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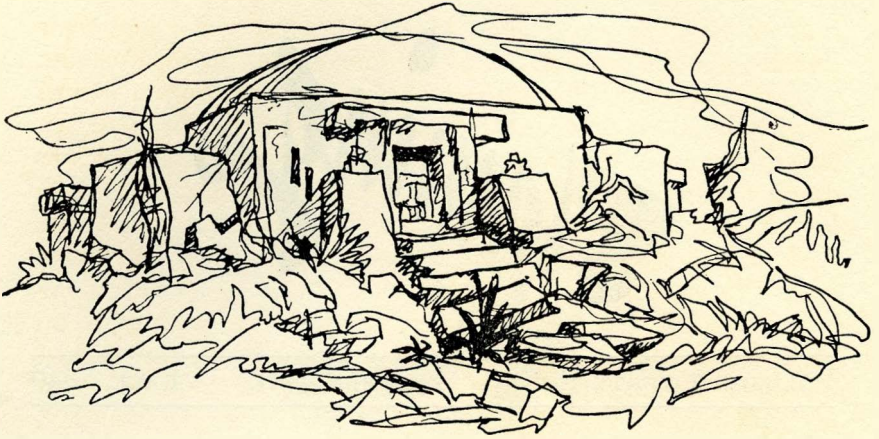
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IN THIS ISSUE

Titles	Page
OUT OF TIME..... <i>by</i> HAROLD P. MCKINNEY	4
AN ELEGY FOR LOVE..... <i>by</i> RICHARD W. GLATTHAR	20
SKETCHES..... <i>by</i> HARRY BALDWIN	22
WHEN TO QUIT <i>by</i> MATILANN THOMS & H. P. MCKINNEY	24
AUTUMNAL SMOKE—A POEM <i>by</i> RICHARD W. GLATTHAR	27
RETURN TO TUNIS..... <i>by</i> GORDON B. CLARK	28
IN ANSWER TO A QUOTATION OF HESIOD.....	36
LOUISA..... <i>by</i> DALLAS WILLIAMS	37
QUATRAIN TO ACADEMICIANS—A POEM <i>by</i> HALL TENNIS	42
CONVERSATION AT SEA—A POEM. <i>by</i> GORDON C. CLARK	43
QUATRAIN—A POEM..... <i>by</i> RICHARD GLATTHAR	44
MY ROLLINS GIRL—A POEM..... <i>by</i> GEORGE LYMBURN	44



OUT OF TIME

by HAROLD P. McKINNEY

THE jeep skidded and slid sideways toward the ditch, sending a swath of light arcing from the headlights onto the gaunt-armed mulberry trees bordering the road. Water-covered rice-paddies picked up the light and flung it against the dikes. The motor roared as the four wheels spun, caught, and lurched the jeep back onto the road.

"Take it easy, Rod." Spence Hardigan loosened his grip on the side of the jeep. "We don't have to make Taiyang tonight."

"I guess we're far enough ahead of those troops by now," Rod Ludlow grumbled, pushing back the lock of silver hair that immediately flopped back across his forehead. "But we wouldn't have to be here at all if you hadn't slugged that General. Just when I had him talked into believing we were old friends, too."

"How was I to know he was a General?" Spence asked indignantly. "They all look alike. Besides, he was poking that shot-gun snoot of his too close to the book. Remember, no book, no dough."

"We should be back in India by tomorrow night," Rod answered, "and the money will be just about made then."

Peering through the slanting rain that turned the road to mire, Rod found the jouncing of the seat cushion against the

base of his spine reassuring. He and Spence had risked their lives to get the leather-bound volume hidden in the cushion.

It still seemed incredulous that it had been only a month since Sidney Marlow, the millionaire book-collector, had approached him in the library of Texas university where he was doing research on his graduate thesis. Yes, he had told Marlow, he was interested both in ancient religions and rare books. And he and Spence knew the Taiyang locale; they had flown from the airstrip there for the ATC.

Then Marlow made his proposition. It had nothing to do with the Civil War but he wanted a rare book, the Korda, brought out of China before it disappeared in the oblivion of war. The Korda was being held by a friend of his, a missionary, who refused to leave his converts. The mission was about a hundred miles north of Taiyang and the lines of battle were falling back toward it, closer each day.

Spence had been glad to come, not only for the money, but for the adventure as well. Marlow money went before them as they flew out to Indian on the Pan-American. The controls of the chartered C-47 had a familiar touch to them as they took off from Dinjan, crossed the matted jungle of Burma, relived the dangers of the Hump, and hours later settled down over the mudwalls of Taiyang. The grinning Chinese who had greeted them with the jeep and fuel for the return trip, they recognized as an old black-market friend.

Then it had been up to them. The ride to the mission had been a nightmare for Rod and fun for Spence. They had to bribe, cajol, threaten, and fight their way the entire hundred miles. At the mission they had gotten the Korda and after spending the night, had tried to induce the missionary to leave with them, only to be refused. On the way back, stray components of two opposing armies, and a gang of bandits had fired indiscriminate shots at them. Then they had been stopped by the raggle-tag General whom Spence had soon punched on the nose. Two bullet holes in the rear curtain appeared ten seconds after the blow landed.

"Lousy shots," was Spence's comment but Rod had been too busy driving south to talk.

Now, as they plunged through a water-filled hole, Spence grunted and said, "What gets me is that any book can be worth all this trouble."

Rod, assuming that not even a bloody-nosed Chinese General would attempt to catch them on such a night, felt in-

clined to talk. "It's not just any book," he said. "The Korda is the bible of a religion worshipped in Ladoc long before Bhudism—maybe more than three thousand years ago."

"If it's that old, you can find it in the WCTU reading room."

"Hardly. Ancient records show that only two copies of the Korda were ever in existence. I'm sitting on one and nobody knows what happened to the other. That's enough to make it priceless."

"What's Marlow going to do with it beyond trying to impress his friends with it?"

"You've got the wrong idea. Marlow's a scholar himself and he'll probably have others come in to try to decipher the unknown language the Korda is written in," Rod said. "I get in on part of that—maybe enough to do a paper for my Ph. D."

"You mean to tell me that Marlow can't read that book?" Spence said. "After all the money he has spent on it?"

"Nobody can," Rod answered. "Philologists need something like the Korda to give them the key, then maybe they'll break it down the way they used the Rose Stone to decipher hieroglyphics."

"I bet all they find is some Nursery Rhymes," Spence snorted.

"No," said Rod, his voice taking on the excitement of the research scholar. "The Kordan monks are supposed to have gone beyond the subconscious and lived in a dream world—which became real for them. Perhaps in that dream world they discovered the secret of life. Just think, Spence, that secret may be in this book I'm sitting on!"

"It's beyond me," Spence said dryly as the jeep bounced over a boulder. "But I'd like to be dreaming myself. And if you don't stop this kidney-killer soon, there won't be any life left."

"Okay," Rod laughed. "The next village."

A few minutes later, the jeep lifted and dropped over a small bridge and passed the clay hovel fringing the road. No light shone within the village. Rod stopped the jeep before the largest house and Spence jumped to the ground. "Wake up in there!" he cried, pounding on the door. "Wake up!"

From inside the house came the murmur of sleepy voices. The flicker of a lamp sprang up as the wick caught fire. The door opened a few inches and a shaven head thrust cautiously through the opening. Spence focused a flashlight on a face

grooved with age. The slant eyes blinked and squinted, trying to peer beyond the blinding light.

"Douse the flash," Rod told Spence.

When Rod and Spence became discernible in the light of the lamp, the wrinkles on the old man's face became a grimace of pleasure.

"Amelicans? Most happy to gleet you." The patriarch bowed his head and opened the door wider. "You come into my humble home?"

"We're looking for the headman," Rod said.

"It is I, Lin Tang, who am headman of this village."

Rod nodded to the old man and glanced into the room. He could see the members of the family stretched in the grotesque postures of sleep. A girl raised her head, sat up, and glanced at the doorway. "He has the lightning mark on him," she said in Chinese.

"It is unfitting for you to look on foreigners," the old man answered sternly. "Go sleep in the shed!" The girl rose with bowed head and left the room through a rear door.

Then a baby raised its cry and Lin Tang smiled apologetically; the cry ceased as the infant was pressed to its mother's breast.

"So solly," the old man said, his eyes on the silver lock that refused to keep its place with Rod's normally brown hair. "Not always so crowded by family has gathered for wedding of youngest daughter."

"Isn't there a vacant shed or house where we can sleep?" Rod asked.

Lin Tang searched his face for a moment, his smile withering to a blank stare. "Few travelers come these days. Long ago when caravan route passed this way, Lamasery of Hangyi gave rest to everyone. But is an evil place for foreigners. Only priest and his daughter go there now."

"We no foreigners," Spence said, pushing up the flesh at the corners of his eyes with his finger-tips. "We good Chinese. Where is the Lamasery?"

