

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“When a true genius appears in this world you may know him by the sign that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.”

Jonathan Swift

On the second filming trip to Texas, we took two airplanes, a Cherokee 235 that was given to me by Piper Corporation in return for the advertising benefit that they would get from my use of the plane in films, and a Cherokee Six that we were loaned by Piper Corporation. I flew one of the planes and McGee flew the other one.

We were using the top of a small mesa, a flat-topped mountain, as a landing strip because it was located very close to Devil’s River Canyon where we planned to film flying sequences. This strip was long enough for our purposes, but just barely. I planned to do all of the filming myself, while McGee did the flying; but first I had to show McGee exactly what I wanted him to do, so I dropped off Herbert on top of the mesa, took McGee with me as a passenger, and started a takeoff run from one end of the short strip.

Then, just as we left the ground, the engine stopped suddenly; I could not continue, and I could not get stopped in the remaining distance that was available, and if I ran off the edge of the mesa we would both be killed. So I crashed the airplane purposefully, that being the only way to get stopped quickly enough.

McGee opened the door and jumped out as soon as we stopped moving, and I reached down to shut off the fuel before I followed him; but the fuel was already shut off, which was why the engine failed. There being only two of us in the plane, and since I damned sure did not shut off the fuel, that narrowed it down to only one possibility: McGee, obviously, had decided to commit suicide, and wanted to take me along for the ride, and almost did.

What did I say about it to him? Nothing, what could I say? But twenty-odd years later I did mention it to him, and he then admitted it. The main landing gear on one side was pushed clear through the wing by the force of impact when I shoved the plane back on the ground and the wheel on the other side was burning directly beneath the fuel tank in the wing; the burning wheel was made out of magnesium and it caught fire because of friction with rocks on the landing strip; and, once burning, there was no way to put out the fire. I expected it to quickly burn through the thin metal on the bottom of the fuel tank and knew that if it did the airplane would be destroyed by an explosion; but, instead, the fuel in the tank apparently dispersed the heat from the fire and thus prevented an explosion rather than causing one.

When the airplane stopped moving it was sitting with the tail, one wing and the burning main wheel on the ground; but the nose was well clear of the ground and the propeller never made contact with the ground, and this created a bit of a problem later when the FAA sent an Inspector to investigate the crash. When he switched the fuel back on the engine started with no hesitation and afterwards ran perfectly; which raised a question about why the engine quit in the first place.

Later that night, on the Del Rio airport, I managed to convince the Inspector that there was a design error in the fuel system and that under certain conditions this could cause an engine failure from fuel starvation; eventually he was satisfied with this explanation although I knew it was pure bullshit. I knew why the engine quit even if I did not know why McGee did what he did.

Afterwards, using the Cherokee Six with McGee flying and me filming, we were able to film a number of very spectacular sequences for both the feature film and the television series. McGee might be crazy, and apparently was, but the son of a bitch could sure fly an airplane; he was simultaneously one of the most skilful and most dangerous pilots that I ever knew, and before his flying career was finished he probably walked away unhurt from more airplane crashes than anybody else who ever lived. During one flight that I filmed he literally flew the airplane through a tree on the edge of the canyon without hitting the tree with the propeller; the propeller screwed itself around the tree without touching it, and this was clearly established by the fact that the tail of the airplane did hit the tree. From the location of

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the damage done to the tail it was obvious that the tree had passed through the turning arc of the propeller. If the propeller had touched the tree he would have crashed into the canyon and would almost certainly have been killed.

We made arrangements with a mechanic on the Del Rio airport to remove the damaged airplane and repair it, and I also decided to have the engine overhauled at the same time since I had already flown that airplane 1,157 hours in a period of just over a year. Then we returned to Slidell. That experience on the mesa was the third crash caused by McGee that I walked away from unhurt in spite of serious damage to all of the planes involved; and, afterwards, I would never let him fly one of my planes with passengers on board; three crashes were more than enough, thank you.

About nine years later, when I started flying jets, McGee made several long trips with me, but I would never permit him to fly any of my jets; always made him ride as a passenger, and usually did so while my young wife Terri was acting as pilot in command, and that really bent him out of shape. Within a period of only twelve years, from 1974 until 1986, I bought a total of twelve jet-powered airplanes, including three four-engined, intercontinental, heavy jets that I flew all over the world, to South America, Africa, Australia, Hawaii, Tahiti and Mexico; these big jets each carried 160,000 pounds of fuel when their tanks were full, and were capable of flying around the world with only two stops enroute; seeing the look on McGee's face as he was riding as a passenger while Terri piloted these big airplanes was all that I needed in the way of revenge for the stunt that he pulled in Texas.

