



Detour, Mr. Darwin

By RICHARD WORMSER

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Fair Cottonville is not herself. The mayor's hiding in an ashcan and the citizens are underneath their beds, for two hundred antic apes are making mayhem, while McNally hoarsely screams a lullaby

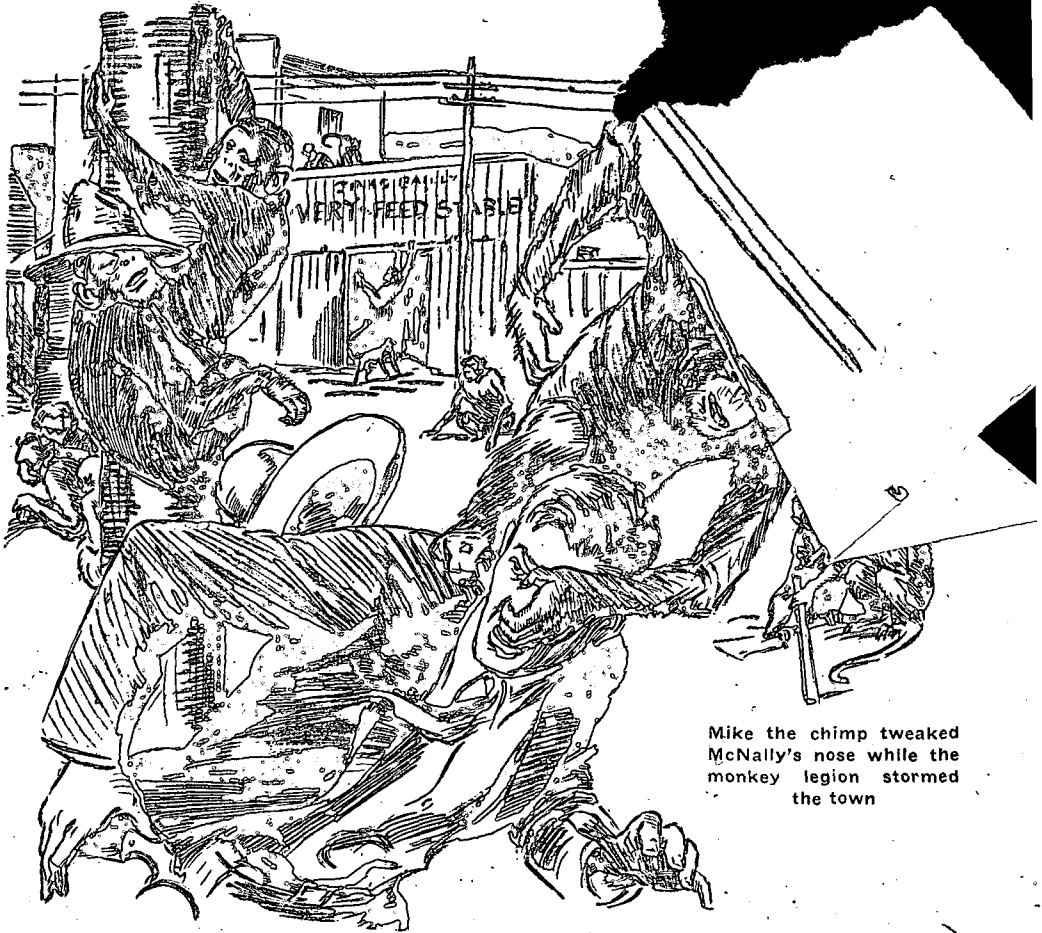
I

WHEN he first got on the train in Kansas City, Dave McNally hoped no one would recognize him. It was a bore always to be asked for your autograph, to have little girls look at you wide-eyed and want to hear about your adventures in the jungle.

After he had killed his second high-ball in the crowded club car, he began to wonder what kind of dopes his fellow passengers were that they didn't know him. He wondered if Frank Buck, his only rival, would have passed unnoticed?

As he tinkled the ice in the bottom of the third glass, he decided that the girl in the cute little Scotch outfit ought to know who he was. He raised a finger for the porter.

The colored man scurried up the aisle with the peculiar shuffle of men who spend much time on fast trains. "Yas, suh, bourbon and soda."



Mike the chimp tweaked McNally's nose while the monkey legion stormed the town

*A hilarious short novelet of
Dave McNally, the animal man*

McNally said: "Not yet. Tell the conductor. I want to see him. Mr. McNally."

The porter looked dubious. "Conductor mighty busy man, suh. He—"

"Mr. Dave McNally!"

"Yeah, yas, suh." The porter did his streamlined shuffle toward the front of the train.

Out of the corner of his eye, McNally saw that the little brunette was unimpressed. Maybe he'd better stick to drinking. . . . No. He was stuck at home for the duration of the European war,

stuck to trains and airplanes and—probably—buses, to living in cities and freezing in blizzards and broiling in the midwestern summer sun.

Stuck to all the things he disliked, and if he added drinking which he had always liked too much—the end of hostilities abroad would find him an alcoholic wreck. Which would mean that he would never put to sea again on some improbable freighter bound for an impossible corner of the earth to bring back an incredible cargo of animals or freaks to astound the circus and carny world. The novelty-collecting business was nothing for a lush.

At any rate, he had impressed the

porter. From the look of that dark face, the conductor's reception of McNally's message had been sufficiently servile; the conductor himself, cap in hand, was hurrying behind the steward.

"Yes, Mr. McNally. Everything all right, I hope?"

