

Glamour Boys

Book II of the Boxcar Kid Series



A Novel by

Dick
Miller

The "Glamour Boys," members of the elite group of aircraft carrier fighter pilots who risked their lives and faced off as the first line of defense with America's enemies



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BOOK II OF THE BOXCAR KID SERIES

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ArcheBooks Publishing

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of

PAT MIDDLEKAUFF

My first editor whose literary expertise and guidance helped me hone this and my first novel, "The Boxcar Kid," into finished products



September 3, 1935- September 4, 2008

With Thanks

For those who encouraged, supported and stood by me...

My wife, Donna, who continued to encourage me and support my efforts through *Glamour Boys*, members of my immediate and extended family; members of Zion Lutheran Church in Fort Myers, Florida; my extended faith community; fellow members of the Gulf Coast Writer's Association and my Fiction Writing Group.

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Mike Behrns-Miller (<http://blog.thedigitalmachine.com>)

Dan Miller (<http://hightechgeek.com>)

For those who provided historical facts, personal stories...

Otto ("Bud") Aadland, PT boat squadron, World War II,

Pacific theatre.

Bowen, 1st Lt. William, First Audio-Visual Educational Advisor to CCC, started program in 5 teacher's colleges, supervisor of camps at Yorktown, Mount Solon, Weir's Cove, and Hanover Courthouse, VA., 1936-38, active military duty in WW II, May, 1941.

Brouser, George, Activist and organizer in "Young American Patriots" (also name of a publication distributed among WWII veterans who enlisted underage). Served in the 10th Mountain Division in Italy.

Filipowicz, Rosemary, P.A. (Ret.), wife of Casimir (contributor to *The Boxcar Kid, Book I*). Biked across Germany, Austria with touring group as a young girl in late '30s. Witnessed the effects of the rising tide of the Nazi party.

Hayes, Captain Morris L., USN (Ret), CFO, Treasurer, Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, Inc., Pensacola, FL.

Janda, AM1 Donald, U.S. Navy (Retired)

Kennedy, Carver G. Fayetteville, GA. Retired solid rocket engineer, Cape Canaveral, FL. Historian, aficionado of World War II Pacific theatre.

Lemke, AM3C Lester, USN, *USS San Francisco*, WW II, Pacific theatre.

Lewis, Ivan, Rear Admiral, USN (Ret).

Rasmussen, Robert L., Director, National Museum of Naval Aviation, Pensacola, FL.

Salzmann, Harold [+], Whiting, N.J. Midshipman, US Navy on *USS Stanton* (transport ship). The Stanton was the only ship in its convoy to escape torpedoes in encounter with German subs in Mediterranean Sea in 1942.

Sieber, Lieutenant (Jr. Grade), Fighter pilot, World War II, Pacific theatre.

Sowa, Mary Louise, English language instructor in Japan.

Snyder, Ken [+], National Museum of Naval Aviation, Library/Research Division. Earned his *wings* in the Cadet Training program initiated in 1936 at NAS, Pensacola, FL. to enlist pilots who were not Annapolis trained.

[+] In memoriam.

PREFACE

During the Great Depression of the 1930's when Bucky rode the rails with his trusted black friend, K.O. (Jeremiah Franklin), he rescued Emily from bondage under her abusive captor, Josh. After a dispute with her father, Emily ran away into the arms of Josh, a young thug, who made her pregnant, took her onto the rails and sold her for sexual favors. After Bucky defeated Josh in an intense fight and threw him off the train, Buck became Emily's protector.

Before Bucky succeeded in reconnecting Emily with her family in Springfield, Illinois and became a member of that household as well, the couple found a respite in St. Louis where they were taken in and mentored by Father Michael Griffin and his wife, Becky. Father Griffin had laid Bucky's mother to rest in York, Pennsylvania, prior to Bucky's departure to ride the rails. Later, the young priest was transferred to St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in St. Louis.

It was during this period, while Bucky served in the Civilian Conservation Corps in Virginia, and Emily remained with the Griffins in St. Louis, that Bucky lost contact with his own family.

The Ellis family had moved to Sunbury when Bucky's father, Chuck Ellis, took work in the mines after he lost his job in Altoona. Only after Bud, Bucky's sixteen-year-old brother, met his tragic death in a mining accident did Helen, the family's loving stepmother, pen the tearful letter to Bucky

about where they were and what had happened.

Neither Bucky nor Helen had any knowledge that the letter had been pilfered from the Company Store mailbag by Crusher's stoolie and forwarded to Crusher. The "Mastermind" destroyed the letter keeping only what interested him...the envelope with Bucky's St. Louis address where Crusher could find him and inflict more pain on his victim.

Helen could have inquired further after she failed to receive a response to her letter. When no word came, she felt Bucky had justifiably blamed her and his father for the tragic death of his young brother. Feeling utterly forsaken, and in despair, she gave up any hope of finding Bucky and bringing him home.

Crusher remains in this sequel to inflict dreadful harm on his hated victim, who left him with a permanent disfigurement of his face and a missing eye after Bucky's interference preventing Crusher from killing K.O. in a vicious railroad yard altercation.

Known only as "The Mastermind" by a network of hardened criminals and recruited felons pressed into service by intimidation and rewards, Crusher built a nation-wide criminal operation enabling him to access resources and people who kept a close eye on his victim's every move.

Aware of Crusher's uncanny ability to show up anywhere at any time to hurl malevolent assaults against him, Bucky continued to harbor a gnawing fear that Crusher would find

1. PSYCHO

AUGUST 1936, Chicago, Illinois

“Here’s your key, Mr. Lane. Welcome back,” the hotel clerk said.

Crusher always used a different alias at places he stayed when he made personal supervisory visits to various locations of his criminal empire. In Chicago, fake IDs and business cards identified him as Mr. William Lane of Lane Construction, Incorporated.

This was his fifth visit to Windemere House. It had not changed much since his first stay in 1933 when two attempts to ruin Bucky at the Chicago Century of Progress World’s Fair misfired. The familiarity of the place brought some comfort to this itinerant crime boss who had no permanent roots in the life he had chosen.

The Mastermind’s stay would only include four days, and, except for an oversized satchel, Crusher packed light. He always carried his own suitcase in addition to a tightly packed satchel which he never left out of his sight.

In this sprawling, expanding criminal network there were still tasks that fell to the Mastermind alone. Such clandestine visits to the centers of operation to observe the loyalty and effectiveness of his crew had become a standard routine.

In the course of these visits, Crusher also spent time closeted in his room with the door bolted from the inside, with a

Glamour Boys

“Do Not Disturb” sign hung on the outer doorknob.

