OUR BOARDING HOUSE — With MAJOR HOOPLE

BLONDIE — That Makes It Unanimous! — By CHIC YOUNG

GASOLINE ALLEY — They Also Serve — By FRANK KING

RED RYDER — What's It All About? — By FRED HARMAN

THIMBLE THEATER — Canceling All Reservations — STARRING POPEYE

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Of The Night

By JAN VALTIN

CHAPTER TWELVE

In San Francisco, I went to report to the address Stu had given me, a rooming house on Clay Street, and asked for Miss Green. I was directed to a comfortable room three flights up. There I confronted a severe-looking girl who wore spectacles. But when she stepped forward, I saw at once that her austerity and her spectacles were camouflage. She had mischievous eyes. She was not American. Her name, I felt, was not Miss Green.

"I am the comrade from Shanghai," I said.

"You came like this?"

"I came as a stowaway."

She was not suspicious. Mandalian had sent a cable after my departure from China. She made tea and sandwiches.

"What'll be my job here?" I asked.

"You'll see," she said, obliquely.

"American Party work?"

"No. We've no contacts with the Party in the United States. It has gone down to two thousand members this year."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"You'll know soon," she smiled.

The girl went out to telephone and to get me some clothes. I bathed and slept until she returned. "The chief will see you at nine," she said.

In a cosy restaurant near the Golden Gate Park, the chief was waiting. He was a Russian who posed as an engineer, and went under the name of Getzy. He was a slender man in his forties, with a quiet, intellectual face. His hair and eyes were gray and the suit he wore also was gray. He had the guarded, monotonous voice of a man who had acquired the trick of talking while appearing to be asleep.

Getzy was well informed about my Party record. "Avoid seeing any of your friends here on the Coast," he warned me. "No one except the people I designate must know that you are in California." Turning to the girl, he added, "Give him some money, Gushi."

The girl took a few bills from her purse and pushed them toward me over the table.

"Is there anything else you need just now?"

I looked at the girl. The name Gushi fitted her much better than the distant "Miss Green." She showed her throat and laughed. With half-closed eyes, the Russian gazed at me through the smoke of his cigarette.

On the fourth day Getzy called me to a conference. Again I met him near Golden Gate Park. He was immaculately colorless, and he gave his instructions in a cold voice. It was a matter of launching a transport of illegal communist literature to Japan. The President Jefferson, of the Admiral Line, was due to sail from Seattle to the Orient. Aboard the liner four communists served as members of the crew. They were to smuggle a large consignment of Japanese pamphlets to Yokohama. The position of Japan in the Orient was of the greatest significance for the revolution in China. Next to Britain, Japan was the strongest imperialist factor in the East. The success of a revolution in China depended in part upon effective obstruction—by strikes and sabotage—of Japanese intervention. Since the lines of communication between Vladivostok and Nippon were too closely guarded by the Japanese secret service, all transmissions of money and propaganda material from Moscow to Japan were diverted over the West Coast ports of the United States.

Together with Gushi, I went to Seattle to attend to the shipment which had come by way of New York, packed securely into barrels. I modelled our assistants aboard the President Jefferson, saw to the re-packing of the pamphlets into many smaller units, their transportation and safe concealment aboard the ship, and fixed the passwords to be given to the recipients of the shipment. In less than a week Gushi cabled the Comintern cover address in Yokohama that the "toys" were on their way.

Gushi was a tireless worker. All her emotional savagery evaporated when she switched her mind to organizational duties. Exalted over the successful consummation of our undertaking, I bought some pretty clothes for her and two tickets for a movie. She was so pleased that she linked her arm in mine and began to sing. "After this, let's go and dance," she said. "I haven't been to a dance in eternities."

"You look different," I said, as she brushed her thick blonde hair before the mirror in our hotel room.

"I am different."

There was a knock on the door. It was a telegram from Getzy. He ordered me to proceed at once to Los Angeles. He was waiting for me in a hotel. Gushi's face tightened as I read the message. Her shoulders sagged. "We'll dance another time," she said, adding, with shrill sarcasm: "We've no time to be gilty, my friend. It's marschier oder krepier!"

"What is this about?" I asked, pointing to the telegram.

"I cannot tell you," she answered slowly.

We parted at the station. I never saw Gushi again.

Late the following night I arrived in Los Angeles. I rode straight to Getzy's hotel. He was in pajamas, a gray-faced somber figure working over papers that were spread out on the desk and on chairs. A fog of cigarette smoking hung in the room. He gathered his papers and locked them into his briefcase before he uttered a word.

"What happened in Seattle?"

"No mishap. Gushi notified Yokohama."

"Very well."

Getzy paced the room, his eyes on the carpet. "There is a serious job you must do," he said.

"All right. What is it?"

"An execution," Getzy said mildly.

I was suddenly on guard. I became tense and inexplicably nervous. This was not what I had expected. Getzy kept pacing the room. His slippers made no sound on the carpet. I noticed that his eyes avoided me. I waited.

