



North were the sagging roofs of the fish-pound sheds.—Page 546.

All the Boats to Build!

BY EDWARD SHENTON

Author of "The Golden Calf"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

I

DRY dark dusts all things—house, street, sky—to the same hue, and the town is at once Fismes, France, and Philadelphia; the street is the Soissons-Rheims road in Fismes and South Broad Street, Philadelphia; near the Paris-Rheims tracks and the tracks of the Pennsylvania freight-yards; so that one way joins the far towns, and the lone boy who walks the two streets at one time knows both and none, but pokes his gun stiff into the night to find the lost way; with slow, dull feet wakes the still gloom, and sound starts the bleak fear to sweat as he comes to the tracks east and west, with the nub of town on the far side and the black lane rent by waist-high fans of lead from the hot, quick guns, just at the height of the soft flesh near his ribs; and at the thought the flesh shakes and the sweat falls and the shrill death rips the dry night; but he must cross, and one foot stumps the dark while the hot lead licks the fat black from west to east, and as he waits the blind shells wail and burst quick in the strewn night of flame, dark, flash, dark, flash, flash, with track-rails in the flare that strike and rise like snakes—east, west, flash, dark; flame and sound strike

fear, and the boy twirls, falls, rolls, his teeth shut on the fright—he must not scream—and the fear twists his guts, swells in him, swells: flash-dark. . . .

II

BOB GIBSON awoke moaning. The shrill noise clung to his lips like a mad-man's froth, choking him. He lay rigid with terror, staring at the gray rectangle of the open bedroom window.

Gradually his body relaxed. He arose and dried his wet skin, put on a bath-robe, and pulled a chair to the window. No more sleep to-night. He lit a cigarette and leaned forward wearily, recalling the elements of the dream in a listless attempt to relate a meaning. It occurred always with the same monotonous exactitude; it had happened so often in the year since his discharge from the army that the physical actions remained definite in his mind, but beyond them moved vague forms, spectres of the past, stalking him.

He sat smoking, and stray memories returned suddenly, as though he roved lost in a mist, and the wind, rending the pale curtain, would disclose a transitory view of some familiar region. . . .

Chamonix, where he had gone on fur-

lough, the snow-deep valley, and the enormous wave of the Alps white-crested on the stars. The Y-girl with her lovely name. Ariel. Light and slim as her name. . . . "Nothing will ever be the same. We shouldn't try to go back. . . ." He could hear her frail voice. They walked down the valley, the night still, all the silence of the world poured into the mould formed by the mountains, congealing there; unbreakable quiet. . . . "Our lives have been spilt" . . . The grotesque holiday . . .

The preparatory flares of the dawn signalled across the eastern sky. A dull exhaustion following the dream enervated the boy's lean body.

. . . Julie Sartén his fiancée, his father, his mother and sister Cora, descending from the train at Camp Dix. Julie wore a fool big hat with a blue doodad over one eye. Bob. Ol' boy. Hello! Darling. Gee, you're big, Bob. We. I. They. How? Tell me. So glad. You can't imagine. Years and years. Tell me. The girls will be. Thought it would never. So glad. Cora's dark young eyes. Mrs. Gibson had four new rings on her puffy hands. Listen, Bob. In the office. A regular job. Looking great, ol' boy. Go to the Country Club dance. So glad. The blue doodad flopping. Talking. Talking. As though they could fill with words the gap between his departure and return. While he visioned a place, quiet, remote, only wind and sun and water; wind stirring the water and the sunlight across miles of fluttering small waves. That kind of quiet . . .

The noisy weeks passed somehow. Julie rushed him from party to party. At breakfast each morning his father said: "Well, coming into the office soon? We're ready for you." Julie said: "Hurry and make a lot of money, dear." Cora said: "You're getting to be an awful grouch." "For God's sake don't jaw at me. I'm all mixed up." The dream; night after night. They went on talking. . . .

The air cooled; a slight wind arose, blowing from the sea, bringing the harsh slide of water on the shore.

. . . "I'm tired of this nonsense. When are you going to work?" "Never in the office." "But Julie, Bob?" "Must I slave at a desk all my life just to sleep

with her?" "Oh, Bob!" His mother upsetting a cup of coffee. The brown fluid spurted over the cloth and splashed the front of Cora's pongee sport dress. "You can get out, then. No son of mine." "All right! All right!" He could hear his mother sobbing; hear the brusque note of his father's speech and the young clear murmur of Cora's voice as they attempted to comfort her. . . .

