

*From the House
of the
Rat Catcher*

H. Bedford-Jones

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From the House of the Rat Catcher

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The barrel-like interior of the plane was gloomy. Joe Grimes twisted in his bucket-seat to ease the weight of the hundred-pound load—weapons and gear—that bulked him so hugely out of shape. The other paratroopers, Army men, not Marines, bulked equally ghostlike in the obscurity.

They talked around him, joked uneasily, smoked, vomited; the ship dropped, pulled up jerkily and rolled, for the moonlight air was bumpy and a high wind was blowing.

It was July 9th, 1943. Under that moon, somewhere ahead, lay Sicily, waiting.

“Hey, Joe!” said a voice in good-natured joshing. “How you making it?”

“Okay,” replied Grimes.

“Well, no goofy business this trip, bud! This is one place you ain’t been in before now.”

There was a laugh; it relieved the tension.

“Maybe not,” rejoined Grimes, with his rumbling, hearty laugh. “Wait till I get there and see. Ain’t airsick anyhow, and I sure been *that* before!”

A little kidding had a wonderful effect on taut nerves. Everybody relaxed and took it more easily. Grimes was burly, tough, hard as iron. Everybody in the outfit liked him and he liked everybody. Little he cared if they called him Goofy Joe! Any nickname was an honor in this gang. Finest of the fine—you had to be a superman first, then a paratrooper. That was top-hole in the Service.

It was odd, though, how his nickname had risen. Back home in training days, even back on the transport coming over, it was the same thing. Over and over the feeling had come to Grimes, sometimes vaguely, sometimes clearcut—he had done this before, he had been here before, he had seen such-and-such a thing before. Because he talked too openly about it at first, the nickname had come.

It was good-natured, it meant nothing much. Mentally he was tops and they all knew it. Like most nicknames in the corps, it went by contrasts. To call him Goofy Joe was a good joke, because he most emphatically was not in the least goofy. So he liked it.

One of the officers who probed into his half-fancies had claimed they were actual memories, or remains of memories, from other lives. To Grimes, that was a lot of baloney. These days, when the feeling came, he said nothing about it; he had learned his lesson. What started him off on one of these spells was hard to say. Anything might do it—a bump when landing, a dazzling light, anything at all. If he tried, he could not bring it on.

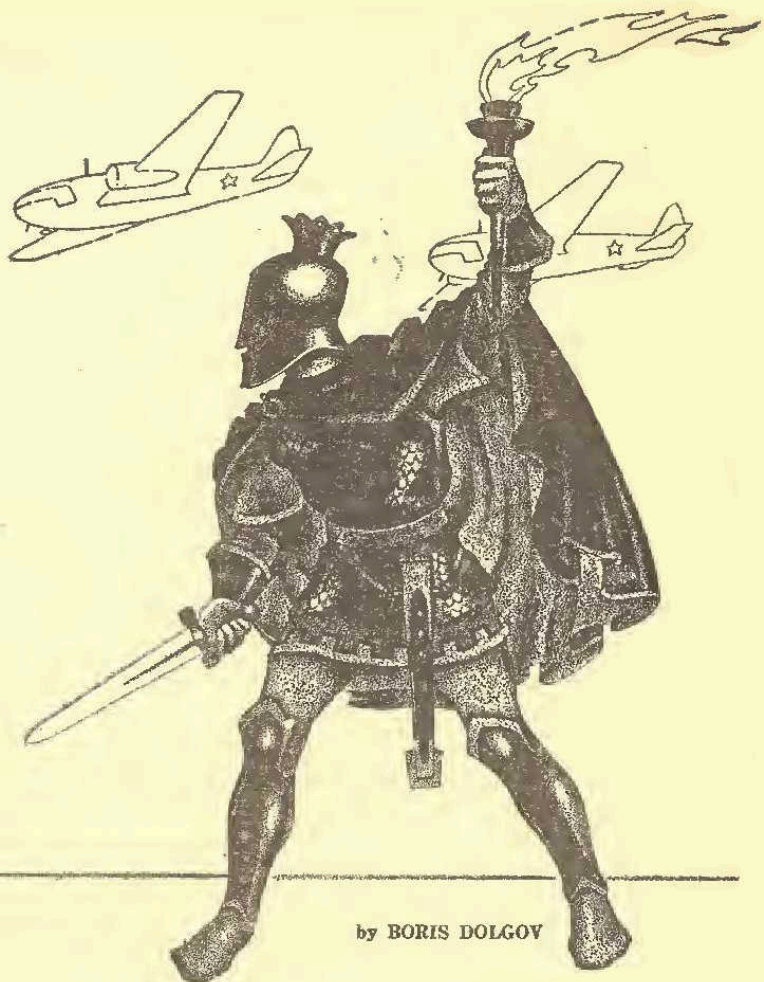
All this slid out of his mind as a word was passed along, and men tensed. That wide blotch ahead in the moonlight was dark Sicily. They were almost there! Ruddy tongues of fire jumped across the horizon, relics of the tons of bombs dropped by the day's air raids. The plane droned on monotonously. An officer was talking, giving a refresher speech on details everybody knew; Grimes scarcely heard it. Flak was bursting and he wondered if any of the planes would be hit, good thing the bucket seats were bullet-proof!

