



Out on the water the bateau seemed to melt away. A man gasped . . . a woman screamed

## Dynamite Boss

By F. M. TIBBOTT

**Come log-jam 'or high water, you can tell pretty exactly what high explosives will do: that is, the regulation kind. But high explosives in skirts are quite another matter**

**Y**OU can hear about Joe Obit and Christine Moore in any of the Pine Tree Paper and Lumber Company camps. Anybody will tell you about it, and then very likely ask your opinion; because something is lacking.

To complete the story you'd have to hear about the flier in psychology that York Marlin and Doc Sumner cooked up: an experiment which they and Cap Welch, who was in on the action, kept under their hats.

And their reason for that was sound.

For Marlin and Sumner and Welch all understood that the yard crew ought never to know what they had done. The yard crew in general—and Joe Obit in particular. Joe was the dynamite boss and he had an uncanny aptitude for locating the key log in a jam. Men with that ability are rare. They have to be born with it. And that spring, when delay in getting the drive downriver meant bankruptcy for the company, Joe Obit took on a value that was close to priceless.

But this was an angle that York Marlin didn't foresee. As the company's woods manager he'd had too many immediate troubles to have time for more than a general survey of possible contingencies.

The first catastrophe had happened in March when floods cut heavily into the Pine Tree Paper and Lumber Company's

reserve supply of pulpwood, sweeping away thousands of cords piled on the bank by the company's mills. There were contracts to fill; contracts with penalty clauses.

And to top it off there was the Ajax Paper Company, hovering like a hawk, indulging in sabotage, trying to force a bankruptcy and thereby pick up the Pine Tree Company's timber holdings at their own price.

York Marlin couldn't prove it, but he knew well enough that Ajax was behind the trouble at River's Head. Somebody had taken hammers and chisels and wedges to the machinery on the alligators, those huge flat-bottomed tow boats that were fitted with engines and winches and mile-long cables to haul the booms of pulpwood and timber down the lakes to Number One Dam at River's Head where the stuff was sluiced into the river.

If he hadn't sent his bosses and a skeleton crew in there two weeks ahead of the usual time there wouldn't have been any drive that season. But the engineers and their assistants got there before irreparable damage had been done and they got the alligators in commission by the time the first booms were ready for towing.

And then everybody from York Marlin down prayed that what wind they had would come from the north. The alligators hadn't the power to drag the two-acre booms of logs against the wind; and their first break of good luck was a northwest blow that took the ice out of the lakes and then settled down to a gentle breeze.

In the first three days of open water on the lakes the alligators jerked six thousand cords to the headworks at Number One Dam: just double what they usually figured on, and half as much again as York Marlin had to average this spring. So he was feeling pretty good that morning in early May as he stood on the walk-way at the dam and watched the steady sluicing.

From out on the lake the dam's superstructure, consisting of gatehouse and storage space, looked like a long Noah's Ark. It vibrated from the rush of a twenty-foot head of water through the open gates.

And down through the central gates went the logs, long stuff and short stuff all mixed in together. They came down between the sluicing booms, pushed by the crew with long slender pickpoles till the suck of the current caught them.

The sluicing booms made a great V, running out from the dam to the headworks; and out there men tramped around capstans pulling into the V each boom of logs brought down by the alligators. In the V and beyond it were acres of logs, brown-backed and yellow-white at the ends; and on beyond them the water rippled, sparkling, blue and green, two miles of it, to the farther shore where the black growth lifted tier on tier to the mountains.

**I**T WAS a clear morning and York Marlin stood on the walk-way with his nose to the breeze, his hands jammed in the pockets of his open mackinaw, his old felt hat tilted over one eye, a pipe in his mouth only a shade or two darker than the brown of his face.

His eyes roved here and there, twinkling, blue. They fixed on a fisherman coming along the embankment road from Oram Caldwell's River's Head Camp a few minutes walk up the shore. The man's faded canvas hunting coat and riding breeches had a comfortable look, and his slough hat and easy gait and the fly-rod and net that he carried completed a picture of utter contentment.

York smiled as he watched him and then went to the end of the gatehouse to meet him. Since the first day of the drive, Doctor Sumner was the only fisherman at the camp who bothered to carry a rod; the river was so full of water and logs there simply was no chance to fish.

York raised his voice above the roar of the river, "You aren't wishing me bad luck, are you?"

Doctor Sumner's eyebrows lifted a little. Then he glanced at his rod and net and his smile matched his weathered coat and breeches; it wrinkled the corners of his eyes and gave his wide mouth a whimsical cant.

"You know I'm not," he said. "I just like the feel of 'em." He laid the rod and net on a pile of boards and looked down at the white-crested river and the dark logs leaping in the spray.