He finished the cigarette. The sun was just nibbling the horizon edge. He dressed in a soiled sweat-shirt, stained duck trousers, a pair of basket-ball shoes, and went quietly down the stairs and out through the kitchen of the small hotel. From the porch he could see the village of Shoal Beach, the dingy frame houses desolate and meagre under the pale height of September sky. The last of the summer cottagers had departed, and the half-dozen streets were parallel barren streaks across the encroaching tangle of bayberry-bushes, scrub-pine, and dune grass. The sea washed almost to the eastern ends; a scant four hundred yards to the west Barnegat Bay licked the edges of the strip. Emptiness to the far rim of the sea; emptiness across the glitter of the bay to the low hills of the Jersey mainland; to the south, beyond the village, only the weather flag on the mast of the coast-guard station marred the cloudless distance; north were the sagging roofs of the fish-pound sheds; then dunes and beach to the red-and-white cylinder of Barnegat light.

Three weeks he had been at Shoal Beach; weeks of quiet, of sun and wind and water, of wandering the bay edge, watching the boys collect sea-grass, to be dried later and sold as stuffing for the seats of cheap motor-cars; watching the pound-boat return over the colorless sea with a certain indolence, and the Swede crew, plodding in the fine sand, unload the small catch.

The sun was up completely. Bob strolled down the yellow road toward the village. Old man Draak would be already at work in the boat-shed, building the fire in the stove under one end of the long steam-box where the oak strips were made pliable before setting them into the rib moulds. He could smell the clean wood, the tar and paint, the acrid damp

vapor; see the partially completed hull of the eighteen-foot sneak-box. He liked the shed, liked the feel of the wood, the fine-grained springy oak, the Jersey boat cedar, light as cloth and used in sheathing, the smooth spruce spars; liked the elderly man, with his weather-ridged face and

"Nope."

Bob returned to the main road. Caster, proprietor of the general store and postmaster of Shoal Beach, sat on the tilting steps talking as usual to Joe Pannini. Caster was a naturalized Englishman, his past a bawdy odyssey from



She swam better than he did.—Page 548

little metallic eyes half drowned by the curling waves of his heavy brows.

The shed-door was open and Draak stood smoking and staring at the frame of the boat he was building.

"Good morning," said Bob.

"Morning."

"Swell day."

"Best time of the year. This month and next."

Best time of the year? The best time he had ever known—during any year. The lethargy was vanishing, the dream fading, all the past dissolving, slipping into the vast expanse of sky and sea.

"Got to get back for breakfast."

"Ain't et yet?"

Liverpool to Sydney, to Valparaiso, San Francisco, and finally Shoal Beach. Somewhere in these wanderings he had lost his right hand. The stump protruded bound in soiled black silk. He was a bitter, crafty, untidy man, constantly reviling this "blasted snotty country run by snivilin' preachers and dirty Jew dollars." He took part in county politics and controlled the thirty-two voters of Shoal Beach. This allowed him a graft of several hundred dollars each year from the appropriation for road maintenance. He was unmarried and lived over the store.

As Bob passed, the two men stared at him.

"Who's that guy?"

"Him? He's up at the hotel."
 "What's he do?"
 "I dunno. He was in the war."
 "Shell-shocked or sumpin'?"
 "I dunno."
 "What's he doin' here?"
 "I dunno. He never does nothin'.
 Hangs around old Draak's place."
 "Got any money?"
 "I dunno. I see him talkin' to Ada."
 "The hell you did!"
 "Sure. Once."

III

ADA waited on the table and made beds at the hotel. She was a young Swede girl from Toms River—tall, robust, composed; with a square, rather small face enclosed in blond curls close-cut like a child's. Her movements were slow, her walk languid; but she was immaculate and her cheap dresses always neat and attractive. She had a white firm skin and kept her hands soft in spite of the labor of dusting, scrubbing, washing. They smelled faintly of soap and lemon. She had a gentle mouth, the thick lips deep-colored, immobile. Her eyes were round, gray, and pale, and stared at the world with a sombre placidity.

She came up from the beach just as Bob reached the hotel. She had been bathing and wore a man's blue suit, ragged and too small for her. Through the holes in the cloth her pale, wet skin appeared at a distance like an uneven pattern of polka-dots. He went toward her and she stopped, dripping in the level brightness.

