



A Scottish Studies Chapbook

Mind and eat these sausage rolls now!" shouted Jim's grandmother as he clicked shut her little wrought iron garden gate behind him. And for goodness sake, keep your cap on!"

"O.K. Gran. Bye now," he answered as he broke into a quick sprint down the street to catch up with a couple of boys also heading for school.

"How's it going, Yank?" asked the tallest one.

"Good," replied Jim. "I've brought lunch with me today, so I can come with you on the Puggy at noon if that's all right". He took his cap off and stuffed it in his pocket.

"What do you think, Leery?" the tallest said to his chum.

"It's O.K. with me, Bingo. I think the Yank should be up to it by now," replied Leery, winking.

These days, Jim was used to not hearing his proper name outside his grandmother's house. All the boys in his class used nicknames and teachers used surnames.

"A lot different from Canada," he thought.

But then there was a big difference between Glasgow and his native Montreal. Blue skies, warm central heating and bright snowy winters had been exchanged for gray dank drizzle, coal fires and fog.

"At least you get a hot water bottle at night," he thought.

At first his acquired nickname "Yank" bothered him. He was annoyed that his schoolmates seemed ignorant about Canada and assumed him to be American in much the same way that some people spoke of England when they really meant Britain. However, he soon became resigned to it, knowing that at least "Yank" was not as embarrassing a nickname as some he had heard.

Jim's parents had sent him to Scotland over a year ago just after his twelfth birthday. His dad travelled a lot and was having problems with his job. "Strong old-fashioned discipline and no-nonsense education would do him good," he was told. "It will make a man of you!" his dad had said.

His mother did not seem quite so sure. "But," she told him in her French-Canadian accent, "Once my little hair salon business is well under way, we'll all be together again."

It had taken Jim a long time to settle in at school and he was trying desperately to make friends. He was useless at soccer or "football" as the local boys called it, and was hopeless at gym. He had difficulty mastering the subtleties of the Glasgow dialect and his one strong point, swimming, gained him little status, as there was nowhere to put it to good use.

But now he felt sure that Leery and Bingo were on the verge of accepting him. Although they were two of the scruffier boys in his school, they had achieved much respect from the rest of the class, mainly as a result of the outrageous and often gross activities which they spent many hours bragging about.

Each day, during lunch, Leery and Bingo would return from their visit to the Clydeside docks with stories and evidence of their escapades.

One of their favourite outings was a trip to the slaughterhouse. Usually they would come back with a chicken or turkey claw sticking out from under their sleeve and, by means of a hidden string attached to the gut and threaded up one sleeve and down the other, were able to slowly open and close the claw like a disfigured hand—something sure to have younger children screaming out loud.

Recently at school Bingo had achieved notoriety when he was called up to be strapped by the teacher. When asked to put out his hand to receive punishment, a very large and grotesque turkey claw appeared, causing the teacher to roll his eyes and shake his head in exasperation before telling him to sit down and behave himself.

Since joining the school, there was one particular aspect of Leery and Bingo's adventures that especially fascinated Jim: their frequent trips on "The Puggy"—a train pulled by an old and particularly decrepit dockside steam locomotive, which, according to the two boys, had an equally cantankerous driver. Thus, Jim got it into his head that for him to gain any kind of respect from his peers, sooner or later he would have to "jump the Puggy." And today was the day.

At noon, the piercing shrill of the bell shattered the tense silence of the math class and the sudden shuffle of feet and buzz of conversation in the corridors signalled the arrival of lunch.

Jim saw Bingo and Leery stuff their books into their desks and dash for the main door. At first he thought they were going to leave

him behind but Bingo shouted, "Come on Yank, we don't have all day!"

Soon they were walking beside the railway tracks that lay between two rows of wooden fences behind the warehouses and shipyards of the dockside.

"We are going to jump the Puggy today, aren't we?" asked Jim.

"Maybe yes, maybe no," answered Leery.

"But I thought you always went on the Puggy," asked Jim.