Inside, Crusher opened the satchel and removed the contents, spreading items out on the desk and the bed. Crusher prized each piece gleaned from one of the traps he had set for his hated enemy. No one else would have particularly valued these things, but Crusher kept each item in a special container as if it were a rare museum piece. Whenever he returned to the solitude of his room, he felt his heart racing with excitement in anticipation of the moment he would open the satchel and pull out each of his “toys,” one at a time.

Ah, the comb...I love the comb the sorry little bastard dropped when I took him at the Chicago World's Fair. Like it was yesterday, I can see his wide open eyes narrowed to slits when I pressed the chloroform to his face. Crusher put the comb to his nose. The odor had long since dissipated, but Crusher's mind indulged him with the memory of the fragrant Wildroot Cream Oil Bucky used for grooming his hair. *Ahh...so sweet. And one strand of his mane still entwined in its teeth, carefully preserved. Handle with care!* He fingered the item tenderly, turning it over in his hands as he revived the memory of the scene with real and imagined details. Recreating in his mind the act of experiencing his victim falling limp in his arms instantly increased the rapid beating of his heart.

He exchanged the comb for the next item: a fragment of a rope. *Oh, yes! The rope. Trying to keep up with the car that pulled you along, your athletic legs blurred. My excitement rises as my imagination recreates what happened when my man hit the car's brakes and you smashed your pretty face and body into the back of the car and you fell squat onto the ground.* Crusher laughed out loud. *Oh, yes...I've run that little scene by over and over...I never get tired of that one!*

Next in his ritual came the duplicate of the phony ticket

DICK MILLER

he printed for a free ride on the Sky Ride at the Chicago's Century of Progress World's Fair when he lured Bucky and K.O. to the tower that night...and so it continued into the night and climaxed into Crusher's plans for the next oppressive challenge that might ruin his targeted prey, perhaps forever.

Since I found his whereabouts at the home of the doctor and his family in Springfield, Illinois, I am close to striking again. But I pause. He is surrounded by others who idolize him. I must find a way to get to him when he is alone. I can't decide in my mind which of the ever accumulating gruesome desecrations in my mind is suitable to unravel the asshole's confidence.

2. KENNY'S REVENGE

AUGUST 1936, Springfield, Illinois

No knock, no doorbell...just a thrown open door with a boy with hazel brown eyes and tousled auburn hair standing in the door frame.

"Kenny, you're back. I'm so glad!"

Dottie quick-stepped over to the boy who had a smirk on his face and a cocky stance, and embraced him. With her hand behind his head she drew it forward producing a fusion of their lips in shared passion.

"Hey, doll, glad to see ya missed me."

"Yeah, couldn't wait to hear how the plan worked."

"I t'ought out things as I went along, and it was as smooth as silk. You opened my eyes when you were fightin' mad when I told you whut happened when Mastermind sent his man to chew me up and spit me out when I kidnapped the tyke. I t'ought da Mastermind would like dat, but instead he sent his stooge to hand me a one way ticket to Butte, Montana and told me if I didn't leave and go dere, the Big Man would get me."



Two weeks earlier, when the agent told the brash 16 year-old of the Mastermind's decision to banish him to a remote and desolate place, Kenny shook with fear. By making the

decision to kidnap Michelle and go beyond his assignment to observe and issue reports on the activities of the Bernard family, he enflamed the Mastermind's wrath. Not knowing the context of this assignment, it never occurred to him that such an act might arouse the authorities, putting at risk the exposure of Mastermind's identity.

When Dottie, his nineteen-year-old accomplice and lover, learned of this mysterious mobster's order to abandon the child inside the lavatory of the local hospital and to leave Springfield immediately, she flew into a rage.

"What the hell is the matter with you, Kenneth?"

"Uhh...the agent said if I didn't go to Montana, da Mastermind would find me and report me to the police. If the guy waitin' f'r me at Butte doesn't see me get off da train wit' da marked hat I'm supposed to wear, I'm a piece of dead meat. You know he's got enuf on me to put me in jail f'r life."

"Don't you know if he did that, he would be risking his own neck? How could he do that without alerting the police to his own identity and revealing to them what he's done?"

"Gee, baby, I never t'ought about dat."

"Well you should have. Fight back, Kenny. Don't let him do this. How can you be so stupid?"

"Now wait a minute, dollface. I ain't well ejudated...but I ain't no fool. I'm smart as a fox when it comes to the streets and gettin' my due. Put one of those smart ass school kids in the streets and he'd be in a sorry state pretty quick."

Regaining some of his confidence, Kenny continued, "You're smarter dan me, and you've gotten me out of plenty of jams, and there's no question dat you loves me like I loves you. But, listen up. I got me an idea. Whut if I turn the tables on Mr. Big? Whut if I can find out who he is and put the screws on *him*?"

Glamour Boys

Dottie pondered his words for a moment. "Well," she said, "I guess you're not as dumb as I thought. Revenge! That's ingenious. But how would you be able to do that?"

"Whut if I took the ticket and went to Montana, but fingered da guy lookin' f'r me before he found me? Here's how I t'ink I could do it...."



Butte, Montana

Passengers at the windows watched the scenery fly by while the train sped towards Butte, Montana. As the distance shortened between the train and Butte, Kenny specked out the people to find a dupe for his plan. His eyes fell on a young boy about his age.

Geeze, dis is almost like a set-up. The kid's all alone wit' an empty seat next to him. He's perfect.

Kenny went to him and asked, "Is this seat taken? Mind if I sit here?"

"No. Go ahead and sit down."

"My name's Kenny. Whut's yours?"

"Clemson. My friends call me Clem."

"Where ya from and where ya goin'?"

By the time the train rolled into the Butte station, the two had become friends.

Kenny said, "Gee, look out the window. It's friggin' cold out there. You got somethin' to put on y'r head?"

"No. I just got this coat," Clem said.

"Say, I got dis hat. Ya can pull it down over ya ears. Here, you can have it."

"I don't want to take your hat. What will you wear?"

“I got anodder one in my bag. I ain’t stoppin’ here and I’ll get it out at the next station. We become friends. It’ll be somethin’ to remember me by.”

“Hey, that’s big of you. You’re a great guy. Glad I met you.”

Clem put the knitted cap on his head. Kenny pulled the folds down. The black knitted cap had a big red circle on its front.

“Der, dat will keep y’r ears toasty warm.”

The boy went to the end of the car and waved back at Kenny before disappearing down the steps to the platform.

