



SUBMITTED BY MARIO SPAGNA

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Approx. 4900
Words

H E R O

By

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WHEREIN THE WIRELESS OPERATOR OF THE LUMBER MONARCH
WAITS IN VAIN FOR HEROSHIP, BUT EARNS HIS BADGE OF
MANHOOD.....

DANIEL NORTON, young telegrapher,

longed to be a hero, chiefly because Helen Noble, sixteen and pretty,
had enviously declared: "I think the TITANIC'S wireless operators're
the outstanding heroes; also the CARPATHIA'S operator who picked up
the S O S."

"Wonder if SHE thinks so," Daniel wondered, studying the newspaper
picture of a prominent society woman, survivor of the ill-fated Trans-
Atlantic liner.

"She ought to worship them," Helen intoned sweetly out of her
pretty oval face. "Really, she owes her life to them."

"After the excitement's over, people forget."

"I think the survivors'll always remember the TITANIC'S and
CARPATHIA'S operators. I would," Helen nodded sincerely. "WONDERFUL
to be a hero like them."

"Next week I take my license examination," Daniel proudly informed.
"Maybe I'll get a chance ~~to~~ save YOUR life. Then you'll belong to
me," he dared laughingly. Helen's large promising smile stirred the
lad's yearning soul.

Since the TITANIC'S sinking, Helen showed intense interest in wire-
less telegraphy. "I'll teach you the code," Daniel offered. "You can
have my receiving set and listen to the ships."

"Fascinating!" Helen sighed, filling Daniel's heart with secret hope.

When he held Helen's soft white hand instructing her to handle the key, and her golden hair brushed his face, a flood of ecstasy swept his tall, adolescent frame.

Daniel Norton was a shy youngster with "crazy" ideas.....said he could talk to Portland and Los Angeles through the air, like Marconi. His world revolved around wireless, and the daughter of John Noble who lived in the magnificent corner brick house. He loved the girl secretly. Passionately!

The boy declined Mr. Noble's offer to learn a trade in his foundry. Daniel had BIG ideas. Helen's magic words: "WONDERFUL to be a hero....." had stuck in his heart.

When Daniel received his wireless license, he walked almost pompously up the street with a boundless pride. "Goim' out on the HARVARD," he told Helen, intoning newly gained prestige. "Call letters W R H. "

"Wonderful, Dan," Helen sighed, offering her hand. "Congratulations! I'll be listening for you." Her large expressive eyes swept the youth's lanky frame an idolizing moment, filling Daniel with a tentative sense of heroship.

AT EIGHTEEN, Daniel became chief operator, coastwise. Later, his ships reached Latin-America. The Orient. He held interminable vigil for the cherished S O S that promised fame. When he bent to his key, he hoped Helen Noble was listening in 'Frisco. He handled it masterfully, his soul and exuberant vitality impregnated into each dot and dash, fast and snappy -- an artist of the airways!

"Heard you the other side of Honolulu," Helen said when he came in. "I can tell your hand any place. It's so distinctive!"

"You flatterer," Daniel beamed, and in imagery, he folded the girl in

his arms. Distinctive! A word he'd never forget, nor the voice that uttered it.

A newspaper mention that Daniel broke the Trans-Pacific distance record brought him new prestige. When he strode up the street, people gazed at him enviously. Neighbors predicted that some day, Norton's boy would save a ship and become rich.

Each time Daniel came in, Helen seemed to grow more beautiful. A subtle perfume she now used drove him wild! Her stunning dresses and elegant silk blouses glorified her young breasts that seemed to have suddenly taken on full, upstanding form. Helen had burst through bud-hood into the full bloom of lovely maidenhood.

When Daniel purposefully added an audion tube to Helen's apparatus, he trebled her receptive distance. He wanted her to follow him all over the Pacific. While installing the tube, several rivals 'phoned. Somebody was always trying to "date" Helen. A hundred times he resolved to speak his heart before someone else would..... But remembering he was earning but forty-five dollars monthly deterred him. She was Helen -- of the rich Nobles.

