A GIFT BY BIOGRAPH

By INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

"SEATS in the front row!" Starrow said jubilantly, as he detached himself from the long line of ticket-buyers. "But I wouldn't have got them if they hadn't been returned just as I got to the window. Want to go in now?"

"All right," Peyton agreed.

It struck Starrow that his companion was not showing the proper degree of enthusiasm. "It's too bad it isn't your own game," he went on, as they made their way into the little dingy, darkened theater. "Say, wouldn't it be great to see yourself making that end-run?"

"Yes, I'd like to see it," Peyton admitted, unemotionally.

He did not seem in the mood for talking, but Starrow went on undeterred. "Heavens! You must be a homesick guy—Harvard football in the biograph and alone in St. Louis on Christmas. Did you get anything in your stocking?"

"Nothing." Peyton's indifference was not assumed. There was only one thing he wanted. Denied that, the best gifts of the magi counted for nothing.

His meager response seemed to silence Starrow. They sat without talking, watching the people come in. Over the house lay the quiet of a Christmas audience—the pitiful quiet of forlorn remnants of humanity who, simply to forget, fill up a holiday with makeshift entertainment. A woman here and there, sitting solitary in the stuffy-looking boxes, added a touch of extra desolation. But, gradually, as the gallery began to whistle and catcall its impatience, the place assumed the superficial cheer that comes with noise.

Peyton, swaying mentally in an overmastering fit of homesickness, tried to get a grip on himself. The depressed, weak-kneed-looking orchestra crawled from underneath the stage. Ah, there would be music! That at least might take him out of himself. But, no; his homesickness inundated him in another weakening flood; for they had begun to scrape through a medley of college songs—"Fair Harvard," "Boola Boola," "The Undertaker's Song," "Up the Street," "For God, for Country, and for Yale," "Veritas." He leaned on the arm of his chair, one hand over his eyes.

The theater darkened. He took no notice. A cone of brilliant light shot from the balcony straight at the big white screen; wavered, and danced upon it. But his attitude did not change. It stabbed the center in a circle of light and—zip!

Peyton sat up.

There, printed on the white rectangle, as if by a flash of lightning, towered the stadium. Firmly, its tiered height rose in a long, gray curve against the sky. A ball-oval of the deserted field stretched out to meet him. It looked exactly as he had seen it one moonlit night. In a "gush" written about it, he remembered he had compared it, in high-flown schoolboy English, to the Coliseum.

Curiously enough, he did not immediately think of football in connection with it. Class day came back to him, and the incongruous aspect of the stadium as he came marching in with '07. Directly in front the students squatted on the grass. At the right, forming a background for them, the "set" of the Greek play cut the gridiron in two. At the left, flowing down over the crimson-hung tiers of seats from the hot blue sky, poured an avalanche of girls—bunches and rafts and slathers of girls; girls of all ages, girls of all sizes, girls of all shapes; blue girls and pink girls, green girls and yellow girls, lavender girls and brown girls, white, red, and black girls; girls in foamy, flouncy, petal things that were dresses; girls under huge, rainbow wreaths of flowers that were hats; hats under huge, lustrous bubbles that were parasols. He remembered that Lawrence, marching by his side, had looked up and said: "Close as bonbons in a box." Peyton thought them more like that mad huddle of blossoms in his aunt's old-fashioned garden in Gloucester. Now the multi-colored throng were applauding '82, jubilant on its twenty-fifth anniversary. Now he could hear the cheers of '08, '09, '10, following '82. Now he could hear the roar that went up from both audience and alumni when '07 marched in. He could hear every sound of it; he would hear that until he died. And it was all over now—the four most wonderful years a man ever spent.

The picture of the stadium stayed on the sheet only a short moment, but in that time he lived over an intense afternoon.

The stadium vanished from the screen; now the biograph had them at Harvard Square on the day of a great game—the old familiar picture of an old familiar confusion. A procession of trolley-cars unloaded a mob of spectators, which ran like a flood through the mob of curious onlookers, packing the square and overflowing into its confluent streets. Everywhere swarmed boys selling score-cards, flags, flowers, badges, miniature footballs, all manner of gimcrack souvenirs.

The sputtering biograph flashed again. This time it was the bridge, with the same old crowd advancing at the same old snail's pace, and flinging abroad, Peyton had no doubt, the same old jokes. The machine, it seemed, was following that crowd. Now the boathouse slipped into the picture, now the training quarters, and now the interior of the stadium again.