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Filming and picture editing were completed on the feature film, but we had reached a difficult point, all sound work remained to be done, and this had been our greatest source of problems in the past. So we went to Hollywood, looking for a sound man. We drove as far as Del Rio, Texas, in McGee's car; McGee had suffered as much as he could stand at Joyce's hands and was returning to California in search of other employment. In Del Rio we picked up the repaired plane that crashed on the second canyon filming trip and continued on to California. Joyce and I went ahead in the plane, taking Bill Binnings along as a passenger, while McGee and George Bergin followed in McGee's car.

In Los Angeles, Joyce met McGee's wife and they spent several days happily comparing notes on their opinions of McGee's shortcomings. I spent most of my time looking around Hollywood for a sound man, and Binnings spent this same period in an almost pitiful attempt to seduce an eighteen year old girl clerk at the hotel where we were staying.

Bill had fallen hopelessly in love with the girl, and insisted on telling me about it in great detail.

"Tell me the truth, Arthur. What do you really think? Am I too old for a young girl like that? I really love that girl, Arthur. I know it sounds silly, and it probably seems awfully sudden, but I've been looking for a girl like that all my life. Am I too old now that I found her? What do you really think?"

This was less than three days after he first set eyes on the girl, and I knew she had done nothing to encourage such an attitude on Bill's part. The girl was so embarrassed and confused by the attention that she came to me for advice, knowing that I was Bill's friend, and hoping I could offer some suggestion for a tactful retreat on her part. I couldn't tell Bill what I knew about the matter and there was a great deal of risk involved, regardless of the course I tried to follow. My greatest worry was that Joyce would try to influence the situation and create another disaster, probably through her attempts to advise the girl.

"Bill, I make it a practice never to advise people in matters of the heart."

"I know, Arthur, it's usually best not to get involved, but I'd really like your opinion."

"Bill, she's a nice looking girl, she seems to be at least reasonably intelligent, and she seems friendly and nice. Beyond that I can't tell you anything about her."

"That's not what I mean, Arthur. What I mean is . . ."

"I know what you mean, Bill, and I've already said that I won't get involved. That's not intended to be a short answer, I'm merely trying to say that I can't possibly advise you about your own emotional involvements, and I won't."

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“You’re probably right, you usually are. I’ll work it out for myself, but thanks for listening, that helped some, anyway. Good night.”

I escaped far easier than I anticipated, and somehow I even managed to keep Joyce from creating another disaster in a potentially dangerous situation, but the added pressure made it a rather miserable trip on my part. Either Joyce or Bill could always manage to keep me in a constant state of worried expectation; the two of them together removed any slight chance of relaxation.

I was successful in locating a sound man, Paul Laune. I phoned Paul and arranged a meeting with him privately; this was necessary, I felt, in order to give me a chance to discuss Joyce with him. I had reached a point where every decision required consideration in regard to its effect on Joyce. Would she object? How would she react? Would she be difficult? Almost nothing, seemingly, could be undertaken without first trying to calculate her reaction in advance. Prior to Joyce’s arrival, I had always been able to simply walk away from anything that became unbearable, but Joyce had created an unbearable problem that I couldn’t walk away from.

“Paul Laune? Arthur Jones. Sit down.”

“I understand Dick Carruth recommended me to you, Arthur?”

“Dick says you’re a good man, Paul. Are you looking for a job?”

“It depends. Doing what? Here or out of town?”

“Sound work, and about as far out of town as you can get. Louisiana to start with, and then Africa, then back to Louisiana. Are you interested?”

“I might be. Tell me about it.”

“Well, I can try. But I have to give you a little personal history first. To begin with, Paul, I’m not a typical Hollywood type independent producer. I’ve got a tight-knit group of very good people, and I’m looking for somebody, hopefully you, to add to that group. Somebody to handle our sound work, all of it.”

“I can do that.”

“So Dick told me. Anyway, we don’t do much of anything on the Hollywood scale and we don’t do anything, if we can possibly avoid it, Hollywood style. Let me spell that out. I own my own company. I don’t have any partners. But, on the other hand, everybody connected with the company has a piece of the action, hopefully intended to give them their fair share of what we produce. Within a period of nine years I’ve made over two hundred films, nearly three hundred. Most of ‘em, quite frankly, were pretty bad; but they’re no worse, and frequently better, than the crap they turn out here in town for ten times as much money, nor do I mean three times as much, I mean ten times. If I spend ten percent of a normal budget then I think I’m wasting money.

“I’m not looking for temporary help, I’m looking for somebody that’ll be with me ten years from now, hopefully twenty years, if I live that long. I want somebody that can do just damned near everything connected with movies, all the way from writing to acting, and everything in between. But, at the same time, they’ve got to be able to do one particular job almost entirely on their own, with little or no help.”

“Well, I can do picture editing, sound editing, music and effects, and I can do a bit of the rest of it, and I can learn what I don’t know.”

“Are you interested?”

“Keep talking.”