"Stand close by, Sparks," Captain Thompson advised during a howling typhoon in the yellow sea. "If another propeller blade snaps, we'll be in a fix. Here's our position, just in case....."

Daniel sat impatiently at the key like a wild colt champing at the bit. But the blades held fast, and disappointment filled his anxious heart. For the third time, his chance had almost come.

DANIEL LONGED TO work a land station, for shipboard, only a few messages were handled. He oared to fill the air with the mastery of his hand. He had class going to waste. Take the operator

at KPX, a fist like a cripple. Those at KPA slow and sluggish. He belonged first class now, like Shaw and Baxter down in 'Frisco (KPH). And shore operators drew around \$125 per. With that, he could face Helen with confidence.

When the Pacific Coast strike came on, Daniel walked off the MONGOLIA. Broke and dejected for months in 'Frisco, Daniel tried to avoid Helen, and it almost broke his young heart. When the walkout ended, Daniel received a punitive assignment: the LUMBER MONARCH. Months since he'd seen Helen, because the lumber carrier, plying between Astoria and San Pedro, passed 'Frisco by. But Helen's letters were jewels, reposing for days in his coat pocket -- against his heart.

"You fellows lost the strike," the chief engineer reproved Daniel, "because you're only a pack o' kids."

"Operators're only in for the travel anyway," first assistant McCarthy added. "Conceited smart-Alecks most of 'em," he snickered, "lazy lollipops without guts."

"Waitin' to become heroes," Chief Fox intoned disdainfully. "Damn little ever printed about us down in the grease and stink and....."

The engineroom was on Daniel, the interminable friction between the black-gang and the deckmen. Just a kid, nineteen, in love with a girl he saw only in vision now. Shipboard life became an alien, unresponsive world, and Daniel suffered miserable moments of loneliness and bitter futility.

"Don't let 'em hound you Sparks," Captain Roberts reproached. "They're always pickin' on the wireless operator. Courage is the badge of manhood, boy. Remember that. Why don't you get that Irish first assistant on the dock and bowl him over? You're big enough."

The skipper's way was impelling, but Daniel remembered too vividly the

time he had stood up for his "rights" on the SIBERIA. When Helen saw his ugly discolored eye and mutilated cheek, she had laughed aloud; in fun of course, but the laugh hurt more than his torn flesh. It was rumored the LUMBER MONARCH might tow logs to 'Frisco. Helen wouldn't have another chance to laugh, Daniel vowed. . . . Let the black-gang gibe. Words didn't matter. Besides, Daniel abhorred the way seamen fought..... the bosun crashed on his head with a bottle last trip. Conway, the oiler, floored in blood, his face ground by a heel. Gory demons!

"FUNNY THE WAY the Old Man takes to that kid," Chief Fox grumbled.

"Don't savy," McCarthy, the first assistant shrugged. "Damn pest. Always crying for juice. Had to start the port generator five times last night."

"Other operators never gave us such bother," the chief said petulently.

To furnish wireless power, the engineers had to start a special generator, a troublesome unit. Ever reaching out in relay work in order to spread his "distinctive" hand across the airways, Daniel made unprecedented demands for engineroom service, unwittingly incurring the displeasure of the black-gang.

Though repeatedly reproaching his operator for tolerating the engineers' cutting gibes, Captain Roberts favored the lad. He saw Daniel growing out of adolescence. His slim form was thickening, with new power growing into his frame. Daniel had bent every arm on the ship except the big bully first assistant's. Finally, even McCarthy's brawny arm went down on the after hatch.

"Atta-boy!" the skipper jubilated, slapping Daniel proudly.

"The kid's strong," McCarthy allowed. "God gave him bull strength."

If he only had the guts to go with it," the garrulous engineer concluded. Belittling laughter arose from the small cluster of seamen.

Daniel smiled, a tolerant smile that faded quickly when he saw Captain Roberts slowly shake his head disgustedly, walking abruptly away in a significant manner that left Daniel coldly isolated and sore with a wounded pride.