"Sure," McNally said. "I was just wondering. Is there any way we could get a wire from the Delta Railroad about my cars? I don't want them to be late at Hopkins. You only lay over there fifteen minutes, according to your timetable here," Dave McNally tapped a pocket, "and if they're late—"

"I'll hook a message off at the next station we go through," the conductor said. "You're right, Mr. McNally. They're supposed to be there an hour ahead of us, but the Delta—" He rolled up his eyes to show how inferior the small Delta Railroad was to his own magnificent employers.

"Swell," McNally said, a little lamely. "And be sure the day coach goes ahead of the animal car."

"Yes, sir, but it's unusual, Mr. McNally. We usually put the performers' car second, so as to enable the people to come back into the train for meals and so—"

"That's the idea. I want them to pass through the animal car each time so's if anythin's wrong with the stock they'll see it."

"Yes, Mr. McNally." The conductor departed with his own version of the roadbed glide. The porter lingered.

"Another highball, Mr. McNally?"

"I hate drinking alone," McNally lied. He had been watching the girl in plaid out of the corner of his eye. She hadn't missed a word of the conference. McNally looked at her directly, and she looked away quickly. He leaned forward, "Won't you join me?"

She started convincingly. Something

about the little jump worried McNally; he'd seen it before. He—but it was too late. She turned, smiled. "I'll have lemonade, please."

The porter went away and McNally changed seats to be next to the girl.

THE deep blue eyes she turned up to him were unfamiliar. The cute little swirl of dark hair that came out from under the pert Scotch cap was fashionable, and thus familiar. But he was sure he had never seen that nose before. His first fear, that he had recrossed an earlier trail, died. Then she smiled, and the smile was familiar, and—

"Going far?" he asked.

"Hollywood," she said. "Hollywood, California."

"You couldn't go much farther," McNally told her, "without getting your feet wet."

"What? Oh," she said in a too-familiar, childish voice, "you mean because of the Pacific Ocean."

This, McNally, is what you get for picking up girls on trains. At your age. "That's right, Gracie," he said.

"My name's Myrtle," she told him, "Myrtle Burbank. Isn't it a pretty name?"

"With all the world to choose from, you should have gotten a pretty one," McNally told her. "You're going to try and crash Hollywood, huh?"

"Why, how did you know?"

He said, "Well, the Myrna Loy startle had me puzzled. The Miriam Hopkins smile started me thinking. But the Gracie Allen voice told me. Good luck," said McNally, gulping his drink. He started to rise. But Myrtle Burbank caught his arm.

"Don't go," she said. "You're in the show business, too, aren't you?"

"Too?" McNally gulped. "Yeah. I'm in show business. Dave McNally."

"Now, don't tell me. Let me guess. Were you Gary Cooper's friend in—"

"I am not an actor," McNally said between clenched teeth. "I am the biggest collector of novelties in the business. Over the last five years I have brought back to this country nearly as many wild animals as Frank Buck.

"In addition, I have acquired and put on the circuits forty-two, trained animal acts—including Thurston the Gorilla Magician, The Harmonizing Cats of Siam, Lionel the Laughable Lion and numerous other headliners. On the side I have rounded up nearly two dozen novelty human acts, which include whole native villages for World's Fairs."

"Oh, my," said Miss Myrtle Burbank. "How glamorous. Do you sell things to the movies?"

"Sure. Both direct and through the animal ranches around Hollywood. But now I have to be going to—" He tried to disengage his arm, and then, looking at her face, realized what he had said.

Oh, grief in the early dawn. He had told a stage-struck girl that he had movie connections. He had cut his own throat, that was all he'd done.

That cold light in her eye was not borrowed from Garbo or Dietrich. It was pure Burbank. "Are you going to Hollywood now?" she asked.

McNally said: "No." He was glad he could be truthful. "I am on my way to pick up a Chinese dog and pony show I own. The manager had an appendix attack and I'm going to manage it myself till he gets back. This war has put a finish to my regular business for a while; I'm not going to sea with any ten-thousand-dollar cargo of animals while there's a chance of being torpedoed.

"So till it blows over, I'm trouble-shooting for my shows and my agent's,

Jake Loeb. I pick up my show at Hopkins, Kansas, tonight, and take it down to Oklahoma City. I get off there. So you see I have a lot to do. Goodnight, Miss Burbank, and I sure hope you make good in—"

"Can't I help you?" she asked. "I'm a good secretary and stenographer."

"I need no help."

He got away from her and, though it was only eight o'clock in the evening, he had his car porter make up his berth. He got into it and thought seriously of pinning the curtains shut with safety pins. But he fell right off to sleep, aided by a feeling of escape, and possibly by the four drinks.

WHEN the hand groped through the curtains and shook his shoulder, his first move was for the revolver under his pillow. Then he remembered where he was, and looked at his wrist-watch instead. One in the morning, unless he had crossed into a new time zone.

He caught the hand, said: "All right, I'm awake. What is it?"

"Telegram, Misteh McNally."

He fumbled a quarter-out of the trousers hanging near his head, shoved it through the curtains, and got the yellow envelope. He switched on the reading light, punching a pillow under his shoulders so as to sit up straighter. He felt a little sick, probably from sleeping in the conditioned air.

It was from Jake Loeb. Change of booking, probably.

Then he read it, and nearly screamed, though he was not a hysterical man.