“All right, I’m going to Africa with a small crew, about eight people, to make fourteen television films, half hour, color, semi-documentary, narrated but with full sound tracks except for lip sync. I need somebody to do all the sound work, everything. Still think you can handle that? One show every two weeks, plus a feature thrown in every year?”

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"I know I can."

"All right, what do you make here? Scale?"

"Three, but I won't work for that."

"I'll give you three fifty a week, plus a percentage with a guaranteed value, bringing you to five a week, plus an apartment and all expenses while traveling. If things go like they should, the percentage can run to seven a week, maybe a grand, with luck."

"When do I start?"

"Well, before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let's cover a few other points first."

"All right."

"To begin with, I've got an eighteen year old daughter, Joyce, and Joyce is a bit much, to put it mildly."

"There won't be any problem there, I can assure you."

"No, just wait. You don't know what I mean. Joyce hasn't been with me long, about three months. But I've had more problems with her in that period than I've had with everybody else I've known in the last ten years, and I don't see much hope of any improvement in the near future."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it's difficult to explain. The girl was raised by an extremely religious mother, her mother and I were divorced when she was just a few months old, and for more than fifteen years I was never around her at all, not any. Then, about three months ago, she came to live with me, after a real disaster of a marriage, and she's given me nothing but trouble ever since, in any way she can."

"So how will that effect me?"

"I don't know. Any way you let it effect you, I guess. Hopefully not at all. If you can just get along with her, or, at least, ignore her, then you won't have any trouble, but she won't make it easy."

"Could I meet her? Is she out here?"

"She's in Fullerton today. What are you doing tonight?"

"Nothing in particular."

"All right, how about meeting me at the Fullerton airport, say eight o'clock. I'll take you to supper, bring a girl if you want to, and you can meet Joyce. O. K.?"

"Fine. I'll see you there at eight tonight, sharp."

"One more point, Paul. Do you mind flying? We use our own planes."

"Not in the least. I'm a pilot myself. I flew in the navy during the war."

"Good. See you tonight."

Finding sound men of any kind was extremely difficult, but finding one that was willing to leave town was almost impossible. I talked to three other men, but none of them seemed interested, nor was I very interested in them. At that point it appeared to be Paul Laune or nobody, if he was still interested after meeting Joyce.

That evening I took the entire group, including Bill Binnings and his eighteen year old girl friend, to supper in a nice restaurant in Buena Park, California, near Knott's Berry Farm. We talked for a couple of hours after eating, and then I had a private conversation with Paul.

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“I can handle the situation all right, Arthur. She won’t cause me any trouble.”

“Paul, that’s what I thought when I first saw her, but I was wrong, and I’m her father.”

“That’s the problem. But I’m not her father, she doesn’t have any wedges against me. I don’t give a damn about her problems.”

“Maybe you’re right. I hope so.”

When we returned to Louisiana, a few days ahead of Paul, I took Joyce and Herbert aside and gave them a firm talk on the subject of Paul.

“Herbert, and you too, Joyce, you’re as bad about this as Herbert is, I want you to get along with this man. Do you understand me?”

“I understand, Arthur.”

“I doubt it, I’ve seen absolutely no evidence in that direction in the past. But this man is important to us, to all of us, we need him, or at least we need somebody like him, and he’s all we’ve got. So don’t run him off two minutes after he gets here. Give him time to unpack his bag, at least.”

“I won’t run him off. Why should I?”

“You weren’t going to mess me up with Willie Schwartz, either. But you did. You damned sure didn’t have anything to gain out of that, either, and a Hell of a lot to lose, but you did it anyway. So don’t ask me, ‘why should you?’ I never know why you do anything, and I don’t think you do either.”

“I won’t cause any problems with the man.”

“See that you don’t, Herbert, it won’t be necessary to waste the first week he’s here telling him just how many kinds of a son of a bitch I am. Please be good enough to let him find that out for himself.”

“I understand.”

“Well, just in case you don’t, I’ll spell it out; that means stay to Hell off the subject of me, but completely. If he asks you what color socks I wear, just make some comment on the weather, then get to Hell away from him. You know, like jump out the window or something. But do it quick. You understand?”

“I understand.”

“I doubt it, I really sincerely doubt it. And, Joyce, everything I just told Herbert goes for you, too, in spades.”

“I’m not an idiot, you know, Arthur.”

“You’re right, you act more like an imbecile, and so does Herbert.”

I rented a large apartment in a new apartment building in Slidell, moved the necessary sound equipment into its living room, and provided this as a working and living location for Paul. He had a large bedroom and bathroom, as well as a kitchenette, completely separate from the working area, so it made an almost ideal arrangement. He was free to set his own working schedule and I left him completely alone. The most important job at the moment was finishing the sound for the feature film ‘Wild Cargo’ and I put Paul onto that immediately; three years later it was still not finished. Largely because of Joyce.