"Up there," Lin Tang said. With trembling, long-nailed finger, he pointed into the darkness over the village.

A blinding zig-zag of lightning cut the night and a squat temple flashed into sight for a moment. It hugged the brink of a hill and, in the eerie light, seemed to be suspended in mid-air over the village. As though from its dome, the thump of thunder rolled ominously.

Rod turned to thank the old man in the doorway but he was gone. Behind the door, a bar dropped into place.

"After the ride we've had, that place looks like the Statler to me," Spence said. "Hope the bar's open."

As the jeep began the ascent up the curving road, the motor sputtered and died.

"I've been waiting for this damn thing to run out of gas," Spence said, getting out and fumbling in the dark to unlatch the auxiliary fuel can. "It could've waited until morning."

"Be careful with that stuff," Rod warned. "We've got just enough to get to Taiyang."

Working together cautiously, they took a long time to empty the can and relash it in place. Then they went up the hill to the Lamasery.

As they neared the forbidding looking entrance of the temple, Spence drew his automatic and jacked a shell into the firing chamber.

"Did the old man scare you?" Rod asked. "You should know you can't stop a Chinese ghost with a forty-five slug."

"Maybe—but that's no ghost coming out of the temple."

Through the dim light reflected by the headlights, a figure walked down the time-worn steps toward them. Spence raised his gun, looked down the barrel, then lowered it. "Anyway, I never saw a ghost with a shape like that!"

She stood beside the jeep in regal dignity. The simple white shirt, covering her from neck to ankle, accentuated her form. Gusts of wind and rain emphasized her lithe legs and jutting breasts. From one delicate wrist sparkled the glitter of an emerald bracelet. Raven hair hung in ringlets beneath a jeweled skull cap. The tapered tilted tear-drops of eyes missed nothing, yet concentrated on the fascinated Rod. Her rich lips formed a smile.

"Welcome," she said. "I, Ah Wong, greet you of the silver hair in the name of my father." She spoke perfect English without the nasal intonations of the Chinese. "I have been waiting for you," she said to Rod.

"You must be expecting someone else," Rod answered. "We're looking for a place to spend the night."

"I know," the girl said. "Come, follow me." Rod looked at Spence and shrugged his shoulders. Taking the seat-cushion under one arm, he went with Spence to the top of the steps. The girl stopped them. "First, eat the food of friendship." Rod, not wishing to offend the girl, accepted the little

cake of rice and honey and ate it. Spence sniffed at his, disliked the odor and dropped it to the ground while making a show of eating it.

The girl led the way to the inner temple. As they entered the huge, rounded chamber, Rod felt the gloom close in on him like a living presence dropping from the dank ceiling of the impenetrable dome. Light came from the far side of the chamber. There, like a bloated frog glaring down at them, squatted an idol. It sat on a platform twice the height of a man, the light between its folded legs casting a shadow from the dimpled, protruding stomach to the chin; above the rounded chin, white fangs of teeth snarled and red fire gleamed from the wicked eyes.

"Friendly looking fellow," whispered Spence as they neared the idol. "Reminds me of my old football coach."

"Stop!" Ah Wong ordered. "You are forbidden to come closer." She disappeared in the shadows at the foot of the idol. Candles took fire and in the hazy light, a couch-like bier with a body on it became discernible. Only the hands and face were visible; the rest of the body was covered with a tapestry. Rod noticed the nails of the hand, resembling unsheathed claws, extended beyond the shoulders. The profile of the face was stern and arrogant.

"Must be one of the permanent guests," Spence muttered.

"He is the Dalai Lama," Ah Wong said, her voice coming from beside them. Even Spence, who hadn't seen her return, jumped a little. "He waits there to greet all travelers."

Rod turned to the girl. "Your father, can I speak to him?"

Ah Wong appeared startled. "You don't know who I am?"

Rod shook his head. "I know you act like you expected me—but I never heard of this place until thirty minutes ago. If your father is the priest, I'd like his permission to sleep here."

"You have his permission and perhaps you will see him later," Ah Wong said, drawing closer to Rod, invitation in her smile.

"Then, Baby," Spence said, "how about showing us a couple of sacks?"

The girl diverted her worshipping gaze from Rod and looked uncomprehendingly at Spence. "You know," he said, "a bed. A place to sleep—when you're sleepy."

"The servant quarters are there," she said, motioning

vaguely into the darkness. She turned to Rod, "I will conduct you to the Royal chamber."

"Look, All Yen," Spence leered. "We do a brother act and we're not splitting up for you. Get me?"

She passed Spence, glaring furiously up at him, and led the way to an alcove off the main chamber. Two beds, with fur coverlets across the foot, sat a few inches above the floor. Silken sheets shone in the sparse light of the copper-bowled lamp Ah Wong lit for them. Rod couldn't tell if the smell that rose to tantalize his mind came from incense in the oil or some perfume the girl wore. He fought back the desire that began to seize him.

Rod turned to the girl and smiled. "Thank you, Ah Wong, you have been very kind."

"I wish you pleasant dreams," she said, and coming closer to Rod, whispered, "We shall meet again." Then she turned and disappeared.

Spence chuckled. "The Royal chamber — you really rate. Sorry I had to ruin a good deal for you but if I let you out of my sight you might get into trouble. The Korda comes first."

"You're right," Rod said, "but do you think that girl was really expecting me? It's all damn confusing."

It's that streak of silver hair you've got," Spence said. "All the dames go for it. Now if she only had a friend that went for big feet—" Spence grinned, kicked off his shoes, slid between the sheets, and yawned. "Better let me use that book for a dutch-wife."

"Okay," Rod said. "But I want to look at it first." Whenever Rod and Spence traveled together, Spence slept with all the valuables on him. It was an instinct he had; during the war Rod had seen him sleep surrounded by his drinking crew and then become wide awake when a stranger had quietly neared him.

Rod sat on the edge of his bed and solemnly drew the Korda from the seat cushion. Carefully he unwrapped the leather bindings and cotton wrappings. Reverently he opened the book and studied it. "The characters appear to be picture-writing," he muttered, bending low over the inked pages, "like Japanese and Chinese. But I don't recognize any I've seen before. If I could only understand them!"

Spence's answer was a snore. Rod sat for half an hour hunched over the Korda, idly flipping the pages, feeling him-

self in touch with this past through his fingers. For all he knew, in his hands were answers to the secrets that man had been trying to understand for centuries, secrets that went far beneath the conscious. An eddy of wind blew against the wick and the flame gutted out.

Rod snapped on the flashlight and rewrapped the Korda. Finished, he shoved the seat cushion under Spence's head. Spence grumbled in his sleep. Rod kicked off his shoes and slid into his bed. Then he yawned, "Better check the jeep." He found his shoes in the dark, strapped on his automatic, and groped his way through the darkened chamber to the outer entrance. The jeep, its wheels hidden by the bottom step, looked like a cat asleep.

Rod turned back into the temple and seemed to feel the unseen eyes of the idol probing into him—then a form rushed out of the darkness and enveloped him. A gasp broke from Rod's lips as he fell back against the wall, his right hand tugging at the forty-five. He started to cry aloud for Spence but hot, clinging lips stopped him. Dancing fingers moved over his neck and into his hair. He strained half-heartedly for a moment to release himself and then surrendered to the caress; the smell of perfume seemed to numb his brain.

"Ah Wong," he whispered, as their lips parted.

"Yes, my husband." Her hands pulled his head down to hers again. "I had to share this night with you. Don't make me leave."

Rod had no intention of making her leave.

"I always dreamed my husband would be from America," she said. "Now you are here." She kissed him again.

"But I can't be your husband," Rod protested feebly. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"There is tonight," Ah Wong said simply, "for love. Tomorrow takes us to our duties." She blocked any further opposition with her lips.

"Later, much later, as Rod held her gently in his arms, Ah Wong pushed back the wayward lock of hair that curled over his forehead. "The lucky mark is on your head," she whispered, nibbling at his ear.

Rod laughed lazily. "That's where lightning struck me," he lied, wondering why he did. "But what difference does it make?"

"In my family," Ah Wong explained, "the groom must bring silver to the bride; she gives him emeralds." Rod felt

the touch of the bracelet against his cheek as she smoothed his hair. "That is the marriage ceremony." Wong sighed deeply.

"What's the matter?" Rod asked, sniffing at the perfume in her hair.

"Don't you see, I must give you my bracelet—yet if I do I shall be found out tomorrow."

Rod seized her wrist. "I have your bracelet and you my hair; now we give them back to each other. The marriage is annulled."

Ah Wong traced a pattern of kisses around his face. "My father will never know."

"Your father—the Priest?" Rod asked apprehensively. "Where is he?"

"He sleeps deeply, my love, but I must return to him." Before Rod could stop her, Ah Wong was gone from his arms. "Don't ever forget me," her cry seemed to linger on even after he had called, "Don't go. Wait! I'll really marry you tomorrow."