"The mill superintendent's daughter comes aboard pretty often lately," the chief observed. "What's up Sparks?"

"The dame's got a crush on 'im," McCarthy came in, "but Sparks is too slow to catch on. What a lousy lover he'd make."

"Sure!" Fox tossed his head. "He's dumb, or else dead. Good looks an' young strength goin' to waste. Hell....."

"No guts," McCarthy forever reiterated. "Wait 'til the girl finds out he's a lollipop. What dame'd give a dime for a guy without spunk. See the way the third put 'im in his place, chief? I'd sooner hit a baby."

Helen wouldn't like this talk, Daniel brooded. Part of him leaped at McCarthy with avenging fury, but a greater part held him back, clutched in a helpless inferiority complex.

Eight months since the operator had seen Helen Noble. But she was still listening, sometimes into the wee morning hours, she wrote. Her letters were his greatest joy, a hundred times re-read. Neighborhood gossip. School. When was his ship stopping in? Wireless lore. ...

The portraits of Daniel's idols on the wireless-room wall seemed to beam down mockingly now. Biens of the REPUBLIC. Phillips of the TITANIC. Irwin of the AMERICA..... Heroes! And he was unheroic; yet to send, or usher in an S O S out of the skies. Worse! The black-gang was forever on him. McCarthy dubbed him yellow, and he took it like a lollipop alright.....a painful humiliation before the captain.

Captain Robert's exhorting "Courage is the badge of manhood," and

Helem's immortal "Wonderful to be a hero!" were interminable echoes ringing in his live young memory.

Helem's last letter brought a snap-shot of her cuddling a baby. Helem had become a God-mother. Daniel kissed the picture with great tenderness and placed it beneath the glass of his framed wireless license, lovingly enshrined amid the portraits of his idols. His eyes moistened because of a yearning fit to tear his heart out. Some day.....

SATURDAY, just in from 'Pedro, KPC's (Astoria) chief asked Daniel if he'd work a night shift. Visioning Helem down in 'Frisco listening in as his "distinctive" hand crashed across the air with POWER, stirred Daniel's spirit with wild anticipation. "Operator down with Flu," Daniel informed Captain Roberts. "Tonight, I'll get my first shore chance," he exulted.

"Do the ex-strikers know you frequent the station?"

"Yes. They're sore at me -- say I shouldn't associate with scabs."

"Don't like to see you get mixed up in this trouble," the Old Man nodded. "Ain't you courting danger goin' up there at night?"

Daniel shrugged indifferently. "They shouldn't intimidate me. The strike's been settled long ago. This might be the only chance I'll ever get at a night shore shift. Gosh! cap," Daniel's eyes flashed with secret anticipation, "there's a heck of a thrill loadin' the air with POWER! I feel like you would if you were suddenly put in command of the MANCHURIA."

The skipper beamed appreciatively. "Has this mess been the outcome of the strike?"

"Since the strike ended eight months ago, the feud's been growing worse. Hard losers against hot-headed scabs. KPC's former chief, Kestler,

is telegraphing in town for the company having wire connections to the station. Boswell, the scab chief, a high-strung fellow, is causing most of the bad blood."

Captain Roberts stood gazing thoughtfully across the Columbia River through the wireless-room door. "Been any outbreaks?"

"They're headin' for some. When Boswell gets Kestler on the Morse wire, they exchange 'you-dirty-so-and-so's'. Kestler usually out-sarcasms the other, and Boswell, fighting mad, shoots the transmitters' 50,000 watts into the telegraph line."

"Wouldn't that kill a man?"

"Probably, if he got it full-strength. I cautioned Boswell last trip. The hot-headed fool said he didn't give a damn. Kestler warns over the wire: 'you'll pay for this, you scab....'"

The skipper nodded gravely. "Sounds bad, Sparks. Better play safe an' keep away."

"Not likely they'd pull anything on Saturday night," Daniel opined calmly. "Besides, carnival's in town tonight."

"How many you suppose are in the gang?"

