



White Dove and the ragged band seemed never to tire

Tonight We March

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

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In a desolate, ravaged land an American flyer discovers why a million deaths do not mean defeat, why China will never die

HE had been cursing second-hand flying equipment for two months; so that now, seeing all his dire predictions suddenly fulfilled, he could find no words suitable to express his sentiments.

Two months, at a thousand American dollars a month, was longer than a lot of the pilots he had been flying with lasted. A great deal longer than some of the enemy pilots he had met in the sky had lasted. It was two more days until payday. Carey wouldn't get her alimony, Pat wouldn't get the three hundred necessary to let her finish the last half of her Junior year. He remembered an expression, "You do what you do."

The ground smacked up against the landing gear and he cut the sobbing motor as

the plane cartwheeled on one wing. Then he was pulling himself into the cockpit, like a snail retreating into its shell, as the plane came to rest, bottom up.

He struggled with the harness, pushing his body upward by pressing the top of his head against the ground. But it took a much longer time to dig a trench that would allow him to squirm out from beneath his prison.

It was no better or worse than a lot of China he had seen. Not a great deal of difference, he thought, between it and some of the country outside Omaha. He had made worse landings, many of them. He remembered, as he settled down on the wing of the plane, that first forced landing in Belgium. Twenty-one years ago, that was. He'd never forget it, even if he wanted to: there was the shortened right leg where the bone had been set poorly.

Forty-three years old. What the hell business did he have fighting another man's war ten thousand miles from home at that

age? He had asked himself that a great many times. And since he still didn't have an answer, he supposed he would continue to put the question. Anyway it seemed better than going on relief or licking someone's boots for a P.W.A. job.

He rose reluctantly and turned to stare at the setting sun. "Might as well get going, Chick," he remarked, and started walking in the direction of the descending sun. Not that it mattered. He was lost, wholly and completely lost, and had been lost for two hours, but that morning when he had left the field he had taken off with the sun in his eyes, so it was sound reasoning that he must keep the sun in his eyes if he expected to return.

He had been feeling pretty cocky with his day's work until two hours back. An hour after leaving the field he had come upon and bombed to extinction a whole troop train of Japanese soldiers. True, there had been that little gunplay from the ground that had compelled him to make a forced landing. It didn't matter much that his compass had been destroyed and the oil feed punctured. He repaired the latter and ignored the former. A good pilot needed nothing more than a bamboo stick and a piece of silk in order to fly. The Chinese, at least, seemed to think that, for the repairs they gave their second-hand planes would hardly have kept a wheelbarrow running.

"Quiet, please," he shouted, and grinned, for even his own voice made hardly any impression on the vast void of silence that surrounded him.

"There's a war going on around here, Chick," he said, speaking confidentially. "You'd better get a wiggle on; you haven't missed a good war in twenty years."

HE hadn't eaten since breakfast at dawn, and he decided if he got back he would carry reserve food and water in future. The sun was almost beneath the horizon when he saw brown shapes against the brown earth.

Friends, he said, and remembering a mistake he had made in Spain the year before, he loosened the gun in its holster.

All Chinese looked alike to him. He stared at these as they came nearer, seeing nothing individual about them.

"Hungry," he said, and made a motion towards his mouth, opening and closing his jaws.

There were nine of them. They stopped, looking from him to each other questioningly. "Water," he said, and raised his cupped hand to his lips as though drinking.

They still stood, looking all around as though expecting to see others like him pop from the ground. "Come on," he said, "let's get going, there's a war on." They retreated before him and parted to let him pass, then fell in a few paces behind his back.

"Which way?" He pointed vaguely left and right. One of them pointed too, and he went in the direction indicated.

It was growing increasingly hard to see where he was walking, and suddenly, with no warning, something was thrust between his legs and he felt, as he went sprawling, the weight of the little brown men on his back.

