Why have I never liked Danzer? Let me count the ways. On the team, there was no love lost between the linemen beating their brains out throwing blocks for him with never any thanks and the Dancer out there at right end grabbing glory with his jersey clean. The only good word he ever had in the huddle would be for Moxie. "Good call, Stomp," I can still hear it, as if a Stamper-to-Danzer pass play didn’t take the other nine of us to make it work. Jake used to say Danzer was so stuck on himself he had gum in his fur.

But that was football, only a game, supposedly. If it had been in England, maybe I’d be remembering a cricket match with Danzer in the whitest pants--and it still would be called only a game and count as everlastingly as if St. Peter was the one keeping score.
“You’re sure this is the only way to get there, Chief?”

Ben arrived alongside the USS McCorkle to find a chasm of disturbed gray-green seawater between it and him, with canyon walls of ship steel on either side. Consistently the swell of the open ocean lifted the destroyer, across there, atop a foaming crest while wallowing the oil ship he was aboard in the trough of the wave. The ships then would dizzily trade elevations. Between the rising and falling hulls stretched the pulley rope that was supposed to carry him across. The line looked to him as thin as spiderspin.

“The motor launch might get crushed between if we tried that, sir,” the oiler’s grizzled chief petty officer replied, unflappably tugging the breeches buoy into place around Ben’s hips like an oversize canvas diaper. “Not to worry, lieutenant. We’ll haul you across in a jiffy and you’ll get a real nice reception on the Cork-- the mail sack is following you over. Ready, sir?”

“No, and never going to be, so let’s get it over with.”

Legs sticking out of the canvas sling and arms tight around the ring buoy that the sling hung from, he was sent bobbing into mid-air, dipping and soaring with the teetertotter rhythm of the ships, the line with its dangling human cargo above the viciously sloshing water but not that far above it. The sleek gray hull of
the destroyer loomed nearer and nearer until he began to be afraid the next toss of
ocean would splatter him against it like a lobbed egg. Then there was a powerful
yank from the crewmen handling the haul rope attached to the pulley and he spun
up over the side of the hull into a sprawling descent onto deck. A helping hand
came down to him, and an unmistakable dig along with it. “Welcome aboard,
eminent war correspondent. You’re just in time for the invasion of Europe.”

Great start. Looking at my reflection in the Dancer’s famous shoes.

Unharnessing himself from the apparatus, Ben got up off his hands and knees and
sought his footing, the deck of the destroyer livelier than that of the slow-rolling oil
supply ship the past many days. Meanwhile Danzer stood planted like a yachtsman
in an easy breeze. Even though both men knew it did not fit their acquaintanceship,
he had put on for general show his languid smile, as if about to say something then
disdaining to. Already irked—What was that Europe crack about?—Ben gave back
the briefest of handshakes. “One of us has his oceans mixed up, Nick. I was
under the distinct impression this is the Pacific.” Without taking their eyes off the
new arrival a number of sailors went about rote chores around them, their faded
blue work attire a contrast to Danzer’s tan uniform, crisp in every crease.
Elaborately considerate, Danzer drew him away from the rope-and-pulley rig. "Stand aside, Ben, here's the real cargo." The mail sack came zinging down the line to the cheers of the sailors, followed anticlimactically by Ben's travel bag. "Come on up to the wardroom and catch the next broadcast of how the war is being won for us."

Up there in officers' country it was standing room only, those who were off-duty blearily awakened by the news and joining the day watch to listen to the transmission piped in from the radio room. Danzer wasn't just woofing. D-Day somewhere on the coast of France and I'm out here with the albatrosses. Thanks a whole hell of a lot for the heads-up, Tepee Weepy.

From half a world away, the Atlantic side of the globe of war, General Eisenhower's crackling voice addressed his cross-Channel invasion force: "You are about to embark upon the great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months....You will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny...Our home fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men....The free men of the world are marching together to victory."
In the wardroom’s explosion of speculation that followed the Allied supreme commander’s brief pronouncement, Danzer murmed aside to Ben: “A gentleman’s C, on that pep talk by El Supremo?”

