Out of The Night

by JAN VALTIN

ABDUCTED

I was determined to sever all further connections with the Gestapo. But Firelei's perilous position in Germany compelled me to execute my plan wit the utmost caution. Without first consulting the Westbureau, I let the Gestapo's regular couriers wait vainly for my appearance at our regular rendezvous. A week passed. Schreckenbach's messengers, unable to contact me in Copenhagen, returned to Hamburg empty-handed.

Schreckenbach, not hearing from his agent, Oskar, nor from me, dispatched a night letter to a cover address in Copenhagen, with which, at the advice of Jensen, I had supplied the Gestapo for use in emergencies. Unknown to the Gestapo, such letters went through Jensen's hands before they were given to me. Richard Jensen was disturbed. The Gestapo wanted to know why I had not met its regular couriers. It also wanted to know what had happened to Oskar.

I scribbled a hasty-looking note to the effect that I was on my way to the Soviet Union to attend a military school—aware of the Gestapo's keen interest in this field. This note I sent to Petrolevics, the Comintern liaison agent in Riga, with instructions to mail it to Schreckenbach's cover address in Hamburg. This gave the note the apperance of having been mailed en route to Moscow. The Gestapo would not expect me to write reports from Russia, and would understand my silence in the future. And Firelei, I calculated, would not have to fear retaliatory measures.

On a morning in October I was called to a conference with Wollweber and Kuusinen in a restaurant near the Thorvaldsen Museum. They ordered me to continue my work for the Comintern inside Hitler's Secret Police. Brusquely I told them that I had burned my bridges, that I was through with that assignment.

"I have told the Gestapo that I went to Russia," I explained. "As far as they are concerned, I have vanished."

Kuusinen smiled enigmatically.

"Well," he suggested, "after a few days you will write to the Gestapo that you have returned from Moscow and are now back in Copenhagen."

The next instant I stood in open mutiny against two of the most powerful figures in the Soviet Service and the Comintern, both of which had by 1937 become thoroughly interlocked.

"Give me four men from Comrade Avatin's Apparat to maneuver my wife and child out of Germany," I demanded. "It has been done before, it can be done for me."

Wollweber remarked that I sought to use the Westbureau as a means for the solution of my private difficulties.

"Private difficulties!" I snarled into Wollweber's face. "The thousands of comrades in the Nazi concentration camps would like to hear that! The ones who had their heads chopped off, the ones who were hanged, cut to pieces, beaten to death. The ones who died with the cry, 'Long live the Communist Party!' They all would like to hear that—the attitude of Comrade Wollweber, their leader, who sits on safe ground on a salary of $600 a month."

I had made powerful enemies. From that day on I became in the eyes of Kuusinen and Wollweber and their legion of henchmen a Bolshevik in whom they no longer could place absolute trust. It was no secret in our ranks that Stalin's quiet method of eliminating—by intrigue, calumny and cold murder—all rivals and subalterns who still retained a spirit of independence had long been adopted also by his leading genuflectors throughout the Soviet network. Only those who succeeded in finding "wreckers" and "Trotskyite reptiles" among their closest friends could be sure of saving their jobs and budgets and lives.

I did not have to wait long. To Petra Petersen's apartment, where I had been isolated as if I had the cholera, came Richard Jensen's son, Martin, with orders from the Westbureau.

"Go to the Soviet consul to get your sailing papers for Russia!"

I decided to give battle. The chance for a counter-thrust came when I heard from Petra Petersen that an important emissary of the Soviet Government had come by plane from Paris to Copenhagen to discuss with Jensen the chartering of Scandinavian vessels to carry war supplies to the ports of Loyalist Spain. This emissary was Leo Haikiss, one of the founders of the Leningrad Tcheka in the initial stages of the Revolution.

I told Haikiss that I had mutinied against Wollweber, and that I suspected Wollweber of having arranged for my trip to the Soviet Union for the purpose of getting me out of the way.