"Hello! I didn't know you swam."

"Some time."

He stood blocking the path and she stepped leisurely around him.

"You're going to fall out of that suit some day."

"Yea?"

Her calm glance was unamused. She continued walking to the hotel, moving with a slow ease. Bob watched her step beneath the rude shower, arranged at the back porch, and wash the salt water from her hair and body. He had scarcely noticed her before. Dressed, she appeared awkward, heavy; now she was

beautiful. Her arms and legs were faintly tanned. While he waited for the breakfast-bell he thought of her. She belonged to the beach. She gave the same sense of permanence, of a direct, natural harmony devoid of decoration. One could see the beach entire; shore, sky, and water: no ornament of hills or trees. Ada had the same superb contempt for accessories. At breakfast he said to her:

"Swim every day?"

"Some time."

"I'll go with you."

"I dunno care."

IV

INDIAN summer came in a hush of tempered sunlight. Caster lolled on the steps and mouthed his anarchies to Joe Panini. Bob swam every morning with Ada. She swam better than he did. She had the long, supple muscles of a swimmer.

During the day Bob worked with Draak in the boat-shed. He was unexpectedly skilful with tools.

"You just sorta persuade things into doing," said Draak.

"Gees, I like it."

The keen edge of the summer mornings, like a patient scalpel, cut the past from the boy's mind. Something of his former resiliency came back, and, as his muscles hardened to the labor, the weary nerves relaxed, easing the tension, permitting the new delight to absorb him. The rhythmical actions of sawing, of planing, the bending and fitting, the symmetrical, slowly advancing hull created him afresh. The easy tolerance of old Draak furnished a needed balance. His acts were tranquil and habitual.

At night he walked the desolate beach with Ada. She let him kiss her as often as he desired. He imagined her a blond sphinx who would propound the riddle of himself and solve it. Her thoughts moved with a certain terrifying simplicity and her actions followed undiluted by analysis. There was about her a natural uncontentative wisdom, an earth instinct, that fascinated him. . . . She knows what women are made for. She can cook and work and have kids. . . . The idea of marrying her and settling at Shoal Beach reoccurred constantly.



Bob watched her step beneath the rude shower and wash the salt water from her hair and body.—Page 548.

He pondered it while he worked with Draak. They were laying the keel for a new boat, a sloop twenty-six feet over all, the cabin to bunk four comfortably. They had been discussing the plans for days. The heavy yellow-pine keel was notched for the ribs, and wedged into the chocks ready for bolting the stem and stern posts.

"There won't be no better her size," said Draak, "from Beach Haven to Bay Head. Nichols is one summer sailor that knows a boat. 'Build her right, Draak,' he says to me. 'So she'll stand up long as the gulls can fly to win'ard.' Lend a hand, Bob. . . ."

The work progressed easily and this induced Draak to a talkative mood.

"This beach now. It's queer what it does to a man. Seems sometimes as if it's a testin' ground. Where there's good in a man it comes up better. If he's worthless he goes just plain rotten. As though, maybe, when nature's reduced down to sky and sand and water the people is likewise skimmed off to good or bad."

"Uh huh," said Bob.

"That Caster, for instance. He's trash."

"So's Panini."

"Caster wasn't so bad at first. . . . Well, I don't give much attention to 'em any more. Where's that hull plan, Bob?"

"On the bench."

"Let's look at it a minute." They sat on the plank nailed to the outside wall, the westerling sun bright upon their faces.

"Now boats. That's different. Boats is good for a man. Building or sailing 'em; but building is best. There's nothin' makes you sleep so sound or eat better than seeing an honest boat that you've

built honest take the water. They're always what you know 'em to be. They got tricks and some is fussy but you soon learn about 'em. . . . But men like Caster. You don't never know."

They re-entered the shed, and the labor continued until it was time for supper. Bob walked up the road to the hotel. Draak—and building boats—and Ada. It was good to be alive. The sun was rolling into the west. To-morrow will be clear. The sea was green and strewn with petals of orange light; the waves translucent, emerald and cerulean, and tufted with white where the wind shredded the thin crests; the shadows slid down and filled the slatch with opaque purples and blues. Just enough time for a dip. Christ, it was good to be alive! . . . The dream had not troubled him for a month.

