



As they rounded a turn, Annie tensed suddenly. "Sam," she rasped hoarsely, "look!"

The Bashing of Bullwinkle

By NORMAN REILLY RAINES

Never had Tugboat Annie Brennan had her enemy in a more helpless position.

But the unbearable Bullwinkle wasn't quite licked. . . .

UNPOPULAR though he was at times along Secoma's water front, when Captain Horatio Bullwinkle, master and owner of the big deep-water tug Salamander, fell and broke his leg, even his archenemy Tugboat Annie Brennan, skipper of the rival towboat Narcissus, showed some concern, for, as she said when she visited the afflicted mariner at the Harbor Hospital: "Yer best friends ain't gonna know ye, wobblin' around on on'y three legs."

Mr. Bullwinkle's reply would have burned holes in a blizzard; but Annie only tch-tch-ed and shook her blowzy head.

"Ye shouldn't ha' tried to trip me," she reproved mildly. "If I hadn't saw the reflections o' you an' Jake sneakin' up on me in that chandler's winder, an' pushed you fust, it might ha' been me lyin' there wid a busted propeller, 'stead o' you."

"I was only gonna ask ya to have a beer with us," Mr. Bullwinkle replied, virtuously indignant.

"So what was Jake doin' on his hands an' knees behint me?" demanded Annie. "Scrapin' the gutter to pay fer it? Anyways," she went on complacently, "it's a ill wind what don't blow back in yer puss."

"What do ya mean?" asked Mr. Bullwinkle sharply.

"I mean that thing," and she pointed to his cast-enclosed leg on its elevated pulleys, "kinda deals ye out o' the Cascade Foundry Company's contrack, don't it?"

"Does it?" Mr. Bullwinkle's bright little black eyes flicked toward the door, then back to her. "Why?"

"Well, somebody's gotta skipper yer Salamander fer ye—an' yer mate, Jake, is too stupid. Expecially fer this job, what needs some know-how."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Bullwinkle derisively. "What know-how? It's a straight launching and towin' job, ain't it?"

"I gotta explain it in verbs o' one cylinder, I see," she said patiently. "Listen—that foundry company's buildin' two big steel barges fer the Navy at their new plant on the Mennagonish River. They're about finished now, so the company called fer estimates to git 'em down to tidewater an' over to the Bremerton Navy Yard."

"So what's hard about that? Sure—the river's kinda narrow, here and there, but it's plenty deep."

"Ye're forgettin' that snow-fed current, this time o' year. It's pretty swift."

"Don't you think the foundry company realizes that?"

"Mebbe so, mebbe not," Annie told him. "They're a Eastern outfit what grabbed that site an' built on it because it was near tidewater an' power was cheap. But if they don't meet their delivery date wid the Navy they pay a thumpin' penalty. If they do meet it, it means a new an' bigger contrack. An' that'll make more work fer me."

"If ya get the job," replied Mr. Bullwinkle sardonically.

"It's in the sack," said Annie confidently. "Because, wid you laid up, where's the competition? Fack is, I was on me way up the river to look the barges over, on'y I stopped in here fust, to make sure you wasn't up to nothin', an' cheer ye up a mite."

"That was kind of you, Annie," said Mr. Bullwinkle earnestly, but his gaze again was on the door. "It reely, reely was! No—don't go yet," he added as she got to her feet. "I—I'm lonesome."

ILLUSTRATED BY HAROLD VON SCHMIDT

Annie gave him a quick, suspicious look; but since his uncouth features expressed nothing but bovine innocence, she relaxed. "O.K.," she said. "I'll drop in again on me way back from the foundry. I gotta pass here anyways, afore I go to their Secoma office to put me John Moniker on that contrack."

