

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 North 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, Major Joppolo recalled the order, to permit food and water to enter the city. M. Capocardo asked permission from the Major to see General Marvin and give him information on German troop movements. When he arrived the General refused to listen to him and had Capocardo tossed out. The general immediately recalled Major Joppolo's name.

CHAPTER XIV

"I don't know whether he has been captured or killed or what. That is the bad part. That is why I wanted to talk with you, Mister Major. Giorgio and I were going to be married."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Can you find out for me whether he is a prisoner, Mister Major?"

"What do you expect me to do, go through all our prison camps and ask all the men if they are the sweetheart of Tina in Adano?"

"You must have some lists, don't you?"

"That is none of my business. I am civil affairs officer of Adano."

"Please help me, Mister Major. Not knowing is worse than having him dead."

"A hundred people come in my office every day asking me this. I tell you it is none of my business. The war is still going on, can't you understand that? We have a campaign to fight. We can't just stop in the middle of battle and open up a question-and-answer service for forlorn lovers."

"Oh don't, Mister Major, don't. You had been so nice to me. I thought—"

"Is this why you were cordial to me? Is this why you sent your father to invite me to your house? So that I could track down your lover?" Major Joppolo stood up. "I'm sorry that you have a mistaken idea of how I work. If you have business to do with me, do not invite me to your home and feed me candy. Come to my office. I will give you equal treatment with all the others."

And he turned and went into the living room, where Captain Purvis was shaping a heart with his two thumbs and forefingers and then pointing first at himself, then at Francesca.

"I'm going home, Captain."

"What for?"

"Oh, I'm fed up with this, I'm going home."

"Well, you'll excuse me if I don't come. I never thought I'd ever get anywhere talking with my fingers, but this isn't bad. See you tomorrow, Major."

It is very rare for an M.P. to drink anything, even vino, to excess, but Corporal Chuck Schultz was a rare M.P. His two friends, Bill and Polack, were in the Engineer Battalion which was working around Adano. They were billeted in the same house with Chuck and some other M.P.'s.

Chuck and Bill and Polack did not drink vino in order to savor it on their tongues. They did not drink it to compare it with other wines which they had had on other occasions. They did not drink it to complement food. They drank it to get drunk.

Therefore it was not surprising that on the night when they bought three bottles for three dollars, they began quite early in the evening to tell dirty jokes, then sang some songs, then argued a little, then got restless and decided to go for a walk. Nor was it surprising that when they found that their walk was not taking them anywhere except round and round the same block, they should have decided to go back to their billet. This was not surprising, but it was the thing which got them in trouble.

If they had stayed in their billet and not gone for a walk, they would have been all right. So would they if they had not gone home to their billet so soon, but had walked until their drunkenness dulled their vision and blurred their keenness. But doing what they did got them in trouble.

Here is why: On the way home, Chuck Schultz said: "Hell of a war."

Polack said: "Smatter, Chuck, you gonna get sick again?"

Chuck said: "Oh, no, I feel good. It's jus' hell of a war."

Polack said: "Prove it."

Bill said, for the ninetieth time that night: "Uno due tre quattro cinque."

Polack said: "Shup, Bill. Prove it's hell of a war, Chuck."

Chuck said: "Major."

Polack said: "Major who?"

Chuck said: "You know the fella. Town Hall fella."

Polack said: "Yeah, I know the one you mean."

Chuck said: "Joppolo, that's fellow."

Polack said: "What about him? What's he gotta do with it?"

Bill said: "Cinque cinque cinque cinque cinque."

Chuck said: "He never gets drunk, never, never gets drunk. But he's good fella."

Polack said: "Oh, he's wonderful fella."

Chuck said: "He's bes' fella whole invasion."

Polack said: "Oh, he's better'n that. He's perfec'."

Chuck said: "No, he ain't perfect. He don't drink. But he's good. Oh, he's good's hell. These wops, they think he's perfect. He's bes' thing ever happened to this town."

Polack said: "What's 'at prove? Prove it's hell of a war. Don't change a subject."

Bill said: "Una due tre una due tre."

Chuck said: "Shut up your counting, Bill. I'll prove it's hell of a war. It's all 'cause of the Major."

Polack said: "How's he prove anything if he don't drink?"

Chuck said: "Here's how he proves everything. He's bes' thing ever happened to this town, but he's gonna get kicked. Now is that any kind of a war?"

Polack said: "Who's gonna kick him? Show me the stiff who's gonna kick him."

Chuck said: "General Marvin's gonna kick him, that's who."

Polack said: "Oh, he kicks everybody, I don't see nothin' special about that."

Chuck said: "Yeah, but look, Polack, here you got a guy who's best thing ever happened to this town. I mean he unnerstands these people."

ent, it's got to be good, if it's for him."

Polack said: "It was Bill's idea. What'll we give him, Bill?"

Bill said grandly: "Uno due tre quattro cinque."

Chuck said: "He's no good, him and his numbers. We got to think of something, Polack, we got to."

Polack said: "Let's go back and get those bottles. Maybe they'd help us think of something."

Chuck said: "That's hard, to think of somethin' good enough for that Major."

Polack said: "I can think of a lot of things, but not a one of 'em is good enough. The trouble with that Major is he's too good. Now you give me a lousy Major, and I'd have you a present in no time."

Chuck said: "It's a hell of a war when you can't even think of a goin'-away present for a good guy."

Polack said: "Say! I just thought of somethin' terrible. Are you sure this Major's goin' away?"

