

Chapter 1

Sunday, August 4, 1935 – The Forgotten Man

“Who’s the bum?”

The deputy whacked the desk with his copy of True Detective Magazine. “Says his name is Fred Dunn, Sheriff. He’s got his Army discharge. Works at one of those vet camps.” He flicked the mashed horsefly onto the floor.

Karl O. Thompson, Sheriff of Monroe County, Florida, let the screen door slam behind him. He sized up Dunn, itemizing his unshaven face, unkempt hair, frayed shirt, tattered trousers, muddy boots, and a bindle stick leaning against the wall. He took the discharge paper handed him, quickly scanned it and gave it back. “Could’ve fooled me. So, the Veterans Work Program, eh? Why aren’t you working?”

“Sunday, Sheriff,” replied Dunn, cap in hand.

“Off Saturdays, too?”

“Forty-hour work week, it’s the law, Sheriff.”

“And Federal holidays?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And half days on pay days?”

“Pretty much so, Sheriff, sir.”

“Well, no days off in law enforcement. So, what brings you to Tavernier?”

“Recreation, Sheriff. I hike the tracks every Sunday, usually out to Craig Key. Today, I thought I’d visit Key Largo.”

“Just can’t have that, Mr. Dunn. Around these parts we get a mite anxious when there’s some stranger snooping around dressed like you. If I let one hobo stroll through my county all devil-may-care, word will get around and soon there’ll be a swarm of bums, looking for hand-outs, stealing what’s not nailed down, and squatting wherever, like a pack of

mongrel dogs. Even the blacks know better than to shit where folks walk. Say, you aren't one of those Reds who torched Washington back in '32?"

"Weren't no Reds. Was the Army done that, Sheriff?"

"Proximate cause, Mr. Dunn, *proxi-mate* cause. Wouldn't have been any fracas if y'all hadn't made that fool march, set up shanties all over town and started pestering Congress about your damn war bonus. Gave veterans a bad name. Able bodied men demanding a cut while decent families lose their homes, shameful."

"We have families, too, Sheriff."

"Then you should've gotten jobs to support them!"

"Weren't none, Sheriff. Only the President's relief camps."

"Playgrounds for derelicts, more like it! Roosevelt just wanted to get you bums out of Washington before the next election. Couldn't count the number of times I've seen your crowd laying back with a smoke and a beer while honest folks were working up a sweat. Even the blacks work harder. I should lock you up on general principles but it wouldn't sit right with the taxpayers, accommodating a vagrant for the night when you're already gettin' free room and board from the Government. Now, get your ass over Snake Creek and don't come back acting like no hobo!"

"Can I have my belongings back, Sheriff?"

Thompson glanced at the deputy. "Checked for stolen property?"

"Yes, Sheriff."

"Well let's just see what a working stiff packs in his bindle." The Sheriff dumped the contents of a cardboard box onto a table: a church key, pocketknife, a half-filled glass hip flask, some coins, a laundry ticket, a sandwich wrapped in newspaper, and a tin snuff box. Its contents rattled. He opened it, looked inside and held up a small cross-shaped object on a piece of blue ribbon. "What have we here?"

"The Distinguished Service Cross, Sheriff."

"I know that. Question is, did you earn it?"

“So they told me, Sheriff. Killed some krauts. Had the citation once but lost it.”

“Probably the last thing you earned.”

“Meaning no disrespect, Sheriff, but I’ve worked plenty. And I ain’t never stole nothing from nobody, ever.”

“Sure, sure, and now you’re relaxing on the public’s dime while regular folks go hungry. Take your stuff and git before I change my mind.” Thompson tossed the medal onto the table.

“Thank you kindly, Sheriff.” Fred repacked his things in the flour sack bindle and tied it to the stick, then tipped his cap and headed out the door. He took care to close it gently. Two steps away he let rip a resounding fart. “Well, still early, guess I’ll just about face and hike on down to Camp 3.”

