

# **Penowa**

**by**  
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*Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society*

# PENOWA

## Chapter 1

The boy, not yet four years old, fascinated by the spectacle before him, watched as the house was enveloped in flames. From his vantage point on his grandparents' kitchen porch, he could look directly down onto the blazing inferno. As he gazed, mesmerized by the great red tongues licking at the structure, he saw a figure emerge. The figure, like the house, was enveloped in flames, and in his young mind, he could not comprehend that the figure was human because how could a human burn like that? But it *must* have been a human because it was running at top speed! A pillar of fire, the figure continued to the edge of the lawn and turned left toward Zick's, in a desperate effort to outrun the engulfing flames, but had God himself in that instant snuffed out the flames, it would nevertheless have been too late. Her lungs seared by the fire, Anna Olenick's brief life had come to a quick and violent end after seventeen years.

Anna's husband, Joe, had survived the fire, although horribly burned. The boy looked at his swollen figure lying in the hospital bed and wondered if a man really existed inside the blackened grotesquerie. He was permitted to enter the room with his parents because hospital personnel had reckoned that he was too young to perceive what was going on. But they were wrong. The event marked his first cognitive confrontation with death and its aftermath, and it would remain indelibly fixed in his memory throughout his life.

Joe Olenick derived his living, such as it was, from the coal mines. Everyone in Penowa derived his living from the coal mines or coal-mine-related activities. The year was 1929. Calvin Coolidge had handed the reins over to Herbert Hoover, assuring him that the country couldn't be in better shape. However, the coal miners, like the farmers, had not shared in the prosperity of the twenties. In October of that year the hapless Hoover, who had promised two cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot, would see the stock market collapse and the country sink into an economic depression that would last many years.

These dire happenings would not impinge on the boy's life style because of his extreme youth. He had other things to do rather than be concerned over something which he didn't understand. After all, didn't he have clothes on his back and something in his belly, plus a two-bladed knife in his pocket with which to play mumbly peg and baseball? What more could a boy want or need? He had pilfered the knife, a Barlow, from his grandparents' general store but forgot that .... they wouldn't miss it. He was mistaken on that count. They missed it, of course, but he was their first grandchild and, as such, enjoyed certain liberties. Oh, he understood that a man named Hoover was President. Not a day went by without someone telling a Hoover joke, or talking about Hooverville, but that was the extent of his political awareness.

Like Joe Olenick, the boy's father also worked in the mine. In those days an Italian immigrant had two options; he could work either on the railroad or in the coal mine. He left for work so early in the morning that the boy seldom saw him leave. Only on rare occasions did he see his father get ready for work. The preparations were simple. You put on work clothes, boots and the canvas miner's cap. Then you made sure the carbide

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can was full because carbide provided the illumination by which you worked. You poured a little into the lower chamber of your lamp and a little water into the upper chamber. Then, by turning a lever on top of the lamp you metered the water into the carbide. The resulting reaction produced acetylene which gushed from a tiny aperture in the center of the lamp's reflector. When the flint wheel was spun, it created a spark which ignited the gas, providing a brilliant white light. The various tools, pick, shovel, etc., were paid for by the miner. Everything was paid for by the miner. The company offered nothing except hard work, low wages and death.

Joe Olenick's sister, Mary, was married to Tony Zick. Tony's was a curious case. He was born in the old country, Slovenia, but since his family lived so close to the Italian border and since there was no other option, he attended Italian schools. And so he came, an Italian-speaking Slovenian, to America to make his fortune. He met Mary and ended up in Penowa, digging coal at the Jefferson mine.

Tony was a good man and he was very content with Mary. By the time he was forty, she had given him six children, four girls and two boys, and he and Mary, being very devout Catholics, made certain that the children were likewise imbued with the faith. So, all in all, Tony reckoned that he had made the right move by leaving Slovenia, even though times were tough in 1930. He had good health, a robust brood with which to share his life, and an unquenchable optimism. About a year after his sister-in-law, Anna, breathed the flames that took her life, forty-year-old Tony Zick's pursuit of the American dream was stopped short in the dark damp bowels of Jefferson mine when an electrical shock snuffed the life from his brawny body. That same year of 1930, nineteen year old Albert Roth also met his end in the same mine when the roof caved in, crushing him. Incidents such as these were to be expected in Penowa. A man had to provide a living for his family, so he gambled by working in the mine, using his life for a pawn. Sometimes he lost.

Shortly after Tony Zick lost his life, the boy's father had a heart attack. It happened when they'd returned home from a Sunday outing. The boy saw his father step to the door, as if to go outside for a breath of air, but he never made it. He crashed to the floor instead. The boy's recollection of events became hazy after that, probably because he was shuttled away from the area. When he next saw his father, the scene had shifted to the Washington hospital where his father was lying in obvious pain. Everything had a dreamlike quality about it. His stricken father, who had always been a pillar of strength, now lay helpless and his mother cried softly whenever she thought she was alone. The boy understood that his father was seriously ill but he had no qualms about it because he knew that things would work out. He was certain that his father would never desert them and he was correct in his assumption. His father did recover but he would be compelled to avoid strenuous work ever after.

The boy was identified by various names like: Murph, Mootz, Mertzy, Tony Baloney, Wop or Dago. Whatever the appellation, he responded. In those days it was common to use terms like: Pollock, Hunkie, Frog, Greaser, Crow [Croatian], or any other demeaning designation. Usually it was employed in a friendly fashion and, unlike today, no offense was

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taken. People had thicker skins then. Only occasionally did someone take umbrage at a particular selection of terms and retribution would be swift and severe .... like a knuckle sandwich to the chops. So it was necessary to know the nature of the person who was being addressed.

There were other social errors one could make. For instance, to mistake a Croatian for a Serbian or vice versa was an unforgivable *faux pas*. Among Italians one wouldn't dare confuse a Calabrese for a Sicilian or a Sicilian for a Genoese, for example. Being somewhat provincial, they each considered themselves the true Italians and looked with disdain upon the others who were unfortunate enough to be a cut or two beneath them. The reason for such behavior may have been that everyone had difficulty making ends meet and it damaged their pride. Therefore they resorted to a type of pecking order by which they assuaged their sense of inadequacy. To the author, it seems a logical explanation; to the reader, perhaps not.

Communication was an experience then. Not among the first-generation Americans but with the oldsters who had emigrated from the Old Country. Many of them had only the most tenuous grasp of the language, and when they spoke, the words were a melange of their native tongue and fractured English. Sometimes, in their intensity, they would forget the English and, instead, lapse into their native tongue exclusively. But living there and being in daily contact with them, one learned to decipher their dialect. A lady entered Rotundo's general store and requested "rreks." The "R" was spoken with a distinct burr as many of them did then: rreks. This order stumped Robbie Rotundo, who was minding the store then. In desperation he called to the kitchen for assistance from Clara, his mother. Clara, likewise, was perplexed. So she asked the lady what she intended to do with this rreks, whereupon the lady said, "You know, rreks" and so saying she dropped her hand to her groin and drew it upwards. It developed that rreks translated to the word "rag" and, used in that connotation, it meant Kotex.

Youngsters of those days are now today's oldsters, and they must certainly confess to a sense of guilt when they think back to those times because they thought it was hilarious to hear those pollocks, wops or Magyars destroy the language. In their youthful ignorance they tended to associate lack of communication with inability but they couldn't have been more mistaken. Those people left their homelands in search of a better way of life. They dared to emigrate to a country separated from their's by a vast ocean and whose language and customs were alien to them. That required a lot of courage, no matter that they may have been driven to it. They had to know that they would be low man on the totem pole and that they would be fully exploited, as indeed they were. Perhaps victimized is a more apt term. But they came and they toiled to eke out an existence while beseeching God to help them provide hope and opportunity for their children.

The author is one of those children and if you were to ask him today whether he fulfilled his parents' hopes, he would probably answer in the negative. He is an inveterate non-achiever even though he was born with the necessary qualifications. There are those who enter school at six years of age and already know what career they will pursue. That didn't

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apply to him. He is now retired and he *still* doesn't know what he'd like to do for a living. He is writing this because writing is something he hasn't yet undertaken and certain friends have suggested that he give it a try.

In 1931 a young woman named Lauren Gilfillan came to Penowa and spent some time there, living among the people while compiling information. Three years later she published a book entitled "I Went To Pit College" and it was a factual description of life in that area during a period of the Great Depression. However, she wrote her book from the standpoint of a detached observer who knew that she could extricate herself from that morass of human misery at any time of her choosing, and of course, she eventually did. To read her book is to sink into the depths of a bottomless gloom from which there is no apparent escape. True, times were indeed difficult, as Sonya Jason, in her book "Icon Of Spring", so aptly describes but people, by their very nature, do not, can not dwell constantly on despair. To do so, corrodes the human spirit. Shortly after publication, Miss Gilfillan suffered a breakdown, according to her sister, as a result of overwork on her book and she spent the remaining forty-three years of her life in a nursing home where she died in 1978. The people of Penowa did not allow the same fate to befall them. They were accustomed to hard living. Instinct dictated that they rise above adversity and head for the light. And they did. This will be an account of people and events as accurately as the author can recall them and he shall endeavor to show the reader that, despite the harshness of life at that time, it was not always gloom and doom.

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## Chapter 2

Rosie Davis looked out the window of her Seldom Seen home. The term "Seldom Seen" in this case, is not a descriptive term, but instead is the name of the coal patch wherein she resided. "Coal Patch" was the term applied to a group of houses which were built by the coal company to provide shelter for the workers. This one was an adjunct of the Waverly mine. Rosie, who claimed to be a Spanish gypsy, could reside there as long as her husband John, a black man, remained employed by the company.

Seldom Seen was located about two miles west of Penowa and it provided a never-ending source of enjoyment for Poopie Cimarolli. When asked where he lived, his standard reply was "Penobscot."

"Where's that?"

"About a mile from Penowa."

"And where is Penowa?"

"About two miles from Seldom Seen. HawHawHawr. Whoogie!"

Looking up at the morning sky, Rosie saw the promise of a beautiful summer day and decided that she would spend it as she did many others ... at Jack's saloon. She could almost taste the icy malt flavor as it slid over her tongue and down her gullet. Lord!, she thought, if there's anything better than cold beer, I'd like to hear about it. On the coal stove a kettle of water was boiling merrily, a small column of steam escaping from its spout. She poured some of the hot water into an enameled basin, tempering it with some cold water from the galvanized bucket perched on a wooden stand. Placing the basin on an orange crate located beside the window, she then propped a small mirror in the kitchen window so as to get the full benefit of daylight illumination.

With a shaving brush, she worked up a dense lather, spread it over her face and then honed the straight razor, almost lovingly, along the smooth leather strop before applying it to her beard. While shaving, her thoughts returned to Jack's saloon, causing her body to tingle with anticipation. Exciting things often happened there, but even if it turned out to be a quiet day, she nevertheless enjoyed sitting in a booth with a glass of cold beer and watching the smoke from her cigarette rise up to mingle with the layer of blue smoke against the ceiling. By evening, that layer of smoke would be down to the floor but, by then, the patrons, including Rosie, wouldn't care.

