

FATHER NICOMEDES fingered his sleeve to look at his wristwatch. It was seven minutes of nine thirty in the evening. Seven minutes yet, he mumbled. Then he glanced at the empty chairs on the deck. He would have said some verses from the Bible, as usual whenever he was alone. But he just sat there and relaxed. He closed his eyes, but didn't sleep. There was no need for that now.

A few moments ago, while he was watching the rough surface of the ocean, a man approached him. He wore a black coat and moony trousers. He was tall and slim. He was restless. He kept on turning around, and when he was sure that nobody was watching him or perhaps lurking in the dark to see him, he sidled near to Father Nicomedes and sat beside him. He said a very soft, "Good evening, Father" which was almost inaudible. The man opened his mouth and closed it, as if waiting for Father Nicomedes to say "Anything I can do for you, my son?" Or something like that.

"Good evening," he answered after a few seconds, for he was then musing on Christ's sermon upon the mount.

"Father, I'm in a hurry," the man whispered. "I want to confess."

Father Nicomedes faced the man and said, "My son?"

"I saw you, Father, when we... I mean... So after we... er, I looked for you and now..."

"Peace be with you, my son." Father Nicomedes had raised his right hand. "Is there somebody after you?"

"Yes, the submarine is..." He stopped.

"Submarine? What submarine are you—"

"Forget it, Father. The important thing is that I must confess."

"Let's go to my cabin."

"No, no, Father. I like here. I've to confess right now or I cannot..." Again he lost the next words.

Approaching footsteps distracted Father Nicomedes' thoughts. A woman appeared briskly in the pale light of the deck. A man also loomed out of the dark. They held each other face to face for a while. The man stopped down. The woman toed herself to reach his lips.

"Tomorrow morning we shall be in Hawaii." The man said.

"Yes." The woman whispered, dropping her head on his bosom and folding her arms. "Darling, it's too cold here."

"Okay, let's go back."

And they walked away dragging

Time was capsulated,  
eternity compressed in

## SEVEN MINUTE!

their footsteps and holding each other.

"So, at exactly nine thirty, Father," the man reached the climax of his confession, "this boat will be blown up into pieces like a paper doll."

"My son," Father Nicomedes cut in softly, "take out the time-bombs, my son!" He spoke calmly but didn't hide the twinge of fear in his voice.

"The seven time-bombs? That's impossible, Father." The voice of the man became a faint whisper. "They are all well fixed and distributed. And I can't just do it alone, Father. We are three here entrusted with the mission. And each of us was instructed individually to shoot any one of us who will try to double-cross."

Reluctantly Father Nicomedes dismissed the man kneeling at his side.

"Father, I promise to escape from them after this. I promise to lead a new life again. Father, I've to leave now." He said and went away vigilant of the shadow.

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A torrent of black clouds swallowed the yellow crescent and the stars. The heaven was a dismal ceiling, sheared now and then by a trident of lightning. The transoceanic gale sounded nearer and nearer.

Father Nicomedes looked at his wristwatch. Only four minutes of nine thirty. Four minutes to go.

And this liner would fly up into pieces like a paper doll.

Three men moved in the darkest part of the larboard. He watched them throw something like a rubber sack into the sea and this inflated and floated like a small boat. Then, they dove one by one and disappeared in the murky, misty ocean.

Father Nicomedes closed his eyes and gulped that lump in his throat

which was not really there. There they are, he told himself.

The music from the dancing hall was wafted onto the deck. It was sweet, lulling. Father Nicomedes suddenly covered his ears with his palms. But the music won.

He sprang up, heaving deep breaths.

"Good evening, Father." A boy in a white uniform greeted him and handed him a cup of coffee. Father Nicomedes received it and thanked the boy. After he had sat back, the boy went away.

Father Nicomedes put down the cup on the table by his side. There was need even of drinking coffee now.

The music stopped. Applause followed. Then he heard the feet of the dancers clattering on the floor.