He had his hand on his gun but never quite succeeded in getting it from the holster. The words came hissing from their lips as they bound his hands and jerked him to his feet.

"Friend," he said, repeating the word again and again, while mentally he cursed his laziness in not having learned their language, at least enough of it to make them understand that he was a friend.

They walked faster now, pulling him whenever he fell behind, with the rope that they had fastened about his neck. Carey, he thought, will be sore as hell when she doesn't get her alimony. Probably want to swear out a warrant for me or something. He wasn't worried so much about Carey, but he wished he had been able to send Pat enough to complete her college education.

He remembered stories that he had heard of how prisoners were treated by natives in the back country, and wondered whether the smart thing wouldn't have been to have used his gun before it was taken from him. After all, these people were his friends,

or at least these were the people he was being paid to fight for. There was scant comfort in that thought, for he couldn't erase from his mind the memory of other foreigners captured by the natives and turned over to the women. Women, he thought bitterly, are the cause of all the hell in the world. If it hadn't been for Carey he wouldn't be over here now, sticking his neck out just so she could have the two hundred a month the court had granted her when they split up. Two hundred a month was a different matter back in 1929. Now, ten years later, it meant dropping bombs on two or three thousand little brown men; it meant watching maybe three or four enemy planes crash in flames, it meant a forced landing or two for temporary repairs. It meant, today, capture by some rough little barbarians who were paying him a thousand dollars a month to do their dirty work and were apparently going to cancel the debt by wiping him out completely.

He was only dimly aware of the other figures that moved at his side. It was completely dark. The unbroken darkness of a vast country; no light as far as eyes could see, no sound except the soft mutter of their own feet on the brown earth.

Because of the rope about his neck he did not dare lag behind. Because of his bound hands he could think of no way to better his position. His captors conversed together at times, their low voices keeping abreast of him, their sharp, clipped words without meaning.

HE supposed they might have walked five miles in the darkness when he was aware of an increased excitement among his captors. Suddenly he smelled the odor of burning wood, and a moment later saw the flickering flames of a fire close to the ground.

Shadows moved around the blaze and added to the smell of the burning wood was that of a not too clean camp. There were, he saw, no dogs barking at their approach. This was unusual enough to make an impression on his mind. When they were still a hundred yards from the fire, fresh

fuel was thrown on the flames and they leaped skyward, making grotesque dancing shadows of the people who stood about.

A slim figure in clothing a little cleaner, a little less ragged than that worn by the other natives moved forward and stared intently at the aviator. There was the quick bark of a question, and the man who held the rope that was fastened to Chick Enders spoke humbly in reply.

"Come here." He was so surprised to hear the command in English that for a moment he stood transfixed. The man with the rope spoke again and the one who was apparently the leader answered him.

"I'm an American," Chick Enders said. "I fight for China. I fly war bird for Chinese."

"You fight for money," the leader said contemptuously. "We fight for love of China."

"At that," Chick Enders said, "I accomplish more in a day than you can in a month, in a year."

The leader shrugged and spoke a command. The rope was loosened from his neck and a moment later the bonds dropped from his arms. He rubbed his hands gingerly together to restore the circulation.

Fried rice patties were brought to him, still warm from the fire. He ate them hungrily, and saw that the natives who had brought him in were also eating. Bolting the food and licking their greasy fingers noisily.

"Your name?" the leader asked when he had finished eating.

"Chick Enders," he said, "and yours?"

The slim figure hesitated, black eyes searching the aviator's face. "In your language you would say White Dove," the answer came finally.

"White Dove," Chick said, and grinned in appreciation of the jest. "A good name for a leader of warring bandits."

"Bandits!" The leader spat out the word. "Who says we are bandits? Did not your own countrymen fight the English for their freedom?"

"Have it your way," Enders said agreeably. "How about getting me a horse?"

"A horse! If I had a horse would I not ride it myself? If I had fifty horses for my men. . . . Do you know where I can get fifty horses?"

