





Calvin's eyes opened just enough to decipher his alarm clock in the beam of the alley light. Four thirty, bed sheets thoroughly rucked. His eyes closed again to the soft pulse of his electric fan.

Abraham Lincoln was in Calvin's dream now, looking over at Thomas Jefferson and shaking his head. Calvin's pen just wouldn't write—it ripped the paper, poked through holes down into hollows in the desk. Grant chewed his cigar. General Lee shot a sidelong glance at his huge blue ox that glared at Calvin with bloodshot eyes. Grant buckled on his sword, then snatched Calvin's paper away, crumpled it and threw it to the floor. Lee stuck his tongue out at Calvin. Grant stormed out the farmhouse door, slapping clouds of dust from his uniform. Sounds of fighting and moaning came from the front yard. Horribly wounded men came crawling in the door, accusing Calvin with their bloody, torn guts. Angry Paul Bunyan's axe came swinging towards Calvin's legs.

He started awake again. The moaning was coming from the yard. He let up the window shade and blinked into the morning light. A small crowd had gathered under the white-blossomed

apple tree in the backyard of his rooming house. The moans came from a huge Persian cat, tied by its feet to a board so that the landlady and her sister could give it his Sunday-morning bath. They chattered soothingly in Italian to the howling cat and laughed with the passers-by attracted by the spectacle.

Calvin rocked on his bed and contemplated his bookshelf. *Uncle Remus*, *Two Little Savages*, *The Boy Mechanic*. His eyes lit on a copy of *How To Work With Tools and Wood*. He pulled it from the shelf, lay back and opened it at random. The difference between a rip and a crosscut saw. What was he thinking? That might make an interesting fifteen minutes of radio—if it were part of a hand-sawed human sacrifice.

A fifteen-minute script? What was that on paper? One hundred and forty words a minute, so fifteen times that is... twenty-one hundred words? About a minute a page—so fifteen pages. And where was the GAO report? What more was there to do? He dressed as the howling continued. Some of the audience sang a mocking cat's lament to the tune of *O solo mio*. Church bells rang in competition with passing fire engines—the Capitol Cafe would be open soon. How long did writing take? If he gave it ten minutes a page, fifteen pages would be a hundred and fifty minutes. The GAO report came first, but he could at least think about the script as he ate. He snatched a notebook and hurried down the stairs. Passing the grocery on the corner of 18th Street, he peered in the window, wishing he could he just go in and buy some pages of radio script off the shelf.

He opened his notebook beside his bowl of chicken broth and dumplings. He always tried to sit by the window so they would give him a bigger serving to impress passers-by, but this time it seemed to be just extra dishwater. He smeared a grease spot on the paper with the side of his hand. The dreams had to mean something. He pulled back the bandage on his hand,

expecting to see that the gash had been magically healed by the old black man's wonderful jamb 'o the fence tobacco, but the cut was still red and weepy. Captain Valentine hadn't been in his dream, but such dreamlike encounters had to mean something. He stared out the window, across the street at Ford's Theater. *Lincoln was in the dream! Lincoln the rail-splitter, Lincoln, what did he use? An axe? No, wedges and a big mallet.* He shook out his pen and wrote on the top of his page "*With Mallets Towards None.*" That deserved another cup of coffee.

At the next table, a bearded man in a knit watch cap and plaid flannel shirt worked his way into a huge mound of mashed potatoes, his lack of teeth requiring exaggerated chewing motions. The man's watery eyes gleamed with pleasure as he processed each mouthful, and primed his fork with the next load. Calvin looked back at his page and wrote: "*The young man was as tall and angular as a hornbeam tree—the same material from which his unsplittable wedges were carefully crafted.*" He looked up and realized that he could hear the man gumming the mashed potatoes. The man's plate was mounded higher than ever. How could there be more potatoes? Calvin tilted his own empty bowl, made himself smaller and stared at his page, but the *yap, yap, yap* of the mashed potato man gripped him. He folded his notebook, paid the bill and left.

As he approached the old Post Office building he could feel the GAO report just waiting to whack him with a rolling pin for being out so late. Climbing the stairs, the whole idea of a Lincoln the rail-splitter script seemed stupider with every step. Agricultural Engineering had published a half-dozen bulletins scorning split rail zig-zag fences. They wasted land with every zig and zag and weed-filled jamb 'o the fence. Besides, nobody split fence rails anymore. Soft voices came from the machine room. He stepped quietly past the windows, slipped into his own office and eased into his chair.

With scissors worn from too much sharpening, he trimmed the rat-nibbled edges of overlap field trial results on the Deere-Burpee model A-3 spreader and slipped it into the pasteboard box. The GAO audit required everything going back to April 1934. Through the afternoon, he worked backward through his files. In the bottom drawer, he found his original presentation to the Naval Ordnance Bureau in Norfolk on the reduced bore erosion predicted if wood-cased reforestation shells were used as practice rounds in the Navy fourteen-inch gun. He tossed it in the box with the other papers.