Completing her shave, she rinsed her face, toweled it

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dry and regarded the visage looking back at her from the mirror, the same face she had been looking at for some thirty-two years. The skin, now entirely free of stubble, still had a bluish pallor but that would be fixed with a heavy application of powder followed by a bit of rouge on her high cheekbones. Any movie buff, seeing her for the first time, would be reminded instantly of the actor, Bela Lugosi, who in 1936 was rapidly becoming world renowned for his vampire roles. Rosie's beard, however, was heavier than Bela's.

The locals believed that she worked in the circus as the bearded lady although, no one had ever seen her in that capacity. It could well have been true because she took frequent trips to all points of the country, staying away for extended periods and she *did* receive the Billboard regularly in the mail.

Murzy, son of the saloon keeper, loved to tell the following story: During WWII, while in the Philippines, his ship was tied to a pier at Subic Bay, Luzon. One day, another sailor walked aboard and introduced himself as Nils Osterberg who lived in Staten Island. He inquired whether anyone aboard, by chance, hailed from Staten Island, to which Murzy replied in the negative. Osterberg then asked Murzy where he called home. Murzy, feeling certain that the man had never heard of such a place as Penowa, and also to avoid lengthy explanations as to its whereabouts, replied that he was from around Pittsburgh. Osterberg peered at him intuitively and said "Come on. Where do you really live?" Murzy, preparing to give a discourse on the topography of western Pennsylvania shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Penowa." Osterberg's eyebrows shot up and, in a state of excitement, said, "Do you know Cross Creek Rosie?" Murzy gained immediate stature when he assured him that he did, indeed, know Cross Creek Rosie. Such was the renown of Rosie Davis. To the people of Penowa, she was known as Rosie Davis but to the rest of the world she was Cross Creek Rosie.

Completing her toilet, Rosie retired to the bedroom and regarded her wardrobe. Her wardrobe was a row of nails driven into the wall from which were suspended the various items of her clothing. Today she would wear the Kelly green outfit: green stockings, green skirt, green jacket, green silk boa, green purse and green hat. She was never without a hat. A hat was needed to hide the encroaching bald spot on her pate. The only non-green items would be her shoes and white blouse. She also had similar ensembles in other colors, all of them garish. Rosie liked bright colored clothing.

It was a two-mile hike to Jack's saloon but Rosie didn't mind. Everybody walked a lot in 1936. Unlike today, a woman could, on the darkest night, walk the highway in relative safety. Rosie was accustomed to walking because her

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appearance was so intimidating as to deter most would-be Good Samaritans from offering her a lift. Many a stranger, having had their first glimpse of her, went scuttling away like a fox before the hounds. A salesman once entered Jack's place, obviously shaken, and ordered a glass of whiskey neat. Downing it, he ordered another and then another, in rapid succession, all the while murmuring over and over, "My God. My God!" After the third glass, he began to recover somewhat. He explained that he had encountered a woman walking the road. From behind, she looked pretty good so he stopped to offer her a lift. When she turned to face him, his blood ran cold at the sight of her, causing him to stall the car in his hurry to escape. "What's more," he told Jack, "she's headed this way." Jack laughed off the man's warning and said, "That's just Rosie." The folks in Penowa, although eschewing intimacy with her, nevertheless understood that she posed no threat.

Rosie entered the saloon that Saturday morning with an air of expectancy. Perhaps, she thought, someone will want their fortune told. That was one of Rosie's fortes; she claimed that, being a Spanish gypsy, she had a natural talent for reading palms. She would do it for a drink or two, thereby augmenting her drinking allocation. She would also conduct a peep show of sorts.

There had always been conjecture about her sexuality, some claiming that she was in possession of both, male and female, organs. If the monetary enhancement were great enough, say four or five dollars, she would allow herself to be surrounded by the males who had contributed to the cause. As they watched, goggle-eyed, she would rearrange her garments to reveal herself *au naturel*. Some came away swearing that she, indeed, was a morphadite. Others pooh-poohed the notion.

That morning, however, things were slow. A few bachelors came in, whose only interests were much like hers: a shot and a beer to clear the throat of last night's indiscretions and to get the new day underway. No prospects there but it was Saturday and she knew that the action would pick up. It always did on Saturday. She need only be patient and nurse her beer. Rosie had enough money to buy her own drinks but, what the Hell, it was much better when others paid.

As the day wore on, fresh customers trickled in. All men. Very few women ever ventured into Jack's saloon, not because of the risk but because it was considered indecorous for a lady to bide her time in male precincts, unless of course, she were accompanied by her husband. In the case of Rosie's husband, however, the matter would have been moot. Being a black, he was not permitted to enter the premises and drink with the whites. Such an occurrence would have been disastrous to Jack's business. John Davis could, however, buy



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beer in bottles and drink it outside on the porch. Privately, Jack admitted the unfairness of the policy, but he could not jeopardize his livelihood. Davis accepted it philosophically. Such was the mores of the times.

As the day wore on, several Italians made an appearance, including three Rotellinis, Guiseppe, Benny and Teddy. Also Frank Rotundo, Giulio Donati and Pete Bonassi. There were more than enough to begin playing the Italian card game known as Briscola, in which, unlike other card games, the deal proceeded to the right, not the left. Others would come in later to commandeer another table. The supernumeraries could observe the games in progress until it was their turn to sit in and play against the winners. Or, while waiting, they could choose to play a game of Mora or retire to Jack's driveway, which doubled as a Bocce court.

It was an exciting activity for these immigrants. Not so for Rosie, who looked askance at the entire proceedings. For one thing, she couldn't understand a word they were saying because those Eytalians were talking in their own wop language. Why didn't they talk American, for Christ's sake? Another irritant was that they seemed to have no interest in fortune telling; only in their dumb games. Hell! they won't even buy a lady a drink. So far, she'd had to pay, out of her own pocket, for every drink. Oh well. she thought, things'll pick up.

She had soon consumed several steins of beer, with the inevitable result that her body now demanded relief. Picking up her purse, she exited the side door and wended her way down the path to the outhouse. The outhouse was a single structure divided in half; men on the left, women on the right. In the bocce court, not far from the outhouse, a group of boys, including Murzy and Frank Korpos were playing marbles, but she paid no attention to them. Neither did she notice the man who had exited the building after she did, and who was now weaving his way, rather unsteadily, in her direction. His name was Albertini Pellegrini.

By the time he reached the outhouse, Rosie had disappeared inside and latched her door against intrusion. Albertini, however didn't enter the men's side. Instead, he stood at her door, swaying gently, like a tree in a soft breeze .... and waited. He, too, seemed oblivious to the marble players, who were now beginning to miss the easy shots. Interest in the marble contest definitely was lagging.

Presently the latch on Rosie's door snicked as she moved to emerge from the outhouse. At that moment, Albertini made his move. Forcing her back into the outhouse, he stepped in and the spring-loaded door slammed shut. What the boys heard were sounds of a gigantic struggle taking place, as of bodies bumping into walls, coupled with guttural sounds and words

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like "sonofabitch, bastard" and other more descriptive terms of endearment.

Suddenly the door burst open and the boys were treated to a spectacle which brought a precipitate end to the marble tournament. There stood Rosie, panties down to her knees, busier than ten hens at feeding time. She was attempting to hold fast to her ever-present handbag while struggling to pull her panties up and her skirt down, at the same time, fighting off Albertini who, from behind her, was attempting with some success, to thwart her efforts in that direction. He was also trying to turn her body around into a more receptive position. So certain was he of his conquest, that he had already dropped his trousers down to his ankles.

At that instant, Rosie broke away from his grasp, sprang from the outhouse and fled up the path, now having more success with her panties. Aware now that she had an audience, she flashed the boys her most brilliant Bela Lugosi smile as she retreated. Meanwhile, Albertini, still oblivious to his goggling audience, emerged from the outhouse, flagstaff at the ready, and with arms outstretched, attempted to catch up to her but it was all in vain. For him, the race was over. His trousers were still down around his ankles, forcing him to take tiny six-inch steps. In his alcoholic stupor, he didn't seem to have enough presence of mind to hoist his pants at least to flagstaff level, enabling him to run.

Although he was still a young lad, Murzy, nevertheless, was aware of all the speculation regarding Rosie's superfluity of sexual appendages. After that incident, he could lay the matter to rest, at least to his satisfaction. Rosie definitely was in possession of a single set of sexual organs .... of the female variety. It would also take some little while before something as prosaic as a marble tournament could, once again, stir his interest.

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### Chapter 3

Mikey was a fighter. Perhaps coming from a family of ten had something to do with it. The Korposes lived on the property adjacent to Jack's saloon in Penowa and though the family was large, the members lived harmoniously with one another, all of them, boys and girls alike, being hard workers. Mike Korpos Sr. was a coal miner who died in 1931 while still in his early forties, but he was one whose life was not claimed by the mine. Instead he was taken by pneumonia.

Young Mike loved sports and he was always on hand to take part in any contest. Due to the untimely demise of his father, however, he was forced to go into the mines at an early age. His career as a miner, however, was destined to be of short duration. While still a teenager, he was caught in a roof cave-in which cost him his lower left leg. Had the accident happened in modern times, with modern techniques and protective laws, the leg could have, and would have, been saved. But in 1936, it was deemed more expedient to amputate the leg and provide a prosthesis plus a pair of crutches. He also received a small amount of money, certainly not like the princely sums awarded in modern times.

Mike, however, was the perennial optimist who lived his life to the fullest of his capabilities and it wasn't long before he disposed of his crutches. Neither did his handicap deter him from participating in neighborhood sports activities. There wasn't much organization then. A group of boys simply chose up teams by the eeny-meeny method and then played as if they were mortal enemies. If brothers happened to be on opposing teams, familial ties were temporarily severed during the contest unless, of course, there were serious injury. Nor was there any parental participation or interference in the games. Parents were too busy trying to keep ends together, besides which, many of them, being immigrants, had no conception of, or interest in, the brand of sports played in their newly adopted country. Despite his handicap, Mike would be chosen early on, since his presence was a decided asset to the team. He played with a vengeance and he gave no quarter, nor did he expect any. He could field a ball as adroitly as those with a full complement of limbs and better than many.

Mike was also handy with his fists, a fact which was exemplified one afternoon at Jack's saloon. Although still too young to legally buy alcoholic beverages, he nevertheless enjoyed the company of his cronies who spent a lot of time sitting on Jack's porch, presumably to watch the antics of the customers inside. Among those sitting there was a character nicknamed "But", from the neighboring coal camp of Penobscot. A husky type he liked to throw his weight around at times and that afternoon, he chose Mike to be the butt of his humor.

Mike endured But's taunting for only a short time before warning him to lay off. But sarcastically inquired as to who it was that would make him lay off.

Mike said, rather heatedly, "I will."

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Gut replied, "Get the Hell outta here. I don't fight cripples."

