



***FRANCIS  
HOPKINSON  
SMITH***

***TOM  
GROGAN***

**Francis Hopkinson Smith**

**Tom Grogan**

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Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



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# I. BABCOCK'S DISCOVERY

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Something worried Babcock. One could see that from the impatient gesture with which he turned away from the ferry window on learning he had half an hour to wait. He paced the slip with hands deep in his pockets, his head on his chest. Every now and then he stopped, snapped open his watch and shut it again quickly, as if to hurry the lagging minutes.

For the first time in years Tom Grogan, who had always unloaded his boats, had failed him. A scow loaded with stone for the sea-wall that Babcock was building for the Lighthouse Department had lain three days at the government dock without a bucket having been swung across her decks. His foreman had just reported that there was not enough material to last the concrete-mixers two hours. If Grogan did not begin work at once, the divers must come up.

Heretofore to turn over to Grogan the unloading of material for any submarine work had been like feeding grist to a mill—so many tons of concrete stone loaded on the scows by the stone crushing company had meant that exact amount delivered by Grogan on Babcock's mixing-platforms twenty-four hours after arrival, ready for the divers below. This was the way Grogan had worked, and he had required no watching.

Babcock's impatience did not cease even when he took his seat on the upper deck of the ferry-boat and caught the welcome sound of the paddles sweeping back to the landing at St. George. He thought of his men standing idle, and of the heavy penalties which would be inflicted by the

Government if the winter caught him before the section of wall was complete. It was no way to serve a man, he kept repeating to himself, leaving his gangs idle, now when the good weather might soon be over and a full day's work could never be counted upon. Earlier in the season Grogan's delay would not have been so serious.

But one northeaster as yet had struck the work. This had carried away some of the upper planking—the false work of the coffer-dam; but this had been repaired in a few hours without delay or serious damage. After that the Indian summer had set in—soft, dreamy days when the winds dozed by the hour, the waves nibbled along the shores, and the swelling breast of the ocean rose and fell as if in gentle slumber.

But would this good weather last? Babcock rose hurriedly, as this anxiety again took possession of him, and leaned over the deck-rail, scanning the sky. He did not like the drift of the low clouds off to the west; southeasters began that way. It looked as though the wind might change.

Some men would not have worried over these possibilities. Babcock did. He was that kind of man.

When the boat touched the shore, he sprang over the chains, and hurried through the ferry-slip.

“Keep an eye out, sir,” the bridge-tender called after him—he had been directing him to Grogan's house—“perhaps Tom may be on the road.”

Then it suddenly occurred to Babcock that, so far as he could remember, he had never seen Mr. Thomas Grogan, his stevedore. He knew Grogan's name, of course, and would have recognized his signature affixed to the little cramped notes with which his orders were always acknowledged, but the man himself might have passed unnoticed within three feet of him. This is not unusual where the work of a

contractor lies in scattered places, and he must often depend on strangers in the several localities.

As he hurried over the road he recalled the face of Grogan's foreman, a big blond Swede, and that of Grogan's daughter, a slender fair-haired girl, who once came to the office for her father's pay; but all efforts at reviving the lineaments of Grogan failed.

With this fact clear in his mind, he felt a tinge of disappointment. It would have relieved his temper to unload a portion of it upon the offending stevedore. Nothing cools a man's wrath so quickly as not knowing the size of the head he intends to hit.

As he approached near enough to the sea-wall to distinguish the swinging booms and the puffs of white steam from the hoisting-engines, he saw that the main derrick was at work lowering the buckets of mixed concrete to the divers. Instantly his spirits rose. The delay on his contract might not be so serious. Perhaps, after all, Grogan had started work.

When he reached the temporary wooden fence built by the Government, shutting off the view of the depot yard, with its coal-docks and machine-shops, and neared the small door cut through its planking, a voice rang out clear and strong above the din of the mixers:—

“Hold on, ye wall-eyed macaroni! Do ye want that fall cut? Turn that snatch-block, Cully, and tighten up the watch-tackle. Here, cap'n; lend a hand. Lively now, lively, before I straighten out the hull gang of ye!”

The voice had a ring of unquestioned authority. It was not quarrelsome or abusive or bullying—only earnest and forceful.

“Ease away on that guy! Ease away, I tell ye!” it continued, rising in intensity. “So—all gone! Now, haul out, Cully, and let that other team back up.”