**DRUNKEN ROUSTABOUT OPENED
CAGES MONKEY CARAVAN IN COT-
TONSVILLE MISSOURI. MONKEYS
AND LAWYERS ALL OVER TOWN
MONKEYS BITING RUBES SCARING
WOMEN WRECKING THINGS LAW-
YERS SUIING ME WHICH MEANS**

YOU TOO. GO THERE DO SOME-
THING OR WIRE ME JAKE LOEB
AND I GRAB AIRPLANE FOR ALASKA
HIDE TWENTY YEARS YOU BETTER
TOO HURRY OH MY—HURRY

McNally lay back and clenched his fists. He had put together the monkey caravan. Two hundred monkeys, some performers and some just menagerie, that traveled around and played for a flat quarter admission. He owned—let's see—forty percent of it, Jake forty, and they had given twenty to the man who put up the money for the equipment.

Say Cottonsville, Missouri, had five thousand inhabitants, and each one sued for five thousand dollars, a reasonable sum for being bitten by a monkey. Five times five is twenty-five, and add six zeros. It was either twenty-five million dollars or two hundred and fifty million dollars and who cared? It was too much money.

He pulled on trousers over his pajamas, shrugged into a bathrobe, thrust his feet into his shoes. He went into the men's washroom of his car. The porter was shining shoes.

"Porter, you know where Cottonsville, Missouri is?"

"You kin git the Frisco Line to about ten miles from there, or git off at Ewingston. 'En you takes the E.C.&J. She's a narrow gauge—"

"I have to get there in a hurry."

"Yes, suh, I sees you do, yes, suh."

"How about airplanes?"

"I don' know nothin' about them things, boss. I'm a railroader."

"Tell the conductor I want to see him right away."

"He'll be up forrard in a club car."

"Okay." McNally went storming up through the train. Two hundred monkeys working reasonably long hours—and a monkey on the loose does not respect union hours—ought to be able to

bite, say, five people an hour, per monkey, a hundred people a day times two hundred monkeys is—four zeros—four thousand people. That should be a good average.

Of course, lots of monkeys don't bite at all. But on the other hand, a good vicious monkey encountering a large gathering—say a Parent-Teachers' Association—could make up for a round dozen or more of non-active monkeys. Say the population of Cottonsville was five thousand, in forty-eight hours everyone would be bitten one and three-eighths times, or was it—

"You're going nuts, McNally," he said. "Cut it out." He pushed open the door of the club car and stormed in. He yelled at the porter: "Bourbon and—"

"Soda," the waiter said, struggling to his feet. "Yes, sir, Mr. Mc—"

BUT McNally was past him. The conductor had obviously been asleep in a lounge at the end of the car. He opened his eyes and blinked.

McNally barked: "I want to get off this train. Right away."

The conductor struggled up from oblivion. "Oh, Mr. McNally. Why, it isn't time to make Hopkins yet. I'm on the job, Mr. McNally, I'll call you in plenty—"

"I'm not going to Hopkins. I have to go to Cottonsville, Missouri at—" A familiar voice broke in; it was La Burbank, playing herself. "Cottonsville? Why that's right near where I live; my Aunt Barry lives there; I've visited her a score of—"

McNally stared wildly at the girl.

"Is there an airport there? I have to get there right away." He waved the telegram.

"There certainly is. Why Cottonsville's a big town, nearly eight thousand people there and—"

Wasn't eight thousand the number he had decided the monkeys could bite an hour or something? "Conductor, it's very important that I get off at the next airport. Where would that be?"

"Airport over in Wichita," the conductor said. "Let you off right up ahead here, and you can get a car to drive you over. No trouble, I hope, Mr. McNally?"

"Trouble? Trouble? I'm about to be sued by everyone in a town of eight thousand monkeys."

The Burbank was off again. "Oh, now, Mr. McNally, the people in Cottonsville are not monkeys. They're nice as they can be; I must have a dozen cousins there. And they wouldn't sue you if they knew you were a friend of mine, and had bought me lemonade, and all—"

"What? Say that again."

"Why, nice people don't sue their cousin's friends, Mr. McNally."

He turned, making his voice as soft as possible. He said: "Are you Southern, Myrtle?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. McNally. There just aren't *any* Republicans in our county."

"I see."

"Mr. McNally, I hoped you'd be back. I've been thinking, how lucky it was and all, meeting you. Maybe I won't go on to Hollywood. Maybe you're the person Fate meant me to meet. I do believe in Fate, don't you? You said you managed acts, and I do just wonderful imitations."

"You're hired," he said. "Thirty a week to start. Now, conductor, about this plane . . ."

II

BUMPING over rutty, back-country roads, making time for Wichita through the night, Myrtle asked:

"What am I hired for, Mr. McNally? You didn't even hear my imitations?"

"I thought you could start as my secretary, learn show business from the inside first."

Settling back in an old Curtiss Robin—the only plane that would make the trip at a moment's notice—Myrtle wanted to know: "Don't yo' want to heah mah imitations, Mr. McNally? Ah kin do an old dahky talkin' to—"

He said: "Not now, Myrtle."

Climbing out of the Robin at Cottonsville airport, five miles out of town, she said: "But, sugah—"

It occurred to him that she had been getting progressively Southern as she got near home. Was this one of her imitations, or was it the real thing, or did it matter?

It didn't matter. Because the kid who had been lounging on the edge of the field in an old jalopy said, as they concluded a deal to drive five miles for five dollars: "You newspaper folk? There's been a lot comin' in, with all these here monkeys loose. A big monkey, what they call a chimpanzee, bit the mayor last time I was in town, about an hour ago."

Going into town—this road was paved at least—Myrtle said: "Won't mah Aunt Barry be surprised to learn Ah got a job with a famous man like you. Ah'll bet just everybody in town'll want to meet you, Mr. McNally."

