could thrill in wonder at the incommensurable perfection of a rose.

These, and others. Colonel Daniels, the Security officer, and Mike Callahan, shop foreman. Wilson, McEwen. The staff wives: Mrs. Daniels, Vanessa Mitchell. The old man gazed with fondness on them all.

"You have worked like Trojans to achieve this," Keppler said. "You have shouldered cheerfully the long hours, the discomfort, the isolation, the strict security regulations. I wish I could tell you now all this has ended. But we have only reached the first milepost on our long road."

He paused briefly, glanced at his uniformed companion, then drew a deep breath and said triumphantly:

"Tonight I am happy to announce that following an exhaustive study of our efforts, General Hays has authorized us to proceed at once with the building of A.S. One!"

Then for a moment all was tumult and confusion, as scientists were children in their sheer joy. Drinks were poured, toasts lifted. Voices rose in the babble of a dozen queries raised, a hundred answers offered. But one disturbance marred Steve Mitchell's pure delight. That was when Vanessa joined the group of which he was a part, by her strained presence interrupting Keppler, who paused in polite query. Vanessa smiled a taut thin-lipped smile.

"Have I interrupted the masterminds? Forgive me. I only wanted to tell my husband that I have a headache, and I think I'd better go home. That is—if my leaving doesn't upset all security rules?"

Steve bit his lip, hoping no one save himself had detected the acid bite in Vanessa's heavy humor. He moved to his wife's side swiftly.

"I'm sorry, Nessa. Of course we'll go immediately."

"Please, no! I wouldn't dream of breaking up your party. I insist you stay, Steve."

A murmured amenity to their host and she was gone. Steve hesitated, started to follow her, and was lost as the General touched his arm.

"About those twin models you propose building, Dr. Mitchell. I wonder if you could explain—"

And of course Steve could and would most willingly discuss breathing metal life into those forms which until now had been mere wraiths of dreams on drafting paper. So he stayed, and the hours fled, and it was long after midnight that the impromptu party dragged to a reluctant close. Steve learned the time with shocked embarrassment.

"Good Lord, I had no idea it was so late. I must get home to see if Nessa's all right. Lisa—coming with?"

The night was dark and cool and wonderful. Before the prefab bungalow where Lisa dwelt they lingered briefly in the comfortable farewell of good companions. Lisa said, "You must be very proud tonight, Steve. Proud and happy."

"Happy?" grinned Steve. "We're talking emotions now, huh? Aren't they a little difficult for even a mathematics expert to measure?"

"Please," said Lisa, suddenly and surprisingly serious. "Don't be flippant, Steve. I really mean it. You are happy, aren't you?"

Her hand touched his own. It was a small hand and a soft one, friendly,

warm. Steve looked at it, at her, in some astonishment.

"Why, yes," he said. "Of course." Lisa's words came from the shadows in a breathless rush, curiously intense and urgent, incomprehensibly savage.

"Don't let anything disturb that happiness, Steve. Not anything . . . ever!" Then softly, "Good-night."

Then Mitchell was alone again with the night and the stars and his dream, treading the deserted walk.

Along the quiet road most lights were out. As he passed Andrews' shack, for an instant Steve saw Toby's lean pajamaed figure arch a yawning silhouette against the blind; a moment later the window was an oblong of black. Only a nightlight burned in the Daniels home—in the bathroom, no doubt, for the Daniels kids. Crenshaw's hut was dark. It occurred to Steve, casually, that he had not seen Phil for some hours, that he must have left the party rather early.

BUT even as he dimly envied the biologist's extra hours of sleep came contradiction. From the shadowy porch came voices that in the midnight hush carried all too clearly to Steve's unwilling ears.

A woman's voice, like molten metal, vibrant with passion. "I want you, Phillip . . . want you too much. Again and again, ever and ever. You've got to get me away from here, out of this . . . this concentration camp."

And Crenshaw's murmur. "Soon, darling. Soon."

"How soon?" The words were a burning challenge.

"It won't be long, I promise you. Come here—"

Meaningful silence. Steve started to back away, hesitated, embarrassed at the intimacy of the scene to which he was an involuntary audience, fearful lest his footsteps, advancing or retreating, brand him an intentional eavesdropper. *Crenshaw*, he thought fretfully, *at it again!* Phil was tops in his field, yes. But did he have to play biologist all the time? What fascinated victim now? Some sex-starved little corporal, AWOL from barracks and subject to court-martial if her absence were discovered? Or one of the messhall waitresses? Crenshaw was not noted for his fastidiousness or discrimination. Anything in skirts . . . Ah, well, no matter! So long as he performed his duties well, what he did in his off hours . . .

And then Steve heard and saw it: the incredible, the impossible thing. The hissing scratch of a striking match, the sudden gleaming circle in the night that briefly but unmistakably illumined two familiar faces. One was that of Phil Crenshaw. The other was his own wife, Vanessa.

Thus it was that for Steve Mitchell, engineer, on the night one dream was born another died . . .

You spend a lifetime worshiping the immutable precision of pure logic, then the unpredictable occurs and all your vaunted science is a shambles. You build your personal happiness about a warming fire of trust, then the unbelievable occurs, and the embers of your romance are gray ash.

Then comes the miracle. The cold, hard flint of logic strikes on the shining steel of love, and a glowing spark is forged. Where there was shambles suddenly is order; where there were embers suddenly is flame. And understanding and a bright new hope . . .

THERE was the faintest of sounds from the doorway and Steve turned. Lisa stepped forward hesitantly, her voice swift, shy, uncertain.

"Steve," she said. "Steve, I—"

Steve demanded harshly, "What are you doing here? Haven't you heard what's going on?"

"Please, Steve!" said Lisa urgently. "Of course I've heard, but . . . don't be silly. The whole thing's so ridiculous. Both things: Smith's stupid accusation, and the thought of your sabotaging A.S. One. That's what I came to talk to you about. I think I've found the reason for its failure. Remember how we worried about the trigger mechanism for the fifteen-second booster?"

"Yes. But we solved that problem finally."

"Mechanically, yes. But not from the fuel standpoint. We overlooked one thing: the evaporation quotient of Toby's new fuel mixture."

"We tested that. We—"

"Our tests were made under *simulated* space conditions. Suppose there are factors we did not consider because we don't know them? Suppose we underestimated condensation losses due to speed and friction? A two- or three-ton volatilization loss in the nose tanks would account for the booster mechanism's failure to work."

Steve stared at her for a long moment. He exhaled excitedly.

"By God, I think you've got it! Did you check your idea with Toby?"

"Yes. He says it's possible. His improved formula is very new, comparatively untested. He's willing to testify to Smith that it could have happened. That it's much more likely than that you should have—that you—"

Lisa faltered. Steve finished grimly, "Than that I should have killed Vanessa and . . . her lover? Say it, Lisa. I don't mind. I took it from Smith, a stranger. I can take it from a friend."

Lisa said plaintively, "Steve—please! Don't be bitter. Did you . . . did you really love her so much?"

"Vanessa?" Steve shook his head. "No. At least . . . well, no. Whatever we might have had ended . . . long ago."

(Night, and the golden circle of a match, and two soft, secret whispers in the dark.)

"Then, Stephen, why did you ever marry her?"

"Why did she marry me, you mean. Who knows? Perhaps because I was a big-shot scientist on a government project; top-secret stuff. She thought it would be a glamorous life. She didn't realize the pathway to the stars led by way of the deserts at White Sands or Deanfield's barbed-wire fences and security guards." Steve's laugh was mirthless. "Slaves in white overalls; that's what she called people like you and me. And I guess she was right."

"No, Steve!" Lisa's voice was intense, compelling. "She was wrong, and you know it. What we are doing is good, is right, is needed. You mustn't let your dream be ruined by the words of a spoiled and selfish woman—"

Abruptly she stifled her outburst, her face aflame.

"I'm sorry, Steve. I shouldn't say such things."

STEVE stared at her oddly for a long moment. Then, almost as if moving of their own volition, his hands reached forth and gripped Lisa's shoulders, turned her to face him squarely. This was the woman, Steve thought in confusion, who for two years had stood beside him, shoulder to shoulder, in staunch companionship. This face upturned to his was that of a proven comrade. How, then, could it be that suddenly these shoulders were so newly soft and strange, this face so curiously changed?

And in a sudden moment of awareness, the blinding veil of loyalty to another finally lifted from his eyes, he saw the truth at last for the first time. Steve's hands tightened, and he drew the slim figure closer.

"Lisa," he said shakily. "Lisa. You and I—"

Then his lips were on hers, and her mouth was his own in a meeting that was a new kind of kiss to Steve Mitchell. A kiss not given or taken, but returned; a kiss that was no mere whiplash to desire, but a kiss that was at once all things: the warming of flesh-hungers and the soothing of soul-needs: a kiss that was the joining of two spirits. From its deep-drowning depths Steve rose as one bedrugged.

"Lisa," he whispered. "All this wasted time! And now we learn . . . too late."

"Not too late, Steve. Smith's accusation is meaningless. He can't prove anything."

"Perhaps not. But so long as I am suspected of murder there can never be any happiness for either of us."

"Then," said Lisa firmly, "we must prove him wrong by finding Phillip and Vanessa."

"Find them where? That's the hitch. They can't be at Deanfield. Smith has searched the area high and low. But they can't have left, either. The security regulations are airtight. Even Keppler can't get off the grounds without a countersigned order."

"Nevertheless," said Lisa doggedly, "Smith has overlooked some loophole. They got out somehow. And we'll find them . . . some day."

"Meanwhile," asked Steve bitterly, "what about us? I won't be allowed to remain here. And no one will want to employ a has-been rocket expert whose big experiment ended in a failure and a murder-accusation."

"We can go somewhere else together, Steve. Anywhere. To the ends of the earth . . . or beyond."

"And let you share the disgrace of a Scotch verdict, neither *Guilty* nor *Not guilty*—just *Unproven*? No, my dear. I might brazen it out alone somehow. But for you and me together there is no way. Unless—"

Steve's brow creased suddenly. "Unless—" he said again.

"Steve, what is it? What are you—" Lisa gasped, swift understanding darkening her eyes. "No, Steve! That's madness. You mustn't! You can't!"

Steve grinned at her, a tight grin but a happy one.

"That's where you're wrong, darling," he said. "I must . . . and I will. It's the only solution. A.S. Two . . . twin to A.S. One. I must go up in it and bring back A.S. One, and prove to Smith it holds no 'nasty bodies!'"

When you were young you heard of rocket bombs . . . V-1, V-2, mysterious V-3 that was never launched. You were too young to share the knowledge of their horror, too far away to feel their awesome might. But they awakened in you a dream that grew as the slow years turned you to a man. A dream that one day Man might rise in a thrumming roar on a white-hot pillar of flame to hurl himself through space to the distant stars. . .

HERE in this narrow cubicle of space, so Spartan in its complement of dials and gauges, metal and quartz and plastic, with only two percussion-beds to prove that man was meant to inhabit its sterile nest . . . here it seemed weirdly foreign to Steve Mitchell that he should hear spoken into a transmitter a quarter of a mile away the final numbers of a diminishing series that soon would climax in an unguessable end.

"Twenty seconds . . . nineteen . . . eighteen . . ."

Steve turned to glance at the cot beside him, the cot whereon, spacesuited like himself, lay a second figure. A brief smile touched his lips. *Good old Toby*, he thought. So like him to raise hell because Steve insisted on being a passenger in A.S. Two. Then even *more* like him to suggest at the last minute that Steve should not make the trip alone.

"Seventeen . . . sixteen . . . fifteen . . ."

When told of Steve's plan of going out into space to bring back A.S. One, Keppler had shaken his head sternly.

"No, Stephen. We're not ready to consider manned flights yet. Our spacesuits are still in the experimental stage. We don't know the results of pressure and acceleration on the human body. We haven't—"

"We know enough to take a calculated risk," said Steve. "We've sent up guinea-pigs, mice, monkeys. Anyway, it's *my* life I'm risking. And that's ruined unless I can prove two bodies are not in the first rocket. I'd rather die than go on living this nightmare for years until A.S. One finally falls back to earth . . . even then, perhaps, to be destroyed in a blaze of friction, or to be lost in an ocean so the truth is never known."

Major Smith interposed smoothly, "An accused man merits a fair trial and defense. I believe Mitchell should be permitted to make the attempt, Dr. Keppler."

Then Toby had chimed in:

"And I agree . . . on one condition. That I be permitted to go with him."

"You, Toby? No!" exploded Keppler. "Not *both* of you. I will not hear of it!"

"Oh, but you must, sir," Toby pointed out. "It would be meaningless for Steve to make the trip alone. Someone—" He glanced pointedly at Smith—"might think that while in outer space Steve had taken the time and trouble to open A.S. One, remove the bodies, and reseal the airlock. With another man along, this charge could not be made. Unless, of course, that second man's veracity and honor were *also* under question?"

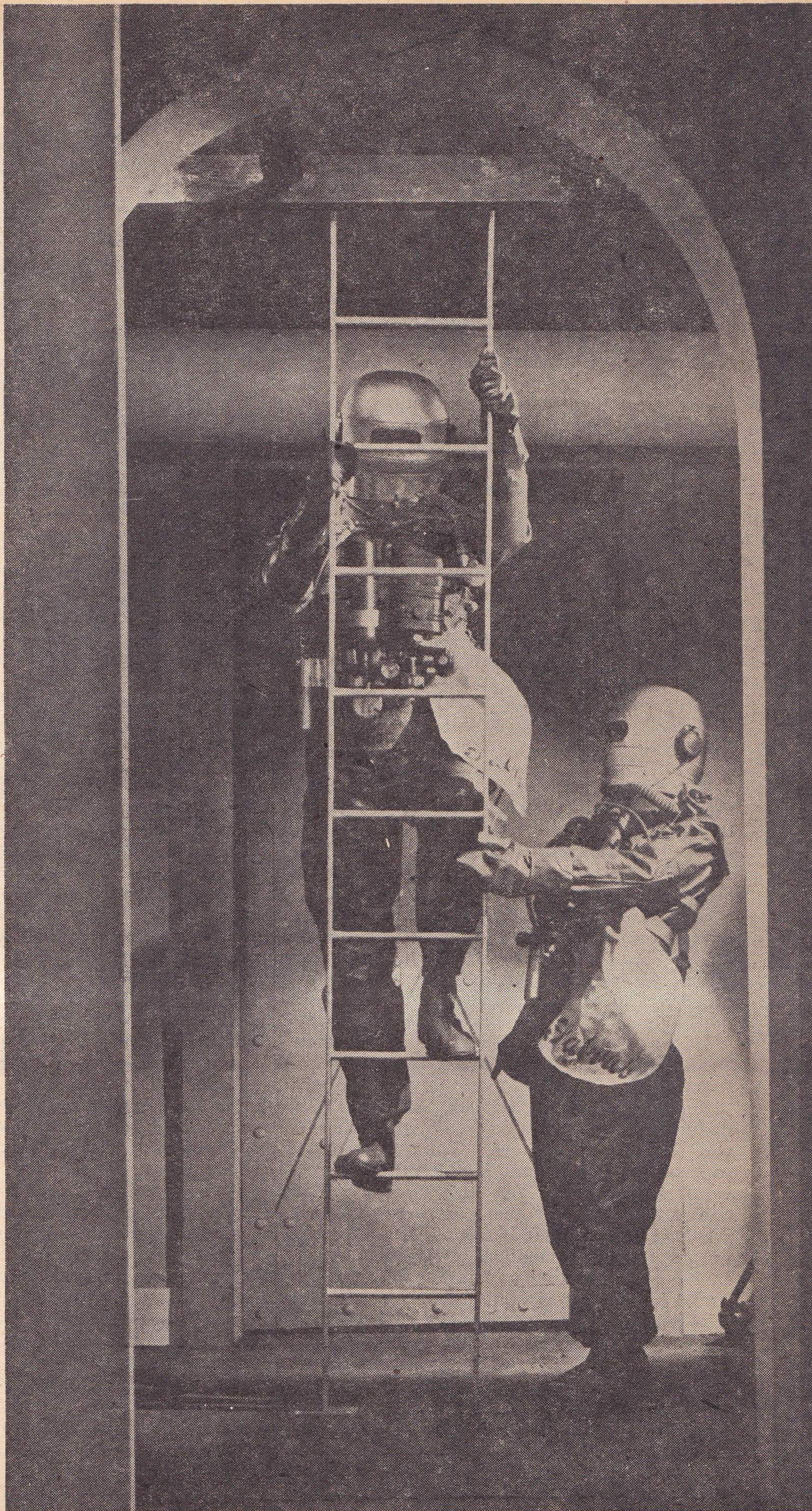
He stared directly, challengingly, at Smith. The plump man nodded placid approval.

"Dr. Andrews' point is well taken. I am more than willing to accept his word as witness."

So it was arranged, and A.S. Two was readied.

"Fourteen . . . thirteen . . . twelve . . . eleven . . ."

On his last night on earth, Steve restlessly walked out to search the heavens with his eyes, to see again, perhaps for the last time, the stars that for so long had been the goal and symbol of his lifetime's dreaming. The soft night was still sweeter when



They clambered down into the ship, encased in the tremendous pressure suits that were required to withstand the acceleration. They were scarcely recognizable as human beings.

Lisa joined him. Her presence at his side was a caress.

"Stephen, you weren't at home. I thought you might be here." Then, her hand tightening upon his arm, her voice breaking: "Oh, Steve! I'm frightened!"

"You mustn't be," said Steve. He bent and kissed her softly, tenderly. "I'll come back. I have to come back to be with you again . . . and I must be with you. You know that."

Lisa said simply, "I don't know anything except that I love you and I have never been so happy in my life. And now that happiness is being snatched away from me."

"Remember what I told you once before," reminded Steve, "about emotions and mathematics? You—"

Lisa's fingers silenced his lips.

"There's nothing mathematical," she said, "about a woman in love. Steve, darling—"

The faraway stars were mirrored in her eyes, were near at last. And so Steve Mitchell found his years-long dream closer at hand than he had dared to hope. So for the first—perhaps the last and only time—the fullness of true love was given to these two, there beneath the stars in the silence, in the night, that veiled them from the world . . .

"Ten . . . nine . . ."

At the last moment, as he crossed the launching site with Keppler, Steve thought to ask, "Smith? He isn't here to watch the takeoff?"

"No. He went away last night, Steve . . . hurriedly. I don't know where he went, but I think he must have got some new clue as to what might have happened to Phil and Vanessa—how they might have escaped Deanfield. One of the guards, no longer with us, was discovered—"

"How they 'escaped'?" interrupted Steve, frowning. "You make them sound like . . . fugitives."

Keppler hesitated briefly, then nodded. "I guess it's only fair that you should know, Steve. I wasn't supposed to tell anyone, but . . . the word slipped out. Yes, it was an escape. For one of them, at least. We have learned that Phil Crenshaw was not what he pretended. Or, rather, he was something more. He was in the pay of a foreign power."

"Crenshaw," gasped Steve, "a spy! Incredible! Or . . . wait! That would explain—"

(*Two voices in the night. "How soon?" And Crenshaw's answer: "It will not be long. I promise you."*)

"You see, Steve—" Keppler touched his arm—"you need not go up, after all. This makes all the difference in the world. A comrade killed might have been murder . . . true. But an enemy agent slain is legal execution.

Smith will drop the charges against you even if you did—"

Roughly Steve jerked his arm free.

"Even if I did?" he repeated harshly. "Doctor, if even you can think I might have done it, what of others? No, I must prove myself innocent or be damned forever. And suppose Crenshaw was a spy. How about Vanessa? You don't believe she, too—"

"No, Steve," sighed Keppler. "Just a foolish woman."

And they had moved forward to the slim needle of A.S. Two. . . .

"Eight . . . seven . . . six . . ."

Steve glanced again at the supine figure beside him, grateful for the opacity of the polaroid pane through which he could not see Toby's face, and for the fact that Andrews could not see his own, witness the growing tenseness in his eyes.

"Hold tight, Toby," he said tautly. "This is it!"

He shut his eyes.

"Five . . . four . . . three . . ."

He thought of Lisa. Small, wondrous Lisa of the secret depths, whose heart was made for loyalty, whose hands and lips and body were made for love. His lips moved in a swift and silent prayer.

"Good-by, Lisa. And God bless you ever . . ."

"Two . . . one . . . Fire!"

Then the swift agony as the rocket burgeoned upward on a screaming stalk of fire. Agony, but not black-out. Even as his body strained to withstand the unaccustomed thrust of grinding gravities, as the dancing blood raced scarlet before his eyes, Steve recognized that once again Lisa's calculations had been precise, that a strong man could endure the ordeal of those first few dreadful moments.

Now a voice filtered to him in his earphones, the voice of the radar operator calling the rocket's trajectory as read from instruments at the launching site incredible miles below.

"Tail section disconnected. Altitude 24.9 miles. Speed 1.46 miles per second. Angle of climb 20.5 degrees. Gyropilot effective. . ."

They would be tensely awaiting reassurance, Steve thought. They would be chafing, now, and fearful, wondering if A.S. Two still carried a live cargo. With an effort he spoke into his lip mike.

"A.S. Two calling Deanfield. A.S. Two calling. Come in, Deanfield. Can you hear me?"

Keppler's eager voice responded instantly.

"Hello, A.S. Two. This is Deanfield. We can hear you. Steve . . . are you all right?"

Steve scanned the bank of instruments before him.

"Takeoff entirely successful. No trouble with the fuel supply or cham-

ber pressure." A movement of the figure beside him caught his eye. He added: "Toby blacked out for a minute, but now he's coming to. We're both strapped down and must remain so until the center section disconnects—"

As if his words had been a sort of signal, the rocket jolted suddenly, then seemed to hurl itself forward at even greater speed. The metallic voice of the ground controls operator reported crisply:

"Center section disconnected. Altitude 40 miles. Distance from takeoff point 332 miles. Speed 14,364 miles per hour. . ."

A thin crackle of static rasped in Steve's ears. Keppler's voice emerged, demanding, "How now, Steve?"

Steve reported, "Cabin getting hot. Switching on air-conditioning unit so we can remove our space helmets—" Cautiously he raised the hood of his fishbowl headpiece, sniffed and then turned and nodded to his companion. "Air's okay, Toby. You can unload."

THEN, as the head of his comrade emerged from beneath its helmet, a gasp broke from his lips.

"Lisa!"

"Hello, Steve," said Lisa quietly.

"But, my God, Lisa! Toby—"

"I made him change places with me. Don't you see, Steve, it had to be this way? You said yourself that you and I belong together always."

Now Keppler's voice came stridently to them from a pickup panel in the cabin wall:

"Steve, listen! That's not Andrews with you . . . it's Lisa! Toby's just come in. This is— Steve, this is impossible. You must turn back immediately!"

Steve answered fiercely, "No can do, Doctor. Not while we're accelerating. At the time of engine cut-off, possibly, just before the booster blast. But turning back now won't solve our problem. We came out here to prove that Crenshaw and my wife are not in A.S. One—"

"That's already been proven, Steve. Smith is back. He tried to stop the takeoff, but failed. Vanessa has been found."

Lisa gasped audibly. Steve croaked, "Vanessa has been found?"

"Yes." Keppler's explanation was sketchy, hurried, earnest. "Smith found them both. Crenshaw is dead, shot by the Intelligence officers who caught him trying to cross the Channel. We know how they got out. Crenshaw bribed a guard. Vanessa went with him for . . . personal reasons. But when she found out what he really was, she refused to leave the country with him. Crenshaw tried to kill her, but Smith got him first."

Now Keppler's voice was pleading.

"Do you understand, Steve? You're clear. You can come back now. You must!"

"But our speed is eighteen thousand. We're only seconds away from reaching the free-fall orbit. We—"

The operator's voice droned corroboration.

"Altitude 63.3 miles. Distance from takeoff point 705 miles. Speed 18,438 miles per hour. Engine cut-off now due..."

Suddenly strange silence in the cabin. They had scarcely realized how they had been shouting above the vibrant roar of the motors until that sound was gone. Steve looked at Lisa. Her smile was proud, triumphant.

"On schedule, Steve. Perfect timing. And now—"

Steve said, almost reluctantly, "We turn back, I guess. There's no reason to go on now. But... Vanessa?"

Lisa said quietly, "She doesn't matter, Steve. She can't hold you now. You're mine... forever."

Keppler again, an angry desperation in his voice. "A.S. Two... can you hear me? Come in, A.S. Two!"

"A.S. Two. We hear you."

"You know what to do, Steve. When the booster cuts on, throw the deflector rudder to break trajectory. We'll follow your revised course on radar and pick you up wherever you land. Got it?"

"Got it!" snapped Steve. His fingers fumbled at the cot-straps and loosened them. With grotesque lurching strides he moved to the forward bulkhead, gripped the deflector for the pull that when the motors again briefly cut on would arc their flight to home again... to earth. "Should be just a matter of seconds now. We're standing by to throw—"

The final words were blasted from his lips. From the suddenly roaring entrails of the ship came a thunderous explosion. Steel struts and girders screamed in metal agony, and a creeping vapor sifted through warped decks to flood the cabin with its choking fumes. Steve fell headlong, slid helplessly across the deck to crash against the wreckage of his cot. Cruel fangs met briefly, sharply, in his arm, and wrenched a gasp of pain from his twisted lips.

Lisa! he thought. Like a wounded animal he turned and dragged himself to where she lay, shaken and white, but—thank God!—still alive. Her eyes opened and cleared, then widened in recollection. Her voice was tremulous.

"What is it, Steve? What happened?"

"I'm not sure, darling. I think it was the kick of the extra fuel. Toby used more this time... too much, I guess. We've got to tell them... warn them."

Together they worked their way across the cubicle. Steve tried the deflector rudder briefly, with no great hope. As he had feared, the lever did not move. He turned to the radio. For the first time Lisa noticed his left arm dangling bent and useless at his side; a tiny cry broke from her lips.

"Steve! You're hurt!"

He shook her off. "It doesn't matter. We mustn't waste time. We must contact Deanfield—"

Desperately he cried his message to the instrument, shouting as if to bridge the gathering miles by sheer voice strength and will-power.

"Deanfield, can you hear me? Listen, Doctor... we've had it. There's no way back for us. But listen carefully. The fault is with the strength of booster kick. Tell Toby to cut down the payload fuel and strengthen

sound in the cabin save the serpentine hiss of air as the yet-undamaged pumps continued working smoothly, calmly, efficiently, clearing the fumes and smoke, feeding fresh oxygen to the lost captive two who had dared the void above earth's native air. One day that pump would cease... but only after they had long since ceased to need it.

And now Steve felt a hand upon his cheek. It was a small hand and a soft one, loving, warm. His own left arm hung useless, but into the cradle of his right he took the woman he loved. Together they clung there, wordless, voiceless, mute, pioneer children of an age newborn, facing the unknown—certain of the inevitable end, yet strangely unafraid of what must come.

So two to whom the stars had ever



From the suddenly roaring entrails of the ship came a thunderous explosion. Steel struts and girders screamed in agony. "What is it, Steve? What happened?" Lisa was tremulous.

the third-stage lining with some heavier shock-absorbent. Can you hear me?"

Keppler's voice was a pale ghost of sound against an increasing tumult of static.

"We hear... Stephen... Cut payload fu... Strengthen third... heavier shock-absorb..."

"You mustn't give up!" cried Steve. "This is the way, the right way. We're on the track now. Someone must follow us so that all this will not have been in vain."

Keppler again. "We understand. Others will... and soon. Steve... Lisa... good-by. And God bless..."

Then all communication ceased as the crackling of static died and the set was coldly still. Now there was no

been a goal and symbol raced outward to the stars... alone, but not alone because they were two... beaten, but victors because they had their dream... lost, but not lost because they had found love and themselves.

You are young, and you cherish a dream. At night when you lift your eyes you gaze with hungry yearning to the sky. The moon is a shining challenge, the planets a bright defiance, and the tremulous twinkling stars are a tiny diamond pain within your heart. So you dream, and your dream is this: that one day Man will reach those beckoning lights.

Will reach them... and return. One day. Some man.

But not yourself...



Bob Riger

Illustrated by BOB RIGER

He was the greatest natural hitter since Babe Ruth, and he could mean the pennant for the Sox. But I still recalled that grim warning about him from Soggy Saunders:

“He won't last—there's a curse on him!”

By HAROLD KEITH

IVERSON'S IDIOT



JACK RHINE, OUR HEAD SCOUT, cornered me in the hotel lobby and dropped his left eyelid shrewdly. “These pitchers better dig themselves a tunnel when they throw to this boy,” Jack wheezed, jabbing me sharply with his elbow to get my undivided attention.

He had it, all right. Although I was giving the cutie at the cigar counter two dimes and a nickel for a package of cigarettes, my big red ears were beamed onto what Jack was saying. No scout in baseball has made more finds.

Jack looked cautiously over his right shoulder and then over his left shoulder as though afraid of being overheard.

“His name is John Yoakum and he's never been out of Texas,” he went on, spilling the words out of the corner of his mouth in his quiet, raspy voice. “I signed him in a dime store. Made the deal between planes—didn't have time to check up on him too good. But he didn't cost us much.”

That was Jack Rhine for you. Always bragging about the great ballplayers he had signed cheaply—always interested in protect-

ing the club first. No wonder he'd been with us twenty-six years.

Again his left eyelid drooped cunningly. "He's here on a make-good deal. If you don't like him, you can always let him go."

No, I couldn't let John Yoakum go. Not after I'd seen him hit. Many a time I would be tempted to release him, for reasons that almost drove me crazy; weird, fantastic reasons that I'll try to explain as we go along. But every time I'd start to run him off, I'd get paralysis of the larynx. How could I fire the one fellow on my club who was hitting and hustling the Blue Sox into their first world series in thirty years?

I'm Mike Iverson, manager of the Blue Sox. It was early July and, in spite of our strong pitching staff, we were buried down in sixth place. Every baseball fan in the country knew how badly we needed a good left-handed hitter, and how our scouts had combed even the Negro leagues and the Cuban circuits without finding one. And then Jack showed up with this John Yoakum.

I backed up a step. Jack had me wedged against the cigar counter, his elbow in my ribs and his mouth in my face.

"I saw him play a game down in South Texas night before last," Jack said. "He's just so-so at first base. But when he walks up to that plate, he's murder. Hits left-handed. Good swing. Lots of power. Meets the ball well. And he's fast as a hiccup. Even when he hits one right at you, you gotta throw hard as hell to get him. His manager was easy to deal with. Fellow by the name of J. W. Saunders, of Laredo. Said he was an old friend of yours."

The girl at the cigar counter handed me my pack of cigarettes and as I paid her I ransacked my memory, trying to place this J. W. Saunders. I couldn't and yet the name had a strange, far-away familiarity. I tried to back up another step so I could put the pack of cigarettes in my pocket, but I couldn't do that, either. Jack had me on both counts.

I shook my head. "Don't believe I know him."

Jack looked disappointed and took his face out of mine. He turned toward the elevator.

"I've got Yoakum with me. We flew in last night. He's up in my room asleep. I'm going up now to shave and take a vitamin pill. I'll have him out at the park at eleven."

Yoakum turned out to be a big, bashful fellow whose sensitive, deep-set eyes, tempered by flaxen lashes, seemed always to be brooding about something. His hair was as white as milk. It was obviously his first trip

East, and twice I caught him looking at me with a fixed, curious stare, as though he were sizing me up, deciding whether he could trust me in this far-away city of four million Yankee foreigners.

I assigned him a locker and handed him the key. "Where you from, John?" I ask, although it was pretty evident from the big Western hat and fancy-stitched boots he was wearing.

"My home's in Lariat, Texas, Mr. Iverson." He was polite and courteous and seemed eager to talk to somebody. Obviously homesick and lonesome, he looked enviously at the good-natured horseplay of the other players, horseplay that didn't include him.

Suiting up, he worked out with us at first base. I liked the way he filled a ball suit. But as I hit fungos to him in the infield, I was disappointed. He was no first-baseman.

In the hotel dining-room that night. I told Yoakum he was going to be an outfielder if he stayed in our organization. His mouth fell ajar. Upset, he raked at his T-bone with his fork. Again he gave me that long, suspicious, clodhopper stare.

"Gee, Mr. Iverson," he said finally. "I can't play that outfield."

"You can't play that first base, either," I told him. "You're just out there. You throw the ball with your feet crossed and you can't find the bag behind you with your left foot."

NEXT morning, I started Ike Black, one of our coaches, working with him in right field. Ike used to be an old fly hawk. But it didn't take either Ike or me long to see that Yoakum was too green to play major-league baseball. I decided to farm him out for seasoning. That was before I saw him hit.

The third day he was with us, we rode across the river to Louisville for an exhibition against the Colonels, of the American Association. They started Cy Norris, their best pitcher. They were trying to knock us off. I played Yoakum in right field the last three innings. Figured I'd give him at least a taste of big-league ball before we farmed him to Wichita. He and I had talked it over and the demotion to Wichita was all right with him; it was all fixed for him to leave on the midnight train.

Louisville was leading us 5 to 3. Norris, a big, stout right-hander, was mowing us down with his crossfire. He's kinda loud and stuck on himself, but a real good pitcher. In the first of the 8th, we rallied and when Yoakum came up for his only time at bat, we had runners on first and second with two out. For the first time in a real ball game, I watched him hit.

He walked to the plate with short, evenly-spaced steps, swinging his

broad shoulders gracefully. Everything about him seemed in perfect time and rhythm. Coolly he spaced his feet in the batter's box and faced Norris, waving his bat once, then cocking it menacingly off his left shoulder. For the first time since he'd joined us, he looked thoroughly at home. I was coaching at third and gave him the hit-away sign.

Norris stepped off the mound, took off his glove, stuck it under his arm and using both hands, tucked in his gray shirttails. He turned facing me. Curtly, he nodded toward Yoakum. "Where's he from?"

"Lariat, Texas," I yelled back at him.

Norris grinned sarcastically. With one sleeve, he wiped the sweat off his forehead. "Lariat, Texas, eh? I'll bet he rode in here on a cow-pony." He put his glove back on, toed the rubber and pitched. I think he intended to throw one under John Yoakum's chin and dust him off.

Instead he got the ball up around Yoakum's T-zone, as the cigarette companies call it. Swinging smoothly and powerfully, Yoakum tomahawked that pitch deep to right-center. Fascinated, I watched the ball ride, then finally strike the ground and roll to the fence. Both our base-runners were in motion. Rotating one arm. I waved them both home. I almost had to tackle Yoakum at third base to keep him from sprinting on in, too. He was fast and he came to play. We squeezed him home for the winning run and beat them 6 to 5.

As Norris walked dejectedly off the hill at the end of the inning, I cupped my hands.

"Never throw high to a small-town boy," I yelled at him.

UNDER the shower after the game, I rubbed soapsuds on my shoulders and did some serious thinking. In Babcock, Boehler and Wood, we've got the best three-man pitching staff in the league. But we're also the league's weakest hitters. I didn't have a regular over .285. I had liked the way my small-town boy had poured the pine to that one high pitch.

I liked his spirit, too. He had heard that crack about the cow-pony. He was all set for Norris. Maybe I was too hasty, rushing him off to Wichita. No club in the league needed a long-ball hitter as badly as we did. I decided to look at him a week longer, using him as a pinch-hitter.

The more I looked, the better I liked what I saw. He was a born clutch-hitter. Singled through the box the first time I sent him up, moving a baserunner around to third. That was in Boston. At Pittsburgh, three nights later, I sent him up for Master-

son. They pitched him on the outside corner and he busted one high into left center that Bing Cunningham ran clear to the fence to pull down. But it scored the tying run. And when Roy Shield, our center-fielder, lamed an ankle, we moved Greb to center and stuck John Yoakum in at right. It was his first full game in the National League, and he got three for four, two of them doubles. Then I got the letter.

It was from this J. W. Saunders, the fellow who told Jack Rhine he used to be a friend of mine. It was written in longhand, in green ink, probably with a hotel pen. It was postmarked Laredo, Texas. The letter said:

Mike Iverson:

Remember that game in Galveston seventeen years ago? Remember Soggy Saunders, the boy you cut the shoes off of on purpose when you come fogging into second trying to break up the double play? Your spikes cut an ankle ligament almost in two and Saunders was through playing baseball, at nineteen years old. Remember, damn you? Well, I'm him. Remember me saying I'd get even?

I'm managing Laredo in the South Texas league. I peddled this John Yoakum to your scout. I read where he looks good up there, just like I knew he would. Don't get your hopes up. He won't last long. There's a curse on him. When you find out what it is, you'll sweat blood trying to decide whether to fire him and stay in the second division where you belong, or put up with him and win the flag which you've never done in your eleven years as a manager. I wish I was there to see you squirm.

Soggy Saunders.

Mystified, I turned the letter over and looked on the back of it. Then I folded it up and put it back in the envelope. I didn't get it. . . . I remembered spiking this Saunders kid, all right. That was back in the old Texas league.

I had a bad disposition in those days—used to take a file and sharpen my spikes for the guys who wouldn't give me plenty of room on the base paths. I hadn't been able to intimidate this Saunders. He'd just laugh at me. So I cut him down and went on about my business. That was seventeen years ago. But I didn't understand how he figured he was getting back at me by sending me John Yoakum.

If I thought Laredo had another like Yoakum, I was ready to hoof it all the way down to the border and

spike this Soggy Saunders all over again. It looked to me like Saunders had brooded so long over his revenge that he'd blown a fuse and sold me the best ballplayer he'd ever developed. For peanuts, too. Well, tough luck! We were in fifth place then and commencing to climb; he couldn't have gotten John Yoakum away from me with an order from Eisenhower.

The next day after I got the letter I watched my new find closer than ever. We were playing in St. Louis. They had us down 4-0 when John came up the first time. John doubled home two runs. On his second trip, he lined into Musial's hands. On his third trip, he singled with the bases full and we went ahead, 8-7. And he hustled all over the field.

In the 5th, he made a flying tackle of a scorching skipper off Slaughter's bludgeon. He must have heard it coming because he had his ear to the ground when he caught it. He fought like a wildcat for everything. If he had a curse, I couldn't see it. He looked like a real good ballplayer, normal in every way.

He looked more normal than ever in the first of the 11th when he figured in a rhabarb with Bill Dempsey, the plate umpire. Every fighting ballplayer takes issue with an umpire now and then. Yoakum had come up with a man on third and two out. They had put in Merchant, a lefty. His first two pitches were curves. Yoakum missed them both. His next pitch was a knuckler. With his bat on his shoulder, John watched it float by.

Dempsey leaned back, dropped his right fist almost to his ankles, then brought it up high in the air and shook it. His face purpled.

"Strieeeeeke!" he yelled, in a roar that could be heard clear down town.

Yoakum turned on Dempsey, his face white with fury. "Don't you yell 'strike' to me!" he shrieked in a high, shrill voice that carried fully as far as the umpire's. "The ball was half-a-foot outside." Grasping his bat by the wrong end, he began pounding the ground with it. "You missed that last one."

Dempsey pulled his whiskbroom out of his hip pocket. He leaned over and began to sweep the rubber plate that was already as clean as a Dutch doorstep. "That puts me one up on you," he retorted cheerfully. "You missed the first two." That crack didn't help John's disposition any.

He kept arguing, and finally Dempsey thumbed him out of the game. Yoakum looked as if he was going to explode. I hurried in from the coaching box. But before I got there John had tapped himself smartly on the forehead a couple of times with his bat. His head was as hard as pave-

ment. Then he sat down, picked up a handful of dirt and threw it up in the air, letting it fall on his head and shoulders. After I got over my surprise, I almost felt like laughing, it was so comical. But when I got to the plate and saw John's eyes, I forgot all about laughing. He looked like a soul in torment. We had to lead him forcibly to the dugout, where I made him sit down next to me.

There he cooled off fast and began to make funny little noises in his throat. Surprised, I looked at him. His eyes met mine and again he gave me that long, soulful stare. In spite of the fact he'd just batted in four very useful runs, there was defeat and discouragement in his face.

"Mr. Iverson, I'm gonna level with you. I'm no good. I'll never be no good. Nobody on the club likes me and I don't blame them. If you know what's best for the Blue Sox, you'll release me. I'll just jinx you. I've jinxed every ball club I ever played with. I lost the game for you today. I'll lose a lot of other games for you, too."

He stood up, blinking his eyes with some strange emotion I couldn't figure out. Cleats clanking on the concrete floor, he took a couple of uncertain steps, looked back at me as though to speak again, but decided against it. Then his gaze shifted back to the diamond. Moodily, he sat down again. This time he stayed there the rest of the game, absorbed in the play on the field.

STARING at the big blue 4 on his back, I felt uneasy. Soggy Saunders had said in his letter that there was a curse on John. And now John himself seemed to be giving me some kind of warning. There was an association in the two opinions that vaguely disturbed me. But I shrugged it off; I'd seen discouraged players before.

Besides, John was wrong about having lost the game. It went into extra innings. We won it in the 14th when Turk Tremaine, our big first-baseman, hit one to the fence. As I walked to the clubhouse, I reached in my hip pocket, took a big bite out of my plug and snorted.

If John Yoakum thought I was going to release him, he was loco. I knew a good ballplayer when I saw one. This fellow might be gloomy and eccentric, but he was a grand hustler and fighter. He liked to win and he hated to lose. What's wrong with that?

And he was mistaken about the boys, too. Although he'd won his spurs two weeks earlier, they'd been slow cottoning to him. You can't rush ballplayers. But now that John had had a run-in with an umpire and been booted, he was a human being, just

like anybody else on the club. Suddenly they all started liking him. Just like that!

That night they took him to a movie with them. Afterward they all played pool. Next day on the way to the ball park, they all got to singing barbershop in the bus and I could hear John's tenor, clear as a bell, take the solo run on "Coney Island Baby."

We came off that road trip in fourth place, thanks to Yoakum's hitting, and opened with the league-leading Dodgers at home. Our fans had hungrily followed John in the sports pages and on the daily radio broadcasts of our games. Now they were eager to see him in the flesh. Fifty thousand of them showed for that first home game. When John came up the first time, they gave him a terrific hand.

I WAS coaching at third. Behind me I could hear thousands and thousands of people buzzing curiously and excitedly as they looked John over for the first time. Although I tried not to show it, I felt a warm glow of pride. With a flirt of my cleats, I gayly kicked a tiny cloud of dirt in the direction of left field. I hoped John would get a hold of one. This crowd expected it—no use putting it off.

"Come on, boy! Bust one! You're

the best!" I bawled at him in my bullfrog bass.

John swung powerfully at the third pitch. The white ball went straight up, soaring so high that it looked as if it was rocket-driven. Watching it, the Brooklyn infielders scurried around, shouting confused advice at one another. A tricky cross wind was blowing in off the river. Nobody wanted to try to catch that foul in that wind, nobody but Toomey, their catcher.

Toomey called for it. He's a good foul-hawk. Everybody gave him room. Eyes glued to the heavens, Toomey jumped laterally here and there until he had correctly gauged the falling ball, then stood still and waited for it. He caught it belt-high just in front of our dugout, making the catch look dead easy.

A long, low moan of disappointment and sympathy welled up from our crowd. For a moment John stood there, muttering to himself. I could see his lips moving and the angry, frustrated expression on his face.

"Tough luck, John!" called Turk Tremaine, who was crouched on one knee in front of our dugout waiting to hit next. "You'd 'a' hit that 'un a cotton-pickin' mile if you'd straightened it out."

John didn't even look at him. Later, Turk said John's face was white as chalk as he passed him on his way to the dugout. John was still talking wildly to himself as he headed for the water-tap. Curiously, I watched him.

He put one hand on the lever and leaned over to drink. His big hand was trembling and his lips were still moving. Suddenly he raised his head with a jerk, without ever having touched his lips to the cold water he wanted so badly.

Angrily he spoke to himself, "No drink for you, John Yoakum! You didn't hit!"

And I'll be darned if he didn't walk away without drinking a drop! The guy had actually passed sentence on himself for fouling out. He sure played the game for keeps! Studying him, I decided to let him alone until he cooled off.

It was good strategy. In the 8th, Coe threw him a knuckler that didn't break. John hit it over the right-field wall. I've never seen a drive carry so far. That ball looked as if it had been whipped out of the park with a gigantic slingshot. It kept rising and rising until it passed from view behind the distant scoreboard. Although it must have lit somewhere near the pavement on 78th Street, I'll bet it didn't roll a foot. John must have knocked it flat.

Pulled to their feet by the carry of that wallop, our fans roared like thunder. How they loved John Yoakum then! Even after he'd crossed the plate, they stayed on their feet, cheering wildly. At the plate a grinning delegation of our players met John with hands stuck out. We took the game 4 to 3 on that mighty swat.

Soon as he got through pumping hands, John headed for the dugout water-tap. For a full minute he drank his fill. Although he was taking on more water than I ordinarily like my players to have, I didn't argue with him. I wouldn't have cared then if he'd drunk out of a gushing firehose.

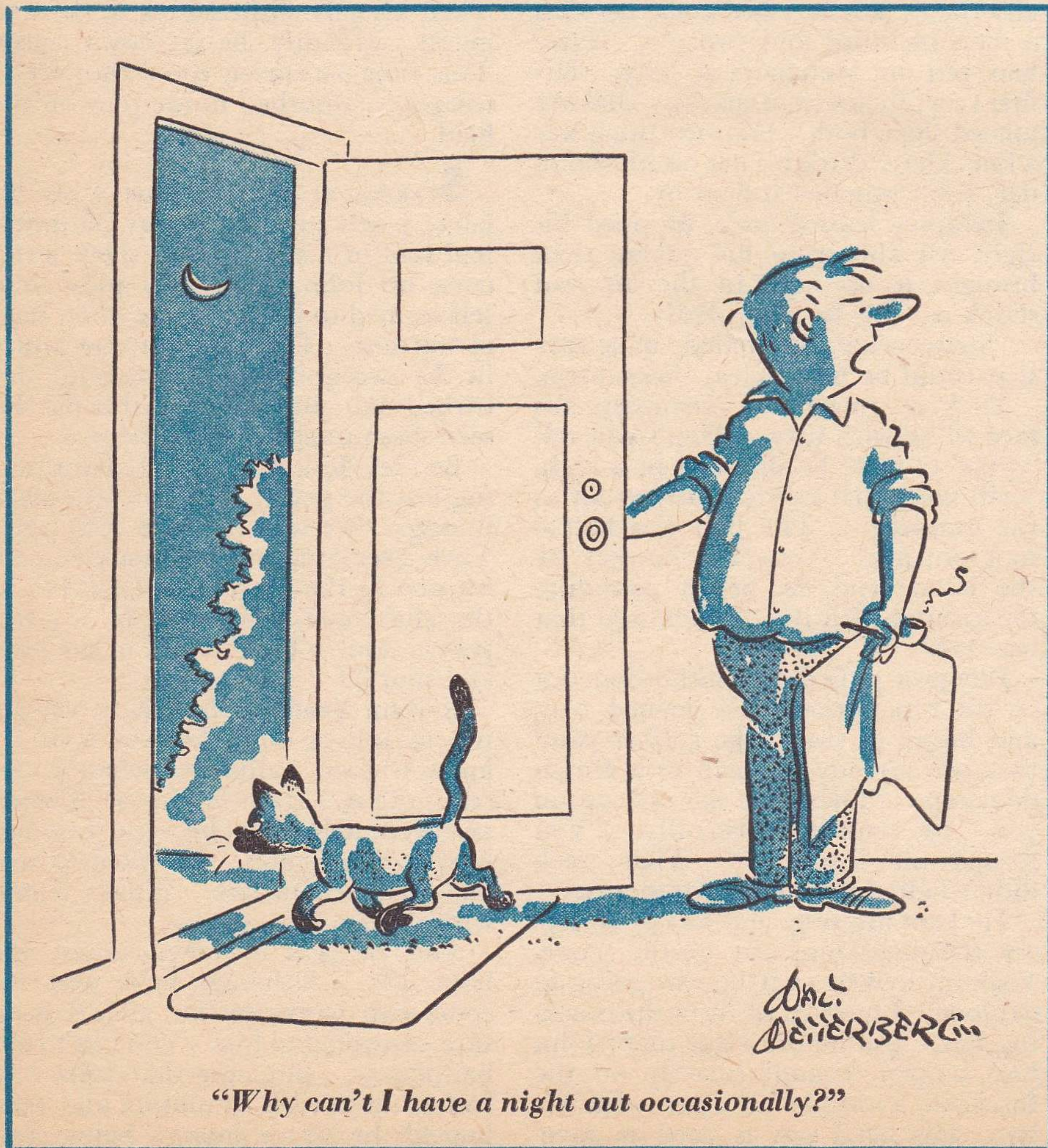
The weather got warmer and so did John's hitting. In Pittsburgh he hammered two triples to the fence, driving in five runs, including the winning one. In Boston he singled home the winner in the top of the 12th, his third hit of the day, and we moved into third place. In New York he blew his top.

He had gotten off badly in the first inning, hitting into a double play. In the 4th he took a called third strike. Big Tim Morority called it on him.

John sprang round, facing the umpire. Sparks of wrath shot from his eyes.

"Whaaaaat!" he roared.

Morority swept off his mask and then his cap. With his handkerchief, he wiped the sweat from his forehead



and neck. As he wiped, he sang a little ditty he always used on a strike-out victim who protested too heatedly, "You'll learn, my boy, before you get much older, that you can't get a hit with the bat on your shoulder."

John took the bat off his shoulder and held it threateningly in his big right paw, as if it was a fly-swatter. For a moment it seemed he was going to brain Morority with it. I ran in from the dugout. But before I could get there, John did something else.

With a gesture of rage, he crouched. Changing hands, he flung his bat high into the air. I'll bet nobody ever threw a bat that high. It kept going up and up and up, glinting in the sunshine as it turned lazily over and over.

"Heads up!" hollered Hoss Miller, one of our coaches. Everybody ducked or ran for cover.

EVERYBODY but John and Morority. With John's bat still heading into the stratosphere, Morority calmly looked at John. "If that bat hits the ground, you're out of the ball game."

It hit the ground, all right. Hit it so hard that it lit on the end of its handle and bounced fifteen feet back up into the air. And Morority booted John. That hurt. With Yoakum out of the game from the 4th inning on, we lost 3-2. We dropped back into fourth place. How we missed John's big stick in the clutch! As I motioned Chastell to go in for John, I saw one thing plainly. John Yoakum got along poorly with umpires. Was this the curse my old enemy Soggy Saunders was referring to in that letter?

I had a heart-to-heart talk with John in the 5th inning. He hadn't showered and dressed the way most kicked-out players would have. Still wearing his uniform, he was standing near the pass gate out in right field, watching every move on the diamond. He never left a ball game until the last dog was killed. The fingers of his right hand were thrust through the wire screen. He looked as crestfallen as a little boy who had been licked and kept in after school. He had cooled off completely; he always cooled off the minute a game was over—and this one was certainly over for him.

I motioned for him to come nearer so I could talk to him through the wire. He obeyed. I could tell he trusted me now. For several weeks he had quit looking at me with that long suspicious stare.

I spat on the ground. Putting my hands on my hips, I began to rake the grass with my cleats.

"What d'ya wanta charge the umpires so much for?" I scolded. "That's my job. On my salary I can afford it.

You can't. If I get kicked out of a game, the club hasn't been hurt. But look what you brought on yourself today. Giles will probably stick a fifty-buck fine on you for your run-in with Morority. Worst of all, we didn't have your bat through the last five innings and we lost. We had eleven men left on base today. You're our best hitter, but you weren't there to drive 'em in. I don't want you as a spectator. I hired you for a hitter."

I frowned at him and spat on the ground again. With my left shoe, I kicked viciously at a spot in the grass. I could tell by his face that he knew I was displeased with him, and it worried him.

"Some day you'll go too far. You'll push an umpire and get suspended for a week. Or you'll slug one and get booted for life. That's no good."

He took it swell. I've never had a player take a bawling-out as good as John Yoakum took that one. For a moment he batted his eyes real fast. There was mingled pride and shame in his face. He looked as if he was about to bust into tears. I've never seen a guy so sensitive. He reached into his pocket. Pulling out a red bandanna handkerchief, he blew his nose. It sounded like one of those model airplanes going round and round on a wire string. Then he got control of himself.

His hand dropped off the screen. He took a long breath and shook his head kind of hopelessly. "It's them Blind Boone empires, Mr. Iverson. I been playin' ball six years now and I ain't never seen a good empire yet. They all got it in for me. I been kicked out of two leagues down in Texas because I wouldn't let the empires run over me. They're all bad."

I blinked. That explained why he was 27 and had never gone up.

"No, they're not," I corrected him. "They're just out there doing their job. From where I sat, that third strike Morority called on you today looked good. You won't always see things like the umpires, especially when the call goes against you. Puff up, if you've got to. Beef a little. Look mad. But don't ever sass 'em back. Don't ever throw your bat into the air. It might come down and kill somebody."

John's cloudy face lit up when I said that. "You mean maybe it'd come down and kill one of them lousy empires?"

I frowned. With the toe of my cleated shoe, I kicked impatiently at a clod on the ground. "Forget that crazy talk. You've got to learn to get along with umpires if you stay in this league. Don't argue with them. Remember, an umpire has got authority to fine you and kick you off the field.

He's carrying a gun; you aren't. You can't afford to cross him."

John looked disappointed. But he seemed to be thinking it over.

As I turned to go, he said quietly, "You needn't worry about my fine, Mr. Iverson, I can afford to pay it. My old man's got six producing oil-wells on his ranch down in Bailey County. Two of 'em's mine."

I gawked at him pop-eyed. "Then what're you doing playing baseball?"

He looked me right in the eye then. "I like baseball, Mr. Iverson. I like it better than anything else in the world. I intend to go to the top in it. I never want to be out of it. Every day, the thing I worry about the most is how I can stay in baseball after I get too old to play." I could tell he was talking straight from the heart.

As I walked off, I told myself that here was one locoed rookie worth saving. More than anything else in the world, he liked to play and he liked to win. All managers love that kind of ballplayer.

FOR a week he behaved, hitting everything the enemy pitchers threw up there. He drove one on a line over the fence in Chicago to chase Barnum home with the tying run. In St. Louis he tripled home the winning run in the first game of a double-header and made a running one-handed stab of Dermott's liner to save the second, and we went into third place to stay. Against Boston he hit four straight singles, threw out a base-runner from short right and stole home. But next day he cost us plenty.

He was two steps off first base when it happened. The Braves worked the hidden-ball trick on him, the first one I'd seen in years. Mayberry, their first-baseman, took the ball out from under his arm, where he had hidden it.

"Looky here, John, what I got," he said, showing John the ball.

John jumped as if Mayberry was threatening him with a live rattlesnake.

"You big so-and-so!" he screamed. "You touch me with that and I'll kill you!" He broke for second base. Mayberry threw him out by ten feet. As the ball passed John and he saw he was trapped, he lost his head and purposely ran over the Boston shortstop who tagged him.

Budd, the Boston second-baseman, ran up to John. Sticking his chin into John's face, he began cussing him. John pushed him off and in a flash they were rolling on the grass in each other's arms. Two more players from each side got into it before the umpires and the cops broke it up. John was banished from the game, suspended three days and fined \$150. I thought of Soggy Saunders' letter then and really began to worry.

"He won't last long up there," my old enemy had written. "There's a curse on him." He could say that again. Yoakum was certainly following Saunders' script.

As John tore off his uniform in the clubhouse, he was still mad, mostly at himself. Like an alcoholic, he was always sorry later. His eyes were swollen. Fogarty, the groundkeeper, said that he saw John pull his hair and butt his head against the concrete wall. He was always keyed to the snapping-point. Without those blow-offs, I guess he'd have gone crazy. I was going crazy just watching him.

Yet, off the field, he was quiet, docile and well-behaved. He never raised his voice. At the hotel he always went out of his way to be courteous to everybody. He always went to prayer-meeting on Wednesday and to church on Sunday. He was generous with his money, a soft touch for anybody who wanted to borrow a sawbuck. He didn't act like the same guy.

THAT night I had a long-distance call from the commissioner's office. I was expecting it and took it in my hotel room. "What kind of a young wildcat you got playing for you out in right field?" Frick asked in his pleasant voice. "He's leading the league in the number of times he's been ejected by my umpires. If he keeps on, he'll break Durocher's old record and everybody thought that would stand forever. I hope you're trying to teach him the importance of getting along better with everybody. He throws more tantrums than a woman."

I promised to tighten the bit in John's sensitive mouth. Frick hung up.

But as I sat there holding the telephone in my lap, I wasn't at all sure I could do it. We'd checked up on what Yoakum had told us about his being suspended from two different leagues down in Texas. John had told us the truth. For the first time I began to realize the depth of Soggy Saunders' revenge.

"You'll sweat blood trying to decide whether to fire him or put up with him," Saunders' letter had predicted. The guy had really bingoed when he wrote that. I was worried sick. Already the Blue Sox had the worst reputation in the league.

I put the phone on the dresser. With a long, worried sigh I sat down on the bed, unbuttoned my shirt, loosened my necktie.

If I kept Yoakum, he might kill somebody with a bat, or get booted for life by the commissioner, "for the good of baseball." On the other hand, if we could find some way to keep him off the umpires, he might win the championship for us. And the Blue

Sox hadn't won a National League championship for thirty years.

I lit a cigarette and blew a mouthful of smoke into the air. As it drifted slowly toward the ventilator, I did some thinking. We wanted that flag, all right. But I had begun to wonder if we wouldn't be better off without John. I couldn't take much more. I'd almost decided I'd rather have peace than the pennant.

Two days after his three-day suspension was up, Yoakum got himself booted again. O'Connor thumbed John out of the game in the 9th. John had beefed too long on a close call at second base. In his own opinion, he was never out when he tried to steal a base.

Two days later, in Chicago, John and Tim Foley differed on a called strike in the 7th. John said that it was a ball. Foley and all the Cub fans voted it a strike. John lost out in the balloting, 30,000 to 1—and a minute later it was 30,000 to 0, because he argued so long Foley had to boot him.

Afterward, in our dressing-room, John was so disgusted with himself and so peeved at Foley that for thirty seconds he just hauled off and purposely bumped that hard head of his against the steel lockers. Finally Hoss Miller heard the noise, came in and made him stop.

That night, I walked three miles without ever leaving my hotel room. Smoking and thinking, I finally made up my mind to get rid of John. I decided to send him to Trenton, one of our farm clubs. Joe Donlan was our manager there. Propping my feet up on my room desk, I reached for the phone.

"You can't do this to me," Joe protested over the wire. "It isn't fair. I've been with the club sixteen years. I've always given my best." But I persuaded him.

Then I went to find Yoakum. I found him sprawled on his back on a divan on the mezzanine. He was reading a comic book.

He looked up and saw the turmoil in my face. It was right after Babcock got hurt and Wood had developed a sore arm. With our pitching temporarily wrecked, we'd lost three in a row and were about to drop back into fourth place. John laid down his comic book. There was sympathy in his face, sympathy for me—the kind, understanding sympathy of one friend for another.

I opened my mouth to speak, but for once he beat me to the punch.

"Mr. Iverson, I can tell you've been worried lately about our pitchers. If you want to buy a new pitcher or two somewheres, and the club can't afford 'em, I can let you have the money. I can get fifty thousand dollars from

my home bank down in Mule Shoe anytime you say—or more if you need it. And I won't charge you no interest, neither. All you gotta do is say the word."

His loyalty floored me. I'd been managing baseball teams eleven years but I'd never had an offer like that from one of my players.

I lost my nerve and just stood there looking at him. I didn't have the heart to go through with it. How are you going to fire somebody who wants to lend you fifty thousand dollars? While John had a lot of yokel in him, he had a lot of character, too. If this wasn't character, I never saw it in a man. He hated defeat so badly that he was willing to dig down deep into his own private funds to help the club avoid it.

Swallowing, I thanked him and went upstairs where I could be miserable all by myself. I chain-smoked half a pack of cigarettes. I even got so desperate I took a couple of nips from a bottle I keep hidden in the bottom of my trunk. Finally, I phoned Donlan again and told him I'd changed my mind about Yoakum. How you gonna fire a guy like that?

Right away, I was glad I hadn't fired him. Things got better. I called a meeting of all our players. John wasn't there; I had one of the coaches decoy him off to a movie. I laid all my cards face up on the table. I told them I thought we could win the championship and a nice slice of World Series money, if we could keep Yoakum in the lineup. They agreed with me and wanted to know how they could help. I told them it was their job to help me keep him out of the umpires' hair as much as possible, to help me protect him from himself.

I ORGANIZED a "cooling-off" squad of coaches and players. Any time Yoakum came to bat, our peace posse got ready for action. If John got in a rhubarb with an umpire, or with anybody, it was their job to run out, forcibly take hold of him and walk him around the premises until he could get hold of himself. Enthusiastically, they agreed to co-operate: they wanted that flag, and all the dough that went with it. More than anybody else, John Yoakum was the man who could help us get it.

After the meeting broke up, I felt better. We were all together on it now. At last we had our problem right out on the table in plain sight, where every man on the Blue Sox could see it.

In early September John's average zoomed over .375 and we fought closer and closer to the lead. Our pitchers were in the groove now and our whole club was battling Brooklyn for that flag. I liked my idea of enlisting

everybody on the club to help me keep John in line. It bound us closer together.

Every time John even looked at an umpire, our little riot squad poured out of the dugout ready for action. But in spite of his improvement, he was so famous for his disagreements with the guys in blue serge that they'd begun to get quick on the trigger. Where other clubs could beef for two minutes at a decision and get by with it, our men would get kicked out after one little insult. Like that September night in New York when John got crossed with little Harry Peck.

Peck was a fiery little guy who'd been in the league only three years. Good umpire, but his ears were a little rabbit. Liked to look good in front of the crowd. It was early in the game and we were behind three runs.

Peck called John out on a third strike. John spun round, facing the umpire. He was so excited that when he tried to talk, all he could do was sputter hopelessly. The words wouldn't come out of his mouth. In our dugout, big Turk Tremaine jumped to his feet and ran over three players as he scrambled to the concrete stairway.

"Come on, boys, let's go!" Our peace patrol leaped into action. But they were too late to save John from this umpire.

John was still standing at the plate, stuttering. He was so mad he couldn't find the words he wanted to say.

Peck raised both arms, called time and stepped to one side. "You're out of the game," he told Yoakum.

John looked astonished; he hadn't got around to saying anything! He finally found his voice.

"What for?"

"For delaying the game," barked Peck. The call was so raw that I ran out and stuck my chin in Peck's face. I was boiling and I told him off good. The boys said I stepped on his feet with my cleats—but you couldn't prove it by me. I don't remember. I was too teed-off to know what I was doing. It was sort of a novelty to me, taking up for John against an umpire, because John was nearly always wrong.

But this time he was right. He hadn't done anything to get kicked out of the game for. Besides I wanted to take some of the heat off him. I succeeded. Peck kicked me out, too. I was so teed-off at him then that if I'd had a knife, I'd have opened one of his veins and drunk his blood. And when I refused to leave, he looked nasty and pulled his watch. Then my own team moved in.

Taking me by the arms, they led me off. That was one for the books: Led off the field by my own riot squad! And when I refused to go with them,

somebody picked me up bodily and lugged me off in his arms, as if I was a sack of onions.

If I gave you forty guesses you'd never guess who it was. John Yoakum!

When I saw who was holding me, my mouth popped open and my reflexes came back. Jumping out of John's arms, I put both my hands on his shoulders. Looking back fearfully toward Peck, I pushed John toward our dugout.

"Don't get so excited," I babbled. "Get on back in that dugout before you lose your head!"

John backed up a step and stared at me with a look of wonder. Then I thought I saw something else come into his face, something that surprised me.

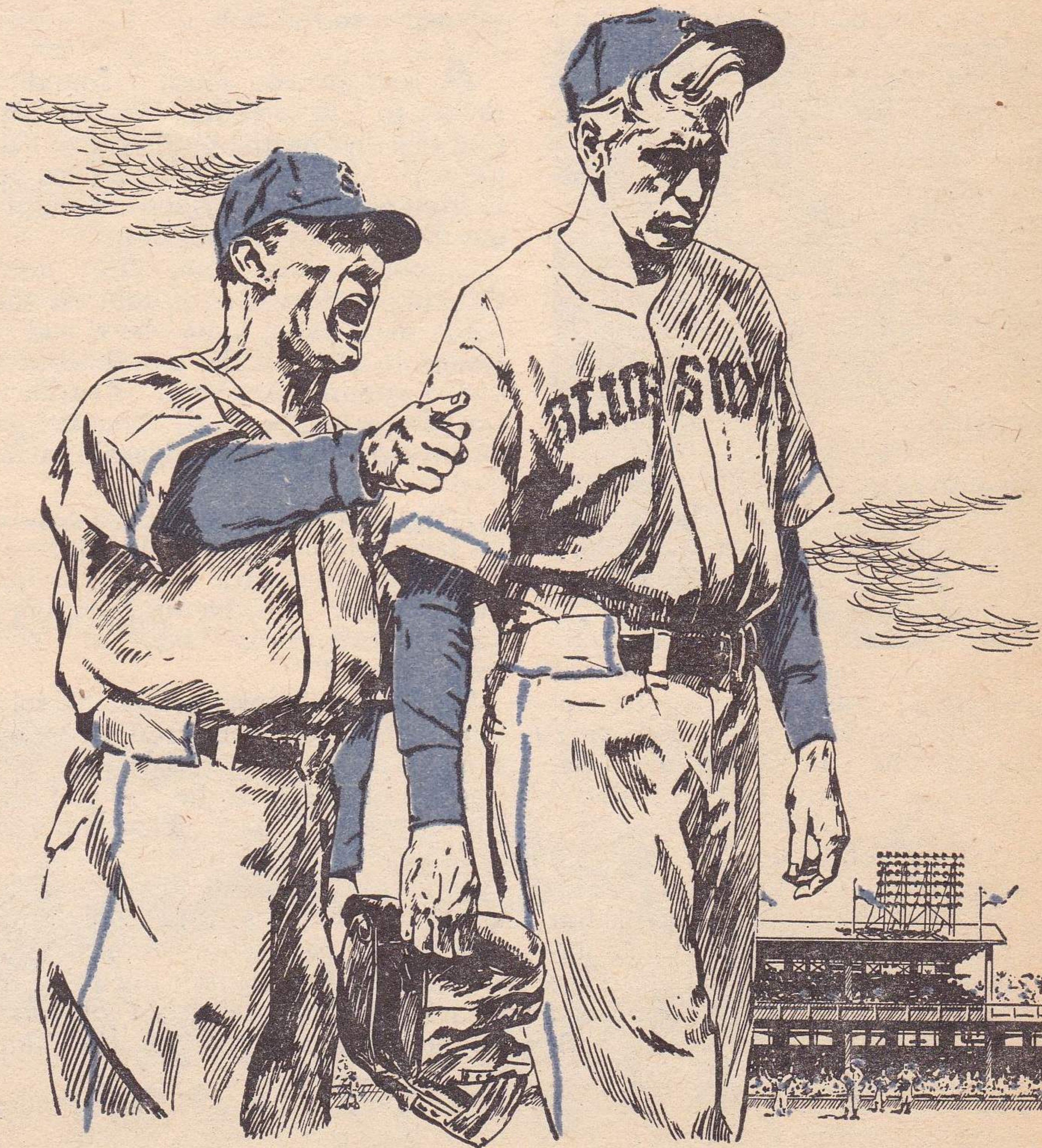
Later, when I was sitting in the dugout and my blood pressure began to go down, I tried to analyze it. John was one of those guys whose facial expression was always an open book. It was frank and eloquent. You could look in his face at any given time and see exactly what he thought of you, even though he might be too polite to tell you with words.

And if I'd read John's face correctly, he had looked at me with something that seemed akin to sorrow and disgust. Baffled, I tried to review my own behavior. What could I possibly have done during the rhubarb with Peck that nauseated as notorious an umpire-baiter as John Yoakum?

I was still trying to figure it out when John came up to me in the locker-room. I had just pulled on my trousers and was groping for the top button. John's shirttail was out and he was knotting a blue necktie that had a yellow steer's head painted on it. As he looked at me, the corners of his mouth puckered curiously and again I saw the look.

