

The Jimmyjohn Boss and Other Stories

By

Owen Wister

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Preface

It's very plain that if a thing's the fashion--
Too much the fashion--if the people leap
To do it, or to be it, in a passion
Of haste and crowding, like a herd of sheep,

Why then that thing becomes through imitation
Vulgar, excessive, obvious, and cheap.

No gentleman desires to be pursuing

What every Tom and Dick and Harry's doing.

Stranger, do you write books? I ask the question,
Because I'm told that everybody writes
That what with scribbling, eating, and digestion,
And proper slumber, all our days and nights

Are wholly filled. It seems an odd suggestion--
But if you do write, stop it, leave the masses,
Read me, and join the small selected classes.

The Jimmyjohn Boss

One day at Nampa, which is in Idaho, a ruddy old massive jovial man stood by the Silver City stage, patting his beard with his left hand, and with his right the shoulder of a boy who stood beside him. He had come with the boy on the branch train from Boise, because he was a careful German and liked to say everything twice--twice at least when it was a matter of business. This was a matter of very particular business, and the German had repeated himself for nineteen miles. Presently the east-bound on the main line would arrive from Portland; then the Silver City stage would take the boy south on his new mission, and the man would journey by the branch train back to Boise. From Boise no one could say where he might not go, west or east. He was a great and pervasive cattle man in Oregon, California, and other places. Vogel and Lex--even to-day you may hear the two ranch partners spoken of. So the veteran Vogel was now once more going over his notions and commands to his youthful deputy during the last precious minutes until the east-bound should arrive.

"Und if only you haf someding like dis," said the old man, as he tapped his beard and patted the boy, "it would be five hoondert more dollars salary in your liddle pants."

The boy winked up at his employer. He had a gray, humorous eye; he was slim and alert, like a sparrow-hawk--the sort of boy his father openly rejoices in and his mother is secretly in prayer over. Only, this boy had neither father nor mother. Since the age of twelve he had looked out for himself, never quite without bread, sometimes attaining champagne, getting along in his American way variously, on horse or afoot, across regions of wide plains and mountains, through towns where not a soul knew his name. He closed one of his gray eyes at his employer, and beyond this made no remark.

"Vat you mean by dat vink, anyhow?" demanded the elder.

"Say," said the boy, confidentially--"honest now. How about you and me? Five hundred dollars if I had your beard. You've got a record and I've got a future. And my bloom's on me rich, without a scratch. How many dollars you gif me for dat bloom?" The sparrow-hawk sailed into a freakish imitation of his master.

"You are a liddle rascal!" cried the master, shaking with entertainment. "Und if der peoples vas to hear you sass old Max Vogel in dis style they would say, 'Poor old Max, he lose his gr-rip.' But I don't lose it." His great hand closed suddenly on

the boy's shoulder, his voice cut clean and heavy as an axe, and then no more joking about him. "Haf you understand that?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you, son?"

"Nineteen, sir."

"Oh my, that is offle young for the job I gif you. Some of dose man you go to boss might be your father. Und how much do you weigh?"

"About a hundred and thirty."

"Too light, too light. Und I haf keep my eye on you in Boise. You are not so goot a boy as you might be."

"Well, sir, I guess not."

"But you was not so bad a boy as you might be, neider. You don't lie about it. Now it must be farewell to all that foolishness. Haf you understand? You go to set an example where one is needed very bad. If those men see you drink a liddle, they drink a big lot. You forbid them, they laugh at you. You must not allow one drop of whiskey at the whole place. Haf you well understand?"

"Yes, sir. Me and whiskey are not necessary to each other's happiness."

"It is not you, it is them. How are you mit your gun?"

Vogel took the boy's pistol from its holster and aimed at an empty bottle which was sticking in the thin Deceiver snow. "Can you do this?" he said, carelessly, and fired. The snow struck the bottle, but the unharmed bullet was buried half an inch to the left.

The boy took his pistol with solemnity. "No," he said. "Guess I can't do that." He fired, and the glass splintered into shapelessness. "Told you I couldn't miss as close as you did," said he.

"You are a darling," said Mr. Vogel. "Gif me dat lofely weapon."

A fortunate store of bottles lay, leaned, or stood about in the white snow of Nampa, and Mr. Vogel began at them.

"May I ask if anything is the matter?" inquired a mild voice from the stage.

"Stick that lily head in-doors," shouted Vogel; and the face and eye-glasses withdrew again into the stage." The school-teacher he will be beautiful virtuous company for you at Malheur Agency," continued Vogel, shooting again; and presently the large old German destroyed a bottle with a crashing smack. "Ah!" said he, in unison with the smack. "Ah-ha! No von shall say der old Max lose his gr-rip. I shoot it efry time now, but the train she whistle. I hear her."

The boy affected to listen earnestly.

"Bah! I tell you I hear de whistle coming."

"Did you say there was a whistle?" ventured the occupant of the stage. The snow shone white on his glasses as he peered out.