He said, "I'll bet."

But then they were into town. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and Cottonsville looked like the sort of place that got up with the chickens. There should have been farmers' trucks on the street. There should certainly have been some sort of activity on the loading platform of that big creamery.

But there wasn't a soul in sight. An old fashioned handset traffic signal in the middle of the street with a beach umbrella over it had been set halfway between *Stop* and *Go* and deserted. From the sagging contours of the chair next to it, its ordinary operator was a big cop, and heavy, but he was invisible at present.

Nobody about? Well—

One lone little man was out in sight. He was nailing boards over the window of a store, covering up a plate glass expanse that said: *Gerter, Dry Goods*. Between each two blows of the hammer, Gerter peered apprehensively over his shoulder.

McNally said, "Stop here, son."

The driver slowed down. "Not me, misteh. This ol' bus is all I got to make a living with. If I left it out here on Main Street, it wouldn't be no good ever again."

Myrtle said, "Why the people in Cottonsville are just as honest as the day is long. You could park your car here all night and they wouldn't touch it 'cept maybe for the spare tire."

"Lady, it ain't the people, it's the monkeys."

"I don't understand why you keep calling those nice Cottonsville people monkeys. There are representatives of the finest Southern families here in —"

McNally said, "All right, Myrtle. Just let us out here, son, and then you can go on back. Where did you take all those newspaper people you are talking about?"

"I guess they're barricaded in the hotel, misteh. See—"

McNally followed the line of the grimy finger. Yeah, that was, or had been a hotel. Now it was just a solid front of tin softdrink signs and second-hand lumber.

McNALLY carried his bags and Myrtle's to the sidewalk. He stood there a moment watching the car do a U turn and start back. Behind him Mr. Gerter's hammer beat an unrhythmic melody as the car came up to the traffic signal; at that moment the signal started going around furiously.

The driver stopped, or rather hesitated; then he shot ahead, but not in time. A pop bottle shot out from under the traffic cop's chair and crunched to bits under the left rear tire, which blew out with a hissing, angry noise.

The jalopy went on out of town on three tires, while a tiny figure ran out from under the chair, climbed up the pole and sat on the *Stop* sign, scratching itself.

McNally shook his head, wincing. Heaving the suitcases, he walked over to Mr. Gerter. "Can you tell me if they've caught many of the monkeys yet?"

The dry-goods man didn't stop hammering. "Go on over to the hotel, knock on the door, they'll let you in. It ain't safe to stand out here, mister."

"I'm not afraid of monkeys," McNally said. "I'm here to round them up, I'm a monkey expert. I—"

Something hit him behind the right ear. He went down on his knees, forward. He was not out, but he was stunned, for a moment, dazed. His fingers, groping on the sidewalk for support, encountered the nut for a half-inch screw; a nasty missile.

Still hammering, Mr. Gerter said: "I told you so. You better—"

There was a tinkling noise, silence, and then a crash as the plate-glass window—covered except for its top two feet—broke inward. Mr. Gerter stood regarding it a moment, then wailed: "A shot like Diffy Dean yet. And me with

my insurance lapsed." He ran across toward the hotel, still wailing.

McNally, on one knee, saw Mr. Genter jump halfway across the street. His straw hat left his head and came sailing back to hit McNally in the nose.

At McNally's elbow Myrtle said, "I declare, I don't know what's come over Cottonsville. People have just gone crazy, that's all. Mr. McNally, before we go around to my aunt's, don't you want to hear my imitations? Then you could tell me where I was gonna work, an' I could tell my Aunt Barry."

"Not now, Myrtle." McNally, his head throbbing, stood up. "Let's get the bags and—Owwwww."

Their bags were still there. In a manner of speaking. The clothes were all over every place, with a silken garment that certainly was not McNally's crowning the effect by hanging from the traffic signal. The straps that bound McNally's best pigskin dressing case had been bitten through and were nearly gone.

"They're not monkeys, they're locusts," McNally said between gritted teeth. He grabbed Myrtle's hand. "He who fights and runs away . . . C'mon, babe."

He dragged her across the street toward the hotel. Apparently they had been watched from within, because the door opened as they approached. They made it just ahead of a jar of cold cream; the cream splattered and broke all over the closing door, and again Main Street was deserted.

INSIDE the hotel, a portly man with his arm in a sling greeted them. "You newspaper people? I'm Austin T. Moody, the Mayor of Cottonsville. You may quote me as saying that we shall have justice from these New York show people who have loosed this

plague upon us if we have to fight the case to the Supreme Court of the United States. I—"

"We aren't from a newspaper, Cousin Austin. Don't you—"

"Why, dog me if it isn't little Myra Ochiltree. What you doin' home, Myra? I thought you'd gone to Hollywood to do your imitations for the movies?"

His Honor turned to some men behind him. "Gentlemen of the press, I want you to meet a local celebrity, the daughter of my good friend and cousin Jeff Ochiltree of R.F.D. 3. She acts under the name of Myrtle Burbank, and if I say it myself who used to dangle her on my knee, she can imitate any kind of radio actor or animal you can name. The Ochiltrees spent a pretty penny having Myra coached in St. Louis, but—"

"That's swell, Mayor," one of the newspapermen said, "but hold it. If newspaper pictures aren't worse than I thought they were, the hard-faced bloke that just entered is Dave McNally, the animal man. Right?"