After Paul had been in Slidell long enough to go completely through the edited film, making a list of animal sounds needed for the sound-effects tracks, we went to Monroe, Louisiana, in order to record these noises in the zoo. Kit Beecher was the director of the Monroe zoo, holding a position I obtained for him three years earlier. I built the zoo on a contract for the city of Monroe in 1962, designing and directing the construction of the buildings and obtaining the animals. Joyce made the trip to Monroe with Paul and I in one of my planes, and during the flight she asked me about Kit.

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“Arthur, isn’t Kit the guy that tried to screw you on that deal in California several years ago?”

“Joyce, Kit’s screwed me on so many deals I can’t even remember most of ‘em.”

“Why don’t you just avoid him?”

“Joyce, if you avoided everybody that ever tried to screw you, I’m afraid you’d have to go live on an island someplace, a small one, the one-palm-tree type.”

“Is he still married to the same woman? Pat, or whatever her name was?”

“No, Pat’s long gone. He’s married to a hillbilly girl from North Carolina, Mildred. I told you about her. She’s the one that Herbert walked out on when she wouldn’t come right out and ask him to screw her.”

“What happened to Pat?”

“Pat was in Miami the last time I saw her, working on the beach in a strip joint, and that was eight or ten years ago. I don’t know what happened to her after that. But, earlier, after I saw how they were living in New Orleans, I took her to Florida to get her and the kids away from the French Quarter, so . . . “

“What’s wrong with the French Quarter?”

“Nothing, Joyce. It’s the people there, they’re like bad, you know. So, once she was away from there, at least the kids had some kind of a chance. I tried to get her to give the kids to a friend of mine in Slidell, but she wouldn’t hear of that, so I did the best I could under the circumstances.”

“Why didn’t the police or somebody take the kids away from her?”

“Oh, I guess they should have, Joyce, but it’s not always easy. I think Kit tried to get them taken away from her, but he never could. They would have been better off in jail than with her.”

“What about Kit’s present wife? You screwin’ her?”

“Not at the moment.”

“I don’t mean now. Did you ever?”

“Hasn’t everybody?”

“I’m serious, Arthur. Did you ever screw her?”

“I make a point not to screw my friends’ wives, Joyce.”

“You screwed Pat while she was married to Kit.”

“Kit and I weren’t too friendly towards one another at the time, either.”

“What about Mildred?”

“I’ve screwed her a few times, Joyce. What difference does it make?”

“None. I just wondered. How did you happen to screw her?”

“We were in bed together, and it just seemed like the thing to do.”

“No. What I mean is, how did it come about in the first place?”

“You’ve got to have all the juicy details, don’t you, Joyce? Well, first I took off my shirt, then I took off my pants, then I . . . ”

“Arthur!”

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“Joyce, it’s none of your damned business, so shut up about it.”

“Did you ever know any women you didn’t screw?”

“Not very many.”

“Don’t you know any decent people?”

“Like you, Joyce?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Joyce, I think I’ve known some of the finest people that ever lived.”

“Tell me about them.”

“Well, that’s a pleasant change coming from you.”

“Who were they?”

“Do you remember Peggy?”

“The big fat woman that lived in Byrd Town, down near the lower store?”

“Well, she was fat, but not very big. She was less than five feet tall.”

“I don’t remember her very well, we moved away from there when I was awfully small, and then she died before I was big enough to know much about her. But I know who you mean. What about her?”

“Well, Peggy was one of the finest people that ever lived, Joyce, one of the very best.”

“Didn’t she raise you?”

“Oh, more or less, I guess, Joyce. What little raising I got. She lived with us in Arkansas and then later in Oklahoma. I never would have met your mother if it hadn’t been for Peggy. I met your Mama when I came through to visit Peggy during the war, in the winter of ’43. February, I think it was.

“Anyway, Peggy, and, in another way, her father, had about the biggest influence on me when I was a kid.

“Peggy’s dad was an old man that lived out his last years in that little house of Peggy’s across from the lower store. I don’t know how old he was, but my memory of him as a child is still perfectly clear, when I was a child, I mean, and he seemed old as Hell then.

“Peggy was the only means of support that he had, and that couldn’t have been much, we were paying her twenty dollars a month at the time, my father was paying her, I mean. There were some other kids besides Peggy, but I never met any of the others, and I don’t think they ever helped the old man any.

“In his earlier years, just after the Civil War, he was a wanderer, something on the line of ‘Johnny Appleseed’, and he walked clear across the country, from coast to coast, several times. That was a Hell of a trip in those days; he did all of it on foot, he didn’t even have a horse, and that was when most of the western part of the country wasn’t even explored, or just barely. I knew him in the twenties, and he was about eighty then, so he must have been walking around the country about eighteen seventy or a bit earlier.