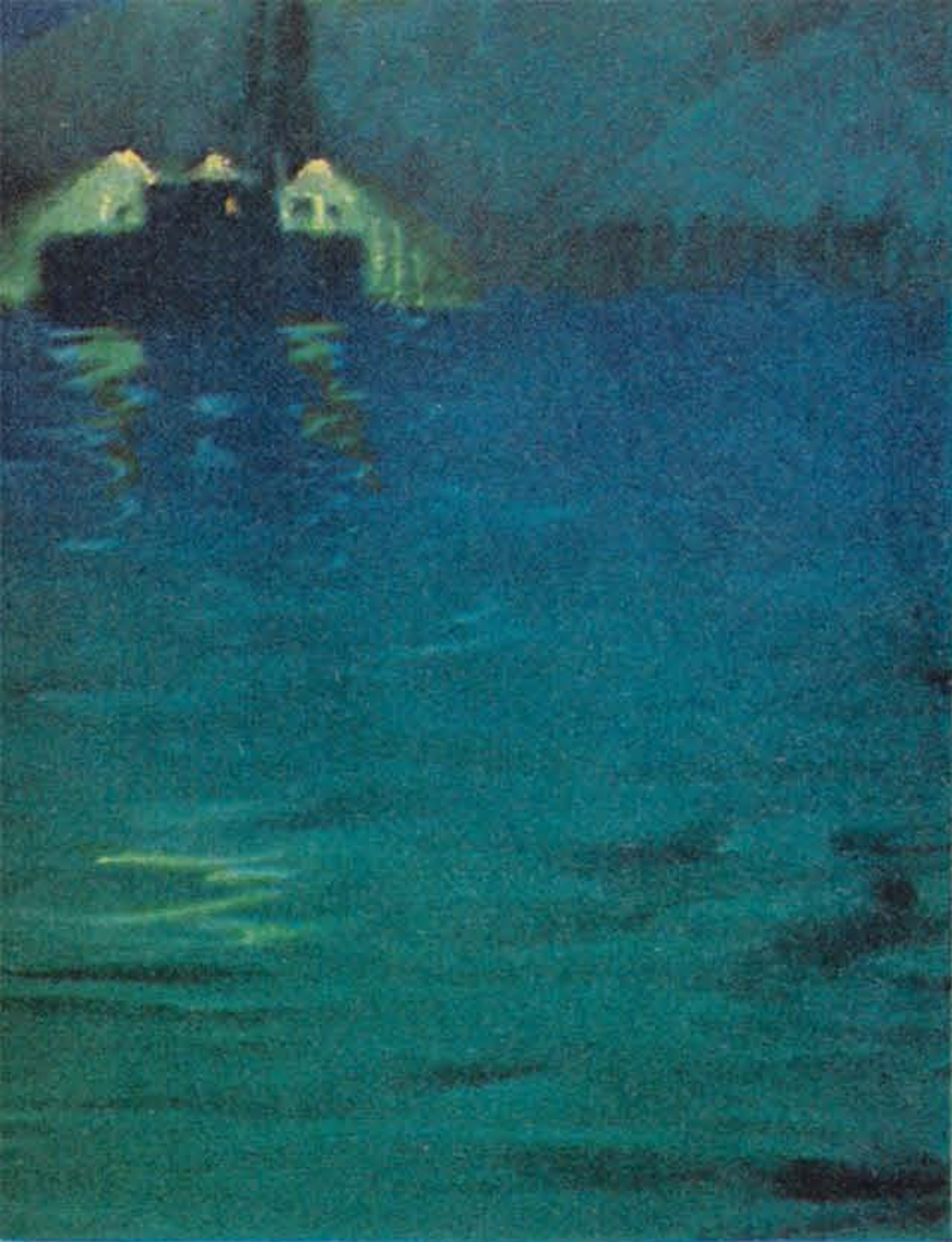
"How long'll ya be?"

"Oh, not more'n a coupla hours. Big Sam's got his car outside."

"Fine!" replied Mr. Bullwinkle with flattering cordiality. "You do that, Annie."

Outside, the sky was a clear, wind-swept azure, and the air, redolent of pine forests, snow fields and the sea, was boisterously keen and fresh. With spirits to match, Annie clambered into the ancient jalopy of Big Sam, the Narcissus' mate, and soon the city was behind them and they were rolling along the coast road. Then, at the little sawmill and cannery town of Mennagonish, where the river emptied into Puget Sound, they turned inland along the river highway; and as they progressed upstream Annie's practiced eyes noted the channel markers, shoals and bends in the deep, swift river, in mental preparation for the job to come.

At first, near the coast, broad farmlands spread their carpet of rich spring green; but as they approached the mountains the stream flowed down through a wide expanse of stony, logged-over wilderness, bristly with tree stumps and unfit for cultivation. To the right, as they passed, near the rotting wooden abutment of an old logging bridge, the span of which had been swept away in some long-forgotten flood, was a warped and weather-faded FOR SALE sign. And it was here that the river was narrowest, hemmed in by enormous glacial debris along the banks.



"For sale!" Big Sam snorted derisively. "Who the heck'd ever want to buy that patch o' rock and dirt?"

But Annie, intent on her survey of the river, was not listening. "It ain't gonna be easy," she said, "keepin' them big barges under control around them turns and wid this current. Oh, it can be did, as Bullwinkle said; but we're lucky it's on'y twelve mile from the foundry to salt chuck."

A few minutes later they rounded a final curve and the busy foundry was in view, its smoking chimneys strange against a spectacular backdrop of forested mountainside and snow-capped peaks. The two huge steel barges were practically completed and ready for launching; but after a quick look Annie disregarded them and instead concentrated on what, to her, was most important, the problem of their launching and subsequent short but tricky voyage out to the sound.

