



He tossed the gem bodily into the wastebasket.

Fiction is Stranger Than Truth

Step Into This Tale and Take a laughing Glimpse of An Editorial Office in Full Function, With Robert Bunyan, Roscoe Pipp and "Freckles" Doing Their Stuff.

By THOMAS THURSDAY

Robert Bunyan, editor of *The Whim-Wham Magazine*, entered his sanctum drearily, accompanied by a corking headache. No editor is complete without one. If they can't get one from their readers they can always get one from their writers. Roscoe Pipp, his associate, greeted his chief with a groggy nod. Roscoe already had been on the job an hour, plowing through bales of submitted scripts, before Mr. Bunyan's arrival. Roscoe looked as disgusted as an undertaker lying in one of his own coffins.

"Well, how's pickings?" asked the chief. "You know, we've got to get a realistic love story for the July number or bust in the attempt. Remember, we promised the readers one in our June editorial."

"I can't find a thing!" moaned Roscoe. So far, I've dashed through ten short yarns, five novelettes, and about forty-nine pounds of assorted poetry. Can't find any real love stuff, Chief! The authors still dash off that old sentimental bunk about love in a cottage, with a mortgage in the distance, and the hero saves the joint in the last chapter. Not so good. Our readers want the real McCoy, eh?"

Chief did not reply. He removed his fur coat—most editors have a fur coat—then took off his hat, displaying a complete set of baldness. Mr. Bunyan

had been editing magazines for fifteen years. And even five-year editors no longer require haircuts.

He eased himself into his plush-covered swivel and sighed. Plenty trouble! He wished to keep his promise to his readers; but, well, he knew that the finding of a real love story was just as easy as balancing a live eel on the tip of one's nose. Writers, he figured, were all wrong on the true love equation.

Presently the youthful elevator operator, Josephus Coke—known to the sanctum as "Freckles"—entered with nine pounds of ruined paper in his hand, the same being newly arrived manuscripts from everywhere, and written by plumbers, senators, bricklayers, farmers, servant girls, college professors, chorus girls, and lonely farm wives. (Who the deuce says that art doesn't flourish in America?) Well, anyway, young Josephus planked the scripts on the Chief's desk and dodged out, whistling "Just As Soon As My Shoes Wear Out I'll Be On My Feet Again." Scripts-carrying was one of the best things that Josephus did. Relieving the letter carriers of their burden, he would take pride and joy in wafting them in to the editorial roundhouse where, later, they would be switched back to the aspiring literati.

Midst the latest batch the Chief noted several envelopes of ordinary size. "Ah," mused he, "perhaps here's some praise for Caesar. Here's where I find out what the customers thought of the latest issue. Personally, I have an idea that it was one of the best."

Slicing the first envelope, he leaned back to scan expectantly the fulsome praise that all editors are entitled to—but don't get. The letter was postmarked "Quickshot, Wyoming," and read as follows:

Dear Editor:

Another fifteen cents shot to perdition! Your magazine is getting dryer than a Senator's speech. Same old hoy, issue after issue. Are you suffering from hemicrania? The complete novelette, which gave me a headache in the very first chapter, was funk. Believe me, the guy who wrote "Two-gun McGimmick" must have been brought up in a slaughterhouse. He shoots some sap on every page and he has the nerve to lay the scene right here in my hometown of Quickshot! The folks back East who read that blaaah must think the West is wilder than a Follies girl midst a flock of heavy-sugar papas. Where do they get that "wild-and-wooly-west" stuff from, hey? Listen! According to statistics, in New York City, N. Y., within one year they had 377 murders, assorted. Get me? But out here, in wild-and-wooly Wyoming—where a man ain't even got a chance to get half shot—we haven't had that many murders since we entered Statehood. See if you can laugh that off!

Yours truly,

Jock Pinto,

Sheriff of Thunder County.

"Lord," moaned the Chief, "Sheriff Pinto shakes a mean pen! Oh, well, editing is a thankless task, anyway. Wonder what the next one has to say. Hope it's a bit of laudatory news." And this was the next:

Dear Editor:

For the love of Mike, what kinda magazine are you publishing? I grabbed the latest issue off the newsstand, the one you said would be a peach, and what did I find? Leaping sardines—what a mess! The best part of the issue was the advertisements. The complete novel was the worst slice of hanswurst I have ever read. D'yer call that stuff love? Bah! The guy who wrote that must have got his ideas about women from the fumes of a Chink

pipe-joint. And how about that short story, by Alonzo Jay Popjoy? I mean the one entitled "Heavens Above!" I would like to know where Mr. Popjoy got his ideas about guinea pigs from. In the second chapter he has the hero, Dr. Evenezer Quimm, pick up the guinea pig by the tail. Ha! ha!—since when have guinea pigs got tails, huh?

And there was that so-called humorous story, "Traffic In Cops," by Reginald Gelt. You wrote in the introduction that it would cause the tin statue of a nanny goat to die of hysteria. Woof! So that was supposed to be funny, huh? Say, if that yarn was funny then the guy who wrote it would die laughing at the Battle of Waterloo! Take it from me, he's got a sense of humor like a sideshow fire-eater with celluloid teeth. Of course, I ain't knocking, understand; I'm simply telling you that the last issue was terrible, and if you don't come through with a brace of regular yarns in future issue, I'm gonna lay off you and spend my money on the movies—which is also pretty rotten!

Sincerely,

Julius McLevy.

"Whew!" ejaculated Robert Bunyan, "I guess I'd better not open the rest. Things don't seem to be very congratulatory this morning. Well, it serves me right for being an editor who tries to please everybody. Dad gave me a chance to be a bricklayer when I was a lad, but I muffed the opportunity. I'll bet bricklayers have a cinch!"