"Nobody whistle for you," returned the robust Vogel. "You listen to me," he continued to the boy. "You are offle yoong. But I watch you plenty this long time. I see you work mit my stock on the Owyhee and the Malheur; I see you mit my oder men. My men they say always more and more, 'Yoong Drake he is a goot one,' und I think you are a goot one mine own self. I am the biggest cattle man on the Pacific slope, und I am also an old devil. I have think a lot, und I like you."

"I'm obliged to you, sir."

"Shut oop. I like you, und therefore I make you my new sooperintendent at my Malheur Agency r-ranch, mit a bigger salary as you don't get before. If you are a sookcess, I r-raise you some more."

"I am satisfied now, sir."

"Bah! Never do you tell any goot business man you are satisfied mit vat he gif you, for eider he don't believe you or else he think you are a fool. Und eider ways you go down in his estimation. You make those men at Malheur Agency behave themselves und I r-raise you. Only I do vish, I do certainly vish you had some beard on that yoong chin."

The boy glanced at his pistol.

"No, no, no, my son," said the sharp old German. "I don't want gunpowder in dis affair. You must act kviet und decisif und keep your liddle shirt on. What you accomplish shootin'? You kill somebody, und then, pop! somebody kills you. What goot is all that nonsense to me?"

"It would annoy me some, too," retorted the boy, eyeing the capitalist. "Don't leave me out of the proposition."

"Broposition! Broposition! Now you get hot mit old Max for nothing."

"If you didn't contemplate trouble," pursued the boy, "what was your point just now in sampling my marksmanship?" He kicked some snow in the direction of the shattered bottle. "It's understood no whiskey comes on that ranch. But if no gunpowder goes along with me, either, let's call the deal off. Buy some other fool."

"You haf not understand, my boy. Und you get very hot because I happen to make that liddle joke about somebody killing you. Was you thinking maybe old Max not care what happen to you?"

A moment of silence passed before the answer came: "Suppose we talk business?"

"Very well, very well. Only notice this thing. When oder peoples talk oop to me like you haf done many times, it is not they who does the getting hot. It is me--old Max. Und when old Max gets hot he slings them out of his road anywheres. Some haf been very sorry they get so slung. You invite me to buy some oder fool? Oh, my boy, I will buy no oder fool except you, for that was just like me when I was yoong Max!" Again the ruddy and grizzled magnate put his hand on the shoulder of the boy, who stood looking away at the bottles, at the railroad track, at anything save his employer.

The employer proceeded: "I was afraid of nobody und noding in those days. You are afraid of nobody and noding. But those days was different. No Pullman sleepers, no railroad at all. We come oop the Columbia in the steamboat, we travel hoonderts of miles by team, we sleep, we eat nowheres in particular mit many unexpected interooptions. There was Indians, there was offle bad white men, und if you was not offle yourself you vanished quickly. Therefore in those days was Max Vogel hell und repeat."

The magnate smiled a broad fond smile over the past which he had kicked, driven, shot, bled, and battled through to present power; and the boy winked up at him again now.

"I don't propose to vanish, myself," said he.

"Ah-ha! you was no longer mad mit der old Max! Of coorse I care what happens to you. I was alone in the world myself in those lofely wicked days."

Reserve again made flinty the boy's face.

"Neider did I talk about my feelings," continued Max Vogel, "but I nefer show them too quick. If I was injured I wait, and I strike to kill. We all paddles our own dugout, eh? We ask no favors from nobody; we must win our spurs! Not so? Now I talk business with you where you interroopt me. If cow-boys was not so offle scarce in the country, I would long ago haf bounce the lot of those drunken

fellows. But they cannot be spared; we must get along so. I cannot send Brock, he is needed at Harper's. The dumb fellow at Alvord Lake is too dumb; he is not quickly courageous. They would play high jinks mit him. Therefore I send you. Brock he say to me you haf joodgement. I watch, and I say to myself also, this boy haf goot joodgement. And when you look at your pistol so quick, I tell you quick I don't send you to kill men when they are so scarce already! My boy, it is ever the moral, the say-noding strength what gets there--mit always the liddle pistol behind, in case--joost in case. Haf you understand? I ask you to shoot. I see you know how, as Brock told me. I recommend you to let them see that aggomplishment in a friendly way. Maybe a shooting-match mit prizes--I pay for them--pretty soon after you come. Und joodgement--und joodgement. Here comes that train. Haf you well understand?"

Upon this the two shook hands, looking square friendship in each other's eyes. The east-bound, long quiet and dark beneath its flowing clots of smoke, slowed to a halt. A few valises and legs descended, ascended, herding and hurrying; a few trunks were thrown resoundingly in and out of the train; a woolly, crooked old man came with a box and a bandanna bundle from the second-class car; the travellers of a thousand miles looked torpidly at him through the dim, dusty windows of their Pullman, and settled again for a thousand miles more. Then the east-bound, shooting heavier clots of smoke laboriously into the air, drew its slow length out of Nampa, and away.

"Where's that stage?" shrilled the woolly old man. "That's what I'm after."

