

UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

By ALLEN K. LANG

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**A mangled corpse held them captive
in that dark tunnel beneath the Earth's
surface—and taught them a lesson
about what freedom really means!**



The hatch to the front compartment swung open for the first time. One man came out. He turned at once to make sure that the airtight door behind him had locked. Satisfied that it had, he turned again to look down the cabin at us. His face showed that insolence we'd learned to know as the uniform of the "Bupo", the State Secret Police.

The man from Bupo walked down the aisle between the passengers toward the rear of the car. He swept his eyes right and left like a suspecting-machine, catching every detail of us on his memory. People leaned toward the walls as he approached, like children shrinking back from a big animal, and relaxed as he went by. He was out of sight in the galley at the rear for a moment, then was back, carrying a pitcher of water in one hand and the key to the front compartment in the other.

A battering-ram hammered into my belly. I slammed bent, hitting my head against the knees of the man sitting across from me. The capsule shuddered, smearing some obstruction against its outer wall. There was an instant when I weighed nothing. Then my head snapped back with hangman's violence as the capsule bounced forward a few meters. Then we were still. From the shock to the silence was a matter of ten seconds.

I pulled myself up from the floor. Surprisingly, my skeleton still hinged at the joints and nowhere else. The Bupo man was flat in the aisle, bleeding black splotches into the green carpet. He still had hold of a piece of the water-pitcher's handle. I ignored him, while my brain began to push out explanations for this impossible accident.

Something had gotten into the Tube, that slick intestine we'd ridden through under the Andes, below the Matto Grosso, out under the pampas. Something had got in the way of the hundred hurricanes that pushed us. The eyes and ears and un-man-like senses I'd helped build into this five thousand kilometers of metal gut had stopped the pumps. The vacuum inviting our capsule on had filled with air, no longer tugging us to the terminal nest by the

Atlantic. We were abandoned, fifteen meters under God-knows-where.

Mrs. Swaime, who knew that I'd helped in the Tube's engineering, turned to me for explanation. "What happened?" she asked. "What did we hit?"

The foreigner across the aisle, Mr. Rhinklav'n, smiled, a curious effect. "A cow on the track, I believe," he said, his voice brassy with the accent of Mars.

"How did a cow get in here?" Anna demanded. She was the girl whose girl-ness had snagged the eyes and riled the hormones of every male in the car.

"The gentleman is joking," I assured Anna. I glanced toward Surgeon-General Raimazan, the man whose knees had hammered my forehead. He was clutching his right forearm, his eyes squeezed shut by pain. "What happened, Doctor?" I demanded, laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Fractured my arm, my ulna. Get my case under the seat. I want to look at him." The doctor nodded toward the Bupo man, who was struggling to sit up. I got out the doctor's bag.

"Morphine?" I asked, finding it.

"Codeine, next tray, will be plenty." I dropped three of the pills into Dr. Raimazan's left hand. He swallowed them without water. I used my newspaper for a splint, rolling it tight and bandaging it to the doctor's forearm. Then I hammocked the arm in a sling made of a triangular bandage. "OK?" I asked.

"You could make a fortune in orthopedics," Dr. Raimazan said. "Let's get our friend out of the aisle." I stepped out and pulled the policeman toward a sitting position. He groaned and opened his eyes. Though he'd fallen into the fragments of the broken pitcher, he'd suffered damage only to his dignity and his lower lip. A line of red dashes below the lip showed where his teeth had bitten through. He shook his head at our offers of tape and antiseptic and struggled to his feet. Holding the key to the front compartment before him like a dagger, he shuffled up there. He unlocked the door. Shouting something violent, he ducked into the compartment and slammed the door behind him.

I lent my hands to the Surgeon-General's instructions, patching up the cuts and sprains the passengers had gotten. In a moment Miss Barrie, the stewardess, took the bandages out of my hands and finished the job with fewer knots and less adhesive. The passengers sat quiet in the dim light of the capsule, as though afraid that panic might constitute a security-violation. The lovely Anna pouted. Though she was unhurt herself, her precious radio was shattered. It lay under her seat, its antenna snapped like a slender idiot's-neck, its electronic guts spilling from its belly.

"Whatever else happens, we're rid of that puling nuisance," Don Raffe growled, looking at the ex-radio. His mouth settled into creases, a satisfied line between parentheses. He picked up his magazine and leafed through it, to prove himself superior to these chance joltings-about. The lights maliciously dropped till only the bulbs at either end of the aisle were glowing. These died till they were yellow coils, magnifying the dark that fogged us.

In the top tray of my test kit was a flashlight. I broke it out to sweep the light in a quick survey of the car. Anna's eyes squinted

at my beam, her mouth loose with fear for a moment, like a drawstring bag. Then she squared off, sat straight, stared defiantly into my light. Without looking down she snapped her purse open and took a tiny automatic pistol from it. She laid this on the seat beside her, out of sight. "I've got a right to defend myself," Anna said, grim as a suffragette. I laughed out loud at this tableau of maidenhood-at-bay. She smoothed her hair back with both hands, making a double cantilever of her arms to lift her breasts, demonstrating the noble architecture of woman, mocking me. I stopped laughing. I jumped the beam over her to help Miss Barrie break out the emergency lights.

Those lamps were lit, and glowed in the cabin with their chilly blue light. Mrs. Swaime asked of the woman beside her, as though it were an afterthought, "Why did we stop?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Grimm admitted. I knew her. She was the wife of the Minister of Agriculture, a man who'd acquired a reputation for integrity in a government that didn't use the word. "For me the Tube has always been just a link between home and Albert's office at Bahia. I didn't think that link could break."

Miss Barrie was knocking at the door up front. It opened a reluctant inch to show the eye of the Bupo cop. He growled some answer to the stewardess' question, then slammed and relocked his door. Miss Barrie hurried back to me. "A man was pulled out of that compartment," she said. "He unlocked the entry hatch and was blown out into the Tube by cabin pressure."

"Like a beetle blasted off a bush by a garden hose," Don Raffe murmured.

"I expect my baggage is strung out from here to Havana," Anna pouted. "Doesn't the State have regulations to keep prisoners from killing themselves on public property?"

"Suicide?" Mrs. Swaime asked, soft as a prayer.

"Must have been," Don Raffé snapped. He twisted his magazine into a club, underlining his words with thumps against his open palm. "Some weakling not worthy to stand with us in war, he was. A conscientious objector, probably." Don Raffé said "conscientious objector" exactly as he'd have said the name of a sexual perversion. "We're all going to the Capital on the Leader's business. Some of us have been called to the Leader's actual presence." He glowed pride, giving his secret away. "There is no place in the Leader's new society for weaklings. They are better where this one is, underground, dead."

"Many of us are pained by the thought of war," the Martian said. "Not in the pain of weakness, but that of pity for men lost in battle who might have grown strong in peace."

"A peace-monger!" Don Raffé's was the tone of a Puritan finding a red zucchetto under his pastor's hat. "Surely you don't expect our Leader to bear forever the insults of the Yellow Confederacy? Of course," Don Raffé's eyes widened in anticipation of delicious violence, "you men from Mars are yellow, too." The foreigner, whose skin was in fact the color of lemon-peel, smiled and made no comment.

"I wish you men wouldn't talk so much about war," Mrs. Swaime broke in. "Talking about ugly things just helps them to happen. Rafael, my boy, is in the Continental Guard. He says we'll have no

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