

JEREMY

I don't know whether Jeremy is plain lazy or whether he is really as superstitious as he makes out to be. Jeremy is a fellow I work with on the graveyard shift out at the ice-plant west of town. He's been there a couple of years, and they tell me he used to be the hardest working man around the place. But you couldn't prove it by me. Whenever there is some heavy work to be done, Jeremy will tell Jake, the foreman, "I was just talking with Ambrose, and he told me to be careful or sump'n is liable to happen to me." I didn't know who the heck Ambrose was, but when Jeremy started telling Jake, "I was just talking with Ambrose," it usually meant that Jeremy would sit that bit of work out.

One night when the rain was coming down like cow-piss, to steal one of Jeremy's favorite expressions, and we were waiting for some icers to come it, Jake told Bill and Fred and me the story behind Jeremy's superstitious beliefs. Bill and Fred are a couple of fellows who started working out at the ice-house about the same time I did.

The language used around the ice-house is pretty rough, and if I don't want to shock you, I will have to substitute mild profanity for some of Jake's expressions as well as delete quite a few cuss-words.

"You know why that sonbitchin' cooler on the west end of the ice-house is boarded up, don't you?" Jake began. We looked mystified; so he continued, "Well, it's boarded up because the floor caved in. It happened one night last summer when Jeremy and Ambrose were working alone out here."

"You mean this Ambrose that Jeremy's always talking about?"

Bill asked.

"Yeah, he and Jeremy both started working here at the same time; they were buddies riding the rods through here a couple of years ago and just hooked on with this outfit when we asked them if they wanted to work. Usually a'bo will stay on for a couple of days or maybe a week and then drift on again, but Jeremy has stuck it out here ever since.

"Well, to get back to this night Jeremy and Ambrose were working alone, we got a carload of those sonbitchin' four hundred pound cakes to unload and store. All the ice rooms from number four to twelve were jammed full, and so was the west cooler; so the big shot told us to clean out the east cooler, which had been used as a store room, and shoot the four hundred pounders up there on the elevator through number three.

"As soon as we got the ice car spotted at number three, I left Jeremy and Ambrose because I had some business up at the yard office. I looked in about half an hour later, and they were just getting the doorway of the ice car cleared. They'd rigged up the chute down into number three, and Ambrose was in the car spilling the cakes and sending them down while Jeremy was in number three grabbing the cakes as they came off the chute and spotting them near the elevator. I told them to take off about fifteen cakes at a time and then to send them up the elevator to the cooler. After they got about that many off the car, Ambrose would climb out of the car and go up on the dock and into the cooler to pull off and spot the ice that Jeremy sent up to him by elevator."

Jake pulled out a box of Copenhagen from his pocket and stuffed

a generous pinch into his mouth. "As I had to check up on a couple of cars in the yard, I left them again. It was damn near daylight when I got back to them; they almost had the car off which was pretty good considering just the two of them had to shove the ice up through the elevator like that. Ambrose must have been all tuckered out climbing from the car to the dock and back; it wouldn't have been so bad if they were handling three hundred pounders, but those goddamn four hundred pounders are no picnic. It was getting to the point where the cooler was damn near full; so I told Jeremy to chop the cakes in half and fill up the rest of the cooler and to let the rest of the ice sit in number three. It was damned slow business and probably not even worth the electricity it took to run the damn elevator motor, but the front office wouldn't give us any more men, and if we didn't unload the car, the day crew would've cried like hell; so we had to work it that way even if it was slow ~~business~~ business.

