

CLASSICS TO GO
THE FIFTY-FOURTH
OF JULY
AND TWO MORE STORIES



ALAN EDWARD NOURSE

The Fifty-Fourth of July

And two more Stories

Alan Edward Nourse

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The Fifty-fourth Of July

Matt had to destroy the rocket because it was a symbol of evil that had brought economic disaster. But must he also destroy—the future?

It was well after dark when Matt Matthews got back down to the headquarters camp, and saw the city stranger sitting there before the fire. He knew he was a city man after a single glance at the shiny, low-topped shoes and the reminiscence of a crease in the dusty trousers. Matt tossed the gophers and the two small coyotes off his broad shoulders to old Moe Arhelger, across the campfire, staring in suspicious silence from the stranger to Moe and back again. "Who's he?" he asked finally.

"He wants to go down to the Ship," said Moe, tossing another stick into the fire. He was a thin, wiry old man, with a white rim of beard scraggling over his lean jaw. A short-bit pipe was clenched between a set of very bad teeth. On his head was a torn, filthy old felt hat, but his clear blue eyes held the silent confidence of authority. The old man puffed quietly as he glanced up at the young giant who had just arrived. "His name's Loevy—he says. Flew over from El Paso this morning in a 'copter, just to see me. Even knew my name—"

"Everybody in New Mexico knows your name," Matthews growled.

The old man nodded, his eyes bright. "Mr. Loevy wants to go down to the Ship tonight."

Matt stared at the stranger's half-day stubble. Then he burst out laughing. "That's what we all want to do, buddy. Just go

down to the Ship. That's all. Only trouble is, the Bulldog isn't ready to lay out the welcome mat for us just yet." He glanced over at Moe. "Did the doc say anything about Jack Abel?"

"Jack's dead. Three slugs in the head."

Matt's face darkened. He looked up at Loevy. "Jack wanted to go down to the ship, too. Tried to go down quiet-like." He set about skinning the first coyote, tossing the rest of the game to the group of silent men sitting around the fire near Moe. "You're wasting your time, stranger. Stick around a while. Be patient, like us. The Bulldog can't hold out forever."

Loevy ran a hand through his dark hair, watching Matthews with sharp brown eyes. "I wasn't figuring on going down quiet-like," he said.

Matt looked up as though seeing the man for the first time, his eyes dark with suspicion. "Then how *do* you plan to go?" His hand moved to the gun at his side, and he began massaging the stock with his huge paw.

Loevy glanced at the gun without fear. "Under a truce flag," he said.

Matthews spat. "Old man Gorham has command of four hundred men down at the ship. They'll shoot anybody that comes close on sight." He looked up at Moe, caught the old man's blue eyes sharply. "I don't like this guy, Moe. I think we'd better take care of him."

Moe shook his head. "Take it easy, Matt. The man thinks maybe he can get this siege broken. Thinks Gorham may surrender if he knows what's happened—in Washington, all over the country."

Loevy nodded, bobbing his head eagerly. "I knew Gorham—before the crash. He's an old-guard soldier, he'll honor a truce flag." His voice was crisp in the still night air. "You want