Myrtle said, "Yes, this is Mr. McNally. I'm his secretary, Cousin Austin, he wants me to learn the theater from the business end before he gets me a job doing my imitations. I—"

"Mr. McNally," the mayor roared, "I understand you're part owner of this—this maniacal zoo that is devastating our city!"

McNally swallowed, glaring at Myrtle. A swell idea to bring that little blabbermouth along. Oh, a brilliant McNally notion. "Yeah."

"Well, sir, I wish to inform you that the damage already done must approximate thirty thousand dollars. And it is mounting every moment, sir, every—"

McNally was so relieved he could cry. They could pay that. He had had

no idea how long the monks had been loose. He had made it in time, like the United States Marines. They couldn't bite many people at night, and apparently that was all they had had a chance to do.

McNally said, "Okay. My secretary will accept complaints for damages, while I go out and see what I can do about rounding up these simian simoons."

One of the reporters laughed.

McNally bowed. "Thanks for the hand, buddy. Now. Where was the show parked? I'll need the cages."

The mayor waved a hand. "On the east edge of town."

"Okay. And is the town grocer present?" Then, as a couple of men stepped forward. "I'll buy out your banana supply. I'm going to need bait. I'll settle later." He felt good now that he was doing something. "And, how about a druggist? . . . Thank you. Here"—McNally wrote on the back of an envelope—"is a prescription. I'll want five pounds of that."

The druggist glanced at it. "Five pounds? Why that's enough to put half of Missouri asleep. I don't think—well, anyway, not without a doctor's prescription."

"Is there a doctor in the house? Doc, sign that. It's what we use on a monkey catching expedition. Thank you. Now, druggist—"

"My shop's across the street. I don't see—"

"I'll convoy you," McNally said. He grabbed the thin little druggist by the shoulder and hurried him to the door. Somebody opened it. McNally leaped out on the sidewalk, still holding his pharmacist. "Which way?"

The druggist pointed diagonally across the street. There was no glass left in the window, but it obviously had

been a drug store. McNally used the monkey handler's best trick; he took a deep breath, and hissed as loud and as long as he could. Then he half carried the apothecary to his shop, shoved him through the glassless window, and stopped.

III

NOTHING happened for two minutes, three. Then the monkeys, deciding that they had not, after all, heard a snake, came to life again. Two little rhesus monks came down Main Street high overhead, swinging along the telegraph wires. A chimpanzee swaggered around a corner, dressed in a farmer's straw hat, followed by an admiring group of marmosets.

Pausing in front of Mr. Gerter's, the chimp put his feet against the copper bottom of the window. Then he locked his strong hands around a board, braced himself, and pulled. The board came loose, and the marmosets scrambled through.

The chimp took time to pull another board so he could go in himself without squeezing. From inside the store came the happy squealing of amused simians.

McNally muttered, "I spent eight days in a stinking grass hut in west Africa to catch that chimp. Those marmosets had colds all the way up from Ecuador, and I sat up nights feeding them whisky and milk out of an eyedropper. And for what? So's they could wreck the store of a guy who'll sue surer than a beartrap. Gratitude, where's those monkeys' gratitude?"

He walked down to Gerter's. "Hey, Mike," he called to the chimpanzee. "Come here, Mike. Remember me, old fellow? Remember?"

The chimp seemed to remember. At any rate he stopped posing in front of

the mirror in the middle of the store, and swung, blinking, toward McNally. Then he lumbered to the boarded up front of the shop. He thrust a long arm through.

"Good Mike, c'mon Mike. Nice of Mike."

This seemed to satisfy the chimp's curiosity. Apparently he remembered McNally now. He knocked the animal man's hat off and tweaked McNally's nose. From the depth of the hotel came muffled roars of laughter. The Fourth Estate, no doubt.

"He isn't wild, just playful," McNally muttered. His fingers went to the gun on his hip. But they came away again. He couldn't do it. His whole adult life—since at eighteen he had quit a good job as press agent for a circus to take a flyer in African tigers—his whole life had been spent taking 'em alive.

Furthermore, he hadn't made this mad dash to Cottonsville simply for the purpose of acting as a one-man firing squad.

That chimp in a cage was worth good money. He was going to need money. And if, in a jungle with no equipment except what he could bring in on porters' backs, he could cage a chimp, he could do it in Missouri, with all the equipment in the world at the end of a telegraph wire.

But there was no use walking around talking to his errant apes. He would have to campaign. Let's see. A thousand men at four dollars a day—five if they were afraid—could surround the town and walk in, pen the monkeys into the center square.

Or could they?

No. Inexperienced hands, he had learned early in his career, were more hindrance than help. A charge of monkeys would terrify the farmhand, and

the monkeys would scatter and be wilder than ever. In fact they would stampede, if that was the right word, and go into other towns, maybe cover Missouri and maybe Arkansas and Oklahoma too.

The druggist stuck his head out. He had found and donned a tin helmet, painted with the letters: *American Legion 1934*. "Here's your prescription, sir."

"Thanks," McNally said. "Where is the nearest grocery store?"

"Two doors down, on the other side of the telegraph office. But aren't you going to take me back to the hotel?"

"Yeah, come on." He hissed again, and ran the druggist out and across the street. When the door opened, Myrtle popped out. "Listen, Mr. McNally, if I could do my imitations—"

"Good grief, girl, pull yourself together, will you?" He pushed her almost roughly back into the hotel and ran across the street. The hissing spell had broken up, because he was pelted with pebbles, bits of tar and nails from the roof of a building where a troop of monks had taken up their fort.