Rod stumbled to the alcove and, undressing, tried to bring order to his perfume-numbed brain. Silver and emeralds and getting married; he must be drunk. It was that God-lovely smell of her. He couldn't get married; he had to take the Korda to Marlow. What a place—an idol, a stiff, a passionate girl, and a priceless book. Spence snoring. And he was going to keep Ah Wong away from me. Anyhow the Korda is safe with him. Ah Wong and the Korda. That doesn't make sense. I wonder if she was making a fool of me. I've been a fool before.

Rod tried to stay awake and think but sleep spread over his relaxed body.

Fear woke Rod with a start. Nothing disturbed the dark silence, yet something was in that room. And Spence hadn't woke up.

"Spence! Wake up!" Rod tried to keep the tremor out of his voice. No answer. Still he sensed a presence. Grasping the flashlight in his sweating palm, he played it on Spence's empty bed.

"Roderick Ludlow, I am here." A voice like tearing paper cut through the gloom. Rod swung the flashlight. The figure of the body he had seen on the bier before the idol swayed toward him; it was the Dalai Lama. Rod felt the flesh at the back of his neck begin to crawl. He wasn't dead at all, Rod thought, then his senses reeled. The beam of light cut

through the body and garmnets of the Lama and projected a round, shadowless spot on the opposite wall.

The figure came closer to Rod and the hands began to slide slowly from the sleeves of the Mandarin jacket. Beads of perspiration broke out on Rod's forehead, joined, and formed rivulets down his face. He shivered, as though cold, and prepared to make a dash for the doorway.

"Don't be uneasy," the voice said. "Flight would be futile"

"What—Who are you?" Rod choked out.

"I am the Dalai Lama, come to welcome you, my son. Ah Wong and I have been waiting many centuries for your arrival."

"Ah Wong—your daughter?" Rod thought he was going crazy. "I don't understand—but where is my friend?"

"We shall join him soon. But first, the fate that is ordained for you." The Lama peered deep into Rod's eyes, then he spoke in a dead, furry voice. "Before the coming of the Buddha, I a young Kordan novice, evolved a plan to make this a world of peace through war. I hastened to present the plan to my brothers."

The Lama's lips writhed and the ghostly voice rose to a shriek. "The fools! They called me mad. They tore the sacred vestments from me. But neither they, nor a few insignificant lives, could stop me.

"I crept into the Grand Lama's cell where he sat reading the Korda and seized the holy oracle after first dispatching him to that heaven he so wished to attain. With fear riding my shoulders, I came to Hangyi and founded this Lamasery. But I had erred; it wasn't time to put my plan into effect. Man didn't have the scientific knowledge for making the weapons of death. And if I were to be the leader of the plan, I had to prolong my life.

"I turned to the Korda in which is written the source of life itself. But even with my great wisdom, I was unable to comprehend the secret. However, I did learn to project my mind."

Rod sat hypnotized, interested in spite of himself. "Project the mind?"

"Yes, my son. It, and the secret of life, had been abandoned as against the laws of nature. They didn't see the power in it. By concentration I can cause the mind—anyone's mind—to leave the body. What exhilaration!—to view the

whales at play in the ocean and to fly with the eagle through the heavens." The Lama paused; cunning took the place of gloating on his face. "But I proceeded cautiously; only Ah Wong was permitted to share the secret.

"And in the Korda I read the holy prophecies. There it is decreed that following a chaos when all nations fight among themselves, the strongest nation will arise and rule the world, either through peace or war." The Lama glared down at Rod. "If it is through war, I will be the leader of the world!"

"How do you know?" Rod asked, his fear leaving him. "Are you mentioned by name?"

"It is decreed there shall be a High Priest whose daughter will marry a man of white skin who will have the silver mark on his head. This man will bring with him the second copy of the Korda. His arrival will be the signal to strike. The time is come!"

And all because I got hit on the head with a baseball, Rod thought.

"I don't know what else," Rod said, "but you're crazy. Projecting the mind and ruling the world! Now where's my friend or do I start shooting holes through that trick mirror of yours?"

"You do not believe me?" The Lama's eyes blazed. "Come, I will take you to your companion."

Rod followed the figure out into the main chamber, covering it with his gun. The temple was illuminated now. From the ceiling, thousands of jewels winked in somber flirtation. Glancing toward the idol, Rod saw the body of his friend lying on the floor.

"Spence! Are you hurt?" He rushed toward the prone figure.

Spence's familiar voice came from somewhere nearby. "I don't know—but it sure does feel funny. Watch that old guy! I was getting ready to knock him back to his coffin when he started talking about concentration. The next thing I knew, I was floating—or something—around up here."

Rod whirled on the Lama and tried to pull the trigger of the gun; the old man stared calmly at him with dilated eyes. "Don't try that on . . ." Rod's voice froze and he grew dizzy. He tried to fight against the spiraling whirlpool of color spinning in his mind. Back through one dazzling eddy to another, he drew himself until reaching the outer edge, he

slipped and plunged into the vortex. Slowly, consciousness returned and he sensed word thoughts penerating the film about him.

"Oh, my husband, now we can always be together."

"Ah Wong," Rod said, trying to shake a head he couldn't locate. "Are you here?"

"All around you," Ah Wong answered.

"That broad even goes for you without the flesh," Spence chortled.

"Quiet, slave!" ordered Ah Wong.

"Baby, let's be more polite or I'll boot your little fanny—if I had a foot and you had a fanny," went on the unperturbed Spence. "Rod, did you believe all the stuff that old man told you? Any place you want to go—zing!—there you are. Want to see how your girl really looks, just float over to her apartment and . . ."

"But you can have any body you want by driving the mind out of it," Ah Wong said. "That is how I came to you tonight in the form of Lin Tang's daughter."

"Lin Tang?" Rod cried. "That's who the Lama looks like!"

"Father took his body to direct you here," Ah Wong said.

"Who cares?" Spence asked. "Let's think ourselves out to Hollywood and take over a couple of those actors' bodies. Then . . ."

"Cut it, Spence! The Lama is going to make slaves out of us and everybody else."

The rasping voice of the Lama spoke. "Enough talk. We put the plan into operation at once. There shall be a leaders of nations from combining their brains against us and war such as the world never dreamed of. First we keep the then we make robots of them, letting them plunge their nations into war."

"But father," Ah Wong wailed, "the prophecies say that I must marry first."

An argument broke out between the father and daughter as each interpreted the Korda differently.

Rod spoke rapidly to Spence. "The Lama's afraid of combined brains—maybe that's the way to beat him. Together we might put out more strength than he—like radio waves. When I give the word, think of nothing but killing him—and think hard!"

"Come!" commanded the Lama, who had placated his

daughter. "Attach yourselves to my thoughts. Remember, I have the ways of compelling you to obey."

"what will happen to us if you are destroyed?"

A snort of derision ripped around the dome. "I, the supreme being, cannot be destroyed by a lesser being. Could I be, the minds would return to their bodies, living or dead. But enough of this. We go to bring peace to the world!"

"Now, Spence!" Rod cried. "Kill him!"

As he entered the whirlpool again, Rod heard Ah Wong crying, "Don't ever forget me." Then he concentrated on the Lama.

Kill! Kill! Kill! The face of the Lama began to materialize! Long-tailed fingers danced before him, seeking his throat. Between the outstretched hands, he saw the yellow face grimacing and twisting in agony. Then, as the hands clutched his throat, Rod smashed his fist against the reeking mouth. Again and again he struck; diseased flesh parted from the bone each blow; decayed fangs broke against his knuckles. The face transformed before him. Horrified, he discovered he was sensely pounding against the evil, grinning face of the idol.

Rod tried to flee but was caught up with the idol in a huge, diaphragmous bubble whirling into space. The face of the idol began to swell and swell until the bubble distended, drawing Rod ever closer to the gaping mouth. A terrible stench assailed his nostrils. With his remaining strength, he drew back his fist and slashed the leering face again. The idol and bubble disintegrated with a blinding flash, dropping Rod into darkness.

A hand kept rubbing across Rod's nose and lips. Struggling, he awakened to discover the hand was his own. Gazing mutely at his bloody knuckles, he dragged himself to a sitting position. The mildewed sheets looped around his body, restricting his movements. The stinking fur coverlet, patches of hide exposed, was tight around his neck. He threw the bed-clothes away with a thrust of his hand.

Rod starting to swing his feet to the floor, blinked his eyes against the sunlight pouring in through a hole in the wall above and looked into the corner of the alcove. Then he made a grab for his gun. Automatic in hand, he stood up and shook his head, expecting the two Chinese in the corner to disappear. The way their eyes, bulging above their gagged mouths, swung wildly from the gun in his hand to the sleeping Spence indicated they would like to be somewhere else, but the bonds made from their own clothing stopped them.

