

I Have A Rendezvous

George C. Taylor

There was no light in the compartment, unless you want to count a dim red night lamp at the base of a bulkhead as light. For a moment the red glare confused him, but when he rolled over, a carbine butt struck his forehead and he knew exactly where he was.

No one else seemed to be awake. He glanced across the aisle and he could just make out the fellow on the next rack. That would be Jimmy, "The Mad Finn." At the moment, "The Mad Finn" sounded rather peaceful. Nothing but a soft snore. He wanted to wake Jimmy up and talk but decided against it. Every time he talked to Jimmy the conversation always got around to Jane. And right now he didn't want to think about Jane. . .

He jammed his field jacket under his head and began to imagine where they were going. A longshoreman had tried to tell him it was the Philippines, but he wasn't buying any of that. Calcutta sounded like the best bet. He'd just about decided that it would be Calcutta when the quiet of the compartment was broken. For a moment he wasn't sure that he'd heard anything. But there it was again . . . a slow, steady, pulsing beat. The engines had started.

He'd been fairly certain that they'd sail that night, but now that they were really moving he felt surprised. Behind

him the coast of California was slipping over the horizon . . .

In a roadhouse in Asbury Park a corporal was ordering another beer and listening to a negro band play "Rose Room"; in Chicago a dime-store clerk was leaving a movie and thinking immoral thoughts about Cornel Wilde; on a lonely road outside of Memphis a boy and a girl sat in a car listening to a newscast; in Seattle a tired merchant tossed the cat out the kitchen door and turned out the lights.

. . . and Marine Island was fading away over the fan tail.

The compartment wasn't quiet now. They were out in the ground swell now, and the canvas cots stretched and squeaked. Jimmy was awake now. Jimmy didn't say anything. He just lay there and stared up at the rack above him.

He supposed that all the fellows who were awake weren't doing much talking. Not much you could say. A neon light, a soft laugh, snow falling at two in the morning on a lonely street, a warm hand in yours; how do you frame these things in words?

"Aw, the hell with it," he muttered and proceeded to fall asleep.

And the snow and the laugh and the warm hand slipped away over the horizon. . .

A youth is to be regarded with respect. How do you know his future will not equal your present?

Confucius.