Kenny stood and watched him turn up his collar against the cold and walk across the platform to the station. Then he raced to the other end of the car and slipped off the train without the boy seeing him. On the platform, Kenny caught a quick glimpse of his target, but the image was blocked by a big, burly man who slipped into Clem’s path behind him. With the big man and Kenny following, Clem marched straight through the station and out the front door. Kenny saw Clem step outside and instantly stop and lean at a sharp angle into a cold wind. Clem reached up and pulled the sides of the knitted cap down farther over his ears for warmth. The burly man stepped out next to him and politely relieved him of the suitcase he carried. Through the tower window at the door, Kenny could watch the two who stood only a few feet away from him. The big man was smiling at Clem, as if to offer friendly assistance. Then, taking Clem by the arm, the man pulled him aside. Before they disappeared from his narrow window view, Kenny saw the face of the open-mouthed boy contorted into a look of surprised shock. Kenny carefully cracked the door open and peered outside. *Where did they go? Nothing here but a parking lot.* A few remaining passengers from

Glamour Boys

the train walked around him headed in different directions away from the entrance.

The Butte railroad station was a two-story brick edifice with a tall clock tower standing like a sentry pasted front and center onto the building. People entering or leaving the station walked through the small vestibule at the base of the tower. Taking a few steps to his left, Kenny heard sounds coming from around the corner of the tower. *Aha! They ducked around da corner and are back by da buildin'.*

Kenny walked into the parking lot where others loitered, and he could see Clem and Crusher's stoolie without drawing undue attention to himself. Crusher's agent leaned into the boy pressed into the corner with his back to the wall. Clem threw up his hands in a gesture indicating he didn't know what was going on. He saw the agent hand him something...a wad of money, that seemed to calm him. The agent grabbed the cap and seemed to be making references to it. Clem shook his head in a "no" response, and then started talking non-stop.

In his imagination, Kenny tried to piece together what he observed. *If he t'inks the kid's me, he probably is handin' him the money pretendin' 'The Mastermind has a job for me. Maybe it's a ruse to keep me from thinkin' I'm gonna be rubbed out. He probably mentioned my name to Clem, since he t'inks it's me. Oh boy...if dat's whut he did, the kid is probably tellin' 'im dat I gave 'im da hat. He's explainin' it to 'im. I can see by his face dat the Mastermiind's mole is takin' it all in.* He watched the operative lift his hands in an apologetic gesture and push Clem away, after which the boy fled.

Crusher's man went back into the station. Discretely, Kenny followed him. It was a risky thing to do, but he assumed that the kid had told the operative that Kenny had continued on the train to the next stop, and that the agent

would abandon his search for him in this place.

Inside, he saw his target go to a Western Union window, no doubt to send a telegram to the Mastermind. Brazenly, Kenny stepped in line right behind him and listened to the information relayed to the man on the other side of the window. No need to write anything down. Kenny's mind was sharp and he could remember every word... the Chicago P.O. address...the message: *Did not get K who gave cap to another kid who took his place. K stayed on train. Awaiting further orders.*



Springfield, Illinois

"The poor sap walked away in a hurry, lookin' around as if he was scart of somethin', of which I ain't surprised."

"What a plan," Dottie said, putting her hands on his shoulders and giving him a proud look. "Did you catch the train back right away?"

"Not quite. I wasn't quite done," Kenny said with a fiendish look.

"What did you do?"

"I waited a little, so the clerk at Western Union wouldn't suspect anything. I went back and sent a message to the same address."

"You mean you sent it to Crusher?"

"Yeah."

"What did you say?"

"Nothin' much. Just somethin' to scare the pants off 'im. I said, *I'm still here and I'll be seein' ya soon. You c'n bet on it.*"

Struck silent, Dottie stared at him with wide, unbelieving eyes. Then she said, "I don't believe it. You are wise beyond

Glamour Boys

your years, little boy. I've got to hand it to you. I hope you have a plan now to get us the hell out of here before he finds us."

"I t'ought about dat already. Tomorra we pack up and go up to dat little cabin we got down in da Ozarks. Nobody can find us dere."

"Don't you think we should leave tonight?" Dottie asked.

"Tonight is f'r celebrat'n. I t'nk I got a reward comin' from ya, eh?"

She smiled up at him.

"I'm hankerin' f'r some satisfact'n right now, baby."

"Me too," Dottie said. "And now that you mention it, I got something here for you to satisfy that hankering."

She went to a cupboard and reached up to the top shelf and brought a small box down and slapped it in Kenny's hand. He opened his palm and read the word "Trojan."

"Whut's dis?"

"They're rubbers, Kenny. You roll them up on your rod before we have sex."

"Whut?"

"It keeps your cream from getting inside me, get it? We can have sex as much as we want without worrying about having any little brats."

"Fun, fun, fun," he said as Dottie grabbed his hand and pulled him into the bedroom.

3. A DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY OPENS

AUGUST, 1936, Springfield, IL

“Bucky, I’ve been wanting to sit down and have this talk with you for some time,” Emily’s father said.

“Sure, Mr. Bernard.”

“I’ve got to tell you something, but I really don’t know quite how to say it.”

Bucky waited while Geoffrey Bernard drew a deep breath, gave a sigh, and continued.

“Buck, you know we have two girls.”

The boy nodded at this rhetorical question.

“I love them dearly, but before each of them was born, I longed for a boy. For a number of reasons, after the girls arrived, we didn’t try for more children. In our love for these wonderful children, we felt fully satisfied.”

For a moment Geoffrey stared at Buck’s face in silence.

“But when you came along, and I got to know what an outstanding young man you are, I began to think of you as the kind of boy my son would have been if I had one.”

Bucky shifted his gaze down in modesty.

“Forgive me, Buck, for getting a bit syrupy about this. Let me cut to the chase. What I want to tell you is that I care about you as a father would a son, and I want to be sure you have a chance to make something of yourself. I did some

Glamour Boys

checking on public school records in York, Pennsylvania where you grew up. You never told us that you moved to the fourth grade from the second, and that you had started high school when you were still twelve-years-old and, at thirteen, you were partway through the 10th grade when you left home.”

“That was a long time ago,” Buck said. “Back then, I think they skipped a lot of kids that year.”

“Buck, education is important for young men like you. I’ve seen the gifts and talents you have to make a meaningful dent in this world. Buck, have you ever thought about what you want to be doing with the rest of your life?”

Without hesitation, Bucky answered, “Yes, as a matter of fact, I have.”

“You have?”

Bucky noted the wide-eyed look of surprise on Geoffrey’s face.

“Well, tell me, what do you aspire to do with your life?”

“I want to be a pilot, sir.”

“A pilot! Well that’s challenging. Whatever you will be doing, you’ll need a good education. With your consent...and I want to succeed in getting that from you in earnest...I want to put you on a track to get the rest of your schooling and a high school diploma. I have contacts who can plan a track for you that I think can work, combining tutoring as well as classes. You already have a good foundation that was started in York.”

