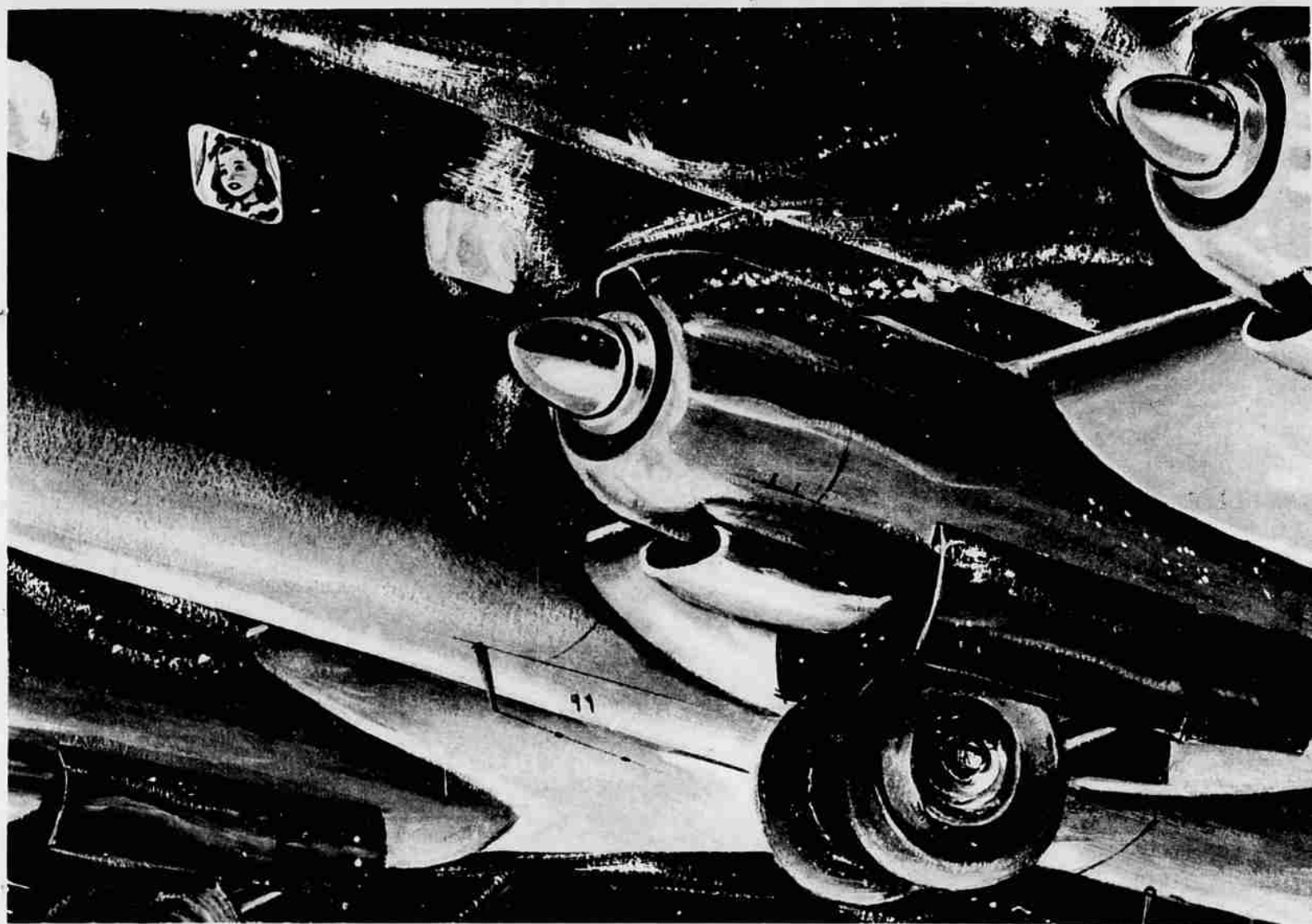




Snowfall on Flight 417

by Sol Barzman

THEY WERE 15 minutes behind schedule when they flew into the snow.

The skies had been heavy and dark, but snowless; Harry Andrews had hoped it would stay that way—at least until they landed in New York.

But now the snowflakes pelted his window with a relentless fury, as though aware that Harry had to be in New York on time, that he cursed weather like this, that every minute lost was money out of his pocket, or could be.

Harry felt a finger of pain gnawing at his insides. He reached inside his pocket for his pillbox, and stood up so that he could pass the man sitting on the aisle seat. At that moment, Miss Haines, the stewardess, passed by.

"Can I bring you something, Mr.

Andrews?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes," he said, "I'd like a glass of water, please."

She nodded. "I'll bring it right back."

Harry had taken this same flight many times. Miss Haines and the crew had come to know him.

As Harry sat down, the man next to him, James Wilson, said pleasantly: "Nice girl, that stewardess."

"Yes," Harry said, "she is." Harry was in no mood for chatter; his mind was on the Lawrence deal.

Evans Lawrence was a man who hated tardiness. He liked everything to be neat and tidy. He couldn't afford to be kept waiting, Harry reminded himself.

"Now you take those people sitting down the aisle there," Mr. Wilson was saying, "that couple with the little girl. Looks to me like they've never been on a plane

before. They seem tense, don't they?"

Harry didn't care, but he followed Wilson's glance. The couple appeared to be in their early thirties. He could have been right about them. They did have an uneasy look, as though this were indeed their first flight.

The little girl, however, didn't share her parents' apprehension. She pressed her face to the window, trying to get as close to the snow as she could. Harry wondered if these people were from the Southwest, perhaps—a place where the little girl would never have seen snow.

MISS HAINES came back. "Here you are, Mr. Andrews," she said. "Sorry to keep you waiting. The captain wanted to see me."

Harry nodded, took the water, placed a pill in his mouth, and swallowed. In a few