Rod staggered over to where Spence lay grinning in his sleep, his arms around the seat-cushion, a forty-five lying beside his pillow. "Get up, Spence!" Rod shook him. "Get up."

"Okay. Okay," Spence muttered, laconically opening one eye. "What's your trouble?"

"Last night," Rod asked, rubbing his forehead with a trembling hand, "what happened?"

Spence yawned. "We had company." He thumbed toward the two men in the corner.

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

Spence sat up and scowled. "Wake you up? It's a wonder those guys didn't. They bounced in here like it was their favorite beer joint. But you just lay there until I knocked Big Stupe," he motioned toward one of the bound men, "on top of you. Then you beat hell out of him."

"I did?" Rod looked at the man's battered face.

"Yeah, but you never did seem really to wake up. Acted like you were drugged or something."

"Drugged?" Rod grasped at the idea. "Ah Wong—that honey cake she gave me."

"Maybe," Spence grinned. "I thought mine was an aphrodisiac and threw it away. Anyhow, I checked the temple to see if these guys brought any friends, but nobody was around."

Rod went to the Chinese and ripped the gags from their mouths. "Ah Wong, did she send you?" he demanded in Chinese.

The two men licked their lips and looked at his uncomprehendingly. Rod raised the automatic. "Who sent you?"

"The General," the smallest one croaked over his swollen tongue. "General ordered—," he stopped and eyed the gun nervously, "—General requested that you, and more so the huge one," nodded at Spence, "return to be honored guests for tonight."

Spence laughed when Rod told him what the man had said. I can hear him saying that through a broken nose; it's touching."

Rod, convinced the man was telling the truth, gave both of them water but left them bound. They thanked him simply, making it clear they had expected a bullet in the back of the head and not comfort.

Rod sat on the edge of the bed as Spence gathered their belongings. "Spence," he hesitated a moment, "did I go out to the jeep last night?"

"I don't know. The last I remember you were sitting in the middle of the floor studying that old book. Why?"

"I think I had a dream—maybe two." Rod looked down at his skinned knuckles. "I'd give a lot to know where the real thing stopped and the other started."

"Maybe you can read that old language; you said the book's about the dream world."

"I don't know what it's about," Rod said to convince himself. "Let's get out of here; it's giving me the creeps."

They left the two Chinese tied in the corner and went into the main chamber. Rod turned toward the idol. Gone was the fierce look; in its place, a kindly countenance beamed. The body was still on the bier but cobwebs and the dust of centuries lay thick over it. Overhead Rod saw empty sockets from which precious eyes of jewels had been gouged by long-dead fingers. The rest of the temple was a shambles; long shafts of light came through crumbled walls to probe among the ruins.

"It certainly did look different last night," Spence said. He turned toward the entrance. "Now let's get that book back to Marlow and collect our dough."

They got into the jeep and rolled down to the village street. In front of Lin Tang's home they could see the old man sitting in the sun talking to a group of men. "He probably sent those soldiers up to the temple to keep from getting in trouble with the General," Spence snorted. "I don't blame him either."

Rod, looking beyond the old man, saw a girl, her face a smiling golden mask, lolling on a bench before the house. As he stopped the jeep, Lin Tang bowed his way up to it.

"You slept soundly in Lamasery?" he asked politely.

"We did," Spence grinned, "in spite of the other guests."

The old man grinned back. "I, as hereditary High Priest, can refuse hospitality to no one. But those travelers," he nodded toward the temple, "I honored with cups of devil wine. Perhaps they became inebriated?"

Spence laughed aloud but Rod, remembering Lin Tang as the Lama of the night before, kept his eyes on the girl. She met his intense gaze with steady eyes, a tender smile on her lips. She raised her hand as though to brush a lock of hair from her forehead and the green fire of an emerald bracelet dangled from her wrist.

"That girl. Who is she?" Rod demanded.

"It is the daughter of whom I spoke last night," the old man said, drawing back at the harshness of Rod's words. "Even now she is awaiting the arrival of the bride-groom whom she has never seen."

"May I speak with her?" Rod asked politely, restraining himself.

The old man shook his head. "Though she speaks your language even better than I, it is forbidden for her to speak to any stranger on this day."

"How is it she speaks our language so well?"

"She has been to the American university at Shanghai. Only recently has she returned to marry the kinsman chosen for her at birth."

The girl cried out in a dialect unknown to Rod and a smile came to Lin Tang's face. "My daughter says she admires your silver hair and prays that her husband will be so blessed as to be struck by lightning. You have the lucky mark, my son."

Rod felt the cool black eyes of the girl peering at him through the interlaced fingers she had thrown before her face in a confusion of modesty for addressing a foreigner.

"It is the mark of a fool and a dreamer," Rod said loudly, to Lin Tang. "But perhaps it has brought me luck. Thank you and may your life be long."

"It has been," Lin Tang smiled inscrutably, gazing deep into Rod's eyes.

"One more question," Rod said. "What is your daughter's name?"

"After the High Priestess of olden days, she is known as Ah Wong."

Rod shifted the gears and the jeep darted ahead. Spence turned from waving to Lin Tang and asked, "Ah Wong? Wasn't that the girl who had such a yen for you last night?"

"I don't know," Rod grunted, "Don't ever forget me" ringing in his mind. He pushed down on the accelerator. "It all seems like a dream now."

AN ELEGY FOR LOVE

Time present hears, and sees, and knows, and is:
Fall's winds rush trees in shivering murmurations;
Recalls love's heat now lying with red leaves
Of fall; and recreates the ghosts of dead
But living still.

Our minds once viewed

The last clear, silver, films of dawn
So slowly weaving upward near
Outstretching trees and leaning stalks
Of corn. Grey columns of choked light
Flooded the shadowed woods. A lone
Unflapping crow, in gliding circles
Earthward, cawed and cawed, then settled
Inside a moss-entangled oak.
Its flutterings ceased. Two severed leaves
Drew floating arcs, upward, downward,
Downward, upward, downward, downward
And then to rest. No winds whispered.

Our lips scarce touched.

In slumbered seclusion

Two blackened logs burned to death
In a shallow grate.
The top log started, hissed,
Splashed crimson flames,
Succumbed.

His mate

Shivered, rolled near, and gave
Her dwindling heat to his prostrate
Form.
So glory, love, and hate
Vanished in thin, scared wisps
Of filmy smoke.

I kissed warm tears from off your lips.

Invincible upon a height

The fleeing pollen swept to distant wolds
And heaths to fertilize a seed in wombs
Unknown though fertile with their egg.

Life's foray goes
From love receiving to a giving love.
A creek too wide, perhaps, for all to jump.
A hope that from our day-dream days of youth
We never think shall come. Though now through one
Unconscious call it finds fulfillment in
The hearts of all

And I enclosed my all
Within your soft, embracing arms.
Knowing winds brushed your hair across my lips.

Alone

With fretful push the fleeting salt-splashed wind
Came soaked from flowered fields and frozen folds,
Dispelling smells and sounds of one
Eternity. Black sky and sea, white stars
And sand enjoyed dynamic harmony.
An everlasting turbid rhythm freed
The night from dissonant behavior.
Revolving rolls of frothing, bubbling foam
Dashed tumbling, crashing forward. Breakers clawed
At breakers, in resounding, pounding, roaring,
Clashing strokes, maddening into surging,
Struggling, cursing, screaming, blasting thundering
Blows of cosmic beats
I kissed those parted lips and drank your fragrant
breath.

Tonight fog sleeps on trees,

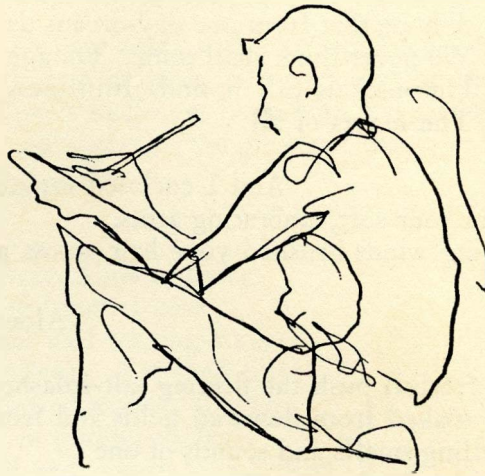
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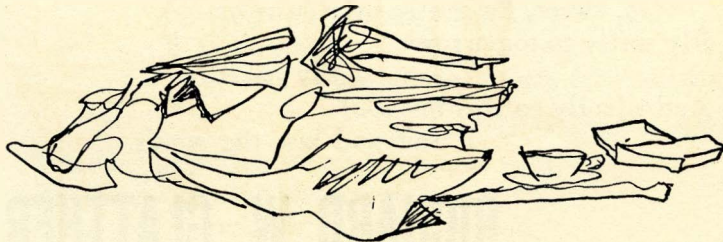
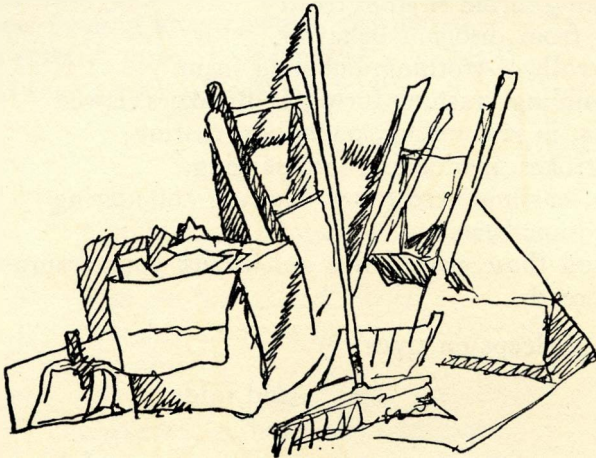
Unruffled sheets upon limp leaves.
Oh, sweet, fly gently over furrows,
Fly softly to tomorrows,
Fly nakedly
And silently to this my soul
I wait and kiss the winds.