"You're certainly pushing 'em," he said. "How many booms so far?"

"Finishing the thirteenth," York grinned and held out crossed fingers. "And if we could keep this pace we'd be through by the end of the month. But we can't. Sixty thousand cords in thirty days—" he shook his head. "But we've got to begin feeding it to the mill by the tenth of June, which is plenty soon."

"I thought there were only forty thousand cords," Sumner said.

"That's four-foot stuff," York told him. "And there's ten million feet of saw logs." He squinted at the boiling current where twenty-odd feet of a log came whirling up like a broom handle and slammed back into the water. "That's what I'm afraid of now," he said. "When those long sticks get to jumping like that they can make a jam in a couple of minutes that'll take us hours, or even days, to break. I wish it was all short stuff."

Sumner smiled. "Keep your fingers crossed and knock on—" He stopped as the gong that was hooked to the gatehouse telephone started clanging.

The sluicing boss ran up the ladder from the booms and into the gatehouse. Presently he came out on the walk-way, and yelled; "Hold it! Drop the gate boom!" Then he came around, and said to York, "They're hung up at the head of Misery, and they want Joe. You know where he is?"

"He's down at the chutes. Call him up and tell him to come out to the road and I'll pick him up in five minutes." York turned to Sumner. "Talk of the devil," he said. Then he grinned. "Well, you can get in some fishing while we're shut down, anyhow."

"No, I think I'll ride down with you," Sumner told him. "I like to see Joe operate on a jam. He'd have made a swell surgeon."

They went down the embankment and

got in an old touring car that was parked in front of the wangan. The car had thirty-six-inch wheels to give it clearance over rocks, and its heavy-duty springs made it ride like a truck. They bounced over rocks and churned through mud. The frost wasn't out of the ground yet and every day it heaved rocks higher and made soft spots softer in the Carry Road.

The car ground along in second gear and its noise drowned out the roar of the river. The Carry Road ran through a tunnel of black growth and white birch, paralleling the river after a fashion but seldom in sight; and overhead, angling back and forth across the road, ran the river telephone line with branches here and there to lookout points on the river.

Joe Obit and a rodless fisherman from the camp were standing beside the road when the car came in sight of the path to the Chutes.

"There's that guy, Bagley, again," York said from the side of his mouth. "The way he gets around on the river you'd think he was an old-timer up here."

Sumner smiled. "He's having the time of his life. He told me he'd never been in the big woods before and he had to see it all."

"He's seeing it, all right," York muttered. "He's under foot everywhere."

THE car slowed and stopped beside the men; Joe, all woodsman and riverman, from his corked boots to his dinky round hat; and Bagley, rigged up in the latest plaids and canvas-topped rubbers, the city sport. Joe opened the rear door of the car, kicked the mud from his corks and swung himself in without touching the floor.

"Do you mind if I go with you?" Bagley asked. "Obit tells me there's a log jam down the river, and I've never seen one."

"Hop in," York told him. "But look out you don't go through the top—this road isn't any boulevard."

The car churned on; down past the branch road that led to the outlet where the river bulged out to form Craw Pond; down past Number Two Dam where Craw

Pond narrowed back to the river again; down to the path that went in to the foot of the Corkscrew and to Misery Pool just below it. They left the car there and took the path to the river. Coming out on the bank, York stopped and said softly:

"Oh, oh!"

Almost as far up the river as the last bend in the Corkscrew there was no water in sight. Logs choked the river, long stuff and short stuff, piled up in a tangled mass that hung out over the deep water in Misery Pool in a ten-foot face. Spread out above the face a dozen men were picking futilely with cant dogs. And under their feet the roar of the river was hushed to a chuckling gurgle.

The crew boss hurried ashore.

"I never see the beat of it," he said to York, and shook his head. "It started up in the Corkscrew and we picked it loose. But them long sticks kep' hangin' up. We worked it down to here but the' was too much stuff comin' down, and before we could stop 'em sluicing at Number Two she was hung for fair."

The crew boss' anxious look cleared at York's half smile and nod, and he turned to Joe Obit. "She must be hung on them deep boulders, Joe," he said.

But Joe didn't appear to hear him. He was looking at the tangle from half-closed eyes, his jaws working slowly on a wad of tobacco that swelled a copper-brown cheek. In repose his face was as smooth as a boy's; a homely face, broad yet lean, and a nose that was too small and pudgy for his wide-spaced eyes. The intentness of his expression, now, gave him a look of forty; but the company books showed his age as twenty-six.

His eyes shifted from point to point, along the face of the jam and upriver. Then he went down the bank and out on the logs, the crew boss at his heels. They moved slowly along the face of the jam, stopping and then going on.

