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MARY GNAEDINGER, *Editor*

Full Length Feature

**HER WAYS
ARE DEATH**

Jack Mann 10

The blood of the dark and fearsome Valkyrs ran in her veins. And he was the master of modern necromancy. . . . Which would survive when the two clashed?

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"You are too high," the unknown officer's voice told him. "Let down fifty feet, quick."

*It was a voice that could never come from living lips,
"talking him in" to that perilous landing. . . . The same
voice he had last heard in choked, violent anger,
bitterly promising—*

I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU

By Oliver La Farge

TOMMY SAUNDERS was too well educated to give in easily to superstition. His job was to keep navigating, especially when it looked as if his plane would have to drop out of formation; it was up to him to give the pilot the shortest, straightest line to where they might expect to pick up fighter cover. He had plenty to do, but from the time after that big burst of flak when the bombardier went down and the right inboard engine began to give trouble, he kept thinking of Bronc Miller and in a broken, interrupted, exclamatory way trying to explain to him. As Bronc was dead, that was the purest superstition. For various reasons Tommy was much more frightened than he should have been, so that he did not fully realize what he was doing.

Bronc Miller and Tommy had become the closest kind of friends in Pilot Training School. You would not have picked them as a pair to team up together, but they did. Tommy was of medium height, slender, rather shy, an Easterner and a good deal of a bookworm. After the war he planned to go back to college and wind up with a Ph. D. Bronc (he got his name at training school) was right out of the West, a rangy, tall man with wide shoulders, fair, slow-spoken and slow-moving. The slowness was deceptive; he could be quicker than a sidewinder when he wished. He seldom read a book. After the war he was going to finish college to please his old man, and after that he'd join him in running the ranch.

Bronc liked Tommy's thoughtful ways. Tommy felt less shy when he and the big fellow were together. They had important things in common, too. Their parents had raised them to dislike foul talk, and when they dated girls they liked to find the kind of girls with whom they acted just as they would with the girls at home. They were, as Tommy put it one time, anti-wolf. Whatever the reasons,

by the time they finished Basic they were inseparable, and when, near the end of Primary, Tommy was washed out, Bronc minded it almost as much as he did.

There was no danger of Bronc's washing out. He was a good soldier and a natural pilot; all he needed was to pile up enough flying time and he would be one of the great pilots. He went on through Advanced, and then he was shipped to Waltham Field where they were forming B-17 squadrons for what was to become the Eighth Air Force.

Tommy's record showed advanced work in mathematics. With a little managing and some help from his C.O., who liked him and was sorry to wash him out, he got into navigators' school. There he was in his element, and that way he got his wings. By then, of course, Bronc was months ahead of him. They had kept in touch right along. When Tommy got orders for Waltham Field he felt that the breaks were really coming away. He didn't warn Bronc; he waited in the officers' club that first evening until Bronc came in, then he walked up to him and said, "Hello, stranger."

Bronc never batted an eye. He just said, "You aren't going to like it here." Then they shook hands and went to the bar for a beer.

Waltham Army Air Base, to give it its full title, is now Maryburg Municipal Airport, with a scheduled traffic of four DC-3's a day. The runways seem too big, there's grass coming up along some of the parking strips, a lot of the buildings have been sold as war surplus. The glory is gone. Maryburg is a nice little town--two DC-3 stops a day northbound, two a day southbound, that size of town. The houses stood in their own yards, and people sat out on the porches when the weather was good. Throwing all these airmen in, all of a sudden, crowded the place. The inhabitants were not entirely happy about their visitors,

some of them were pretty rough, but a man in uniform who behaved himself generally got a decent deal. There are all kinds of people in any town, but take them by and large, the people of Maryburg appreciated what these boys were doing.

Bronc had made friends in town. He dated with a girl called Betsy Harrison, and Betsy had a friend, Martha Gavin, who teamed up with them to make a foursome. Tommy owned a car, which helped a lot. Martha was on the blonde and bright side; Betsy was a brunette, rather quiet of manner with a fine streak of humor under that. She had a lovely, regular profile and an enchanting smile. If anything, you would have figured that Betsy was right for Tommy, Martha for Bronc, but they divided up the other way. They went dancing a lot. When they took their girls home, each of them kissed his girl good night, but that was all there was of that.