His nerves jumped suddenly; everyone came taut, as the red warning light flashed on. He rose. The grotesque, shapeless figures around came erect and began to hook up the release lines. Flares had been released and were floating over shores and rocky shelving hills. He was waiting, they were all waiting, for the red light to become green.

In this moment, this fraction of a moment, of waiting, time suddenly stopped for Joe Grimes. (You know yourself how the last ten minutes of your homeward ride may be either a cold, hungry, nerve-tortured eternity or a laughing conversational orgy that is gone in a flash.) For him, it stopped.

He was conscious of the orders. The plane was circling somewhere back of the town of Gela; this group was hours ahead of the fleet and landing. It had special work, before the Rangers came ashore there and took the town. It had to work on that long hill back of the town and locate the hidden battery commanding the sweep of shore. Intelligence had sure word of those hidden guns; they must be found at all costs. His own tactical group had to locate that battery and knock hell out of it. Otherwise the shore landing would be a welter of blood and death.

*Beneath the paratrooper lay Sicily, but a Sicily of centuries ago, of historic cities
and temples, of ageless intrigue!*



by **BORIS DOLGOV**

This was a long process in his mind, this reflection and remembrance. Then time clicked again for him, with a roar of sound. The red light had gone. The green light was on—his mind had been working in that little instant of change. The others were rushing and pushing to get out. Five hundred feet, speed one hundred and ten—they were going out, he was going out—he was out. The first Americans into Axis Europe!

“Geronimo!” He was yelling the word with the others, the jumping word that expanded throat and muscles and met the drop and atmospheric pressure. Not the cuss-words used by the Marines—“Geronimo! Geronimo!”

Then he was floating, keeping his legs together, readying them for the landing, hauling them up. The earth was close now. Chutes were all around him. He had a glimpse of his wrist-watch dial, as his hands gripped the cords; the exact moment registered. 12:40. He knew this, he was certain of it. 12:40.

Here was the ground. He was dropping into blackness out of moonlight. He touched, and rolled over and over, gloved hands gripping at the cords, fumbling for the chute release. Another man barged into him. They yelled at each other and yelling, struck head on. The helmets clashed. That was Clancy, dammit . . .

For Joe Grimes, everything went out in a shower of sparks and tumbling stars.

How long it lasted, he could not tell. He was slow in coming around and felt stiff with cold. He was vaguely conscious of the moonlit night, then heard a voice beside him. He recognized by its authority and decision that it was an officer’s voice, though it was none he knew or remembered.

“He’s had a bad crack but he’s all right. I’ll stay with him and bring him in. Get on with you, everybody! You know the orders. Clear out. Leave us alone. I’ll say a prayer.”

A chaplain, of course. Grimes tried to lift his head, but grunted and relaxed as a wave of pain dizzied him. He was blissfully free of his crushing load; guns and gear were gone, thank heaven!