"This man," Getzy said coldly.

"Executions are G.P.U. business," I said.

"Just so!"

"I think a comrade better trained than I should do it."

"I have no other man at hand. It is a pressing matter. All the preliminary work has been done. We have the address." Muttering, he said: "Don't think this is a personal affair. The decision to wipe out this man does not come from me."

"What did he do?" I demanded.

"What affair is it of your?" Getzy snapped.

Fear, anger and a stubborn sense of duty battled inside of me. "Suppose I resign?" I said lately. "And go back to Germany?"

Getzy stiffened. "Resign? I trust you said that rashly. Once in a while we dismiss a man—for cowardice, for disloyalty, maybe for unproletarian conduct. But resign?"

"I did not mean it."

"I know you did not."

"It is one thing to shoot an enemy in barricade fighting. Shoot him in self-defense. Or in a rival rage. An altogether different thing is a deliberate killing." I tried to argue.

"A difference of degree," he more," said Getzy.

"If I am to take a man's life, I want to know why."

Getzy came up to me and put his hands on my shoulders. "My dear comrade," he said. "This man is ordered killed for a reason—and that's enough. That's a universal law, as old as the first tribe."

"Well, I'll have to find out."

"In our organization independent investigations are not permissible. You know that."

"Give me time to think."

Getzy resumed his pacing. I sat in a deep chair, my hands cupped over my head, trying to straighten out a disturbing turmoil in my brain: I had accepted the principle of Red Terror as a necessity. What then was my objection to sending a man to his death with my own hands? A just man sitting by the fireside and reading that a dangerous criminal had been hanged until dead might grunt with warm satisfaction. A judge who had sentenced some luckless scarecrow to the gallows might go home afterward to enjoy a good steak and relax with his wife. But would the just man grunt with satisfaction and the judge find pleasure in his steak and the embrace of his wife if they had to do the hanging with their own hands?

Getzy was pacing to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back, talking, talking. His monotonous voice seemed to cast a spell over the whole room, until it was as gray and pitless and impersonal as the owner of that voice himself, which was saying: "Bourgeois ethics are not our ethics. Humanitarian considerations, where enemies of the revolution or the Soviet State are concerned, savor of petty bourgeois sentimentality which is incompatible with the demands of class war and the expansion of Soviet power."

Was I a blubbering weakling? Was I seeking refuge in the moral and esthetic ramifications of a world to which I had never belonged? Getzy spoke of his life in the outlawed organizations of the Bolsheviki in Czarist times, told how the hunted revolutionary workers of St. Petersburg and Kiev had captured and executed Ochrana spies in cellars and in the woods. He spoke of Tcheka work during the years of civil war. He spoke of the legions of workers who had become the victims of our enemies and were now rotting in countless prisons and graves. Must it be reported to Moscow that I refused to carry out a revolutionary task?

"That a better, more devoted comrade than I must be employed for the task? Did not the Comintern possess the status of an army at war? Was it not everywhere understood that a soldier in the front line trenches who refused to level his gun at the foe had forfeited his own life?

There was no way out. Getzy stopped near enough to touch me. His voice was so low that it could not be heard more than a few feet away. Was I afraid of having my neck broken under the gallows for murder? "To prevent that is merely a question of organization," Getzy said. Thousandfold worse than hanging was ostracism from the Party.

"Comrade Getzy," I wanted to say, "why not do the assassinating yourself?"

"All right," I said. "I shall do it."

"When?" I asked.

"Without delay," Getzy said. "Is your head clear? Very well. Let's consider the details." The Russian's voice was dry and cold.

The following days were filled with a mad exasperation, a wild craving for action and hesitations and futile efforts at self-hypnosis to shut out and down the agony brought on by doubts and hesitations. The specters of that bloody Hamburg October of 1923 now came back to plague me. It was not fear that troubled me. It was a battle between my blind sense of duty and the spontaneous rebellion of my nature against the alien savor of the projected enterprise. The struggle left me mutinous and in a daze.

Editor's Note: The execution was never carried out by the author. At this time he was arrested, charged with an assault upon a man in Los Angeles, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to a term in San Quentin prison.

(To be continued)

Belmont Signs Athletic Director

BELMONT—George E. Hunsucker, native of Hamlet, now of Elizabeth City, will be director of athletics in Belmont High School next year, according to announcement by Superintendent H. C. Sisk.

Mr. Hunsucker has been elected to fill the vacancy left by William Guy, who recently accepted the principalship of the East Spencer School.

Having had an unusually successful career in athletics at Elizabeth City, Mr. Hunsucker comes to Belmont highly recommended. He will be assisted by Ed. Bullard, of the Belmont High coaching staff, and Tom Woodard, graduate of Western Carolina Teachers' College, at Cullowhee, who has been teaching and coaching athletics in several schools in Western North Carolina.

Mr. Hunsucker is a brother of Mrs. R. B. Suggs Jr., of this city, formerly of Hamlet.

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