"So we do, but let's see if we can scrounge some fruit from that big ship over there first."

"Hey mister! Have you any fruit you don't want?" shouted Leery to an Indian sailor on the old rusty vessel. A sailor wearing a turban threw down a large bunch of bananas. "Catch this!" he shouted as they flew through the air. Bingo intercepted the bananas in mid flight. "Thanks mister. You're a gent," he yelled back."

Suddenly, a heavy shower of rain had them running for the shelter of a nearby tool shed. Sitting on its hard, wooden floor, they opened their bags and started to eat. Jim could not help noticing the unappetizing look of the other boys' lunches. His homemade sausage rolls seemed much more appealing than the plain white bread and margarine sandwiches which, nevertheless, were devoured intently by his mates.

"I bet they're glad we got those bananas," he thought to himself.

No sooner had they finished eating when the unmistakable sound of a steam engine broke through the hiss of the falling rain.

"It's the Puggy. Let's move!" Leery announced.

"Make sure the driver doesn't see us," whispered Bingo, as if the driver would be able to hear him speak above the noise of the engine which, as it drew closer, increased to an almost deafening level.

The old locomotive was wheezing, blowing and reeling from side to side on the uneven track. As the engine passed by, Jim could see the driver peering ahead at the track through a small circular window, a cigarette hanging from his lips. A number of boxcars followed, rattling and clicking over the rails. Next came a series of flat cars, each carrying the iron, steel and machinery of the shipbuilding trade.

"O.K. Now!" shouted Bingo running to catch up with a half-empty flat car. The others ran behind him as he jumped on board.

Leery was next to follow while Jim continued running as he tried to figure out how to board the moving car. Finally, Bingo and Leery had to pull him up over the edge.

"Sit back and enjoy the view," said Bingo, laughing.

"I wonder what the plebs are doing today?" said Leery in a snobbish voice. He was sitting cross-legged on an armchair of wooden boxes, pretending to smoke a cigar.

Jim was more concerned about maintaining his balance as the train rocked erratically from side to side. He noticed that the rain showed no sign of stopping. If anything, the sky seemed to be darkening.

Suddenly Bingo let out a yell. "Look at that! A big rat. Over there. Inside that pipe."

He pointed to a stack of metal tubes piled at the end of the car and, sure enough, in one of them was the unmistakable gleam from a pair of tiny frightened eyes.

"Let's get it!" shouted Leery, grabbing a copper rod. He aimed the rod at the tube and the rat quickly moved further inside. Bingo blocked the other end with a piece of plywood.

"We've got it now," shouted Leery, "I could spear it if I wanted to".

"Why don't you leave it alone," said Jim. "It's not doing any harm".

"Rats spread disease," Leery replied. "Haven't you heard of the bubonic plague?"

"Let the poor thing go," pleaded Jim.

Just then, the train gave a sudden lurch to one side and Bingo momentarily lost his balance, dropping his piece of wood in the process. In an instant, the rat escaped from the end of the tube and took a flying leap off the train. It ended up on the gravel beside the track, somersaulting its way to a gradual halt by the time the last car passed it.

"I hope it doesn't go and infect anyone," said Leery. A sudden blast from the engine's whistle obliterated any reply.

"Help ma Bob!" exclaimed Bingo. "Look where we are now!"

In their preoccupation with the rat, the boys had failed to notice that the train had joined the main line and was moving away from the

city at an alarming rate. There was no doubt that it was moving much too fast for the boys to jump off safely.

"We're in for it now!" Leery said.

"Who knows where we'll end up," lamented Bingo.

Jim sat silently. He not only knew he was surely getting into deep trouble but he was getting very cold and very wet. He looked at the other boys' faces. They were becoming quite black from the sooty smoke belching from the train and he guessed that his would be in the same condition. He also dreaded what his grandmother would think of all of this.

The train continued to gain speed and the boys saw a continual parade of factories and shipyards slowly give way to fields and farms as the train entered the countryside. Despite their concern, Leery and Bingo were now developing a new respect for the Puggy which, until then, they had assumed was restricted to the slow and monotonous labour of the shipyards. It had never occurred to them that it had the freedom to go beyond these constraints.

