

QUITE TOO BAD

The navies had been doing overtime for a fortnight. "Blimey, Bill, I wasn't arf tired last night when I got 'ome," said one. "I couldn't even answer the missus back."

KLEINBURG

A large attendance marked the Kleinburg United Church annual congregational meeting and dinner on Wednesday evening of last week. The hot dinner, served by the ladies of the church, was immediately followed by the business session presided over by the Rev. J. C. Bailey.

Reports were given as follows: Y.P.U. secretary's report, Mrs. G. Taylor; Y.P.U. Treasurer's report, Miss Anna Kaiser; Sunday School, Miss Olive Devins; Cradle Roll, Mrs. G. Taylor; Women's Association, Mrs. H. P. Wardlaw; M. and M. committee, Mr. H. P. Wardlaw; and the church treasurer's report, Mr. H. P. Wardlaw. The latter reported a splendid balance on hand to commence the new year.

Officers were elected as follows: Historical Custodian of the Church Records, William Wardlaw; M. and M. committee, Miss A. Train, Miss A. Kerr, Miss Anna Kaiser; Auditors, N. Watson, V. Shunk; Organist, Miss Margaret Watson; Assistant Organist, Miss Masel Shaw; Stewards, H. Wardlaw, J. Kellam, M. Wardlaw, D. McLean; Elders, D. McDonald, J. Coward, W. Wardlaw, N. Watson.

A gallon of gasoline is said to have the explosive power of 90 pounds of dynamite.

Fox-hunting has become a very popular sport in the Palgrave district. Some of the hunters have been lucky; some have not.

THE LIBERAL SHORT STORY

THE CHAMPION

By Shane O'Neill

None of us saw him come on the lot that night—he just seemed to be there. We noticed him just before Capt. Daredevil Oliver's dive into the flaming gasoline. He came up to Joe Warndt who was boss while Old Man Tannery, the owner of the Carnival, was away.

"I'm hungry," he said in a husky half-whisper. "How about a job to pay for a meal?" He did look hungry. The heavy growth of beard that covered most of his face didn't hide the flaming signature of alcohol on his cheeks, his hands were shaky. Altogether he looked just like another old booze-fighter completely down on his luck.

Joe listens to so many hard-luck stories that he's not a sucker for them any more. He knows that mostly guys that ask for a job of work in trade for a meal don't really want to work. They only say that and hope that the boss will answer, "what the hell, go to the cook tent," and let it go.

Joe's face got a little red because the guy wasn't asking any favors. He was telling Joe—calling his bluff, yet there wasn't anything he said that you could put a ticket on.

"Okay," Joe said. "You asked for it."

So he sent him over to where Orlando Muscle, who was billed as the World's Strongest Man, was working with a roustabout to get his tent up. This Orlando was a hard citizen that nobody liked. Most big, strong fellows are easy-going—but not Orlando. His idea of a joke was to take your wrist in his two hands to show you how he could break it with a twist.

"Orlando'll teach him not to be a wise guy," Joe muttered as he watched the stranger shuffle away. As he watched a puzzled expression came over his face.

"You know, I've seen that lug some place before," he said, "but I can't figure out where." The roustabout told us most of what happened after the stranger got over to help with Orlando's tent. The strong man looked him over when he reported.

"Fine," Orlando said, "let's shake hands. I like to be pals with everybody who works for me."

So the stranger stuck out his hand and Orlando grabbed it, and squeezed hard. He held on, it being his habit to squeeze until the other fellow yelled, but the stranger did not holler. His face went grey, and all the whiskey flames died down out of it, and his lips were almost white. But he didn't say anything. Finally Orlando let go, and the stranger shook his bruised hand like a dog shakes itself when it comes out of the water.

"You've had your fun," he said then, "now show me what I've got to do. I'm hungry, and I have to work to earn my meal."

So Orlando worked him like a dog, gave him all the heaviest jobs, and no rest between lifts. "You want to work," he growled. "All right, work then."

The stranger kept his mouth shut, even though he looked like he would drop any minute. He just worked until the job was almost done, with Orlando and the roustabout standing around going through the motions. He was on the last peg, as a matter of fact, when Lolita came along, swinging free and easy, the way she always walked—just like the snakes she worked with in her act. She saw the stranger, and she stopped.

"Hi," Lolita said, "got you working, haven't they?"

That was like her. Around the tent shows for a long time, she was pretty, if you like the dark husky kind, and she had a swell way about her. No matter who it was, she always had a grin and a "hello" and she was always a great trouper. She'd share her last dime, and make you take eight cents of it.

The roustabout says he never saw such a look in a guy's eyes as the stranger had when he gave that peg a final whack, and turned to look at Lolita. Maybe nobody had had a good word for him in a long time. He looked like a dog that's used to kicks and rocks, and suddenly has a big steak bone shoved towards it.

"Yeah," he said, "they've got me working. And—thanks, lady." Orlando heard that and turned around, his little eyes hard. It didn't suit his book to see this stranger get any time from anybody, especially Lolita.

