

# THRILLING Wonder STORIES

VOL. XLIV, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION WINTER ISSUE

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THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Published quarterly by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1954, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Single copies, 25c; Subscription (12 issues), \$3.50; Add 40c for Canadian, 75c for foreign and Pan-American subscriptions. Re-entered as second-class matter August 28, 1953, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication please include your postal zone number, if any. Winter, 1955 issue. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Illustration by F. K. FREAS



# My Fuzzy Cousin, Reamer

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

**A**LL OF US gawked some; you can't take that out of human nature. But my girl, Mary Ellen's pretty little mouth was sagging like a tired trumpeter's, and in her queenly blue eyes I detected a glassiness that was horrible, let me tell you. It was the glassy look that disturbed me. I nudged her with my elbow and whispered, "Let's don't

be rude, Mary Ellen. Let's don't be rude to my cousin, Reamer."

Reamer was the first Martian that Mary Ellen, or any of us, had ever seen. Half-Martian, really, since his father happened to be my Uncle Frisley, who is a mining engineer on Mars.

We had not seen Uncle Frisley in twenty-five years. When the family

*Blood is thicker than almost anything—*

*even when your relatives come from Mars*

heard about his taking a Martian wife, they had just stopped talking—but not necessarily thinking—about Uncle Frisley. Nobody could have predicted that anything like this would happen. It was simply too awful to contemplate.

When we got the message that we were supposed to meet Reamer at the spaceport, my mother flipped her lid, the way women are privileged to do. She yelped a couple of yips to attract our attention, and then fainted.

When we had revived her, she started screaming again, right in mid-scream, where she had left off. "What *are* we going to do, Arnold? We'll be ruined socially! Imagine a shaggy ape-thing living in the same house with us, calling us aunt and uncle! What will our friends say? We'll have to leave town—to move out of the country. We can't ever live it down. Oh, Ar-r-rnold!" This last in a long-drawn-out banshee wail.

"Now Milly," my father said. "We've got to be civil to him. He's our kinsman. Besides, maybe the boy will take after Frisley."

"Your kin, not mine!" Mother said. "If you think for a minute that *my* family would claim any relationship to a—"

"*Milly!*" said Father, in the ice-water tones of a card shark who has just discovered three aces up his opponent's bib. My mother shut up.

Well, I didn't even want my girl friend, Mary Ellen, to come along with us to the spaceport, but she said she wanted to see a Martian once, and she would promise not to make fun of Reamer.

Mary Ellen worked down at Baccardo's, where I played the slip-horn with Skip Sorrenson's Un-Swedish Six. She was our thrush, and while her head was not much good for thinking, it was a nice, blonde head, and it had a fine set of pipes and a sense of pitch. She could sing, Mary Ellen could.

All too soon, the passengers had disembarked, and the first thing you know, there he was, with his pile of matched *djaga* hide luggage, and making the Martian gesture of friendship by touch-

ing his forehead to my mother's hand.

It was really too bad, but the fact was, Cousin Reamer took after his mother.

IT IS a curious thing, but my mother, I after the first, startled glance, didn't seem to notice that the blond—reddish hair that seemed to completely cover Reamer's huge, angular body was over three inches long—that his cranium sloped back to a perfect point behind, and his arms hung well below his knees. She was really the bravest, kindest person in the world. She said, "We're very happy to have you, Reamer. That's your uncle Arnold there, Reamer, and this is my son, Harvey. Shake hands with Reamer, Harvey."

I shook, and said, "How do you do, Reamer, old boy." It seemed that he fractured every bone in my hand.

And then I went over to Mary Ellen and grated into Mary Ellen's ear. "Come off it, Mary Ellen; you've got to stop that."

"Mind your own business," Mary Ellen said. Later on I learned that all women looked at Reamer like that. I guess he must have been used to it.

We had arrived home, and were climbing out of the autocopter when my dog, Teddie, came running out to meet us. Teddie is a sociable dog. He began to lavish his usual display of affection upon all of us:

Then he seemed to sense Reamer. He turned and gave Reamer the once-over for a long moment, with his glistening, brown eyes. He stood there, nose-testing, with his head low to the ground, and then he howled in sheer terror, and bounded out of sight around the corner of the house. It was the last we saw of Teddie for two days.

