

an outstanding soldier, but there were thousands like him. They didn't get medals, only the Africa Star and Italy Star and so on. He wasn't a good drinker, either, really—always swore too much in an unaccustomed sort of way. Women didn't seem to worry him a great deal, except that he made you feel uncomfortable, and even a little sick, when he talked about them. Too intense, perhaps.

Douglas Mason and I were thrown together a lot, and we became sort of cobbles. Honestly, I don't really know whether I ever liked him. Maybe that's a queer thing to say about a fellow who rode in the same three-tonner with you for years and shared your bivvy. I suppose I did like him, but thinking back on it now I realise that we never talked about anything really important. Only what someone said to someone else, or what a great driver so-and-so was, or what we thought of Ities, or Tommies, or Poles. But I must have liked Douglas, because when we went into town together I often left early with him when I could see that he was getting crook or something on the beer. Other times I'd go on the bash without him, but then afterwards I'd feel I'd let him down somehow. But it was none of his business. I wasn't going to give him any extra marks for not drinking as much as me. He just couldn't take it, that was all.

After we met again in civvy street he never drank except on Friday nights. Saturdays he'd stick in his garden while I went down to the pub. I think he just wasn't interested in other blokes. He had a much better garden than me, of course; but I had a rotten section for a start, anyway.

I DON'T do mental arithmetic for the last two stops on the way home now. After I pass that bend, though, I often think, well, what good were his seconds every day to him? What was the use of saving 25 minutes 12 seconds? Maybe it was even a loss, because he'd be that much early on the other side, and waiting 25 minutes 12 seconds in a kind of suspension may be like waiting for all eternity. There mightn't be any time there. I don't know. Why the hell couldn't he have waited until the tram stopped? You can't do anything in six seconds. He was too intense. I doubt if he consciously intended to save time by jumping that tram as it slowed down at the bend. He just did it because that was the way he was made. At work he was the same—always straining at what he was doing, but never quite sure if it was good. It never got him anywhere in the department.

I've read somewhere that a crook stomach makes you nervous, or maybe it was the other way round. I tain't! Douglas Mason was just plain nervous.

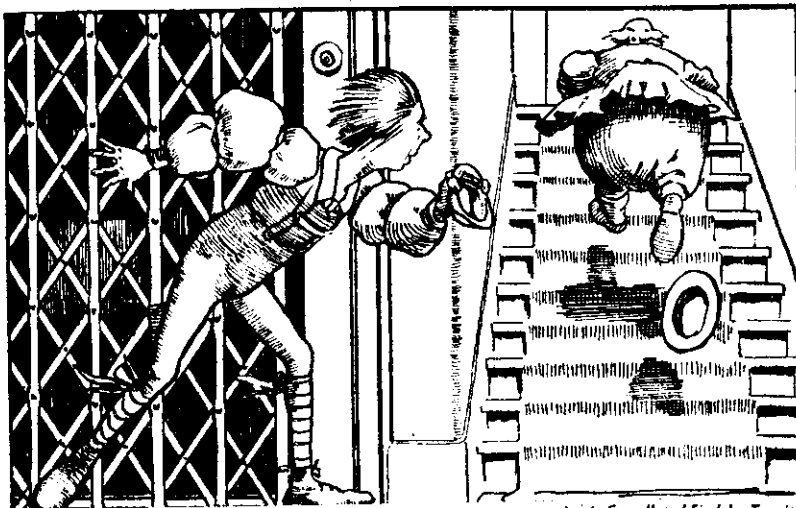
We went home together several nights a week for over a year, but we only talked about the department, and his garden, and sometimes about what other chaps we'd known in the Army were doing. When he came to get off, jumping at the bend, he'd say: "See you later."

Damn it, he'd have been better to have stopped one at Cassino. He'd have been a hero then.

Instead he goes out in a street accident. And maybe he had to wait 25 minutes 12 seconds before he could go over the other side properly. Whatever happened over there, I'll bet he turned out to be in the wrong. Some chaps always do things for the best and they always turn out to be in the wrong.

(continued on next page)

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MARCH 7



"Old Father William"—with apologies to Lewis Carroll and Sir John Tenniel

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Such sprightliness, surely, at your time o' life's
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So now when I'm racing from old Father Time
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