Two months after Tommy arrived, Bronc's squadron was moved out. It got one of those stupid, unnecessary deals that were so common in the Army, cooked up usually by someone who wasn't involved himself and thought it was fine and military to be in a hurry. They pulled the boys out of bed in the middle of the night and told them to get packed, they were leaving at 0600, and there would be no communicating with anyone. Even Tommy knew nothing about it till he went to breakfast.

He went to see Betsy that evening, to let her know what had happened. There was nothing special between her and Bronc, but they were real friends, and naturally she would be upset at having him pulled out like that. She'd been surprised when Tommy telephoned, saying he wanted to give her some news, and having learned a little about life in the Army air forces by then, had a pretty good hunch what it would be.

When Tommy had told her, she asked, "Where are they going? Or can't I ask that?"

"It's no secret that we're training for the ETO here," he said.

The Americans were just beginning daylight bombing over France and Holland then and the first newspaper stories had been printed.

"He'll be flying over Europe pretty soon then?"

"Not for a while. They get a lot of transition training in U.K. first."

"I wish he didn't have to go. I wish none of you had to go. They say—in the papers—that it's a successful raid if casualties are under five per cent. If one man in twenty is killed." Her voice dropped on the last words.

Tommy improvised fast. "Oh, no, that in-

cludes the wounded. There are always a lot more of those." It was five per cent of aircraft lost, actually.

"I shouldn't have said that. You'll be going over, too." She put her hand on his a moment. He felt something disturbing and surprising.

"Who knows? They may keep us here until we rot. You can't tell."

"Tommy, I never could ask Bronc, somehow—don't you worry about it?"

"Yes, I worry about it." He spoke slowly, thinking. He was a person who would have to imagine forward. "I figure—it's like the weather. Lots of the time we don't like the weather, but long ago we learned to take it as it comes. Well, that's the way this is. All you can do is relax and let whatever is going to happen, happen. It's a funny thing; you're being trained to do about the most positive and deadly thing on earth, and the first thing you have to learn, so that you can stay with it, is to be sort of negative. Not about the job itself, of course, but—well—" He made a broad gesture. "About things in general."

They talked awhile about other matters, then they went over to Martha's. It was the middle of the week and he had a heavy schedule on, so he took Betsy home early. Driving back to the field he wondered, alarmed, whether he was falling in love with her, and with that fell to searching his mind to make sure of what he believed Bronc felt about her, or rather, what he didn't feel.

They had a new co-pilot on his ship, an agreeable, cheerful fellow, new to the field and to Maryburg. Tom brought him along next Saturday. He turned out to be an excellent dancer. He wound up paired off with Martha, Tom with Betsy, without anything being said by anyone. It was in the course of that evening, dancing with her so much more than he ordinarily did, that Tommy knew for sure that he was in love with the dark-haired girl. It was as if so long as Bronc was around he had been unable to see, not the girl, but into himself. Now all of a sudden he saw. A couple of days after that he got Bronc's temporary APO address and wrote to him, but he didn't say anything about this new feeling; it was too new and too impossible.

WITH Betsy, especially when he was alone with her, his shyness returned. It didn't seem as if he already knew her well, had danced and traded jokes with her; she was someone else now, the most important person in the world. He noticed intensely how she looked at different times; tricks of her voice, the way she touched her upper lip with her forefinger when she was thinking. He

found these details painfully beautiful, and at some particular look or gesture or turn of voice he'd become speechless. Sometimes he was tongue-tied, sometimes quicker of speech and mind than ever.

A couple of weeks after that his Group C.O. had an attack of militaryitis with the immediate result that the co-pilot pulled Commander of the Guard and had to pass up a date. Martha chose to drop out, so Tommy took Betsy out alone. He was delighted to have her to himself, then he lost his confidence and, fatally, he thought of Bronc, self-assured, always easy and with something pleasant to say. That sank him, so that for the first part of the evening he could feel and hear himself being dull and stiff. At one point he caught her looking at him with a funny half smile and a soft expression he did not understand in her eyes. He wanted to grab her up right then and there and hold her close to him, clear off the floor. Their dancing filled in the silences, and dancing they were good together. Later he forgot himself, and they had some serious, absorbed talk about after the war and what they wanted from life. He felt as happy as a man in his stage of being in love can feel.