* * *

Camp 3 was on Lower Matecumbe Key, some 12 miles altogether. Fred crossed the wood trestle bridge spanning Snake Creek to Windley Key, passing by Camp 1 on the beach where he bunked. He hiked the half-mile Whale Harbor Fill to Upper Matecumbe Key, entering and leaving the tiny tank town of Islamorada. You could walk from end to end in the time it took to hawk back and spit. The Hotel Matecumbe was about a mile beyond the train depot. It was rented out to the State of Florida for the camp headquarters.

Indian Key Fill linked Upper and Lower Matecumbe Key. Fred stopped there for lunch, a swallow of rum from his hip flask followed by the fried baloney and cheese sandwich he’d saved from breakfast. About four miles offshore boats were fishing for tarpon and dorado around the iron pilings of Alligator Reef Light. Indian Key itself was visible just a little offshore. The Seminoles had massacred the white settlers there almost a century before, as the story goes. They won the battle but lost the war.

Fred walked past Camp 5 on the eastern tip of Lower Matecumbe. 195 men were bunked here. They slept in wood plank shacks on rickety platforms, set up so near the ocean they might float away with the next high tide. There weren't many around this afternoon, just a bunch playing ball. One guy sat on the beach his back resting against a coconut palm, drawing on a sketch pad.

A frigate bird hovered about 30 feet above Fred. Its wings were motionless, but with only an occasional flick of its pencil thin tail it kept pace with him. It was a good companion, silent and alert. He sang the bird a verse of the song he'd been humming,

*The punk rolled up his big blue eyes,
And said to the jocker, "Sandy,
I've hiked and hiked and wandered too,
But ain't never seen no candy."*

* * *

Fred was about a mile from the ferry landing near Camp 3. It had gotten very hot. He lay down the bindle stick and wiped his face with a bandana. He wringed out the sweat and then tied it loosely around his deeply tanned neck. The key here was only 200 yards wide. A spur from the main line ran to a siding at the bridge construction site. It was a short cut to the camp canteen and some cold beers. He thought he might follow it. On his right, parallel to the base of the grade ran State Road 4A. There hadn't been any traffic for a while. The road was an option, but a few feet higher on the Florida East Coast Railway's right-of-way there seemed to be a bit more breeze and fewer mosquitoes. Also, the crib ballast was almost level with the tops of the ties, allowing a natural stride.

Out of the blue a hobo's itch wanted scratching. By old habit Fred bent down and grasped the rail. It burned his hand in the afternoon heat.

The steel faintly hummed. He placed his ear against it, ignoring the pain. “Strange, the train from Key West never comes this early.”

The shimmering rails converged in the west, then, nothing. A whistle sounded a ways off. He stood up, turned east and looked up the track. The whistle blew again, this time closer. Two more short blasts and one of FEC’s 4-8-2 oil-burner locomotives appeared, blasting towards Key West. “Must be doing about sixty, a real cannonballer, looks to be half a mile. That gives me 30 seconds to decide whether to risk it.”

The engineer leaned out the cab window and waved his arm. He blew the whistle again and opened the cylinder cocks. White clouds of steam erupted from either side of the engine. Fred nimbly hopped off the tracks and waved back.

Long Chain Charlie used to take bets in the jungle. He’d offer odds figured on the length of the margin. The smaller it was, the bigger the payoff. Charlie was good, he’d made a study of it. Most any bum can run eight feet, the length of a tie, in a second or so. But the rules said, standing start. Not many could jump that in a single leap, and even if they could it wouldn’t necessarily be the fastest way. Charlie did it in two steps. He’d stand on the end of a tie waiting for the train to get close enough to make the bet interesting, then push off with his right foot, landing on the tie midway between the rails with his left, push off again and land on the opposite end of the tie with his right foot. The rails themselves were standard gauge, 4 feet 8 ½ inches apart and about seven inches high so you had to take that into account. But of course, it wasn’t just practice, it was nerve that made a winner.

