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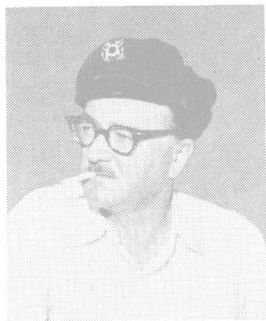
Say, Darling

美小说



Richard Bissell

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After graduation from Harvard with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1936, Richard Pike Bissell sailed as an Ordinary Seaman on an American Export Line to the Azores, Marseille, Naples, Genoa, Leghorn, and other Mediterranean ports. In 1938, he shipped with the Federal Barge Lines from St Louis to St Paul, and in 1942 he went to work for the Central Barge Company of Chicago as deckhand and mate on the Illinois River. He retired from the river and became secretary-treasurer of a clothes company which makes men's pyjamas, shirts, and sportswear. He was also factory-superintendent and stylist for the company.

He is married and has four children. The family moved from their houseboat in Iowa to Long Island Sound during the Broadway success of *The Pajama Game* as a musical. Richard Bissell then started work on this book as a result of his experience in the staging of the play; his other novels, *A Stretch on the River* and *High Water*, are both about towboats.

Cover drawing by Patrick Tilley

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RICHARD BISSELL

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To Bobby Griffith

'Have you been taking more interest in baseball since your marriage?' she was asked.

'Well . . .' Marilyn hesitated. 'Yeah.'

- AN INTERVIEW WITH MISS MONROE

As anyone on Broadway can tell you, none of the fictional characters in this novel resembles anybody living or dead on the main stem. They are all too lovable. At any rate, the only place they have ever lived is in the author's imagination.

Chapter 1

Man, when you got to ask what is it, you'll never get to know.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

I DON'T think I ever was cut out for it in the first place. Frankly, New York makes me nervous.

It was just as pleasant as you would expect in the Pennsylvania Station, and I began to sweat inexpensively but artistically in my genuine tropical worsted (Marshall Field \$55.00). A redcap agreed to take on my bags and I walked up the length of the train and into the station.

I went into a booth and called Frankie. I had to spell out the name of the town pretty carefully and to point out to the operator that it was in *Indiana*, not *Indianapolis*. The operator got the routing and dialled direct and I could hear the phone ringing way out there by the fields of new-mown hay.

'Hello,' she said.

'Hello, honey,' I said. 'What's the latest? How's the price on hogs?'

'Jack!' she said. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter,' I said. 'I'm just lonesome is all. I thought I would let you know I got here all right.'

'Thanks. I sure was worried,' she said. 'There's so many young fellows getting kidnapped these days on the trip to New York.'

'Well anyway,' I said, 'how the hell are you?'

'Just the same as I was yesterday morning this time - sleepy,' she said.

'What did you do last night?' I said.

'Listen, did you see them yet?'

'No. I just got here. I'm still at the station.'

'When are you going to see them? How's New York?'

'Today sometime. New York doesn't show up so good from inside this railroad station, but maybe it will look better when I get outside.'

'Are you scared?' she said.

'Now what the hell should I be scared about?' I said quite loud.

'Well I guess you are then,' she said.

'Don't be so goddamn ridiculous,' I said. 'I've been in New York before.'

'Not on a deal like this,' she said. 'You look out for those boys.'

'Frankie, do you miss me?'

'Uh-huh. Say, Jack, where do you think they'll take you to lunch, Sardi's?'

'Yeah. I suppose. Or 21 or someplace.'

'Isn't it wonderful!' she said.

'I don't know yet, honey,' I said. 'I might be right back home again tomorrow night, sitting around the saloon listening to the boys.'

'Oh, by the way - Cousin Archie called,' she said.

'All right, let's have it,' I said.

'He says you won't like it in New York. He says you can't get a square meal there, but he says to tell you there's a wonderful place to eat in Newark. He says Newark is a lot more interesting than New York anyway.'

'Yeah, that's what everybody says,' I said. 'Leave it to Archie. Say, honey, do you miss me?'

'Give me some time,' she said. 'Say listen, what kind of a shirt have you got on? You better wear a white shirt when you meet them. S'pose you've got on one of those crazy shirts. You better wear a white one. What are you wearing?'

'Well, the one I got on is kind of a candy stripe with an overplaid, and I have on a cravat with a hand-painted hula girl on it that lights up when I press a concealed switch. That okay?'

'Well,' she said, 'my advice is wear a white shirt.'

I had left my bag standing over against a pillar and at this point a coloured boy came along and picked it up and started off at a brisk pace in the direction of Harlem.

'Hey, rube!' I said. 'So long, baby, there's a fellow going off with the well-known valise. Bye-bye!'

'Wait a minute - Jack, listen . . .' she said.

