

# TARGET HUDSON

Imperial Germany  
Strikes New York Harbor

A NOVEL

RICHARD SACKERMAN

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

# TARGET HUDSON

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To my wife Patty, who played Jill to my Jack  
and went up the hill with me.



# 1

## The Docks 7/26/16

**I** DOZED OFF IN POP'S favorite chair by the open window. It was hot and humid, and I was exhausted from my shift at the docks. Summertime in Jersey must be experienced to be appreciated, and I don't mean liked. Think of trying to breathe through a few layers of burlap while your shirt is soaked with sweat and your shorts keep riding up under your breeches, chafing you between the legs. That's July in Jersey City. Nestled between the Hudson and the Hackensack, Newark Bay and the Kearny swamps, we've got more humidity here than Borneo and more mosquitoes than Panama – at least, that's what I imagine. We baked in the sun all last week, too, with a heat that rivaled the Sahara itself. Folks keep to the shade in the daytime and hover about their stoops late into the night. Not saying much, not doing much, just sittin' out front trying not to sweat. I've had a rash for over a month down below and only petroleum jelly gives some relief (I hope to be over that before my girlfriend Molly makes it back from the Poconos). If she gets a look at me scratching, she'd wonder if I picked something up from one of the saloon gals on Grand Street. Well, the truth is, I don't much go to those places, and if I do, I'm with my buddies. I've been through a lot with them and we all steer clear of the harlots these days. Sort of a mutual protection pact, if you will.

Molly showed up on an unusually cool day about a month ago at the Hudson River, when I was caught up with a crew loading a few

tons of wire for the Brits over in Belgium or France. I saw her looking down at the water in frock coat and beret and wondered what it would be like to talk to her. She'd lean on a piling for a few minutes, gazing out at the harbor or Lady Liberty, and then she'd up and move to the next piling or a bench. Her coat was unbuttoned and as she moved, a flash of red would flicker from beneath it. Long, blond curls trailed out from under her hat. This was the last week of June and a nicer day for working hard you couldn't pick. We were hours from finishing, and I had to keep my eye on the bales of wire or I'd cut my hands on the barbs while guiding it. Lenny was up on the derrick and he had a rhythm going that was hard to catch up with if you missed a beat. He'd pick up a load off the dock, swing it slowly landward, and then bring it back to the ship for the stevedores to guide into the hatchway. He said the load gained momentum that way and sped things up. I think he's nuts, but he's got the steam-crane certificate, not me. We were half done loading the pallets and she was still there, staring down into the waves or looking across at Manhattan. By the time we had the 500 rolls aboard she was gone.

Two days later it rained, and she showed up again. She had the same frock coat but a blue peaked cap hiding that explosion of wind-blown curls. There was a shipment of medical supplies to deal with and I was working a hoist with Nick while Lenny attended to huge crates of bully beef and biscuits on his coal-burner. I'd peek over at her occasionally but lost track of her before lunch. "What's a gal doing by herself walking the docks in this weather?" I wondered, but like I said, there was lots to do and I lost sight of her. The wind kept playing tricks, too, and you had to keep an eye on the swaying cargo nets or you'd get whacked. Lenny finished up first and went up to chat with Foreman Schuyler while Nick and I wrestled up our last few bundles of bandages and boxed cotton. Ten minutes later Len was back telling us the boss said shipments were picking up over the next few months and wanted to know if we had any friends looking for work. I remember it rained all day but seemed to stop a minute or two before quitting time. I left my slicker on a nail in the shack, picked up my lunch pail and joined Nick and Lenny for the walk home.

We stopped for a shot and a beer at Sully's, like most Friday nights, and talked about this or that. Nobody mentioned seeing the woman, and I wasn't about to bring it up either, as I thought of her as my personal challenge. John Sullivan himself was behind the bar and after our first round refilled our mugs for free out of the new Pabst tap. "Try this Blue Ribbon and let me know what cha think," he said, sliding the mugs downstream to us. Well, he got three glasses raised in unison and an old Gaelic *Slainte* for his trouble. And a fine beer it was, that lager, and we hoisted a few more after that.

We might order it again next time, too, but more likely we'd be back with our usual Ballantine. Old habits die hard, and the Sullivans had not carried Pabst in all the years I'd been going there. As Newark breweries go, Ballantine's seemed to have the best water-source, and you saw their delivery wagons all over the area. For Pabst to make a comeback in Jersey City they'd have to beat the price at the tavern or beat some heads on the delivery routes. Maybe a little bit of both?

