

LYNCH HIM!

A Story

BY LEN ZINBERG

THEY can't do nothing to me, I'm covered. I was smacked on the head and I've got two cuts there to prove it. Of course it's an awful big case and I see where they have my picture in all the papers and Charley's and the twenty dead people. In all the papers all over the country; it's a big case. But I was hit on the head and I can show you where. Right on the head with the butt of a tommy gun.

I was at the jail when they brought Charley in. You see I had been made a deputy about three months ago. My old man was on pretty good terms with the sheriff, and me and the sheriff, Old Tom, was in charge of the jail and law and order in the town. I hear a lot of noise and shouting and then a crowd comes up to the jail and Old Tom has got out his gun and is pointing it at Charley's back. Then he takes Charley in and tells me to lock him up. Well, while I'm locking Charley up, I hear Old Tom telling the crowd, I guess there was about sixty or seventy there, that he won't stand for any necktie party because they mustn't forget that Charley is a white man.

Several people in the crowd yell: "He's a nigger lover." But Old Tom just shakes his head and shuts the door.

The mob goes away soon and I ask Charley what's the matter. You see we had grown up together and were sort of pals. Charley says that Big Ed Bach had

stopped him in the street and said: "Listen here, no white man in this town can go around with any damn nigger girl, see?" And then he spit in Charley's face. Now Charley is a hell of a big guy himself and he almost killed Big Ed before they were finally separated. Some of the other boys were standing around and they began to make some cracks and it looked like Charley was going to have to take them all on when Old Tom came along. Then John Barrett, the barber, who is a pretty smart guy, says that Charley robbed him of five bucks and that he will swear out a warrant for Charley's arrest. So Old Tom had to pinch him. I was a little scared because when they arrest a black man like that it means a lynching sure and maybe they might try to string Charley up.

It was a funny thing about Charley—he was so serious all the time and always worrying about the niggers, I mean Negroes. Charley always called them Negroes and wanted me to call them the same. I remember when we was about fourteen they lynched Joey who used to play ball on our team. They said he had raped Old Man Ray's daughter. Almost every white man in town had been with Old Man Ray's girl but now that she was going to have a kid in a few months she had to blame somebody for bumping her, so she said that Joey had attacked her. The bar-

ber John and a couple of other boys said that it was about time they had a good necktie party anyway and they got ahold of Joey and beat hell out of him and then they strung him up and lit a fire under him. When me and Charley and some of the boys went out there the next day you couldn't tell it was Joey. His legs were black bone and bent up almost double under him. We didn't stay there long, but Charley kept on staring at Joey's bent up legs and wouldn't go home with us. His old lady said he was out all that night and the next day John Barrett had a big lump on the back of his head and he said that some kid had clipped him with a stone as he was going home.

From then on Charley got very serious and would stand on the corner arguing with us about Negroes being the same as us and how we should all be friends. Some of the fellows got a little sore but they didn't start anything because Charley was too big. People in town began to talk and once a man passing by heard Charley arguing with us and he went up and slapped Charley in the face hard. Charley was smaller than the man but he tore right into him and the man knocked him down. Charley got up and the man knocked him down again. The guy knocked Charley down about ten times and each time Charley would stagger to his feet and go after the guy. His eyes were so hard and bright that they looked as if they would pop from his head. Even when the man hit him in the eye and some blood came out, you could still see how bright the eye was. Finally the man shook his head and walked away and we had to hold Charley from going after him.

It got so that hardly anybody in town would talk to Charley and he used to stay by himself a lot. He would go out

and talk to some of the Negro farmers and hang out with them. For some reason he would not get a haircut in John Barrett's place and he used to go to the Negro barber. Of course I still spoke to him but he was always telling me a lot of stuff about equal rights and the brotherhood of man and stuff that I didn't care about. He was a good friend though, once he lent me twenty bucks when I thought I had got a girl in trouble. I think I only gave him back sixteen-fifty.

Charley went to the university up state and got thrown out for something he wrote in a paper and came back to work in his father's clothing store. Charley didn't talk so much and people said that his old man had worked hard to send him to college and that he had thrown down the chance and that he was no good.