"Don't let that hold you back, you sonofabitch."

At that point, they adjourned to the street where Gut, sensing a quick and effortless victory, immediately went on the offensive. Slightly shorter than Mike, but much wider and brawnier, he used his weight to advantage as he bored in with sledgehammer blows. The suddenness of the attack caught Mike off guard, causing him to backpeddle, a feat which, for someone in Mike's condition, required no little expertise. Because of his wooden leg, he lacked the sure-footedness required of a fighter. He bounced around in a curious manner, his good leg carrying the brunt of the load while the artificial leg assisted in keeping his balance. Mike's strategy simply consisted of playing a waiting game. He would attempt to evade Gut's blows or deflect them as much as possible.

Mike knew he must weather the initial savagery of Gut's attack. He also knew that he must begin to administer some punishment in return. One advantage was that his reach was a little longer than Gut's. Using that edge, he peppered his opponent's face with every opportunity. However, he was absorbing a great amount of punishment.

Things were looking grave for him and it seemed as if he might not survive his ordeal. But those privy to him knew that he was no quitter, that he was as tenacious as a pit bull. At last an opening presented itself and he delivered a devastating blow that knocked Gut off his feet, providing him with the opportunity he'd been seeking. Like a flash, Mike was upon his quarry, straddling him and pummeling his face unmercifully with all the pent-up fury that had been building up inside him throughout the struggle. So frenzied was his attack that he didn't even hear his victim begging for an end to it. Only when he became aware that Gut, his face a mass of torn and bleeding tissue, was crying and blubbering uncontrollably did he, at last, arise to leave the field of battle.

Times being what they were, Mike, of course, had to continue working despite his handicap. Had he had the means to further his education, he undoubtedly would have excelled in any field of his choosing. He learned quickly, retaining everything, but with his father gone, he had to go out and earn, turning his pay checks over to his mother. So he returned to the coal mine, but not to the deep mine. Never again to the deep mine. This time it was a strip mine, owned by Leonard Sasso of Carnegie, Pa.

Mike's new job was truck driving. He arose early in the morning, went to the shop where he picked up his truck and drove to the pit. There, a power shovel loaded him and off he'd go to the tippie. The tippie was located a few miles from the mine, in the neighboring town of Virginville, W.Va.

A tippie is defined as an apparatus where cars are tipped to unload them. In strip mining, this is not the case. Usually a tippie consists of a ramped approach, up which a loaded truck backs. The driver then "trips the tailgate." By pulling a lever just outside his door, he releases the bottom catches of the rear gate of the truck bed, thereby allowing the gate to swing free on its upper hinges. The driver then activates the

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hydraulic hoist which raises the front of the bed and the coal slides out through the rear gate. It then goes through a series of oscillating screens where it is sorted according to size and shunted to holding bins. The driver, meanwhile, has buttoned up his truck and gone on his way for another load.

It was a dreary job, Mike reflected as he drove along his solitary way. The only break in the monotony occurred when he met a driver coming the other way. Then there would be the customary grin, the waving of a hand, followed immediately by the accompanying cloud of yellow dust churned up by the truck's wheels as it rumbled by.

There was always dust. Dust as fine as talcum powder. Dust in his eyes, in his teeth, in his lunch bucket. Lord only knew how much he'd breathed into his lungs. Sometimes he tied a rag over his nose and mouth, but it didn't help very much. The shrubs and undergrowth lining the roadway were bowed to the ground with the weight of dust lying upon them. Walking in the stuff felt, to him, much like walking on a high-napped carpet even though there was no high-napped carpet in his home. Nobody in Penowa owned a high-napped carpet. He'd walked on one, once, in a lawyer's office.

For the time being, however, he was satisfied with his job. It was enabling his mother to keep up with the bills. At this stage he wasn't sure whether he would make a career of it, but of one thing he was certain; it was, by far, easier than deep mining. And certainly much safer.

It was while pondering these things that his truck faltered and lurched to a stop. Goddammit, he thought, not again! It seemed to him that these trucks were forever breaking down. Well, it was no big deal. He'd hitch a ride in with the next truck and get word to Eldo, the boss mechanic. Maybe they'd go out and fix his truck or maybe he'd get another one.

Retrieving his lunch bucket, he dismounted from the truck and waited at the side of the road. Shortly, another truck came along and stopped to pick him up. It was Jake Yopsic, headed for the tipple with a full load. He was glad to have Mike aboard because it meant a welcome relief from the humdrum of the job. As soon as he dumped his load he'd take Mike to the shop.

Getting to the tipple meant going down Virginville hill which had a gradient of about fifty per cent. It could be a hair raising event, especially if the truck had less than adequate brakes. Near the bottom, the road made a one-hundred degree turn to the right, immediately followed by an equally sharp turn to the left, a short jog across a double set of railroad tracks and, finally, a left turn to the tipple located several hundred feet up along the track. For an experienced driver like Jake, it was child's play.

Returning from the tipple, the truck, now relieved of its burden, created much more noise as it trundled along, and as it jounced across the railroad tracks, the men were obliged to raise their voices a few

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decibels in order to communicate. Mike, from force of habit, glanced to his right and the last thing he remembered was a wall of steel hurtling towards him.

The locomotive struck the truck precisely where Mike was sitting. Although the engineer had the brakes fully applied, the train traveled hundreds of feet down the track, scattering pieces of the truck as it went. When they found Mike, he was more dead than alive. A friend, Robbie Rotundo, who sped to the scene at once, later reported that, although Mike was lying on his back, his toes were pointing downward, which indicated extensive damage. Jake, on the other hand, escaped practically unscathed.

They took Mike to the Ohio Valley hospital in Steubenville, Ohio and placed him in a full body cast. He was destined to spend a long long time in his plaster carapace. Again, his tenacity came to the fore. Most people would have thrown in the towel, but not Mike. He would abide and he would prevail because there just was no other way.

## DOG DAY

It was a hot summer day, with the spectre of the new school term looming in the near future and the boys were gathered in the common field at Penowa, trying to reach a consensus on their activities for the day. The field was large enough to accomodate two baseball fields and was owned by several people in the neighborhood. Most years, it was allowed to lie fallow by the owners, thereby providing an excellent playground for the progeny of the immigrants who inhabited the valley.

The group gathered there that morning, ranged in age from ten to eighteen. Flies and various other insects buzzed around sun bleached heads in endless circles, alighting only when the victim was sufficiently distracted. Gnats flitted scarcely an inch from sweat streaked faces, risking certain death by threatening to enter an unguarded eye, ear or nose. Bees busily plied their trade as they flitted from flower to flower and were no threat if left to their own devices.

"Why don't we play Duck On Davy?" This from Murzy because it was his favorite game at that time.

"Nah! We played that yesterday."

"How about Sacks On The Mill?"

"Hell with that. Joe's too rough. He'll bust your ass."

Joe Bennett only laughed, displaying his perfect set of teeth which were, early on, showing a slight discoloration due to his fondness for chewing tobacco. A strapping youth, Joe had biceps which would have been the envy of Charles Atlas, and his thighs reminded one of marble columns.

The group included two fairly large canine members. One, a Shepherd belonging to Robbie Rotundo, was named Prince, while a shorthaired, mixed-breed named Fido belonged to Joey Zick. These two dogs, like quarrelsome neighbors, seemed never to get along. They had fought one another many times. So far, no one had bothered to throw out a stick to fetch or offered a rag for a tug of war. Bored with the apparent stagnation of the group and unable to distract their masters, they focused their attention on one another.

In dogdom, having once established eye contact, there is no retreating. The dog is left with two options: Either he takes up the challenge or else he rolls over on his back in a gesture of surrender. Neither dog had rolled onto his back. Now, hackles extending from the ears to the base of the tail, raised up on both dogs.

Murzy was playing a game of baseball with the two-bladed Barlow knife which he'd pilfered from his grandparents' general store. His buddy, Frank Korpos, dropped to his knees

and joined him.

"Maybe we can play a game of mushball."

"Not enough guys."

"Would be if we played rounders."

"Who's gonna go after the bat and ball?"

Silence.

"Too damn hot anyway."

The dogs had now assumed a stiff-legged attitude and were slowly circling, eyes locked, one and then the other occasionally emitting a deep growl. Murzy and Korpos were deeply involved in their game. Tommy Fodor, reclining on his haunches, pulled up a sprig of timothy grass and chewed thoughtfully on its tender end. Johnnie Korpos held his closed hand to his ear and listened to the frantic buzzing of the trapped fly which he'd caught in midflight. Johnnie was a whiz at catching flies out of the air, to the dismay of Murzy who just couldn't get the hang of it. Robbie, Bela and the two Joes, being a little older were discussing more adult topics.

The gnarring of the dogs was now continuous, interrupted only by the need to draw a fresh supply of air into the lungs. Their tenseness, as they circled, was more pronounced, the stone-hard leg muscles flexing, both dogs hesitant to make the first move. They could continue for hours.

"Well. What the Hell's it gonna be?"

"I dunno," from several mouths.

"What about stick in the mud?"

"What the Hell you talkin' about? There aint any mud."

"Well, what if we all pissed in the same spot?"

That remark earned hoots all around and a slap behind the head for its author.

"I was just bullshittin' for Chrissakes. Can't you guys take a joke? What about a game of caddy? I got a caddy in my pocket."

There were no takers. The languor of the August weather seemed to steal over the group as, one by one, they sank to the grass, some sitting while others lay supine, looking at the sky. For some little while, they occupied themselves by pointing out faces and forms in the slowly drifting fluffy white clouds.



By now, the baseball game with Murzy's knife had palled because the knife didn't work as well on the ground as it did on a wooden floor. The grass made it difficult to see whether or not the haft of the knife touched the ground. It made the difference between a single and a double. So he and Frank decided to go on to mumbledy peg. Mumbledy peg utilizes only one blade of the knife. The object of the game is to successfully plunge the knife blade into the soil ten times in a row, in ten different steps, each step more difficult than the previous one and to do so without missing. Having accomplished that, a player may then take a wooden peg of predetermined length, usually the length of the knife blade and, using the knife as a hammer, drive the peg into the ground as deeply as he can with ten blows, after which the other player must bend down and retrieve the peg using only his teeth. It could be a very messy affair if the peg were driven to, or even below, the surface of the earth.

The cloud watching also began to pall and Joe Bennett sat up, hands clasped around his bent knees. He regarded the dogs as they continued their primeval rite. "Oh Hell," muttered Joe. The dogs' orbit passed within a foot of Joe and, when the next stiffly erect tail went by, he reached out and slapped it. Instantly the dogs erupted in a blizzard of teeth and hair.

"Why the Hell'd you do that?"

Joe laughed.

"Now we'll hafta break 'em up."

"Can't do that. You'll get the Hell chewed outta you. Maybe get rabies."

"Maybe we kin get some water and throw it on 'em."

"Wouldn't help. Time you get the water it'd be all over anyway."

"They don't have rabies!"

