

IRISH

A Novel by Harold MacGrath



They began working at the canvas canopy.

"What's the trouble?" demanded William, getting up.

"Orders to lash everything, sir. Blow coming up fast out of the sou'east, sir."

William and Ruth ran to the starboard rail and stared at the great evil pall of blue-black clouds pouring up over the eastern horizon. The face of the waters changed even as they gazed.

"A storm!" she cried.

"Well, Cook can't soak us extra for that," said William.

Ruth ran back to the chairs and gathered up the rugs, pillows and books, piling them into William's outstretched arms. "Hurry!"

The companionway was jammed with excited tourists. William heard "typhoon" and "tornado" and "hurricane"; and one of the missionaries began to recount a previous adventure of his in which the ship went down, and was only too happy to go into details. William surged toward him, hoping to get within range of the fool's shins. But the second officer spoke up loudly. Typhoon was all nonsense; only a stiffish blow was coming and would probably be over in an hour or two.

William was not satisfied, however. He knew where he could get the truth; and so he started for the chief engineer's cabin. But as he encountered that officer in the act of descending to the engine room, his official drill exchanged for greasy dungarees, William comprehended that he and his fellow-voyagers were in for some excitement.

"A blow?"

"Aye, and a hell of a one, too, if I know anything about these dirty waters. This blow is a thousand miles from home, Mr. Grogan; and I don't like its looks. It's Chinese, and we're just off the coast of Araby. Y' never can tell what's in the egg when y' turn the point at Aden. Oh, there's no real danger. She'll pitch a lot and the stewards 'll be busy with their yellow basins. But it's me and the captain without relief as long as it lasts; twenty hours for me in yon hell-hole, mayhap. Can't ask you to come down, Mr. Grogan. Good luck to your lunch—if you've got the gall to eat it!"

William stole back to the smoke-room. It was deserted. Then he remembered that he could see little or nothing from this point; so he went forward to the ladies' saloon. That, too, was deserted. Rugs and pillows and books and baskets of fruit lay strewn about. He knelt on the lounge under a forward port and peered out. It was almost as black as night outside; but the sea was green and terrible. Suddenly he sensed a shiver; it seemed to come from the very bowels of the ship, as if she had become a living thing, sensing her trap. Shortly after this he heard a sound which reminded him of rubbing resin-encased fingers over the top of a deep glass tumbler. This piercing hum rang in his ears intermittently hours after the storm was over.

There was no pitching in the beginning; the wind bore down too powerfully for that. It lashed the water into ribbons of spume, however. He heard a crack like a pistol-shot. The canvas had been ripped off one of the lifeboats. For a moment or two it clung to a davit, then whirled seaward like a gray bird of evil omen. Strange thing, there was not the least fear in William's heart. On the contrary, he was filled with the wildest exultation he had ever known. He longed to go outside, to lay against that wind and laugh and shout and sing.

Over the starboard bow—for they were going into the gale almost head-on—rose a thin sheet of water, so thin that William could see through it. It hung in mid-air for two or three seconds—a viper seeking for something to strike—then smashed upon the deck. He knew instantly where he had heard that sound before—when they sent sheet-tin down the cellar chute at the shop.

The shop! How unutterably far off that was! Wasn't that all a piece of a humdrum dream? Could he ever return and settle down? Never had he felt so keenly and wonderfully alive as at this moment.

The bow of the Ajax went down, down, down, fathoms down. From the dining-saloon came the racket of crashing dishes. The potted palm on the piano fell with a crash. William laughed. Then the bow of the Ajax went up, up, up. He had to hang to the grip of the port to keep from sliding off his perch. The ship did not fall far this time. She struck a roller a thousand years old, and tons and tons of green water rushed over the deck. A forgotten magazine swam about frantically but hopelessly. It fluttered like a wounded gull against a boat-block, then slumped overboard. William chuckled. Inanimate things did not have much show. But a man, now! He was letting himself be carried along by the elemental and irresistible desire to escape this stuffy

cabin and to see if he could stand up under that smashing wind and wave. To get out there and fight, to yell back at that infernal bell-like humming! Chinese, was it? Well, he'd like to show the old pigtail that William Grogan was no milksop.