"Shucks, Mr. Iverson," he began, concern in his voice. "You were sure riled up out there today. I hope you don't mind my speaking to you like this but—well—you looked awful out there in front of all those people. I felt sorry for you."

Flabbergasted, I turned loose of my pants and they dropped clear down around my ankles. My mouth fell open and I stood there in my bare shanks. Holy cow! I had looked awful!



"You're suspended!" I howled, soon as I got my breath. "Take off that uniform!" He cringed as though I'd struck him, and my voice was hoarse. But he'd probably cost us the pennant.

How did he think *he'd* looked the dozens of times I'd had to pull *him* off of umpires! I wished he could see himself when he was throwing one of his tantrums. I started to tell him so. But I didn't; something told me not to.

I just looked down at the concrete floor and shook my head ruefully. John stepped over in front of a mirror to put the finishing touches on the knot.

Looking after him, I did some fast thinking. In his hassles with the arbiters, he'd always been so crazy mad he probably didn't realize how ridiculous he had looked. He probably didn't even remember. And now here he was telling me how bad I'd looked.

REACHING down, I picked up my fallen pants, pulled them up to my waist, found the button, pulled up the zipper. This might be valuable. When a ballplayer as cracked as John Yoakum blew his top, he probably didn't realize how silly he looked before the multitude, because he never had a chance to see himself. All he could see was red.

But when he wasn't so teed-off himself, and had a chance to see somebody else lose control, maybe he got a different perspective.

Thoughtfully, I reached for my shirt and looked back on my own conduct that afternoon. Red was all I'd been able to see, too; I didn't remember a thing I'd done. All I could remember was that I'd wanted to strangle Peck. And yet I'd been thrown out of the ball game and my own players had had to lead me off the field. I must have done something else to get both a heave-ho and an escort like that all in the same afternoon.

In my room that night, I went all over it again. I thought I saw what might be a way out. It was a long chance, but we had so much at stake that I was ready to try anything.

Since rhubarbs in which the subject became completely daffy were so repulsive to John, provided he was watching somebody even more slug-nutty than he was, having one, what would be wrong with this? I'd always have another player standing by. Every time John blew his cork, I'd have my stand-in get twice as violent. Maybe John would be so horrified at his teammate's behavior that he'd forget his own quarrel and help lead the other guy off the field! Like he had led me off when I got crossed with Peck.

I know it sounds screwy. We'd always end up getting somebody on our club kicked out. But if we played our cards right, it would always be somebody more expendable than John. I

had to keep John in the game somehow.

Next morning I talked it over with my coaches. They didn't think it would work and voted solidly against it.

Hoss Miller flipped away his cigarette butt and squinted at me keenly. "One idiot on a ball club is enough. I don't think I can stand two. We're already the worst-hated ball club in the league. Frick'll take our franchise away from us." But I vetoed them. When you get desperate, you'll try anything once.

It cost me, though. When it came time to pick the stand-in, I was unanimously elected.

"You're the only one he likes an' looks up to," Ike Black said. "You're the only one he'd do it for. Besides, you've got it all set up: when you blew your top against Peck yesterday, John forgot his own little war to carry you off the field. Now he's worried about you. He told Mick Thomas last night that he was afraid you were cracking up under the pressure of the race."

I gulped. They had me trapped. I decided to go through with it. That night we had a meeting and while Hoss lured John off to a show, I explained it to the club.

A DAY or two later, I found a chance to talk to John. We were sitting together on the bus going out to the park. He had his knees folded up in front of him and was staring glumly out the window. I nudged him.

"John," I told him, "I've been thinking about what you told me the other day. You know—how bad I looked in front of the crowd when I had a run-in with Peck. I've been worrying a lot about it. What if I go off my rocker and do it again some day?"

John looked at me with shock in his face. He began to shake his head and make funny little clucking noises in his throat. "Mr. Iverson, you don't want to even *think* about it! You looked awful!"

"I've got to think about it," I told him. "In fact, I've been thinking about it a lot. I appreciate your getting me off the field the way you did day before yesterday. That was fast thinking."

John blushed modestly. "Aw, it wasn't anything, Mr. Iverson. You just needed help. You were making an awful fool of yourself out there in front of all those people. I felt sorry for you and ashamed for the Blue Sox."

"Yeah," I told him, "but you were the only guy on my club who tried to do something about it."

John shook his head solemnly. "Oh, no, Mr. Iverson. We were all trying

to help you. I just happened to be the closest."

I dug a small knife out of my pocket, opened the blade and began to clean my nails. "I hope you're the closest next time, too," I told him. "Tell you what I'd like for you to do: I always ride the umpires hard the last month of the season. I can't help it. Keep an eye on me, will you? If I ever get in that condition again, I'll appreciate it if you'll get to the scene of action fast and take care of me—the way I try to take care of you when you have your brawls with the umpires."

He looked horrified. "Gosh, Mr. Iverson! Do I act like you did when I'm having trouble with the umpires?"

"You usually act worse," I told him honestly. That seemed to hit him like a fist below the belt; he just sat there, worrying about it.

"Let's face it," I went on gently. "We both like to win and we both hate to lose. But we both lose our heads a lot. And that's not good for the Blue Sox. From now on we've got to help each other."

John was still facing it when we got to the ball park. He brooded about it so much that he was the last guy off the bus. The driver had to tell him to get off. . . .

We were playing Boston two weeks later when I got to try out my new scheme for the first time. John had doubled off the wall and made a clean steal of third. But he overslid the bag. He dived back for it and the play was close, though I thought John was out.

Bill Todd, the base umpire, swung his thumb into the air.

"You're out o' there!" he bellowed. Then all hell broke loose.

"No!" screamed John, jumping to his feet. His high, shrill voice carried all over the park. Anger in his face, he made a rush for Todd. But blocking John out of the way, I got to Todd first. I had made up my mind a week back that I was going to make this first show my best. I wanted to impress John.

TODD still had his thumb in the air. Sticking my jaw in Todd's face and holding my hands behind me to keep them off him, I bumped him with my chest, shoving him back.

"You blind old so-and-so!" I told him. "The guy was safe from here to there. When are you umpires gonna quit robbin' us?"

Retreating a step, Todd looked at me as though he couldn't believe his eyes. I'd always had a pretty good reputation around the league as far as umpires were concerned. Todd and I had always got along well. He was an old-timer—a good umpire, too.

Recovering, he pulled his cap bill down tight and growled at me out of

the corner of his mouth. "Mike, you've jumped your trolley! Git hold of yourself. Git the hell away from me or I'll have to run you in." And darned if he didn't turn his back on me and start to walk off.

I hated myself for doing it, but I had to follow through. I ran clear around Todd and again stuck my face in his.

"Didn't you ever hear of free speech?" I howled. "Don't you dare to walk off from me without hearing what I've got to say! I say that's the rottenest call you ever made. The guy's hand was on the bag when they tagged him!" I kept arguing loudly and roosting him with my chest. Then I felt John's restraining hand on my arm.

"Stop it, Mr. Iverson," John was pleading. "You're having another one of your bad spells. Everybody in the park's watching you. Please stop."

Todd pulled out his watch and ordered me off the premises. The sun flashed off the watch's gold case. It was a twenty-one-jewel job; I know that, because before the hassle was over, I was going to have to buy Todd another.

DUCKING under John's arm, I grabbed the watch out of Todd's hand, turned and with all the strength in my right arm hurled it against the grandstand boards. The springs and wheels flew in every direction.

Then John grabbed me, clamped an armlock on me and led me bucking and yelling off the field and into our locker room. There he made me sit down. He was trembling; his face was tragic. He wouldn't leave me until I'd taken off my uniform and walked into the shower. Then he went back to the ball game and struck out three times—as I know, because I heard the rest of the game on the clubhouse radio.

At the hotel that night, John didn't eat a bite, just sat around by himself looking like a man who had gone through a terrible emotional experience. I was at the desk asking for my key, when Hoss Miller and Ike Black walked up. Ike motioned with his hand toward John. "I don't believe he's gonna last through the night. I don't think he even wants to live any more."

I looked at John, then dropped my eyes and looked down at my hands, the hands that had pegged Todd's fancy timepiece against the grandstand that afternoon.

I didn't feel too good myself. For the first time in my life, my conscience hurt me for abusing an umpire. What made it worse, Todd was right in calling John out. And, on top of that, he'd tried to warn me, give me a break.

Hoss looked at me with admiration. "You ought to get the Academy Reward for that act put on this afternoon."

I scraped the toe of my shoe on the hotel rug and hung my head; I wasn't so proud of what I'd done. It's funny the things a manager will do trying to win a pennant.

"Yeah," I said gloomily. "Frick'll probably come down tomorrow and personally present it to me. A thousand bucks—and permanent suspension."

But I was wrong. It was only five hundred bucks and one week, plus the cost of the watch. And he didn't phone me to meet him any place—just wired. I knew he had waited for Todd's report before acting. Now I felt meaner than ever. Todd could have made it rough on me.

That night I went downtown alone. I knew Todd liked oysters. I bought him a whole barrel and shipped 'em to his home in Baltimore. I didn't put a name on the shipment. After that I felt a little bit better.

John soon got to feeling better, too. And, to everybody's amazement, he quit badgering the umpires. In St. Louis he once started to make a pass at Joe Dorman but again I butted in, climbed all over Dorman and got kicked out, accompanied by John and his arm-lock. This time he'd got to me faster; I didn't have to smash anybody's jewelry.

"Gosh, Mr. Iverson," John told me afterward in the locker-room. "You were sure riled up out there today. I felt sorry for you—but not as sorry as I felt that time you threwed Todd's watch against the grandstand in Philly. This time you got over it quicker."

I took a long drink at the fountain and wiped my mouth with the back of my sleeve. "No, I didn't," I told him. "You just got to me quicker. But thanks, anyway. I sure appreciate it."

John looked pleased; he almost smiled. "Aw, shoot, Mr. Iverson," he said shyly. "I know just how you feel. It's hard to get along with them Blind Boone empires. Sometimes I get so riled up in a baseball game I can't even get along with myself."

He could say that again. Especially after what happened the last week of the season. This time it wasn't a run-in with an umpire. John Yoakum had a run-in with himself.

This was something I had completely overlooked. All my healing efforts in his behalf had been concentrated on improving his public relations with umpires. You live and learn.

WE were playing the Reds in our park. The season was almost over and in spite of Soggy Saunders'

gloomy prophecy, John Yoakum was still with us. And how he was powdering that ball! It was an off day for Brooklyn. If we beat Cincinnati, we tied Brooklyn for the lead. Then we rested a couple of days and closed the season with a three-game series with the Dodgers that would settle everything.

It was the 7th inning. We led Cincinnati by two runs. The Reds were at bat. They had the bases full, one out. Salsinger singled to right. The ball was well hit. Startled, I jumped to my feet in the dugout and stuck my head out to watch John make the play.

YOAKUM ran in to field the ball on the first bounce. But it slipped between his legs and rolled to the fence. I gasped and swore. What a break! With the Reds streaking around the bases, John wheeled around. His face was white with rage. He threw down his glove and like a man chasing a hat in a gale, sprinted after the fleeing ball.

And when he ran it down, after it had bumped gently against the fence and met him coming back, John did an incredible thing. I've been in baseball nineteen years but I've never seen anything like that, before or since.

Instead of pegging the ball back to the infield, so we might have cut off the last two runs, John snatched that ball off the outfield grass and with all the strength in his right arm threw it high and far over the center-field fence! Astonished, our big crowd of 53,000 stared in shocked and dismayed silence.

Ike Black had leaped to my side in the dugout. He was staring at what he'd seen.

"Damn!" Ike swore. "He must have a friend on the other side of the fence that he promised a ball to."

The minute John turned loose of that ball, you could see he was sorry—tragically sorry. Recovering himself, he followed the ball to the fence on a dead run. But there he had to say good-bye to it. The wall was too high to scale.

All four Red runs scored, including the winning ones. I made the longest run of my life then.

I charged out into center field and the breeze I made didn't air-cool me. The farther I ran, the madder I got. I wanted to cut John's heart out and eat it raw, right out there in front of the multitude. All the toil and sweat and heartbreak and scheming we'd put out getting almost up to first place kicked away in two seconds by this madman who still couldn't keep his head in a ball game!

When I finally got to Yoakum in deep center, he looked at me sideways

with a hangdog look. My voice was hoarse and my hands were trembling. He'd probably cost us the championship.

"You're suspended!" I howled, soon as I got my breath. "Take off that uniform!"

John cringed as though I'd struck him. For a minute he stood there, looking as stricken as though he had just run over my only child in a speeding automobile and was standing with the corpse at his feet. Then he turned and began to trot toward our clubhouse.

As he loped along with a peculiar shuffling gait, I could hear him sniffing and see him swallow and bat his eyes. The more he cried, the faster he trotted, until finally he passed from view through the clubhouse door.

I just stood there in right field, my hands on my hips, glowering at him. I felt like a burned-up cinder. What punishment was stiff enough for a ballplayer who would do a thing like that? What was I going to do with him? What would you have done?

After the game, the sports writers descended on me like forty hen hawks on a sitting quail. Cornering me at the clubhouse door, they demanded that I kick John off the club for life. They wanted me to ship him back to

Texas on the next cattle train. You should have seen what they wrote next morning!

One writer called John "Iverson's Idiot." Overnight, all the sports writers and radio men took up the new nickname. The heat was on; I had to do something quick.

One of our owners wanted me to take John to see a psychiatrist. Another said hell, no, that the only difference between John and any psychiatrist was who had the key. Neither of them knew I'd already taken John to see two different psychiatrists, neither of whom had been able to help him. My own players were so furious they wouldn't speak to him. That hurt John most of all; he always worried more about letting them down than about anything else.

They were probably thinking about the dough, as much as anything else. When John had thrown that ball over the fence, he'd thrown each Blue Sox player's World Series' share of five thousand bucks over that brick wall with it. They completely forgot they wouldn't even be up for fourth-place money if it hadn't been for John's big brown bat. I still get a migraine from thinking about that.

John disappeared for two whole days. Nobody knew where he was.

He left no word. That was okay with me. I hoped he'd gone back to Texas. Right then, I didn't care if I never saw him again.

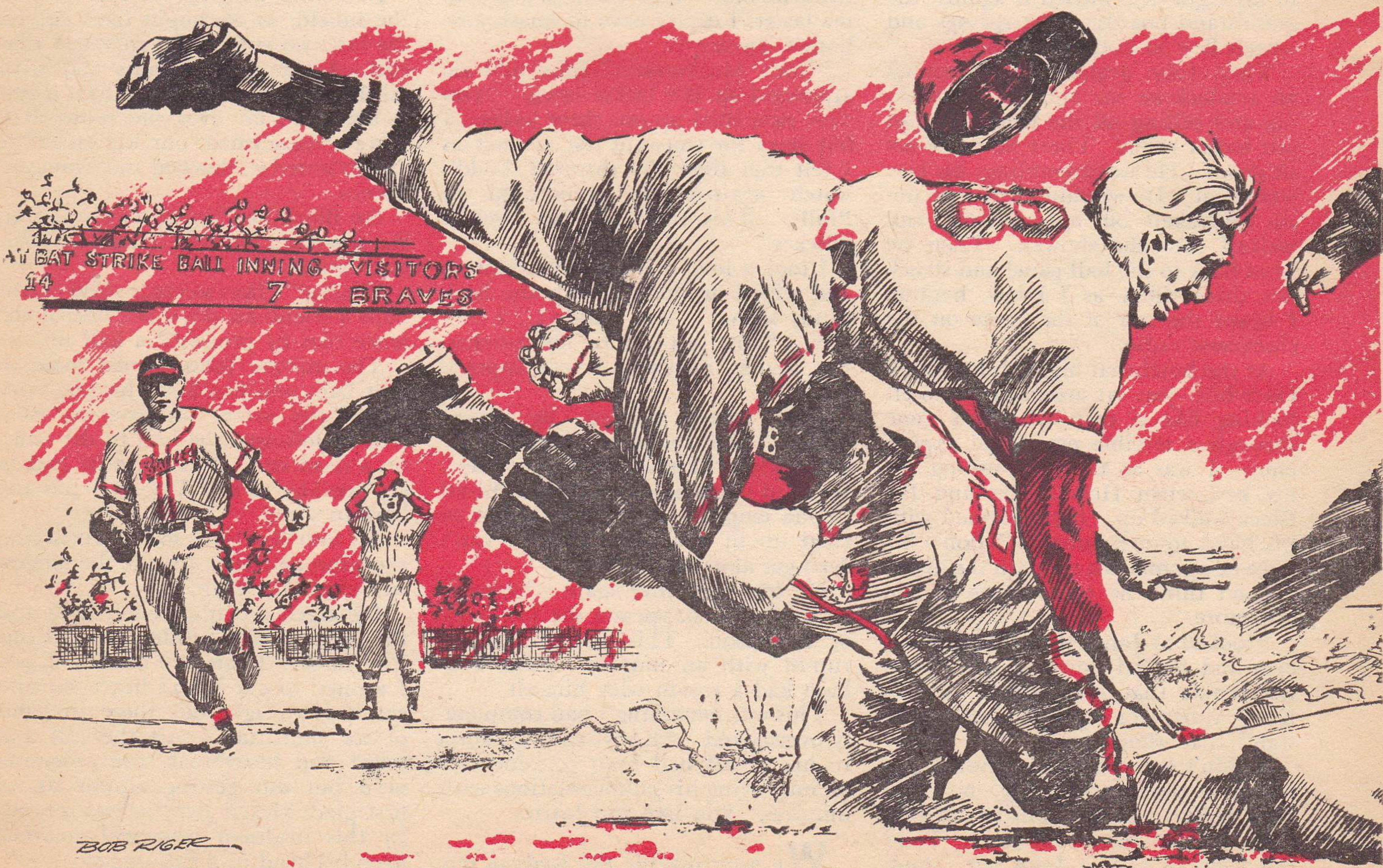
Two nights later, I had locked myself in my hotel room and lit a cigarette. I was tired and sick. Because of John's newest tantrum, we were going into the big series a full game behind Brooklyn. That meant we had to sweep the series to win the National League championship. Or take three out of four to win it on a playoff. I didn't think we could win one out of four from them.

Sitting in the dark with my feet up on the window ledge, I wrestled with my problem. Suddenly there came a short, timid knock on the door. I ignored it.

"Mr. Iverson," somebody called. "Please unlock the door."

I got up, padded over to the door in my sock feet, turned the bolt. It was John; his face looking pale and haggard in the hall light. He walked in and sat down on the bed. I locked the door behind him. Although it was dark in the room, the hundreds of neon lights in the street below kept throwing a weird, reddish half-light over everything.

John leaned forward dumbly in the dark, his hands clasped together



He dived for the bag, and the play was close. Bill Todd, the umpire, swung his thumb. "You're out!" he sang. Then all hell broke loose.

across his legs. I could read his pain and suffering in the dejected droop of his shoulders. For a moment his body shook with emotion, and the queer, clucking noises I had grown to know so well came out of his throat. He was crying again in his silent, enraged fashion. Then he grew quieter and got control of himself.

"Mr. Iverson, I'm sorry I boiled over out there day before yesterday. I know you've got to punish me. And I deserve all the punishment you give me. But I hope, no matter what you stick on me, that you'll still let me play. The Blue Sox need me in these last three games with the Dodgers."

GLARING at him in the dark, I took a long, bitter drag off my cigarette and flung it out the window. Angrily, I snorted.

"I don't *dare* let you play," I told him hoarsely. "I can't trust you! You'd kill an umpire with your bat or pull some other screwy stunt like you did out there the other day. You never know yourself what you're gonna do next. You can't even trust *yourself*."

I could hear him catch his breath as he shrunk back in the dark. Then he lifted his head and straightened up. His hands came unclenched and be-

gan to twist and writhe helplessly as he struggled with his emotions.

"I don't mean to play regular, Mr. Iverson. I don't deserve ever to play regular for the Blue Sox again. But if you'll just let me stick around and pinch-hit—like I did when I broke in—I don't think I'd get into trouble and hurt the club. I'd never let the count get up to two. Then the empires couldn't call the third one on me and start an argument. I'd hit the first good pitch they threw in there."

He might, at that. Thoughtfully, I kicked at the floor sideways with my foot, forgetting I was in my sock feet and not wearing cleats out in the coaching box. Surprised at the novelty of the suggestion, my anger cooled a little.

This was just like John, this passing of sentence on himself. I remembered the day he had hit that mile-high foul to Toomey, the Brooklyn catcher, then refused to allow himself a drink at the water fountain. It was his code. And now here he was benching himself, with the biggest series of the season coming up. And him the best hitter and best hustler on my club!

You can't realize how much that decision cost him, or how much self-sacrifice there was in it. All ball-

players want to play regular. With them it's a matter of fierce pride. And more than any ballplayer I ever saw, John Yoakum wanted to be in there every day. Yet here he was taking himself out.

Besides, I hadn't been fair when I'd told him that he might kill an umpire with his bat. He hadn't had any umpire trouble for five weeks. Apparently, I had shocked him out of that.

"Where've you been?" I asked.

He lifted his head wearily and shuddered. "Mr. Iverson, I've been watching myself throw that ball over the fence day before yesterday—watching myself lose that game for the Blue Sox."

I blinked. His odd behavior scared me. The guy sounded batty—as if he'd lost his marbles, brooding over this thing.

"I've been watching how surprised and disappointed all those people at the game looked when I did it. I watched you run all the way from the dugout to the outfield to chase me in. It was awful. It was the worst thing I ever saw."

Puzzled, I leaned forward, squinting at him. "What do you mean you've been watching today something that happened two days ago?"

"The news-reel in the movies," John said. "All day yesterday I walked along the river. I walked away down by the ferry where nobody'd know me. Last night I slept on the wharf. I haven't had anything to eat for two days. Tonight I dropped in at a movie. They had a news-reel there. It was all about the ball game we lost because I got mad at myself and pegged that ball over the fence. I saw the picture twice. They didn't leave out nothing."

Now I understood John's deep emotion. He *had* seen himself having trouble with himself. And it had shaken him clear down to his toes. A thrill of excitement shot through me. Maybe this guy *had* learned his lesson on both counts. Maybe he had learned to control himself and didn't know it. Maybe I had me a normal ballplayer at last.

NEXT day I told John to move his stuff into my room. Then I publicly announced my decision. I knew the fans and sports writers would pan me good, and they did. The newspaper guys told me, the directors told me, and the public told me—especially the public. You should have heard those guys behind third base.

That made me all the more stubborn. I told them that I was running the ball club. I told them that, while I was benching John at present, I wouldn't hesitate to put him back in there any time I figured he might do



the ball club some good, and that I would be the sole judge of that, too.

Before the largest crowd in Blue Sox history, we beat Brooklyn 2 to 1 in the first game behind George Babcock's pitching. We won the second, too, Lefty Woods blanking them 1 to 0. John Yoakum didn't play a minute of either game. If we had got behind, I guess I'd have used him. But we led both games all the way.

With his chin in his hand, John just sat there in our dugout gloomily watching everything that happened out on the field. His sharp, sensitive eyes didn't miss a thing. Nobody spoke to him and he never spoke to

anybody. He just sat there suffering by himself.

I never saw a club fight as hard as ours did without Yoakum. It was mostly a victory for our pitchers. Now we led by one full game. That assured us of at least a tie for the flag.

If we won the finale, we would take the pennant by two full games. But, if we lost the finale, we would still be tied. A lot was riding on that third game. I had George Boehler, my slowballer, all rested up ready to pitch it.

Brooklyn came out with Jim Gray, their best pitcher. He had won twenty-three games for them. It was a pitcher's battle all the way. In the

4th, the Dodgers got to Boehler for three runs when Patterson parked one with Bloss and Zimmerman on. It was the only poor pitch Boehler made all day.

After that, he gave them nothing but horse collars and with Brooklyn still leading 3-0, the thrilling game moved through the late innings. It looked as if a playoff would be needed. In the last of the 8th we got a small rally going, without hitting the ball out of the infield. Gerdeon hit one on the handle down to Koehler, who fumbled. O'Shouse walked. Iceley moved them both up on a sacrifice. Shield was hit by a pitched ball. Greb fanned. Bases still full; Chastell, John's substitute, was at bat.

I walked out of the dugout and held up my arms. This was the spot I'd been waiting for. It was time to lift John's suspension.

"Yoakum pinch-hitting for Chastell," I told Harry Peck, the plate umpire. He was the same one who'd fast-booted John that time for delaying the game and ended up kicking me out, too. When the public address announced that John was pinch-hitting, an excited hush fell over the big crowd. My move had surprised them.

John climbed the stairs out of our dugout, paused a moment to pick up his bat, and with his short, mincing steps and his smooth, graceful glide, began the long walk to the plate, his wide shoulders swinging rhythmically.

I felt my throat tighten and my mouth go dry. What a spot I had put him on! A man kicked from one league to another because he couldn't hold a rein on his temper; a man with such a fiercely competitive spirit that he couldn't abide defeat. And yet, after each unfortunate outburst, his own conscience scourged him as with a whip. And now here he was striding bravely, doggedly to the plate, a bat in his hand, a galling pain in his heart.

A few scattered boos greeted him. Then a wonderful thing happened. A solid roar of cheering and handclapping broke out. It burst first from the grandstand behind him, then spread wildly to the stands along each foul line and rolled like a tidal wave to the bleachers.

I felt a warm thrill. Our crowd had come through; like most American sports crowds, they were for the underdog. They were pulling for the Blue Sox bad boy to make good.

Now John was at the plate. That cheer had bucked him up. He pulled his cap bill down tightly and looked at me. I gave him the hit-away sign. Carefully setting his spikes, he dug in, waved his bat once, then cocked it threateningly on his left shoulder. He threw a challenging look at Gray.

TEETHPRINTS

"Join the Navy and get your teeth photographed in full color!"

This could well be a new slogan for Uncle Sam's sea arm, because the Navy now is snapping color pictures of the teeth of some of its personnel. Before long, the Navy may be doing the same thing for all of its men.

Well, you say, so what? Who can get excited over having his molars snapped, in black-and-white or color? To be frank about it, the Navy isn't excited about the esthetic qualities of a bunch of molars. It's just that they have hit upon a new and superior method of identification.

Teeth are the most indestructible part of the human body. An atomic-bomb burst—or even an ordinary explosion—might well mangle bodies beyond recognition. Identifying "dogtags" can be blown off, and hands can be so badly mangled that fingerprints cannot be taken. But it takes super-white heat to disintegrate teeth. Ordinary fire won't touch them and even time, which causes decomposition of other parts of the body, will not change the teeth.

As the Navy's dental-research expert, Captain C. A. Schlack, puts it, we could even identify Neanderthal men, who lived hundreds of thousands of years ago, if Neanderthal men had had the foresight to leave "teethprints" behind.

After about ten years of work, the Navy has succeeded in developing a device that makes three different photographs of a person's teeth in three minutes. The Navy is almost ready to put the equipment to use with individual ships and land units. Meanwhile, the FBI and other law-enforcement agencies have shown keen interest in the new identification system.

Most needed at this point is a satisfactory classification system, and California police experts have taken a long step in that direction. Working with the Navy, they have developed a system based on the number of teeth and number of fillings, and the system has proved practical in several "dry-run" tests. The system works even if the victim has lost several teeth after the pictures are taken.

Color pictures, which show spots and discolorations as well as shape of teeth, can be used to identify a victim even if there are only a few teeth left, and Captain Schlack says there is every chance that even one tooth, studied microscopically, could establish identification.

It could well be that the present-day fingering system, helpful as it is to both military and civilian authorities, may soon be playing second fiddle to the "teethprinting" system.

—Harold Helfer

"Come on, boy! Bust one! You're the best!" I bawled at him, kicking a small cloud of dirt toward the outfield.

Calling time, the Dodgers huddled warily around the mound, talking it over. I was afraid they'd give John an intentional pass, donate us a run. But they had lots of confidence in Gray. They decided to pitch to John. The percentages are always against the hitter, even a good hitter. Our big crowd of 60,000 was in a tumult, shouting abuse at the Dodgers and Gray, calling encouragement to John.

Gray wound up, jerked his chin toward third base, whirled around and delivered. It was his best pitch, a fast curve that came in low and bent like a trout-hook. True to his promise, John didn't let it go by. Watching it like a hawk, he leaped at the ball and swung.

Ping! It sounded like buckshot hitting a baling wire. Nobody saw the white ball at first, it was hit so terrifically. Then it gleamed into view, streaking past the Dodger first baseman, a low, twisting drive. With our crowd on its feet roaring, the ball glanced once off the right-field grass, skipping in long bounds toward the fence.

The Dodger right-fielder made a long, futile dive for it on his stomach but got only a mouthful of grass for his pains. Quickly he jumped to his feet, pursuing the ball. All our runners were in motion. All three of them scored. I held John up at third base. It was a triple.

Now the game was tied, 3 to 3. I've never seen a crazier crowd. Fire and brimstone seemed to burst from them. The thunder of their cheering for Yoakum redoubled. People who were entire strangers hugged each other wildly and danced little individual jigs of joy. The umpires had to hold up the game while the field crew came out and picked up all the straw hats and canes and assorted debris the crowd had pitched onto the field. They needed a gigantic minnow seine to drag up all the stuff.

I looked at John, standing on third. Hands on hips, he stood there drinking it all in, his big chest rising and falling as he panted. If ever a ballplayer was vindicated, he was. Triumph shone in his deep-set eyes. All the years of pain and self-torment and hopeless longing had their compensation in that moment of glory.

Finally, the umpires started the game again. Our next batter was in the box. The Dodgers walked slowly and dejectedly back to their positions. In the anticlimax that followed Yoakum's hit, they were a little off-guard and of course they had poetic license.

Heavy-hearted, Gray trudged toward the mound with the ball, turned his back on the plate and shook his head slowly and resignedly. Toomey looked disgustedly at his mask and started to put it on. For a brief instant, their guard was down.

Suddenly I saw the opportunity every manager watches for. I gave John the steal signal.

Lifting his knees almost to his chin, John was halfway to the plate before they saw him. Then the Dodgers yelled at Gray, who spun around in alarm, got control of himself and fired the ball to Toomey. John, Toomey, Umpire Harry Peck and the ball all seemed to reach the plate together. I thought John beat the ball a foot.

"You made a grand slide, but you're out!" sang Peck, waving his thumb in John's face. A gigantic "boo!" broke from our crowd. Of all the lousy calls I'd ever seen, this was the worst. The thing I hated most about it was that it robbed us of the championship, robbed John of his chance to score the winning run after he'd driven in the first three to tie the score. What a comeback that would have been!

Something told me to get to the plate fast. I ran in from third. As usual, I was too late.

In a flash John flipped over on his stomach, his face contorted with fury. Slapping both hands on the ground, he vaulted to his feet facing Peck. And then he froze in his tracks, staring with nervous fascination at something on top of the grandstand. As I ran in, I looked up too and I saw what John saw—the news-reel cameras.

I charged Peck, my hands opening like claws as I reached for him. And then something latched onto me with a grip of steel. It was John's armlock. I tried to jerk loose, but he was too strong. It was like trying to jerk loose from a steel hitching-post.

To my amazement, John had complete control of himself. He was polite but firm. "No, Mr. Iverson! I'm not going to let you." And he dragged me all the way to the dugout.

THE game went on. I put John back in right field. I wasn't afraid now that he'd lose his head—he'd passed the acid test. In the tenth Gray grew wild, walking two.

They put in Gerner, a lefty with a blazing fast ball. He fanned Shield but, when Greb bunted, he fell down. Bases full. And now John was up for the second time in the series.

Gerner got nervous. He pegged two balls. His third pitch broke down sharply. John ducked, but not quite far enough. With a loud thud, the ball glanced off his head, knocking him to his knees. A startled murmur broke from the crowd and a chill

ran up my back. Our whole team spilled out of the dugout and made a run toward John. Hoss Miller ran in from first; I ran in from third; Gerner ran in from the mound.

But before anybody could reach him, John bounced to his feet, shaking his head. Relieved, I took a long breath. He looked okay. With his ballplayer's instinct, John rubbed his skull and started to trot down to first. But Hoss Miller grabbed him and began jumping up and down. Quickly, every Blue Sox player joined them in a war-dance of joy. The game was over! Hit by a pitched ball, John had driven in the winning run. We'd won the championship!

In our dressing-room afterward, I had our team physician examine John's cranium carefully. There was a little skin torn, but that was all.

They had to take six stitches in the ball.

You will probably remember that World Series. We won it, four games to two, with John batting .426, hitting three homers and driving in eleven runs. And you probably have been wondering whatever became of John, because he never played another game of professional ball after that season.

Well, I can tell you what happened to him.

I'm the general manager of the Blue Sox now, and I saw the big guy just last week. I'd argued with him for weeks after that series, trying to get him to reconsider his decision to quit, but he wouldn't listen.

"You've done more for me, Mr. Iverson," he told me, "than any man ever did for any other ballplayer. And I sure appreciate it. But Pappy tells me our oilwells are beginning to produce like crazy, and he needs me to he'p out a bit. So I guess I'll just mosey back to Texas."

And he did. I heard later that he and his father made a fortune with their oil investments, but I always wondered how a man who loved baseball as much as John Yoakum could just give it all up for the oil business, no matter how much money he made at it. So, when I was in San Angelo a week ago on business for the Sox, I found out.

Sitting in a box at the ball park with Jack Kelly, our scout down that way, I brought up the name Yoakum and wondered out loud if Jack had seen the big guy lately.

"Sure," Jack said. "In fact, I can see him right now, out there on the field." And he pointed down the right-field foul line. I followed his eyes, and finally caught a glimpse of that white thatch and those familiar broad shoulders. It was John, all right.

He was an umpire.

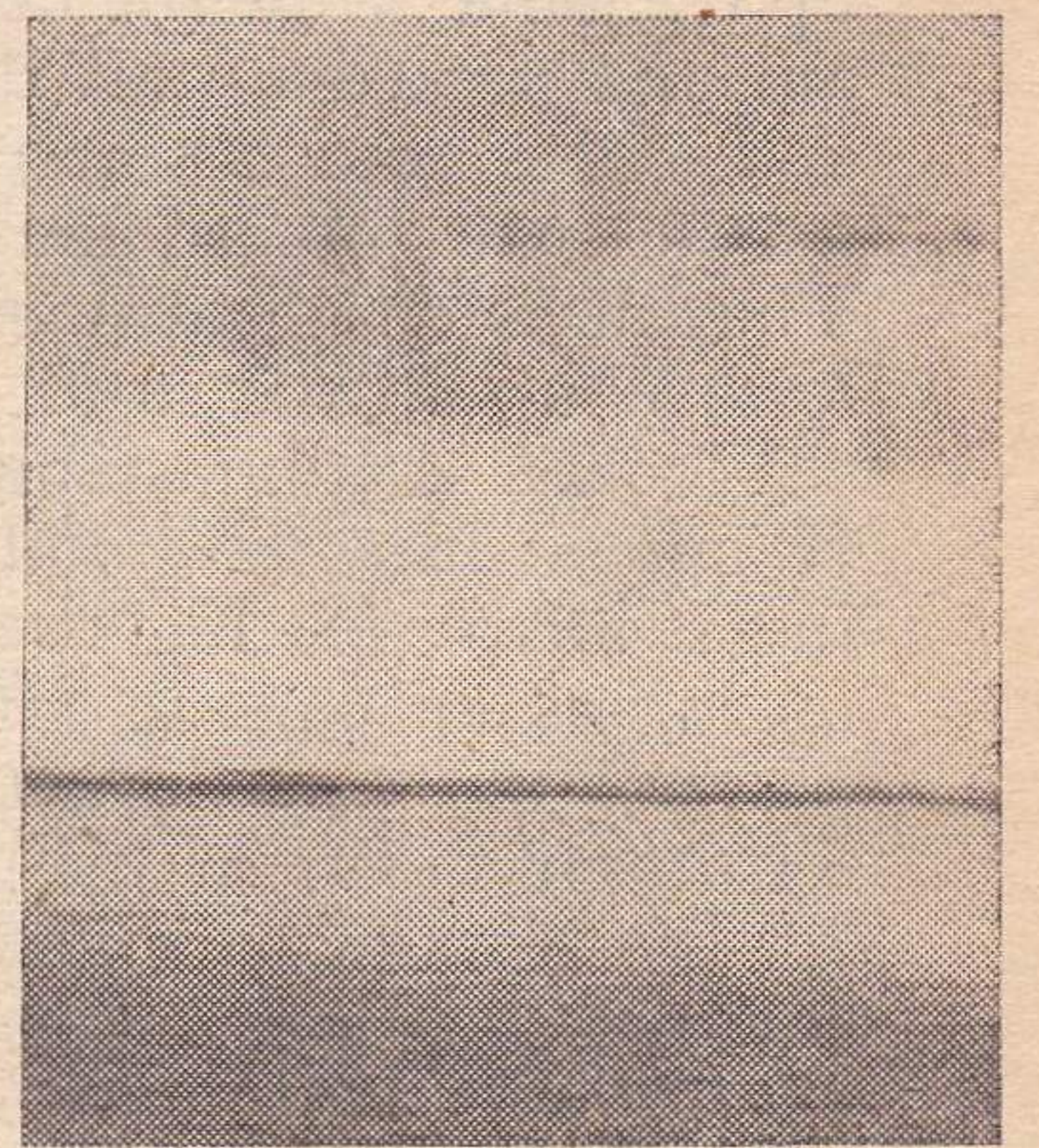
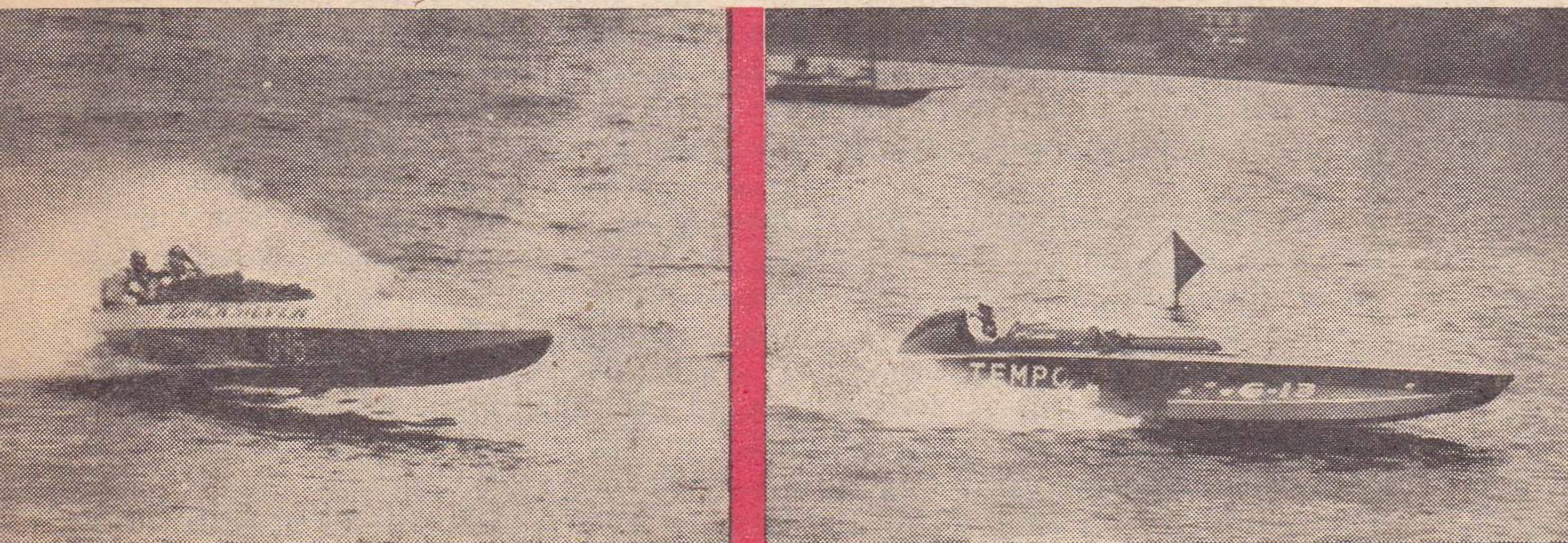
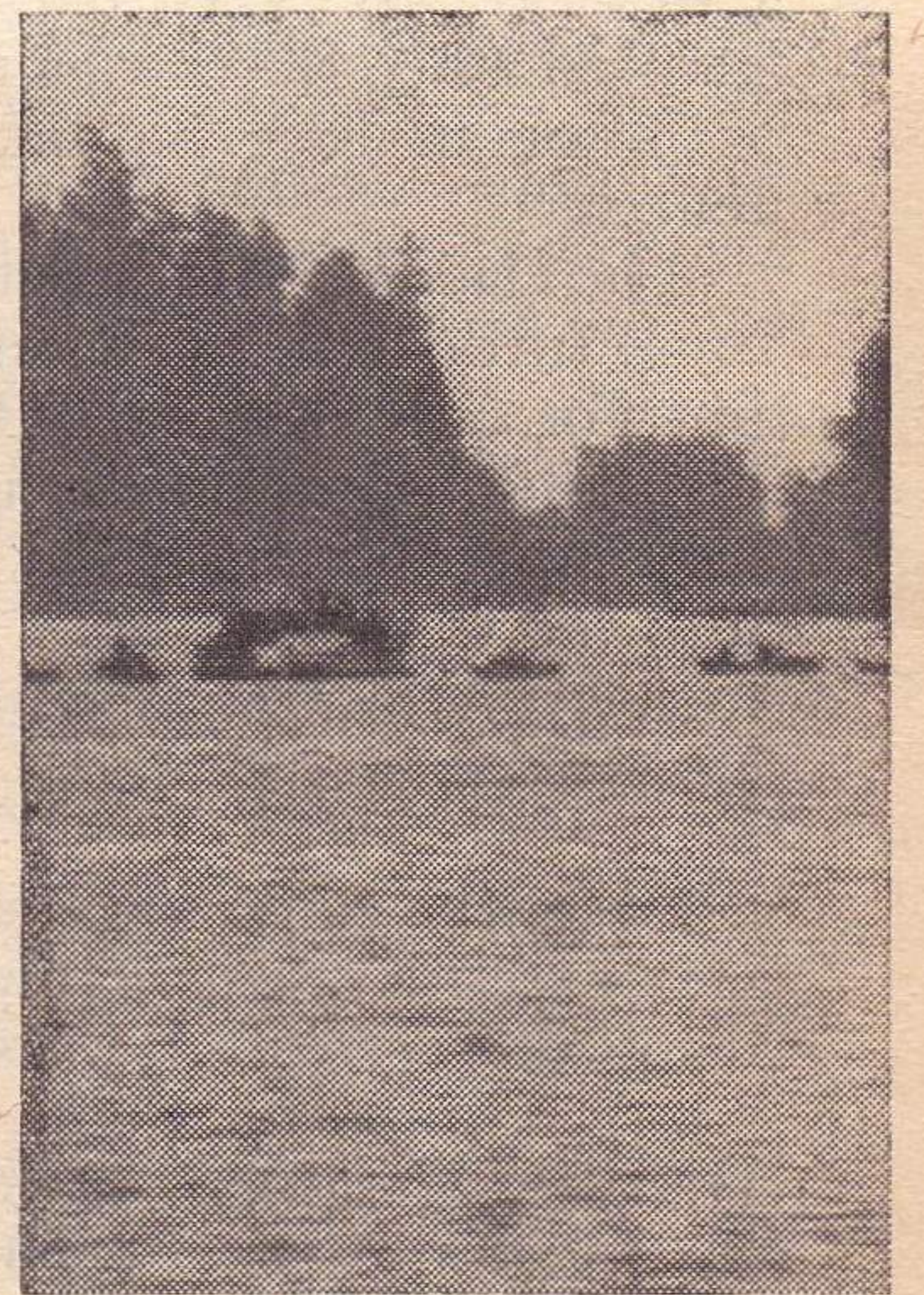
It's a roaring, blinding, terrible sport and not—I'm told—for sissies like orchestra leaders. The water is as hard as concrete at 140 mph and your eyes shake out of their sockets, but I love it.

I Race with DEATH

SOMEWHERE IN THE FASCINATINGLY TRIM lines of a speedboat there lurks a virus as yet unclassified by the medical profession. If you haven't already got it, the chances are that you will. It's a highly contagious virus and very powerful. I've seen it sweep through an entire movie audience whose only exposure to a speedboat was its picture. The symptoms, once you have been alerted, are easily to recognize. If you find yourself staring at a speedboat—no matter what size—tied firmly to the dock, and if all of a sudden it seems to be roaring off at 100 mph, its bow atomizing waves and its stern lashing up a plume of spray, and if you see yourself in the cockpit deftly manipulating the wheel with one hand and the throttle with the other,

you've been bit. As far as I know, there is no cure.

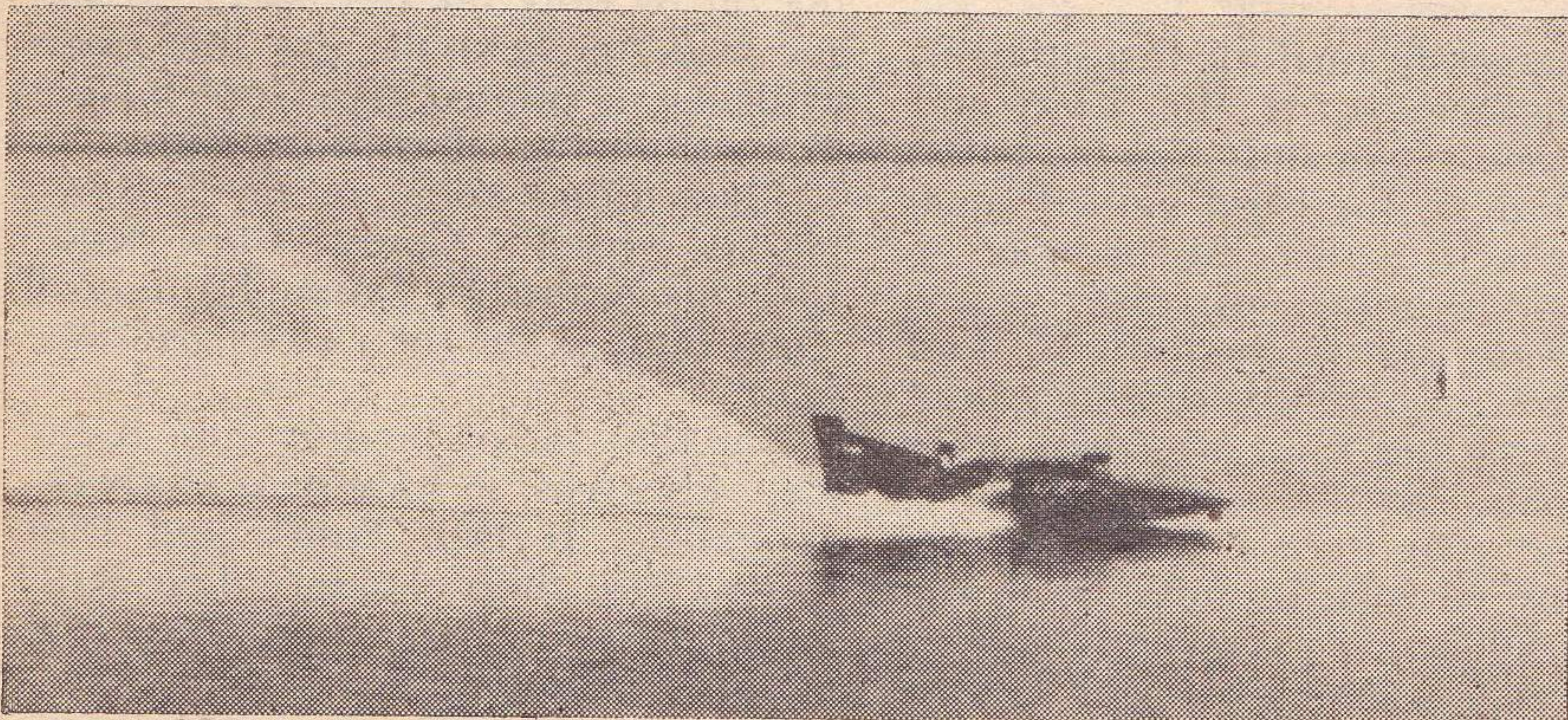
This year, with speedboating becoming one of the fastest growing sports in America, the virus is going to reach epidemic proportions. Any of you who live within driving distance of a mudpuddle are bound to be exposed, because the conditions are exactly right. In the first place, the yen for high speed is a vital part of the American spirit, but the highways, all crowded, are no place for it. The airplane is not the answer, because as any pilot will tell you, even when flying faster than sound, you get only the illusion of hanging motionless in space. But in a speedboat— Ah, there you have it! I've been in outboard-powered pumpkin seeds knocking





■ By

Guy Lombardo



The water looks smooth enough in these photos but, at racing speeds, even these tiny waves feel as if you're driving across railroad ties.

off 20 mph that have created the feeling of such fantastic speed that I got dizzy thinking about it.

Along with the fact that the open water is the last resort for safely releasing that yen for speed, is a very new factor: that is economy. Speedboating, once reserved for the few who could afford it, is now within reach of every pocketbook. No longer do you have to spend thousands of dollars for power plants, and more thousands experimenting with hull designs. Outboard motors are today just about perfect. Marine conversions have been created that can be fitted to just about any motor you care to pick from a used-car lot. The boating and popular how-to-build-it magazines can supply you for a few cents or a few dollars with hull designs which would have cost thousands of dollars only a few years ago. Right now I have a boat that we completed this winter, which I call *Tempo Jr.* In February I tested it at St. Petersburg, Fla., and know that under ideal conditions it will do better than 100 mph. I did 95 mph at 5000 rpm's, and was still picking up speed when I ran out of straight-away. It would have cost thousands of dollars to harness this speed to a boat as late as 1952 (my *Tempo Jr.* wasn't exactly cheap either) but now that the plans have been pioneered and tested, I am willing to venture that any boy or man can build and launch the craft for less than \$2,000, provided only that he has a knack with tools.

Yet *Tempo Jr.* is in a speed class that could have won the Gold Cup Classic—a race that is to speedboating what the Indianapolis classic is to auto racing, or the Kentucky Derby to horse racing—only a couple of years ago. In outboard-motor speedboating, the deservedly popular sport of millions, the price drop has been equally spectacular.

So, if you thought a slim pocketbook was your defense against the speedboat virus, you can see now where 1953 has removed your last retreat.

I can tell you at first hand just how it is going to work on you, because I have been living with the virus for years, with no cure in sight. And I love it.

JUST what is it, this stuff called speedboating?

I suppose I have been asked that question more than any other racing driver, mainly because I am an orchestra leader. People seem to find something incongruous in my leading a band that has become identified with the slogan, "The Sweetest Music this Side of Heaven," and my driving a speedboat that has a roar of 1350 devils. They seem to feel that the hand that lifts a baton can't lift a monkey-wrench; that the man who

wears a tux can't wear greasy coveralls. That, of course, just isn't so.

Anyway, the virus got to me while I was still a boy living in London, Ontario. My dad owned, along with a large family, a slab-bottomed rowboat that could be moved, sometimes for several feet, by four kids pulling hard on two pair of oars. And then one magic day, he brought home an outboard motor. By winding a few yards of clothesline around the starting wheel, and with several of us spelling each other at pulling on the rope, we could often get it started—on its good days. I have since figured that the effort we spent in rowing and the effort we spent in starting the motor came out about even, but the big thing about the outboard was that for the first time in my life I had control of live POWER. Speed? At six miles an hour that old rowboat practically flew! I can honestly say that even when winning a Gold Cup race, my sensation of speed has been no more thrilling than the speed I experienced in that old rowboat.

This might be a good place to point out that in speedboating, the actual miles per hour are immaterial, anyway. If the top speed of your class of craft is 30 mph and you coax it up to 31, your satisfaction is every bit as great as it would be in shattering a world record in the unlimited hydroplane class.

Having caught the speed virus from our rowboat, I practically haunted the water from that time on. From a neighbor I borrowed an outboard-powered runabout and worked my speed up to 15 mph. By the time I organized the Royal Canadians the virus was so firmly entrenched that even when we were starving to death I actually refused engagements which would take me away from the water.

Then one summer back in the Twenties our ambitions for the band and my overpowering yen for the water merged beautifully in a summer-long engagement at the Cleveland Yacht Club. Not only was I on the water, but as our band gained some popularity with the club members, I was given the opportunity to drive just about every boat in the harbor. And in that town where wealth is measured in oil, steel and railroads, there were some boats. By the time I left Cleveland and that harbor full of superboats, my virus had graduated to the major leagues. My craving for power and speed was insatiable, but at least it was held firmly in check by my pocketbook. My virus might be made of major-league stuff, but my pocketbook wasn't. For the next few years, I was what my friends called "safe." . . .

It happened in 1938. The Royal Canadians were playing an engagement at the Michigan State Fair in

Detroit, and at the same time the Gold Cup races were going on down in the Detroit River. I was interested, to say the least, even though I could not be among the thousands who lined the river bank to watch each heat. But I could get around in my spare time and meet some of the drivers.

So I met a couple of lads named Dan Arena and Dan Foster who had just made their way in from California, lugging with them a tremendous chunk of boat named *Miss Golden Gate*. It was a homemade job, pasted together by spit and incredible skill, and with it they hoped to win the Gold Cup over all the other millionaire-built craft entered in the race. At the time I met them I doubt that they could have raised two bucks in solid cash between them.

I COULDN'T see them race, and they were too modest to talk, but here is one thing, among many others, that happened. As they came screaming down the course at some 80 mph (the best heat was clocked at 66.08 mph that year) with Dan Arena at the wheel and Dan Foster at the throttle, they were putting to shame all the rest of the craft competing with them. But they wanted still more.

Foster isn't big, but he sure is powerful. He bore down still harder on the throttle, and the whole works came off in his hand. Instantly the motor snapped back to idling speed, the big bow came down, and the boat lurched into a helpless wallowing. And just as instantaneously, Foster leaned forward, knowing every bolt in the craft, and beat a hole in the motor covering. Through this hole Foster thrust his arm, unerringly getting past the red-hot exhaust pipe, and grabbing the hot gas feed with his bare hand. He yanked her wide open. Then, with his body extended at full length over the cowling, hanging on by only the one hand on the gas feed, he held the gas line open while Arena piloted *Miss Golden Gate* to a slam-bang, rib-cracking finish.

They didn't come in first. They placed second. Count Theo Rossi with his beautiful, Italian-built boat *Alagi* came in for the well-earned first place.

But that bit of boating tore it for me. My virus, so long held in check, exploded. If Dan Foster and Dan Arena, with their courage, their skill, and their two bucks, could enter the majors, so could I.

By that time my band had something of a reputation, the Roosevelt Hotel in New York was showing some willingness in renewing our contract every year, and I felt the time had come to see whether I had it or not. With the two Dans as my professional advisers, I went out and did it.

I began with *Tempo I*, and began learning some of the facts of life on the waves—such as why oil lines were always breaking just as some expert driver and mechanic had some major race all sewed up. Why, I wondered, if he was such an expert mechanic, and as long as he knew oil lines were vulnerable to vibration, couldn't he fix up an oil line in advance that wouldn't break? So I fixed my oil lines right and entered a race on the Ohio River at Cincinnati.

I'll admit it was rough water. There were times when I was as high as six feet out of water (I have bounced as high as ten feet out of water, according to reliable judges clocking the race) and what I had carelessly called "vibration" became a violent, hull-smashing and motor-torturing ordeal. Three-quarters of the way down the course the oil line circling the rear of my engine directly above my leg snapped as though cut with a shears. Scalding oil sprayed me from knee to ankle.

I should point out here that few racing drivers strap themselves in, the reason being that should a boat flip and head for the bottom it is far better to be thrown free in a life-jacket, even if knocked unconscious, than carried under in straps when knocked cold. Instead, we use a carefully designed footrest, each measured to fit the size of the driver, against which we press with all our strength. This serves to wedge us tightly against the back seat cushion and hold us secure against fore-and-aft bucking. Then, to hold us down in the seat, we grasp the wheel, not at the sides but at the bottom, and thus are secured against a vertical pitch.

You can see why I was in a bad spot. If I moved my leg away from the flying oil, I would be instantly bucked

out into a river boiling with speedboats behind me. The spring throttle on my own craft would snap back to idling speed once my hand left it, but it would inevitably wallow into the path of one of my competitors. For once I regretted being in the lead. But I had no choice. I closed my mind to the pain and drove for the finish line. Newspaper reports said I displayed heroic fortitude. Nuts! Far better a scalded leg than killing myself or a rival, and that was the only choice I had.

But I did learn about oil lines from that, and if I ever forget that lesson, I have but to look at the long white scars on my leg to refresh my memory.

That lesson, along with the rest, came hard. When I moved up to *Tempo II*, the whole works blew up. From that I learned about the painstaking planning need to balance the power plant with the hull, and still have enough room left over for gas tanks and lines, manifolds, exhaust stacks, and the other incidentals that don't get along too well when in close proximity.

Tempo III was a good boat, but it had no personality. It liked it well enough back with the pack—so I learned a lot about jockeying for position in a crowded field—but I could never coax it to come up front for a solo at the finish. Into *Tempo IV* I put all my experience as a driver, all my knowledge as a designer, and most of my cash. That one was a dog.

Which brings us up to *Tempo V* and the year 1942. That year I won 20 out of 21 races, and ended up with the national speedboat championship. Then World War II intervened, and we stored our craft for the duration.

The three years of non-racing finally persuaded Zalmon Simmons, a great driver who had piloted his *My Sin* to

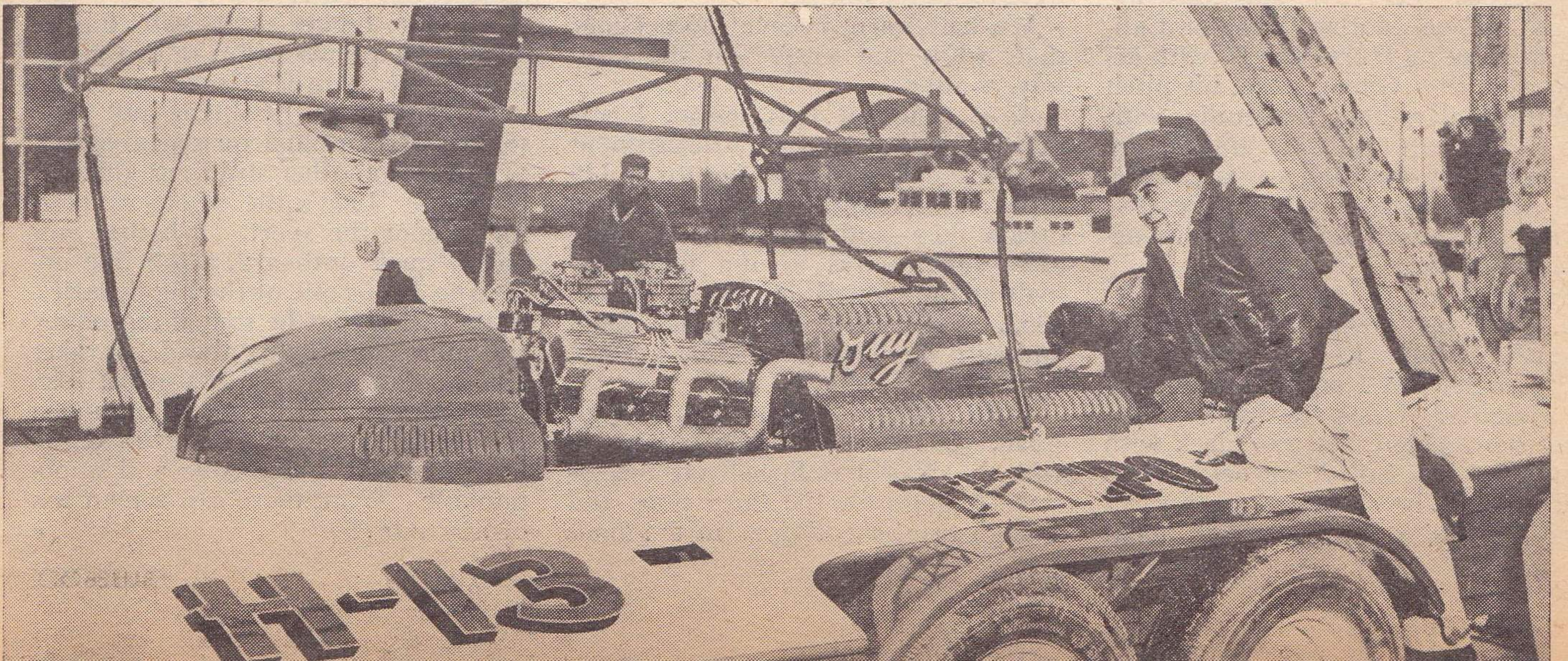
two Gold Cup victories in 1939 and 1941, to retire. And I managed to buy his boat. For years *My Sin* had been the apple of my eye and the envy of my heart. Now it was mine. I renamed her, with no particular originality but with a lot of sentiment, *Tempo VI*.

And *Tempo VI* is a boat with personality. At high speeds her three-point suspension Ventnor hull powered by a 1350-h.p. Allison engine rides with the comfort Simmons built into his mattresses. But we did make some changes. The war had taught us a lot in aerodynamics, maximum powers, fuels and oils. At Maresca Brothers' boatyard in Freeport, L. I., we converted *Tempo VI* into a single-seater. This gave us more room to put into effect some new ideas on streamlining of the hull, and also knocked 300 pounds from the original 3800 pounds.

That year of 1946 I won the Gold Cup at Detroit with a best heat of 70.878 mph, the fastest ever turned in, up to that time. I had graduated; I was in the big-time of speedboating. The jeerings of those who thought an orchestra leader should confine himself to his orchestra stopped. I felt



Speedboats are sensitive critters as exasperating as a stubborn mule and ten times as demanding. They have to be cared for and pampered like babies, and things still go wrong.



myself vindicated, the master of my avocation. But I had more to learn.

A rule of the Gold Cup racing meets gave the winner of a race the right to pick course for the following year.

Naturally, living on Long Island as I do, I picked Great South Bay and became more or less the host of the 1947 meet. Since I would be racing on home waters that would be strange to my rivals, I worked for weeks arranging a course that would be fair to all. We slaved to get the course clear of floating debris. But I had forgotten one thing: In a river, with the current flowing from one direction, debris can be stopped on the upstream side of the course. But on Great South Bay, with incoming and outgoing tides from many inlets, there was no possible way of keeping out all the drifting logs, orange crates, and assorted hunks of flotsam and jetsam.

Who hit the hunk of debris? Well, when I hit it I did a good job. I hit it so hard that I not only smashed a pontoon on the outside, but snapped an oil line on the inside as well. Along with the fact that my neck snapped as though it were the lash end of a cracked whip.

That gave me 1948 to win back my Gold Cup, with the Detroit River once more the scene of the race. One estimate has placed the number of spectators lining the banks at more than 400,000, and that might be correct. Even I, saturated with the virus, was astounded at the way speedboating had captured the public fancy.

FOR the Detroit River the water was about average, not good and not bad. We were to race three heats of 30 miles each for a total of 90 miles. We were off on the first heat, roaring toward the turn. I was well back in the field, relying upon my experience with the course to pick up speed on the straightaway. Even so, I was battling along at better than 100 mph. There were fifteen of us in the pack. We were, to say the least, crowded.

We came into the turn, the most treacherous part of speedboating. Ahead of me Morlan Visel of California, piloting *Hurricane IV* with his mechanic Don Glenn, made his pitch and it was all wrong. Unfamiliar with the river, he swung wide around the turning buoy, heading toward shore, and directly across my bow. Because of the angle, neither he nor his mechanic saw me.

It was all up to me!

I gave my wheel a tremendous wrench. *Tempo VI* banked at a fantastic angle, and I began a side skip. As I righted, I saw the bank of the river dead ahead. It was black with people. I was still doing better than 100 mph. The shore was only yards away—inches, to my horrified look!

I gave the wheel another yank and flipped her.

There was nothing else to do. Had I hit the bank at my speed, it would be curtains for me anyway. *Tempo VI* would have shot up into the crowd and exploded. My own precious hide undoubtedly would have been perforated, and along with me would have gone a lot of innocent people. By flipping, I gave myself a fighting chance, and had the added dividend of sparing the crowd.

I really don't know what happened after that, so I will quote Clarence Lovejoy, Boating Editor of the *New York Times*: "Rescue craft pulled Lombardo out of the raging river, dazed, gray-white. Blood streamed from face cuts, and he held his left arm with his right. Rushed across Belle Isle Bridge to the Detroit mainland, the X-rays at Jennings Hospital found that Lombardo had a fractured left arm, to say nothing of bruises and cuts. Instead of staying there as a bed patient, he was back at regatta headquarters in a couple of hours, his arm in a cast and sling, his face dotted with adhesive tape . . ."

Of course I was back. I had to get there to see the final 30-mile heat. It was a lulu. Between wind, waves and debris, the boats were literally smashing themselves apart. *Miss Great Lakes*, with Albin Fallon driving, was the winner, with only one other craft surviving to follow him across the finish line. Repair bills came to more than a hundred thousand dollars, with *Tempo VI* running up a \$10,000 bill all by herself. But I heard no complaints. That, too, is a part of the spirit of speedboating.

Later I was to drive that great boat, *Miss Great Lakes*, myself. At 90 mph she was as smooth as silk. At 100 she had a live quiver as though she were a beautiful horse stretching out for home. At 115 mph she suddenly screamed like a banshee, and the propeller flew off. I thought motor, hull, and the river itself had all exploded at once. Yet when the spray settled, we were all fairly intact.

We had learned some more about shaft whip and torque—in the hard way, as usual.

As a result of that lesson, I was able to beef up the thrust department of *Tempo VI*, and coax her up to 119 mph on the Salton Sea. I began to dream then—and I still do—of going after such marks as the unlimited hydroplane record of 178.49 set in 1952. A touch here and a touch there, and with the water conditions perfect, maybe—

In the meantime I am learning all I can. In 1951 I was lucky enough to win the National Speedboat Sweepstake Regatta for the third time, and though two boats flipped in the finals

at Red Bank, N.J., and others suffered considerable damage, *Tempo VI* came through like a dream boat. With the work we have done on her this past winter, we think she will be ready this year to recapture the Gold Cup that has been eluding us recently.

The speeds are getting up there now. The best heat in the Gold Cup race last year averaged out at 101.24, with Stan Sayres driving his *Slo-Mo-Shun IV* past the 100-mark for the first time in the cup race. That means that at some parts of the course he must have been doing 140 mph or better. And strange things happen to the driver at that speed.

From 60 to about 120 mph the manipulation of a speedboat is about the same, although the water does seem to increase in hardness. I have often received the impression that I am not on water at all but skimming along on a thin film of oil that covers a concrete highway. Waves, even little five-inch ripples, become as rocklike as curbstones, and only the design of your boat saves you from crashing against them with the violence of a hot-rod smacking a low wall.

ABOVE 120 mph the character of the water changes for some reason or other. The impact of boat against wave which up to now has been largely absorbed by the hull and seat cushions, is transmitted directly to the driver. Nothing satisfactory in the way of shock-absorbers has so far been found to prevent this. The result is that your body takes a terrific beating, and since most drivers drive by the seat of their pants, you can see what happens when that area becomes jolted into numbness.

Worse than that, however, is what the impacts, delivered at split-second intervals, do to your eyes. They are literally shaken in their sockets. Your instrument panel, your cowling, the water itself all run together in a shimmering blur streaked with flashes of white. You are, in effect, flying blind, so that is another problem which we must whip. After all, while we can yearn for higher and still higher speeds, we can also want to live to enjoy the new records after we set them.

We'll whip the problem, and once solved, we can bank on speedboating to produce another still more difficult problem. That's the whole wonderful lure of the sport. Whether you race a small outboard, a job like my *Tempo Jr.*, or one of the big beauties, there will always be something newer and more challenging ahead. It takes you out into the open spaces between sun and water; it fulfills your inborn craving for speed, and its ultimate objective is both indefinable and unobtainable. What more can a man ask of any sport?

By DOUGLAS KENNEDY

Hollywood called her
"a heroine of the resistance,"
and said our marriage
was "made in heaven."
But Lilly and I knew it was
made in the gutter.