“I don’t know what to say, Mr. Bernard. You would do that for me? Is there a way that it could happen? How could I refuse such an opportunity?”

“Buck, there is a fine educator I know who will come to the house to tutor you. I’ll pay for his lessons. All you need to

do is apply yourself and study. You'll have homework and you'll need to work hard, but you can move at your own pace, perhaps completing what is needed in a shorter period of time. I've seen your maturity and intelligence. I think it will be a piece of cake."

"Does Emily know about this?"

"Yes."

"And does she approve?"

"Yes, heartily, I might add...as long as it doesn't interfere with the wedding plans, of course."

They both laughed as they stood and Geoffrey grabbed Buck and they hugged each other.

"And by the way, my good man. Since you'll soon be my son-in-law, why don't you call me 'Dad'?"

"Hey, O.K., Dad," he said, as they slapped each other's backs.

"One more thing, Buck. What made you want to be a pilot?"

4. THE BIRTHING OF A DREAM

OCTOBER 1927, York, Pennsylvania

Bucky Ellis' passion for aviation ignited when, as a young boy growing up in York, he read a story about Eugene Ely. The first pilot to make a daring landing in a flimsy aircraft onto the modified landing deck of the *USS Pennsylvania* in San Francisco Bay on January 18, 1911, Ely performed the feat that captured the young boy's imagination nine years before Bucky's birth. At ten-years-old, his inspiration blossomed over exploits of the most renowned flyer of the day. Charles Lindbergh's bold 1927 transatlantic flight took the world by storm, and radio broadcasters and newspapers hailed the achievement as historic.

In those days, Buck and his friend, Tim Spinakker, spent hours together in the printing room of *The York Gazette* where Tim's dad worked. They picked up firsthand news of events before the paper hit the street. They knew about Lindbergh's successful transatlantic venture before any of their friends.

Every red-blooded young boy admired this national hero and wanted to emulate Lindbergh. Buck collected photos and clippings about the aviator and tacked them onto his bedroom wall.

Now the big news championed in the *Gazette* headlines hailed Lindbergh's planned transcontinental trip across Amer-

ica to promote aviation. The excitement of the two boys peaked when they learned Lindbergh had agreed to put York on his itinerary. He did this in response to an invitation by city leaders as they organized the celebration of a historic 150th anniversary event.

The event commemorated the signing of the *Articles of Confederation*, the first Constitution of the United States, on November 15, 1777 when the Second Continental Congress had gathered at York after the British routed the patriots from their former gathering place in Philadelphia.

The Gazette trumpeted the 150th anniversary as the grandest celebration the city had ever seen. High expectations included a parade featuring four-thousand marchers, one-hundred and seventy-five floats and fifteen bands.

For Buck and Tim, the excitement of such crowd pleasers paled next to the anticipated sight of Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* soaring over the city. They could hardly wait to tell their friends.

"Hey guys, have we got news for you!"

"What's happenin'?"

"Charles Lindbergh is flyin' across America to show everybody how great flyin' is," Tim said.

"That's it?" one of them countered.

"So what?" said another.

"He's comin' to York...he's comin' to York!" Tim said.

"You know the big celebration comin' up?" Buck continued. "He's comin' then. He's part of the show!"

"Holy cow. Where'd you guys hear that? Now just a minute...we know..."

Several of them chanted with the speaker as he continued, "...you read it in *The Gazette*."

"That's right," Tim exclaimed. "You'll see it in tomor-

row's headlines.”

“Hey! That's first-rate. I want to see that!”

“Where's he gonna land?”

“Uhh...” Bucky said, “there's a little problem about that.”

“There ain't an airfield around here long enough for him to set her down,” Tim said.

“Then what...?”

“... but Lindbergh promised to fly over the city so everyone can see him and cheer him on,” Tim continued.

“When?”

“Don't know the exact time,” Buck answered. “But when he's about to arrive you'll know it.”

“Yeah,” Tim added. “They're gonna blow all the whistles and ring all the bells in town when they see him comin'.”

“Geez, I don't want to miss that. Hey, do you think he'll just fly over way up there? What if he came close to the ground to buzz us?” The boy made a sweeping motion with his arm dusting the ground while blasting a raspy imitation of a plane with his voice: “Eeehhhhhh!”

“Geeze, wouldn't that be somethin'?”

“What else did ya find out?”

“Nothin', but you can count on us to keep you posted with the latest news.”



Lindbergh never arrived because of rainy, overcast weather. This disappointed the boys, but for Bucky, the excitement of Charles Lindbergh's endeavors remained a lingering memory, sparking his resolve to become a pilot.

Bucky had not forgotten Ely's remarkable feat. Whenever Buck read stories about further developments involving planes

DICK MILLER

landing on aircraft carriers, his imagination burned brighter. By 1930, bi-planes landed on ships with renovated top decks.

These early days helped shape Bucky's character with several strengths to achieve Bernard's educational goals: A firm vocational focus, plus an avid reader sparked by daily readings of the newspaper, books and listening to radio newscasts.

5. A BUMP ON THE ROAD TO MARRIAGE

AUGUST 1936, Springfield, Illinois

With a clear road ahead for Bucky and Emily to marry, the date of Saturday, September 19th was confirmed with Pastor Gary Messerschmidt on the calendar of Trinity Lutheran Church. Agnes Bernard continued to plunge ahead at a frantic pace setting everything in place in accord with her idea of “the perfect wedding.” She regarded the occasion as an opportunity to plan the grand wedding she never had when she and Gregory Bernard began their lives together in more humble circumstances. Now, as mother of the bride, Agnes felt obligated to spare no expense for the wedding of her eldest daughter. The thought of consulting with the prospective bride and groom about their wishes never occurred to her.



“Uhh... Emily, I hate to say this, but your mother seems to be running a race to the finish line in arranging our wedding.”

“I know, Bucky, but you need to understand how mothers are. All this is important to her. I’m the first of her daughters to marry.”

“I know, Em, but it’s important to me, too...and to you.

Has she spoken to you about what you want?"

"Not really *with* me, but more *to* me about what she's already planned."

"Em, it seems like everything is going bang! bang! bang! and we'll be married before we know it and suddenly say, 'What happened?'"

"I have to agree...mother seems to be overreacting a bit. We really don't need to rush. We have time to prepare more thoughtfully."

"I don't want anything to take my breath away except you," Bucky said as their eyes met wistfully.

"You are the sweetest man on earth. How did I ever find you?"

"Hey, remember, I found you!"

