

# ARGOSY

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Cover by Rudolph Belarski

Illustrating Cancelled in Red

*This magazine is on sale every Wednesday*

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.  
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.  
3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE  
111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1939, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies 10 cents. By the year \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$5.00; Other countries, \$7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

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The two cars hurtled  
along the mountain road



By JOHN AMES YORK  
Author of "Requiescat in Pace"

## Show Me the Way to Go Home

Out of the night fog the song  
came . . . and in it a mad woman  
heard her ironic Destiny

**T**HE big black car picked its way through the fog as slowly and painfully as some hurt and wary beast. The smoky mist would part before the stab of the headlights, and then close in again as soon as they had passed.

It was sure creepy—like being shut off from the world and sealed tight in a universe beyond reality. Once in a while the lights would pick up the black trunk of a tree straight ahead, dark and shining with moisture; then Hatrick, at the wheel, would pull them back into the road and they'd go on.

"How long before we hit the main road again?" John Burck carefully kept his voice even and uncomplaining. Hatrick was having a worse time, fighting the bucking wheel, that he was.

"Dunno. Can't tell where we're at. I never been on this alley before. Maybe we missed a turn some place. Want I should turn back?"

"No. You're doing fine. Keep on going."

Burck looked at the crazy woman, bent against the left-hand window. The interne at the county hospital hadn't called her crazy—he'd said something ending in -pathic and -osis. But to Burck, that's what she was—crazy.

He didn't like to be around crazy people. He hadn't been long enough in his new job at Saunder's Sanitarium to get used to

them; and in other hospitals where he'd been an orderly, he'd steered as clear of the psychopathic wards as he could.

"I gave her a shot," the interne at the county hospital had said, giving her into Burck's hands. "She'll be quiet for two-three hours."

Two or three hours. It seemed they'd been on this crazy detour more than that already. No fog until they'd taken it, either—just a cold autumn mist.

The crazy woman swayed against him as Hatrick swerved the car out of a rut. Burck noticed how light she was. With hands instinctively gentle, he soothed her back into her corner.

She was a pretty thing. Soft and small, and fine-featured. Even now, her eyes deep-circled and her lips white as chalk, there was something about her that sort of got you. She wasn't asleep, because her eyes weren't shut. But when they'd rest on him, he knew she wasn't really seeing him at all.

All he knew about her was that she'd been in an accident. Concussion. And then they'd found that somehow her mind had died within her.

Burck was cold. He peered out his window, then out of the back one. Nothing but the swirling, blanketing, eerie fog. And then there *was* something—rushing at them.

"Pull over, Hatrick!" he shouted. "Pull over!"

The big man obeyed, and the car that had loomed up suddenly behind them—with no warning sound, almost as if it had been manufactured out of the mist itself—burtled by them and swerved ahead.

"Say, that's a break," Hatrick said, not turning. "Looka. See that sign on the back? Broughton Used Car Agency. They're from where we're going. We just follow them, we'll be okay."

For a moment the other car—a green sedan—seemed to hang back, waiting. Burck could see the sign all right, and the license plate: 3xZ-154. Then the sedan gathered speed, and Hatrick pushed down on the gas to keep up with it.

In the car ahead some woman screamed, but Burck couldn't tell whether it was with relief from terror or just plain laughing excitement.

THE crazy woman stirred. She sat up slowly and touched Burck's sleeve gently with just the tips of her fingers. Her eyes were luminous and pleading. "I want to go home, please," she said in a voice smooth as silk. "I'm all right now. Honestly I'm all right."

Burck nodded. "Sure. You're all right, lady. We're going home. Don't you worry, ma'm."

She kept smiling at him gently and telling him she was all right, and Burck kept talking to her, quiet and low, not paying much attention to the words. It was like being shut up in an endless tunnel, cut off, with this poor crazy woman beside you, and never knowing when she might get really wrought up—and dangerous.

He had quieted her a little; he wiped the sweat off his forehead. They seemed to be moving faster now; and the fog hadn't lifted. But Hatrick had to go fast to keep the sedan's taillight from vanishing and leaving them stranded in the fog again.

Burck couldn't see the speedometer needle getting past forty—then fifty. But he wouldn't have cared. The drug had worn off his charge now; something was worrying her—he could tell by her soft, almost delicate complaints and gestures. He had to get her to the Home quick.

Faster and faster went the green sedan; faster and faster Hatrick drove to keep up with it.

The woman had begun to sway; her head bobbed back and forth as if in time to music that only she could hear; the smile on her face was vague and senseless; yet she kept saying she wasn't crazy and only wanted to be taken home.

