

# 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 found out that the American generosity was responsible for a troublesome black market. To stop this condition he placed a ceiling on all prices. Mayor Nasta was placed in the prisoner of war cage. He swore that he would get even and that the Americans would suffer.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Life in the p.w. cage was not very pleasant for Mayor Nasta. None of the men had blankets, and the nights were pretty cold, so they slept in close rows, keeping each other warm with their bodies. But no one would sleep next to the Fascist Pig. They said he had a peculiar smell. As a matter of fact, he did have a peculiar smell for several hours each morning; it came from being a mistake.

At last Mayor Nasta found a man who would talk with him. This was a German who spoke Italian.

Mayor Nasta told him that he was still Mayor of Adano, that he had been treacherously arrested by the Americans, that he was trying to do all he could to help the Germans win and that, in short, he was a pretty important person who ought to be helped. The Italian-speaking German told his friends all about Mayor Nasta, and they decided they ought to help him escape.

For a couple of days Mayor Nasta moved over and lived with the Germans. They made plans for the escape. There was nothing elaborate about the plans. They just decided to lift the Mayor up over the wall. They asked him if he had the courage to sit on barbed wire for a few minutes. He said yes, anything to escape. They asked him if he had the courage to jump down twelve feet on the other side. He said yes.

So in the middle of a dark, clouded night, the Germans made a pyramid of their bodies and let Mayor Nasta climb up it to the top of the wall. He sat on the barbed wire on top of the wall, quiet as a cat, until he was sure that the sentry outside had marched to the other end of his beat. Then he turned facing the wall, let himself down as far as he could, and let go. He hurt one knee a little; it hit the wall as he landed on the ground. But he was able to get up and run off silently.

The Top Sergeant at the p.w. cage called up Sergeant Borth at eight-thirty the next morning and told him that Nasta had escaped.

Sergeant Borth borrowed Corporal Chuck Schultz and a jeep from the M.P.'s and went hunting. By this time Sergeant Borth had so many voluntary informers and informers-informers that the job of tracing Mayor Nasta was not too hard.

He soon found out that Mayor Nasta had been sheltered for a few hours in a house on Via Favemi. He had then left town by the Via Roma. He had stopped in at a farmer's house near the Casa Zambano to change into peasant dress. This was one of the easiest things to check, because the peasant turned up wearing Mayor Nasta's loud powder blue suit, which was dusty from several nights on the ground.

Mayor Nasta had then been seen at several points along the Vicinamare road. One farmer had given him a lift in his cart. Mayor Nasta had evidently had enough of the hills, and was trying now to get to Vicinamare, where friends would be able to hide him.

Sergeant Borth picked him up three miles short of Vicinamare, at about ten-thirty.

Jeeps had been passing Mayor Nasta all morning, so that he was not particularly alarmed when Sergeant Borth's jeep drove up alongside him, and even when it stopped, he waved crudely and shouted: "Good day, good day," in what he thought was a thick peasant accent.

Sergeant Borth mimicked the accent: "Good day, good day, farmer."

Mayor Nasta, who still did not recognize Borth, shouted again: "Good day."

Borth shouted: "Good day. You are the first farmer I have ever seen with pince-nez glasses on."

Then Mayor Nasta knew Borth. Mayor Nasta's spirit, which had been strained by the arrest and by the days in the cage and by the escape, suddenly broke. He turned and ran out across the fields, squealing crazily, just like a soldier who had broken under shellfire.

Sergeant Borth got out of the jeep and went out onto the fields. He did not hurry, because Mayor Nasta was running in circles, wishing to run away from himself more than anything else. By the time Sergeant Borth caught him, he was exhausted and limp, and his eyes were milky with fear.

As Borth half walked, half carried him to the jeep, Mayor Nasta jabbered and mouthed his fear. "If you are going to shoot me, tell me first. Don't shoot me in the back. Tell me if you are going to kill me. I want to know, I want to know..."

Sergeant Borth slapped him sharply in the face, and for a few seconds he was silent.

But when he was seated in the jeep, and the jeep began to move, Mayor Nasta began again. "Don't shoot me in the back. I will do anything to be shot from the front, where I can see the gun. I will tell you everything I know. I can give you names. Don't do it from behind."

Borth said: "How can I shoot you from behind when I am in the front seat and you are in the back seat?"

Since it was the noon hour, scores of people had drifted to the Doppo Lavoro clubs along the street near the Albergo dei Pescatori to listen to the radio and wait for lunch. When they saw Borth's jeep, with a man tied up in the back seat, they clustered around, and called for their friends. And when they saw that Borth's cargo was Mayor Nasta, and that after all these years the Mayor had a gag in his mouth, they cheered and laughed at the man.

These noises increased Mayor Nasta's terrors, and he kept twisting and trying to look behind him.

Borth went into the restaurant and found Major Joppolo and brought him out.

Major Joppolo held up his hand to silence the crowd. "I want to speak



He let himself down as far as he could and let go.

to Nasta," he said to Borth. "Can he hear me with that thing on his face?"

"Yeah," Borth said; "you've got the rare pleasure of being able to speak to Nasta and he can't talk back."

Major Joppolo said: "Nasta, you are a disgrace to your people. There is goodness in your people, but not in you, not a bit. The world has had enough of your kind of selfishness."

It was one of Major Joppolo's greatest attributes in his job that he could speak pompous sentences with a sincerity and passion so real that his Italian listeners were always moved by what he said. Now all the listeners except Nasta were moved by his words to shout: "Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!"

Here was one time when Major Joppolo's sincerity and passion bounced back on him, because the people's shouts frightened Mayor Nasta so badly that he fainted, and Major Joppolo was the first to see the ridiculousness of trying to spellbind an unconscious man.

There was nothing left to say except one sentence to Borth: "We'll have to send him to Africa."

