

PREFACE TO THE DUOLOG

The weakness of a preface is that it implies the existence of an obscurity in the paper that needs explanation. This preface, however, is to warn the reader that there are no obscure allegories in these satires. They are intended to be broad in some ways and specific in others, and there are several allusions, but far from being obscure, they are clumsily obvious. To read any allegory in the papers is to credit me with more profundity than is my due.

The aim, if any be required, was, at the outset, to stimulate the reader to "thoughtful laughter." After rereading the papers, I shall be grateful for laughter alone or will settle for just thought without the laughter.

The theme of the second paper was formulated half-way through the first draft of the first paper, when the pattern of the first began to mould itself into something approaching didacticism. I thought that an antithetical character would be a good contrast. Naturally, this in turn suggested a trilogy, the third paper to portray the happy medium, but this will have to be postponed until such time as I become qualified to determine what constitutes the true nature of the virtues of moderation and until such time as I will be able to conceive of a heaven worthy of rewarding such virtues.

j.b.i.

was that he didn't seem to notice that Shorty, Limpy, and Big Bo were trying to cut him out.

"That reminds me of something that happened to me once," he repeated.

Limpy had been telling us some pretty tall ghost stories and had just finished his funniest one when the stranger first spoke.

"It happened three years ago last summer," the stranger continued. "I used to sell insurance in New York, but I was getting pretty sick of it; besides, the city air wasn't ~~so~~ good for my wife, so we decided to buy a chicken farm some place and settle down. I heard that there was a small place for sale in a little town in Iowa, <sup>and</sup> so I bought <sup>it</sup> the place sight unseen and went out there with my wife.

"Considering what we paid for it, it wasn't a bad place. It was large enough for a chicken yard and had room for a little garden too, and it wasn't so large that the two of us couldn't run it. The house was in pretty good shape, so it was only a couple of weeks before we had our chicken ranch going pretty good. Three weeks after we'd been there, though, our well ran dry. Being city-bred, I didn't know the first thing about digging a well."

"You're supposed to start at the top ain'tcha?" quipped Limpy, interested now, not so much at what the stranger had said, but in the way he'd said it. It didn't sound like so much to me, but it sounded as if it might get better further along. Like a strip tease show as my old buddy Mac would've said.

"I was going to advertise in the county paper for a well-

digger, but that night before I got around to it, a man came around asking me if I wanted him to dig a well for me. That was a break for me.

"'What's your name?' I asked.

" 'Enos Pritchard,' he told me.

" 'That's strange; there's another Enos Pritchard around here; are you a relative of his?' I remembered this other Pritchard pretty well because when I ~~first~~<sup>first</sup> moved onto the farm, he came over and watched us unload. He was a big, hairy, evil-looking hulk of a man; he didn't offer to help; in fact he didn't say a word. Just kept watching everything we did with those evil eyes of his. He frightened my wife at first, but as he went away as soon as we'd finished taking our stuff into the house, she didn't say anything. After that, he kept coming around to our place about twice a week, never saying a word, but always following our motions. And every once in awhile, I'd see him at the general store, and he'd look at me as if he were trying to read my mind. If this well-digger were a relative of his, I was going to turn him down.

" 'Nope, no kin.' ~~He~~<sup>He</sup> looked as if he wanted to say more, but he kept his mouth closed.

"He agreed to my price; so I asked him if he wanted to start the next morning, but he replied that he'd rather start that night. 'I'm allergic to sunlight,' he explained with a wry smile, and as I'd heard of cases like that, I didn't think anything of it.

"I had a spot for a well all picked out, but Pritchard wanted to dig at another spot. I didn't know ~~the first thing~~<sup>anything</sup>

about digging wells, and I figured that he knew where he'd strike water, ~~xxx~~ so I let him dig where he wanted to.

"Well, I went back into the house and went to bed. Early the next morning, I went out to see how much work had been done on the well. It was about three feet deep, but what struck me as queer was that instead of being round, it was oblong, about six feet by four. It looked more like a grave than a well to me, but as I said, I didn't know the first thing about digging wells and supposed that Enos knew what he was about."