“That old man, Joyce, was one of the few examples I’ve ever seen of an almost completely independent person, he was almost totally self sufficient, and he was a Hell of a nice old man. Even if he did get drunk at times, and he made his own whiskey, too.

“That’s why Peggy finally had to quit working for us; he fell on the ice when he was drunk and broke his hip, and it never did heal properly.

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“That old man and his daughter, Peggy, are among the very few people that I have a great deal of respect for, or did, they’re both dead now. I’m sure there are lots of others just as nice, I just don’t happen to know many of them.

“Peggy was the only person from whom I experienced real compassion during the earliest years of my life. She wasn’t well educated, and maybe not even very intelligent, but she had a lot of other qualities that are more important. She was completely honest, almost to a fault, if that’s possible, and she was one of the few totally non-self-seeking people I ever knew. She would help anybody she could, in any way she could, and she did.

“Joyce, intelligence isn’t really the blessing it’s cracked-up to be, sometimes it just lets you see through the people around you, and that’s not always an advantage if you want to enjoy life. Did you ever hear the story about Diogenes?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You know who he was, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Diogenes was searching for an honorable man, walked up to a man, looked him in the eye while holding his lantern over his head, then lowered the lantern, shook his head and walked away.

“Somebody said, ‘What are you searching for, Diogenes?’

“‘I’m looking for an honorable man.’ He said

“Then he went to Italy, and he went all over the country, and still no luck. So, finally, he went to the Vatican, and he walked up to the Pope, and he looked him in the eye.

“And somebody said, ‘What are you searching for, Diogenes?’

“‘I’m searching for my lantern.’”

“So what’s the point? I don’t get it. Is it supposed to be funny?”

“He couldn’t find an honorable man, and when he went to the church he got his lantern stolen too.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“You going to screw Mildred while we’re up there?”

“Joyce, just sit back and shut up.”

We recorded the animal sounds, returned to Slidell, and Paul continued working on the sound tracks; in the meantime, I completed negotiations for the new television series, and final plans for the African trip were being made. I was left with only thirty-four percent ownership; but that percentage would pay me over a hundred thousand dollars for about fourteen months work, with an additional profit coming later. There were, in addition, certain side benefits to be expected. Altogether, I stood to make at least a quarter of a million dollars in just over a year.

Gaylord, having spent most of his life as a very pampered house pet, was far from happy living in his cage in the carport. Eliza still played with him several times a day, and he usually spent about as much time out of his cage as he did in it, but it became gradually harder to get him to return to the cage. Sometimes it required the combined efforts of two or three people to run him down, overpower him, drag him back to the cage, and heave him inside, and that was when he was in a good mood. When he was irritated, it was simply impossible to get him back into the cage until he calmed down.

Feeding time was always especially difficult; so we quickly developed the system of feeding him only inside the cage. But even that was far from easy, or safe. We fed him by opening the sliding door a few inches, whereupon he

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would seize the food and drag it inside, but there was always the danger that he might grab your hand along with the food, or force the door open and escape. Under normal circumstance, such an escape was merely a slight inconvenience, but when the jaguar smelled food he was completely unmanageable; to have him escape while you were holding food created an extremely dangerous situation, even being near him was dangerous, since he considered your presence a threat, and since he considered attack the only possible defense.

Liza opened the door too far one day while feeding him, he forced the door open even more and escaped, then somebody made the mistake of phoning the police. This was done by one of our very interested neighbors, probably the man that had been keeping the goose.

If the cat had been left alone long enough for him to finish eating and calm down, then it would have been fairly easy to get him back in his cage; but Liza made another mistake and tried to get him back into his cage before he finished eating. The jaguar grabbed her arm near the wrist, and worked his way up to her shoulder, biting and scratching her rather badly.

The cat had Liza down and was mauling her, the police had arrived and were sitting in their car with the doors and windows tightly closed; one finally did get up enough nerve to roll a window down about two inches, the neighbors were looking out their windows, the phone was ringing frantically, the police calling to ask if reinforcements were required, George Bergin was standing in the kitchen door watching helplessly, and it was a rather confused situation. Eventually, with a large towel wrapped around her arm to stop some of the blood flow, and with the help of Herbert and George, Liza was able to get the jaguar back into his cage. By that time her wounds were starting to hurt, and she was weak from loss of blood. Having saved the day, the police drove off, never having been outside their car, and never having done more than open one window, slightly.

When I returned late that night, Liza was in bed with a heavily bandaged arm and shoulder, and with a very sad look on her face, and she was furious. "Arthur, those people actually wanted to shoot my cat."

Eliza was rather badly hurt by the jaguar, and she spent several days in bed; but she was fortunate in at least one respect, she completely avoided the greatest danger from such a mauling, secondary infection, an almost inevitable result from cat bites and scratches. During her convalescence, we had an opportunity to discuss my continuing problems with Joyce, a subject that had been almost impossible to discuss for several weeks, since Joyce made a point of keeping us apart as much as possible, and intruded upon all conversations that she was aware of.