"Are you crazy?" Enders said. "Do I look like a stable? Where are we? How far is Hankow?"

"Hankow," White Dove said, "over there, three, four days' walk."

"Walk, four days?" Enders said. "You're crazy." Then he thought of Pat waiting for a check; perhaps she needed clothes, maybe her rent was due; then there was always tuition. He didn't think so much about Carey's alimony. White Dove was looking at him contemptuously. "All right," he said, rising, "which way?"

A ghost of a smile flicked across White Dove's face. "You are not afraid, Mr. Enders, you walk through the night alone?"

"Afraid?" Chick Enders scoffed. "I stopped being afraid in Germany twenty years ago. A man's dead in this business the first day he takes to the air. Every day you live after that is just borrowed time. I've got a wife and girl back in the States—or I should say I had a wife. She kicked me out because I wouldn't give up this business."

"I had a husband," White Dove said evenly. "The Japanese killed him. If only we had horses I would not care so much."

Enders said, "I knew there was something strange about you. You looked kind of—well, kind of soft to be in this show. War isn't any place for a woman."

"It is my place," White Dove said. "While there are two of us left in the land, Japan shall not be the victor." She ended by throwing a command in her own language at the circle of men. "Come," she said to Enders, "we will escort the bird man on his way to Hankow."

"It's odd," Enders said later as they walked through the soft darkness, "finding a woman like you in a place like this, and having you speak English, too."

"I was not always here," White Dove said. "When my husband was killed I took his place. He had a thousand men, I have fifty, but with horses we would be the

same as a thousand." She shrugged.

"What can you do with your fifty men?" Enders asked. "One bomb would wipe out the lot of you."

"But first the bomb must find us. You will see. Tonight we march, tomorrow we rest. Can the eagle catch the rabbit at night? Can he follow him into his burrow in the morning?"

ENDERS knew by daylight that his companions were not playing at war. They were serious about it, marching silently except for occasional soft-spoken commands from the leader. Weary and tired to the bone, he would have welcomed a rest many hours before it came. Had it not been that he refused to allow a woman to outdo him, he would have asked for it. He cursed the German who had shortened his leg for him twenty years before. His mouth was parched as a sun-drenched bone, yet to ask for water when it was obvious there was no water would be too ridiculous.

His body ached and his shortened leg grew first painful and then numb, but he kept doggedly on. It was not yet dawn when they came to the banks of a small river. He fell upon his knees and like the others splashed water into his mouth with his hand. They forded the stream, wading waist-deep in the sluggish current, and the bare, flat land stretched in the early dawn for miles before them.

White Dove spoke to her men and said to Enders, "We will stay here for the day. If only we had horses, over there," she pointed, "is a Japanese outpost, food, ammunition, with only a handful of men to guard them. Each day they come out and pillage the countryside. With horses we could attack them."

"They have horses?" Enders asked.

"Our horses, horses of my countrymen, and if we attack the walls, they will kill the horses before they will surrender."

One man disengaged himself from the others and moved out across the plain.

"We do like this," White Dove said, and showed him how to scoop out a shallow trench that would hold his body.

"But doesn't the sun get pretty hot?" He looked at the first red rim of it on the horizon.

"This is a war," White Dove said. "Should we complain at the heat of the sun when thousands, millions of our people are dying?"

"Well"—Enders looked at the meager protection the trench offered—"if a Jap plane gets an eyeful of us, we're apt to do some dying ourselves."

"We are not afraid to die," White Dove said proudly. "We live to save our country. If dying helps our cause, we are glad to die."

"But you'd rather die on horseback," Enders said.

"You joke, Mr. Enders. Would you treat war so lightly if your wife, your daughter were being abused by soldiers and afterwards killed? If Chicago instead of Hankow were being bombed?"

"Chicago?" Enders said. "What do you know of Chicago?"

"I studied there for six years; then the war, and I came back to try to help my country, my poor country."