In ’31 Charlie got the Jake leg. They said he was crazy to go track jumping after that. When the train hit him, he burst like a rotten pumpkin and greased the rails for a quarter mile. They tried hosing down the locomotive, but it took high pressure steam to do the trick. The word on the road was that the engineer found poor old Charlie’s jawbone wedged

up in the pilot, pried out a tooth, boiled it, and glued it beside the throttle. It wasn't the only one.

Fred picked out the joint bar two 39-foot rail sections up the line. Charlie had paced twelve feet back from the nearer joint. Fred took only six just to keep it fair and tossed his bundle across the track. The engineer saw and waved him back. Fred smiled and gave an answering wave.

The locomotive roared over the farther joint, the rail flexing beneath its massive weight, cylinder cocks wide open again, bellowing clouds of steam. Fred pressed his right toe against the tie. *Now!* He jumped over the first rail, landing on the tie midway. Less than four feet to go. He'd be clear with his next bound.

Perhaps he'd misjudged the train's distance or speed. Perhaps the second rail caught his toe. There was a flash and an impossibly loud bang. He was blinded and deafened. He smelled the mud of France, reeking of death and mustard gas, and tasted blood. The world seemed to jump, and he felt a brutal kick in the ass. A blast of air sent him tumbling into the ditch at the bottom of the embankment.

Flat on his back Fred looked up at the pale faces of boy soldiers whipping past. One of them leaned far out a window, laughed and tossed him a can. It landed in the weeds nearby. Fred got back up, shook himself and noticed nothing missing. "God damn it!"

As the last car sped by, he saw a banner tied across the rear platform, *265th Regiment, Florida National Guard*. From his hip pocket a sticky wetness began spreading across the seat of his pants and down his leg. Reaching behind he felt shards of glass and cut his finger. "Son of a bitch."

Brakes squealing, the train slowed to a stop, the last car about 200 yards past Fred. The conductor came out on the observation platform and looked back along the tracks. He jumped off and started walking towards Fred. A group of Guardsmen followed, shouting and pointing. One of them waved at Fred. "Must be the kid who tossed me the can."

It was lying nearby. He held it up. The conductor stopped half-way and pointed.

“Is that the drunk?”

“Yep, he was lying in the ditch,” replied the Guardsman.

“What’s your name?” the conductor shouted at Fred.

“Huey Long,” Fred shouted back.

“A wisenheimer, eh? Well now, *Senator Long*, the Sheriff will hear about this, you goddamn crazy ass mother fucking son of a bitch!”

Several vets watching the show hooted him down. The conductor glared at them, “No-account hooligans!” He checked his pocket watch, grimaced and hurried back to the train. The Guardsmen followed at a slower pace.

A curious vet walked up to Fred. “Hey, Hooey, what camp ya’ from?”

“One, and it’s Fred.”

“Damnedest thing I ever saw. Thought sure the train got ya’. Didn’t nick ya’ none, did it?”

“Nope, nothing broke but this,” Fred held up the neck of the flask. “And that I fell on.”

“Hoo boy! You sho got a pair! Next time you try that stunt give me a heads up and we’ll make a killing.”

“Oh, wasn’t planning that. Just seemed the thing to do.”

“Hah! You sure some crazy ass mother fucker!”

The train started up again and the vet wandered off. Fred looked at the can he was still holding, Krueger’s Special Beer. Passing a hand through his shock of dark brown hair he grinned, “Beer in a can, complete with instructions. Gee, that’s peachy. Hmm . . . Nope, Stoopnocracy is peachy!” He stuffed the can in the bindle, got back up on the tracks and started off again toward Camp 3.

His last bet with Charlie was for a quart of hooch. This round was a net loss, a newfangled tin of beer for a pint of un-taxed Havana Club.

“But maybe I’ll have to wait a mite. No rule says it has to come just now. The dead are in no hurry to pay up. They have plenty of time. I expect a lot, though. Big fucking deal to bet your life. Maybe on payday. Yeah, I can wait that long.”