"This Wollweber," Leo Haikiss said slowly. "What is his background? Can you tell me of his private affairs? Or little opportunistic mistakes in his past? Manuilsky in Moscow is his good friend, and, to a lesser degree, Comrade Molotov. He will not deal with Dimitrov. Could it be that Wollweber is a secret friend of the Gestapo?"

"I know the names of nineteen comrades who were practically surrendered by Wollweber to the Gestapo," I said. "More than ten of them have been executed."

"Kharasho! You can write me a report on Ernst Wollweber," Haikiss went on. "I do not want a diplomatic report. I want a report that comes from the heart. The comrades in Moscow distinguish between diplomatic reports and honest reports. Remember that Wollweber is a bandit. He drinks. He spends much money with women. In international questions he is a brazen nincompoop. Write in detail and sign your name. Retain no copy. I shall take the original to Moscow."

"Very well."

I wrote the report. Leo Haikiss took it with hi mto Moscow. I did not know then that he, too, was destined to vanish, like so many others, in Stalin's Great Purge after the Spanish adventure had ended in dismal defeat.

Two eventless weeks passed. During this time I saw neither Wollweber nor any other member of the Western Secretariat. I was without papers and almost without money. However, the command that I should go to Russia seemed to have been dropped.

In November I received an order to proceed to Antwerp, to take charge of the Comintern communication bureau in that port. Jensen's workshop supplies me with a Swiss passport. Armed with this and a sum of money in American dollar, I boarded the westbound express to Esbjerg. I rejoiced. I believed that I had won at least my first round in my campaign against Wollweber. The Comintern was still mother, fatherland and home to me. I had traveled too far to turn back, to conceive of a life outside the Party. Moreover, as the head of the Antwerp Apparat, I felt sure that I would find a way of spiriting Firelei and Jan out of the talons of the Gestapo.

Late in December I returned to Esbjerg. It is less than a two-minute walk from the steamer-landing in Esbjerg to the Norta Sea terminal of the Copenhagen express. The passport inspection was carried out by officers I had not seen before. I avoided it by walking through the little gate marked "Scandinavians Only." I was halfway between the quay and the station-platform when a burly man in a thick gray sweater stopped me.

"Follow me," he said. "I come from Jensen."

We drove through the town, past farmhouses and fields, and out into the open heath-like country. The man behind me never took his hands out of his pockets. I turned on him abruptly.

"What have you got in your pockets? All the gold from Spain?"

He said stolidly, "No, I have a gun in my pocket."

We drove for fourteen hours, leaving the car only twice for coffee and sandwiches on the Frederica and Korsor ferries. At four in the morning we entered Copenhagen. Even at that hour the center of the city was filled with gayety and light. Girls in fur coats huddled in the dorways of Vesterbrogade. The car squealed to a stop in front of Richard Jensen's home.

I was ushered into Jensen's study. Jensen, hair disheveled, his huge form wrapped in a dressing gown, nodded a greeting. We did not shake hands. His face was gray and grim under the electric lights. With him were four young men, a German, a Lett and two Scandinavians,—GPU aides on Avatin's force. They had been drinking beer. A thin fog of tobacco smoke eddied under the ceiling.

"Sit down," I was told.

Jensen telephoned. He called the number of the Nordland Hotel, only a few houses away. His voice was a short, indistinct rumble. In a few minutes Jensen's son, Martin, appeared. On his heels, squat, dark, truculent, Ernst Wollweber walked into the apartment.

From the dining room two guards brought in a large table. Wollweber sat down at one end of the table, I at the other. Between us, on both sides of the table, the guards took their place.

I knew now that I had to expect an inquisition. The old symptoms appeared. My stomach contracted, all muscles grew taut. I was ready to fight, and yet I sat very still, waiting.

"Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and the other traitors," he said, "have always maintained that they were the staunchest supports of Lenin. Yet, in every acute crisis they turned against Lenin. Such types may be of some use to the revolutionary movement, but in no circumstances can they be entrusted with key positions."

I agreed. Wollweber continued: "Bitter experience has shown us that every former comrade who was caught conspiring against the Party must, as a matter of necessity, wind up in the camp of Fascism, an ally of Hitler and the counter-revolution."