"Arthur, you're much too hard on the girl; you keep telling me you want to build up her self confidence, but you keep slapping her down, verbally if not literally, and sometimes you sound like you might even do it literally."

"Liza, you're not even aware of most of the problems I've been having with Joyce, and you probably wouldn't believe me if I told you; the girl's in far worse shape than you realize, and I've got to use force, nothing else works. I thought Herbert was difficult, but she makes him look like a saint."

"So tell me about it, what's she been up to that I don't know about?"

"Liza, I can't tell you about it, or I won't; if she gets better, if she gets straightened out, then the fewer people that know about it the better. I don't want to create another situation like the one we've got with Herbert, and we will if too many people know about it. She hates you enough now, there's no point in adding any more fuel to that fire."

"What did she tell you about the 'blood wings'?"

"Oh, she denies the whole damned thing; that's just another example of people trying to make her look bad, according to her. Exactly what happened? Did you ever get the whole story?"

"She went out on a date, a double date, and they parked somewhere, and the other couple got out of the car and walked off; then, when they went back to the car, it was pretty obvious what was happening. So they waited, and a bit later, when they saw Joyce lighting a cigarette, they figured it was all right to go back to the car. Then, a few days later, Joyce was showing her 'blood wings' to her date's sister, and bragging about how much he liked her, and she finally

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just said too much; so the other girl opened a drawer and pulled out about a dozen 'blood wings', and stuck 'em under Joyce's nose.

"So that's what Joyce is mad about, she feels like she's been 'seduced and abandoned', and she thinks half the people in town are laughing about her behind her back, and some of them are; but it's her own damned fault, falling for an old line like that. I can just hear him, 'Yes, it's terrible, the men in my outfit just don't have a chance, I doubt if any of us'll get back, but that's the way it is during a war, and somebody's got to fight. Now Joyce, I'm going to give you something, and maybe it won't mean much to you, but it means a great deal to me, my 'blood wings', the symbol of my outfit; this means more to me than anything I have, and it's the only way I can think of to show you just how much I care for you. Then, if I don't come back, you'll always have them as a symbol of my love.'

"Then, when she gave his sister a big spiel about having his 'blood wings', you can just imagine Joyce's reaction when she saw about a dozen more. He'd been spreading 'em all over town, he bought 'em in the PX, probably by the gross, so that works out to about fifteen cents a lay, that's even cheaper than going to a whorehouse; so, when Joyce found out about that, and his sister really spelled it out, well, you can just imagine the scene.

"One thing that did surprise me a bit, though; Joyce seemed awful damned anxious to keep you from finding out about it. Knowing her, I can understand why she was mad about it, and probably embarrassed, but it was more than that; she was actually afraid, she was scared to death you'd find out, and it worried her, and it still does. And, if she ever finds out I told you, then the fat will be in the fire. But I still think you're being too hard on her; I know you give in to her in a lot of ways, probably far too much, but the way you talk to her."

"Have you noticed the way she talks to me?"

"Arthur, that's no excuse, the girl is sick."

"Liza, that's all she understands; do you think I like breaking my hands on Herbert's head? I do it because I have to, he simply doesn't understand anything else, I've got to hit him to get his attention, that's why I started kicking him, I was ruining my hands; and Joyce is the same way, she talks like she does because it frightens her when somebody threatens her, so she thinks her threats frighten other people.

"I've tried everything I can think of, or damned near everything, and the only thing she understands is force, or the threat of force; you don't treat all people the same, or you shouldn't, you treat people the way they need to be treated, the way they demand to be treated. You don't shoot a sick child, and you don't pet a mad dog, or you damned sure shouldn't. That's the biggest problem in the world today, they treat a little pip squeak bastard like Castro like he was a God or something, they ought to go down there and blow his brains out."

"Arthur, let's don't get started on politics, I'm tired of hearing it, and . . ."

"Liza, that's another big problem, too damned many people are tired of hearing it, so they just ignore it, and the politicians just love that, they can do any damned thing they want to, and nobody cares, or nobody objects, at least; but I was just making a point, I don't like the way I have to talk to Joyce any more than you do, probably a lot less, but it's necessary at the moment. I've tried reasoning with her, I've talked to her for hundreds of hours, and it didn't do a damned bit of good; she usually turns right around and throws it back in my face, twisted so bad I can't even recognize it, or just barely."

"What does her mother say? Or is she even aware of what's going on?"

"She says about the same things she said to start with, she smirks and says, 'You thought I was exaggerating about Joyce, didn't you?' And she's got me there, I really did; but she wasn't, Hell, she didn't know the half of it, and she still doesn't. And I don't even bother to tell her, what's the point? Let her get a little peace and quiet while she can, she put up with Joyce for eighteen years, and she didn't squawk for help from me, so now it's my turn."