Fred noticed a shadow on the ground and looked up. The bird had circled back. He sang,

*I've hiked and hiked till my feet are sore
And I'll be damned if I hike any more
To be bugged sore like a hobo's whore
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.*

Chapter 2

Friday, August 30, 1935 – Payday

Fred paused on the back stroke of the cross-cut saw. “Want a drink?” he called to his partner on the other end. Razor Blade let loose a long stream of brown tobacco juice. It made a nasty puddle on the quarry floor.

“Yeah, sure. Teeth starting to get dull, anyway.”

The 20-man crew working in pairs had begun work at 7 a.m. By mid-morning their bare torsos were covered in a pink paste of coral dust, sweat, mashed mosquitoes and blood. The quota was 8 blocks of keystone a day. Each weighed about ten tons. The saw blades wore out quickly.

While Mr. Blade exchanged the saw for a sharpened one, Fred visited the cooler of limeade. He drank two cups, filled them again and started back.

“Break!” shouted Sergeant Hank Morgan, the foreman. The men looked up from their work. Hank removed a sweat stained pith helmet and wiped his bald head with a towel, “Gotta make a run to the warehouse. Who’s coming?”

The men returned blank stares.

“We’ll stop at the depot for a drink.” Several now mumbled approval. “OK, get on the truck, and put your shirts on. There might be ladies present.”

The highway ran beside the railway tracks and the men could see the train chasing them. Hank drove faster to stay ahead, bouncing over the wood trestle bridge at Snake Creek. It was about 2 miles to Islamorada. When they arrived, the locomotive was still a distance from the depot. Inside a waiting room was provided for whites, and a ticket booth and telegraphy office for the agent. In the back were two

restrooms marked WHITE and COLORED. This was progress. *Separate but equal* they called it.

The gang bought their beers and smokes at the little general store, beside the post office, and then went around to the depot platform to see what fun they could have with whomever might step off the train. This is what passed for live entertainment on Matecumbe.

Fred was last in line. Minding the store was a cute teenager, one of Henry and Ruby Russell's nine kids, aged 15 to one. And maybe one more on the way. The old goat was wearing out that pretty little wife of his. Bernice Mae was their second. There were about fifty members of the Russell clan on Matecumbe. With little urging she'd rattle off all their names in twenty seconds, 40 seconds if she included their middle names. When she finished, she'd wipe her brow and exclaim, "Whew!"

Her uncle, John Russell, was Islamorada's postmaster. Fred suddenly felt a pang of guilt, he still hadn't opened that damn letter. He'd found it under his pillow the Sunday he tried to hike to Key Largo. Someone must have tossed it on his bunk the day before. The return address was familiar, he guessed the contents. The business always made his head ache. He'd swallowed a handful of aspirins with a gulp of stale beer from the open bottle on the floor. He ignored the dead bug floating inside. *Why don't they just leave me alone?*

Had John known he might think Fred was disrespecting the U.S. Mail. Not many vets were getting typed letters from New York City. He would remember. He might ask about the letter and the one that came before if he saw Fred. Why, John could come walking through that door right now to chat with his niece. *All that effort gittin' it here through gloom of night, hell, and high water and ya haven't the common decency to even open it!* This needled. He'd just have to do it. Wouldn't have to read it, though. The first one he did, all the way through. It was at the end that it hit him. He retched until there was nothing wet to throw up, then heaved some more. They docked him three days' pay after Doctor

Dan said there was nothing wrong with him, just a batch of bad moonshine. No pay for drunk days. He didn't dare open the one that followed. He slid five pennies across the counter.

"Beer's a dime, Fred, you know that."

"Swore off."

"Really?"

"Sober for 25 days. Just a coke, please."

"Well, good for you. How about a Nehi, instead? We have orange, grape and peach."

"You're a peach, Bernice Mae. But I'll still have the coke."

"Thought you'd like to try something fresh and juicy. It's what I like." She smiled a little sideways and handed him the soda bottle.

"Thanks, sugar." He popped the top with the rusty bottle opener tied with a cord to the big red and white cooler.

"Coming back later?"

"Dunno."