"And why are you suddenly tapping Blue Ribbon in this foine establishment?" asked Lenny. Now, just so you know, Lenny's a six-foot Polack, but could pass for an Irishman with his red hair and green eyes. He always has a ready smile and is good for a laugh. A hard worker at the docks, he often has a few more irons in the fire than I can track. Sometimes it's a team of horses for sale, or a few crates of scotch he picked up and needs to dump cheap. Other times he's collecting for some church function or Saint Theresa's Orphanage. But here he was on his stool at Sullivan's, affecting his Irish brogue. After the first three or four he could pass for County Cork.

"And why would I not?" replied Sully. "When I could pick up a discount from my relations? My new brother-in-law just so happens to be a brewer at their Raymond Boulevard plant." Well, we had heard of this marriage between Mary Sullivan and Tommy something-or-other but knew little of its benevolence on us until now.

"Right, and pour us another one then," chimed Lenny, "and here's to the lovely couple!" Nick then stood up suddenly, raised his glass, and in a fine tenor, began the strains of George M. Cohan's ditty:

*For it was Mary, Mary, plain as any name can be.  
 But with propriety, society will say, Marie.  
 But it was Mary, Mary, long before the fashions came.  
 And there is something there that sounds so fair,  
 It's a grand, old, name!*

• • •

Nicky O'Halleran is a native of Galway, a dark-haired sort who fancies the cards and dice. To look at him, you wouldn't think he could sing like a choir boy, but he sure could carry a tune. He plays a fiddle Saturday nights at the Hibernian Hall on Bergen Avenue, and the snare drum while marching with their Pipe Band. A nicer fellow you couldn't meet, but woe to the sport who tries to scam him. With his five feet height and 140-ish weight, he was quick on his feet and could hold his own in a sparring match. His face did show a few adjustments to his features made when he wasn't quick enough, but that didn't keep him from speaking his mind, or lessen his charm with the ladies. He's lately going on about starting a baseball team with some of us dockers, where we'd get together on weekends over in West Side Park in a league that's started up over there. It was a big deal last year, with a good group of teams formed up already. Up 'til now, the dock bosses wouldn't allow it, but things change. We've heard a lot about it on the job, here at Sully's, or anywhere folks get together to shoot the breeze. Lenny said he made some money on it but he didn't say how. Nick thinks we've got a good shot, as dock work gives you the shoulder muscles to knock the ball far. There's a whole set of rules to it that he's been explaining while we're loading the ships, as if we didn't know them already. We've thrown the ball around a bit and I can even hit it pretty far once in a while.

• • •

I was born in a small town in Westphalia, Prussia, in the Ruhr River Valley. Like my parents, I have the blond hair and blue eyes common



to the region. Mother and Pop brought me through Ellis Island in '96 and together we picked up American quicker than most, what with Pop's job working at the produce market and dealing with the public. He'd educate us at supper with the phrases and local slang he picked up from the folks who stopped by for tomatoes or peaches that day. Pop had an ear for translating the European tongues spoken in our neighborhood with help from hand gestures, a small chalkboard, and his years at the customs house back in Elberfeld. His six days a week at Bengston's Market got him more than just nine dollars a day or a few free potatoes — he'd light his pipe in the parlor after dinner and share the new crop of words, news, or political views he'd learned over the vegetable scales that day. Night after night I'd pick up varied tidbits such as how to greet somebody in Lithuanian or French, the new way Manhattan folks serve green beans, or the scoop on getting favors at Tammany Hall. There were bits of wisdom on how to deal with noisy drunks, snobby ladies, or the clergy, who always sought a discount. Other times when Mother went off to the kitchen, he'd lower his tone, lean over toward me and say something like, "Augie, you won't believe who walked in today when I was choppin' onions," and he'd go on from there about how "This big, brute of a fellow come in and quietly asked me for ten pounds of butter, winked at me, and said he was having his boyfriends over that night." Then there was the time when a well-dressed lady looked him in the eye and whispered, "How about a quick roll out back?" He stood there with his mouth agape, hands covered with grease from chopping meat when, gratefully, in walked Mrs. McAllister from next door, asking, "And how's the Missus today, Herr Landesmann?" Well, that quelled the hussy's urge in a hurry, and out she went without further ado. Yes, I can see now why Pop would keep those cards close to his vest! Mother would have a fit if she heard him telling me those things, and not see the point behind his exposing me to the darker side of folks. Looking back on it, I can see there was always a reason behind the storytelling, sort of a moral lesson to impart to me, his only son.

