



# FLAG OF TRUCE

BY ROBERT LEWIS TAYLOR

You think you had a tough war! Look what Henry went through!

**T**WENTY-FOUR hours," said Mary to herself, "and this marriage of mine should be over." Sitting down to light a cigarette, she wondered how life would be without Henry; wrapped in a light swirl of smoke she thought of their interrupted career. "A birthday party is a *stinking* time to quit," she said argumentatively, but since the apartment was empty, save for herself, nobody denied it.

Before the war, she reflected, things had been different. In a modest way, Henry's star had glowed with promise. As a junior editor for the biggest publishing house in New York, he had shown a valuable flair for working with authors of a comical turn of mind. For example, the whole office recognized that he, and he alone, could mollify J. Biggs-worth Stokes, the humorous essayist, when it became necessary to keep down a word count. Once, a liquid luncheon at 21 and an exhausting afternoon of roaring with the appreciation that only Henry could stimulate, had led to a few apologetic cuts in the text, and had prevented Stokes from stalking over to Scribner's with Horse and Buggy Plumber. The book had sold 396,000 copies, was described by Time as "zany, reminiscent of late, great Twain," and was snapped up by RKO, emerging, curiously enough, as a Western.

"Henry was wonderful," said Mary to the walls, "before the war." They had lived together for two years, then. And in August of 1942, Henry had gone off to fight. He had done it, she remembered, in high good humor. At a farewell party the office had given him, he had appeared in a painfully new white uniform, with rolled-up cuffs and a sword that an enterprising salesman had assured him was regulation equipment. Around midnight, having attained a distinguished edge on company Martinis, he was conveyed to the station while coining military sentiments like "Out of the trenches by Christmas," "Fight it out on these lines if it takes all summer," and "Hooray for the torpedoes!" Henry had even started a funny book of his own, in those days.

He had gone to a Navy indoctrination school, verified his commission, and then, at almost no notice, been shipped to the Pacific. Mary never knew quite where. "I wish I could tell you," he said in his early letters, "but it's against the security regulations." She knew only that Henry was not aboard ships, except for short hops from base to base, but she gathered that he had something to do with airplanes. While the weeks passed, with almost maddening slowness at first, she strengthened her will by imagining how terrible it must be for Henry. Never once did she have a date or do anything that Henry would have disapproved, but there were times when she felt a strong need for him. At the end of two years—two very long years—he was given a furlough, and she flew to the West Coast to meet him. Their two weeks at the Hopkins in San Francisco were marked by a bleak, moody detachment on Henry's part. He had changed; at times he was irritable and snapped at her for no reason at all. They were both miserable. Their leave-taking, when he boarded the big Navy am-

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phibian, was hopelessly strained, almost wordless.

Henry had been out nearly a year now, Mary thought. "And what a *lovely* year," she added aloud. She could not remember one really happy week. His irritation had increased, his detachment broadened. The war had done something furtive and horrible to Henry. His sensitivity about his experiences transcended all the clichés she had ever heard on the subject. Since his return, he had never divulged, spontaneously or under questioning, any details of his military life. With one exception—when Mary found a ribbon in his jacket pocket and asked him what it was, he replied, in a surly and muffled tone, "Legion of Merit," but when she asked what it meant, he had whirled around and snapped, "Please shut up, will you? Leave me alone. I don't want to discuss that or any part of it—ever, do you understand? Drop it, for good!" His work, too, had suffered; he was even irritable with his colleagues, and on one awful occasion he had been unmistakably sharp with J. Biggs-worth Stokes.

**H**ENRY had been out almost a year, and now, tomorrow, came his birthday, a traditionally festive occasion, with her father and mother turning up for a turkey dinner, with cranberry sauce. The thought was so unbearable that Mary got up and, with a guilty look around, poured herself a small glass of sherry. Four or five sips made her feel warm and comfortable, but her mental clarity was unaffected. "Tomorrow ought to do it," she said, and lighted another cigarette. Of all the known bores on the subject of the first World War, she mused, my father Fred, after two drinks, is out in front of the pack by at least four laps. It was funny. Sober, he never seemed to mention it, but bring on a celebration like a birthday dinner and . . .

The prospect was too dismal to contemplate; she decided to take a nap and forget it.

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HANK!"

Oh, swell, she thought, the perfect beginning. Hank. Just like that, and if there was one name Henry couldn't stand . . .