They reached the far side and worked back; and near the center, some ten feet from the face, Joe indicated a spot and set the crew to work. He watched them a few

minutes then came ashore and went over to a clump of alders and cut a twelve-foot pole with the knife he wore at his belt. He trimmed the pole and carried it up to the shack. York and Sumner and Bagley went to the shack and watched him tie several sticks of dynamite to the large end of the pole. He crimped a length of fuse in a dynamite cap and set the cap in one of the sticks.

"Matches?" York asked.

Joe fished a tin box from his pocket and shook it.

"All set, I guess." He grinned, hitched up his suspenders, and dropped down the bank. The extra hitch he had given them made his wide white suspenders bite into his shoulders and gave him the appearance of being suspended in a breeches buoy.

He swung out to where the crew was working. When they had completed the hole down between the logs to his liking he waved them ashore, lighted a match and cupped his hands. Bluish gray smoke spun from the end of the fuse as he lowered the charge, working it deeper and deeper with the pole.

He stood there a moment, gave the pole a final shove and then came leisurely ashore.

A muffled *whur-room* came from the river; water spouted and chunks of wood flew; a cord or two of four-foot stuff spewed from the face; the jam creaked and moved, and settled again, quivering uneasily.

The crew dropped down the bank with their cant dogs but Joe held up a hand and stopped them. He cut another alder pole and rigged a heavier charge and went out on the jam alone. Logs groaned and shifted here and there as if the jam were going out. Joe stood poised, waiting. The movement stopped and he went on.

There was still a hole where he had placed the first charge. He peered into it, stepped carefully to the farther side, streaked a match across his pants, lighted the fuse and lowered the pole.

An instant later the log he was standing on snapped sideways. It moved so quickly

it left him hanging in the air. He jabbed down with the pole, but there seemed to be no bottom; and he dropped into the hole, out of sight, on top of the charge of dynamite.

**I**T HAPPENED so quickly, so unexpectedly, that every man there was shocked into immobility. York's eyes strained at the hole. He couldn't believe that Joe wouldn't come out of it in an agile scramble. But the moments passed and then the logs slowly closed over the hole. One of the crew cried out, and the horror of it beaded York with a cold sweat.

The charge exploded with a dull concussion. The logs around it shifted, creaking, and a tremor ran through the jam. It began to move. Then a man cried:

"There he is!"

And out in the pool, yards from the face of the jam, York saw Joe Obit's threshing arms and white-suspended shoulders. The crew fell down the bank and into the water, directly in the path of those mangling tons of logs. They made a living chain and snatched Joe ashore and boosted him up the bank; and the last man was hit on the foot by a whirling stick of pulp-wood.

Joe's face was a brownish gray. His mouth hung slack and his eyes rolled. York was kneeling, holding up his head and shoulders; Doc Sumner's stubby fingers were going over him, back and neck and ribs and legs. Joe shook his head, groaned:

"I'm all—huh—all right. I—" he sat forward and retched. He brought up shreds of brown stuff, and York asked, "You hurt inside?"

Joe shook his head. "No-o. I—huh—" he retched again. "I just—uh-h-h," he shuddered. "I just swallowed my chew."

One of the crew broke out in a hysterical laugh and stopped suddenly. Sumner was pushing back Joe's lids and looking at his eyes. He smiled a little and peered at Joe. "Can you really hear all right?" he asked in a low voice.

Joe nodded, and Sumner shook his head again. "I don't understand it," he said.

"The concussion when that dynamite went off should have ruined your ears."

"Oh-h," Joe grinned faintly. "I beat it out. That first shot made a hole out t' the pool and I got my head out just before she went off."

The crew boss let out a gusty breath. "Boy!" he said. "What a squeak! They'll be tellin' about this when I'm gray-headed."

A startled look came over Joe's face. He half rose and then glanced at the river. The logs were making *tunking* sounds as they bucked and shouldered each other; and Joe said to the crew, "You guys better keep 'em moving."

He waited for the men to get back on the job, and then he said to York, "Look, you gotta keep 'em quiet about this. If Christine hears about it, she'll kick-up a row. She—uh-h—" Joe reddened and looked sheepish. "She's scared something'll happen to me on the river."

York looked at him, barely able to hide his amazement. What he'd heard about Joe and Christine this spring had only amused him. He couldn't believe it had gone this far.

"Oh," he said softly, "I didn't know it was like that between you. She—you sure she isn't kidding?"

Joe's eyes narrowed a little. Then he said, "Godfrey, I wish she was—I mean about the river. She—" Joe got redder. "Well, she don't like me to be on the river."

York glanced at Sumner and then at Bagley. Sumner looked thoughtful. Bagley had moved quietly to the bank where he was watching the river. The logs were running free again, and the men were rolling and shoving in those that were hung up on the banks.