"Isn't it payday? There's a swell new picture show in Tavernier, with Gable and Harlow. You like Jean, don't ya?"

"Sure, but Tavernier? I don't cross Snake Creek 'cepting to work. I bet you've plenty of friends who'd go with you."

"Ah gee, Fred, you know . . ."

"Yeah, I guess I do, but I'm not crossing that line neither. Here's two bits. Go have some fun."

She glanced at the quarter he'd placed before her, then looked up to his face and grinned. "Oh, boy! Thanks!"

He smiled back and headed out. The girl placed her elbows on the counter, rested her chin in her hands, and watched his walk.

"Don't work too hard."

Fred glanced back over his shoulder. "Ha! Not a chance." The screen door slammed behind him.

Bernice Mae sighed and slipped the coin into a small leather pouch tied to a strap around her neck. Her father had made it for her when she was little. She looked in the mirror on the wall, fussed with her cropped raven hair and tried to picture it after a soaking in ammonia, Clorox and Lux soap flakes. Just like Harlow. “Now Fred is about Mr. Gable’s age, and if he grew a pencil mustache . . . yeah, that would work.”

She made a funny face and laughed. Under the counter she felt for the wad of bubble gum she’d stuck there when the vets came in. It hadn’t hardened much. She popped it in her mouth and chewed.

On the shelf below the cash register was her new copy of Photoplay, with Kay Francis on the cover. The feature story, though, was *The Private Life of Ginger Rogers*. She’d read it through three times already. She began again.

* * *

Fred ambled to where his buddies were loitering. Beside the platform the engine hissed. The fireman had swung out the spigot arm from the water tank and was filling the tender. Going around the opposite side of the depot building was John Russell carrying a mail bag over his shoulder. He hadn’t seen Fred and kept on to the post office. *Well now, that was close.* Putting the bottle to his mouth he leaned his head back, closed his eyes and took a swig. After a moment he noticed that the idle chatter of his pals had stopped. There were now wolf howls, whistles, lip smacks, catcalls:

“Hot damn! Fill a bucket, let’s see how she looks wet!”

“My, my, my! Oh, baby, come to Papa!”

“Hey Jane, wanna go for a swim with Tarzan?”

“Pussy, pussy, sweet little pussy!”

“Show some leg, doll! Smile!”

Fred opened his eyes to see who had caught their attention. He swallowed the coke in a hard gulp that hurt his throat. Standing beside

the nearest passenger car not more than four steps away was a dazzling dream of a girl, about 5 and a half feet, all in white, brilliant in the morning sunlight. The sleeveless dress fitted her very closely and came to mid-calf. Sleek as an otter, 20, maybe 21, he thought. She had a blue silk scarf with white polka dots around her neck, white pumps, and wore a wide brimmed beribboned sun hat cocked to one side revealing short, wavy platinum blonde hair. Nonchalantly she removed her sunglasses, placing a temple tip between her teeth. Bright blue eyes regarded him. Then a coy half smile curved her slightly parted, ruby lips.

“Want a sip, miss?” Fred offered the bottle, stepping forward.

The platform suddenly became very quiet. This was a show the vets hadn’t expected.

“Gee, mister, that would be swell!” She said it like one of those sassy gold diggers in the Warner Brothers musicals, *Yeah, sure brother, that’s just what I need*. Taking the bottle without bothering to wipe its mouth she closed her eyes, threw her head back and took a long drink. He gawked at her slender throat, pulsing with each swallow. She drained the bottle, spit some back in, then delicately ran the tip of her moist pink tongue around the lip. Grinning, she gave it back to Fred, their hands briefly touching. That merest contact was like an electric shock, unleashing a torrent of emotions. He was speechless. Maybe he would come up with something clever by tomorrow. She seemed about to say something when the conductor shouted, “All aboard!”

Another girl came up and grasped the blonde by her arm. “Come on Cindy. The train won’t wait, not even for you.”