As he hit the door of the grocery store, still clutching the medicine to his bosom, there was the noise of a lot of glass breaking in the next block. Cottonsville was being taken apart bit by bit.

THE grocery store was locked with a padlock. He shot it off with his gun; a little more damage this late in the day wouldn't do any harm. He plunged inside in the silence that followed the roar of the revolver; the monkeys, scared, had stopped their depredations for a moment.

Ah, glory be. Hanging over the counter was a big bunch of bananas. How had they overlooked those?

He went to work, peeling the bananas, breaking them in half, dipping each half in the powder. Through the walls of the shop came the steady clacking of telegraph instruments. Apparently the operator was still at his post. Wire for help? No. He would—

A chattering out in the street brought his head up. It was Mike, the chimp, leading his little circle of fans out of town again. This time Mike was wearing a football helmet, no doubt from the stock of Mr. Garter.

McNally grinned, evilly. Oh, Michael, here you go! Gently he tossed a dozen of his doped bananas out into the street. The silky white crystals clung all over the bruised yellow meat, shone in the Missouri sun.

Mike grunted, stopped. He picked up a piece of banana in his fingers, turned it over in his hand, the pink palm open.

McNally held his breath.

With his free hand, Mike shoved the helmet to one side, scratched his head; then, gravely, carefully, he dusted the banana free of every bit of powder, popped it into his mouth, and chewed it with little grunts of satisfaction.

The marmosets, with the monkey's proverbial trick of imitation, dusted their bits just as carefully and ate them.

McNally sank back to a sitting position and then jumped up again. He had sat on a flat of tomatoes.

Sunk, sunk. He backed away, his hand over his eyes, because the monkeys, gay over finding food, were pelting him with the splinters and nails from the gutter, and he kicked with his heel against the telegraph office door. It opened, a hand jerked him in, and he breathed again.

"Ain't this awful?" asked the telegraph operator. "Worse'n a war."

"Yeah. Look, send a wire for me. To Jake Loeb, Paramount Building, New

York. Got it: 'Hire all available men with menagerie experience, shoot them my assistance, need help badly.' Sign that McNally and—"

"Oh, you Mr. McNally? Got a wire for you." The operator handed over a yellow sheet of paper.

HAVE HAD TO SEND ALL AVAILABLE CASH TO EUROPE TO PAY FOR PASSAGE HOME TWO DOG AND PONY SHOWS WORKING THERE. NO CASH ON HAND. STALL COTTONSVILLE CLAIMS LONG AS POSSIBLE. HAVE BOOKING MONKEY CARAVAN CHICAGO FLAT RATE TWENTY THOUSAND PER WEEK FOR THREE WEEKS. HAVE YOU GOT MONKEYS CORRALLED YET? MR. LOEB HOME IN BED NERVOUS PROSTRATION. WHEN YOU GET CARAVAN OFF FOR CHICAGO COME HOME RUN OFFICE.

JANE

Jane was Jane McGregor, Jake's secretary and office manager.

The phone rang. McNally said, "That'll be for me and it'll be grief."

The telegraph man answered it. He said, "You're right about the first part. It's the mayor."

Those lush accents boomed, "Misteh McNally, I have held off as long as possible, realizing that the salvage of your animals was to the interest of my constituents in collecting their claims from you.

"But I can hold out no longer. I have phoned for the state police and the militia. In an hour two hundred men will come through this town with guns and shoot every ape they find running loose. They—"

"Nix, nix. Hold it, Your Honor, I'll be right over."

IV

McNALLY rushed for the door, stormed across the street. A bunch of carrots hit him just below the left

ear, wrapped themselves around his neck. But the hotel door opened, and he got in.

Undrapping the carrots, he handed them to Myrtle. "Here, secretary, give these to the cook. Now, Mr. Mayor—"

Myrtle took the carrots. She said, "I've been arguing with Cousin Austin, Mr. McNally, but he won't listen. And maybe he's right. These gentlemen have all been filing claims with me every few minutes, like you said. They watch out the window, and whenever the little monkeys break something, they tell me and I write it down." She waved some sheets of paper.

McNally stared at her. "You told me they wouldn't sue any friend of yours."

"Oh, but their business' are being destroyed. It's over fifty thousand dollars now, Mr. McNally. But I've made five dollars; this gentleman here paid me that to do an imitation of a lion for his movie camera."

"Lion?"

"Yes, Mr. McNally. I reckon you get your percentage on—"

McNally said, "Which gentleman?" His voice was high, shrill.

A thin guy shuffled up.

"Me. I'm a freelance cameraman; my brother and I here own a sound outfit out of Chi. We were down at Springfield takin' pictures of a dog show for a meat packin' outfit to use in its advertising, and we shot up here to see could we get something to sell to the regular newsreel companies. But they all got outfits in."

McNally said, "Hang around. Oh, hang around, buddy. Steer clear of those newsreel boys, and keep mum. Myrtle!"

He grabbed the girl's shapely arm, led her to one side. The inimical eyes of the Chamber of Commerce were on him; those boys were getting restive. He said, "Babe, you imitate animals?"

"Yes, of course. That's what I been telling you. My daddy paid to have me taught imitations at the Stage, Screen and Radio School of the Three Arts in St. Louis, and our teacher used to take us out to the zoo and make us study the animal."

"But I can imitate actors good, too. Wanta hear me do Walter Huston imitating Lew Lehr? I was always good. When I was little I could do a rooster, and all the hens on the farm would come running and—" She crowed, convincingly but surprisingly.