Almost at once, however, came new crisis. The man beside him leaned close and spoke guardedly at his ear.

“You’ve come around; all right, use your head! We’re in a tight pinch. They’ll be back in a minute to kill us both. Roll over. Crawl. Don’t make a sound. Follow me.”

The urgency in that voice roused Grimes to action. Groggy as he was, he managed to obey the orders, inching himself along the ground after the other man. The shadows were black and fathomless, but ahead the moonglow and

starlight dimly revealed enormously wide stone stairs. The voice drifted back to him.

“Well done! Now for the stairs; once up, we’re safe for the moment. I’ll tackle ’em first. Keep to the right, where the shadow falls.”

Grimes grunted assent. He must have been out quite a while, he reflected, for he had been stripped of baggy suit and high boots; not so much as a knife remained. A faint scramble and the other man was bounding up the stairs, keeping to the shadows. He picked himself up and followed, dizzily. He stubbed his toe and swore with hearty emphasis.

A laugh sounded. There was the other man, holding a hand to him, hauling him up to a platform between two uprights. These uprights were legs. Above them, towering in the moonbeams, was a colossal statue whose bulk shadowed them.

“Good work. Take it easy, now,” said the unknown. “If we get out of this, we’ll be damned good; it’s going to take some figuring. They’ve got us blocked on all sides. I’d be dead now if you hadn’t come along just when you did. Those blasted guards of mine are in the plot; luckily, they didn’t know I was on to ’em.”

Grimes could see the speaker now. He was a big fellow, bareheaded, handsome, with a powerful head and shoulders; he wore what looked like a loose flowing nightgown of rich scarlet trimmed with gold. Then, turning his gaze, Grimes saw something else—and the sight knocked him speechless.

There, curving far out in the moonlight, was the same sea-edged shore he had seen from the plane hatchway. The flares were gone now but the moonlight was stronger. The rocky ground and the little town of Gela were gone. In their place was a city, even whiter and larger than Tunis, that stretched clear from the shore up to this point, the long shoulder of hill behind and above the town.

Nor was this the bare rocky cactus-clad scarp pictured to him and the other men; all his memories of those instructions, of his comrades, of the invasion, were growing dim and fading out. Above rose the colossal figure, an image of a man holding a bow. Behind, occupying the crest, was a stone platform that ran back to the pillars of a temple. It, like the city below, was snowy white and shimmering in the moonlight.

“It’s a dream!” muttered Grimes. “I got knocked daffy and I’m still dreaming!”

Beside the great steps and running back along the side of the temple and beyond, were dark, tall trees. Grimes looked at the grove and heard them sighing and rustling in the sea-breeze. The other man laughed, and extended to him a small leathern bottle.

“Here, there’s a drop of wine left; polish it off. Dreaming? Far from it.”

“This isn’t Gela,” muttered Grimes.

“It certainly is. Gela, my city! I suppose you’ll say next that I’m not Gelon, dictator of Gela and of Syracuse—*tyrannos* of all eastern Sicily! Or that you’re not Eacarcus, my bodyguard, the one faithful man, the only one I can trust in this emergency! Finish that wine; it’ll clear your head. Apollo!” Gelon lifted an arm to the towering bronze statue above them. “Apollo Loxias! Apollo the Inspirer! Your friend Gelon is in a pinch and needs help. Produce it! These rascally Carthaginians from Africa and some of his own people have caught him off guard. . . .”

“Caught off second, by gosh!” muttered Grimes. “Eacarcus, huh? That’s a hell of a name.”

This was almost his last coherent thought as Joe Grimes. He gulped the wine, and it cleared his head. The situation came into focus. He was indeed Eacarcus, this was indeed Gela. There was a girl, Chryseis, who lived in the lower part of the town; her old man had a whole fleet of tunny-boats and was well off . . . yes, things were coming back to him.

His skull was ringing a bit; he had received a nasty crack when he fell, in getting back to Gelon with the warning. And Gelon had bluffed the handful of guards, sending them on so casually . . . there was a man for you, by heaven! Perhaps more than man; there was something godlike about him.