"War isn't for women. There are ten million men able to fight in China."

"Yes," White Dove said, "ten million men, like these poor men of mine. They are like sheep without a leader. What China needs most is leaders. With, oh, so very little money, I could rouse China. We are hopeless only because we are ignorant of what is taking place. One great leader with other strong leaders under him could free the land in a single month. China sleeps, she is not dead; some day will come the awakening."

"Lady," Enders said fervently, "if I was planning to conquer this country, my first move would be to get rid of a certain young woman named White Dove."

"It would not matter, there will be others. I do what I can, and when I fall someone else will take up where I stop. China has never been conquered. Next year, ten years, twenty years our enemies may be among us, then suddenly we are free. It has been so before, it will be so again."

Enders watched the native men pull loose dirt over their prone figures and followed their example. Whether for protection from the sun or to make them harder to see from a plane, it did not matter; he was convinced that for whatever reason it was advisable to follow their actions.

A SUDDEN outburst of whispered conversation drew his attention and he followed the direction of White Dove's eyes. Far, far out across the plain a blot spread and became a dozen or more little dots. White Dove's face became masklike as she stared. "Dogs," she said, "murderers, butchers. They go now and kill and loot the native villages. It is sport to them, they think it fun. If we had guns, if we had horses!"

"But why," Enders asked, "if this is the garrison don't you try to capture the place while they are away?"

"It would be nice," she said, "nice for them. They have rifles that will shoot a mile. And always there is left a guard behind. One shot, and the lot of them would come back. No, we must fight a different war from that."

"Listen," Enders said, "tomorrow's payday for me. If I don't show up in Hankow I don't get any money. My wife needs her alimony, or so she says; the kid needs her money to pay for her last semester at school. If I get some horses out of that dump, will you let me take one and tell me how to get to Hankow?"

"Are you mad," White Dove asked, "or do you still play at war?"

"Perhaps a little of both. I tell you I've been dead twenty years. Maybe I've lived on borrowed time long enough. But if I come through, you get your horses, I get my pay check. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal, but death follows folly. Wisdom and bravery are sisters."

"You do what you do. Is that a Chinese proverb, or did I pick it up in Spain or perhaps France? Anyway, it holds good. I'm hungry as a shark, but I suppose if I asked about food you'd tell me that this is a war. Of course I'll need my gun?"

"Yes," White Dove agreed, "you couldn't

hope to take the place with your bare hands. Or do you expect to go up to the gates and ask for some horses?"

"It might not be as crazy as what I plan to do at that."

It was past midday, he judged by the position of the sun, before the horsemen came back across the plain and disappeared in the rough country beyond. "You've heard of Troy?" Enders asked.

"I studied the Greek and Italian poets in your college. Are we to make a Trojan Horse?"

"It's the same principle, without the horse," Enders admitted. "How would your men take the suggestion that I approach this place with six captives?"

"My men never question my commands, but I fail to see that killing six of them will help you get my horses or help your wife get her alimony."

"Forget the wife angle for a minute. If I walk in there with six Chinese captives, the least they can do is to hold all of us until they contact their headquarters."

"And that, Mr. Enders, will be about ten minutes after they see you. Maybe you haven't heard of the radio."

"Unless their radio is better than the one I had on the plane, it won't do them much good. But anyway, assuming they had a radio, if I say that I'm an American pilot and the prisoners tried to rob me, they'll have to wait long enough to investigate."

"Wait? They'll wait long enough to call a firing squad. Were it for myself, I would not hesitate; for my men, no. I refuse to send them to certain death. You are no better than the Japanese. You would slaughter these ignorant peasants so that your wife and daughter can get their money on time."

"I don't see but what my plan is better than this. What do you expect to gain, lying out in the hot sun all day and walking all night? Your men are starved. They couldn't fight anyway, they're too weak."

"They'll fight," White Dove said, "when the time comes, and it will come. That is why we wait; carelessness follows safety."