Taking my eyes out of the beer mug I caught the reflection of Nick

in the mirror, just wrapping up his melody, and nearly tripping over the Sullivans' cat as he approached me. "Damned cat," says he, "folk-s'll think I'm in my cups and me with but five pints under me belt." He draped his arm over me and quietly said, "That gal from the docks I seen ya eyein' this afternoon, what's up with that?" Well, he could have knocked me over, for I was certain I was the only one who noticed her. My shock must have shown, because he patted me on the back and said, "She's all yers, August, I was just wonderin' why you didn't take a smoke break and go have a word with her!" (Nick always called me by my given name, or worse, "Mister Landesmann," despite my younger years and protests. He'd say I looked like a leader and damned if he wouldn't treat me like one).

"She's been by a few times the past couple days," I told him. "I was sort of wondering what must be going on in that head of hers. Could be she's blue about something, or missing someone, or maybe she's thinking of jumping in and ending it all," I took a swig, and continued. "You hear of this sort of thing from time to time on the docks, and I figured, well, if she did something like that with this current, she'd be swept away before any of us even noticed it happening!"

He looked me in the eye and said, "August, yer a nice fellow, smart and all, but ya don't notice much, do ya?"

"Huh?" I replied, not having the foggiest notion where he was headed with this.

He tossed down a shot of Jameson's, belched, and continued with, "Well, in my vast experience with women, having been with a few myself, I've yet to see a gal down in the dumps who was whistlin' and tappin' her foot! Cheesh, August, yer imaginary dark thoughts are cloudin' yer perceptions! Had ya joined the pipers with me a few years back like I asked ya, perhaps the feel o' music would open yer eyes!" *What with all the keening and screeching sounds, the last thing I'd do would be to beat a bass drum in the Pipe Band like he suggested. I did like the uniforms, and thought I'd look impressive in those tartans, knobby knees or not. I told him I'd think about it, but a few years passed since that day!*

Nick always seemed to confuse me with his antics. Was he pulling my leg about her? Or worse, was I too dense to notice such a detail? I began to feel a bit warm around the neck and burst out with, “Tapping her foot? Whistling, too? You’ve got to be kidding, pal! She was blue as can be, staring down into the Hudson on a dreary day. How can anyone be musical on a dark, rainy day?”

He laughed out loud and said, “Maybe ya were right to skip the Pipe Band, August. If ya had but listened to me and picked up those drumsticks I’d a gotcha educated in all sorts of music — not jus’ yer marches and jigs, but yer dirges and requiems, too. Even today’s Ragtime or nee-gro spirituals share some of the basic rhythms and beats. It’s all mathematical — ask yer Pop. A rainy day is perfect for thinkin’ up new tunes, what with the sound of the wind and rain to help guide yer way.”

Two more Blue Ribbons appeared. Sully grabbed off two nickels. Lenny came back from the john just then and said, “Hey, what about me?” Quick as a flash, the barman completed the third transaction, and plopped down a basket of peanuts to boot.

Nick continued, “What yer missin’ about this gal was she was creatin’ music on the spot, with her whistlin’ and toe-tappin’. That can only come from the heart, and a sad-hearted creature don’t see fit to create like that.”

“Come on now, Nicky,” said I, “you were standing right next to me while she was there; no way in hell could you have heard her at all — I sure didn’t!”

“Laddie,” he said to me, putting his brotherly arm on my shoulder again, “neither of us could hear her, that’s for certain. But while you were lookin’ at her legs in an impure way, I was detecting a fast, two-step ditty, judgin’ by her toes. There was a sway in her hips, too, and

I knew when she got to the Finale. God knows what you were thinkin’!”

That was Nick in spades.

## 2

### The Ride: 7/1/16

**T**HE NEXT DAY WAS SATURDAY and a bunch of us normally pick up four or five hours at National Docks loading odds and ends before quitting for the weekend. I got there early and waited at the gate for Lenny and thought about my conversation with Nick about that girl. I wouldn't be seeing Nicky until Monday, as he normally helped his brother Clarence out at their old boardinghouse in Newark on weekends. They'd be re-building the front porch today with a bunch of scrap lumber we got together from some large packing crates. Next week they planned on painting it all to cover up the stenciled lettering on some of the boards or you would see some strange words on them like "10 Ox Tongues" or "Rio de Janeiro" or "High Explosives." You bet; they would have to paint those steps!

Maybe he was right about her, and then again, maybe he wasn't. I decided right then that I'd amble over to the dock-girl the next time she made her appearance at the water's edge. If she were blue as I thought, well, maybe I could cure what's ailing her. But if she was as happy as Nick was suggesting, maybe she could cure what was ailing *me*. I'd been too long moping around, feeling sorry for myself and not getting much fun out of life these days. I couldn't tell you why, either, but I had a feeling this gal could be just what I'd been waiting for. There was something interesting about her and I was going to find out what. I'd put on a clean set of overalls Monday and see if I could have a word with her. It may help if I whistled something on the way

over; one of the Irish tunes would work. I'd have to think about that a bit and make sure I picked one I could handle.