"One night last month, Kestler's crowd crashed the station's windows. By the way the rocks fell, Boswell estimated about six, Kestler and some longshore union sympathizers. The windows're heavily shuttered now."

"Better take a gun from the armory, just in case."

"Oh, I'm not afraid."

"You've got some spunk at that," the skipper conceded nicely. "You ought to use some of it on the black-gang, 'specially McCarthy. Courage is the measure of manhood," he reminded subtly.

AT DUSK, inhaling deep draughts of the breeze off the Columbia, Daniel headed across Astoria for KPC. The secret,

subduing charm of the scented Oregon woods invaded him. He climbed briskly up the one mile forest trail leading to the hill-top station, whistling the boundless ecstasy of his new young spirit.

"You got a chance to show your mettle tonight," Boswell said. "The YOKCHAMA MARU and the MINNESOTA're trying to contact KPA (Seattle). The YOKOHAMA has a batch of fifteen. Beat KPA to 'em. Receipts have been lousy lately."

"How about right-o'-way?"

"On thru business, it's a free-for-all. Lots o' business out there tonight. Big night both ways. Here's a pile."

Daniel joyously fingered the sheaf of radiograms.

"Some Japs on the other side of Honolulu have been calling KPA," Boswell informed. "You ought to contact 'em around two." Lighting a small kerosene lamp used by the night shift to light the forest trail, he added: "Kestler's gang is getting ugly again. I gave Kestler the works over the wire today. If anyone starts anything, let 'em have it. The gun's in that drawer."

Daniel felt a vague, uncomfortable flutter at Boswell's parting injunction, but it was quickly submerged by his wild anticipation of the fortunes of the night.

KPC, PICTURESQUELY situated on a barren hilltop surrounded by a pine forest, commanded a wide, magnificent view of the Columbia River and the open sea. It was a typical pioneer station, a crudely constructed two-room structure, twelve by fourteen feet, flanked by two high wooden masts.

Daniel gazed awesomely at the massive transmitter equipment as if beholding a machine of supernatural power. The air was alive with

stuttering sound. Shipboard, one was denied this treat possible only with high elevation.

The YOKOHAMA MARU called KPA, and young Norton leaped quickly to the key, liberating a flood of crackling sound, a resonant musical tone that stirred him with insane joy. He was a master, reaching out across the Pacific with 50,000 watts, impetuous, matching his wits and snatching the business.

Coastal stations vied in vain with this mysterious demon of the airways robbing them of revenue. Daniel's capacity to conquer heavy interference was phenomenal, singling out a particular ship's monotone out of the ethereal chaos for a revenue tally.

"BK!" (Keep out) coastal stations thundered in the vernacular of the game, but Daniel imposed his will, ploughing across the skies to intoxicating triumphs.

Sarcastic words with KPA. He flung insolence to KPH down 'Frisco way. "BK!" they protested sharply across the skies, but Daniel pressed on relentlessly, unmindful of a possible rebuke from company headquarters for unethical conduct.

"To hell with 'em. No guts, eh?" he soliloquized with a glorious feeling. The black-gang's words were sore in his breast. Down went the switch, his key tapped solicitously, garnering two more from the LURLINE right out of KPH's reach. Intermittently, he laughed aloud. Swell!

On through the night, Daniel worked prodigiously, daring, crowding, beating the coastal stations to the maritime business. With each start of the transmitter, he felt tremendously potential, drunk with unguessed power. There were ego-mad moments when he felt as if God had put the harnessed power of the world at his command, his key unlocking pent lightning and flinging it to the far reaches of the earth in authoritative dots and dashes.

To enjoy the fullest measure of sound, Daniel opened the transmission-room door. Plunging the room into darkness, he was away, plaintively calling a string of ships. The crashing charges of electrical energy vaulting the droming rotary spark gap rose deafeningly, each signal lighting the room with realistic blue-white lightning. Bathed in the fluctuating light of dazzling flashes, with the ozone scent deep in his nostrils, young Norton lived in fantasy -- custodian of all hell's fury and fire. A wild young earth-God rocking the heavens, with the world at his feet. Was Helen listening to the hand of "distinction".....?