Not empty this time; the seats were almost filled. But spectators were still pouring out of the chimney-like entrances. The ushers were leaping up the aisles, two steps at a time, deflecting the thick streams up, down, across, into scores of tiny currents. At the very top a row of heads made black blobs on the sky-line. Above stretched the aerial banners that always grace a big stadium game.

This was the enemy's side; banners bearing the word "Yale," pennants displaying the letter "Y," proclaimed it. The girls, beginning to roll themselves in extra wraps, wore huge bunches of violets. As plainly as though the picture had been colored, he saw that their streamers and tassels were of Yale blue.

The scene shifted. Peyton jumped again. It was the Harvard side this time—the flags, the pennants, the monster bunches of chrysanthemums, all shouted the fact to him.

This picture vanished. It was plain that the biograph-operator had moved down close to the audience, and was beginning to present a panoramic view of the spectators.

Smooth as a river the old familiar audience flowed past him; the cheering sections crowded with hats, like pin-cushions studded with black-headed pins; proud fathers, prouder mothers, superior little brothers, excited little sisters; graduates, ranging from last year's crop to alumni of thirty years; critical prep-school boys, giggling boarding-school girls, Radcliffe girls, all Cambridge, nearly all Boston, and a little of all its suburbs. Hi!

Peyton was on his feet.

The panorama had vanished. Into its place leaped a picture of the Harvard half of the stadium. And the whole Harvard side was rising with the steady movement upward of a tidal-wave cresting to break. All the flags, banners, and pennants had cut loose to make havoc of the sky-line. On the gridiron, a half-dozen yell-leaders, megaphones in hand, arms whirling, looked like mechanical toys wound up to work together. He could fairly hear the deep, "Harvard! Harvard! Harvard!" He knew what was happening. He had seen that magnificent concerted movement many times. The team had come on.

Starrow pulled him back into his seat.

Unheeding, Peyton bent forward over the orchestra-rail, bursting with eagerness. Would the picture ever change? There they were, running toward him over the field. Afar off they might have been buffalo. Now he could make out the "H's" on their breasts. He caught a face here and there.

The herd spread out like a fan and fell into the well-known formation. Holley, the easy-moving full-back, had stepped back for a kick. Peyton could almost hear the plunk of the ball and the thumping feet of the ends as they coursed down under the punt. He examined them critically. Even allowing for the exaggerated speed of the biograph, he could see how easily they moved, how perfect was their condition. In his own thews he could feel again that powerful zest of the man trained to the minute, as he comes to the mark for his supreme effort.

The Yale side was next, and the reception, equally frantic, of their team. This series vanished, and in its place came a prolonged close view of each of the sections. Peyton jumped again. The pictures were so near and the figures so big, it was like being in front of the seats. There was Moulton, '04—Moulton who, he thought, was in New Orleans. How the deuce did he—Great Scott! there was Wright, '05, with Doris Nason. He didn't even know they knew each other. There was a whole bunch of Hasty Pudding fellows. What a good time they were having! There were the Hiltons and the Morrows and the Gallaghers, all talking, laughing, waving flags to each other, exchanging chaff, examining score-cards. And, by Jove, there in the front row, big as life, happy in a holiday seriousness, were Milly and Ted Danton, his cousins.

He caught himself just in time. He had started to yell over the footlights.

Milly was getting to be an awfully pretty girl. How becoming those furs were to her! She pulled a bunch of envelopes from her muff and, characteristically, she looked them over, Ted, saucer-eyed, with the fierce concentration of a prophesy, had interest for nothing but the field. The team must still be practising—Peyton could tell from the lack of frenzy in the audience. But what in the world was Milly doing? There were letters and a package under her arm. Peyton suddenly understood. Milly was a senior at Radcliffe. Coming down from Fay House to meet Ted at Harvard Square, she had scooped her mail off the letter-board.

She glanced at the letters and, without opening them, put them back in her muff. The package evidently interested her; she looked it all over. It interested Peyton also; there was something familiar about it. A huge, jet-black signature dashed a slanting course over one corner. Suddenly he recognized it. It was the trademark of the St. Louis photographer who had, recently, taken his pictures. He himself had sent Milly that package six weeks ago. Grinning to himself, Peyton watched her open it. Her unfeigned delight in the picture was pleasant; Peyton's spirits lightened a little. Equally amusing was Ted's swift, grumpy, unseeing glance.