"Where in the heck is Lenny, anyways?" I began to wonder. It wasn't like him to keep me waiting like this, and I was just about to consider going through the gate without him when a motorcar pulled up, Lenny at the wheel, and his pair of Sheltie dogs in the back. They started raising hell, too, when they seen me, because I spoil them every chance I get. I pulled out my ham sandwich and broke off some of the crust for them. Blackie sat on his hind legs and gave me that soulful begging look while Whitey sat perfectly still. They're both mostly brown, by the way. I began feeding them part of my lunch and looked at Len to explain his turning up in this machine.

"It's a Ford," he tells me. "Model T," he added, like I wouldn't know for crying out loud. What I didn't know was what he was doing with one. He'd drive a truck on the job from time to time, but I've only ever seen him outside the docks in his dray wagon. That's how we got the packing crate lumber over to Newark last week, with Lenny's draft team pulling the load. Since he had the dogs with him it didn't quite look like he'd be working the hoist with me today.

"Hop in," he says, "and let me fill you in on events." Well, I'd never had the pleasure, so I ran to the other side and climbed on in. He worked some pedals and turned the wheel a bit and we were off! The dogs sort of tumbled back there in the box but before you knew it they were running around, poking their heads through the stake sides and barking at some of the chaps coming in for their half-shift. I waved over at Dave Hinchcliffe, and he flipped me the one-finger salute we so often share. Most folks would look down on that, but we dockers take it as a compliment.

"Well, you're probably wondering where I got this here Tin-Lizzie," he said, smiling that big oafish grin of his. He had his cap on backwards and was working the gear shift, looking left and right and then going on thru past the trolley tracks on Johnston Ave. It looked like we were speeding up, too, so I held onto the metal bar above the windscreen. "I sort of cut a deal last night," he continued, as he turned

west onto Communipaw Ave. I looked back to make sure we still had both dogs, but they seemed to be unfazed. “Cost me two cases of Black Label, but it’s going to be worth it.”

“What is this all about, Lenny? What Black Label? Why this Ford, this, what do they call ’em, ‘Flivver’?” I closed my eyes for what looked like a sure impact with a mule cart. A blast of the *ah-oogah* horn and a quick dash to the left and by the time I looked, the mule was plodding away untouched.

“Scotch, Augie, the best I could find on such short notice, and it cost me dearly, let me tell you.” He tootled the horn once again at some boys tossing a ball and they both started running after us, but they couldn’t keep up for long. He went on through a large puddle along the curb, splashing a drunk who was out for the count on a bench. “Remember that Jersey cow we acquired from Old Man Dentz a month or two ago, for that load of grain? Well, she’s gone to her maker, she has, and just when I was beginning to like my tea with milk.” That load of grain had come from the docks late one night after the boss left Lenny in charge of the crew. While Mister Schuyler was off for a shot and a beer, Lenny had me drive a wagonload through the gates and park it in a shed a few blocks away, walking the horse back to the dock stables. “No way can they track missing grain,” he had told me, “unless it’s already bagged. But when we’re loading from the hopper car right into the ship’s hold who’s to miss the odd half ton?” He was right about that, too, and we drove the wagon the next day over to Kearny where Gustav Dentz had a dairy farm. Afterwards Len dropped me at home and drove off with a milch-cow tied up in back. Where he kept her, he never said, but for the past month we had fresh milk on the job each day.

He pulled the gearshift as we climbed the hill headed toward the Lincoln Highway and the Hackensack River Bridge. They opened this highway a few years back and it was the quickest way over to the Kearny Freight Yards and from there over to Newark’s Ironbound Section. He poked me in the ribs and said, “Wait ’til you see what this machine can do once we’re out of the busy streets.” About a mile

later we climbed the bridge ramp, and I looked down at the “Hackey.” I always liked seeing the sun glint off the ripples — made me think the eye of God was watching. He honked the horn just for the fun of it and said, “So, let me fill you in, now that we’re free and clear of any obstructables.” He then floored the pedal and off we went over the new road surface. As I held on more tightly and checked the dogs for the fifth time, he explained, “Augie, I got us a sweet deal. We won’t be at the docks much the next couple months, not me, not you, nor Nicky. No sir, not one of us! We’re gonna be switchin’ gears, you might say.” He looked at my skeptical reaction — so typical of me when he starts his planning, and continued, “Just listen, Augie, you’re gonna love this. You know how old man Schuyler has an affection for the hard stuff, but his Missus keeps him tied down at the house? Then, don’t forget his excursions to the tavern where he leaves us to our own devices — we know he ain’t got a gal-pal, right? Well, I hinted I’d be moving some cases of scotch on the sly for my brother and his ears just perked right up. He’d really love to have his own private stash away from her prying eyes, see? He out and asked me what was up with that, so I told him about a shipment of Johnny Walker that got mislaid on a siding in Newark that my brother stumbled upon and, knowing my connections, was relying on me to help distribute.”