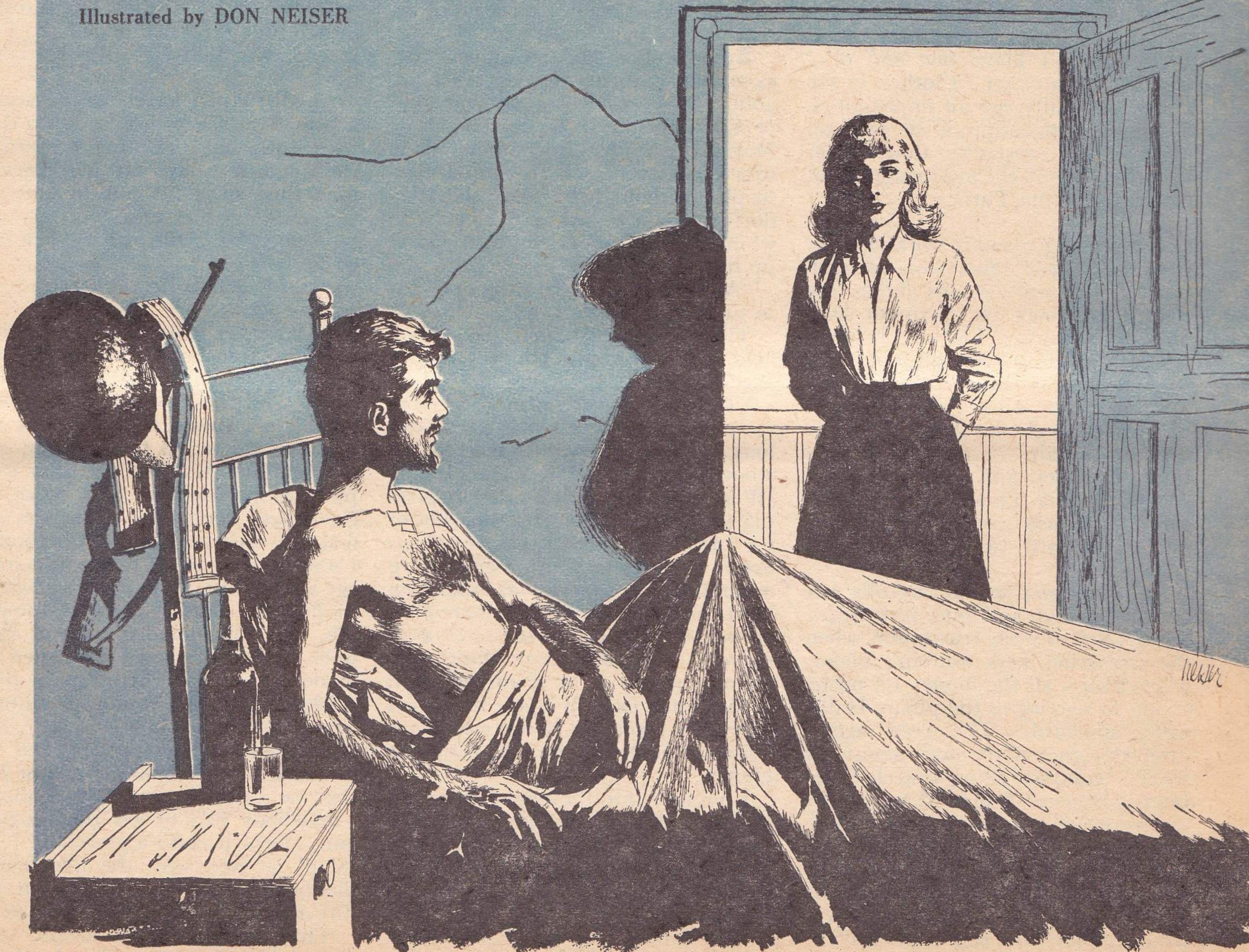
THE HANGOVER WAS REAL ENOUGH, but the surroundings seemed as unreal as they had been a week ago. If I'd had the strength I'd have pinched myself to make sure the magnificent suite was real, too. Here I was, plunk in the Waldorf-Astoria, engaged to the most desirable celebrity in the world. Engaged, hell—this was my wedding day!

The advance newspaper stories had played it up almost as big as the Rita Hayworth-Aly Khan business. They even played up the twist. This time the man was marrying the countess. Only the man was no movie star, and the princess, though she had the title all right, was a phony from way back.

Let me bring you up to date a bit. My name is Tom Hutton. If you follow the literary set—or even if you read books these days—you know I wrote

Portrait of Lilly

Illustrated by DON NEISER



"Death, Deliver Thee." It was *the* great American novel about the war. I was, so the critics said, "Ernie Pyle and Ernest Hemingway wrapped up in one taut, explosive bundle."

That's a lot of malarky, to put it politely, but the book certainly sold well enough. Naturally, Hollywood fell for it like a ton of bricks. And, just as naturally, when they finally got around to making the picture, they loused it up. They called it "Through Night's Thunder," a dandy little title dreamed up by some resident genius because the initials were T.N.T.

"It's dynamite, Tom," they told me. But, after I saw the first rushes, I knew it was a dud, a real stinkeroo. It was, too. They might as well have kept my title, "Death, Deliver Thee," and called it D.D.T.

But it made a star of the Countess Lilly St. Cloud de Marignac.

I don't have to tell you about Lilly, I guess. Hollywood's frantic press agents, burning out the bearings on all the mimeograph machines, have flooded the country with wave upon wave of tripe about the "little French orphan, the war waif who was discovered by a talent scout while working her fingers to the bone as a Paris seamstress." Seamstress, my foot! Lilly wouldn't know one end of a needle from another. Clothes, to the Hollywood Lilly, are an impediment, a diabolical invention of the Johnson office which constantly thwarts her from showing off the most magnificent figure since Lana Turner.

THE press agents were working overtime with "flash" releases on our wedding. They wrote reams about "the rugged kid from the Vermont foothills, who worked his way through school peddling newspapers, who worked his way through college peddling magazine subscriptions, worked his way through the Army from private to captain (battlefield promotion, Silver Star and all), worked on 'Death, Deliver Thee' in a tiny Paris garret." It was easy to write about me. The word "worked" was overworked.

And the press agents carefully left out the last lean and lousy three years. Three years of futile frustration, when the typewriter keys wouldn't budge, when I blew all the money I'd made, trying to live up to the phony Hollywood standard. The press agents carefully ignored the part about my writing contract being canceled, because whenever I showed up at the studio—which was seldom—I was usually stinko. They didn't tell about the big "reform," my return to a cold-water flat in New York (trying to recapture the mood of that Paris garret). Instead, they said this marriage was "made in heaven."

Hell, if it was made anywhere, it was made in a Greenwich Village gutter. For that's where Lilly found me, potted as usual, just eight days ago.

The press agents, newsmen and gossip columnists had to gloss over part of Lilly's story too. They shrouded her early years in mystery. They had to; no one knew anything about them, and Lilly wasn't about to tell, either. So they picked up the thread at the "seamstress" point. Actually, Lilly was a high-priced mannequin for one of the famous *couturiers* when she was first "discovered," and it took her three more years and two more marriages (including the one to the Count) to get to Hollywood.

The press agents had a field day with the "romantic" angle, too—about how the wounded hero met the little "seamstress" in Paris during the war, and how our star-studded paths had crossed in Hollywood four years later. And how, now, Lilly finally had found the real man in her life after three heartbreaks. Hedda Hopper wrote a whole column about how we were "destined" for one another. Jimmy Fidler called it "fate." Louella Parsons used the "made in heaven" line.

So now, Tom Hutton, ex-newsboy, ex-soldier, and, for sure, ex-writer, is going to try to tell you the real story of Lilly, the Countess St. Cloud de Marignac. With this whopping hang-over I can't very well give you a play-by-play without help. But the Waldorf-Astoria is always ready to cater to whimsical clients. Gingerly, I picked up the bedside phone.

"At your service," said the operator in tinkling tones.

Then, forgetting herself, she gushed, "Oh, Mr. Hutton, Happy, Happy Wedding Day!"

"Thanks," I said grimly, wincing away from the outpouring. "Now, look, get Room Service to send me up a bottle of Scotch, Haig & Haig Pinch. (*What the hell, the Countess is picking up the tab*). Never mind soda or ice (*Attaboy, Tom, never freeze or drown good liquor*). And send me up a secretary, one who can take dictation fast (*I hope she looks like a fence-post, all angles. I'm fed to the teeth with curves*). And one more thing, Operator, I'm not to be disturbed, even if the Countess calls (*the condemned man has a right to a hearty meal—or a bottle of Scotch—before he takes the plunge*)."

I plunged into the shower first. By the time I'd dried and wrapped a towel around my middle, the super-efficient Waldorf had supplied me with my needs: the pristine bottle, the prim secretary.

"My name's Hutton," I said, clambering back into bed.

"I know," she said, averting her gaze, and looking at the bottle.

"What's yours?"

"I don't drink—during working hours," she said, with a perfectly straight face.

"No," I said, laughing—for the first time, it seemed to me, in years, "I don't mean, 'what'll you have?' I mean what's your name?"

She blushed. "Mary Dilworth."

"O.K., Miss Dilworth. Settle down while I open this bottle. I want to dictate a little love-story about Tom Hutton and the Countess."

The first taste of the Scotch was like nectar.

"Miss Dilworth, how fast can you take dictation?"

"As fast as you can talk," she answered, with a dubious glance at the bottle.

I took another slug. That was more like it. It even brought the efficient-looking Miss Dilworth into sharper focus, and I saw that she was in the typical Waldorf tradition: slim, smartly yet conservatively dressed, young (she could have been 23), and as wholesome as a Kansas wheatfield. Her gray eyes shone from behind tortoise-shell cheaters whose shafts disappeared into soft, ash-blond hair. Five years earlier, I'd have called her beautiful.

So, all right; I looked at my watch. It was 9:30. I had a wedding date with Lilly at 5:30. Eight hours—a workingman's day. It had been a long time since I'd put in even an eight-minute work day.

"Ready, Miss Dilworth? Then let's go."

And I began to dictate.

I FIRST met Lilly in June of 1944, at a little French port near Saint-Malo. My outfit had landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day-plus-one. That's me, always a day late for the big show. The 9th Infantry and part of the 82nd Airborne Division were pushing the Germans back down the Cherbourg Peninsula. That was our first aim—to get the port of Cherbourg. I wasn't aware of all that grand strategy at the time. I was just a sergeant in General Bradley's army, doing a job. My job included a lot of dirty work—things that men are called on to do that they never, even in their wildest Walter Mitty-like imaginings, would dream of doing. Like going after machine-gun nests. When the lieutenant was killed—*bang*, just like that, he was all crumpled and bloody—somebody had to get the machine gun. I got it, with a grenade. I got it, all covered with the lieutenant's blood and my blood, and the rich ripe dirt of France all over my stomach.

That made me a lieutenant, complete with Silver Star, Purple Heart,

and a grim awareness that death, indeed, was a deliverer.

Ten days later, after the flesh-wound had been patched up, I was back with the company, down near Saint-Malo, still waiting, like so many others, for death to deliver me.

"Have a drink now, Miss Dilworth?"

"No. Thanks for the offer, though."

It was the same bloody, dirty, filthy fighting there near Saint-Malo. Some damfool German general—they called him "The Madman of Saint-Malo"—wouldn't quit, wouldn't budge. We had to go after the smaller ports that the Germans wouldn't defend in force. I took a platoon over to clean the Germans out of the fishing port of—let's call it Versailles; that's a proper place to find a countess. Only she wasn't a countess then. Not by a long shot.

THE Maquis, the French Resistance forces—what a helluva job they did in some places!—were already fighting a pitched battle in the streets when we arrived. Street by street, alley by alley, house by house, the Maquis and my boys drove the Germans out. It took all day. I lost eight guys, men whose names I can't even remember now, boys who were playing at cops and robbers with lethal toys.

"Join me in a drink to the cops and robbers, Miss Dilworth?"

"Thanks, no, Mr. Hutton. Not now. I'll toast them tonight, though."

Eight guys. The Maquis lost four more. I caught a chunk of 20-millimeter in the shoulder. Still more blood.

The Maquis and my boys stacked eighteen dead Germans in the town square. Eighteen for twelve. The people came out of their houses. They met, as if by some prearranged signal, at the square. They walked by the stacked bodies, silently. Some of the Frenchwomen spat on the cordwood-like pile of dead.

I could see the scene from my bed at the inn. The innkeeper was the head of the local Maquis, a burly, red-faced man, fat and flabby-looking. The Germans must have taken him for a clown. But they never saw his eyes when he was angry, as I did—during the fighting, and later on. His wife had patched up my shoulder and propped me up in bed, "so you can see what we thought of the Germans." Then this motherly woman, looking at the scene in the square, spat on her own floor. Never, during all the fighting, did I ever come to hate the way those people hated.

I must have dozed off—some good French brandy helped—when I was wakened by an insistent, light tapping on my door. It was almost dark. I could see a bonfire flickering in the square.

"Come in. . . . *Entrez,*" I said in my best high-school French.

The door opened. I couldn't see her well at first. There was just the aura of beauty. She was tiny, with long hair. She hardly seemed any larger as she approached my bedside. But I could make out a great mass of flaming red hair; the white-white skin seemed to glow. Her bright blue eyes were worldly-wise, and yet they held a scared innocence too. Her shining face was young with the flush of youth, yet old with the cynicism of age. She was a girl, bright with promise; and yet she was a woman, promising more than any girl would ever know. It was written all over her, from the tips of her flaming hair, down through the body that glided, rather than walked, to my bedside.

"*Bonjour, mon Capitaine.* I have come to be with you."

The English was a little faltering. But it was obviously well-rehearsed, and with hardly a trace of accent.

"My name is Lilly."

The way she said it, it was an invitation, an invitation for me to find out more—or all—about Lilly.

"*Pas ce soir.* . . . Not tonight, honey."

Don't get me wrong. It wasn't that she wasn't desirable, or that I'm prudish. I was pretty punchy from the brandy. My shoulder ached like hell. And I was beat from chasing Germans up and down the streets of Versailles.

"*Je comprends,*" she replied. But there was hurt puzzlement, rather than comprehension, in her eyes. And there was fear, too.

WITHOUT another word she walked across the room and got into the other bed, facing the wall. Before she turned away, I caught one more look at that breath-takingly beautiful face from the dim light that flickered now from the bonfire in the square. I dozed again.

The next time I woke, the knocking was more insistent, masculine, and it did not wait for my "*Entrez.*" The light clicked on, and I could see the angry face of the innkeeper.

He never even glanced at me, this man who had been fighting at my side that day. Without a word, but with quivering rage in his every step, he strode over to Lilly's bed and rudely stripped the covers off. Then he slapped her, hard. She did not quiver or cower. Slowly she sat up; mechanically she reached for her shoes.

She never got her hands on them. Brusquely, rudely, the big innkeeper grabbed her wrist, twisted it, and led her out the door. I was wide awake now. The weird pantomime had taken perhaps ten seconds. The door slammed. I waited.

Suddenly I was aware of shouts, animal cries, coming from the square. I looked out the window. The bonfire was brighter. The dead Germans cast a ghastly, ghostly shadow in the fire's flickering light. Lilly, her head held high, was walking slowly toward the crowd, her flaming red hair bright in the light. I watched in horror as they closed in on her, a spitting, hissing mass of hatred. I could see a man, wielding a big butcher knife. I thought he was about to kill her. Instead, with great slashing blows, he sheared off her red hair a scant inch from the scalp. Then, jostling, shoving, prodding, kicking, the crowd drove her over toward the pile of dead Germans.

The crowd tossed her there by the dead bodies—sprawled, crushed by their blows. And then they left her in the square, alone, with the bonfire burning bright, lighting the dead bodies.

"A drink, Miss Dilworth?"

"No, Mr. Hutton."

THE innkeeper came back to my room, wiping his hands on the side of his pants, as if to clean dirt from his palms.

"I am sorry, *m'sieu.* But that one, she is nothing but a pig. She was the mistress of the Hun captain. He was another pig. Now she is with him again. She probably thought that you would protect her."

I shook my head.

"I figured she was your business. Where did she come from?"

"Like her pig of a mother, who left her here when the Germans came, she is from this town. We do not know about her father. We took her in, fed her and clothed her, and put her to work in the kitchen. She was eleven, then; when she was fourteen, the German captain took her. He lived here. She did not resist. After he took her, she would not work in the kitchen. We"—and the innkeeper stamped on the floor in his rage—"we who had treated her as our own child, who had washed dishes and scrubbed floors for her!"

"I'm sorry." It was lame to say it. But what else could you say?

"*Bonsoir, m'sieu.*"

When he had gone, I sat by the window for a time, looking blindly, as one does, at the bonfire. Then I pulled on my pants with my good arm and went out of the inn. I went over to the pile of Germans. Lilly lay there, shorn, wide-eyed, and too terrified to move. I helped her up and led her back to the room.

"*Bonsoir, Lilly.*" I turned out the light.

"*Merci! Bonsoir, m'sieu.*"

The next morning, when I woke, she was gone.

"Miss Dilworth—did you say your name was Mary?—Mary, I'd like it if you would join me in a drink to the charming woman who is to become my bride this afternoon."

"No, Mr. Hutton. Will there be any more dictation, Mr. Hutton?"

"Yes, Mary, a little more."

I didn't see Lilly again until right after the Battle of the Bulge, Christmas, 1944. I was in Paris on leave. How she ever got there, in those days when civilian travel was still restricted, I'll never know. But Lilly, once she sets her mind to it, always seems to manage. I looked up a war correspondent I knew at the Scribe Hotel bar. There was Lilly, chic and seductive, surrounded by a bunch of brass. I was a captain then—you get promoted fast when death fails to deliver you—and Lilly was surrounded by chairborne colonels. But I was set for a big night on the town and the colonels didn't bother me.

I busted into the charmed, charming circle.

"Hello, Lilly."

She didn't turn a hair of that poodle cut, the cropping she had earned just six months before at Versailles.

"*Bonjour, mon capitaine.* Is it time for us to go now?"

We grabbed a droshky and went to Montmartre, to Monseigneur, where violins swayed and swelled and spilled forth chorus after chorus of intoxicating music. The champagne was intoxicating, too. So was Lilly, when we danced or even when I looked at her. But somehow the champagne appealed to me more than Lilly did. I got stinko and wound up in a fight.

Lilly? She managed. She always does. The last I saw of her, she was walking out on the arm of a second-rate British film actor. She married the guy, what's more, though she dropped him in a month for a French movie director. Lilly was already well on her way.

I didn't see her again until after the armistice. I took my discharge in Europe and settled down in a little Left-Bank fleabag in Paris. It used to amuse me, on Saturday nights, to drop in at the Dôme, or the Cafe de Deux Magots, and listen to the chatter, pro and con, about existentialism. It was lively enough to develop into some high-class brawls.

It was at the Deux Magots—the name seems almost prophetic in retrospect—that Lilly and I met again. She was up to her eyeballs in furs. And dangling from her arm, leashlike and leechlike, was "the monocle," the Count de Marignac. I guess they were slumming.

"*Bonjour, Capitaine Hutton.*" Lilly spotted me first. "May I present the Comte de Marignac?"

After much heel-clicking, handshaking and a small amount of small-talk, I left. It seemed simpler. Lilly obviously wanted him—at the time. Naturally, she got him.

Lilly's career, for the next couple of years, was, to put it politely, checkered. There were no ups and downs, though. It was all up. She dropped the Count like a hot brick when she got the call to Hollywood.

The part in my book was a natural for her. After all, she was French, and as the Hollywood publicists dreamed it up, "a heroine of the Resistance." There was no real reason for me to disabuse them of that little fiction. I could have blackmailed Lilly into anything at that stage—and she knew it. She feared it, too.

The day she signed for the part she called me up. Her proposition was about the only one Lilly can understand: a proposition. I thanked her politely, and turned it down. That made three times I had declined the honor: Versailles, Paris and Hollywood.

"*Three strikes and you're out. . . . Right, Mary?*"

"*She seems willing to give you another chance, Mr. Hutton.*"

"*Do you know why I declined the first three?*"

"*I think so.*"

"*Do you know why I got a fourth chance?*"

"*Not exactly.*"

"*Take this down, Mary.*"

THE next time I saw Lilly—sounds like a song now—was from the disadvantageous point of looking up at her from a Greenwich Village gutter. Other people had looked up to her. I never had. This time, with Lilly swathed in mink and Tom down in the dumps, Lilly, for once, had the upper hand. She has, for all her faults, a smidgen of compassion. She knows how it feels to be down in a gutter. She took me home and put me to bed, just as I had done for her.

But I didn't disappear, as she had. I couldn't. When I woke up she was still there, waiting.

"*Bonjour, mon Capitaine.*"

It sounded good, familiar and warm, to hear her say it—even with that throbbing hangover. Later, she made her proposition: I was to marry her. It was not like the Versailles offer; nor was it like the chance I had in Paris. And she was no longer afraid of me as she had been in Hollywood. This time, pouring out warmth and compassion, Lilly, for perhaps the only time in her life, offered to do something entirely unselfish. She wanted to help me back on my feet, and she knew that the only way it could happen was for me to be under her thumb. I was overwhelmed.

I did the only thing I could do. I kissed her. It was the only time I had ever really touched her. She was touched in another way; she cried a bit. And she was warm, alive and desirable in my arms. It seemed an easy way out. But I knew that there were pitfalls, and maybe pratfalls, even with Lilly trying to help me. And I knew one thing above all others: Lilly also wanted me because I was the only man ever to turn her down. She wants me because she thinks I don't want her. . . .

"Do you?" asked Mary Dilworth.

I LAY back against the pillow and automatically reached for what was left of the bottle. It was a good question—"do you?"—"Do you, Thomas Hutton, take this woman to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish, till death do you part?")

I looked at Mary Dilworth, prim, slim and trim. She had no crown of flaming red hair; it was that soft ash-blond. She had no voluptuous figure; it was merely trim and wholesome, and businesslike. She had no bright blue eyes; they were gray. But they sparkled expectantly as she leaned forward waiting for my answer.

"Do I want Lilly, Miss Dilworth? Well, that's a good question." (*Stop stalling, Tom, you've been doing that for a week.*)

I changed the subject. "What time is it, Miss Dilworth?"

"Ten-twenty, Mr. Hutton."

"I'm a long-winded slob, Miss Dilworth. How long will it take to type up what I've given you?"

"About half an hour." She was all business again. The sparkle had gone from her eyes. She no longer seemed to care whether I wanted Lilly or not.

Suddenly her query angered me. Whatinhell business had she got asking me whether I wanted Lilly?

"Type it up, Miss Dilworth." And I couldn't resist adding, "And burn it up!"

She looked startled, hurt, as if I'd suddenly slapped her. Then her expression changed. She was flaring; excitingly angry.

"Now look, Mr. Hutton. I'm paid to do a lot of things, like typing and dictation—and listening, if necessary, to people's troubles. But I'm not paid to burn up my work. And I won't do it!"

She was magnificent when she got mad. She stood up, straight and tall and proud, like a Vermont pine.

"And furthermore, Mr. Hutton, I read your book. And I think it was wonderful. And I think you're a darn fool. And I think you shouldn't

marry Lilly. And I think you should stop drinking. And I think you should start writing again. And I know you don't care what I think, and I *don't* care if you don't care! There, now, I've said it. And you can get me fired any time you want to, and I don't care—because now I've said it."

She finally stopped, probably because she was out of breath. There were tears in her eyes, tears of anger and tears of frustration. But she didn't weep or sob. She just stood there, hands on hips, glaring at me. It was a very sobering experience.

She started for the door.

"Wait, Miss Dilworth."

Coldly, "There's nothing more to say, Mr. Hutton."

"I appeal to your sense of fair play, Miss Dilworth. Hear me out."

"Very well, Mr. Hutton." But she didn't budge from her place by the door.

"I have a date at 5:30 to marry a woman who doesn't really want me. And I don't want her, never did. All I wanted was a shot in the arm. Instead, it was usually a shot of liquor. Miss Dilworth, you have supplied me

with a kind of shot in the arm. But like any shot, it becomes habit-forming. At 5:30—is that when you get through work?—I'd like another booster, Miss Dilworth. I'll be sober and circumspect; I'll do right by Lilly. May I call her up now and tell her it's all off?"

"Yes, Mr. Hutton."

"Will you meet me at 5:30?"

"No, Mr. Hutton."

That was quite a blow. I had thought I was pretty persuasive.

"When will you meet me?"

"Mr. Hutton, let's get one thing straight. It'll probably be quite a while, if ever, before I meet you again. You'll know where to find me if the time ever comes. And that time will be when I no longer have to give you a shot in the arm. It's not a specialty of mine; I want a man who doesn't need a booster."

With that, she walked out and slammed the door in my face. . . .

The trees on the Vermont hillside remind me of Mary as I look out the window. I've been here three months. The nearest place I can get a drink is four miles away—and after the Army

I'm never going to walk another mile as long as I live. The typewriter keys don't stick any more. One of these days—and soon—I'm going back to New York, back to the Waldorf-Astoria. And I'm going to hire me a suite. Then I'm going to call up Room Service and ask them to send me up a bottle of Scotch, Haig & Haig Pinch, complete with soda and ice. Then I'm going to ask them to send me a girl to take dictation, a girl named Mary Dilworth.

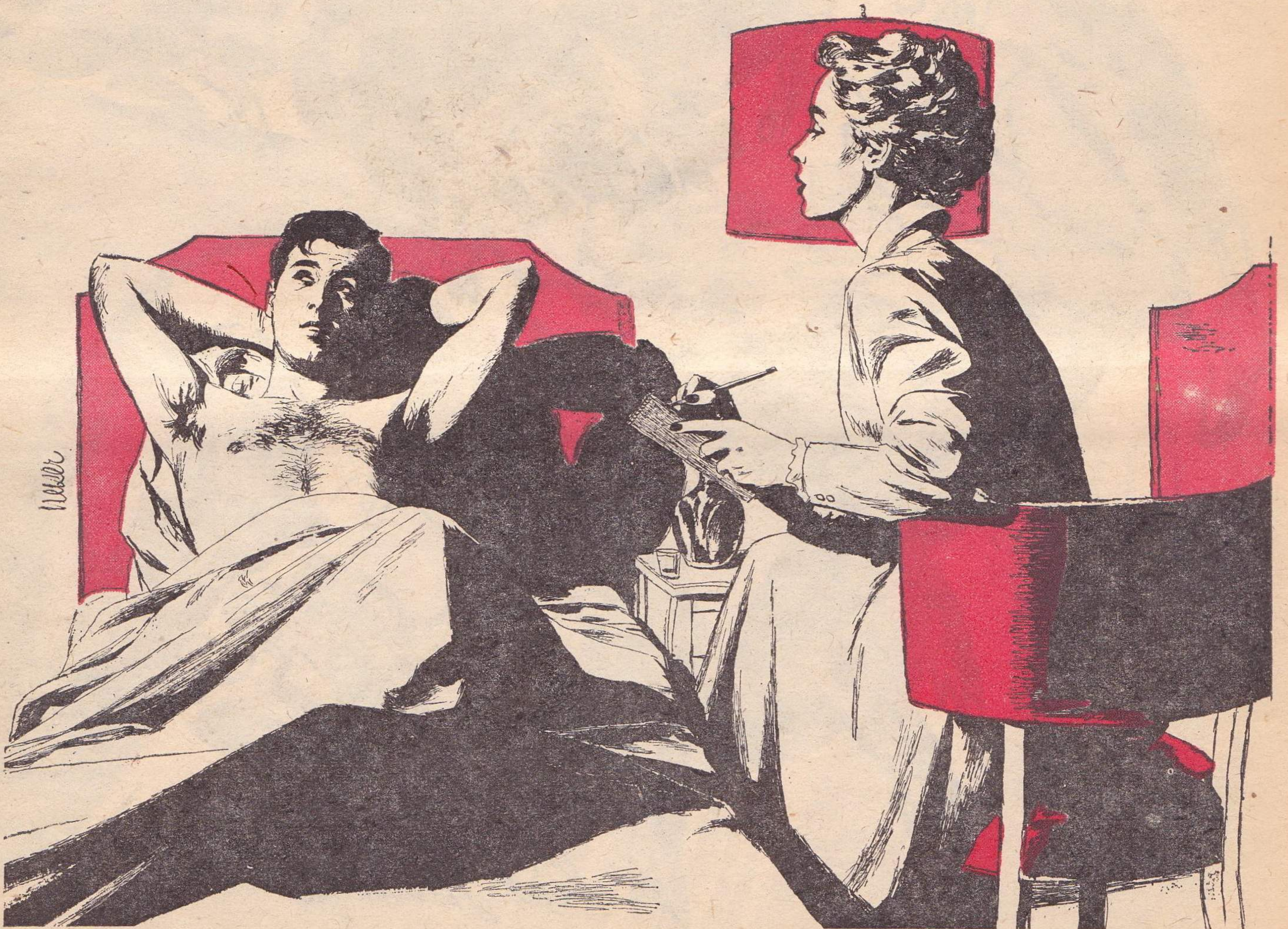
I'll say: "Miss Dilworth, take a memo."

She'll write:

"I love you, Miss Dilworth. I love you because you're straight and true and honest. And because of a lot of other things that I hope to spend my life telling you about. I love you, and I no longer need a shot in the arm. I love you, and the typewriter keys don't stick any more. I love you very much, Miss Dilworth. Will you marry me?"

I hope she says yes. If she does, we'll have a drink on it. Just one.

Lilly? I hear she's in Europe or Asia or Africa somewhere, chasing Aly Khan. ●



"She seems willing to give you another chance, Mr. Hutton," Mary said. "Do you know," I asked her, "why I declined the first three, and why I got a fourth chance?" "Not exactly," the secretary answered. "Take this down, Mary—the next time I saw Lilly I was in a gutter and . . ."



► By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN


PIGS FOR MIKE HARLOWE

Sis was no fool.

She knew which side her matrimony

was buttered on. And

it had nothing to do with pigs.



■ MIKE HARLOWE, FORMERLY Sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps, had finished taking his mail from the mailbox and was scowling at an official-looking letter with FARM PLANNING BUREAU printed at the top, when Ollie Lancaster rolled up in his big red truck. Mike and Ollie had been in the same company at Parris Island and there was no love lost between them—particularly now that they operated adjoining truck-farms.

“Hello, stupid,” Ollie said, thrusting his ginger-colored head out of the cab. “Stole any sheep yet this morning? Tipped any little birds out of their nests?”

Mike looked up, scowling. He was twenty-four, with sandy hair, a square pugnacious face and blue eyes. Things usually didn’t bother him much—but this morning, things did.

First, there was this new letter from the Farm Planning Bureau. Then, Ollie Lancaster’s pigs had slipped through the fence again last night and rooted up a good fifty bucks’ worth of new

tomato plants. Finally, a curt note from old man Dulligan, who ran the Gaileyville bank, informed him coldly that his application for a loan was “under consideration.”

Mike wasn’t sure just what “under consideration” meant but it had a nasty sound, and his heart was set on getting that loan in order to modernize the white bungalow with green trim which sat back from the road a hundred yards away. After all, you couldn’t expect a nice gal like Mary Eileen Smith to move into a place with an ancient coal range and outdoor plumbing.

“Beat it,” he said shortly to Ollie. “Go clown somewhere else. I’ve got enough trouble this morning without having that ugly puss of yours peeking over my shoulder.”

Ollie gave him a sly grin, showing crooked teeth. “My, my!” he said. “Testy this morning, ain’t we? Go right ahead with your fan mail, Sah-jint. Don’t worry none about old Ollie.”

“Old Ollie had better start doing some worrying himself,” Mike said tightly, “if old Ollie

doesn't keep those pigs of his out of my tomatoes. They were in that field across the creek again last night—as if you didn't know it."

"The little rascals!" Ollie said fondly. "Now, if you'd just sell me that two acres across the creek—for, say, about two hundred bucks—you wouldn't have to worry about my pigs no more."

"You'll get that two acres across the creek the day hell freezes over and not before!" Mike said. "That's the best tomato field in the whole county and you know it. Two hundred dollars! Go on—beat it before I get mad!"

"Okay, wise guy," Ollie said. "I'll get that two acres one way or another before I'm through. Old Ollie is like a bloodhound when he's after something that he wants."

"Old Ollie is going to get that snoop nose of his bent right up between his eyes one of these days," Mike asserted sourly as he went back to reading the letter in his hand.

It was from a Mr. Walter Crummit, of the Farm Planning Bureau, and it stated with asperity that the Bureau had twice written Mr. Michael Harlowe regarding the submission of Form 1126—Inventory of Livestock—and that, to date, the Bureau had received exactly nothing in the form of a reply. If, the letter went on to say, Form 1126 was not received forthwith from Mr. Michael Harlowe, the Administrator intended to invoke the full penalties provided by law, including the restriction of farm credit. A new Form 1126 was enclosed for Mr. Michael Harlowe's convenience.

"Nuts!" Mike grunted. "What this Walter Crummit needs is a good poke in the nose. I haven't got any livestock to inventory!"

OLLIE was watching him with a beady eye. "You corresponding with Uncle these days, huh?" he asked inquisitively.

"Some thimblewit, named Crummit, wants to know what my pig inventory was on January 1st, 1953," Mike mumbled sourly. "Not that it's any of your confounded business. I was chasing gooks north of the parallel on January 1st, 1953. I raise tomatoes—not pigs. The only time I ever see a pig is when those mangy porkers of yours sneak through my fence!"

A calculating light suddenly came into Ollie's eyes. "Pig inventory, huh? And you ain't made one—can you imagine that! Sure you don't want to sell me those two acres cheap, palsy?"

"No, I don't want to sell you those two acres cheap, palsy!" Mike snapped. He returned his attention to the letter. "I'll put this Crummit straight on his condemned form! I'll

write him a letter that'll singe his eyebrows!"

"I'd do that," Ollie said, grinning toothily again. "Yes, sir, I'd do that for sure. Maybe I'll write 'em one, too."

"Get out of here, you fat bandit," Mike told him coldly. "When I want any help from you I'll ask for it!"

MR. WALTER CRUMMIT'S pink face grew pinker as he finished the first paragraph of Mike's letter some three days later; it became a deep crimson as he read on. When he had finished he laid the letter carefully in the middle of his desk—as though it were a box that ticked—and looked out of the window. After a little he picked the letter up and read it again.

He was a plump young man with a spiky mustache and horn-rimmed glasses and no sense of humor. To him, F.P.B. was a sacred thing and above criticism. This letter was bald sacrilege.

Mike, himself, had considered his comments pretty restrained on the whole. Generalities, really. He felt that he had merely pointed out a few self-evident truths which should be apparent even to people like Mr. Walter Crummit.

Form 1126, he stated succinctly, was a document which made the Egyptian hieroglyphs seem as simple as a comic book and he advanced the theory that the individual who had dreamed the thing up was now probably picking fleas off himself in the Washington zoo. He implied also that anyone who had the colossal nerve to waste the taxpayers' money by mailing such stuff broadcast across the nation must have learned his trade at Dillinger's knee. Furthermore, anyone naïve enough to think that Mike Harlowe would have any truck with such tripe would probably buy Brooklyn Bridges in half-dozen lots.

As an afterthought, Mike added that if Mr. Walter Crummit, or any of his rascally minions, wanted to come down to Gaileyville and argue the point, he would endeavor to plant the lot of them down by the slough where he dumped his spoiled tomatoes. The letter was signed: *With best wishes—Michael Harlowe, Esq.*

After Walter Crummit had finished reading Mike's letter for the third time, he got out of his chair and stomped purposefully into the next room. His secretary gave him a startled glance.

"Read that, Betty!" Walter Crummit snapped, slapping Mike's letter down in front of her. "Just read it!"

A look of shock spread over the blonde secretary's face as she read. "Why, it's—it's awful, Mr. Crummit!"

Illustrated by BOB GREENHALGH

she gasped when she had finished. "And he does, too, have pigs! We got a letter from someone in Gaileyville yesterday that *said* he had pigs!"

"I have written Mr. Michael Harlowe three letters about his Form 1126," Walter Crummit said grimly. "Now I get this!"

"What are you going to do, Mr. Crummit?"

"I," Walter Crummit replied dangerously, "am going down to Gaileyville and teach this Mr. Michael Harlowe a lesson! When I am through with him he'll shudder at the mere mention of Form 1126! If that backwoods buffoon thinks that he can write poison-pen letters to F.P.B. and get away with it, he's got another think coming!"

Mike was tuning up the tractor that afternoon when Mary Eileen Smith drove up in her ancient coupé. She batted the horn and Mike pulled his attention away from the tractor's insides and grinned back at her. Mary Eileen was petite and she had a dust of freckles across the bridge of her nose and brown hair which had a way of blowing across her face in silky cobwebs.

"Hi!" she said. "What's the matter with Christopher Colombo, Mike? Hees-a bust?"

CHRISTOPHER COLOMBO was the second-hand tractor, Mike's pride and joy. "Nope," Mike said cheerfully. "Nothing wrong with Chris. Shees-a fine. Joost tune-a her oop. What you know, sis?"

Mary Eileen slid out of the coupé and came over to lean against the tractor, hands thrust into the pockets of her levis. A mile away, down the road which led to Gaileyville, a big red truck was steaming toward them. Mary Eileen scowled as she saw it.

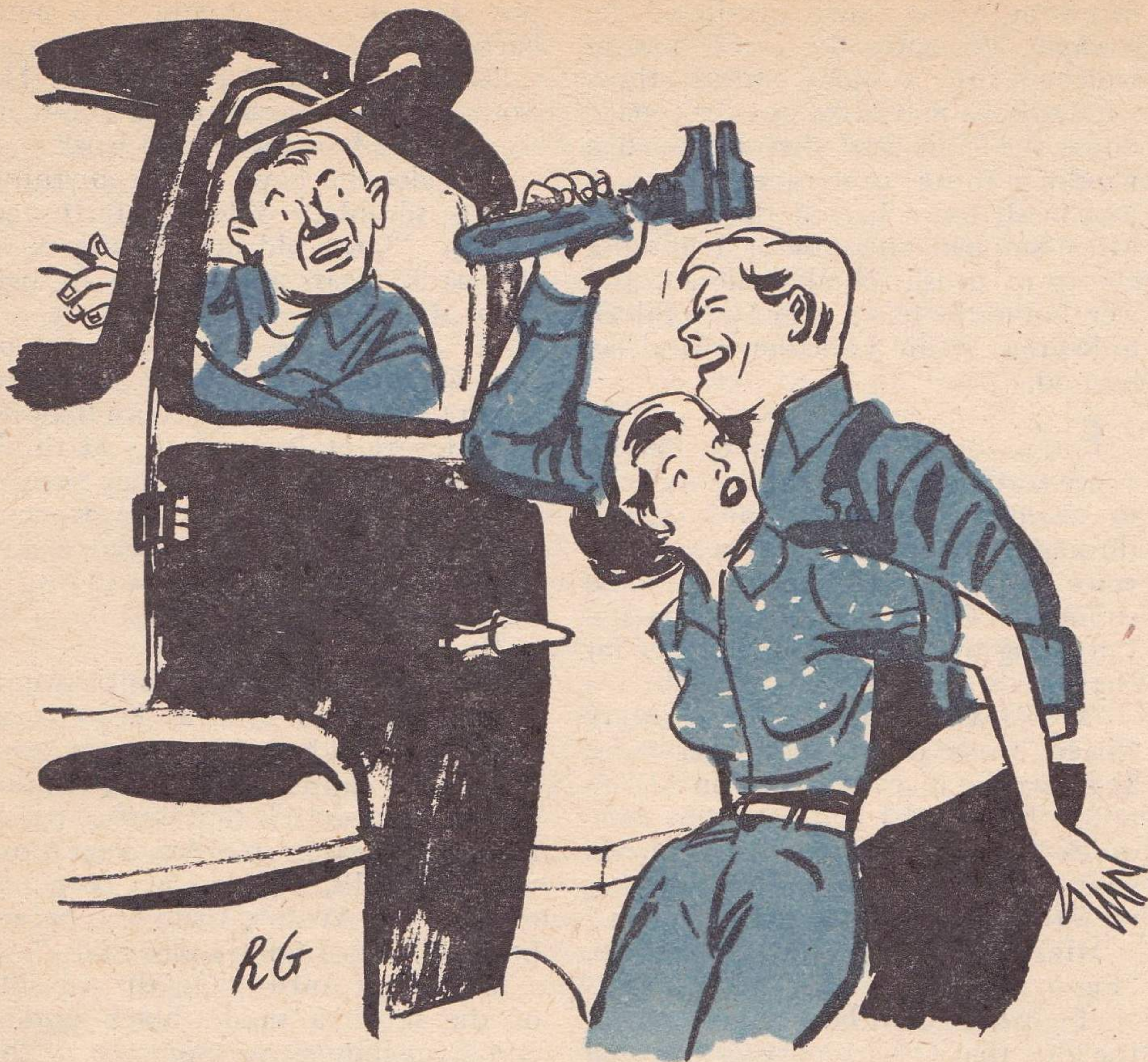
"I don't know anything," she said, "except that your former comrade-in-arms, Ollie Lancaster, approaches—the heel! I saw him in Gaileyville just as I was leaving. He was in front of the bank, talking to a fat man in eyeglasses and store clothes—somebody I've never seen before. What's Ollie up to now, Mike?"

"I wouldn't know," Mike told her absently. "Hand me that wrench, sis. Ollie's always up to something."

"Always up to no good," Mary Eileen snorted. "Is he still pestering you to sell that land across the creek?"

"Yep. Hand me the pliers, sis."

Mary Eileen's face darkened. "I don't like for Ollie Lancaster to talk to strangers that I don't know. Particularly fat strangers in store clothes," she said tersely. "It usually means he's cooking up trouble. Did you get that business straightened out with the F.P.B., Mike? That inventory or whatever it was?"



"Four days ago I told you to keep your pigs out of my tomato plants, remember?" Mike demanded. Ollie grinned. "Naw, I got a very bad memory." Mike's ears began to get red. "I'll tickle it for you," he said, stalking purposefully toward the truck. "With a spanner," he added.

"Sure," Mike said in a muffled voice. "I wrote 'em a letter."

Mary Eileen scratched her back against the tractor and chewed a straw, watching moodily as Ollie Lancaster turned his truck in off the highway. It rocked on toward them.

"I know the kind of letters that you write, Mike Harlowe," she said. "After we're married I'll do the writing for the family." She added under her breath, "If you ever get around to asking me, you big lug!"

Mike said from the depths of the tractor, "I heard that, sis. Tch! Tch! Not ladylike!"

"I don't feel like a lady," Mary Eileen told him crisply. "What did you tell that Mr. Crummit—or whatever his name is? He's probably mad enough to spit carpet-tacks by now. Here's Ollie!"

The red truck ground on up the dirt road and stopped a dozen feet from the tractor. Ollie's moon-shaped face, surmounted by uncombed, ginger-colored hair, was thrust out of the cab window as he leered amiably at Mary Eileen.

"Hi-ya, beautiful," he trumpeted through his nose. "What you want to waste time on a broken-down hero like Mike for, when you got a real man just waitin' for you to say the word?"

"A real man like you, I suppose," Mary Eileen retorted icily. "I'd rather have a spavined hippopotamus. Good-by, Mr. Lancaster!"

Ollie smirked. "'Ollie,' to you, baby—just be informal. I know you're shy about showin' your infatuation, but you don't need to pretend with old Ollie." He shifted his attention to Mike who had straightened and was scowling, a wrench in his hand. "Well, you decided yet to sell me them two acres, stupid?"

"I'll sell you a six-by-three plot down by the slough where I dump the rest of the rotten tomatoes," Mike told him roughly. "And another thing, you fat Judas: four days ago I told you to keep your pigs out of that field. You remember?"

"Naw," Ollie grinned. "I got a bad memory."

"I'll tickle it for you," Mike said in a grim voice, stalking purposefully toward the truck. "With a spanner! Your pigs got through the fence again last night and rooted up more tomato plants."

"I'll speak to the little rascals," Ollie chuckled.

Mike's ears began to get red. "Not only that, but I've got a hunch that those pigs of yours are being helped through my fence. If I ever catch you at that, I'll make you hard to catch,

you overstuffed Genghis Khan! Do you get that?"

"Now, now," Ollie protested hastily, locking the cab door and running the window up so that Mike couldn't get at him. When he was safe, he added, "You want advice, and old Ollie's just the lad to give it to you. I hear it said around that you're tryin' to get a loan from old man Dulligan. So you're in the glue some place and you got to have money. So you better sell old Ollie that two acres—because old Ollie's got a pretty good hunch that the bank ain't goin' to lend you no money! Got it, bud?"

Mike's face suddenly blossomed into an angry scarlet and he half lifted the wrench. Mary Eileen grabbed his arm and pulled him back, then pushed by him to stand close to the cab window.

"Wait, Mike," she said sharply over her shoulder. "I want to hear about this. You're crazy, Ollie! Mike's not trying to borrow money at the bank. Why should he?"

"You ask him, baby," Ollie said nastily.

"I don't have to ask—" Mary Eileen began and then her voice trailed away as she swung back to look at Mike.

"Mike . . ." she said in a shaky voice.

"It's all right, sis," Mike said slowly. "I'll tell you about it as soon as I chase this crumb out of here."

"Old Ollie will go when he gets ready, Sah-jint," Lancaster said, his voice suddenly mean. "He'll up the ante on that two acres to three hundred bucks—cash on the line. You better take it, because old man Dulligan ain't goin' to lend you anything—after that Government feller gets through talkin' to him."

"What Government fellow?" Mike demanded.

"Feller named Crummit. He was askin' about you, Mike."

"Asking what, you redheaded hoo-doo?"

"About pigs," Ollie said smugly.

"I haven't got any pigs!" Mike yelled. "If you told him that I've got pigs I'll—"

"Now, now," Ollie said in a soothing voice. "Let's not lose our tempers. Just call me up when you're ready to sell, bud—I got a hunch it won't be long now."

HE swung the red truck, eased it back to the highway and turned off in the direction of his own place which lay out of sight over the brow of the low hill. Mary Eileen turned anxiously to Mike.

"Mike, what did he mean? Are you in trouble? So that you have to borrow money from Mr. Dulligan at the bank?"

"I'm in no trouble," Mike growled angrily. "I'd like to break that

chump's neck. I was going to surprise you, sis."

"Surprise me how, Mike?" Mary Eileen asked softly.

Mike told her and when he had finished Mary Eileen was in his arms and her eyes were very bright. "You lug," she whispered. "You darned sweet lug—only you mustn't do it, Mike. You need the money for a new cultivator—and other things. The house can wait."

"Nope," Mike insisted stubbornly. "Old Granny Hopkins, down the road, has been waiting forty years for the fixings that Pappy Hopkins promised her before they were married. That's not for you, sis. No fixings, no wedding bells!"

"You mean you're sort of proposing to me with a bank loan, Mike?" Mary Eileen asked, her eyes dancing a little. Mike grinned at her. "Could be, pal."

"That," Mary Eileen told him briskly, "puts a different face on the matter. Have you still got that letter from the Farm Planning Bureau? I seem to remember something important in it."

"I got it," Mike said. "What's eating you, sis? It's just about some fool form that they wanted filled out."

HE pulled the crumpled letter from his pocket and handed it to Mary Eileen. She slipped the letter out and studied it while she bit uncertainly at her lower lip. Finally she looked up.

"What do you suppose this Mr. Crummit means about restricting credit, Mike? Could that have anything to do with the loan?"

"Naw," Mike said casually. "Stop worrying. Those are just words that they put in those letters to make 'em sound good."

"What did you say in the letter you wrote back?"

"Nothing much," Mike answered modestly. "I just told that fathead, Crummit, that if he didn't stop bothering me about pigs I'd toss him in the slough. I was polite about it."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" Mary Eileen said in a shocked voice. "Why didn't you offer to burn the Constitution or throw rotten tomatoes at the White House? This guy's in Gaileyville! Do you get it? Suppose he comes out here to see if you've got any pigs?"

"Let him come," Mike said, his voice unconcerned. "I haven't got so much as a slice of bacon on the place. Come on, sis. Let's take a spin on Chris. See if shees-a tune oop."

They chugged past the green and white bungalow and Mary Eileen regarded it with fond and speculative eyes. Mike crossed the shallow creek on the rickety bridge and swung left,

following tracks which paralleled the stream. Presently the creek bottom widened into a sandy stretch thick with willows and Mike put the tractor down the bank and they threaded a winding route upstream. Then a wire-mesh fence barred the way and Mike stopped the tractor behind a clump of brush, climbed down, and went on to the fence with Mary Eileen following. Ollie Lancaster's land lay beyond.

FOR a moment Mike stared; then he swore softly and squatted on his heels to examine the hole which gaped through the wire. "Cut!" he said, his voice hard as he reached for the loose strands. "Okay, sis! This tears it—I'm going over there and tie that fat character's neck into a bowline!"

"Wait a minute, Mike," Mary Eileen broke in suddenly, her voice angry as she placed a hand on Mike's arm. "You and I had better do some quick figuring before you climb on your big white horse and go charging off to hang a mouse on Ollie's eye."

Mike scowled and straightened up. "Figuring about what?" he asked.

"Figuring about how to keep out of the glue that Ollie Lancaster is trying to herd you into," Mary Eileen told him crisply. "Now, Sir Lancelot, just why would Ollie cut holes in your fence?"

"So that his pigs can get through and root up my tomatoes," Mike said grimly. "He thinks it's a joke. When we were in the Marines, the fat clown used to put burrs in guys' blankets just for laughs. You ever had a burr in your blankets?"

"No," Mary Eileen said crossly, "and Ollie's not doing this just for laughs, either. He wants that tomato field and he said that he had been talking with this Mr. Walter Crummit in Gaileyville. It's ten to one *he* told Mr. Crummit you've got pigs!"

"Pigs—what pigs?" Mike demanded angrily. "I haven't got any pigs!"

Mary Eileen gestured eloquently at the hole in the fence. "You want to bet that you won't have pigs just about the time that Mr. Walter Crummit shows up? Ollie's planned this—when the time is ripe he'll shoo *his* pigs through the fence. They've been here before and they head for your tomatoes like homing pigeons. And then there *you* are! Smack in the glue!"

"Suppose this Crummit does see pigs here?" Mike asked stubbornly. "They're not my pigs."

"Look, Mike," Mary Eileen said in a resigned voice, "after that letter you wrote him, Mr. Walter Crummit is going to be so mad he's probably on the verge of apoplexy right now. If he sees pigs on your land he won't give a hoot who they belong to—he'll

just start shooting at you with both barrels!"

"Oh, nuts!" Mike mumbled. "He wouldn't really do anything about it, sis. I know how these birds work."

"He doesn't have to do anything about it," Mary Eileen interrupted grimly. "Once old man Dulligan, at the bank, hears that you're in bad with the Farm Planning Bureau—pouf! There goes your loan out of the window. Old man Dulligan doesn't love a dollar any more than he loves his right leg and if you think that he's going to lend money to anybody feuding with the Government you ought to have your head examined! He wouldn't even lend you a bag of used peanuts."

"But—"

"But nothing, you big clunk!" Mary Eileen stormed. "I've heard the tinkle of wedding bells in my ears once today and I like it! And I'm not going to let you sell that tomato patch to Ollie Lancaster in order to get those wedding bells, either. We're going to find this Walter Crummit before he finds any of Ollie's pigs and—"

She didn't finish. On the far side of the fence a small, black porker thrust an inquisitive snout out of the underbrush and peered brightly around. Then he spotted the hole in the wire and scuttled through to head down the creek. For a moment, Mike glared; then he grabbed a wrench and started in pursuit. As he charged into the brush, a series of startled squeals disturbed the quiet of the afternoon and the creek bottom was suddenly full of pigs fleeing in all directions. A score of them.

Mike swore and took after the nearest, brandishing his club. The pig—a dirty white one with scabrous brown spots—dodged nimbly but Mike got in a solid whack and the animal grunted protestingly and scrambled for the bank. Mike followed, dimly aware that a car had stopped up there at the edge of the tomato field and that a man had climbed out and was standing peering down into the creek bottom.

"Head him off!" Mike yelled and swung his club again.

THE pig scrambled up the steep bank, its short legs churning dust back into Mike's face and the outline of the stranger above disappeared into the yellow cloud. Then Mike reached the top of the bank and stopped, with his mouth dropping open.

A stoutish young man was sitting on the ground, his horn-rimmed spectacles dangling precariously from one ear. Beyond him was a black sedan with FARM PLANNING BUREAU inscribed on the front door. The spotted porker was disappearing into the tomato vines.

Mike glowered. "Why the devil did you let him get away, bud?" he demanded. Then the significance of the legend on the car door penetrated his consciousness and his scowl deepened. Mr. Walter Crummit was scrambling angrily to his feet.

"Damn it!" Mr. Crummit was shouting. "Keep your thus-and-so pigs out from between my legs!"

"They're not *my* pigs!" Mike yelled back violently. "I haven't got any pigs! I wrote you a letter and told you I didn't have any pigs! Don't they teach you to read in the Farm Planning Bureau?"

WALTER CRUMMIT jerked as though he had suddenly felt a snake crawling up the leg of his trousers. "Are you Michael Harlowe?" he demanded in a strangled voice. "The Michael Harlowe that had the unmitigated crust to write that confounded letter?"

Mike started to answer but Mary Eileen's voice, coming from the willows below, interrupted him.

"Shoo!" she was yelling angrily. "Get away from me, you animated lard-kettle! Scat!"

There was the sound of a solid *thwack*, followed by a shrill squeal, and a second pig, bigger than the first, charged up the bank. He went between Mike's legs, depositing the latter on his back in the dust, and then bowled Mr. Walter Crummit over for a second time. Walter's language took on a crisp picturesqueness.

Mary Eileen came up the bank, waving the dust away as she tried to peer through its cloud. The hair was blowing across her face and the freckles were shining on her nose.

"Mike!" she called hoarsely. "Where the devil are you? We've got to round up these pigs and get them out of here before that blithering idiot from the F.P.B. shows up!"

"That blithering idiot from the F.P.B. has already showed up," Walter Crummit said nastily, getting up so slowly that his face seemed to rise out of the dust like a pink island rising out of a brown sea. "That blithering idiot from the F.P.B. is about to come down on one Michael Harlowe, Esq., so hard he will think a brick silo has fallen on top of him!"

Mary Eileen stopped as though she had suddenly run into a barbed-wire fence and her mouth made a round "O" as she peered through the dust. Mike was sitting with his hands braced on the ground behind him. Walter Crummit, his face smeared with dirt, was trying to readjust his glasses on his nose. His expression was grim.

"Oh, my goodness!" Mary Eileen said in a horrified voice. "Oh, my goodness! Are you Mr. Crummit?"

"I am," Walter Crummit said in a voice that sounded like a beer bottle being ground up in a meat-chopper. "And I've got some things to talk over with this young man here. Quite a lot of things!"

"Oh, my goodness!" Mary Eileen said again. "I didn't—"

"I'll handle this, sis," Mike interrupted curtly, getting slowly to his feet. "Go on back to the tractor."

Walter Crummit was taking a crumpled paper from his pocket. "You," he said between his teeth, "are going to fill out Form 1126 right now, Harlowe. What is your pig inventory?"

"I haven't got any pigs!" Mike yelled at him. "How many times do I have to tell you I haven't!"

His voice trailed away as a chorus of grunts came from the creek bottom. Then there was a grunt louder than the rest and a river of pigs, following in the footsteps of their two predecessors, poured up across the bank fifty feet away and disappeared among the tomato vines. Walter Crummit's eyebrows lifted sardonically.

"Ha!" he said. "No pigs, eh? I suppose those are just spots in front of my eyes, Harlowe?"

Mike choked, then started to reply; but Mary Eileen brushed by him and placed a hand on Walter Crummit's arm.

"It's not what you think, Mr. Crummit," she said urgently. "We can explain—"

She stopped suddenly. A new and cajoling voice had come from the willows. "Cooley! Cooley! Cooley!" it was coaxing. "Get through that hole, you little rascals. You don't think your Uncle Ollie cut it just for fun, do you?"

For a moment the little group froze in silence at the top of the bank; then Mary Eileen's grip tightened on Walter Crummit's sleeve. She yanked imperiously—like a school teacher leading a reluctant pupil by the ear—and started to tow Walter along the bank.

"Come on, Mr. Walter Crummit," she said grimly. "I'll show you what I mean. Ollie Lancaster is the only man I know who can talk to a pig in his own language!"

The three of them hurried upstream until the willows thinned enough so they could see the fence. Ollie Lancaster was there, on the far side, shooing a half dozen shoats toward the opening. They scuttled through, and Ollie—on his hands and knees—came after them, urging them on. Walter Crummit stopped suddenly.

"By George!" he murmured. "Why, that's the chap who told me you raised hogs, Harlowe!"

"Oh, he is, is he?" Mike asked roughly. "Well, he'll wish talking

had never been invented when I get through with him!"

He went down the slope at a run, wearing the same look he had worn when he had been chasing gooks over the Korean hills. Mary Eileen followed. For a moment Walter Crummit hesitated; then excitement got into his blood and he joined the chase.

Ollie Lancaster, still on his hands and knees, looked up with a startled expression. Then sudden consternation washed across his red face and he scuttled back toward the gap in the fence. His pigs, disconcerted by the unexpected appearance of three strangers in front of them, also turned and scuttled back to safety. They went over Ollie, flattening him in the dirt, and scooted through the hole in the fence.

Ollie, scrambling like a fat bear, tried to follow; but the wire prongs caught his shirt and held him fast. He was kicking frantically when Mike's foot thudded against that part of him which was last through the fence—and he howled like a wolf.

"Tell the man who those pigs belong to, Ollie!" Mike said in a dangerous voice. There was another *thwack*. "Just explain it to the man, Ollie!"

"I'll tell!" Ollie screeched. "I'll—"

"Yes," Walter Crummit chimed in, in a voice which was virtuously outraged. "And just tell the man why you have dared perjure yourself before the Farm Planning Bureau, sir! I warn you, Mr. Lancaster, that is no small offense!"

MARY EILEEN was sitting on the tractor seat the next day when old Pop Norton came by with the mail. There was a long envelope for Mike and he ripped it open, glanced at the letter within and then waved it with satisfaction.

"From old man Dulligan. He says he will be happy to make me the loan. Told you everything would be all right, sis."

"Oh, Mike," Mary Eileen began, moving toward him.

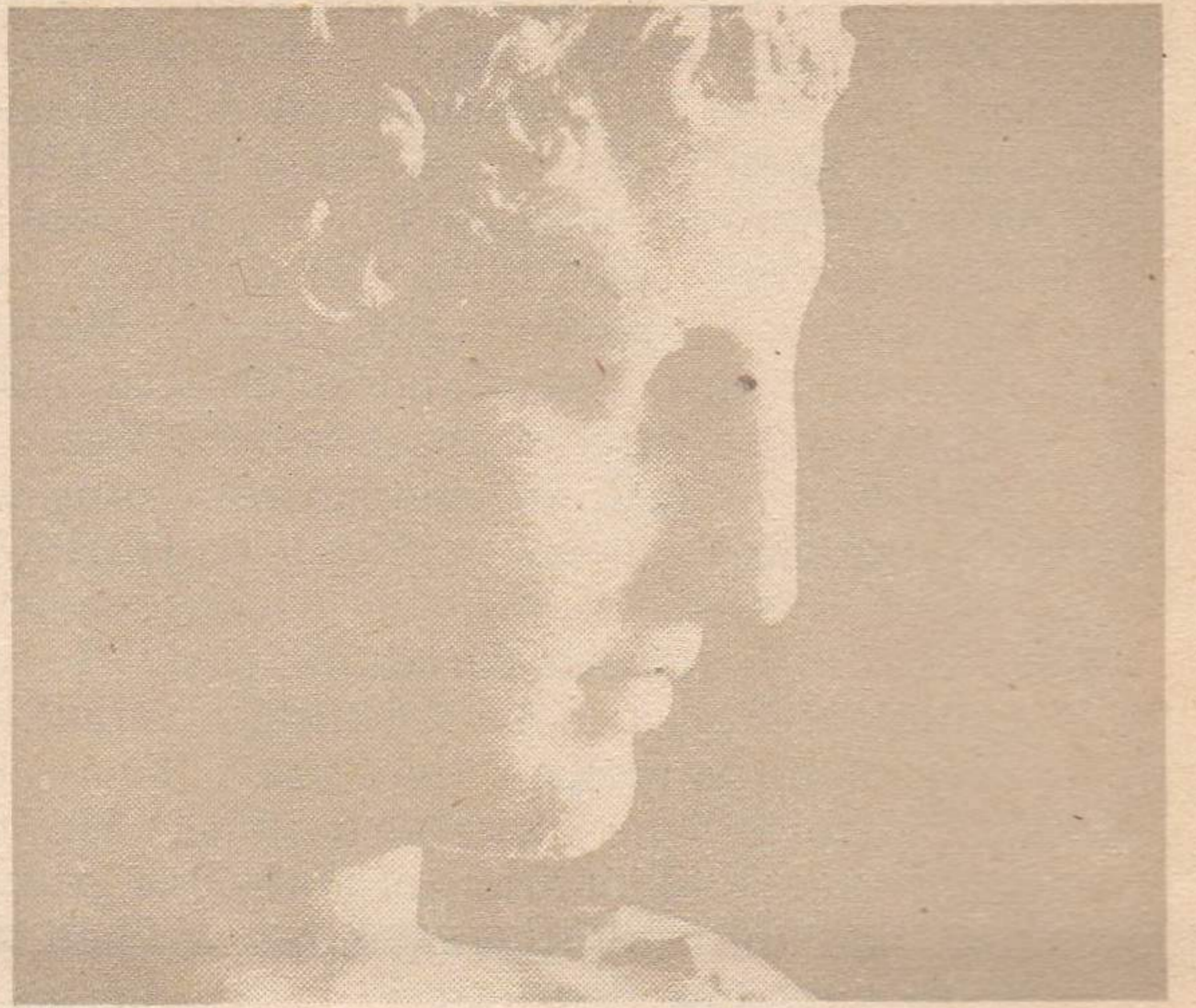
Mike wasn't listening. Instead, he was scratching the back of his neck and staring thoughtfully off into the distance. "Sis," he said absently, "maybe it would be a good idea to get a herd of pigs, at that. They've got a lot of personality. Take those little fellers that walked over Ollie, for instance."

Mary Eileen reached up and took a firm grip on Mike's ear. "Into Gaileyville, Sir Lancelot," she said positively. "Into Gaileyville to sign those papers at the bank. Then we go to a building contractor—I'm not trading my wedding bells for any flock of flea-bitten shoats! March, bub!"

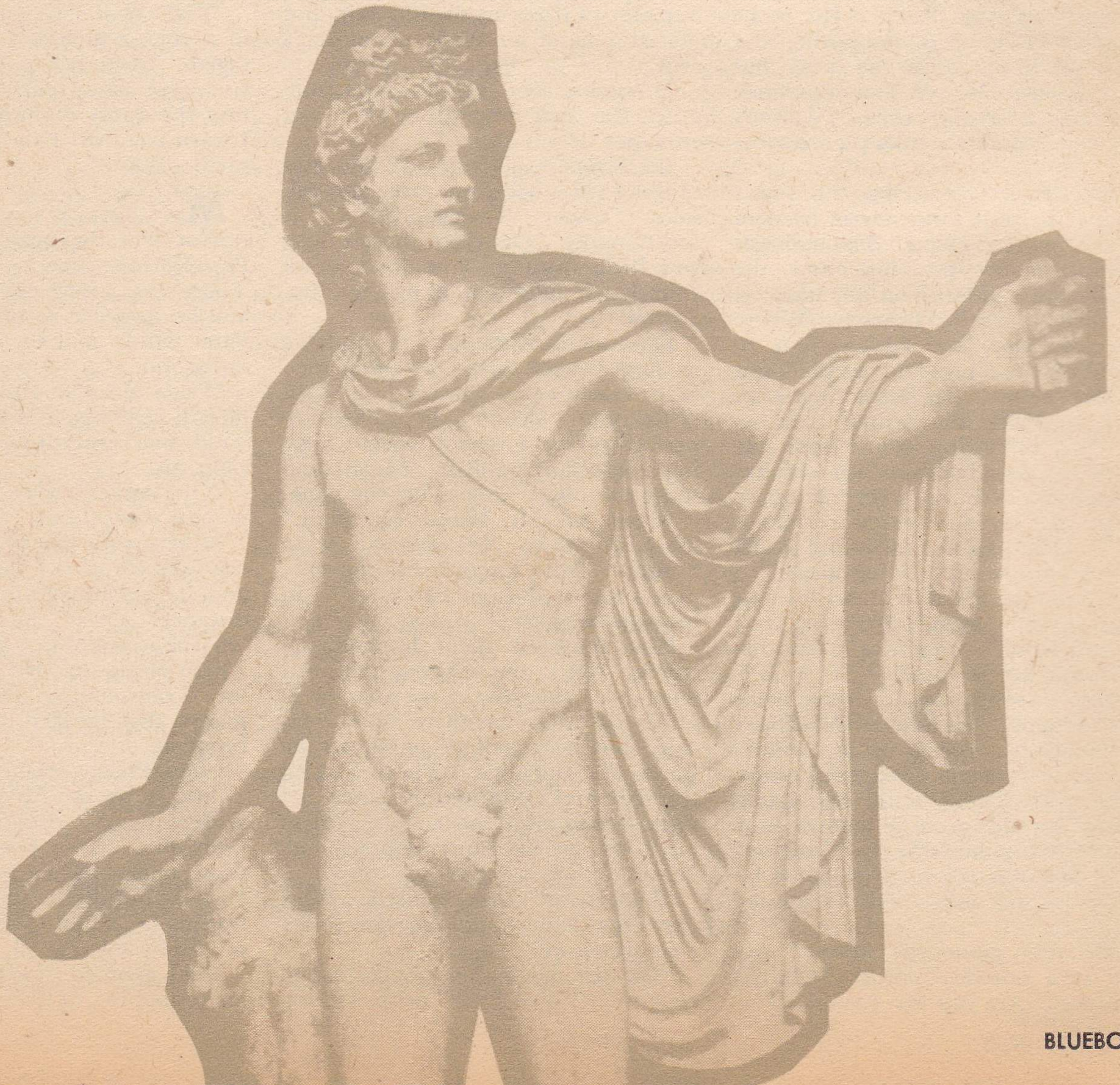
Mike grinned slowly. "I guess you got something, at that, sis," he said •

A foolish question, you may say.
Everybody knows what
a man is. But that's just it;
if current popular belief
is any yardstick, maybe everybody
doesn't, and it's time
for a re-statement of principles.

■ By MAXWELL HAMILTON



WHAT IS A MAN?



■ THERE WERE, THE LAST TIME ANYONE LOOKED, some forty-odd magazines being published especially for men. They ranged, in content and appeal, from tasty-looking periodicals telling the reader how to build a houseboat in his backyard to lurid, salty-talking journals depicting night-life in Macao and how to keep from getting rolled in the back streets of Tangier. They all were lusty, hairy-chested, two-fisted and outspoken.

They were obviously written and edited for "men."

And, since the book you now hold in your hands also is a magazine for men—and the oldest continuously-published one in the business—it was inevitable that a *Bluebook* editor eventually should run into one of his rivals at a waterhole and ask him if he had any idea whatsoever what a typical male magazine reader looked like. What, in short, is a man?

"Well," the other fellow said, straightening his shoulders somewhat, "I think I'd describe him this way: he's roughly six feet two inches tall, weighs somewhere around 190 pounds, with a strong jawline, plenty of his own hair on his head, and wearing levis, field boots and an open-neck flannel shirt.

"At least," he concluded, "that's the kind of man *we're* trying to reach."

And, unless the gentleman's point of view changed radically in the last month or two, that could be the reason his boss announced—just about a day before this was written—that they were going out of business effective immediately. They had, apparently, run out of readers.

Meaning what? That there aren't enough he-men to go around? Or that the American male doesn't average six feet two inches and 190 pounds, climb mountains in his spare time, trap cougars with his bare hands, and spit nails at the bunkhouse wall?