You’re the one who would recognize one. “You were spoiled by Bruno,” Ben said in return. “Half-time dramatics don’t sound that good with real blood involved. Moxie is somewhere in that invasion force, you can about bet.” He looked at Danzer curiously. “You knew he was stationed in England, didn’t you?”

“Merry Old Moxie,” Danzer said as if that constituted an answer. “You’re bunking in the sick bay. I’ll show you to it.”

Nicholas Edwin Danzer. ‘Ned’ when he was growing up in Livingston, but ‘Nick’ as soon as he hit Treasure State University and figured out what rhymed nicely with ‘slick.’ His family owned the Paradise Gateway Toggery, outfitter to moneyed tourists on their way to Yellowstone Park. The snappy Stetsons. The gabardine slacks, men’s instant fittings by a male tailor right there on the premises, women’s by a female one. The specialized cowboy boots with walker heels, which takes the nuisance of cowboying out of them. How it all must have rolled into the cash register, and out of that, the vacation home up the Paradise Valley, the fishing
trips with the Governor, the football camp at the Rose Bowl while most of the rest
of us were teenage muscle sweating through summer jobs at a dollar a day. Born
with a silver shoe horn in his booties and he took advantage of it. Give Slick Nick
the benefit of the doubt, allow as how it was okay for him to be the clothes horse of
the locker room and a mile around, for that matter. The more-wised-up-than-thou
attitude he wore, that was not okay.

It was Vic, rest his soul, who shut him off at the mouth. Sooner or later it
might have been Jake or Animal or, I like to think, me, but Vic drew first honors.

That day Bruno had run us ragged in practice, all of us were out of sorts, and
Danzer made the mistake of pushing past Vic into the showers with "Move it along,
Tonto." Vic hit him in the chest with the base of his fist the way a person would
bang mightily on a door and that finished that. From then on, Danzer's attitude still
showed but he kept it buttoned.

And here he is, supply officer on the destroyer U.S.S. McCorkle, on
station probably a thousand miles from the nearest Japs. As cushy an assignment
as there is in a theatre of combat, how ever he snagged it. He makes Dex Cariston
look like an amateur at foreshewing war. For once, I wish I had less knowledge
of the person I'm supposed to write about.
But that's not how it is, or ever going to be, with the Dancer. I know him right down to his shoe size. Or in his case, to his shoe polish.

The story galloped among the former teammates, after Animal Angelides picked it up from a troopship navigator who went through officers candidate school at Great Lakes with Danzer. Inspections were ferocious in their barracks, a terminally picky commander stalking through the squad bays handing out gigs--demerits--for specks of dust imaginary or not. Always with one exception.

Danzer's shoes dazzled the man, as well they should have; shiny as black glass, sheerly flawless as obsidian. It reliably drew Danzer an approving nod and a squint at his nametag, and everyone knew that the good regard of the commander was the one sure route around wading the chickenshit customarily awaiting an officer candidate. Danzer's shoeshine secret, whether he bribed it out of some crafty yardbird at Great Lakes or more likely devolved it from making those fancy boots gleam to best advantage in the show window of the Toggery, was to press the polish into the leather with a spoon made hot by a cigarette lighter, buff it, melt some more polish in, buff some more. It wrecked the shoes for wearing--Danzer had to hop into an ordinary pair when inspection was over--but could not be beat for display.
“Better have another pork chop, Ben. I had to practically buy out the hog farms of Queensland to get them.” The gloss on Danzer these days shone up from the capacious plates the officers of the *McCorkle* ate off of. It had the reputation of a ship that fed exceedingly well, and did just as well for itself at the greater table of chance besides.

“No thanks. My stomach still wants to be back on land.” Which he knew would take another week yet, before the destroyer put in at Brisbane. *And the Dancer can keep on with the war effort by bargaining the Aussies out of groceries.*

By whatever flick of fortune in the chain of command, the vessel was something like a palace guard to General Douglas MacArthur, imperious commander-in-chief in the Pacific headquartered—the unkindly said driven into exile there by Japanese triumphs—in the Australian port. MacArthur’s war thus far had been an early series of ghastly defeats—Corregidor, Bataan, the entire Philippines—now somewhat assuaged by dogged amphibious invasions that rolled back the enemy from New Guinea and a handful of other strategic map spots strewn down the South Pacific.