Then, as she stood on the riverbank, with Big Sam and the foundry superintendent, at the spot where she decided the launching ways should be, Annie suddenly grunted "Ouch!"

They glanced at her. "Bellyache, Annie?" asked Big Sam, concerned.

"Unh-unh! Headache! I knowed there'd be a trick in it somewheres." She turned to the superintendent. "How far do ye estimate it is to the opposite bank?"

"No need to estimate," he told her. "It's sixty-five feet."

"Yeah," said Annie thoughtfully. "That's what I guessed. I'm glad I come up here, for what I found is sure gonna make a big difference in me figgerin'. Come on, Sam! Let's go!"

Puzzled, Big Sam stared at her; but her heavy face was impassive; so, silently, he followed her to the car.

They had ridden hardly out of sight of the foundry, however, when Annie said, abruptly: "Stop the bus! I wanna think!"

Obediently Big Sam halted; and for a spell Annie sat there, staring at the narrow, deep, fast-running stream, her weather-faded blue eyes crinkled in intense concentration. Then she nodded; grinned. "O.K.! I got it! Home, Jackson!" she ordered grandly; and on the road back she made the day hideous with carefree song.

When Annie returned to the Harbor Hospital, with Big Sam again waiting for her outside, she was in playful mood; so at Mr. Bullwinkle's door she announced herself with a rollicking tat-tat-tat-tat!

"Who is it?" inquired Mr. Bullwinkle coyly, from within.

"Supprise—supprise!" Annie replied jocosely and swung open the door; but when she had entered she stopped dead, for her host had a visitor, who sat, as if rooted, in a chair at Mr. Bullwinkle's bedside.

He was a squat, enormous-bellied man in a wrinkled and shiny blue serge suit coat, with dull, pink-rimmed lethargic eyes under sleepy lids; and at Annie's entrance he looked briefly at Mr. Bullwinkle. A tiny signal was exchanged, whereupon the pachydermous stranger's sluggish regard turned to Annie and he inclined his head toward her in a species of slow-motion jerk.

"What is it?" he wheezed.

"Ho-ho-ho!" chortled Mr. Bullwinkle; and instantly Annie bristled. "It's a female walrus name o' Tugboat Annie Brennan. The character I told ya about—remember? Annie, this is me old friend and shipmate, Captain Paddy Gavin, of Oakland. He's a towboatman, and —"

"He's also," grunted Annie, "a full-growed set o' triplets walkin' around in one pair o' pants! An' anyways, seein' as you already got so much company I'll trollop along to the foundry company's office."

"If it's about the launching and towin' of them steel barges down the Mennagonish, dear, you're—er—" fleetingly embarrassed, Mr. Bullwinkle coughed—"you're too late."

"Too late?" Annie echoed, puzzled.

"It's a parrot," wheezed Captain Gavin, apparently to himself.

"Shut up, Pat!" reproved Mr. Bullwinkle indulgently. "Ya see, Annie, when I knew I'd be laid up, I asked meself, 'Who's the smartest man I know?' So —"

"I am," wheezed Captain Gavin. "Me."

"So I wired Paddy here to fly up, and take over the Salamander for me and handle that Cascade Foundry Company deal. He got in early this mornin'—I was expecting him when ya was in here before—and as soon as I gave him me power of attorney he went up to their office. And I think—I think," he emphasized delicately—"he got us the contract. Am I right, Paddy?"

Captain Gavin blinked porcinely. "Natch!" he grunted.

"So ya see, Annie," went on Mr. Bullwinkle solicitously, "there's reely nothin' up there for you to do."

Annie surveyed them, glaring balefully, big hands on hips. Then: "What is this?" she roared. "I had that thing sewed up!"

"The stitching come undone, ma'am," observed Captain Gavin asthmatically. "You hadn't signed yet. So they gave me the job."

"I told ya he was smart, Annie!" cried Mr. Bullwinkle complacently.

Speechless now with indignation, Annie stared at them as if contemplating mayhem. Then, unable to trust herself, she bumbled hastily out the door, followed by a series of choking gasps which were the nearest the ponderous Captain Gavin could come to a titter.

Outside, the sun still was bright over the sparkling harbor, but it might have been blackest night to Annie as Big Sam drove her back to the water front. Alongside the home dock were the company tugs, including her own big deep-water Narcissus; and across the slip was Mr. Bullwinkle's Salamander, with Jake, her mate, energetically kicking his deck hand around a corner of the galley; but none of this familiar scene registered.

Instead, jumping impatiently out of Big Sam's car, she stomped up the outside steps to the Deep-Sea Towing and Salvage Company offices and flung open the door.