"She might be able to help, Arthur, if she knew the truth about what's happening. You should tell her the truth anyway, out of common decency if nothing else."

"...And God Laughs"

The Arthur Jones Collection

“Liza, the girl just damned near drove her crazy, and she can’t help, she can no more understand Joyce than Herbert can; Joyce is completely beyond her understanding, so why worry her about it? I’ll be the goat in the end anyway, no matter what happens; if Joyce doesn’t get better, or gets worse, then it’ll be my fault, and, if she does get better, then it’ll be my fault because she didn’t improve even more. So I can’t win on that score, no matter what happens, but I couldn’t care less; I gave up worrying about what people think a long time ago, if I want to wear my pants on my head, then I’ll do it, and people that don’t like it can go fuck themselves. You don’t fit the definition of a conformist very closely either, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“Arthur Jones, you’re a dirty old man.”

“I have a right to be, I was a nasty baby too. You should have known me when I was twenty years younger, Hell, I’m practically a saint now, by comparison.”

“Arthur, what do you really think about Joyce? Do you think she will improve?”

“I’m almost afraid to say; but, if she doesn’t, then she’s in real trouble. She’s too much like me in some ways, and too much different in other ways and it’s a damned dangerous combination. In some ways Joyce is so much like me that it frightens me; I look at her and I see myself twenty years ago, or almost, there’s one important difference, Joyce is mean, she’s mean as Hell, and I never was. I’ve been involved in a lot of violence, but some people seem to attract violence, and I just happen to be one of them, but I don’t like it, and I never did, and I avoid it if I can. But Joyce doesn’t, she likes it, or she would, if she wasn’t a coward; and that’s another difference, I never was afraid of anything, or not much, but she is, she’s damned near as bad as Bill Binnings, not quite, but almost. But, in her case, that’s a blessing, that’s all that stops her from doing a Hell of a lot more damage than she does, just fear, simple fear.

“If she wasn’t such a coward, she’d be dangerous as Hell, and she’s bad enough as it is, a lot worse than you realize, a lot worse. But the similarities to me are what frighten me, she uses almost exactly the same methods I do, but she uses them to hurt people; I never hurt anybody in my life if I could possibly avoid it, and a lot of times I didn’t even do it when I should have, and that usually just led to more trouble. But Joyce does, she likes to hurt people, she hates damned near everybody she ever knew, and she’s constantly talking about destroying people, and she means it, and someday she’ll try it, if I can’t get her straightened out first.”

“Changing the subject for a moment, Arthur; how’s Paul getting on? Have you been able to keep Herbert away from him?”

“Paul’s not happy and I don’t know why; it could be Joyce, but he says not, and she says not, so I really don’t know. But he’s not going to Africa with us. I made a deal with him to finish the sound on the feature, but we’ll have to get somebody else to do the television films. He’s going back to Hollywood as soon as he gets the first three reels finished, and we’ll have that much done by the time we get back from Africa. I wanted to have the whole thing finished before we left, but I’ve been damned lucky to get this much done; Joyce stays on my neck constantly, but I get a bit done while she’s asleep.

“Paul’s a funny guy, Liza, in several ways; when I first met him I thought he was a queer, so I just asked him, point blank, and he laughed about it and said no. And now I don’t think so either. He told me he was a navy pilot during the war, but he doesn’t seem to know a damned thing about flying; so I called Bupers, that’s the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, and they wouldn’t tell me a damned thing, they wouldn’t even tell me if he was ever in the navy, they said it was confidential information. He also told me he was a cop in Los Angeles, so I called them, and they gave me the whole story, and it checked out just like he said. They said he was an ex-navy pilot, and they said he had a good record on the Los Angeles police force, and that he was subject to reemployment, if he applied within two years; after that he’d be too old.

So his story checks out all the way, and I get along with him fine, but he’s still not happy, so we’ll have to look for somebody else when we get back from Africa, but I’m damned if I even know where to look.”

“How’s his work coming along?”

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“Liza, he’s working, but that’s about all I can tell; if he wants to, and if he’s capable of doing a good job, then he’s doing it; but I can’t tell a damned thing by listening to it on a moviola, it could be the best sound in the world, or the worst, but I won’t know ‘till I hear the finished job. Dick Carruth recommended him, and Dick did the sound for me on ‘Savage’, and he did a Hell of a good job, so all I can do is take his word for it.”

“Getting back to Joyce, and her mother, what does her mother think about her going to Africa?”

“I don’t really know, I don’t even know what I think about it; but I can tell you what Bill thinks about it, he doesn’t like it worth a damn, and I don’t really blame him; for the first time in his life he may be right about something. But I don’t have any choice; I know she’ll cause trouble, but I’ll just have to put up with it the best way I can.”