'So long, hotstuff,' I said and hung up and busted out of the

booth and took off after the case. I caught up with him and tapped him on the shoulder.

'Where you going with the trunk, buddy?' I said. He didn't say nothing.

'See I keep my razor in there and I might want to shave tomorrow a.m.,' I said.

He dropped the case and got off in a hurry. I picked it up and walked for a cab.

'Oh say, folks, it's a big friendly town,' I said. 'Underneath this seemingly cold metropolitan exterior there beats a warm and friendly heart. Because folks are just folks, folks, whether it's mighty Manhattan or that old home town.'

A lad from sunny Puerto Rico ran past, pursued by two cops with drawn service revolvers.

'They say this Macy's is some store,' I said, and got into a cab.

I told the driver to haul me up to the Algonquin, where they had reserved a room for me.

'Well is it hot enough for you?' the driver said as we waited for a light.

'I'll say,' I said.

'It was worse yesterday,' he said.

'No kiddin'?' I said.

'Yeah, jeez it was awful,' he said.

'It don't sound good,' I said.

'I hope it don't get no worse,' he said.

'I seen in the paper', I said, 'where it was 101° down in Phoenix yesterday.'

'Yeah, but that was more of a *dry* heat. That dry heat ain't nothing like this.'

'It's the humidity does it,' I said.

'You can say that again,' he said.

I took it all down and later on I mailed it to the *New Yorker* but I never heard from them.

By this time we were up around 50th Street.

'Say, buddy,' I said, 'the Algonquin is on 44th, isn't it?'

'That's right,' he says. 'But you see with the traffic like it is at this hour why we make it faster this way.'

'Well do me a favour,' I said, 'and take a right down 50th

here and a right down Sixth and a left at 44th. First thing you know we'll be in Armonk and there ain't no good hotel there.'

'Okay, okay,' he said, and we completed the voyage in comparative silence except for the rear transmission which had some loose rocks in it.

The Nedick's attendants had shaved, some of them, but not the fellows staring into the windows of the joke and novelty shops on Sixth Avenue trying to make up their minds whether to invest in some back numbers of nudist magazines or in *Diana, A Strange Autobiography*. Half the streets were torn up as usual and they were putting up a new building on the southeast corner of 44th and Sixth and the jackhammers were going full blast. Dust filtered through onto the Fabrikoid upholstery of Cab #23406 as we whipped past, clipped the rear end of a truck bearing the legend M. BLUMENTHAL SONS INDUSTRIAL SEWING MACHINES and landed with a resounding klunk in front of the Algonquin. I gave Irving Golub, driver, a quarter for his very own self just to prove I wasn't mad.

'You picked a real boob trap here,' he said.

A man with a cane and a Homburg hat helped a dame loaded with *embonpoint* into Irving's cab. Two lovely girls with arms around each other's waists emerged from the hotel and paused.

'Cab, miss?' said the doorman.

'I really should call Josh,' said the petite blonde to the music of her tinkling bracelets.

'Darling!' said the petite brunette. 'Don't be silly. Talk to *Liebling first*.'

One of those personality-loaded bellhops grabbed the case and I followed him into the Fun House.

Chapter 2

The secret of my success is clean living and a fast outfield.

LEFTY GOMEZ

So I went to my little room, and the handy bellhop with the receding hairline pulled up the Venetian blinds for me so I could get a better view of the brick wall facing the window.

'Say, if they charged according to the view a man could get this room fairly cheap, couldn't he?' I said.

'You must be an actor,' the bellhop said.

'Musician,' I said. 'I play two cornets at one and the same time.'

'They keep you pretty busy?' he said.

'You can say that some more,' I said, and gave him thirty-five cents - which was way too much, considering he needed a shoe-shine. 'You know any good places to eat in Newark?' I said.

'No, I never bin there,' he said.

'Well,' I said, 'my cousin Archie says there isn't anyplace to eat in New York City and the best place around here is to go over to Newark.'

'Where does this cousin of yours reside at?' he said, turning on the water tap to see whether the authorities had shut off the water yet. 'Myself I come from Snowflake, Arizona. Very small place.'

'Why he lives out in the Golden West, way out in the glorious state of Indiana,' I said.

'Why don't he go home for lunch when he's in New York?' he said. 'It would be a good deal quicker than going to Newark.'

'However,' he added, opening the closet door just in case I wouldn't be able to find it, 'one thing, they do have a pretty good burlesque show over in Newark.'

'Archie doesn't care much for the theatre,' I said. 'I went to *South Pacific* with him and he slept half-way through it.'

'Whereabouts was that?' he said.

'Columbus,' I said.

'Well them road companies are no good,' he said. 'If you want anything leave me know.' And he departed.