"Oh-oh! Annie's on the warpath!" grinned Fred, the dispatcher, to Olive, the boss' secretary. "Hi, Annie! Who's been kicking you around?"

"I'm jest in the mood fer somebody to try it!" Annie growled. "Is Alec in? I might as well git this over wid!"

Fred jerked a thumb at a closed door on which was painted: A. SEVERN, PRES. Then, as Annie moved reluctantly toward it he asked, "Get what over with?"

"Tellin' him," Annie replied morosely, "that we lost the Cascade Foundry deal."

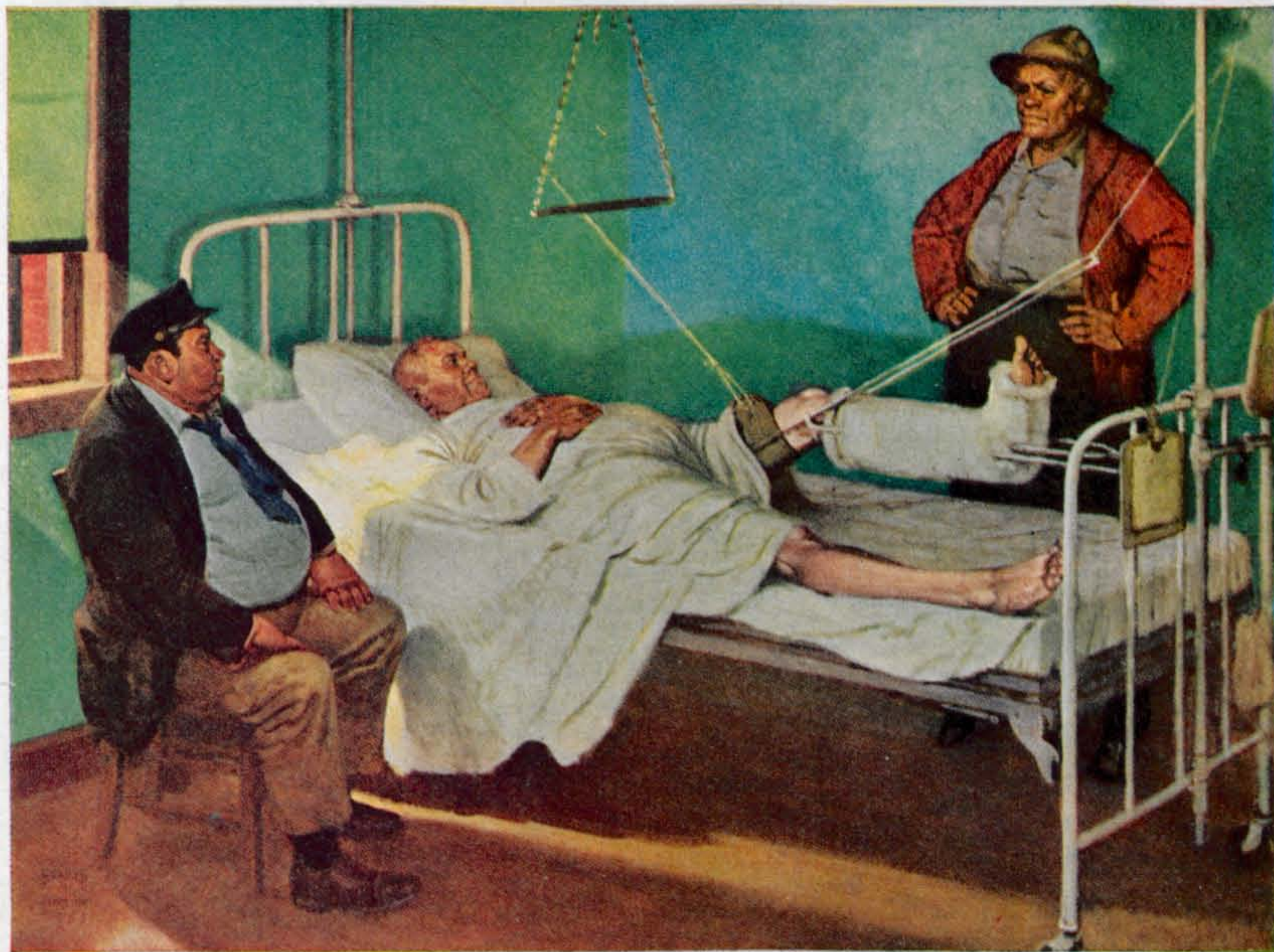
"Oh, no!" gasped Olive, dismayed. "Whatever happened?"

Briefly Annie explained, and Fred shook his head. "The boss'll blow his stack over this one! You're sure they weren't bluffing? You know what Bullwinkle's like."

