

LITERARY PAGE

Other Guy's Lives

By RALPH KRAMER

IT was hot and kind of noon-dayish, but a successful breeze was wheeling gulls from across the slow-rolling green breakers. The breeze had also whipped up a salt air tang that solidified about ten miles out into a glary horizon haze. With the gulls, the breeze, the sun and the sea—everything added up to a swell day—almost a vacation day.

One of the two guys from Jersey was groaning with semi-ecstasy as he stood and stretched himself. He twisted until someplace a joint or two snapped, then he hopped onto a sand bag, lit a cigarette and surveyed the beach.

"This could just as easy be Atlantic City as not." He spoke down at the beach and across the breakers. Some of the guys looked at him thinking "so what to Atlantic City?"

"Ya' know it, Joe?" He continued, still looking away. The other guy from Jersey's name was Joe. He was lying on his belly next to the gun. His eyes were closed and his mouth was open against the sand. He seemed asleep.

"Ya' know it, Joe?" "What!" Joe's voice had the bite of sleepy irritation.

"This place reminds me of Atlantic City."

Joe took a while to answer. "It hasn't got a boardwalk."

"Cape May or Barenagt Bay, maybe."

"Maybe."

The guys were quiet—kind of wanting the Jersey chamber of commerce to dry up. He did for awhile, but before the easy breaker noise could put Joe back to sleep, he began again. "Boy, Joe, wouldn't it be nice if we could walk through those palms into a place like Casey's and tear into a real sea food dinner—filet of sole, oyster, horseshoe crab?"

"Yeah," said Joe, his eyes still closed.

"Boy, I wish I was back in Jersey right now."

Everybody wanted to say it, but the dry wag, Corporal Leisen won out. "So do I, buddy."

THEY were stretched around in various stages of bored stupor—half asleep. Too tired to do anything, yet with enough nervous tension and pinging sand lice to keep them awake.

It was Joe's turn to stand up; hairy-armed and swarthy. He too grabbed a cigarette, lit it indifferently, and blew smoke Scarface style; out of the side of his mouth. He climbed up onto the sand bags; squatting like an Indian, even to the hand shading his eyes. He gazed at the other sandbagged crews down the line. A few guys were moving around, but as far as he could see everything was as quiet as it was around here. Then some guy down the way began with a harmonica; he couldn't catch much except that it was a harmonica, but it sounded pretty good. He listened idly, not because he wanted to too much, but because his ears were hungry for a little tonal desert.

The cracks were few and far between; talk of women was somehow less salacious, and sometimes irritation got the best of them. Sand was in everything; when they chewed, it crackled; when they scratched, it stuck in their fingernails. They rubbed it out of their eyes, their ears, their

armpits; it was part of their feet.

It wasn't so bad when the sun was up, and the sand was kind of toasty, so that when you lay in it half naked, it kind of tickle-burned. But then when you had to face the same sand as you ate, as you tried to sleep, and when it got clammy and damp, then it was pretty punk.

Leisen was sort of looked upon as the host, or at least he felt that way when the sergeant wasn't around. Perhaps to end his own boredom he began thinking hard to keep alive the show of interest.

"You should have joined up with Gene Tunney, Joe. You could have thrown a baseball around Norfolk, and had a rating to boot."

Joe was either naive or not particularly ironical.

"I used to be a pretty fair ball-player. Caught for a semipro outfit for a good while," he modestly admitted. "Never did go far with ball though. I had a big pay-in' defense job and a dame."

"Then why did you join up, Joe?" asked Vince Quentin, scratching his groin.

"Guess I was a sucker for 'the Halls of Monezuma.'"

"What about the dame?" Vince liked to talk about women and Joe had been pretty silent about his love life to date.

"Her too."

"Her too what?"

"Her too—I was a sucker."

"A fool there was," put in Art Reese, who hadn't gotten over his days at Marquette yet. He was about to continue the verse, when Phil broke in, "Wasn't that the girl from Hackensack?" Phil was on the limited back to Jersey again.

"Yeah," answered Joe.

"She was OK."

"Yeah."

Elsa Maxwell Leisen saw how close Phil was getting to Jersey, and threw the switch over to the big kid from Texas.

"How come you got in, Tex—"

"Well," the kid had a clean grin—"Ah'll tell ya'—Ah saw a picture once with that li'l gal Maureen O'Hara, a rompin' aroun' an' lovin' fer me." He paused with a shy likeable laugh. "Boy, when ah got down there to San Diego—those ole' boys never let me out of camp long enough to see anything but a few sailors."

"Them San Diego women didn't know what they were missin'." Corporal Leisen said, appraising the Texas boy, who smiled dumbly with an "aw shucks" expres-

sion. He was big shouldered, and brown. The sun had whitened his eyebrows and his arm fuzz. His hair was clipped and soft; like well-used tooth brush bristles. His face was strong and cheek bonish, but his eyes were friendly.

They all admired him here in the world of men, where they'd be plenty jealous of him if a bunch of women were hanging around. He was the big, unprotected sort of guy that can make women feel as though they were kissing him, instead of him them.

CORPORAL Leisen stood up, shrugging sand all over the place, "I've heard so much about you guys and your dames ever since we been here, I feel almost like I been along with you."

"I like to make 'em crawl," Vince said, ignoring Leisen and Art. "Get 'em to 'I love you' and then give them the works. It burns 'em up but they like it. Isn't that how you do, Tex?"