Mary Ellen hung around and had dinner with us. She and Reamer got along very well, a perfect case example of beauty and the beast. I took her down to the Club early to get her away from him, and on the way down we had our first serious quarrel. I forgot what the

argument was supposed to have started over, but we both knew what it was really about.

It was two o'clock in the morning when I got home. Everyone else in the house seemed to be asleep, so I had had a quick snack and went quietly up to bed to keep from disturbing anyone.

I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking a lot of crazy, moody thoughts, most of them centering around Reamer. Reamer made me uneasy. I had been prepared to patronize Reamer, to feel sorry for him, but now I wasn't so sure he needed it. There was something about the penetrating blackness of his eyes. Something about the careless grace of his apish body. There were some strange stories told about the Martians. Besides, Reamer was half Terran, and he was certainly no square. I had a premonition that things wouldn't be too peaceful during his visit.

The dogs around the community were howling dismally, as they were to do all night. About two-thirty I got up and put my robe on.

I decided to walk around a bit, since I couldn't sleep.

The hallway light was burning dimly. Coming up the stairs was my kid sister, Minnie. Minnie's eyes were half closed, as she stumbled on the last step and almost dropped the covered tray she carried.

I waited for her. "Where do you think you're going?" I said. "A twelve-year-old girl ought to have been asleep six hours ago. You know you're not allowed to eat in bed."

She gazed at me with bleared, slitted eyes, and said nothing.

"Well."

"It's for cousin Reamer. I'm taking it up to Reamer."

I lifted the napkin. There were several carrots and three pork chops on the tray.

*Raw* pork chops.

"That's a fine thing," I said. "What's the matter with you, Min, have you been walking in your sleep again?"

MINNIE'S lower lip began to quiver ominously. "I'm *not* asleep. He likes them this way. The pork chops, I mean."

"All right, all right," I said. "Don't start yelling." I took the tray out of her hands. "Now run and hop back into bed. You've been having a nightmare."

She didn't move. I balanced the tray on the newel post, and took her by the hand. I took her to her room, tucked her in bed, and shut the door behind me. During all this time she didn't make a sound of protest. I went back, picked up the tray, and started downstairs. Then, I thought I could feel eyes boring into my back; upon impulse I glanced behind me.

I must have jumped a foot. Cousin Reamer's shaggy head was poked around the edge of his door, and his eyes were glittering with a dark, preternatural interest in what was going on.

"What's the matter?" I said, with some irritation.

"Sorry if I startled you," Reamer said. "Having a snack?"

"Well, no. I—that is—yes, I suppose so. I was going to, but I changed my mind."

"Let me have it, then," said Reamer eagerly. "I'm starved. That is, if you don't mind. Say, why not bring it into my room, and we'll both make short work of it."

"Well, I don't know. I—"

But Reamer was already holding the door open for me, looking clownish in his plaid pajamas.

I set the tray down upon his night-table, and he whisked the napkin off quickly. He gave the chops and the carrots a quick look.

"It was dark," I said, trying to explain the raw chops. "I must have . . ."

"Oh, boy!" Reamer said. He picked up a chop by its handle and bit into it. A trace of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, and he wiped it daintily with his napkin.

I figured it was about time for a show-down. I said, "Did you by any chance

order three raw pork chops and five carrots to be brought up to your room by my little sister, Minnie?"

He stared at me. "Of course not. I'll admit I was thinking about it. I woke up a moment ago, ravenously hungry, and—"

"Minnie said you were. But it doesn't explain how she knew."

"So that's it," said Reamer after a moment. "That explains it. I should have been more careful. Have a pork chop, will you?"

"No thanks. Maybe it explains it to you, but it doesn't to me."

He shrugged his shaggy shoulders. "A thing called '*natural empathy*,'" he said.

**N**ATURAL empathy? That's the same thing as thought transmission, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. More of a wish transference, you might say. It's common among the Martian males. It's how we control the females. Within a given radius about any male, the females are obliged to—but I say, haven't you heard of this before?"

"I'd heard some stories," I admitted, "but I don't like the sound of this thing. On Earth, men and women are created free and equal."