"Sa-ay, there's a thought!" Annie cried. "Gimme the phone!"

The manager of the foundry company's Secoma office provided quick verification of the bad news, however; and as he talked Annie's gloom deepened. But suddenly Annie interrupted him with such an electrically hopeful "What's that? Say that again!" that Olive and Fred turned to stare.

"I see! . . . Yeah! Well, thanks," she concluded; and when she faced them once more her eyes were sparkling with their old combative light. "Oh, brother!" she remarked deeply as she strode, confidently now, toward her employer's office. "This is gonna slay Alec!" And, forgetting to knock, she threw open the door. (Continued on Page 89)



"Ho-ho-ho!" chortled Mr. Bullwinkle. "It's a female walrus name of Tugboat Annie Brennan."

THE BASHING OF BULLWINKLE

(Continued from Page 21)

Her plump, amiable little employer looked up, first surprised, then smiling. "Well, Annie," he asked, "how did it go?"

"He got it," said Annie hastily, cushioning the blow, "on a basis o' 'No Cure—No Pay.'"

"Huh?" Severn was lost. "What the devil are you talking about? Who got what?"

Quickly Annie gave him a run-down; and as she talked an angry red crept into his cheeks; but he restrained himself until she had finished. Then: "How is it," he demanded, "that every easy job you go after gets all fouled up, while the hard ones —"

"Ain't you listenin', ye bad-tempered little sprat?" Annie roared. "Sure I lost it! But that fat Gabardine swine Gavin took it on a 'No Cure—No Pay' deal. An' that's the crud o' the whole thing!"

"Maybe it's me that's stupid, Annie. But —"

"Maybe?" Annie snorted. "Now listen again—careful! We was gonna do the job, wid a guaranteed delivery date at the Bremerton Navy Yard an' a thousand-dollar-a-day penalty fer failure. Right?"

"Right!"

"Against that we was to git a good big flat rate, to cover the launchin', towin', the whole works! Correct?"

"Correct! So —"

"So I found out today that the figger we was gonna quote wouldn't even begin to cover the risk. So on that basis we're well out of it! But this Gavin smart aleck, widout even knowin' what our figger would be, offered to meet it on the same terms, penalty an' all. An' in addition to that," she cried triumphantly, "if he don't deliver he don't git paid at all!"

"So what do we care if he does or not!" Severn snapped. "Look, Annie, all you're trying to do is cover up your own failure!"

"It may look like it," admitted Annie with deceptive mildness, "'cept fer one thing. I went up an' looked the job over fust; an' Gavin didn't, because Bullwinkle told him it'd be easy, an' Gavin took his word fer it. Got that?"

"Go on," said Severn, grim-lipped.

"O.K. So they walked right into the middle of a squeeze play! Because what none of us realized afore was that last spring's heavy rains, an' snow-field run-off, washed so much stuff down from the mountains that the Men-nagonish silted up till it's on'y sixty-five feet wide in front o' the foundry. An' how's anybody gonna launch them big steel barges, even sideways, on a little bitty stream like that?"

"Sure! I can see that," her boss admitted. "The momentum would carry them across and smash 'em against the opposite bank!"

"Not on'y that, Alec! The current through there right now is swifter than the one in Suicide Gut up in the San Juan Islands."

"Hm'm-m'm'm. You may have something there."

"Ye're darn shootin' I have! Because even though Gavin's done all his towboatin' around the Oakland estuary and don't know nothin' about fast-river work, one look at that current in the narrows an' he'll start yelpin' fer help! Help he can't git from Bullwinkle! An' that," concluded Annie

happily, "is where I step in an' snatch the job right away from 'em!"

"You?" Incredulously he stared. "You just got through telling me we couldn't do it and make a profit!"

"Not accordin' to the original plan. But I already figgered out a way to beat it when I was up there today. So when they see the jam they're in, an' begin yellin', that's when I step up an' sock 'em wid the old know-how! Fer a price, o' course!"

"What price?" asked Severn, by now enthralled.

"Jest leave that to me," said Annie with a grin. "Now do ye see what I meant by a squeeze play?"

Despite her confidence, however, two full days passed without word from the enemy camp, and Annie was beginning to worry when, after returning on the Narcissus from a tow across the sound, she received a plaintive telephone message asking why she so heartlessly had neglected her dear friend Horatio Bullwinkle, who, it seemed, was pining away on his hospital bed.

They were both there when she arrived; strangely subdued, but eying her through narrowed lids. So Annie lost no time.

"Ye're skunked, spite o' the hip-potomus brain o' yer pal Fatso here," she told Mr. Bullwinkle, blithely ignoring her own considerable avoirdupois. "An' wid the penalties an' all, Lord knows how much ye'll be stuck fer, under nonperformance o' contract. So what's it wuth to ye to duck out from under?"