Eacarcus looked at the dim figure with heartfelt admiration. He had been a professional runner and boxer, a wandering athlete along the Italian coasts. Gelon had picked him as bodyguard. The two men clicked from the start. Each possessed the same quality of arms, brave faith. Each man rang true.

Gelon, of course, was an aristocrat. He was master of Syracuse as well as of Gela and Agrigentum; he had fleets, armies, enemies—and friends. This time, his friends had gone back on him and he had been trapped, here in his own city. Carthaginian agents, envious nobles, traitor guards, had combined to trap him. Now, stripped for the moment of all power and wealth, a hunted fugitive, Gelon perched under the colossal statue of Apollo—and his strong, manly laugh rang out as heartily as ever, even with death close upon him. He had no fear of anything or anyone. A man’s man, Gelon!

The magic of the moonlit night, the star-struck carpet of the sky, the shimmering sea and the white outspread city, was potent even in this desperate moment. Beginning on the far side of this very ridge were the vast grain-fields, sweeping on across the uplands to the hills. This long-bearded wheat was the wealth of Sicily; it grew in quantities incredible and was exported to the whole world. The granaries of Gela, stretching along the shore by the river-mouth below, were bursting store-houses of wealth. . . .

“To work, Eacarcus!” The vibrant, energetic voice broke him abruptly from his reflections. “Those rascally guards of mine lost their chance to kill me, thanks to you; but we’re in a tight spot. Every egress from the city’s under guard. The barracks, the waterfront, the arsenal, the walls and gates, are patrolled. If we don’t get away to safety before daylight, we’re lost.”

“Right,” assented Eacarcus. “That big cavalry base of yours at Pantelica is only twenty miles away. No traitors there!”

“Sure. How’ll we get there? Fly over the walls?”

“Oh! We’ll have to get out of here first.”

“Precisely.”

“Well, there’s the answer.” Eacarcus jerked his thumb toward the temple. “The priests of Apollo—”

Gelon laughed harshly, scornfully.

“They’re in the plot, too. I heard today that the oracle had given out word that Gelon would find life or death at Gela. The usual double meaning, of course; but that shows the priests are lined up against me.”

“Well, make the oracle fall your way! Get out of here and you’ll find life!”

Gelon grunted and made a gesture.

A torch was flaring at the temple entrance. The usual midnight ceremony of a visit to the oracle was going on, but the torchlight showed something else. A faint glitter shone out to right and left of it; armed men, soldiers, were patrolling the temple walls and grounds.

Down below, where the great stone stairs began, showed other torches, and still others flitted here and there through the streets. The hunt was on.

“Caught like rats! Without so much as a weapon!” growled Gelon angrily.

Eacarcus started slightly; rats! That reminded him.

“Is it midnight yet?” he demanded.

“A little past.” Gelon pointed to the temple, from which were coming a dozen or two men across the platform, heading for the stairs and the streets below. “The midnight visit to the oracle is just over. Why?”

Eacarcus stood up, swept up dust from the stones, and smeared his face.

“I’ve thought of something. You can stick it out here for an hour. If I’m not recognized as your bodyguard, I’ll be back then.”

“If recognized, you’ll be killed.”

“Quite so; but I’ll pass for a slave, and remain alive.”

“You can get a fistful of gold pieces by betraying me.”

Eacarcus chuckled. “I can get a basketful by saving you! I’m a practical man.”

Gelon uttered a laugh. “You’re a fool! Where are you going?”

“If I told you, then you’d say to stay here. Instead, trust me.” He held out his hand to the other man, who gripped it hard. “You talk to Apollo, I’ll talk to someone else of less authority—wait! Give me that gold pin from your peplon.”

The dictator asked no question, but removed a handsome gold brooch from the neck of his royal scarlet tunic. Eacarcus took it; and naked to the waist like any slave, darted away. The file of worshipers were on the stairs. He slipped in among them. No one paid any attention.

Below were soldiers and torches. The group was halted, then passed, and scurried off. All were in haste to reach their homes safely. When they broke up, Eacarcus darted away, chuckling.