"Well, ah don't exactly do much. Ah jest kinda—well—ah don't exactly know what I do,—Mu li'l ol' brunette don't crawl, though."

"Try what I told you when you get back home," continued Vince. "Why if I had your looks, I'd devote my life to makin' dames miserable. Why back home right now, I'll bet there's a cool fifteen girls lookin' at my picture."

Joe was looking at Leisen with a half smile and knowing eyes. Phil and the Texan acted as though they believed it, while Art Reese sat staring at his shoes. Vince was undaunted.

"There was one little gal I went with that almost had me floored though—What a pip she was, too—Told me she loved me, and all that kind of rumble-seat malarky. So I got my ring back from that Mexican babe I was tellin' you about yesterday, and I jammed it on her finger only to find there were two rings on there already."

"Was she married?" asked Phil.

"Married as hell—and givin' me all this bull about 'you're the only one'—you can imagine how that affected a young kid like me who believed in institutions like marriage—so there I was, double-crossed by a floozy!—But nobody gets the best of Vince Quentin, and this dish was no exception. So I ups and fixes a date with her and a pal of mine. They got parked and begin

Boyd's Wife

Boyd Cameron, man about the town,
Up when the rest of us were down,
Forehead, like Shelley's cluttered with curls,
Squired in turn the Trenton girls;
And met the village talk with scorn
Suitable to "the manor born."

Boyd Cameron was brought to bay
In the Episcopal church one May;
And man and boy stood staring by
To see the glint in Andea's eye.
"He'll tire of Andea," women said;
But Andea's head was a smart proud head.

The years have passed and time grown thinner.
But the Camerons entertain at dinner,
And the Camerons entertain at tea,
And Andea sits by quietly.
Wives call Andea Cameron smart;
But Andea's art is a subtle art.

When Boyd's glance strays to another girl,
Andea straightens a falling curl;
When Boyd's eyes grow too cordially warm;
Andea brushes against his arm;
And when Boyd smiles at dimpled knees,
It's "Boyd, dear, fasten my sandal, please."

So, every crisis is met calmly.
With Andea's practised sophistry.
And the chains on Boyd are the kind of chains
A woman fastens with skill and brains.
And Boyd never feels the tightening links.
Of the Camerons, only Andea thinks.

—By Barbara Hampson.

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smoochin', and I arrive with the husband."

His voice broke with laughter. "Gosh, was that a scream! Anyway, it taught her to mind her P's and Q's, what I mean!"

"What about your pal?" asked Art Reese.

"Oh, he was about the size of Tex here, and the husband was a little shrimp. In fact, the husband apologized to this guy for his wife—"She's just a little fickle, Mister," he said."

THE kid down the line with harmonica was pretty hot now, and it was fairly easy to tell that "Honeysuckle Rose" was the tune.

"Yeah," said Joe to no one in particular. "It's a funny world. I mean the way they get us from all over the country. Knowing different people, different women, different things; and they stick us down here on some flea-bitten beach together, and we get to talking and shooting the crap, and finding out that life's pretty much the same all over—"

"Yeah." Corporal Leisen's face wrinkled wisely. "Here we've been for about ten days, laying around with not a blasted thing to do

but shoot the breeze and get sleepy. And this is just bein' around guys, listenin' to them; like old "make 'em crawl" over there, well, it kind of gives you a feelin' you can't put into words, but it makes you know how good a bunch of guys really are, and how good livin' is, too. I guess I mean that things as a whole are

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Geoffrey Discovers America

THOROFARE by Christopher Morley, Harcourt, Brace.

This is the story of Geoff, a little boy who left a Victorian England to discover the New World. He became Jeff, learnt about Lexington and Concord, and always had to be Cornwallis and Braddock when Yorktown and the Indian wars were refought.

Christopher Morley has come a far cry from "Kitty Foyle" with "Thorofare." But there is the same richness and flavor to the book; he gives a delightful picture of the times and an even more winning picture of Jeff, or Geoff, who always spoke his mind, and what happened to him in America.

The boy isn't the only charming character; his uncle, Dan, and English professor who introduced Uncle Remus and Brer

Rabbit to his nephew, is a prominent person in the book. There is Aunt Bee, who found America so strange and yet so familiar, and Aunt Allie, who stamps herself on the reader's memory with the epigram, "Virtuous women don't wear hats;" (They wear bonnets). Aunt Em lived in a glass cupola and was said to have the evil eye. Her bad temper was genius.

Then on the crossing to America Jeff and Uncle Dan met some more individuals that only Christopher Morley could dream up: Professor Friedeck, an eminent philologist, who said that the English language was "simply emotional helter-skelter" and liked privacy while searching for his collar-buttons. Miss Shaugraun was an Irish lady with a

booming voice who forgot that the ship's ventilators were excellent voice conductors. There is a host more of characters, each as delightful as the next.

There is something of the whimsy of "Where the Blue Begins" in this book; at least it veers closer to that than to "Kitty Foyle." Every now and then the book becomes uproariously funny; every now and then it becomes serious and philosophical. You can't put your finger on Morley's intrinsic quality; it is indefinable. If you are a Morley addict, you can take this book and sink into a comfortable chair with a sigh of bliss. This is your meat. If you don't like his work, this book will not convert you, for it is characterized by his personal style in every line.