"We'll keep 'em quiet," York said.

He called the crew together. "We won't say anything about what happened this morning," he told them. "Not a word about it till the drive gets down. And tell the boys on the other side. I want you to understand that I'm not asking this just for fun. I've got a good reason."



He looked the men over, one by one, and each nodded solemnly and returned to the river. York turned to Joe. "You'd better get out of those clothes. Build a fire in the shack and dry 'em out."

He watched the logs a few minutes and then drove back with Sumner and Bagley to Number One. Bagley went up on the dam, and York took Sumner to the office.

"There's something goin on, Doc," York said. "Can you imagine Christine falling for a guy with a mug like Joe's?"

Sumner smiled. "I've heard of stranger things. But it's had me wondering some, myself."

"THERE'S something going on," York repeated. "This is Christine's third season up here and if there'd been anything between her and Joe before this spring I'd have heard about it. They didn't see each other last winter because Joe's been right here in the woods, and he's too shy with women to make anything like this headway with a gal in the ten days that Christine's been here. There's just one answer to that, Doc; she's gone after him."

Sumner nodded. "It does look something like that," he admitted.

"And I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that I know why."

"Well—I've got an idea, but I hope it isn't the same as yours."

York closed the door, and said in a lowered voice, "You got what he said about Christine not wanting him to work on the river?"

Sumner nodded again. "She's a good head waitress, but it's struck me more than once that she's more interested in tips than she is in the service. She has what I'd call the 'money eye,' and if somebody could use her for a certain piece of work, and offered her enough, I think she'd take it."

"Even to working on Joe to quit this job?" York asked.

"Even that—if the price was right."

"That," York said, "is exactly what I've been thinking." He shook his head. "And if she pulls it off, I'm sunk. And the com-

pany's sunk. But I can't go to Joe about it; he'd never believe it. And if I went to Christine—"

"I wouldn't," Sumner said. "There's always the chance that she's really fallen for Joe; it's pretty slim but it's still a chance, and there might be another way of getting around her."

"As how?"

"Well, there's Jaimeson—if Joe isn't too expensive a risk."

York didn't get the connection at first. Then he recalled that Jaimeson, who came up to River's Head Camp every spring, was an insurance broker.

"Oh," he smiled. "Now there's an idea!" He turned it over in his mind and his smile widened. "Accident insurance; and for enough to make Christine's eyes stick out. I'll get it if it costs me a hundred a month! And I'll see Jaimeson about it right now. Coming?"

"No. I'm going to get my rod and sit on a rock and watch the water."

They went out and Sumner took the short cut up over the rocks and York continued on to the embankment road. As he reached it he saw Bagley hurrying from the dam. He didn't want to talk to Bagley and increased his own pace.

He was gratified to see Jaimeson sitting on the main camp porch talking with several other fishermen and guides. He took Jaimeson aside and told him what he wanted and they went to Jaimeson's cabin and filled out an application blank. Then York went around to the help's quarters and looked up Christine.

She seemed nervous and a little pale. Her face seemed sharper and she wasn't, York thought, nearly so pretty when she looked like that. He guessed it was due to a combination of guilty conscience and his sudden coming upon her, and tried to put her at her ease. He smiled, and said:

"Joe told me this morning that you were afraid something might happen to him on the river. Of course there's some danger; but there's just about as much when you cross the street in the city. That's why I carry an accident policy on top of the

company insurance. When Joe told me about you this morning I thought it might ease your mind if I took out the same kind of a policy for him."

Christine shook her head and pressed her lips together. "No," she said.

"But it's a pretty good policy, Christine. It pays ten thousand dollars for accidental death or the loss of both hands or feet, and from that down to a few hundred dollars for things like a cracked rib or a sprained wrist."

YORK watched her as he spoke and thought he caught a glitter in her eyes, but he wasn't sure. He said, "I've just been talking to Mr. Jaimeson who handles insurance; and he's telephoning one of his companies now to put Joe's policy in effect immediately. By noon today Joe will be covered, and if anything happens to him after that, he or somebody will collect anywhere up to ten thousand dollars."

Christine wet her lips and then shook her head again. "No," she said. "It's Joe I want, and I want him just like he is."

"Of course you do; we all do; I don't know what we'd do on the drive without him. But I just wanted you to know that if anything did happen to him—"

"If anything does happen to him," she broke in, "it'll hafta happen t'day. Because he won't be on the river after t'day—not if he listens t' me; and I think he will after what happened this morning!"

York looked at her, startled. "This morning?"

"Yeah," she said tartly. "You know mighty well what happened!"

"Who told you, Christine?"

She pressed her lips together and shook her head. "That's my business."