And then—it was curious it had never occurred to him to anticipate this—Constance Terry came walking down the aisle with Lawrence Graves. Peyton knew her the moment she appeared at the top of the picture. And so real she seemed that he shrank back in his seat. He watched her progress, not breathing.

Down she came, growing bigger with each step—down, down, down. She was going to sit in the front row with Milly. There was something almost dramatic about this entrance. Looking from her height over the field, she seemed to be gazing straight into his eyes. There was something curious about her gaze; it was as if she looked hard at something that she did not see. Peyton's devouring glance noted that she had lost none of her beauty; the spirited grace of her figure, the lovely lift of a red upper lip over a red lower one, the long, straight eyelashes, the thick, black brows, that in anger made thunder-clouds of her gray eyes. His memory limned all the colors that the biograph left out.

"Denced pretty girl," Starrow commented; "that one that's taking a seat in the front row."

Peyton did not answer.

Milly had risen. There were quick greetings; and the party seated itself. Something Lawrence was saying gave him the center of the stage. Constance, not listening, turned her attention again to the field; again, apparently, she looked straight into Peyton's eyes. The strange expression came back into her face. Her look was absent, apathetic almost unhappy.

What could be the matter? Was it possible that Lawrence had not proposed yet—he knew Lawrence's ways with girls—and that she was perplexed, perhaps grieving over the omission? He wondered why Lawrence delayed; for there was no doubt of the genuineness of his "case" on Constance Terry. Certainly it was not fear of a refusal. In all Lawrence's meteoric amorous career, Peyton had never known him to fail.

Peyton tried to imagine himself holding off one minute after he had seen that he had any show with Constance Terry. Not that he had any idea that he could complicate Lawrence's suit. He had left Cambridge the moment he found himself in love with the girl his room-mate had picked. He could renounce, but he could not stay and day by day face his renunciation.

Milly's lips moved. Constance withdrew her wandering, unseeing gaze from the field. The two girls talked.

The picture passed. Peyton had lived through the longest five minutes of his life.

Peyton threw himself into the game with a fierce intensity. At first there were moments when he lost himself so completely that he thought himself fighting with the Harvard eleven. Starrow would wake him with a—"Say, cut it out, will you; you're pushing me into the aisle." But, after a while, Constance's face kept coming between him and the struggling heap on the gridiron. His yearning for another glimpse of her began to absorb his interest in the game. He spent the last minutes of the first half thrashing impatiently in his seat.

He groaned with impatience when he saw that the biograph, instead of turning back on the spectators between halves, still trained itself on the gridiron. It was just a flashing picture of the Yale eleven trotting wearily to its quarters, circled and surrounded by trainers, coaches, rubbers, and the privileged spectators of the side-lines. Would it never go back to the stands?

Ah, there they were—scattering glimpses of the spectators, at first only quivering, waving throngs in which he could not recognize a face. Once the band must have broken into the "Marseillaise"; for, suddenly, the whole Harvard section arose, lifting their hats three times and in perfect unison. Mechanically, true to an old training, Peyton started to rise, too. But, again, Starrow held him down.

Finally, when he thought he could stand the suspense no longer, came the section-pictures; the group he longed to see. In the midst of a storm-center of howling Harvard enthusiasts, Constance sat, still languid, still distrait. In another second, Peyton was sorry that his wish had been granted. For Lawrence, taking advantage of the preoccupation of the rest of the party, was devoting himself to her. A jealousy, as hot as flame, excoriated Peyton as he noted the little intimacies of his attitude. Lawrence questioned and explained. He leaned over her to adjust wraps obviously in no need of adjustment. Though his suffering grew intense, Peyton could not take his eyes away.

Once it came over him how strange it was. The tragedy of his life was being played there before a theaterful of holiday riffraff, and no one suspected it. No one about him had an eye for his little group. Not a man about him but was watching the shrieking, jumping, cheering, flag-waving crowd that surged about the lovers.

Followed more pictures of the Harvard sections; followed many of the Yale sections, but Peyton did not see them. He did not even look at them.

The second half was close. Peyton summoned all the mental strength that was in him to concentrate on the game. And at first he thought that he was going to be successful, that his mind had adjusted itself to the situation. But, after a brief interval, his longing, his impatience began to grind in him again. He churned restlessly in his chair. He studied the audience about him. It must have been somewhere along here that he failed to see that long run on a forward pass—the sensational play of the season by which the game was won.

