

Fish

(Continued from page 2) "See what it's come to already," said Mr. McGospick. He had suddenly become drunk on that morsel of incipient rhetoric. His eyes glistened and he crossed the table unpleasantly. "We've killed crucifixion, an' burnin' at the stake, the cannibalism and piracy and polygamy and—this thing's the same—only we'll kill it."

"they mostly do. This is a voluptuous life, ain't it!" It happened that this philosophy was to be notably borne out. Appropriately, we rowed toward a red sickle moon that at last secreted itself behind the tree tops on the far side of the pond, and was no more seen. Its light, very faint, it left to add to the general sense of mystery, for we found we were now moving in an increasing stillness. When we entered the woods our very pathway vanished, and the boat ahead, rowed slowly by the pianist, became a sliding shadow. We could faintly see the inaudible Mr. Anderson crouched in the stern. So, with unexpected reeds scrubbing our gunwales, we were scurrying by the inlet—almost invisible channels walled with bull-rushes and weighted down with silence. Mr. Kimborough moved on until we came out on the reach that road, and below the bridge we halted close by that straggling wood-path.



SANTA EN ROUTE TODAY

running back, and the sound of heavy objects being dumped in the reeds not ten feet away. They made a half-dozen trips in three minutes, then rejoined their ship where they lay panting and overcome with smothered laughter. Mr. Simpson was irate and burned with curiosity. "Wot in hell—" he began, but Mr. Anderson suddenly froze once more and the pianist braced himself on one knee. The bull, snorting, was coming round in a circle, and as we listened he crossed the road, ploughed through the bushes and came to rest within ten feet of the spot he had stood before. Impossible, but this was the thing as it happened.

CHAPTER V

At this juncture the shadow that had been Mr. Charles Anderson suddenly ceased to move, and sat with one hand raised. Ten seconds later the pianist slid his boat toward ours and beckoned us in under the shelter of the reeds on the bank next to the road. "Tsst!" he breathed. Mr. Simpson sighed audibly. "Now, we begin!" he murmured, then, apologetically, "I'm only goin' by his past record." Mr. Anderson again lifted a hand and we were still. Our boat was held lightly by the reeds and the pianist reclined serene on the thwart. We listened and heard nothing, and we continued to listen while our senses scouted for any sort of contact. First, out of the rustling density of the inlet, and before my own heart beats super-

vine howl, unlike the note of any ungulate with which I am familiar, and this great apparition heaved itself, head on, into the bull's ribs. There was a most sonorous whang, and all the air seemed to go out of that animal at once. Then, locked together, the bull and the battering ram went over the bank into the inlet, just beside the boat, and the water raised itself ten feet into the air. When I had wiped my eyes they were climbing ashore on the opposite bank, side by side, and in five seconds they had vanished utterly. Mr. Simpson, a sodden figure, was dancing beside us. "That was my cow—the one I rode and gave the mash to." A small person joined us, running. It was Mr. Archambault. He was spluttering with excitement.

CHAPTER VI

Far down the pond, near a smallish island we had seen, there was a sharp explosion, something hurtled skyward, then, a half mile overhead, a flash and a deafening bang. Five seconds later there was another. Within the time it took the startled echoes to reach us, every dog north of St. Peter's swung into chorus, two great blue herons from a nearby pile left everything and departed, and more black ducks than should live in one pond went up with a continuous rattle of squawks and fled over our heads toward the open sea. "Ships' signal bombs, large size," said Mr. Simpson, recovering himself—"but why?"

