

ers, led by crooks and murderers—especially the CIO action committee.

“The A.E.C. is infiltrated by Reds and the Iowa people should thank God for Hickenlooper.

“America is for Americans—to hell with signing pacts with a lot of dirty foreigners.”

At which point we asked if he, as a scientist, didn’t believe in freedom of knowledge.

“Communist!” he screamed, as we beat an undignified retreat.

We wish to deny to R.J., by the safe medium of paper, that we are affiliated with the Communist party—and we hope soon to bring to our readers more of R.J.’s timely remarks on the world situation.

—*Robbie Cleary, Sci. Spl.*



The Sissy

I REMEMBER the first time I saw Harper. The ship had just put out to sea from Frisco and the steward had sent him up to clean up the radio shack. He was eighteen years old, tall and skinny, and his long legs were a little bowed. He wore very thick glasses. His eyes were pale blue and looked at you steadily enough but always shyly and submissively. His shoulders hunched a little, and his movements were hesitant and awkward. He was already seasick. He was suddenly finding himself on a ship bound for the other side of the world, miserable with the brutal pitching of the ship, taking part in a life of which he knew very little, and disliking and fearing what he knew.

He was lonely and eager to talk. I found that he came from a small town in New York. He had been in college for six months before he had enlisted. He had liked college and it was easy to picture him among stacks of books, studying diligently.

It was a long trip. Only seven months, really, but seven months of the worst sort of monotony. We were one of thousands of ships that had been sent to the Pacific to sup-

port the invasion of Japan. The war had ended and we had been caught out there. We were sent from island to island trying to discharge a cargo that no one had any need for. Eniwetok, Ulithi, Saipan, Guam, Okinawa, months of swinging idly and forgotten at anchor, a useless ship on a useless voyage. A man could eat and sleep and work a little. He could go slowly insane. It got to all of us, once in a while, and we'd walk back and forth on the deck with that great feeling of restlessness ripping out minds apart. We wanted and we cursed the wanting but there was nothing.

Harper never fitted in. Gradually, he became the butt of jokes and a scapegoat for the crew's discontent. He withdrew even more into himself and spent most of his time in his room, reading. He must have read the small store of books on the ship over and over again. He hardly ever spoke to anyone, and then shyly and defensively. I think he hated all of us. I know he hated his petty, menial job.

The source of most of Harper's persecution was a man called "Rivets". He was big and loud. That's about all I remember about him. I don't think there was much else to remember. You find his kind everywhere. There are a lot of explanations for that kind of a man but it must have been something pretty degrading that caused "Rivets." He baited Harper unmercifully. He played jokes on him and made him look like a fool. The jokes were little nasty things, constantly repeated with an almost maniac perseverance. Although most of the crew weren't bad men and disliked "Rivets," they were intensely contemptuous of Harper. Harper must have become a fixation with him. He poured out all his frustrations in tormenting Harper. He looked happy while he was doing it. Harper took it all. He never resisted or tried to get even. It would have been hard to do so.

I was a little sorry for Harper. Several of us were, even though it's hard to be sorry for a man you think is a coward. I used to drop in his room from time to time. One day, about the fifth month of the trip, I was sitting in his room talking with him. We were at Okinawa, at anchor as usual, about a mile out from the flat pile of rubble that had been the city of Naha. It was raining dismally, as it had been for a week. While we were talking, "Rivets," wandered in. I

could see Harper stiffen. "Rivets" sat down on Harper's bunk, rumpling it. He grinned contemptuously. "Hi-ya, Tiger. How's my boy, today?"

Harper squirmed and said nothing.

"Did you sleep well, last night, old buddy?"

Harper hesitated, then said, "Yes."

"I heard some low character threw a bucket of water in your porthole."

"I didn't notice."

"Rivets" laughed in Harper's face and looked around the room. The door to Harper's locker had swung open. There were several pictures inside, mostly of Harper's family. He must have been horribly homesick. There was one picture, larger than the rest, that could only have been Harper's mother. She was benevolently ugly and wore thick glasses over eyes that must have been a bashful pale blue. "Rivets" pointed at the picture and laughed coarsely. "Hey, Harper, what do you keep that thing for? To scare the rats away?"

Harper jumped. "That's my mother."

"Rivets" kept laughing, irritatingly. "She looks like a barmaid I picked up on the Liverpool waterfront. She married?"

I was disgusted. Disgusted with Harper for being a fool and a coward, and disgusted at "Rivets" for being what he was.

"Rivets" persevered, "What's the matter, buddy? Isn't your Momma got a husband?"

Harper sat with his head bowed as if in intense concentration, then he seemed to decide something; something irrevocable and of mortal importance. He rose awkwardly from his chair and stood completely relaxed. He spoke flatly, "Get up, 'Rivets.'"

"Rivets" had been about to say something, and his mouth was open. It stayed that way. For just a moment, he was lost, then he struck an exaggerated attitude of mock fear. "Why, what for, buddy? You aren't going to hurt me are you?" It didn't sound quite convincing.

Harper stood waiting. He wasn't even breathing hard. His face held no expression nor did his eyes, except that

they weren't shy anymore. He spoke quietly and with conviction, "If I can, I'm going to kill you."

"Rivets" sat motionless. He didn't seem to be able to say anything. I think I know what he was thinking. He was thinking, as I was, that Harper had gone mad. Maybe he had. He was pretty sure that he could take Harper, but he was even more sure that if he made one mistake, if he should happen to slip, or misjudge the roll of the ship and stumble, or any one of a hundred possibilities, Harper would kill him without mercy. He was also pretty certain that Harper would die trying. His eyes shifted uneasily to me. I think that he wanted me to try to break it up. I don't think that I could have produced anything more in the way of argument than a gurgle, right then, and somehow, I didn't want to. I could see "Rivets" figuring the odds and I could see his decision start to set within him. Gradually, his face started to flush. He, too, had decided something.

Harper spoke insistently, "Get up, you yellow louse." His voice was still steady.

"Rivets" didn't get up. He breathed quickly in the silence of the room. Harper waited a long time, then spoke again, suddenly. This time his voice held contempt. "Get out."

"Rivets" got up and left without looking at either of us. Harper sat down and there was a long silence. He looked at me, his eyes bashful and self-conscious. He was trembling a little. He started talking about whatever it was we had been discussing before "Rivets" had come in. I got out of there as soon as I could.

"Rivets" told everyone that Harper had gone crazy. The crew admitted the possibility and fascinated, demanded all the details. "Rivets" was rather evasive but I managed to fill in the little details that he might have overlooked. Harper didn't show any more symptoms of insanity, though, and one day I passed by the mess room and saw Harper playing poker with some of the men. A cigarette dangled out of his mouth and he studied the cards shrewdly. He had never been invited to play, before. It must have been a great day for him.

—Donald W. Hendrickson, *Sci. Sr.*