That trip to the Navy base with the Commander had been a hell of humiliation. The Captain of the *West Virginia* politely allowed the Commander to make his case, but just as politely refused to allow their “shit-shells” on board his vessel. Calvin and Linda had followed dutifully along behind the Commander, carrying tables showing how to convert the light-weight reforesting shell trajectory into the arc of the standard 1,600 pound armor-piercing shell. The sailors on the battleship hid their smart-ass comments from the Commander and from Linda—their military bearing demanded respect—but Calvin was fair game. During the courtesy tour, even the contractors installing a test-model anti-aircraft gun on the battleship deck made amusing scatological comments for Calvin’s benefit. He tried to ignore them by concentrating on the beautiful sweep of the teak splinter deck, and contemplating that the Bofors gunners, should they ever have to use this new weapon in a last-ditch defense against torpedo planes or dive bombers, would do so with their butts cupped in plain old John Deere iron tractor seats.

Linda knocked at his door. “That’s it for the vouchers. All present and accounted for.” She set a pile of papers beside the box on his desk. “There’s a bunch of the Extension Service bulletins to add to the pile, though.”

Calvin fingered through them. "I think I got 'em all. Already in there. But I want to go through it all one more time."

"Whew!" Linda fell back against the doorjamb. "You should get some sleep so you'll be fresh tomorrow."

Calvin shook his head. "If I'm late tomorrow morning, just add any last-minute stuff to the box. Okay?"

"Okay." Linda rubbed her exhausted face with her hand, her left arm stub moving in sympathetic synchrony. She batted at the rim of the box. "You know, this sort of represents everything we've done together."

"Seems small, doesn't it?"

"Well, it doesn't have your models in there."

"No, and it doesn't have your calculating machine either."

"No, it doesn't." She lowered her voice and settled on her accustomed corner of his desk. "Chief, what's the best we can expect?"

Calvin bit his lip. "Well, at the very least, I'll stay out of jail."

"But once the GAO finds out we're—disconnected, we're bound to get reassigned."

"I'm afraid so."

She shook her head. "We're not leaving Shirley behind."

"Who?"

She waved her hand toward the machine room. "Shirley, we call her Little Shirley, after, you know...Shirley Temple."

He shook his head. "You call who Shirley?"

"The machine! The computation machine. We call her Little Shirley. We're not leaving her behind."

"Linda, that thing weighs a couple of tons!"

"I know, sir! We haven't figured it out yet, but I'm sure we could hide her up in the tower."

Calvin leveled his eyes with hers. "We'll do what we have to do," he said, too tired to argue practicalities. "No one left behind, that's your Marine ethos, isn't it?"

She grinned. "Semper fi, chief."

"Semper fi."

As Linda's receding footsteps echoed in the atrium, Calvin stared out his window at the red lights, slowly, hypnotically blinking at the top of the Washington monument. He stretched, yawned and started back on the GAO questionnaire, inking in the final tentative pencilings. He kept slouching lower in his chair and finally had to stand at his desk to sort the contents of the box. The required vouchers were right on top, followed by the ordinance modifications and fuse diagrams, then equipment test reports and extension bulletins — enough to choke a storm drain.

He slid the box into a safe niche behind his desk to ensure that no janitor would mistake it for trash, dropped back in his chair and closed his eyes. Audit tomorrow afternoon. Before that, he would have to track down Bubby and apologize. Brockwell will sure be happy that he had come up empty. There'd be no chance for an interview now either. After the audit, there would be no more Broadcast Research section.

The gigantic pencil-shaped George Washington blinked slowly at Calvin with two red eyes. Inside the giant pencil, Linda and the girls scurried up the winding staircase pushing a fat Shirley Temple ahead of them. The giant George Washington kicked out ponderously with his black leather riding boots, shaking off the tiny Hessian soldiers pursuing them. Calvin bolted upright, stopping only to snatch a big pinch of fresh typing paper before pounding down the stairs.

Eight o'clock and Calvin had refilled his pen twice. He padded into the kitchen where the water was just beginning to jump into the glass watchtower of Mrs. Costagini's aluminum coffee pot. Starving. Crackers and cheese. He rummaged in her kitchen drawer for a knife. *But they can't logically*

*have tools in a Hessian prison!*

He lay back on the bed, staring at the bookcase. *Boy's Complete Book of Indian Crafts*. Oh my faithful Indian companion! Just in time!

Now he was typing. *Okay to listen to Jack Benny? No listen radio, Kemo-sabe! Write radio!*

He needed the kicker for the end. Anything. *Who turned on that damn radio? Later, and then only for the Charlie McCarthy Show. No more coffee! Lower your standards and keep going!*

To muffle the clack of his little Underwood, he set the typewriter on his bed, turned his chair over on it and tented it with the quilt that still reeked of burned airship. He sat cross-legged on the bed, typing into the night as, over the radio, W.C. Fields traded jibes with Edgar Bergen's wooden puppet.

“Ah, yer father was a gate-leg table,” said Fields.

“If he was,” said smart-ass Charlie McCarthy, “then yer father was under it!”