They embraced and kissed tenderly, and then gazed dreamily at each other for several moments.

Then, Bucky said, "You know, we've both agreed on one thing that we feel strongly about."

"Yes, I know."

"Someone needs to speak to your mother about that. Should you talk to her, or do you want me to do it?"

"I think we both should tell her, sweetheart, and I think we need to do it soon."

"I'm with you, Em. Let's do it."



"Mama, could you stop what you're doing for a minute so we could speak with you?"

Agnes turned around quickly and said with a look of concern, "Of course, dear. Is there anything wrong?"

"Well, not really...but there's something we want at our

Glamour Boys

wedding, and we both feel strongly about it.”

Her concern faded into a smile, as she said, “Certainly, dear. It’s your wedding and nothing is too good for the wedding of our eldest daughter. Whatever you wish...tell me.”

“All right, Mama. We want Father Griffin to marry us.”

Mrs. Bernard suddenly stood with wide eyes and gaping mouth with her forearms raised and palms spread open.

“Oh my...oh dear...but what about Pastor Messerschmidt?”

“We’d like both of them to be included.”

“But my dear, Father Michael is a nice man and we have nothing against him...but...well...*he’s not even a Lutheran!*”

“Yes, Mother, but he’s a Christian, we love him and feel that he has inspired us in our Christian faith more than anyone we know, with the exception of you and Daddy, who first brought us to Jesus and raised Nan and me in the church.”

Bucky stood silently in support of Emily letting her take the initiative.

Agnes responded with pleading eyes, “But...I don’t think that will be possible.”

“Why, Mother? Why can’t both of these fine Christian pastors contribute to our ceremony?”

“Well, it’s just simply unconventional. Clergy do not preach or conduct ceremonies in churches that are not of their denomination. It just isn’t done. I don’t think the Missouri Synod would allow it.”

Emily’s heart sank and she sadly gazed downward. Bucky firmly pressed his arm around her to comfort her.

The sight of her daughter’s disappointment touched Agnes’ heart and she quickly said, “Let’s talk to Pastor Messerschmidt about it. He’s so understanding. Tell him what you told me. He may consider it.”

“Oh, really, Mama?” Emily exclaimed, her eyes brightening.

“I can’t promise anything, of course, but we can see what he says.”

When Emily sent word to Father Michael after they talked with Pastor Messerschmidt and told the priest that he was not certain he could allow that, but would consider it, Father Michael immediately penned the following letter:

Dear Pastor Messerschmidt,

I am writing to you upon hearing that Emily and Bucky have requested my participation with you at their wedding.

I cannot deny that I would be pleased to be permitted to share some good words on behalf of the couple that we nurtured in our home and feel a bond with them. I realize, however, how radical this may seem to many, as it is not commonly done. But we share the same faith, and I assure you that I believe Jesus to be my Savior and Lord, and my hope for salvation rests entirely on Him.

Nevertheless, I know that should you permit this in your congregation, unwelcome consequences could arise, not only for you, but perhaps for me as well. As for me, the heartfelt desires of Emily and Bucky take precedence over any rebuke or discomfort I may incur.

If this is a matter of not compromising your conscience by having me occupy the pulpit there, I would be happy to say a few words from the pavement.

I am concerned that neither of us takes any action that may dishearten these young Christians in their faith and perhaps injure them spiritually.

I pray that God would guide us in His will in this matter, and will bless each of us in our service to Him.

I prayerfully await your response to their request.

Glamour Boys

*May peace and joy be yours in Him,
Michael Griffin*

Bucky sat on the arm of the stuffed chair with his arm around Emily as they both read Father Michael's letter. Pastor Messerschmidt had shared it for them to read and now sat opposite them watching their eyes dart back and forth over the page like a clock pendulum moving at double time. When they finished, the engaged couple and the pastor looked at each other in silence.

"Well, what's the score, Pastor Messerschmidt?"

"Bucky!" Emily said snapping her head to confront Bucky with glaring eyes.

"That's all right," Pastor Messerschmidt said. "I can understand your impatience as well as your possible disdain for church politics."

"I'm sorry," Bucky quickly said. "My question wasn't meant to be disrespectful, Pastor Messerschmidt."

"I didn't take it that way."

"What do you think, pastor?"

"First, let me say that rules and regulations in church practice, observed locally as well as in the national church body, may seem rigid at times, but they serve a purpose. It is necessary to maintain some semblance of order as we conduct the church's business. Pastor Peter Marks is our District President, and represents the Synod in our area. He is a close personal friend and golfing buddy. As a matter of fact, I played golf with him a few days ago and spoke to him of this matter."

"What did he say?" Emily asked.

“Well, first he reminded me that our church body is not an autocratic body that tells the congregation what to do. It is advisory, and its policies, which may change from time to time, are determined by voting delegates from all our churches as they gather to express consensus on church issues. Our main doctrine, based on Scripture, of course, is not subject to change. We insist that the message we bring to the world remain Christ centered and the Gospel, which proclaims the good news of our salvation through Jesus alone, remains the foundation stone upon which our faith and proclamation rest. Pastor Marks cautioned me that as an action that is somewhat unique and different, it may stir up some criticism. However, if challenged, we would be standing on good ground on the basis of Father Griffin’s written letter in which he clearly states his own belief in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.”

“And so...?” Bucky queried.

“And so I have spoken to Father Griffin, and we agreed that he will preach the homily, and will do so from our pulpit, and I...well, I will have the privilege of joining you both together in marriage.”

“Oh, Pastor Messerschmidt, thank you, thank you!” Emily declared as she threw her arms around him and hugged him.

“Thank you, Pastor Messerschmidt,” Bucky said. “We will never forget this.”

6. THE TRIGGER MAN

AUGUST 1936, the Ozarks, somewhere in Missouri

The dark eyes of the six-foot-two muscled man peering through the window of the cabin had become accustomed to the dark. The rays from a full moon streaming in to illuminate the naked couple asleep on top of the disheveled bed clothes made the task of assessing the situation even easier. A chair at the bedside held a few articles of clothing, but the clothes the two had worn before getting into the bed lay strewn across the floor. At the foot of the bed, the hunter's gaze picked up a discarded condom.

The cabin consisted of one room with a fireplace. The man guessed somewhere a path would lead into the woods to an outhouse. The gurgling sound of running water from a nearby brook suggested the apparent source of fresh water.

Sparsely furnished, the room had only the barest of necessities...an empty box for firewood at the fireplace...a seedy looking three-cushion-couch spotted with stuffing poking through holes in the fabric...a bookcase with shelves overflowing with a few books, magazines, papers, and other debris piled up over a period of time. Counter cabinets filled a corner. A window above one cabinet provided a view to the wooded area on the east side of the house. A basin topped one cabinet, its door below hanging askew, the result of a broken hinge at its top. Dishes cluttered the other countertops along

with used towels, wash cloths and other kitchen supplies.