Babcock pushed open the door in the fence and stepped in. A loaded scow lay close beside the string-piece of the government wharf. Alongside its forward hatch was rigged a derrick with a swinging gaff. The "fall" led through a snatch-block in the planking of the dock, and operated an iron bucket that was hoisted by a big gray horse driven by a boy. A gang of men were filling these buckets, and a number of teams being loaded with their dumped contents. The captain of the scow was on the dock, holding the guy.

At the foot of the derrick, within ten feet of Babcock, stood a woman perhaps thirty-five years of age, with large, clear gray eyes, made all the more luminous by the deep, rich color of her sunburnt skin. Her teeth were snow-white, and her light brown hair was neatly parted over a wide forehead. She wore a long ulster half concealing her well-rounded, muscular figure, and a black silk hood rolled back from her face, the strings falling over her broad shoulders, revealing a red silk scarf loosely wound about her throat, the two ends tucked in her bosom. Her feet were shod in thick-soled shoes laced around her well-turned ankles, and her hands were covered by buckskin gauntlets creased with wear. From the outside breast-pocket of her ulster protruded a time-book, from which dangled a pencil fastened to a hempen string. Every movement indicated great physical strength, perfect health, and a thorough control of herself and her surroundings. Coupled with this was a dignity and repose unmistakable to those who have watched the handling of large bodies of workingmen by some one leading spirit, master in every tone of the voice and every gesture of the body. The woman gave Babcock a quick glance of interrogation as he entered, and, receiving no answer, forgot him instantly.

"Come, now, ye blatherin' Dagos,"—this time to two Italian shovelers filling the buckets—"shall I throw one of ye overboard to wake ye up, or will I take a hand meself?"



Another shovel there—that bucket's not half full”—drawing one hand from her side pocket and pointing with an authoritative gesture, breaking as suddenly into a good-humored laugh over the awkwardness of their movements.

Babcock, with all his curiosity aroused, watched her for a moment, forgetting for the time his own anxieties. He liked a skilled hand, and he liked push and grit. This woman seemed to possess all three. He was amazed at the way in which she handled her men. He wished somebody as clearheaded and as capable were unloading his boat. He began to wonder who she might be. There was no mistaking her nationality. Slight as was her accent, her direct descent from the land of the shamrock and the shilla-lah was not to be doubted. The very tones of her voice seemed saturated with its national spirit—“a flower for you when you agree with me, and a broken head when you don't.” But underneath all these outward indications of dominant power and great physical strength he detected in the lines of the mouth and eyes a certain refinement of nature. There was, too, a fresh, rosy wholesomeness, a sweet cleanliness, about the woman. These, added to the noble lines of her figure, would have appealed to one as beauty, and only that had it not been that the firm mouth, well-set chin, and deep, penetrating glance of the eye overpowered all other impressions.

Babcock moved down beside her.

“Can you tell me, madam, where I can find Thomas Grogan?”

“Right in front of ye,” she answered, turning quickly, with a toss of her head like that of a great hound baffled in hunt. “I'm Tom Grogan. What can I do for ye?”

“Not Grogan the stevedore?” Babcock asked in astonishment.

“Yes, Grogan the stevedore. Come! Make it short—what can I do for ye?”

“Then this must be my boat. I came down”—

“Ye're not the boss?”—looking him over slowly from his feet up, a good-natured smile irradiating her face, her eyes beaming, every tooth glistening. “There's me hand, I'm glad to see ye. I've worked for ye off and on for four years, and niver laid eyes on ye till this minute. Don't say a word. I know it. I've kept the concrete gangs back half a day, but I couldn't help it. I've had four horses down with the 'zooty, and two men laid up with dip'thery. The Big Gray Cully's drivin' over there—the one that's a-hoistin'—ain't fit to be out of the stables. If ye weren't behind in the work, he'd have two blankets on him this minute. But I'm here meself now, and I'll have her out to-night if I work till daylight. Here, cap'n, pull yerself together. This is the boss.”

Then catching sight of the boy turning a handspring behind the horse, she called out again:—

“Now, look here, Cully, none of your skylarkin'. There's the dinner whistle. Unhitch the Big Gray; he's as dry as a bone.”