He drove her home and saw her to her porch steps. When she turned to say good night to him, she seemed expecting to be kissed, so, hesitantly, he did kiss her. It began as one of those friendly kisses, his hands resting lightly on her arms, her hands barely touching his blouse, then it took fire, their arms went around each other, and the kiss went on for a long time. When they drew back, without a word said, they sat down together on the porch steps, and he took her hands in his.

The silence lasted some time while he collected himself. Then he said, "Betsy, we've been seeing each other for nearly three months. Not every day, of course. Anyhow, do you think you know me well enough to know whether you could marry me?"

"I think I do."

"Well, then, do you think you could?"

She drew in a little breath; then she said softly, "I think it would work."

It wasn't until the next day that they realized what a flat answer to a proposal hers had been. Then it became a joke with them, one of those private sayings that get established in a family.

Betsy's parents took the news cheerfully. They liked the young man, he came of a solid family, and his post-war plans were good. Everyone agreed on a short engagement. Tommy's parents came to Maryburg for the wedding. Afterward, the couple got four days' honeymoon, then set up housekeeping in two

rooms at the back of the Harrison's house. As things went around Army posts in those days, they were well off.

Tommy wrote to Bronc about his engagement right after he wrote to his parents, as soon as he had recovered from his first daze. He told him, as he would not have told anyone else, how strange and wretched it was to marry like this when you were expecting to be sent far away any day, and how it affected his feelings about overseas duty, wanting it and dreading it.

They had had nearly three weeks of married life when Tommy got his orders. The Eighth Air Force had sent in a call for replacement navigators, and the finger was put on him. There was not the brutal suddenness Bronc encountered; he had a chance to say good-bye decently. Betsy was wonderful, she stayed cheerful, she was tender, she told him to hurry up and win the war so that they could set up housekeeping with a kitchen of their own. Her last word was a joke. Not that she fooled him, nor he her, for that matter, but it sent him on his way with a lift.

Going as replacements, he and six others from Waltham flew as passengers with A.T.C. They had a Number Two Priority, and as they encountered good weather all the way, they found themselves unloading at Waring-Tenley Field in England, their new base, at one o'clock one morning, thirty-two hours after they had left Waltham, all but four of which had been spent in bucket seats. They were hungry and groggy for sleep. They were taken to their quarters to stow their bags, then to the mess hall to get some chow before they sacked in.

At that hour there were a lot of men in the mess hall, most of them in flying clothes, stowing away breakfast. They had the sleepy, alert look of men just getting up. A number of them stared at the six navigators when they came in. Seeing this group, all in rumpled, Class A uniforms, unshaven, all with the same wings, all second lieutenants, it was easy to spot them for newly arrived replacements. To make them feel at home, a number of men called, "You aren't going to like it here!"

The newcomers smiled tiredly and got in the chow line. Tommy's eyes were half open. He got his tray loaded and went to a table with his bunch. He did not see Bronc. Bronc saw him, and went right on eating.

When Bronc had lit his cigarette and finished off his coffee, he got up and came to Tommy's table. He looked big in his monkey suit. As he jumped up, Tommy saw that he was wearing sliver bars. He held out his hand and said, "Hello, stranger."

Bronc's hands stayed on his hips. "My pal.

Waiting till I'm shipped and then stealing my girl. My pal."

"Bronc!"

"Cut it. We're due at briefing in—about three minutes. I don't have time to talk now. I'll take care of you when I get back."

"But Bronc, I— My God—"

"I said cut it. Stow it." His eyes were alien, hostile. "My pal. Okay, pal, I'll take care of you." Then he said a strange thing, out of the early morning and the tension of the mission ahead, "If I come back or if I don't come back, I'll take care of you." He turned on his heels and left.

Tommy sat down. One of his companions said, "You're starting off right, huh? Was that his girl you married?"

Bronc didn't come back. That was the period when the Germans were learning to adapt their fighter distribution to the daylight bombing. No one can fly a plane with only one wing, they say. Bronc's went in over the target and the report was that the men on board never had a chance. Tommy felt awful. He had dreaded Bronc's return, but there had been the hope that to some extent he could straighten things out. Never to see him again, not to have that chance, was bad, and then there was the simple, desolate fact that Bronc was no longer on this earth. He wrote at some length to Bronc's family, and in another vein to Betsy, but he did not tell her that Bronc must have been in love with her after all. That would have to wait until he could, if he should be able to, tell her himself.