McNally clapped a hand over her mouth. "Later, Myrtle; later, babe. Listen. You've been around zoos. Ever see a baby monkey fall?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. McNally. We were so scared, one of the girls in the class cried."

"Skip that. What kind of a noise did the little monk make?"

She opened her mouth and let out a chattering wail or a wailing chatter that carried McNally back to the holds of a dozen freighters, to the huts of a dozen jungles. That noise that had so often awakened him at night.

"Myrtle, I just noticed," he said. "You're a right pretty girl. I like you, Myrtle." He raised his voice. "You sound track man, come here."

Myrtle said, "I was afraid you were mad at me, Mr. McNally. You wouldn't let me tell you, I wanted to imitate a monkey, and maybe they'd all follow me. Like the Pie-eyed Piper of—"

"Easy, Myrtle. I just gave you a compliment. Now, Mr.—"

The thin guy said:

"Lafzig. Lafzig Brothers of Chicago."

"Lafzig, listen. You and your brother get out of here the back way, and get your outfit down the street about a block east of here. Myrtle, you go with

him. And Laffy, keep Myrtle inside the sound truck where she won't be hurt. She's valuable."

"But what we gonna do, Mac?"

"Laffy, listen. You know my rep, if you're in show business. You know I know an attraction when I see one? I'm going to stage, for you and you alone, two reels that'll sell to every wired house in the world. I provide the producing, directing, writing and acting. You shoot. We split fifty-fifty. You on?"

"I'm on my way."

McNally went and borrowed the tin helmet from the druggist. Then he wrapped himself in the heaviest coat he could borrow from a closet in the lobby, and took off.

V

ON THE east edge of town he found the monkey caravan. It was a two-truck outfit, big trac-and-trail trucks one of which had carried the cages, one the tents and props. The cages were constructed so they unbolted and made a caged arena.

Neither then nor later did he find the manager of the show or either of the trainers he had hired. But locked in one of the cages was a roustabout.

The man was frantic.

He screamed, "It wasn't me, Mr. McNally. I didn't do it. I been trying to get those monkeys back up, but I can't do it alone and the rest of the gang mud-trailed it outa town. I—"

"All right, son. Unlock yourself, and let's go."

McNally trotted around to the front of the truck. His nose was bleeding and one ear was puffy; he had not reached here without a few minor skirmishes. You cannot throw things at monkeys because it puts ideas in their heads.

The hood of the motor was up. Someone or something had been beating on the hood of the motor with a wrench.

"It was a ringtail done that," the roustabout said. "The other bus is a Diesel; it'd go, but they done flattened all its tires."

"We'll switch that trac to this bus, then," McNally said. "And— Here they come."

He and the roughneck just made it to the cage. They pulled the door shut after them.

It was now explained why the damage in town had not been more. Just past the show grounds was a pecan grove; at least a hundred and fifty of the animals had never left there.

"They keep a-coming back here," the roustabout said. "I figger they want me to feed 'em."

The monks, led by the other chimp of the show, Molly, swung in around the cage. The more thrifty among them carried a stock of pecan nuts; a little lady rhesus with a charming face tossed one in gently to McNally.

He picked it up, bowed. "Turnabout's fair play," he said. "They've been doing that to you a long time, babe."

It seemed fair enough.

But a gray spider monkey had other ideas. He banged a rock into the cage. Instantly there was a shower of them. McNally cowered under his tin helmet and his heavy overcoat. He didn't look up until the rain had ceased.

The roustabout moved beside him. "You all right, boss?"

"Bruised but living."

"Me, too. Let's go."

By alternately hissing and working they got the tires changed on the Diesel tractor, used it to pull the cage trailer away from its wrecked motive power, hooked up.

"You wanta drive?" the roustabout asked.

"You drive. Think those monkeys'll follow us?"

"Should. This is the only home they know."

McNally rode the trailer. The driver pulled slowly toward town, and the monkeys peered out of the pecan grove. McNally raised his voice, remembering Mike. "Molly. Oh, Mollilly—"

The chimp came out of the woods. She ambled over to where the truck had been. Seeing her cage gone, she chattered, and monkeys galore—big monks, little monks, spider monks, rhesus monks, squirrel monks and marmosets—clustered around her big knees. McNally called again and she looked up, began to follow.

So far, so good.

McNally beat on the driver's cab to stop him at the edge of town. With a piece of wire and trainer's hook he broke open a garage door and stole the passenger car inside. He drove it into town, where the sound truck waited. There McNally got out.

MIKE came down the street, ambling along, looking for trouble. McNally gave his best hiss of the day and gained three minutes; he raced for the sound truck.

He pulled open the door, barked: "This is the scenario; everybody listen. Myrtle, you're the heroine. Get into that car, and go to the edge of town. Count to a hundred if you can. Then drive back in and park right under the mike; you know a microphone when you see one? Good."

"That roustabout just bringing the cages up and I will be fighting the monks. Laffy, you pan from us to the car stopping, Myrtle getting out. Myrtle, get out in a hurry; you might

show a little leg while you do it. Stop under the mike, and give it to us in a brave womanly voice: 'What's happened?'

"I say: 'This monkey show's been loose all night, terrorizing the town. The damage has been terrific.' Then I break off: 'Aren't you Myrtle Burbank, the great imitator?' You give that a yes, but modestly Myrtle, modestly."

"I say: 'Miss Burbank, the lives and property of eight thousand people depend on you. Get into that cage and do your monkey imitations. They'll follow you if anyone.' Incidentally," McNally said, ducking and giving another hiss, "while we're doing all this, the monks are ad libbing. Then you get into the cage, and God go with you."