"Mother, Dad." She kissed them wanly. "Has he?" she said to her mother, nodding toward Fred, who, in taking off his topcoat, was unsuccessfully trying to pull a bottle covered with white tissue through one coat sleeve.

"I'm afraid so, dear."

"One?"

"Two before we left home and one at the club, I believe."

"Hank," cried Fred, who had somehow got out of the coat with the bottle intact, "a little present, my boy. Prewar, and I don't mean the late war—I mean the war, if you know what I mean."

Looking drawn and tense, Henry mumbled an indistinct thanks, and took the present into the kitchen, followed by his father-in-law. The pleasant smell of roasting turkey filled the room, reminding Fred, it appeared, of a time in that dark season of '17, when he and a buck sergeant named Pokey Edwards stole a goose from a French barnyard and cooked it in a culvert.

"Hank!" he cried, with a comradely whack on the shoulder that joggled Scotch from the newly opened bottle, "wish you could have seen that *goose!* Not just skinny, you know. Not just a *skinny* goose. There wasn't any more damn' meat on that goose—"

His daughter's voice, calling from the living room, interrupted him.

He thrust his shiny red face, aglow with the carnival spirit, through the doorway. "Was telling Hank," he said, "was telling Hank about old Pokey Edwards and that goose we grabbed off in '17. There wasn't any more damn' meat on that goose—"

"Come on in here, Fred," said his wife. "Let Henry fix a drink. You'd like a nice drink, wouldn't you? Then we'll all sing Over There. And you can march. We're going to let you march with an umbrella, Fred."

He looked dubious for a moment, then came in and sat down with a determined show of sedateness. Watching him, Mary wondered if the shell hole at Château-Thierry or the visit from General Pershing was coming next, and she thought that either one would probably do the trick. When Henry joined them, holding the shaker in a grip so tight his knuckles showed white, she felt a little faint; then she saw her father preparing a sentence, and perversely her strength returned.

"There wasn't much doing at the club," he said, looking at them righteously.

Suddenly there was an overpowering reaction, a vast and compelling urge to laugh, and she knew that she couldn't sit waiting any longer. It's hopeless anyhow, she told herself, and to her father she said, "Wasn't that the goose you ate in the shell hole with General Pershing, Pop?"

Henry stiffened, beside her on the sofa, and only then did she feel sad. It was a shame; it *had* been fun, before the war.

"Funny your mentioning that," said Fred, getting up, "though I don't mean to infer—imply—infer that I ever ate a goose with General Pershing, *nor* in any shell hole. We weren't in the same—mean to say we were in different—"

"Echelons?" said Henry.

Fred snapped his fingers. "We weren't in the same echelons, neither one of us."

"This is certainly a fascinating narrative," said Mary's mother. "What happened next?"

"Well, we were in this shell hole, say eight, make it nine feet across, and in the meantime the attack, *our* attack, if you get the picture, went on back, repulsed, and there we were—*right out in the middle of no man's land!*"

"Why did you get in a shell hole, Fred? Aren't they awful muddy? It seems silly, all those grown men crawling down in a hole like that."

"It was an *attack*. We were taking cover."

"It was dark, as I remember," Mary suggested.

"Pitch dark. But we got up—six of us, not counting the lieutenant, who was dead, and—"

"He didn't join you, then?" asked his wife.

"Who didn't?"

"The lieutenant."

"I just said he was *dead*, for God's sake!"

"Go on."

"And we hadn't got more than fifteen yards out, crawling on our bellies—"

"Only way to travel in the Army, I hear," said Mary, trying to keep from glancing in her husband's direction.

"Look here," said her father, "*do* you or *don't* you want to hear this?"

"But we *do*," cried his wife.

"Well, give me a chance, then. So we hadn't got more than fifteen yards out when they cut loose with a bunch of Very lights. (Continued on page 61)

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM PACHNER

# CITY TO ORDER

BY

**HARRY HENDERSON AND SAM SHAW**

On the rolling hills south of Chicago a city for 30,000 people is being built in one operation. Its creators, the American Community Builders, have taken all the essentials for an ideal community and are piecing them together like a jigsaw puzzle

America's first "planned" postwar city, under construction near Chicago, will look like this when completed. First of its 30,000 people will move in soon. Planners designed for safety, cleanliness, and "a better life"



Carroll F. Sweet, Sr., ex-banker, dreamed of a town for vets, then finagled to get the men who could build the "dream city"