Scripts-carrying was one of the best things Josephus did.

The Chief turned weary eyes toward his associate.

"What luck, Roscoe?" he asked. "Find a good love yarn yet?"

Before replying, Roscoe dropped a few yards of wrecked paper on the floor then brushed a shapely hand across his forehead.

"Not a thing, Chief—not a thing!" he whooped. "I thought I had a good one a few moments ago—but the boob author had the landlord turn out to be the hero who married the fair stenographer. You know what a fat chance a hero-landlord would have with our customers; eh? Then I had another collection of typewritten manure that started off with plenty of love interest, but the hero was a plain plumber instead of a Prince. If we printed that all the lady readers would be off us for life. Good love stories are mighty scarce, Chief. Er—pardon me, please, while I rub some bay rum over my head. I feel kind of dizzy."

Entered again Josephus Coke—alias "Freckles"—elevator operator and general factotum, who placed a few more pounds of newly arrived manuscripts upon the Chief's desk. "Mail guy says they won't be only two more mails today," remarked Freckles.

"Thank God!" intoned the Chief. Opening a fat envelope, he rolled his eyes toward high Heaven and low Hell and prayed that it might be the love yarn he sought for the July issue. The title was all to the good if you understood it. It was called "The Biology of Practical Democracy," and was written by one Peter Fenimore Blimp. More, it was an

essay, and *The Whim-Wham Magazine* published nothing but red-blooded "westerns," yellow-blooded poetry, and blue-blooded love stuff. With a snort of disgust, the Chief tossed the script in the cuspidor and angled for the next. This time he sliced open a gem that was surrounded with ten cents worth of pink and blue ribbon, not to mention the combined odors of Coty, Houbigant and the worst of Fleur de Woolworth. Chief snorted—and who wouldn't? Chief sniffed—and who wouldn't? A letter dropped out:

Dear Editor:

Just a word to let you know that I worked three months to write the enclosed. It's my first attempt and my friends all say it's better than anything they have found in the magazines in a long time. How much do you pay? I would like to get as much as possible; also, I'd like to reserve the motion picture rights. (Mary Pickford would be glad to star in it, don't you think?) Make the check out in my name, please, and maybe I will write you something else during my lunch hours at high school.

Yours very sincerely,

Ruth McApple.

The Chief unraveled the script from two pounds of ribbon and prepared to wade in. Title: "Lulu of the Lemon Grove." Try and laugh that off!

"Well, titles don't mean anything," mused the Chief. "Maybe this young lady is a genius. Perhaps it's a great tale of love."

He read the first three pages. Miss McApple was a wizard at description. She began by describing a chestnut tree that had stood in front of the heroine's ancestral home since Grant annoyed



Lee. All of this was mighty thrilling reading—to a giraffe. Chief gripped his chair for support. Reaching the fourth page the Chief let forth a whinny of rage, opened the editorial window, and submitted the masterpiece to the morning wind. Fluttering coyly hither and yon, as they say, it finally descended and downed Officer Pat O’Cohen on the head. Pat picked it up, mistook it for a batch of bench warrants, and stuck it in his pocket.



... arrived on the job with a new suit, patent leather shoes, and a natty top hat.

The next gem the Chief sliced was not only fat but decidedly heavy. The dissection of the mess sprinkled the Chief with assorted bun crumbs. Chief smiled.

“Old stuff!” he hooted. “Though I wouldn’t mind if they’d send the whole bun. I’m not a sparrow.” Now, speaking of the crumb business, the idea was not new. The idea, if it is an idea, was to see whether or not the editor read his or her story. If the story returned to its writer, minus the crumbs, then the writer knew his story had been read—or else the editor ate the crumbs. On the other hand, if the script came back with the crumbs, it was a sure sign that the editor never even glanced at more than the title—a thing that most amateur authors have always suspected. Naturally, such affairs always made a hit with the editor. And so he tossed the gem bodily into the wastebasket. What’s more, he did not find the long sought after love

story for the July issue. Hour after hour he toiled, and hour after hour he found bad yarns after bad yarns. Finally both Robert Bunyan and his associate, Roscoe Pipp, contracted a mild form of circular neurosis—which you may also find in the dictionary—after which they called it a day. And then departed in search of a bootlegger.

Non-bright and non-early the next morning the Chief entered his sanctum—meaning office—looking a shade sadder than a cat chewing a tin mouse. His associate, however, greeted him beamingly, and flashed in his face a collection of typewritten sheets. Roscoe’s pan—or face—was alight with enthusiasm.

“What’s it all about?” asked the sunken-eyed Chief. “Don’t dare tell me that you’ve found the love story we’ve been searching for!”

“Positively!” enthused Roscoe Pipp. “And its a peach. Talk about love. Say, the author who wrote this must have been married no less than ten times, and then spent years studying the inmates of a harem.”

“What’s the title, if any?” demanded the Chief.

“Title is O.K.—‘We Must Have Love!’ How’s that; eh? Maybe the bird who wrote it doesn’t understand women. Oh boy! This will make the girls forget to chew their gum, powder their noses—they’ll be so busy reading it. Better give the author a contract before he gets away. Here—have a look at it.”

The Chief had a look.

“Great!” he pronounced. “But who in hades is the author, Lorenzo La Plume? Never heard of ‘im!”

“Neither have I. But he’s good for a check; what?”

Now we’ve got to furnish the plot, since the story is about finished, otherwise the tale would be ruined—if we haven’t done so already. So here goes—hold everything!

A week later Josephus Coke—alias “Freckles”—arrived on the job with a new suit, patent leather shoes, natty velour—and an authorial grin. Whether or not he is still writing love stories under the anonymous cloak of *Lorenzo La Plume*, we don’t know.

Laugh that off!