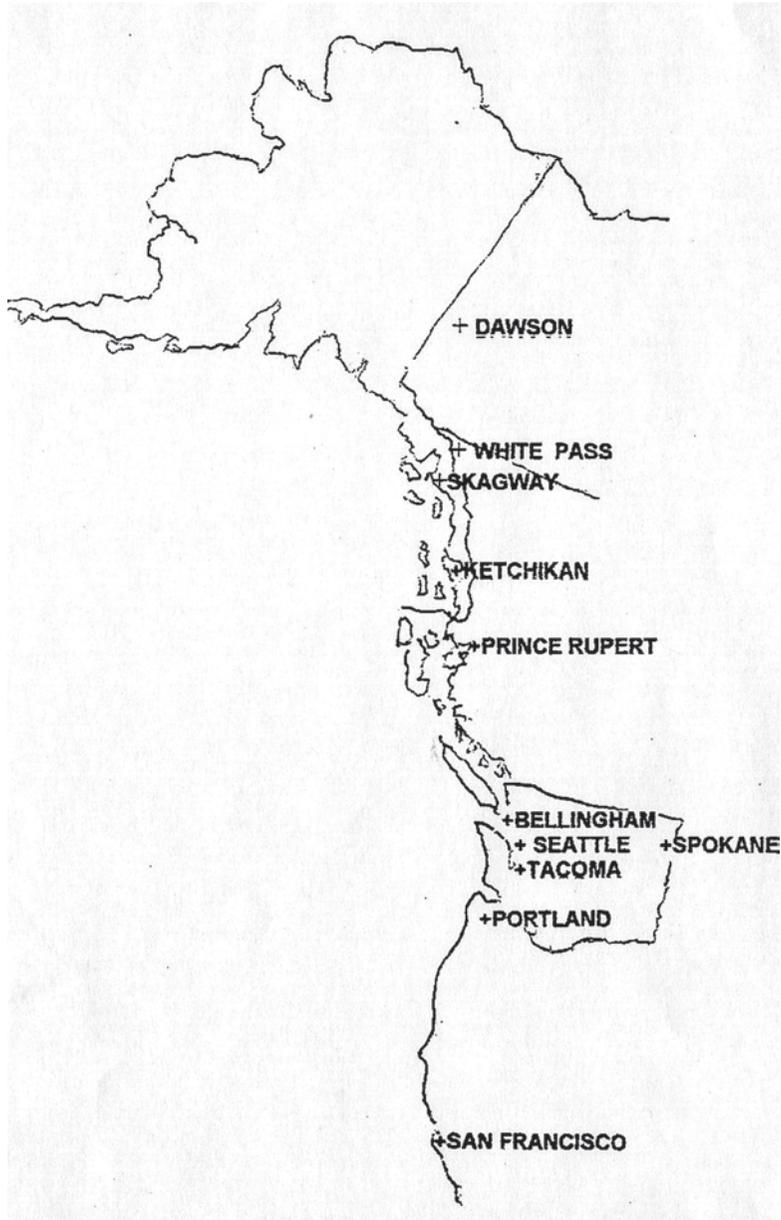


CRY OF THE GOSHAWK





CRY
OF THE
GOSHAWK

(gos'hawk)

A Casey Jones Adventure

Roy Bush

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I. Title

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To Dorothy, my wife and inspiration.



CASEY

one

MY TRAIN WRECK



I'll always remember the summer of 1920. My dad died, and I still re-live the dark days when my mom and I struggled to get our lives back on track. I couldn't help to support us. . . no job anywhere for a boy of sixteen that would pay enough. So now I'm on my way out west to live with my aunt. In a few hours, this train will roll into Seattle.

At first, thoughts of Mom and my friends back in Brooklyn crowded out everything else. But when I changed trains in Chicago, I sat next to this nice-looking guy. I watched him put his tan, tattered suitcase under the seat. I thought talking to him might get my mind off myself.

"Hi, I'm Casey Jones," I began.

"Hello, I'm Benny from the Bronx." He smiled and added, "Any relation to the famous railroader?"

Because I have the same name as an Illinois Central engineer who died trying to avoid a train wreck, I always get this question.

"No, Jones is a common name."

Benny continued eagerly, "I'm goin' to Seattle . . . gotta job on a fishing boat . . . might even make it up to Alaska."

Benny, who settled in with a sigh, seemed to be in his early

twenties; with his slim, lanky frame, he looked hungry.

“Fishing in Alaska . . . that sounds exciting.”