The *McCorkle*’s war this far along consisted of patrol duty and support chores here in the conquered waters central to MacArthur’s realm. Ben didn’t think he could
get away with writing it, but the Southern Cross in the night sky was a constellation of extreme luck for the crew of this ship.

“We’re jealous of Danzer, you know,” one of the older officers said in a joshing tone, if that’s what it really was. “You’re here to make him famous back home, and as dog robber he already gets to be the first one off the ship when we hit port.” As he spoke, a white-jacketed mess attendant went around the table pouring coffee and dealing out fresh forks for pie. The Navy’s ways made Ben feel at sea in more ways than one. Except for whoever was on the bridge the dozen or so officers all ate together at the one long table in obligatory lingering fashion, which meant the talkers got to talk endlessly and the listeners got to listen eternally. Cliques showed through the crevices in conversation; this nonfighting destroyer mostly was officered by a mix of merchant marine retreads, such as the gray slump-shouldered captain who sat at the head of the table regarding Ben without pleasure, and ninety-day wonders—example: Danzer—turned out by officer candidate school. All meal long, Ben had behaved like an anthropologist tiptoeing between tribes.

“You wouldn’t want the burden of being him,” he now answered the officer oratorically enough to draw a laugh. Danzer joined in.
“Still, it’s an interesting morale device, isn’t it,” the executive officer spoke up briskly. The exec was a Naval Academy man, and chafing at this becalmed post in his career climb if Ben did not miss his guess. “Giving people a periodic glimpse—not that your talents can be entirely captured at any time, Nick—of someone all throughout the war. Rather like time-lapse photography.”

Before the executive officer could hold forth further, Ben put in “Right now I’m the one lapsing,” barely covering a yawn. “If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen”—he tried to intone it without irony and could not be sure he succeeded—“I’m going to have to hit the sack.”

The one advantage of bunking in the sick bay was privacy, which he craved in the crowded confines of the ship. *Just me and the aspirin and the sawbone’s slab.* Those and the unsettling sense of being cast backward in time. It had been, what, nearly a year since his impatient period of mending on the ship off New Guinea, the radio in that similar compartment tuned to Tokyo Rose as she perpetually alternated between taunting American soldiers all over the Pacific and playing the likes of “Deep Purple” and “Tuxedo Junction.” (The Japanese were good at such propaganda, he acknowledged; the German counterpart, Lord Haw
Haw, sounded like P.G. Wodehouse construing Bertie Wooster.) The swollen thoughts of that time returned to him, as haunting as they were contrary. A main one, why couldn’t Carl Friessen have come out of the hand-to-hand combat on that bloodslick trail with just enough sacrifice of flesh to retire him from the war? The million-dollar wound, shrapnel in the back, a stray bullet in the lower leg, that sent a soldier home for good. His own seemed to him the two-bit variety, scarcely deserving of a Purple Heart or anything else, yet the throb in his shoulder was a message of what might have been. At the time he was disturbed with himself for wanting any of the Supreme Team out of the war; Friessen, Vic, the others were in it of their own choice and who was he to wish carefully calibrated harm to any of them? With what he knew now, he should have called down the heavens in support of such wish.

Steady. Don’t come down with South Seas whimwhams. You saw enough of those lately. He was aware of being worn to a thin edge by the time he reached the destroyer. Ever since shipping out of Seattle in what seemed an eon ago, he had filed stories from latitudes of the Pacific theatre of combat. The Pacific conflict was a strange piecemeal war, fought from island to island, mapping itself out more like a medieval storming of castles, if the castles had been of coral and
moated by hundreds of miles of hostile water and defended by men committed to
die for their emperor rather than surrender. He had seen things it took all his
ingenuity to put into words that TPWP would let pass into print, and some that
would never surface in civilized newspapers.

The dirt road at Rabaul, the dust carpeted with excrement, where the
retreating Japanese had evacuated their hospital patients in some manner of forced
march, the sick and wounded crapping while they walked like cows with the
drizzles.

Constant corpses, the accumulations of death on every fought-over island,
decay and flies always ahead of the burial squads.