"Listen, you bag of tripe —" began Captain Gavin ungallantly. But Annie cut him short.

"O.K.! I'll tell you! Fust, ye'll sign the contract over to me! Second, ye'll pay me five thousand smackers fer gittin' ye off the hook! What about it?"

"Suppose," said Mr. Bullwinkle despondently, "the Cascade people won't agree to the contract transfer?"

"They will," said Annie promptly. "They're in a spot too."

"If we can't do the job," wheezed Captain Gavin angrily, "how are you going to?"

"I should tell ye fer free?" Annie derided.

They looked at each other; but that did no good. Meanwhile, Annie waited complacently. And presently Mr. Bullwinkle spoke.

"I hope I die first, Annie," he said ponderously, "with a hunk o' napalm in each fist. Because there's a certain fire I want to stoke up —"

"Sure-sure!" agreed Annie gaily. "But ye ain't dead yet. Ye on'y look that way. You an' him. So le's git down to brass knuckles!"

"It's a deal, then," conceded Mr. Bullwinkle unhappily. "On one condition. If you fail, we don't pay you nothin', neither."

For a moment or two Annie hesitated; but, reviewing quickly in her mind what she intended to do, it seemed safe enough. So she nodded. "In writin'," she said. "I'll have the office type the agreement an' ye kin sign it. Both o' ye, mind! An' a certified five-thousand-dollar check to be deposited in the bank. Today!"

When she returned to the office, however, her employer was no longer so optimistic.

"I don't know, Annie," he said anxiously. "If you don't deliver, it'll cost us, in penalties and loss of profits, all of ten-twelve thousand dollars, to say nothing of waste of time and equipment."

"Aw, quit fussin', ye ol' wart-worrier!" cried Annie gaily. "Look —"

le's jump in yer car an' we'll run up there, whiles I show ye!" And forty-five minutes later they were standing together on the riverbank in front of the foundry, while she explained.

"Ye kin see the river's too narrow an' the current too strong fer ordinary launchin', can't ye, Alec?"

His eyes on the deadly swift flow of water before him, Severn nodded.

"O.K. So we send up two of our small tugs, like the Pansy an' the Iris, each towin' one of our own big scows, an' each follered by another of our small tugs, to tow at the downstream end. That clear?"

He nodded again.

"Then we lay our scows alongside the bank here; an' wid blocks an' rollers we'll nudge them barges on board our scows an' carry 'em downstream piggy-back."

"But even with two tugs that small, to each scow," Severn objected, "there'd be no control in that current!" He pointed. "Look at the way it sucks those big rocks on the bank in, even now!"

"Sure—except I forgot to mention that each scow will also be draggin' a long length o' heavy iron chain to act as brakes. That'll help cancel the current; an' wid one tug ahead, an' another exertin' backward pressure an' control astern, everythin' will be hunky-donkey."

"Yep!" He drove his fist into his palm. "It'll work! Then, at Bremerton we'll sink our scows—and raise 'em later, of course —"

"An' the Navy barges'll float off," Annie chortled, "like ducks on a hot stove!"

"By golly, Annie," Severn beamed, "you win! Come on." He turned back to his car. "Let's go to work!"

Two days later, the interval having been used to construct the necessary staging and loading wharf on the bank in front of the foundry, the small tugs and big scows skillfully threaded the swift current of the Mennagonish River and were brought alongside and made securely fast, ready to receive their unwieldy cargo.

Annie, busy with the Narcissus on towing jobs around the sound, was not with the fleet, nor was it necessary. But that night, after the dispatcher had assured her that, barring emergency, her tug would not be required again before morning, she descended to the Narcissus' engine room.

"Come on, Sam!" she said, in high spirits. "I got the company gasboat alongside. We're goin' up to see how they're gittin' on wid that piggy-back job."

Wiping his hands on a wad of waste and slipping on his jacket, Big Sam followed her to the deck and into the tender. Then, as they were about to cast off, Severn appeared on the office landing. "Hold it, Annie!" he called. "I'm coming too!"

The evening was calm, with lights glittering diamondlike over the black flowing tide, rank with the smell of kelp and the sea, as the powerfully engined tender swept out of the harbor and into the lovely, tranquil reaches of the sound. The air was pleasantly chill after the springtime heat of the day, the stars were out, and as the high bluffs of the shore line glided by, Annie, who was at the helm, felt hugely content. She gazed with indulgent affection at her little boss, bundled comfortably in his topcoat, and at the ruminatively moving jaws of Big Sam, that solid sheet anchor in times of stress. No, she thought, not for riches would

she trade her life afloat; especially when, as now, she was on the eve of a spectacular and profitable triumph over her cherished enemy, Horatio Bullwinkle. She drew briny, exhilarating air deep into her capacious lungs. Yep, life sure was good; and the happy chuckle she presently emitted drew upon her Severn's amused and understanding glance.