"Listen," he yelled, "you ain't supposed to talk to anybody. If you're through with your work, get the hell out of here." Then he made a grab at Lolita.

"Take your hands off me, you mutt," she cried, tearing away from him, her black eyes blazing. "I've told you before to leave me alone."

But Orlando only laughed, and grabbed at her again. Then, the roustabout says, a funny thing happened. The stranger began to move smoothly, like all his muscles and joints were floating in oil, and his fists went out fast—like the roustabout had never seen fists go before. Orlando dropped his hands from the girl, and put one of them up to his mouth which was bleeding.

"You'll pay for this," he said, "you'll pay for it right away." And he started for the stranger.

But Lolita got between them. "Listen," she screamed, "you big bully. Don't you touch him—or I'll have you pinched."

"Never mind, lady," the stranger said. "I take what comes."

By then a big crowd of peasants had come up, and they were yelling for fight. One of them—a wise chump—hollered it was a gag, just like the tightrope walker dressed up in the tramp suit who turns out to be the best in the act. Joe Warndt

was over by them, and he sized things up right away. If he didn't let them fight, the peasants would scream they had been gypped, and the law might put out the bite. Joe didn't want the old man coming back to anything like that—so he decided to make the best of it. Besides, he was still a little sore on the stranger.

"Get into the tent, and up on the platform," he yelled in his best ballyhoo way. "We will see this through, my friends, and determine who is the bettah man. Strength against skill, folks; brain against brawn. The oldest struggle in the world. Step up, step up. Ten cents, one dime, the tenth pot-of-a-dollah to see this epic struggle."

As the customers began to push their way in like sheep, he whispered to Orlando to take it easy, or he'd have him shot. But he knew the big lug wouldn't, so he posted roustabouts around the tent to stop a killing if it began to look too bad. He told the stranger he'd get a pound note if he could stick one round.

When they squared off up there on the platform, it looked brutal. Orlando was like an elephant up against an alley cat—and a pretty poor alley cat at that. But there was a certain springiness about the stranger, in spite of his flabby arms and legs, and whisky paunch that make you wonder.

Lolita grabbed Joe's arm. Her face was dead white and all her muscles were tense.

"I gave him a shot of booze," she whispered, "it ought to keep him going a while."

There was a big crowd by then, and Joe gave the signal to start. The wise chump wanted to lay bets on the stranger. "It's all a frame-up," he yelled.

Joe cooled him off. He took fifty bucks of his money.

"A frameup, huh?" Joe said. "Here's five tens that says it ain't." He said afterwards that he meant to pay off the stranger with his winnings.

It was something to watch them start. Orlando rushed across the ring, his big arms flailing out, and it looked like he'd bear the smaller man down in no time. But when he got there the stranger was in the middle of the ring, and his flicking fist had opened a cut under Orlando's eye.

It was like that for three minutes, and everybody got so excited, including Joe, that they forgot to stop the round, and the stranger began to slow down—even though Orlando hadn't laid a glove on him, and had himself lost a good deal of blood. But you could see it wouldn't last. Try going a full three minutes yourself some time—and then figure how it would be if you'd been living on rot-gut for years. The whiskey Lola gave him began to wear out—you could see it—and it looked like Orlando's next rush would finish him.

He came on, and he was something terrible to look at, with blood streaming down his face, and with his little eyes glinting hate. You wondered whether the stranger would have the strength to side-step and stab just once more.

But this time he didn't—maybe he couldn't. Anyhow, when Orlando came in, he moved a little to the left, crouched like a spring, and like a spring he lashed out. His fists moved so fast you couldn't see them. Pack! Pack! Pack! Pack! against Orlando. You could hear them—and they carried plenty.

The strong man trembled for a minute, like a big tree in a storm. Then he fell face downwards. He was out cold. The stranger staggered over to the ropes, and held on, breathing hard. His face was grey again, and you could tell he couldn't have stood up by himself.

Joe looked almost scared as he helped the stranger down out of the ring. It had happened so fast, he couldn't believe it. He gave up his fifty to the rube he bet with, like he was in a fog. Then he peeled a twenty off his roll and held it toward the stranger.

The man looked at it for a minute, and then he grinned, the first time he grinned all the time he was on the lot.

"All right," he said. "I guess I earned it. I'll take it. It ought to buy a lot of pork chops—a lot of smoke."

"But look—stick around, Joe'll find you a job... and... all... You could see by the look on Lolita's face that she wanted him to, when she said that. It was that look women get when they want to save a kid from hurting himself. The stranger's face went a little soft.

"Thanks—lady—" he said quietly. "I'll be moving on. It wouldn't do any good now—it's too late. Thanks—and thanks for the good word."

Joe came to life then. "I never saw anything like it," he muttered. "What a fight. If you were in shape you could handle

any one, I only saw one fighter like you—the old middle weight champ, Slots Duffy. You punched just like him."

The bitter look came back to the stranger's eyes.

"I ought to punch like that—when I can punch at all," he said. "I'm Slots Duffy."

The stranger—we always called him the champ after that—moved off into the darkness. He felt that he knew his own business best. We never saw him again.

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