V

ADA went home for the week-end. Draak had gone to Ship Bottom to purchase some gear. Bob stopped in the store for a newspaper. Joe Panini was driving the soiled cue-ball about the ancient pool-table.

"Caster away?"

"Yes. He's gone for a little fun."

Panini leered and winked and took the money. "Some guy, Caster, eh? Great one for the ladies." Wink. "They fall for him, see. Easy." Wink. "Musta like his stump." Wink.

"I'm going to rock Mr. Panini to sleep some day," thought Bob. "I'll push that smirk down his throat till he chokes to death. If they're not a pair of dirty dogs. So Caster's fond of the ladies."

The idea made him feel squeamish.

Ada returned Sunday evening. Bob was reading "Sur l'Eau" from the set of De Maupassant secured by the hotel-owner with a magazine subscription. As he read, a reverie interlaced the lines of type. . . . *Once more we glide over the waters toward the open sea. . . . Some time I'll sail a boat. Build it myself would be the way. . . . The coast disappears, all around us looks black. . . . Old Draak is sure fond of boats. To have a feeling like that makes living reasonable. . . . It is indeed a sensation, an enervating and delicious emotion, to plunge*

onward into the empty night, into the deep silence on the sea far from everything. . . . Satisfactory. Men establishing a reasonable thing in their lives. Horses. Houses. Flowers. . . . He had a brief vision of weary men barricading themselves from the boredom of routine with the frail walls of their hobbies. . . . Boats for me. . . .

"Hello," said Ada.

"Hello."

. . . Almost every man at some period seeks refuge with a woman. The idea continued to unroll. A bit of jewelry at Ada's throat glinted in the lamplight. She put up her hand, suddenly.

"What you starin' at?"

"Uh? Nothing. Where'd you get the cut glass?"

"This?"

His mind was back on the book, but Ada explained.

"My brother gav it to me. He's got a good business in New York fish-market."

She saw he was not listening and walked through the dining-room, her hand still covering the bright ornament.

VI

ON an evening two weeks later Bob went to the store for cigarettes. Caster leaned on the counter, the sour light from a hanging kerosene-lamp dropping in leprous patches on the bald top of his head.

"Two packs."

Caster spun the crisp packages toward Bob and said:

"Say, you, what's your name—Gibson?"

"Uh?"

"I just want to tell you. In case no one has yet . . . Ada's my girl, see?"

"Uh? What? What the hell?"

"You heard me, didn't you? You're not dumb, eh?"

"Yeah, I heard you. You're a liar, Caster."

Stump and good hand jerked in a vicious movement.

"If I had two whole arms you'd call me a liar, eh? Whata you doin' here, anyway?"

"None of your damn business."

"Well, lay off her—see? lay off or you'll be sorry."

"Are you trying to scare me?"

"Just you lay off, see!" "Listen, Caster." The boy's face changed with the droned words. He appeared older, haggard; his body altered,

"I've been through something. I know." He paused suddenly, shaking his head, like a diver rising from unknown depths and breaking the unexpected sur-



All the way back . . . he watched slantly the straw-colored clipped head only a few inches from him.

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the shoulders sagged, his hands rose slightly before him, as though grasping a bayonetted rifle. He stepped toward the counter with a weary, shuffling motion, somnambulistic; uncanny in its suggestion of a mechanism substituted for the rational occupant. Frightened, Caster tried to bluff.

"Get outta here. Gwan! Outside! . . ."
"Listen, Caster."

The slow, insistent, dull voice smothered the man's words.

face. "Oh, hell!" he said and walked from the store.

Ada was sitting in the kitchen, sewing, when Bob reached the hotel.

"Get your coat. We're walking out."

She followed him without speaking. Half-way to the coast-guard station he said:

"Caster says you're his girl. Is that right?"

"Caster lies."

Bob laughed and kissed her. She was

no longer passive. Her full, soft lips clung to his mouth.

"Dunn you believe me?"

"Sure. Say . . ."

"You dunn thank no good girl would have nothin' to do with Caster?"

"No. I guess not. He just got under my skin for a minute. Excuse me, Ada."