RICHARD W. GLATTHUR

**SKETCHES
BY**



HARRY BALDWIN



HARRY BALDWIN



WHEN TO QUIT

by MATILANN THOMS & H. P. McKINNEY

I DIDN'T pay much attention to the little guy when he wandered in. He stood for a moment outlined in the doorway, blinking and shivering in the bright light and sudden warmth. I saw his dark eyebrows knit together as the odor of stale beer hit him. A loud customer broke my attention.

"Bartender! Hey, you! What the hell are you doin' to that whiskey—agin' it?"

"Okay. Okay! Take it easy," I said. "Here's your shot."

Any other time I would've told the bum to shut up and then kept him waiting another ten minutes, but the little guy was walking towards the bar. Something cocky and defiant in his walk caught my eye. There was a familiar look to him. He sat at the end of the bar and I got a good look at him. I was wrong. I'd never seen that beat-up face before. His denim pants and torn leather jacket were crummy looking; the man in them wasn't much better off.

"What'll it be?" I asked.

"Whiskey—double." His voice sounded old and tired.

His mouth wasn't old, though; it was kinda like a kid's. He sat there staring at the picture of Mike Malloy over the bar like it was Jesus Christ himself instead of a fightin' Irishman.

It wasn't much of a picture—Mike in his fightin' trunks, his hands shaking over his head in victory. The punk photography made the long chest scar welt out like a streak of light and the trunks sagged in the bottom. Nope, not much of a picture but the kid, Mike, had been welterweight champ—and against all comers. Not many champs had been as popular as Mike, what with his big grin and easy ways.

"Remember him?" I asked.

The little guy looked away from the picture and stared at me.

"Remember who?" he asked.

"The guy in the picture," I said.

"Oh, him. Yeah, I remember him."

That would have been the end of that but Shamus Boyle had come in to shove his big frame onto the stool next to the stranger.



"Did I hear you say you remembered pretty-boy up there?" Shamus opened up. "What a punk! He got that scar from a coke bottle. The photo don't show where the tomatoes hit him."

Shamus was a big blow-hard ex-fighter always talking about how lousy the other fighters better than him had been. That didn't make him popular around the bar but he was the toughest guy in the neighborhood. We just ignored him, but the stranger didn't.

"Gimme a rye!" Shamus bellowed.

As I went to get his bottle, I heard the little guy ask, "You got something against the guy in the picture?"

"Sure I have!" Boyle answers. "Malloy was a pretty fair fighter until he found out it was easier to make money hitting the canvas. He was the Champ, alright—of the tankers!"

I banged his drink down in front of him. "Look, Boyle!" I said. "The kid never threw a fight in his life! He just didn't know when to quit. Do you?"

Shamus's laugh was mean. "Why that yellow-livered bastard didn't have enough guts to . . ."

The stranger's fist stopped up Boyle's mouth as it knocked him off the stool.

Before I could get the bung-starter, the little guy and Shamus were standing toe to toe slugging it out. I put the bung-starter down and watched the room go to pieces—the little guy was doing all right. Shamus couldn't keep it clean; he started trying to use his weight in wrestling first and then he started kicking.

The little guy grunted, "OK, if that's the way you want it!", and grabbed Shamus's foot as it grazed his belly and

toppled Shamus to the floor. He jumped on Shamus's chest and started his head to rocking with both fists. There was something clean and expert about the way the little guy punched with his fists. I should've sold tickets to that fight. Everybody was rooting for the little guy.

Boyle was tough and heavy. He managed to get his feet against the little guy and sent him flying against the bar. This time they met in the middle of the room, crouching and waiting for a break. The little guy peppered Boyle's nose and eye with lefts and then tried a haymaker. Boyle was no bum. He caught the stranger in a clinch, and practically carried him back against the bar. I saw the little guy go limp and thought it was all over.

Boyle backed away a little to get working room. I started to cover my eyes as that ham-big right hand started for the little guy's guts. But the little guy knew what he was doing; he swung around inside Boyle's arms and the "finisher" hit the bar. Boyle backed away holding that battered right hand. The little guy hit him, hit him hard in the belly and Boyle automatically dropped his hands. Then it was all over as the little guy stood on his toes and put everything he had against Boyle's chin.

Boyle hit the floor on his can; then his shoulders hit and snapped his head against the wood. He was out cold!

The little guy was leaning against the bar, gasping for breath. I poured out a shot of good whiskey from my own bottle. When he reached for the glass, his shirt fell open in the front where the buttons had been broken off. I saw the long scar like a streak of light.

"Nice going, Mike," I said.

His kid's mouth broke into a big grin. "Sorry," he said, "to mess up your bar like this."

"Think nothing of it! I'll put it on his bill." I pointed down to Boyle.

"Some guys talk too much," Malloy said.

"Yeah," I agreed, "they just don't know when to quit."

A U T U M N A L S M O K E

I am the smoke of autumn's fires
 Kindled by faded leaves;
 I carry smells of oaks and briars
 Floating past streams and trees.
 My wisps and flows are pantomines
 Prancing about the air,
 For winter, spring, and summer climes
 Play in my straggling hair.
 For little boys arrayed with lances
 Slashing my filmy trail,
 I twist and dodge their mortal glances
 Laughingly while they fail.
 To weary strollers of the hills
 Stumbling a homeward way,
 I lift their heads with rising frills
 Easing the toils of the day.

I am the haze that nestles low
 Blanketing downs at eve;
 I watch the fields and farms below
 Bundled in harvest sheaves.
 About the halls of forest streams
 Spinning a silver web,
 I toss the gleams of moonlight beams
 Slithering to flow and ebb

I am the rolling, stately spire
 Rising from crackling hearths;
 I am the flowered seasons byre
 Closing with folding scarfs.
 In regions bright with silver light
 Piercing celestial sky,
 I fade from sight to wings of white,
 Changing but shall not die.

—Richard W. Glatthar



RETURN TO TUNIS

by GORDON B. CLARK

THE ship had been at sea three days before Jim Burke, by one casually spoken word, was forced to face a time in his life on which he was sure a door had been closed forever.

The ship was headed southeast across the Atlantic toward Gibraltar, and beyond to Egypt, where he was to spend a year with the Cairo branch of his firm. At first it seemed unreal to Jim that he was returning to a part of the world he had known and flown over, and to which he had never thought he would return. But slowly, as those familiar Mediterranean names fell from the lips of the other passengers, the reality of that other time returned. And it came as a shock to Jim how dim and distant that time had become, which once had been the very essence of his life.

Again he heard the throb of the bombers taxiing at dawn for takeoff; felt the upward lift of his ship from the plummeting bombs; saw the blue somnolence of the Mediterranean below the squadron as they slanted down toward a dusty airstrip on the edge of Africa. There again were the mountains and the plains, the green lands, high peaks, deserts, the sunlight and the storms. Faces and names were disinterred from time; faces filled with hope, pain, loneliness, and joy; names like Jay, Somers, and Higgins. And remembering the last two, Jim felt with sudden poignancy the ruthless erasure of time.

Yet there was one memory he would not face, or dared not, until that evening when he was standing beside the rail, staring out over the water. Then, without warning, the band-

ages were torn from a wound he knew had never healed. One of the passengers came up beside him and said:

"Did you see the notice, Burke? We're stopping at Tunis for a few hours. We'll reach Alexandria a day behind schedule."

The word, *Tunis*, was a key turning in a lock. A door swung inexorably open before Jim and Suzanne was standing just beyond the threshold. He spoke her name, saw her smile and walk toward him.

Jim wanted to cry out as a feeling of loss and pain swept over him. Why had he not, in that space of time since they had parted, had the courage to remember their love? The remembered fragrance of her hair became almost real on the wind. They, who had been so close, what had their love lacked? There was yet still time.

As the ship plowed outward under the endless cycle of dawn and sunset toward the Mediterranean, Jim began piecing together those fragmentary yesterdays . . .