The pilot who fell to earth--New Guinea again--near enough the American
forces that a patrol was sent out to recover him. Ben was with them when the
spotter plane dropped its flare where the Hellcat dive bomber had failed to come out
its dive and they thrashed through the jungle in search of the pilot. No one had
seen his parachute open for sure, nor did it. The lead man practically fell in the hole
the body made in the jungle floor, three feet deep. Then and there Ben had been
seized with a stomach-turning fear for Cass, the altitudes at which she did her job a
deadly chasm as constant as the sky over him after that. He had tried to shake that
feeling in his gut—he had enough of those already—but the thought of life without her refused to quite go away. It was going with him throughout this ocean of war, a hue of loneliness always accompanying him now, like another depth to his shadow.

_In which case, I need to somehow tolerate my own company, don’t I._ He made himself move off the cot where he had dropped into this mood and go over to his typewriter on the cubbyhole desk. His things were laid out on the slablike medical table and he reached over for fresh paper and rolled a page into the typewriter. He took his time at this, which would have astounded Jones or anyone else back at East Base who had ever seen him put a typewriter to work. On TPWP pieces he wrote as fast as the keys could tolerate, never needing to glance down—one of the blessings he owed his father was those boyhood sessions at the training typewriter in the _Gleaner_ office, with bunion pads hiding the letters on the keyboard. But nights on his movie script, which were many, he deliberately slowed to a sculptor’s pace, letting the imagination feel its way toward the shape of trueness. The scene he was working on took place on the Letter Hill. The character based on Purcell was the last player to reach the whitewashed rocks—

_Camera: the slope below him appears steep and endless_, he tapped onto the paper—
and others of the football team sagged against the stone emblem trying to catch their
breath. His fingers resting on the keyboard, he tried out dialogue in his head,
trying to catch words out of the air. It was a pursuit that enabled him to stand the
slow, slow passage of military hours, the way some other man in uniform
somewhere might endure the duration by nightly reading in *War and Peace*, and
upon finishing it, starting over. (He made a mental note to find out what Danzer
did to pass the time, if he did anything.) It was an abiding mystery, the script, that
promised to reveal itself only in the measured workings of his mind and his fingers.
And it was something Tepee Weepy could not reach.

He lurched through the next days at Danzer’s side, listening over and over
to him regulate a cook here, a baker there, a storeroom swabbie down in some
gloomy hold at the bottom of the ship. All of it about as exciting as the derring-do
of the corner grocer. ‘SUPREME TEAM’ MEMBER BATTLES ENEMY WITH
BISCUITS, he could just see the headline. Tepee Weepy would be thrilled to the gills
with this piece. Sure it would. As military service went, what he was reporting on
aboard the *U.S.S. McCorkle* amounted to the essence of quiescence.
Meanwhile the long lean destroyer itself was never at rest. The “Cork” was aptly nicknamed, bobbing with every bit of weather. Yet that was the only discernible peril it faced. There were moments, staring out at the methodical ocean, when Ben pined for a typhoon to shake shipboard routine up into something he could write about with some life to it, before snapping back to his senses. Think about it, Reinking. Throwing up your guts doesn’t help you do your job. Just ask Dex.

movie, shown on wardroom wall. newsreel months old, Ted Loudon, spring training. (or basketball, Carlisle ‘Skins vs. House of David)

Hours refused to budge, yet before he knew it a day had gone to no good use.

Ben goes to his compartment, flips on Tokyo Rose for distraction.

Sentimental Journey.

“Poor American boys. Your ships go up in flames every day and your planes are shot from the sky every hour of that day. There are too many islands where your death waits for you, while slackers at home sit out the war. Go home, G.I.s, before a bullet brings you the sleep that lasts forever.” Out wafted the eternal strains of Brahms’ “Lullaby”.
“Sweet dreams to you too, Rosie,” Ben mocked back but kept the music as he twirled a half-finished page of script into the typewriter. He hated to admit Ted Loudon was any kind of inspiration, but that rat-at-tat voice evoked the stadium, the cleated team poised to charge onto the football field, the gilded season that led to so much else.

His stare at the waiting white space had just begun to find the ghost forms of words when a rap on the door broke the trance.

He hoped it would be any other of the officers, even the declamatory exec, and naturally it wasn’t.

“You scooted out of the wardroom before I could catch you, Ben.” Danzer stood there in the passageway as crisp as the cutout of a naval recruiting poster. “I thought we ought to have a chat, auld lang syne and all.”