The dogs were tumbling and growling horribly, wide-eyed, teeth snapping and jaws slavering, clumps of hair, drops of blood and saliva flying about, while the group watched, some in fascination, others in dismay. Murzy, although he wanted the fighting stopped, was, nevertheless, mesmerized by the raw fury, the primitive savagery exhibited by the struggling beasts. This must have been a common occurrence back in the stone age, he thought. Upon further speculation, he remembered reading somewhere that dog fighting was still being promoted for money.

Each dog was trying for the other's throat, all the while to the accompaniment of such guttural sounds as to make

one's hair stand on end. It was plain to see that it would require more than a dash or two of water to separate them. It was also plain to see that the spectators were enthralled by the display of savagery. Momentarily, the thin veneer of civilization had been shed, to reveal their primordial emotions. There is a primitiveness about dogfighting that holds some men spellbound, but common sense soon returned.

"Maybe we oughta break 'em up."

"Okay, but for crissake dont grab 'em barehanded."

"Get a coupla poles or boards or somethin."

"No water?"

"Water Hell! Mize well piss on 'em for all the good that'd do."

"There's some tomato poles in Fodor's garden."

"Get 'em."

It took some time plus the concerted efforts of several of the bigger boys to separate the tattered dogs which were then held in check by their owners.

"You satisfied, Joe?"

Joe laughed.

A dismal silence settled over the group, as each boy savored his reaction to the fight. They glanced surreptitiously at the tattered, bleeding dogs and quickly turned away, feeling guilt over the plight of the suffering beasts. The episode had to be put behind them.

"Well, if we aint gonna do anything I mize well go home and eat something instead of sittin' here on my ass."

"Me too. I'll see you guys later."

"When it gets dark, we'll play Go Sheepy Go. How's 'at."

"Suits me."

"Me too."

"Okay."

The group vacated the field, each going his own way, the dogs trailing behind their masters. The dogs would soon demonstrate that they had learned nothing from their recent encounter. They would retire to their boxes, lick their wounds and, in a few days, return, once again, to the gladiatorial arena.

# PENOWA

## Chapter 5

One day, Frank Rotundo announced that he was going to build a cistern. It would be a formidable undertaking, since, in those days, ready-mixed concrete was not yet commonplace, so his concrete would all be hand mixed. He made up a work force by dragooning some of his acquaintances with promises of payment, plenty of food and lots of good wine. Most of them were aware of the quality of his wine and would have been content to work for that commodity alone. They would also enjoy the camaraderie which was certain to prevail. The majority of them were bachelors. There seemed always to be a plentitude of bachelors in Penowa. Some were *de facto* bachelors while others had wives who had been left behind until their mates could save enough money to send for them. Some never did.

Frank had amassed a mountain of sand, gravel and neatly stacked bags of portland cement, each bag weighing 94 pounds. And so the work began. Under his supervision, they attacked the mountain, dumping one part of cement into the mortar boxes, accompanied by two parts of sand and four parts of gravel, adding water as needed. The resulting mix was poured into forms where it would harden into concrete. They worked furiously, Frank included, since concrete should be poured in a continuous fashion for the sake of integrity. An outsider, upon observing the undertaking, would have been reminded of the Tower of Babel, such was the number of nationalities involved. However, unlike the Babel undertaking, which was a debacle, Frank's project proceeded smoothly. The men had, long since, devised their own system of communication and in a relatively short time the cistern was completed. For Frank, the waiting period now began.

Through the ensuing days, Frank had a buoyant air about him. Being short in stature, he seemed to bounce along as he sang and whistled more than usual. After each rain, he went down and checked to see how much water had accumulated in the cistern. At one point, Murzy reminded him that it was over half filled. His response was, "Yeah, but itsa gotta be full up." Another time, he returned home with a new garden hose which aroused some interest around the house.

At last, the day he had been waiting for arrived. A recent rain had brought the level of the cistern up to the top. Now he attached the new garden hose to the spigot located at the bottom of the cistern. Seizing the other end, he began climbing the outside stairs leading to the kitchen porch, a height of twenty feet, at the same time calling for Clara to come out and watch.

Frank had never had any formal education. In Italy, he attended first grade for one day. During that first school day, the teacher approached Frank with the intention of punishing him for having committed an infraction. Frank, deciding that he had had enough of formal education, decamped hastily and never went back. So how could he be expected to know anything about physics? He knew, of course, that water doesn't run uphill. Any jackass knows that. But this was altogether different. He had thought the whole thing out. He had reasoned that the huge bulk of water trapped in the cistern, just waiting for release,

## PENOWA

would surely create enough pressure to force water up that skinny hose.

He stood on the porch, hose dangling over the banister, and shouted down for Murzy to "opena the water." Murzy did so and a few moments passed. Again, more vehemently, he shouted, "I tola you, opena the water!" Murzy, becoming slightly uneasy, assured him that the water was, indeed, turned on, at the same time scanning the area for a place of refuge because, more than once, his grandfather, in a fit of rage, had hurled objects at him.

Frank continued standing at the banister, his face exhibiting disbelief. He had envisioned that, except for drinking water, there would be running water in the house. No more pumping by hand and hauling it up those stairs in buckets. As he jiggled the hose, pausing intermittently to peer into the end of it, the look of disbelief was gradually replaced by one of disillusion and, finally, desolation. It was a bitter lesson for a man as proud as Frank. The cistern, however wasn't a total loss. He bought enough additional hose to conduct the water down to his garden, where he spent most of his time anyhow. Paradoxically, it was in the garden where his ego would receive another devastating blow.

Frank derived much pleasure from his garden, particularly when he produced nicer crops than his neighbors. At times like that, there was no end to his boasting as he lustily proclaimed, "Nobody beata me." He had a volatile temper coupled with an extremely short fuse, a combination that, at times, led to disastrous results. But also, his nature was such that, in an instant or two, his fit of pique would vanish as quickly as it had surfaced. He never held a grudge very long. Clara was just the opposite. She lived for 93 years and, until the very end, she could recite the name of each former customer who had failed to pay his grocery bill plus the amount of the bill.

One spring day, Murzy was helping Frank in the garden, or so he thought. Most of the time, Frank was pleased whenever his grandson helped him at his work, but the garden was a different matter. It was sacrosanct. A ten year old boy, he reasoned, just didn't have enough savvy and could do more harm than good. At the same time, Frank didn't wish to discourage the boy, so he solved the problem neatly. Immediately adjacent to his garden, he marked off a plot measuring about twenty feet square and informed the boy that it was to be his own personal garden to do with as he wished. He gave the boy seedlings to set out, he gave him various seeds to plant, along with a lot of invaluable technical advice to get him started on the right foot, and the boy was elated by it all.

Not long thereafter, Clara called the boy in from play. She had just finished peeling potatoes for supper and had the peelings wrapped up in an old newspaper. These she presented to the boy with instructions to plant them in his garden. He looked at her and grinned, knowing full well that she was toying with him but she spun him around and shoed him off with orders to do as he was told. Filled with misgivings, he dug a number of shallow holes in the soil and planted the peelings after which, certain that they wouldn't grow, he promptly forgot about them.

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But grow they did! In a seemingly short time, the tender sprouts poked through the soil into the daylight. Having decided that the environment was friendly, they then began to flourish with a vengeance. Frank, although obviously disturbed by the boy's success, felt obliged to congratulate him. He couldn't know that a more distasteful threat to his prowess was in the offing.

Eventually the plants wilted and turned brown, indicating that it was time to dig them up. The boy went to his garden with a spading fork to harvest his potato crop. He toted a peck basket with which to carry home the fruits of his labor. Surely, he thought, with any kind of luck, I ought to, at least, get a basket full. With his foot he pushed the spade into the soft earth, levered the handle down and turned over the soil. At the sight, he dropped to his knees in disbelief and reached down to extract the largest potato he'd ever seen in his young life. Nor was it a fluke. As he dug hill after hill, the enormous potatoes continued to emerge from the soil. In a state of euphoria, he seized two of the largest and hurried off to show his grandmother, who praised his accomplishment. She then sent him scurrying off to show his grandfather.

When he exhibited the potatoes to his grandfather, Frank said not a word. At the boy's urging, he went to view the crop, where he stood, staring grimly, with corncob pipe clenched tightly in his teeth, facial muscles twitching. Only a day or two earlier, he had harvested his own potatoes, which were only average size, and that, after all the care he'd lavished upon them.

To be upstaged by a boy, a mere stripling, was more than a man could bear. Forcing the words out between his still-clenched teeth, he asked the ecstatic boy where he'd gotten the seed potatoes. When he learned that it wasn't seed potatoes, at all, but only peelings which Clara had given him, he said no more. He spun around on his heel and made a beeline for the house, where he berated Clara unmercifully for her treachery, saying she had no business giving the boy those peelings. In any other field of endeavor, Frank would have been proud of his grandson but not in this set of circumstances. After all, gardening was his forte. Wasn't his credo "Nobody beata me?" And now to suffer this humiliation. He viewed it as a conspiracy by both, Clara and *her* grandson.

He raved on and on, his voice growing louder with each outburst. He was having his day in court. But he also knew when to stop. Frank, although of diminutive size, feared no man. Like his brother, Valerio, who spent a term in prison for killing a man during an altercation, he had a fiery temper and never backed down from anyone. Anyone, that is, except Clara, for whom he had a healthy respect. She was the one person on earth whom he feared. So he stopped his harangue before it got out of hand and left the house, a thoroughly subdued man. He decided that, next year, he would not offer a garden plot to his grandson. After all, a man can take only so much.

## THE DROWNING

The tale raced through Penowa that summer morning in nineteen-thirty-six: There's a dead man down by Maderia's. As soon as the report reached his ears, Murzy hurried off to see for himself. John Maderia lived only a hundred yards down the road, directly across from Korpos's, so it was a matter of only thirty seconds before he reached the scene.

Sure enough, there lay a body on the grassy berm of the road. Alongside the road ran a small drainage ditch to carry off water which originated from a spring located just a short distance up the road, near Jack's saloon. In that shallow ditch the man's head and left arm reposed while the rest of him lay on the grass. The water in the ditch was scarcely an inch deep.

Also on the scene, along with other townsfolk, was Murzy's constant companion, Frankie Korpos. Sidling up next to him, Murzy said, "He's face down and I can't make out who it is. Do you know.?"

"It's hard to tell yet but I think it's Petey Hartnik."

Petey was, or had been, a regular at Jack's bar. Like most of the people in the area, he worked in the coal mines whenever there was work. Leisure time was generally spent at the saloon where the miners gathered to play cards, checkers or just to swap stories while they enjoyed their beer. Sometimes an argument would erupt, culminating in fisticuffs, but that was considered by many as another form of entertainment. In the summertime they sat on the front porch of the saloon to watch cars go by, observe the various activities of the townsfolk or discuss their work at the mines as they slaked their thirst.

As with many of the others around Penowa, not much was known about Petey's private life. Of course, like most of the older residents, he was an immigrant. He lived alone and whether he had left a family in the Old Country, as others had done, no one knew and he never discussed it. But he was an easygoing man who never precipitated trouble and who got along with everybody.