The Ajax began to plunge heavily. William's fancy had made the ship a living thing, and she was fighting. Each time a great monster threatened to engulf her she slammed down her steel forefoot and split it, broke it, shattered it.

"Go it, old girl! Beat 'em down, smash 'em! Don't let 'em bluff you; soak it to 'em! That's a girl! Show 'em up! Tell 'em you're from little ol' New York, where they have to show you. That's a girl! Wow!"

He had forgotten Camden, he had forgotten Ruth; there was nothing left in the world at all but himself and the storm. He slipped off the lounge and flung his hat to the floor; the ancient Celt was sticking out all

over him. He staggered to the port door. This was in the lee, but as he opened it the blast took away his breath. He did not hear the steward's yell of warning, and he wouldn't have minded if he had. It took all his strength—twofold in this mad hour—to shut the door. He hung on to the knob—he had to.

"God! but this tastes good!"

He shifted his grip from the knob to the handrail which ran around the deck-houses and began to pull himself forward, all the while ankle-deep in the back-wash. The whole world was green, the sky and the sea, green like emeralds, green like the horse chestnuts in the spring, and the white-caps were the blossoms.

From all directions came the crackling and slapping of canvas. The mysterious hum had now deepened. It took William's memory back to the Italian cathedrals where priests or choirboys were eternally intoning. There was also an undertone, but this

was due to the vibrating wires and cables; the great diapason was the wind itself.

Some chairs had broken loose from their lashing on the starboard side, and a tangle of sticks and cane bottoms swirled about at the junction of the cross and port rails, for the deck was now constantly flooded.

(To be Continued Next Sunday.)

The Traitor in Prison.

A SENATOR was talking about a straw vote.

"One of the canvassers," he said, "asked a woman:

"Is your husband, madame, a tariff reformer or a free trader?"

"The woman, a simple soul, answered with a strong foreign accent:

"Der Judge say Gus iss a trader, but he ain't free, I guess, 'cause he got four year for tryin' to blow up der ammunition plant."

The Observer Writes of Graduation Day

IT seems that present day graduating costumes are not as flossy as they were back in the late '80's, when I was ushered into an eagerly waiting world to begin my battle for flapjacks and pork chops.

Somewhere I heard that the girls' dresses were cheap as could be and that boys wore simple effects that were easy to stand and sit in—totally unlike, I might say, the kind the lads wore in the days of my youth.

Fearing, however, that I might make a mistake, I went to a young lady friend of mine who is a graduation fiend, having attended 126 in her time, and asked her all about it.

"Would it be proper," I asked, "to draw a pen picture of Bertha, the sweet near-graduate falling on her knees before father pleading for 90 cents with which to buy a graduation dress?"

"Not so that you could notice it," she replied.

"How about \$1.50?" I inquired.

"Hevings, no!" she said. "They cost just as much as they ever did, but they look simpler."

"I don't quite get you," I countered.

"Well, to put it in plain English so that any simple-minded person can understand," she said, "the kind of dresses they wear at graduating exercises nowadays don't have so many furbelows as they did at the time of the St. Louis exposition. In other words, they don't resemble a fly-net quite so much and it would be easier to run through a gooseberry patch in one of them."

"And how about the speeches?" I inquired. "Do the girls still make speeches, like they used to?"

"Never in the world," she said. "They hire some fellow to make a speech, and they are easy to get. Of course, one girl, who usually is broken out with oratorical hives, is named valedictorian, and she has her say, but that is all. The rest is paid talk."

Well, I suppose that is all right, but I'll say the old graduating days were better. Those were graduations, I'll say.

A graduation period in those days lasted a good bit longer than an epidemic of mumps, and the effects were a great deal more conducive to laughter.

Even though I live to be so old that I wear white spats and walk down F street on sunny afternoons with a red carnation in my buttonhole, I shall not forget my graduation exercises. I look back on them now in grave wonderment; how it came that the entire class was not shot is quite beyond me.

There were sixteen of us, most all of the crowd just as bad as the next one. We were about evenly divided between boys and girls, but we had quite a collection of different sized models—talls, shorts, mediums and such. If variety were the spice of graduations, we owned a whole grocery store, I'll state.