Reamer took a bite of chop. He looked slightly amused. "An odd system," he said. "On Mars, the females live expressly for the pleasure and convenience of the males. They are attracted to the males at all times by the empathic aura, and are emotionally drawn to them. They sense the male's incompleteness and strive to give him what he wants."

"The howling dogs?" I said.

"Animals are very sensitive. I must be more careful."

"Hah!" I said.

"I'm really sorry that my thought emanations awakened your sister. Naturally, I had no way of knowing. I will try to control myself after this." He reached for the last chop and then drew back. "Are you sure you won't—?"

"No," I said. He took the chop.

"I don't think you'll like it on Earth, Reamer," I told him. "Of course, you're welcome to stay with us, and we'll try to make your visit pleasant, but—"

Reamer stopped eating, and delicately licked the fur on his forearm with his pink tongue. He said, "But it isn't a visit, you know."

"It isn't?"

"I have come to stay." He dropped his eyes to his coverlet and looked very sad and alone for a minute or so. Then he said, "I had heard that the people of Earth were very tolerant of aliens; that is why I came here. You see, I am an alien on Mars too, and Martians can be very cruel to one who is different. Merely because one's fur happens to be a different color—"

And all of a sudden I felt sorry for Reamer. I had never thought of it that way before. To full-blooded Martians he must appear as freakish as he did to us. And his male empathy would be no special advantage there, where it was so common.

"One other thing," I said. "Do all Martians eat raw—"

"Raw carrots?" said Reamer, picking up one and biting the end off it. "No, I'm afraid it's a rather disgusting habit that I picked up from my father. If it offends you—"

While I was trying to think up an answer to that one, the knock at the door came.

"Now who would that be?" asked Reamer.

I went over and opened the door.

Mother was standing there. She looked sleepy, but resolute. She was carrying a tray. On the tray was the only t-bone steak in the house. It was uncooked.

**M**Y FATHER was a quiet man with peptic ulcers and a conventional belief about homes being castles, and the like. I had never seen such a desperate look on his face as that evening when he called me into his study. He said, "Son, we've got to do something about

it. Things have gone as far as they can go if I keep my sanity."

I knew what he meant, but I wanted to hear him say it.

"Your cousin, Reamer, has usurped this household, lock, stock and inmates. Your mother pays about as much attention to me these days as if I were Teddie there. Minnie, your sister, has gotten to be completely incorrigible. Whenever Reamer is around, I simply can't do a thing with her. She won't mind me.

"And *he* sits around smoking my cigars, and being oh-so-damned civil and polite! Got to give him credit for that, you know. The boy's got proper manners. Learned it from Frisley, I'll warrant, (and look where it got Frisley!). We've got to do something about this confounded business. This 'empathy,' as he calls it, has gone far enough. Yesterday I saw your mother search out my last bottle of medicinal whisky, and—well it's just got to stop, that's all. A good thing I am a moral man, son, or I'd be staying out at nights myself. Yes, and I think I will, by George, if there is ever a night that Reamer doesn't borrow the car."

"I know how you feel," I said. "It's the same way with Mary Ellen, but what can I do?"

"Get him a job."

"Me? But why don't you get him one?"

He snorted. "I'm an architect. The carpenters' and joiners' union would never allow me to hire an alien—especially one who looks like an outsized Barbary ape. But it's different with you. That drummer in the band, for instance, is almost a dead ringer for Reamer. Swing bands cater to odd types like Reamer."

"But what could Reamer do?"

"How the hell should I know."

"Reamer doesn't have much sense of humor," I said, "but I'll see Skip Sorrenson about it."

Skip Sorrenson, who is a right guy all the way through, listened while I told him the whole story. He thought it over.

"We might be able to use him," he said, "if he's willing to stooge, and take a few prattfalls. We might even double him in the band—for novelty—if we can teach him to play some instrument. People will come to see a Martian. It ought to be a great drawing card."

"Thanks," I said. "That's swell, Skip. I'll tell cousin Reamer about it."

And I did. I broke it gently to Reamer that he was going to have to go to work if he wanted to keep eating regularly. I expected him to take it a little hard. I certainly didn't expect it to have the effect on him that it did.