Then one day about two months ago Mrs. Walt's granddaughter from up north came down to see her. She was a nice looking dark skinned girl and some dresser. She certainly had some fine clothes and it looked funny to see her sitting in front of Mrs. Walt's old shack all dressed up in a fine dress or a pretty gray suit. Nothing loud, but just like you see on the magazine covers. Everybody in town was saying how she was dressed better than any white girl in town.

One day me and Charley and some other men were sitting in front of the drugstore and we see her coming down the street. So some guy from the country says he thinks he'll teach this northern nigger girl a lesson and when she passes us he reaches out and slaps her across the behind and says: "How about to-night, baby?" Then he grins and then Charley hits him on the jaw and knocks him cold and says to the girl very politely: "May I walk you home?"

She looks at him for a moment and says: "Certainly, if you want to." And they walk away and we watch them and then the farmer comes to and we have to tell him all about Charley.

Every day after that Charley was hanging around this girl. Her name was Muriel. She gave Charley a lot of little books to read and he was all excited about communism and Russia and how black and white workers must unite and talked my ear off every time he met me. It was plain to see that he was sure stuck on her and people began to talk about him again. Only this time they were real sore because he didn't pay much attention to the white girls in town and fell for a northern black girl. Finally John Barrett, Big Ed Bach, Old Tom and some others went out to Mrs. Walt's one night and told her to send her granddaughter home before there was trouble. Mrs. Walt was very old and white-haired and she was scared and said she would and sure enough the next day Muriel left.

That day Charley tried to get his old man to give him enough money to go up north and his old man refused and I guess Charley was going around town trying to raise the dough when he bumped into Big Ed and landed in jail.

II

All afternoon me and Charley talked, with him behind the bars of course, and he says he's going up north and marry her if it is the last thing he does. About five o'clock old Tom comes in and gives me my supper and he says that a lot of the men are drunk and raising the devil and talking of lynching. He takes out a tommy gun and gives it to me and says that no white man will be lynched while he's sheriff.

After Tom had gone Charley looks at me and he says: "Listen George, I want you to give me that machine gun. I'm going to let those bastards have it once and for all. I've been saving up for something like this. You got to let me have that tommy gun, George."

I says: "Say, what's the matter with you—are you nuts? I can't give you this gun, I'm the deputy sheriff."

"I'm not going to let those guys lynch me. Don't you see, George, I got to fight them. I can't let them take me without a fight. Look, George, you're my pal and you wouldn't let anybody kill me, would you? Well now, even if you are deputy sheriff you can't shoot into that mob. You know what would happen if you did. But they're coming after me and I got a right to defend myself and if you let me have that gun for a minute I'll fix them. Every damn one of them."

I see that his eyes is like they were when that man knocked him down and I get frightened as hell. "But if I give you the gun I'll get sent up and lose my job," I tell him.

"I'll hit you on the head," says Charley. "Then you can say that I escaped and knocked you cold and it wasn't your fault, see? I'll hit you easy, George. You got to do it. It's just . . . look, I'm going to get killed, you're only getting hit on the head. Come on, George, do it for a pal."

His eyes are as bright as a cat's and I don't know what to do. Finally I says: "Nobody is going to string up a white man, I mean you, while I'm in charge. Of course I guess I couldn't very well shoot them down. I'll give you the gun if they come after you. But only if they come after you."

He grabs my hand and shakes it hard and I see he's almost crying. I knew that

would shut him up and anyway I really didn't think there was any chance of them coming after him. I had seen too many of those lynch scares and Charley being a white man and all that.

But about seven o'clock Old Tom comes rushing in and says that there is about a hundred men headed this way and that they are after Charley. While Old Tom is phoning for the troops I can hear them shouting and soon they're outside the little jail and throwing stones at the windows. I look out and I see that they're drunk and in a bad mood.

Charley is walking up and down in his cell. Looking at my gun once he says fierce-like: "You promised."