The man's eyes moved to the wooden table at the room's center with four chairs scattered around it. On top rested a kerosene lamp and two uncorked empty bottles. *Might have been wine bottles, or maybe even champagne. No glasses...must have drained the drink right from the bottles. How convenient. They must have drunk themselves into a stupor. It's always easier to rub out de-based characters rather than decent minded people. These kind always set themselves up making my job easy.*

The brute felt anticipation and excitement growing within him. *It's been a long time since the Mastermind gave me a job. For something like this, he insists on me...his professional "trigger man." He knows my reputation, and the 500 dollars retainer burning a hole in my pocket will multiply many times over when I give him the proof that I've done the deed.*

The man easily found entrance into the cabin and put the can of gasoline quietly on the floor. *Folks out here in the sticks never lock doors or windows.* Moving to the bed, the man rolled up his sleeves and gazed down at the young boy lying on his back, whose name he did not know. *I don't need any details about the victim...only what the job entails.*

With a sudden kangaroo-like leap, he landed on top of the boy. Massive hands wrapped around Kenny's neck. Eyes popped wide open and limbs flailed wildly under the weight of this strong man.



Dottie fell from the bed and scrambled to her feet. Her body tensed and her heart raced from the terror that clearly revealed itself in her gaping eyes and her screams.

"Quit your hollering, bitch. There's nobody can hear you."

Glamour Boys

Instantly, he dropped Kenny 's limp body and leaped with super-human agility onto Dottie, bringing her to the floor. A few smashes of his fist across her face put an end to her screaming. All became silent.

The slow determined movements of the killer to reposition the couple in the bed, place a package of cigarettes and some used butts in appropriate places, and douse the area and victims with gasoline, presented a gruesome, creepy scene for anyone who could have observed it.



Not long after that, Crusher received the following clipping from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* sent by the Trigger Man as proof that his final payment should be forthcoming.

YOUNG COUPLE PERISH IN CABIN FIRE

A forest ranger in the Ozarks uncovered the bodies of two young persons in a cabin in a remote area yesterday, the victims of a fire. The ranger, Captain Ross Lensin, was alerted to the situation when he went to the top of his tower station and spied a plume of smoke rising in the distance. The little-used road up to the cabin had deteriorated and washed out in some areas, making the approach to the scene difficult. By the time the ranger arrived, the cabin had burnt to the ground and was smoldering. It was estimated that the fire started in the early pre-

dawn morning hours. The bodies of the burned victims were identified as Kenneth Simmons (16) and Dorothy Prone (19). Forestry staff and local authorities concluded that the fire had been ignited by cigarettes dropped by the couple after falling asleep.

No one bothered to conduct any further investigation. No one examined the second set of automobile tire tracks in the clearing outside the cabin and whoever emptied the contents of a trash bin near the park entrance found it unusual to find a discarded empty gasoline can in it.



Crusher's eyes lit up and a wide smile spread across his face as he read the news. *Well done. Now with that problem eliminated, I can give my full attention to capturing and torturing my prize!*

7. A SERENDIPITOUS REVELATION

AUGUST 1936, St. Louis, Missouri

Two medical students sat together at a table in the cafeteria of Washington University in St. Louis. "Look at the fella over there in the wheelchair," one of them said.

"What about him?" the other asked, glancing in that direction.

"They took his left leg off above the knee."

"Probably had to," the other said. "So what?"

"No chance he'll ever walk with a prosthesis," the first student added. "I wonder if he really needed it taken above the knee."

"You're pretty observant today, Tano. Why the big concern?"

"Whenever I see someone like that, it reminds me that it could be me. Once, I almost had my leg unnecessarily amputated."

"Whoa," his friend said. "How did that happen?"

Tanoa replied, "In the early days, when I first came to America as a student at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, a buddy of mine convinced me that it would be a splendid bit of fun to jump a freight train and take a ride. In the process I was injured. Some pipes fell on me, my legs were crushed, and I ended up in a delirious stupor in a railroad yard in Des

Moines, Iowa. A boy found me there and got me to a hospital. At the time, I had no wallet or identification on me, and by my appearance, the doctors thought I was a penniless transient. They were going to cut my leg off and be done with me. But the fine young man had my jacket, found my wallet with all my identification cards in it and brought it back to the hospital. When the doctors saw my relationship to the Tongan royal family and plenty of money in my wallet, they quickly changed their procedure. I had a compound fracture of my tibia, but they patched me up very well.” He pulled up his pant leg. “See, there is the scar.”

“Bill, that young boy saved my life,” he continued. “We later tried to locate him and offer him a reward through a New York law firm. However, the lawyers could not locate him and what was left of the money after they took their fee was returned to us. It wasn’t much.”

“You never cease to surprise me, Tano. How many other adventures did you have that you haven’t told me about?”

Tanoa continued as if he didn’t hear, paying no mind to his friend’s remark.

“I’ll never forget that young man. His name was Bucky...Bucky Ellis.”

Looking up instantly at the mention of Bucky’s name, the other student pushed his chair back with a start and said, “Bucky Ellis? Did you say ‘Bucky Ellis? I know him!”



After the Sunday service at St. Bartholomew’s, two young men approached Father Michael Griffin. Father Griffin knew one of them as Bill Simmons, a Washington University medical student and a regular attendee at services.

Glamour Boys

“Great sermon,” Bill Simmons said.

“Thank you, Bill. Who’s your friend here?”

“This is Tanoa Tupou. He’s from Tonga, an island in the South Pacific. He’s a fellow medical student at Washington U. and a good friend.”

Father Griffin and Tanoa shook hands.

“Father Griffin, we have something important to tell you,” Bill said. “Could you speak with us after you finish greeting the folks?”

The priest glanced down the line and could see only a few more people waiting behind the two young men.

“Sure,” he answered, “But it may be a minute or two. I see Mrs. Bancroft at the end of the line. She’s a talker, and waits to the end to be sure to get my undivided attention.”



Later, in Father Griffin’s study, he listened to Tanoa’s remarkable story.

“It’s hard to believe that your studies brought you here where Bucky lived with us. The situation reminds me of when Bucky left his home and family in York, Pennsylvania, where I officiated at his mother’s funeral. I never expected to see the boy again, but after I was transferred here to St. Louis, who should show up at our Soup Kitchen but Bucky Ellis and a girl with him named Emily. It was as if the hand of God paved the way for us to reconnect.”