The boy loosened the traces and led the horse to water, and Babcock, after a word with the Captain, and an encouraging smile to Tom, turned away. He meant to go to the engineer's office before his return to town, now that his affairs with Grogan were settled. As he swung back the door in the board fence, he stumbled over a mere scrap of humanity carrying a dinner-pail. The mite was peering through the crack and calling to Cully at the horse-trough. He proved to be a boy of perhaps seven or eight years of age, but with the face of an old man—pinched, weary, and scarred all over with suffering and pain. He wore a white tennis-cap pulled over his eyes, and a short gray jacket that reached to his waist. Under one arm was a wooden crutch. His left leg was bent at the knee, and swung clear when he

jerked his little body along the ground. The other, though unhurt, was thin and bony, the yarn stocking wrinkling over the shrunken calf.

Beside him stood a big billy-goat, harnessed to a two-wheeled cart made of a soap-box.

As Babcock stepped aside to let the boy pass he heard Cully shouting in answer to the little cripple's cries. "Cheese it, Patsy. Here's Pete Lathers comin' down de yard. Look out fer Stumpy. He'll have his dog on him."

Patsy laid down the pail and crept through the door again, drawing the crutch after him. The yardmaster passed with a bulldog at his heels, and touching his hat to the contractor, turned the corner of the coal-shed.

"What is your name?" said Babcock gently. A cripple always appealed to him, especially a child.

"My name's Patsy, sir," looking straight up into Babcock's eyes, the goat nibbling at his thin hand.

"And who are you looking for?"

"I come down with mother's dinner, sir. She's here working on the dock. There she is now."

"I thought ye were niver comin' wid that dinner, darlint," came a woman's voice. "What kept ye? Stumpy was tired, was he? Well, niver mind."

The woman lifted the little fellow in her arms, pushed back his cap and smoothed his hair with her fingers, her whole face beaming with tenderness.

"Gimme the crutch, darlint, and hold on to me tight, and we'll get under the shed out of the sun till I see what Jennie's sent me." At this instant she caught Babcock's eye.

"Oh, it's the boss. Sure, I thought ye'd gone back. Pull the hat off ye, me boy; it's the boss we're workin' for, the man that's buildin' the wall. Ye see, sir, when I'm driv' like I am to-day, I can't go home to dinner, and me Jennie sends me—

big—man—Patsy—down”—rounding out each word in a pompous tone, as she slipped her hand under the boy's chin and kissed him on the cheek.

After she had propped him between two big spars, she lifted the cover of the tin pail.

“Pigs' feet, as I'm alive, and hot cabbage, and the coffee a-b'ilin' too!” she said, turning to the boy and pulling out a tin flask with a screw top, the whole embedded in the smoking cabbage. “There, we'll be after puttin' it where Stumpy can't be rubbin' his nose in it”—setting the pail, as she spoke, on a rough anchor-stone.

Here the goat moved up, rubbing his head in the boy's face, and then reaching around for the pail.

“Look at him, Patsy! Git out, ye imp, or I'll hurt ye! Leave that kiver alone!” She laughed as she struck at the goat with her empty gauntlet, and shrank back out of the way of his horns.

There was no embarrassment over her informal dinner, eaten as she sat squat in a fence-corner, an anchor-stone for a table, and a pile of spars for a chair. She talked to Babcock in an unabashed, self-possessed way, pouring out the smoking coffee in the flask cup, chewing away on the pigs' feet, and throwing the bones to the goat, who sniffed them contemptuously. “Yes, he's the youngest of our children, sir. He and Jennie—that's home, and 'most as tall as meself—are all that's left. The other two went to heaven when they was little ones.”

“Can't the little fellow's leg be straightened?” asked Babcock, in a tone which plainly showed his sympathy for the boy's suffering.

“No, not now; so Dr. Mason says. There was a time when it might have been, but I couldn't take him. I had him over to Quarantine again two years ago, but it was too late; it'd growed fast, they said. When he was four years old he

would be under the horses' heels all the time, and a-climbin' over them in the stable, and one day the Big Gray fetched him a crack, and broke his hip. He didn't mean it, for he's as dacint a horse as I've got; but the boys had been a-worritin' him, and he let drive, thinkin', most likely, it was them. He's been a-hoistin' all the mornin'." Then, catching sight of Cully leading the horse back to work, she rose to her feet, all the fire and energy renewed in her face.

"Shake the men up, Cully! I can't give 'em but half an hour to-day. We're behind time now. And tell the cap'n to pull them macaronis out of the hold, and start two of 'em to trimmin' some of that stone to starboard. She was a-listin' when we knocked off for dinner. Come, lively!"