Chuck said: "Didn't I see that slip of paper?"

Polack said: "That's right. Shall we give him a bottle of ol' lady Fatta's wine?"

Chuck said: "Polack, you know that's not good enough."

Chuck said: "Polack, I think you're drunk. What's the matter with you?"

Bill said: "One, two, three, four, five. Why don't you borrow something from ol' Four Eyes here to give the Major? You'd find a real nice goin'-away present right here in this house if you just got up and looked for it."

Chuck said: "Bill, why don't you have more ideas? You got the best ideas when you have 'em."

Polack said: "Yeah, good idea, let's borrow something."

Chuck said: "Bill, you don't even know how good your ideas are when you have 'em. Look: this Major, he's Italian himself, speaks it like a native. He sure is gonna appreciate something Italian from ol' Four Eyes' house. Boy, Bill, I don't know why you aren't a millionaire with the ideas you got."

Bill said: "Una and tre is quattro. Due and tre is cinque. I can even add."

Chuck said: "Let's go an' find something 'fore we pass out."

Polack said: "Lookit that room, like a Gran' Central Station. There's a lot of Etyaljan junk in there."

Chuck said: "Let's have look."

Polack said: "Why'n we give'm a chair?"

Chuck said: "Good idea. Take the shroud off'n a chair, give 'im a chair."

Chuck and Polack skated across the floor to a chair. They bent over it to take the slip cover off. Their fumbling hands could not find where to loosen the cover.

"Lif' it up," Chuck suggested. "Look at it from underneath."

So they lifted the chair above their heads. Polack reeled. Chuck lost his grip. The chair crashed to the floor, and a leg broke off. Bill picked the leg up.

Chuck said: "Too much trouble, lousy chair."

Polack spotted a terra cotta bust standing on a marble pillar-like stand in one corner. "Who's 'at?"

Bill said, as if positive: "Gari-baldi."

Polack said: "Le's give'm a Gari-baldi." And he went over to the corner, lifted the bust off the pillar, started uncertainly back toward the others, lost his balance, and dropped the bust. It broke into hundreds of pieces.

Polack looked over the mantel at a painting of a fat nude. She was lovely in his wine-washed eyes, and he said: "Give'm a woman. A Major needs a woman."

So the three worked together to get the painting down. They balanced themselves on chairs and grunted and all lifted on the bottom edge of the painting. They managed to lift it off its hook, but they could not keep it balanced. The picture fell, and its canvas hit the back of a chair, and the fat woman was ripped from flank to flank.

Polack said: "Le's go in 'nother room."

They went into a dining room. In one corner there was a big glass- faced cabinet containing Venetian glassware on shelves. "Give 'im somethin' to drink out of," Chuck said.

He tried the door of the cabinet, but it was locked. "Bill," he said, "open this thing up. Don't just stan' there with that club. Open up."

Polack said: "Case of 'mergency, break glass an' pull lever."

Bill stepped up and poised the chair leg. "Una, due, tre," he said, and on three he let go. The glass front shivered to the floor. The three boys staggered forward to choose a gift. First they dropped a bowl. Then they dropped a glass swan. Then they dropped a big goblet. Then they knocked the whole cabinet over and broke everything.

The three men went from room to room this way, leaving a trail of ruin behind them. Their disappointment grew as they saw their chances dwindling of getting anything good enough (or durable enough) for the Major.

Finally Chuck said: "Hell of a war, when you can't even find a present in ol' Four Eyes' house."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"Not knowing is worse than having him dead."

and that old General Marvin he's gonna bust him down to Corporal, just like me. Now what kind of a war is that?"

Bill said: "Cinque quattro tre due uno. Backwards. Cinque quattro tre due uno."

Polack grew suspicious. He said: "How you know? Does the old general tell you who he's gonna bust and who he's not?"

Chuck said: "I seen the paper."

Polack said: "Bustin' him?"

Chuck said: "No, the paper 'at's goin' to get him busted. Trapani and me, we tried to hide it, but the Cap'n found it. It's sure goin' to get the Major busted when old pie-face sees it."

Polack said: "Jeez, can you imagine a war like that?"

Chuck said: "Hell of a war."

Polack said: "Chuck, you proved it to me. Hell of a war."

Bill said: "I like cinque best. Cinque cinque cinque."

Chuck said: "Rotten dirty stinkin' unfair lousy war."

Polack said: "Hell of a war, you take and ruin the bes' man you got."

Chuck said: "I like that Major, he's honest. I don't want for him to be busted like that."

Polack said: "I ain't never seen this Major, but if you say he's the best Major you ever seen, I'll take your word for it and I think it's an unfair war myself for bustin' him."

Chuck said: "You know, we ought to do somethin' for that Major. Polack, we ought to do somethin' for him."

Polack said: "You said me a mouthful, Chuck. We sure ought to."

Chuck said: "What could we do, Polack? Somethin' good. He deserves it, somethin' good."

Polack said: "What could we do, Chuck? You're a Corporal, and Bill and me, we're just P.F.C.'s. What could we do?"

Chuck said: "Let's think."

Polack said: "Okay, pal. . . . You thinkin'?"

Chuck said: "Yeah, but I ain't got a thing."

Bill said: "Uno due tre. We ought to give the guy a goin'-away present if he's all that good."

Chuck said: "First sensible thing you said all night, Bill. We'll give him a present."

Polack said: "What'll we give him, Chuck?"

Chuck said: "That's a hell of a tough one. For a goin' away pres-

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