“God works in mysterious ways,” Bill Simmons said.

“I thought we might greet Bucky here at church. Is he away?” Tanoa asked.

“Buck moved to Springfield and is living with Emily and her family. In fact, he and Emily are going to be married.”

“Married? Young Bucky married?” Tanoa remarked.

“Well, he’s not a kid anymore, you know. He’s nineteen years old.”

“Heaven be praised. I’ve got to see them!” Tanoa said. “I am not yet well acquainted with United States geography. Is Springfield far from here?”

“No,” Father Griffin answered. “I can show you on a map how to get there. If you want to visit, I could contact him and let him know when you’re coming.”

“No,” Tanoa said. “I want to surprise him. I want to see his face when he opens the door and sees me.”

8. TOGETHER AGAIN

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1936, Springfield, Illinois

“Yes?” Agnes said at the open front door.

“Is Bucky Ellis here?” Tanoa asked.

“Yes, he lives here. Might I ask who you are?”

“My name is Tanoa Tupou. Perhaps Bucky has mentioned me. He saved my life when I was injured in a railroad yard in Des Moines, Iowa. That was back in 1932.”

“Well, that sounds like Buck. He and Emily aren’t here at the moment, but they should be back shortly. I’m Agnes Bernard, Emily’s mother. Do come in. I want to hear what happened.”

Agnes gave a brief explanation to her husband, and he shook Tanoa’s hand and invited him inside. Agnes and Geoffrey had never before had a dark-skinned person in their home, in fact, few colored people ever ventured into their neighborhood. Any friend of Bucky’s, however, was their friend as well, and they eagerly provided a hospitable welcome to their guest.

“Can I get you some coffee?” Agnes asked.

“Do you have any tea?” Tanoa asked.

“How do you like it?”

“With cream and a little sugar, thank you.”

Tanoa and Geoffrey got acquainted while Agnes left and returned a few moments later with a tray of cups, saucers, cream, sugar, a teapot and a plate of home-made cookies.

After conversing for about a half hour, Geoffrey said, “I

hear the car. They're home."

Buck and Emily briskly walked from the driveway and noisily entered the back door of the house, bounding into the living room after a successful shopping trip to the jewelry store.

"We picked out our rings," Emily said, entering the room.

"Yeah," Bucky said, "and you should see..."

With jaw-dropping amazement on his face, he stopped mid sentence when his wide open eyes fell upon his friend. "Wha...hey...what's going on? Is that you, Tanoa?"

He gave an inquisitive glance at Geoffrey and Agnes.

Tanoa jumped from the chair, ran to Buck, threw his arms around him, compressed him into a hug, lifted him off his feet and swung him around like a rag doll. He squeezed him so tight, Buck's eyes closed and his face contorted until his friend released him and dropped him to his feet, allowing him to regain his composure.

Tanoa exclaimed, "Master Bucky! You are a sight. My heavens, look at you...and this pretty lady with you. How did you get so lucky?"

Buck had told Emily a few things about Tanoa, but she could hardly believe her eyes when she saw Tanoa's imposing figure standing before her.

"Tanoa, you're talking like one of the guys. What's happened to you? What are you doing? How did you get here?"

"I'm now a pre-med student at Washington University in St. Louis, and I spoke of you to a friend who attended St. Bartholomew's and knew you. On Sunday, he and I went to services and met Father Griffin. You can probably guess the rest. And, yes, I have picked up on the way Americans talk differently than we do, but I still prefer to pass on some of your more vulgar expressions."

Glamour Boys

“Well, I’ll be!” Buck said. “You’re going to be a doctor? Shoot...that’s swell!”

“He’s studying to be an orthopedic surgeon,” Geoffrey Bernard offered. “After he finishes medical school, he wants to go back to Tonga and practice among his people.”

“Geeze,” Buck said, “you all know more about Tano than I do.”

“And I know some things about you, as well...such as the wedding you and Emily are planning. Where did you find this...I hope you don’t think me forward when I call you a *beautiful* young woman?” Tanoa said with a quick glance at Emily and a sly wink at Bucky.

“You two have a lot of catching up to do,” Becky interjected. “I’ll leave both of you and Emily and start getting supper ready.”

“And I have some work waiting for me at my desk,” Dr. Bernard said and left the room.



Tanoa arrived on a Friday, and the Bernards urged him to stay with them for a few days.

“You can sleep in Nanette’s room. She often spends weekends with her grandma, and on Sunday, we all gather at church and Nan comes home with us.”

“My arrival is so sudden. I don’t want to put you out. Are you sure Nanette wouldn’t mind?”

“We would be honored to have you stay with us,” Dr. Bernard added to Agnes’ urgings.

“Yes,” Mrs. Bernard chimed in again. “She won’t mind, as long as you don’t mind the pink and white décor, her girlie things, and a some stuffed animals that she will keep until she

reaches a hundred years.”

They laughed as Tanoa said politely, “I am the one who is honored to be a guest at your home, Dr. and Mrs. Bernard, and I heartily accept your invitation. But I must leave on Sunday afternoon to get back to Washington University.”

“Then you can come to church with us,” Agnes said. “You must meet Pastor Messerschmidt and see the church where the children will have their wedding.”

9. A SEARCH RESUMES

Since Bucky had joined the household, he held a steady job as groundskeeper and gardener of the three acre Bernard estate. In addition to his room and board and inclusion as a member of the household, he was paid handsomely for his labors. Buck had no hesitation in accepting Geoffrey Bernard's invitation to leave St. Louis and integrate into the Bernard household, but in these hard times, a steady job offered in addition was the icing on the cake. Treated as an adopted son, Buck would have gladly worked the grounds without pay, but Geoffrey's personal principles dictated that "the laborer is worthy of his reward." While the women tended to wedding details during these days, Bucky kept himself busy with the demands of summertime crop cultivation and landscaping, in addition to his lessons with Mr. Biggins, his education tutor, who now met with him at regular intervals.

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 1936

Bucky had mowed the lawn, trimmed some bushes, and now stood at the edge of the fish pond. He flung his arm out in a sweep casting tiny grains of fish food into the pond. He grinned as he watched the placid surface come alive with activity as the fish furiously competed for each tidbit of food.

Emily ran to him and grabbed his hand. "Come inside, sweetheart. Mama wants to talk with you." Grabbing Buck's

hand, she turned and ran, disrupting his serene posture and jerking him into a clumsy trot behind her.

Inside, they sat at the round kitchen table, where an array of papers, pencils, address books and photos related to family and friends rested. Agnes Bernard, with pencil in hand, glanced at Buck as she prepared a list of names of prospective wedding guests.