Judging by magazine illustrations, advertisements for rye whisky, and the average Hollywood movie star, the latter can't be the case. Every man drawn or photographed today is a shop-girl's dream. Where you begin to get suspicious, however, is that the evidence tends to point toward the fact that this character is a dream. Or, if he isn't, he apparently manages to keep himself thoroughly hidden. At least, you don't see very many like him on the 5:15.

Then, what? There aren't enough he-men in the world today? We think there are. We think there are more real men doing business today than at any time in history. But we also think the *real* he-men are being ignored in a weird, modern confusion regarding what constitutes a man.

A man, if one can draw conclusions from his newspaper, his radio, his favorite gossip column, or his television set, is a great big handsome guy, a gentleman who's had at least two wives, who knows all the headwaiters in town, who has at least one mistress, who probably is being investigated by a Congressional committee, who wouldn't be caught dead anywhere west of Times Square (unless it was California), and who knew every salty story about Christine Jorgensen five minutes after it was created. That this may not be anywhere near a resemblance to a *real* man seems of late not to have occurred to anyone.

Or it may just possibly have occurred to a woman patron of a small bar on New York's West 43rd Street, a week or so ago. In the bar at the time were a prominent movie actor noted for the masculinity of his rôles, two advertising men known for the lustiness of their conversation, a professional baseball player whose forte is fighting with umpires, four writers of articles for outdoor magazines, a lawyer whose hobby is hunting big game, a truck-driver for a beer company, a race-track tout, and a prizefighter. And, of course, the bartender.



"And he," the lady said, "is the only *real* man in the place."

Which called for a second look at the bartender, who may have been five feet tall, who was almost the same distance around his middle, whose education may have encompassed at most the eight elementary grades, who probably never went big-game hunting or deep-sea fishing in his life, and who laughed out loud when he heard what the lady said about him.

Yet a look at the bartender's private life, and you got some idea what his admirer had in mind. For the bartender just happened to be one of those ordinary chumps who does his job as best he knows how, who goes home to his wife and kids when his day's work is done, who'd never dream of robbing the till, making a pass at another man's wife, or looking for his name in a gossip column, and yet who, withal, finds time on his day off to teach a bunch of tenement kids how to play basketball.

"That," the lady concluded, "is my idea of the biography of a man."

And sober reflection reveals that the lady may have something there, may have something that the modern-day chroniclers of the passing scene are tending more and more to overlook—that *real* men, like our bartender, men like the ones we feel are the typical readers of *Bluebook*, are being by-passed in a furious and frantic attempt to set up a phony picture of a real man, a character who doesn't

exist outside of the shop-girl's night spasms, a strawman, if you will, who nevertheless is taking over where real males can't be bothered stepping simply because they *are* real males.

And, for evidence, try this little test. Walk up to the next five persons you meet and ask them to describe a he-man to you. It's a safe bet that four of the five will give you that dream-world conception of the true male drawn by the editor mentioned above. He's big, he's rugged, he fairly exudes masculinity, and he can tear an unabridged dictionary in half with his bare hands. Whether he's just as big mentally and morally is something else again; the fact is, he *looks* like a man.

It's the current tradition. Any adult male who isn't a walking, breathing likeness of Jack Dempsey in his prime is deemed inferior. And all husbands and fathers who keep their names out of the papers and out of the courts, who tend their lawns and help with the dishes, who take the kids to the circus and go on hikes with the Boy Scouts, who catch the 5:15 and go to bed before midnight—these, in the current philosophy, are dopes. They are, in the vernacular of their so-called betters, "little men," regardless of their size or station.

"I was parking my car, you know," someone will chortle, "when this *little man* came up to me and asked me if I knew the way to Park Ave-

nue." . . . "We were all eating with Toots when this *little man* came by and" . . . "I had trouble getting the door open, when this *little man* stopped and asked if he could help."

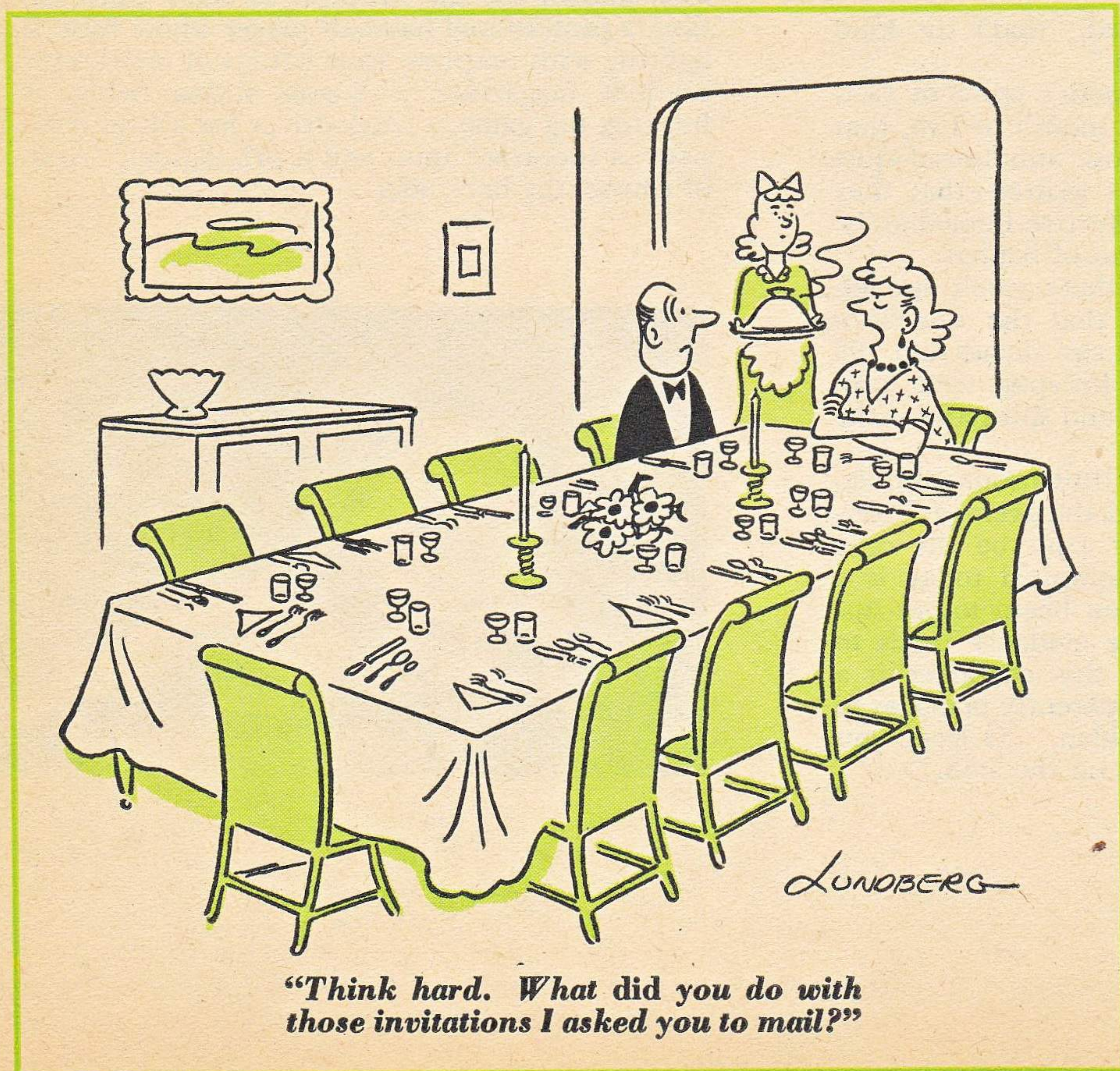
The intention is one of belittlement, of course. The "little man" is inferior physically, socially, mentally and economically. He is laughable, too. And, naturally, he is less of a two-fisted, red-blooded, oath-spitting male than the narrator. Naturally.

ON all sides, the fiction of bigness connoting masculinity becomes increasingly predominant. All Hollywood heroes must be over six feet tall, square-jawed and rugged, in order to be known as men, and regardless of how weak-kneed they may have shown themselves to be in the conduct of their private lives. The idols of our children, on radio and television, all literally seethe with pine-scented ruggedness. Witnesses to the excellence of this cigarette, or that brand of beer, or some other kind of gumdrop, all are physical specimens capable of playing left-end for the Chicago Bears or of bashing the ball out of the park for the Yankees. They are men, period.

Which is not to say they aren't, either. They may very well be the personification of virile, shave-every-hour maleness. But it is just as much a truism that, among the elements which contribute to their masculinity, physical perfection and muscular coordination rank considerably below first place on the scoreboard. There are other factors to be considered, no matter how successfully the latter may have become submerged in the modern rush to evolve a pattern.

Take a moment to pause and consider the males you know who fairly generally are accepted as blue-chinned, strong-armed he-men. If they're stamped from the typical mould, there never will have been the slightest question of their masculinity, and they might even now—as they sit in their dens testing a fly rod, hefting a Smith & Wesson, or polishing a brassie—be startled to learn that someone thought it necessary to assay their genes for sexual predominance.

Take George —, for example. George is a bank official, husky, handsome, tanned and debonair. Married and the father of two boys, George is heading right for the top, both at the bank and in the civic life of his suburban community. He is the first man out on the trout streams in April, the champion at his golf club, a big-game hunter. He can run you ragged on a handball court, and he can hold his own with a Martini. To round him off, George is a vestryman of his church and the head of his local office of Civilian Defense.



You really can't fault George as a man. You can't, that is, until you begin to consider the little affair he's been carrying on for more than a year with his secretary. Or until you bring up something George doesn't think you know—namely, the occasional black eye he bestows on his 110-pound wife. Or the systematic chiseling he does each year on his income-tax return.

When you consider these things, you have to admit they aren't terribly different from what a lot of fellows do; but you still have to ask yourself, is this my idea of a *real man*?

Or take Bill —. Bill's the super-salesman, the lad with ambition, charm and personality-plus. Everybody likes Bill—men, women and children—and not the least of his admirers are the boys down at the club, with whom he plays a really special game of stud poker. As for his family, they are the delight of the community, and any neighbor will tell you there isn't a more considerate and thoughtful father than Bill when it comes to taking the kids to the ball park, or the zoo, or seeing that they get a summer in camp, regardless of what it does to his bank account.

What people don't know, though, is that not all of Bill's trips away from home are for the purpose of visiting his customers. There was the junket to New Orleans last October, for instance. Bill's wife, of course, told everyone, with a smile, that Bill was away on business; she had too much pride to reveal that he'd just walked out as usual, without telling her where he was going, how long he'd be gone, or where she was to get the money in his absence to run the house. She managed, mainly because she still has a little left of the windfall she inherited from her mother. But she isn't sure she can hold out through many more of these periodic disappearances.

Is Bill your idea of a real man?

WELL, maybe Charley — will fill the bill. Charley is what is known as "a man's man." Always the first to start the office pool on the big fight, or to pick the winner in the Kentucky Derby, or to scare up the precious tickets for the World Series, Charley could win a popularity contest at the bar in Toots Shor's or Gene Leone's any time he tried. And the fund of spicy stories he has! (Wasn't Charley the first guy in the group to come up with a full set of Marilyn Monroe calendar pictures?) You'd never call Charley a "little man."

Yep, Charley's no panty-waist, no doubt about that. And, when you remember that dandy tackle he played in college, and the plain-spoken sports column he wrote for the papers after

he graduated, you begin to suspect that maybe Charley's your boy, after all.

Until you recall a conversation you had one night with Charley's wife, when she was slightly tipsy and not too guarded in her speech. That was the night she scowled at Charley, who was across the room regaling a mixed group with one of his better off-color stories, and revealed that, though Charley *talked* a good brand of sex, he was something else again in his relationship with his wife. He was, she admitted, more than a little bit of a prudish, stuffed-shirt in his own boudoir, and she wondered if she'd ever have the pleasure of meeting a *real man*, one who understood that women sometimes are just as interested in sex as men, especially when it involves their own husbands.

Like Tom —, for instance? Tom's that successful New York publisher, with an estate on Long Island and a career studded with landmarks of success. The son of a coal-miner, Tom worked his way through college, graduated into the depths of the Depression, and surged up through a succession of jobs as a prize-ring sparring partner, bouncer in a night club, roustabout in a circus, steeplejack, merchant mariner and newspaper reporter.

Graduating into publishing, Tom quickly demonstrated a flair for meeting men on their own level, and his company was known for its ability to land a breed of writer as ruggedly masculine as Tom himself. Naturally, moving in such exalted literary circles, Tom might be excused for having a mistress in town; after all, isn't it expected of a full-blooded male, especially one in a position to afford such a luxury, and whose wife is so obviously a plain-Jane, more interested in the kids and the furnishings of the house than getting in for the first-nights and the cocktail parties?

Of course. Tom is no less a male for that. Where you begin to wonder about Tom is in his choice of a hobby, which is his collection of amusing phallic symbols which he keeps on the shelves behind the bar in his rumpus-room. And any writer desirous of a sympathetic reading for his latest manuscript has but to add to Tom's collection, and the cleverer the addition the more Tom likes you and your work.

Is *this* your picture of a real man?

Probably not; but, of course, the Georges and the Bills and the Charleys and the Toms all are pretty definitely white-collar class. Regardless of the size of their biceps or their demonstrated ability to grab an armchair by the leg and lift it to the ceiling, they still are apt to be a touch soft around the waistline and hardly to be com-

pared with the barrel-chested Tarzans who work on the docks, heave coal or dig tunnels.

But there again you narrow your standards to purely physical ones, with the many other attributes of an all-around man fairly generally shoved into the background, if not missing completely.

Then perhaps it's to the armed forces that one must turn to find his masculine ideal. Surely an individual who has proven his ability to wipe out an enemy machine-gun nest, shoot down a MiG, or prowl the ocean floor in a submarine has to be given top priority in any job of separating the men from the boys. Yet sociologists can attest that bravery is not strictly a masculine characteristic.

THERE was the large metropolitan hospital which, during World War II, had the problem of rehabilitating veterans suffering from battle fatigue. One of the social workers on the staff once told a reporter, however, that few of their knottier cases resulted primarily from nervous systems shattered by the externals of all-out war. Instead, she reported, even among men who had distinguished themselves in battle, of far greater concern to the majority of the patients than whether the conflict might leave them minus an arm or a leg was their very real worry that it might leave them impotent.

She cited the case of a radioman who'd been cited for heroism and extreme coolness under fire during the sinking of his aircraft carrier as the result of enemy action. Under the constant probing of the psychiatrists, he steadfastly refused to dwell for long on the naval action involved in the sinking or on his outstanding rôle in it. Instead, he freely admitted that, throughout the business of abandoning ship in shark-infested waters, he'd had no time to plague himself with concern over his own safety. On the contrary, he'd been too busy fuming inwardly over the claims of a shipmate who'd bragged of having intercourse with ten women in one night. And the radioman's problem, as expressed to the doctors, was simple: was he less of a *man* than his shipmate?

The social worker insisted this was far from being an atypical case, and virtually any man who served in the armed forces during World War II, or in Korea, can testify that the fear of sterility, impotence and general loss of sexual vigor was a much greater and more prominent one than any serious concern over one's personal safety under fire.

And whose fault is this? The armed forces, for taking men away from their normal lives and tossing them into an all-male society of chaps

who have nothing to do with their spare time but keep from getting killed? Or modern society's, for glorifying the legend of masculinity based on sex, on brute strength, on bigness?

Just recently, a physician emphasized this fact to a writer who was doing a story on the dramatic effects of atabrine in combating malaria in the South Pacific. The writer mentioned that there was evidence to prove that atabrine had not always been effective, and was the physician convinced it actually did a better job than quinine?

"Certainly, I am," the doctor said. "The trouble with atabrine, as we found it in the Navy, was that some joker in every outfit invariably circulated the rumor that atabrine left a man sterile. As a result, many men, given atabrine, simply threw the capsules away (we knew they did, because we saw the stains of the drug on the ground), and we'd immediately have an outbreak of malaria.

"It was only when we stood a pharmacist's mate at the door of the mess-hall, and made the men swallow the atabrine before we'd let them eat, that we completely eliminated malaria from whatever island we might be on."

IN a word, the men would sooner risk fever and its lasting after-effects than any possible loss of what they considered was the only true criterion of their manhood.

Which pretty much puts a finger on the very crux of the problem—our seeming inability today to distinguish between ordinary *maleness* and old-fashioned, deep-seated *manhood*. We hear of a fellow whose physical attraction is undeniable, whose masculine exploits are a matter of record, and whose conquests among the opposite sex virtually are legend, and we say that here's a *man*. In brief, we have, today, substituted sexual accomplishment and sexual proclivity for character—and thereby have lost sight of the true yardstick for measuring masculinity.

The very act of procreation is given an aura of heroism in modern society. Here's a function God has given to virtually every living organism—from man down through the lowest of the lower orders—and we act about sexual accomplishment as if it were man's supreme achievement. A man's wife has a baby, and the man—who has done little besides obey a natural, God-given impulse—puffs out his chest, hands out cigars to the office help, sets up the drinks at the corner tavern, and behaves in general as if he'd just been awarded the Nobel Prize. And the rest of us smile tolerantly. Of course! We understand; he's a proud, new father.

Or *is* that what we understand? That here's another male who has proven to the world that there's nothing wrong with his physical functions? Or that here's a male human who has proven his manhood?

There can be no question that it proves his maleness. Whether it proves his manhood, however, is something else, and, to at least a few observers, it does nothing of the sort.

The late Franklin D. Roosevelt made much of the expression, "the forgotten man." But, probably more from design than ignorance, F.D.R. popularized the forgotten man, in the Depression era, as the *jobless* man, whereas, in actuality, the originator of the phrase had an entirely different guy in mind.

Yale's Professor William Graham Sumner, who first used the term "forgotten man" in his sociological treatise "The Science of Society," described the individual this way: "A," he said, "gets together with B, and between them they decide what C shall do for D. In this formula, C is the forgotten man."

In other words, "C" is the poor slob who has a job, who keeps his nose to the grindstone, who pays his bills, who obeys the laws of God and man, and who, in return for his industry and his sense of innate character, is forced by "A" and "B" to bail out "D." And the chances are pretty good that "A," "B" and "D" will get a big laugh out of the discomfiture of "C." He's a chump, they'll say, and something less than a man.

In at least one opinion, "C"—the forgotten man—our Manhattan bartender—is a bigger buy than any of them, forgotten or otherwise.

But one opinion is not the majority view. In the majority view, "C" is not only the forgotten man today, he isn't even a man. He is a jerk. He does a job, he rears a family, he guards and protects that family as did his pioneer forefathers, and in return for this ruggedness of spirit he is given the horse-laugh.

On the other hand, his neighbor who marries and divorces a coterie of wives; who lives openly in abject sin; who betrays his country (and repents to write books about his perfidy, and to lecture the rest of us, at a good fee, on how to avoid the mistakes *he* made, we who haven't shown any inclination to make them in the first place); who regularly makes the front pages because of his scapegrace conduct, and who, because of it all, seems to go on to bigger and bigger financial triumphs—*this* is the individual we enshrine today as a semi-hero.

And, once again, character and manhood take an unearthly cuffing. Yet we wonder why children, growing up and seeing for themselves what lies

ahead, are becoming more and more of a problem. Are they to emulate their fathers, who, in anonymity, grow old before their time in a tireless struggle to do the right thing? Or are they to pattern their lives on the profligates, to whom come, seemingly, success and wealth and even fame, if one understands the meaning of the latter in its gossip-column, accepted usage.

It takes almost a superchild to decide on the former path, with the latter showing such an inviting and widely-cheered effulgence.

What you arrive at, therefore, is the conclusion that a bit of sober reflection is in order as to what constitutes a real man. If masculinity, rather than manhood, is our god, and we call a man a man just because he's built to male specifications—and regardless of his moral fiber—then you and anyone else who hews to the simple verities, to the Golden Rule, are doomed to an even more forgotten existence than the one you now experience.

On the other hand, if we really take the time to study true manhood, to come to some fairly obvious conclusions as the result of that study, and then strengthen a national resolve to set ourselves a code of rules based on those conclusions, then and only then will we get back on the course charted for us by the boys who founded modern society in the first place.

What would a *real* man look like? What did our bartender look like? What, in other words, is a man?

He is many things, in varying degree and pattern. There is, of course, no question as to his masculinity. While admitting that all individuals possess characteristics of the opposite sex in greater or less degree, the real man is the one with the balance perfectly adjusted to his own side of the fence, with the wrist devoid of any suspicion of limpness.

He believes in—or at least has given intelligent thought to—the existence of some Power greater than himself. Or, barring that, he occasionally takes the time to question his beginnings and his eventual end.

AT the same time, he is not a recluse, a bigot, a psalm-singing do-gooder, or a professional benign smiler. (Certain clergymen—of all faiths, and probably as the result of their wartime chaplaincies—have bent over backward in recent years to be "regular guys," and a suspicion grows that their teachings have become less effective as a result than if they had adhered to their original personalities. A man who is a man knows his God and his obligations thereto, without having to have it brought home to him by clerical good fellows singing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm.")

A real man, married or otherwise, respects his family, even to cousins to the fourth degree removed, and he recognizes his obligations to that family, whether the obligations be moral, financial or otherwise. It's all very well to say one isn't his brother's keeper, but, if the brother needs keeping, it devolves on a member of the family to do it.

A married man regards his particular brood and his home as his most cherished possessions, and he places them second to no one or nothing. In short, a night out with the boys is virtually a must in any well-regulated household, but the chap who spends every night with the boys falls a shade short of being a real man, according to the more expert marriage counselors.

The real man is the one who prefers his home to any other place he can think of going, and he will fight to maintain that home. He will see that his children get to church, that his wife gets help with the dishes, that the leaks in the roof are repaired, that the lawn is mowed, and that the screens are put up. Again, it is his sense of responsibility to his obligations that outweighs every other consideration.

When a real man marries it is to a girl he sincerely believes will be his companion for life. He is something less than a real man—in his basic lack of inner security—when he marries for any other reason, whether it be financial, social or as a source of inflation to his own ego. A real man, in other words, will be proud of his wife in any gathering simply because she is his wife, and not because her natural beauty or earthly lustiness causes every eye to turn when he enters a room with her on his arm.

A real man remembers—even if he's married in a civil ceremony—that he has promised his bride to love, honor and cherish her until they are parted by death, and he weighs carefully his good and sufficient reasons for breaking that promise when the occasion arises. You can hardly pin the label of man, in other words, on a lad who seizes upon the flimsiest of excuses to get out of his marital obligations, just because those obligations have begun to outweigh the early joys of wedlock.

A real man is one who looks on adultery for what it is, a breaking of one of God's solemn commandments, as well as a breaking of a sacred vow made to one's bride on their wedding day. He does not—despite a current trend in that direction—look on extra-marital adventures as being either clever, a mark of sophistication, a badge of conquest, a gauge of virility, or a subject for idle boasts in the locker-room. He is more apt, if he truly has attained manhood, to re-

ARE YOU A MAN?

Below are 25 questions designed to pinpoint the characteristics of a real man. Why not give yourself a test? Answer each question honestly, to yourself, and then check your score. 25 yeses indicate that you're the perfect male; at least 20 yeses mean you have no cause for worry over your manhood; 15-20 yeses show you need a little personal checking up, and less than 15 affirmative answers should be cause for concern.

1. Do your friends regard you as a real man and treat you as they would any other red-blooded male?
Yes No
2. Are you concerned about your origins and what happens to you after you die? In short, do you occasionally think seriously or wonder about God?
Yes No
3. Are you able to meet and talk to all kinds of men on their own levels, to enjoy yourself in the presence of other men?
Yes No
4. Are you concerned about your obligations to your family, moral, financial or other?
Yes No
5. Would you rather be home with your wife and family, most of the time, than anywhere else?
Yes No
6. Do you help around the house?
Yes No
7. Do you see that your wife gets a night out, either with you or her friends, at least once a month?
Yes No
8. Did you honestly marry your wife because you loved her above every other, regardless of her looks, financial position or social standing?
Yes No
9. Can you accept responsibility, and carry it out to its completion, regardless of what the outcome may be?
Yes No
10. Do you believe in the sacredness of your marriage vows, in your promises to love, honor and cherish your wife, in sickness and in health, till death?
Yes No
11. Do you look on adultery and promiscuity for what they are, a breaking of a solemn commandment as well as one's marriage vows?
Yes No
12. Are you considerate of others, of their feelings, their rights and your obligations toward them, regardless of their race, creed, color or standing in the community?
Yes No
13. Do you handle your drinks like a gentleman at all times, neither overdoing them nor regarding them as the source of all evil?
Yes No
14. Do you regard profanity and vulgarity of speech for what they are, signs of inner weakness?
Yes No
15. Do you abhor physical brutality as a means of settling disputes?
Yes No
16. Are you considerate of the other guy's opinions, at the same time as you refuse to submerge your own because he's bigger than you, or more important, or more popular?
Yes No
17. Do you enjoy the sight of a pretty girl, at the same time as you are convinced it takes more than surface beauty to make her a real person?
Yes No
18. Are you polite to waiters, hat-check girls, clerks and similar contacts, at the same time as you realize that overattention to you on the part of such workers is nothing but flattery?
Yes No
19. Are you able to handle your finances intelligently?
Yes No
20. Can you accept setbacks intelligently and in good spirit?
Yes No
21. Do you appreciate that fear is a normal reaction in all individuals, and do you face up to your fears intelligently, doing your best to interpret them and counteract them?
Yes No
22. Do you dirty your hands willingly when a dirty job has to be done, at the same time as you experience no embarrassment at being clean and neat of person when such neatness is expected from you?
Yes No
23. Do you do your job to the very best of your ability, giving it your all so long as it is your job? And would you quit that job when you no longer can give it the loyalty your employer has a right to expect?
Yes No
24. Would you stick by a friend no matter what anyone said about him, as long as you were convinced he was right?
Yes No
25. Do you value your citizenship above all other earthly possessions, and would you fight to maintain that citizenship?
Yes No

gard adultery as a genuine outward sign of immaturity, of a desire to prove the existence of that manhood in a place where it doesn't exist in the first place.

At the same time, no true man is embarrassed by sex or sexual temptations. Far from being a prude, a real man recognizes sex as a God-given basic instinct which calls for no false modesty, when it is properly used. He has a true and frank understanding with his wife on the subject, and he works with his wife to make that understanding even more complete. By the same token, a man should in no sense ape the leering small boy on the subject of sex, referring to it as would a sidewalk chalk-writer.

If a real man tells an off-color joke, you can be sure he tells it because he thinks it's genuinely funny, and with offense to no man or no man's beliefs. He does not tell a smutty story for smut's sake.

A man also laughs at an off-color joke when it genuinely makes him laugh, and not because the boss told it, or the boss laughed first, or because the other guys will think him less of a man for not doing so.

A man never tells an off-color joke to, or in the presence of, a lady. Repeat, *lady*.

A man regards neatness—of action and appearance—as the outward sign of a gentleman. The ability to choose the correct clothes is one a man has or he hasn't; but, once having chosen them, he wears them correctly and with pride, and with no adolescent embarrassment.

A man is polite, and is not ashamed of politeness, and he exhibits politeness as a matter of course to everyone with whom he comes in contact, regardless of sex or station.

A real man does not drink because he thinks it's expected of him, or because he believes not doing so will make him any less of a man, or because

others whom he admires do it. Again, he does not subscribe to the theory that the individual who can drink all the others under the table is more of a man for having done so. (There is at least one editor of a man's magazine who will never buy anything from a certain writer because the writer one day proved that he was unable to drink five Martinis before lunch without becoming gloriously stiff.)

Contrariwise, a real man does not subscribe to the theory that all men who drink are alcoholics. A real man is one who can take the stuff or skip it, as is his wont, without undue eyebrow-lifting, unsolicited advice or tales out of school.

A real man is one who is not profane as a matter of habit. He develops a vocabulary and uses it to maximum effect, and when he is profane or vulgar it is because the situation calls for it. When a real man swears, in other words, his listeners sit up and take notice.

A real man, regardless of his size, resorts to physical violence only in self-defense, and never against any individual weaker or less well-armed than he. Except in the normal emergencies, the real man has far greater weapons at his disposal than his fists.

No real man is selfish. He respects the other fellow and the other fellow's opinions; at the same time, he refuses to submerge his own well-founded beliefs.

A real man has an appreciation for a pretty girl and shows no embarrassment at giving her a second look. At the same time, he is aware of the fact that it takes a great deal more than physical beauty to make an attractive woman, and he never knowingly ignores any female simply because she does not appeal to him at first glance.

Your true man never is deliberately rude to a waiter, hat-check girl or maid. But he also does not curry favor with such people by lavish tips,

undue familiarity or other devices, merely to demonstrate his own superiority. There is a tendency to be wary of the individual on too friendly terms with a hat-check girl, for example; the observer is quick to suspect that such a man has some basic lack he is attempting to cover.

There also is a tendency to think less of a man who loses more than he should at the race-track, at the gaming-table or in the barracks crap game. A real man knows his obligations, from a financial standpoint, and risks only so much money on a turn of the wheel or a flip of the card as he knows he can afford. By the same token, the writer knows of at least one gentleman whose disposition when he is winning is beyond compare, and when he is losing is abominable. He long ago was tabbed by those who know him as something less than a strong and red-blooded male.

THE real man is the first to admit fear, and perhaps the last to show it. He is intelligent enough to realize that certain situations are calculated to make anyone show real terror; but his manhood asserts itself in his ability to study the things that make him afraid, and do the best he can with them. He is not foolhardy, however, and never takes chances in a spirit of braggadocio.

Short or tall, thin or fat, bald or hirsute, weak or strong physically, a genuine all-around man carries many outward marks of distinction. He can listen as well as he can talk; he is intelligent enough to ask the proper questions when he doesn't know the proper answers; he is basically honest.

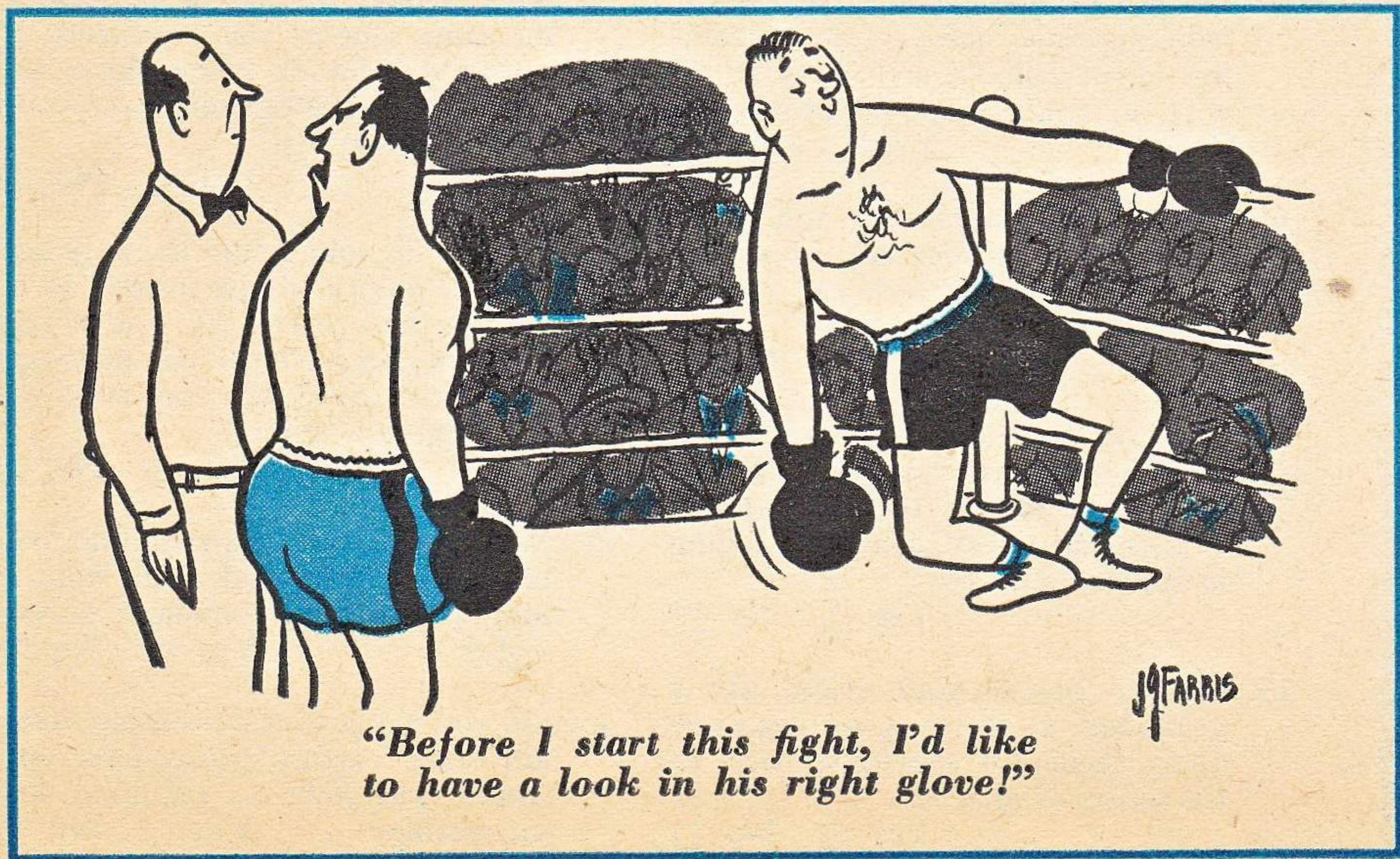
He is not afraid to dirty his hands on manual labor, and he is equally unafraid to wear them spotlessly clean when the situation demands such cleanliness. He will wear a flower in his buttonhole and not feel it makes him a sissy, so long as he knows down in his heart that he is not a sissy. He is not a fop.

He will quit a job instantly when he knows he is being exploited or otherwise treated unfairly, because he has the conviction that he has enough on the ball to get another, perhaps better job. By the same token, he will, so long as he holds a job, serve his employer with unstinting loyalty, and defend his employer's practices when he knows that employer is right. When he no longer feels he can support his employer with every ounce of his courage, he will quit.

Above all, he will value true friendship, and he will fight to preserve a valued friendship so long as his friend proves worthy of that fight.

He is a fair fighter, a forgiving enemy, a gentleman.

He is a man. ●





Illustrated by BILL FLEMING

Sucker Bait

They had me figured for
the sucker, the bright boy
in from Nevada, and
no friends in town.
Trouble was, they couldn't
leave well enough alone.

A BLUEBOOK NOVELETTE
by JOHN R. PEDERSON

A MAN GETS SO HE CAN FEEL TROUBLE COMING. A man like me, anyway. I felt it coming when I shoved the registration card back at the desk clerk, and watched him read my signature. I saw his eyebrows lift a little, his mouth tighten up at the corners.

"Nick Burke," he read. "Las Vegas, Nevada."

His eyes raked me up and down.

"Give me a flop with a bath," I said.

He grabbed a key from the rack behind him, tossed it at me.

"Take 301." He grinned, showing a mouthful of broken teeth.

I decided somebody must have tramped all over his mouth with hobnailed boots. "I got a tip for you, Burke. This is a real rough town. Just because you're a bright boy in from Nevada—"

I got sore.

"Look, if I need any local news I'll buy me a paper."

He kept on grinning. Then as I turned away from the desk, he growled, "Here's news you won't get in the paper: Somebody tried to bump Lou Roby the other night."

I didn't let him know that interested me. I only said "Yeah?" in a bored tone of voice and started over toward the stairway. As I reached the bottom step the clerk said, "Yeah. Kicked in the door of his office and hosed the place good with a tommy-gun. Only thing saved Lou, he was in the washroom, combing his hair."

"This guy Roby," I stated, "is lucky he's not bald-headed."

I went on up the stairs. The desk clerk snorted disgustedly behind me.

Room 301 was like all the other cheap hotel rooms I've checked into across the country. A narrow metal bed, a broken-down dresser, a filthy washbowl and shower, a chair with two wobbly legs. Also, one dirt-streaked window. I dropped my suitcase on the bed and walked over to the window.

Smoke was pouring from the mills along the river, settling down on all the buildings and streets. This was a dirty town, all right, and a rough one—as the desk clerk had said, real rough. It had to be, to scare Lou Roby into looking for a partner.

Then I spotted a guy in front of a cigar-store, across the street, leaning against a mailbox. Big, sharp-faced, young, his hat tipped back on his head. Any guy can lean against a mailbox if he wants to, but I'd noticed this guy leaning against a door down at the railway station, half an hour ago. He didn't look like a man with that much time to waste.

I WATCHED him for a while. He didn't seem to have any place to go. Finally I quit sight-seeing, washed my hands, and changed my shirt.

When I came out of the hotel it was three-thirty exactly; the sun was already growing pale in the mill smoke. The big boy was still letting the mailbox hold him up. He didn't move when he saw me, not even when I came across the street. I bumped his right shoulder, mumbled "Pardon me" and went into the cigar-store behind him.

"Got a telephone?" I asked the dried-up old gent behind the counter.

He nodded toward a booth near the rear end of the store. While I was looking up Lou's number in the phone book the big boy came in and bought a pack of cigarettes. The owner seemed to know him. They were telling each other the Yankees ought to be broken up, when I closed the booth door and started dialing.

"Highlights Club," said a girl's voice, a second later.

"Let me talk to Lou Roby."

"I'm sorry." She didn't sound sorry. "Mr. Roby's not available."

"He's expecting this call," I told her impatiently.

"Who is this, please?"

"Nick Burke."

"Just one moment." She cut the connection.

The big boy sauntered past my booth and looked in at me. While I waited he reached the rear of the store, turned, and came past me again. I pushed the booth door open.

"Won't be a minute, friend," I said. "Having a little trouble with my connection."

"Uh—that's O.K." He grinned crookedly. Then he swung a right hand as big as a house at my chin.

I'd been expecting that. I slammed the door shut when his fist was only three inches from my face. He caught at the door frame, and howled like a wolf. I pushed the door open and came out of the booth fast. When he reached for me I stood him off with a left. Then I kicked his right shin, hard. He stumbled forward and I kned him—anything goes when the other guy is fifty pounds heavier and six inches taller. My knee bent him double. I popped his chin with a good right and left, then worked low, into his stomach. He sagged slowly against the back wall and sat down. His eyes glazed over; he was out cold.

Sometimes the big ones get a little careless and figure a job is too easy.

The proprietor came around the corner of his counter and stared at the wreckage on the floor. He looked puzzled; evidently no one had taken the big boy over the bumps for quite a while.

"What's his name?" I demanded.

"Orly—Joe Orly. Listen, I better call the cops—"

"No, you better not." I grabbed the seat of his pants as he turned toward the booth, hauled him back. "Who's Orly with? What's he after me for?"

The old gent shrugged.

"He's just muscle. Any guy with twenty bucks and an urge to have somebody beat up sends for Joe. It's automatic around here."

Maybe this antique knew something, maybe not. There wasn't any way to tell for sure. I said, "How's Orly stand with Lou Roby?"

That stopped him, but only for a second. Then he shrugged again.

"How should I know? Roby runs his gambling joint—I stick to selling cigars. We don't move in the same social circles."

That convinced me. The codger wouldn't say anything interesting—not if I hung around all day and listened hard. I didn't blame him much. He wanted to stay in town—and stay alive.

"How do I get to Roby's joint from here?" I asked.

"Six blocks down the street, toward the river," said the guy. "Then left a block. Fanciest layout in town."

"Thanks." I walked out. Orly was just beginning to blink his eyes and

stir a little as I left. I figured I'd hear more from him later. He wouldn't be happy about the way the first round had turned out. Neither would the people who'd sent him. . . .

The Highlights Club was fancy, for a town like this. Lou knew how to fix an old dump up to look like something. He'd stuck a paneled false front on the building, run a canvas canopy across the sidewalk to the curb, and strung a big neon sign above the canopy. The sign showed a couple of chorus girls kicking out the word "Highlights." It could be seen, I figured, a good quarter of a mile away. Anybody who didn't know much about the town, or Lou Roby, would have doped the place for a high-class night club, and that's all.

WHEN I came through the front door into the vestibule, I wasted a couple of minutes giving the place a good casing. To my left, a couple of steps down, was a small cocktail lounge paneled in glass. Straight ahead I could see the main dining-room and dance-floor, with a bandstand at the far end. Near the bandstand a staircase led to an archway covered by heavy green draperies.

That was the real business entrance. Beyond those draperies, I guessed, was Lou's gambling layout. Evenings, there'd be a bouncer at the head of the stairs. Nobody would get through who didn't look right.

At ten minutes after four, though, the place was practically empty. In the cocktail lounge a lonely barkeep stared thoughtfully at a racing form. Somebody was banging out "Beer Barrel Polka" on the bandstand piano. Nobody paid any attention to me.

I spotted a buzzer on the wall, near the checkroom, and gave it a push. The barkeep looked up from his form. Then he came around the end of the bar, up the two steps, and growled, "Yeah?"

"Lou around?" I asked.

"Maybe." The barkeep played it careful. "If you got an appointment."

"I've got one; the name's Nick Burke."

"That don't mean nothing to me."

"You're asleep on your feet, boy. Everybody else in this whistle-stop seems to know all about me."

His face flushed. He was a guy who liked to look smart all the time.

"Just a minute." He went back to the bar and picked up a telephone. I heard him say, "Burke—Nick Burke," and then "O.K., O.K.," a couple of times. Finally he hung up.

"Well?"

He jerked a thumb over his left shoulder, toward the dining-room.

"Through those drapes at the other end. Lou's in his office."

"Thanks."

He didn't say anything; his pride was hurt.

The guy at the piano on the bandstand was young, wavy-haired, handsome—a bobby-soxer's dream, the type that looks natural parked in front of a microphone, crooning about love and stars above. He watched me as I walked across the dance-floor, up the steps toward the green draperies. If he was wondering about me, he didn't show it.

Lou's office was at the end of a corridor, just off the main gambling-room. I took a quick flash at the roulette wheel, the chuck-a-luck and crap tables. Nice layout. Then I rapped on the door marked "MANAGER" and a voice called, "Come in, Nick." I went in.

Lou Roby wasn't alone. A tall brunette was sitting on his desk—one of the best-looking brunettes I've ever seen in my life. Blondes happen to be my dish, but I'm able to appreciate top quality in any line when I see it. I was seeing it now.

She smiled at me. I smiled back. She was wearing about a quart of pearls in the places demanded by law, and a pair of dancing pumps; nothing else. The pearls didn't leave too much to the imagination.

Lou stood up and stuck out his hand.

"Good to see you again, Nick," he said carefully.

"Uh-huh. Real good," I agreed.

We shook hands. Then he said, "This is my wife, Sylvia."

THAT jolted me. But I mustered up a grin and gave her a big hello. She murmured, "Greetings, Nick," in a low, throaty voice, and managed to look as though now at last she was meeting the Man in her Life. Only one thing spoiled it for me: her eyes were as hard as agates.

"Well—we've got a lot to talk about." Lou cleared his throat. "Sylvia, if you don't mind—"

She jumped off the desk.

"You don't have to be subtle, boys," she laughed. "I'll go. Anyway, I have to practice my new number. See you around, Nick."

I held the door open for her. She gave me a wink as she went out—a big, mean-anything wink. I stood and watched her walk down the corridor, and I wondered about a couple of things.

"O.K.," said Lou, behind me. "You can close the door now."

I glanced back at him. He was sitting down again. He was also holding a gun on me, and looking as if he wanted to use it. So I closed the door and came back to his desk.

"All right," he muttered. "Let's get it straightened out right now. What's the play, friend?"

"No play, Lou," I began.

"Maybe. But you're not Nick Burke." He waved me into a chair with his gun. "What the hell—did you figure me for blind or something?"

"I'm John Burke, Nick's brother." I put my elbows on the desk, stared hard at him. "Nick couldn't come, for a good reason: He's missing. He disappeared six days ago."

Lou didn't react much. He just sat there, looking at me. At last he asked, "Was my telegram delivered to you?"

"Yeah. Nick and I have an apartment together." I reached into my inside coat pocket slowly, lifted out an envelope. "Here it is."

I threw the envelope on the desk. He picked it up with his left hand, fumbled around a while, dug the contents out. First he looked the telegram over carefully, trying to remember if he'd worded it exactly that way. Then he read the newspaper clipping about my brother's disappearance, read it over three or four times.

"Too bad," he said finally. "I was hoping Nick could sit in on this deal." He put the clipping back in the envelope, tossed it at me. "But that don't explain about *you*."

"It explains about me, all right," I said.

"I don't get it." Lou Roby looked baffled. "Why didn't you send me a wire, tell me Nick was gone? You'd have saved yourself a long train ride."

"Look," I snapped, "I'm interested in finding out what happened to Nick. I've got to know if he's dead, or kidnaped, or what. There aren't any trails around Las Vegas. I figured maybe I could find some of my answers here."

"Can't the Las Vegas law handle the job?"

"Maybe. But the case won't be cracked without a lot of checking around out of town. It's not a local caper."

"If I were you," Lou said, "I'd let the blues handle it, all the way. Amateurs shouldn't fool around with that kind of thing."

"Who's an amateur?" I asked. I worked a business card out of an inside pocket, and tossed it on his desk. He picked it up, read it, and grinned.

"John Burke, Private Investigations.' Who'd have figured Nick Burke's brother for a piecework detective?"

"Nick figured me that way," I said. "We've been partners for three years now."

Lou didn't say anything, just grinned again unbelievably. Nick's old friends always refused to believe he'd changed sides.

After a moment I asked, "You think Nick's disappearance could be tied up with the trouble you're having here?"

Lou shook his head.

"I had that idea for a minute or two—but it don't figure. We haven't seen each other for six years; Nick doesn't have a dime in the Highlights Club. Why should anybody tie us together?"

"I wouldn't know," I said. "You figure your opposition here is local?"

"Sure. I'm grabbing most of the local gambling take." A muscle began to twitch in Lou's neck. "Somebody else wants to take over. I'm supposed to jump town."

"Who's the somebody?"

He shook his head. "Can't find out. That's what I wanted Nick for."

"Tell you one thing that's wrong," I said. "Your own organization stinks. Everybody in town knew I was going to show except your own barkeep."

I told him about the hotel clerk, and the scrap with Orly.

"Don't worry about Joe," he said. "He don't count for anything."

"Sure," I agreed, "but who put him on me? Who knew you wired Nick in Las Vegas? Find that leak and you get the answers to quite a few questions." I thought of something else. "Who tried to bump you the other night?"

ALL at once his face turned gray and his hands shook. His nerve, I realized, was all gone.

"Nothing there, either. I was in the cashier's office downstairs, next to the checkroom. A guy with a chopper walked in one second after I went in the washroom to comb my hair. He blasted away, turned around, and walked out again. Guess he figured I was ducking under the rug, or somewhere."

"Anybody get a line?"

"No. Nobody saw him come in, and everybody was flat on the floor, head down, when he left. Couldn't learn anything at all."

"Well," I observed, "you got a couple of problems, too. Maybe I could give a little help before I hop a rattler home."

"It's possible." Lou put the gun back in his pocket, stood up. "Let's go downstairs and have a drink. We can talk some more later."

As we went out the door I said, "Quite a wife you got for yourself. Been married long?"

"Five months."

"How does a guy meet up with a girl who looks like that?"

"Sylvia checked in here with her partner last December. Song-and-dance act, plenty good. I kept them on, one thing led to another—" He shrugged expressively.

"Let me take one guess: The partner's the guy downstairs right now, playing the piano."

"Yeah," said Lou, suddenly tight-lipped. I got the idea he didn't want

to talk about anything any more. We went silently down the corridor.

We didn't get as far as the cocktail lounge. When we pushed through the green draperies Sylvia was on the dance-floor, practising her new number. It was something to see. She'd put on a long red dress over her pearls, and she was wailing the blues about a man who'd taken her all and gone away. Her voice was deep, but curiously soft. A red spotlight played down on her from the ceiling; every other light in the room had been blacked out. The piano-player's background support was in the groove.

"Let's catch this," Lou whispered. "She tries it on the customers tonight."

"The customers will probably tear the roof off the place," I prophesied.

We moved forward in the darkness and sat down at a ringside table.

SYLVIA moved around the dance-floor, singing her song. Her eyes were enormous, her arms moved like twin snakes in front of her; she sold a tune with her body, too. Suddenly the red spot died. The pianist hit a series of queer, jarring chords. A blue spot smacked the floor, danced around crazily, picked up Sylvia. Her dress was gone, she stood there in her pearls. For just a second she stood there. Then she was off, spinning, whirling, leaping—in one of the wildest, warmest dances I've ever seen. I found myself moving forward to the edge of my chair. My forehead was damp, I started breathing too fast. The girl was dynamite.

Lou shifted his feet uneasily. He didn't care much for this kind of stuff, not with his wife in the spotlight, anyway. As the dance grew wilder he shifted feet again. I took my eyes off her, just for a second, and glanced at him—then I turned back. Suddenly he jumped up and yelled, "Cut it!"

The piano trailed off in a few minor chords. Sylvia stopped. Lou got off his chair and stepped into the spotlight with her.

"It won't go," he said tightly.

"Why not?" demanded Sylvia. Her face was flushed, her voice shrill. She didn't like being crossed by anybody.

"There'll be no burlesque in my place. The customers won't go for it."

"Oh—won't they, though?" She laughed in his face.

Lou clenched and unclenched his hands. He was sore. Sylvia stepped out of the spot, toward me.

"What do you think, Nick?" she asked.

"It's hard to say." I fumbled for neutral words. "Maybe yes, maybe no—"

The shot came from somewhere close behind me. The bullet sang right over my head, caught Lou in the chest, spun him halfway around be-

fore it dropped him. He kicked once or twice, then quit kicking. I yelled "Down!" at Sylvia. Then I hit the floor fast, clawing for my rod, wishing I had more protection than the fragile table, the frail gilt chairs. If the electrician got excited and swung his spot over this way, Sylvia and I would be sitting ducks, too.

Feet scampered madly in the background; a door opened, closed with a bang. I pumped one wild shot in the direction of the noise. Then there was silence—complete, except for Sylvia's excited breathing close by. Blood pounded in my temples. I counted a slow twenty, and yelled, "Lights! Give us some lights!"

At once all the lights in the place came on. I helped Sylvia up. The pianist was already on his feet, dusting off his clothes. He looked plenty scared.

"Don't run away. I'll be right back," I said, and pushed through the closely-packed tables to the door that had just opened and closed. When I grabbed the handle and shoved I saw a long corridor, angling back toward the rear of the building. I went down the corridor, sweating. At the far end a heavy metal door opened into a trash-loaded alley. I went out into the alley and took a good look around. There was nobody there—absolutely nobody. So I put my hardware away and went back into the corridor.

Sylvia and the pianist were bending over Nick when I reached the dining-room. So were the bartender and a couple of miscellaneous guys. The pianist was trying to find a pulse. I took one look and knew he'd never find one.

"Forget it," I said. "They did a job, this time. We got to figure our play."

"Play, hell!" growled one of the unknowns. "Call the John Laws. Nobody's big enough to keep this quiet."

I was hoping somebody else would see the thing that way. There was no percentage in a stall.

"O.K.," I nodded. "Somebody get on a phone."

The pianist stood up and started across the dance-floor. He was all the way across when Sylvia called, "Wait a minute, Alec."

Alec came back; he was used to doing what Sylvia said.

"Look, I'm not happy, either," I told her. "But there's no other angle we can use."

"Sure, we have to call the Laws," she said. "I'm not arguing the point. I'm just thinking you're going to get hurt a little, Nick."

"Nobody can frame *me* with this caper," I snapped.

"Certainly not." She looked at me pityingly. She was deciding that I was just a dull brain, after all. "But

somebody's going to be picked up and sweated about it. You're the boy the Johns are likely to choose."

She had something there; I couldn't deny it. In a couple of hours the local papers would hit the street, bleating about Lou's murder. Immediately indignant citizens would start to blow off all over town, the way they always do after a murder, demanding to know what the cops planned to do about it. Things would be a lot easier for the police chief and his boys if some suspicious character could be iced for questioning; that would shut everybody up for seventy-two hours.

As Nick Burke, I was tailor-made for the suspicious character part. A clever boy from Las Vegas, only a couple hours in town, and an old acquaintance of Lou's. The chief probably wouldn't be above hinting that Lou and I had had trouble in the past, and I'd grabbed this chance to settle old scores. He couldn't keep me canned too long, of course, not if I got hold of a smart lawyer. But I didn't feel like sitting in stir at all; I wouldn't be doing anybody any good there.

"Any suggestions?" I asked, and looked around the circle. But the four men just looked at Sylvia. They were strictly muscle in search of a brain.

"Nobody knows you came into the joint, except the people right here," she said. "That's not counting the killer, of course."

"Well?"

"We can all agree to shut up about it. Can't we, boys?"

ALEC, and the barkeep, and the two miscellaneous guys all said yeah, sure. They'd be glad to forget they ever saw me.

"I hate to be nosy," I remarked. "But nobody in this bunch knows me. How come you're willing to give me this kind of a break?"

"Can't you see?" Sylvia didn't try to hide her irritation. "This way, we worry the guy who pulled the job. It's a cinch he knows you were here today. If your name don't show in the papers, he starts wondering what happened to you." She shrugged. "Before long he sells himself on the idea we know who he is—and decides you're out gunning for him."

"Suppose he does scare. What then?"

"He does something foolish, gives himself away." She slapped her palms together softly. "Then we grab him, settle for Lou's murder."

The way she said it, I felt sorry for the killer. She hadn't loved Lou, wasn't trying to kid anybody about that now. But she was set to see this thing through, all the way. She believed in action instead of tears.

I said, "All right. I'll go back to my hotel room and lay low for a while. Pass me the word when it's safe to show."

"No dice." Alec smiled lazily at me. "The opposition knows all about your hotel room. You got to hide somewhere that they won't spot you right away."

"Like where?" I asked.

"Like my apartment." He showed me the teeth again. "I got a fancy little three-roomer with bath up on the hill. The people across the hall ain't nosy, either."

It would keep me out of sight; that was all that mattered right now.

"Sounds good. How do I get there?"

"Don't worry. We'll take you," Sylvia said. "Just remember one thing, Nick: Don't come out of that apartment for any reason—until we give the word."

That burned me a little.

"I'll stick around," I snapped. "I've been in on this kind of a shuffle before."

I didn't impress her much. She shrugged. "All right, Alec. Give him the key."

Alec pulled a bunch of keys out of his pants pocket. All of them were hooked on a ring except the one he gave me.

"Room 627," he told me. "Walk right in and make yourself at home. You'll find beer in the icebox."

"Thanks." I tried to look thankful. "You're giving me a break, friend."

"Forget it." Sylvia sniffed impatiently. "Go call a cab, Alec. Hurry!" Alec hurried.

FIFTEEN minutes later I came out of the rear entrance of the Highlights Club, into the alley again. I had the key to Alec's apartment in my pocket.

A broken-down cab came around the corner of the nearest shed and pulled up in front of me. The driver leaned over, pushed the door open. I climbed in.

"Number 316 Front Street," I said.

"I know." He giggled juicily. "I drive Lou and Sylvia and Alec out there pretty regular."

We pulled out of the alley into a dingy side street. After we'd rolled a couple of blocks a cruiser tore past, siren screaming, heading in the other direction.

"Little argument some place," said the cabbie, grinning. "Boys will be boys."

I didn't answer; I knew where the cruiser was going. I wondered if Sylvia and the boys would play this thing straight, as we'd rehearsed it.

We drove four or five blocks. Then I got an idea. I rapped on the window and asked, "This place got a courthouse?"

He looked surprised.

"Yeah. Half a mile straight ahead, two blocks over. But Alec said—"

"Alec said right," I cut in. "I suddenly remembered a little unfinished business, that's all. Won't take me a minute."

He didn't like it. After a moment, though, he shrugged and muttered, "Sure, pal. Any way you want it."

The courthouse took me more than a minute. It took half an hour. I had a couple of offices to visit. When I came out the cabbie was tramping the sidewalk nervously alongside his heap. He gave me a sour look when I hopped into the rear seat.

"This is gonna cost dough," he barked. "Hell, I could have had a dozen fares!"



I put my hardware away and returned to the dining-room. Sylvia and the pianist were bending over Nick and the pianist was trying to find a pulse. I took one look and knew he'd never find one. "Forget it," I said. "They did a job, this time. We've got to figure our play now."

I shoved ten bucks into his hand. He took it and shut up.

Number 316 Front Street was a classy apartment-house, eight stories high, ten minutes out from the courthouse. The hack pulled up directly in front of the wide front entrance. I hopped out, blurted "Thanks" over my shoulder, and hurried through the revolving doors. Then I pulled out the key Alec had given me, looked at it. The suite number was stamped on it—627.

I thought about things for a while—in particular, about something Alec had done, and a remark the cab-driver had made. Finally I walked over to the registration desk and gave the chunky brunette standing there a big, bright smile. She didn't faint or throw herself at me, but her eyes changed, looked a little friendlier. That was all I'd hoped for.

"I'm trying to locate a guy," I said. "His name's Alec, and he plays a hot piano at the Highlights Club. That's all I know, except he's supposed to live here."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Cook. He's in 829."

"Eight twenty-nine?" I worked the smile again. "You sure about that? The barkeep at the Highlights said six-something—if I remember right."

"That barkeep," said the brunette, "was born stupid! He must have been thinking about Lou's apartment."

"Lou?" I acted as if I'd never heard of the guy before.

"Uh-huh. Lou Roby, the Highlights boss. He and his wife have Number 627."

"Well," I remarked, "you're real quick with the answers, aren't you? Thanks a lot, bright girl."

She looked disappointed because I didn't ask what time she'd be through. I tipped my hat and turned away, down a long corridor, past two elevators, to the rear of the building. When I opened the back door and stepped out I was in the tenants' parking lot. I leaned against a yellow Cadillac and smoked a fast cigarette.

THE picture was coming clear—not all of it, but enough for me to figure where I fit in. I didn't like my part at all. So the thing to do now was keep moving, change the setup, make the other team sweat.

I looked around and saw what I'd been hoping to see: A fire-escape on my left, running up a corner of the building. I worked my way past the long jobs in the lot to the bottom of the escape, and started up. Maybe someone would see me and call the Johns, but I decided I'd have to take the chance. Dusk would be down on the town soon, anyway, mixing with the smoke and the dirt. In a few minutes I'd be practically invisible.

It was a good fire-escape—solid, strong, durable. I've walked on a lot more dangerous sidewalks. In two minutes I reached the sixth floor. I stopped there to catch my breath and figure the thing once more.

A catwalk ran across the rear of the building to the far corner. Narrow, but plenty wide enough for one man. All I had to do, if I wanted to look into the rear rooms of all the apartments, was take a little stroll for myself. What bothered me, though, was not knowing which rear room belonged to Suite 627.

It was my own boner, of course; I could have checked downstairs. But there wasn't time to correct boners now. Lights were going on all over the apartment-house. I started along the catwalk, studying each rear room carefully, keeping out of sight as much as possible.

I'd figured on bedrooms, and bedrooms they were. In the first one a fat, middle-aged dame was trying on a mink coat; even that couldn't do her figure any good. A white-haired, red-faced character, probably a lawyer, camped in front of a mirror in the second room. He was operating an electric shaver with his right hand. His left held a full highball glass. He looked reasonably happy.

Joe Orly was in the third room. He was lying on the bed, with the night-light on just above his face, and he was reading a comic book, but he didn't seem interested in it. Every once in a while he quit reading and stared hard at the ceiling.

A rod lay on the bed alongside him, near his right hand. He was just killing time, waiting to do business—the only business he really knew.

The night-light wasn't strong enough to show me much of the setup, except Joe and the bed. I could see the outline of an end table, with a telephone on it, at Joe's left, and a dressing-table in the background. That was all. But I didn't care—I knew all I needed to know about Suite 627.

For five minutes I stood on the catwalk, watching Joe on the bed, and doping my play. Then I went back, past the happy man and the fat lady, down the vertical escape to the parking lot. Behind the trunk compartment of one of the long jobs I paused to check my rod, snap the safety-catch. When I came back into the building I was ready to roll.

The two elevators were self-operating. I'd been hoping for that. Maybe I wouldn't want some operator identifying me in court, later on. When I reached the seventh floor I got out fast. The main building stairway was just to the right of the elevator shaft; I ran up one flight.

I found Suite 829 right away—the fourth door on the left. It took me

only three minutes to jimmy open Alec's front door and work my way in. Opening doors is a specialty of mine.

The place was small: a living-room, a two-bit kitchen, a bath, a bedroom at the rear. On a hunch, I unhooked the catch on the bedroom window. Then I went back to the living-room, and found the telephone near the TV set, just inside the front door.

"Give me 627," I told the switch-board operator. If I sounded just like Alec, it was because I was trying to. Trying real hard.

"Yes, Mr. Cook," she said uncertainly. "But I don't think Mr. Roby's in, this time of day—"

"Try it, anyway," I commanded. "This is important."

The operator sniffed. But after the sniff I heard a phone ringing.

IT rang nine or ten times before Orly picked up the receiver. I could understand that. He'd think twice before he answered a phone in Lou's apartment.

"Yeah?" he said suspiciously.

This was one of the real tough parts. I talked fast, muffled my voice.

"Listen, Joe," I mumbled. "It's all off."

He clammed up for a full minute. His brain was definitely slow.

"Say—who is this?"

"The cabbie. The guy jumped out on me—"

"Cabbie?" Joe insisted on taking the thing easy. "Who—Ward?"

It could be a trick question. I hadn't learned the driver's name.

"Right," I said. "Ward."

"Hell of a cold you got." He sounded relieved. "What happened?"

"Like I said. Burke jumped out of my heap a couple of blocks away from his hotel. All of a sudden, before I knew what happened."

"You tail him?"

"No. Couldn't get rid of the cab in time." I giggled juicily, the way I remembered Ward doing. "But I played it smart. I went down to the railroad station and waited for him to show. He showed, all right—a half hour ago."

"What then?" Orly's voice smacked impatiently against the wires.

"He grabbed a train for Nevada. Pulled out of the station just a couple of minutes ago."

"You sure?"

"Absolutely."

"You better be," said Orly. Then he thought of something else. "Tell Sylvia about it?"

"No. I figured you needed to know first. Want me to pass the word to her?"

He thought about that for a second.

"No. The Highlights is full of Johns right now. Better keep away from the place."

I thought he sounded worried. So I said, "You want me to pick you up, Joe? I can be out there in five minutes."

"Yeah, good idea. Make it on the corner in ten."

Orly hung up.

I was out of Alec's apartment and over to the stairway in nothing flat. When I got down to six, a fat guy and a tall tired blonde were standing in front of the elevator shaft, waiting. I ducked back in the stairwell, didn't let them see me. The elevator came up, they got in and disappeared—heading for the Highlights, maybe. I took one deep breath, and stepped out into the corridor. Then I turned left, passed doors marked 623 and 625, and stopped in front of 627. I pulled the key Alec had given me out of my pants pocket, and pushed it carefully into the keyhole.

This was all gamble, now. If Joe heard the key turn in the lock, he'd nail me as soon as I opened the door. My hope had to be that he was still in the bedroom, sweating, trying to figure the score. That would give me a chance—my only real chance—to get into the apartment alive.

The key made a lot of noise when I turned it; it seemed that way to me, anyway. I counted a slow twenty before I grabbed the door handle and started pushing inward. I took it easy, real easy, scared all the way, waiting for Joe's shot to cut me down.

When the door was open eighteen inches I heard him moving around in the bedroom. I came in fast then, and closed the door quietly behind me. The place was pitch dark. I unholstered my rod, got set for a showdown. Then I started forward, moving my left hand along the wall on that side, feeling my way carefully.

AFTER three steps the left wall ended; my hand grabbed space. I guessed that was the boundary line between entrance hall and living-room. I inched forward another foot—and saw light around a door fifteen feet away, ahead and to my right. It was faint light—the door was open only about half an inch. Joe was on the other side, still walking the floor nervously. I started forward again.

It wasn't smart, catfooting around in the dark in a room I didn't know. But I was counting on an open space between entrance hall and bedroom door. That seemed logical. The only thing I forgot was the coffee-table.

I didn't hit it hard, just hard enough to throw me off balance. I fell forward, grabbing with my left hand. My elbow smashed the table and I fell against it. The table turned over with a crash. I sprawled headlong on the floor.

Joe's bedroom light went out in a flash. He kicked the door open, fired two shots into the wall a foot above my head. I fired once. He jumped back. A woman screamed thinly, not far away—probably, I thought, the middle-aged dame with the fur coat. Joe fired again. This time he couldn't have been more than six inches from my head. I scuttled back toward the entrance hall, pumping a shot as I went. Joe dived for the floor. I was getting warm, too. We lay on the floor and listened to each other's frantic breathing. The woman screamed again, louder this time.

I was locked in, just as tightly as if I'd been in jail. I'd never seen the room in daylight, but Joe had it all pegged out. He was crouching near the door, figuring an easy way to take me. When the slow brain had worked it out, he'd come winging. It wasn't a time to hang around and wait for the other guy's move. The trouble was, I couldn't think of anything else to do.

Suddenly pain stabbed my right shoulder. I kept on rolling, over and over, until I hit the bedroom door. Somehow I pulled myself through, kicked the door shut. I was groggy from shock.

Off in the distance a siren screamed. I wondered dully if the fat lady had made the call.

"Burke," said Joe loudly, "you're done. This time I'm gettin' you."

"Maybe," I told him. "Let's play it out, though—all the way."

I didn't blame him for bragging. The odds were all in his favor. His shot had creased my shoulder, up near the neck; it ached unmercifully. I got out my gun again, and waited.

He knew his way in a roughhouse, that boy. He figured me for nervous, and nervous I was. When he flung the coffee-table against the door, I wasted two shots on it. When he rattled the doorknob, I wasted another. I sat on the floor, and waited for him to come in and end it. My only hope was the Laws. The siren was loud now; they were getting close. But I didn't think they'd show in time.

When Joe rushed, I wasn't ready. He simply wrenched the door open and came in running. My gun wasn't even up. I put everything I had into a kick, straight out, with both feet. It caught him flush on the ankle. He fell hard, somewhere to the right of me. I jumped, and hit his back. He collapsed, stunned for a second; his gun clattered to the floor. I clubbed him on the side of the jaw with a left. He shook his head, snorted, and dug an elbow just above my heart. My head spun. Orly half rolled, recoiled suddenly, and sent me flying off his back. I crashed head-on into a metal

wastebasket. He was on his feet in a second; his foot lashed out, caught me in the side. I raised my gun and fired.

He took a couple of backward steps and sat down on the bed.

The siren screamed once more, no farther than half a block away. The Laws had reached the scene.

"Tickled my elbow a little," said Orly. "It ain't enough to stop me."

"The cops got us sewed up, Joe," I told him. "You'll never get out of the building."

"Sure I will." He laughed softly. "Sure I will."

He stood up, started toward the door. I threw the wastebasket at him. I could have blasted with the gun again, but I wanted him alive, if possible.

The basket must have caught him off balance. He said "Oof!" and banged against the wall. I pulled myself to my feet, charged toward the bed. My knees hit; I fell across it. Then I reached up and turned on the night light.

It didn't turn the place into a Gay White Way; but it did the trick.

JOE was moving forward again, toward the door, when the light came on. He looked back, and I covered him with my rod.

I picked his gun up from the floor, stuck it in my pocket.

"Across the living-room to the door," I ordered. "Don't try anything. I'll be one step behind you with the chopper."

"I ain't crazy enough to make a play now," he growled. "The Johns'll show in two minutes flat. All I want is away from here."

We went across the living-room and into the little entrance hall. Joe played it straight, just like *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. He put his hand on the front door and said, "What now, boss man?"

"Open it. Then turn right to the main stairway, and start climbing. Move fast, but don't run."

"Listen," he muttered, "we got to come out swinging, slug our way. The corridor's probably jammed with rubbernecks."

"Ever see any rubbernecks around before the cops showed? They're all under their beds yet." I prodded him hard with the gun. "All right, Joe—move!"

He opened the door, fast. We were both right and both wrong. The corridor was empty, but most of the apartment doors were open, with heads poked out. We couldn't go anywhere without being spotted by a dozen people.

"O.K.," I said resignedly; "close it."