But their excursion to the countryside was short-lived and eventually the train entered the next town. In the heavy drizzle it seemed even more squalid than the part of the city they had left. With a sharp jerk to one side, the train left the main line and veered down towards the docks.

"As soon as this thing slows down, I'm getting off!" announced Bingo.

"Me too," agreed the others.

However, the train's speed did not decrease substantially until it started to cross a long narrow bridge over an inlet from the main river. The bridge was a simple arrangement of rails spiked to open ties or sleepers supported by vertical wooden piers. Looking down, the boys saw the black oily surface of water about thirty feet below.

Suddenly, the train pulled to a halt but although the engine had reached the other side, the car holding the boys was still only about half way across.

"Let's get off now," suggested Bingo.

"Do you think there's enough room?" asked Jim. "There's only about two feet between us and the edge."

"Listen," said Bingo, "If this thing starts moving again, who knows where we'll end up next!"

He cautiously climbed down on to the railroad ties. "Whoa!" He exclaimed, wobbling precariously near the edge. "This wood's slippery! It's all oily!"

Without warning, the train gave a sudden jerk forward, catching him by the sleeve and sending him flying over the edge. At the same time, Jim and Leery lost their balance, hitting the floor of the car with their rear ends.

"Help! He'll drown!" shouted Leery in a state of panic. "He can't swim!"

As the train slowly gained speed, Jim instinctively pulled off his shoes and took a flying dive from the moving car. The cold wind ruffled his hair and made him catch his breath as he plunged to the water below. A sharp cold pain pierced his head and enveloped his entire body as he made contact with the icy water. Surfacing, his eyes stung and he almost gagged from the oily mess coating the surface.

Jim caught sight of Bingo thrashing around in a state of panic alternately cursing, shouting for help and choking on the foul liquid but at last Jim finally reached him and pulled him towards the shore.

For a while they both lay on the filthy stone bank until a crowd of spectators appeared. Jim knew that Bingo must be in bad shape and was quite relieved when a doctor arrived on the scene. They were both wrapped in blankets and eventually an ambulance appeared with Leery and the engine driver on board.

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Back in Canada, Jim's dad was trying to figure out what time it was as he fumbled down the stairs to answer the telephone which had just shattered a very sound sleep.

"Who the heck is calling at four thirty in the morning?" he muttered to himself.

"It's your Mum," said the voice at the other end. "It's about Jim."

Jim's dad's drowsiness vanished in a sudden surge of panic. "Is he OK?" he blurted.

His mother attempted to explain what had happened but the line was bad and so the only information he was able to comprehend was that Jim was in some trouble with the authorities for playing truant and had got into some other kind of bother. He hung up the phone and grumpily went back to bed, upset that Jim had let him down.

That morning, already late for work, he did not take time to take his usual look at the morning newspaper; instead he bolted down a cup of coffee and drove quickly to the office. On his arrival, Julie, his secretary, greeted him with a smile. "How does it feel to be the father of someone famous?" she asked.

"What are you talking about?" he replied, puzzled.

"Look at this!" she said, placing the morning paper in front of him.

"Canadian teenager saves drowning student in Scotland!" read the headline.

Sure enough, below the headline was a photograph of Jim with Bingo and Leery on either side, Jim's arms around both pals. "Wow! I don't believe it!" Jim's dad muttered out loud.

Later that afternoon he took out the paper to have another look at the picture. "I thought there was something strange here," he thought, looking closely at the newspaper photo. At first he couldn't make out whether Jim was wearing gloves or whether there was something wrong with his hands. Suddenly, it dawned on him that they were not hands at all.

"Well, I'll be darned! Chicken claws!"

He looked again at the photo of his boy. A mischievous face was smiling back at him. Quickly he clicked the intercom key to speak to Julie outside his office... "Hey Julie, could you call the airlines and see if you can get me on a flight to Glasgow!"



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