

*Going to College to Get to Be a Ship's Engineer? Just
a Lot of Bunk, Pop Thought*



NO FAVORS ASKED

By B. E. COOK

Author of "Old Expendable," etc.

THE world is his oyster, then he's pacing a hospital hall. It's a boy! Thence on, it's "a chip o' the old block," only better. All the way up the tender years on the kid is another Pops in the making. Pump him full of "get your schooling, son," so he'll enter Pops'

line with a head start. College? Okay, anything; spend what it takes, anything so long as son finally leaps into it well prepped. Then, by gosh, he's on his own.

That is fatherhood and this is the American system.

NATE BRICE liked the Portland-New York run because it let him home every week twice, home in his uniform of a chief engineer. His wife liked it. His boy admired him and his clothes, which was right; of course, he'd work up to chief, a better one.

"Chet," Nate would say, "you've got brains. You'll get schooling and a head start." Often did Nate hammer the idea home and it did stick. Chet worshiped Nate.

Big-time shipping caught the public fancy. For ten dollars a day, anybody could sail the world over and coastwise caught the smaller fry in droves. People fought for staterooms, for bunks, for mattresses on saloon carpets, come a holiday. Sea breezes, night under the stars, fetching ads—wonderful adventure after months in stuffy buildings. It became the rage.

Something happened. Great liners left worldwide routes to run on West Indian cruises. Co-captains provided shows, people lunched all over the decks, danced . . . and smart Nate penetrated the undercurrent of this change. The "luxury" idea did not fool Nate Brice. To the little woman he confided, "It's hollow. Times are changing. What shall we do about Chet?"

"Send him to college. College men stand the best chance in case you're right." She had her answer ready.

"College to get into my line? That's crazy."

"Your line, yes and no," she replied. "There are engineers ashore, surveyors, bridge builders, stationary engineers. Oh, I've looked it up."

"And talked?" Nate probed.

"With Chet," she admitted. "Some engineers aren't away from home, at sea in blizzards or over holidays with mobs ready to pile into lifeboats like cattle if

you're in trouble. I know, I'm a mariner's wife."

Nate's ship cut the New York runs down to once weekly. Lack of traffic. He came home in a blue funk. Business, he declared, was dying; the New York docks no longer bustled with foreign freight, the ocean looked bare. "And what about Chet?" he groaned.

"What I said," she came back.

So the boy out of high school checked in his track shoes and halfback's suit and looked in vain for summer work. That fall, Nate saw a new invention in lifeboat davits—and Chet's trunk labeled "Worcester Tech" in big letters.

"Find out what kind of engineer you want to be, kid, then go after it. Forget the rah-rah stuff; this slump won't last. By the time you graduate, they'll be after good men, whatever your line. But nothing doing in mine; the woods'll be full of us for years."

"You think so." Just like that. It was the first time Chet ever had reserved judgment on a Pops' utterance. Chet, it seemed, had done some of his own thinking.

"Listen, kid. You know a lot more than you will a few years hence. I've made the grade, I'm in the game. I tell you the marine chances are zero flat for you. And what the hell can college education do for you in my line anyway? Keep your head down the way you run the last lap and take an expert's advice." Nate was angry. He felt his hold on the kid slipping, wanted desperately to get a new one and didn't know quite how. Because there was none. The kid knew, by then, that it was his life, not Pops', he was staking out.

One night the *Cottage City* got in with half a cargo and a dozen passengers. That was curtains. She was taken off the run, the Portland-New York service discontinued. Nate went home to worry.

“More than ever it’s a good thing Chet got onto himself in time,” he said. “Well, this is the hell of going to sea; it unfits us for everything else.”

That winter they covered the top of the *Cottage City’s* funnel and lined her bearings with lead compound. Would her chief get the assignment to give her engine the daily exercise on the hand gear?

Eastern Lines had a towboat in and out of Portland Harbor. They put Nate aboard her instead, as engineer. Days on the water, nights ashore; a seaman’s dream, but not for Nate Brice. He dreaded she’d be tied up, he dreaded what the future might not hold for Chet too. The hard times did not end or even promise to get better.

“Anyway,” he sighed, “college is the best place in the world for a young fellow nowadays.”

Eastern Lines transferred the towboat to Boston and Nate moved. One night his wife said, “Chet and I’ve been talking; he wants to transfer too.”

“Where?” Nate blurted out defensively.

“To M. I. T.”

“Why?”

“Well,” evasively, “it’s right here in Cambridge, isn’t it? He could come home nights.”

Nate suspected something, he knew not what. “Isn’t M. I. T. more expensive?” he demanded.

“Yes. Now let’s talk. He’d cut the room and board bill out by living at home. Out of that cut he could buy a small car; they’re cheap now.”

“Hup—”

“We’ll still be saving money and have him home to boot.”

Nate’s head was too full of waterfront, bad-times talk to argue with her, but he felt like a lawyer whose client won’t come clean. “I don’t even know what he’s

studying to be,” he threw in.

“Well, it’s engineering because that’s an engineering school.”

Chet came home in a storm, eyes set and intent on something and Nate knew the answer. “Okay,” he surrendered, “your mother broke the ice. Go to M. I. T. I’ll pass on a car before you buy one.”

SUDETENLAND had left the headlines. Munich still lingered; a bad taste in the mouth. The engineer of the Eastern Lines towboat opened a paper in the subway and read carelessly something about the British ambassador. The train emerged onto the bridge. He looked out at the Tech buildings and wondered about his Chet somewhere there. Not a word to Pops of enthusiasm over his new classes, not a growl. It wasn’t natural, thought Nate. Had the kid found the going tough? Too tough?