His clothing was in disarray, which was understandable after a night of revelry but there was no blood evident nor were there signs of violence. The people stood around in tiny clumps, conversing in muted voices, with one or the other pausing occasionally to lean away from the group and have another look at the body.

"I guess he was here all night," ventured Murzy.

Frank said, "I ain't sure. You remember, we was playin'

'Go sheepy go' last night till about eleven, eleven-thirty. When I come home I never noticed nothing but, hell, I wasn't lookin' neither. I was thinkin' about sumthin to eat before goin' to bed. He coulda been already here for all I know."

"He prob'ly was. I wonder if anyone called Thompson."

"Yeah, I think someone went up to Rotundo's and made the call a good while ago. He oughtta be comin' pretty soon."

"Seems like there oughtta be a cop called. Don't they always call a cop when sumthin like this happens? Maybe someone killed him."

"Aint no blood around, is there?"

"Don't hafta be if he was cracked on the head."

"I s'pose so. 'Course, he coulda had a heart attack, too, y'know?"

Murzy ruminated on that for a moment. "You know sumthin'? I think you're right. Who the hell would want to kill him anyhow? He don't have any money and he don't have any enemies, far as I know."

"Beats me," said Frank.

The boys drifted a little closer to have a better look. "Get the hell back from there, you little bastards," shouted one of the men. "They might want to check for clues or something. You trynta screw up some evidence or what?"

"What the hell kinda evidence is he talkin' about?" Murzy inquired of Frank. "Fingerprints? A knife? Gun? Club? What kinda goddam clues, for Chrissake? Do you see any kinda weapons layin' around?"

"I don't see nothin'. That Louie's just tryin' to act like a big shot. Like he was important or something."

"Well, he's big enough to kick our ass so I guess we better steer clear of the simple sonofabitch," muttered Murzy.

A car came into view, slowly approaching the groups clustered near the body. "That might be the police now," said Murzy.

"Could be. Well guddamit, look at that stupid bastard now," snorted Frank. Louie had jumped into the center of the road, arm upraised to hold up nonexistent traffic on the lower side while signalling the oncoming car to come on but to exercise caution.

"Hey Louie," shouted Frank, "you're steppin' all over the evidence." That riposte elicited a quick response from Louie. He made a short dash toward the boys who wisely decamped. From a safer distance the two boys again set up their observation post. The car was not an official car. It was only a Penobscot resident on his way home. After taking in the scene, the motorist proceeded down the road a short distance, parked his car and walked back to spectate along with the others.

The day was beginning to heat up as the sun climbed into a cloudless sky. Now another car came into view and it was closely followed by a long black hearse. The car, a dull green thirty-four Ford, drifted onto the berm, its mechanical brakes screeching in protest as it came to a stop before reaching the group while the hearse eased on by and stopped directly at the scene. The boys, now that Louie's attention was diverted, had once again merged into the crowd.

"That Ford's got suicide doors," remarked Murzy. The doors were so named because they are hinged at the back. When opened, the front of the door swings out. As the operator exits from the car, he steps forward rather than backward as with conventional doors.

The man who now emerged from the car wore a suit but no necktie. He had earlier removed the tie and stuffed it into his coat pocket, in deference to the heat of the day. Reaching into the other pocket he drew out a handkerchief and mopped his sweaty face. Tilting his head back, he studied the heavens while blotting the moisture from his neck. Judging from the appearance of the handkerchief, it clearly wasn't the first time he'd used it that day. The boys thought he didn't look much like a policeman. Shortly they learned that he really wasn't, when they heard hushed voices in various quarters repeating the word "Coroner."

The coroner lent the impression that there were other places in the world he'd much rather be than attending to a drunken derelict whose passing would go unnoticed by anyone. He stood beside his car and regarded the body for a moment. Then his gaze drifted cursorily over the assembly, made a mental assessment of them and returned to the corpse. Taking a deep breath, he then walked resignedly toward the business at hand.

From the hearse emerged the funeral director from Avella, Mr. W. Howard Thompson and his longtime partner, Floyd Pittman, known by all as Shorty. A hush fell over the crowd with the appearance of Thompson. In direct contrast to his short-statured companion, he was a very tall man whose gaunt face fitted the role of a man in his profession, even to the black felt Homburg on his head. In point of fact,



however, he was a very engaging fellow. Extremely gregarious, he enjoyed the company of his cronies and, at such times, was inclined to imbibe injudiciously but it did not detract from his popularity. Yet, to those not privy to his personal life, his somber appearance bore testimony to the fact that he was, indeed, the agent of death and was to be accorded due respect.

The three men gathered at the rear of the hearse for a short discussion after which Thompson and Pittman, acceding to the coroner's directives, donned gloves and retrieved the body from the ditch, depositing him face up in the grass. The group pressed closer to have a better look at the corpse and to verify that it was, indeed, Petey Hartnik but the coroner swept them back with a single, long-ago-perfected, look of menace.

Now he squatted down to check the body while the group leaned forward expectantly, hoping to overhear any official talk that might take place. Completing a somewhat cursory examination, the coroner straightened up and addressed Thompson in a conversational voice, with no attempt at confidentiality, "He's dead, all right. I'll report it as asphyxiation caused by drowning."

The group was nonplussed at this conclusion. Asphyxiation due to drowning! Murzy whispered to Frank, "How the guddam hell can you drown in an inch of water?" Frank's reply was a mute lift of his shoulders.

Thompson nodded his head curtly at the coroner's pronouncement, turned to Pittman and again nodded his head. Pittman opened the rear door of the hearse and pulled out a long wicker basket which he placed beside the corpse. Both men bent down and with a little maneuvering placed the body into the basket. Closing the lid, they then loaded it into the hearse, slammed the door shut and climbed into the front seat. The coroner had, by then, re-entered his car, started the engine and was again mopping his face as he, once more, scanned the crowd. Letting his car drift slowly through the group, he turned around in Korpos's alley and headed back towards Avella, closely followed by the hearse.

The group did not disperse immediately. Reluctant to put an end to the excitement by returning to everyday routine, they remained huddled in small clusters, rehashing events and exchanging opinions. The overriding consensus was that the coroner didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground. Drowning in an inch of water? Bullshit!

"I'm like you," said an amazed Frank. "How the guddam hell can you drown in that pissyass little bit of water? No, that aint what killed him."

Both boys gave ground when Louie, finally tiring of his efforts at directing nontraffic, ambled over. "You smart little bastards sure got big mouths. I guess youns know more than the coroner. I oughtta kick your asses up between your ears jist to keep in practice."

Frank, taking Murzy's sleeve, pulled him into the Korpos front yard where he then picked up a short club that had once been a tomato stake. Walking up to the fence surrounding their yard, he then challenged Louie, "I'm in my own yard now. You trespass in here, you sonofabitch, and I'll knock your stupid brains out." It was a false bravado backed up by the knowledge that his mother was nearby. Louie did not wish a confrontation with Frank's mother so he wisely backed off.

"I guess I told that sonofabitch off, didn't I," Frank crowed to Murzy.

"You sure did. That simple bastard!"

Meanwhile, the hearse had returned to Avella where Thompson and Pittman lugged the basket into the mortuary and simply deposited it on the floor for the time being. "Another one for Potter's field," remarked Thompson.

The coroner had departed on his way to Washington, the county seat, where he would file his report. Shorty bent down and unlatched the lid of the wicker basket. "Leave it," said Thompson, "let's go down the street for a bite first." There would be no hurry about this one.

Petey opened his eyes to a semidarkness. What the hell's wrong? he thought. I must be going blind or something. He was aware of light but it was a very subdued light, sort of splintery. He also was aware that his head and right arm felt clammy. A frightened yelp escaped his lips when he discovered that his sleeve seemed to be wet. My God, he must be bleeding? He wondered how that could have happened. But it didn't hurt at all. Extending his hand tentatively he encountered a rough, yet smooth textured surface. He could not imagine where he was nor what could have happened to him.

His hand continued to caress the odd surface. I must be inside a basket of some kind, he concluded. Placing his hands against the surface, he pushed. The lid swung open and plopped gently to the floor. He raised to a sitting position and looked around him.

He found himself, indeed, seated in a long wicker basket which rested on the floor of a strange room. Being a very astute man, it didn't take Petey long to determine that he

was in a mortuary. He had seen these long baskets before and knew their function. He turned his head slowly, his eyes taking in the assortment of outré equipment. Emitting another yelp, he was up and out of the place as quickly as he could go.

Later that day, Murzy, taking advantage of his status as a saloon keeper's son, was sitting in the barroom listening in on the several conversations taking place. At one table the customers were laughing uproariously, so he sidled closer to learn the reason for their merriment. What he heard, sent him scurrying outside and down the road to Korpos's.

To Frank he said, "Did you hear about Petey Hartnick?"

"Whatta you mean? I'm like you...all I know is he's dead."

"The hell he is! He walked outta there."

"Outta where?"

"Outta Thompson's, fer Christ's sake! Him and Shorty left Petey in the basket and set it on the floor while they went out to eat, prob'ly at Bogonuts's place and when they got back, the basket was open and Petey was gone."

"Maybe somebody stole the body."

"Naw."

"Why not? They use 'em in those medical schools where they cut 'em up fer practice."

"Naw, naw, naw. They seen him. Someone, I ferget who, said they seen him walkin' outta the joint and he mighta been groggy but he sure didn't look very dead."

"I'll be a sonofabitch! Wait'll I see that guddam Louie. Remember what he tole us? 'You guys think you know more than the coroner.' Boy, am I gonna tell his ass off."

"Okay. But be sure you leave plenty of room to run. That bastard's strong...and crazier 'n hell. I don't wanna see Thompson an' Shorty Pittman comin' after you with a basket like they jist did fer Petey."

"That'll be the day."

The following day, one of Jack's early customers was

Petey Hartnick. He strolled up to the bar and ordered a shot and a mug of beer. Downing the shot in one easy gulp, he sloshed a little beer after it. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he looked over his shoulder to survey the several customers sitting about. Satisfied with the gallery, he turned back to Jack and chugged more beer.

Leaning toward Jack, he said, in a voice designed to appear confidential but nevertheless audible to his audience, "Jack, you know vhat dat doggone sonamagun Tompson try to do on me yestaday?"

Jack, remaining noncommittal, took up a bar towel and wiped up a small spill from the top of the bar.

"Vell," Petey, hunching closer, continued, "I guddam gonna tell you vhat he do..."

Jack sighed inwardly.<>

## Chapter 7

On a spring day in the twenties, Felix Dorisio sat looking out his window at the annual flood which always took place when winter began to relax its grip on the land. He lived along the stream known as Cross Creek, at a point not far from the mining camp called Seldom Seen, or Old Blocks, as the hard-nosed oldtimers referred to it. The past winter had seen an abundance of snow which was now melting quickly, spurred on by a warming trend during the night which also produced heavy downpours, resulting in a heavier than usual spring flood. Well, he pondered, nothing to worry about....in a day or two the water will be back to normal.