He had been with Somers and Higgins the night he met Suzanne. They had driven in from their base outside Tunis to the officer's club. Suzanne was sitting alone, watching the dancers, and all three of them saw her at the same moment. Jim reached her first and they had danced.

Suzanne was dark and slender. She moved lightly in his arms, her long hair brushing against his sleeve. The top of her head just reached his shoulder.

"Your face is like a cameo," he said. "Except for your eyes."

"Ah, and my eyes, lieutenant?"

"Did you ever remember the eyes of a cameo?" he replied.

Her smile was warm. They finished the dance without speaking, then joined Higgins and Somers at the table. The evening was a quiet one, for him. Suzanne spoke enough English and he enough French. Though what they said was not important, yet as they left the club that night it was with the feeling they had known each other a long time.

They took her home in the jeep. Higgins and Somers looked surprised when, as they stopped in front of the apartment building, Jim told them to wait. He returned in a few minutes.

"What's the matter?" Higgins said, as they drove away. "We thought you were all set. Some of the troops are slipping!"

No, even that night Jim knew it was going to be different.

After that he was with Suzanne more and more often. They danced at the club; dined at the squadron mess; walked by the harbor and over the ruins of ancient Carthage. A kind of peace came into his life. With her it was possible to forget the almost daily missions, the war, the inevitable thought that his body was not inviolable to steel. In those days there was no time nor need for questions and answers.

It was only after Higgins was killed, plowing into a peak behind Tunis during a storm, that he admitted the fullness of his love for Suzanne. Love of some sort, however transitory, was necessary for all of them. Jim, holding Suzanne close to him, knew he had been more fortunate than some.

Jim received his captaincy shortly after Higgin's burial, a few days before the Sicilian invasion. He had brought Suzanne out for the squadron celebration, but around ten he was very drunk and got Somers to drive her back to Tunis. Suzanne made no protest, only smiling and touching his hand as she left.

When Somers returned he said: "Suzanne says to tell you there is only each day. That she's always with you. What does she mean, Jim?"

Jim wasn't quite sure himself, only knowing he felt the same way too. For them there was no sum of times past, only the sharp, sweet flavor of each day. "Hell, Somers," he said. "Don't ask me to explain anything now. Let's have another drink!"

But there were four days when even Suzanne wasn't with him, or if she was, then only as something distant and unattainable, like the beauty of a sunset behind sharp peaks; four days of sweat and fear and the names on the squadron blackboard proxy for unquiet death. Then the invasion was over and he came back to Suzanne.

He rang her bell, heard her door open and quick footsteps in the hall above. She reached the top of the stairs as he reached the foot. Only for an instant was she motionless, her face white. Then she was in his arms saying softly, over and over again: "You're tired, Jim, so very tired," tears and her smile all mixed up.

She never asked him about those four days. But then, they never did talk about the war or the future. They accepted each day as it came. The days of summer passed swiftly and if the squadron wondered that for him there was no one but Suzanne, at least they never mentioned it.

Then abruptly in September, the squadron was ordered to Sicily. Jim had known it was coming but said nothing to Suzanne until the night before they were due to leave.

"Yes, I heard," she said.

"Suzanne," he said, feeling the words forming awkwardly on his lips. "Would you come to Sicily with me? I can arrange it. I know it isn't . . . that is . . ."

"Yes," she said. "I'll go with you. I was hoping you'd ask me."

Jim got Somers to help him arrange the flight. He got Suzanne a room in the little town near their new base and Somers was the only one that knew about it until the evening he took her to the first squadron party. He was nervous, wondering what their reaction would be. Colonel Sardo, the C.O., could really make things tough for him if he wanted to.

But when they saw Suzanne the whole squadron, the colonel among them, came swarming around them, all talking at once. She stood in their midst, smiling up at them, and when she glanced at him, Jim could tell by her eyes that what he had done was right.

"Seeing you and Suzanne together makes things seem solid," Somers said. "As though there is still something real left in the world."

There were other things that were real, too. The bombing missions were getting rougher. Almost immediately they lost two ships over the mountains behind Salerno. It wasn't easy on Suzanne. He knew she never slept when he was out on a mission. There were days at a time when it was impossible to see her. But when they were together again everything was good. They had their hours of quiet peace, of love. There was no use asking for anything more.

Then came the night the squadron was given that bridge deep in the mountains of Yugoslavia as their target. It was at the limit of their range. That meant something to the flight crews. Usually they bitched about the targets. This time they were silent.

Jim parted from Suzanne that afternoon, hoping he hadn't shown the apprehension he felt. It wasn't until he climbed up into the belly of his plane that evening that he recalled how strangely quiet Suzanne had been. And she had kissed him as he left, something she had never done before.

It was a clear night, a sliver of moon low in the west. The squadron formed over the field in flights of three, then began

the long climb northeast. Jim saw Sicily drop behind. They crossed the battle line south of Rome at ten thousand, leveling at fifteen over the Adriatic. Jim checked his flight, spoke briefly to Somers, heading the lead flight, and was staring at a curious spark of fire glinting on the mountains ahead when Jay, his new co-pilot, spoke.

Jay was a big, blond kid, one of a batch of new replacements. Jim, after he had flown and talked with Jay a few times, had sensed his curiosity about Suzanne. He might even have been a little shocked. But he had never asked Jim a direct question about Suzanne.

"Say Jim," he said. "About you and Suzanne. Not that I'm trying to stick my nose in—but what's the story on you two? You in love with her? You going to marry her?"

And there were the questions, the questions Suzanne and he had never faced, never attempted to answer. Jim's hands tensed on the wheel.

"Sure Jay," he said softly. "We're going to get married. It's simple. We're going to build a cottage small by a waterfall and I'm going to come home from work every evening and find her waiting on the porch for me, the vine-covered porch, that is. Yeah, Jay, we're in love and we're going to live happily everafter."

"I'm sorry," Jay said. "I didn't mean to . . ."

"Look, Jay!" he snapped. "I'll tell you something you ought to know. Don't waste your time worrying about the future. There's no percentage in it!"

Liaison had done a good job with the Partisans. Their target was circled by sudden fires as they came in at fifteen thousand. Ahead Jim could see the dark shapes of Somers' flight leading the way. There wasn't much flak and things didn't look too bad. They looked that way right up to the target, right up to the moment Somers' plane blew up like a giant fire cracker. Then, even as Jay cried out sharply, their own plane lurched. The wheel went slack in Jim's hands. For an instant Jim sat motionless, seeing the stars begin to reel crazily. He hardly remembered afterward shouting over intercom for the crew to bail out. Then the cold, night air was about him and the sound of the rest of the squadron planes fading in the distance. His parachute let him down gently into a small, mountain clearing.

The Partisans found him next morning. They fed him, then took him upward into the mountains to a small cabin.

He slept most of the day, awakened as the rest of his crew, Jay, Gibbs, their navigator, the crew chief and two gunners were brought in. Two days later they were taken farther into the mountains. There was a man named Mihailovitch who smiled, shook their hands warmly, gave a few orders, and they were on their way. Secretly and at night they were led through the mountains, past villages asleep, hiding for days at a time, then moving on. In three weeks they reached the coast. A week later Jim saw Suzanne again.

She was waiting for him in the square of the little town. Sunlight was in her hair, tears in her eyes, as he took her in his arms. Peace and quietness flowed through his body and he knew he had come home.

"I wouldn't go, Jim," she said, clinging to him. "They said they would take me back to Tunis. But I went to see Colonel Sardo. He understood. He said I should wait. Oh Jim, you've come back!"

After that the days were a little better. For a while he was grounded. There were times then when words like, *tomorrow*, and *future*, were almost spoken. Dangerous words, they both knew. So one day Jim said: "I'll be flying again soon, Suzanne." After that there was only each day for them.

Rome had fallen and in the early spring the squadron moved to Italy. This time it was Jay instead of Somers who flew with Jim when he took Suzanne up to their base south of Rome. Jim began flying again and the desperate urgency of their love returned. But there were still the bright days, the days when they swam together at Ledo, danced half the night in Rome, and watched from the balcony of Suzanne's apartment as another dawn slid up the Italian sky. Then it was summer again, August, 1944.

The day after the invasion of southern France Colonel Sardo called him into his office.

"Jim," he said. "Bad news for you." And Jim, looking at the colonel, knew what was coming.

"Some of the brass in Group have found out about Suzanne and you," the colonel said. "They're new over here and they wouldn't understand. They wanted to throw the book at you. I told them I'd handle it."

"Thank you sir," Jim said. "And so . . ." He could feel something draining away inside him, leaving him empty and weak.

"And so I've scheduled a supply flight for Tunis tomor-

row morning. I'll leave the rest to you. By the time you're back orders will be through sending you back to the states." The colonel paused, then said: "Sorry Jim. You've done a good job for us. And we'll all miss Suzanne. I guess you both knew this was bound to happen."