And to the music of Adano's delighted cheers, Borth and his limp companion drove down the street.

There was no better index to the state of mind of Adano than the activities of the painter Lojaco. If one had made a graph of the spirits of the town and then put beside it a graph of the number of commissions Lojaco received, the two would have exactly corresponded. Whenever the town was optimistic, Lojaco worked. When the town was blue, Lojaco was idle.

Lojaco could paint anything. He could paint a house or he could paint a saint. He was the one who painted panels in the churches. He was the one who painted the fat and holy people on the fat Basile's two-wheeled cart.

The white-haired Lojaco suffered when he painted. First he suffered the pangs of creation, then he suffered when the people of Adano criticized his work. His work was beautiful and everyone in the town loved it, but for some reason they always criticized it first.

Major Joppolo had not been in Adano very long before Lojaco was busy. His first efforts were a little crude, because the town had been depressed, and his right hand

idle, for so very long. But soon he warmed to the town's happiness, he did things he had never been able to do in his life, which had not been short.

The same morning that the crowd stood around Borth's jeep in front of the Albergo dei Pescatori, another, smaller crowd stood on the Molo Ponente in the harbor and watched Lojaco work. He was painting new names and little figures on the bow surfaces of the fishing boats, and the crowd consisted of fishermen and their families.

Except for Lojaco's work, the boats were all ready to go. Their seams were calked, and they were tight as wine-bottles. The barnacles and the whisks were off, and the bottoms had been given a little lead paint. The rigging was smart, for Major Joppolo had persuaded the Navy to give the fishermen some bright cable and some unsoaked hemp rope.

The fishermen were impatient to have Lojaco finish.

Lojaco stopped working and looked at the fishermen standing there. He pointed at his work and said angrily: "Have you ever seen a porpoise less messy than that one?"

Agnello said: "The porpoise is not bad, but he will die of loneliness unless you hurry and give him some company. Porpoises like company, you know that, Lojaco. Have you ever seen a porpoise play alone?"

"He will have company," Lojaco said impatiently. "The Mister Major is going to be riding on his back. If you would be silent, I could get on with my work."

Merendino said: "Work then, old man, do not be so slow."

The old man went back to his work. Tomasino, sitting with his head in his hands on the afterdeck of his boat, which was moored next to Agnello's, said gloomily: "I cannot see the point of all this painting. It is frivolous. My boat has been named Tina since the girl was born. It will remain Tina. The leaves and the fruit which dangle from the name are good enough for me, even if they are not new."

Agnello shouted to Tomasino: "What is the matter with you, sour one, this morning? Cheer up, we are going fishing again."

"In the next century," said Tomasino glumly, "after all this painting is finished."

Lojaco stuck his head up over the side of Agnello's boat and shouted: "Be quiet, Tomasino, you know that the only reason you are so impatient is that you like what I did twenty years ago and you have no desire for anything new."

Tomasino said: "If I have to wait another day for the slow painter I will blot out the name Tina and the leaves and fruit with some lead paint I have, and I will go fishing alone in a nameless boat."

Lojaco started painting the Mister Major, and the little crowd came in closer to see the details. He resolved a difficult point by making the Major's hat rather big and by tilting it so that it covered most of his face. At least the hat was definitely American.

"His leg is too short. The leg of the Mister Major is longer," Agnello said.

"I was about to say that the leg is too long," Merendino said.

"In other words," Lojaco said, "the leg is precisely right."

"He does not have a hunch-back like that," said Sconzo, another of Agnello's helpers.

"He is bending forward because of the speed of the porpoise," Lojaco said.

"The color of his skin is too white," said the wife of Agnello.

"His skin is more Italian-colored."

"You are dull," Lojaco said, "you do not see the symbolism of the white skin."

This is what the criticism was always like. And this shows the purpose of the criticism: it was not so much that the people did not like what Lojaco was doing, as they wanted to know exactly what was in his mind. In future, showing off his boat, Agnello would be able to say: "You can see how fast the porpoise is going by the way the Mister Major is leaning forward. And do you see how white his skin is? That is because of the symbolism in the Mister Major's skin."

In due course Lojaco finished his work, and everyone pronounced it quite good, although, one said, it would be hard for a porpoise to jump that high out of the water with a man on his back, and, another said, should not the name of the boat, which was now Americano, be a little lower? Lojaco attributed the former highness to good spirits and the latter highness to the way the name American had been raised in everyone's esteem by the Mister Major; and everyone went away satisfied.

The next morning the boats went out. Major Joppolo went down to the harbor to see them off, and the people in town were all excited at the prospect of eating fish.

The catch that day was excellent. When the boats were all in and the fish all weighed, it was estimated by Agnello that a total of three thousand two hundred pounds had been taken in. Better than that, the fish were mostly of good grades.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

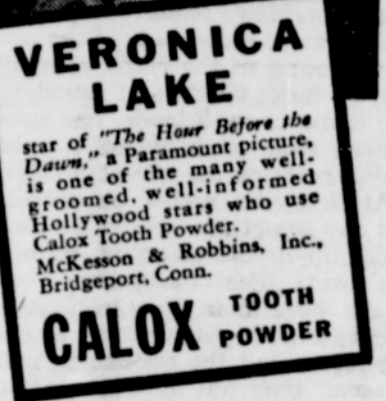
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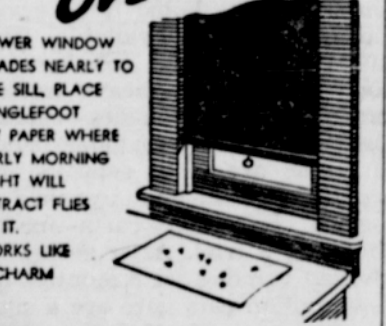


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