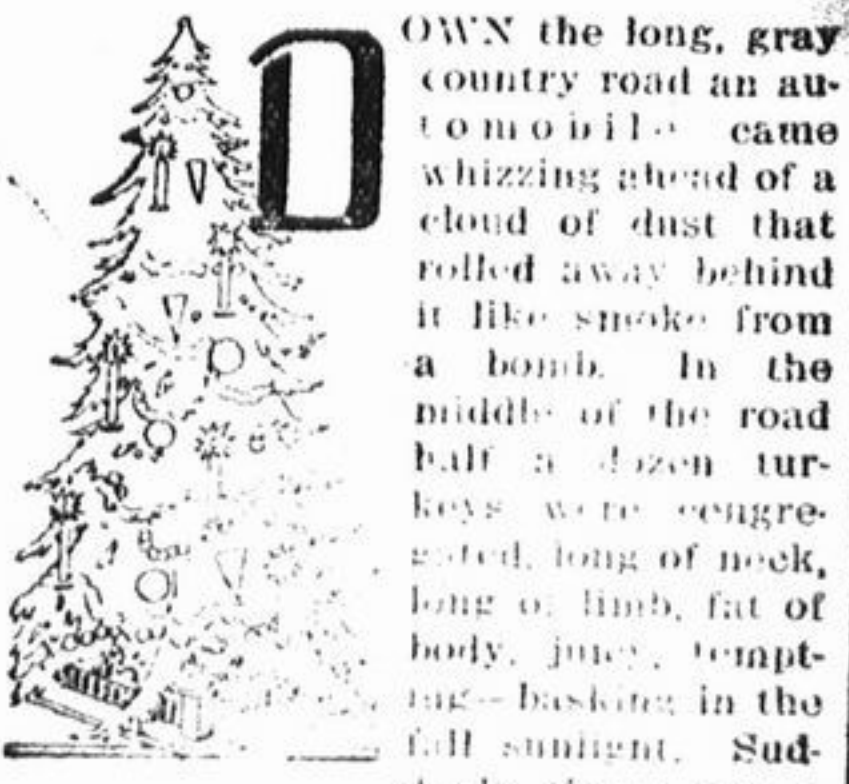


HOBBO JIM

BY HARRY IRVING GREENE

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DOWN the long, gray country road an automobile came whizzing ahead of a cloud of dust that rolled away behind it like smoke from a bomb. In the middle of the road half a dozen turkeys were congregated, long of neck, long of limb, fat of body, juicy, temptingly-basked in the full sunlight. Suddenly there was a rattling gobble from the rear of the machine, an answering gobble from the throats of the turkeys, a cloud of feathers in the air and the man at the wheel passed on with a backward grin at the fowl as it lay fluttering by the wayside. "One more gobble gathered to the eternal roost," he chuckled.

From out of the long grass that fringed the wayside a man arose, lean and hungry, and stood looking at the still kicking victim. Then he drew a huge, old-fashioned silver watch from his pocket and glanced at it. "Just dinner time, and I haven't had a taste of a turkey in a year. Guess this is my lucky day," he soliloquized. Then he picked up the bird and started for the brook near by.

He seated himself by the bank and commenced dressing his bird, tossing handfuls of feathers to the whirring of the plump body with grins of satisfaction. Then all at once he looked up. A sour faced man with a big star on his coat was standing over him. "Come with me," he commanded.

"To where?" grunted Hobbo Jim. "To the place where all turkey thieves should go—to the coop."

"But I didn't steal this bird," Jim began, then stopped short. He was staring into the open countenance of a disagreeable looking cooperator who had dropped his prey. "All right, I'll go," he said, sullenly.

Night had smothered the country side and from out of it the fog came



"Come With Me," He Commanded.

coming down in hard, frozen rain like sifted sands. Across the fields the wind came nipping like a sharp toothed terrier, and Hobbo Jim shivered anxiously about through the gloom. He had been released from the coop only that day after two months confinement for having been caught with a dead turkey in his possession, and he shivered a bit beneath his thin clothes as he hurried along the long road. To make matters worse he was hungry, broke and friendless, and on Christmas eve is hard enough for any man. Then as he peered he saw through the darkness of the road side a glimmer of light that twinkled before his eyes like a great star of hope and he paused with his gaze fastened wistfully upon it.