“Bucky, dear,” she said, “we are compiling a list of people to invite to the wedding. Invitations are ready to be sent out.” She put her hand on Bucky’s. “What about your side of the family? Is it possible to find your father and members of your family?”

“Buck,” Emily added, “When you saved me that day on the train from Josh’s abuse, you told me it was important to find my family and reunite with them, and you vowed to stay with me until we reached that goal. Now it’s my turn to encourage you to renew your search for your dad, Aunt Helen, your brother, Bud, and your sisters, Lily and Lena.”

Buck put his hands to his head remembering his pain of separation from them, and the long silence that followed the correspondence he once had with them. “I try not to think about them anymore, but it’s impossible to forget. I still have the letters. I remember the letter I wrote to Dad and Aunt Helen from that jungle in Davenport, Iowa saying how sorry I was when I found them in Altoona and saw Dad in a situation with Helen. I misunderstood and said things I regretted. I burned my bridges behind me saying I never wanted to see them again. Helen wrote back and mended the fences, proving to me that Bud was right when he ran after me and told me Helen was a good person and saved my father from grief and despair. I have the letter of congratulations and encouragement she sent when I told her how great and promising

Glamour Boys

my job was with the *New York Times*. And I have other letters she sent when we left New York and lived with the Griffins in St. Louis. Then it seemed after the summer of 1935, their letters stopped and the letters I sent to Altoona produced no replies. Finally, one of my letters came back stamped 'Moved. No forwarding address.' You're right, I need to keep trying. But I don't know what else I can do."

"What about people and friends you knew in York. Maybe they may know where your family is," Agnes suggested.

"Yes, that's right," Emily said. Didn't you once tell me you about a best friend you had...what was his name...Nick, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's right," Buck replied. I still remember his address if the family hasn't moved. Maybe his family knows where they are."

"That's a start, dear," Agnes said, patting his hand gently. "But time is running out. Why don't you write them right away?"

"I will," Buck said with a brighter face of enthusiasm, as he rose and went for writing tools and paper.

10. AN ELUSIVE HOPE

A little more than a week had passed since Bucky sent his inquiry to Nick's family in York. During this time, his anticipation grew that he and his family would be reunited.



When the letter Helen had written was confiscated by Crusher, she could have inquired further when she failed to receive a response to her letter. When no word came, she felt that Bucky had justifiably blamed her and his father for the tragic death of his young brother. Feeling utterly forsaken, and in despair, she gave up any hope of finding Bucky and bringing him home.

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 1936, Springfield,
Illinois**

"Bucky, come here! Bucky, can you hear me? Come here?"

Buck trotted into the room in response to Agnes' call. She and Emily stood at the kitchen table. Dr. Bernard was at his office tending to his patients.

"Look," Agnes said, waving a sealed envelope in the air.

"What? What is it?"

"It just came in the mail," Mrs. Bernard said, handing the letter to him.

Glamour Boys

Buck looked at the return address. "It's from Nick's family. What does it say?"

"It's addressed to you," Emily said. "You open it."

Buck ripped it open and unfolded the letter. Quickly, his eyes darted back and forth and scanned over the words. Then his head drooped, he dropped the letter on the table and went directly out the back door into the yard, leaving the screen door to slam noisily behind him.

The two women looked wide-eyed at each other. Then Emily picked up the letter and began reading with Agnes looking over her shoulder.

Dearest Bucky,

I almost did not receive your letter, as we had moved from York several years ago. The mail arrived at our old home and might not have been forwarded to our new address here in Shrewsbury, had the present residents of our old house not been friends. They forwarded the letter to me.

I regret that I cannot give you information about your family, as we have not seen them since they left York, and we moved from there about six months after your visit. Perhaps other inquiries you have made will bring results. Please let me know if they do, now that you have our present address.

I am happy for the way your life is turning out. And now you are about to get married, and I'm sure to a wonderful girl. Congratulations. I wish you all the best.

Bucky, this letter also bears some sad news that has nothing to do with your family, but I must share it with you.

Our son, Nick, is no longer with us. In June of 1935, Nick enlisted in the Army. He was interested in mechanical things, especially radios and how they worked, so he went to Fort Monmouth, New

Jersey to train to become a Signal Corps Officer. He was doing well, but when Christmas furlough came, he planned to come home. To save money, he often hitchhiked, and when he did, he had good luck most of the time. But on that fateful day, December 22, 1935, a lone driver who had been drinking picked him up. Just outside of Reading, the driver drove onto the wrong side of the road going up a hill. Another car was coming up on the other side, and they hit head on. Nick was killed instantly. The troopers on the scene said Nick's driver must have been going well over the speed limit. The driver was taken to the hospital in critical condition, but later survived. He had a history of arrests, most of them for drunk driving. Once, he wrote us a letter, apparently in a sober and penitential moment, asking to see us to apologize and seek forgiveness, but we cannot bear to face him and tear open wounds wider than they already are. I pray that God will forgive this man, but I cannot face him myself. May God forgive me. We continue to be tortured with thoughts of what must have gone on between Nick and the driver before it happened. We dream about our son being trapped in the speeding car. We can see him trying to stop the driver, pleading with him.

We are grief stricken and, although the pain may lessen with time, I know it will never go away. Losing a child is the greatest anguish anyone can ever suffer. Bucky, I know how your family, particularly your father, must feel. Your separation from him must be like a death of a son to him. I pray that you find each other soon.

Buck, I'm sure you remember how strained the relationship was between Nick and his father when you were friends. Well, a healing took place between them before the accident and they became close. My husband and I were proud of Nick's decision to seek the discipline of military service. But now, my husband, John, is left completely devastated. He was enraged at God, but with my many pleadings, he finally went to speak with our priest. John has never been a religious man, but now he attends mass regularly. We attend church together and still shed tears, but it has helped us to bond in our grief. Before

Glamour Boys

we reconnected to our faith, we could not comfort each other. Strange, while it seems that a common loss between us should unite our hearts, it did just the opposite. When a loved one dies, there are so many regrets. You can find so much cause to blame yourself and others. Our priest met with both of us over a period of time and helped to relieve some of our guilty feelings.

Bucky, please pray for us, as we are for you. If you and Emily are ever up this way, please visit us. It would be a heartwarming visit for us.

God bless you,

Elizabeth Bradley

Agnes and Emily went to the back door, held it open and saw Bucky standing some distance away beside the fish pond. He stood with his hands at his side staring into the pond.

Buck had not experienced heartfelt grief since his mother died. Now he had regrets, too. *I wish Nick and I could've spent more time together. He was one of the best friends I had in York. He was such a great kid. He was too young, too young, God. Why?*

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