“It’s your boat, Nick.” Ben gestured him in.

Gliding in, Danzer assumed a seat on the bunk and cocked an ear as he did so. “Blotting out the war with Beethoven?”

“Brahms.”

“Same difference?”
“Hardly. ‘Beethoven’s is music to move the universe, Brahms’ is to move the heart.’” Ben reached over and clicked the radio off. “Sorry. I picked that up somewhere and it’s always stuck with me.”

“You were the word man among us and that hasn’t changed,” came the response from behind the held smile. “Our old friend Loudon hasn’t lost his touch either, has he.”

“Nope. Bullshit stays green for quite a while.”

That did not appear to be the reaction Danzer had been counting on. He scrutinized his host briefly, then leaned forward, hands steepled together as if aiming a prayer. “I hope this isn’t stepping on your toes, Ben, but I wanted to make sure you’re coming along all right on your article. Two more days until we’re in Brisbane, and you’re off to wherever’s next. It would be on my conscience if I haven’t provided everything you need.”

Ben studied the slick source of those words. You’re a provider if there ever was one. Danzer, monarch of the cold storage locker and master of the cooks and bakers and servers; the story that really interested Ben was how he had cozied himself into this slot in the American logistical empire. Some alliance of convenience made back there in shiny-shoe OCS? Some influential Yellowstone
tourist, togged out by the Toggery, who knew someone on MacArthur’s staff? Pull was involved somewhere, Ben would have bet his bottom dollar. There was nothing wrong with being a storekeeper. What rankled was Danzer being Danzer, his every pore exuding the attitude that he was entitled to a free pass through the war.

“Well, Nick, I’ll tell you. It’s a little tough to make the commissary sound like a knife at Japan’s throat. I’ll come up with something along those lines, though. Breadknife, maybe.”

“I’m the first to admit, patrolling MacArthur’s backyard is a tolerable tour of duty. There’s a nice amount of leisure.” Danzer pronounced it as if it rhymed with pleasure. “But don’t forget it’s a long war for me, too. They also wait who only stand and serve.” Ben could tell it was not nearly the first time that line had been trotted out. “We haven’t exactly kept in touch,” Danzer was saying as though it was considerate of him to notice that. “How about you? Seen much action yourself?”

“Enough,” Ben answered shortly. “With Friessen, before he was killed.” He did not want to go over that territory, the team’s lives taken by the war, in the
clammy companionship of Danzer. “Moxie’s all right, by the way. I checked. His
tank column hit a lucky pocket at Normandy, not much resistance.”

“Is that what that was about, the code traffic ahead of the captain’s morning
messages,” Danzer said drily. “The skipper thinks you have more radio priority
than Roosevelt.” He thought to add, “Good for Moxie,” before bringing the
conversation to where Ben saw it had been aimed all along. “I have a bit of news
of my own. I know where our buddy Dex is and the reason why.”

Ben felt a lurch the ship was not responsible for. He shifted in the chair as
he eyed his now truly unwelcome caller.

“Is that so. You’re busier than you look, Nick.”

Danzer spread his hands. “This fell in the family lap. A boot
representative”—it took his listener a moment to translate that to traveling shoe
salesman—“we deal with has a line of work wear he thought might interest the
Forest Service. Just right for smokejumpers, you know? The Cariston stores are
one of his accounts too, so imagine his surprise when he paid a call to Seeley Lake
and spotted Dex in there with the conchies. The rest of the conchies, I think it’s
safe to say.”

Knowing what the answer would be, Ben grimly asked anyway:
“Are you spreading this around, back home?”

“Word might get out, I imagine. You know how these things are. People have no idea the heir to Cariston Enterprises is taking the yellow road through the war otherwise, do they.” The offhand manner in which Danzer said it made Ben realize he had underestimated the man’s disdain for the rest of humankind. He was the sort whose contempt you couldn’t tell from the wallpaper. It was always there in back of whatever he said or did. “That was one of your pieces I did happen to see, on Dex”—Ben stared back while Danzer delivered this straight at him—“‘conscientious objector’ did not leap out at me. At any rate, it might not reflect on him any too well, do you think? What with the rest of us putting in our tour of duty.”