In a way, it was exciting to watch the assortment of debris passing by. There were logs, trees that had been wrenched free by the relentless force of the waters, sheds and even entire haystacks. Although it happened every year, one never tired of watching the spectacle. It was but a small example of what can happen when Mother Nature shrugs her shoulders.

Incongruously, the skies were now a deep blue and the sun's rays caressed the cocoa colored spate, creating millions of sparkles on the restless waters. As Felix's eyes swept upstream, a horse and buggy, carrying one man, entered his field of view, and was slowly wending its way in his direction. When it drew near enough, he recognized Dr. Stunkard and wondered why he was coming to their house. To his knowledge, no one in the family was sick. Maybe he was coming to check up on Ralphie.

PAR.

Dr. Stunkard was a family doctor who resided in Avella and served those who worked and lived at the various coal camps in the southwestern Pennsylvania area, such as Donahue, P&W, Cedar Grove, Duquesne, Waverly, Jefferson, Penobscot and, of course, Seldom Seen. In contrast to today's crop of practitioners, he responded to house calls whenever summoned. Summoning a Doctor, then, was no simple matter either. The only phone in Penowa was located at Rotundo's general store.

Soon Dr. Stunkard was abreast of the Dorisio home and Felix stood up in preparation to greet him. To his surprise, however, the Doctor continued on past the house. Now what the Hell is he doing? Felix asked himself. There's no place to go but to the creek. Unbeknownst to him, the Doctor was, in fact, heading for Virginville, W. Va. to see a patient. In those days, when one wanted to go to Virginville, he went past the Dorisio home just a bit and then forded Cross Creek.

It was at that ford that the Doctor now sat in his buggy, gazing out at the stream while a transfixed Felix stood at his window, staring apprehensively at the Doctor. Surely he's not going to try it, Felix speculated, he can see how deep it is, can't he? The Doctor continued to ponder his

predicament. Meanwhile Felix, overcome by anxiety, made a decision: I'm going out there right now and talk him out of it, he decided. But even as he said it, he saw the plucky Doctor's shoulders snap up sharply, saw the riding whip slap the horses's flank and watched the nervous horse draw the rig into the chocolate maelstrom.

"Gesu Cristo," he bellowed, "Primo, Primo, venga qui. Pronto." Primo, his eldest son, responded at once to his father's summons and together they rushed out to the barn where they readied their two huge Belgian horses. Taking a length of rope, they sped to the stream as fast as the ponderous horses could travel.

By the time they reached the creek, Stunkard was stopped at the halfway point due to the horse's refusal to go any further. Sitting there, he knew that he'd grossly underestimated both the depth and the force of the murky waters and was trying desperately to backtrack. The horse, by now wild eyed and panic stricken, disregarded the Doctor's commands and, instead, was floundering helplessly, going neither forward nor backward. It seemed readily apparent to Felix that they would soon be swept away by the torrent.

Not exactly sure what plan of action he would take, Felix instructed Primo to fasten the rope securely to his horse. Taking the other end, he tied it about himself and, without further hesitation, entered the frigid waters to rescue Stunkard while Primo payed out the rope. The great horse lumbered toward the Doctor but as he approached midstream he, too, despite his massive size, became restive. Felix, aware that any chance of success depended on the horse, leaned forward to gentle him, breathing a sigh of relief when the beast plunged onward in response to the familiar voice and caressing hands of his master.

When he reached Stunkard, Felix had already decided that trying to get close enough to pull the Doctor onto the Belgian with him would be too dangerous an undertaking. They could both slip off in the process or the horse could get tangled up and they'd all go down together. He didn't know whether the Doctor could swim but he knew that he, himself, would never be able to swim in those turgid waters. He considered tying the rope to the back of the buggy and signalling Primo to pull everything ashore but the Doctor's horse would surely be injured or even killed in the process. Suddenly the problem solved itself.

Felix noticed that the presence of his great Belgian seemed to have a gentling effect on the Doctor's horse. Taking a deep breath and uttering a silent prayer, he passed around the lower side of Stunkard's rig and pressed on to the frightened horse. Once there, he seized the reins and began to execute a left turn into the current. The horse, reassured

by his massive cousin, responded to Felix's gentle urging. The turn completed, they returned to the shore where Felix spun around to a white-knuckled Stunkard and they both laughed, nervously at first, then uproariously at having averted a catastrophe. They, then, adjourned to the house where Felix prepared a bracer for each of them, Primo included.

One might think Felix's act was one of exceptional courage which, indeed, it was but he did not take time to think about that. To him, Stunkard was a very special person for whom he would not hesitate to risk his life. It was only a short while ago when Ralph, his youngest son at the time, was stricken with a mysterious illness. His temperature had risen dangerously high, resisting all efforts to lower it, and the boy went into a comatose state. His parents were convinced the boy would surely die.

Doctor Stunkard was a stubborn man, however. He ordered the family to gather up all the jars and bottles they could muster and also to heat a tub of water on the coal stove. As soon as the water was hot, they began filling the jars. With these, Stunkard covered the blanket-lined body of Ralph, after which he took up his vigil.

He sat beside the boy day and night, issuing orders to the family, monitoring the boy's temperature and general condition, replacing jars when they began to cool and occasionally dozing while the parents kept watch. On the third day, the boy's temperature broke and his eyes opened. By evening, to the joy of everyone, he was ravenously hungry. From that day forward, Felix Dorisio would always be at the good doctor's beck and call.

Later that day, Felix was back at the window, again watching the flood waters rush by. Stunkard had dried off, eaten dinner with them and then continued on his way to Virginville, this time taking the long way through Penobscot. Felix considered himself a lucky man; his youngest son was alive and well due to the efforts of that wonderful Doctor who had literally snatched the boy from the jaws of death. He looked up at the blue sky overhead and thanked God for having given him the opportunity to return the favor.

## THE HORSE TRAINER

On a sunny summer morning in nineteen-forty-six Murzy was occupying a lawn chair beside the family home and wondering how he would spend the day. Having recently been discharged from the Navy, he had not yet attempted to find a job. Instead he had joined the fifty-two-twenty club and was taking life easy for the nonce. The fifty-two-twenty club was no more than a government handout of twenty dollars per week for a period of fifty-two weeks, available to any WWII veteran who applied.

What I *should* do, he pondered, is absolutely nothing today. The previous night he had been out carousing with cronies, still celebrating his freedom from the strictures of Navy life and he had imbibed somewhat unwisely. My mouth tastes like shit, he mused. I oughtta have better sense than that.

While chastising himself over his indiscretions, a strange noise intruded upon his ruminations. It sounded like an Army jeep...albeit a very sick Army jeep. The sound was originating from the big turn on Turney road, directly above Seccamani's who lived in the lower part of Penowa. The noise grew louder as the jeep neared and it sounded as if a demented body man were busily hammering a fender. However, the hammering was not the erratic sort of pounding one might expect from a body man. This hammering was occurring in a very regular pattern, at millisecond intervals.

Murzy recognized the noise at once. That sounds like someone's got a bad bearing knock, he mused...matter of fact, it sounds like there's no bearing left in it. And why's he running it in first gear and racing the engine like that? That'll only make it worse.

At that point, the vehicle came into view after passing Bauduin's garage and approached the intersection. Without as much as slowing down it swung to the right onto the state road, scuttled across to the left side of the highway and slid to a stop scarcely twenty feet from Murzy, who had by then assumed the scratch position in preparation for taking flight.

It appeared to be Albert Miller's topless jeep but the driver was not Albert. It was Hector Moore, Albert's permanent hired hand. Hector remained in the seat and the jeep continued to run at idling speed, still producing a knock but not as loud now. "Why the hell don't you shut it down?" shouted Murzy.

"Get a rock."

"A rock? What the hell for?"



"Put it under the wheel so it won't drift away."

"Just put the damn thing in reverse and then shut it off. It won't go anywhere."

Obedying the younger man's instructions, Hector, first assuring himself that the jeep would indeed stay put, then proceeded to separate himself from the vehicle. Other people alighted from a car, or dismounted or emerged but Hector separated~~ed~~ himself, a piece at a time, the reason being that he had, quite obviously, already been to the watering trough more than a few times that morning.

First, a booted foot emerged, to be followed by a long leg. Hector never made a public appearance without boots. Then, with some complicated maneuvering, the other appendage made its appearance, after which some thought was given to the next move. Presently, his hands seized each side of the door opening and he levered himself to a standing position, where he leaned on the jeep's exterior while permitting his body to adjust to its new position. The exodus completed, he strode over and sat in the grass beside Murzy.

Hector was a tall man, well over six feet, with an emaciated appearance. Murzy thought he would be a perfect stand-in for Ichabod Crane. Born on a farm in Barnesville, Ohio, Hector spent his spare time at the local poolroom there, where he never tired of listening to the oldsters swap tales. An adept pool player, he was once asked at what age he learned to play. "As soon as I could hang my nose on the rail," was his rejoinder. It may well have been true because he had a thin nose which was distinctly turned up at the end.

His true forte, however, was horses. He was a trainer and he possessed a large bookcase full of books...all of them about horses. He had a most remarkable memory for horses. He could recall the horse's name, age, his sire and dam and recite his track record plus his time at the quarter, half, etc. It had been said by many that, as a trainer, he couldn't be surpassed.

Murzy asked, "Why didn't you put the jeep in high gear?"

"Hell, I can't drive! I'm lucky to be able to move the goddam thing."

"Does Albert know you took the jeep?"

"Oh yeah. He doesn't care."

Murzy knew it was an out and out lie because Albert Miller wouldn't even have been home at that hour. He never failed to attend church on Sunday morning.

Unruffled, Hector stood up, motioned serenely with his head, "C'mere." Walking to the jeep, he reached in, threw back another burlap sack and pointed. There lay a full case, twenty-four cans, of motor oil. "That oughtta get us down

screached Murzy.

sixty miles from here; we'll need an oil well to get there!"

running. For Christ's sake, be serious; Barnesville's over ourselves stranded down there in Hoopy when that thing quits

"That's not the point; the point is that we're gonna get Besides, Albert's gonna get another motor for it."

"Well, we can't damage it any more than it is; can we?

engine's junk.

"You're crazier than hell. That thing's blown up. The

tilting his head toward the jeep.

"We got transportation right there," replied Hector,

car? I don't have one."

folks, I'll soon be leaving for the day. What'll we use for a

"Barnesville! How? You know it's Sunday, don't you? My

"Let's go to Barnesville," said Hector.

didn't have long to wait.