At the end it was a relief to cheer with the handful of Harvard men who sprang up from different parts of the auditorium and, following the motions of the yell-leader in the biograph, shouted themselves hoarse. But, in a moment, his heart was thumping in a very madness of yearning, pointed by the anguish of uncertainty. Biting his lips, he watched the long line of undergraduates zigzagging over the field in the wake of the band. When, at last, the biograph began to show section views of the dispersing audience, he gripped the orchestra-rail hard. If it came it would be his last view of her until—until—when? he wondered. Until, best man at their wedding, he would watch her drive off with Lawrence. He clenched his hands.

Again the picture! Unmindful of the others, his burning eyes riveted themselves on Constance. The group had risen, waiting for the crowd to thin. Milly was talking. In the midst of her narrative, she handed to Constance the package that contained Peyton's picture. Without stopping, she swept the two men on in her talk.

Constance pulled the picture out of its wrappings. Peyton watched her. And he saw—in a brief moment—he saw a great deal. He saw the pronounced start that shook her at the sight of it. He saw the quick, furtive glance she gave at her unnoticing companions. He saw her turn her back to them and, like one famished, look at it again, holding it, in her unconsciousness, unnecessarily close to her face. He saw her start to put it back into the paper, but, changing her mind, look at it again, a long, close gaze. He saw her turn it over as if she expected some writing. And he saw—but now more with the eyes of the soul than of the body—the emotion that seemed to vitalize her whole figure, to shine through her wistful face, to make light in her somber eyes.

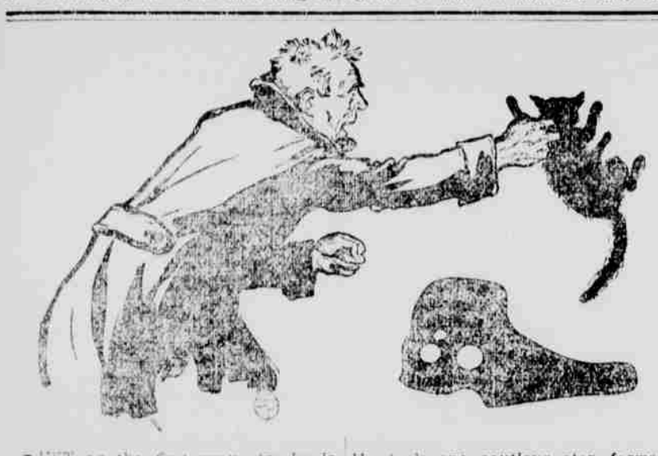
"Say, what's your rush?" Starrow remonstrated as Peyton made a flying leap into an open space which offered a swifter egress.

"Oh, I say, excuse me, Starrow," Peyton exclaimed. "I've got to get to a long-distance telephone." And then, in utter forgetfulness of a statement he had previously made, "I want to thank somebody for a Christmas gift I've just received."

(*Copyright, The Frank A. Munsey Co.*)

FOOD FOR SKEPTICS

By JOHN BARTON OXFORD



JUST as the first gray streaks in the sky to the east were heralding the approach of day, the weird, nerve-racking wails, which had sounded intermittently since moonlight from the branches of a maple close to the bedroom windows, begun again.

Scarcely had the first melancholy note shattered the frosty stillness when the back door was opened cautiously, and down the steps came Captain Solomon Beale, the collar of his hastily donned overcoat turned up about his neck and his bare feet thrust into a pair of well-worn carpet slippers.

In one hand he bore a stout gunny-sack; in the other was a saucer of cream, which he balanced gingerly as he tiptoed to the foot of the maple. High up in the branches above his head, a furry ebon ball, crouched on one of the spreading limbs, showed the position of the enemy.

The captain's lips set in grim determination. He held out the saucer of cream in enticing fashion, the while he strove to work something like blandishment into a voice of unusual gruffness.

"Come, kitty, come!" he coaxed, but the black ball above him, possessed, seemingly, of some inkling as to the true inwardness of the captain's sudden hospitality, refused to venture from its retreat. A pair of green eyes stared down at him, as if already they more than half suspected the treachery he was planning.

Captain Beale put down the saucer at the foot of the tree and moved away a few paces. There was a light movement of the branches, the sound of outspread claws upon the bark, and down the trunk came the cat, sniffed suspiciously the contents of the saucer, and then began to lick the cream with a relish that was most apparent.

