

• SERIAL STORY
PLAY BY PLAY

BY PAUL DAVID PRESTON

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CHAPTER I

Obedient at last, Miss Blythe Miller nestled down in the big bus seat and took some of her own nap.

"Now see that you stay put," Pop ordered. "The lads have worked and they've got to rest, for at dawn again they'll be up flying."

"You go to sleep," she bossed him in turn. "Are you warm enough?"

"Mmm."

He was as tired and depressed as his lads and Blythe knew it. Gently she pushed most of the overcoat back over him. Since age 16—that would be 16 years ago—the bright-eyed miss had understood this kindly man. So, too, did the cadets understand him, and love him; he shared their wins with hearty exuberance, and showed no false heartiness when they lost. He was a good coach; indeed, a great coach.

Blythe closed her eyes, feigning sleep while the bus tires sizzled on the wet asphalt and rain slashed the window at her side. Passing car lights turned droplets into momentary gems when Blythe peeked. She wasn't really sleepy herself. She seemed never to be. She watched the sleet mix with the rain and come ticking against the glass in intermittent dashes of colder cold, so that unconsciously she snuggled Pop a bit. The bus heater wasn't any too strong for this night in late autumn.

Presently, Pop snored. Blythe turned her head and peeked experimentally between the seats.

Her pulse quickened just a little. Scrouched down in the front seat this way, she could see diagonally and back to the place where Duane Hogan was riding. Big Duane. Fatigue seemed never to touch him, either. He sat almost erect, rocking slightly with the rhythm of the bus, while most of the boys sprawled or slumped grotesquely, courting sleep.

She could see all of his fine head. It was like a Greek god's, she thought; like that statue of one in the main library back at school. He was not smiling. His mind seemed far away; perhaps he was on the rolling hills of his homeland, his horse knee deep in lush bluebonnets that froze the sky color in a sea of flowers stretching untold miles. It was this dreamy quality which added gentleness and a strange beauty to Big Duane.

When he sensed her gaze on him he turned toward her, and characteristically Blythe Miller winked. Big Duane did smile, then, very slowly.

"Slowly and benevolently, darn it!" Blythe told herself.

FOR two years now the big blind or had treated her like a child! Courteous? Kind? Oh, Lord, yes, Blythe edited out silently, thinking it all over again. It's awful, loving a man who adopts the role of great silent Uncle Duane. Uncle! Blythe knew it wasn't an act, though; Duane Hogan was really quiet. But deep. He seemed to typify those men of the west one reads about in fact or fiction, and he did indeed come from a west Texas ranch. Maybe, Blythe sighed, he was far-and-away too good for her, too grand. It was a thing to moon about.

Her wink had not been flirtatious, and both of them knew it; Blythe Miller would have slapped any man who accused her of flirting! But it was an invitation to be sociable, even so. Duane Hogan winked his nose impulsively at her. Blythe edged away from her father so as to kneel on her seat.

"We make powwow," she signaled, using Indian signs Duane himself had taught her. She pointed to the rear.

Not Duane, but another young man stood up. He had been alert two seats to her rear. In a moment he leaned across the sleeping Pop Miller and whispered.

"You're lonesome, Bly, and so am I. Let's go way back and have a cigar!"

She didn't want a cigar—Pop forbade smoking now anyway—and she didn't want to talk to Norman Dana. But, too, she didn't want to seem rude.

They stepped over khaki legs and duffel to get back there. Piqued at Duane for slowness, she studiously ignored him as she passed, then she sat with Norman on the rear-most seat that curved clear across the bus. No one else was here.

"You shouldn't smoke in training," Blythe murmured, looking not at him but out at the stormy darkness.

"Have to let down after a licking," said he. "Anyway—the hell with it. We're not in school now." "But you're in flying school! A case! That's even more important, Norman."

a licking. Blythe knew that having to swallow one did things to his pride. But he didn't nurse the mood long; instead, he turned to her direct and smiled in Norman Dana's own devastating way.

"I wanted to talk about you; you, Bly," he murmured. "You know I'm crazy about you, don't you, hm?"

She answered him, flat tone. "I ought to. You've told me enough."

"Then you'll marry me? Now? Tomorrow?"

"Don't be a dope."

She felt his quick anger again.

"Listen, Bly, you can't do this to me."

"I'm not doing anything to anybody, Norman. I—like you, and I think you're nice, and I know you can make a perfectly good aviator as well as a quarterback, but this is not the time to—"

"Hogan is still hounding you, isn't he?" It was a statement, not a question.

Blythe's eyes flashed now. It was her turn for anger.