With a caution grown of long experience he passed quietly to the back of the building and peered through a window. He could see into the dining room from here, and as he gazed and sniffed at a crack deep within him his stomach began clamoring like a famished wolf pack, for within a dozen feet of him was a table piled high with good things to eat, while about it the gorged family still sat nibbling. "There is enough left for a dozen lunches, and still things to throw away," he muttered as his eyes roved over the board. Much encouraged by the sight he stretched forth his knuckles in a timid tap, then putting on his most woebegone face stood awaiting his fate with a heart that fluttered anxiously.

The door opened and a man stood before it peering into the darkness. And as the lamp light from within fell upon the hobo's cringing form, the face of the one upon the threshold darkened until it matched the night. "So it is you—sneaking around here and looking for more of my turkeys," he said threateningly. "I have a no-

tion to run you in again upon suspicion. Get out of here, thief."

"But I didn't steal that bird—" whined the caller. Then he paused suddenly, for once more he was staring into the mouth of that same unpleasant looking revolver. "Oh, I'll go all right," he added hastily.

Up the road he went harrying, angry, disappointed, hungry and colder than ever. In the bottom of a pocket where he had plunged a hand for warmth his big, old-fashioned watch lay ticking and his fingers closed about it fondly. It was his only possession of slightest value. Twenty years ago it had been given to him upon a Christmas eve, twenty years ago in the days of his boyhood, and he had carried it with him incessantly throughout all his wanderings. "I suppose I could get the price of a meal and a bed tray for that old ticker," he mused. Then his jaw set. "But I wouldn't part with it for ten weeks of greubacks. It is the best thing I ever gave me, and I'll hang on to it if I hang for doing it. I'll be starved—yes, or help myself when nobody is looking before I'll part with it." He shoved it deeper into the place and bent forward to snatch the door.

His object later he forgot in the darkness. By the way of a doorway light was the first and with a quick glance up and down he peered in great haste. "No, no one here," he said, but the box groaned and he found he had not so long to go. "So long as the yard with that that you are so fond of," he said, and he stepped more than a dozen feet from the door. "I'll be starved—yes, or help myself when nobody is looking before I'll part with it." He shoved it deeper into the place and bent forward to snatch the door.

He stepped quickly to the kitchen door and tried the latch. The door was fast locked and he set out with the most solemn of grimaces. "A good night to you, my dear," he said, and he stepped back into the hall. "I'll be starved—yes, or help myself when nobody is looking before I'll part with it." He shoved it deeper into the place and bent forward to snatch the door.

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line, and the proper administration of the medicine was a very important matter to the sick one. "That's kind of tough on the kid," thought the hobo from his hiding place. But it was no fault of his and anyway he had troubles enough of his own.



Sid the Watch Into the Stocking.

Midnight came, and for the last hour all had been still as a cavern. Cautiously, silently, Jim backed out of his lair and rising to his feet stood alert. By the dim light from the other room he could see the pantry. Then he gave a snort of disappointment. There was not enough upon the barren shelves to fill one corner of his hollow stomach, and here were a woman and a sick boy to feed off of it. It was disgusting. Slipping in a crust of bread into his pocket he stepped out again.

From where he stood he could see the interior of the dimly lighted room beyond and curiosity arose within him. With the tread of a prowling fox he stepped to the threshold and entered around the corner. The boy was sleeping now, while beside the bed the woman was sitting with head bowed forward as if in pain. From her long veil she had fallen asleep in the midst of her weeping. And as he peered at their faces, there came to him a picture of many long years before, a picture of when he had been a boy and so, as this memory came, a woman had seen her son from the long nights through the years. "I'll be starved—yes, or help myself when nobody is looking before I'll part with it." He shoved it deeper into the place and bent forward to snatch the door.

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How Far Is It to Christmas?
By Wilbur D. Nesbit

How far is it to Christmas? It's across the Land of Dreams, where are the laughing valleys and the ever-singing sirems, and up the hill of doubting and along the road of smiles until you reach the border of the land of otherwhiles.

It's far away, and near us; it is there, and close at hand—oh, earnest little fellow, can I make you understand? You lie awake and whisper, you count, and count the days, and try to bring it nearer in a hundred varied ways!

Already you have seen it in a gleam of joy afar, have seen its joy approaching in the twinkle of a star; you hear the bells that jingle and the clatter of the hoofs that tinge a song of gladness as they gallop on the roofs.

How far is it to Christmas? It's not so far away—for all I know, already you have and hold the day; it has no time nor season; it is not set apart, but sends its blessed sunshine to every little heart.