"Please take me home," she would murmur. "I'll—I'll give you a thousand dollars. This car isn't taking me home. And I'm not really crazy. Please . . ." It was like a child begging. Burck was nearly out of his mind himself.

The woman's lips suddenly bubbled laughter, but her eyes were as suddenly afraid. The people in the car ahead were cutting up a racket, yelling and laughing and singing. Burck could hear the singing more plainly as they sped along. Snatches of the words came to him; but he didn't know whether he recognized them by the sound or because the woman's lips were forming them so clearly.

*"Show me the way . . . to go home . . ."*

There was a woman's voice in the car ahead, loud and deep; and then—this was worst of all—the two of them began to sing in harmony: the woman at his side and that other low-voiced woman up ahead in the green sedan:

*" . . . I'm tired and I want . . . to go to bed . . ."*

It was terrible. Burck was really scared now. "Better slow down," he gasped at Hatrick. "Them guys up there are drunk—"

Hatrick grunted and his thick neck was greased with sweat. "I'll hang on a while." It had suddenly become very important to stick with the green sedan. He felt as if the black car were being drawn into the swirling suction of its wake. Like a whirlpool.

**T**HE crazy woman stopped singing. She was weeping. Calling somebody names, begging to be let alone. Screaming wild, bitter, senseless reproaches. She stiffened suddenly, threw herself wildly against Burck's straining arms and shouted: "Stop! Stop this car!"

Burck got his arms around her; held her, breathing hard.

Her nails raked his wrists. "It—it's going to happen . . . Please . . . oh, please, I'm all right. I'm not crazy. You must listen—"

The green sedan stepped it up even more. Hatrick's foot, magnet-drawn, went down on the gas. His hands were glued to the wheel.

They'd been twisting and dodging around short curves. Now they came to a long straightway. "Must be the end of

the detour here," Hatrick breathed. "Looka them monkeys go."

The crazy woman began to scream at the top of her lungs. "Stop! Stop this car!" Over and over. As if death stared her in the face. And she hurled herself wildly out of Burck's grasp and flung her arms around Hatrick's thick neck. "Stop—I tell you! Stop!"

Burck was a matter-of-fact sort of person. But the very anguish in her voice told him they must stop. And Hatrick did, heavy foot tamping instinctively on the brake. The car slued around, shuddered to a halt. Burck realized he was breathing again.

The sedan's taillight went straight ahead, winking into nothing. . . .

The woman slumped over in her seat. "What's the matter?" Hatrick said. "We hit something?" Burck scowled—hadn't Hatrick heard the woman?—and climbed out of the car to see.

It was funny. There wasn't any fog at all any more.

A clear, cold moon threw a ghostly shine over everything. Burck shuddered.

Not two feet ahead of the front wheels was the brink of a deep and rocky ravine. The road twisted sharply off to the left and over a bridge: they weren't anywhere near in position to make that curve. But the green sedan . . . There were no tracks going anywhere at all. If the green sedan had passed ahead of them, it had left no marks on the muddy road. And Burck, chilled to the bone of him, suddenly knew that if they'd followed it, they would have landed in the gully. His quick eyes saw no wreckage down below—but they did find a place in the whitewashed guard rail that looked as if it had been newly replaced.

"I don't get it," he mumbled aloud. Then, raising his voice: "Didn't you see that green sedan, Hatrick? Didn't you see it, too? It's crazy . . ." He explained quickly.

Hatrick scratched his head. "I guess we're all crazy. . . . That fog maybe."

Burck climbed back into the car. The

woman shuddered up against him. "You're all right now, lady. You're all right."

She smiled. "I want to . . . go home," she whimpered. "I was frightened for a little while."

Burck studied the slip of paper on which he'd written the license number of the green sedan. The county license clerk looked at him quizzically through the grille.

"Sure. Green sedan, all right," he said, running his finger over the record. "But you couldn't have seen it on the road last night—nor any other night the last six weeks. That car was in a terrible

smashup—wasn't enough left to sell for junk. Folks must've been drinking, I guess; sure wouldn't have torn into that ravine bridge at no seventy per, if they hadn't been. Two killed. Miss Ames, singing teacher here in town; and the husband of the woman who was driving. Joe Lovering. Right nice fellow, Joe was—ran a used-car agency here in town."

He scratched his head. "Wonder what happened to Mrs. Lovering. She musta took it pretty hard—with two deaths on her mind like that."

Burck nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess she musta."