COASTWISE TRAFFIC was waning. With midnight, deep water ships came in, plaintive melodious tones, thin and elusive, like whispered dialogues of some unearthly region -- the haunting voice of distance.

For three hours Daniel lived on great heights, a full-fledged Marconi shore operator who raided the air and dominated the Pacific. Class AAA! There were interludes when he dialed sensitively for a cherished SOS. Potentially, the stage was set, what with the raging storm above Seattle, and the gale off the south coast. Swell to be mentioned in the papers, with a picture. The neighborhood would buzz about the "crazy" kid who made the grade. And Helen would.....

The YOKOHAMA MARU jerked him out of his extravagant dreams. He answered, but her signals quickly faded as if the liner were falling off the earth. Intermittently, Daniel called a string of ships, a passionate repetition impelled more by great love than by the business of the moment.....a dedication to a girl down 'Frisco way, each dot and dash rounded out with the spirit of an inspired artist.

At one, a few messages still awaited transmission. Daniel relaxed

in his swivel chair, sensitive and vigilant, his heart praying for an S O S that promised glory. When an annoying drowsiness overcame him, he stepped outside for a brace of air.

Whimsically, Daniel turned off the light and emerged into the starless night. He had never faced such cold and absolute silence. It seemed as if someone had sealed his ears which all night had been attuned to the noisy air lanes. Suddenly oppressed by a feeling of strange loneliness, he returned to his headphones.

Tuning delicately, Daniel ushered in two faint signals of exotic beauty, strange undecipherable mosquito-like monotones, intriguing murmurs of some far-off region. They began fading, and Daniel restrained his breathing to hold them. Were these the voices of Mars? Venus? he wondered, they were that extraordinarily different and beautiful.

They swelled back in, more bewitching than ever. In the lull that fell over the Pacific, they purred so sweetly that Daniel cursed the intermittent static that marred their treble splendor. He was determined to decipher the mysterious signals. Haunched over the table, still and in deep, breathless concentration, the lone operator felt the shack definitely move against his chest.

SAVE HIS EYES that shifted startingly in their sockets, Daniel Norton couldn't move a muscle. His heart pounded. The haunting monotones faded out completely, and the Pacific became a moment dreadfully dead. In the ominous silence, a brutal sense of isolation seized Daniel. Craving sound, he unleashed the station's crackling power in a prolonged plaintive ship-call, the crashing noise temporarily calming his frightened soul.

No ship answered. A garrulous Jap called the TENYO. During a long weird hush, the two mystifying mosquito tones swelled back in. Engaged

awoke in breathless concentration, Daniel felt the shack move again, turning him deathly pale. Breathless, teeth tight-clenched, he slid the headphones from his ears. As his hands lowered slowly, the structure shook again, followed by a dull thud. Daniel's hands remained suspended in the air as if frozen there. Goose-flesh alternated with panic perspiration, his young heart pounding audibly in his temples.

He conjectured an earthquake. A rodent. Had the wind come up? A loose wire swaying against the house? Came a third shake. Another thud, this time followed by a queer scraping against the rear transmission-room wall, outside. The stealthy sounds struck Daniel with a sudden realization that he was trapped in the vindictive clutches of a feudal gang.

Before leaving, Boswell had boasted: "I gave Kestler the works on the wire again today." And Kestler's crowd had hinted they'd blow up the shack. Dynamite!..... They were preparing the blow-up. Daniel's conclusions were logical -- terrifying!

The lone operator futilely resisted a premonition of impending doom. Each faint thud and scraping sound grew more menacing. Trembling, he racked his frantic brain for a quick course of action. He'd better step outside and shout out it was he, Norton, and not Boswell or his men. But folly. Kestler's gang had warned him about associating with scabs.