Reamer was tickled to death. He preened himself. He strutted up and down in his blue silk lounging robe, with the Martian ghaza-birds on it.

"I'll do it," he said. "My baritone isn't so bad, if I do say so. Maybe they'd like me to do a number with Mary Ellen. I could learn to blow a trumpet, too. Why this is great!"

He hadn't quite got the idea, but I thought it was better for Skip to fill him in. That Mary Ellen business was a sore spot with me anyway. Mary Ellen was still indulging in an unseasonable coolness toward me, and I knew that Reamer had taken her out a couple of times this week. You put Reamer in a tux, and clip the hair on his face, the way he clipped it now, he wasn't so bad looking, even without this devil's advantage he had of being able to influence female ids. I was beginning to be annoyed with Reamer.

"Come on down tonight," I said. "You'll have to get there by six to work out something with Skip for the first floor show."

**T**HE way it turned out, Reamer insisted on singing, and Skip tried him out. We didn't have a male singer, and it turned out that when Reamer growled it wasn't half as bad as we had expected.

"Sure," whispered Skip to me, kindly, "let him go ahead. I hate to break his

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heart. And if the customers think it's funny a gorilla should be singing, we can always turn it into a comedy act. He might not like that, but we'd have to do it. Okay?"

"It's your show," I said. "Either he makes good, or he gets pie in his face."

I guess you would say that Reamer made good with a vengeance. When he first shuffled out on the stage, a woman at one of the front tables screamed. The house was packed, and we had bally-hoed him as a great artist from Mars, but you could tell they didn't believe it. They thought it was a gag. Until he started to sing.

After a moment of awe-struck silence, a man at a corner table guffawed. His wife slapped him across the face.

That was the only sound that was made. When Reamer finished, they applauded wildly. Reamer bowed and showed his inch-long yellow fangs. He was already becoming quite a ham.

After that night the weeks passed even more drearily for me than before. Mary Ellen had forgotten that first, silly quarrel, but it seemed that every time we spoke to one another we got into some kind of argument about Reamer, so we just stopped seeing each other, except at the club. I had an idea that Reamer was seeing her more often than that, and I had to do something about it. But what?

I was a long time getting the idea. Reamer was becoming well known, but he had still sung only before small night-club audiences. If I could book him on a tour, then he'd have to travel and leave Mary Ellen behind. Also, he wouldn't be underfoot around the house any more.

But it didn't work out that way. Plans hardly ever did for me. Reamer liked the idea well enough, but he said he wouldn't have anybody but me for a manager. I was flattered enough to accept, and the way it finally turned out, we booked the whole gang, Mary Ellen, and Skip Sorrenson's Un-Swedish Six for a six month tour.

I still hadn't got them apart, but we

were so busy after that, there wasn't much time to think about anything but business for a while.

We had leaped, somehow, right into big-time. Our fame spread on ahead of us and it grew in each new town. We drew record crowds, and we added novelty acts to our group until we grew bigger and richer with each mile. We had three copterbuses with our name printed on the sides in gold letters.

Reamer's head swelled so that he would hardly speak to the band members—with the exception of Mary Ellen, who was still hexed, when she had time to think about it, by Reamer.

When Reamer went on the stage, you could hear the women screaming and yelling. It was sickening, but he loved it. He played it up for all he was worth, sending his emphatic aura full strength over the audience, playing them like fish. If it hadn't been for restraining men in the audience—but I'll get to that presently. . . .

When I got around to it, I still had my original problem, and it was growing worse. If I won Mary Ellen back, I'd have to take some really drastic action.

I wasn't mad at cousin Reamer, but I wished I had never set eyes on him. He meant no harm—he never did—but he couldn't stand the sudden flux of prosperity and fame, I suppose. There was a lot of unrest in the band because, as it was with Mary Ellen, so it was with all the other eligible females we happened to run across, and the Un-Swedish Six, after all, were men, with normal male instincts. With Reamer around, the rest of us might as well have been in Timbuktu.

We grumbled among ourselves, and let it ride.

**I**T WAS the fifth of April that we played at the Platt Women's College at Stockwell, Pennsylvania.

It was the biggest audience we had ever had, and likely to be the rowdiest. I had misgivings about that audience from the first. Ten thousand females

without the moderating influence of a single male.