"But, Mr. McNally, you might get hurt."

McNally sighed.

"I'd rather be bruised than battered, baby. Get going."

McNally got her into the car and started away. He grabbed up a trainer's hook. In the street, the town monkeys led by Mike had met the country monkeys led by Molly. Mike kissed Molly and cuffed her behind the ear. A pitched battle between the two forces started.

In the midst of it worked McNally and the roughneck, their hooks swinging. This was no acting; Mike apparently wanted to know where Molly had been all night, and was willing to tear her apart to find out. Under the mike they roared and screamed at each other.

Myrtle's voice cut in just as something ripped McNally's coat up the back: "What's going on here?" She could deliver lines.

They went through the little dialogue, and then—glory be—it was all over. With the hooks, they kept the

monkeys back so that Myrtle could get out of each cage; and did those monkeys pour in. The wail of a distressed baby was too much for the lady monks, and the gents followed their now docile wives. The whole thing couldn't have taken more than five minutes.

McNally leaned against the last cage to be locked, and sighed. "Okay," he waved at the Lafzigs. "Cut."

Lafzig swung down from the camera. "Boy," he screeched. "What staging. At thing'll book more than a Mickey Mouse. We—"

"Get it out of town," McNally said. "Rush the prints to Jake Loeb, Paramount Building, New York." He was tired. He reached down, patted Myrtle. "Kid, you were swell. You're not much on brains, but you're a wonderful imitator. . . . You guys get out of town

with the prints and Myrtle before these people attach 'em. I got to stay here and face these suits."

Lafzig said, "But any of the big releasing companies'll give us more for this film than the damages done in town."

"Yeah, but when? Jake and I are strapped. Two weeks, five weeks from now we'll be all right, but—I'll have to sit in jail here till then."

"I never heard anything so silly," Myrtle said in her Gracie Allen voice. "Uncle Drew wouldn't put you in jail, Mr. McNally, after 'all you've done for me."

"Uncle Drew?"

"He's the county judge. My Aunt Barry's husband. He isn't really my uncle—just by marriage—but he—"

"Myrtle," said McNally. "You're in the act from now on."



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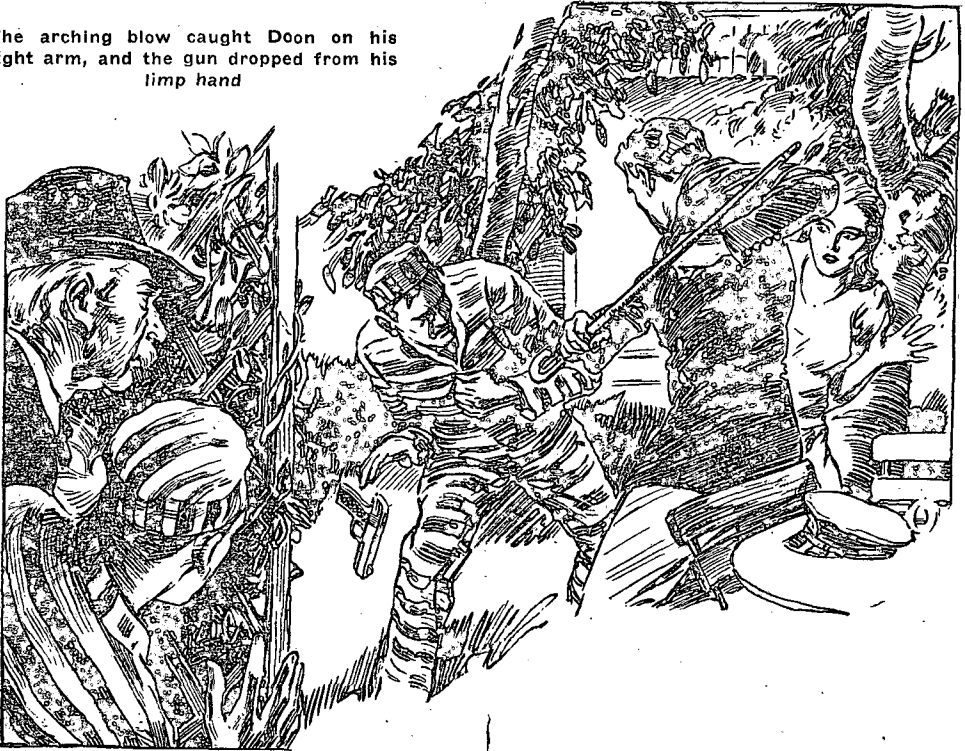
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The arching blow caught Doon on his right arm, and the gun dropped from his limp hand



Butcher Bird

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Author of "Angel Sharks," "The Man from Laramie," etc.

Salute old Captain Bo. He held a chopper gun on tough muggs for a lifetime without shooting one of them; and when the ax was ready to fall, he learned cheerfully that the hard way out was best

WITH a chopper gun on his arm, Captain Beauregard Harris stood under a palm and watched his gang, strung down the highway. His smoky eyes squinted with suspicion.

Somewhere in his outfit trouble had come up. A few minutes ago every-

thing had been all right. Now it wasn't all right.

Under the alert rifles of Captain Bo and his guards, the gang was working shoulder on the Trail that afternoon. All eighty-four convicts were on one side of the highway and bunched close. Easier to guard against a break, that way.

It was almost another day. On a county road back of Captain Bo three big monkey-wagons were parked, ready to wheel the gang home to supper and cells.

The trouble, the something suddenly