The House of the Rat Catcher, in the lower street opposite the Syracusan wine-shop; this was his goal. He had a date there with Chryseis, and had all but forgotten it until that curious train of thought sparked his brain; then he had remembered something else. Goats! Rats led to goats, by way of a sulky-eyed girl. And goats might—by the barest possibility—be the answer to his desperate problem.

“She’ll be in a stew over being kept waiting,” he reflected as he hurried along. “Fact is, I promised to take her to watch the dancing at the Sunken

Gardens—that's out now. This brooch may save the day. She's a regular little gold-digger, that gal!"

He collected more dirt en route and smeared his face anew. If recognized, he was done for; the bodyguard of the dictator was far too well known. True, Gelon was dictator here; he had inherited the rule of Gela, but after mastering her rival Syracuse had made that city his home. This provoked jealousy and hatred in Gela, and Carthaginian agents scattering gold had done the rest. Those African bandits would step in and loot all Sicily once they had the single strong ruler out of the way, and could destroy the cities piecemeal. Gelon had built up a united rule from Syracuse to Gela and beyond to Agrigentum—

There was the House of the Rat Catcher ahead, surrounded by trees; a public gift to a man from Rhegium who kept the granaries clear of rats. Its gardens ran clear down to the Gela river. And there, under the trees, was a cloaked shadow. Eacarces hurried up.

"Well, you certainly took your time!" broke out Chryseis. "Do you know how long you've kept me waiting here, with the city full of rioting soldiers and the gods only know what's going on? And—"

"Listen, my dear, I can explain everything," began Eacarces. She halted him in new anger.

"Explain! You dare to keep a date with me in that costume—oh!" She gasped at closer sight of him. "Do you think I'm going to the Sunken Gardens with anyone who looks like a slave? Keep away from me! You're filthy, dirty, you beast!"

"Well, I saved this, anyhow." Eacarces held up the brooch in the moonlight. It was a truly regal gaud, hand-chiseled out of massy Egyptian gold, and a different sort of gasp came from her at sight of it. "I had this and a necklace to go with it. I got into that riot of drunken soldiers and was lucky to save my life. They tore off most of my clothes and rolled me in the mud, but I hung on to this. It's a beauty, eh? Gelon gave it to me."

"Is it real?" she exclaimed, awed by the touch of it.

"Of course. Well, that's why I'm late. And we can't go to the Gardens tonight. The boss is leaving for Syracuse in an hour and of course I must go along. We'll have to put off that date till next time I'm around this way."

Chryseis murmured something, anything. She was fondling the brooch and lost in admiration of it. Why, it was heavy enough to buy a couple of slaves!

“A dozen, if you pick one of those Tyrian dealers; they’re nuts about gold,” Eacarces said carelessly. “Look, honey; I’ve only got a minute or two. Must get back. Do you remember telling me once about following a goat, when you were a kid, and getting smack into the oracle of Apollo, up back of the temple?”

With an effort, she brought her mind back to him. She pinned the brooch into her tunic and reached forward and gave him a hearty smack.

“There, sweet man, that’s for thanks! Dirty or not—why, of course I remember! I’d probably have been whipped to death if the priests had ever found out about it.”

“Tell me again. I’ve got a bet with a guard captain that I can reach the oracle without going through the temple. I’ll work him up well and make the bet a really fat one, and split with you when I win it, next trip.”

“You’ll win something you don’t bargain on, if those priests catch you!” she said.

“Me? The dictator’s bodyguard? Not much. Whisper it, honey!” He slipped an arm about her, wiped his face with a corner of her robe, and found her lips. She laughed.

“Well, you know the big statue, and the wall around the grove to the right of it. It begins at the steps. You follow that wall. It’s all grown up with trees and brush. You come to two cypresses together, very tall, taller than the other trees, after you’ve gone a long way.”

“On the hillside above town, yes,” he said. “But that’s where the solid rock begins.”