As the train clacked over the tracks, I sat back on the green, plush seat and wondered about sailing out to sea, fishing for a living. I longed for adventure; something that would give my life a lift, like standing on the deck, pole in hand, as a huge fish took the bait. My arm muscles tensed, as, in my mind, the line gave a mighty jerk. Braced on the ship’s rail, I struggled to reel in a huge, silvery salmon, then flipped it, flopping and flashing, into a waiting tub. The captain gave me a smiling thumbs-up just before the train gave a jerk, and I came back to reality. I wanted to stay aboard the boat . . . bait the hook, cast it in the frothy foam and challenge the sea for another catch. But my vivid vision evaporated. Instead of fresh, ocean air, I breathed cigar smoke mixed with fumes from our coal-burning engine.

Well, so much for my dandy day-dream.

I turned to Benny. “I’d rather be catching fish aboard a boat than slicing them up in a Seattle sea-food shop.”

Benny’s dark eyes went wide with surprise. “You’re going to work in a fish market?”

“Yes, from what my aunt wrote, it looks that way.” I slipped Aunt Minnie’s letter from my shirt pocket. “Listen to this, Benny: ‘Casey can use our spare bedroom . . . and maybe he’ll find it interesting to help out in his Uncle Carl’s sea-food business this summer.’”

Benny’s whole face wrinkled into a big smile. “Well, looks like I’ll be catchin’ ’em and you’ll be cleanin’ ’em and sellin’ ’em.”

I had to laugh. “And the moms will be fryin’ ’em and everybody’ll be eatin’ ’em.”

Benny welcomed a little humor, guffawed and poked me on shoulder. “Haw! Between the two of us, we’ll have folks eatin’

so much fish, it'll be a comin' outa their ears!"

Laughing helped lighten up my dark mood. But still, I couldn't forget the strong smell of the Fulton Fish Market in lower Manhattan.

I hoped for the best. On the job I'd probably get used to smelling fish, and maybe I'll get to go to high school too.

As we talked, the home-sick lump in my stomach melted away. Benny'd left New York to start a new life, too. Maybe we could get together in Seattle before he sailed for Alaska.

I told myself, "You're dreaming again! Seattle's a big place. When we get off the train we'll go our separate ways and I'll never see Benny again."

I looked out at the passing countryside from my window seat. In a way, my whole life seemed to be rushing by.

What would my life with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Carl be like? Would school be a part of it? Already I missed my classes back in Brooklyn . . . especially the interesting new electronic stuff produced by the inventor, Edison, and a scientist named Tesla.

I thought of old Mr. Lambrusco who lived in our apartment house. What a wonderful neighbor. He taught me to juggle, to play his mandolin, and loaned me fascinating geography and history books that showed how the explorers opened up the new world. Well, if I can't go to school, at least maybe there'll be a library nearby.

These last two days Benny and I had rolled through the mostly flat land of Montana, then crossed the Rocky Mountains. Now, as we raced though eastern Washington I noticed a big change in the landscape . . . and it wasn't what I expected.

Back in Brooklyn, the principal's parting comment was, "You'd better pack an umbrella, Casey, Seattle gets as much rain as London." Checking me out for a three-thousand-mile journey brought out the teacher in him. He added, "Wet,

maritime climate there, you know.” From that, I expected to see lush greenery about now. Instead, my eyes traveled out to a treeless countryside. Rain? Maritime climate? Not out there! Dry, desolate desert rolled by. Even the sparse sagebrush, which extended out to the distant hills, looked dead. I’ll bet if a drop of rain hit that scrubby stuff, it would explode. London? Forget the umbrella! This country is more like the Sahara!

I refused to be depressed by the dreary desert. We didn’t own an umbrella anyhow. A thought made me smile: “This part of the west is not exactly as bright and colorful as those patchwork quilts Mom made to cover our beds back in Brooklyn.”

In New York City the sidewalks run up and down; one like another, but the buildings are different and the neighborhoods with their six-story apartment houses, little shops and parks, have a sameness about them. Then I thought of the view from the Staten Island ferry . . . the big bridges, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, so different from this strange land out there.

An unpainted house came into view. Two black horses cantered about in a split-rail corral.

“Aha! I thought, “There is life out there.” I liked horses, and drank in the sight of them. In New York, motor cars were replacing them, but the big city still had horse-drawn carts. A strange idea began to push its way into my mind like grass sprouting between the cracks of a sidewalk. For days now, this train had rolled on through cluttered cities, thick forests, and vast prairies . . . on and on . . . I began to think we’d overshot the west coast and somehow wound up in another land entirely. As the corral passed by, my imagination began to gallop. Maybe we’ve run off the face of the earth to another planet. Except for the little farm, it was more like Mars out there than planet earth.

I bumped my head against the thick window a couple of

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