Soon they drew abreast of Port Mennagonish and headed for the range lights at the river mouth; and shortly thereafter the tender was chugging sturdily up the fast-flowing stream, with broad, fat cultivated fields on either hand and, far across them, the friendly light of a farmhouse-kitchen window.

Gradually the plowed area fell astern and they entered the desolate, logged-off stretch of wilderness in the midst of which the river closed to its narrowest point. Then, as they rounded a turn, Annie tensed suddenly, and her groping hand closed tightly on Big Sam's arm.

"Sam!" she rasped hoarsely. "Look!"

But the others had seen it, too, and had sprung instantly alert; for directly ahead, in midstream, was the brilliance of cluster lights over a large, cumbersome floating object upon which men moved; and even plainer to their ears as they approached, came the hiss of steam and compressed air, the rattle and clang of heavy machinery and a loud and periodic "Thump!"

"Floating pile driver—a big one, too!" muttered Severn incredulously. "Annie, what do you suppose that monstrosity is doing up here?"

"Search me!" Annie rasped. "It sure couldn't ha' been here earlier when them tugs an' scows went up."

"You're right," confirmed Big Sam stolidly. "They couldn't ha' got past it. It's anchored too."

"Well, it sure can't stay there!" bellowed Annie, thoroughly aroused

now. "Not when we gotta git them tugs an' barges downstream!"

Despite her brave words, however, the sudden unease she felt developed into a king-size headache when, the gasboat having come up with the obstruction in the channel, they saw that already several huge, creosoted pilings had been rammed deep into the riverbed with shafts projecting above the surface. They fenced off half the breadth of the stream, with hardly enough room for the launch to edge around them, the current piling high on the upstream side. And, when completed, they would form an impenetrable barricade.

Then, glancing up at the bank as the boat slid by, Annie's headache swelled into full-scale panic; for, standing on the bank edge and gazing phlegmatically down at them, was the vast, lethargic bulk of Captain Paddy Gavin, who stared at Annie and waved a ham-like hand. "Ah there, Fatso!" he wheezed.

"Listen," yelled Annie, cutting down the engine and nosing the boat in toward the bank, "what is this?" But already she knew, and her stomach was a ball of stone.

"Ain't any of your business, really," Captain Gavin told her with an asthmatic chuckle, "but, bein' it's you, I'll tell you. Glad to, in fact! Me and Bullwinkle has took up farming."

"Farming?" Annie bellowed incredulously. "Look, don't give me that."

"It's true!" Captain Gavin was enjoying himself. "Going back down from here the other day I happened to notice that 'For Sale' sign. So we was lucky enough to get an option on a few acres each side o' the river. And now"—he nodded toward the busy pile driver—"we're lawfully building a bridge to connect our property."

Before Annie could reply, Severn intervened. "Who is it?" he whispered hoarsely.



"It's Gavin!" she told him loudly. "That ten ton o' secondhand fishgut what calls hisself Bullwinkle's pal!"

Severn stood up. "Now look here, Gavin!" he shouted firmly. "That 'farming' stuff is nonsense! What crop could you possibly raise on that logged-over stretch of rubbish?"

"Who knows?" replied Captain Gavin humorously. "Crocodiles, perhaps."

"Crocodiles?"

"Why not? Mebbe we can train 'em to shed a few tears over the jam that that Tugboat Annie character's got herself in."

"Tish-posh!" bawled Annie furiously. "You wait till the Coast Guard climbs up yer neck! This is a navigable channel ye're blockin'!"

"No, it ain't," he contradicted sharply. "Not till the Government declares it so! We checked that first! And the only things that ever traveled this river before was logs and Indians. Now the Indians is on the reservation. And the logs, missus," he pointed out delightedly, "is what your head's made of. But you was goin' someplace," he ended with elaborate politeness and waved his arm upstream. "Don't let me keep you!"

Apoplectic with fury, Annie swung the boat away from the river bank and against the current. But the calloused hand of Big Sam quickly checked her.

"Better take her back down, Annie," he advised quietly. "Time we get up to the foundry and back they'd have them other pilings in place, and we'd be trapped on the wrong side too."

It was only then that the full extent of the disaster hit her. "Alec!" she gasped. "Sam's right! All our tugs an' scows—an' those barges!"

"That's pretty plain, isn't it?" Severn replied bitterly. "They're stuck! They can't get out now! I'm stuck

too," he went on slowly. "Not only for loss of profit on this deal, but indemnities, for God knows how long, at a thousand dollars a day!"

