

A Bell for Adano

By John Hersey



THE STORY THUS FAR: The American troops arrived in Adano, with Major Joppolo, the Amgot officer in charge. Sergeant Borth was in charge of security. The Major was determined to hold the confidence of the people and to replace their bell stolen by the Nazis. Despite orders issued by General Marvin, barring carts from the city, Joppolo recalled the orders, to permit food and water to enter the city. The Major placed a ceiling on prices to stop a black market caused by the generosity of the Americans. The fishermen sent Tina to the Major to thank him for arranging for the renewal of their fishing rights. The Major told her he would soon have good news about her sweetheart.

CHAPTER XX

The case which Gargano considered serious was the case of Errante and his mule cart.

Errante was sworn in. The Major asked for the accusation. Gargano pushed Errante to one side and stood before the Major.

"Honorable Mister Major," he began, "this is a case of interference with the American military. I consider it one of the most serious we have yet had to handle."

The Major said: "That is for me to judge, Gargano. What is the accusation?"

Then Gargano told, or rather acted out, the story of how Errante Gaetano's cart had blocked traffic on Via Umberto the First. Gargano the Two-Hands leaped and swore and shook his two fists at Errante, and he made Zito act as the mule, and he attacked Zito fiercely, and then he reeled back from sham blow after sham blow. He did not ask anyone to act out the part of Errante, but let his own dodging and staggering give the idea.

"I am poor, Mister Major," Errante began. "I have a cart. A cart is all I have."

He looked around the room and thought.

"My wife died of the malaria," he said. "My wife was a serious woman. She did not laugh for eighteen years. However, she cooked rabbit well. She died of the malaria."

After another pause he said: "It seems to me that I have heard more laughter since the disembarkation. This is especially true among the children. You see, I have been trying to think out what made me stop and listen to the children the other afternoon, when I did not notice the Swimming War."

"The what, cartman?"

"I call them Swimming War. They are American vehicles which swim."

"Amphibious trucks, yes, go ahead."

Errante Gaetano paused. This time it did not look as if he would come out of the pause. He frowned.

Major Joppolo covered up this embarrassment by saying to Gargano: "We are going to have to dismiss this case, Gargano. I regret that it caused you embarrassment. But after what this man has said, could you see any justice in punishing him?"

Gargano protested: "American soldiers might have been killed by the delay."

The Major said: "I doubt it, Gargano. All he was guilty of was being too interested in the children's laughter."

Errante had recovered from his moment of emotion. He said: "There is more laughter. I think my wife would have laughed at my description of this man"—he looked at Gargano—"talking about my cart. It is too bad she died of the malaria. Now that you Americans are here, I think she would have laughed." In spite of the mistake about the mule. Yes, I think so, Mister Major.

"Oh dear," said Private First Class Everett B Banto, clerk in A.P.O. 917, in a second floor room in one of the annexes of the Saint George Hotel in Algiers.

He was reading somebody else's V-mail letter, the envelope of which was open. Private Banto was a mail clerk. He had also been a mail clerk in Greenton, Vermont, before the war. Even in Greenton, he had been very concerned about the way America was behaving herself in the world.

"Oh dear," he said, "I don't see how we're ever going to win the war."

"What's itching your pants now?" said Sergeant Walter Frank, another clerk, who was reading somebody else's copy of Collier's.

"Listen to this," said Private Banto. "It says here: Why the hell do we have to give the Frogs and the Limeys and the Chinks all the stuff we make? Seems to me we've played Santa Claus long enough. Oh dear."

"Says who," said Sergeant Frank, "what's a matter with that? It makes me vomit to see these Frenchmen driving all over the place when my folks at home can hardly even drive to the A & P to get their food."

"Walter, that's not a very good attitude, is it? We won't make many friends in the world that way."

Private Banto put the V-letter back in its envelope, and put the envelope in its proper cubbyhole. He picked up one of the mail pouches from the front, cut the wire binding and began to sort the contents, most of which consisted of tempting

memoranda, not enclosed in envelopes.

"Gosh, Walter," he said, "we Americans certainly go in for a lot of paper work. Look at this stuff from the front—from the front, where they're supposed to be fighting. I don't see how we're ever going to win the war."

Sergeant Frank, who was trying to read a story, said testily: "So what's the matter with a little paper work?"

"And look at this. Gosh, but we're inefficient. Look here, this is supposed to be addressed to someone in the 49th Division which is over there, and it's from someone else in the 49th Division, right there, too, and they sent it all the way back to Algiers. Isn't that terrible?"

"Oh yes, it's just terrible!" said Sergeant Frank, imitating Private Banto's voice.

"Well, what should I do about it, Walter?"

"You can jam it in the ash can for all I care," Sergeant Frank said harshly.

"Why, Walter," Private Banto said. When he had recovered from



"I think the Major's falling for the blonde."

the shock, he said: "Seriously, Walter, what should I do with it?"

"Well, if it don't look important, you can throw it in the dead letter basket, that's what we usually do."

"You couldn't do that, Walter."

"You just said yourself there's too much paper work. What's one paper more or less?"

"It might be important."

"Well, look at it. What is it about?"

"It says: 'For information. Re carts, Adano.' And then it has something about an order that General Marvin issued, and then apparently a certain Major Joppolo countermanded the order, or something."

"It's about General Marvin? Throw it away!"

"Oh no, I wouldn't dare." And Walter put the memorandum in the pouch to go back to the front.

"Now don't bother me," Sergeant Frank said. "I'm reading."

Private Banto kept on sorting. "Oh dear," he said in a few minutes, "listen to this, here's a thing about a captain that's being sent back because of behavior unbecoming to an officer. I don't see how we're ever going to win, dear me."