"Haw! haw! what a bonehead!" chortled Big Bo, "Any fool knows that there aren't any oblong wells."

"Shut up!" hissed Limpy, smelling a story that he might be able to retell, but the stranger ignored them both.

"I meant to ask him about it that evening," he continued, "but he didn't come to the door. I went to see if he'd come yet, but he wasn't at the well. As we were used to retiring before 10:00, I had to go back to the house and go to bed.

"Early the next morning, I <sup>again</sup> went down to where the well was being dug, ~~and~~ there was Enos Pritchard lying in the hole."

"Drunk?" asked Big Bo.

"I thought he was drunk at first, but when I got down to look at him, he was dead. And, funny thing, there was dew on the ground but not on his body. Not only was he dead, but he looked as if he'd been dead for about a month; parts of his hands and face were already decomposed. Thrown carelessly on top of his body was a billfold. I was afraid to touch it at first, but I finally picked it up; it was pretty soiled with earth, but there were a few cards in it that I could make out.

There were three membership cards, a few calling cards, and a check, all with the name of James Hoskins on them. I recalled a newspaper article about a James Hoskins disappearing when I first moved there, and all of a sudden it came to me, hard as it was to believe, that his ghost had appeared to me and uncovered the body."

"Migawd! you don't really believe in ghosts do you?" ~~xxx~~ said Shorty in a voice that showed that he himself wasn't altogether sure that ghosts didn't exist.

"What convinced me more than anything else was the fact that there were no footprints other than mine on the dew-covered ground. I couldn't see why he ~~was~~ called himself Enos Pritchard though until I visualized the real Enos Pritchard's evil face and hairy body; I recalled the way he kept watching me. 'Watching me to see if I'd discovered his secret,' I decided. And I recalled too, the well-digger's look when I asked him if he were related to this Pritchard; he looked at me as if he wanted to say more but couldn't. James Hoskins had been murdered by Enos Pritchard, and the only way his ghost could bring the murderer's name out, I concluded, was to call himself Enos Pritchard.

"I thought of calling the constable immediately, but hearing a noise behind me, I turned to look up into the evil face of the real Enos Pritchard. I was afraid that he would read on my face what I had discovered, so, for the first time I spoke to him, trying to be casual, 'Good morning, neighbor.'

"It was plain that his conscience wouldn't let him discard

the suspicion that I knew his secret; perhaps without meaning to, he replied gruffly and inanely, 'Found the body, huh?' although it was impossible for him to see it from his position.

"I couldn't be casual any longer; 'You killed him, didn't you!' I blurted out hysterically in accusation.

"If you'd been there, you'd have actually seen the beast in him take possession of his body. 'Yerse,' he growled, 'I choked him with my two hands,' lifting up his ham-like paws, 'and I'll kill you the same way so's no one else will know.' I backed off, but he was fast for all of his bulk. I could have run towards the house, but I didn't want to endanger my wife. He finally caught up with me near one of the chicken sheds, and I prepared to fight back with every ounce of my strength. He got hold of me with his huge hands and..."

The stranger's voice broke off with a choking sob.

We all sat and stared into the fire; none of us wanted to look at a man crying; like my buddy Mac would've said, there ain't no sight worse'n a grown man bawling like a baby or a woman.

Finally Limpy couldn't hold it any longer. "What hap--, j-j-jeez," he ended up, fear nearly strangling him. "Wh-where'd he go?" I looked up wondering what had gotten hold of Limpy. I followed his eyes to the log that the stranger had been sitting on.

No one was there. The snow on top of it wasn't even packed down. And there were no footprints in the snow.

Ishikawa, Joseph

English 211  
Section II  
November 10, 1942  
Paper number 3

*FF- / B*

*Good work,  
Mr. Ishikawa.  
The piece should  
be handed up here  
anywhere, but I  
believe you have  
the idea safely*

*"mailed down"  
in story form.  
see*