

SPORT FOR LADIES

A Grim Little Tale

By STANLEY G. THOMPSON

"It is the first time that ever I heard the breaking of ribs was a sport for ladies." (*As You Like It*: Act I; scene ii.)

CITY newspapers have little time and less space for the small affairs of small persons which concern only themselves. If a police reporter had not been well acquainted with the craving for publicity of a detective friend even the following brief item might never have found space in the *Carrsville Journal*. It occupied but eight lines:

"Ed 'Cockney' Cravens, one of two convicts who escaped from Norton penitentiary last week, was arrested at eight-thirty o'clock last night by Detective Sergeant J. M. Sweeney at the home of Albie Brooks, 234 Ninth Street. He was very drunk, the detective said, and refused to tell what had become of his companion in the escape. He will be returned to the prison tomorrow."

The name of the Cockney's companion was left out of the brief story, and the readers neither noticed nor cared for the omission. If the arrest had any effect on the citizens of Carrsville, it was to make their sleep more peaceful, since they knew an escaped murderer was no longer at large, although Norton was so far from their city that they had not heard of the escape.

THERE was nothing spectacular in the flight of Cockney Cravens and Marshall Stollard from the Norton penitentiary. There never is anything spectacular about hard work, and that was what had effected their get-away. Six months of back-breaking, hand-blistering digging had preceded the night they crawled through the ceiling of their cell to the attic of the cell-house, slid down a pipe, scaled a wall and dashed five hundred yards into a dense thicket on the river bank before the alarm was given.

Two men more different in every way than Stollard and Cravens would be difficult to find. The former was American born. He stood six feet, three, in his bare feet and weighed a trifle over two hundred pounds. In his college days he was captain of the football team, a basketball star and a first-class

pinch hitter, while as a swimmer he won every prize for which he was permitted to compete.

His sobriquet of "Cockney" was one of the few things Cravens had come by honestly. He was an under-sized man, a foot shorter than Stollard, skinny and unhealthy. His few remaining teeth were rotted. For athletics, or any other form of physical exertion, he had the utmost contempt. In manner, too, he was vastly different from the American. The latter was, like most very strong men, soft spoken and courteous, while in speech the Englishman was as wicked and as fierce as he was small in stature.

Each was serving a life sentence for killing a fellow man. Stollard had been sent to the prison after a trial which had attracted considerable attention in the small city where he lived and was known as a rising man in the general contracting "game." He had lost patience with a stock salesman who had visited his office several times, and had pushed the solicitor out of his door. The push was given with considerable force, throwing the salesman to the floor and causing a fracture of the skull which proved fatal. Cravens, who had left the London underworld with the police hot on his trail, was in prison for stabbing a drunken sneak thief in a brawl over a woman in a red light saloon.

These men occupied the same cell in the penitentiary for three years, during which the World War came to an end and the United States adopted prohibition, much to the disgust of the Cockney, though not to his immediate personal discomfort.

The plot to escape originated with Stollard. He would have preferred to have had for a partner any other man in the prison than Cravens, or, most of all, he would have liked to go it alone. But, he felt, escape he must and, as much as he abhorred the man, Cravens must be his partner. A reform wave had swept the State and he knew that parole or pardon within a decade was a remote possibility.

By superiority of mind and body Stollard kept his cellmate at the task of removing particles of stone from the

ceiling of the cell. Often the little man groaned and begged the other to let him rest during the long nights, hating physical labor more than he loved freedom. These requests were granted as often as they were refused, but Stollard's inbred sense of justice prevented his doing all the work from which each would benefit equally.

Stollard lifted the Cockney through the aperture in the ceiling. When they reached the opening in the wall they had made by a drain pipe, the little man trembled and said he could not slide down. Patiently, the American took the little man on his back and slid down with him. The big man also boosted his companion over the wall, and half carried, half dragged him along as he ran toward the river. At the bank the two drew up. Cravens was panting.

"W'y the bloody 'ell 'ave ye come 'ere?" he demanded. "There ain't no rylewy 'ere."

"We want no railroad," whispered the other. "We're going by boat."

