

"Sorry, Friend, I Didn't See Ya Standin' There"

Chester Perkins

I SAT IN MY usual corner booth at the Victory Bar, sipping a glass of beer and glancing about at people and things I had seen dozens of times before.

Heavy-jowled Charlie, the proprietor-bartender, stood behind the oaken bar, polishing a beer glass and swapping small talk with the patrons seated on the high stools across from him. Most of his customers were G. I.'s, and he smiled and beamed with pleasure as one of them handed him an army shoulder patch insignia. He placed it with other patches which were pinned to red, white, and blue banners hanging on the wall behind the bar.

Charlie liked soldiers. He had opened the Victory Bar when the government built an army hospital nearby, and he catered to the boys as if each was a hero just returned from Bataan. They liked him too, and there was always a spirit of good will and fellowship in Charlie's tavern, even when some of the boys got a little "pickled" around midnight.

Outside, there was a loud clicking of heels on the step, and Danny Maddin, whistling, came bursting in. He headed straight for the bar with sure steps, and when he bumped into one of the customers he said, "Sorry, friend, I didn't see you sittin' there."

"S'all right, Danny," came the reply.

"Hey, Charlie, y'old son of a gun," Danny exclaimed, "damned if you ain't gittin' fatter every day. Why don't ya' quit drinkin' up all the profits? Draw me a tall one."

"Okay, Danny, okay," Charlie laughed. "We can't all be as neat 'n trim as you are."

Danny was, as Charlie said, neat and trim. And he was good looking, too. He had black, thick, curly hair which, although he seldom combed it, never seemed mussed. His teeth were white and even, and they accentuated his winning smile. The only thing which marred his appearance was a number of small scars around his eyes.

"I got a buck that says I can whip anyone in a game of shuffleboard," said Danny as he headed for the table in the rear of the room.

On his way, he nudged two or three people, and to each of them he said, "Sorry, friend, I didn't see ya standin' there." A couple of G. I.'s accepted his challenge, and the game was on. Several minutes later he was back at the bar, waving three one-dollar bills in the air.

"Won't these jokers never learn they can't beat me?" boasted Danny. "Give everybody a drink, Charlie."

One of the bills slipped from Danny's grasp. He stooped to the floor to pick it up, and, as he groped for it, he grabbed a man by the ankle. "Sorry, friend, I didn't see ya standin' there," he apologized.

The drinks were served to everybody in the house, and Danny gave a toast he had learned overseas from a Chinese girl. Everyone laughed.

A minute later, eyes opened wide and mouths dropped in amazement as Danny reached up and removed one of his two plastic eyes and dropped it into his beer.

Turning toward a telephone booth, he remarked, "Scuse me, friends. I just want to keep m'eye on m'beer while I'm gone."

Fenner Street

Patrick J. Mahoney III

THE BLACK BUICK came to a halt at the foot of Fenner Street. The man behind the wheel sat smoking a cigarette until Officer Fogarty passed out of sight down Nelson Avenue hill.

The door swung open, and the man that emerged from the Buick was an interesting study. His clothes did not go with his face. He was a big man who did justice to the obviously well-tailored brown suit, but his face was cold and expressionless. His eyes were jet black orbs, peering out from under the large brimmed hat.

He gave another swift glance in the direction Officer Fogarty had disappeared, and proceeded up the street with a determined gait. He struggled through groups of women buying produce from the market carts. A rummy asked him for a dime and was ignored. There were an ice cream vendor short-measuring a couple of kids and the inevitable crowd surrounding the Ginny and his playful monk. Three boys jostled against him in their mad flight down the street. They had stolen some wire-spoked wheels from Max Colbert's Junk Yard, and old man Colbert was in hard pursuit.

As he approached the front of Giofannis' Delicatessen, a little, dark eyed girl sat on the pavement playing jacks by herself. She had a large steel brace on her left leg.

He glared at her "Hi, Mister," grunted, and started through the door.