Cindy, that fits, he thought. Her friend was younger, hardly older than Bernice Mae, but poised and confident, a glossy bob, black bangs crisply cut, a stylish two-piece frock. For an instant their eyes met. There was an appealing archness about her and something foreign, maybe German in her voice. If he hadn’t seen the blonde first, he’d have been more interested. Both girls turned and started walking away. The fabric

accented Cindy's every movement, her weight gracefully shifting from hip to hip as each step fell nearly in line with the preceding one. Great butt. *Wonder if she's wearing anything underneath . . . no, she isn't.*

Abruptly, Cindy stopped and reached into the small reddish-brown purse she was carrying. She pulled out a penny postcard, fumbled some more and found a stubby yellow pencil. Holding the bag on its side in her left hand, she laid the card on it and scribbled something. Then she spun around and jogged back to Fred. She took his right hand and pressed the postcard into his palm. For a moment her fingers played with his wrist.

"Gotta go, now." She grinned, turned and walked smartly to the car steps where the other girl stood shaking her head.

Fred watched them climb aboard and disappear inside. The conductor snapped shut his pocket watch and frowned at Fred before signaling the engineer. Cindy did not appear at any of the windows. But as the train began pulling away a hand holding a scarf reached out and waved in Fred's direction. He tapped the brim of his cap. His hand still tingled where she had touched it. He finished the coke.

With smoke and steam and much clatter the train headed down the line. "Yeehaw!" exclaimed Hank who was standing closest to him. "What did she say?" The other men gathered around eagerly.

Fred only now looked at the postcard in his hand. The picture was the railroad's emblem, a view of the Havana Special crossing the Long Key viaduct. He turned the card over. It read, *Casa Marina tonight. No kidding! Cindy.* Without expression he folded it in half and shoved it in his dungaree pocket.

"Well, what did she say?" Hank asked again.

"Oh, nothing much, just thanked me for the coke," Fred replied. "Really. . . no kidding."

"Yeah, couldn't be anything serious. Just a sweet kid, I say. Freddie, you can feed the other guys that line of horse shit but I've known you

since Vittel. Come on, level with me. I'm only looking after your best interests, wouldn't want you to get your heart broken again like with that cutie Army nurse . . . now you've took the pledge and all."

"OK, OK, just between you and me, she asked me to come to her hotel tonight."

"Ooh la la!" the men chorused.

"How about her friend?" one of them asked.

"I don't think she approves. Besides I haven't decided whether I'm going. There's the ball game in Ojus on Sunday."

Razor Blade spoke up. "Think you'll get more than one night with her? I can loan ya some, I'm staying in camp."

"Thanks, but my good clothes are at the Miramar."

Hank draped his arm over Fred's shoulders. "Hey, buddy, when a classy doll like that grabs your coke by the neck, sucks it dry and then rims it with her tongue a man, a real man, a decorated hero of the Great War doesn't need an order. He fixes bayonet, charges up the hill and shoves it right in that fur-lined fox hole! I'm going to the game myself and you know how loud I razz the other team so no one will miss you, and some of the guys have clean duds that will fit. Ain't that right fellas?" Several of the men nodded in agreement. "And I'll even give you a lift to the ferry. You see Freddie? If you won't go for yourself then go for us poor slobs who get by knowing their buddy is gettin' laid!"

Fred thought a few moments. "I dunno. There's maybe a one in a hundred chance she's on the level. I'll think about it after I cash my check."

"Maybe Dunno just likes them younger." Fred looked up.

"What's that, Skeeter?"

"Spent an awful long time in the store alone with that little piece of jailbait. Did she lick your lolly? No? Oh, I get it, you only had a nickel and she's a two-bit cocksucker." That got some nervous laughter from the men.

Fred walked coolly up to him and stopped within an inch of his chest. Skeeter took a firm grip on the empty beer bottle in his right hand.

Razor Blade stayed close to Skeeter's side. "Better watch your mouth, the Russells won't let that slide."

"You got a hard-on for her, too? Fuck off!"

Fred looked over his shoulder at Hank and winked. Suddenly he whipped around and drove his right fist low into Skeeter's gut. "I'll kill anyone, anyone who messes with that girl!" Skeeter stumbled back gasping, unable to breathe.