Analyzing the stealthy sounds followed by cautious interludes of silence, Daniel deduced the plotters were working at the rear of the shack. He'd run for it. Folly to stay and die like a trapped dog. But impelling echoes modified his will: No guts.....Yellow..... Courage is the badge of manhood.....Lollipop..... No dame likes a guy without spunk..... Then Helen leaned into his vision. By God, he'd shoot it out!

The revolver felt authoritative in his nervous hand, but suppose someone

was guarding the door? Only a fool would get sentimental against such odds. The moment he'd flash his electric torch, he'd be an easy target. He didn't want to be a DEAD hero.

Young Norton suddenly thought that the plotters wouldn't notice it if he turned off the lights because the windows were tightly shuttered. He could then spring for the forest, fifty yards away.

Reaching for the switch, Daniel glimpsed a long electric cord attached to a globe. Hesitant a moment, but with pulsing courage, he took a piece of scrap cardboard and, using pins and rubber bands, shaped it into a cornucopia, through which he passed the electric cord, improvising a crude light deflector.

Though awkward and fumbling in nervous haste, his pen-knife scraped the wire ends quickly, so rigging the contraption as to permit turning on the light, yet be a safe distance from it, thus getting the drop on the plotters. Connecting one wire to the pistol's trigger guard, he carefully held the other, crudely insulated, loosely in his hand. He plugged the leads into a wall socket, extinguished the lights, then cautiously opened the door, praying for silent hinges.

TENSE, LOW-CROUCHED, Daniel moved slowly, drawing the cord behind him, dreading a shock from the crude, cumbersome affair. In the sensitive black silence, he listened for human whispers. The thud sounded so menacing outside. A new sound, like a furtive foot-step, left him panic-stricken. He had progressed a few yards when a terrifying sense of futility seized him. The contraption might fail.

Again impelled by the instinct of self-preservation, Daniel turned toward the forest. But mocking memory stirred his young pride: No guts..... Yellow.... No spunk..... What damn would..... The captain had nodded a

reproachful head, in disgust..... Then a sweet, smiling face filled his vision, and he heard Helen's voice. Well, he'd show 'em, and shoot it out. Perhaps he was a fool, but anyway, he'd go down like a man.

Haltingly, he moved forward again, his eyes straining through the solid blackness. Came a thud. A sniff-like noise. An earth-sound, close, like a foot-step, drove Daniel's teeth to chatter. The plotters too, were fumbling in the dark, stealthily pursuing their deadly mission.

Daniel placed the deflector on the ground, pointed toward what he calculated to be the alien corner, then backed quickly away. Crouched over, atremble, his heart in his mouth, he was thinking of mother, dad, Helen..... But all thought died as he made the vital contact.

A bright flash dissolved the blackness. Then solid darkness again. Daniel's hands had fumbled, a jolting charge of electricity knocking him to the ground, a bundle of shattered nerves.

He lay very still a moment, listening, skeptical of the vision gained in that flashing instant. Cautiously, he retrieved the wire, and when the light came on, he swung the deflector's thick beam searchingly across the hilltop. A startled lone cow standing close to the shack moved Daniel to uproarious laughter that frightened the wanderer into the forest.

The huge bulk of the vagrant animal scraping against the corner could easily have shaken the fragile shack, Daniel concluded, reconstructing the ominous sounds. The cow's tail, slapping the wall, produced the dreaded thud. Her hoof impacting the ground, and the cow's vague snort when he stepped outside, suggested the presence of human beings. Suddenly emptied of terrifying fear, the lad split the night with unrestrained laughter -- a triumphant laughter of newly found strength.

IN THE FOLLOWING hours, Daniel Norton reached out over the Pacific with a new spirit. Bolder than ever now, he raided the air, garnering six from the CANADIAN PRINCIPALS right out of KPA's hands. He smothered KPX and KPW, and even defied coast naval stations.

At daybreak, Daniel swung open the window shutters and turned off the light to capture the full splendor of the approaching dawn. The overcast Oregon sky was breaking up. Save for intermittent splashes of static, and an occasional purr of a distant station, the world was asleep. At sea, dawn had never touched Daniel like this. He breathed with new yearning, a wakeful dream so full of Helen Noble. Impulsively, he typed a tentative letter demanding a transfer to a San Francisco ship, or else.....