The grim expression upon Captain Beale's face became more pronounced. He took one cautious step forward, and then another. Engrossed in the feast before it, the cat paid not the least attention to the stealthy approach. It was only when the captain was close beside it, that it condescended to turn its attention from the cream, and then it was too late; for the captain, with an agility surprising in a man of his years, suddenly leaped forward and caught the black body by the nape of the neck.

Vainly did the cat give vent to its outraged feelings; vainly did it struggle to effectively use its teeth and claws. In a trice the captain had thrust it into the gunny-sack, the neck of which he tied with a piece of stout twine.

Panting, but triumphant, he laid the wriggling bundle, from which came the sounds of a lost soul in the deepest woe, upon the ground. He turned to cast a hurried and guilty glance at the windows of the house next door, half expecting to find there numerous protesting witnesses to his perfidy; but the windows of the house next door remained discreetly curtained. Thanking his lucky stars for this deliverance of his enemy into his hands, Captain Beale picked up the sack, bore it into the house, and went upstairs to array himself somewhat more fully.

It was only too obvious that a man, bearing a bundle of such liveliness as the sack bade fair to be, could never hope to go through the village streets in broad daylight without attracting unpleasant attention to himself. Therefore, as soon as the captain had completed a hurried toilet, he came into the kitchen, took up the sack, and while yet the town was wrapped in slumber, made his way to the water-front, where his schooner, a little craft of some hundred tons, lay at the dock, her cargo of potatoes aboard, all ready to sail with the morning tide.

But even in the half-light of early morning the captain was not without a certain breathless anxiety as he hurried along the silent, deserted streets, the gunny-sack over his shoulder and the cat within it sending out soulful protests every step of the way.

Indeed, it was only when he gained the dock, scrambled aboard the Lucinda, and tossed his burden unceremoniously into the spare stateroom of the little cabin, that he found courage to draw a long breath.

"There, drat ye!" he apostrophized the sack, "squall your infards out now for all I care or for all the good it will do ye! I'll learn ye to come sneakin' round that maple by my bed room every night I try to stay ashore, keepin' me awake with your infernal yowlin'. Go on; keep it up now; don't mind me! Have your fun while you can. I cal'late you've pretty nigh yowled your last yowl, and spit your last spit. I sum, I'd heave you overboard now, if it wa'n't for the tide takin' you ashore and them Rider folks next door gettin' suspicious that I drowned ye. I'll jest keep ye trussed up in the bag till we git outside, and then over you go like the wuthless carcass you are. I guess likely next time I stay ashore here in my own house I'll git a little more peace, so far as you are concerned, anyway."

He slammed the door of the spare stateroom, crossed the cabin, and threw himself into his own berth to snatch what sleep he might before it was time to start for Rockville with the cargo.

He was awakened somewhat later by the sound of heavy footsteps on the deck over his head. He arose and went up the companionway to find his two foremast hands, and Joe Blair, his cook, but just come aboard.

"All right, boys," he greeted them cordially. "Glad you got here bright and early. May as well git under way right off. Tide's settin' jest right for us now. Git breakfast goin', Joe. Look alive there, for'ard. Cast off them lines."

In a few moments the Lucinda was drifting with the tide away from the dock, and presently, with all sail set, she went careening across the bay toward the open sea.

It was after he had eaten one of Joe Blair's excellent breakfasts that Captain Beale's mind returned to the spare stateroom and the sack therein. He arose from the table, and, thrusting his head out of the companionway, mentally noted the schooner's position. Far away the shore was but a hazy blue line; while just over the port bow loomed the gray shaft of the lighthouse on Flat Island. The captain chuckled.

"This is as good as any place," he told himself. "The tide'll never wash it ashore from here."

He descended to the cabin, opened the stateroom-door and drew out the sack. With much vocal effort, the unwilling tenant had well-nigh exhausted itself, but as the bag was lifted it summoned sufficient spirit to send up a last wail that would have killed the last spark of pity in the captain's heart, had such a spark existed.

As it was, he stolidly carried the bag to the deck, and looked about for a convenient piece of scrap-iron to serve as sinking-weight.

He was intent on his task of securely lashing a piece of spare chain to the neck of the bag when Joe Blair, with a basket of dirty dishes on his arm, came up from the cabin. He spied the captain seated on the bitts forward and made his way thither.