“Dang, Lenny, how many cases did he come away with?” This sounded like happy days were coming, and soon!

He looked over at me and replied, “None, actually, that’s why I needed to trade the cow.”

I stared at him, speechless, as we bounced down the ramp onto Kearny Point. He turned off the macadam onto a cobblestone side-road that led to the Kearny Freight Yard, pulled over by the marsh reeds and began to tell me the scoop while the Ford’s engine rattled.

“It’s like this, lad, and I’ll make it brief, ’cause we’re expected in the Yards. You see, I was just sounding the old man out about the booze, figuring if he didn’t bite it wouldn’t matter at all. Once he opened his blue eyes wide, I merely spun a web as soon as I could, knowing it wouldn’t be too hard to lay my hands on some hooch if I

had something to bargain with. The milk cow was the quickest thing I had at the house, and it was down the street to the Red Rose Saloon we went.”

Before I could express my befuddlement, he went on, “Come now, Augie, you know the ‘Rose’ adjoins that butcher shop — Carbonetti’s — what better spot in the whole city to bring her? All I had to do was set up a deal between the two proprietors and be on my way with the goods. I stopped at the Red Rose after Sully’s last night and was out of there in five minutes with a case of Black Label in my hot little hands.”

“Aha!” says I. “Yer one case shy, by the sound of it. How’d you miss that, Lenny?”

“Oh, we’re good, buddy; the going rate is about one case per cow, depending on size, age, type of liquor, and so on, but you wouldn’t know that, not being in the private ‘*Marketing Business*.’ No, we’ve yet to earn the other case, which Mister Schuyler expects next month. Tis not a problem at all, once we get rolling on the deal I was telling you about.”

I nodded in understanding and added, “So, we’ve got to get another cow from Dentz? Do we have to fill the wagon with grain again?” I was beginning to catch on!

“Cow? Grain? What are you going on about, Augie?”

“Well, I just thought...” I stammered. Maybe I wasn’t beginning to catch on after all?

Lenny lit a couple smokes, passed one over to me, and said, “Remember last night I told you shipments were about to increase, and Schuyler was asking did we have any pals looking for work?”

I nodded as I took a deep drag and started to think of a few possibilities. It was picking up lately and we were busy enough already.

“Well,” he continued, “in the big picture, it’s even more complicated than that, not just for our outfit, but for the boys loading artillery shells, too. What with more munitions trains coming into the area to support these spring offensives in France, the rail yards are full up with explosives. They’ve shunted fully loaded trains to the sidings and the backlog just keeps growing. The warehouses on Black Tom



are all full to capacity and now there's that trolley factory up there in the meadows, what is that, North Arlington?"

"Kingsland," I said, having an aunt living there. Nice, quiet place.

"Yea, that's it, up by Rutherford. The Canadian Car factory up there just retooled the foundry to assemble shells and plan to ship over three million a month. Problem for us is they're getting priority access to the Hoboken Docks since a main rail line runs right past them. That's gonna reroute some of the other Hoboken-bound freight through Newark instead, which means even more of a backlog for us. On top of all that, these ships keep coming faster than we can load them!"

I chuckled, dumped ash, and added that our cranes and derricks weren't the best machinery in Jersey either, not like the docks down in Elizabeth.

"You're always going on about the equipment, August, just because you worked 'Lizabethport last summer. Sure, they got one on us for modernization at the water's edge, but the heart of Jersey railroads beats at the Hudson Docks!" To illustrate his point, he tossed his butt at a puddle on the road and missed. A gull dove toward the target and thought better of it.

I followed his missile with my own, hit the puddle, and lamented, "We do what we can with what we've got, Lenny. What more can we do?"

He gave a thumbs-up to my shot and said, "Oh, we'll get better machines soon; you can bet-cher life. Meantime, we'll have plenty of overtime if we want it, and we're looking to hire fifteen or twenty more men. That's where the deal comes in!"

"Ach!" I barked. "And just what is this deal you keep harping on?" Lenny could be tiresome at times.

"I was just getting to the heart of the matter. Gee, Augie, what's with you anyway? Like I was saying, we're looking to hire a new crew to handle the overflow and I get to assign their duties. This puts me in a position to pick and choose should anything special come our way. Now that summer's here, I thought it would be swank to pull some light duty during the hot days and put some extra hours loading in the evenings, when it cools off a little."