I tried to persuade Reamer to cancel this one, or at least underplay his act here, but he said he didn't have anything to do with his personality. The empathy just worked automatically, and he couldn't help the way it affected women. He was going to give it all he had.

"All right," I said. "Remember that I warned you." It occurred to me that this might be an opportunity to be rid of Reamer once and for all, if things happened the way I thought they would.

I went out and made an investment that I thought might come in handy, and when I got back it was time to go on.

They were howling for Reamer before our introductory number was half finished. The audience was so noisy that it was hard to play. There were catcalls and screams. Rennie Masters, the drummer, got so rattled that he dropped both his sticks, stood up to get them and fell flat on his back when they rolled under his feet.

When Reamer came on, the deafening noise died. Reamer spread it on a bit thick, with all the flourishes and gestures that he had picked up from the cinema stars. But they didn't laugh. You could almost see the thick, cloying magnetism of Reamer, wafted over that hall.

Reamer growled and groaned. He mumbled and crooned. He boiled and simmered. He clutched the mike in his hand and bent like a reed in a stiff wind.

And when he finished they didn't clap. They poured purposefully out into the aisles, a roiling river of maddened females, screaming, clamoring, shoving one another. It was just as I had known it would be. They made for Reamer.

Reamer turned to me; I had come to stand beside him in this climactic moment.

"What's the matter with them?" said Reamer, sounding scared.

"They liked you," I said. "They love you, Reamer."

"Then what are they going to do?"

"What they always do to great stars.

You've become a great star tonight. They're coming to get souvenirs and autographs, Reamer."

"Souvenirs?"

"Your tie. Pieces of your coat and trousers. Your colored vest. Swatches of your fur and small patches of your skin."

"No!" bleated Reamer in horror.

"But you must let them; they're your public. A star belongs to his public."

"I won't do it," Reamer said. "You can't make me. I knew that Earth women were crazy, but you're crazy too, Harvey, if you think I'm going to stand here and let them tear me apart. You've got to get me out of here. You hear me, Harvey?"

THAT was where my plan came in. I had seen this kind of thing happen before. I hated to do what I was about to do, even to Reamer, but it had come to a matter of self-preservation.

"Okay," I said. "Follow me, and make it snappy." We ran toward the wings. I turned and shoved a rather large, blonde young woman, who threatened to block our way, so hard that she fell off the stage. I hated to do it, but I couldn't let her spoil everything.

The side door was closed. It could only be opened from the inside.

"Now, Reamer," I said. I opened the door and gave him a push. Then I slammed it behind him, while I stayed there to fend off the mob as long as possible.

But a thunderous sound was swelling up behind me, *outside* the door. It was even louder than the noise within. For just as I had suspected, while ten thousand women were inside the auditorium, fully half the turn-away crowd had lingered outside the stage door to waylay the escaping quarry if he should come that way. They had played this game before.

Poor Reamer!

I waited in the auditorium for Reamer. Everyone else had gone home. Even Mary Ellen, who didn't know what



had happened, and thought that Reamer had stood her up.

It was very quiet in there, and I had almost begun to doze. Three hours had gone by. Then I saw him—a vague dark shape slinking across the back of the stage.

"Hey, Reamer!" I said. He sprang into the air.

"Oh, it's you," he said, relieved. He came forward and sat down with his legs dangling over the footlights beside me. He was almost naked. Great tufts of fur had been torn out, and he looked inexpressibly weary. His eyes were red, forlorn and hopeless. A stranger would have mistaken him for a very discouraged ape.

"What happened, Reamer?"

He gave me a penetrating look. For a moment I thought that he had guessed that I betrayed him. But apparently not, for he began to tell me all that had befallen him.

After losing his clothing and much of his fur, he said, he had wrenched loose from them and fled down the street. Seeing a high stone wall, he had pulled himself over it. He shook his head sadly. That had been the final straw, the thing which had broken his spirit forever and eternally.

He had landed in the middle of a sorority lawn party.

"Well," I said, "it's too bad, but you've got to expect this sort of thing from now on. You're a celebrity, Reamer, and you belong to the people, like I said. There's nothing we can do about it."