I hear Old Tom talking to them and I can hear John Barrett say: "We're going to string up that son of a bitch if we have to tear down the jail!" and all the rest of them shout and curse Charley. Old Tom comes in and he has a tommy gun in his hand too and he tells me to bring Charley into the office and that we may have trouble before the troops can get here. So I go in and unlock the cell door. Charley comes out and before I can stop him he grabs the gun from my hands and says "Thanks" and then he smacks me over the head.

III

I don't know what happened after that as I was out cold, but from what I've heard he walked into the office and surprised Old Tom. Then he took Old Tom's tommy gun away from him and opened the door and pushed Old Tom out with the rest of them. Of course the men were surprised to see Old Tom and they stopped yelling for a minute. Then the

door suddenly opens and Charley stands there smiling and with the tommy gun in his hands.

For a second they all stare at him and then Old Tom whips out his pistol and fires. He hit Charley in the stomach and Charley sinks down on the top step.

They all start yelling again and make for Charley who is sitting there like he was dead with the gun in his lap. When they get to the bottom step Charley suddenly straightens his head and squeezes the trigger. There is that nervous ta-tat-tat and about five men go down including Old Tom.

Then they are silent again and Charley pulls the trigger again and some more go down. Then they all start running like hell.

There is a little square in front of the jail and they had to run across that and they say that Charley just sat there and took careful aim and sprayed the square with lead. The papers say that Charley was laughing but I don't believe it.

Men was falling like they do in war pictures and they counted twenty dead when it was all over and Charley had dropped the gun and had fallen over and down the steps.

It's in all the papers all over the country and so is my picture. They say that there will be a big investigation but they can't do nothing to me. They can't do nothing to Charley now, either. Some papers called him "poor Charley," but I don't know, I bet those last few seconds when he was popping them off like flies, was the sweetest seconds in his life. And me? I'm covered, I can show them where I was hit on the head. I ain't worrying none, I can show them where.

CONTEST-CRAZY

BY EDITH M. STERN

COMMERCIALY sponsored prize contests, in their present gargantuan form, are a logical outgrowth of the depression. John Brown, a manufacturer, finds that, despite the allurements and cajolings of his high-pressure salesmen, the tons of ink he spreads over the pages of publications, and the Happyland Boys who regale audiences during the John Brown hour on a national hook-up, the public stubbornly refuses to buy his canned milk. He appeals to the astrologers of the advertising agencies. "Higher pressure," they advise. "Stunts. Shots in the arm, Mr. Brown." So Mr. Brown sponsors a contest.

Jim Smith is unemployed. He hasn't very much to do with his time. Furthermore, he still believes that there is gold in the streets of America if you only know where to scratch for it, and that by your own efforts you can jump overnight from worrying about the fifty dollars for last month's rent to enjoying permanent economic security. Mr. Smith enters the contest.

Not that contests are new. P. T. Barnum, that Old Master of ballyhoo, when he was doing advance publicity for the Swedish Nightingale offered a two hundred dollar prize for an American song. Seven hundred and fifty poems were turned in, but what is that compared to the estimated four million entries in the recent Pepsodent Contest? Many, too, the American Legionnaires who, when they were boys, entered popularity or largest-

number-of-subscriptions contests to win a Shetland pony. But the contest on a large scale, with its technique carefully elaborated, with prizes running into thousands of dollars in cash or merchandise, with special clerical staffs to handle its mail and Ph.D.'s to act as judges, with its organization as a heavy industry and all its corollary rackets, is a triumph of contemporary civilization.

Ten years ago contests in their present form were almost unheard of: if they were held, the sponsor deemed himself an innovator and a gambler. Five years ago they began to spring up. By 1931 they were replacing offers and premiums, and during 1932 the country went contest mad. Though their numbers were slightly reduced after December of that year, there were more in 1934 than in 1933, and twice as many during January, 1935, as in the same month a year before.

Contest requirements fall into certain broad classifications. Either you make, draw, write or solve something. (Guessing the number of beans in a pot is not a contest—it is a lottery.) Procter and Gamble have sponsored contests for the best piece of soap sculpture. In a neat and mutually beneficial combination a company manufacturing films and another making toothpaste offered prizes for photographs of The Brightest Smile in America. Here the number of entrants is naturally limited since not everyone sculps or photographs. Solving puzzles or finding the number of