"Duane Hogan hounds nobody and you know it! It's a stupid thing for you to say. And if I'd thought you were going to quarrel, then—"

She turned to the storm-kissed window, one knee pulled up under her in manner like a little girl. No man could help being acutely conscious of her beauty, her grace. No man—honesty in his heart—could help wanting to touch Blythe Miller, to hold the soft sweet youth of her. Norman stretched down the seat to take her arm.

Blythe stood up indignantly as if to leave him, but the bus driver—intent on home and bed—slithered around a curve. Blythe was thrown off balance.

For a moment Norman Dana

held her close, too close, ostensibly to keep her from falling. Then on quick impulse he smiled and kissed her full on her cherry-red lips.

The two lips parted in astonishment. Furious, she could have told him plenty in the next minute or two, but—

SCREE-E-E-E... SLAM!

It could have been lightning itself which struck the bus, for with the screech were blinding lights and thunder. Blythe was thrown headlong with Norman. She fought for her senses, held them.

But terror gripped her soul when she smelled gasoline burning, then heard a child's frantic wailing and a woman's scream.

(To Be Continued)

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THIS CURIOUS WORLD By William Ferguson



MIRAGES
FREQUENTLY CONFUSE GUNNERS IN THE AFRICAN DESERT! UNEQUALLY HEATED LAYERS OF AIR CAUSE ABNORMAL LIGHT REFRACTION AND PRODUCE STRANGE SIGHTS! A DISTANT ARMY MAY APPEAR TWICE ITS ACTUAL SIZE.



ANSWER: Frogs.

DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVE

HORIZONTAL

1 Pictured U.S. diplomat.

14 Highway.

15 Pertaining to dower.

16 Proprietion.

17 Wayside hotel.

19 Prohibit.

21 Salt.

22 Fate.

25 Squall.

27 Cloth measure.

29 Small particle.

31 Harness part.

32 Master of Science (abbr.).

33 Rough lava.

35 Chemical compound (pl.).

36 Sloth.

37 He is a U.S.

VERTICAL

38 Labyrinth.

39 South America (abbr.).

40 Kind of heron.

41 Half an em.

42 Wood sorrel.

43 Torment.

45 Compass point (abbr.).

47 Like.

48 Russian river.

50 Open (poet.).

53 Vends.

55 Opposed to verse.

57 On top of.

58 He is U.S.

to Russia (pl.).

1 Put on paper.

2 Electrified particle.

3 Disembark.

4 Lord (abbr.).

5 Paid notice.

6 Crowd.

7 Station (abbr.).

8 Light brown.

9 Symbol for aluminum.

10 Doctor (abbr.).

11 Most recent.

12 Greek letter.

13 Shouts loudly.

18 Kind of boat.

2 Electrified.

20 Annoyances.

23 Over all (abbr.).

24 Inlaid colored floor blocks (pl.).

25 Not local.

26 Symbol for tin.

28 Youths.

30 Most bombed island in world.

31 Rhymet (var.).

33 Manner (pl.).

34 Eucharistic wine vessel.

36 American humorist.

44 Work into a mass, as dough.

46 Insects.

49 Singing voice.

50 Globe.

51 Genus of grasses.

52 Letter S.

54 Lorenzo (abbr.).

18 Kind of boat.

20 Annoyances.

55 Afternoon (abbr.).

56 Electrical term.

THE GOOD OUTLAWS Out Our Way By J. R. Williams

"I'D BET A MILLION NOT ONE OF THOSE YOUNG GUYLS WOULD EVER STEAL A CALF—THEN WHY EVERY TIME THEY SIT DOWN, ARE THEY FOREVER TRYING TO CHANGE SOMEBODY'S BRAND?"

"SPECT IT'S TH' SAME AS SOME CITY PEOPLE, WES, WHO NEVER KNOWINGLY BREAK A TRAFFIC LAW, BUT WHEN THEY DO PULL A BONER AN' DON'T GIT CAUGHT THEY GIT A BIGGER KICK OUT OF IT THAN A REAL CROOK—THEY'S TH' SAME, I RECKON!"

Red Ryder

"WELL, RED, AT LEAST WE AN' WEARIN' OUT BOOT LEATHER!"

"AFTER THE WAY WE LET OURSELVES BE TRAPPED, WE DESERVE MOST ANYTHING!"

Little Orphan Annie

"ANNIE, I'VE GOT SOME BAD NEWS FOR YOU—I'VE BEEN AFRAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN! IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN!"

"QUIT BEATH' AROUND TH' BUSH, FRANK! GET IT OFF YER CHEST!"

"IT'S THAT RED MADIGAN GANG—I HATED TO SEE YOU LET 'EM INTO THE JUNIOR CRAWMADOS—THEY'RE BAD EGGS..."

"YEAH? IS THAT NEWS? COME ON—GET TO TH' POINT!"