Hank laughed. "You had that coming, Skeeter. Walk it off. Captain Hard-ass says all Conch cunts are off limits, get caught and it's either vamoose or the hoosegow, dependin'. OK, you flabby-assed goldbricks, show's over. If you wanna get paid today, back on the truck!"

Clutching his belly, Skeeter spit out some pinkish bile. His grimace shifted into a thin smile.

Chapter 3

Friday, August 30, 1935 – Havana Special

“What were you thinking? The conductor warned you not to get off the train!”

“Don’t I always get off and take a brisk walk when the train stops? It’s good for your circulation, helps keep your derriere firm . . . saw it in a movie. You should try it.”

“Not at that stop. Didn’t you see Time Magazine this week?” Cindy’s friend demanded, producing the issue from her travel bag. She flipped quickly through the pages, folded the magazine, and held it up to Cindy. “*Playgrounds for derelicts*, that’s what it says! *Shell-shocked, whiskey-shocked, depression-shocked, psychopaths!* They were staring at your breasts, seeing you naked, getting hard. The filthy things they said! And you, shamelessly flirting with that man.”

“Ella, please. I’m playing a hunch. I think he’s the right guy.”

“Right for what, a scavenger hunt? The only place he belongs is skid row. So, what was on that postcard you gave Mr. Shirtless?”

“He was wearing an athletic undershirt, very sexy. You could see his nipples.”

“You invited him, didn’t you? I knew it! It’ll serve you right if he does come, and you see what a worthless derelict he is.”

“Derelict? You know Riverside Drive, uptown along the Hudson?”

“No, never been there. Why?”

“Sure, you have. The Central’s tracks go right by.”

“That hardly counts.”

“Just listen for a sec! Back in ’32 a bunch of homeless, jobless, *derelict* veterans built a shanty town, between the tracks and the river. The city was OK with it because nobody complained. Then some dried-up old biddy complained to the police that the shanties were unsightly.

They had to come down. You know what? Some of those vets were *Croix de Guerre* men. You know what that means? What they did to earn it, what it meant to them? They hocked their medals to eat! Can you imagine how low you'd have to go to do that? It would be like me pawning my mom's purse or you that necklace with the whatchamacallit."

"It's called a *hamsa*, it's a good luck charm." Ella placed the magazine on her lap.

"Daddy helped find them work. He says the only difference between a derelict and a man is a job. Well, my forgotten man has a job, building bridges, or something. And he was polite, sorta sweet, even. Not much hair on his chest, I like them smooth. And you couldn't have missed those arms and shoulders. He could be on varsity crew, show up those impossible frat boys."

Ella harrumphed. "Well, a boy he's not. He's probably old enough to be your father."

"Hardly. If he was 18 when the war ended, that would make him 35, maybe even younger. You know some of those boys lied about their ages to enlist."

"I don't know about your uptown vets, but *these* men are broken. The war ruined them. They can't hold a job. They're a demoralized *lumpenproletariat* begging the government to transport them to *konzentrationslager* where, if they work at all, it's only to get enough money to get drunk."

"*Lumpenproletariat*? Where did *that* come from?"

"Marx, Karl Marx. You've heard of him? Those men are dirty, rude, vulgar and pee in public. I don't know how you could possibly drink from the same bottle. There are plenty of decent, responsible, clean young men back in New York, and you go vamping in a relief camp for broken-down drunks!"

“I felt safer than at the riot you took us to last month. I bet you’re sweet on that Red who grabbed the swastika. What was his name? Billy?”

Ella sat up straight. “Bill Bailey is a true comrade, not afraid to risk his life for the Party. What he did took real courage! You heard him speak at the anti-Nazi rally, up there on the podium in front of 20,000 people in Madison Square Garden! Wasn’t he wonderful?”

“He said he was Catholic. I was just wondering . . .”

“You mean can a good Catholic be a Communist? Well, there’s considerable debate about that, but it is essentially a political question. You see . . .”