He shut the door, we went back across the living-room, into the bed-

room. I went over to the window, shoved it open, and waved my gun at Orly.

"Out on the fire-escape," I snapped. "It's the only chance."

Joe didn't argue; he saw my point and crawled out. I followed him, pulled the window shut behind me.

"Sucker play!" Joe's voice was almost a whine. "They got us. We fiddled around a couple minutes too long."

I thought so, too. But I said, "Along the catwalk to the corner. Then up two flights."

"Up! Listen—you're nuts!"

"Up." He caught the gleam of the gun-barrel, and moved along. Before we'd gone five feet the lights came on in Lou's living-room. The cops were in. We almost ran after that.

When we reached the eighth floor I counted four windows from the corner. Then I bent over and pushed. The window came up slowly. Joe and I dropped into Alec's bedroom. I congratulated myself for being smart one time. Then I closed the window.

"That won't work," Joe remarked. "They'll search the whole apartment-house, sooner or later."

"Let's go into the living-room," I grunted. "We can turn a light on in there."

When he turned around I slugged him hard, behind the right ear, with my gun butt. He went down without a word or a sound, and lay still. I pulled the window-shades down and took a big chance, turning on the night-light. In Alec's dresser drawer I found what I wanted—some extra bed sheets. I ripped them into strips and tied Joe's hands and wrists, tight. Then I stuck a gag in his mouth. Joe looked peaceful; his breath came slow and even. I felt jealous; the guy didn't have anything to worry about until he quit dreaming. After he was fixed up I dragged him into the clothes closet and left him there, with the closet door open a quarter of an inch. I turned out the night-light, rolled up the window-shade, and went into the living-room.

THE whole apartment-house was jumping. Heavy feet pounded along the corridors below me; loud voices bawled orders. I grinned sourly, picturing the mess in Lou's and Sylvia's apartment downstairs, and the cops pawing through it, trying to figure the score—with a noisy mob milling around in the corridor. Not yet, but in a couple of minutes, maybe, the Blues would quit pawing, and get organized for a search. That wouldn't be good. My big hope was that they'd look from the sixth floor down, never figuring we'd boxed ourselves in tighter than ever by coming up to eight. The John in charge of the police detail

would have to call the turn on that one.

I knew all about the murder now—who did it, how, and why. I couldn't prove anything, though. Orly would never tell me the real story. He was scared, sure; but he'd been around a long time, he knew when to keep his mouth shut and avoid a bigger scare. What I really needed was a confession from somebody else in on the deal. Somebody without as much guts as Joe.

For a long time I sat in Alec's easy chair in the dark living-room, and considered the angles, and tried to make up my mind. A smart boy would have worked his way out of the apartment-house, caught a fast train for Nevada, and left Orly to do his own explaining when the Blues found him. But I did something else: I groped my way over to the telephone, and lifted the receiver off the cradle.

The operator didn't answer for a good minute. When she did plug in her voice was high, almost hysterical.

"Yes, Mr. Cook?" she said.

"What's happening around here?" I demanded. "Everybody gone nuts?"

"Haven't you heard yet? There's been a big fight in Mr. Roby's apartment. Half the cops in town are here, horsing around—and everybody else in town is phonin' me, asking a lot of fool questions. I'm ready to drop."

"Mr. Roby's apartment?" I made a big thing out of it. "Who got hurt?"

"Don't know. Nobody's been found yet. The cops claim the gun-boys are still in the building. Me, I think they took off down the fire-escape—out through the parking lot."

"I doubt that," I said quickly. She might plant an idea about the fire-escape in somebody else's mind. "Give me a line, honey."

"Sure, Mr. Cook." She yawned convincingly. "Man, am I beat!"

I felt a little better as I dialed the Highlights number. The operator wouldn't listen in on my call. Not the way she was feeling.

The line buzzed only once, then the Highlights switchboard answered. I asked for Alec Cook. He came on, saying suavely, "Yes, please?"

"The Law still around?" I asked.

"Who is this?" His voice changed, just a little.

"Burke. I got a couple of things to say to you—but not if some boy in blue is tuned in over your shoulder. How's it look?"

"Just a second." He set the phone down noisily, was gone for a few seconds. Then he came back on. "I'm up here in Lou's office with Sylvia. There's a couple of harness bulls downstairs, making sure we stay closed tonight—that's all. The brain squad blew about ten minutes ago."

"How'd you make out?"

"All right. All they found out for sure was that somebody shot Lou." He gulped a couple of times, and said tersely, "What's up, Burke?"

"Look, Alec," I told him, "you gave me a real bum steer—sending me up to Lou's apartment, making me think it was yours."

"Yeah. I muffed one; didn't realize it until too late." His voice was tight as a drum. He had to push the words out. "What happened?"

"Joe Orly was there." I let him sweat for a second. Then I added, "He was plastered to the eyeballs."

"Plastered!" cried Alec. "How come?"

"I couldn't figure it. He gave me a long, sad story about being strictly a brass-knuckles boy, doing a little honest slugging for his cakes and ale. Said he'd never been mixed up in a fancy deal before—and wished he wasn't mixed up in this one."

ALEC was silent a while. Trying to find his voice, I guess. Then he croaked, "How'd you handle him?"

"Well," I said, "he acted kind of unnecessarily boisterous. We got to rassling around and taking shots at each other—but nobody got hurt much. Only trouble was, some of the tenants in the apartment-house turned out to be nervous people. They put in a rush call for the Laws to come and break it up."

"You mean," Alec quavered, "the Johns grabbed Orly?"

"No. I sneaked him up to your apartment. That's where we are right now." I let that sink in. "Joe's sleeping off his drunk on your living-room sofa. When he wakes up lots of people ought to have lots of fun."

"What do you mean—fun?"

"He's gonna do a lot of talking, first chance he gets. I'll bet on it. He figures on getting a good break from the D. A. if he sings loud and clear—and soon."

"Sings? Not Joe Orly."

"Well," I said agreeably, "you draw your own conclusions. I already drew mine. I'm checking out of town right now—without giving anybody good-by kisses."

"No guts, huh?" Alec didn't mean it, though. His voice wasn't contemptuous; it was respectful—as though he'd suddenly realized I had a brain or two in my head.

"Maybe so." I let a little panic creep into my voice. "The way it looks to me, though, this is no time for staying around. No time at all. So long, Alec."

He tried to say something more, but I went ahead and hung up. Then I smoked another cigarette and wondered if I'd worded my remarks right. I decided I hadn't done too bad. So I



Joe did not argue. He caught the gleam of the gun-barrel and moved along up to the eighth floor. We couldn't go down without landing in that nest of cops down there, but maybe they wouldn't suspect we had bottled ourselves up even tighter by going up instead of down.

put the butt out and went back to Alec's bedroom. Joe was still resting on the closet floor. I listened to him breathe for a few seconds, then went over to the window and took a look at the parking lot.

It was nice and bright down there. Too nice and bright to make me really happy. All the regular lights were on, plus four strong spots from police cruisers pulled up around the lot edges. Teams of cops were inspecting every car in the place—the top John must have decided we'd crawled into somebody's luggage compartment and gone to sleep. Well, I thought, that'd keep the boys busy and happy for a while; they wouldn't nose around up here. Then somebody came along the catwalk, moving slowly. I threw myself on the floor.

The man on the catwalk leaned over and pushed against the window-pane. He pushed hard; I was glad I'd remembered to turn the catch back after escorting Joe in. The man quit pushing at last, said a nasty, four-letter word, and moved down to the next window. I decided he was a cop, too. The head John wasn't so dumb after all; he was working all the angles.

Pretty soon the man went back past my window. He'd finished his check: the eighth floor was clean. I got up. Then I spent ten minutes watching the dragnet sweep the parking lot. The cops didn't act too enthusiastic about their job—the search dragged a little. Inside the apartment-house the noise slacked off a little, too. Everybody seemed ready to admit we'd made a getaway.

A yellow, beat-up taxi came down the street behind the lot. It moved slowly; the people inside were taking everything in, studying the set-up. Ward's cab looked like that; but I couldn't be sure it was his, it was too far away. The cab turned left at the first intersection, and moved toward the front of the building. I went into Alec's bathroom, switched on the light for a second—just long enough to reload my gun. After that I went into the living-room and crouched behind the sofa, facing the front door. I kept the gun in my right hand.

Right away, sweat started to trickle down my face, cold sweat. I let it run, without wiping. I was scared to take my eyes off the front door.

It couldn't have been more than five minutes before I heard the elevator grind to a stop down the corridor, but it seemed a lot longer. My knees ached by that time, the gun felt heavy in my hand. I didn't move, though, after I heard the elevator. I strained my ears, listening for footsteps in the corridor; then the elevator started again, went back down the shaft.

"False alarm," I told myself. "They wouldn't play it that way."

So I relaxed. I straightened one leg out, and shifted the gun to my left hand.

Then Alec opened the door and came in—not bulling his way, like Joe, but silently, smoothly. The whole operation didn't take more than two seconds. If I hadn't caught a glow from the corridor lights when the door swung open, I wouldn't have believed he was there with me. I switched the gun back to my right hand, and quickly pulled my head down below the edge of the sofa. The sweat started coming in rivers.

A thin pencil of light swept up and down the sofa, hesitated, then circled the room. Alec was one up on me; he had a flashlight. He ran the beam the length of the sofa again, grunted, and turned the flashlight off. Then he moved around the sofa toward the bathroom. He moved fast; he knew his way around the place, even in the dark. It was the same kind of spot I'd been in with Joe, a little while ago. I was getting sick of being on the short end.

When he reached the bathroom door he snapped the flash on again. I took a deep breath, and said, "Hold it, Alec."

He was good, too—better than I'd figured. The flash must have been in

his left hand, because he threw it at me. Then he triggered two shots from the gun in his right fist. There wasn't much noise, for he was using a silencer—but the bullets could kill, just the same. They ripped into the sofa right next to my shoulder.

I went flat; my chin cracked on the floor.

Alec moved back toward the front door. He was breathing hard, like a man with a tough case of asthma—the same way I was breathing. When he reached the door he threw another shot, high, into the wall behind me. I came up fast; it was now or never. Alec flung the door open, started forward. I saw him outlined in the corridor light, and I fired. He sagged suddenly against the door; the gun dropped out of his hand. He said, "No! No!" in an unbelieving voice, and went down on one knee. I came cautiously around the sofa toward him; but the fight was all over. He clutched his left leg, moaning. I squirmed past him out into the corridor—and raced toward the elevator, faster than I'd moved in a long time.

The apartment-house was in an uproar again. My cannon shot had started women screaming by the dozen. Doors slammed and feet pounded, all over the place.

I reached the elevator shaft, took a look at the indicator. It was at seven,

moving upward toward eight, toward me. Sure, they'd planned it that way. Sylvia had stayed in the elevator, taking a little ride for herself, while Alec went into his apartment and did a job on Joe. That way, nobody else could get a ride, and Alec would have an easy exit when the job was done. Sylvia must have heard my shot, though, and she would come out of the elevator ready for anything. I went down five steps of the main stairway, leaned against the wall, and waited.

THE elevator door swung back. Sylvia stepped out. She called "Alec!" Then she started down the corridor, moving as quietly and carefully as a cat stalking a mouse. When she passed the stairway I saw a gun in her right hand—a tiny, deadly gun she was aching to use on somebody. I counted five and came up the stairs into the corridor behind her.

She stopped, and called "Alec!" once more. No answer. She took another step or two forward. Then suddenly Alec stumbled through his apartment door into the corridor. He'd picked up his gun—leaving that had been a bad mistake on my part—but he wasn't going anywhere with a leg like that. He was just answering Sylvia's call, the way he'd been doing for years.

"Get going, baby," he mumbled thickly. "I'm washed up." His left leg buckled and he lurched against the wall. Then he saw me, behind Sylvia. He bawled "Burke! Watch out!" and brought up his gun.

He was still wobbling a little when he pulled the trigger.

Sylvia turned just as he fired. His bullet caught her in the back, knocked her forward, toward me. She looked angry, then surprised—then, all at once, there was no expression on her face at all. Her eyes glazed over; her knees gave way. She was dead when she hit the floor.

Alec stared down at her. He didn't seem to understand what had happened. I guess he didn't want to understand. I said, "She's gone, friend. You want to try your luck with me now?"

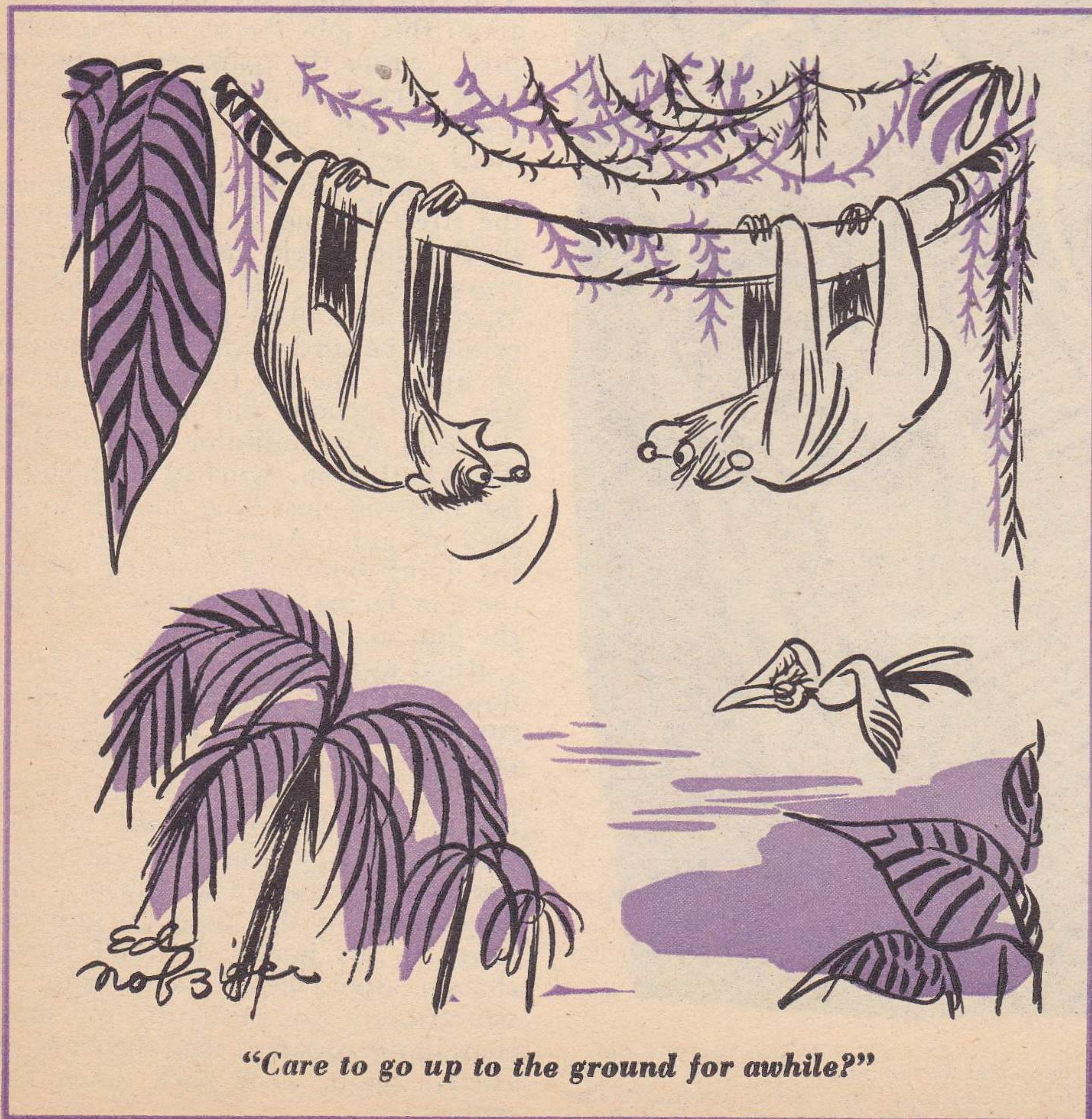
Alec shook his head tiredly. He was on the verge of a blackout.

"No, thanks," he whispered. "I don't want to try anything at all."

I believed him.

We were still standing there, still watching each other carefully, when the Johns raced down the corridor and grabbed us. . . .

My shoulder still ached, a couple of hours later. Not as much, maybe; the police surgeon had done a pretty good repair job. But I didn't feel good, sitting at the detective sergeant's desk, having him stare at me. He looked as



"Care to go up to the ground for awhile?"

if he hated private snoopers on principle.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you know all the answers in this gun opera, Burke. That's the way it goes in all the storybooks. Us uniforms are just around for comic relief."

I shrugged, then winced a little.

"I can tell you the way it looks to me," I stated. "I haven't many proofs that'll stand up in court."

He snorted.

"Let me in on it," he suggested. "I hate being a dumb dick all the time."

"All right." I lit a cigarette. "After Sylvia and Alec had worked around the Highlights Club a while, they saw what a good thing Lou had, and decided to deal themselves in. Step number one was for Sylvia to make a play for Lou. When Lou went for her, she got herself a quick divorce from Alec—they'd been married six years. Not because Lou was really making a hit with her, but they just didn't want any trouble about her inheriting his estate, after he died."

"The divorce was last March. I checked it at the courthouse this afternoon. Lou didn't know anything about it, of course. He and Sylvia got married in May. I checked that, too. She and Alec waited a while before trying to bump Lou—it would have looked queer, happening right after the ceremony."

"Where do you fit in?" The sergeant didn't sound much interested in what I had to say.

"Right after the first try to bump Lou had flopped. Lou got scared and sent for my brother Nick—but I came instead, as I've explained already. Sylvia and Alec didn't worry much about me at first. They hired Joe Orly to rough me, figured I'd take a run out of town right away. After I beat Joe up in the cigar-store, he phoned Sylvia to say I was on my way over, and she'd better be careful. That was when she got her big idea. She was a plenty bright girl."

I STUBBED out my cigarette. The sergeant kept on looking skeptical.

"She knew if she put on a rehearsal in the dining-room, Lou and I would show up eventually and stop to watch it. So she told Joe to come in through the alley, bump Lou, and duck out the same way. After that he was to go up to her apartment, wait around—and surprise me when I showed up. He was supposed to take my gun away and keep me there, quiet, until she phoned and said the Johns were on the way over. She figured you boys would check the apartment as part of the routine investigation of Lou's murder."

"She was right, there." The sergeant nodded his head. "That's standard procedure in most cases."

"Uh-huh. Well, when Joe got the word, he was supposed to sap me, but lightly, stick the murder gun in my pocket after wiping all the prints off—and take off, running. About the time I woke up, you boys would be opening the front door, and finding the answer to Lou's killing right in his own apartment. I don't suppose you would have listened very hard to what I had to say—not with the gun in my pocket."

"Probably not," agreed the sergeant. He thought for a moment. "Pretty good planning. It's the kind of a set-up Joe Orly could handle better than anybody else in town. The whole thing's a little too complicated, though."

"Sure. That's why it flopped. A couple of things made me suspicious: Alec gave me the key to his apartment, but it was loose in his pocket, not on his regular key ring. Somebody must have just slipped it to him. Then the cab-driver, Ward, made a crack about driving Sylvia and Lou out to the apartment-house regularly. So then I checked up, found I'd been given a bum steer, and backfired Joe's little surprise party. We had ourselves quite a time. I guess we didn't do Lou's apartment much good."

"It's a complete wreck." The sergeant grinned, remembering a few scraps he'd had along the way. "Wish I could have seen you two goin' at it."

"Well," I said, "after I collared Joe, I was still in a tough spot. Half a dozen unfriendly people were ready to swear I'd been around when Lou was killed—and nobody was willing to spot Joe there. So I had to carry the play further. I phoned Alec, told him my little white lie. That left the next move up to him and Sylvia."

"Smart." The sergeant was beginning to thaw a little. "Risky—but smart."

"It worked out just right for me. If they'd used their heads, they would have figured I was lying. Their right play was to sit tight, ignore the whole thing. But they got panicky instead: they came over to kill Joe, shut his mouth for good. Tomorrow morning they'd have doped some way of tipping you boys about me, and the way I'd left town in such a hurry. You'd probably have wound up figuring I did both jobs."

The sergeant nodded.

"Common weakness of crooks," he remarked. "Never can leave well enough alone."

"There's my story." I grinned tentatively. "You know the rest. *Bing, bang, bing!* Sylvia dead, Alec wounded, Joe with a scratch and a sore head. Want to buy it?"

He didn't say anything for a while. He wasn't a man who made his mind up in a hurry.

"Yeah," he said, finally, "I buy. It's tricky as hell in spots, but it hangs together. Anyway, Alec confessed right after we booked him. His story agrees with yours a hundred per cent." He scratched his big nose. "After we told Joe Orly about that, he sang, too. Admitted he'd killed Lou on Sylvia's instructions. Say, you did a pretty good job of doping this caper."

I sat back in my chair. I felt good; the shoulder didn't ache any more.

"Suppose I got to stick around and be a witness at the trial," I said.

The sergeant shook his head.

"Ain't gonna be much of a trial, the way things look now. Not with two signed confessions. They'll probably throw themselves on the mercy of the court. They're in a real tough spot."

SOMEHOW or other I couldn't feel sorry for Joe and Alec.

"In that case," I stated, "maybe I'd better head back to Las Vegas."

"Sure. Head back any place you want." The sergeant worked hard to make his smile affable and almost succeeded. "The chief told me to say thanks for doing a job here. He's got a hunch this town will be a better place without those three."

"Maybe. But it won't be as interesting." I stood up and began edging around his desk, heading for the door.

"Too bad you couldn't find anything out about your brother."

"That's the way it goes sometimes. I took a chance, and it didn't pan out." I grinned and held out my hand. "Be seeing you around."

The door opened just then and a young cop bounced in.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Burke," he said. "Delivered at the Highlights a few minutes ago. One of the boys rushed it right over."

I didn't say thanks or anything else. I grabbed the envelope he held out, tore it open. The telegram read:

TOLD YOU YEARS AGO NEVER TO WORRY ABOUT BIG BROTHER STOP ELOPED TO MEXICO WITH ELAINE ON SPUR OF MOMENT COULDN'T TIP YOU OFF BECAUSE WOMEN ARE ROMANTIC ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT STOP JUST GOT BACK AND FOUND OUT YOU ARE ALL WORKED UP WITHOUT ANY REASON STOP COME BACK HERE AND GET YOUR CLOTHES OUT OF APARTMENT SOON AS POSSIBLE STOP THIS IS NO LONGER A BACHELOR HANGOUT

REGARDS
NICK

I sat down heavily in the nearest chair. All at once I felt kind of sick again. I'd planned to propose to Elaine myself, next month. Then I nodded to the sergeant, said belated thanks to the young cop and walked out.

*Ever felt you could write
a book if you just had the time?
Sure you have—and here's what
happened to a guy who did write one,
and almost lived to regret it.*

..... and then,



I wrote a best seller!

■ CHARLES SAMUELS



■ UNTIL TWO YEARS AGO I was the happiest little hack-writer you ever saw. If some of my editors disliked me, they were polite enough to conceal it. More important, they kept on buying my stuff. Though my name appeared each year over some forty to fifty non-fiction pieces (mostly in movie, confession and fact-detective magazines), the public remained blissfully unaware of me—and vice versa.

If I didn't have a fan, I didn't seem to have an enemy, either. For one thing, I possessed nothing that the greediest man—assuming he was in his right mind—would possibly have envied, or cared to steal or borrow. Our house was rented. We had only beat-up furniture. Our car was a nine-year-old Packard, every window and seat of which was busted.

It was true my income never dropped to a dangerous low, but the money never came in either steadily or on schedule. We were forever a little more than \$400 in debt.

But we were happy-go-lucky people; we were living where and as we wanted, I was doing the only work I liked, and we had lots of good times with the swell people who were our friends.

When these friends expressed astonishment because, despite my supposedly adequate income, we seemed never to have a cent in cash, we always explained that we were a couple so unimaginative we could think of nothing better to do with money than spend it.

In those days I did have *one* deep source of pride: my family. I was able to watch my two kids grow up—Joan is now 21, Bob 16—harassed neither by poverty nor excessive thrift, nor embarrassed by the presence of a “great man” in the house. Whenever they felt like it, the kids busted in on me. My work seemed never so fascinating or important that I minded their interruptions.

Yet it was Louise, my wife, who was my real treasure. Unlike the wives of the other hacks we knew, Louise never pestered me to stop writing trash and turn out something she at least would not be ashamed to show the neighbors.

No, my wife wasn't like that. She always said that, considering the miserable little crumb of talent I had to work with, I was doing great to get published anywhere. And, far from wishing to show my work to the neighbors, Louise herself read it only under duress or threats of bodily harm.

None of us took the others seriously, and we were all happy together—especially me.

Then, in 1951, I wrote a book that became a best-seller.

This was Ethel Waters' autobiography, *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*, which I wrote in collaboration with the great Negro star.

The book was a sensational hit from the beginning, and made a sockful of dough. Four magazines published parts of it and it was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. It stayed for thirty-three straight weeks on the coast-to-coast list of best-sellers, was published in England, translated into French and German and is now being sold in a 35-cent paper-back edition.

I got exactly half the sockful of dough the book made.

Miss Waters got the other half, and I do hope she kept some of it; because the big scrapbook full of clippings she has, which describe our book as “a social document” and “the greatest theatrical autobiography,” will never even pay her laundry bills.

Personally speaking, I was unable to retain *any* of my royalties. But I am not the only Schnook-of-the-Month who wrote a Book-of-the-Month only to end up shaking hands again with the inquiring investigators from the finance companies. This has happened to so many other writers that one can only conclude that, to keep any portion of the fortune you make out of a smash-hit book, you must maintain a better strangle-hold on currency than even Billy Rose reputedly does.

Literary prestige I now have. But this, as you will see, can prove about as useful and decorative as a red lump four inches high in the middle of one's forehead.

But let's give it the blow-by-blow treatment from the morning of March 1, 1951, when *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* was published. We live out in the country, and that morning, as usual, at 7:35, the paper-man delivered copies of the New York *Herald-Tribune* and the *Daily News*. Also on that morning, as usual, my wife was dedicated to the sometimes difficult task of remaining in bed until 10 A.M., come earthquake, high water or forest fire. It is her only shortcoming as a life partner and helpmeet.

Wrestling my two papers out of the startled delivery-man's hands (naturally, I was out on the road that morning to meet him), I ran into the house and with trembling fingers (I tore only the financial pages), opened the *Herald-Tribune* to Mr. Lewis Gannett's review. It was on my book!

I raced upstairs, woke Louise—which at 8 A.M. is like spitting in the eye of a man-eating tiger—and read her the review. “Gannett says, and I quote,” I began. “He says ‘a short rocky book and the best part of it is the rockiest—flashes of bitterness—success tends to be monotonous to read about—’”

“I told you to wake me up only if there was a *rave!*” she said reproachfully, and before I could get to the best part of the review she was back asleep.

WISTFULLY wishing I'd married a woman suffering from insomnia, at least on days when my books were published, I tiptoed downstairs and ruefully picked up the *Daily News*, which publishes no book reviews. On reaching page 61 I was electrified: John Chapman, the dramatic editor, had reviewed our book in glowing terms—he not only said I was an “incontestably perfect ghost,” but he added “an important document in the history of race relations. . . . Best . . . amazing . . . fascinating!”

Leaping upstairs, a middle-aged gazelle—springy, jubilant and crying triumphantly, “Louise! Louise!” I told her about it. She replied, “The *Daily News*? That's a tabloid. How many of *its* readers belong to a circulating library, not to mention buy books?”

With that, believe it or not, she turned over and went to sleep again. Only then did it occur to me that the lordly *New York Times* might have a review. Unfortunately, we don't get the *Times*. But my neighbor, across the road does. Unfortunately, he was an irascible old man who had threatened to appeal to the authorities if he ever saw me again creeping among his rosebushes looking for a baseball I'd let my son hit past me.

Illustration by HANK BERGER

Fearlessly, I dashed through his gate, picked up his *Times* and ran off with it. Hiding behind a tree, I glanced at the book review written by Charles Poore, whom I can describe only as a saintly man. His opening sentence said that we should get the Pulitzer Prize!

Gaily tossing the paper back into my neighbor's yard, I ran upstairs for a third time. This time the news I bore caused Louise to jump out of bed like a bride on her wedding day. She lost no time in dressing. “*The New York Times!*” she exclaimed. “Let's get down to the village fast and buy all the copies left. At last I have *proof* to send my rich relatives out in Missouri that I didn't marry an idiot!”

While we were at the village buying up all the copies of the *Times* in sight, I was delighted to see, in the window of the largest bookstore there, a copy of my book. We have been members of the circulating library in that store for years, so I assumed the owner would recognize my name.

Going inside, I said, “I see you have my book in your window. That's very nice of you. Thanks.”

“What *book?*” he asked suspiciously.

“What *book?*” I repeated. “Why, Ethel Waters' autobiography.”

He smiled faintly. “Well, I'll be damned,” he said. “Are *you* Ethel Waters?”

The next thing that happened after the book came out was alarming. It had never happened to me before in all the years I've been free-lancing:

I stopped writing for six months.

This calamity often sneaks up, I've heard, on even the greatest of authors. Sometimes it's boredom or unrequited love; sometimes it's slipping in one's golf game or a divorce.

But the reason I couldn't write anything for six months was that I didn't have time. I was kept so busy talking over big deals with editors and publishers that I didn't have a minute to waste on making a living. My agent kept saying, “We gotta go easy, be careful. We must get you everything you're entitled to!”

This sort of talk, of course, is very easy to listen to, particularly if you've never been in demand before, except as a utility man on a bowling team. But after awhile, eager to work, I went around saying, “No deal is too small for me to accept—or big enough for my agent to agree to.”

ALL the publishers and editors wanted me to do the same thing—write another autobiography of a celebrity. Among those suggested as fit subjects for my talents (in an endless series of interminable conversations) were:

Marlene Dietrich, Clark Gable, Judy Garland, Jane Froman, Blossom

Seeley and Benny Fields, Josephine Baker, Eddie Cantor, Gregory Ratoff, Amos and Andy, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Sugar Ray Robinson, the fighter; Jerry Geisler, the California lawyer; Mickey Cohen, the mobster; Mary McLeod Bethune, the distinguished Negro educator, also many others and, last and maybe even least, George Rosenberg, "New York City's wittiest cab-driver." And, oh yes, Rita Hayworth.

Now, almost every one of these deals was discussed exhaustively by me, my literary agents, publishers, and editors. Sometimes the talk progressed far enough to confer with the celebrity, invariably flanked by lawyers, press agents and *his* or *her* agents, at luncheons, office get-togethers and five-o'clock cocktail gabfests.

About the only thing one can say in favor of these talks is that they never ended in bloodshed. But each and every time *something* went wrong. Occasionally, after four or five hundred thousand words had been exchanged, someone would unearth the interesting fact that the celebrity didn't want—and had never wanted—his life-story written by me, himself or anyone else. More often he or she wanted too much money. Miss Hayworth, for instance, sent word that she wanted \$50,000 before she'd even look at me. I promptly sent back this word to Rita: "I'm a homely man, my dear, but, Lord, I'm not *that* repulsive."

And sometimes it was I—yes, meek little me—who wanted more money than the publisher interested cared to put up.

Nothing came of all this yammering between me and a dozen book publishers. And in the end I became so tired of the flood of pointless and unprofitable conversation that I fled to the Northwest to collaborate on a book with a woman named Norah Berg. She is a beachcomber and a clam-digger on Copalis Beach, in the State of Washington, and her life story was published last winter under the title of *Lady on the Beach*. To my utter mystification—not to mention Norah's—the publisher of this book assures me it is in its third edition, and a solid success.

"Success for whom?" I asked with what I trusted he interpreted as a menacing sneer. "Neither my collaborator nor myself has been paid a single dollar—really not a dime, to be small about it, small and precise—over that modest advance you doled out to us."

He merely smiled, and why not? Today hard-book publishers are commerce's Lucky Alphonses, always in the middle (and always doing all right for themselves) between starving authors, and booksellers headed for bankruptcy.

On returning from the Northwest, I figured out how to cut short all business talk of the non-profit-bearing type. Henceforth, to anyone who even looked as though he were going to suggest I write someone's autobiography, I decided to yell:

"I want \$25,000!"

This policy was immediately successful, and soon I was able to claim I was currently vetoing more suggestions than even Comrade Vishinsky.

But just then it happened!

One day a Hollywood press agent called me from his New York hotel to ask if I'd be interested in writing the life-story of one of his clients, a famous and popular singer. Let's call her Lulu Lallapalooza because she certainly was a lallapalooza and her press agent sure was one lulu.

By this time I had won a long struggle and had completely overwhelmed my inferiority complex—and I shouted with conviction:

"I want twenty-five gees!"

He didn't answer; all I could hear over the phone were gurgling sounds. I was certain he wasn't phoning me from the bathtub. He wasn't drowning, so he must be strangling, I thought. I hastily added, "Bill, only half of the twenty-five thousand need be paid to me in cash. The rest can be deposited in some reliable New

York bank—in escrow, as they say on Wall Street."

"Twenty-five, eh," he said gamely. "Well, I think we will be able to arrange it."

The next day Bill and I went together to the singer's home. Now I've seen Lana Turner in person, I've talked for hours with Ava Gardner. Dozens of the greatest Broadway and Hollywood beauties call me by my first name. But never in all my life have I gazed upon a woman with such rapture as I did upon that singer who was going to pay me twenty-five thousand dollars, half in cash and the other half securely held in escrow. All this before I wrote one word!

On the way up in the taxi Bill said that he hadn't had time to take up the matter of the money with his client but he repeated that he anticipated no difficulty about getting it.

So Lulu talked about her life. I was fascinated. But her press agent seemed lost in a dream as his client told of her triumphs and defeats, her sins, her sorrows and her many kindnesses to her mother. I kept winking at Bill so much that my eye was sore for days afterward.

Finally, he got the hint, and said, "Oh, yes, Lulu dear, I forgot to mention it, but Charlie must have a \$2,500 guarantee before he starts work."

And I had to get up and scream: "Not *twenty-five hundred*, you dope! I said *twenty-five thousand!*"

Lulu's eyes turned cold; the next thing Bill and I knew we were out in the street.

To me, a man sounds pretty foolish when he asks for \$25,000 for a yacht, a house or a business. But to ask \$25,000 for a job of writing that hasn't been done yet, and whose value may be nothing, makes a fellow really sound silly.

Going downtown in the cab, I asked Bill, "How could you make such a mistake?"

He shrugged. "I thought you said twenty-five *C's*, not twenty-five *G's*. Your diction, I must say, leaves a lot to be desired." . . .

Last summer, an actor now playing in a current Broadway hit called up and asked, "How would you like to go to South Africa and write a movie with me about the diamond mines down there?"

I told him—let's call him Leon, which I understand is the diminutive (in Rumanian) for lemon—I'd go anywhere if the pay was right. He invited me to come immediately to his apartment.

When I arrived, Leon was playing the loudest Louis Armstrong record I ever have heard. Also, a pretty little girl dressed only in a scanty loincloth and something that looked like a cor-

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set-cover (except I could see she wasn't wearing corsets) was yelling something over a solid gold telephone.

"Glad you got here in time," howled Leon. "Now we can talk business."

"Take that Louis Armstrong record off!" I yowled.

Leon shrugged, as though puzzled, but complied. Then he turned to the girl. "You shut up, too," he said. Running over, he took the solid gold receiver out of her hands and hung it up on the solid gold hook. Immediately the phone began to ring.

"Get us some Pernod frappés," he told the girl. Into the mouthpiece, he said, "Shut up!" Then he hung up again.

"Do you know," he asked me, "much about the diamond mines of South Africa?"

Well, fellows, right there I made one of the biggest mistakes of my whole life. I said, "No." It turned out that Leon had just been putting in three days in the public library doing research on the subject. He hadn't forgotten a detail—but *nothing*—and was intent on educating me, fully.

Leon started with the discovery of the first diamond in South Africa, in 1867, by Dr. W. G. Atherstone. It had been found by a farm child on the

banks of the Orange River and was thought to be a pebble but—

Seven hours and fifteen Pernod frappés later he was down to 1905, the year production from the Orange River mines was more than 320,000 carats.

"I must get home for breakfast," I said, stumbling out.

I called him the following day. "Leon," I said, "when do we get paid if we write this documentary on the diamond mines of South Africa? When and how much?"

"You don't think," he gasped, "that we're gonna be suckers and let them pay us off in cash, do you?"

"I have always been the kind of sucker who falls for cash."

"Well, it's time you got wise to yourself. We're gonna hold out for a percentage of the profits of the picture."

"I'm a weak character," I started to say. "I'm not gonna hold out—"

"And then we're not gonna be saps enough to pick up our percentage in money!" he declared. "Don't tell me you were even considering *that*!"

"I got a confession to make, Leon," I told him. "I've gone past *considering* it, away past. Getting paid in money has been a lifelong obsession

with me. I'm practically maniacal on the subject."

"Not this time, boy. This time we get paid in diamonds!"

"You mean, Leon," I murmured craftily, "that we can get the diamonds wholesale in Africa, smuggle them back here past Customs—and make our fortune?"

"What else?" he demanded.

On that fantastic note we parted—I trust forever.

Another screwy proposition came from a Broadway producer who had a flop that had been playing the summer theaters. He was a brave man, but even he didn't have the courage to bring that lemon into New York. The producer told me if I'd rewrite the play—changing all the characters from white people to Negroes—we'd make a fortune.

"But I've seen the play," I told him. "It's awful. What makes you think that it would be any better if Negroes did it?"

"With Ethel Waters starring in it—and you could get her to do that, I think—we'd have a hit."

"I got news for you," I told him. "Miss Waters saw your play, too. And would you like to hear her comment?"

"What was it?" he asked, eyes shining.

"She said that the Negro race had suffered a great deal but Heaven had spared them the indignity and humiliation of having such a play written for *them*."

I keep writing this, hoping that no one will misunderstand and think having a book become a best-seller isn't a whale of a lot of fun. The headaches really are minor, but they are new to anyone like me who has always been just an old hack.

For example, there was the curious thing that happened after I wrote an article called "Ghostwriting Can Pay Off" for an authors' trade magazine. The object, of course, was to stimulate interest in the Ethel Waters book among stripling writers so that some of them might buy it.

Instead of this happening, people who weren't writers at all but were looking for a writer to set down their fascinating life-stories read this piece and assumed I was eagerly seeking employment—preferably, as the collaborator of each and every one of them.

Hundreds of them, literally hundreds, wrote letters to me about this. Among them were old convicts, retired housemothers, soldiers, marines and letter-carriers, lighthouse-keepers, saloonkeepers, prostitutes, ferryboat captains and survivors of third-degree burns and other accidents and maladies.

The letters were pathetic for the most part, and I answered all of them



"Perhaps you'd be interested in a really lightweight suit, sir."

that I could. But one woman, who described herself as "one of the few white ladies running a poolroom in Harlem" was persistent. She kept telephoning me.

"My place is close to the national marijuana sales headquarters," she said, "and I'd give you all the dope on *that*."

I told her that I was a weak character and would be afraid to write her book. "If I did," I said, "I'd be rolling my own reefers in no time."

Determined to share her autobiography with me, this woman was not going to be laughed out of it. She said that one of her customers, a thief, had trained a cat to steal the pocket-books of drunken women when they fell asleep in saloons.

"Wouldn't that be wonderful to write about?" she asked.

"I think describing such a thing would be beyond my powers," I said modestly. But she kept pressing.

I suggested, in the end, that she get in touch with Richard Maney, the Broadway press agent who ghosted Tallulah. I think she must have done that—anyway Maney hasn't spoken to me since.

As I've hinted above, the money one makes from a book seems to pass through one's hands almost as quickly as dough won in a crap game—for many reasons, some of which I will set down here:

Old pals for one thing, in your favorite bars and restaurants take it for granted that you'll pick up all the tabs in sight—so you do.

You try to buy things you and your family have wanted—and in certain rare cases needed—for years. A fur coat for the little woman, an outboard for your boy, a second typewriter for you, a new car, a house that looks pretty even dressed in two mortgages.

People who never dreamed of borrowing from you before, and for obvious reasons, suddenly put the bite on you. As an old and experienced borrower myself, I didn't mind this except in one instance—a fellow who sold a story to Hollywood a week later and ignored suggestions he pay me back.

"Can you imagine?" he asked a mutual friend. "That chump blows all his dough, then depends on me to pull him out of the hole by paying him back that C-note I borrowed from him only two weeks ago!"

IF he wanted to teach me a lesson, I've learned it.

The one person who got a real bundle from me was my uncle William, who said he needed the money for an operation. After I gave him the check I kept thinking about that. One day I called on him in his private hospital room (nothing is too good

for Uncle William so long as he doesn't have to pay for it).

"It seems to me, Uncle William," I said, "that you told me ten years ago that you needed this very operation."

"That's right, my boy," he groaned from his luxurious bed of pain. "As a matter of fact, I've needed this operation for *fifteen* years!"

"Then why did you wait so long before having it done?"

"That's very simple. I couldn't afford such an expensive operation until now."

"*You* couldn't afford it?" I wailed. "Don't you mean that *I* couldn't afford it?"

Uncle William nodded solemnly. "That's just what I meant. But I didn't want to rub it in."

Literary fame is so ephemeral that these and all the other confusions of the year I wrote my only best-seller all seem now like events that happened long ago.

Today, I find, most people remember only that I wrote a book about somebody in show business. Once in a while, at a party, somebody will come up to me, and say:

"When are you ever going to write another book as good as the one you did about Lena Horne?" Or it might be, "Never as long as I live will I ever forget that fine life-story of Ethel Merman you wrote."

This in two years.

I figure that, in one year more, people again will be mistaking me for one of the few founding fathers of "Murder, Inc." to escape the electric chair, something that used to happen to me all of the time.

Now that all the excitement has died down it hasn't been too tough to get back in the groove as a hard-working hack. One reason is that if my family was overly impressed by all the praise showered on *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*, they never let me in on that secret. This even though it was my first book in twenty years. My first novel (there were just two of them) was published away back in 1929.

For example, when I asked my son what he thought of the Ethel Waters book, he said, "Oh, it's all right. But it's not nearly as good as that first book you wrote in 1929. Whatever happened to you right after that, Dad? You've been slipping ever since."

My daughter also takes precautions which, I must say, seem at times excessive, against my getting a swelled head. Recently, when she moved into a girls' club in New York she announced she wouldn't take her copy of the Waters book with her. Joan said she didn't want anyone to like her because she is my daughter.

I grinned happily. It was the first

time it occurred to me that my daughter might be liked for that reason. It was my hard luck that she saw that somewhat smug grin and added quickly. "There would be no danger of that happening if they could meet you *personally*. Would there be, Dad?"

Anybody who gets an inflated ego around my house would have to keep blowing himself up, day and night, it seems to me.

ABOUT the only financial change that writing a top-selling book has brought to my family now, two years later, is an improvement in our credit. We used to be able to owe only \$400. Now we owe \$4,000 without much trouble.

The only outfits that refuse to recognize I'm a better risk than before are the utility companies. Not long ago I was on the "Strike It Rich" television program. The announcer gave me a big send-off, calling me "one of the greatest living authors." He didn't restrict it. He didn't even say "in America." He did identify me as living, but that was the only qualification to "greatest."

This program is re-broadcast on the radio the following day. I had hardly been able to believe my ears on the TV show. The next day I impatiently waited to hear those glorious words repeated.

I had settled down, turned on the radio. When I heard that announcer say "greatest," *again*, I glowed like a neon light.

Just then the phone rang. It turned out to be a girl at the telephone company asking when I intended to pay my bill.

"Don't you people *ever* listen to the radio?" I demanded.

"Why, yes," she said.

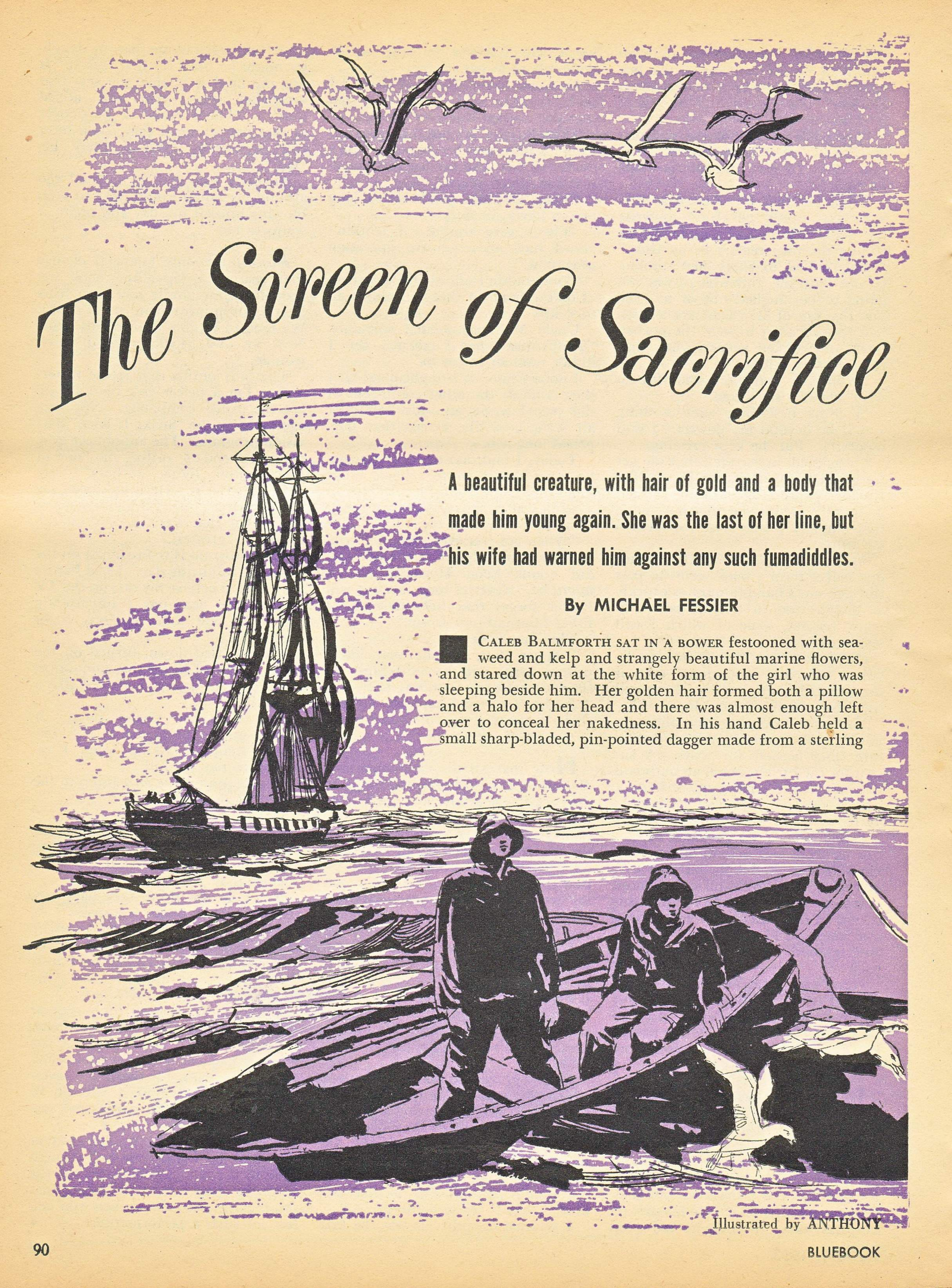
"Well, then, turn on WNBC right now," I told her, "instead of bothering me about this trivial matter."

With that, I hung up.

But I do not think they have any radios in that phone company. As usual, a couple of days later, I got the notice that my service would be cut off—if I didn't rush some money over there quick. As usual, I wasn't the greatest *anything* in their book.

All this means that my life is normal again, after that short flutter of fame. I was 48 when I wrote my first big hit, and had been writing professionally for 28 years. If the law of averages holds in my case I will be 76 years old before I have a second success.

I hope I can take it then—but at least by then I will have had enough time to prepare myself better for the surprises, shocks and belly-laughs that come along with the shekels you collect for such a performance. •



The Sireen of Sacrifice

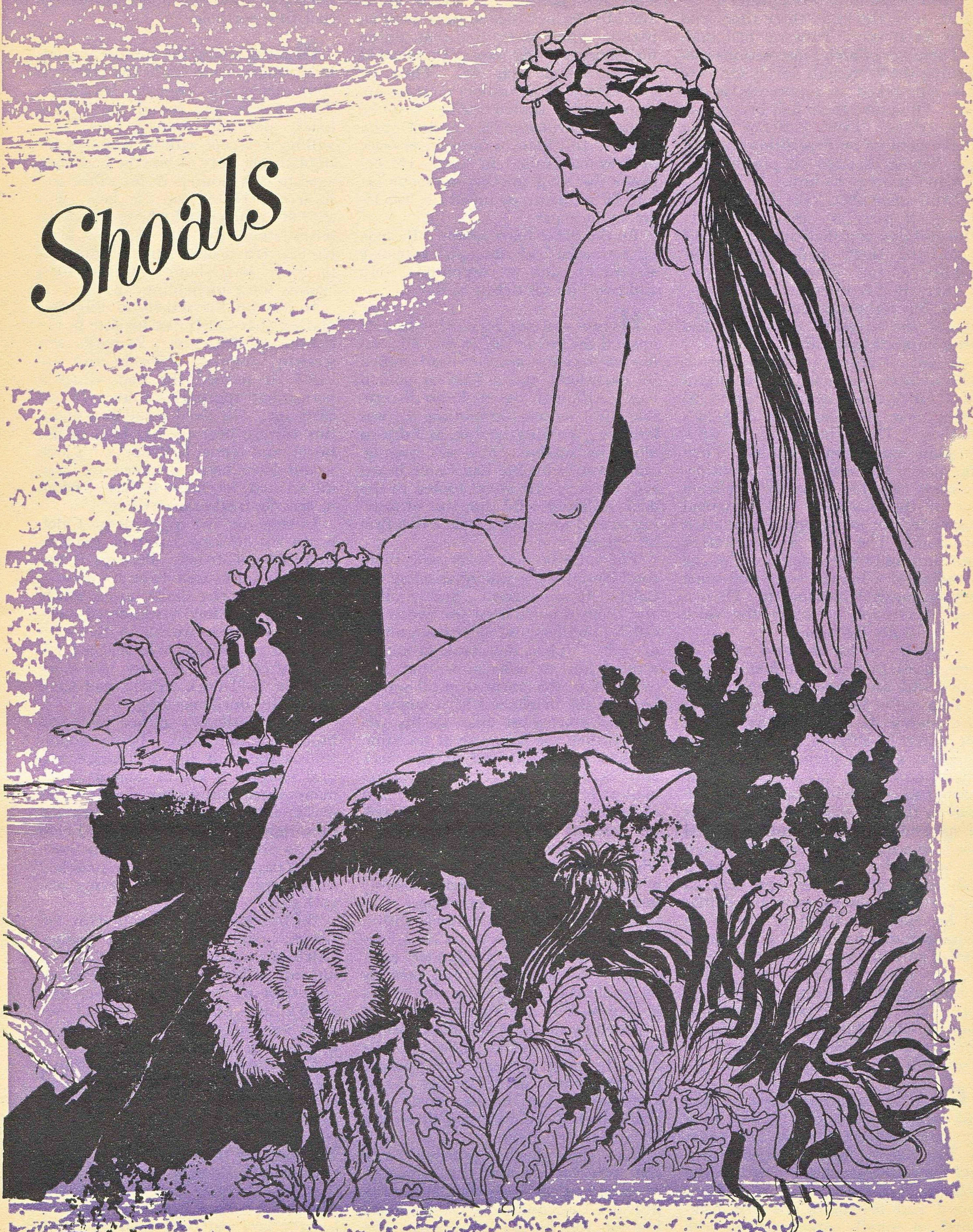
A beautiful creature, with hair of gold and a body that made him young again. She was the last of her line, but his wife had warned him against any such fumadiddles.

By MICHAEL FESSIER

■ CALEB BALMFORTH SAT IN A BOWER festooned with seaweed and kelp and strangely beautiful marine flowers, and stared down at the white form of the girl who was sleeping beside him. Her golden hair formed both a pillow and a halo for her head and there was almost enough left over to conceal her nakedness. In his hand Caleb held a small sharp-bladed, pin-pointed dagger made from a sterling

Illustrated by ANTHONY

Shoals



silver table knife. As he fingered the weapon the warning words of his wife Patience came back to him.

"You've got to stab her firmly in the heart, twist the knife three times and then let it stay," Patience had said.

These were Caleb's instructions concerning the incredibly lovely creature who slumbered so innocently at his side. Of course there had been other instructions. Trust Patience not to send a man on an expedition without first having dictated all possible tactics and strategy to him.

"And remember," she had warned him. "If there are any preliminary fumadiddles, you shall answer to me."

Perhaps there had been fumadiddles, if one wanted to be pernickety in his interpretation of the word; but right now Caleb was thinking of the dreadful duty that had been imposed upon him. . . .

It had all begun, or to be exact it had all been resumed, several nights ago. Caleb was snug in his bed in his cabin near the shores of Pilgrim's Harbor. There had been a wild, shrieking storm and then a lull. Then the silence was broken by a hauntingly sweet call that came singing from out of the blackness and remained suspended for a moment in the dark bedroom. The call was penetrating and clear and seemed composed of the blending of a human voice and some strange musical instrument. Of one thing there was certainty—the voice was decidedly feminine.

Caleb lay in his bed and trembled from head to foot. At first he was seized with an almost intolerable urge to leap out of bed and go tearing out of the house, in his nightshirt, toward the waters of Pilgrim's Harbor. But long years with Patience had disciplined Caleb; he was a man of propriety and considered action. In addition to that he was past eighty years of age and the fires of youth had died down to a mere afterglow. Although the wild voice from the sea promised infinite delights if he were but to answer its summons, he realized that all he could do about it was to lie there quietly and quiver with a mixture of anticipation and foreboding.

Then it was as if the owner of the voice realized the futility of her project. The call was repeated, but this time it expressed grief and longing and despair. Finally it died away in a sob and there was silence again.

CALEB remembered when he had first heard that voice. It was long ago, many cheerless years ago, when he had been a black-bearded youth and the youngest master of sail on the Atlantic seaboard. He was both proud and fearful of his first command, a small two-master in the South Seas trade.

It was a balmy night and Caleb stood at the aft rail, watching the moonlight skid across the wake of his ship, the *Comus*. He heard music and idly decided they must be near an island. Then he realized that, unless his navigation was wrong, there could be no island near by. Then he guessed one of the sailors must be unaccountably skilled with the—the strange instrument he couldn't quite name. And then he heard the voice of a woman raised in song. He enjoyed the song another moment before he suddenly pounded his fists together in anger.

By the great horn spoon! If some bilge-crawler had smuggled a female aboard his ship to compromise him and cost him his ticket, he'd—

HE was starting forward, when he noticed the girl in the water. She was floating face upward, her head limned by moonlight and a halo of golden hair. Although she made no discernible effort toward locomotion, she was keeping pace with the ship, as if drawn along by suction. She was singing, and never in his life had Caleb heard such a voice. He stood rooted to the deck, although wild thoughts of heaving to and lowering a boat came into his mind.

The voice became lower now, more confidential, as if intended solely for Caleb. It was caressing and cajoling and there was no need for words for Caleb to understand what was wanted of him. This delectable creature wanted him to come down and play with her in the warm tropical waters beneath the bright southern moon.

Caleb started to take off his pea jacket; then the long arm of tradition reached out, took him by the neck and held firm. He was a ship's master; he had duties to perform and obligations to fulfill. Was he to risk his precious ticket for a romp with a strange, outrageously unclad female who came from some frightful nowhere, the locale of which probably only the devil had knowledge? Although temptation churned within him, he resisted. He was a New Englander and no New Englander, especially a ship's master, could possibly be involved in the situation so brazenly proposed by the creature below.

Aided by the long arm of tradition, Caleb turned and struggled up the deck, bending forward and pushing his legs hard, as if facing a stiff nor'easter. He finally made his cabin, locked the door and threw the key out the porthole.

Back through that porthole came the girl's voice. Now the unspoken promise of delirious delights was amplified a thousandfold. Caleb cursed himself for having abandoned the deck—rather for not having aban-

doned it in favor of warm tropical water.

He then discovered that he could not shove his broad shoulders through that tiny porthole.

NEXT morning the young captain's loud, angry voice bade his crewmen chop down the door to his cabin. They did so and found Caleb in a black, alarming mood. They were willing to accept without question his implausible story of how he had managed to lock himself in his cabin and subsequently to lose the key. But they did wonder and whisper to themselves about the fact that his huge hands were swollen and bleeding, as if from long hours of pounding against some unyielding surface. . . .

It was on his return to Pilgrim's Harbor that Caleb met his fate in the person of Patience. Patience was scrawny, angular, unlovely and unloved; it seemed she had achieved permanent spinsterhood at a record early age. She lived alone in a small, tidy cottage near the outskirts of the town, and grew hollyhocks. Caleb would have been surprised to learn she existed, let alone to have known he was destined to marry her.

During his first night home Caleb broke his lifelong habit of moderation and got drunk. Perhaps it was to wash a bitter taste from his mouth; in any event, he drank prodigiously and long and finally wandered away into the darkness, unable to steer even by dead reckoning. He reached Patience's cottage, fell over the fence into the hollyhock garden and slept peacefully until morning.

There Patience's father and two brothers found him. Being opportunists and counting on Caleb's natural temporary loss of memory, they maneuvered the groggy young ship's master into a marriage with their depressingly undesirable relative. There was no display of maidenly reluctance on the part of Patience. She snatched at the opportunity as a starving seagull gulps a sardine.

With a heavy heart and with Patience beside him on the bridge, Caleb put out to sea again. Patience did not go along out of any spirit of adventure or desire to share her husband's life. She wanted to find out what went on in foreign ports and to keep an eye on Caleb.

The *Comus* was again sliding through tropical seas and Caleb stood at the aft rail with Patience by his side. The golden-haired girl reappeared in the dark waters below. At first she sang invitingly and held out her arms enticingly to Caleb, and then she became conscious of Patience's presence. She emitted a heartbroken wail and then launched into an angry tirade. She scolded ve-

hemently for a while and then swam toward the bow of the ship and disappeared in the darkness.

"What," Patience asked Caleb, "was that?"

"I don't rightly know," answered Caleb unhappily.

"Well, I know," snapped Patience. "That was a Sireen!"

Now to others, those supposedly mythical followers of Circe were sirens with one *E*, but to Patience and most residents of the Eastern seaboard they were sirens with two *E*'s—and that was that.

"It's very suspicious," said Patience, "that a Sireen should be following your ship. It's more than suspicious; it's downright proof that fumadiddles have been going on. And to think I came to you pure and unsullied!"

She wept lemon juice for awhile and then she started nagging. During the next half hour she gave Caleb more than a piece of her mind; she threw her whole narrow mind at him with its entire load of suspicion, intolerance and condemnation. She was just getting her second wind when there was a rending crash; the ship writhed and wallowed and its timbers screamed in agony. Then it gave up the struggle, heeled over on its port side and began to die.

"There," said Captain Caleb bitterly, "I hope you're satisfied. While you've been jawing at me that Sireen led the helmsman off his course onto the rocks and I've lost my ship."

Caleb lost more than his ship; he lost his ticket, and he lost his freedom.

Unwillingly, but ever prodded and lashed by Patience's tongue, Caleb returned to Pilgrim's Harbor and invested his nest-egg in the real-estate business. As the weary years passed they acquired ownership of most of the small shops and summer cottages in the town, which had become a popular vacation resort. The property they did not own was nearly all mortgaged to them.

ON this morning Caleb awoke, a rich man but unhappy, with the echo of a sad, haunting voice in his ears. His wife, attired in a moldy wrapper and with paper curlers on her head, was staring at him. He stared back in distaste.

"Caleb," she asked, "did you hear anything strange or unusual last night?"

"No," said Caleb cautiously, "can't say that I did."

"Well, I did," said Patience, "and if it was what I think it was—and I'm sure it was—I'm setting out right now to do something about it."

While this scene was being enacted, young Tom Trescott stood at the wheel of the fishing smack, *Dora III*, and he was dreaming the dreams of

youth. He was not conscious of the sun-flecked waters about him, nor was he responsive to the perfume of salt air and spray in the breeze that caressed his cheeks. His eyes were misty and his mind was far away. In his imagination he was wandering down the green-carpeted Elysian fields of Kelly's poolhall at Pilgrim's Harbor and in his nostrils was the tantalizing odor of frying hamburgers, not too well done and with plenty of onions. He had just put the five-ball in a side pocket, when something drew his attention back to the wheel, and to a spot directly abeam.

IT seemed that a white porpoise had broken water and was frolicking through the green-blue sea. Tom's common sense told him there never was and never could be such a porpoise, but he clung stubbornly to the delusion rather than admit the truth of what he actually saw, which was a girl clad only in pink and white skin and with long golden hair flowing behind her, as she swam swiftly over the long lazy swells. The girl—or porpoise, as Tom still insisted it was—struck a course slightly to port and instinctively he eased the wheel over a notch or so. The girl started swimming through the swells, disappearing for a minute at a time, only to reappear stroking with unabated power and grace. She changed her course more to port, and Tom eased the wheel over another couple of notches. Far in the distance he heard the muted roar of white water breaking over rocks.

There were heavy footsteps on the planking behind Tom and then Ab Kennedy, the skipper, was standing beside and above him, his fist and voice raised in rage.

"You're off your course, you pimple-faced son of a landlubber's sow," he roared. "I'll break your bones, I'll—"

The skipper looked forward and then he just stood there with his hands still upraised.

"Well, I vow," he croaked. "Did you ever?"

"It's a porpoise, sir," said Tom, gaining courage.

"It sure is," said the skipper. "You're a smart boy, Tom. It's a porpoise, sure enough. Did you ever see such a porpoise in all your born days?"

"No, sir," said Tom. "Never."

The skipper's arms slowly descended to his sides and he shaded his eyes as he peered ahead.

"She—I mean it—is veering more to port," he said. "Give her a twist, son."

Tom again swung the wheel over and the roar of water breaking upon rocks became a shade louder. Neither Tom nor the skipper was conscious of it.

The girl was now swimming on her back and both the skipper and Tom fought a losing battle against the comforting theory that this being, this graceful creature, was a porpoise.

The remainder of the crew, consisting of French Pete and Jake Trent, came lumbering onto the deck.

"Say, Skipper," said Jake, alarmed, "isn't that the surf on Sacrifice Shoals I hear?" He followed the trajectory of the skipper's stare, and gulped. "Good howling, jumping Jehovah!" he gasped.

French Pete was also staring dead ahead. His eyes glistened and his white teeth gleamed in a grin.

"A toots," he said rapturously. "A booful toots. Bait ze hooks, break out ze nets; we mus' catch her."

"A toots?" said Skipper Kennedy. "Are you crazy, man? We're twenty miles at sea. What would a girl be doing swimming way out here? That's a porpoise."

Jake clung to the skipper's statement as a bolster to his tottering sanity.

"Sure, you French slob," he said to Pete. "Can't you tell a porpoise when you see one?"

"Ne vair," breathed Pete, "have I seen ze porpoise wiz fins like zat!"

It was only by main strength that the others prevented him from lowering the dory and following the gleaming white apparition. And as they struggled, the roar of surf rose louder and louder and finally they became conscious of their danger. They were in the treacherous currents that led up to and swirled around Sacrifice Shoals. Whitecaps were dead ahead. The girl had disappeared.

THE imminence of catastrophe served to clear even French Pete's groggy brain and he, together with the others, set about frantically to head the small craft out to sea. As he labored, Pete glanced once more toward the froth-crowned rocks.

The girl was now sitting on a crag which thrust high up out of the seething white water. The bright sunbeams highlighted and limned her exquisite form. Her slim white arms gleamed as she combed her glistening, golden hair with her fingers.

"Ze porpoise," declared Pete, "has arms, she has hair, she has legs, she has—"

Choked with emotion, he went to the rail and clung to it. The others followed, ranging themselves alongside Pete. Gone was all thought of danger, now. The small craft drifted closer and closer to the shoals; it seemed that the noise of the surf had abated.

Suddenly the girl became conscious of the men in the boat. She stopped combing her hair, shaded her eyes and

peered intently at them. Then she rose and stretched out her arms to them. Her hair was whipped back over her shoulders by the wind. A promising smile was on her lips. Even at that distance her eyes shone coral-green and inviting.

"Heaven save us!" breathed Ab Kennedy, staring. "Providence guide us. Don't look at her, men—it's immoral. Remember your mothers. Remember your wives. Remember your New England upbringing." He continued to stare.

Then the girl began to sing. It was a song and a sound such as none of the four men had ever heard on earth and yet it was nostalgic; it seemed to touch a period in their memory, it seemed to have a meaning and a promise. It was as if a human voice had been blended with some strange wind instrument; it was flute-like and clear and melodious and it filled the hearts of the four men with an ecstasy that was akin to agony. Then it stopped.

The girl leaned forward as if to scrutinize the men closer; then her voice rose almost in a scream.

"No, not you. Not *any* of you!" she called and then abruptly she was gone.

The boat struck a rock with a rending crash. It heeled over on its side and white waves boiled over the deck. It was some time before the four men roused themselves enough to launch the dory and begin the herculean task of rowing away from the perilous Sacrifice Shoals.

"Remember," said Ab Kennedy as they beached the dory. "Not a word of this to anyone. It's bad enough to lose the boat without being made a laughingstock."

Naturally, Tom Trescott and Jake Trent and French Pete immediately headed for the nearest bar and tried to drink themselves out of the illusion they'd experienced. But the more they drank the more convincing the illusion became. Finally it became an incontrovertible fact and they began to talk about it. The more they talked about the Siren the more the other villagers laughed. What an excuse, they jeered, for having wrecked a valuable boat!

THE laughter began to die out the next evening when Alben Roos limped into port, rowing a stove-in dory with one shattered oar. He was white-faced and sober and obviously genuinely frightened. His one-man fishing boat, he claimed, had been wrecked on Sacrifice Shoals. He, Alben, had been lured there by a Siren. He did not equivocate. He did not suggest that perhaps the girl had been a summer vacationer. He swore up and down that he had two good

eyes and he knew what he had seen. What he had seen was a Siren and just before his craft hit the rocks the Siren had cried, "No, not you!" and then disappeared.

The laughter had ceased within a week. Three more fishing boats, a sardine trawler and a motor-powered pleasure craft had been lost at the shoals and always the stories of the survivors—there was no loss of life—had been the same: the girl, the song and the last disdainful cry, "No, not you!"

Newspapers became conscious of the situation and they commented on it with caution. Of course there was no such thing as a siren—or "Siren"—but there were circumstances, there were aspects; something peculiar undoubtedly was going on.

Caleb spent a miserable week, waiting for Patience to show her hand. She had been unaccountably quiet and away from home most of the time,

FIRST WAS THE WORST

When cost of surgery today
Excites your disapproval,
Consider, men, what we still pay
For Adam's-rib removal.

W. W. H.

but Caleb was seafaring man enough to realize this was merely the lull before the storm.

Finally Patience faced him and in her hand, partially concealed against her bosom, she clutched a shiny, metallic object.

"Caleb," she said sternly, "I suppose you know that that Siren you so shamefully encouraged and courted years ago is now threatening our very existence?"

"There was no courting," said Caleb, "and how is she threatening our very existence? We don't put out to sea any more."

"You're blind and a fool," snorted Patience. "Don't you know that already five families of fishermen have left Pilgrim's Harbor for good? And what's worse, summer visitors are becoming alarmed by the bad publicity we've been receiving. Ten reservations for beach cottages have been canceled and more cancellations may be expected every day—from wives, of course. We're faced with bankruptcy, thanks to your fumadiddles."

"There were no fumadiddles," said Caleb, knowing he'd never convince her of that. "Anyway, what's on your mind?"

"This very night," said Patience, "you must go to the Siren. And not for fumadiddles. You've got to kill her."

"Oh, no," said Caleb, despairingly. "I could never do that."

"Do you want us to starve in our old age?" demanded Patience. "What's more, do you want your friends and neighbors to starve? Think of them."