"What you goin' to do with that, cap'n?" he demanded.

Captain Beale went on with his work without so much as looking up.

"I'm goin' to heave this bag over," said he.

"So? What yer got in the bag?"

The contents of the bag answered for itself. There came from its depth a wail of misery that would have melted the heart of an idol. Joe Blair started perceptibly. He set down the basket of dishes and looked accusingly at his superior.

"It's a cat," he said.

Captain Beale bristled. Hard lines appeared about the corners of his mouth.

"Well, what of that?" said he.

"What you goin' to do with that cat?" the cook questioned in a tone that boded trouble.

"Do with it?" the captain snapped. "What do you s'pose. D'yer think I was goin' to use it for a figger-head? I'm goin' to do jest what I told yer I was—heave it overboard."

Joe Blair's brow darkened. He pushed back his soiled cap and scratched his head in doubtful fashion. It was plain he wanted to speak his mind, and yet felt some hesitancy in doing so. He shifted from foot to foot, and looked helplessly at the basket of dishes at his feet.

"Say," he ventured at length, "say, I ain't exactly what you'd call a superstitious man, which ain't saysin', neither, that I ain't got my peculiarities. But I was on a vessel once—the old Starlight, bound for Maracaibo, it was—and they had a cat aboard that took sick, and they hove it overboard; and after that—"

"Yes, yes, I know," the captain interrupted irritably. "You've told me all about that once or twice before. There ain't nothin' like that goin' to happen this time. This ain't the ship's cat. It's one I fetched aboard a purpose to drowned."

"It don't make no difference," the cook maintained doggedly. "It's bad luck to leave a cat over, no matter where it came from, nor how it got aboard. Say, what color is it?"

"Black," said the captain with incautious truth.

Joe Blair fairly gasped. "Black!" he cried. "Say, you don't mean you'd heave a black cat overboard, do ye?"

"I ain't so terrible partial as to colors," was the captain's sardonic response.

"Don't you go to heavin' no black cats off'n this schooner!" the cook said in a shaking voice.

Beale stiffened. "So here, you blasted grease-skimmer," he bellowed, "I'm cap'n of this craft. You want to remember that. I shall most probably do about as I'm mind to, and that blasted cat is goin' over—see?"

"If she does," the cook threatened, "I'll git out of this schooner—see? I don't. I'll git out of her as soon as we git to Rockville—if we ever do," he ended gloomily.

The threat struck Captain Beale in a vulnerable spot. The one boast of his otherwise modest nature was of the superiority of his cook. All too well he remembered the galley regime before Joe Blair had shipped with him. All too well he pictured the soggy biscuits and the greasy hash of Joe's predecessor. What mattered the cat's presence for a few days, anyway? He could manage to take the pest ashore when they arrived at Rockville and lose it somewhere. The main thing was to get rid of it. Where or how were secondary considerations. Therefore Captain Beale nabent.

"Well, if you're so terribly touchy about it, take the critter into the galley, then," he commanded, "and keep her there out of my sight until we git to Rockville."

"I tell ye I ain't what you'd call a superstitious man," the cook reiterated, "but you'd got into some kind of a scrape if you'd drownded her."

He picked up the sack and slouched off toward the galley. Captain Beale, with a grunt of disgust, as much for his own weakness as for the cook's, stalked aft to the wheel.

It was ideal weather that followed them that trip. The wind held fair and brisk; the fogs, usually prevalent in those waters in the early spring, were conspicuous only by their absence. In the galley Joe Blair made friends with the cat and fed it upon the best the lockers afforded.

"Havin' a good run of it this trip, ain't we, cap'n?" he observed to Beale the third day out, with a grin that angered the captain.

"Couldn't be better as I see," the skipper replied.

"Know what makes it?" the cook questioned, with a meaning jerk of his head. "It's the cat."

Nor was it only the propitious weather that Joe Blair ascribed to the cat's presence. When they discovered the old leak, that had caused them more or less trouble the last trip, had stopped, it was the cat—according to Joe. Nothing but the cat saved one of the foremast hands from serious injury when he fell from aloft, and, by something in the nature of a miracle, landed unhurt upon his feet on the deck. Again it was the cat that steered them into a school of pollack, and brought the cook the luck of landing some hundred and fifty pounds of them as he trolled a line astern.

Day by day the cat's hold upon the ship's company grew apace; and day by day Captain Beale waxed more wroth and disgusted.

