



# Off Colors

There is such a thing as "an ice harvest." To call it a nice harvest would be to depart from our proverbial truthfulness (which, of course, we will not do, even to please the two-faced god, January, Janus). It is everything but an ice harvest.

We were placed aboard a train—and after three young men, dressed like time-keepers, had been unloaded on a plea that the company could not use them (as much as it would like to) the train was gotten under way and we were carried to our destination.

For the benefit of those who do not know the meaning of the word destination, I will go deeper into the subject. But I want it understood that any remarks I may make should not be construed as an endorsement of the capitalist system.

Destination means a ramshack camp, full of lousey beds and dirty blankets, full of dirty cooks and dirtier flunkies; dirty language. Oh, what's the use?

The morning is bitterly cold. Outside the camp 'tis somewhat colder than inside—zero inside, seven below outside. The system has provided each harvester with a set of rags for clothing; pieces of burlap do the office of socks, etc.

The system has starved these men for years. The very last "feeble kick" has been "drained out" by mal-nutrition and under-nourishment, lack of raiment—and here we are, undergoing the same process in the ice-fields. Great Skads, is it in the hope that we will ketch pneumonia and pass away to the icefields of eternity where toil is not, and consequently no products to fight for. Perish the thought.

Difficult, indeed, is the position of our overlords. They would eat their banana and save it for tomorrow; they would have us work but dare not feed us. If they feed us not, we cannot work; if they do feed us we may develop manhood enough to make a decided "kick." Hence, hungry, ill-clad, we step out into the seven below. Brave effort, indeed!

Like going into a burning building to save your enemy's poodle. The boss says, go; the winds says, no! The slave says, I will; the thermometer says, you will, like hell! *Not in them wraps.* Was it disobedience that brought these men back to shiver in a miserable camp? Was it a last remaining spark of manhood in them that caused them to risk the company's wrath? I hope so, but think not. I think it was seven below zero that whispered in their ear, "Come to mother; come to the cheerless fireside—the hearth you have always known."

## Part II.

Once ensconsed in the "home" the "pure ice" company has provided us, reaction sets in and the slave again is comparing notes with his fellow man. A United States army man, evidently over seventeen years old, relates his experiences aboard ship (abroad and elsewhere), to an interested bunch of listeners; his trip to Sunny California and subsequent escape to Kansas City coming in for a great deal of attention, and how K. C. proved itself, a depressing influence upon his expanding young life, compelling him to move to fields of greater scope—Chicago—and thence to the fields of ice, aided and abetted by a "charity lady."

His conception of the good times had in California was very hazy (therefore his record is incomplete), but aboard ship, he says, he was treated with every respect. His shipmates would, and did, fight for the pleasure of basking beneath his smile. They would vie with each other in carrying delicacies to him, and officers even, would divest themselves of all martial dignity, selecting him for the most enjoyable tasks. He was voted as the most beautiful boy in the service of his country and, altho he served only three months, he swears he will go back and prove to the world that he can win an honorable discharge.

He didn't mention why he was "bob-tailed," but hinted strongly that the Admiral was jealous of his popularity. His discharge papers, it seems, were stolen from him by a "deserter" who won his confidence in Chicago. I believe the lad.

Weil, the boy is gone, summarily discharged. The nemesis "discharge" seems to pursue this lad everywhere. It's bad enough to be drummed out of the navy, even with a "white dishonorable," but it's infinitely worse to get "bobtailed" from an ice camp, turned out on the cruel world (and its rapacious citizens) without so much as a "check," as proof of honorable service—toil. The lad worked, intermittently, about a week, and the board ate up the pay, while the boy ate up the board. The ice was stored without the formality of paying cash. That's why I say, an ice harvest isn't a nice harvest.

But, I hope the "charity lady" in Chicago will give the lad another boost along the road to wealth. Maybe he will learn. H'm, can't expect much from a mere lad when us older ones need a return to sanity and sanitation.

It looks bad—truly "off color."—T-Bone Slim.