York finally came away without any further satisfaction. He walked thoughtfully back to the dam and found Doctor Sumner on his rock.

"She's deeper than I thought, Doc," he said. "When I told her I was insuring Joe she said she wasn't interested in anything but Joe—just as he was. But when I told her it was for ten thousand I'd almost

swear it hit her right where she lives. And Doc, she knows about what happened this morning."

"She what?" Sumner sat up straight.

"That's isn't the worst of it," York said grimly. "She said—she put it something like this: that Joe wouldn't be working on the river after today; that if he listened to her he'd be through, and she thought he would listen to her after what happened this morning."

"What else did she say?"

"Nothing. When I asked her who told her she shut right up. I think she realized that she'd said too much. She was nervous and acted as if somebody'd been talking to her. If I could only be sure of that, I could get somewhere. But the way she spoke of Joe almost made me think she liked him pretty well."

Sumner's brief grin was sympathetic. "Well," he said, "if she does want Joe, you'd better send for another dynamite man."

"If I know where to get one I'd have sent for him already." York shook his head. "No, if I lose Joe, I'll put Cap Welch on the job."

"Cap?"

York nodded. "At least he knows enough about the stuff not to blow anybody up. But I'm not through with Joe yet. If I could just keep him away from Christine, and find out what was behind her interest—"

York paused. "You know, Doc, I'm going to be surprised if Bagley isn't behind this business. I think he was lying when he said this was his first trip in the woods. He's got too good a nose for the trouble spots on the river, and that's where he's been spending his time."

"And there just isn't anybody else who could have told Christine. He followed me when I went up to the camp just now and saw me talk to Jaimeson; and while I was making out Joe's application he could have seen Christine and warned her—maybe even threatened her, or offered to pay her more than anything I offered."

Sumner said: "I'm beginning to think

you're right, York. It certainly fits the pattern. But it does seem to leave us about where we were."

"You're telling me?" York exclaimed.

They were silent awhile. Then York said, "Well, there's one thing I can do. I'll send Joe over to Track's End with Cap this afternoon, and late enough so they'll have to spend the night. That'll give us till tomorrow to think up a way out."

**H**E WENT up on the dam and sent word to the alligator captains to haul no more long stuff till tomorrow noon. Running only short stuff, there wouldn't be any danger of a jam while Joe was away. Then he went out on the float and talked to Cap Welch, who ran the company's heavy-duty power boat between River's Head and the railroad town of Track's End some twenty miles up the lakes.

"We'll be needing some hay for the tote team pretty soon anyhow," he concluded. "And you can bring over those last half dozen cases of dynamite."

"Okay," Cap said. "I'll be ready to start at three."

York walked slowly off the float and over the embankment to Sumner.

Sumner looked at him questioningly. "More trouble?"

"No-o. . . . I had a flash back there, just before I left Cap. Something about Christine and the insurance, and something else that I can't pin down."

"Well!" Sumner said, and became professional. "Sit right here and we'll try to dig it up. Just go over everything you said to Cap, as nearly word for word as possible."

York went over it. And when he came to the hay and dynamite he jumped to his feet. "Got it!" he said. "At least it's an idea. Come over to the office."

"You know," he went on when he had closed the door, "when we bring in hay or dynamite we always load it on a bateau and tow it behind the power boat; and Joe always goes along when we're hauling dynamite and rides back on it.

"Well, we'll blow up the bateau this trip, right out there in front of the camp, with a dummy on it that looks like Joe, and when Christine thinks he's dead and then finds out that he isn't—well, I think watching her will tell us what we want to know."

Sumner chuckled. "I believe you've got something, York."

They talked it over, working it out till they were satisfied with every detail. It was a simple plan. On the way up the lakes Cap Welch was to make the power boat develop engine trouble, and he would tell Joe it would take him at least five or six hours the next day to get it fixed. With this assurance, Joe would spend the morning around town and leave Cap free to load the bateau in a certain way, the dynamite in the stern, with one case capped and fused, and the baled hay piled mostly in the bow and leveled out over the cases. The fuse would be cut to a thirty-minute length and looped under the hay from stern to bow.

Cap's next job was to buy a pair of wide white suspenders, a shirt, a pair of overalls and a hat. Then he was to tinker on his engine till Oram Caldwell arrived in his speedboat with Doctor Sumner—Sumner having cooked up an urgent errand as an excuse for a quick trip to town. And Cap was to tell them of his engine trouble and to bring Joe home, so he could start right along to be sure he'd make River's Head before dark.

That was to be about ten o'clock and Cap would start down the lakes immediately. At the narrows, three miles from River's Head, he would stop, fill the shirt and pants with hay and complete a dummy which, at half a mile, nobody could tell from Joe. Then he would wait till three o'clock, when he would place the dummy in a sitting position against a bale of hay, light the fuse and start for River's Head. The dynamite should let go about half a mile off the camp.