His logic was sound, as always, but there were still a lot of unanswered questions. Like, what kind of light duty would ever come down the rails? And what about those cases of scotch? I was just about to open my mouth to speak when he said:

“You’ll see, just as soon as we get in the Yard.”

At that, he put the Flivver in gear and we headed through the gates to the Kearny Point Yards. The dogs came back up to the front stakes and started barking again, at nothing. We made a sharp right turn around a caboose, rumbled over a crossing, pulled up to the northern sidings and I was amazed to see dozens of these Model T Fords! They were lined up on the grounds by the score, alongside two sidings worth of flatcars of two Fords on each, with large wooden crates stowed between them. Some “Ts” were black, some were olive green, and more than a few were camouflaged. Most were ambulances with a large red cross within a white circle. Others had stakes on the sides, some had just flat beds, and there were a few with water or fuel tanks built on them.

“Dang,” I stammered. “Is this the light duty you’re talking about?”

Lenny smiled.

I added, “Does this have to do with the deal?”

He smiled ear-to-ear this time.

“Yup,” he said, his arms opened wide in an all-encompassing gesture. “We’re goin’ in the delivery business.”

# 3

## The Yards: 7/1/16

**W**ITH THAT, LENNY SHUT OFF the engine, hopped out, and began walking toward the Yard Shanty. Before I could even get out of my seat he turned and, in that barroom voice of his, blurted, “Augie, get those dogs out, will ya? I don’t want ’em taking a leak on the floorboards.”

I climbed down, adjusted my cap and pants, and sauntered to the rear of this remarkable machine. I took a moment to admire the pneumatic tires, the dark black wheel spokes and rims, the smooth metal fenders. *Yep, I thought, a marvelous contraption, this Tin Lizzie. Boy, what a ride that was!*

I bent over the rear bed of the T and was about to loosen the chains that held the tailgate up when a cold, wet tongue darted into my ear, and an even colder nose nuzzled my cheek. I jumped back, but not before a Sheltie paw knocked my cap right off my head onto the muddy ground. “Darnit, Blackie, that wasn’t called for!” I whined as I bent to pick it up.

Lenny hollered back, laughing, “Oh, stop your bellyaching and get ’em down.” He shook his head and added, “And that was Whitey, anyways!”

Well, I hate to say it, but all Shelties look alike to me, with their mottled colors and long noses. I swear their snouts are longer than any other breed of dog I know. They just look different, I guess, but it’s kinda weird and takes some getting used to. I dropped the gate and gave both

a hand down to the ground. They rambled off barking while I caught up to Lenny at the door to the shanty, a typical Pennsylvania Railroad structure from the last century. The clapboards were once painted brick red but had faded to a dull, softer tone with the wood grain bleeding through. Of the several windows down the front and sides, a few were missing a couple small panes. These were plugged with boards or oilcloth that complemented the chipped white paint of the sashes and frames. As we strode through the doorway into the darkness within, I noticed a heavy odor of pipe tobacco and heard the loud tick of a clock somewhere. I shot a glance around and was surprised to see Lenny's brother Peter sitting at a table, a pitcher of water in one hand and a glass in the other. He was in the process of pouring a glass for Yard Boss Charlie O'Reilly, who looked up at us and said, "What the hell kept you boys?"

Lenny, who was always quick to reply to most anyone about anything, was unusually respectful of Charlie and merely said, "Well, I had to make a few drop-offs of those samples we talked about last night."

Peter put down the pitcher, slapped his younger brother on the back, and extended his hand to me saying, "Ah, August, but it's good to see you again! Lenny speaks highly of your automotive abilities and we're going to need every good driver we can find!"

My "automotive abilities" being limited to the past half hour as a scared passenger, I was about to reply that there must be some mistake, when Lenny chimed in with, "Oh yeah, Augie is quite the driver indeed — makes the rest of us look like amateurs, he does. Makes deliveries across town for his Pop's market, in fact."