"Why," he said, "it might be Mr. McGospick comin' back. Say, that sounds more in anger than in sorrow, don't it? D'you suppose he's in trouble?" Mr. Kimborough wagged his hands. "No," he murmured. "He's safe, and he sprang once more into action. Now listen. You keep this boat

here. You'll know when to move, Charley and I have to clean up this country a little. Just now it's a ravin' mess of professional potato growers practicin' as amateur hijackers. When you move, row to Felix's landing. I'll be there." They scraped through the last bank of reeds and disappeared. "What did he mean by saying we'd know when to start?" I inquired. "Faith," said Mr. Simpson, "is what you need. Say, Bill, truly, you don't think he worked that bull any way, do y'?" I said I did not, and we sat still again studying the northern stars. The strain was too much for Mr. Simpson and he pried open one of the cases and extracted a wired bottle. A beautiful pop and he dove suddenly. He came up with a sigh and I finished the bottle, which obviously hailed from the Epernay country. Now we were prepared for anything that might happen, except what actually did.

CHAPTER VII

"Say! Listen, this is not a joke. Peter McGospick is on his way to town by the Lot 48 road. He has two barrels in his car that may contain rum—I don't know. And listen! For prima facie evidence, to save opening the barrels, you might find two bottles under the right side of the rear seat." We could hear voices coming over the wire—"Thanks, me dear," he resumed, "Congratulations later!" and he hung up. "That," he said, "puts it all on a strictly proper and legal basis. We will now eat." We inferred that the man on the telephone was a Government inspector, but with a fine sense of humor.

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"On!" this last business, which is humorous. "Mr. Kimborough grinned like a small boy. "The two barrels now accompanying Mr. McGospick along the Lot 48 road contain—water. I filled 'em. The rum that was in them is at present in a large barrel"—he indicated the direction to make his point clear—"in the cow barn—I put it in, and Felix has his receipt in full."

"In return for the water!" said Mr. Simpson, brightening. Then immediately he was borne down again with disappointment. "Then they won't get him!" Mr. Kimborough arose and executed a brief and stately skip. "Oh—but they will," he beamed. "You forget the bottles. They contain the finest Demerara. We had to contribute something!" Mr. Simpson sat silent for some time, then smiled on the whole company.

"Bill," he said to me, "as I mentioned before, I'm very, very happy. Would you hand me another bottle of that?" At this juncture Mr. Felix Archambault, who had been listening, facing rapidly toward each speaker, and drinking, as Mr. Simpson put it, "head down, like a horse," now visibly concluded that the evening was flawless, and his ultimate Gallic temperament plucked him from his seat as a leaf is lifted by autumn winds. He drew from his case a rosin-dusted fiddle, seeing which, Mr. Kimborough solemnly opened a large melodeon, which machine can never be wholly out of tune. Then ensued for an unguessable time a concert that ran from laughter to tears. Some incredible faculty at one moment revealed the four hundred pipes of the massed bands at Olympia, and these passed, leaving one ridiculous, if dying, artist that played until his last breath, somewhere behind bracken and amid falling waters. In a little, Mr. Archambault, awe-struck, stood out, and remained standing, swaying slightly, but otherwise rigid, and the pianist, using all stops, called out the gaudy if unsuspected faculties of that abused instrument. Incidentally, he chose to tell the whole history of Scotland in song. He closed, as ever, in profound silence, with Archambaults of all sizes, and variously clothed for the night, filling all available openings.

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baul's hands with fervour. From Mr. Simpson he parted with some coldness. When his tail light had faded the pianist drew breath. "Farewell!" he said. "Say, he was so sunk in his own troubles he never notices the fireworks. He's an illusionist. I had five separate stories ready for him, none very good; but no matter, he's gone." He sighed, and we went into supper. There he flung himself on Mr. Archambault's telephone, a many-party circuit with which he wrestled for a time. Finally he reached someone in Charlottetown named George, who seemed to be in an official capacity. He communicated briefly:

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky! There's a mother's deep prayer, And a baby's low cry— And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing, For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King

—J. F. Holland



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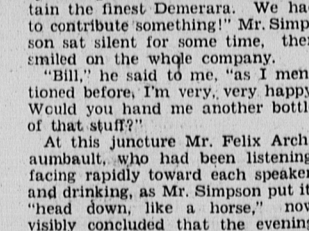
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