In the meantime, Doctor Sumner was to see that the speedboat left town at exactly two-thirty. That would bring them



clear of the narrows in time to see the bateau blow up; and it was up to Sumner then to keep the speedboat out on the water until after the power boat had landed. This last, to give Christine several minutes in which to think of Joe as dead.

IT WAS nearly noon before York and Sumner decided they'd covered everything. Sumner left the office then and returned to camp, ostensibly for dinner, but really to fasten himself to Bagley until Joe and Cap had left for town.

York ate with the last shift of the sluicing crew and then sent for Cap. He went over the details with him, step by step, until Cap had them letter-perfect. Then York drove down the Carry Road after Joe. He found him at the wangan at Number Two, eating dinner.

"Oh, Joe," he said. "Cap's going to town this afternoon after hay and the last of the dynamite. He'll stay over till tomorrow morning and give you a chance to see a movie and do any errands you have."

"Boy," Joe grinned. "How soon's he leavin'?"

"Be a couple of hours or so. Time enough for us to go down to the forks and see how they're getting along."

On their way downriver York told Joe about the special insurance policy. "I thought it might ease your mind to have it," he said. "But don't tell anybody, not even Christine."

"Godfrey, no!" Joe said. "She's been tryin' hard enough already t' get me t' quit my job. And if she thought it was dangerous enough for all that insurance . . ." Joe shook his head. "But I'm sure obliged to you for it, York. If anything should happen, it'll come in mighty handy."

They came back to Number One a little before three. Jaimeson was waiting for them, and York asked:

"Anything wrong?"

"Not a thing," Jaimeson said. "I just need Joe's signature on this application. Right here where the cross is, Joe. And

it might be just as well to put down your beneficiary—just in case."

"Beny-fish—" Joe looked puzzled.

Jaimeson smiled. "That's the—scientific name for whoever you want the money to go to in case you get bumped off."

"Oh," Joe said. "Where do I write it?"

Jaimeson showed him, and Joe went in the office. York was amused. He watched through the door and saw Joe write painstakingly in the two indicated places, blot each carefully and fold the paper. Then Joe came out and handed it to Jaimeson.

"Much obliged," he said.

"Same to you," Jaimeson smiled, and Joe went over to the wangan for his toothbrush and more chewing tobacco.

A few minutes later York watched him start up the lakes with Cap, the power boat towing a long wide-beamed bateau. It was a perfectly good bateau and he made a little gesture toward it, telling it goodbye.

That evening he walked up to the camp for his mail, watched Sumner and Bagley and four other fishermen playing poker and then started back for the river.

The stars were bright and seemed to hang low as he walked down the embankment road. Beyond, at the dam, he could see the lights where the crew was still sluicing the short stuff. And against the lights he caught the shadow of someone coming along the embankment. Presently he saw it was a woman; and then, even in the darkness, he recognized Christine.

She stopped in front of him, and said, "They tell me down to the wangan that you sent Joe t' town and he won't be back till t'morra."

"That's right," he told her.

He caught the angry twitch of her head, and then her voice rose sharply, "You did it just so I couldn't see him! But you wait till t'morra, and when I see him—you just wait!"

She stepped around him and hurried toward the camp.

York had a restless evening and an uneasy morning. He saw the speedboat start

for town a little after nine, and then settled down to wait.

A few minutes after three he picked up the power boat, just a spot against the black growth on Beaver Island. The spot grew larger and then there were two spots, with several boat-lengths between them. Cap, he thought, wasn't taking any chances, with nearly a hundred feet of tow-line on the bateau.

York wondered how much of the hay they'd lose; probably just the bales immediately around the dynamite.

**Y**ORK swore suddenly under his breath. The dummy! Dynamite always spent its force downward. Over deep water like that, with the baled hay on top, the dummy wouldn't be much more than jarred and would float like a cork! Why hadn't he thought of that? York sweated a little. He could only hope that Cap would have the sense to turn back and jerk it to pieces and hide the clothes.

He glanced at his watch and then back at the lake. The dummy's white suspenders flashed in the sun, and a waitress in the yard called out:

"Oh, Christine! There's Joe."

York smiled to himself. Cap had done a good job so far, anyhow. In another ten minutes he'd be directly opposite the camp and scarcely half a mile away; and the thirty-minute fuse had just ten minutes more to burn!

From the corner of his eye York saw Christine and two other girls come out in the yard at the end of the porch. But he didn't have a chance to watch her. A shifting air current brought a sound to him that made him stand up and stare at the narrows. He couldn't see it, but he knew the speedboat was coming. Strange that he could hear it back in the narrows.