When we returned from a final trip to South America, George Bergin returned with us; he had been working with Raymond Johnson in Colombia, but it was never a very satisfactory arrangement, since Raymond considered George a spy for me, and George considered Raymond an idiot for permitting himself to be swindled so easily, so, when I pulled out of the South American business entirely, there was no question of George remaining. For a few weeks George talked about leasing one of the bombers from me and reestablishing the tropical fish hauling business; but, in the end, he decided to make the African trip.

To complete the crew for the African trip, I hired two other men, Donald Spence and Jerry Young. Donald was a young man of about thirty, fairly tall, slender, and rather dark; he was from central Mississippi and had worked for me on an irregular basis for a period of nearly ten years, both in the United States and in South America, but this would be his first African trip.

Jerry Young was about forty, slightly crippled by bad feet, and almost grotesquely ugly, with widely spaced, extremely protruding, dark green teeth. Jerry lived and worked with Raymond Johnson for a number of years before Raymond went to South America, and, nearly ten years earlier, Jerry worked for me, although briefly.

Donald would go to Africa with a party of six traveling by air, the others being Bill Binnings, Herbert, George, Joyce, and myself; Jerry would go by sea, together with the heavier pieces of equipment. Liza was traveling separately as far as Europe, and would remain there until I sent for her, which I could only do if Joyce failed to stay during the entire period scheduled. Following final arrangements for the trip, I took Herbert to a nearby restaurant for a private conversation.

“I’ve got to take Joyce on the trip. I don’t want to, but I’ve got to, even though I know damned well she’ll cause trouble. And Bill will cause trouble too, unless we anticipate it, and plan for it, and that’s what I’m trying to do right now. In so far as Joyce is concerned, all you can do is try to ignore her, and I realize that won’t be easy, especially for you, but I want you to try. She’s trying to run you off, Herbert, that’s what she wants to do, and she will if you let her; so, when you let her get on your nerves, then you’re playing right into her hands, that’s exactly what she’s trying to do.

“In Bill’s case it’s not so simple; Bill needs a kicking boy, and you’re it. He needs somebody to blame all his own screw-ups on, a goat, a patsy; so, when he does something wrong, then I’m going to jump on you, in front of him, and that’ll get the idea across to him without hurting his sensitive ego. Now, do you think your sensitive ego can stand that?”

“I think so, if it has to be done.”

“It does; Bill needs two things, he needs a goat, and he needs somebody’s shoulder to cry on. You’re the goat, and I’m the shoulder; and that’s the way it’s got to be. That’s not the way I want it, Herbert, that’s the way it is. I don’t want you to irritate Bill, and I don’t want you to even talk to him if you can avoid it, and you can if you try, but you’ll have to try; I don’t want anybody to talk to him, when he wants to talk to somebody, then I want him to talk to me. Bill talks himself into things, and it always causes trouble, and all he needs is for somebody to listen to him, he doesn’t need somebody to agree with him, all they have to do is listen; so, when he talks, I’m going to be the one listening, and I’ll kick Hell out of anybody I catch talking to him, or even listening, that’s worse. Now, do you think you understand that?”

“...And God Laughs”

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“I understand it; but there’s one thing I don’t like, I don’t like you letting Joyce run Liza off.”

“Herbert, you’ve been trying to run Liza off for the last two years, why the sudden change of heart?”

“Well, I just changed my mind about her, that’s all.”

“No, Herbert, that’s not all, that’s not anything, in fact; you just want what you don’t have. If she was staying, then you’d want her to leave; but, since she’s leaving, then you want her to stay. But don’t say anything about it to her yet, she doesn’t know about that part of it herself. Where did you find out about it?”

“Joyce told me, she was damned happy about it too, she was practically gloating about it.”

“That’s interesting, I’ve been trying to decide what to do for weeks, and you’re the first one I told, I haven’t even mentioned it to Liza yet.”

“Well, Joyce knows it, or she thinks she does, at least.”

“Herbert, the things I told you a moment ago about Joyce and Bill are important; this trip means a Hell of a lot to all of us, but I can’t do every damned thing by myself, I need a little help at times, and I could damned sure do without any more unnecessary problems. But I’m going to have them from both Joyce and Bill, and I know it, so I would appreciate a little something in the way of cooperation from you, for a change.”

“Arthur, I’m not going to create problems, unnecessarily or otherwise.”

“Yeah, well you said that before, but you always do, anyway. Now, I could lecture you ‘till I’m blue in the face, but it wouldn’t be any plainer than I’ve already put it, so I’m going to shut up about it, and then we’ll just see. But I warn you here and now, one more stunt’ll be your last. O. K.?”

“All right, Arthur, I won’t cause any trouble.”

“Get the stuff packed, make out a list, check everything twice, and then bring it to me and I’ll check it. We’re leaving day after tomorrow.”