"I won't put up with it," Reamer said. "I'll go away."

"But where can you go unless you go back to Mars? You're too well known on Earth. You're a star, and I'll bet you get your name in *Who's Who*, and the *World Almanac* next year."

"Mars is out," he said. "Father wouldn't have me back anyway. I never told you before, Harvey, but I got into a little trouble up there. I haven't got time to go into detail about it now. No, I've got to find someplace where I can

get away from them all."

"Well," I said, "if you insist, Reamer. Have you got any money?"

"Fifteen dollars," Reamer said. "I lost the rest playing poker with that crowd in Aubon City last night."

"Here," I said, taking the ticket from my pocket that I had bought for this purpose. "Here is air-fare to the West Coast, where you can maybe start over, Reamer. I bought it to go on a vacation, but you can have it and pay me later. I sure hate to see you leave us."

Reamer took it. He said that he was much obliged.

IT WAS a couple of years before I saw Reamer again. At least I *think* I saw him. It was only for a few seconds, you understand, so I couldn't be certain.

I got this letter from Reamer one morning which said,

"Dear Harve,

I'm writing this to let you know I'll be in your town for a one-night stand next Thursday. I'm still in show business. I guess once it gets in your blood there's nothing you can do about it. This time it's the Carney circuit. A real good job, and nobody knows who I am. I'd appreciate it if you didn't tip anybody off that I'm in town, but maybe you could bring Mary Ellen down so that I can see her. I wouldn't want her to know, but I'd like to see her. I thought a lot of her, you know. Sorry I tried to cut you out, but I guess you've made up for lost time.

"Just walk down the midway, Thursday night, for old time's sake, Harve. That's all I ask. I'll see you even if you don't see me. I like this work fine but I get a little lonesome sometimes. How about it?"

Your cousin,  
Reamer."

I could hardly refuse Reamer, and I figured that it wouldn't be too risky to bring Mary Ellen along. After all, we had been married more than ten months.

So we did it. We went down and we bought cotton candy, buttered popcorn, some flat-tasting ice-cream, and hot-dogs. We shot at the Venusian lizard horses on the rack with stopper guns, rode the Rocket, played a dollar pitching

game and the Moon lottery. We had a hell of a time.

But I didn't see anything of Reamer.

Once Mary Ellen noticed me looking, and she asked me what I was trying to find.

"Nothing much," I said.

We had crowded up close to listen to a talented talker. He was yelling it up. ". . . twenty-five cents, one fourth part of a dollah, ladeeze and gentlemen! Come in and see the five-legged pony, see the moon maidens; see the wild *gheks* from Venus. The giant, three hundred pound rats from Saturn. Step right up, you good people! Only two-bits. Hurreh, hurreh, hurreh! See the whiskered woman . . . see the Mercurian wild man . . . hurreh . . . !"

We bought two tickets and went in. We walked along the sawdust aisles, hand in hand. It was pretty dark. They kept it that way so that discerning customers would not become too critical of the marvels.

I was looking at a thing that seemed to be a cross between a giraffe and a musk ox, with an obviously puttied-on human face, when I noticed that Mary Ellen was standing stock-still, and quivering slightly, like a sensitive bird dog come to point.

"What's the matter, Mary Ellen?" I

asked. She was staring at a dark cage over to the left.

She didn't answer, but that far-off glazed look in her eyes was reminiscent. She took a slow step toward the cage, seeing, apparently more than I could see. She took another step. She was close now. Too close.

Something huge and furry flung itself against the bars, growling a low, bestial growl at us, ravening at the intruders. I could not make out the form of it, but it was blue—a brilliant blue, and it was most certainly savage. The blue could have been dye, but the savagery was real enough.

Mary Ellen fell back into my arms, in alarm. I held her there for an instant, with her head buried in my lapel, and I looked over her shoulder at the thing, which had now become quiet. It had its face pressed against the bars—a not unhandsome face. One dark eye was plainly visible. And then—I swear—it happened.

*The eye winked at me!*

I swear it did.

What could I do? I winked back of course, and I nodded and tried to smile. But I got something in my eye just then, damn it. I had to take Mary Ellen and get out of there, into the fresh, cool night air.