“Oh, no! I thought so too, till I saw the goats coming in and out. The wall’s broken down there, by some old trees. It was a terrible climb, I remember, but it takes you into a cleft in the rock, exactly like some god had carved it along the hillside. You can’t see it from anywhere. Well, you get to the top and turn left. That’s the end of the cut, and comes into a grotto. The oracle is there.”

“So. And the other end of the cut? Where does that go?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Somewhere out around the hill—clear past the city walls anyhow.”

He kissed her again, swiftly, passionately. What an ideal bargain all around—from her standpoint, from his own, from that of Gelon! Never had a gold pin served variant purposes so well. She had no objections to going home alone; indeed, he rather suspected that she would head for the Summer Gardens without him to show off her splendor.

So he got clear of her and made for the hillside and the temple once more.

He kept a bright lookout, passing from shadow to shadow, threading his way along the narrow streets that climbed the height. A furious exultation seized him and bore him onward. That glorious temple stood just at the edge of the city walls, and at this one point, outside them. There was no doubt whatever that he had learned something of the utmost value, not only for the moment, but also for the future if Gelon wanted to punish his angry city! That is, if it were true.

She might have lied. She might have made the whole thing up. Even were it true, long years had passed. Perhaps that broken wall had been brought to light, that cleft in the rock discovered and walled up! Goats that pointed the way to one, might have pointed it to others since then. At this thought, chilled as he was, he broke into an anxious sweat. That cleft in the rock, unseen and unknown, suddenly became the biggest thing in the world to him.

It loomed so large in his mind that he even forgot his face, wiped clean on the robe of Chryseis. But he thought of it suddenly, when he panted around a corner and broke into a glare of light from torches, and hands grabbed at him. Here were half a dozen armored men, men of the guards, men who knew him!

“Eacarcēs!” shrilled up the yell of recognition, as they gripped him. “Where is he? Where’s the tyrant? Speak, you damned dog—”

“In the temple!” blurted out Eacarcēs. “Gone to the temple—sanctuary—the altar of the god—”

Hot voices yelled. A spear-point drove at him, a sword slashed at him. Both reached him; he slumped and sprawled on the stones with blood spurting. They were off with an excited blether of voices, in a mad rush of frenzied haste.

Staggering, he came to his feet. They were just under the stairs. He looked up and saw the torches flaring along past the pediment of that

colossal statue of Apollo; torches and guards together swept up past the statue and on toward the temple beyond.

Eacarcēs stumbled forward, hand pressed hard against his side. The spear had done small damage, but the sword-cut was a bad one, under the ribs and deep. He came to the great stairs and paused there. His voice lifted bravely.

“Gelon! Come down, come down quickly! Quickly!”

A timid soul would have feared a trap, would have hesitated and hung fire. Not Gelon! He knew the voice, he knew the heart. From between the legs of the giant statue his figure slipped out and came running down the limestone stairs.

“This way! No time to waste!” said Eacarcēs, turning aside to the dark thicket along the retaining wall.

They reached it together, pressing on among the trees and brush that clad the steep slope. A faint tumult reached them from the temple; it was being searched. Gelon laughed at the sounds. On and on they fought their way, whipped by branches, seeking ever the two high cypress trees reaching into moonlit air. Eacarcēs babbled out what he had learned, as they went along. Blood was running down his leg, his energy was failing.

“There they are!” exclaimed Gelon. “A cleft in the rock behind, you say? I never heard of it. No matter! If it’s there, we’ve won!”

They came to the cypress trees and shoved in for the wall behind. Matted undergrowth checked them, but they got through.

“By the gods, you’re right!” cried Gelon. “The wall’s crumbled—climb for it!”

That was a climb indeed for the sound man, a horror for the hurt man. Gelon dragged Eacarcēs up the last length of it and stood up.

“It’s there—look!” Awe was in his voice, as he viewed the unsuspected cleft that followed the line of the ridge. But Eacarcēs, clinging to a tree, sobbed for breath and could see nothing.

“Go on,” he said. “Go on, I’ll follow. Let me wait—get my breath—make sure no one is after us. Turn right, be sure and turn right—”

Gelon, fiercely exultant, plunged away as bidden, and was gone to safety.