"I'll take care of you," Bronc had said, "If I come back or if I don't." A strange thing to say. An educated man can believe no part of what that might imply, but with combat coming up and with all you learn of what happens after the formations take off, you have a feeling that you can't take chances on anything, believable or no. The memory of the tension of enmity in Bronc's eyes bothered him at moments; most of the time he just tended to his knitting.

His first mission was set up. At that time the Eighth Air Force had been robbed of P-38's, among other things, for the campaigns in North Africa and Italy. Missions were going well into France and Holland, without long-range fighter support. The last part of the run to the targets and the first part of the return were accomplished without escort, and even with the bombers going out in fairly large formations, the practice was proving expensive. Tommy sat in his place in the nose of his B-17, back of the bombardier, strung up like the rest of them, thinking sometimes about Betsy but also thinking too much about Bronc.

The diversionary sweeps must have drawn off the Germans, for interception to and over the target was light. Flak over the target was moderately heavy and it was from that, turning after the bomb run, that they caught it. The bombardier simply keeled over, and the engine started acting up. Tommy gave the bombardier first aid. He was destined to give a lot of first aid that trip. The engine got rougher and rougher, until, about a hundred miles from the coast, the pilot feathered the prop. After that they had to fall out of formation.

The coast came into sight. The pilot, Judson, asked Tommy where they were. Tommy told him. Jud said, "Where the hell are our fighters? Wouldn't you think they'd wait around for us?" Then the turret gunner reported four fighters coming in from high up at two o'clock. They hoped they might be part of the cover, but they turned out to be ME-110's. They peeled off and attacked from ahead, which was the approved tactic with the Germans at that time. On three engines, there isn't very much to be done about evasive action.

Tommy thought they got one with the forward guns and the turret gunner claimed one definitely, but the Germans raised hell with the flight deck. They made only the one pass, then a formation of Spitfires turned up, coming from the coast. Tommy heard Jud call him on the intercomm, so he came up. The co-pilot was out, rocking in his seat and held by the strap, and the side of Jud's face was all over blood. Further back, Sparks was on the floor. He looked dead, and he was. The flight engineer was working overtime, checking on the three good engines.

"Look after Bill first," Jud said.

TOMMY let the co-pilot onto the floor and did what he could for him. Then he did his best for Jud's head. Jud was white as a sheet where he wasn't covered with blood.

"You've done some flying," he said. "You'll have to take over a little while. I've got her on George. I've given her a lot of trim tab. Keep the left wing down. Lemme out of this."

He fumbled with his safety belt buckle. Tommy undid it for him and eased him, too, to the floor. He fixed him up as well as he could. Then he took the left hand seat. He checked with the crew on the intercomm, telling them what the score was. One waist gunner had been hit in the leg, not seriously, the others were all right.

They were over the water, with the Spitfires still covering them. He was all right flying her on the automatic pilot, but he didn't

think Jud would be able to take over when it came time to bring her down. Tommy had held the stick occasionally in straight and level flight, and of course he had watched plenty of landings. Jud began moaning. That settled it. He told the engineer, "Give him a shot."

The engineer got the morphine syrette out of the first aid kit and used it as he had been told.

On the intercomm, Tommy said, "Navigator to crew, attention please. I am going to try to bring her in. The biggest thing I ever landed was a PT-19, and I washed out on that. Those of you who aren't hurt had better get ready to bail out."

The tail gunner said, "My parachute's shot up. I'll walk, Loot."

The turret gunner said, "Do you think you can make it?"

"I'm certainly going to try."

"Let's all ride together."

The others agreed.

He corrected their heading to aim for a field nearer to the English coast than Waring-Tenley. If Sparks had been alive, he'd have him in touch with the field by now. As it was, he broadcast on voice communication, hoping he could get something on his frequency. The Spits shot on ahead of him, presumably running low on fuel. He didn't like seeing them go.

The picture of Bronc's hostile eyes came vividly to him. He did not try to explain to him any more; he was too angry, profoundly, killingly angry, at what had happened to the four men near him, for that.

He got a beacon which seemed right for the field he was aiming for, and homed on that. As he crossed the coast, he broadcast harder than ever. "Sugar three seven nine to Lover, Sugar three seven nine to Lover, come in, Lover."

"Lover to Sugar three seven nine!" It was a Wac's voice, and how glad he was to hear it. "Come in Sugar three seven nine."