"Well, then," said Boss Charlie, "this calls for a drink." With that, he picked up the pitcher from the desk where Peter had placed it and poured two glasses from a nearby tray. He handed Lenny a tall, clear glass and me a shorter green one and said, "To good friends, good health, and good fortune. *Slainte!*"

I didn't know what was in that jug, but suddenly knew it wasn't water. As I tipped that glass, I had the quick thought that this meeting was going to change my life and, also, a hope that it would change it for the better. Funny how quickly our minds can race within just a

few seconds! At the same time, I also considered that Lenny was lying for a reason and knew it was in my best interests to go along with him. When Lenny “puts the game on,” as he says, it’s best to hop on for the ride and admire it for the thing of beauty it always proves to be. I trust him like my own father, and here he was trusting me in front of Boss Charlie. My final thought before I tasted that liquid was, *If Lenny says I’m a good driver, then I’m a good driver.*

My next thought is not clear to me, even now as I look back on that day and the moment the liquor hit my tongue, for a very hard liquor it was. Nor was it your normal bar-served booze that I’d been swilling for the past few years, but something that either came down from heaven itself or up from “Down Below,” what with the heat it had to it. As I tasted it, my mind exploded with something like “Holy God Almighty!” I do recall that as it went down, I nearly followed it to the floor! I swayed, I buckled, I hung on to the desk, but I kept to my feet after all. It felt cool, and then it felt hot. As it hit my stomach, I thought of shotgun blasts and how they always made me jump. I coughed a bit and tried to get my breath.

The other fellows eyed my reaction to this unexpected detonation and put their empty glasses on the desk. Boss Charlie puffed his pipe, pulled it out of his mouth, and burst out laughing.

“That was some booze,” I whimpered, tears in my eyes.

“Now don’t you worry about it, son,” Peter said. “You’ll get used to it. It burns a bit going down, it does. Haven’t you ever had ‘Shine’ before?”

Charlie refilled their glasses. He motioned to me, but I just put mine down and covered it with my hand. “No,” I managed to say, “but I can see why it’s illegal.”

Peter nodded, picked up his glass, and said, “Yes, and that being illegal is going to make us a ton of greenbacks!” The three of them all smiled at that, picked up their glasses and were about to toast again when Lenny said, “Hold on, fellows. I think Augie’s ready for another belt — better make it a short one.” I could have killed him.

Charlie hit me with about a third this time and I found the courage

to hoist it up to about chest height while I waited the executioner's command. After all, you only live once. Yet, I thought I could buy some time with a question and said, "Just so I know what I'm toasting, would you mind filling me in on just how we're going to be making a ton of greenbacks?"

This seemed like a fair question, resulting in several nods of affirmation that would buy me the time I needed to recover. Unfortunately, it didn't help after all, because Peter raised his glass higher still and said, "To Moonshine!"

Charlie joined him and said, "To Hooch!"

Lenny added, "To White Lightning!"

I raised mine and said, "*Mein Gott!*"

And with that, we drank. I didn't cough this time, but the feeling going down was the same. I was worried if it was going to burn on the way out, too.

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It felt good to get out into the fresh air after that liquid fire. The bright sunshine was a stark contrast to the dim, smoked filled chamber we just left, and the Yards seemed a lot bigger than when we first arrived. We left Boss Charlie at the large blackboard that showed the rolling stock and locomotives at Kearny Point at any given time. Before we left, he pointed at the tracks with a wooden stick and gave us the lowdown on the two sidings full of Model Ts that needed to be off-loaded from the flatcars by Monday night. Lenny assured him we'd take care of it, "*No problemo.*"

As he put down the pointer Charlie said, "Those two trains need to be sent west by Tuesday, as there is a huge backlog of shells up the line that need to be shipped to the docks. Shells have priority over all other freight, so management's big idea was to dump these Fords right here in the Yards and drive 'em right to the ships instead. This works out fine for the new booze delivering business of ours, so no surprises fellers. We can't afford to slip up with the schedule or someone might start snooping around."

“Oh, don’t worry ’bout that, Boss,” said Peter. “We’re on the case.”

Boss Charlie raised his eyebrows at that and said, “You’ll find that Kearny Yards won’t work the same way you guys run the Newark setup. We’re compressed here between the two rivers and don’t have the real estate to shunt trains off when we need to hide ’em. An odd boxcar or two won’t raise any questions, of course.” He yawned, then continued, “That reminds me — I’ve stuck a Lehigh Valley reefer car off on a short siding behind the tool shed. It’s got a red Out-of-Service card on it because of a broken coupling. We can use that to store the hooch once it comes down the line.”

He then dismissed us as he was expecting some freight through shortly and had to evacuate a train held up on the mainline as soon as another was done coaling on a siding. The rail yard is a busy place!

Just as I suspected, glints of Len’s plan were beginning to shine through. Boss Charlie clearly spoke about the new booze delivering business and storing the hooch once it comes down the line. The only unanswered questions were who would be buying it and how much we would sell it for. I was sure Lenny had a list.

