

BILLIKEN FOR A DAY



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JONAH was one of those shabby individuals who furnish food for thought by parading the streets with sandwich boards on their backs. He was also the ex-living skeleton from Barnum and Bunnifum's freak show, the man who could drop jobs faster than red steel billets, the man was a living epic of hard luck.

It had been a far-seeing mother that had named him Jonah. Ever since he was a two-year-old, he had swallowed somebody's lead quarter, the name had fitted him like a new bathing suit. He was such a Jonah that he couldn't go to the aquarium without some of the whales recognizing him.

On this particular September morning Jonah shuffled through the Broadway crowds with a heart like the stuff they make bullets of. The depths of despair, in which he had struggled times without number, seemed at last to be going to engulf him. But far from dreading the thought, he rather welcomed it. And not without reason, for what was he to know of the jack-pot of life, when he had never even held the "openers."

Trolleys clanged; autos tooted, Gabrielled, honked, screeched and simply made noises; the sidewalks echoed to the clatter of a thousand heels, and like distant thunder came the rumble of the "L." Taken all in all, it was about as soothing as the crack of doom.

Jonah's eyes blinked. The last three nights standing in the bread line had left him famished for want of sleep. It mattered little that he stumbled into people, or that he was being edged off the sidewalk by the jostling passers-by.

"Hey there! Look out!"

Jonah roused himself just in time to be knocked down by a speeding taxicab. It was a hard fall, but there were no bones broken, and Jonah's first thought was of the heavy damages he would exact from the cab company. He looked for an officer to arrest the careless chauffeur, but there was not a bluecoat in sight the length or breadth of Broadway. On top of that he turned to find that all that remained of the offending taxi was a haze of blue vapour.

Jonah stumbled over to the curb and sat down gloomily. Bystanders, who had seen the accident with horror-stricken faces, when they saw that he was able to walk, went on their way laughing about "the luck of some people."

ALITTLE later an officer strolled by, and caught sight of Jonah sitting there with his head in his hands. He came over and tapped him on the back.

"Here, you," he growled, officiously, "you gotter move on. You can't stay there, you're blocking the traffic."

"I'm hurt," said Jonah, pointing to a large and rapidly-growing lump on his forehead. "A taxi hit me."

The bluecoat winked knowingly.

a customer get a smile from the fat man at the cashier's desk. This made a propitious opening and Jonah went inside.

"I can't work any more to-day," he told the fat man, weakly, "and I wish you'd give me what you owe me."

"The deuce you say. You fellows don't know when you've got a soft thing. But I'll square up, I'll—Holy mackerel! What have you been doing to that sign?"

Jonah stood holding the torn canvas timorously in front of him.

"It wasn't my fault," he said, dully, "I got pushed into the street and a taxi hit me. I think it can be fixed."

The fat man showed signs of approaching apoplexy. His face turned a reddish blue, like a raspberry sherbet. His body shook with rage, and the words that rushed from his lips popped like champagne corks.

"Get out of here, you slab-sided son of a gun! Expect to get anything from me, after ruining that brand new sign? Well, I guess not! Beat it, before I charge you for damages."

"But you owe me for a whole week." Jonah was desperate now.

The fat man stepped out from behind his desk, and advanced threateningly.

"Are you going to leave, or shall I have to put

you out?" he demanded.

It did not take Jonah long to make up his mind. Click! went the door, and the fat man was again at his desk punching meal checks with a satisfied grin on his ruddy cheeks.

Once outside, the ex-sandwichman flung the tattered banner of his calling into the gutter. Having shaken off the shackles of his thralldom, he started resolutely for the Bowery lodging house, which held his few personal belongings. His mind was made up. One last sleep, and then the river.

NOW, if Jonah did not believe in a lot of things he should have, he at least believed in dreams. Dreams were his only luxury, and to hear him doting out the future from the little dream book he had under his pillow would surely have made you laugh. But with him it was every night the same dream. Three blind men, leading a black horse to water, and anyone who is at all up on Dreamology will tell you that that is a sure sign of trouble.

After tying his household furniture into a small bundle, Jonah pulled off his clothes and crawled into bed. Now that his mind was made up to end everything, he knew that it would be only a few moments before he would be in Dreamland, with the three blind men and their horse trailing by. Surely death was some trouble, and he was headed straight that way. Perhaps there would be six blind men this time.

Jonah slept the sleep of the just, and when he woke up at nine the next morning, he was all in a cold perspiration. He had dreamed all right, but it was such a one as he had never had before.

Instead of the blind men with the black horse, he had seen a black cat, chasing a white rat, through a field of clover! Without looking in the dream book, Jonah felt instinctively that something even worse than death must be in store for him. His fingers trembled as he turned the leaves to see.

"Black rat, black bat, black cat," he read off excitedly, and then, with a long drawn out "A-ah!" Jonah stopped fearfully with his finger on a line printed in red ink. There it was. His identical dream, true to the letter.

"Black cat, chasing a white rat through a field of clover," he read apprehensively, "is an almost certain indication of approaching good fortune. If the right opportunities are seized during the twenty-four hours following the dream, success is sure to follow."

Jonah turned white as a sheet. In all his imaginings nothing so astonishing had entered his head. He, Jonah the human hoo-doo, who had faced death unafraid, stood trembling from head to foot at the prospect of good luck.

BANISHED all thoughts of the river now, banished all thoughts of everything save the dream book's marvelous message. For one day at least he would be free from the Nemesis of hard luck, free to follow up the dictates of chance, without the cards being stacked against him.

While he was getting dressed, Jonah astonished his fellow lodgers by whistling, in an insultingly cheerful fashion. Twice "Mucker" Burns told him to shut up, that he wanted to sleep, but Jonah paid no heed.

Then Burns reached out of his cot, picked up a hob-nailed boot, and hurled it delicately at Jonah's head.

It missed him by a foot, and Jonah laughed tantalizingly.

"Sure and don't be mad, Burns," he said, "Matty himself couldn't hit me this morning. It's not a Jonah, but a lucky Billiken you're throwing at now."



"I was watching you play to-night," said Jimmy, over a seidel of Munchener.