Sixteen graduates in a town of 1,500 persons is quite a mob, and you can guess that the coming of graduation time was something of interest to every one in the burg. Figuring five to a family, you see, one out of every twenty families, on an average, had a representative in the class. Hence, when the girls began to make their graduating gowns there was white organdie strung from the Methodist church to the brick yard, at least, and there were enough white shirts in evidence to keep Charlie Sam, the Chinese laundryman, busy for two weeks.

The graduating exercises proper in our town were just a small part of the performance, however. Activities began long before the date of the graduation, leading up to it gradually by a series of class days, banquets,



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sermons and such. Every graduating gown or suit, of course, had to be well worn in order to make it pay for itself. You see, we practiced thrift never heard of even during the late war, hence the many graduating activities.

The first thing on the program, as I recall it, was the class day. On that occasion we got out all of the graduating wax works for the first time and took a little trial heat around the high school chapel. It really did not amount to much except that it gave all of us a chance to break in our sheet-iron shoes and get used to high collars.

Then began the work of preparing commencement addresses. That was a job. Everybody had to prepare and deliver an address. In due time they were delivered, all in one afternoon and in one place. They varied in length of from half an hour to an hour. I thought the addresses of Lizzie Graham and mine were the best. Hers ran about twelve minutes and mine limped about six. Before I got half way through my address I was missing on a couple of cylinders, and if the doors of the church in which we were speaking had not been locked, goodness knows, I should have had no audience. As I recall it, I advised the crowd that Thomas A. Edison was born and that he was a blamed good inventor. Outside of that, however, deponent sayeth not what he said.

The senior banquet was a grand thing, too. That was the one night in the year that Dan Smith got out his covered back. I know, because I hired it to take Lola Sharmart, as fair a blond as ever cast an eye winker, on the particular evening of our banquet. And how we did orate and consume bluefish! If you don't think the fish was blue, by the way, you ought to have seen it after it had traveled well across country and reached the banquet table. It was as blue and as tough as a pair of denim overalls. The school board also spoke that night, and predicted great things for us. Much of what they said was true. Thus far only one member of the class has been hanged for anything as serious as horse stealing.

By the time the senior banquet was over I was getting used to my flood-gate collar, but I never did get used to the hard shoes. So, on graduation night, I was in great pain from the time the curtain went up until, hours later, when it went down.

I wish you could have seen the stage on graduation night, Charlie

Berry, the town editor, said it was a "profusion of potted plants, feminine beauty and white dresses." There was much in what he said. I never have seen so many bales of white goods on one stage before or since. Every girl there wore literally hundreds of gallons of white fluff of one kind and another. Their mothers had sat up nights for weeks sewing new flounces on their fair daughters, with the result that the same mothers could be easily identified on graduation night by the presence of gumboils, etc., on their sewing hands.

Most of the fathers, with their mustaches well combed, sat in the back part of the opera house in which the exercises were held and wondered if the white dresses ever would salvage out anything in kitchen aprons. As for their sons' white shirts, they not only knew that they never would be of any further use to the young men as wearing apparel, but there was present a strong suspicion that the boys, as a result of their high-faluting ways, never would amount to a cuss henceforth.

The graduating address and the attendant waiting of the class, which sat in the full glare of the footlights, was an awful ordeal. I remember that they were featuring me as the bird who had gotten through high school in short trousers, and I sat well out in front. Well, they might also have played up the fact that I got through high school short of a great deal of information, but of course that would not do. Anyhow, I wished very fervently for the orator of the evening to get through and let me get back home and take off my shoes. If ever a pair of fiddle cases were plastered upon a young man's feet, it was in my case. Neither did I enjoy the patent-leather finish that Joe Blackburn put on my hair. It took me three days after the exercises were over to get my head in shape for the usual summer "close clip" which was so popular in the best swimming circles around about the swimming hole.

It would appear from the foregoing description that our old days were different from the new. Yet in one respect I find that graduations are just alike. That is in respect to presents. They still shake the public down for them, I hear. In passing, I might say to this year's graduates that I have for exchange three copies of Scott's "Lady of the Lake" in padded leather—red, green and blue—to exchange for plug tobacco, a riding bridle, a self-ventilating butter dish, or what you have.

THE OBSERVER.