"Concretely," I said, "what are the denunciations against me and who made them?"

"There are no denunciations," Wollweber growled. "There are charges. Comrade Dimitrov in Moscow is in possession of a report signed by you in which you accuse the Western Secretariat of the Communist International of having uselessly sacrificed able comrades on wild-goose chases in Germany."

"I did not accuse the Western Secretariat," I cried hotly. "I accused Comrade Ernst Wollweber. I maintain this accusation."

Wollweber hunched his shoulders. Jensen leaned back with a sneer, half-incredulous, half-contemptuous.

"Rigmarole," growled Wollweber, "all this is open for later discussion. I have here another report. It comes from Holland. Here you are definitely accused of shady transactions with such counter-revolutionary wolves as the renegade Hans Krause, with the Socialist Fascist Edo Fimmen, with Franco spies, with a long gallery of other political adventurers."

I felt as if someone had hit me on the head with a hammer.

"Comrade Krause is no renegade," I said sullenly. "He went to Spain to demonstrate that the rumors against him were false. He was wounded at the front I considered it my duty to—"

"Excuses!" Wollweber burst in. "True Bolsheviki have never grubbed around for excuses. They admit their mistakes, and let the Party decide."

"All right. I demand a hearing before the Control Commission."

"This is the Control Commission," Jensen said. "You will have time to talk later."

There was a long silence. Jensen drew a geometric pattern on the fly-leaf of a book. Wollweber smoked. The guards sat immobile, but tensely attentive. I wondered what would happen if I simply stood up and walked out of Jensen's apartment. I could think of no place to go.

At six o'clock Avatin arrived, roughly clad as always, in a stiff brown suit of Russian manufacture. He flashed a smile of recognition at me. With Avatin a smile meant nothing. He could smile at a man one minute, and kill him the next. Accompanying Avatin was Inge, a stenographer, a handsome athletic blonde and the wife of Martin Jensen.

"You may now speak in your defense," Woolweber announced. "We give you half an hour."

I spoke of the stormy years of 1923 and of my part in the preparation and execution of the October uprising in Hamburg. I had done the hardest work that was required of the rank and file. I had fought for the revolution with arms in my hands. I spoke of my work for the Comintern in America, in Hawaii, in Belgium and Holland and France, in Switzerland and Norway, in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Russia, in Singapore and Shanghai and England. I spoke of the jails and prisons, of the Nazi horror camps, where I had suffered and continued to fight for the Party, for the revolution, for seven years. Before I had said half of what I had intended to say, my time was up. Even in this situation I was too disciplined to break the rules made by those who had been my superiors. Inge, Martin Jensen's wife, had stenographed what I had said. Had I harangued a stone wall, I should have found no more response. Then I realized my mistake: I should not have defended myself—I should have attacked . . . or bowed my head, proclaimed myself guilty, and cringed for mercy.

Then Wollweber spoke. No one in the room believed his accusations. Least of all did he believe them himself. His object was to make me crawl in self-abasement. He was not sure that I would crawl. Had he been sure, he would have chosen a larger audience.

Wollweber rose, and with a curt nod toward Avatin and Jensen, he left the room. I never saw him again. Richard Jensen offered me a bottle of beer. Avatin gave a signal to two of his helpers. They put on their overcoats and stepped up to me. One I did not know. The other was Ignace Scharnetzki, a native of Poland, a stocky man with a round stubborn face.

"You come with us now," he said.

"Where to?"

"Never mind!"

Avatin intervened. "We have been good friends," he said. "What I tell you is the truth: You will live in a country place. Until your case has been decided, you are relieved of all your duties."

"I am a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"You come with us now," Scharnetzki repeated softly.

It was morning. I followed the GPU men's orders without resistance. I marched down the stairs into a waiting car. On my right sat Scharnetzki. On my left was a lanky Dane. Both had their pistols drawn. Martin Jensen drove. The car leaped forward. Large numbers of young men nad girls were riding to work on their bicycles. Traffic grew thinner as the car neared the city limits. I felt like a man in a trance. I lit a cigarette and closed my eyes.