Freckles and His Friends

"JUNE AND I HAVE ALREADY MET, FRECKLES! SHE WAS KIND ENOUGH TO GIVE ME A LIFT TO MY HOTEL THE OTHER DAY!"

"GOOD FOR HER!"

"YOU ENTERTAIN DANNY WHILE I SEE IF I CAN HELP MOM, JUNE!"

"I'M ENTERTAINED ALREADY!"

Wash Tubbs

"PERMIT ME TO REMIND YOU, HERR OLIVANT, THE GERMAN REICH DOES NOT REQUEST CO-OPERATION OF CONQUERED PEOPLE... IT DEMANDS IT! THEREFORE YOU WILL OBEY ORDERS, AND REDRAW FOR US THE PLANS OF YOUR INVENTION!"

"BUT I HAVE FORGOTTEN THE DETAILS"

Boots and Her Buddies

"COULD MADAM GAZO, THE FORTUNE TELLER, HAVE BEEN RIGHT ON BOTH COUNTS? BOOTS HAS THAT JOB SHE REFERRED TO—OR SO J. RIDESBY BUFFINGTON TOLD HER! BUT THE TALL, DARK, GENTLEMAN...?"

"COME ON... GEE WIZZ! HURRY UP!"

Alley Oop

"SO FAR, SO GOOD! NOW IF EENY'S GUARDS DON'T DISCOVER THAT MESS OF COCONUTS I LOWERED INTO THEIR FIRE..."

"BY JINGO, I BELIEVE MY STUNT IS GONNA WORK! THOSE NUTS OUGHTA START POPPIN' ANY TIME NOW!"

Our Boarding House With Major Hoople

"I CHECKED IN FO' TH' DOOR—MAN'S JOB LAK YOU TOLE ME, MUSTAH MAJOR!—I BIN WASHIN' WINDOWS, MOPPIN' TH' BAGEMENT, RASSLIN' FURNITURE, SHELLACKIN' FLOORS, TACKLIN' LINONEUM, BRESHIN' OUT TH' FURNISS, AN' NEW WEEK I CREOSOTES TH' ROOF!—I AIN'T SEED NO DOOR TO THAT PLACE YIT!"

"GREAT CAESAR! WHAT A FEARFUL FATE I ESCAPED!"

"COURAGE, JASON! STRUGGLE ON A WHILE LONGER, AND WHEN THE PROFITS START ROLLIN' IN FROM MY PHOSPHORESCENT SHAVING CREAM, I'LL RESTORE YOU TO YOUR OLD DIGNITY AND LUXURY AS MY VALET!"

DORMAN WITHOUT A DOOR

Jagro Pastraj Osker!

"RECKON HE MEANS THIS IS THE END OF THE LINE!"

"PAICHY, WHY'D I EVER COME TO MYSTERY MESA WITH YOU?"

"STOP GRUMBLING AND LIGHT A MATCH—WE AIN'T ALONE IN THIS CAVE!"

By Harold Gray

"WHAT DID THEY DO? KILL SOME OLD LADY, OR ROB TH' FIRST NATIONAL BANK IN BROAD DAYLIGHT?"

"NOT THE BANK! THEY BROKE IT AND ROBBED OLD JOES CANDY STORE—TOOK A LOT OF CIGARETTES, TOO—AND SEVEN-EIGHTY OUT OF THE TILL!"

"HOW DYUHN KNOW IT WAS ANY O' TH' RED MADIGAN GANG? DID IT ALL COME TO YOU IN A DREAM?"

"NIX, ANNIE! YOU'RE A RIGHT KID—BUT YOU'RE OUT ON A LIMB, STICKING UP FOR THOSE LUGS! I'M GRABBIN' RED MADIGAN—I'LL MAKE HIM TALK!"

By Blosser

"IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT JUNE LOOKS LIKE, YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE HER IN THERE WITH DANNY!"

"WHAT DOES SHE LOOK LIKE?"

"SHE LOOKS LIKE HE COULD TAKE HER RIGHT AWAY FROM YOU!"

By Crane

"PERHAPS THAT WILL AID IN REFRESHING YOUR MEMORY, HERR FREUND?"

"PLEASE! I... I TELL YOU, I HAVE FORGOTTEN"

"SO! YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO OUTLAST THE GESTAPO AT THIS LITTLE GAME?"

"WE SHALL SEE!"

"WHIPPETY WAP!"

By Martin

"HIYUH, CUTE 'N' LITTLE WILLIE!"

"HA HA HA HA"

"OH, WILLIE! YOU OLD DARLING! BUT—"

"WHEE!"

"? NOW I ASK YOU—"

By V. T. Hamlin

"THERE THEY GO... NOW FOR TH' NEXT STEP!"