But the suspicion could not be shaken so easily. All the way back to the hotel he watched slantly the straw-colored clipped head only a few inches from him. The sand sucked at his feet. A moody passion flared and died, shook him to a momentary, shuddering anger, released him suddenly to an irrational disgust, a weary self-pity. Ada's silence irritated him. Lighting a cigarette, he first held the match toward her, cupping his hands to concentrate the glow upon her impassive face. Her eyes shone palely amid the threads of shadow, fine as silk, flung from the long lashes across the slight mounds of her lids. He left her abruptly and went to bed. Toward morning he awoke moaning, drenched with sweat. The dream. . . .

VII

"WHAT's come over you?" said Draak.

"Uh? I'm not feeling well. I don't sleep sound."

"Is it the Swede girl?"

"Hell, no! I get this way sometimes. Insomnia, I guess."

"Remember as I was sayin' about this beach bringing out good and bad in men. The same holds true for women."

"Say! Are you trying to throw dirt on . . ."

"Easy, son. Easy. Nobody's throwin' dirt, as you call it."

"Well."

"Why don't you take a little trip for a week? Go up to New York or down to Atlantic City."

"Maybe that's a good idea," said Bob.

At breakfast he told Ada.

"I'm going to New York for about a week."

"Yea?"

"Be a good girl while I'm away."

He tried to keep his voice light, but it sounded suddenly grim, detached; not

his voice, but some bitter tone substituted for his customary inflections.

"I guess you ain't my boss," said Ada.

The phrase persisted in his memory while he waited at the Ship Bottom station for the train. He was troubled. The more he tried to put her from his thought the firmer she became fixed. Other things dropped irrelevantly into the turmoil. The week-end she went to Toms River. Caster was away at the same time. Panini's leering suggestion. The bangle of cheap jewelry. . . . He blinked angrily into the sun-hazed distance. Double-cross me? That limey? The train arrived and he climbed aboard. His rage increased, and at the first stop on the mainland he got off. He wandered about the little town struggling with the fury. At dusk he started to walk the seven miles back to Shoal Beach. The night caught him at the end of the long bridge across the Bay. Dark as hell. He was glad of the darkness. The road wound in a series of slight reverse curves between the absolute black edges of scrub. It was after ten when he entered the kitchen of the hotel where the cook was setting the batter for the morning biscuit.

"Where's Ada?"

"Gone out, mister."

"Where to?"

"I dunno."

Bob ran up to his room, fumbled in a suitcase, dragged out a triangular-shaped object swathed in oiled cloth, and unwinding the greasy wrappings disclosed an army automatic. He stared at it gloomily and examined the clip before he shoved it into the pocket of his sheepskin coat.

He went down the stairs and out the back door. The darkness seemed to have increased; it was an actual weight and he felt helpless, momentarily blinded. The wind poured over the dune crests and spat the sand into his face. It was neither hot nor cold; merely a smothering pressure edged with the keen particles. He could see the lighted window of the store hung in the black distance and cut across the field where the sea-grass lay knee-deep, drying. The thick, rank mass tired him as though he were wading some semifluid stream. The window was above his head and he wasted time finding

a box to stand on and enable him to peer through the soiled panes. Joe Panini sat behind the counter reading a magazine. Bob hurried to the beach and paused undecided. South or north? He stood, swinging the heavy gun, working the safety with an aching finger. North or south? He could see scarcely a dozen yards in any direction. It would be easy to miss them. He seemed to be staring into a great, empty black hole. Everything was strange. The jetty pilings leaped suddenly out of the gloom and he choked a scream. A German patrol had appeared that way one night in the Argonne. He paused, trembling, remembering the thin fire spurting from the unseen rifles. "Redneck" Cotton got his. . . . Down the beach? He could not endure the indecision. He started north at a trot on the firmer sand near the curdled foam of the sea-edge. It was heavy going. He began to gasp for breath. The beach extended limitless. Distance was no longer definite. The two thick timbers holding the ropes used in warping the pound-boats up the shore loomed beside him. He stopped in amazement. Only to the pound? He thought he was near the coast-guard station. He continued running, but slower. Time existed no more. The dark had destroyed time also. The dark was absorbing the world, like an immense sponge sucking the earth bare. He was giddy and sick of the affair. Some one laughed in the obscurity ahead and he dropped to the beach. He heard the brittle slide of feet in the dry sand, and a moment later saw two figures pressed close together and could distinguish Ada's slow, broad speech and Caster's voice. They passed unnoticed; vanishing instantly, mysteriously, so quickly the boy would have thought his eyes tricked except for the stir of their feet and the blurred sound of their talk. He followed them cautiously. The dry dark dusting everything. . . . Flares burst in his head, each illuminating for an instant a scene, past or present, ghosts of actions, shapes of fury. He became confused and forgot at intervals the object of his pursuit. He shuddered, expecting the night to be split by the brilliance of a rocket. The muscles in his legs, remembering the gaping shell-hole, flexed instinc-