With sunrise, the spring air grew warm, fragrant with the pine odor of the forest. Daniel paced the hilltop, unable to contain a new restless spirit, a delightful awareness he had arrived at the top of life. He opened his shirt wide, exulting in the sight of his chest gilded by the morning sun. He bent his arms vigorously, piling the biceps, pleasuring in the moving play of muscle brawn.

Re-entering the station, he tapped out long, passionate calls for ships beyond range. He loved KPC's deafening noise, a stupendous song of power. Then outside again, spending the nervous energy of his exuberant being. With wild boyish glee, he cast stones against the electric poles with explosive velocity, leaving deep marks in testimony of his new strength. He lifted boulders, muscling them at arms-length. He wasn't a kid anymore, but a man, full-fledged and potential!

Singing birds and subtle wood noises exalted the Sabbath hilltop quietude, raising Daniel to inspiration^a heights. Intermittently, he stood pensively

still, gazing out where the Columbia met the sea. The ROSECRANS had recently sunk out there on Peacock Spit. A spar protruding from the murderous waters grimly reminded one of how staunch hearts had perished. But Daniel dismissed the spectre of dead heroes.

"Wonderful to be a hero....." In three years of seafaring, Daniel had failed to achieve the enviable status glorified by Helen Noble, and exalted by Jack Binns. Phillips. Irwin..... Guess God had something to say about it. No matter though, for this morning, Daniel's feelings transcended any exultation that might have sprung from heroism. The night had proved his mettle. He had gained a greater status - MANHOOD! The thought moved him to unrestrained song, revelling in the strength of his young lungs -- the voice of a man, full-grown. Complete! It seemed his voice, new and courageous, could reach yonder valleys, and shake the trees and the stones, and the shack that had so terrified him last night.

FROM A NEARBY mound, Daniel sighted the LUMBER MONARCH at her dock. "Yellow.....No guts.....What damn would....." Vindication moved impetuously through his swelling veins. McCarthy needed attending to before sailing. So Chief Fox, and the third assistant. When the relief operator arrived at eight, Daniel almost flew down the forest trail, shipbound.

In two weeks, Helen wouldn't see a hero, Daniel was thinking. But she'd face a new Daniel Norton, maybe with marks on his face. If Helen would giggle, he'd giggle with her, for they'd be proud marks. She'd hear a different voice, full and mannish. He'd eat her up with his eyes, with a swagger of subduing self-confidence born of a night when he dared great fancied odds.

McCarthy was wiping his hands with cotton waste near the midship winch

when Daniel came over the gangplank. "Hi, lollipop!" he called in his garrulous, bantering way.

In five inspired steps Daniel was at his side. "So I'm a lollipop, eh?" Daniel bared his strong teeth through an amused, disarming grin. In a flash, his fist lashed out unerringly. The bully engineer fell back against the mast, reeled, then crumbled, face down, on the deck -- unconscious.

"You're Ok, Sparks," Captain Roberts called down furtively from the upper deck, then prudently, he disappeared into his master's quarters, rippling with uproarious laughter. "Well done, by God. The boy's ok, yes sir, and....." The words, suddenly muffled by a new blast of laughter, came down magically to Daniel.

In his wireless room, Daniel faced the portraits of his idols with large contentment in his heart. Unheroic, yet he felt magnificent! Helen's picture, with babe in arms, held him long with yearning. Gosh! In two weeks more..... A shy kid had gone to sea, but a daring man would return. Helen Noble would feel his new strength -- full-bodied and audacious in the way of great love.

"You're Ok, Sparks....." The Old Man's exalting words added fuel to Daniel's new spirit, luring him on to unfinished business and new triumphs, and the operator left the wireless-room precinct in search of the third assistant and Chief Fox, with a mighty purpose beating in his stout young heart.

----- Finis -----

SUBMITTED BY MARIO SPAGNA

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.