When I opened my eyes, I saw a stretch of open sea to the left.

We were speeding south.

(Continued Monday)

Defense Bond Quiz

Q. Can Defense Savings Stamps be redeemed ?

A. Yes; they can be redeemed for cash at face value or exchanged for Defense Savings Bonds. For example, 75 of the 25-cent Stamps—total cash value $18.75—May be exchanged for a Defense Saving Bond which in ten years will be worth $25.

Q. Why should Americans buy Defense Bonds and Stamps now?

A. Among the reasons are: 1) It is the quickest way in which every citizen can both serve his country and conserve his earnings, and (2) the purchase of these Bonds and Stamps helps not only to finance national defense but also to prevent high prices and increased cost of living.

Note.—To buy Defense Bonds and Stamps, go to the nearest post office or bank, or write to the Treasurer of the United States, Washington, D. C., for an order form.

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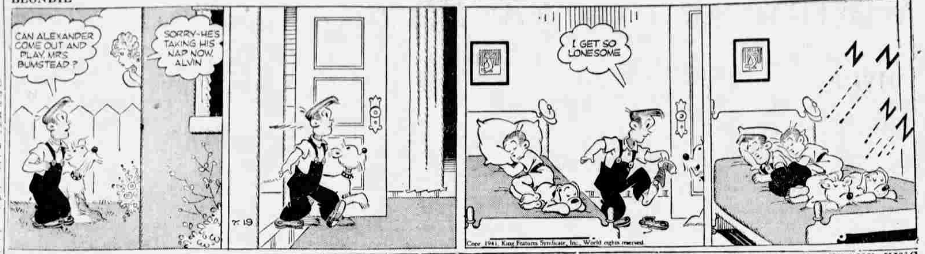
HERE is a pleasant little game that will give you a message every day. It is a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is six or more, subtract four. If the number is less than six, add three. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner of the rectangle and check every one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

BLONDIE — Siesta for Four — By CHIC YOUNG

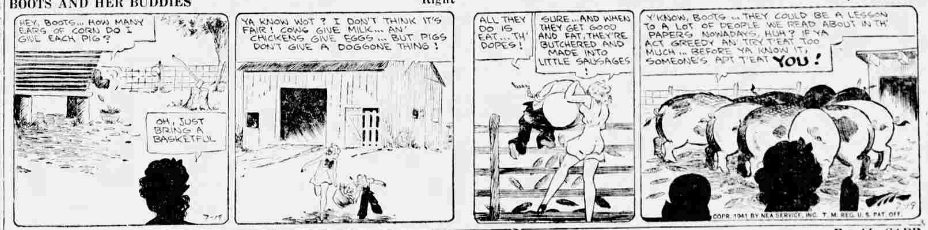


GASOLINE ALLEY — Share Croppers — By FRANK KING

RED RYDER — In the Toils — By FRED HARMAN

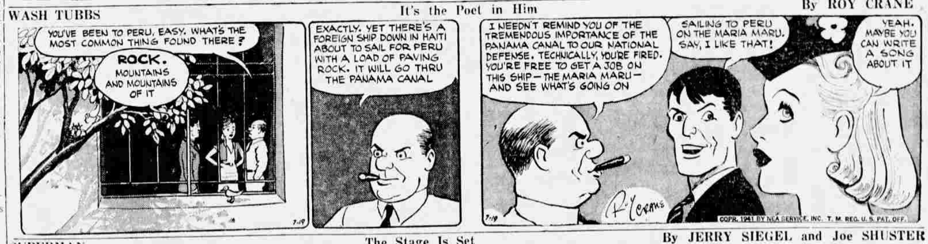
THIMBLE THEATER — She Hasn't a Leg to Stand On! — STARRING POPEYE

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES — Right — By MARTIN



LI'L ABNER — Thet Means Jest One Thing!! — By AL CAPP

WASH TUBBS — It's the Poet in Him — By ROY CRANE



SUPERMAN — The Stage Is Set — By JERRY SIEGEL and Joe SHUSTER