Cravens hated water in all its forms. As a means of transportation it appealed to him as little as a beverage or a cleaning fluid. Stollard ordered him to be quiet and to remain concealed in the bushes until he returned, and started away.

"Ditch me 'ere, will ye?" shrieked the little man, but the American interrupted with a command that silenced him.

The former athlete had once been a guest at the Norton Boat Club, and was able to make his way without difficulty to the boat house, not yet open for the summer. He took the best canoe he could find and broke open several lockers. Altogether, he managed to find clothes enough for the two of them, though the costumes were motley enough in make-up. The escaped convict then covered as well as he could evidences of his visit to the club.

Cravens was surprised to see Stollard return. He donned the clothes, still grumbling, but set up a howl of protest when he saw the canoe. He declared he would not ride on a river

three-quarters of a mile wide in such a "bloody fryle Hamericau" boat.

"Ride in it, or make it alone," said the American quickly. The Englishman already had begun to rely on his companion to such an extent that he feared not to obey.

Stollard disposed of the little man in the center of the canoe, threw one paddle into it, seated himself in the rear and pulled out, sticking close to the shore. Later, he decided, he would teach the cockney to handle a paddle. By daylight they had traveled thirty miles, and at dawn they camped, cold and hungry, in a thicket of willow trees where the insects of early Spring made life a burden. Stollard bore these hardships silently, while the other cried to high Heaven against them.

The next night, after a long altercation in which Cravens stormed and swore, while Stollard spoke with calm superiority, the little man undertook to master the art of handling the steering paddle, and did so with moderate success; so that, with Stollard pulling in front with long, clean strokes, the tired fugitives reached a small town ten miles from their camping place by midnight.

Here Stollard gave the Cockney an assignment which suited his tastes and training. He broke into a general store while the American kept watch.

Clothes, food, blankets, cooking implements and hardware useful in a camp were carried to the canoe. Cravens also rifled the cash drawer, taking thirty dollars and a revolver. These he carefully concealed from his companion.

FOR four days the fugitives continued their downstream journey, traveling by night and camping by day in the manner of Huckleberry Finn. Stollard reacted to the outdoor life, his muscles bulging and hardening, and the prison pallor leaving his face. He did most of the paddling and practically all of the camp work. Cravens, whose position at the rear paddle required but little exertion, spent his time in camp lying flat on his back and cursing everything in general.

On the fifth day the fugitives arrived near the city of Carrsville, one hundred and fifty miles from the prison and in another State. Stollard carried the canoe and the supplies several hundred yards inland, because of the numerous boats on the river around the city, and camp was made in an out-of-the-way ravine. After the American had cooked and served breakfast, Cravens became unruly. He demanded that the other consent to his going into the city; for

by this time he had thoroughly accepted Stollard's leadership.

Wearied by his companion's entreating and wishing a few hours alone, Stollard permitted the Cockney to go shortly before noon, exacting a promise that he would return at three o'clock. The American, having been in prison, thought of the prohibition law as strictly enforced and respected, so feared nothing on that score. Otherwise, he would have held Cravens in the camp.

When Stollard awoke from a nap he knew by the sun that it was considerably after three o'clock. Cravens had not returned.

"That dirty rat has gotten himself arrested," he thought. "Now he will lead the police to me."

He began making preparations to flee. First, however, he took from a secret pocket in his undershirt a small sack he had concealed from his dishonest companion. It contained a number of coins and bills—eighteen dollars and seventy cents in all. He had counted it so often that he knew every piece by its individual marks. This was his prison treasure, the result of many a surreptitious trade with fellow-prisoners to whom he gave his allotment of tobacco and other luxuries.

The arrest of Cravens, Stollard decided, meant that he must give up his scheme to proceed down the river to its mouth, now only fifty miles away, and then down the Father of Waters, to the ocean, escaping observation by extreme caution. He had expected to arrive at the ocean before the fall days became too cool for canoeing. Then to some foreign land—

"Hi," a voice broke in on his thoughts. "So ye've been 'oldin' out on yer old pal, 'ave ye!"

The leering face of Cravens peeped from behind a tree. The cockney obviously was under the influence of liquor, as he hove into sight, snarling at the other.

"Glad you're back," said Stollard, quietly. "Now, we'll get ready to break camp."