_I get the message, you manipulating bastard. Make you look good or you and your Toggery bunch smear Dex and me along with it for covering for him._

Silently Ben wrung the neck of the words he had just heard. Tour of duty. That’s what Danzer was doing with it, all right, touring duty like a cynical sightseer for every spot of advantage it might offer him. For several seconds he did not trust himself to respond to Danzer, because the response he most wanted to give was to knock some teeth out of that smile.
“Nobody’s perfect,” he at last managed to keep it to, too much at stake not to, “but I do my goddamnedest to give everyone I write about a fair shake.”

“Then I’ve been speaking out of turn about Dex and all, haven’t I,” Danzer provided with the grace of one who had won. “A man’s best is all he can do.”

Showing every appearance of being pleased with that bromide, he made as if to go, but paused when the paper in the typewriter caught his eye. He cocked a look at the ragged margins of the typing, as when he had deigned to notice the classical music.

“Writing poetry in your spare time?”

“If you have to know, it’s a screenplay.”

“Is it.” Danzer seemed to weigh that information. “As I suppose they used to ask of Shakespeare, what’s it about?”

None of your goddamn business. Something contrary sparked in the back of Ben’s mind, and he gambled it on out.

“Purcell. The twelfth man. Football as we knew it, Dancer.”

Danzer’s expression slipped several degrees of control. Ben thought he saw bleak surprise in those flinty eyes, something buried threatening to come out.

“It’s about an accident of nature, then,” the chiseled voice quickly recovered, at least. “Two of them. That freak kid himself and what happened to
him on the Hill. I’m surprised you can’t find something more worthy of your
talent, Ben.”

You’re surprised. Purcell does the trick on Slick Nick: that’s a surprise.

Gratified as he was at discovering a way to get under Danzer’s skin, Ben
still found it murky territory to try to explore. True, back there in the famous ‘41
season Purcell was the most glorified scrub there ever was, but still a scrub; he
made the team only posthumously. What was there about the raw kid from
nowhere to upset, even now, the receiving end of that impervious passing
combination, Stamper-to-Danzer? ‘Stomp and Dance, the touchdown prance.’ Ted
Loudon always went nuts over that, he had plugged it into his column all season
long. You had your share of fame, Dancer, did you want Purcell’s leftovers too?

Ben had seen the time since change the mortal balance in too many ways,
but not in this case. The Dancer was still scoring plentifully in the game of life, the
Twelfth Man was still dead. Whatever grasp the specter of Purcell had, let damn
Danzer squirm under it, he decided.

“Don’t judge my script too soon, Nick,” Ben flicked the page resting in the
typewriter. “Maybe it’ll turn out to bring back valuable memories for you.”
Danzer regarded him stonily for moment, then in turn tapped the radio where the Brahms had been. “Do you know your trouble, Ben? You let your heart be moved too easily. Dex. Purcell. The list doesn’t stop there, I’m sure. Whatever it is, you let it get to you too much.”

“Is that what’s wrong with me?” Ben acted surprised. “And here I thought it was an old pain from football acting up.”

Danzer smiled that sterile smile as he got up to leave. “Those last on and on, don’t they. Good night, Ben.”

General quarters.

He scrambled into his clothes.

“Sonar picked up a submarine trailing us.”

“What are you waiting for? Take evasive action.”

Here was the piece. If he stayed alive to write it.

The pulsations kept on.

The water trembling under the stars...A stern, explosions bloomed white in the darkness. The destroyer zigzagging, dancing with an invisible devil.

“It’s still there.
The executive officer at last spoke up. They must have taught logic at Annapolis. “Something’s fishy about this. They can’t shadow us that exactly.”

“It’s all chewed to hell. A shark must have got at it.”

“I’m on a bit of a spot. The captain sent me to ask if you’ll be writing anything about

Ben couldn’t help but grin and tap the typing paper in answer. “The case of the phantom sub. Can’t you see the headline? THE HUNTING OF THE SHARK.

Beware the frumious Bandersnatch, Lieutenant Danzer.”

Danzer’s brow darkened. “Ben, damn it--”

“Damn it yourself. The outfit I have to answer to isn’t going to let you look ridiculous, don’t worry.