The idea of a party for Major Joppolo grew up in a peculiar way. It came up partly because of real affection for the Major. But it was also partly because Captain Purvis wanted to see if he couldn't make some time with one of the daughters of Tomasino.

Giuseppe the interpreter stopped in to see Captain Purvis at the M.P. command post one afternoon. Giuseppe was just keeping his butter evenly spread. "How's a thing, a Cap?" he asked. He called Purvis Cap because his tongue always tripped on Captain.

"Okay," the Captain said. "You like Adano?"

"Okay," the Captain said. "You like a little more fun?"

"Who wouldn't?"

"Why you don't go see Francesca no more?"

"There's nothing there, Giuseppe, the family's always hanging around."

"I'm a no so sure. You don't a try very hard."

"Besides, I think the Major's falling for the blonde. He's a good guy, I wouldn't want to mess him up any."

"How you mess him up? You fool around a Francesca."

"No, Giuseppe, I think the Major's serious. I don't know, he didn't say anything, I just got a hunch. If I fooled around with those girls, it would be strictly for fish. No, I don't think it's a good idea."

"You mean a Mister Major, he's a fall in a love?"

"I don't know. Maybe. I think so."

"What a for? Can he have a no

fun without a fall over like a that?"

"Doesn't look to me like you can have much fun with a whole bunch around, including you, Giuseppe, and having to eat that awful candy, and the old lady sitting there. No, Giuseppe, if I play house with a little dolly, I like a little privacy."

"Giuseppe's a fix."

"I doubt if you could."

"Francesca's not a scrupulous. Tina's not a scrupulous. You can have a some fun."

"How? What can you fix, Giuseppe?"

"Fix a party."

"There you go with a crowd again. No, let's have a little privacy."

"How about a Major?"

"Yeah, I suppose we got to think of him. You know, Giuseppe, he's a funny guy. Sometimes I think he's an awful wet blanket, and sometimes I can't help liking him. He was telling me the other day at lunch that the main thing he really wants around here is to have these Italian people like him. You know what I think we ought to do? I think we ought to throw a party for him. Or rather I think we ought to rig it so these Italians throw a party for him." Captain Purvis never thought of Giuseppe as an Italian, because he spoke English.

"Giuseppe's a fix."

"I mean a real good party, Giuseppe. With people like the Mayor and that old sulphur crackpot, and some nice girls of course."

"Giuseppe's a fix."

"And some wine. Couldn't we get some champagne for a change?"

"Giuseppe's a fix."

"If we really had a big party, then a certain Captain and a certain young lady could do a disappearing act, couldn't they?"

Giuseppe winked again.

"That's what I hate about a small party, anyone goes out, everyone else notices it. We ought to have a big party for a change."

Giuseppe said: "How many you want, a Cap?"

"Oh, I don't know, you can get some of these Italians together and decide. I'll put up whatever dough you need. We could have it down at the villa where my men stay, that Quattrocchi guy's house."

"When you want a party?" Giuseppe asked.

"Well, pretty soon, how about next Friday?"

"Giuseppe's a fix."

And so it happened that in his mail, two or three days later, Major Joppolo got a card, on which was written in Italian: "A Committee of the people of Adano request the pleasure of your company at a party in honor of His Excellency the Mister Major Victor Joppolo on Friday evening, July 29th, at Villa Rossa, 71 Via Umberto the First, at 8:30 p.m."

Major Joppolo propped the card on the inkstand on his desk where he could read it, and often did: . . . in honor of His Excellency.

General Marvin believed in what he called "keeping in touch." He liked to know what was going on, both in the world and in the Army.

That Monday morning, the Lieutenant read him Ernie Pyle's column and Pup Tent Poets from the Stars & Stripes, an article on Teller mines and S-mines in the Infantry Journal, a condensation of birth control in the Reader's Digest, three situation reports from A.F.H.Q., a handful of fan letters arising from an article about the General in some magazine, and a letter of commendation of the General from Secretary Stimson, referring to a battle in Tunisia. This last had arrived several days before, and without being told, Lieutenant Byrd had had the sense to read it to the General every morning.

By the time these things were finished, the General was in an excellent mood. But as always seemed to be the case, when Lieutenant Byrd started in on the memoranda from various officers, the old man gradually got angry.

Memoranda always seemed to be written about things that had gone wrong. This morning there was one about how some signal corps telephone wire had been lost on an LST, so that one unit was very badly off for communications; there was another about the need for gasoline drums to be established closer behind a certain division so that trucks would not have to run so far for fuel; a third about the way close air support was occasionally attacking friendly troops . . . and so they went.

After some of the memoranda, the General would bellow directions to Colonel Middleton, sitting in the next room. After others he would roar: "The hell with 'em. They're no worse off than all the others. The answer is no."

Lieutenant Byrd picked up one of the memoranda and read: "To General Marvin for information etcetera etcetera, routing address, and so forth. Subject: Mule carts, town of Adano."

The General rumbled: "Dam mule carts."

Lieutenant Byrd read: "On July 19, orders were received from General Marvin, 49th Division, to keep all mule carts out of the town of Adano. Guards were posted at the bridge over Rosso River and at Capardo Sulphur Refinery. Order carried out . . ."

"TO BE CONTINUED"

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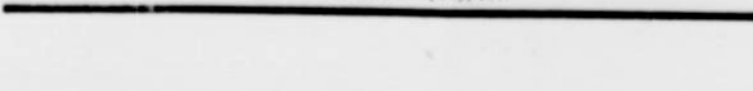


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