The speedboat wasn't in the narrows; it was well this side—minutes ahead of time!

It came rushing on. A nervous shiver ran through York. If it kept that pace and direction it would be close to the bateau when the dynamite exploded. It kept its pace and direction, getting closer and closer

till it seemed to York that it would strike the bateau. It was on the far side, partly hidden by the bateau; and in that moment York saw two men rise in the stern as if they were struggling.

One of them went overboard.

The speedboat shot ahead of the bateau, the roar of its engine dropped to a hum and it swung in a wide circle. York's eyes came back to the bateau, and in the water just ahead of it he barely made out a spot that he knew was a man, swimming. He saw the man reach for the tow rope, swing along it and slowly pull himself up and onto the hay in the bow. He was conscious of laughter, on the porch and from the yard. Somebody said, "Well, he made it. But what the—" The voice stopped.

And out on the water the bateau seemed to melt away. A ring of smoke that was neither white nor blue nor gray sprang out where the bateau had been and drifted slowly upward. A dull, heavy sound came to York, and in the silence a man gasped.

The few men on the porch and the girls in the yard suddenly started running, with one accord; for the pier. York was the first to reach the float at the end. And all the time he was watching the water.

The smoke ring spread and lifted and thinned. Now he could see the speedboat nosing slowly among bobbing bales of hay and a litter of splintered wood. The boat headed for the pier and its engine roared. It shot out of the smoke haze, but Oram Caldwell at the wheel and Doc Sumner's back hid what might be on the stern seat. Presently Sumner straightened up and turned and raised an arm.

York didn't know what he meant till the boat came closer and he saw that Sumner was smiling. All at once his legs felt weak and his stomach seemed very empty. The float was still rocking from the explosion; and he swayed over to an up-turned rowboat and sat down. The speedboat eased in and he saw Joe's chalky face at the gunwale. Then Caldwell cut the engine, and Sumner called out:

"He's all right! Just shaken up."

Hands reached out to lift Joe from the

boat; but he stood up and stepped out by himself. He was pretty wobbly. Christine got an arm about him. She looked sharply at York; and rather than have her burst out at him, York moved back and nodded to Sumner to take Joe's other side. They tried to lead Joe from the pier. But Joe shook his head.

"No," he mumbled. "I gotta find out—" He belched suddenly. It seemed to relieve him and his voice was stronger, as he went on, "I gotta ask Cap about that damn' dummy."

**Y**ORK glanced at the lake. The power boat was rising in and he waited in hollow suspense, wondering what Cap would say. The power boat swung broadside and stopped just off the float. Cap peered at Joe, and called incredulously:

"You—you ain't hurt?"

Joe shook his head. Then he asked, "How come that dummy on the bateau?"

York held his breath. Then Cap grinned. "Why," he said, "you always ride on the dynamite. And when I come off without you it didn't seem right not t' see you back there; so I rigged up the dummy just t'—" he stopped and shrugged.

Joe muttered something but, in the sudden laughter and confusion of voices, York didn't hear what he said. Joe started ashore with Christine and Sumner, the others trailing after them. York waved to Cap Welch. "Get a couple of the boys and pick up what hay you can," he said, and went ashore himself.

Sumner had gone to the guides' camp with Joe and Christine; and he looked worried when he came around to the porch. York said, "How is he? You didn't find something—?"

"No," Sumner told him. "All he needs is a few hours rest. But it was pretty close. I almost had heart failure when he jumped overboard. He spotted smoke coming out of the bateau, and when he saw the dummy he thought it was a man lying there asleep. I tried to hold him, but he thought the bateau was on fire and might set off the dynamite. And when it did go off—"

Sumner's face screwed up and he shook his head. "I thought we've never see him again."

York said, "If he hadn't been on top of the hay, we wouldn't. Not alive, anyhow. How did you happen to be ahead of time?"

"Oh-h—" Sumner grimaced. "The engine wouldn't start. We were ten minutes late and I guess I got under Oram's hide. When we did get going he opened her wide and I couldn't make him slow down." After a moment, he asked, "Did you get a chance to watch Christine?"

"I never even thought of it."

Sumner grunted. "Well, I don't suppose it makes much difference. I've got bad news, York. Joe told me just now that he was through. He says that two such close calls must have used up his luck for years."

York just sat there. Finally he said, "That's another thing I didn't think of. I guess it's time I was getting through, too."

"Yeah, I'm afraid you're getting too old for this business," Sumner told him ironically. Then he dropped a hand on York's shoulder. "Come out of it, feller, you'll lick this trouble yet."

It was after dark and York was sitting in his office with Sumner when somebody rapped on the door.

"Come in," York said. The door opened and a man stood there in the shadow.