Yes, Suzanne and he had known. Yet now it didn't help. As he left the office Jim had the same feeling as when coming in for a crosswind landing, when just above the ground there is nothing left to do but wait for the wheels to touch. Then you know what to do. Jim knew he was waiting for his wheels to touch.

He told Suzanne that evening. For a moment she was still. Then she said: "We knew, Jim. Now it has come and there is nothing we can do."

She did not cry. She opened a bottle of Chianti and they drank, silently at first, then speaking the inconsequential words meant to hide their grief. Jim was grateful that even in her eyes there were no questions, no pleas for promises he knew he could not make. If there were tomorrows they had waited too long before facing them.

He had asked Jay to fly with them to Tunis. He met them at the plane early the next morning and after taking off he got up and Suzanne came forward and sat beside Jim. Neither of them spoke much during the flight, for the most part staring silently out over the Mediterranean, seeing the tip of Sicily pass beneath them and the African continent lift up from the horizon ahead. Suzanne sat very straight, her hair falling to her shoulders and hiding all but her profile. Once she leaned towards him and touched his hand and it seemed to Jim that her beauty had been touched with an indefinable sadness.

He borrowed a jeep at the airfield and drove Suzanne into Tunis. She stepped quickly from the jeep in front of the building that had once been so familiar to them, turned and held out her hand.

"Goodbye, Jim," she said, then reached up and kissed him lightly, turned and ran into the building.

It was after Jay had taken off and Jim saw Cap Bon pass beneath them that he became fully aware of what had happened. Suzanne was in Tunis. He was returning to the states. Suddenly he was sick at heart, consumed with a lost and desolate feeling.

"Sure Jay," he said, his voice tight and dry. "Sure, it's simple you blockhead. A cottage small by a waterfall. A vine-

covered porch. And they lived happily ever after!"

And he knew that Jay understood what he meant: That for them there were no tomorrows; and in the strange and unpredictable twisting of life, the turmoil and forgetfulness that lay ahead, who could ever say if he would once again return to Tunis.

Early one evening the ship steamed past Gibraltar. The next morning Jim saw the white-capped Atlas peaks towering above the dusky African coast. Before that morning, as the memory of Suzanne and their days together had grown sharper, Jim had begun to feel more unsure of himself. And now, when it was possible for him to measure the miles separating the ship from Tunis, it seemed to Jim that all the days that had passed since he had left Suzanne were empty, meaningless. It was like returning from a flight. She would be waiting for him. There was still time.

It was noon the day the ship dropped anchor in the quiet harbor of Tunis. Jim stood by the rail, staring at the distant city, its white buildings shimmering under the sun. The smell of the African soil, a dusty, old, almost nostalgic odor, filled the air.

Then abruptly Jim decided not to take the first tender to shore. Instead, pacing up and down the deck, he tried to tell himself that this was a thing that should be forgotten. It was something that had happened in another time. But he was on board the next tender as it swung away from the ship.

He walked along the familiar streets past the stores and cafes he remembered so well. Nothing had changed. He went on more swiftly. When he reached the building where Suzanne had lived he stopped and looked up, half expecting her to lean from one of its windows and call down to him.

Her name was no longer among the nameplates in the hall. Well, why should he have expected it to be? For moments he stood there, staring at the buttons beside the nameplates. Then, on an impulse, he pressed the button where her name had been, listening for and hearing the distant, familiar sound of the bell. A door opened in the hall above and as he stood looking up Suzanne appeared at the top of the stairs.

For seconds she was motionless, one hand touching her hair. Then she came running down to him even as he went up to her.

"Jim," she whispered, and they were holding each other close. The perfume of her hair enveloped him and her lips were soft.

"You haven't changed, Suzanne," he said. He held her from him, seeing in her eyes that she had not forgotten.

Her apartment was almost the same as before. A few changes. Jim stood in the center of the room looking about him while Suzanne walked to the window and stared out over the rooftops at the somnolent, blue harbor. Gradually his heart quieted and a feeling of peace came over him. When, finally, she turned to him he had realized completely the full meaning of their days together. And he accepted it.

"Odd what crazy ideas you can get," he said. "On the ship I was thinking there might still be time."

"Jim," she said. "I've been married now almost two years."

"Yes," he said. "I see."

She came to him, placing her hands in his. "But Jim, we both know it wouldn't have mattered." She let her head rest against his chest. "Oh Jim, I could cry. Not from unhappiness. It's just that you've brought back all those days I hadn't dared remember."

"I shouldn't have come," he said.

"But yes, Jim," she said quickly. "At least now we can remember without fear, knowing we never asked for tomorrows."

For a while then, a few hours, they remembered together. And when, as Jim stood by the door, Suzanne reached up and kissed him, he knew that she understood the one thing he could not say. They would never see each other again. Which, he knew, was as it should be.

Jim watched the Tunisian sky flooded by the swift, haunting beauty of a sunset that was gone as he reached the harbor's edge.

IN ANSWER TO A QUOTATION OF HESIOD

But what if one should come, as fair as thee,
And never in my presence silent be,
Yet I, from dreaming overmuch of you,
Find too much of the old love in the new;
Would you say then: in love there lurks the fool,
Who jests for kingdoms and forsakes the jewel?

—Gordon B. Clark

LOUISA

by DALLAS WILLIAMS

LOUISA Clyde smiled at the policeman on the corner. He would have smiled back, she thought, but he didn't see her. He was shading his eyes against the sun as he directed traffic. Louisa understood. But she always smiled at people, and it made her a little sad when they didn't smile back.

Babs had told her she was just too sensitive. Babs was proud of not being too sensitive herself. Louisa did not quite understand this in Babs, but she was fond of her anyway. You couldn't help getting fond of a person when you worked with her six days a week. Louisa felt the same way, almost, about Mr. Dromling. Babs and Mr. Dromling were like the family she never had. She wished, sometimes, that she could tell them that. If only she could do something for them, just once, she thought, then they would know

On her walk to the shop this morning, Louisa hummed to herself. It was nice to be out of the closeness of her room. Even when she opened all the windows for air, it seemed very small. Of course, the shop was small, too, but the air in it was always moist and cool because of the flowers. It was as if the dew never quite left them. Especially in the back, where she and Babs made floral arrangements and corsages for Mr. Dromling.

Louisa hadn't worked in the front part very much, waiting on customers. There weren't so many of these, because most of Mr. Dromling's business was in orders to be sent out. But he had said he might need her when there was a big rush before the holidays.

Louisa crossed the street and stopped under the sign that said Dromling's Flowers. She peered through the little window that held the trellis covered with English ivy and the pink begonia in pots. Through the window she could see the tall figure of Mr. Dromling moving back and forth between the back entrance and the icebox. Louisa knew then that she was late. On almost every delivery day she tried to be there in time

to help Mr. Dromling carry the cut flowers to the icebox. She knew he appreciated the help, although he never asked her to give it.

This morning Babs was helping him. When Louisa came in Mr. Dromling did not say "Good morning," as he usually did. She would feel much better if only he would smile back at her with his fine, grey eyes. They made Louisa think of the way the sky looks after it has rained, and the sun is just ready to come out. Once she had confided this thought to Babs, and Babs had agreed, which surprised Louisa at the time. Babs usually had some comment to make. She had been engaged twice, and knew all about men. Louisa wondered sometimes why she had stopped being engaged, but of course she couldn't ask.

Mr. Dromling closed the icebox door and turned to his desk. Babs stood watching him. Louisa felt the color rising to her face. "I'm sorry I'm late," she said. "I guess I walked too slowly She smiled shyly and pulled off her coat. Mr. Dromling nodded in her direction, but said nothing. Louisa watched him with concern. "Is everything all right?" she said.

"Sure," said Babs. "Everything's fine."

As Louisa put on her apron, she thought how nice Babs looked. She always looked nice when she wore that pink dress. Almost beautiful, Louisa thought. She wondered if Mr. Dromling thought so too. Probably he did, for he looked at her a great deal lately. Louisa had mentioned this to Babs, but Babs had only smiled.

"He looks at you too, doesn't he?" she said. "You know, sometimes I think you've got a crush on the guy, the way you smile at him every two minutes."

Louisa knew why she smiled like that, but she couldn't make Babs understand. She had tried, but after she was all through Babs just said, "Well, I'd watch that, if I were you, when that wife of his is around."

Mrs. Dromling came into the shop about once a week. She was a wispy little woman, with deep lines around her mouth, but not the kind that came from smiling. When she would see her crossing the street to the shop, Babs always said, "Oh, God," and went out the back entrance and around the corner for a cup of coffee. She told Louisa that even coffee never tasted very good when she knew "that woman" was in the shop.