"Why, hello!" shouted Vogel. "Hello, Uncle Pasco! I heard you was dead."

Uncle Pasco blinked his small eyes to see who hailed him. "Oh!" said he, in his light, crusty voice. "Dutchy Vogel. No, I ain't dead. You guessed wrong. Not dead. Help me up, Dutchy."

A tolerant smile broadened Vogel's face. "It was ten years since I see you," said he, carrying the old man's box.

"Shouldn't wonder. Maybe it'll be another ten till you see me next." He stopped by the stage step, and wheeling nimbly, surveyed his old-time acquaintance, noting the good hat, the prosperous watch-chain, the big, well-blacked boots. "Not seen me for ten years. Hee-hee! No. Usen't to have a cent more than me. Twins in poverty. That's how Dutchy and me started. If we was buried to-morrow they'd mark him 'Pecunious' and me 'Impecunious.' That's what. Twins in poverty."

"I stick to von business at a time, Uncle," said good-natured, successful Max.

A flicker of aberration lighted in the old man's eye. "H'm, yes," said he, pondering. "Stuck to one business. So you did. H'm." Then, suddenly sly, he chirped: "But

I've struck it rich now." He tapped his box. "Jewelry," he half-whispered. "Miners and cow-boys."

"Yes," said Vogel. "Those poor, deluded fellows, they buy such stuff." And he laughed at the seedy visionary who had begun frontier life with him on the bottom rung and would end it there. "Do you play that concertina yet, Uncle?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes. I always play. It's in here with my tooth-brush and socks." Uncle Pasco held up the bandanna. "Well, he's getting ready to start. I guess I'll be climbing inside. Holy Gertrude!"

This shrill comment was at sight of the school-master, patient within the stage. "What business are you in?" demanded Uncle Pasco.

"I am in the spelling business," replied the teacher, and smiled, faintly.

"Hell!" piped Uncle Pasco. "Take this."

He handed in his bandanna to the traveller, who received it politely. Max Vogel lifted the box of cheap jewelry; and both he and the boy came behind to boost the old man up on the stage step. But with a nettled look he leaped up to evade them, tottered half-way, and then, light as a husk of grain, got himself to his seat and scowled at the schoolmaster.

After a brief inspection of that pale, spectacled face, "Dutchy," he called out of the door, "this country is not what it was."

But old Max Vogel was inattentive. He was speaking to the boy, Dean Drake, and held a flask in his hand. He reached the flask to his new superintendent. "Drink hearty," said he. "There, son! Don't be shy. Haf you forgot it is forbidden fruit after now?"

"Kid sworn off?" inquired Uncle Pasco of the school-master.

"I understand," replied this person, "that Mr. Vogel will not allow his cow-boys at the Malheur Agency to have any whiskey brought there. Personally, I feel gratified." And Mr. Bolles, the new school-master, gave his faint smile.

"Oh," muttered Uncle Pasco. "Forbidden to bring whiskey on the ranch? H'm." His eyes wandered to the jewelry-box. "H'm," said he again; and becoming thoughtful, he laid back his moth-eaten sly head, and spoke no further with Mr. Bolles.

Dean Drake climbed into the stage and the vehicle started.

"Goot luck, goot luck, my son!" shouted the hearty Max, and opened and waved both his big arms at the departing boy: He stood looking after the stage. "I hope he come back," said he. "I think he come back. If he come I r-raise him fifty dollars without any beard."

II

The stage had not trundled so far on its Silver City road but that a whistle from Nampa station reached its three occupants. This was the branch train starting back to Boise with Max Vogel aboard; and the boy looked out at the locomotive with a sigh.

"Only five days of town," he murmured. "Six months more wilderness now."

"My life has been too much town," said the new school-master. "I am looking forward to a little wilderness for a change."

Old Uncle Pasco, leaning back, said nothing; he kept his eyes shut and his ears open.

"Change is what I don't get," sighed Dean Drake. In a few miles, however, before they had come to the ferry over Snake River, the recent leave-taking and his employer's kind but dominating repression lifted from the boy's spirit. His gray eye wakened keen again, and he began to whistle light opera tunes, looking about him alertly, like the sparrow-hawk that he was. "Ever see Jeannie Winston in 'Fatinitza'?" he inquired of Mr. Bolles.

The school-master, with a startled, thankful countenance, stated that he had never.

"Ought to," said Drake.

"You a man? that can't be true!
Men have never eyes like you."

That's what the girls in the harem sing in the second act. Golly whiz!" The boy gleamed over the memory of that evening.

"You have a hard job before you," said the school-master, changing the subject.

"Yep. Hard." The wary Drake shook his head warningly at Mr. Bolles to keep off that subject, and he glanced in the direction of slumbering Uncle Pasco. Uncle Pasco was quite aware of all this. "I wouldn't take another lonesome job so soon," pursued Drake, "but I want the money. I've been working eleven months along the Owyhee as a sort of junior boss, and I'd earned my vacation. Just got it

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