"I'll try to," said Caleb miserably. "What's that you're fisting onto up against your dress?"

PATIENCE unfisted the dagger and showed it to him.

"Made of pure sterling silver," she said in triumph. "Granny Bates sold me it."

"That old witch!" snorted Caleb.

"Witch is right," declared Patience. "That's why I went to her. Cost me a pretty penny, too, but it was worth it. All week, she's been scrabbling through a pile of books and papers, and finally she found out how to kill a Siren."

She told Caleb the gruesome details of how the murder was to be accomplished.

"No," protested Caleb weakly. "I won't. I can't."

But he knew he was a lost soul. Might as well try to shout down a hurricane as Patience. Besides, for many, many years he had been trained to obey and he had lost the power to resist.

Sighing unhappily, he donned oilskins and set out for the harbor. He detoured a little for a brief chat with Salthorse Sam, a hundred-year-old follower of the sea, who might be expected to know a little something about Sireens, himself.

After leaving the old man's shack, Caleb rowed for many a long mile, and he was tired as he piloted the dory toward the rocks of Sacrifice Shoals. The water was quiet and there was hardly any spray, a rare occurrence. The girl, her hair shining in the sunrise, came out of a cleft in the rocks and peered at Caleb, her hands shading her eyes. Then she smiled radiantly and her green orbs blazed with joy.

"Come, Caleb," she said, stretching out her arms to him.

Caleb beached the dory and stepped onto the shore.

"Ma'am," he said uncomfortably, "it is my painful duty to—"

"Ah, my darling," said the girl, softly, lovingly, "how I have been longing for this moment."

"Well, ma'am," said Caleb, and for a while he forgot the nature of his mission, "I can't rightly deny that I've been kind of looking forward to it, myself."

"My Caleb!" said the girl dreamily. "My love!"

"And mind you," said Caleb sternly, "I haven't forgotten the loss of the *Comus*, or my ticket."

"I was jealous," said the girl. "Come to my arms."

Caleb didn't go to her, so she went to him. She nestled into his arms, all soft and warm, and there was the odor of her hair in his nostrils. She lifted her head and kissed him, then stepped back, critically, to observe the result. What she saw evidently pleased her.

"Well, I'll be billyboy-damned if I ever went through such an experience before," said the dazed Caleb, "and I've been in many ports."

"There is more," said the girl. "Come with me."

She darted through the cleft in the rocks and Caleb followed her until they reached the mossy bower she had decorated with kelp and sea weed and strangely beautiful marine flowers of many colors. Without preliminary, she turned to him and kissed him; she kissed him again and again and again until his blood pounded like boiling surf upon rocks, his brain was filled with storm and lightning and he gasped for breath. When she finally released him, he sank to a rock and sat there, his eyes glassy.

The girl began to talk to him in a soft musical voice. He hardly caught the words but their effect was soothing. There was something about wondrous plans she had for both of them; something about long journeys to enchanted places—a lot of things that didn't make sense. And then she said something that cut through the fog in his brain and he fixed her with an incredulous stare.

"**W**OULD you repeat that, ma'am?" he asked.

The girl repeated what she had said and the meaning was exactly what Caleb had feared.

The gist of it was simply this: The girl was the very last of her species. She proposed that Caleb rectify the situation.

"But, ma'am," gasped Caleb, "I'm a married man, and besides, I'm old enough to be your father."

"If you'd think a little you'd realize that you're not old enough to be my father," said the girl with a silvery laugh. "And what's more, you're not really old. Look at yourself."

Caleb looked downward and caught a glimpse of his beard. It was no longer limp and white; it was black and bristling and virile. He tore off his oilskins and looked at arms no longer shrunken and blue-veined, but huge and hairy and muscular. And then he realized how he'd had the strength to endure all those kisses. He was a young man again, as young as he was when he was master of the

Comus and had first sighted the Sireen swimming in moonlit waters.

"Ma'am," he said, "this is a plumb wonder and don't think I am not appreciative—but as to your plans for me, there is more than a question of age; there is the question of right and wrong and what people'll think and—"

"Come, come," said the girl, placing a pink finger to his lips. "Your appearance is that of a man. Let's have you prove it. Catch me, if you can."

With another silvery laugh, she climbed a rock and dived into the green waters, her white body cleaving through the depths like an ivory harpoon. Caleb tore off his jacket and kicked off his shoes but he did not sacrifice his denim shirt nor his dungarees. He leaped to the rock and dived in after the girl.

The water was cold but not uncomfortably so, and Caleb's newly-young blood coursed warmly through his veins. Far below him he saw a white flash. He swam straight down, with powerful thrusts, not seeming to feel the lack of oxygen in his lungs. The girl breast-stroked her way deeper and deeper and Caleb followed her, until the sunlight no longer penetrated the depths and the water was black and there was only a pale blur to guide him. He felt no fear; rather, he felt a great exhilaration, a new sense of power.

Finally the girl slanted upward and sped to the surface with Caleb right after her. On the surface he caught her but she slithered out of his arms, laughing tauntingly, and flashed away from him. He caught her again and they gamboled over the surface of the green water which so well matched her laughing eyes. Caleb was tireless; he was a bull seal, master of the ocean's surface and of its depths. He lifted his head above the water and emitted a mighty roar of triumph that scared the wits out of a flock of cruising seagulls.

At last the girl led him back to the bower. She sang to him for awhile, a contented dreamy song, and then she fell asleep.

And now Caleb was staring down at her as he hefted the silver dagger. As with the sea, there is an ebb tide in all human emotion. Passion runs for awhile at high tide, savagely embracing the shores of its desire, then it recedes, leaving in its backwash the seaweed of remorse, the barnacles of doubt, and like a moribund eel the slowly writhing pangs of conscience.

To some folks, conscience is merely a mild reminder that something pleasant and forbidden has come to an end, but to a New Englander, born within the sound of surf, conscience is not only a searing realization of a sin committed but a lashing warning that you'd better not do it again.

What Caleb had done was a sin. He knew that, not out of an interpretation of theology, but because it had been so much fun. In a few scant hours he had enjoyed himself more than an entire generation of New Englanders had a right to expect in a lifetime. And now he must pay. For having enjoyed beauty and youth, he must destroy beauty and renounce youth.

Patience's words came to him as a command: "You've got to stab her firmly in the heart and then twist the blade three times and then let it stay."

HE lifted the dagger—and then the words of Salthorse Sam, who also knew a thing or two about Sireens, came to him.

"To get shed of a Sireen," Salthorse Sam had said, "you need a silver dagger, all right. But you don't have to stab her to do it. All you gotta do is cut off her hair. Of course this is neither fatal nor permanent. She jest leaves the shipping lanes and goes to the Sargasso Sea for a hundred years or so until her hair grows back on. Of course, if I was to meet up with a Sireen I wouldn't even think of barbering her, let alone killing her. I prefer my wimmen with hair on their heads."

Salthorse Sam could say that with impunity, for he was not a proper New Englander. He had been born in Ireland.

Caleb gazed at the white breast that would soon sheathe his dagger, and it seemed that somewhere far back in his ancestry a poet had somehow got into the family orchard. A still, small voice whispered to him:

To destroy beauty might also be a sin, it said.

For the first time in his life Caleb compromised with his conscience.

He twisted the golden hair into a single strand and slashed it off with one stroke of the silver blade.

The girl awakened, saw the dagger and the golden tresses in Caleb's hands, and her beautiful eyes misted with grief and an expression akin to pity.

"To yourself, too," she said sadly.

She leaped to the rocks, poised for a moment in white perfection, and then dived into the green waters.

"To yourself, too, Caleb," her words came floating back.

Caleb did not have to guess the meaning of those words. Without looking, he realized that his beard was white again and that his arms were once more shrunken and blue-veined.

But the tresses he held in his hand were alive and golden and there were enough of them to stuff a pillow upon which to dream dreams and relish memories that Patience could never know.



It took a beautiful gimmick to get a trunk full of dope through Customs without a hitch, and this gang had one. Plus a beautiful girl to take care of curious inspectors.



Loophole

BLUEBOOK'S COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

THE LITTLE BLUE SLIP on his desk said, "See me—urgent." Lou Fisch had signed it, and Lou Fisch meant what he said; nevertheless, Scott Webley tossed the slip to one side and ran through his mail before he pushed back his chair and strode down the Customhouse corridor to the door marked *Chief Inspector*.

Lou Fisch's all-but-bald, kidney-shaped head was bent over another of those blue slips. Web knew what was on it. He'd written it himself.

Lou's head snapped up, and he peered through

By LAWRENCE GOLDMAN

AUGUST, 1953

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thick glasses. "What the hell is this, Web? April Fool or something?"

Web eased himself into a well-worn chair. "I don't think so, Lou."

"But—a whole trunkload! Somebody's kidding you."

Web shook his head. "I took the phone call from Paris myself. Didn't sound like kidding."

"Give a name?"

"Zebulon."

"What?"

"That's the name he gave."

"Doesn't sound like a name."

"A code word. So I'll know him when he applies for the reward."

Lou Fisch pursed his lips. "Um! What else did he say?"

"Very little. He was cagey. Said somebody was bringing in a trunkload—that's right, I made him repeat it—a trunkload of heroin on the *Macedonia*. Period. End of tip. I tried pumping him for more, and he hung up. Said I'd hear from him later."

"Sounds as if he's coming over himself."

Web smiled slightly. "I figured he might be bringing the stuff in."

Lou stared at the blue slip and rubbed his jaw. "A trunk! That's impossible!"

Scott Webley shrugged. "Just as you say. Do we forget about it?"

"Hell, no!"

Web grinned inwardly as he watched Lou Fisch's bald head turn a deep pink with the vehemence of his explosion. Fisch glanced at a schedule on his desk. "The *Macedonia* is due in on Thursday. Who's in charge of the inspection crew then?"

"Wally Turner."

"I'll take him off, put you on. I want you to handle this yourself."

Web nodded.

"And I want every man due on shift then to be switched. Pull in a whole new crew at the last minute. All the usual precautions, and then some."

"Check."

"Contacted Narcotics yet?"

"Harrison is coming over this morning. We're going over the passenger-list together."

"Good. Then you haven't been sitting on your hands."

Web rose to his feet. "Not exactly. But I did figure to get one night's sleep before I let you in on this thing."

Fisch grunted. "Maybe you were smart. It might be a long time before you get another."

MILO REEVE was unhappy.

It was ironic; he should be the happiest man in the world. The dream of a lifetime—a trip around the world—had been his. Right now he was steaming home on the last leg of that trip, on the luxurious *Macedonia*.

It had been wonderful, at first: The flight from New York to San Fran-

cisco—Brooklyn-born Milo had never been in the air before. The big plane that dipped down at Honolulu, at Manila, at Tokyo. Then to Hong Kong, the tiny Crown colony, surrounded on three sides by vast, mysterious Red China.

Picking up the kilos had been a breeze. The contact was a fat benign Chinese who wined and dined Milo in true imperial style, then offered him his choice of three lovely petal-frail dinner companions for the night. And when Milo had trouble choosing, his host had simply waved for all three of them to accompany and divert the honored guest. Milo licked his lips reminiscently.

The next day the kilos arrived at Milo's hotel room, lugged up by a coolie like so much oatmeal. Milo paid the fat Chinese, and packed the kilos in the trunk. They made a tight squeeze; looking at them, stacked like paper sacks of sugar, Milo was struck for the first time with the awful realization of what he had taken on.

From that point on, the trip had been pure hell. Not conscience; not the prospect of long years in a Federal pen if he were caught. No, what made Milo unhappy was the infuriating fact that these kilos—nearly two hundred of them, four hundred pounds of chemically pure heroin—had cost just five thousand dollars! Why, in New York the stuff would wholesale for an easy hundred grand, just the way it was. And by the time it reached the hypes—cut down ten to one with sugar of milk, and sold at one to five bucks a shot—Milo's mind bogged down at the final figure.

And he, sucker that he was, had agreed to bring the stuff in for a measly five grand and expenses!

By the time his ship had passed the tip of Ceylon, he knew what to do. He sent Kirby a radio message.

UNEXPECTED COMPLICATIONS. NEED
TEN THOUSAND MORE FOR EXPENSES.

The answer caught up with him at Suez. He read it, his hands shaking.

IMPOSSIBLE. COUNT UPON YOU TO
COMPLETE CONTRACT AS AGREED.

Milo had been looking forward to celebrating that extra ten grand with a flying trip to Cairo. The Pyramids . . . the Sphinx . . . the Sahara! Names like these had charmed him with a strange fascination since he first had pored over poorly-printed engravings in the books of P.S. 64. Suddenly he didn't want, any longer, to see the Sphinx. He canceled the flight and stayed with the ship.

He hadn't missed the significance of that reply: "Count upon you . . ." Milo had seen the results when Kirby

had counted on a man and the man didn't come through. He shuddered involuntarily.

He seethed all the way to Marseille. There, following instructions, he had his trunks, including the trunk full of kilos, sealed in bond for the overland trip to Cherbourg.

It was in Paris that he got the bright idea. By God, if Kirby was too tight to shell out a few grand for a job that would bring in a quarter of a million, then Kirby would get nothing—unless it would be a ten-year stretch in Atlanta!

Milo put in an overseas call to the United States Customs in New York. After he hung up, he wrote the word *Zebulon* on a card, and tucked the card in the inside pocket of his coat.

The moment he saw the name on paper, he was petrified at his own temerity. Through his rabbit brain coursed the million things that could go wrong—every one of them ending with Milo Reeve in a very unpleasant predicament indeed.

THE trunk in the hold of the *Macedonia* weighed on him throughout the voyage, an indigestible lump at the pit of his mind. Kirby had arranged a code message to send him if anything went sour at the New York end. On receipt of this radio, Milo's orders were to have the trunk brought to his stateroom and chuck every blessed kilo through the porthole. Milo began to haunt the radio-room, hoping and praying for the message to come. He could hardly eat or sleep, straining to hear his name paged. But it never was.

The ship was homing fast. She was due to dock tomorrow. Kirby would be there, and the trunk—and Customs men would be out like a swarm of bees. It was up to Milo to make a decision, and quick.

The moment for decision came even sooner than Milo expected. He almost fainted when the purser tapped him on the shoulder. But it was not a radiogram the man held out to him. "Your baggage-declaration, sir. Shall I wait while you fill it out?"

Well, there it was. Kirby had gone over this thing with him a dozen times, and Milo knew exactly what he was to do. He had three trunks in the ship's hold, containing his personal belongings—and one other. If he declared them all, the trunk full of kilos would be opened by the Customs men on the dock. Milo would be yanked down to headquarters and put through the wringer. That would be the time to come out with the "Zebulon" card, to identify himself as the Paris informer. The Government gave twenty-five percent of the valuation of the seizure to the tipster. With all that dough in his kick, Milo could skip to South

Illustration by AL TARTER

America—and live like a lord. . . . If Kirby didn't catch him first.

Milo's hand sweated, stuck to the official form.

His other alternative was to adhere to the original plan. That way the trunk would pass through Customs untouched. . . .

Maybe. Maybe not.

Kirby had said the scheme was fool-proof. But he could be wrong; the Customs guys weren't dopes.

Milo sweated even more, in spite of the cool Atlantic breeze. He filled out the rest of the declaration, trying to gain time, trying to think. But there was nothing to think about.

He wrote, slowly, "Trunks—" His pencil stopped.

"Is anything wrong, sir?" the purser asked.

"No. . . . I—I just don't feel well," said Milo truthfully.

"A bit queasy, sir? I could get you something."

Milo brushed him off testily. "Skip it."

He took a deep breath, and finished the line: "*Trunks . . . 4.*"

Instantly he was seized with a violent chill. Resting the form on the ship's rail, he turned the pencil around, erased the 4 and made a substitution: "*Trunks . . . 3.*"

He handed the form to the purser.

When the chips were down, Milo Reeve feared the United States Government less than he did Ben Kirby.

Chapter Two

SCOTT WEBLEY SWEEPED THE PIER with a glance. One end of the long concrete-floored, iron-roofed shed was blocked by a small portion of the hull of the *Macedonia*; baggage spewed out of the cargo hold on an endless belt, there to be picked up on motorized trucks in tandem and deposited under the various initials that hung alphabetically from the high corrugated roof. At the other end was the exit gate, the street, New York—the United States. Theoretically, every bit of the baggage of the *Macedonia's* twelve hundred passengers would come under the scrutiny of a Customs inspector before it went out that gate.

Web watched the baggage pile up like the moraine of a capricious glacier. Fifty inspectors, twelve hundred passengers. Another ship this afternoon. Tomorrow morning, still another, perhaps two. And so it went. Half a thousand men to stem the never-ending tide of incoming goods at the giant Port of New York. Nine huge districts to be covered, including the air districts at La Guardia and International.

The job would be utterly impossible, of course, if most persons weren't

intrinsically honest. There were always problems, of course. A "problem" to Customs could be a smuggler, a flustered passenger, an incorrectly filled-out declaration—anything that stretched the inspection much beyond the usual ten or fifteen minutes.

Web circulated with the crowds, watching his picked men with approval. They were handling the complicated job smoothly, competently. They knew how to deal with excited trippers, jittery to get off the pier and home, touchy after the double ordeal of health and immigration inspection. People expected Customs men to tear their baggage apart, leer over filmy feminine lingerie, generally act the part of bureaucratic ogres. Sometimes they were disappointed when it didn't happen.

For all their polite attention to duty, their seeming single-minded concern over the passenger at hand, every man was alert to the big thing. Web had called them all together before the ship docked and laid his cards on the table. There had been whistles and raised eyebrows at the description of a trunkload of heroin; most of them frankly believed it couldn't be done, wouldn't be tried. But not a man among them was going to let his skepticism dull his eyesight. Web knew that no trunk would go off the dock this morning without special attention.

He jammed his hands into his pockets and continued his tour of the pier. It was like coming home again; this was the district he had worked regularly until he'd been promoted to investigative work, two years ago.

He headed for the assignment desk, weaving through the feverishly milling mass of passengers, porters, inspectors and visitors—the impatient ones who couldn't wait for their homecoming friends to clear Customs, but had to get pier passes and clutter the place still more.

To the seasoned pond-jumper, Customs was an inescapable nuisance; to the Very Important Person, it was just another place to demand—and sometimes get—special service. To the newspaperman, it was a last chance to get the story or the picture after he'd hung around the bar too long and missed the pilot-boat. To all, it was a place of endless distance, noise, and aching feet.

But to Scott Webley it was home. He found himself falling into the old familiar routines. He directed passengers who were unable to see the two-foot initials hanging from the roof-beams. He advised anxious mothers with crying babies. He tossed words of calm comfort to nervous immigrants in scraps of a dozen languages. He endlessly dodged weeping couples entwined in each other's

arms, oblivious to the world; messengers with inconsequential telegrams; other messengers with flowers that were a nice gesture, but a damned nuisance to everybody concerned at a time like this.

"Home" was the wind blowing through the open sides of the pier, the smell of seawater somehow mixed with the aroma of freshly-brewed coffee; it was the birds flying under the high steel arches and roosting on the cold trusses in lieu of trees; it was the long queue in front of the assignment desk.

WEB went around the barrier. Merck, the assigning inspector for the day, looked up. "Any luck, Web?"

Web shook his head. "Nothing yet."

He picked up a book of gummed stamps. "I'm taking S-14501 to S-14600," he told Merck. "I'll help out on the line."

Merck nodded, made a notation of the stamp numbers. "Glutton for punishment, eh, Web?" He handed Web a passenger's declaration. "Your first customer is Mr. Milo Reeve, here. Inspector Webley will look after you, Mr. Reeve."

Web and Milo looked at each other. Milo Reeve saw a man in his thirties, above average height, sandy of hair and complexion, with generous brows shading dark-brown eyes of deceptive calmness. Web saw a smaller man, middle-aged, a bit on the paunchy side. His declaration indicated a well-to-do businessman back from the Orient. Probably a first tripper, else he wouldn't be smoking a cigarette under a "No Smoking" sign. Nervous, certainly; but Web discounted that. He knew the agony of the Customs ordeal, even when one had nothing to fear.

"You found your baggage, Mr. Reeve?" Web asked pleasantly.

Milo nodded, and together they threaded the maze toward the big initial R, halfway down the pier.

Web glanced at the deck again. The man with him was unknown to Narcotics, to the FBI, to the New York police. Those agencies had been alerted by Web and had checked the passenger list. They'd turned up half a dozen doubtful characters, but Milo Reeve was not among them. There was no reason why he should be. Milo had been picked for his present job precisely because he had no police record, local or Federal.

The declaration listed three trunks and four bags. No dutiable articles. That checked with the businessman's story. A man with a serious mission didn't waste time shopping.

The man appeared absolutely clean, yet there was something about him that rubbed Web the wrong way. He couldn't put his finger on the hunch,

but it was definitely there, and Web knew better than to question it. Long years of sizing up passengers gave most Customs men a kind of sixth sense. Clean or not, Milo Reeve would get the works.

The three trunks and four bags contained nothing out of the way. Web examined each one carefully, but in the end he pasted a white, numbered stamp across the seam of each piece. The use of each stamp was duly noted in the stub of the book, somewhat after the manner of a checkbook.

Only one small irregularity cropped up. Web said, "You didn't declare that briefcase, Mr. Reeve."

For a moment the man's eyes showed panic. "I didn't know—I never thought—" he stammered.

Web smiled away his worry. "Don't take it so hard, sir. Just about every other passenger does the same thing. You don't think of it as baggage, but it's baggage to us, and has to have a stamp before it goes off the pier. May I see it, please?"

Milo handed over the briefcase as if it were hot. Web riffled briefly through the papers inside, closed it. He tore another stamp out of his book and pasted it over the case. In the book he noted: "Stamp No. S-14508, used on one briefcase in excess." On Milo's declaration he made a similar notation. Now stamps and declaration agreed with the actual pieces of baggage Milo was taking off the pier.

"Otherwise," he explained as he handed back the briefcase, "you wouldn't be allowed to take it off. The port patrol officers at the gate wouldn't pass it."

Milo was relieved. "I see. Well, thanks. You fellows do scare a guy to death, you know."

WEB was about to answer with some stock pleasantries. The hunch had faded with each piece of harmless baggage he had looked through. Now, as he glanced at Milo's declaration again, it came back stronger than ever.

Milo was asking, "Can I go now?"

Web hesitated. "There's just one more formality, Mr. Reeve." He beckoned a near-by uniformed inspector. "Ernie, will you detail somebody to take care of Mr. Reeve's baggage, please? Prepare a complete report on it. And look up Harrison of Narcotics. He's around somewhere; ask him to meet me in Lou Fisch's office right away."

Milo's face drained white at the mention of narcotics. The fact did not escape Web's apparently casual glance. He knew a moment of inward elation. Maybe he had something here. Maybe.

Milo began to bluster. But Web was a past-master at the art of pouring oil where it would do the most good.

"I'll be quite frank with you, Mr. Reeve. We're looking for a certain illegal shipment. I'm sure you'll want to co-operate with us." He smiled. "It will only take a few minutes of your time."

It took a lot more than a few minutes of Milo Reeve's time. He sat facing three courteous but hard-eyed men for a matter of two hours.

But as the inquisition proceeded, Milo's courage returned. He knew all the answers, and he knew they would stand up. He had to admire Kirby's sharpness in picking a man like himself, instead of some gangster whose story would have broken down in five minutes. He thought of the little card, still tucked in his inside pocket, and a chill coursed up his spine at the risk he had taken. No, Kirby was not a man to fool with.

The questions kept coming.

"Your purpose in making the trip, Mr. Reeve?"

"Pleasure, mostly. It's something I've been promising myself for years. My wife and I planned— Then she died. I put it off for a year; then I thought, why not?"

"You did business on the way?"

"I made some contacts, yes."

"And your business—what is it?"

"Wholesale paint. Chiefly iron oxides, lead oxides. For bridges, construction—rust, you know."

Lou Fisch leaned forward. "Would you mind furnishing us with the names of the people or firms you contacted on your trip?"

Milo took out a notebook, read them off. A stenographer copied the names and addresses faithfully. Well, let them check. He *had* seen them, and even sold a little paint. Kirby had insisted that every move he made must stand checking. Smart guy, Kirby—too smart to fool with. No, Milo had done the right thing.

The going got rougher when Harrison, the Narcotics man, reeled off a lot of names, asked if Milo knew them. None of the names was familiar, but Milo kept expecting the next one to be Ben Kirby, and he was afraid his face would betray him.

His fears were groundless, however. Harrison did not mention Kirby's name. Another point for Kirby.

Web picked up where Harrison left off. "How many trunks did you bring back, Mr. Reeve?"

"Why, three. It's on there, isn't it?"

Web held out the declaration for the harassed man to look at. "You marked 'four,' then erased the figure and wrote the three over it."

Milo hesitated only a fraction of a second. "Yes, I remember now." He

looked up disarmingly. "Does that require an explanation?"

"Don't you think it's a little unusual to make a mistake on a matter like that? These were the trunks you carried with you around the world, weren't they?"

"Yes, of course."

The three men waited in silence. But Milo was on firm ground now. If *this* was all they had on him— He put on his most charming smile.

"Gentlemen, I simply made a mistake. If I've committed a crime, I'm ready to pay the penalty."

The telephone rang. The three inquisitors turned to it as if they had been waiting. Lou Fisch picked up the phone. He said "Yes . . . Yes . . ." a couple of times, but mostly he listened. Finally he hung up.

And then it was over, and they were apologizing to Milo for the inconvenience they'd caused him, thanking him for co-operating with the Department. And a few moments later Milo was on the street, laughing inside himself.

What slob! He'd certainly done the right thing, sticking with Kirby. He certainly had.

Chapter Three

LOU FISCH'S WATERY EYES topped his glasses to survey a disconsolate Scott Webley.

"Well?" he demanded.

Web looked at the chair recently vacated by Milo Reeve, and at the other chair still warm from the ample seat of Harrison, the Narcotics man. "All right," he said. "I agree it's crazy. But I still believe it."

"You saw the man. You shook him down yourself. He's clean. His story checks out."

"So it isn't this guy," Web said doggedly. "It's some other guy."

Lou put on his let's-be-reasonable voice. "You have picked men swarming all over the pier. You have three men at the gate double-checking every piece. Everything's accounted for. Right?"

"Right," Web admitted wearily. "But you heard Harrison. He told you there was a big buy out of Hong Kong last month. Two hundred kilos."

"It could have gone anywhere. Europe, Africa—anywhere."

Web looked up. "Where would it command the best price?"

"Here, of course; but that doesn't—"

"It's here," Web said. "It went off Pier 23 this morning."

"By magic?"

Web shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe it *was* magic."

Lou Fisch thrust his jaw out hard. "Think, Web! This is no sailor skip-

ping ship with a bundle strapped to his leg. This is no inspector taking a bribe to overlook a silver tea set or a fur coat."

"Don't bother to tell me again. This gang—I'm sure it's a gang, too—couldn't possibly have foreseen which inspector was going to handle that trunk. I saw to that."

"It means someone is pulling your leg, Web."

"Or else it means that someone has found a hole in this airtight system of ours, a hole big enough to pull a trunk through." Web reached for the phone, dialed the pier, and got hold of Merck. "Give Milo Reeve his stuff," he ordered, "then put a tail on him and let me know where he goes." Web consulted the clock behind Lou Fisch. "I'll be at Obie's, waiting."

WEB stared into a gradually flattening glass of beer and an untouched cheese sandwich in front of him on the table at Obie's. Obie himself—Michael Dennis O'Brien on his birth certificate in Galway Courthouse—came over and looked at him shrewdly.

"Troubles, Web?"

Web grunted. Obie was all right, of course—used to be in the Service himself; when he left it, he had opened his bar and grill. A nice, clean place, just across from the Customhouse, it naturally drew the Customs boys as they got off duty. You could usually find two or three of them there.

Yes, Obie was all right, and he had a hell of a pretty daughter, but Web automatically shied away from confidences. Service problems belonged in the Service.

"You can't kid me," Obie was saying. "I can spot that civil-service grief a mile away. What is it this time—diamonds? Furs? Uranium?"

Web grinned up at the florid face. "Oh, you know," he answered easily. "Usual thing. Working at a job like this is like trying to keep your finger in the dike."

"Don't I know it! You're like the ant, buried in a pile of manure. He works and sweats and strains his wee little muscles and finally he gets his head and shoulders above the ground. Then he opens his mouth to take a big, deep breath of fresh air—and some bastard heaves another shovelful of manure in his face!"

Web grunted appreciatively, stood up and dropped a dollar on the table. "Where's Betty?"

Obie pushed the dollar back at him. "I'm not supposed to tell you."

"She's still mad?"

"Boiling."

Web's face fell. "Oh!"

"So mad," Obie went on, wiping the table, "that this morning she was crying."

"Crying?" Web's head snapped up.

"Yeah. From pure mad, I guess."

Web stood up. It was his turn to grin. "Thanks, Obie." He punched the other man lightly on the shoulder and went out.

He walked around the corner to a door that showed lace curtains behind the glass. The apartment Obie occupied with his daughter was actually part of the same building that housed the tavern, but Obie was adamant about the separate door. "Nobody's going to walk through the back of a hash-house to call on my little girl," he had said.

Web had to push the bell three times before the door opened.

If Betty had been crying recently, her wide blue-green eyes gave no evidence of it—thanks, possibly, to a little quick repair work between Web's first and third ring.

Her soft lips tried vainly to harden when she saw Web. She made a move to close the door, but Web was too quick for her. He got inside, bent down and kissed the lips back into softness. He felt her body, stiffly held at first, melt under the pressure of his arms.

"Oh, Web," she murmured. "Please . . . at least, shut the door."

They had no time for talk during the next few minutes. Then, "I've missed you so, Web, darling!"

Web smiled at her. "You called the shots, honey."

She kissed him again. "I'll never be that foolish again. I don't care how many Viennese blondes you run around with."

"But Betty—"

"Shh!" She stopped his lips with a finger. "It was business. You've already told me. I believe you; just don't let it happen again!"

Web gripped her by the shoulders, held her away from him firmly. "Look here! That case is closed, and I can tell you about it now."

"I don't want to hear about it."

"You're going to listen! We got a tip from a London jeweler that this Lisa Stern had bought a valuable emerald necklace, and would probably try to smuggle it in. When she came off the ship we went over her with a fine-tooth comb—"

"You handled that personally, no doubt."

Web had to control himself to keep from shaking her. "We have women on the force to take care of that end! But she was clean—no necklace anywhere. I had orders to stick with her like glue."

"Your boss will be happy to know you followed his orders to the letter, Inspector Webley."

"You little—" He sucked in a breath, tried again. "I couldn't tell you because I was acting under cover."

She didn't say anything, just nodded knowingly. In spite of everything, Web felt his neck beginning to flush.

"You want to know what she did? She went down to the same tub—the *Elizabeth*—to see a friend off on the return trip. The friend just happened to have the same stateroom Lisa occupied, westbound. That was too much of a coincidence. I flashed my badge, cleared the cabin—and we found the necklace neatly plastered inside the light fixture, all ready for Lisa to pick it up and calmly carry it off when the all-ashore sounded."

"So that was the end of a beautiful friendship."

"I'll say it was! You never saw a beautiful girl change so fast. Why, I learned words—" He broke off, stared at her. "You don't believe me!"

"Of course I believe you," Betty said sweetly—too sweetly. "But just don't let it happen again."

Web sighed. He'd never be able to convince her that the story was the literal truth. Did she think he could invent whoppers as incredible as the antics that sprang out of the warped minds of smugglers? Why, if he tried to tell her about this "Zebulon" thing—

It was out of the question. She'd never believe that. Why should she—when Lou Fisch himself thought Web was wacky for believing it?

SHE may not have believed him, but she forgave him. That was the important thing. "We'll celebrate," she said. "You'll take me to dinner tonight."

"Tonight's out, honey. Tomorrow?"

Her finger was running over his chin; he ducked his head to kiss it.

"Tomorrow's a long way off," she pouted.

"For me, too. But tonight I've got a date."

"Another blonde?"

"A ravishing brunette."

"I'll scratch her eyes out!"

He grinned. "Six o'clock tomorrow? At the Cosmo?"

She nodded. He kissed her again, reached for his hat.

"You have to go now?"

"'Fraid so, honey. I'm still on the taxpayers' time."

"I'm a taxpayer."

He grinned at her. "So you are. Well, here's your share." He kissed her lightly on the nose and went out.

The call hadn't come in, Obie informed him. "How'd you do otherwise?" he asked, grinning.

"Not bad." Web grinned back. "It's all straightened out."

"Fine," said Obie. "I'll have no future son-in-law who can't handle his women or his liquor. And speaking of liquor—" He gestured toward a bottle on the shelf.

Web shook his head. "Thanks, Obie. On duty."

"Duty! When are you going to get wise to yourself, son, and come into the business here with me?"

Web's eyes ran over the small, neat café. He couldn't see himself in this picture, not ever.

Obie misunderstood his glance. "We'll enlarge the place, build it up. I got plans—"

Plans, Web thought—but it took money to put plans into action. Betty had confided in him that the little business was shaky; she kept the books.

"Thanks just the same, Obie. I appreciate the offer, believe me. But I'm sticking with the Service—for now, anyway."

Obie shook his head sadly. "Give me just one good reason!"

Web smiled, punched the older man gently on the shoulder. "I guess I just happen to like my job."

He went to the phone booth and called Merck.

"No news yet," Merck told him. "I set a man on Reeve, but he hasn't reported back yet."

"Okay," Web said. "I'll keep in touch with you."

He hung up, waved a so-long to Obie, and took the Bureau car ten blocks to the bachelor apartment he shared with Dick Cameron, another inspector.

CAMERON—tieless, shoeless—lay on one of the twin beds. There was a tall glass on the floor beside him. He looked up when the door opened, grinned up at Web.

"Hi, Pop."

There was no offense in the appellation, and Web took none. It dated from the time Web and Cameron had taken the civil-service examination for Customs Inspector; Cameron, looking over Web's application, had noted that they both shared the same birthday. It turned out that Web was the older by a couple of hours—hence the nickname "Pop."

Both men had taken to the Customs work avidly. They approached the job as they had approached that same examination, each in his own way. Web, earnest, serious, methodical, put in weeks of solid study; Cameron skimmed through the books lightly, at the last possible moment.

Web passed with a grade of 94; Cameron topped him with 96.

Dick Cameron was built on long, sloping lines; he looked youthful for his thirty-four years, and he took life almost flippantly; a perpetual, half-sardonic smile curled one corner of his mouth. Web had seen that smile wiped off Cameron's lips only once—that was the time Lou Fisch announced Web's promotion to investi-

gator. Everybody on the force had expected Cameron to get the nod. Everybody, including Web, and including Dick Cameron himself.

But Lou Fisch was calling the shots. And Dick had snapped out of it quickly, clapped Web on the back and congratulated him. Since then he'd been the same friendly, happy-go-lucky Dick.

Web dropped into a chair. "They told me you were off sick."

"I was. This damned tooth started acting up."

"Did you go to a dentist?"

"No," Cameron said. "I went down and got some medicine for it." He indicated with his thumb the half-emptied glass.

"You ought to see a dentist," Web said, reaching for the phone.

"You calling one?" Cameron asked.

Web continued dialing. "You're not a child. You can make up your own mind."

"What's with the trunkful of dope?" Cameron asked. "Find it yet?"

Web shook his head.

"Don't think you ever will," Cameron said. "Somebody's ribbing you."

"Guess I'm the only one who goes for it," Web said, "but I'm convinced that trunk got off the pier this morning."

Merck's gruff voice came over the phone.

"Merck," Web said, "you wound up with the *Macedonia* yet?"

"Just finished. By the way, I put Chet Holman on your friend Reeve. Chet just called in."

"Yes? What'd he say?"

"Reeve took his stuff off the pier and stopped at his own Twenty-eighth Street address."

"What was the count?"

"Just what we had on him. Three trunks, four bags, one briefcase."

"I see. Holman say anything else?"

"Reeve came right out of the apartment and took a cab for a place on Central Park West." Merck gave Web the number. "Chet will hang on till you relieve him."

"Good. Tell me—what's the count on inspected pieces leaving the *Macedonia* pier?"

"I've got it here. Six thousand and forty-two pieces."

"Will you break it down for me—how many trunks, and so on?"

"Will do."

"How does the count check with stamps used?"

"Now hold on, there, fella!" Merck's hoarse voice bridled. "Give us time!"

Web smiled. Counting up the partially used books of fifty or more inspectors would take an hour or more. "Sorry. I'll call you back on that."

He hooked up the receiver, got to his feet.

"Where you going now?" Cameron asked.

"Number 844 Central Park West."

Cameron's eyebrows went up and he whistled. "Ritzy, eh? What's there?"

"I've got a halfway suspect. Acting a little on the peculiar side." Web stopped as Cameron swung his long legs off the bed. "You getting up?"

"Sure. Want company, Pop?"

"But your tooth—"

Cameron grinned. "Forget it. Just let me finish my medicine and I'll be right with you."

Chapter Four

THE BAGGAGEMAN SWEATED the big trunk into the freight elevator. Ben Kirby was right behind him. "Forty," he said to the operator. The operator closed the big door and the cage started up.

"Hot day for this kind of work," the operator said.

Kirby said nothing. The trucker wiped sweat off his brow and looked at him. He saw a man hitting a gray-ing forty-six. An expensive tailor hadn't been able to hide the flabbiness underneath. Let him wrassle trunks a few days, the trucker thought. That'd take off the belly. Not a bad-looking guy, though, except for those eyes. They had grayish-brown folds in them like a lizard's eyes. You never knew if they were looking at you or not, and they seemed never to blink the way ordinary people's eyes did. And the way he followed this trunk! You'd think it was full of diamonds.

The elevator stopped at the fortieth floor. Kirby went out first, let the trucker rumble the trunk on the dolly down the carpeted hall behind him. He stopped before a door and pulled a key out of his pocket. The trucker rested and waited. Kirby swung the door open, stood aside to let the trucker wheel the trunk inside.

The phone rang just as Kirby closed the door. "Put it in the corner there," he threw over his shoulder as he went for the phone.

The trucker was carefully tipping the trunk off the dolly when she came into the room. Involuntarily he stopped short and stared. He couldn't help himself.

She was dressed in jade-green pajamas, the Chinese kind embroidered in silver relief, with the collar buttoned high at her throat, and embroidered Chinese slippers covered her tiny feet. Her skin was a pure clear olive that seemed to grow out of the delicate shade of the silk. Under jet-black hair, in bangs over her forehead and drawn tightly behind her ears, her eyes caught and held him. They were

Oriental eyes, with only a touch of slant. A Westerner had got into the act somewhere in her recent ancestry. Just a shade of highlight to her cheekbones carried out the picture.

The trucker decided she was the most beautiful woman, bar none, he had ever seen. But she had more than beauty; just standing there, she did something to a man—just by looking at him, she made him feel ten feet tall.

A hint of a smile played across the corners of her perfect mouth. She accepted his homage as her due, acknowledged the involuntary, stunned reaction calmly, as a queen might.

Reality intruded as Kirby banged up the phone and turned. He caught the glance between them, and his voice was harsh.

"All right, Buster. We've got to move this trunk out again."

The trucker's mouth fell open. "Out?"

"That's right." He turned to the girl. "Moose here?"

She waved a hand languidly toward the interior of the apartment. She had just painted her nails, evidently, and she held her hands away from her body, fingers separated. In her, even this homely gesture took on the grace of a temple dance.

Kirby brushed by her and yelled, "Moose!"

The man who lumbered in deserved his name. He was big, broad, knobby and slow. He still held the comic book he had been reading when he was interrupted.

Kirby took him aside and whispered quick, excited instructions. Moose nodded from time to time, incurious, absorbent. At the end he stepped inside, returned with hat and coat.

"Come on, boy," he said to the trucker.

"Look here," the trucker began.

Kirby shut him up with a bill waved under his eyes. "This ought to make it worth your while."

It did. The trucker followed Moose like a lamb. If the operator of the freight elevator was surprised he kept it strictly to himself after one glance at Moose.

Riding down, the trucker rested on his dolly. That dame! The trucker's eyes misted over. What a dish! A dame like that could give you a lot of grief. But worth it—worth it! If his wife knew what was running through his mind right now— He snickered.

Moose turned and stared down at him. The trucker didn't feel like laughing any more.

KIRBY double-locked the door as soon as the two men left.

The girl watched him from a sofa across the room. She held her pencil-slim fingers in the air to dry the pale rose lacquer. The smile she had

awarded the truckman still lingered faintly on her lips.

Kirby turned on her savagely. "Do you have to give the eye to every man you see?"

"It bothers you?" Her voice was a mingling of the accents of all nations and races—a crossroads of East and West. "It annoys you, my dearest darling? Then of course, I shall never look at a man again—only at you."

Kirby's lizard eyes studied her suspiciously, but no sarcasm was mirrored in her placid, exquisite features.

"In a moment," she was saying, "I shall kiss you."

The rush of desire all but pulled him across the room. He forced himself to go to her slowly; she should not be allowed to know the hold she had over him—but of course she did know. Her smile told that plainly.

He reached for her, careless of her nails. She drew back. "Not now. My nails must dry. You will ruin them."

He halted, upright. Always so sure of herself! And always with reason.

"That was the trunk?" she asked. "It got through?"

He hesitated. The less you talked, the less you had to regret. That had been his lifelong code, and it had stood up well. But he couldn't resist the chance to expand, to crow just a little.

"Yes, Hila, that's it. We made it, darling! Think of the money—the beautiful things we will put on this lovely body of yours!"

"You're generous, Ben. You're good to me."

You never could tell when she was laughing at you. She might be laughing now, inside.

"Why did you send it away?" she was asking.

His face suffused with rage. "That son of a bitch, Milo! Letting himself get picked up by the Feds! I couldn't keep it here. We've got to lie low until we find out how we stand."

A knock at the door startled him. His lizard eyes darted to Hila, questioning, unsure. She continued to smile, imperturbable, untouched.

Kirby went to the door and called out softly, "Yes?"

"Open up. It's me—Milo."

Cold murder blazed in Kirby's eyes for an instant, but only for an instant. His smile was broad, friendly, welcoming, as he seized Milo's hand, slapped him on the back.

"Milo! Glad to see you back. What kind of a trip did you have?"

Milo was too worried to respond in kind. "Look, Ben, I don't know what happened, I swear it. I don't know why they nabbed me like that. But I want you to know I didn't peep. They put me through the wringer, but I didn't peep, so help me."

"Sure, sure," said Kirby soothingly. "I'm not worried about you, Milo. They didn't have anything on you."

"That's right." Milo grasped the straw gratefully. "They didn't have a thing on me. They must've got a buzz about something else altogether." He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow. "I been worried, Ben. Worried you'd think maybe I—"

He stopped. He'd caught sight of Hila; and for a second his tongue refused to function. Kirby did not miss the byplay. For the merest instant the mask lifted on his hatred; by the time Milo caught himself, it had descended. Kirby was all bland friendship again.

"Did—did everything go all right?" Milo asked anxiously, still unable to keep his glance away from Hila.

Kirby made no move to introduce him. Instead, he replied:

"Of course it did—like clockwork."

MILO blew out a relieved breath. "Am I glad! You'll never know what I went through. I wouldn't do it again for all the tea in China."

"Why not? There's dough in it."

"Yeah, but— It's not worth it, believe me!" Milo turned anxious eyes on Kirby. "That cable I sent you. You're not sore about it?"

Kirby laughed shortly. "Sore? Why should I be?"

Milo forced an uncertain smile. "You can't blame a guy for trying, eh?"

"Hell, no. And you can't blame a guy for turning you down."

They laughed together. Hila looked up momentarily, then lowered her incredibly long lashes again.

"I got to hand it to you, Ben. You called my bluff."

"I knew you were bluffing."

"Just the same, it took nerve. I was away on the other side of the world—I had the stuff—"

"I knew you'd come through with it. I didn't worry about you, not for a minute."

"Well, that's great, Ben, great. It makes me feel good." He hesitated. "Uh—"

The smile was still on Kirby's face, but it did not show in his cold lizard-like eyes. "What do you want, Milo?"

"Uh—if you got my piece, I'd kinda like to pull out. Forget it."

Kirby said easily, "I thought you knew. It'll take a couple of days to get rid of the stuff. We'll pay off then."

Milo's face fell. "Oh! I thought—" "I'll ring you. You can depend on me, Milo."

"Oh, sure, sure." Milo spoke quickly, a little too quickly. He turned toward the door. Once there, he seemed undecided whether or not to acknowledge Hila's presence. He re-

membered Kirby's look, and decided against it.

"I'll expect to hear from you. You've got my number?"

"Right, Milo." Kirby gripped his hand warmly. "And glad to see you back. The trip did wonders for you. Never saw you looking so good."

The door closed on the nervous Milo. Kirby stood with his back to it, scowling evilly. His lips formed the words, "That son of a bitch!"

He glanced at his watch. "Moose will be at Zoltan's with the trunk in half an hour. I'll call him then."

Hila held out her arms to him, invitingly. "My nails are dry now. I shall kiss you."

In her embrace he said thickly, "At least, you're improving. You didn't make a play for Milo."

She closed her eyes, draping long lashes over olive cheeks, and smiled the smile he could never quite fathom.

"What is the use," she murmured, "to get interested—in a dead man?"

Chapter Five

WEB AND CAMERON found the man they were looking for across the street from the Central Park West apartment. "Good old Chet Holman," Cameron quipped. "Bet the first thing he mentions is his feet."

Chet Holman lurched his two hundred twenty pounds away from the building he seemed to be holding up. "Sure glad you guys got here," he said querulously. "My dogs are killin' me."

Web tried not to smile. "Thanks, Chet. I sure appreciate this. What'd you find out?"

"Not much, I'm afraid, Web. I'm too slow for this gumshoe work." Holman waved at the endless grid of windows across the street. "Take your pick; your man could be anywhere up there. He got into the elevator before I had a chance to follow. Damn thing stopped at just about every floor going up, too."

"He didn't come down, though?"

"I don't think so. There's two doors, though; I couldn't watch 'em both."

Web cursed inwardly. A good investigator could have watched both doors. But he'd called on Merck in a hurry; and Merck had probably had to grab the only man available. Just tough luck all around that it happened to be Holman.

Web nodded. "Thanks, Chet. Dick and I will take over."

"Can't make me mad. I'm going to get these dogs of mine into a tub of hot water just as fast as I can. So long, fellas."

Cameron grinned at the broad back of the retreating Holman, then turned

back to Web. "Well, what now, Pop?"

Web shrugged. "We don't even know if our man's still in there. We try to find out, I guess." He started across the street with the change of signal. Cameron kept at his shoulder, hands in his pockets. They headed, not for the ornate front door of the apartment, but around the corner to the less fashionable street.

"Where you taking us?" Cameron demanded.

"Service entrance," Web told him. "If Milo Reeve had anything to do with that trunkload of heroin, the first place he'd want to go is where the trunk went. I'm going to find out if it came here."

The elevator operator found Web's question an easy one. "Only two trunks up here today," he told the Customs man. "One to the Heartwells on Eighteen and t'other to the Moores up on Thirty-one."

"Take us up, will you?" Web asked.

"Sure thing. Where you want to go first?"

"Makes no difference. We'll take the Moores first."

The Moores were a false alarm; Web saw that the moment he and Cameron entered the door. They'd returned from California on the Century; their trunk was in plain sight in the living-room of their apartment. The two inspectors dropped down to the eighteenth floor and rapped on the door of the Heartwells.

"Want to make a bet?" asked Cameron sardonically as they waited.

Web was glad he didn't take his partner up. The Heartwells, a well-preserved couple in their seventies, were packing the trunk they'd had sent up from the basement, in preparation for a trip to Saratoga. Web apologized for disturbing them and bowed out.

"Well, that's that," Cameron commented. They took the passenger elevator down. Web said nothing till they reached the lobby. There Cameron started for the door. Web hesitated.

"You're not still chasing that wild hair?" Cameron demanded. "Look, Web, face it: You're licked on this thing."

Web said nothing.

"That Reeve is probably with some dame, bedded down for the night. If he's still here, that is."

Web said, "Dick, I'm going to hang around, but you don't have to. You look pretty rocky."

Cameron grinned. "I feel rocky. Pop, I wouldn't mind if I thought there was the slightest chance of getting anything out of this. Why don't you let it ride, Web? There's no percentage in giving your all for dear old USCB."

Web slapped him on the shoulder. "Go home and soak your feet in hot water."

"I've got better medicine for what ails me. And I take it at the other end." Cameron made a circle with finger and thumb. "Well, good luck. Maybe Reeve'll set you in with his tomato when he comes down, tomorrow."

Web sought out a phone in the apartment lobby and dialed his office. He got Lou Fisch on the wire. "Did Merck call in?"

"He did," Lou Fisch said. "He checked the Macedonia's baggage-decks. Six thousand forty-one pieces listed."

Web grabbed the mouthpiece. "The hell you say! Six thousand forty-two pieces went off the dock!"

"I know it."

"How many stamps issued?"

"Six thousand forty-one."

Web knew elation. "All right, you suspicious bastard! Now will you admit I was right?"

Lou's raspy voice retained its calm. "I've got Merck rechecking the decks for an error. It could happen, Web."

"Not likely. And you're not going to tell me that a trunk went off the pier without a stamp."

"I'm not going to tell you anything, until that recount is in, my bucko."

"All right. Has Merck made a breakdown to compare the stamp stubs and decks with the ship's records of trunks aboard?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, have him try that. And I'll bet you a new hat that the discrepancy is a trunk—the trunk, the one I'm still looking for."

There was a pause at the other end of the line. "Maybe," Lou Fisch said at last.

Web hung up, grinning at the black instrument. That "maybe" from Lou Fisch was as good as a medal with palms from anyone else. With one cryptic word Lou had come over to his side. Sure, he'd continue to check for error—he wouldn't be Lou Fisch if he didn't—but Web knew that now he had the chief's confidence, the sky was the limit, if he needed it.

He hoped he wouldn't need it. He was morally certain that if Milo Reeve came to this building, the heroin was in this building.

HE caught himself. For the first time he'd thought of it as heroin, rather than a trunk full of contraband goods. Maybe they were separated by this time. In that case, Milo Reeve would be following the dope, not the trunk. Web made a quick mental calculation. Two hundred kilos of heroin—a trunkful—would fill seven or eight ordinary traveling-bags.

He asked the desk clerk.

No such concentration of traveling-bags had gone up the front way, the clerk assured him. Had he tried the freight-elevator operator?

"I was back there asking him about trunks," Web replied. "Didn't think of bags, though."

The clerk smiled. "Then neither would Dave. Maybe you'd better try him again."

The wizened pensioner at the freight elevator shook his head and peered at Web through watery, myopic eyes. "You're the fella that was askin' about trunks a few minutes ago, ain't you? No, nuthin' like that went up here, mister. Been a pretty quiet day, tell you the truth."

"You're sure?" Web persisted. "Nothing big—just the two trunks you told me about before?"

"That's all." The man paused. "'Course, there was the trunk that went up by mistake. I don't hardly count that."

"Mistake?" Web could not keep the eagerness out of his voice. "What was that?"

"That's right. Went up—come right down again. Same delivery-man."

"Where did it go? Whose apartment?"

"Le'see— That was Kirby, on Forty, Mr. Kirby, he rode up with the trunk. You want to go up an' see him?"

"I certainly do," Web said fervently.

HILA looked her visitor up and down, slowly, with quite evident approval.

"Come in, Mr. Webley. I'm most curious to know what the Customs Bureau could possibly want with me."

Web slipped his shield back into his pocket and followed Hila into the room. Dick Cameron had suggested a girl friend, but nothing had prepared Web for the electrifying vision before him.

He got back to the business at hand with some difficulty. "A routine check-up, miss. I understand a trunk from the *Macedonia* was delivered here this afternoon."

She raised flawless eyebrows. "The *Macedonia*? I am afraid you are mistaken." She shrugged delicately-rounded shoulders beneath the jade-green fabric. "I have not taken an ocean trip for some time."

"No. It is our information that the trunk was brought in by a Mr. Milo Reeve."

Web watched her closely without seeming to do so. The name produced no perceptible reaction.

"Why would his luggage come here—whatever he is?"

"That's one of the things I'd like to find out."

"It's curious you should ask about a trunk," she said, "because I gave one away not half an hour ago."

Web leaned forward a fraction of an inch. "Gave one away?"

She smiled. "Yes. But it was my own, not anything belonging to—what was the name you mentioned?"

"Milo Reeve."

"Yes, of course. Mr. Kirby called some salvage organization or other; he had the man bring up the trunk from the basement; I removed a few things I wanted to keep, and the man took it away."

The story sounded all right. The beautiful face before him was bland and guileless; the smoky eyes that met his did not waver. Still, Web could not rid himself of an uneasy SOS.

"A salvage organization, you said? Which one?"

She held out slim fingers in a helpless gesture. "Mr. Kirby phoned for me."

Mr. Kirby. Husband? Not likely. This girl suggested many things, but a husband was not among them.

"Is Mr. Kirby here?" Web asked.

She smiled, shook her head. "I'm sorry, no. Is it so important?"

"Probably not. But we have to check up, where contraband is concerned."

"Contraband." She drew out the word. "It has an exciting sound."

Web said nothing.

"I could ask Mr. Kirby to call you when he returns. He will undoubtedly be able to give you the information."

Web considered. If this willow-filly were telling the truth, it wouldn't matter. And if she weren't, the information he could expect would be

of no use to him anyway. He made his voice crisp. "That won't be necessary, thank you." He got to his feet.

She opened the door for him. "It would be no trouble."

He could not decide whether the faint smile playing around the corners of her perfect lips held a hint of mockery, or not.

Hila closed the door, turned to face a coldly-frowning Kirby coming out of the bedroom.

"Pack up," he said shortly. "We're getting out of here."

Hila made no move to comply. "You are not worried, my sweet?"

"You're damned right I'm worried. The Feds on our trail, and us sitting on the biggest haul of stuff in—"

"He will never find it," Hila said indolently. "He will spend the next week tracing the salvage organizations. You did not like the way I handled him?"

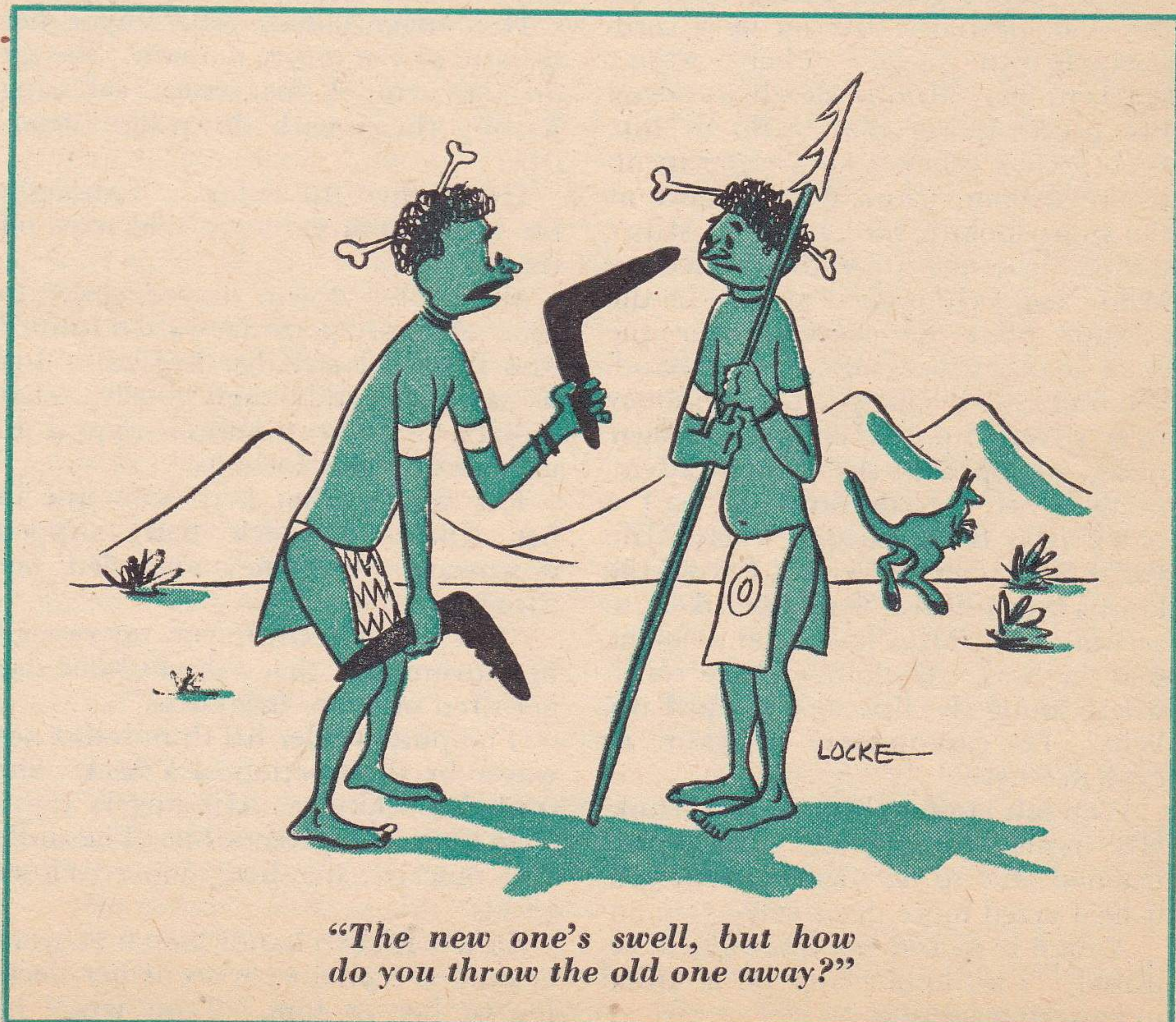
Kirby was in a closet, digging out traveling-bags. He came out, white and furious. "The way you handled him! The way you handle everything in pants!"

"He *was* rather attractive," Hila murmured reminiscently.

"Why didn't you get into bed with him while you were at it?" Kirby demanded. He threw the bags on the rug. "Get moving!" He rammied a fist into his palm. "That bastard Milo. Oh, no, *he* didn't rat!"

Hila moved indolently toward the bags. "You are overwrought, my darling."

He glared at her. "Do you realize I've got a buyer coming here any



"The new one's swell, but how do you throw the old one away?"

minute?" He made a dive for the phone, savagely dialed a number. He waited while the buzz sounded at the other end. "If I can catch him—" Kirby murmured.

A voice answered finally. Kirby clutched the instrument. "Nellis? You know who this is . . . Yeah, yeah! . . . Listen, I'm glad I caught you; there's been a switch in plans. Now here's where you meet me—"

He gave an address in lower Manhattan, repeated it carefully, then hung up. He did not go back to the job of packing immediately. Instead, he dialed another number.

"Moose?" he said cautiously. "Everything under control? Good. We'll be over soon." A cold glint turned the gray-rimmed eyes into twin menaces. "I'll have a job for you, Moose—a job you'll like. No, I can't tell you over the phone. You wait for me."

DEATH keeps no office hours; the morgue is open twenty-four hours a day. There the tragedies of the city play out their last act. Mourners creep in, red-eyed and frightened, to inspect the latest crop of human refuse. They pass the marble slabs that hold the bloated by drowning, the riddled by gunfire, the crushed by falls, the death's-heads of malnutrition—the ones from whom life has been wrenched violently, the ones who have let go their hold on life gladly for good and sufficient reasons of their own.

None came to mourn Milo Reeve. Only one person was interested in him, and he not from pity.

Web looked glumly at the body on the slab, partially covered by a carelessly-thrown sheet. There wasn't much to see. Milo in death was even less prepossessing than Milo in life. Web flicked ashes from a cigarette to the tiled floor, threw a last glance at the angry-looking bullet-hole in Milo's temple, the tag unfeelingly tied to Milo's toe. He turned away. In the morgue office he checked over the dead man's belongings. Keys, handkerchief, small change, paper money in a silver clip. A couple of sugar cubes, wrapped in the printed advertisement of a restaurant not half a block away from the spot where Milo Reeve had met his end. Cards—the kind a paint dealer would be likely to accumulate. Milo had been what he said he was, all right. Only somewhere along the line he'd slipped up. Why? For easy money? It wasn't in evidence here.

Web felt close to the missing trunk. His mouth went grim. If he had listened only to his own inner hunch, if he'd acted more decisively—

A man is picked up, questioned, released. Two hours later he is killed in gangland fashion.

Web's thoughts switched to the Eurasian girl. There was no direct connection between her and Milo Reeve. But she'd lied to him. No salvage organization in town had picked up a trunk from that address on Central Park West—Web had checked them all.

Idly Web turned over the business cards. A few bore notations—telephone numbers, sums of money.

Web stopped short. A word sprang at him from the card in his hand:

Zebulon. . . . Pay dirt!

Chapter Six

HILA PACED THE ROOM like a caged tiger, her eyes flashing. "Is this the end of your promises? Is this what you have brought me to?"

She halted, hands planted on slim hips. Her scornful gaze swept the dust-laden mohair settee, something out of a junk-dealer's basement, the chipped iron bedstead that even a junk dealer would not think of offering for sale.

"Sit down, Hila, sit down. Relax," said Kirby.

Her tiny nostrils flared. "Yes, that's right. I should relax, while you bungle the biggest chance a man ever had!"

"What do you mean, *bungle!* Could I help it if that scabby Milo ran to the cops?" Then, placatingly, "Look, honey. It's just for tonight. You heard me make a date with Nellis. He'll be here with the dough, take the stuff—and then it's Easy Street for us, baby. Anything you want."

Her anger faded. She forgot her distaste of the musty mohair. She sat on the arm of his settee, caressing Kirby's cheek with down-soft fingertips.

He grinned up at her. "I thought the mention of money would wipe off that pout."

She smiled down, moved closer to him. A heady perfume wafted toward him from between her breasts. "Let us say," she said languorously, "that dollars—in large numbers—appeal to my more tender feelings."

His fingers, that had been lost in her silken, jet-black hair, slipped downward until they encircled her throat.

"Did it ever occur to you, my sweet," he murmured, "that I might some day get tired of your—frankness?"

The pulse under his thumb did not waver by the fraction of a beat. She smiled mockingly. His fingers tightened almost imperceptibly. The smile still mocked; her body moved closer to his.

Slowly Kirby's hands loosened, went around the pliant curves of her back, locked her to him. "You win," he

whispered. Then fiercely, "But don't be too sure. You might not always win."

"But the danger is exciting, no?" she murmured.

They heard a key in the lock. Kirby stiffened.

"Well, well! A touching scene," said a voice.

The newcomer was small enough in stature almost to qualify as a dwarf, but aside from eyes that bulged, frog-like, behind thick lenses, he was not misshapen. He removed a battered black felt hat from hair that immediately sprang out to an untidy bulk.

"I didn't hear you coming," Kirby said.

"I doubt if you could have heard a regiment of soldiers in full parade, a moment ago."

"All right, all right," Kirby said with irritation. "What's on your mind, Zoltan?"

"There is plenty on my mind," the dwarf called Zoltan said mildly. "You might explain why you suddenly ship the trunk here, then descend on my humble abode yourself and proceed to pitch woo just as if a sizable fortune in heroin were not sitting like a keg of dynamite in the next room."

KIRBY took on a more reasonable tone. "I couldn't explain over the phone. We had a visit from the Feds." Zoltan's froglike eyes opened wider. "Oh, don't worry, they didn't get anything. It was that rat Milo. He spilled his guts."

"So you had to bring the stuff here!"

"I couldn't help it. I had a buyer coming; he'll be here any minute now. I couldn't keep the junk in the apartment." His eyes brightened; he went over and slapped the diminutive Zoltan on the back. "We made it, man! We made it!" he cried exuberantly. "I admit I had my doubts, plenty of times, but we got it through! Come on, don't you want to take a look at it?"

Zoltan stood his ground as the other started for the door. "I can wait," he said coldly. "I'm not interested in dope—only in money. How soon will your buyer be here?"

As at a signal, there was a knock at the door—three short raps, a pause, and three more. Kirby grinned at Zoltan.

"How's that for timing?"

The man Kirby let in the door was large and florid. He wore a gray suit, and when he took off his hat, the high, bare dome of his head glistened with sweat. He smiled nervously at Kirby, looked with curiosity at Zoltan, who returned his gaze with an owlish stare. Kirby made no move to introduce anyone; but when the bald-headed man's eyes rested on Hila, the newcomer bowed slightly.

"The merchandise is in the laboratory, next door," Kirby said.

The bald man had difficulty pulling his eyes away from Hila. Kirby's mouth tightened.

"Yes," the bald man said at length. "I'd like to see it."

Kirby stood still. "And of course, we'd like to see your money, Mr. Nellis."

Nellis reached into his breast pocket. Both Kirby and Zoltan stiffened slightly until his hand reappeared, holding a leather wallet. "I figure to take one kilo tonight."

Kirby's head jerked up. "One kilo!"

"Yes; I brought a thousand dollars."

"A kilo! What the hell do you— You agreed to take it all!"

"And I will," said the bald one pleasantly, "if the kilo is up to snuff. My boss wants to test it."

Kirby spluttered. "Test it! What do you think we're trying to do? Gyp you?"

Nellis smiled. "It's been done. At any rate, that's the deal." He opened the wallet and took out a sheaf of bills. "I've got a grand here, for a kilo. I want to see all the rest, to be sure you've got what you claim. If this kilo shapes up all right, I'll be back tomorrow with the cash for the whole shebang."

He waved the bills, then stopped suddenly. In Zoltan's hand was a gun, pointing at his stomach.

"Frisk him," Zoltan said crisply to Kirby.

Kirby stepped forward, ran his hands through the bald man's pockets. He took the wallet and bills. "That's all," he reported. "Just what you see here."

"Give it back to him," Zoltan commanded.

Kirby hesitated.

"I said give it back!" The dwarf bit off the words. The gun looked oversize in his tiny hand.

Kirby complied. Nellis took the money, held it as if he were not sure what to do with it.

ZOLTAN took a step toward Nellis. "Now get this: You're not the only one we can sell this to, mister. This is no chicken deal. The mob that picks this up won't have to worry about running out for a year—and there's going to be more where this came from. Now suppose you chase your tail out of here and come back with the cash we talked about, by"—the dwarf glanced briefly at his watch—"midnight, or no deal. Understand?"

The bald man nodded.

"This is no crap," Zoltan assured him. "Five minutes after twelve, we make a phone call, and you're out."

Nellis shook his coat back into shape. He put the bills into his wallet

and returned the wallet to his inner pocket. His eyes drifted involuntarily toward Hila, sitting motionless on the stained and dusty settee, a faint mocking smile playing at the corners of her perfect lips.

Nobody said anything as he went out the door.

WEB stared at the Doty Building. In the heart of the city's warehouse district, the street was deserted after nightfall, and the building looked just as deserted. No windows faced the street, no light came from within. Web read the faded, chipped sign over the door with difficulty by the faint light of a corner lamppost a hundred feet away.

The Doty Building. Kirby, for all his legerdemain in spiriting a trunk full of dope through Customs, had slipped up. He'd been stupid enough to overlook the fact that a truckman would recall delivering a trunk to his Central Park West apartment, then being ordered to take it right down again. Web had found the right truckman easily enough; it had just been a matter of feeding enough dimes into the telephone.

He had barely time to flatten himself in the shadows when the door of the Doty Building opened and a man came out, walking rapidly in Web's direction. Web held his breath, but the other did not glance into the shadows.

Web waited until the man had rounded the first corner. No one else came out of the building. Web ran quickly and noiselessly to the corner. His man was heading for a lone sedan parked across the street. In a moment he'd be in it and away. Web could not make out the license number; he played with the chances of making a dash across the open street.

Now he could see the other man more clearly in the dim light of a not-too-distant street lamp. He was heavy-set, and walked with a certain flat solidity. When he got to the car he put his hand on the door-handle, then stopped as if in thought. Web saw him take off his hat, and made out the gleam of a nearly-bald head. The man mopped his forehead and the inside of his hat with a handkerchief. Apparently seized with a sudden decision, he took his hand off the car's door and continued walking rapidly down the street. Web divined his destination—a wan light on the far corner. A bar.