For a long time there was silence in the boat; and it was not until the wilderness of rock and tree stumps was left far astern and they were surging once more between the rich and tranquil farmland, wrested, generations ago, from the primeval forest, that Annie spoke.

"There—there must be some way to git around this, Alec," she said.

"You name it!" he returned flatly.

"We ain't licked yet, if on'y we have a little faith," she continued doggedly. "That kin move mountains, ye know. It's what the Good Book says."

He looked at her heavy, unhappy face in the faint light of the stars, and compunction moved him.

"O.K., Annie. Maybe you're right," he agreed quietly. "But the way I feel right now, faith could more easily move that big farmhouse over there right into town, than shift those barges out of their trap."

For more long moments Annie was silent, while her gaze traveled across the sleeping fields to the distant building, then back to his worried face. Then, presently, she stirred, and it was as if a fresh wind had swept across the boat.

"Thanks, Alec," she said, her voice low. "I knowed an idear would have to come. I'm glad it came this way."

"Idea?" He stared, roused by a certain quiet vibrance in her voice.

Annie nodded. "The thought ye jest gave me," she said solemnly. "An' if it don't hand Bullwinkle an' that prize brain-buster o' his the wust bellyache o' their careers I'm a monkey's orphan!"

By now Big Sam also was intrigued. "What you drivin' at, Annie?" he asked hoarsely.

But Annie, suddenly bristling with confidence again, chose to be mysterious. "You'll find out," she promised, with a sudden heartfelt chuckle. "An' so will they! An' how!"

It was a full three days before Annie, a large, heavy and brightly wrapped parcel in her arms, again found time to visit Mr. Bullwinkle in his hospital room; but his visitor had hardly entered when Mr. Bullwinkle sat bolt upright, every red spike on his bullet head bristling.

"Go ahead, ya old fat-pot—crow!" he challenged; but Annie merely lowered the parcel to the bed, then sank into a nearby chair and wiped her brow.

"Look," he persevered, "I don't want ya in here! You're a hex!"

"Now, Horatio," reproved Annie indulgently. "Is that the way to treat a ol' pal what brought ye a nice present an' on'y wants to pass the time o' day? An' by the way"—she peeked archly, but not without significance, under his bed—"where's Jumbo?"

"He's went home—wi' the rest o' the morons!"

Annie clucked. "Yer smartest friend, too," she sympathized.

"Listen!" he rasped. "If you only come here to belch wisecracks——"

"Who—me?" asked Annie innocently. "All I come fer, apart from fetchin' ye some titbits"—she pointed to the parcel on the bed—"was to explain how-come I got the idear from Alec o' usin' that firm o' house movers to shift the barges from the foundry, overland. It was easy as pie! They jest lifted 'em up an' rolled 'em clear to the Secoma shipyards, ready fer launchin', an' ——"

"I know all that!" he snapped. "So ya got 'em to Bremerton under the wire and ya won! Just the same, if you hadn't of dynamited them pilings the

next night I'd ha' kept those tugs and scows of yours up there forever!"

"I figgered that too," said Annie calmly. "That's why I done it. Anyways, what ye gripin' about? Ye got off lucky; an' all it cost ye was the profit from the deal an' that five thousand—plus, o' course, the cost o' hirin' the pile driver an' whatever ye had to pay Fatso off wid. So why not let bygones be ditto, pal?"

He glared at her suspiciously; but she shook her untidy head.

"I mean it!" she said earnestly. "Seems to me that me an' you has fit enough! An' wid you here in hospital an' all—well, to prove how I feel I went out an' got ye a present, didn't I?"

"Yeah; guess ya did, at that, Annie."

"Sure. An' you got no idear how I sweated me brains tryin' to figger what'd suit ye most. But I got it!" she added triumphantly. "It took a bit o' trouble, but I got it!"

Deep in his uncouth interior, and against all his experience of her, Mr. Bullwinkle was touched. "You reely," he said huskily, "done all that fer me?"

"Open it an' see," she said gently. "Well ——" She got ponderously to her feet, looking shy. "I—I hope ye enj'y it, Horatio," she said softly and tiptoed out the door.

"Well, kin ya beat that?" said Mr. Bullwinkle in wonderment to himself. "Aside from bein' the world's ugliest monster, I guess her heart's in the right place after all. I wonder what she brought."

Frank in his curiosity now, he quickly ripped off the gay paper and brightly colored ribbons, then plunged his hand in and closed his eyes.

"Eeny-meeny-miney-mo," he counted in pleasurable anticipation, then opened his eyes upon Annie's carefully selected gift—a box of oats and a small, tightly compressed bundle of hay.