

SHORT STORY AMERICA

AND 'FRISCO KID CAME BACK

JACK LONDON

“HELLO ye stiffs!—got the makin's? I got ter smoke so bad I can taste it. Say! it's like t'ree squares a day an' a hold me down, ter be wid yer onst more.

“Wot'v I been doin' wid meself? an, w'ere did I snare me good togs? Well, it's dis way. I wuz down in my luck—way down in G—way down under me uppers— Say! I wuz down dat far I fell clear troo' an' cum up on top on de udder side—way up in C. Say! yer wudn't a knowed me!

“Dis is how de presto change happened. I struck a jay town on de C. B. and Q. jerk an' got hoodooed. I battered a house fer me breakfas' an' bumped up inter a red-headed woman. Say! I wuz dat rattled I fergot ter steal de soap. De nex' house I slammed de gate at, dere wuz a cross-eyed man, an' I didn't spit in me hat. Dat done me all up. I was clean off me nut wid de hoodoo.

“After dat I cudn't put me han' ter nuthin' widout gettin' de gee hee. Nuthin' went O. K. Bimeby, w'en I wuz mopin' up de main-drag, I struck a guy fer de price, an' he wuz a fly-cop an' I got thirty days. Dat settled me. Me name wuz Mud. I wuz not in it. I wuz outen de movement.

“W'en I did me time I wuz goin' ter give de burg de swift an' elegant side sneak—but I didn't. An' dats how I fell clean troo'. Dere wuzn't a freight along 'till dark, so I chases meself around ter have a swim. Den I swiped a kid's line an' went ter fishin'. Dey wudn't bite. I cudn't ketch a cat.

I cudn't ketch nuthin' 'till an old Rube take a tumble to himself offen de end. He cum sailin' by wid a horrible thirst on—he cudn't get enuff. I trowed 'm de line an' snared 'm de firs' rattle outen de box.

“W'en I got 'm landed, he sez, 'Yer me saviour.'

“So yer tellin' me,' sez I.

“Yer an angel,' sez he.

“Yer bet yer sweet life,' sez I.

“I'll reward ye,' sez he.

“Now yer shoutin',' sez I.

“Say! dat old guy chases me home, an' after he chewed de rag wid his ole woman—mebbe yer tinkin' I'm tellin' yer a fairy story—but may I never get der price again, if dey didn't adopt me.

“I tole dem me tale of woe. Wot did I w'isper? I tole 'm how me ole man uster t'ump me ole woman w'en he got an edge on, an' I tole 'm how pious she wuz, an' how she uster tell me to be upright an' noble—an' how she kicked de buycket wid a broken heart, an' how de ole man kicked me out, an' how he swilled like 'r fish till he kicked de pig, too. Me little song wuz nuthin' but kick—'fer tell yer de truth,' sez I, 'I wuz never growed up, I wuz kicked up. Dat's how I cum here—I wuz kicked here.'

“Den de ole girl took me in her arms an' sez, 'Me poor boy.' An' de ole boy blows his bandana fit ter kill, an' I makes de stage hit by cryin' meself. Say! dat brung down de house—we all blubbered.

“De old girl—say! she was a nice ole girl—she sez I wud never get kicked no more, an' de ole hoss, he sez he had enuff fer ter take care 'v me too.

Dat's how I fell troo' me luck an' cum out on top.

“W'y didn't I hol' it down? Wot are yer givin' us? Wait till I give yer me spiel. It was no snap. see! Dey wuz too good fer me. Every time I'd get settled down ter tinkin' 'v de gang, he'd ask me wot de las' verse wuz, an' w'en I didn't know, he'd look dat hurt it 'd make me feel bad. I never cud listen, 'cept w'en he'd read about Joshua. Say! he wuz a scrapper fer yer life! Den I liked Samson, too. De barbers were on a strike w'ere he Deadwood Dick an Nick Carter, an' w'en he cum to w'ere an ole bloke wuz dat long winded, he lived over nine hundred years. Say! it wuz

out uv sight; but den dey wuz a whole lot 'v dem an' I got weary. An' w'en he'd read about dere sons, an' de sons of dem sons, an' de sons of dem sons, an' all de udder sons beside, I'd pound me ear an' snore.

“Den, I cudn't quit swearin', an' every time I'd rip a big 'n out, de old gal'd show de whites 'v her eyes an' say, 'Thomas!' long an' solem' an' reprov'in' like.

“An' dey wud allus smell me breath ter see if I'd ben smokin'. An' dey wudn't let me eat wid me knife, nor spill de java out 'n me saucer. I cudn't never ketch on ter dere style. I was allus jabbin' me knife inter de butter dish, or fergettin' ter put de sugar spoon back in de bowl. Den I chewed out loud an' dat scraped on dere nerves. An' I'd allus fergit an' put de napkins in me pocket w'en I wuz done. Den dey made me sport me head piece straight on me nut, an' dey sed I swung me shoulders too much w'en I walked.

“Den I kep' gettin' inter scraps wid de kids on de block. Had to do somethin' fer excitement, see! One time I got a lot 'v dem on de back fence, an' made 'm sit in a row, wid each a chew of Star in his han'. W'en I guv de word dey all began ter chew. De kid dat chewed de longes' wuz ter get a bird uv a kite I made fer de occasion. Say! yer outen seen dem kids. W'en I called time, dere wuzn't one left on de fence. Yer'd t'ink de cholera 'd struck de town de way all chased home, sick. Say! yer outen ben dere. Dere mudders waltzed over ter de house in flocks an' pestered de life outen de ole girl. Dey sed I wuz corruptin' de good morals uv dere sons, an' dat I was a menace ter dere lives an' property.

“I got inter lots uv scrapes like dat; but I allus jollied dem up an' made it all right. Dey tried ter sen' me ter school—Say! I got de G. B. de firs' day. Dey never got tired—dey wuz allus tryin' ter improve me. Dey wuz bound ter make a good boy outen me, an' I wuz boun' dey wudn't.

“Bimeby I got homesick. I got ter t'inking of de road again—of de gang an' de good ole times I had wid dem. Say! it'd make me heart jump w'en I'd hear an engine whistle, an' I'd t'ink 'v freights an' passengers, an' remember how I uster ketch de blind an' shinny up ter de decks, or grab a gunnel an' swing underneath. An' I wuz jes' dyin' fer a game uv craps 'r seven up. I made up me mind date de adoption scheme was N. G. One day I got ter rememberin' de las' mulligan I had. Yer knows de time—w'en Pittsburg Joe bummed de butcher-shops, an' Chi Slim de bakeries, an' de Montana Sports de groceries, an' you an' I swiped de chickens, w'ile Moulder Blackey got de beer, an' Leary Joe made de fire, an' Skysail Jack

did de cookin'. Say! it made me mouth water ter t'ink uv it. I cudn't stand it no longer, so I giv me adopted parents de ditch, an' hit de road onst more.

“Ah! dere's de greasy, old deck again. Don't care 'f I do. I'll go yer jes' onst fer luck. Cut fer deal—Jack High.”