"I am on three engines." He did not waste time on the usual repetitious identifications. "I have another one that doesn't look too good. I am heading three hundred twenty-five degrees, homing on your beacon, just crossing the coast. My pilot and co-pilot are out, this is the navigator flying the plane. I say again, the navigator is flying the plane. I have five wounded aboard. I am going to try for a landing. Do you hear me?"

The Wac replied, "Lover to Sugar three seven nine. I hear you badly. Do you hear me?" She was still observing the formalities.

"I hear you faintly. I have picked up an N signal, is it yours? Over."

"That is ours. Bear right for the beam. Over."

"Please get someone to talk me in. I have never landed one of these damned things before. Over."

"You are cleared for emergency landing. We are sending for a pilot. Have you found our beam?"

"Hold on, sister. Stand by."

He adjusted the nobs, swinging to the right. Shortly he caught in his earphones the solid buzz where the A and N beams overlap, "the beam".

"Sugar three seven nine to Lover. I am on your beam. Over."

"We have sent for a pilot to talk you in." She had said that before. "Come in on the beam at five thousand—"

The voice was cut off. He called, "Lover, I do not hear you. Do you hear me? Come in, Lover. Sugar three seven nine to Lover, come in, Lover."

The silence lasted for an eternity which was probably three minutes. He and the flight engineer fiddled futilely with the earphones and the wires. He could not hear the beam any longer, but his direction finder was still working.

Then a man's voice came in, calm and steady.

"Sugar three seven nine, do you hear me now?"

"I hear you."

"Do you know how to uncage and go back on manual?"

"Yes."

"Then do so, but take her off trim tabs first and correct for your missing engine with left rudder. Over."

He could spot the field ahead now. How did whoever was talking to him know that he was on automatic and that Jud had given her a lot of trim tab? Guessed, he supposed. The voice had been calming, steady, unworried, familiar.

He visualized a colonel, with a thousand hours and command pilot's wings.

"Sugar three seven nine, are you on manual?"

"I am."

"Come down to two thousand feet and pass over the tower. Turn to your downwind leg at one ninety degrees as soon as you are over the tower. Keep your airspeed, you can't get it back if you should have to go round again. When you are over the tower turn to one ninety degrees and drop to fifteen hundred feet. Repeat."

He repeated, and added, "My airspeed is one hundred thirty miles per hour." He was

(Continued on page 113)

I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU

(Continued from page 103)

beginning to feel a certain assurance—if only Bronc didn't intervene.

"Barometric pressure is twenty-nine point seventy-one. Repeat."

He repeated and corrected his altimeter. As he turned on the downwind leg the voice gave him his wind velocity and direction and the rest of the information. It went on, describing three-engine procedure as if they were having a conversation in an officers' club, but speaking extremely clearly, each word unforgettable. He would keep more airspeed than usual until he was surely ready to land, and he would use no flaps. When he began to horse back on his throttles and lose speed after he turned in from his base leg, he must let up proportionately on his rudder.

Tommy had signaled the engineer into the co-pilot's seat. The man knew enough to perform some of the co-pilot's functions. He, too, was listening to the instructions. As Tommy turned on the base leg, the voice said: "A B-Seventeen is about the most buoyant plane there is; she's still a honey on three engines, she'll fly on two." The unknown officer continued talking him in, step by step. It was almost as if he could see into the cockpit, like flying a two-place trainer with the instructor sitting behind you. Tommy supposed that an experienced man could tell a lot about what was happening just from watching the altitude of the plane.

He lined up the runway. The engineer reported:

"Landing gear is down and locked."

Tommy kept reporting his airspeed. The voice told him he was too high, to let him down fifty feet quick. Again, as if he could read the instruments. Tommy began to believe that he would make it, that he had Bronc licked after all. "Keep her nose up," the voice said, still calm, but with urgency. "That's right." He touched down, bumped, touched again. "Get your foot off that rudder!"

He was on the runway, now. "Cut!" He cut. The plane still ran under its own momentum, the crash trucks and ambulance racing for it. Tommy was drenched with sweat. The engineer took his earphones off and let out a long breath.

Tommy heard a chuckle, a chuckle that he could not fail to recognize. "I told you I'd take care of you, didn't I, Tommy?" the voice said. "From where I sit now, things look different than they did where you are. Betsy's a swell gal and she surely loves you; you take care of her." ■ ■ ■