"Bryke camp, 'ell! There'll be no bryking camp this night for we. Me jyne's wytin' for me now, an' ye'll git me that money for more o' this."

Cravens flourished a bottle of moonshine, two-thirds empty. "An' bloody vilc stuff it is. Blarst them thievin' temperance—"

The cockney finished with a string of oaths.

"Give me that." Stollard rose quickly, seized the bottle and threw it to the ground where it was dashed to pieces on a rock. Cravens was wild.

"Ye blasted, bloody _____," he roared and, made bold by alcohol, rushed at Stollard, swinging his fists. The American thrust out one hand and pushed him back. Cravens lost his balance and fell to the ground.

"Now see here," said Stollard. "You go over to that tree and sit down while I make a fire. We're going to have a little chow and move on. I'll break camp while the food's cooking."

With the air of a whipped dog, Cravens obeyed.

Stollard busied himself gathering sticks with which to start a fire. Cravens noticed that his back was turned. At the Englishman's side lay one of the canoe paddles. Silently he rose. He picked up the paddle.

The big man whistled as he worked, while the cockney slipped nearer. Rising to his full height, Cravens swung and brought the paddle against the other's head, flat side front, with all the force in his little wiry body. Had he struck with the edge it might have been a death blow.

Stollard fell forward. He was momentarily stunned, but his great vitality brought him to his feet again, his head throbbing as if it would burst.

"You damned little cur!" he shouted, and seized Cravens. In the heat of his suffering, he struck the cockney several times in the face, drawing blood, and pommeled him in the sides unmercifully before he regained his composure.

The cockney's resistance was futile, and he cried for mercy. Stollard flung him to the ground.

"You dirty little cur!" he said. "Another trick like that, and I'll break every rib in your miserable little body."

Suffering less now, Stollard turned to his work, while the Englishman crawled to the tree and lay in misery, groaning and rubbing his wounds.

The American was rather ashamed of his anger. "He's a miserable little rat," was the trend of his thought. "and I'll get rid of him soon, but I shouldn't have hurt him so much. Of course, one like him couldn't be expected to know what fair fighting means."

These thoughts prompted Stollard to step ten yards away to where the supplies were concealed under the overturned canoe. He would open a jar of sliced bacon and have a real feast, just to show the other he held no animosity against him.

Cravens saw his companion move away, and took from its place of concealment the revolver he had taken

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from the general store. It contained but one cartridge.

Stollard got the bacon and returned to the fire he had started without looking directly at the Cockney. His back again was turned. Slowly Cravens rose and took deliberate aim.

Simultaneously with the report Stollard's body fell, dying, into the fire, extinguishing it and scattering embers. A thin stream of blood flowed from the wound in his temple.

Cravens paused to make certain he was dead. Then he walked to the body and turned it over on its back. It was the work of a few seconds to remove the sack of money from the lifeless man's pocket.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" snarled Cravens into the lifeless face. "Not with this ye won't," looking fondly at the pistol. Then he gave the weapon a final fling into the bushes.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" he repeated, as he prepared to leave the ravine which Stollard had selected for a camping place because it was evidently so far from the beaten paths of man.

"Bryke me ribs, will ye?" again repeated this man, who never had heard of Shakespeare. "I'll have ye know that for me the bryking of ribs is a sport for ladies." And, with a final kick to the body of his erstwhile leader, he went back to the city, where Alma Brooks and Detective Sergeant Sweeney were waiting for him.

The proprietor of a village store was sitting with the loafers who had formed a circle around the stove. His sole assistant was a youngster who had lately drifted in from parts unknown. A woman entered and asked for a pound of cheese. She would not allow the assistant to wait on her but insisted on having the proprietor. The lad must have been trained in some city office, for to this demand he made firm reply.

"Can't disturb him now. He's in conference."

A man arrested for murder bribed a simple member of the jury with a hundred dollars to insist on a verdict of manslaughter. The jury were out a long time, and at last came in with the desired verdict. Afterward the prisoner had an opportunity of seeing the simple juror, and said: "I'm obliged to you, my friend. Did you have a hard time?"

"Yes," replied the man. "A deuce of a time. The other eleven wanted to acquit you."

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