Even now one of my men is waiting for nightfall to see if there is not some way for us to enter undetected. Tonight, when it is dark, we will again advance; tomorrow we will be beyond the garrison. You may leave us then. If you are lucky, in two, three days you will be in Hankow. It is time you got some sleep. Look, the ignorant coolies you would slaughter have already slept for many hours."

Gnats and bugs settled upon them from the air and ants burrowed up from the ground and tortured them, but in spite of these and the hot sun, after a time Enders slept. The sun had already set when he awoke, though it was not yet entirely dark.

White Dove said, when he had stirred and opened his eyes, "I have thought of a plan, Mr. Enders. It is not without risk for you, and for me."

"I bet it's good," Enders said.

"It is very simple, so simple that they may not suspect a plot. You and I can go alone. You as an American aviator, I as your Chinese wife. It isn't improbable that a Chinese girl educated in America might marry an American. You need not give your right name; then if an investigation is started, it will take time."

"I don't like it," Enders said. "War isn't the place for a woman."

"But you must not think of me. Think of the daughter who must have the money for her education, think of the wife's alimony."

"If you're trying to be nasty, skip it. I earned that thousand bucks, every penny of it."

"Oh, certainly, it is the price my country must pay when it buys patriotism."

"I hate to do it," Enders said, "but it looks like there's no other way."

"In a little while it will be dark; then we will eat and go back to the river for a drink. After that we will start. I must tell the men what to do." She spoke to them at length, and Enders saw the black looks that were thrown at him. He couldn't blame them. Under other conditions he would refuse to go through with it, but had proposed the plan herself.

IT WAS quite dark when they left the river and started in the direction that the horsemen had taken across the plain. "I will say," White Dove said, "that I am an American Chinese. As White Dove I am known to them all. They would kill both of us if they suspected my real name."

"We wouldn't be any better if they knew mine, so you'd better start calling me something else. . . . How about Perkins, Joe Perkins? The real Joe Perkins had an argument with a Heinie about half a mile above Belgium back in eighteen. It was a dead heat, if you know what that means."

"Poor Joe, I mean the real Joe, of course. And my name will be Nana. It would not do for an American girl to have a too Chinese name. My men are to follow and wait until we are within the walls. If we can't let them in, they are to try to scale the walls. At the signal of two shots fired close together, they are to enter at any cost."

"Sister," he said admiringly, "I'll hand it to you. You've got what it takes."

"China has what it takes," she corrected.

Enders did not question the direction that the girl took. She appeared to know unfalteringly the way she wanted to go, and they traveled faster than they had the previous night. He was stiff and sore, but after a time his muscles responded more easily and he was almost at the point of welcoming the approaching crisis.

White Dove had returned the gun to him, and when they saw lights flickering dimly from a rise in the ground he settled it freely in the holster. "Keep your chin up, Nana," he said, laughing at the unfamiliar name, "and we'll put this over."

"You are brave, Joe Perkins. I hope the real Joe is watching over you tonight. If we succeed, tomorrow night you will be in Hankow."

"Here's hoping," Enders said.

A night bird whistled eerily from a little way ahead of them, and Enders jumped when the sound was answered by his com-

panion. A form came out of the darkness and White Dove held whispered conversation.

"He says," she told Enders as they continued, "that there are forty or fifty men in the place and some women, mostly native women kept prisoners. All the men are mounted. Horses, do you understand, horses for all of us. With fifty mounted men I can recruit a thousand, ten thousand. I can save China if we succeed here tonight."

"Nana, we'll take this place like Grant took Richmond. You stick to your Uncle Joe and we'll have horses to burn."

They were beneath the shade of the wall before the sounds beyond told them that even in the darkness their approach had been seen. A flare was hurled down from above, and in the glare they could feel a score of eyes upon them.