tively at every depression. There was a rushing in his head. He believed he was walking into the sea, and turned abruptly up the beach until the dunes, pale and magnified by the night, upflung like waves of ice. He had no idea where Ada and Caster might be. Fatigued, he started at a limp run and unexpectedly their voices wandered back from the gloom. He wanted to get it over and, leaping forward, tripped in a heap of cordage, fell and lay stunned, the automatic knocked from his hand. He sprawled motionless in a tangle, his face in a reek of tar and salt and brine-soaked oak-woven baskets. He remained inert, gasping. Presently he sobbed. The paroxysm ended quickly. The rushing passed from his mind and became the sea, familiar, compassionate. A gull cried sharply, close to him in the blackness. The flares eased in his head, the quick flashes dwindling. Rope and wood and the wet, strong beach smell. There was the cabin to be started tomorrow and all the joints to be worked, cunningly, deftly; patient, kindly labor in the sun-filled shed, the double doors open to the west, where, by raising his head, he could see the Shoal Beach cove, the blue crisp path of the channel, Sandy Island and the three miles of silver bay water. . . . A squarehead Swede girl. . . . He rolled out of the débris, glanced about and saw the twin masts of the fish-pound. They were like the squat spars of a fishing-schooner with the topmasts sent down and the gear unrove. Draak had promised to let him sail the boat; in the spring, after it was put over. He lit a cigarette, searched for his gun, found it, and shoved on the safety. By now he'd be making tracks for—somewhere. He wanted to stay at Shoal Beach, to serve an apprenticeship in building. . . . A squarehead, damn Swede chambermaid. . . . All the boats to build from the long, slim, sweet-smelling cedar planks and the pliable oak damp from the steam-box. Boats! Some day he would build big fellows, yawls and schooners, keel-boats for the deep-water New England sailing. And have one for himself. There would be photographs of them in the yachting magazines with spinnakers set and the foam heaped crazy over the sheer strakes; below the pictures a line: *Designed and*

built by Robert Gibson. The automatic rested heavily on his knee. He fingered the steel, warm from his hand. Done in an instant. Crack, flash—dark! Everything lost. . . . A flat-faced, slop-carrying Swede slut. . . . Perhaps a schooner; about forty foot. *Schooner 'Ariel' Taking a Stiff Knockdown in the Third Day's Racing at Marblehead. Owned and built by Robert Gibson.* Boats! On the hidden sea muttering along the shore, on the bay, on lake and sound and river—boats at anchor in tranquil harbors, the old harbors where innumerable boats for many years had come to rest—Salem, Gloucester, New Bedford, Boston: an endless fleet in the twilight evenings, the owners' flags limp at their mastheads; boats fluttering in coveys across the uncertain dawn-wind; heeled to the salt brisk morning breeze. From Key West to Lubec. . . . All the boats to build. . . .

When Falstaff Met the Wife of Bath

BY ARTHUR GUITERMAN

THE oak-beamed inn, whichever one
They honored—Tabard, Triple Tun
Or Mermaid—bustled low and high;
The landlord watched with careful eye
As capons, puddings white and black,
Huge tankardfuls of sherris-sack
With eggs new-culled from plover nests
Were brought to cheer the welcome guests
By eager potboys lithe as lath,
When Falstaff met the Wife of Bath.

And while they dined, the buxom pair,
What splendid zest for life was there!
The zest that makes Despair a crime,
The zest that mocks at baffled Time;
What store of shrewd and world-wise truth
That kindly Age bequeaths to Youth!
What talk was had, what songs were trolled,
What brave, robustious tales were told
With rousing mirth for aftermath
Where Falstaff pledged the Wife of Bath!

They drank and feasted, laughed and played;
And if their merry hearts were made
Of gold not free of base alloy,
Small harm they did who gave much joy.
So Chaucer, he of gentle charm,
With Shakespeare walking arm-in-arm,
Looked down from Heaven's pure domain
Upon that unregenerate twain
And blessed them—tell it not in Gath!—
When Falstaff met the Wife of Bath.