We walked toward the first group of Model Ts as I breathed in the fresh meadowlands air. The salt marsh and the Hackensack River have a unique smell that is altogether pleasant. The hot sun hitting the creosote RR ties gives off an odor that reminds me of the wharf. I was about to mention this to Lenny when Peter tapped me on the shoulder and said, “I’m ready to learn if you’re ready to start teachin’, Augie!”

I stared at him, looked at Lenny, then back at Peter and said, “I think I’ll need to familiarize myself with these Fords first — these are sensitive machines, not like the beat-up ol’ truck I’ve been driving for Pop.”

This cracked the two of them up and Lenny chimed, “See, I told you — he’s my pride and joy!”

Peter nodded and respectfully added, “And it’s like he didn’t even miss a beat; I’m impressed!”

I was once again playing catch-up with Lenny’s antics but caught my stride and said, “Ok, so I’m not the only one who doesn’t know

his arse from his elbow when it comes to automobilin', is that right? Well, Len, don't cha think it's about time we get to work?"

"Oh yes, indeedy," he replied, "and if you gents would climb up front here, we'll get started immediately. Augie, you better take her out first because Pete hasn't even had a chance to ride in one yet. Now, you know what to do — you was watching me the whole time up from the docks."

"The whole time from the docks?" I blurted. "I was watching out for dogs, trees, people, wagons, any number of things I was sure you were going to hit! I had no clue what you were up to, and you were driving like the devil himself was after us!"

"Oh, give me a break, lad. It's a cakewalk, really, just sit on down there and let me crank her up. You'll hold on to the wheel with both your mitts, and keep your left foot there, and your right one there. I'll explain how those pedals work a bit later." At that, he stuck my two feet between three pedals sticking up out of the floorboards, hopped out and bent down on the front of the Flivver.

"Now," he said, as he opened the hood cover, "lookee down here at the engine and what I'm about to do. There's a fuel line petcock handle you gotta turn to get gas into the carburettor. It's shut right now, and you just turn it in-line, like this." He turned it, and went on. "It's gravity-fed, so once we get her going she'll get a steady supply of juice, but there can be problems going up steep hills when she's low on gas." At that he shut the hood, flicked a clasp shut, and walked over to me.

"Next," he continued, "push that there lever on the steering wheel all the way up to the top, like that. It's called the 'spark-advance.' You must always have it UP when the engine gets cranked, or it'll kick back and break someone's arm."

I did as he asked. Nothing happened. I was getting a little shaky and said, "Now what?"

Lenny smiled and replied, "We're getting there, we're getting there. Now we gotta give her some throttle. It's on the right side of the wheel and needs to go half-way up to start her. Go ahead, move it up there."



Still nothing happened. My nervousness increased and my hands were gripping the wheel. They were clamped on tight.

Lenny noticed my white knuckles, tapped them with his hand and said, “Lighten up, Augie, the good part’s about to begin. You’ll need to move the handbrake lever backwards like so,” at that he moved a lever on the left side of the front seat and continued with, “that’s gonna put her in neutral, the transmission, that is, so she won’t move forward when I’m up there cranking!”

I nodded in affirmation (it was the least I could do), and said, “She sure runs quiet.”

Peter offered, “That’s because she ain’t running yet, Augie. We didn’t crank her up yet!”

“Well, that’s for certain,” said Lenny. “Fact is, we have to put the key in the coil box first — right here on the dash,” he pointed to the “Magneto-Off-Battery” switch, handed me the key and in a voice worthy of oratory said, “I now present you with the Key to the City!”

I put the key in the designated hole, and nothing happened. I looked at Lenny and he said, “You’ll have to turn it, Augie.”

I did. Nothing happened. Maybe I broke it?

Lenny held up his finger and said, “Ooops, my mistake. Turn it back off. It’s still a bit confusing and here I am trying to teach you two. Allow me.” At that he walked to the front of the car, bent down to the crank handle, turned it a couple times and yelled, “OK, now... turn it to ‘Battery.’”

I did. Something started buzzing in the coil box in front of me. I bent my head down to look when all hell broke loose under the hood. The gas must have caught the spark and the T started vibrating wildly, shaking me up, down, and sideways!

I had a good hold of the wheel and was worried we’d be gliding right over Lenny, but he just got up and came back around to my side of the T, hopped in back and said, “Now we have to trim the spark speed to the proper level. Push in that choke button on the right and now bring the spark advance down slowly until you hear and feel the engine begin to smooth out.” I did as he said and was surprised to

hear the cacophony blending down into the familiar, almost orchestral blend of machinery that I recalled from our ride up from the docks.

“Now all we’ve got to do is figure out where we’re going, bring up the throttle speed, and set the advance-spark lever to half-way — and we’re golden.” As he said this, Lenny handed us each a cigar and said, “And now the hard part.”