Murzy that there was more than beer on Hector's mind. He for a moment. The fact that he didn't immediately leave, told of grass, he began chewing on the soft end, remaining silent the jeep, he returned and again sat down. Pulling up a blade over his shoulder. Depositing the beer on the back floor of not long before he came out with a sack of bottled beer sitting the building where the living quarters were located. It was sack. Then he disappeared around the corner at the back of

He stood up, walked to the jeep and extracted a burlap

"I'll talk to him."

was disseminated upon those standing nearby. "Hell," he said, accompanied by a wet snuffing sound. Sometimes the wetness occurred a series of rapid inhalations and exhalations, laughed, his face remained expressionless while there originating from the belly or even a loud gutfa. When Hector

Hector laughed. When Hector laughed it was not a laugh

Sunday it'll be his ass," he added.

beverages on Sunday. "If he ever gets caught selling beer on father but Pennsylvania law prohibited the sale of alcoholic of replenishment and he wanted to buy more from Murzy's reason for that question. Hector's cache of beer was in need

"Goddammit Heck, you know it's Sunday." Murzy knew the

"Is your old man home?" inquired Hector.

there and back, by Jesus!"

Murzy stared at him in consternation. "Didn't you hear what I just said? Did any of it sink into that thick skull of yours? Let me spell it out for you: *That friggin' machine won't take us to Barnesville and back! Period.*"

Hector laughed. Reaching into his jeans, he extracted a wad of money. "See here? There's enough here to get a hotel room or a taxi back home, in case we have trouble. Not to worry, we won't be stranded."

What the hell, it's no skin off my nose, Murzy reflected. Besides, I was wondering how I'd spend the day and now I know. "OK, but if there's any hell from Albert over this, you're the one that's gonna take the flak."

"Understood," replied Hector.

Murzy entered the house, explained to his folks what was afoot and not to worry. Retrieving his wallet from his bedroom, he emerged, walked over to the jeep and threw up the hood to check the oil. "It needs a quart before we even get started," he exploded.

"Put 'er in. We got twenty three quarts left."

And so the dauntless travelers got underway, to the accompaniment of that same horrendous knocking which earlier had intruded on Murzy's early-morning reverie. He was now busily mapping out a route in his mind. He wanted to avoid the main roads, if possible, because he didn't wish to run the jeep faster than twenty-miles-per-hour. To run at that slow speed on the main highway would hold up traffic, invite jeers from other motorists and, possibly, even draw the attention of the police. In truth, Murzy had learned later on, that the vehicle owner's card was neither in Hector's possession nor in the vehicle, which fact could have been a sticking point had the police stopped them.

He decided to go through Avella, on to Breezy Heights and remain on the backroads through Bethany, West Liberty, finally taking Route eighty-eight to Wheeling. Once there, of course, he would be obligated to venture into Wheeling Proper because that's where the bridge into Ohio was located. After that, being unfamiliar with the area, he wasn't sure what course he'd then take but there was no point in becoming concerned until they reached there...if they reached there. It was a circuitous itinerary but a lot safer. We'll just take it a mile at a time, he reasoned.

By the time they reached Breezy Heights, a distance of about eight miles from Penowa, Hector had finished one bottle of beer and opened another. Murzy pulled over and stopped.

"What's wrong?" queried Hector.

"Gotta check the oil." Reading the dipstick, Murzy ruefully said, "Hand me another quart. Let's see...eight miles per quart goes into a hundred-and-twenty miles about fifteen quarts if we're lucky."

"Not to worry," chastised Hector. "We'll make it. If it wasn't for wanting to see my mother, I wouldn't be troubling you this way. But it's been a while," he muttered dolefully.

And so they continued onward, uphill and down, across Buffalo Creek, through Bethany and West Liberty, stopping every eight or ten miles so that Murzy could add more oil and Hector could step into the underbrush to relieve himself of the beer he'd been drinking at a steady rate since they'd left Penowa. At every downgrade, Murzy put the transmission into neutral, permitting the engine to idle and cool down as they coasted downward.

They had been on the road for two hours and were now traveling down Route eighty-eight, within throwing distance of Wheeling. By then, Murzy was a bundle of nerves. Having some knowledge about cars, he understood the seriousness of the jeep's condition. Hector, on the other hand, was totally unperturbed. Murzy pulled over to the side and turned off the engine. "What's wrong now?" inquired Hector.

"Can't you hear that engine hammering? It's gettin' on my nerves. I've got to take a break and think about this."

"What's there to think about?"

"About going through town with this thing knockin' like it is. The police'll probably arrest us for disturbin' the peace or creatin' an obstruction."

"Aah bullshit! I know all these punk police down here. Not to worry."

"The hell you say."

A few minutes had gone by, during which Murzy got out and added another quart. Hector pitched an empty bottle to the side of the road and extracted a full one from his gunny sack. He belched loudly. How the hell did I let myself get talked into this, pondered Murzy. I oughtta have better sense...seems like I already said that a while back.

A passing motorist stopped and offered assistance which Murzy politely declined, assuring the man that all was well. They were parked in the vicinity of Oglebay Park, a popular resort, and he knew the Sunday crowds would soon be rolling

in. I better get moving, he thought. We're drawing attention.

The engine knock, when he started up again, was noticeably louder. He could only think "My God." Easing the jeep forward as gently as possible, he drove into Wheeling, looking self-consciously both right and left, as he drove along. Making a right turn onto the bridge, they proceeded across the Ohio river. A century later, it seemed to Murzy, they completed the crossing, with a caravan of cars behind them and were now in Bridgeport, Ohio.

Again Murzy pulled to the side, stopped the jeep and turned off the engine. The motorists who had been trapped behind them on the bridge were now passing them, each blowing his horn in indignation as he went by.

"Now what?" asked Hector.

"That's it, Heck old boy. This machine's just not gonna go much longer."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

They remained quietly sitting, each thinking his own thoughts. Hector had just finished another beer and cocked his arm. "Yeah, go ahead and throw the Goddam thing out," muttered Murzy. "We're only in the middle of town. Let's see how long it takes the police to come and drag our ass in on account of a Goddam beer bottle."

His admonition seemed to strike a nerve. "Shit! Didn't I just tell you I know all these punk cops down here."

"KNEW, not know. Wake up! Don't forget, you've been gone from here so long that the cops you knew are all retired or dead."

"Hasn't been *that* long."

"I know what," he added. Start up and let's get going. I'll tell you where to go."

"Not to Barnesville. If we go anywhere, it'll be in the direction of Pennsylvania."

"OK. No, not Barnesville. We'll go back upriver on the Ohio side and cross over at Steubenville. Hell, it's the same distance, either way. Just go where I tell you."

With that, he began to issue a stream of directions and in very short order Murzy was completely disoriented. "You better know where the hell we're going because I sure don't."

Hector snuffled. "I got everything under control. Not to worry."

They were traveling through a heavily wooded area on a road so narrow that, if two cars met, each would have had to yield half of the road. Presently they came to a cleared area where there stood, on the left side, a two-story wooden building. There were no signs of habitation anywhere, yet, incongruously, there stood this building with several cars parked around it.

"Pull in here. We're goin' inside."

Murzy pulled in and shut down. With the engine stopped, other sounds penetrated his consciousness. He leaned back in the seat and looked up at the deep azure overhead. He could hear the leaves rustling in the soft breeze to the accompaniment of a thousand deliriously singing birds and, way off in the distance, he could hear a dog barking. From the rhythm of his barking, he judged that the dog was on chain. He felt he could remain, just so, forever. Hector, however, put an end to his abstractive ruminations.

"C'mon. Get off your ass and let's go in."

Upon entering the building, Murzy's state of serenity immediately evaporated. They were in a saloon. A cloud of blue cigarette smoke hung from the ceiling, already about halfway to the floor. On the far wall stood a silent juke box, its garish twirling colors inviting any music lover to deposit a nickel in return for a melody. On Sunday? thought Murzy. He had momentarily forgotten that he was in another State. In his own home State, the Blue laws forbade the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Hector came to an abrupt stop in the center of the floor and, with eyes that, by then, were slightly bleary, regarded the various patrons scattered throughout the room. Turning to the bartender, he swept his arm regally, encompassing the entire room and proclaimed, "Drinks for everybody!"

The bartender looked at him somewhat askance. What he saw was a man in a scruffy pair of jeans with matching jacket, wearing unlaced rubber boots, a soiled corduroy cap that had seen better days and a packet of rolling tobacco, with string hanging, stuffed in the pocket of his flannel shirt. *And that man is going to set up the house?* was the question written on the bartender's face.

Hector, despite his condition, was quick to perceive the reason for the man's hesitation. Walking toward the bartender while reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a handful of bills and slapped them on the bar. That action provoked the

bartender into animation as he hurriedly filled glasses and distributed them around the room and in the dance area.

Hector strode across the dance floor where he deposited a quarter in the jukebox and made five selections shouting, "Enjoy yourselves, everybody!" Returning to the bar he seated himself on a barstool, motioning Murzy into the adjoining stool. "What'll you have?"

Murzy felt, considering the kind of day he'd had so far, he was about ready for a little hair of the dog. He ordered a glass of beer, nothing more, because he still thought there was a good chance of being stopped by a curious policeman and he certainly didn't wish to be inebriated if that should happen.

Hector was clearly enjoying his role as munificent spender as he toasted some patrons and made remarks to others. An hour later, after ordering and paying for the third round, he stood up, announced to one and all that business concerns required his attention elsewhere and he must go now. Executing a snappy salute to one and all, he tilted his head at Murzy, exited the saloon and marched to the jeep.

Once again they were underway and it seemed to Murzy that the knock had grown more ominous. How long can this machine go on this way? he wondered. Hector reached back over the seat and extracted another bottle of beer from his gunny sack on the back floor. He snuffled, "Did you see the way those punks lapped it up, back there?"

"You didn't have to throw your money around like that, you know! Who in the livin' hell were you trying to impress?"

"I just had to put that punk bartender in his place. The sonofabitch thought I was a Goddam bum, that's what! I'm not a goddam bum! I'm *somebody*!"

"Shit Heck! They're probably *still* laughin' at you back there. You musta dropped twenty bucks, you simple bastard."

"It's only Goddam money. They print more every day."

"We'll be needin' some for a tank of gas pretty damn soon. Where are we, anyhow?"

"Didn't I tell you not to worry? We're about halfway to Steubenville. I know all these back roads around here. Trust me."

"Trust you! Look what the hell I got into by trusting you. I'm out here lost in the Ohio woods with a jeep ready to blow any second and almost out of gas to boot. I need my head

matinee rate or full rate?"

Hector spluttered, "I can see it's no use trying to convince you I was on real business"

"That's right. No use. No Goddam use at all. Let's see if we can get this bucket of bolts home in one piece."

It was about seven-thirty when they arrived back at Penowa. Murzy parked the jeep exactly where it had been parked that morning and shut down the clanking beast. The sun was disappearing over the western horizon as he resumed his seat in the lawn chair he'd vacated so many hours earlier. Hector crawled from the jeep, turned and scrutinized the back floor. Then he reached in and pulled out a now empty gunny sack. Walking toward Murzy, he sat on the grass and lay back, resting on one elbow, facing Murzy.

"What'd I tell you? We still got ten cans of oil left and we got back in one piece."

"No credit to you. If I'd listened to you, we'd probably be sitting on a side road in Barnesville. Or in jail for cluttering up the highways."