Should he summon them to prayer? No, to make a dancing hall a praying room at once would be very hard. Besides that, the minutes were running short, shorter, and shorter.

Then as if in a dream he heard a voice so deep that it seemed to come out from eternity.

"And I saw, when he had opened the sixth seal, and behold there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair; and the whole moon became as blood."

Father Nicomedes looked up and saw that the cloud had split a little to show the half gory face of the moon.

"And the stars from heaven fall upon the earth, as the fig tree casteth its green figs when it is shaken by a great wind:

"And the heaven departed as a book folded up: and every mountain, and the islands were moved out of their places."

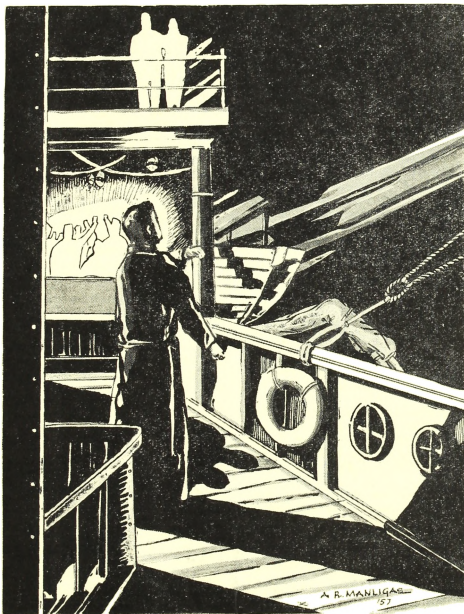
The first thunder came rolling from the east like an empty barrel and exploded. Father Nicomedes sprang up. Whether it was another man's voice or his own talking to himself he wasn't sure. But it was horrible. While he slowly sat down again, he shook his head saying, No, no, this is not the end yet. This

is not the end yet. But, a few minutes from now this boat will fly up into pieces like a paper doll!

This time the music from the dancing hall shifted into a wild, fast tempo. Laughter burst out and he could imagine them drunkenly hugging themselves now, and taking swig after swig of wine.

He felt like shouting. He wanted to rush into the hall and stand in the entrance. There he would shout at the peak of his voice—Haste! Make haste! Fly away. Leave this place right now! And pray! And pray! But then they would only sit still and look at him inquisitively, or, just go on dancing unminding him. Perhaps some would care to ask. Why, Father Nicomedes, why? Then, he would shout again—Don't ask! There's no time! Haste! But they would only shake their heads.

by *Juane Cañizares*



and doubt—Maybe something has happened to Father Nicomedes.

Yes, something I could never tell. He gave up helplessly like a judge announcing a death penalty.

Tears slowly welled up in his eyes, and he was rocked with sobbings. Oh, when shall man draw his dagger? When? When the panther has already leaped upon his throat? Oh, if I could only break the seal... If I could. He lamented.

And the voice came back.

"And the second Angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and there came blood as it were of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

No, no, this is not the end yet. He mumbled. This is not the end yet. But a few minutes from now this boat will fly up in pieces like a paper doll.

He was sweating profusely now. His mind pierced the thick, dark, awful clouds of the words... stratum after stratum until he reached the summit. There he stood guarded by two pillars of fire.

The inaudible tick-tick of his tiny watch now became loud, deafening strokes. His heart pulsed faster. Tick-tack and pulsations were

## • Short Story •

running to overtake each other. More black clouds piled above. The gale wheezed like a top. The Pacific leaped up and down. And then there was a rushing of moments to fill an empty space as the boat tottered.

He was afraid, utterly. But it was his manly side. It was the man of him that sweated. The other part of him was already there, there guarded by two pillars of fire. He looked at his watch once more. Three moves of the second-hand join the hour-hand and the minute-hand at exactly nine thirty. And this liner would fly up like a paper doll. He made the sign of the cross. He wanted to pray, but there was no need of praying now. He willingly stood up as any prepared fighter would do. He stood and waited. ‡