"They were almost through plugging the cooler, and I had some cars to write up; so I went back to the office. Along about 7:00 o'clock, Jeremy came limping in holding on ~~to his~~ his left arm and babbling like a crazy man. His clothes were torn all to hell, but I couldn't find anything wrong with him outside of a few bruises. While I dressed his wounds, I tried to get him to tell me what happened, but he was incoherent as hell, and I couldn't make out what he was trying to say. After I got him all bandaged up, I told him to lie down and went tearing over to number three. Half of the wall between number three and the cooler was torn down and some chunks of ice were scattered around in number three. I hollèred for Ambrose, but ~~he~~ as he didn't show up, I took my lantern

and looked into the space under the cooler. What I saw made me sick as hell; half the cooler floor had fallen through, and thirty-seven tons of ice was lying in the space underneath. Then I saw a gory mess that used to be Ambrose. Standing in the middle of the cooler floor, he must have fallen through first with the ice falling on top of him, because he was really ground to pieces.

"I went back to the office and called the ambulance; while waiting for it to come, I finally got Jeremy calmed down enough to tell me what had happened. It seems that Ambrose had~~x~~ been calling for those half-cakes one at a time. Finally, Ambrose hollered down that only two more would be needed; well, Jeremy shot one up, but the impact of the half-cake falling ~~off~~ the elevator was enough to shake ~~the~~ half the floor loose. The next thing Jeremy knew, part of the wall had given away, and he got hit with some chunks of ice. By the time the ambulance got there and cleaned up the mess, the morning crew had arrived; so Jeremy and I went home.

"Jeremy didn't come back for about a week, and in the meantime, the other half of the floor had been braced and pronounced fit while ~~the~~ motor room above the cooler had also been reinforced. A few days after Jeremy came back, the big shot had the smart idea of storing hundred pound sacks of salt in the reinforced section of the cooler. I was against it, but the big shot insisted. ^{however,} Jeremy/flatly refused to set foot inside the cooler. 'Ambrose's ghost came to me while I was sleepin', and he told me it warn't safe to go into the cooler; no, sir; you'd sooner ketch me hitchhikin' t' hell than ketch me agoin' in there.' Well, we had a couple of other guys working by then too. So I set Jeremy to sharpening

tools while the two new fellows toted the salt over to the cooler. I went down to the office to make a report. About three hours later, Jeremy came tearing into my office hollering, "What'd I tell you! the rest of that cooler has fell through and one o' them fellers is hurt bad; you'd better call the amb'lance!" I called up the ambulance and went out to see how bad the damage was. It was just as Jeremy said; the floor had caved in under about twelve tons of crushed rock salt. One of the fellows was on the dock as white as a sheet; he said he heard the floor start to give away and made a dive for the door; the other fellow was further back and couldn't make it. The fellow who was hurt was under a couple of sacks of salt, but was conscious. I knew that it wasn't a good idea to move him, but the ceiling, which is the floor of the ^{motor} ~~mother~~ room, was sagging pretty dangerously without any support from the pillars which had toppled too, and I didn't want the damn motor to come falling ~~on~~ the poor fellow; so this other man and I dragged the ~~ix~~ injured man out under the dock after chopping a hole in the wall. About that time, the ambulance came and took him to the hospital. He managed to live, but had a broken back, three broken ribs, a broken arm, and some internal injuries.

"Well, Jeremy kept telling me that he knew that it would happen because Ambrose had warned him. And ever since then, he's managed to have Ambrose warn him of ~~the~~ danger when there's some heavy work to do although no more accidents have happened. I don't know if he really imagines that he sees Ambrose's ghost or if he's cooked up a good thing to keep him from hard work."

Jake took another pinch of Copenhagen and walked over to the window. "It looks ~~xx~~ like fifty-two's bringing in that string of icers,"

he said, peering down the dock. "Rain's letting up; let's get down there and ice those damn cars. Grab your rykos and giffords and chutes, and let's get down to the east end; come on, Jeremy." This last was addressed to Jeremy who had been dozing in a corner: been talking with Ambrose

"Waal," began Jeremy, "I've just been talking with Ambrose again, and--"

The rest of us picked up our tools and started moving toward the east end where they'd spotted the string of icers.

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ENG 211-12

DR WIMBERLEY

1750 WORDS

Style

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Substance

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