There was a rattling of chains and a massive wooden gate swung inward. It was, Enders saw as they went forward, reinforced by more wood on the inside. Two or three dozen men in uniform stared at them suspiciously.

"Where's the boss?" Enders asked.

A man came forward. He walked cautiously, a gun ready in his hand. "Who you?" he asked in English. "What want?"

"Americans. Airplane." He made a motion of a plane going through the air with his hand. "Wreck." He pointed back the way they had come and then indicated their travel-stained clothes. "Walk far," he said to discourage them from looking for the plane. "Two days."

THEY were ushered into what Enders saw had been at one time only a small village. Seven or eight houses seemed to be all the buildings. About these a wall had been built. A man, apparently the officer in charge, had been summoned, and he too approached, gun in hand. He spoke to the first man who had questioned them and pointed to White Dove. "This woman Chinese girl," the first man interpreted.

"Wife," Enders said, "American girl. Tell them," he commanded White Dove.

"I am American girl from Chicago," White Dove said.

The two men conversed again, and the interpreter demanded, "What you want?"

"Hungry, tired, go long way, Hong Kong." He knew that Hong Kong was already in the hands of the Japanese and hoped that this would allay their suspicions. The entire garrison, he decided, had been turned out. Beyond the soldiers he could see the frightened faces of the women and girls and even a few old men, used, he decided, as laborers.

After another dialogue the man who spoke English said, "Give gun. You stay tonight. Tomorrow we see."

Enders thought there was an air of expectancy in the faces that looked at him from all sides. "No gun," he said, "gun I keep."

The men smiled at each other, and White Dove said as though in fear, "Don't give up your gun, Joe."

"Show us some place to stay," Enders said, "then bring some food."

I'm a fool, he thought. If I'd only had the girl tell her men to get over the wall in back while we were all palavering here. He moved his hand to his gunbutt and ordered, "Come on, now, something to eat, a place to stay."

A girl had pushed her way through the throng and spoke in high-pitched words to the commander. White Dove's fingers tightened on his arm. Vaguely he was aware that a night bird whistled from somewhere in behind the houses. The interpreter raised his gun. "This no American girl, this Chinese girl. This girl . . ." He had brought his pistol up and it was leveled at White Dove's breast.

"Why, you—" Enders' right foot shot up and the gun exploded before it left the man's fingers to fall somewhere beyond the flares that lit the night. There was a mutter and a stir among the Japanese soldiers and Enders brought his own gun from the holster. "We're staying here tonight, see?"

Again that soft, plaintive whistle of a night bird came from within the walls, and immediately it was answered. Enders saw

that others, too, had heard it this time. They were all listening. The commander barked an order, and the men melted into the darkness.

White Dove was whispering in his ear. "Those are my men," she said, triumph creeping into her voice. A cry came from the blackness and was stopped short. "Quick," White Dove said, "put out the flares." As she spoke she moved toward the nearest one; then suddenly the place was alive with men. Hard, tight-lipped men armed with knives and clubs. In a moment the place was in complete darkness, and Enders caught White Dove's arm and backed with her until he was against the wall. His gun ready, he waited. . . .

SOMETIMES far away, sometimes near at hand, there would be a scuffling struggle, then suddenly silence. When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, Enders saw stealthy, shadowy figures. A shot rang out and a bullet tugged at the sleeve of his coat. He fired at the flash and dropped to the ground, pulling White Dove down with him.

A body dropped from the wall above upon his back, and before he could free himself another and a third made added weight upon his prone figure. Faintly, as though from a long distance, he heard White Dove barking orders. The last thing he remembered was her voice begging him in English to speak to her.

When he returned to consciousness the flares had been lit and the evil-appearing, gaunt men who served under White Dove were seated in a ring eating with loud, unmuffled sounds.

"Joe," White Dove said, "Mr. Enders, you had me very much frightened."

"The horses," Enders said, "did you get the horses?"

"Forty-two of them, and tomorrow I shall escort you to Hankow."