“No, not that. I was wondering if a Catholic cock is any different from a Jewish cock, appearances aside, of course. You know, performance wise.”

“You’re so shallow, Cindy! Can’t you ever be serious?”

“I am being serious. Cocks come in all shapes, sizes and colors, or so I’ve heard. It’s a subject close to my heart. They should have a catalog for them, like for mushrooms. Now your professor has that wild hair, genius look. You follow him all over campus like his pet schnauzer. How does he look without his pants?”

“Really!”

“So, just talking?”

“We enjoy speaking German.”

“And that’s all you do?”

“We walked together under the stars that last night in Ithaca. The moon was nearly full.”

“The moon in June, that’s original. I bet he turned it into a physics lecture.”

“You laugh but he knows why the stars shine, the only one who really knows, with equations and everything! It’s all about Coulomb repulsion and the proton-proton reaction. You know, hydrogen fusing into helium.”

“Oh, Ella, how romantic! He’ll win a Nobel one day or maybe fill up zeppelins.”

“He said I was . . . that everything was made of *star dust*. It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Yeah, I like Hoagy, too. But for you it was the equation part, wasn’t it? He has a formula for making whoopee, definitely get the Nobel for that.”

“Stop teasing! I told you; he respects my father. Peter is very proper with me. And we’re both concerned about what’s happening in Germany. The SA is back on the streets. Goebbels is making speeches again. I haven’t heard from *papi* and *mutti* in a month.”

“Oh, they can’t think about you all the time, they’re probably on vacation.”

“There’s to be an important announcement at the *Parteitag* in September.”

“Another speech by *him*?” Cindy rolled her eyes.

“Yes, and they say he’ll proclaim the final solution to the Jewish question.”

“Don’t be such a worry-wart. So, Ella, what is Prof Pete, 20 years older than you?”

“Eleven.”

“Well, our tastes aren’t that different. Anyway, this is our last chance to have fun before classes start. Maybe you’ll find someone.”

“You do this every time, Cindy, picking up strays! This was supposed to be just you and me. Can’t we just go somewhere by ourselves for once? Now what am I supposed to do? I should have just stayed in New York. Bill’s court date is next Friday. I should be there with him for the verdict. Solidarity!”

“Oh, he’ll get off. Daddy knows the judge, he hates Nazis.”

“Then they’ll be a big party to celebrate . . . and I’ll miss it.”

“Hey, Emilio will keep you busy. He can rumba, mix cocktails, and he’s planning something special for us. And just think, you may get to see Hemingway! His house is in the city tour guide. He’s another geezer you’re sweet on. You read all his stories, even the fish tales.”

“That’s the point, Mr. Ernest Hemingway is successful. Your Mr. Shirtless is a bum.”

Cindy didn’t reply.

“Well . . . anything to say?”

Cindy shrugged and looked out the open window, studying a close formation of brown pelicans keeping pace with the train. Ella took note, too, leaned around Cindy and took a snapshot with her new Leica camera. She returned it to its leather case and then began reading an old *Cosmopolitan*, April ’34. The pretty girl on the cover looked a lot like her, black penciled eyebrows, blue eyes, long lashes, a perky nose, and alabaster skin. Only the hair was different. Earlier that summer, Ella had bobbed her school girl braids. Inside was a complete short novel by Hemingway, *One Trip Across*. Cindy didn’t find the characters very sympathetic. Ella likely brought it hoping she could get it autographed.

* * *

When Ella spoke again Cindy strained to listen.

“*Wenn die Soldaten* . . . when the soldiers came home from the war, they were missing . . . eyes, arms, legs, faces . . . their manhood. Some were missing parts inside you couldn’t see, holes in their souls, what they saw, what they did. Some had . . . *granaten* inside. You never know when they will explode.” Ella covered her face with her hands and wiped the tears away. “Cindy, this man, be careful.”

Cindy wrapped her arms around her friend and hugged her hard. “I will, Ella, I will,” she whispered, “. . . remember my forgotten man”.