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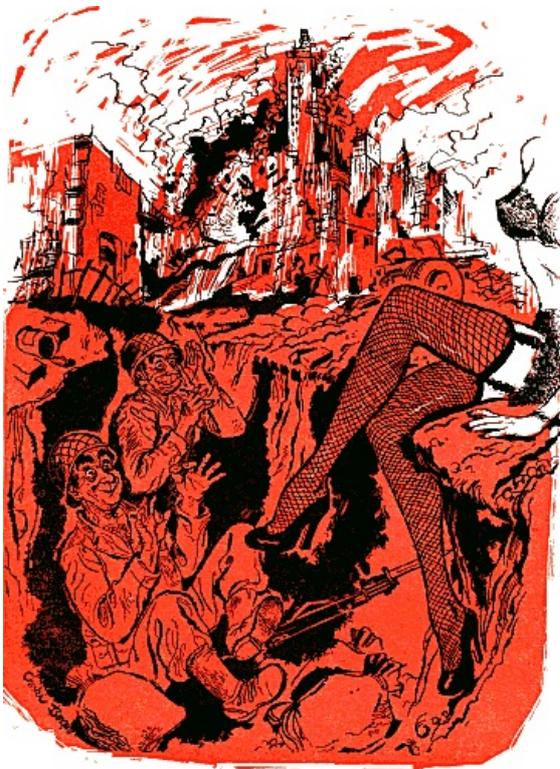
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BELLY LAUGH ***



Illustrator: Charles Berger

BELLY LAUGH

By IVAR JORGENSEN

You hear a lot of talk these days about secret weapons. If it's not a new wrinkle in nuclear fission, it's a gun to shoot around corners and down winding staircases. Or maybe a nice new strain of bacteria guaranteed to give you radio-active dandruff. Our own suggestion is to pipe a few of our television commercials into Russia and bore the enemy to death.

Well, it seems that Ivar Jorgensen has hit on the ultimate engine of destruction: a weapon designed to exploit man's greatest weakness. The blueprint can be found in the next few pages; and as the soldier in the story says, our only hope is to keep a sense of humor!

ME? I'm looking for my outfit. Got cut off in that Holland Tunnel attack. Mind if I sit down with you guys a while? Thanks. Coffee? Damn! This is heaven. Ain't seen a cup of coffee in a year.

What? You said it! This sure is a hell of a war. Tough on a guy's feet. Yeah, that's right. Holland Tunnel skirmish. Where the Ruskies used that new gun. Uhuh. God! It was awful. Guys popping off all around a guy and him not knowing why. No sense to it. No noise. No wound. Just popping off.

That's the trouble with this war. It won't settle down to a routine. Always something new. What the hell chance has a guy got to figure things out? And I tell you them Ruskies are coming up with new weapons just as fast as we are. Enough to make your hair stand on end.

Sugar? Christ, yes! Ain't seen sugar for a year. You see, it's like this: we were bottled up in the pits around the Tunnel for seven damn days. It was like nothing you ever saw before. Oops—sorry. Didn't mean to splash you. I was laughing about something that happened there—to a guy. Maybe you guys would get a kick out of it. After all, we got to keep our sense of humor.

You see, there was me and a Kentucky kid named Stillwell in this pit—a pretty big pit with lots of room—and we were all alone. This Stillwell was a nice kid—green and lonesome and it's pretty sad, really, but there's a yak in it, and—as I say—we got to keep a sense of humor.

Well, this Stillwell—a really green kid—is unhappy and just plain drooling for his gal back home.

He talks about his mother, of course, and his old man, but it's the girl that's really on his mind as you guys can plainly understand.

He's seeing her every place—like spots in front of his eyes—nice spots doing things to him, when this Ruskie babe shows up.

My gun came up without any orders from me just as she poked her puss over the edge of the pit, and—huh? Oh, thank you kindly. It sure tastes good but I don't want to short you guys. Thank you kindly.

Well, as I was saying, this Ruskie babe pokes her nose over the edge of the pit and Stillwell dives and knocks down my gun. He says, "You son-of-a-bitch!" Just like that. Wild and desperate, like you'd say to a guy if the guy was just kicking over the last jug of water on a desert island.

It would have been long enough for her to kill us if I hadn't had good reflexes. Even then, all I had time to do was knock the pistol out of her hand and drag her into the pit.

With her play bollixed, she was confused and bewildered. She ain't a fighter, and she sits back against the wall staring at us dead pan with big expressionless eyes. She's a plenty pretty babe and I could see exactly what had happened as far as Stillwell was concerned. His spots had come to life in very adequate form so to speak.

Stillwell goes over and sits down beside her and I'm very much on the alert, because I know where his courage comes from. But I decide it's all right, because I see the babe is not belligerent, just confused kind of. And friendly.

And willing. Kind of a whipped-little-dog willing, and man oh man! She was sure what Stillwell needed.

They kind of went together like a hand and a glove—natural-like. And it followed—pretty natural—that when Stillwell got up and led her around a wing of the pit, out of sight, she went willing—like that same little dog.

Uhuh. No, you guys. Two's enough. I wouldn't rob you. Well, okay, and thanks kindly.

Well, there I was, all alone, but happy for Stillwell, cause I know it's what the kid needs, and in spots like that what difference does it make? Yank—Ruskie—Mongolian—as long as she's willing.

Then, you guys, Stillwell comes back out—wall-eyed—real wall-eyed—like being hit but not knocked out and still walking. I know what it is—some kind of shock. I get up and walk over and take a look at the babe where he'd left her—and I bust out laughing. I told you guys there was a yak in this. I laughed like a fool—it was that funny. As much as I had time to, before Stillwell cracked. It was enough to crack him—the little thing that pushes a guy over the edge.

He lets out a yell and screams, "For crissake! For crissake! Nothing but a bucket of bolts! Nothing but a couple of plastic lumps—"

That was when I hit him. I had to. He was for the birds, Stillwell was. An hour later we got relieved and a couple of medicos carried him away strapped to a stretcher—gone like a kite.

They took the robot too, and its clothes, but they forgot the brassiere, so I took it and I been carrying it ever since, but I'll leave it with you guys if you want—for the coffee. Might make you think about home. After all, like the man says, we got to keep our sense of humor.

Well, so long, you guys—and thanks.

Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from *Amazing Stories* April-May 1953. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BELLY LAUGH ***

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