"Well, we aren't." Tossing the gunny sack into Murzy's lap, he said, "I'm outta beer. Put a case in here so I can have something for tonight. I can't sleep without a nightcap"

Murzy stared at him in stupefaction.

Hector spluttered, "Oh! Don't give me that shocked shit. I know it's still Sunday and you can't sell beer on Sunday. Just put a case in here and I won't hand over any money. I'll pay your old man tomorrow. If no money changes hands, then no laws are broken. Aint that right?"

"It's not that, for Christ's sake. I'm just wondering how the hell you do it. Just how in the Goddam hell are you able to guzzle those things one after another? Do you realize you drank nine quarts of beer today *just in the jeep!* That's not counting what you had before you came down here this morning or what you had in that backwoods saloon down in Hoopy...or during your "business appointment." You chug it down and then piss it out beside the road. Don't you worry about your liver at all? Most guys would be falling down drunk long ago but you just keep poppin' caps off those bottles and slogging along." It was the longest speech Murzy had made that day.

"That comes from many years on the field of battle, my boy." Hector farted...a low-keyed eructation that emanated endlessly from him like a long, wet rag. "My, that felt good!"



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The oldsters sat around the perimeter on long wooden benches and reminisced while watching the dancers whirling past them. At some point in the festivities, the floor was cleared of dancers and two adults stepped forward, one holding a bowl of Jordan almonds, the other a bowl of pennies. These they flung by the handful in all directions, while everyone laughed to see the mad scramble by the children as they rushed to scoop them up.

The hall was also used as a voting polls. In the early days Penowa was active enough to merit visits by both, incumbent politicians and by those aspiring to office. These visits took place in Jack's saloon because it was the only saloon in Penowa. They would buy a few rounds of drinks, say a few words in their own behalf and depart for the next port of call. However, with the passing of time and the gradual slowing of the mines, the polls was eventually phased out.

A number of children received music lessons in that hall. A man came around once a week who, for a dollar a lesson, offered instructions in the Spanish guitar, the Hawaiian guitar and the tenor guitar. He furnished the guitars and the student acquired ownership of his guitar if he completed the full fifty-lesson course.

Union organizers used the hall to hold secret meetings. They would enter the darkened hall at night and drape heavy blankets over the windows before turning on any inside lights. At least one man remained outside as a lookout in case of impending violence. If the coal and iron police got wind of a meeting, they came on their horses, prepared to trample anyone who failed to move quickly enough. They would even ride their horses up onto the porch, if necessary. The coal and iron police were not true policemen. They were a private force of company goons who, through some political maneuvering, had acquired police powers throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

Murzy used to sit in on these meetings. It excited him to listen to these men tell of their experiences and voice their complaints. Ordinarily a boy wouldn't have been permitted to attend such a function but since he was a grandson of the owners of the hall, he enjoyed certain proprietary rights. Sometimes a rickety movie projector was brought out to show a silent film depicting the hardships and dangers of working in the mines. Its purpose was to instill in the men a determination to keep fighting for a union. As the machine portrayed scenes of violence or abominable working conditions on the tiny screen, not a sound could be heard in the hall except the clacking of the projector, but to Murzy, it was a movie picture and he found it exciting.

For a long period of time, there was a soup kitchen operating in the hall. There, many children received their only meal of the day, if soup, per se, can be called a meal. In the evening, many of them would be going from door to door, begging for something, anything, to eat. Clara was a matriarch who ruled the family with an iron hand, but she never turned a hungry child away from her door despite opinions she may have had about the child's parents.

The soup kitchen was maintained by so-called communists who were

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among those trying to organize a union. They referred to themselves as "Save the union" but some called them Commies, Rooshans [Russians] or Reds. They went out daily and foraged the countryside in search of any type of food to put into the pot. They visited area farms where they might get a bushel of withered potatoes or beets, perhaps some cabbage that was "right on the edge." They were not above "accomodating" a chicken or two. Or anything else that wasn't locked up.

Many of those who joined the Communist party, did so without the faintest notion of what the Communist philosophy was all about. Nor did they care. They were simply following the dictates of their stomach. The acquisition of a bowl of soup was of much more concern to them than any type of harangue.

Around 1936 there had been a bumper crop of cotton, so it was decided that the people should benefit from the surplus. Once again, the Rotundo's were solicited for the use of their hall, this time as a mattress factory and, once again, they freely gave permission.

Trucks arrived loaded with bales of cotton, bolts of blue and white striped ticking, boxes of buttons, spools of heavy twine, packs of needles, foot-operated sewing machines, plus patterns and instructions on assembling these materials into mattresses. And the people came.

They came in droves. It was a community effort. They signed their names to the list, stated their needs, and joined the work force. Everything was done by hand. It was like an ant colony; everyone was constantly on the go, the air suffused with lint. Despite all the windows being opened, the temperature hovered around ninety degrees, which proved deadly to one of the participants. Mrs. Fedor, due to a combination of the heat plus elevated blood pressure after an altercation with another woman, collapsed and died on the floor. Aside from that sad event, the enterprise was a huge success.

On another occasion the Government launched a similar program .... again in Rotundo's hall. This time, it was for the manufacture of throw rugs. They sent out huge supplies of rag scraps, cones of string, looms with which to make the rugs, along with instructors to get them started, after which the people were on their own. As with the mattress making enterprise, the rug program was also a success, providing households with bright, colorful rugs.

The second floor of the Rotundo building, the one at street level, was the busiest. It housed the general store. Begun in the early twenties, it was a joint effort; all family members, as soon as they were old enough, were expected to contribute their share of work. When she reached age twelve, Adeline, the eldest, inherited the chore of hitching the team of horses to a wagon and going down to the freight station to pick up supplies for the store. The station was situated on the Wabash Railroad, about a mile from the store and it was very important to commerce since many commodities were shipped by rail in those days.

Marketing, then, was a far cry from the methods now employed. Meat, for instance, was not neatly packaged then. The deliveryman, upon

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reaching his destination, slipped into a long robe that, at some point in ancient history, must have been white but was now a dirty gray, mottled with blood stains. He heaved a quarter of beef or half a hog to his shoulder, walked it into the store and slammed it to the cutting block. Rubbing his hands on his garment to "clean" them, he then reached into the inner recesses of his costume, extracted an invoice for a signature and left, his part of the business transaction being completed. Frank and Clara would then cut up the carcass into manageable pieces and hang them on hooks inside a small walk-in cooler. All meat cutting was done by hand and the soup bones were handed out free on a first-come basis. It was cause for celebration when Frank came home from Pittsburgh with a secondhand Hobart electric meat grinder. It groaned and whined horrendously but to the family it sounded like symphony music because it signalled the end of hand grinding.

Sanitation was not a paramount concern then. Olives were packed in small wooden kegs filled with brine and were usually retrieved by simply grabbing handfuls of them. Cookies came in cube-shaped cardboard cartons measuring about twelve inches all around and were placed in a special display rack furnished by the company. It featured hinged glass lids over each carton but being bulk packed instead of vacuum packed, the cookies were vulnerable to the vagaries of the atmosphere. They, too, were retrieved by hand. Spaghetti came in boxes constructed of very thin white wood and measuring about 6x10x24 inches long, each holding about 20 pounds. Each piece of spaghetti was actually 48 inches long but was bent in the middle to resemble a 24-inch-long hairpin. When freshly made, it was hung on drying racks, which is how it acquired its hairpin shape. From there it went directly into the box. When a customer requested some, the clerk took a handful from the box, weighed it on the scales, snapped the handful in the middle to make it into a manageable twelve inch length and wrapped it in butcher paper. Everything was wrapped in butcher paper or brown bagged.

Vinegar came in pint, quart or gallon bottles but it was also packed in bulk, usually in 32 or 40 gallon wooden barrels for the thrifty minded who brought their own gallon jugs. Due to the pervasive odor of vinegar, the barrels were stored in a room underneath the front porch. Frank rolled the barrels into position on an elevated rack, placed a wooden spigot against the bung and, with a sharp rap of a wooden mallet, drove the bung into the barrel, at the same time setting the spigot firmly into place.

Bananas came in a long wooden ventilated crate containing the whole pod nestled in a bed of shredded newspaper. Frank would lift the pod from the crate and hang it on a hook screwed into the ceiling, being careful to watch for those big spiders. It hung there until all the bananas were sold. A hawkbill knife was used to cut the bananas from the stalk. Chicory was a popular item then because it was used to stretch coffee a little further. Some claimed to prefer the flavor. Karo, since it was cheaper than Log Cabin syrup, was also a big seller. Most penny candy had no wrappers, purchases being placed in a brown bag.

Potatoes came in hundred pound burlap sacks which were opened and the contents dumped into bushel baskets for display. Bacala came in

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wooden crates. Bacala is the Italian term for dried, salted codfish. It is primarily a product of Norway but has been largely embraced by Italians. The fish were about 12 to 18 inches long and, when cured, were very hard. Grasping one by the tail and using it as a mace, one could well knock an opponent senseless. Dried beans also came in burlap bags which were opened and emptied into a compartmented display case with glass front and lids on top. A scoop was used to retrieve the beans.

Foodstuffs were dealt from one side of the store. On the other side could be found men's work clothes and boots, print house dresses, stockings, gloves, hats and Endicott Johnson shoes. A display case with sliding doors was crammed with patent medicines, toiletries and sundry items such as: castor oil, Fletcher's Castoria and Citrate of Magnesia. Others were: Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin, Bromo Seltzer, Cuticura, Dr. Miles Nervine, Dr. Jaynes Expectorant, Sloan's Liniment and Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. Still others were: Carter's Ink, Father John's Medicine, Musterole and Edlis Dandruff Cure and Hair Invigorator.

To the left of this case was the corner of the store reserved for miners' supplies. Here one could buy picks, shovels, augers and safety hats. There was a rack filled with pick and ax handles where men would extract each handle, one at a time, sight down the length of it to determine its straightness and agonize endlessly over which one to select. There were carbide lamps, carbide in metal kegs, cases of blasting powder and squibs, which were used to detonate the powder. It seemed that safety, likewise, was not a priority matter in those days.

A hand-operated gasoline pump was located about forty feet from the building. When pumping gas, the handle was moved to and fro, resembling an inverted clock pendulum as it moved. This action drew gasoline from the underground storage tank and forced it up into a large glass reservoir situated at the top of the pump. The reservoir was equipped with a numbered scale to indicate the amount of gasoline in it and when the desired amount was reached, it was emptied into the customer's tank by means of a hose. Gasoline prices were generally around twenty cents, except during gas wars when a customer might get seven or eight gallons for a dollar.

There was a kerosene pump nearer the building. Kerosene was a big seller then because everyone used coal stoves, and kerosene, or carbon oil as some called it, gave your stove a quick start in the morning. Many people, too, used kerosene lamps for illumination. It also had another use. Despite the low cost of gasoline, the younger men, due to limited resources, saved a few cents by filling the tanks of their Model "A"s with an equal mixture of gasoline and kerosene. Then they went blithely on their way, impervious to the clouds of white smoke belching from their exhaust pipes.