Louisa felt that it was up to her to help Mr. Dromling

on these occasions, as his wife never talked to him very much. She just walked around looking at things. Sometimes she pulled a dead leaf off one of the potted plants, but never looked as if she enjoyed doing it very much. She never smelled the flowers. Louisa felt rather sorry for her, but she felt sorer for Mr. Dromling. She couldn't let them know, of course, so she was especially cheerful when Mrs. Dromling was there. It wasn't a comfortable cheerfulness, though. Louisa found herself hoping that Mrs. Dromling would not come in today.

She pushed the thought out of her mind as she went to the back table where Mr. Dromling had placed the list of orders to be filled for the day. Louisa noticed, inspecting his careful script, that they were mostly corsages. That meant a dance at the College that night. She liked dance nights. The whole day would be a succession of roses and gardenias and carnations. Louisa liked carnations the best of all. Not as expensive, she knew, as the others, but there was such a delicacy about them.

She would start with the carnations. Louisa took great pains with all her corsages. Mr. Dromling had often said how nice they were. Louisa smiled radiantly at Babs when she came over to the table.

"Looks like there's no rest for the weary," Babs said.

"Are you tired?" asked Louisa. Babs did not answer. Louisa tried again. "Is something the matter with Mr. Dromling?" she began. "He acts so—"

"Don't mind Mel," said Babs. "He's got a lot on his mind."

Babs always called Mr. Dromling by his first name. Once she had asked Louisa why she didn't, since there were just the three of them in the shop most of the time. Louisa hadn't been able to explain it to her, any more than she could explain the smiling. She just knew she couldn't call him anything but Mr. Dromling.

"I can't find my apron anywhere," Babs was saying. She smoothed her pink skirt down over her hips. "I wonder if I was wearing it when I left last night." She frowned.

"Wear mine," Louisa said. "This dress is so old it doesn't matter." This, she realized, was not exactly the whole truth, but it was true that all of her dresses were old. And Babs looked so nice and fresh. Louisa untied the apron and handed it to her. "I'll feel much better if you wear it," she said.

"Thanks a lot," Babs said.

Louisa looked at the list again and went over to the ice-box. She opened it and picked out some white carnations. Back at the table she gave half of them to Babs. "Don't you love these?" Louisa said.

Babs was staring at her. "Don't you ever get tired of this?" she asked.

Louisa said that she didn't. Babs shook her head. "You're a card, Louisa," she said. "I don't know how you do it." She looked toward the front of the shop where Mr. Dromling was pacing up and down.

Louisa looked for a minute too. Then she sighed and turned back to the carnations. In a little while her mouth was curving in a wide smile. The lacy petals delighted her. She fondled them gently, careful not to bruise the delicate edges. Mr. Dromling had showed her how to handle them so as to keep the flower part away from the heat of her fingers. His own fingers were deft and cool. They never trembled, as hers did sometimes, when she pulled a wire through the neck of a flower and twisted it around the stem. She always tried to do this quickly. It was the one thing she didn't like about making a corsage.

This morning Louisa wanted to do everything slowly, so that her work would be perfect. She breathed the spicy carnation fragrance deeply and felt almost too happy. She worked steadily, scarcely noticing when Babs got up and walked away from the table. When she looked up, her apron was lying on the chair.

Babs was not in the shop. Mr. Dromling was still in the front, and Louisa was glad he had stopped walking up and down. Now he was standing at the window, looking out into the street.

Suddenly the door opened and Mrs. Dromling came in. Louisa smiled as she came toward her, but Mrs. Dromling did not change her expression, which was even grimmer than before. She stalked into Mr. Dromling's little office and came out in a moment clutching a checkbook and Mr. Dromling's fountain pen.

She handed these to him abruptly and spoke in a low voice. Louisa was able to catch only the last few words—"last night," and "If you think I'm blind to what's going on, you're a fool."

Mr. Dromling was looking at her very strangely. He said something that Louisa could not hear. She bent over the

flowers again as the two of them approached the table. When she looked up Louisa saw that Mr. Dromling's face was very white, and his lips compressed into a thin line.

Mrs. Dromling glared at her, squared her narrow shoulders, and shot an awful glance at Mr. Dromling. He was writing in the checkbook, pressing so hard with the pen Louisa could hear the scratch of the point against the paper. He tore the check out and walked towards Louisa. "I'm sorry, Miss Clyde," he began.

Mrs. Dromling gave him another terrible look. "You don't have to say anything," she hissed. Then to Louisa she said, very evenly, "And if you smile at me once more, I'll scream. Here's your money. Now get out." Her voice cracked toward the last

Louisa got up slowly. She felt the piece of paper being pressed into her hand by Mr. Dromling's large, cold one. "I'm sorry," he said again. Louisa looked past him, at the front window where the light was shining through the English ivy on the trellis. It seemed to be swaying just a little. She brought her gaze back to rest on the apron thrown across the chair beside her.

"I think you're making a mistake," she said slowly. She did not smile, and she did not look at Mr. Dromling. Somehow her feet carried her across the room to the door. She opened it and walked out into the street. The sunlight was very bright, and Louisa did not mind the chill in the air. She could barely feel it.

How long she walked was all of a piece with' where she walked, all mixed up with the dazzling quality of sunlight on cement and a great emptiness in her chest. She began to shiver. For just a moment she wondered why her coat was not around her. Then she looked up and found herself beside a familiar window. Beneath the sign that said Dromling's Flowers, the door stood slightly open.

Louisa pushed it gently. The door swung in with a faint creak. That was the only sound inside the shop. Louisa strained to see, but there was no one. She caught the fragrance of carnations as she moved toward the back of the room. They lay scattered over the floor as if someone had brushed them from the table in a single sweep. Louisa looked back at them as she took her coat down from the rack.

In another minute she was kneeling on the floor among the carnations, gathering them into her lap. Tenderly she

brushed away the particles of dirt that clung to the lace edges. she cradled them gently. She would put them back where they would not die so soon.

Louisa rose and walked over to the icebox. Holding the flowers in one hand, she pulled at the door with the other. It was not going to open. She set the flowers down on the desk beside the icebox and tried it with both hands. It was locked. Louisa felt herself drooping forward. Then she thought of the key. Mr. Dromling had provided her with a duplicate of his own when she had first come to work for him.

Louisa kept it around her neck, on a narrow ribbon. She untied it now with fingers that trembled a little. They grew steadier as she inserted the key in the lock and turned. This time the icebox door opened easily. Louisa picked up the carnations, but she did not put them in their bucket on the floor. Instead, she stared down at the woman's body that lay beside it.

Mrs. Dromling's arm was thrown over her face, but Louisa could see the marks on her throat. For a long time Louisa stood looking at the helpless form. It lay so still. How different it was from the suspicious little woman who had come into the shop to spy upon Mr. Dromling. He was free of her at last. Louisa would see that he was free forever.

One by one she dropped the carnations over Mrs. Dromling's body. The coat slipped from her arm, and Louisa knew what she must do.

She bent and spread the coat over the body. She rose and closed the icebox door and locked it. Slowly she walked to the front of the shop and out into the street. She squinted and shaded her eyes. Yes, the policeman was there at the corner. She walked in that direction, fingering the key and thinking . . . thinking. When he saw the coat, the check, and . . . she tightened her fingers over the key. Smiling a little secret smile, she started across the street toward the blue-uniformed figure.

QUATRAIN TO ACADEMICIANS

Above the evil and good,
And limbo inbetween,
The pure bright stars all stood
Not helping and faintly seen.

—Hall Tennis

CONVERSATION AT SEA

At the storm's height the man and women stood side by side,
she pressing her ripe body against the rail,
pointing as she saw the gannet, hunting
over the water, poise suddenly,
then plummet—a black and white projectile.

"How horrible," she said, turning to the gaunt man,
"to think there is no rest, no peace. You could write
a poem about this, how that bird is like death."

For a moment he was silent, his wasted frame erect as he
watched the gannet rise, a small, flapping thing caught in its
beak. Then he said:

"There is the fallacy we have of symbolizing death with
living things, as you would this gannet, hunting the sea-wastes.
Death is more cold, immaculate, certain."

"But we must have symbols," she said, moving closer to
him.

As her body touched him his bloodless hands closed more
tightly on the rail.

"Then let it be us!" he cried. "Let it be the naked, white
animal, the alien voyageur across the face of the world!"
She seemed not to hear, her eyes flashing as she pointed.
The man looked at her, then at the gannet diving again.

"So I shall write a poem," he muttered, shivering, the
first lines forming in his mind:

*"The world is full of poison and the thin-skinned two legs
Hunts through the diminishing lands, seeking without
wisdom*

The lost and irretrievable pastures . . ."

—Gordon B. Clark

QUATRAIN

A quartrain is a form of verse
For simple thoughts and scenes;
It's suited best, albeit terse
For men of little means.

—Richard Glatthar

MY ROLLINS GIRL

Laughing eyes hypnotize,
Stylish clothes, turned up nose,
Walks and sways different ways;
I love her—so does she,
My Rollins girl.

—George Lymburn