The bald man disappeared inside the bar. Web followed, making a mental note of the car's license as he passed it. He waited a minute to take the edge off the coincidence, then entered the bar.

One customer hunched over the bar, but he was not Web's quarry.

The shirt-sleeved bartender glanced up when Web entered, and put down the glass he was polishing. The bald man was nowhere in sight.

Web hooked an elbow on the bar and looked down to the far end. The barkeep came over. Web asked for a bourbon, laid his money down so he wouldn't have the barkeep on his neck in case of a fast exit.

Presently the folding door of a telephone booth at the rear opened and through the mirror Web saw the bald-headed man emerge. He walked over to the bar and ordered a drink in a tone so low Web could not hear him.

While Baldy waited, he casually looked over his two fellow-drinkers. Web paid him no attention whatever.

Baldy finished his drink at a gulp, paid and went out. He passed Web without a glance.

Web counted twenty, very slowly. Then he ambled out the door.

The shadowy street was empty to the eye, but the car was still in place. Web directed his steps to take him past it.

NO more than a shadow and a hunch warned him. He whirled in time to intercept a flailing, pile-driver arm. Ducking sharply, Web brought a fist up into the middle of a large blob of black that appeared out of the still-darker black, and was rewarded with a grunt of pain. He chopped his other fist into the same place, with less effect. Baldy had moved out of the shadows by now, giving up the advantage of surprise for better room to swing.

Neither man said a word, each reserving his strength for battle. Web felt lightning along his jaw as a glancing fist caught it obliquely; he shuddered to think what might have happened if he'd taken the blow full on.

Web's opening came without warning. Thinking with his body rather than with his mind, he shot his right into a gray highlight that must be Baldy's face. It was. The pain of contact paralyzed Web's knuckles and traveled up his arm clear to the elbow, but satisfaction erased the pain. Even before the bald man sagged slowly to the sidewalk, Web knew the fight was over.

Breathing hard, Web turned his fallen foe over and looked into his face. Bald head, fringed with sparse gray-blond hair, the slightly bulbous nose, the loose, blood-flecked mouth were put through a mental rogues' gallery, but rang no bells.

There was no time for extended speculation. Web was surprised that the fight in the otherwise quiet street had not already drawn some attention from the bar. He grabbed two handfuls of coat-front and painfully dragged the heavy inert body to the

car. He loosed one handhold long enough to open the rear door, and heaved his erstwhile opponent inside like a sack of grain.

A quick frisk by expert fingers told him the other carried no weapons. Web tugged a wallet out of the breast pocket of the coat. A driver's license was made out in the name of Alexander Nellis; a couple of miscellaneous cards confirmed the name.

The wallet was fat with bills. They were all fifties, and there were twenty of them.

Web's ear, constantly attuned to danger, gave him the first warning. He snapped off his cigarette lighter only seconds before the car rounded the corner—a car traveling without lights. He crouched down to wait for it to pass.

BUT the car didn't pass—not immediately. Web heard the motor slack as it drew near. Muffled voices came over the noise: "This it?" . . . "Yeah." Then, cautiously, "Nellis?"

Web acted on impulse. He clapped Baldy's hat on his own head. "Yes. Get out of here, quick!"

An object came in through the open window. At the same instant the other car gunned away. Web leaped up and peered out the rear window, straining his eyes at the dark car fast disappearing around the nearest corner. He could not tell with certainty the make of the car, much less scan the license-plate.

He scrabbled about in the blackness for the object the men had thrown in. It was bulky, soft, leathery to the touch—Web's fingers made out a handle. He didn't spend too much time examining it. He had to get out before one of those guys had time to realize that the voice he'd heard wasn't the voice of Baldy, Nellis, or whoever the bald man was.

He slipped out of the car with the satchel under his arm in time to see the beam of the headlights. They'd done the double-take, all right, and whipped around. In another moment the headlights themselves would be bearing down on him.

The street offered few chances for concealment. The doorways of buildings were worse than useless: they were traps. But there was little time for choice. The same instant the car's headlights turned the corner, their beam sweeping down the long musty street, Web's body found a slit between the walls. Web's back scraped against unfinished mortar and the clogging smell of brick assailed his nose as he sidestepped his way deeper into the crevice.

The debris of decades underfoot made the going precarious. It seemed he was going uphill; Web knew a moment of fear that he would find

the rear completely blocked. That *would* make a sitting duck of him. Even a lousy marksman could scarcely miss when slugs ricocheted off the brick walls like billiard balls.

But even as he worried, he felt the debris sloping downhill; all at once there were no brick walls pressing him before and behind, and he could breathe air again. He surmised that he was in an alley. One direction was as good as another. He walked swiftly but cautiously to the nearest corner and listened.

He listened for a time; the silence was the honest silence of emptiness, not the false silence of a menace about to pounce. Web ventured out, rounded the next corner.

The street was empty. Both cars were gone. They had given up.

Web looked at the satchel in his hand. The catch gave at a touch. Web looked inside, and gasped.

The satchel was filled with bills. Twenties . . . fifties . . . hundreds. Hundreds and thousands of dollars!

Chapter Seven

WEB STARED at the money-filled satchel. The implication it presented was crystal clear. Money like this, passed from one hand to another in such devious fashion, could have no honest purpose. But it could well be the price of a shipment of heroin—a very large shipment: a trunkful.

The satchel banged against his legs as he headed for the Doty Building at a fast clip. If he had had any doubt that the trunk he was seeking lay on the other side of that blank wall, he no longer held the doubt.

He pushed open the grimy front door. A lot of Z's, the truck driver had said. That was all he remembered to connect with the address where he'd delivered the trunk. There weren't many names to choose from on the board inside the door. One stood out immediately.

**ZOLTAN, DR. ZEBULON
INDUSTRIAL CHEMIST RM 304**

Web fingered a card in his pocket, a card with the word *Zebulon* scribbled on it. So Milo Reeve hadn't pulled the name out of the air. Web went up the stairs—the Doty Building didn't offer an elevator. After a second's hesitation he knocked at the door where the legend of Dr. Zebulon Zoltan was repeated.

A dwarfish man with wild hair opened the door and peered at Web through almost opaque lenses.

"Dr. Zoltan?"

The dwarf nodded.

"Nellis sent me."

It was all Web had, and he wasn't sure it would work. Zoltan looked

him over without speaking; then he opened the door wider and motioned Web inside.

Web looked around the room. It was the doctor's sleeping-quarters, obviously; and the good doctor was not particular about his surroundings when he slept.

But the furniture, no matter how dingy, was not dangerous. Web wished he could say as much of the black-haired man with gray-rimmed lizardlike eyes who watched him tensely, unblinkingly, from the far corner of the room, his hand in the pocket of his coat.

Web was under no illusions. He was walking on eggs.

"Who are you?" Kirby demanded.

"Nellis sent him," said Zoltan.

Kirby stared at Web suspiciously. "What's the matter with Nellis?"

"He got hung up," Web said. "He couldn't come."

"Fine business!" Kirby grunted.

Zoltan's voice took on an edge. He was looking at the satchel in Web's hand. "What difference does it make as long as we get the dough?"

Kirby's eyes dropped to the satchel. "You got it there?"

Web nodded.

"Let's have it."

Web shook his head. "I want to see the stuff first."

"Hand it over." Zoltan's voice carried authority; the gun in his hand carried more authority. Slowly Web handed him the satchel. Zoltan pocketed the gun and opened the bag. Behind his thick lenses his eyes gleamed with avarice; he let out his pent-up breath audibly.

KIRBY came close to Web, studied him curiously. "Don't I know you?" he demanded.

"Never saw you before," Web said.

Kirby was not convinced. "There's something—I can't place it—"

Web prayed for an interruption; for once his prayer was answered. The door opened.

"Ah, more company! I love company."

Web turned at the sound of the rich, throaty voice. His heart lost a beat at the sight of the girl provocatively framed in the doorway of the inner room. This time it was not her loveliness that caught at his throat. Her long-lashed slant eyes were on him contemplatively, the smile at the corners of her lips enigmatic. She could destroy him with a word, and Web could only wait helplessly for her to speak that word.

Kirby rushed up to her with the satchel he had torn out of Zoltan's hands. "Hila, darling," he shouted. "Look!" He pulled out the thick pads of bills, riffled them before her eyes. "Look at it!"

Her eyes rested on the money momentarily. "Money. Very nice, my dearest. There are so many beautiful things to spend money on."

Again she was eyeing Web with languorous, almost insulting deliberation. She seemed about to speak, when Zoltan interrupted curtly:

"Ben, don't act like a child. Let's get this business over with first."

"Sure, sure." Kirby spoke nervously. Avarice broke out over his face like sweat as he contemplated the money in his hand. He turned to Web. "You wait here."

WEB nodded. Zoltan had already gone into the other room, taking the satchel of money. Kirby started to follow, hesitated.

"Hila," he began.

Hila dropped into a seat. "I shall stay here."

Kirby's face suffused with anger. He opened his mouth, but Zoltan's commanding voice came from the other room. "Ben! Don't be all night!"

Kirby hesitated, shot a glance of ill-concealed malevolence in Web's direction, and went out.

Web took a step toward Hila. She put a finger to her lips; her eyes indicated the other room. The voices could be heard plainly, in excited conversation. Web nodded, took out a pack of cigarettes, offered them. "Care for one?"

A slow smile spread over her perfect features. "Thank you. I'd love it."

His hand cupped a lighter for her. She held the hand, brought his face close to hers. Her perfume struck his nostrils.

"He knows your voice," she whispered. "Get out—quick."

He nodded.

"Thank you so much," she said aloud.

Web sized up people quickly, tabbed them by their codes. Kirby was easy, a compound of avarice, low cunning, and unreasoning jealousy. Zoltan was somewhat different. His eyes had lighted up at the sight of the bills, but he was not in this for the money alone. Rather, his greater satisfaction came from his skill in bringing a dangerous, exacting job to a brilliant, successful conclusion.

Both these men were dangerous, but more dangerous than either was this slim, exciting creature before him. What made her tick? What was she after? Web would have thought she would go where the money was; but she was betraying Kirby. Web could not down the uncomfortable feeling that here was a woman who despised all men, used all men, took a perverse joy in the power she wielded over them. And he could trust her as far as he could throw a locomotive.

He capped his lighter as Kirby appeared in the doorway. The flesh-pocketed eyes were suspicious, inimical. Kirby beckoned Web with his head.

Web mashed out the cigarette he had just kindled. Keeping his face a mask, he preceded Kirby through the door.

The back of his head exploded into spiraling light that blotted out the room and the world. . . .

Consciousness came back to Web; and instantly he wished it hadn't, for consciousness was unadulterated pain. At first the pain was everywhere, but slowly it localized, concentrated in his head. His head was a red-hot brazier of burning nerve-ends.

He tried to put his hand up, but something prevented it from moving. It was tied, with his other hand and his feet, to the chair in which he was sitting.

Slowly the world shimmered back into reality. He was alone; this was the inner room. He'd had just a glimpse of it when he crossed the threshold, an instant before Kirby had lowered the boom on him.

The room was as neat and spotless as the other had been filthy and neglected. Here table-high counters ran along two walls, meeting at a monel sink in the corner. Shelves held gleaming chemical glassware, carboys of reagents stood on higher shelves, upended with rubber tubes coming out of the rubber corks, ready for instant use.

But the laboratory itself kept Web's attention only for a moment, because, through the haze of pain he saw—the trunk.

It stood in the far corner. Covered with hotel stickers from Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bombay, Cairo, Marseille, it was no different from thousands of trunks Web had seen and examined on the docks during his years with Customs.

Maddeningly, the trunk was turned so that Web could not readily see if there was a Customs stamp on the seam. Ignoring the need to free himself from his bonds, he began hitching his chair—carefully at first, and then, when there was no immediate sound from the other room, with less caution.

He'd almost made it, when they came in. With Kirby and the dwarf Zoltan was a huge, mooselike hulk of a man whom Web had never seen before.

Web stopped his efforts. He said, "Nice deal you hand your customers. Is this the way you do business?"

Kirby brought his livid face close. "It is when the customers pay off in counterfeit money!"

"Coun—" But Web caught himself with an effort.

Zoltan came forward with the leather satchel. He yanked out a stiff pad of bills and slashed them viciously across Web's face. "So you thought you could get away with this, eh? It is bad enough to be cheated, but to be taken for a fool—that is what I will not support. That is what you will pay for!"

Web licked his lip, tasted blood. He'd tabbed the little man right. That's what would burn him.

There was no use denying the accusation. Zoltan was too palpably livid to be putting on an act. So that was why the men in the darkened car had been so free with an apparent fortune—and why they had given up the chase so readily.

Zoltan had turned away and lighted a Bunsen burner. With meticulous care he began to feed the bills to the flames.

Kirby watched him nervously. "You oughtn't to do that," he protested. "That stuff may be queer, but it's good queer. We could keep it—"

His voice trailed off at the look he got from Zoltan.

"You *would* think of that! No dice, Ben. I want a clean deal out of this, not a headache wondering when you'll be picked up passing funny money and start blabbing, like Milo."

Kirby was indignant. "You know I wouldn't blab!"

"Shut up," said Zoltan wearily. He looked up from his burner, caught Web's eye. "As for you, my friend, we've got plans for you. Plans that will make Nellis think twice before he tries a stunt like this again."

Web chilled at the icy tones.

Kirby had turned to Zoltan. "It'll take all night to burn the stuff that way. Come on, the incinerator's faster."

Zoltan hesitated, turned off the Bunsen burner. Moose lurched upright from the doorframe where he had been watching and listening with a deceptive air of thoughtfulness, while he champed a toothpick between horselike teeth.

Zoltan glanced in Web's direction. "He's all right?" he asked Moose.

Moose nodded. "Don't worry about him. He'll stay."

Web said, "You know Nellis will be back here if I don't show."

Kirby stopped at the door. "That's what we're waiting for, chum."

As soon as he was alone, Web tested his bonds. His feet were tied to the chair rungs with twisted strips of white cloth, and he had reason to believe that his hands were bound behind him with the same material. It was efficient enough.

He glanced longingly at the Bunsen burner. If Zoltan had only left it alight! But he hadn't, and Web ex-

amined the room for other aids to freedom.

There was plenty of glass. He might break a flask, but the noise would be sure to bring the men back. Besides, he'd have no way of bracing the glass so that the edge would do him any good.

His eyes lifted higher, to the inverted carboys. The nearest one was labeled HNO³CONC. Web's teeth went on edge. Fuming nitric acid would do the trick, all right—but at a cost.

He forced himself not to think of the cost. He began to hitch his chair closer to the dangling hose. It was slow progress. He couldn't afford to make any noise; he knew he'd get this one chance, no more.

The pungent acid bit into his nostrils as his teeth tugged at the metal clamp on the hose. Twice he had to stop and turn his head to breathe, each time losing the small purchase he had on the recalcitrant clamp.

This was getting nowhere. Web took a deep breath and attacked the clamp in a do-or-die attempt. He got the clamp to the first notch. The acid began to drip from the end of the hose, each drop hissing and steaming as it splattered on the floor.

"Very ingenious."

For a moment Web thought he imagined the voice. Then he made out the svelte figure of Hila in the doorway.

She was smiling. "Ingenious," she repeated languidly. "And very brave."

He pulled his hands away from the acid, and yanked at his bonds. The bonds still held.

"All right," he gritted. "Go ahead and tell them."

She came closer. "Perhaps I shall not tell them."

HE gasped as he saw her go to the counter, push aside a large stone mortar and pestle, pick up a razor-sharp scalpel. She came to him, holding the knife, slipped behind him where he could no longer see her.

Web held his breath. A moment later his bonds were parted.

He tore away the shreds of cloth, rubbed his raw skin, turned to the girl. "Thanks," he said. "I don't know why you did that, but thanks."

She put a fragrant hand over his mouth. "You must hurry. They'll be back." She urged him toward the door.

He shook his head. The trunk—he had to see the trunk. He turned.

But she fought his first step away from the door like a lovely, lithe wildcat. There was no mistaking her terror.

She all but dragged him into the dingy bedroom, opened the door, and looked cautiously up and down the corridor.

"It's clear," she said. "I must talk to you."

"Yes. Tomorrow?"

She nodded. "I don't know what time I can get away—"

"I'll be at the Cosmo," he said. "I'll wait all afternoon."

"The Cosmo. Yes. I'll do my best."

He started to go but she held on to him. "Wait. First you must hit me."

"Hit—you?"

She nodded urgently. "If you want to save my life. They will suspect, otherwise. They will kill me."

He got it then. It wasn't going to be easy, but there was no time to waste. "Close your eyes." . . .

The sidewalk outside the Doty Building was as deserted as before. Web glanced automatically toward the spot where Nellis' car had been parked. It was gone, of course. He started up the street, rubbing the knuckles of his right hand that still tingled from the contact with the girl's lovely, rounded jaw. Was he supposed to feel like a heel? Maybe not; but he couldn't help it. . . .

This time there was no warning. An arm snaked around his neck from behind, cut off his breath. A knee in his back took him off balance. Web could recognize an expert mugging, even on the receiving end.

He went down, fighting and gagging for breath. He had confusing impressions of sudden, blinding headlights that whipped into sight from nowhere, the whine of a motor, the dry screech of tires. Then there were two on him instead of one; he was hustled, and not gently, into the back seat of a car. The car shot ahead while somebody pushed something over his hand, something that clicked, and clicked again.

His captor heaved to the seat beside him and jerked him up. The movement sent agonizing spasms through one acid-scarred wrist.

Web looked up to see Nellis wiping his florid brow with a handkerchief held in his far hand.

There was a reason for using his far hand—his near hand was attached to Web's by a shiny steel handcuff.

Web stared at the restraining handcuff incredulously. He tried to control himself, but he couldn't. He broke into Gargantuan laughter.

Nellis fixed him with a startled eye, and the driver, ripping the car through the lower Manhattan streets, turned to look at him grimly.

"You won't think it's so funny when you get to the Tombs and start serving a one-to-fourteen in Atlanta," Nellis commented.

"I can't help it," Web gasped. "After all this—the law!"

"You're damn right, the law," the driver grunted.

"Secret Service?"

"Narcotics."

"So that's how you get those piles of queer to toss around!"

It was the driver's turn to be startled. "You mean they tumbled? That was good stuff!"

Web went into another burst of uncontrollable mirth.

"What's the big joke?" demanded Nellis.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," chuckled Web.

Chapter Eight

TENDERLY Web rubbed his raw and itchy wrists. He looked across the desk at Lou Fisch, then to the other chairs, occupied now by Dick Cameron and Alexander Nellis.

"This goes to prove one thing I've been hammering at for years," Lou Fisch was saying. "There should be closer co-operation between bureaus." He glared over his glasses, first at Nellis, then at Web. "Jumping Moses! Customs and Narcotics playing peekaboo with each other! What the newspapers wouldn't do with that one!"

Web winced, while Nellis mopped his brow.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather," Nellis said uncomfortably, "when we got this guy to the Tombs and he turns out to be a law-man himself."

"All right," Fisch cut in. "It's water under the bridge. Now what we've got to do is clear this thing up—together."

Web smiled inwardly. No more talk about the trunk's being a figment of his imagination. Lou Fisch was convinced—and as concerned as Web was when he took the transatlantic call from the mysterious Zebulon. He was ready to do business, to throw every available resource into the problem now.

"First of all"—Lou Fisch was looking at Nellis now—"let's recognize where we're together and where we're apart on this deal. You want to stop that heroin from circulating."

"You're damned right we do," exploded Nellis. "Two hundred kilos! The biggest score in the Bureau's history!"

"Biggest in Customs history, too," Lou Fisch conceded. "But I'm going to ask you to do something you're not going to like, Nellis."

The Narcotics man looked at him. "What's that?"

"I want you to work with Webley and Cameron here."

"Of course."

"And," Fisch drilled on, "I want you to hold off rounding up this gang until Web gives you the word."

Nellis half rose out of his seat. "Now look here—" he began; but Lou waved him down.

"Hold your horses, Nellis. The dope is important, granted. But it's a hell of a lot more important to plug the leak this outfit has found. Otherwise, nabbing this shipment and this gang means nothing. You know how the underworld works. They'll serve their term, then go back to shipping in more dope. If it can work with one trunk, it can work with two, or ten, or a hundred." He pounded each word into his desk like a nail. "We've got to clean up the Customs angle first and foremost."

Nellis subsided. His chronically flushed face was a grim study as he chewed over Lou Fisch's pronouncement. He looked at Web, then at Dick Cameron, finally back at Lou Fisch.

"Okay," he said at last. "It's all right with me. I'll have to take it up at headquarters first, though."

Lou Fisch grinned. "That's already taken care of. I was on the phone with your boss before you came in. He said he didn't think you'd buy the idea, and if you didn't, he'd have to pull you off the case. He hated to do that after you'd set the groundwork. I told him I thought I could sell you."

The slow-acting Narcotics man looked at Lou Fisch, a startled expression on his face. A moment later it gave way to a broad grin. He reached out a hand. Lou Fisch met him halfway across the desk in a solid grip.

Nellis turned to Web. "Okay, boss. What do we do first?"

"I think the first order of business," Web said soberly, "is to brief you on what we're up against." He stood up. "The *Gripsholm* is berthing this morning at Pier 32, isn't it, Dick? What do you say we take a walk down there?"

"Right," Nellis said.

WITH Cameron trailing along, Web explained Customs procedure to the Narcotics man as they watched the passengers disembarking from the *Gripsholm*.

"Before the ship docks," he said, "each passenger fills out a baggage-declaration, listing each piece of baggage he is going to declare and take off the pier. Every piece of baggage must have the passenger's name on it. The purser collects the decks—declarations—and turns them over to us on docking."

He pointed out the moving belt disgorging trunks and bags and boxes from the capacious maw of the ship. "The passengers must remain on the pier. Truckers place the pieces in their separate spaces, under the passengers' initials. If you're getting off

the ship, you go to N for Nellis and look around until you've located all your stuff. Then, not before, you line up over there at the assignment-desk. You reach the head of the line, and he assigns you an inspector. Now get this, Nellis. You can't possibly pick your inspector. The inspector can't possibly pick his passengers. He gets them in rotation."

"Mind if I butt in?" Nellis asked.

Cameron offered: "Sure. That's part of the idea of this. We've been racking our brains to find the leak, but maybe we're too close to it, too ingrown. We're hoping somebody from the outside might put his finger on it."

"Well, don't count on me too much," and Nellis grinned. "I'm not exactly topheavy in the brain department. But that last remark of yours—about the inspector's not being able to pick his passengers—I don't think it's exact."

"How do you mean?"

"Look at that line—six people in it. Let's say I'm an inspector—I'm in cahoots with Number Six—the guy in the brown suit."

Web nodded. "Go on."

"I'm working on a customer. I see Number Six get in line. It's going to take him five minutes to get to the desk. I rush through, or slow down, whatever's necessary, and I amble up just after the assignment-man has sent away Number Five. So I'm right in line to get Mister Six."

Web and Cameron looked at each other.

Cameron shook his head. "Too chancy—much too chancy."

"Another thing wrong with that," Web said, "is that the inspectors haven't the slightest idea where they're going to work until the day before the ship docks. All these men got their duty assignment last night."

Nellis thought a moment, then threw up his hands. "Set 'em up in the other alley."

Web smiled. "All right. Now the inspector and passenger go back to the proper baggage space, and the passenger points out his stuff to the inspector. It's scattered all over the space—maybe a thousand other pieces around, but he's supposed to have located it first, to save the inspector's time. The inspector opens each piece in the presence of the owner, and inspects it. If he finds nothing dutiable, he locks it and pastes a stamp on the seam. This stamp—here's one—indicates that the piece has been inspected and may now be taken off the pier. The stamp must not be disturbed until it's off the pier, or the inspection is void." He glanced at the attentive Narcotics man. "With me so far?"

Nellis, his brows knitted, grunted affirmation.

"Now: When all his pieces are inspected and stamped, the passenger locates a truckman to take them off. The truckman will move only stamped, inspected baggage. Let's follow through."

The three men walked the long pier to the gate. Web indicated the high fence. "There's no way to get off except through this gate. Outside, there are two moving stairways to take passengers and baggage to the street level. But before that, watch what happens."

NELLIS followed Web's pointing finger. At the barrier a post patrol officer in khaki examined each piece, checking the seals. He canceled each one with a rubber stamp.

Nellis watched the procedure thoughtfully. "How about bribing the inspector as you lead him to your baggage?"

"Would you risk a fortune in dope, not to mention a felony rap, on anything as uncertain as that?"

"Guess not. . . . Suppose you didn't put your name on the trunk?"

"It would get a thorough inspection anyway, to identify the owner."

"Could you get to the man who does that work?"

"Not a chance. You don't even know who he's going to be," Cameron said.

Web chimed in: "I don't see this mob depending on anything with risk attached. They've got a foolproof gimmick, and that's what we're out to find."

Nellis kept trying. "Any way to check the number of trunks leaving the pier against the number in the hold on the trip?"

Web grinned. "We did that. Milo Reeve put four trunks on the liner in France, but he declared three in New York."

"What happened to the other trunk?"

The grin wiped off Web's face. "When we know that, we'll have this damn thing licked. How did it get off the pier?"

Nellis said, "How about these stamps? What's the chance of buying one?"

"Not on your life," Cameron said sharply.

"I'll explain why," Web said. He called to a near-by inspector, "Ralph, may I see your stamp book, please?"

The inspector, trim and cool-looking in his black peaked cap and white shirt, left his perspiring passenger and extended the book. "Sure thing, Web."

Web showed the book to the Narcotics man. "You see the stamps are all serially numbered. The numbers handed out to each inspector each morning are carefully recorded. After

they're through with this ship, the men turn the books back in, along with the baggage-declarations of the passengers each man has handled; on each declaration he marks the stamps used and their serial numbers. Likewise in the stamp book—see here?—he writes the declaration number and again the number of stamps used, along with their serial numbers. Clear?"

Nellis took the stamp book and studied it. "Sounds pretty complicated."

"Not so complicated. Just that every stamp and every piece of baggage is earmarked and recorded twice." He explained further: "Take this customer of Ralph's now. He showed up with two trunks and five suitcases, and handed Ralph Declaration Number 1819. Ralph has gone through the seven pieces and sealed them all. On the declaration he has written '7 stamps used, Nos. 10918 to 10924.' On his stamp book he has entered, 'Declaration No. 1819—used 7—Nos. 10918 to 10924' and signed it. This declaration will become part of the permanent files of the Bureau. The used stamp books also are kept for future check if necessary."

HE handed the book and declaration back to the inspector, who went back to his nervous passenger. As soon as they were out of earshot, Web said, "Now, suppose you tell me how an inspector can get away with a stamp."

Nellis shrugged. "Perhaps counterfeit stamps," he suggested.

Web smiled wryly. Nellis was one to talk about counterfeit! But he only said, "I don't think so. I had a couple of our best men at the gate here when the *Macedonia* came in. They'd have spotted a phony bug in a minute. And they were alerted for trouble, too."

"Besides," Cameron offered, "here's what you're up against, with real or counterfeit stamps. The stamps come in eight different colors. You noticed Ralph's were orange. On the *Macedonia* we used white. The inspector in charge hands out a different color any time he wants to. None of the inspectors know what color will be used until they are dished out, just before the ship docks."

"You mean they use several colors for one ship?"

"No; the same color is used for all baggage on any particular ship. But the selection is purposely kept strictly offbeat. The chief inspector may issue red stamps several times running, then not use red again for a month."

Nellis let his eyes wander past them to the bustling activity of the pier, over the chaos of passengers, visitors, reporters, employees—a chaos that

somehow resolved itself into every passenger's leaving the pier with his own possessions.

"Well," he pontificated slowly, "if you're right, a trunk just can't get off the pier without a stamp—a real one. The way I see it, that allows only one answer. Those guys are getting hold of your stamps. And if you have eight colors, then, by God, they're getting all eight colors!"

Web and Cameron looked at each other. The Narcotics man's statement was a bitter pill, but it had the unmistakable ring of truth.

Chapter Nine

BETTY O'BRIEN GLANCED into the mirror thoughtfully provided by the management of the Cosmo. What she saw there should have given her supreme satisfaction; indeed, the swiveling eyes of passing males should have told her all she needed to know.

Nevertheless she had arrived a full half-hour early for her six-o'clock date with Web. She planned to make good use of the extra time in the ladies' lounge of the hotel, and to present a dazzled Web with something really special. After all, this was a date to celebrate the making-up of a lovers' quarrel—and what event in the calendar of romance is sweeter than that?

Through a kind of feminine sixth sense, Betty became attuned to a subtle change in the atmosphere of the hotel lobby. For a moment she couldn't quite put her finger on it; then her eyebrows contracted slightly, while the corners of her lips pursed into tight dimples.

The men weren't looking her way any longer.

The girl who had supplanted her was striking; Betty admitted that without rancor. Not beautiful, perhaps—but interesting. She could see how a man might go for that sloe-eyed suggestion of the harem.

Betty saw Web then. He came out of the bar, looked over the lobby. He failed to see Betty—she could understand that, for he didn't expect her for a half hour.

But what happened the next instant took her breath away.

Web's eyes alighted on the girl in the center of the lobby at the same time that she saw Web.

Then both of them, like marionettes impelled by the same string, headed directly for each other.

Betty halted in her tracks and gasped as the exotic girl greeted Web with a slow, radiant smile and an outstretched hand. Web, true, did not smile in return. He looked at her with what appeared, at that distance, a grave concern; but he took the hand offered him, and led the girl

into the darkened doorway to the hotel's bar.

Betty did not realize how clearly she was exposing her feelings until she heard a quiet, grief-laden voice at her ear.

"It is not pleasant, is it, to see the one you love go off in the arms of another?"

Betty turned. The face of the man at her shoulder was suffused with sadness, tempered by a fire she knew must be mirrored in her own.

"I could not help noticing you," the man said. "It seems we have something in common, you and I." His eyes drifted to the dark opening of the bar. "A faithless lover!"

Betty pulled herself together. "I beg your pardon," she said, a chill in her voice.

He nodded sympathetically. "I've suspected for a long time. It seems you did too."

"Please! I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about them." He looked darkly at the bar entrance. His voice broke slightly. "We—were going to be married."

"But—so are we!" Betty could not repress the exclamation, little as she wanted to confide in this man. She laughed, a little uncertainly. "Please, if you're worried about him and your fiancée, you mustn't think that for a moment. He had an appointment to meet me. It's just business, I'm sure—"

He shook his head sadly. "I wish I could believe that."

"But this is a horrible misunderstanding. Web wouldn't—I'm sure we can clear it up in a moment."

He bit his lip, as if trying to phrase his painful thoughts. "I see you're learning for the first time what I've known for months. I suspected—but I couldn't bring myself to spy on her, until I saw the letter."

Betty started. "Letter?"

He nodded. "I think it would interest you. I have it outside, in my car." When she hesitated, he added, "You should see it before you try to go in there. It is best to know the truth, believe me."

He was already leading her to the street door. "I think introductions are in order," he was saying. "My name is Kirby—Ben Kirby."

"I COULDN'T get away any sooner," Hila told Web across the tiny round table after the white-coated waiter had brought their drinks. "Ben watched me like a hawk."

"You're sure you weren't followed?" Web asked.

"Reasonably sure. I took precautions, but with Ben, you never know."

"You've put yourself on a spot, coming here, meeting me. You've cut

yourself off from Kirby. He may not know it yet, but he'll find out. And if we don't catch him before he catches you—" He left the sentence unfinished.

"You will catch him first," she said with assurance. "Ben Kirby is cunning, but he has bungled this thing horribly. He'll never get away with it."

Web studied her face. After a pause he said, "I'm going to say something that's not flattering."

She raised her lashes, intrigued. "Please do."

"I shouldn't have thought you had this kind of foresight. Kirby's got the money. I'd have thought that would be as far as you could see."

SHE traced an aimless line in the moisture of her tall, untasted glass. "There are other things in the world besides money."

"Name one."

She hesitated, drew another line in the beaded moisture. Then, "The electric chair."

He leaned forward. "You know who killed Milo Reeve? You can testify to that?"

"Perhaps. Is that what you need?"

"Later, yes. Right now, I need something else."

She said, "Before we go into that, suppose we discuss what I need."

"And that is—"

"Protection—immunity." And Hila smiled. "That other thing you mentioned—money."

"I can't promise you anything. But I'll do what I can. It depends on what your information is worth."

He glanced at his watch suddenly, then looked back toward the lobby.

"Is something the matter?" Hila wanted to know.

"I was supposed to meet someone. Will you excuse me a moment?"

Hila nodded. Web rose and went through the door into the lobby. In a moment he was back.

"She's not here yet."

Hila's beautifully arched eyebrows rose. "A lady?"

Web smiled. "The girl I'm going to marry—I hope."

Hila inclined her head. "My congratulations."

"Thanks. To get back to business—"

"By all means." Her tone was ironical, her eyes challenged him to stick to business, across a table from herself. Web found his lips dry. He wet them with his tongue.

"How did they get that trunk through Customs?"

"I'm afraid I don't know."

It was Web's turn to be ironical. "It's quite a trick, you must be aware, to get a trunk stuffed full of narcotics off a ship right under the nose of the

Customs Bureau. The scheme was somebody's idea."

"I should say it was Zoltan's."

"The little shrimp?"

"Yes. He has the real brains of the combination."

"Where does Kirby fit in?"

"Financially. Zoltan didn't have the cash to finance the plan, so he brought Ben Kirby in."

Web made another try. "Think hard. Try to remember. These guys don't send a trunk three-quarters of the way around the world unless they're damned sure they're going to get it into the country. They can't afford to fluff."

"They never talked about that. I'm sure of it."

Web studied the sensuous face.

"If you can get *that* information, the Government will make it worth your while. I'll try to get you the informer's reward for the heroin seizure. You know what that is."

She nodded, reached for her handbag. "You'll hear from me. And thank you for the drink."

"I owe you more than a drink," Web said.

Long lashes descended, half hid her smoky eyes. "Perhaps," she said languidly, "when this is all over, we can discuss—your gratitude."

As she walked down the length of the bar, every male eye turned to follow her.

Web finished his drink, then glanced at his watch. He left a bill on the table and hurried into the lobby. Betty was nowhere in sight. He found a phone, dialed Obie's number.

A few minutes later, he hooked up the receiver, more disturbed than before. Betty had left in plenty of time to keep their six-o'clock appointment.

BETTY couldn't have put her finger on the moment when she felt the first twinge of doubt. Of course there had been a flash of doubt as soon as she had committed herself to this unplanned course of action; but Kirby quickly put her at her ease about that.

He had unfortunately been mistaken about finding the letter in his car, but he knew it practically by heart, he told her. In a darkened bar, across Martinis, he spoke in hushed, halting words of Hila—of what she meant to him, how her heartless coquetry anguished him.

It was only natural for Betty to reciprocate. She told of Web, mentioning his job at Customs quite casually, as a matter of course. If Kirby's eyes widened ever so slightly at that, she failed to notice it.

He excused himself to make a phone call—but she did not connect the call with the shaggy, mooselike man who showed up at their table ten minutes later. He said he was from Customs,

and told her that Web had been in an auto smashup.

After that, of course, she was in no condition to think at all. She didn't question Kirby and the mooselike man when, on the pretext of taking her to Web, they drove her to a dingy building in lower Manhattan, led her upstairs and through a door.

Not until they pushed her into this dark room, not until she heard the key scrape on the other side of the lock, did she come to herself. Web was not here! They were not taking her to Web! The whole thing had been a ruse—but for what?

She found out soon enough that it did her no good to scream. The big man opened the door, walked up to her, and cuffed her brutally across the mouth with his open hand, so hard that the blow seemed to jar her skull.

Chapter Ten

ZOLTAN SAID, HIS VOICE dripping ice, "I don't know why I took you in on this deal!"

"Because you needed the dough, that's why," Ben Kirby shot back at him.

"I could have got the dough from somebody who wasn't a complete idiot. But no, I had to get you."

Kirby towered over the other man, but he gave the impression of a small boy meekly taking a scolding from a stern parent. "I—I was sore. If you'd seen that guy with Hila—"

"That doesn't explain why in the hell you had to kidnap this dame."

"She's his girl, I tell you. She's insurance for us. If Hila blew to the Fed—if he comes after us—we got something to bargain with."

Zoltan did not answer immediately. Put that way, it did make a modicum of sense. As they walked down the deserted corridor of the Doty Building, he heard Kirby mutter, "That bitch! I'll kill her!"

Zoltan opened the door and the two men went inside. Zoltan's eyes darted over the dingy sleeping-room. "Where is the girl?"

"In that room, other side of the lab. I got Moose watching her."

"Fine," said Zoltan. "And where's Moose?"

A muffled scrape answered his question. Zoltan ran through the laboratory. Kirby got ahead of him, ripped Moose away from a half-conscious Betty, whirled him around.

"You fool!"

Moose, slack-mouthed and flushed, looked at him stupidly for a second before he re-oriented himself to the new situation. Then he doubled his fist and advanced on Kirby.

"Nobody pushes me around—" he began.

Zoltan stepped between the two men, looked up at Moose. "Get out of here!"

He spoke, not loudly, but with infinite authority. Moose hesitated. "She was yelling," he muttered, truculence fighting apology in his tone. "She was makin' a racket—"

"Get out," said Zoltan again.

Slowly, the outsize hulk moved. Dragging his feet faintly over the floor, he went out, slamming the door behind him.

Zoltan bent over the girl, touched her temple, glanced at her heaving breast. "She's all right," he pronounced. "Just scared. We've got to get her out of here."

KIRBY made an effort to regain some of his lost authority. "Now wait a minute. We can't have her running back to that Fed, blabbing. Not while we still got *that* here."

He threw his head in the direction of the trunk in the laboratory.

Zoltan considered, straightened up. "It's a hell of a mess you got us into, but I guess there's no other way. The girl will have to stay until we make a getaway." He glared icily at the sheepish Kirby. "When's that customer coming?"

"Nine o'clock."

Zoltan glanced briefly at his watch. "Two hours."

Kirby's eyes followed the path of the vanished Moose. "Where do you think he's going?"

"What's the difference?" Zoltan said mechanically, then recovered himself. "You're right, Ben. We can't let him run around loose. Better get him."

"Me?"

"Yes. Take him to a bar or something, soften him up. But keep your eye on him. We can't let anything slip up now. Get back by nine."

Kirby's eyes narrowed. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll stay here. Somebody's got to keep this girl on ice. And you can handle Moose a lot better than I can."

He listened as Kirby's quick footfalls diminished and faded out. His thick lips quivered in a sardonic smile. He slammed the door on Betty and locked it behind him.

He went from the laboratory to the sleeping-room, directly to a side table, picked up the telephone and dialed.

A voice answered the call in a cautious monosyllable.

"Your merchandise is ready," Zoltan said. "Yes, I know you were due at nine. Would you like to close the deal at a ten percent discount? . . . Okay. Get up here right away. Half an hour, no more. Can you make it? . . . Good. Remember, thirty minutes, or the deal's off. Right, I'll expect you."

He rang off, grinning. . . .

For the dozenth time, Web looked at the clock over the registration desk. Seven-forty. The nagging worry that had been building up inside him would not down. Betty had never been this late before.

It wasn't likely he had missed her, but— Web put his problem up to the desk clerk, who looked properly blank. Web was about to turn away when the official suggested, "You might try Dyke. Just a moment, sir."

He tapped a discreet-voiced bell three times. A diminutive bellboy hopped forward and stood smartly at attention.

Web looked at him. An incredibly old, incredibly wise face topped the body of a stripling. "What can I do for you, mister?"

The clerk said, "The gentleman wants to know if you observed a lady—"

Dyke tipped a finger to his pillbox. "Right." To Web he said, "Want to come over here, mister, where we can talk?"

Web followed him to a corner of the lobby, where a decorative wall-break hid them from the desk. Here the diminutive elf halted, winked at the Customs man. "Gotta get out of old Stickyfingers' clutches, see? I don't know what this is worth to you, but I'd just as soon have it myself. . . . Catch?"

Web couldn't help grinning. "I catch. It's worth five, if you can help me."

"Don't you worry about me, mister. If the lady was here, I seen her. Got one of those photographic minds, I have. The old camera eye—sees everything, forgets nothing. That's no marlarkey. Try me."

Web described Betty, and Dyke nodded. "I seen her."

"You did? When did she come in?"

"She was here same time you came in."

Web was startled. "What?"

"That's right. Only you couldn't see her, account of that dish over in the corner, the one you took into the bar." The wise eyes noted the flush creep above Web's collar. "Hope I ain't speakin' out of turn."

Web smiled. "No, that's all right. She is a dish—only way to describe her. You're out of place here, fellow. Ever think of going on the police force?"

"Ah, I tried the cops. Couldn't make minimum height an' weight. They don't want anything that don't come wrapped up in a side of beef."

"I know a few men downtown. I might be able to stick in a word for you."

The other's face lighted up. "Say, would you? Maybe there's somebody at the top who can stretch a regulation—recognize a guy can be useful

to the force even if he can't look into a second-story window without climbin' a ladder."

"I'll do what I can. Now, about that young lady: You're sure you saw her?"

Dyke bridled. "Look, mister, you think I'm givin' you a line because you can't check. I wouldn't do that, not to you. You know anything about this lady's clothes?"

"Well, some," Web said uncertainly.

The elf grinned. "That's with a man, all right. Never sure! Now me, I'm different. I remember everything, every single thing. This lady had on a tweed suit, sort of a powder-blue color. She wears alligator shoes, dark blue, and she's got a big square alligator bag to match; it's got a big B on it, in script. Under the suit coat is a white blouse, ruffled-like—shirred, I think they call it. I say it's a blouse, but it might be one of those dickey things. I got camera eyes, not X-ray eyes. On the suit she's got a big jewel, kind of a sunburst of silver and blue stones—"

Web stopped him. "Okay, Dyke, you win. I gave her that sunburst on her last birthday. Only thing I can't understand is, how I didn't see her—or she see me."

"She saw *you* all right, mister."

IT took a good moment for that to sink in. "You mean," said Web, appalled, "you mean she *saw* me go over to—that other girl, and she just sat there?"

"She was plenty burned, believe me, mister! I thought sure we was going to have action, the way she looked daggers at you and that babe."

Web squirmed uncomfortably.

"We would've, too, only this other guy, he comes over an' calms her down."

"Other guy?"

Dyke nodded sagely. "That's right. This guy, he's been watchin' you, too. Then he goes over to the young lady, an' she acts as if she don't know him. He must have a pretty good line, though, because next thing you know they're goin' off arm in arm."

"What'd he look like?"

"I could describe him from top to bottom, but if you know him, all I gotta say is 'eyes'—eyes like a horned toad."

Web yanked a bill out of his wallet.

The other jerked out of the way as if he'd been burned. "I don't want your money, mister. You was goin' to fix me up with the force, remember?"

"Oh! Sure, Dyke." Web scribbled a line on a card. "Here—take this downtown to Captain Gillihan. He can call me." He pushed bill and card toward Dyke. "And take the fin, too. You earned it."

"Okay," Dyke said, grinning. "You twisted my arm. Thanks a lot, mister."

Web was already out of earshot. He headed for the telephones, dialed a number savagely. Cameron's lethargic voice answered.

"Dick? Get Nellis, and meet me in ten minutes. At the Cosmo."

Cameron came to life. "Raid?"

"Yes. Step on it."

Someone turned the knob against the locked outer door. Zoltan, busy throwing clothes into a suitcase, started. He went up to the door, put his face against it.

"Who is it?"

"Open up!"

The little man visibly relaxed at the sound of Hila's voice. He turned the key.

Hila swept past him into the room. "Where is Ben?" she demanded.

"He'll be back later."

Her eyes settled on the partly-filled suitcase on the iron bed. "You're going away?"

A malicious half-smile crossed Zoltan's puffed lips. "We're all going away from here, aren't we?"

"But the others aren't—" She stopped. Suspicion laced her customary bland beauty.

Before he could stop her she had darted, like a cat, to the laboratory and pulled at the lid of the trunk. The trunk was locked, but at her tug it came easily off the floor. She released it; it dropped back with a light, hollow thud.

Zoltan was behind her. He grasped her slim wrist, whirled her around. "Hila," he said.

"You've sold them out. You're double-crossing Ben."

There was a new, urgent tone in his voice. "Hila, don't be a fool. Come with me."

She looked down at him, incredulous, disdainful. "You?"

He loosed her wrist. "Before you laugh, look."

She looked, her slanted eyes narrowing. Zoltan flipped the bills in the bundle of green and yellow currency tantalizingly.

"This is the McCoy, too—no queer in *this* wad, Hila. There's enough for both of us, for life."

Zoltan pressed toward her, talking fast. "You've got to, Hila! Kirby saw you with that Federal copper. He'll kill you. But we won't let him; we'll get out, the two of us. Let him hold the bag—what do you care?" He had her hand again, and this time she did not pull away from him, or show scorn. "I won't deny it. I don't have to tell you what you do to a man—you know it better than anyone. Even a caricature of a man like me." He was closer, breathing hard. "How do you think I've felt, all this time, seeing him with everything—with you—

while I had nothing? But it's going to be different now. You're coming with me."

Her lips went dry. "What—what makes you so sure?" she demanded shakily.

He grinned knowingly, waved the thick rich bills before her eyes. "This makes me sure, Hila. This is travel, clothes, jewels, luxury. For that, you'll take even me."

The telephone rang. Zoltan spun around as though it might bite him. He let it ring twice, three times. Then he slowly approached, lifted the receiver.

Mostly he listened. When he hung up, he turned to Hila. "We've got to hurry. The Feds are on the way here—a raid."

Hila lost her composure for an instant. She stared into the eyes, quick-darting in the massive, wild-haired head. She watched the ungainly back as Zoltan hastily stuffed the bills into a corner of the suitcase and slammed it shut.

When he turned back to her he was smiling. "This is even better," he said. "Let the Feds pick up Ben—he can do his screaming from a cell in the Tombs." The suitcase was huge against his undersized figure. He saw her eyes fixed on it. He grinned evilly. "No, my pretty. Don't look so greedy. I'll be generous—but I'll be captain in this outfit. I'm no fool! Come on, now—we've got to get out of—"

His mouth clamped shut suddenly; he strained to a listening stance.

There were footsteps outside, coming closer.

The girl was first to act. "Ben! He's coming back!" she whispered urgently.

She took the bag from his unprotesting hand, flung it into the closet, and dropped an ancient, chemical-stained smock over it. She closed the closet door, stood taut with her back to it a moment, fighting for composure.

Zoltan came to himself. "Don't you peep," he whispered. "We'll get out all right, but he mustn't know about that." He jerked his head toward the closet.

Hila nodded. The perfect oval of her face lit up with a smile of languorous welcome as the door opened; a smile that changed instantly to a dark expression of mixed surprise and fear.

The man in the doorway was not Kirby.

Chapter Eleven

CAMERON DROVE THE TREASURY CAR with the undercover license. It bore no mark to distinguish it from a million others—not too new, not too old, not too clean, either.

He looked across the portly Nellis to Web, glowering on the other side of the front seat. "What's up, Web? Isn't this a little premature?"

"Yes," Nellis chimed in. "I thought we were holding off the raid till you cracked that Customs leak."

"We're raiding now," Web said



shortly. "You're getting what you wanted, Nellis, so stop beefing."

"Glad you finally saw it my way," the Narcotics man said complacently. "Now you're cooking with gas." He wriggled his shoulders for a more comfortable seat between the two Customs investigators. "After all, when you come right down to it, Customs is nothing but a collection agency."

"Whereas in Narcotics, you're saving the people of this country from the evils of dope."

Nellis shot a quick look at Cameron, but the slope face was deadpan. "Yeah, in a way we are, at that." He looked at his two companions in turn. "You fellas ever think of switching over? We could use more men like you in Narcotics."

"Oh, I don't know," Cameron said mildly, missing a taxi with a delicate touch on the steering-wheel. "I'd rather stay in a job with a future. There's no future working for the Snowbird Division."

Web knew that under the calm reasonableness of his placid exterior, Cameron was taking huge delight in needling the portly Narcotics agent. But as long as he was reducing the distance to the Doty Building with swift efficiency, Web swallowed his irritation, drew back in his seat, and stared grimly ahead.

Nellis was about to reply, when Cameron slipped through an amber light just as it turned red. A car from the right squealed its brakes.

Web had a split-second to think, "We'll never make it!" Then he ducked and put his hands instinctively in front of his face.

He heard the sickening crash of metal on metal; he was slammed against the dash. The car spun, swayed, and was still.

VOICES came to Betty through the closed and locked door.

Since she had opened her eyes to darkness and to solitude on the bare wooden floor, she had not dared to make a sound. She did not want to bring her attacker back. For whatever reason he had abandoned her, left her shaken but unharmed, she did not know—she had been nearly unconscious when Kirby and Zoltan had rescued her.

Voices. A man's voice—angry, loud, strange. She had never heard Zoltan speak.

A woman's voice, low-pitched, voluptuous, carrying in its tones the breath of the East. Without for a moment realizing how right she was, Betty automatically conjured up the image of Hila's olive face and sloe eyes.

Another man's voice—this one was belligerent and oddly familiar: "I don't give a damn about that! You

settle with your woman later. I'm here for my split. I don't want talk; I want dough."

Betty puzzled over the voice. Someone she knew, knew well. Yet her battered body and tortured mind would not let her focus the voice exactly. In the back of her mind she had the nagging feeling that she did not want to know the answer.

ZOLTAN'S hoarse voice: "We're in the same boat. My buyer was going to come at nine o'clock. Didn't Kirby tell you that?"

"Yeah, he told me, but—"

"But it's all off now. The Feds are on their way over here—I just got the word."

"How do I know you ain't pullin' a fast one, you little punk? I wouldn't put it past you."

"All right. Don't believe me; stay here and get knocked off—see if I care! But we're getting out of here. Hila, get that suitcase."

The strangely familiar voice again, tantalizing, elusive. Betty had the feeling that if she heard the man's normal tone, instead of his present white-hot anger, she would recognize it instantly. "Wait a minute, there! What you got in that bag?"

"Clothes, you fool. We're going on a long trip. And you will too, if you have any sense."

"Let me see that bag."

"You're wasting time."

"I said, let me see it!"

The listening Betty shrank back from the door as if it had suddenly turned alive. Involuntarily a scream cut through her throat:

"Dad! Dad!"

In the other room, Obie, pushing past the struggling Zoltan to get at Hila and the bag, stopped like one stoned. Not until he heard the frantic, tearful cry repeated could he believe his own ears.

Loosing the trembling, panting Zoltan, Obie stumbled toward the locked door across the laboratory. He turned the key and threw the door open. Betty flew into his arms and sobbed against his barrel of a chest.

"Daddy! Take me home! Take me away from here!"

His lips tight, his eyes hard, Obie put an arm about his quivering daughter. He led her past a silent Zoltan, a motionless Hila.

Zoltan stared at the open, empty door-frame through which man and girl had disappeared.

"His daughter! Who'd have dreamed it?" Zoltan shook his head to clear it. "That was a close call."

Hila, clutching the suitcase to her breast, breathed fast through parted lips. She watched as Zoltan moved swiftly to a shelf, took down a small brown bottle. She watched curiously

as he carried it, walking with exaggerated caution, toward the trunk.

"What are you doing?"

Zoltan did not reply at once. He set the small bottle carefully on the lid of the trunk. He backed away, still watching the motionless bottle.

"That's soup," he said with satisfaction. "Nitroglycerin. Those Feds are going to get a surprise when they walk in here."

Hila, behind him, groped along the chemical counter. "What do you mean?" she asked.

Zoltan kept his eyes on the bottle. "Nitro is sensitive stuff. When that bottle hits the floor, everything else hits the ceiling—trunk, Feds, and all."

Hila's hand touched the big stone mortar, clubbed the heavy pestle, lifted it.

Zoltan turned. "I'll take that suitcase—" he began, and stopped. Horrified, unable to move, he watched the weapon in Hila's fist start downward toward his head. At the last instant he was able to throw up an arm. The blow caught him, glancingly, off his left ear. His knees gave way under him and he fell to the floor.

When he opened his eyes, perhaps thirty seconds later, Hila was gone. The suitcase was gone also.

He heard heavy shoes coming up the steps. The Feds! They mustn't knock that bottle off!

He got to one knee, got one hand off the floor. He reached for the bottle. His hand trembled; his body trembled. His fingers, groping, missed.

The bottle crashed to the floor.

Chapter Twelve

FOR A MOMENT after the two cars hit, Web was motionless, hunched against the dashboard. His shoulder ached intolerably, and he tasted blood from a gash where his cheek had struck one of the instrument projections.

When he ventured to straighten up, he moved with caution; but the movement did not bring the flash of grating pain that meant broken bones.

Nellis was similarly testing himself. "You okay, Web?" he asked in a shaken voice. Web nodded and looked at Cameron.

Cameron's face was drained white. The muscles in his jaw bunched with the gritting of his teeth; with his right hand he was grasping tightly his left wrist. The wrist was cocked at an unnatural angle.

He looked over at Web and managed a weak grin. "Broken," he explained unnecessarily.

A crowd had begun to gather; a policeman shouldered his way to the car. Web managed to dig out his shield and showed it to the officer.

"This man has a broken wrist. Will you get him to Emergency, officer? We're on a raid; can't stop. He'll give you the details."

Web drove as fast as Cameron had driven, but with grim and calculating caution. They were in front of the Doty Building in less than five minutes.

The explosion came at that instant. . . .

The laboratory was a shambles. Wading ankle-deep in debris, Web kicked against something soft. He bent down and turned over Zoltan's inert body.

Nellis stood over him. "Dead?"

"He's breathing. Find a phone, will you, and get the rescue squad down here. Arson, too."

"Right." Nellis turned, went out.

The sleeping-room was only partly damaged, because the door to the laboratory had been shut. Web gave the place a quick glance and abandoned it. There was an open door on the other side of the lab—another room.

A struck match showed him a warehouse room. A light-socket hung from the ceiling, but someone had removed the bulb. A partially boarded window gave off on an airshaft and a brick wall opposite.

Nellis, behind Web, saw the Customs man close his eyes a moment and reach for the support of the door-jamb. "You better sit down, fella. That crash didn't do you any good."

"I'm okay," Web said, opening his eyes. "Thank God, Betty wasn't here when it went off." He straightened up. "I've got to get to a phone! I've got to locate her."

He ran all the way to the little bar where he'd first tangled with Nellis. In ten minutes he was back, his eyes shining.

"You found her?" Nellis asked.

Web nodded happily. "Home. She's safe."

"What happened to her?"

"I didn't wait to ask. Let's get this end cleaned up and I'll go over there."

Nellis held out a scrap of blackened wood, with a shred of cloth hanging from it. "Guess this is your department. Part of the trunk. Looks like a bit of the Customs stamp on it."

Web seized the scantling. "It certainly is. Where's the rest of it?"

"On the ceiling, mostly. They did a good job."

"Not good enough," Web said grimly. "This is going to hang 'em."

BETTY started slightly at sound of the doorbell. It was Web, she knew. He had called her on the phone; his relief at finding her alive and safe had been almost pathetically fervent. He'd said he'd be right out, and hung up before she could protest.

He must have flown, to get here so soon, thought Betty, going to the door and opening it. At the sight of him all her defenses crumpled. She flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, Web, darling!"

He enfolded her gratefully, kissed her upturned lips. By the time they were able to separate, to sit down, Betty's defenses were up again. She mustn't let herself go—there was too much at stake.

Web felt the change before he had any idea what it portended. "Darling," he whispered, "you've had a rough time, but it's all over now. Kirby got away, but we can lay our hands on him any time we want to. With your help, he'll be behind bars tomorrow."

"With—my help?"

Web nodded. "And once we get him facing a one-to-fourteen in Atlanta, he'll talk. We'll have the rest of the gang."

Betty faltered. "But—I don't understand. Why do you need me?"

"Don't you see, honey? You're the link. You can tie Kirby up with this mob the way no one else can." He clasped her hand. "I talked to the Federal District Attorney. It'll be made as easy as possible for you. All you'll have to do is give a deposition—not even a court appearance. More than likely Kirby and the others will plead guilty when they see the evidence against them. That'd be their smart move—"

The look on her face stopped him.

"Why, what's the matter, baby?"

Betty bit her lip. "Web, I can't do it."

"You—can't?"

She stood up. Web followed suit. He looked down into her troubled eyes. "I don't understand."

She could not take his steady gaze. "Please—don't ask me why. I have reasons, good reasons, believe me."

Web's brow clouded. "You'll have to do better than that," he said slowly. He gripped her arms. "What is it, Betty? Why are you protecting that—that—What are you holding out on me?"

The misery was only too evident in her eyes. "Web, I can't tell you; you mustn't try to force me."

He dropped his hands with startling suddenness. "You can't mean what you're saying. You can't!"

Her head was hidden in her hands now; she turned away, her shoulders beginning to quake with silent sobs.

He forced her around to face him. "No, don't turn away," he said coldly. "I think you'd better face what you're doing—what it means." He paused, scanning her tearstained face. "I've never talked about my job very much. I've never dramatized it. But I think now is the time. Betty, this is not a

fur coat or a diamond ring these boys are smuggling through Customs. It's heroin—*dope*—and in bigger quantities than the Government has ever run up against before. This last job was a trunkful of pure heroin. We're not sure it's the first—and if we don't stop it cold, it certainly won't be the last. Do you know what will happen to that stuff? Do you? It'll pass from hand to hand, get cut down each time, until it becomes a million caps—a million jags for a million hypes. Some of 'em will go to confirmed addicts. Maybe that's not so bad. But a lot of those caps will be sold or given away—yes, given away to hook new customers for the racket: high-school kids, college kids. Think it over, Betty. Is that the sort of thing you want to be responsible for? *Is it?*"

SHE was openly sobbing now, but not too far gone to fight back. "I'm not responsible. That happened—I had nothing to do with it."

"If we don't crack this gang, there'll be another gang, and another after that. Those rats have a lifetime pass through Customs. We've got to plug it up, Betty—and you can help." He laughed shortly, without humor. "Help? You're the key to the whole situation. You're in the driver's seat! And you won't talk. Why?" Then a sudden horrible thought chilled him. "Kirby? Is it Kirby? I can't believe—"

"No, no!"

"Then what else?"

She sobbed, but said nothing. Web turned, walked from the room.

A pair of beefy hands touched her shoulders almost instantly, patting her with inept sympathy.

"I heard you, honey," Obie said huskily. "I— You shouldn't do it. Not for me. I'm not worth it."

Betty pulled away, kept her back turned to her father.

Obie bit his lip. "I don't blame you for hating me," he faltered. "You don't understand. I didn't get into this thing like—the others. They came to me. I—well, you never knew how I felt about Customs. But I didn't quit—I was fired, fired without a shred of cause, after fifteen years of faithful service. That hurts, honey! Insubordination, they said. Who wouldn't be insubordinate, taking all that guff?"

"They came to me," Obie went on. "At first I didn't know what they were after. They asked me about the details of Customs procedure. They had a scheme—they wanted to be sure there were no bugs in it. They offered to cut me in." He licked his lips and stared at her noncommittal back. "I'm not alibiing, honey. It was a lot of dough, and the restaurant had been losing money—you know that. . . . I just couldn't refuse."

Bitterly, Betty tried to remember when she had last heard such emotion in her father's voice. Not since the death of her mother. What mockery to put that tragedy on the same scale with this one!

"Baby, I never realized it was going to be dope. I swear it to you. They told me they had a line on Swiss watch movements, jewelry—things like that. Sure, that's against the law. But it don't do anybody any real harm. The tariffs are artificial; any lobby with enough dough can get a protective tariff . . ."

It sounded hollow, empty, even as he said it. Betty felt suddenly drained, at the end of her rope. She knew that if she listened to another word, she would scream.

"Stop," she said tonelessly. "Please stop."

She started for the door.

Obie looked after her anxiously. "Where are you going, baby?"

"I don't know. But I can't stay here, not any more."

"Baby—" he ventured; but she was already in her own room, opening drawers, packing a bag.

When she came out, she said, "I'll stay at Aunt Marge's, for tonight, anyway. After that . . . I'll have to see."

Then she was gone. No kiss, no good-by.

The cozy living-room, comfortable with many little touches of her hand, was empty. With her going, it became suddenly a bleak, cavernous cell echoing Obie's very heartbeat.

He sat down at the desk in the corner and turned on the green-shaded gooseneck lamp. This was the desk where Betty, up to now, had kept his restaurant books and accounts for him. Not so long ago she had done her schoolwork here, biting the tip of her tongue in concentration.

For a long time he stared at the ink-etched wood. Then he picked up a pad of invoices and a pencil.

Chapter Thirteen

WEB SAT STOLIDLY in the hospital waiting-room. At the sound of footsteps, his head snapped up; he saw Cameron in the doorway.

"They told me you were here," Cameron said. "What's the score on Zoltan?"

Web shrugged. "They've got him under ether. I was hoping he'd come out of it soon so he could talk. How's your wrist?"

Cameron grinned, held up a hand encased from the knuckles up in a plaster cast. "Want to be the first to autograph it, Pop?"

Web was in no mood for pleasantries. "What brings you here? No good news, I'm sure."

"You can say that again. The D.A. released Kirby."

"I expected that. We didn't have enough to hold him. Fisch put a tail on him, I hope?"

"Sure thing. He won't get far."

"And neither will we, unless this joker Zoltan opens up."

Cameron scratched at the edge of his cast. "This thing itches like the devil," he said. Then, diffidently, "Maybe I shouldn't talk out of turn, but I thought that Betty—"

Web snapped, "Leave her out of this." The next instant his whole body echoed apology. "I'm sorry, Dick. I shouldn't bite your head off." He blew out his breath. "Dick, if we don't crack this thing somehow, I'll go nuts!"

The door to the operating-room, down the corridor, opened; an orderly wheeled out a still form on a rubber-tired stretcher. With half a dozen long-legged strides, Web was abreast of it, looking down on Zoltan. The dwarf was a mass of bandages. He breathed heavily, reeking of anesthetic.

"How about it?" Web asked.

The orderly jerked his head back. "Ask the doctor."

Web turned and went into the white-tiled operating-room. A nurse gathered up bloodstained instruments and gauze, while the anesthetist worked with his equipment at the other end of the now-empty operating-table. Web passed them both by, and turned his attention to the white-clad surgeon.

"Doctor?"

The doctor looked at Web. "You're not supposed to be here," he said curtly.

"I'm from Customs. That case you just finished—"

The doctor ripped off his white cap, showing huge gout of sweat behind the cotton. Web followed him through a door into another white-tiled room. There the doctor pulled off the gown. His body, bare to the waist, was lean, muscular, hard. He activated a washbasin with his knee and began to slosh cold water over his face and chest.

"Boy, I needed that!" the doctor said. "Jail case?"

"Yes. Will he recover?"

"I think so. But God knows why—he should be dead." The doctor looked at Web from behind a towel. "Won't be out of danger for quite a while."

A nurse put her head in the door. "Are you Mr. Webley?"

"That's right."

"Telephone for you, sir. Urgent."

Web tagged at her trim heels. Cameron joined him outside the operating-room, making a very appreciative third. The nurse indicated

a phone in a tiny office, and Web picked it up.

The clipped tones of Lou Fisch came over the wire. "Web? Sorry as hell to have to be the one to tell you this, but—Your girl's father committed suicide."

Web gasped. "Obie?"

"Put a bullet through his head."

"Great heavens! What about Betty?"

"She wasn't there. They haven't located her yet."

"I'll go right over."

Web cradled the phone, turned to Cameron. "I've got to leave, Dick. Put a twenty-four-hour guard on Zoltan's room."

"But what—"

"Personal business."

KIRBY did not have to look out the rear window of the taxi. He knew without looking that the other cab was following. That plainclothesman had been dogging his steps since his mouthpiece had sprung him earlier in the day.

Kirby still couldn't understand why they'd let him go. Clam up, his attorney had advised him, answer nothing; and Kirby took the advice right down the line. Oh, sure, the D.A. had tried, tried hard. He'd threatened, blustered, and cajoled by turns. To all his efforts Kirby had awarded a bored, stony silence, secure in the knowledge that the writ was on its way to him as fast as a friendly magistrate could sign it.

Once out, he'd made a few phone calls, and he had information, lots of information. Zoltan was alive, but Zoltan would be taken care of. Obie was dead; he wouldn't talk either. The trunk was out of the picture. Good—that meant the big thing, the gimmick, was still safe. Sure, this deal had gone sour in a big way. But with the gimmick, there'd be other deals, plenty of them. It was money in the bank, the way he'd always said.

That left one loose end to take care of. He had information on that, too, and he intended to take care of it right away.

He stared casually at the Fifth Avenue scenery. They were approaching Forty-second Street. It was as good a place to shake the joker behind him as any other.

The meter read \$2.30. Kirby readied three singles. He reached forward and passed them to the driver.

"I'll pay you now," he said. "Turn at 43rd, and stop in front of Stern's. Don't go to the curb. I'll hop out there."

Kirby was out of the door before the cab stopped. His move into the crowded department store might have been a trick of legerdemain. Again he disdained to look behind him.

He knew he had gained precious seconds before the cop, caught flatfooted, could fumble for his wallet and pay off his cab.

Kirby had his choice of exits. Buffeted by the midday crowds, he allowed himself to be carried along to the Forty-second Street side. It was as good as any.

Out on the street he hailed another cab, directed the driver to La Guardia. At the airport he purchased a ticket to Las Vegas.

A UNIFORMED policeman let Web in the door.

It was the same door out of which he'd stalked, white-faced with anger, only yesterday. Only, yesterday, he'd towered over a small, unyielding Betty and vented his frustration and disappointment in words he'd now have given his life to recall.

Web was half afraid he'd find Betty in the room, and half afraid he wouldn't. She wasn't there. Two men from Homicide looked up as he entered. Web recognized them both.

"Hello, Singer," he said. "How are you, Bentham?"

Singer, a tall, saturnine man whose beetling brows kept his eyes in almost constant shadow, nodded briefly. The heavier, sallow Bentham came over to meet Web.

"Glad you came, Web," he said, shaking hands. "You knew O'Brien, didn't you?"

Web nodded, and Bentham held out a piece of paper. "Then maybe this is for you."

The paper had been crumpled and straightened out. It bore the printed letterhead of the Jefferson Provisions Company and the heading INVOICE. On the back was scrawled, painful handwriting: "*Dear Web, I got a lot to get off my mind, and I hope you and Betty—*"

It stopped there.

"Looks like a false start," Singer said over Web's shoulder.

Web scanned the abortive note, rubbed his chin. "I don't get it. Why me? If he wanted to write a suicide note, why not to his daughter?"

Singer shrugged. "Hard to say. Maybe he had something special to say to you. O'Brien was a Customs man once, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was, but—" Web broke off. His mind was racing. Betty—her strange refusal to help him convict Kirby—he hadn't been able to get that out of his head through a sleepless night. She was protecting someone; he'd assumed it was Kirby, although for the life of him he couldn't imagine why. But Obie—

It was a staggering thought. Web wanted time to assimilate it. "Is this the only note? Did you find anything else?"

"Nope," Bentham replied. "Must have been afraid he'd get cold feet if he put it off any longer. They do that."

"It was clear suicide?" Web asked. "No bugs?"

Bentham shook his head. "Everything checks. Prints on the gun, track of the slug, position of the body. If you're thinking of homicide, perish the thought."

Web nodded, ran his hand through his crisp curly hair. "Who found him?"

"O'Brien's cook opened up the restaurant this morning. He got curious when the old man didn't show up at his usual time. He waited a while, then came around and knocked. Nobody answered. That was peculiar, because O'Brien has a daughter."

"I know," Web said dryly.

"She should have been home. Anyway, the cook tried the door and found it unlocked. O'Brien was slumped over the desk there."

Web walked over to the desk. Only one spot which might have been a bloodstain showed there.

The pad of invoices was there, upside down. Web turned it over. The pad told its own story; probably dropped off by some salesman, and kept by Obie for scratch-paper, he had reached for it in his last hour to say something to Web, and then he had not said it.