"Oh, hello, Joe," York greeted him. "Well, I'm sorry you're through, but I'm mighty glad you're okay. I haven't told Jerry to make out your time yet; but if you'd like to have it now I'll call him. Come in and sit down."

"Why—uh-h, I didn't come for my time. I—" Joe hesitated, still standing outside the door. Then York noticed something queer about his face and went over to him.

"What in the world!" he exclaimed. There was a bluish swelling around one eye, running from his cheekbone up under his hat. "You didn't do that in the water?"

Joe shook his head and grinned faintly. "I got it up to the camp."

"What happened?"

JOE shifted his feet uneasily. "Why—uh, it was in the kitchen. We was talkin' while the girls was puttin' away the dishes and Will Samson asked me how it felt t' get blowed up. I told him I didn't know, I was too busy wondering if somebody was goin' t' collect that ten thousand dollars on my insurance. I guess I wasn't thinkin' good, or I sure wouldn't of said that."

Joe wagged his head. "It sure got me into trouble. Ed Rowe said if I had that much insurance he bet Christine had put me up to it so she could collect it. Ed's always kidding, and Christine just laughed. But I didn't like it and I told him she didn't know a thing about it, and if I had got blowed up, the money would all of gone to my ma."

York said queerly, "Your mother?"

"Yeah." Joe looked puzzled. "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing! Not a thing!" York told him. He looked at Joe, hoping yet scarcely daring to hope. "Go on," he said, wetting his lips. "What happened?"

"Why, Christine—Say," he interrupted himself, "it's kind of hard t' tell whether a woman's goin' or comin, ain't it? Why,

ever since she come in this spring she's been after me t' quit my job; and this afternoon, when I told her an' Doc Sumner, here, that I was through on the river, she turned right the other way round. Wanted me t' go back t' my job, an' kep' after me till supper time."

Joe stopped and shook his head again, utterly perplexed. York could hardly contain himself. "But what happened?" he asked. "I mean tonight when she found your insurance would go to your mother?"

"Why—she was standin' across the table from me with a plate in her hand, and she called me a dirty double-crosser and slammed me with the plate."

Sumner made a choking sound, and York didn't dare try to speak. Joe moved his feet and went on, hesitatingly. "So I—I thought I'd come down an' see if I could have my job back."

"You—you sure can!" York managed to say. He hated to ask the question, but he had to know; he crossed his fingers, and asked, "But what about your luck?"

Joe grinned. "Why, accidents always run in threes," he said, and put his hand gently to his face. "Anyhow, I figure it ain't so dangerous on the river."

**THE GIRL WHO PUNISHED HERSELF**





**BETTY:** I don't know which is worse . . . constipation or the remedy!

**SALLY:** You're silly to punish yourself that way. Why don't you try Ex-Lax?

**BETTY:** Ex-Lax? You expect that to work for me . . . a little chocolate tablet?

**SALLY:** Don't let its taste deceive you. Ex-Lax is thorough and effective.

**LATER**



The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

**BETTY:** No more strong, bad-tasting laxatives for me! Ex-Lax fixed me up fine!

**SALLY:** What did I tell you! We've used Ex-Lax in our family for over 30 years.

**10¢ and 25¢**





It was still coiled there; the cold, lidless eyes stared at him unblinkingly

# Journey to Judgment

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "No Patriot There", "Mosquito", etc.

**Strong the man who has the courage of his derelictions. But not strong enough. For there is a conspiracy against transgressors: a conspiracy sometimes worked out in fire . . .**

**B**Y THE thin reluctant light of the dark dawn, Rensfell saw his haven; and although it appalled him, still, he was grateful. He was grateful for any small solidity of land beneath his tired feet after the terrible night he had managed to live through.

The slate brightening of the dirty east brought the spit out of the sea around him, and he could discern, presently, that it was rock. Black, rough bare rock, without a tree, without earth or sand, without even the remnants of driftwood and jet-sam.

Just a long parabolic rock, about fifteen feet wide and sixty feet long, all

wetted from the breaking surf upon it. Rensfell could not conceal his momentary horror. It was enough to keep him alive, for it would not go beneath the surface of the sea. The tide was at flood then and the rock had an altitude of at least four feet at its highest point.

But there was nothing to be had in the way of food. He could not eat from rock. Even the rainwater which collected in the pockets of the spit would probably be contaminated with salt sea water.

Day broke fully, as much as it could. For although the wind was dropping, and the ponderous seas were falling off, the petit-point drizzle hung in the sodden air like mist, and gusts of it bent into Rensfell's face at times when the antic wind bunched it in a ball and blew it off the pimple of land.

Then, when the rain stopped and the sky grew glaring bright behind the blanket of dirty, olive-edged clouds overhead,