"Tomorrow," Enders said, "is payday. We're leaving now."

His head seemed to be split apart and he raised his hands to see whether it was really in one piece.

"You can't go tonight," White Dove said. "You're hurt, maybe badly hurt."

"This is war," Enders reminded her. "Did you forget? How about the enemy?" He looked around for the Japanese.

"I lost twelve men," White Dove said soberly. "The Japanese—we cannot take prisoners. You understand."

"Why, yes," Enders said doubtfully. "Now if I can have that horse . . ."

It was late the next afternoon when they sighted Hankow. "Now," White Dove said, "I must return to my men. They have gone to the hills to wait for me. Horses, men—I tell you China will be free. In a month I will have a thousand, ten thousand men, and horses and cannon and planes. Perhaps then you will show me how to fly so that I can quicker rid my country of its oppressors."

"I think you'll do it," Enders said; "you've got what it takes. But come on into Hankow with me; I want to send back a present."

She said suspiciously, "A present? What present? You would not hand me over to the military. The regular army has small use for people like us."

"I promise nothing shall harm you. We do what we do," he finished under his breath.

It was two hours later before he had been able to convince army officials that he was really Chick Enders in the flesh. When the red tape had been completed and his thousand dollars was safe in his

pocket, he went back to where White Dove waited his return.

"This," he said, handing her the money, "is for you. It may mean another ten horses."

"You cannot do this. There is your wife, your daughter. I won't take it."

"Pat can go visit her mother for a month. Carey isn't one not to have put something aside for a rainy day."

"But you have already done so much. China can never repay you. . . ."

"We do what we do," he said. "Is that a Chinese proverb, or did I pick it up in Morocco or South America?"

"It will be China's cry of freedom," she said. "Tomorrow, next month, next year, it will ring from every housetop."

He watched her ride away before he turned in the direction of his own quarters. There were two cablegrams under the door to his room.

The first one read:

DON'T SEND MONEY. GETTING MARRIED TODAY, LEAVING COLLEGE. LOVE.

PAT.

The second was even more brief:

PAT MARRIED, SEND HER ALLOWANCE WITH ALIMONY.

CAREY.

He put the first in his pocket and tore the second into little pieces. Just before he fell asleep he muttered drowsily, "We do what we do, Carey, old girl."

GIANT THRIFT PACK
12 for 25¢
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4 for 10¢

STAR

WORLD'S LARGEST-SELLING SINGLE EDGE BLADE

FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS



Bible Bill swung his ax at the towline, and those drunken Irishmen raved like madmen

Mother Damnation

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Begin now this lusty and colorful tale of the roaring days on the Erie Canal

THOSE were the roaring days of the Erie Canal—the days when the Ditch was teeming with commerce and the canalmen were lusty, brawling fellows who used their fists well and often and spent their cash in violent play at the Swillberg Tavern.

But more than a match for these canalmen is Mother Damnation, proprietress of the Tavern. Built like the Statue of Liberty, she can bring down the roof with a song or toss out a brawler with equal ease; and it's a sight to see her dive into the canal in her flaming red bathing suit. A sight for anyone but Bible Bill MacBride.

For Bible Bill, the mightiest canaller of them all and the owner of three spick-and-span boats, is so intensely God-fearing that he will knock a man out for swearing. So it is only natural that Bill should regard the lusty Mother Damnation as a sinful woman, that he should stride into the Swillberg Tavern—to consign it and its proprietress to perdition. These two—Bible Bill and Mother Damnation—feud endlessly.

LOW-BRIDGE (who is telling the story) soon discovers that his captain is even a stranger man than he had thought. For one night Bible Bill confesses that he hates the canal and its life; and when Low-Bridge tells him he cannot quit the life that he is born to, Bill flies into a fury. He can break away; he is the Master of his Fate! It's all too much for Low-Bridge. He wonders what

This story began in last week's Argosy