Or had he? Web turned over the pad. The Jefferson Provisions Company numbered its invoices: the top number on the pad was 1301. Web looked at the crumpled note in his hand. It was numbered 1343. He stared at the two, perplexed. Forty-two sheets?

Of course not! Obie would tear sheets from the back of the pad. Web flipped the pages. The last number was 1338. Four pages missing. What was on those four pages, and where were they? A quick survey convinced Web that the missing sheets were not in, on, or near the desk. It was highly unlikely that Obie had taken them anywhere else. A man contemplating suicide doesn't run down to the mailbox before he takes his own life. He leaves his note on the spot—he knows it will get to the right party. . . .

The door burst open and Betty stood before them. She looked at the strange men, then at Web.

"Web, what are you doing here? What are these men—" Her eyes widened. "What's happened? Web—where's Dad?"

Web moved to her quickly, studied her face keenly. She didn't know. She wasn't shamming.

He threw a look at the two Homicide men. Singer nodded.

Web put his arm about Betty's shoulder, led her toward the door.

"My car's outside, Betty. Come with me."

"I saw your car," the bewildered girl said. "Web, what's happened?" She stopped, faced him with growing horror. "Something's happened to my father!"

"Come." He urged her toward the street, steered her into his car, then slid his own long legs under the wheel.

"Betty, why do you ask? Were you afraid something would happen to him?"

"Yes, I— That's why I came back." She spoke automatically, halted just as automatically.

"Where were you?"

"At my aunt's; I spent the night there. But I couldn't sleep. I was worrying about him."

"Why?"

"Please, Web, why are you acting so strangely? Where is Dad?" A fearful intuition lit up her wide eyes. "Is he—dead?"

Web gripped both her shoulders, held her with firm compassion. "Yes, Betty. I don't know how to break it to you any easier, darling, or I would."

"**T**HEY killed him!" The words seemed torn out of her. The tears came then, and Web held her tightly until her sobs died down in quiet grief.

"What did you mean by that, Betty?" he asked.

She looked up at him through tear-dimmed eyes, but could not speak.

"Was it about that trunk—the heroin? He was mixed up in it, wasn't he?"

"You—you knew?"

"I guessed, honey. Before he took his life, he tried to write me a note. He did write it. He had something very important to tell me." He regarded her steadily. "That note is missing, Betty. Did you take it?"

"I!"

"I'm asking you straight, Betty. I wouldn't blame you for wanting to keep his name clear. I'd understand. But it was his last wish, to set himself straight; you wouldn't want to deprive him of that."

"But I didn't, Web!"

Web kissed her protesting lips. He smiled, though it took an effort. "I believe you, darling. I only hoped—" His mouth hardened. "If it wasn't you, it was someone else. And now I'm sure that note was meant to tell me what I'd give my right arm to know!"

"You mean—he knew how they got the trunk off the pier?"

"I'm sure he did. They'd need advice—the kind of advice Obie could give them."

"He said they came to him—"

Web cut in eagerly, "He told you that? Did he say any more?"

"No. That was all. I—I walked out on him. I left him alone." She bit her lip and the tears started again.

"Darling, I don't want to rake you over the details. The important thing is, when you were locked up by Kirby, did you get any intimation, however slight, of the scheme they used to get that trunk through?"

"No, they didn't discuss that. They took it for granted they would get the next one through just as easily."

"The next one?" Web sat up straight.

"Yes. Kirby said it had already left Hong Kong." She turned wondering eyes up to his. "Didn't you know? Kirby said he didn't care if you had the entire Customs service at the pier when it comes in, they're going to get that trunk through!"

Chapter Fourteen

THE ROOM LOOKED like any other hospital room until you noticed the bars on the windows, and saw the shadow of the uniformed cop sitting in a tipped-back chair outside the door.

The man on the bed had no way of getting out, bars or no bars. He lay, bandaged and pallid, silent and immovable.

Web followed the doctor into the room, nodding at the policeman on guard. The doctor, seeing Web automatically tiptoeing, boomed cheerfully, "Don't bother to keep quiet for this one, Inspector. Can't hear a thing; in fact, we're waiting for the time when he *can* hear."

"And talk, too," Web added fervently. "What's chances, Doctor?"

The doctor leaned over the still form of Zoltan. "Never know with these cases. Sometimes— Oh, oh!"

"What's the matter?" Web stepped forward, saw the doctor staring into Zoltan's glazed left eye, holding the lid back. He let go, and the eye stayed open, unblinking.

The doctor didn't answer immediately. He felt the patient's pulse, reached under the blanket for the heartbeat. Then he turned to Web.

"He's dead."

Web knew a feeling of dread inevitability.

The doctor was back at his examination. "I don't like the looks of this."

"What do you mean?"

"Cyanosis." He bit at his mustache. "The p.m. will give us a better idea."

"You'll call me as soon as you know?"

"Right. I say, that's pretty bad luck for you. He sure won't talk now."

Web paused at the door. "Yeah. He doesn't know how inconsiderate he's been."

Lou Fisch nodded curtly when Web broke the news. "Don't take it too hard, Web. I never really expected him to sing. This thing is too good, if they can hold onto it. Zoltan nearly blew himself up, trying to destroy that trunk, because he didn't want it to fall into our hands."

"What about the scrap of stamp we located?"

"We put it under infra-red. It showed the last figure of the number. A seven."

"Well, that's something."

Fisch said cuttingly, "Sure! Every tenth stamp ends in a seven. We used six thousand stamps on the *Macedonia*—now we only have to look for six hundred. Big deal."

Web said, "All right—be sarcastic. So I didn't wrap it up for you. But I remember the time you didn't even believe there *was* a trunk. You're improving, Lou."

Using a boss's prerogative, Lou Fisch changed the subject. "What about Kirby?"

"Shook his tail. Probably in Rio by this time."

Lou peered over his glasses. "Your girl—she'll testify?"

Web strove to keep his voice level. "I've made a date with the D.A. to take her deposition. But what good will that do, unless we find Kirby?"

"I've got a notion he'll be back."

Web leaned back in his chair and stared at his chief. "You know, Lou, you're cute when you go all mystical like that."

Lou Fisch grinned. "Not so mystical." He reached into a drawer of his desk and drew forth an envelope. Web recognized the name of one of the large steamship companies.

Turning the envelope in his fingers, Lou Fisch said, "When you gave me Betty's information that the gang expected to put through another trunkload, I passed it on to Nellis. He cabled contacts in Hong Kong. That trunk is already on its way here, Web. How'd you like to meet it in Marseille, follow it home?"

"You know who's carrying it?"

"That's the rub. Nellis couldn't get that information. But you'll have the whole trip to dig that out."

"Thanks," Web said dryly.

Lou Fisch was all seriousness now. "Web, I've got confidence in you. If anyone can crack this, you can. I know it's a tough assignment, but think what it means. If you do make out, you can *watch* the whole procedure on the pier. We've got 'em then!"

Web nodded. "I'll need help."

"I've got two tickets on the *Republic* for you. Who do you want to take?"

"Dick Cameron."

Lou Fisch screwed up one corner of his mouth.

Web grinned. "I know—you think Cameron acts a little boyish at times; but he's there in a pinch. Let's have those tickets."

Lou Fisch tossed the tickets across the desk, followed them with a ham-like hand. Web grasped it; he hoped silently and fervently that he could justify the confidence of its crushing pressure.

"Cheer up," said Cameron, as they leaned over the ship's rail in company with two thousand other passengers, watching the floodlighted *Miss Liberty* recede into the inky distance. "Here, have a spot of Mothersill's."

Web shook his head at the proffered flask. "No, thanks."

"What worries you? Betty? She'll be okay."

"Wish I could be sure. I don't like the way the principals in this case have been popping off."

"Well, that first guy, that Milo, he came to a bad end. But Obie was a suicide. And Zoltan—you could almost say the same about him."

Web said, "I called the M.E. just before we sailed. The autopsy on Zoltan showed death by asphyxiation."

Cameron snapped to attention. "No!"

"They found cotton fibers in his nose and trachea. Same composition as the pillow he was lying on."

"You mean—somebody got in, past the guard?"

"That's the way it looks to the M.E. now. Somebody wasn't taking any chances on his talking. The guard swears no unauthorized person passed him. Just a minute, Dick." Web turned away from the rail and snagged a passing steward. He scribbled his stateroom number on a card. "Will you please give this to the captain, and ask him to let me have an appointment at his convenience?"

The steward glanced at the card, with its small reproduction of the Treasury seal. "Yes, sir, Mr. Web-ley!"

THE following morning the captain made time for Web and Cameron. When he heard their story, he turned them over to the second officer with instructions to place the business of the Customs men above anything else on his program. The second officer, Mr. Lycomb, was a clear-eyed, alert young man who might have filled a junior executive's chair in any large and thriving corporation. In actual fact, that was exactly his position; the *S.S. Republic* was a large and thriving business in every sense of the word.

Lycomb put himself at Web's disposal. "One thing I'd better tell you right off," he said. "You're going to have to work fast, if your man takes this tub coming back. We're out for

a record crossing, you know. And the return should be even faster."

"How fast?" Web asked.

"Three and a half days; maybe only three, if the skipper really pours on the coal."

Cameron whistled.

"Our information gives the man we're looking for to arrive at Marseille on the fourteenth, on the *Bombay*. You sail for the States on the sixteenth. I'm guessing he'll ride back with you. First available ship, for one thing, and he'll be damned anxious to get home. Then there's the excitement at the pier—it's always twice as bad on a maiden trip or a record crossing."

"Brings 'em out in droves," Cameron concurred.

"We get the excitement all the way across. Enough to drive you crazy," said Lycomb. He was trying to hide his pride under a casual, professional exterior, and doing a fairly poor job of it. "What did you gentlemen want to see first?"

"I suppose your reservations are all made up for the return trip?"

"Couldn't squeeze another one in with a shoehorn."

"We'd appreciate a look at your list," Web said.

Three-quarters of the passengers could be eliminated out of hand. "All we're interested in," Web told Lycomb, looking up from the list, "are those on the last leg of a world tour."

"We've got about four hundred of those," the second officer remarked.

"I see that." Web glanced over the long columns of meaningless names. "Wish we had Nellis here," he muttered. "One of these might ring a bell with him."

Lycomb pushed a telephone into Web's reach. "Call him up. This is a ship-to-shore phone."

"That won't be necessary. We can radio him the list, and have his answer by the time we dock."

Chapter Fifteen

AS LYCOMB HAD HOPED, the ship did set a record for the eastbound crossing, and they arrived up against the French Customs in a seething excitement that permeated the entire passenger list. Although Cameron had checked the night before, there still was no answer to their radiogram to Nellis, and Web's partner now suggested they keep their official position to themselves, in order to sample the routine of another country from the other side of the fence.

Web drew an affable and garrulous bluecoat who glanced at his bags and passed him without the semblance of a search; but Cameron's mentor fixed him with a suspicious eye. He not

only tore into Cameron's baggage like a whirlwind, flinging shirts and ties all over the place; but when that ordeal was over, he directed the hapless Cameron to follow him into a shed-like room. Web waited half an hour before his livid companion emerged.

"Do you know what that bastard did?" Dick Cameron gritted through clenched teeth. "He made me strip right down to my suntan and went through my clothes with a fine-tooth comb. Even wanted to knock off my plaster cast!"

"Did he find it?"

"Find what?"

"Whatever it was you're smuggling in."

Cameron gave Web a withering "you-too" look.

Web shook his head sadly. "I guess it pays to have an honest face. I could have brought in the crown jewels."

"You know what you can do with your honest face," Cameron said without rancor. "Not to mention the crown jewels." His eyes lit up. "When we get back on the job I'm going to try that technique sometime, on some French babe." He sighed. "Oh, well, dream on! Got a cigarette, Web? That s.o.b. 'confiscated' all of mine." . . .

In Marseille, they made their mission known to the *Chef Douanier*. French Customs, despite the vagaries of individual inspectors, was just as interested officially in a solid trunkful of heroin as were the United States authorities.

The Chief of Customs, a short, round-faced M. Juvenal, refused to believe it at all until Web showed him incontrovertible proof. Then he threw out his hands, palm up. "But this is incredible, m'sieur!"

"We felt the same way, believe me," Web said. He added tactfully, "And after observing your own admirable inspection at Le Havre, we are doubly puzzled." He turned to Cameron. "Aren't we, Dick?"

Cameron grunted and squirmed lower in his chair.

"Naturally, we shall give you every co-operation," M. Juvenal said. "I shall assign a double crew to the *Bombay*, and we shall open every trunk—"

Web stopped him. "I'm sorry, I'm afraid that won't do, M. Juvenal. Our principal concern is not the heroin, although of course we want to catch that, but the method by which it is brought into the United States. Unless we can plug up that loophole, we haven't gained a thing."

Juvenal considered through plump tented fingers. "That is true. What, then, is your plan of operation, gentlemen? Do you suggest that we shall allow all this narcotic to enter France

without seizing it, without jailing the perpetrator?"

"It is true," Web said, "that when the *Bombay* lands here she is on French soil and under French jurisdiction. However, I don't think you will find it necessary to compromise your conscience. There's only one way I can imagine this gang working. They would not risk *two* Customs searches."

Juvenal's small eyes widened. "Aha—in bond, of course."

"That's right. A trunk destined to go past your country without being opened can be sealed in bond here in Marseille and put aboard a ship at Le Havre intact."

"That is the common procedure," Juvenal concurred. "Without doubt it is the way these rascals work."

"Right. And of course it cuts down our problem somewhat."

"Problem?"

"To locate the carrier."

Juvenal's expressive eyebrows rose. "You do not know the carrier?"

Cameron grinned sourly. "That would make it too easy."

THE Chief of Customs considered. "Ah, so," he agreed at length. "In what way can I help you, messieurs?"

"Permission to come and go freely, for one thing," said Web.

"Granted."

"Your records on the *Bombay* passengers."

"Most certainly."

"We'll have to keep an eye on those who are going directly through and sealing trunks in bond overland. For the rest, we can only hope Nellis gets on the ball and gives us some kind of cue." Web turned to Cameron. "I can't understand why he hasn't cabled us already."

"Want me to jog him along?"

"Might be a good idea."

Cameron rose to his feet. "I'll get off a cable."

"Good. I'll stay here and study M. Juvenal's records. Might turn something up. Don't forget the *Bombay* docks at five." . . .

A couple of inconspicuous loiterers, Web and Cameron watched a cosmopolitan crowd disembark from the *Bombay*. After the towering *Republic*, it seemed unlikely that a man or a trunk could go unnoticed here. Turbaned Hindus, dark-skinned, caste-marked women in saris, Chinese and Japanese correct in Western costume, as well as returning Americans and Europeans, reacted with a universal weariness at the strange feel of solid land after twenty-two days on the equatorial oceans.

"I'll bet that tub was plenty rough, too," Cameron chuckled.

"I've got the list of those sending trunks in bond," Web said. "I think

we can eliminate all but the Americans. The gang wouldn't use anybody who'd stick out in any way."

"Check. Now to tune in that famous Customs sixth sense."

"I hope that's not all we're going to have to depend on. Damn that Nellis! Why doesn't he say something?"

The Customs sixth sense rang no bells inside Web's head as he watched the *Bombay's* passengers being put through their paces. His mouth became grimmer as the hours went by.

Cameron got more fun out of it. He crowed gleefully whenever a blue-coated inspector fixed a hapless passenger with the baleful gaze he'd come to recognize. "Off to the showers!" And he was oftener right than wrong.

With the last passenger off the pier, Cameron lurched upright from the iron girder he had been supporting. "Well, that's that. Any hunches, Pop?"

Web let out an explosive breath. "Not a hunch."

Cameron glanced at the list in Web's hand. A round dozen names had been checked. "All these going over on the *Republic*?"

"Yes. No other fast boat for ten days. And I'm betting that our man won't want to hang onto that trunk a minute longer than he has to."

SECOND OFFICER LYCOMB thought of the same question. "You're sure your man is aboard the *Republic*?"

"We're not sure," Web said. "But if we don't have any luck this trip, we can check the ships that arrive later when they dock."

Lycomb asked, "Suppose your man switches to air?"

"We've alerted all the airlines, just in case. And our men will go over any trunks with a high-power microscope."

Lycomb said, "Well, the same warning I gave you before still holds. You're going to have to work fast."

"Another record?"

Lycomb's brass buttons strained just a little. "It's in the bag."

"Great," Cameron put in. "For you, that is. For us, it means nothing but no sleep."

"I wouldn't say that, Dick." Web smiled. "But you're going to pay for the good time you had on the way over."

"And you're going to pay for the good time you *didn't* take while the taking was good, Pop!" Cameron retorted.

Web handed Lycomb a slip of paper. "Here's the list we're interested in."

Lycomb scanned the typewritten sheet. It gave the names of twelve persons, along with the number of trunks they had brought off the *Bom-*

bay. All of them were finishing a trip around the world; all had left from some West Coast port; and all had stopped in Hong Kong.

Lycomb picked up the phone and called the purser's office. He read off the names, and after each one noted the stateroom number as relayed by the purser.

He hung up, passed the list back. Cameron leaned over and picked it up, held it so that Web could study it with him.

"Half of 'em are married couples," Web commented. "I think we can concentrate on the others."

"Not likely the gang would send two where one is enough," Cameron agreed. "Shall we split 'em up?"

Without waiting for Web's answer, he tore the paper into two parts, passed one part to Web.

"Anything else I can do?" Lycomb wanted to know.

Web said, "You might give us a hand at getting acquainted with this select list of world travelers."

"I'll see that the steward arranges any meetings you request."

"They mustn't wise up," Cameron warned.

Lycomb drew himself up stiffly. "You can rely on the staff of the *Republic*, Mr. Cameron." . . .

By the end of the second day out, it was amply evident that only an iceberg could prevent the *Republic* from beating her own record on the return trip.

But the end of the second day saw a tired and discouraged Web who met Cameron by prearrangement in his stateroom.

"Any luck?" Cameron greeted him. "As if I needed to ask."

"No luck so far. And you?"

Cameron counted on his fingers. "So far I've had my ear bent double by an old-maid schoolteacher on her sabbatical, who is so anxious to get back into harness that she's spending the trip preparing lantern slides to show her little stinkers. All about the strange lands and people Teacher saw on her wonderful round-the-world trip. She was able to go cabin class, by skipping lunches for the last seven years, and she certainly shows the results. Miss Elizabeth Benson, of North Falls, Idaho—how we got her on the list I'll never know."

"She fits the requirements," Web said. "Round the world, stopped at Hong Kong, carries trunks. No reason why the gang couldn't use a woman."

"Not this woman. She's the McCoy, I'll stake my badge on that."

"Then we'll put her aside," Web said. "Who else?"

"I spent a damp hour or two with this Ridge Fielding. Used to run an employment agency in Memphis. Re-

tired. Been traveling ever since he got out from under. Having the time of his life."

"How's he look to you?"

Cameron shook his head decisively. "No dope-runner he."

Web shrugged. "Put him aside. Did you case this Kerry Mahne?"

"That I did, Pop. Measures the same in every direction, pins you down in a corner and talks your arm off. Drinks nothing but plain seltzer water—by the hogshead—and gets higher on it than I can get on 35-to-1 Martinis. I think he's some kind of a yogi."

"I'm not interested in that," Web said.

"I know. You're interested in whether he's hauling a trunkful of Horse across the Atlantic. The answer's no."

"What's his trip all about?"

"Gathering more material for his theory. A field theory of art, he calls it, whatever that is. Going to open an academy or something when he gets back. I might take a few lessons myself, if the way he handled that blonde is any indication."

"We can cross him off, then?"

"Sure. By your own definition. Too odd-ball. The gang would run from a guy like that."

WEB looked ruefully at the list of prospects. A line had now been drawn through every one of them. "Think we've drawn a blank, Dick?"

Cameron thoughtfully sucked the inch-long butt of his cigarette before he stubbed it out. "You don't think we could have a blind lugger on our hands, do you? Some guy who doesn't even know what he's got? Remember the Andrews case?"

Web sagged in his armchair. "Andrews didn't have to carry his stuff all the way around the world. And it wasn't a trunkful, either."

"I just thought that would account for the guy's being so innocent we wouldn't glom onto him."

Web managed a wry smile. "Nice try, Dick. Better luck next time; but if we don't grab this *paisano*, there might not be any next time—for us."

A knock sounded at the door. Cameron opened to admit a uniformed assistant purser. He handed Cameron a large envelope. "From the purser, sir."

Cameron thanked the man, closed the door, and brought the envelope to Web. "What cooks, Web?"

Web ripped the tab, shook out the contents of the envelope. "I asked the purser to let me have our friends' baggage-decks when they turned 'em in."

Cameron dropped into a seat. "Good idea. What are you looking for, though?"

"We've got a rundown on the number of trunks these passengers brought aboard. Seems to me one of them is going to have to declare himself one trunk short of his actual count."

"You're right!" Cameron exclaimed. He reached for the sheaf of declarations. "What are we waiting for?"

Together they went through the declarations, comparing them with the baggage figures Web had secured ahead of time.

At the end they sat back and looked at each other.

"Every one checks out," Cameron said.

Web passed a hand over his eyes. He had never felt quite so frustrated. He'd been confident that he would find a discrepancy; but outside of inconsequential errors that all passengers were prone to make, there was nothing wrong with the declarations.

They were at dinner in the main dining-saloon when the same assistant purser leaned over Web.

"Mr. Donaldson would like to see you, sir—as soon as possible."

Mr. Donaldson was the chief purser, a solidly-built Scotsman with a burr as broad as his shoulders.

"I thought you might be interested in this," he said, when Web and Cameron presented themselves in his office. "One of the gentlemen whose baggage-declarations you inspected came back to make a correction."

Web leaned forward. "A correction?"

"Yes. He'd signed his name under the wrong statement—signed as a non-resident of the United States instead of as a resident."

Web's disappointment showed plainly. "But that's nothing, Mr. Donaldson. A lot of passengers make that mistake. We correct it on the pier for them."

"That's what I told this gentleman, Mr. Webley. But he insisted on making out a brand-new form; said he didn't want to run into any delay or question when he landed. So of course I let him have a new form."

"Nothing wrong in that," Cameron commented.

"No. But I thought he acted curiously. Instead of dropping the wrong form in the wastebasket there, he stuffed it in his pocket and went out with it."

Web was alerted all over again. "You've got his amended form?"

Donaldson pushed it over the desk, and Web grabbed it up avidly. He knew from memory the data already acquired on each of the suspected passengers.

"He signed in the right place this time," Cameron said. "Who is it?"

"Ridgeley Fielding. And that's not the only change he made," Web said.

"He came on with three trunks—listed three before. This time he's declaring only two!"

Chapter Sixteen

TEN MINUTES LATER, Web outlined the situation to the second officer and the chief purser.

Lycomb looked at the Customs declaration Web handed him, glanced at the ship's manifest in his other hand, and back again. "It could be a natural error. Trunks vary in size—the term is relative. An Army footlocker could be called a trunk."

"How are we going to find out?" Web asked.

"Very simple." Donaldson reached for the phone.

"It's very important," Web cautioned him, "not to let Fielding know he's marked."

The purser smiled. "Leave it to me, Mr. Webley." He got his connection. "Albee? Donaldson. Man named Fielding in your corridor. Been some mixup about his baggage count. Trunk in the hold we can't make out the ticket on." The purser reached for a pencil. "Give me that again, please? . . . Three hand cases, three trunks. Are all the trunks in the hold? . . . Two, eh? Other one in his stateroom. Good enough; we'll keep looking. All clear. Thanks a lot, Albee."

He hung up and passed over to Web the slip of paper on which he had written.

"Don't worry about Fielding. Albee would rather have his tongue cut out than mention it. Hell hath no fury like a passenger who thinks he's lost a trunk."

Web nodded his thanks. "Fine. Now, how about seeing what's inside those trunks?"

Lycomb said decisively, "Out of the question, without Mr. Fielding's permission."

"And it's out of the question *with* his permission," Web sighed. He stood up. "Well, gentlemen, thank you for your co-operation. And wish us luck."

Web had little trouble locating Ridge Fielding, still less striking up an acquaintance. That perennial topic—the ship's record-breaking speed—made an infallible opening gambit.

Fielding was sallow, hollow-cheeked, middle-aged; his thinning sandy hair stayed right in line on top of his head regardless of wind. He needed no encouragement to launch into a vigorous account of his trip.

"Around the world!" Web marveled dutifully. "Boy, what I wouldn't give for a chance like that!"

"Sold my business," Fielding said, "and I figured, what the hell. I can

sit back on my rocker and leave it all to charity—widower; you know; no children—or I can have some fun out of it. Seen too many men retire, then go nuts with nothing to do. Not me! All my life I've been reading about foreign lands and people; well, now I've seen 'em myself. Got a whole program lined out when I get back. Going to take in South America next; all of it, not just Rio and B.A. After that—"

Fielding rattled on. Web studied him without appearing to. Ordinary in looks, ordinary in manner. The perfect choice for this job—if indeed he was the carrier. Web's famous Customs sixth sense gave him no signal here; that would come into play on the pier where the effluvium of guilt would inevitably come out.

The meeting was worth-while, nevertheless; Web would be able to get closer to Fielding during the inspection routine as a known fellow-passenger than as a complete stranger.

Web broke away finally, and started back to find Cameron. His path took him past the radio-room; on an impulse, he stopped in. The blue-coated operator with the sparks on his sleeve finished tapping out a message and turned to Web politely.

Web identified himself. "Anything for me? I've been expecting a message."

The operator fluttered through a file with practiced fingers. "Nothing, sir—not since your radiogram of the tenth."

"The tenth? That was on the east-bound trip, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Last day."

"But—I never got it."

THE operator looked puzzled. "I have the record here, sir. The message was received at 5:37 A.M." He held out a paper. "Isn't this your signature?"

Web took the form. The name scrawled there was certainly his own, but the handwriting was a far cry from Web's own precise script. Someone had intercepted the message boldly; when Web read it, he had no difficulty understanding why:

SCOTT WEBLEY
S.S. REPUBLIC
RIDGELY FIELDING ALIAS R. W. FIELDS
ARRESTED 1947 SUSPICION POSSESSION NARCOTICS. RELEASED LACK OF EVIDENCE. SUGGEST DOUBLE-CHECK FIELDING. ALL OTHER NAMES UNKNOWN. NELLIS.

Web thanked the operator and went out. Cameron would want to know this development right away.

The implication was staggering: the gang must have known from the start that Web was on their trail. They'd had a man on the outbound

trip, watching his every move. Maybe other messages had been intercepted.

He pushed his way through the crowded deck. On the last night out, excitement over the impending record-breaking crossing was building to a fever pitch. Passengers milled everywhere, ganged up on the bulletinboards, waiting for each new hourly log. In place of the usual five or six pools on the ship's speed, the pursers were handling ten or more. Private pools and side bets built up the tension.

Struggling through the crowd, Web felt a hand on his arm. He turned to face Donaldson.

"Misterr Webley," the Chief Purser burred. "I've been lookin' for you. Would you care to step into my office a moment?"

Web nodded, and followed the broad back.

"There," Donaldson said, shutting the door. "This is quieter, some. Sit down, if you please."

Web sat, waited for the other to unburden his mind. The Chief Purser rubbed the black mattress of hair on the back of his hand reflectively.

"Mr. Webley," he began with explosive suddenness, "I take you for a man who can keep his mouth shut."

"That's a large part of my business, Mr. Donaldson."

Donaldson jerked his head forward in agreement. "In ordinary circumstances, I should agree with my superior officer. I believe this is not an ordinary circumstance. It pains me that the letter of the rules should hamper your work. Do you honestly believe it will help you to know what is inside Mr. Fielding's trunks?"

"Yes, it would."

Donaldson hesitated, then took the plunge. "Well, I propose to give you a look inside those trunks. At least," he modified his statement, "the ones in the hold."

THE hold housed all the baggage of its capacity passenger-load without the appearance of crowding. Donaldson made his request to the porter who kept guard over this domain deep below the waterline; and the porter, after consulting a card index, ran a small power lift into a corner of the hold and neatly forked down two trunks.

Donaldson hauled a fat ring of keys out of his pocket. "I borrowed these from Mr. Johns, our locksmith."

Web smiled, and came forth with a ring almost as fully furnished. "Too bad you went to the trouble. I wouldn't have come down if I wasn't prepared. Thoughtful of you, just the same, Mr. Donaldson."

The two men grinned at each other in perfect understanding. Donaldson pocketed his jangling keys; Web, after

a glance at the make of the trunks, went to work. He opened one trunk on the second trial, the other on the third.

A careful inspection of both trunks, however, revealed only clothing, personal belongings, and the souvenirs that any world-traveler would naturally pick up.

Donaldson did not hide his disappointment. "No dope here."

Web quickly tested the walls and bottoms of the trunks for possible hidden spaces; found none. He repacked the contents, closed and locked the trunks. Then he turned to the purser. "There's still that third trunk in his stateroom. That's got to be it."

"But how are you going to get to it?"

Web grinned quizzically. "Better not ask, Mr. Donaldson. What you don't know can't hurt Second Officer Lycomb."

CAMERON whistled when Web showed him the intercepted radiogram. "If they're on to us, it means we've got to be doubly careful," was his comment.

Web nodded. "The first order of business is to get a gander at that trunk."

"Have to hurry. This damn ship is going so fast she's scarcely touching water. We'll be in by dawn."

Web ruminated. "There'll be a million cocktail parties tonight—Fielding's not going to sit on that trunk in his stateroom."

Cameron grinned. "I think I catch."

"Okay, Dick. You ought to be able to meet up with him somewhere by midnight anyway, without making it seem obvious."

"Right. As soon as I think he's going to stay put I'll give you the high sign. How long will you need?"

"Ten minutes should be plenty. I'll wait here in the cabin for your ring."

Cameron said, "That's going to make it a dull evening for you."

"It'll be worth it to see what's inside that trunk," said Web grimly. . . .

The din outside was piling up to rival Times Square on New Year's Eve. Web sat with a book in his hand, reading the same paragraph over and over without getting the dimmest gleam of sense out of it.

Midnight passed—then one o'clock—then two.

It was well after three when the phone rang. Cameron's voice came over, almost drowned under a background of thunderous conviviality.

"Hi, Pop?" Dick sounded half seas over. Web smiled. Cameron must be putting on quite a show—Cameron, who could hold two quarts of aquavit without turning a hair.

"Dick? What's up?"

"We want you come on over here."

"Who's there?" Web asked cautiously.

"Ev'body. Ev'body who is anybody. All here."

"Going to be there long?"

"Long enough."

"Okay, Dick. Hold the fort. I'll hurry it up."

Web cradled the phone and reached for his coat. The heavy ring of keys pulled at his pocket with a comforting weight.

He fought his way down to Corridor E on D Deck, worked through the crowd to Fielding's stateroom. A quick glance in both directions showed him plenty of passengers in various stages of inebriation; Fielding was not among them. Web calmly went to work with his keys. No one paid him the slightest attention.

The room was a mess—Fielding was a sloppy dresser—but Web scarcely noticed. His eyes were reserved for the large fiber trunk in the corner.

He hurried to it, threw aside the shirt Fielding had discarded on its lid. He selected a key and opened the lock on the first attempt. He snapped open the hasps and threw up the lid.

He had been prepared, but even so, he gasped.

The trunk was filled—to the top—with neatly packed paper sacks, each about the size and heft of a two-pound sack of sugar, each with the familiar label in Chinese and English:

HEROIN HYDROCHLOR

DIACETYL MORPHINE HYDROCHLORIDE

Kilos. Two hundred kilos! Maybe more. . . . Four hundred forty pounds! Three million grains—thirty million caps for thirty million hypes. Enough to supply three thousand addicts for a full year!

Web closed the lid of the trunk. He must get out of here before Fielding returned.

He saw the flash of a shadow, too late to turn. He had heard nothing—there was too much noise outside for that.

The crushing blow from behind shattered his world and plunged it into the darkness of limitless space.

Chapter Seventeen

WEB WENT OUT TO DARKNESS and to darkness he returned—darkness and close, fetid, overused air. His head throbbed intolerably; but when he tried to put his hand to it, the automatic gesture was blocked. He was confined on all sides, he realized; his long legs were doubled into a kind of foetal position in a space much too small for them.

Carefully he moved his hands along the surface of his prison; he felt fabric, a seam, metal brads. Then something

that moved to his touch: a tightly-packed paper sack about the size of a two-pound bag of sugar.

He froze at the sound of a voice. He recognized it as Fielding's, but not the expansive Fielding of the ship's bar; a tense voice, nervous and frightened.

"Yeah, yeah, all taken care of. . . . Sure, I know what to do. I only hope to God there's no slip-up on the pier. . . . It's easy for you to say don't worry. I can't help worrying. If anything goes wrong—"

A knock sounded at the stateroom door. Fielding sucked in a breath, then called out: "Who's there?"

"Porter, sir."

"Just a minute." Then, lower, "Porter's here for the trunk now. All right, all right. See you later."

Web heard the phone click, heard steps, the opening of a door. The porter, clearer now: "We're docking in a few minutes, sir. May I take your baggage?"

"Go right ahead."

"You'll find it on the pier, under your initial," the porter said.

IN spite of the seriousness of his predicament, Web almost laughed aloud. He was in the trunk—the very trunk he had been examining when he'd been so neatly sapped! His hand brushed another kilo, and another. He wondered how many kilos had gone through the porthole to make room for his body. Plenty—and each one must have caused Fielding to sweat blood.

Fielding's cryptic conversation could mean only one thing. Web had been mad to imagine that his movements were unobserved. The same confederate who had intercepted Nellis' radio was on this boat now. He'd tipped Fielding off; or maybe it was he who'd slugged Web while Fielding remained under Cameron's watchful eye. The question was academic now. It was clear that they took him for dead. Getting rid of a murdered body aboard a crowded liner could be a problem—but not for men who knew how to smuggle a loaded trunk past Customs. Body and dope would travel together.

A rough jolt, a slight tip, and the trunk was lifted on a dolly. Web both heard and felt the handbags slammed on top of his tiny tomb. Then he was rolling, rolling. . . .

The trunk was of fiber, Web remembered. As soon as it was set down, somewhere amid thousands of others, Web tried to reach his pocket knife. An arm, a leg, or a kilo seemed to block his every movement. He gritted his teeth, damned the greed that had led Fielding to save as many kilos as possible.

He managed the knife finally, at the cost of more sweat and throbbing

agony at the back of his skull. He worked with his left hand stretched across his face until his fingers were numb. Then he tried switching hands.

The noise outside his prison told him a moving belt had been started and baggage was being loaded on it. That meant the ship had docked. Web stopped his digging temporarily; he didn't want to plunge his blade through into the sight—or the backside—of some unsuspecting porter.

He awaited his own turn with dread. He knew how trunks were man-handled, especially out of sight of the customers. His turn came all too soon. He was unceremoniously tipped end-over-end—there'd be bruises from this, all right—then dumped to the comparative calm of the endless belt.

The comparative calm was a snare and a delusion. The memory of each separate roller would be forever implanted in his spine, Web was certain.

At the belt's end, more rough treatment as the trunk was transferred to a fork-lift. Then the blessed peace of solid, immovable land.

Web immediately went to work on his peephole again. Now his concern was that he wouldn't be able to finish in time. But the knife went through in a matter of minutes; and the tiny shaft of light that followed the blade was the most welcome light Web had ever seen.

With renewed energy, he concentrated on enlarging the hole. Now the work went faster. In a short time he

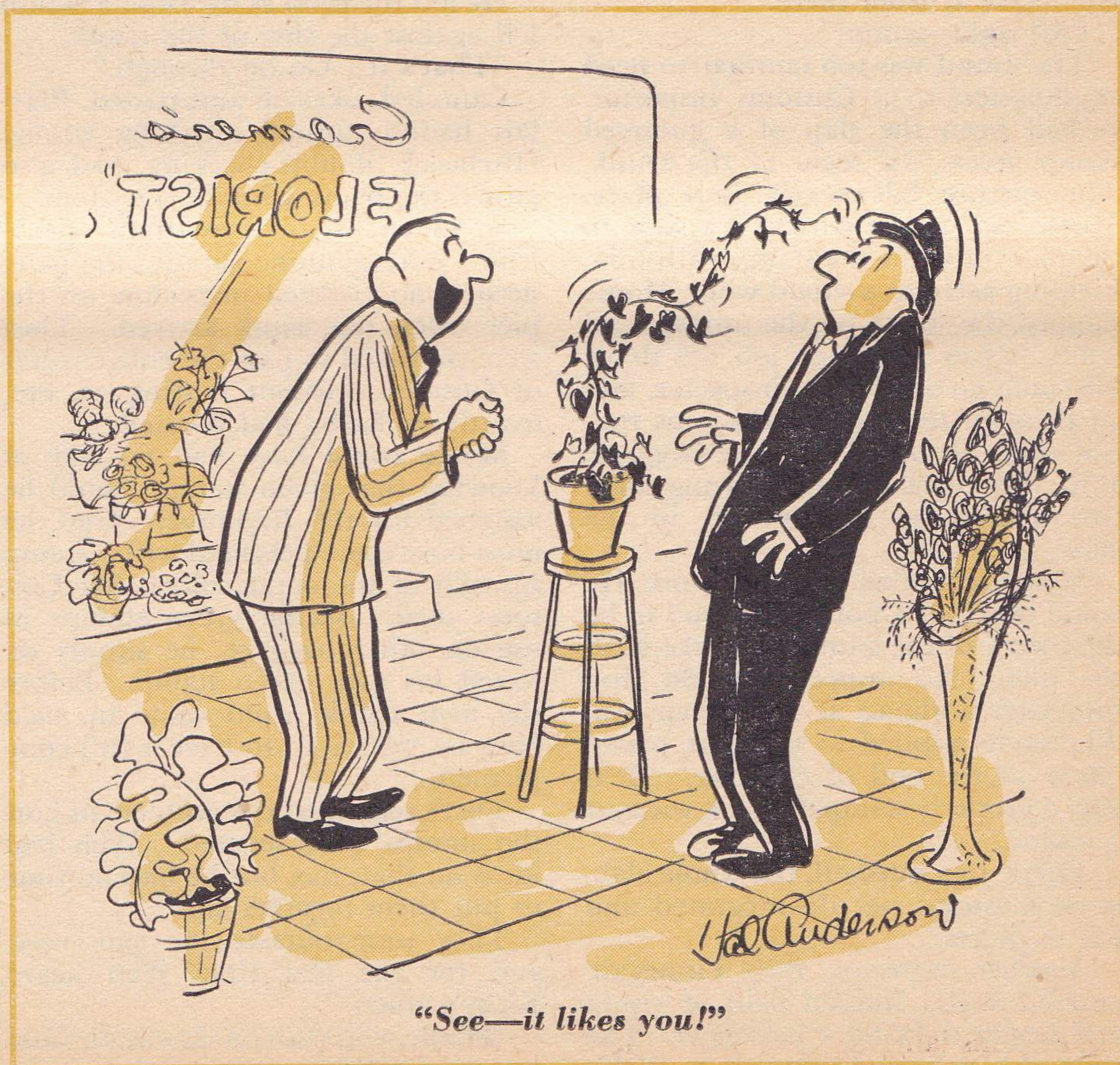
had a respectable peephole an inch in diameter.

Web applied his eye to the opening. He was in luck; instead of the non-edifying view of another trunk, he could see for a considerable distance across the pier. He tried to arrange the kilos and himself to reach the least uncomfortable position possible.

He watched the familiar activity of disembarkation. Kautsky, a veteran inspector, came into view and worked with a passenger so close that Web could hear his every word, could see the green stamps he pasted on inspected baggage. Kautsky would be impressed, Web thought grimly, if he knew to what lengths his superior would go to observe his work—impressed, but not gratified.

Web stiffened suddenly. Framed in his peephole was Ridge Fielding. The sallow Fielding was some distance away, threading his way through the maze of baggage and milling people, searching to right and left. A thousand other passengers were doing the same, but the strain on Fielding's drawn face was something more than the usual fatigue of the ordinary passenger rounding up his baggage for inspection. As Fielding drew closer, his haggard, intense eyes told Web with crystal clarity that this was the moment he had been waiting for. This, incontrovertibly, was it.

When he was twenty feet away, Fielding spotted the trunk. Web held his breath.



Fielding's eyes darted quickly to right and left. He threw a casual glance behind him, then stepped toward the trunk in a gait that anyone not alerted would have accepted as casual and unplanned.

Web's view was blotted by Fielding's legs. The lid of the trunk creaked. Fielding had sat down on it, just as scores of other passengers were resting weary feet on other trunks all up and down the long pier.

BUT unlike the others, Fielding didn't stay put. Ten seconds later he was up again, walking back in the direction from which he had come. Web breathed again, and shifted his cramped position to await further developments.

Developments weren't long in coming. Fielding was coming back; and paralleling his path, carefully ignoring him, was the huge, unmistakable bulk of Moose.

Web held his breath as the two converged on him. Their muttered words came clearly through the thin fiber walls.

"All right, get it on." This was Fielding.

Moose's voice, lumbering, emotionless. "Keep your pants on."

"The green one, you idiot!"

"Yeah, yeah. I got it."

Web heard a soft, slapping sound outside the trunk, then Fielding's muttered, "Okay. Let's get moving."

"Kirby's waitin' outside the gate. He'll take it from there."

"All right—scram!"

The sound was too familiar to need explanation to a Customs inspector. It had been the slap of a gummed stamp across the seam of the trunk. The picture fell neatly into place. Moose, acting the part of a visitor to the pier, brought the stamp with him. Fielding acted as a shield while Moose slapped the stamp on the uninspected trunk. Now Fielding's job was done. He could go off, find an inspector, and go through the regular Customs routine with his own legitimate baggage. With his declaration showing only two trunks, he was entirely in the clear.

Moose remained with the trunk. He could now call a porter, pretend to be the owner of the trunk, and take it off the pier. No inspector would stop him after a glance at that green seal. The same applied to the port patrol officer at the end of the pier. He'd pass a properly stamped trunk without question.

There, in a nutshell, the whole elaborate Customs net disintegrated and fell to pieces.

Another inspector, Billy Finnegan, entered Web's limited field of vision and began working a passenger. The sight of him brought sharply to Web's

consciousness the risk he was taking. All he had to do was shout to be set free. But in the resultant confusion, before the startled Finnegan could locate the source of the shouting and manage to free him, the gang would make a permanent getaway and there'd be no tying the trunk and the dope to anyone except Fielding—when and if they caught even Fielding.

Web had not overlooked the chance that they'd dump him, trunk and all, into the East River the first opportunity they got. But it wasn't likely. He reached down and fondled one of the kilos with his fingers. These neat packages were his insurance. Fielding had managed to save a good thirty of them, Web figured; enough to give the gang some profit on their investment, if not the staggering profit they'd counted on. The space his own carcass took up must amount to a hundred and fifty grand. He'd never been worth that before, and very likely would never be worth it again.

"This way, porter," said Moose.

THEN a jolt as the trunk went on a handcart, and the rough ride over the cement pier. The gate was the critical point. When the handcart slowed down, Web knew that they'd reached it. Two port patrolmen would be double-checking the stamps.

He identified their voices as the handcart inched ahead. Playfair and Hitchcock—good men, both. A moment more would tell how good.

He felt the thud as the rubber stamp fell against the side of the trunk.

"That's it. Go on through."

Canceled, okayed, and passed. Playfair hadn't noticed anything wrong. Hitchcock, double-checking, had also passed the trunk without question.

So much for one mystifying problem. With genuine stamps, the gang needed no crooked inspectors on the pier when the trunk arrived. They were prepared to pass the entire roster of Customs without batting an eye, exactly as Kirby had boasted.

Moose could have had no way of knowing that green stamps would be assigned for the *Republic*. Ergo, he must have come prepared with a stamp in each of the eight colors that Customs used. Seeing green stamps in use on other baggage, he simply selected his own green stamp. Before the next trunk could come in, he'd have to replace it, to have a full complement.

There remained the problem of how the stamps were secured. Web had ideas on that, too, but he had no time to put them together now.

They were outside the gate now, and for the first time Web heard Kirby's voice.

"Moose, you rush on downstairs and reserve a cab."

"Yeah, sure. Ain't we going to wait for the other guy?"

"Fielding? He'll come along later. You get that cab; I'll handle the trunk."

"Yeah, yeah." Moose's voice was already fading.

There was a minute of inactivity, then Kirby's voice came through the thin walls once more. "Look, porter, we'll go down the other ramp."

The other ramp? Web was puzzled. The other ramp was a hundred feet away.

The porter had the same idea. "But, mister, this one's just as good, and a lot closer!"

A moment's pause, undoubtedly filled with the silence that indicated a bill changing hands.

"Yes, sir! The other ramp it is!"

Web felt the sudden right face as the porter wheeled him crosswise on the pier. This wasn't in the script. Now he was on the moving baggage ramp, going down. He knew that Kirby was riding the passenger escalator alongside, traveling at the same speed.

The street noises built, took over, smothered the pier noises. Web heard Kirby hail a truck.

The driver came over. "You got just the one trunk, mister?"

"That's all." Kirby's suppressed hurry and nervousness escaped the truckdriver.

"Gonna cost you just as much, y'un'erstand. Takes me just as long for the trip."

"I understand." Ben Kirby pressed without seeming to try to press. "Let's go."

A grunt as the driver hoisted the trunk first to his knees, then with a practiced movement, over the tailgate. He blew out his breath. "Heavy bastard you got here. Where to, mister?"

"I'll ride with you," Kirby told him. "Come on."

DURING the ride, Web tried to straighten out the meaning of this new development. Where was Moose? Where was Fielding? It wasn't likely they'd take their eyes off the trunk, let Kirby play nursemaid to a small fortune in dope as well as a presumably dead body.

But of course, Kirby had no way of knowing about the body. He and Fielding had pointedly kept apart, appearing not to know each other on the pier. Fielding must be excitedly whispering the tale to Moose at this very minute while they waited for Kirby and the trunk at the bottom of the other ramp.

The other ramp!

It hit Web like a thunderclap. Fielding and Moose were waiting at the bottom of the *other* ramp, while Kir-

by, by the simple expedient of redirecting the porter, was stealing the trunk and its contents right out from under their noses!

In the trunk, Web bumped up the freight elevator of a hotel. Kirby stayed right with the trunk, answering the truckdriver's attempts at conversation with brusque monosyllables. Sounds told Web they were entering a room; the trunk was tipped off the dolly. Kirby paid off the driver and closed the door behind him.

For a moment there was silence, then quick approaching footsteps. Kirby didn't have the key—that was still in Fielding's possession, of course. He attacked the lock with a screwdriver or something similar. The lock held valiantly; Kirby cursed and undoubtedly sweated. Inside, Web reorganized his cramped limbs for action.

A sudden snap of metal, overloud in the closed space. Kirby's triumphant grunt, "There, you son of a bitch!"

There were more metal snaps as Kirby opened the hasps. Then a rush of fresh air and a blinding light.

The lid was open.

WEB tried to spring up like a jack-in-the-box. The effort was a dismal failure.

But his sudden appearance was far from a failure. Kirby ripped out an unearthly yell and staggered back as Web slowly, painfully forced his protesting legs to lift him. He was all but blind from the sudden rush of light to his distended pupils. Somewhere in the indeterminate distance he saw a blob of moving shadow that was Ben Kirby.

In the middle of the blob he made out a shiny, motionless glint that was Kirby's gun.

"Don't move," said Kirby, still sucking his breath in audible fright. "Stay where you are, copper."

"Mind if I step out of this trunk?" Web asked. "I can't see. I've been in it for a long time."

"Stay where you are. You're going out of here in that same trunk. Only this time you'll be dead."

"Better get the kilos out first, Kirby. Quite a lot of 'em here."

The blob made a move closer, then stopped. "Don't give me that."

"I'm not kidding you," Web said. "Look, I'll show you."

He started to reach downward, against the screaming agony of his outraged muscles. Kirby's sharp command halted him.

"Stop!"

Web straightened up. It was just as agonizing as bending had been.

"Get out of the trunk."

Web obeyed with creaking slowness. "Over there."

"I can't see, I told you. My eyes are all haywire."

"By the wall. Move."

Web moved. Something that looked like a table was in the way. He put out his hand; it was a table; he went around it.

He watched Kirby's blob, a little clearer now, move swiftly to the trunk, loose a furious monosyllable.

"See," Web said pleasantly, "I wouldn't fool you. That was neatly done, Kirby; the way you hijacked the trunk away from Fielding and Moose; very neat job." Every second he delayed Kirby from action meant clearer vision for Web; even with vision he didn't stand much of a chance, without it he stood no chance at all. "Too bad most of the stuff is gone, but Fielding had to make room for me."

"That son of a bitch!" Kirby spat out.

"I've sure got to hand it to you," Web said. Flattery might be a road to reach this man. "One man's brains knocking the whole Customs system cockeyed."

It almost worked. "Not bad, eh?" He could hear the pride in Kirby's voice, a pride that turned instantly to suspicion and venom. "You're stalling, you lousy copper. Well, your time's run out, see?"

The gun—Web now could see it clearly as a gun—glinted as Kirby's finger tightened on the trigger.

Web made a dive for it. He had nothing to lose, not any more.

The sound of the explosion filled the room. The slug should have stopped Web, spun him around, numbed him. It didn't. That was crazy, Web somehow found time to think, crazy! Kirby couldn't miss at this distance!

HE reached Kirby the next instant, grappled with him.

The body he seized was oddly limp, nonresistant. It sagged, collapsed, pulled Web to the carpet with it.

Web turned, looked at the figure in the doorway.

It was the figure of a woman, clad in black that shrouded her from ankles to fingertips. From her hat hung a veil that hid her face; around her neck a small scarf was draped to cover her throat.

The figure was familiar, but Web was slow to place it. Then he heard the voice, and he knew.

"He will be a long time dying," Hila said. "But not so long as I."

Web stared at her incredulously. She lifted her left hand, the hand that was not holding the small, smoking revolver. She raised her veil, and Web gasped.

The brutal beating she'd been given had disfigured her for life.

"His gift to me in Las Vegas for double-crossing him," she muttered. "And now he has mine in return."

Chapter Eighteen

IN THE CHIEF INSPECTOR'S office they sat facing Lou Fisch. A night's rest had removed from Web most of the evidences of his ordeal by trunk; but his eyes were filmed with a grimness that had not been there before this assignment started, and his shoulders sloped a little lower than formerly. Cameron slumped as usual in his chair, his good left hand nervously scratching from time to time at the edge of the cast on his right.

The deep-set eyes of Lou Fisch darted from one to the other behind thick-lensed glasses. They settled on Cameron, whose own eyes narrowed slightly as he met the challenge.

"I got Nellis out of here," Lou Fisch said abruptly, "because I don't like washing the Bureau's dirty linen in public. So now, just between us girls, maybe you'll tell us where in the hell you were, Cameron, while all this was going on?"

"I told you, Lou. I was at a cocktail party on the deck below. I was supposed to hang on to Fielding."

"And did a lousy job of it."

Cameron leaned forward, snapped, "Quit riding me, Lou. You can't make me feel any worse than I do already. I tell you the guy fed me knockout drops. When I came to, the ship had docked." He turned to Web. "I was frantic, Pop. I hunted all over for you. When I couldn't find you, I took it for granted you'd gone off on one of your lone-wolf jaunts." He turned back defensively to Lou Fisch. "He did that all the time."

Web said, "That's true, Lou."

Fisch appeared not to hear him. He was still fixing Cameron on the skewers of his eyes.

Cameron went on: "By that time the passengers were getting off. I had to do something. I didn't see Web tailing Fielding, so I took that on. I watched him like a hawk, Web."

"But you didn't see the trunk," Lou Fisch said.

"I saw Fielding sit on a trunk, sure, but how was I to know that was the hot box? After all, I'd never seen it. Web cased the stateroom, not me."

"Right again," Web put in. "Dick hadn't seen the trunk."

Lou Fisch shot a look at Web. "How can you keep covering for him? He damn near killed you!"

"I'm not covering. I'm just telling what happened. The main thing is, we've got the scheme licked. We know how they did it." Web reached into his pocket, pulled out a sheaf of colored stickers. "Here are the stamps,

right off Kirby's body. Every color but green, and that's on the trunk."

Lou Fisch bent forward. "Counterfeit?"

"No. They're genuine ones, all right."

"Where'd they get 'em?"

"That's the next question," said Web.

"We'll find out fast enough," Lou Fisch said grimly. "All we have to do is check back on the stamp numbers. See who they were issued to."

Cameron put out his good hand. "I'll tend to that, Web. You've done enough already."

Web looked at Cameron, made no move to hand him the stamps. "That won't be necessary, Dick."

Cameron's eyebrows came together, and the tiny curve disappeared from the corner of his lip. "How's that?"

"I mean, you can tell us without checking. Why don't you, Dick?"

Cameron stared at Web as at one suddenly demented.

WEB'S voice carried no triumph, only a pensive sadness. "It came to me on the ship—the last day, remember? I mentioned to you then that I knew how it was worked."

"How?" demanded Lou Fisch.

"Like the rest of the scheme, it was simplicity itself. You know the procedure when an inspector finds a passenger has failed to declare a hatbox or a camera."

"Of course. Inspect the piece, stamp it, mark the declaration 'Stamp number so-and-so issued in excess' and record the same information on the stub."

"Right. But suppose there is no excess article."

Lou Fisch's head snapped forward.

Web went on: "Suppose a passenger has six articles of baggage. That takes six stamps. But the inspector simply writes up a nonexistent excess article. He marks the deck 'Used one stamp in excess—camera' or 'briefcase,' or some other article the passenger doesn't have. He reports the stamp used on his book, and now he has an unused stamp. He'd probably pick a passenger who was continuing out of the country, to make it tougher if we ever tried to check back. He continues the process until he has a stamp in every color. Then he's in business."

Lou's eyes narrowed to carborundum slits. "So that's it. A crooked inspector."

"Yes. But not a crooked inspector on the dock when the load arrives. The stamps can be collected months ahead, at leisure." Web turned to Cameron. "And it takes a man on the job, not an ex-inspector like Obie; a man who can replace a stamp each time one is used up."

"Obie said that Kirby approached him—what could he want from Obie? What was Obie's value to the mob? Obie knew all the inspectors. They all ate and drank at his place—and chewed the fat with Obie. He'd know who'd listen to reason, who'd go for a chance at the big money. . . . Who carried a grudge against the Service because he'd been passed over for a promotion."

Cameron was on his feet, his chair rasping back over the wooden floor with the force of his movement. "Look here, Pop—"

Web, still seated, looked up at him. His eyes were sad, pained, regretful. "I thought I knew you, Dick. I never dreamed—"

The knuckles of Cameron's left hand were white against the back of the chair. "Watch it, Web! You don't know what you're saying. You're crazy."

Web ran a tired hand over his eyes. "Why drag it out, Dick? You haven't got a chance. We've picked up Fielding and Moose. They'll turn on you, you know that."

"So!" Cameron snarled. "A frame!"

"You know better than that. There's the cop on duty at the hospital. He said no *unauthorized* person got into Zoltan's room. But he'll remember the last *authorized* person to go in before we found Zoltan dead. And the steward on the *Republic* will recall the man who signed for Nellis' radiogram—signed with his left hand because his right was in a plaster cast—"

"I wouldn't go into that, Pop. If I were you, I'd stop right now." Cameron took a step backward. The two seated men saw the Police Special flash in his uninjured left hand. He kept backing toward the door. "Just keep your seat, Pop, and you won't get hurt."

"Put that gun down," Lou Fisch ordered.

Cameron barked out a short, ugly laugh. "Look who's giving orders!" He turned the muzzle of the revolver toward Lou Fisch. "Playing God there behind that desk of yours: This one is in and that one is out."

Fisch slapped his palms down on top of his desk and half-rose. A threatening gesture of the gun backed him down again.

"Get up, skipper," Cameron said. "Go on, get up. It'd be a pleasure to let you have it."

Fisch's eyes measured the hopeless distance between himself and Cameron, the big desk that blocked his way. He subsided in his swivel chair.

Web stood up; Cameron turned his attention from Lou Fisch. "Stay where you are, Pop; I don't want to have to—"

"What happened, Dick? Where did you go off the beam? We were friends.

We studied for the exam together, took this job together."

"And then the little tin god over there stepped in."

Web shook his head. "It can't be just that. A guy doesn't go off the deep end over losing a promotion, not unless there's more behind it."

"Nix, Pop. You don't have to dig for the reason. There was dough in it. Isn't that good enough?"

"Good enough for murder, Dick?"

"I *had* to protect the gimmick! The first deal went sour, sure, but as long as I held onto the gimmick, I could use it again. You said it yourself—a lifetime pass through Customs. I couldn't let Zoltan blab."

"So you smothered him with his pillow. Then Obie—"

"Obie saved me the trouble. He bumped himself off first. But it was lucky for me I got there before anybody else."

"The confession?"

Cameron nodded shortly. "Four solid pages—the poor, fat slob really spilled his guts. I burned it." Cameron eyed Web steadily. "Then I had you to worry about. I did my damnedest to steer you off. Warned 'em you were going to raid. Even tried to stop you by wrecking the car." He held up his plaster-bound wrist. "Only I got this, and you went on. You're a real bird dog, Pop; I gotta hand you that." He wagged his head regretfully. "And you wrecked the gimmick. Now it's gone; nobody'll ever use it again. I ought to plug you just for that."

"Yes, I guess you should, Dick. Because, now that we know, you can be sure it'll never work again. The loophole will be plugged."

CAMERON had his back to the door now. His fingers tightened around the stock of the gun.

Web held out his hand. "Don't be a fool, Dick. Give me the gun."

Cameron's lip trembled, showed signs of breaking into the old sardonic curve. His eyes searched Web's eyes. They found no enmity there, only sadness and disillusion.

Lou Fisch, pinned behind the desk, leaned forward but did not dare speak.

A tiny shudder went through Cameron's frame. With a quick flip, he tossed the gun to Web.

"Take it, Pop. You win. I couldn't before, and I couldn't now—not to you."

Web caught the gun, slipped it into his pocket. His free arm went around Cameron's shoulder.

Cameron looked into Web's face, close to his own. "You'll take me over, won't you, Pop? I wouldn't want it to be anybody else."

Web nodded. "Sure, Dick, sure." •

RELAX and ENJOY

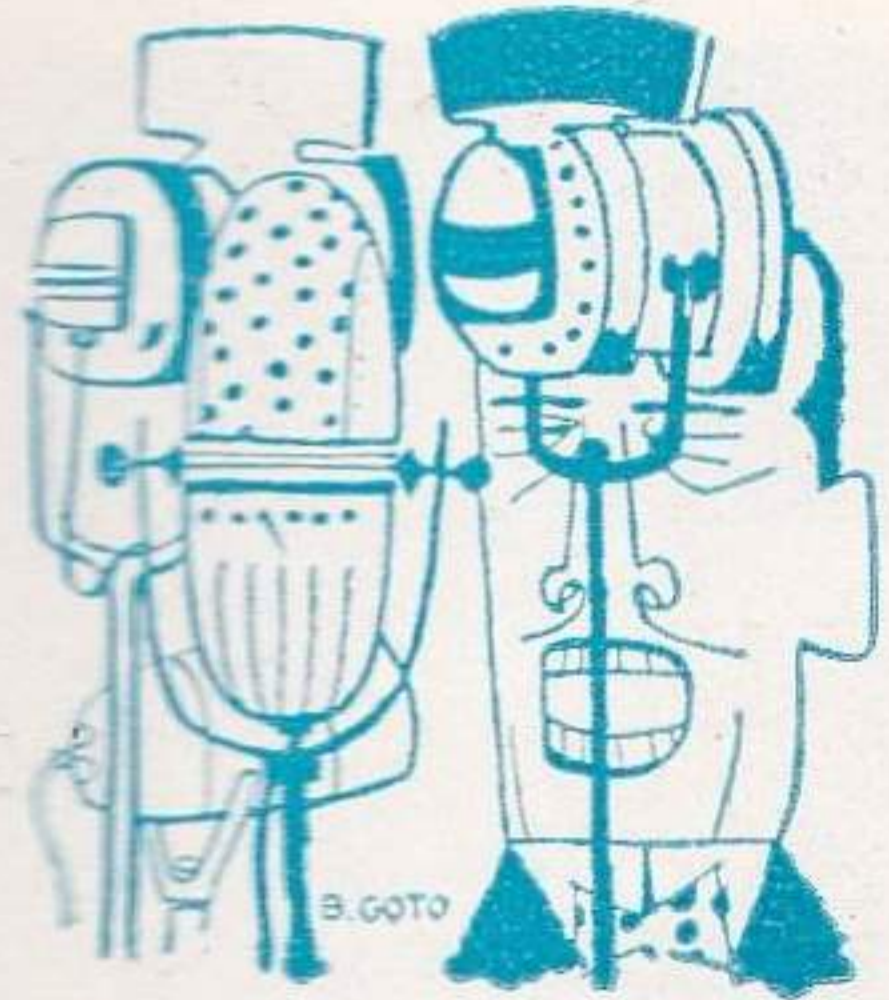
BOOKS ↴



Adventure: *The Story of Everest* (Dutton, \$3.75) By W. H. Murray. *The Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, 1951* (Dutton, \$6) By Eric Ship-ton. Just two months ago the 32-year-old battle against the heights of Everest, the world's highest mountain, was won. And battle it has been, demanding at least

twelve lives and untold hardship. Even now that it has been conquered, the massive, ugly mountain retains its deserved reputation of almost human malevolence and brutality. In his book, Murray carefully chronicles the nine attempts to scale the legendary mountain from the first reconnaissance expedition in 1921 through last year's Swiss expedition. The un-emotional, factual reporting merely serves to point up the almost unbelievable obstacles these expeditions have had to overcome, with the result that this is a narrative of adventure on the grandest scale. Ship-ton's book is primarily a collection of magnificent photographs taken on the 1951 expedition, with a brief introductory text. In combination, these two books go a long way toward answering the virtually unanswerable question, "Why climb a mountain?" Mallory's famous reply, "Because it's there," begins to make sense after reading these books. The haunting fascination of the landscape, as fantastic as the face of the moon, the challenge of the unbelievably hostile elements, the almost transcendent beauty of the distant peaks—all these are here in these books along with the personal knowledge and experience of the courageous men who have been there. The saga of Everest hasn't ended, and probably never will as long as there are men of courage and imagination with a taste for the rugged thrills that can only be found on the slopes of this Himalayan giant.

RECORDS ↴



Instrumental: Big band swing gets a good going-over by *Yank Lawson and Will Bradley* in an exciting Brunswick album. The drive and spirit of this all-star aggregation sounds like the great bands of the 1940's, and it's really welcome after years of bleating singers and mushy sounds. . . . The tinkling "good-time" rhythms of Art Mooney's orchestra that hit the big time with "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover" are on exhibition in MGM's new album "*Banjo Bonanza*." It's good fun.

Band Music: Paul Lavallo's Band of America plays a rousing set of classics in Victor's "*Sunday Band Concert*."

Note: All records reviewed are available in all speeds.

MOVIES ↴

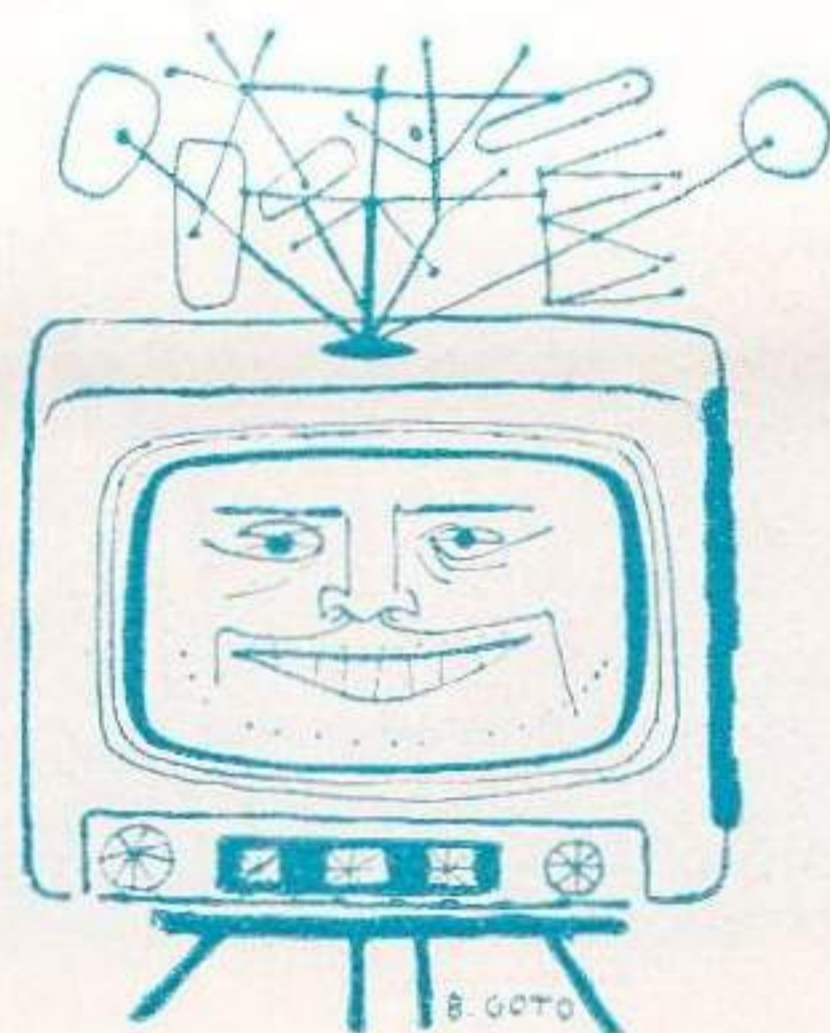


Biography: *Houdini* (Paramount). Based more, perhaps, on fiction than on fact, this breezy film of the great escape artist, with Tony Curtis playing Houdini and Janet Leigh as his wife, is pleasant, with some good moments of excitement and danger. The stunts are excellently staged, with the right amount of suspense

and realism, and include many that Houdini made famous and which have tantalized so many performers since then. The end is a little disappointing, since it by-passes fact completely and has Houdini die from an appendix which ruptures as he is doing a water-torture act suspended head-first in a tank; but except for that deliberate bit of hokum the film isn't as fanciful as many Hollywood biographies.

Science-Fiction: *Spaceways* (Lippert). Adapted by Nelson Bond and rewritten in narrative form elsewhere in this issue of BLUEBOOK, this made-in-England film gives a good idea of the conditions under which men of science must often work nowadays, and, combined with some excellent rocket-shots and a strong chase-sequence, it all adds up to one of the better and more believable science-fiction pictures in the current Hollywood series.

TELEVISION ↴



Detective: Melvyn Douglas joins the crowded ranks of video private eyes with his new offering, *Hollywood Offbeat*. It's a standard detective story, TV type, that has only the exceptionally competent work of the veteran stage and film actor to differentiate it from the raft of similar sagas, jamming the channels these days.

In the rôle of a somewhat cynical ex-GI turned sleuth, Douglas gets involved with a large assortment of unsavory characters who run the gamut of civil and criminal offenses. The amount of swift action and narrow escapes is up to par for this kind of show, and the plot-twists, while never startling, are interesting enough to give Douglas plenty of opportunity to make the most of his acting versatility. As long as he can continue to add his skill and authority to this standard whodunit series, it will be good viewing.

Drama: *Tales of Morpheus* is that TV rarity, something both different and good. A dramatic series, *Tales* dramatizes "real dreams of real people." Whether they're real or not makes no difference—it's a good show.

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

25c



THE MAN OF THE YEAR

GEORGE "SPECS" TOPORCER

With this issue, *Bluebook* announces the first of what is expected to be an annual series of awards to be given to the one individual in the country selected by the editors as The Man of the Year.

Ordinarily, in giving an award of this type, a magazine selects a columnist, or commentator, or star of the entertainment world, in order to capitalize on his publicity value. *Bluebook* abjures this method of selection in favor of an honest search to discover the one man in the country, regardless of his station, who is best suited to receive this award.

Based on the principles set down in this issue of *Bluebook* (see pages 66-72), the editors unanimously have selected as this year's award winner the one man we feel best exemplifies the qualities of courage, resourcefulness and greatness typical of our country's founders.

The recipient for 1953: George "Specs" Toporcer.