"Say, after the luck we've had this trip, I dunno as I should want to go to sea again in this schooner, if the cat wa'n't along," the cook confided, and the remark set Captain Beale to thinking and planning.

Plainly the cat was becoming all too popular. She bade fair to be a permanent fixture unless something was done to shadow her with disrepute. Somehow or other suspicion must be brought to rest on her. Captain Beale meditated long and deeply.

"I don't want to lose such a cook, and I'll be eternally cussed if I'll have a cat aboard," he ruminated. "I guess likely the best way out of it is to have something unlucky happen while she's aboard. Something unlucky, that's the ticket," he repeated with a chuckle, a plan already beginning to unfold itself to his mind.

Long that evening Captain Beale sat before the little table in the cabin, figuring laboriously.

"She's got to go on the ways before long and have some new plank in her bottom, anyway," he mused, the while a smile of satisfaction wreathed his homely face. He consulted an almanac at his elbow. "Now, if she was to hit Shovel Rip Ledge to-morrer, say about six in the evenin', the wust she'd do would be to hang there till high tide, long about nine, and, maybe, pound out a plank or two. She might jest as well go on the ways this trip as any. That's the ticket; let her pound out a couple of plank while she's hangin' on the ledge—jest enough to git her leakin' so's all hands, includin' the cook, will have to work the pumps for dear life the rest of the way to Rockville, and then let's see what becomes of that cussed cat's reputation. I'll bet they'll heave her over themselves."

To aid the captain in his plan, the next afternoon a gray mist began to rise from the sea. Steadily it thickened, until by five o'clock it was an impenetrable pall. In the bow the fog-horn in the hands of the lookout boomed and bar-r-rched in monotonous fashion, sending out its hollow wail through the dun-colored walls that had closed about them. Captain Beale glanced into the binnacle, headed the schooner a point farther to the southward, and grinned.

Presently by the bitts he could see the lookout straining his ears between the blasts of the horn, evidently listening intently. Full well the captain knew to what he was listening; for already through the mist he could hear the distant moan of the whistling-buoy, which marks the outer edge of Shovel Rip Ledge.

The sound grew steadily plainer, Captain Beale's grin widened. At last the lookout hailed:

"Whistlin'-buoy dead ahead, sir!"

The skipper made a great pretense of listening. "I don't hear it," he declared, and held his course. The lookout seemed a little uneasy. In a moment he was hailing once more:

"There it goes again, sir. Whistlin'-buoy dead ahead!"

Captain Beale affected a fine scorn. "I don't hear no whistlin'-buoy," he maintained, "but I can hear some old freighter groanin' off there."

The lookout's next hail, which followed almost immediately, was a wild yell, while he tore aft at his best speed.

"Breakers, sir, right under her bow!" he howled. And then the schooner struck.

There was a shock, a jolt, a grinding sound. The little craft shivered from stem to stern. Up the galley companionway came tumbling the cook.

"Lord help us!" he yelled as the familiar moan of the whistling-buoy smote his ears from close quarters. "We've hit Shovel Rip Ledge!"

There was another bump—a series of bumps; the schooner stopped, surged ahead, then stopped again. Then the grinding beneath her keel began once more, slowly she forged ahead. They could plainly hear the scrape under her bows.

"Judas Priest!" shouted the amazed skipper. "What do you make of that? Dummed if we didn't hit Shovel Rip Ledge, and some clean over it! Start the pumps, quick!"

In a trice the pumps were shrieking their protests.

"How much water is she takin'?" the skipper demanded.

"Not a drop, sir," the men at the pumps answered.

Captain Beale wiped his forehead. For a time he stood staring stupidly at the binnacle before he put the schooner back on her course.

Then the cook came running aft with a black, furry body in his arms.

"Say, will you believe it now?" he shouted. "Ain't there something in it. Would you ever get on a that ledge, much there gone over it, if it hadn't been for the cat? Ain't it a special provision—you ketchin' her? I'll tell ye one thing, I ain't goin' to sail in on this schooner, nor no other, w'ile our a black cat aboard."

The skipper burst into a great roar of laughter, which left the cook staring at him in open-mouthed wonder.

"You win," said Captain Beale, when he had somewhat recovered his breath. "I'm most beginnin' to think myself there's somethin' in it. That cat stays aboard."

(*Copyright, The Frank A. Munsey Co.*)