Eacarcus lifted his head. Everything was silent here, though it seemed that a breath of faint voices stirred in the high cypress branches. His eyes cleared. Far below lay stretched the city, white and shimmering in the moonlight. Northward were the wide plains of golden grain, stretching afar to the dark line of the hills and broken by the little river, which lifted the eye to the snowy crest of Etna in the distance. His gaze followed the line of hills as they dropped and lowered to the eastern shore by the Scalambrian cape—then everything blurred.

He caught at the tree. He could feel the strength, the very life, pouring out of him. Everything went black. Only that awful feeling of his life-stream gushing forth, and voices in the trees, voices that increased with strength, speaking his name:

“Eacarcus! Eacarcus!”

A hand was shaking him, a voice was at his very ear. He looked up. The moonlight was there, but everything else was gone—trees and temple alike. Nothing here except bare naked shelving rock, and the dark, baggy figure above him.

“Joe! For Gawdsake wake up, Joe! You ain’t hurt!”

That was Clancy’s voice—good old Clancy! With an effort, Joe Grimes sat up; all the weight of his equipment was upon him again. He found voice.

“Did he get away? Did he get away?”

Clancy shook him savagely. “Come on! The colonel’s here and there’s hell to pay—we can’t find that damned battery. The directions are all twisted.”

Dazed, struggling to comprehend, Grimes looked at his wrist, pulled back his glove, and saw the luminous dial there: 12:42. His jaw dropped, his eyes bugged out. Why, it had been 12:40 just before he hit the ground—the damned watch had stopped! But it had not stopped. He saw the sweep-second hand clicking around.

From somewhere came a growl of voices. He caught his name. Clancy shook him again.

“Come on, ya big mutt! Quit dreaming! Come on!”

He heaved himself upright, Clancy lending a hand. He looked around—what the devil! There was the same sickle-sweep of curving shoreline, the distant hills, the cape dark in the moonlight. . . .

Something came to put life in him. He lumbered forward at the dark cluster of figures and broke in upon them without ceremony or formality.

“Hey! I think I can find that place! It runs parallel with the ridge. It lays over here to the right, just along past where the temple used to be—”

“Migawd, he’s off again!” groaned somebody. “Goofy Joe! Been here before, have you?”

He swung on them fiercely. “Never mind! I know damn well what I’m doing! That place lays off to the right, and you can’t see it till you climb slap into it—”

The voice of the colonel cut in with quiet decision.

“Lead the way, Grimes. And if you lead us wrong, by God I’ll take you apart!”

He turned and lumbered away, and broke into speed. He could remember fighting along through that thicket of trees, right along this same slope. No cypresses up above now; no wall, but just the same he had the feel of the place. He pushed ahead confidently, surely. Off to the left the moonlight disclosed a little steep scarp of rock, in no way different from the rock around, but he pointed at it with his tommy-gun.

“There y’are! I told you! Up and over that—”

They went at it. A startled Italian yell quavered up from nowhere. Then they were into it before they knew it—into the long concealed battery there, guns emplaced out of sight—Eyeties running and yelling, guns stuttering away in red smashes. Then, when things had scarcely started, the show was all over, with masses of men holding up hands and waving white cloths in surrender.

A little later, the colonel strode up to Grimes and Clancy.

“That was damned good work, Grimes,” said he heartily. “You were the only one of us all who kept his bearings. Boy, it was perfect! Spread farther along that ridge yonder; they say Nazi tanks are coming up.”

When they were alone, Clancy put his head close in the moonlight.

“Good work, my eye!” he said softly. “Joe, you were havin’ one of your fits again. I know durned well you were dreaming, after we hit! I had a hell of a job fetching you out of it.”

“You’re a damned liar. I was just—just getting my bearings,” said Joe Grimes. Clancy’s big hand slammed him on the shoulder.

“Okay, feller! Keep it up, anyhow! You’ll get your chevrons out of this job, so keep it up!”

“Aw, nuts,” said Goofy Joe, and grinned happily.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *From the House of the Rat Catcher* by Henry Bedford-Jones]