While Nate rode, the British ambassador viewed a new factory in far off Tennessee, one of many which we, the public, scarcely heeded, much less tried to account for. Suffice it that slowly, subtly, something was breathing back life into business. Aye, waterfront wind had it that a certain local area was under survey. For a huge shipyard, they said; foreign business, a few whispered. “Phooey!” Nate snorted, then glanced around him lest somebody on the train had noticed. He must be getting old, at that.

Nate walked the blocks from Kenmore home, dour and deeply disappointed with his career. All the way up from stokehold hand firing and plugging tubes at the back of boilers, all the way to chief. Now, in the midst of pulverized, automatic feed and watertube boilers and diesels and geared turbines—now he was out of the swim in a mere harbor tug. Had Eastern Lines side-tracked and forgotten him? Was he being eased toward retirement? Could this be the fruit of a life conscientiously devoted to

service?

He entered the apartment and resented its smallness.

Chet was home. And on the crest of a wave. He had won the two-mile for Tech in the New England Meet and he had rated a B in—what was that? Wha-at!

Now came her low voiced talk and Chet's abrupt silence. Nate walked in on them. "What is this?" he demanded with the misgivings of the man of the house when he surprises a family confab.

The little woman sighed, patient and brave to meet his challenge. A terrific moment had burst upon the family, a real crisis. She would deal with Nate as of old.

She was relegated to third place before she could start. It was to be Chet's race this time. "Okay, Pops, you're asking for it," he launched. "I am up to my ears in reciprocals, geared turbines, diesels and tons of this marine boiler stuff. I just landed me a B in a test on watertube boiler efficiency. I'm going to sea."

Nate Brice's response to shocks depended somewhat upon how they caught him. The "how" today was—worried. Hints of impending war boom and he a forgotten man in a harbor tug. So the jolt knocked him groggy for a moment. His fists flexed, his gray tired eyes glared, but the well-known eloquence of the towboat man just would not come up.

Chet read his dilemma. Never before had Pops been lost for words. With the uneasy sensation that he had succeeded too well, he said, "Sorry, Pops. I had to spill it to you sometime."

Nate came to abruptly. Not roaring, understand, simply cold and quiet and set. He and Chet were alone when he let go in measured pace: "Very well. You're going to sea. I'm schooling you for that while I sweat out my nights—never mind. Kid, I'll still see you graduate, then you're absolutely on your own. Don't expect to

get in on Eastern Line ships; go make your own start the way I did."

Chet stared at his back receding through the doorway and it was now his turn to take it. To himself he vowed: "Why I wouldn't go crawling to you if . . . towboat engineer!" Then he smiled, but it was like mixing choke cherries and mumps.

THE new drydock reeked of red lead and torches and occasional whiffs of vile water. Though unfinished, already it had a major repair job on pillow blocks, exposing ragged rents of war to be closed.

High and away in a mold loft window, a top engineer turned his back on a brand new model in process of creation and the template men at it on their knees. His eyes sought instead the repair job, his mind reviewed her machinery. That tail-shaft was not right yet. Somewhere abaft the last crank something must have been knocked a hair out of line by the explosion of bombs close aboard.

He left the loft with a faraway stare, once again to urge another inspection. So two loftmen look after him and grin. "That new job's got him, says one.

"Nah, that guy always stares; he's carrying a load."

Load? Him? Nuts! He makes the inspectors sign; they lug, not him."

"You think so. Jack, my boy, he's lost something."

And it's the same down in the yard. Men squirt torches and glances as he passes. "Big shot." "Him? Ahr, he graduated from a towboat. He's gone so high so fast he's dizzy. You'd stare and search faces yourself."

"Always he's lookin' for . . . for what?"

Well, they were wrong and they were right; but the big shot engineer was not dizzy, he knew his business here. That's

why he went below to insist upon one more inspection of the tailshaft; that's why Eastern Lines loaned him to the yard.

But right they were about his looking. For three-four years he'd stared, wondering where and if and whether. He searched faces from a habit his own speech to Chet had forced upon him. He searched for the face of Chester Brice, wondering where the kid could be, if the kid actually had gone to sea, whether his treatment of the kid had been just.

Of one thing he was sure: the kid had not applied for work aboard any Eastern Lines ships, looking for favors at Nate's expense. Yes, sir, Chester Brice had been graduated from Tech and straightway had vanished. Today big Nate wondered whether the lad had gone tough; so many athletes, he believed, had.

Nate Brice came to official attention. He had become a character in the yard because of his habit of quizzing men on incoming jobs. "Brice is his name, yes. Chester Brice of Boston. He's a graduate of M. I. T., he knows his business." Time and again Nate said that speech until a few careful inquiries were made at Eastern Lines. This filtered eventually to President Dingley's ears and he blew up.

"We loan them one of the best men we ever had, an authority on reciprocating engines. Now they ask slyly if he's mentally unbalanced!"

Only they didn't say it so grammatically; the word around the yard was "teched." That old guy had a one-track mind and engineering was merely a spur track off of the main line of where-is-my-kid. So they lost a real expert.

MR. DINGLEY haled him into the sanctum. "What in merry hell—" he exploded, but once the door was shut he said, "Nate Brice, you saw the *Cottage City* through many a dirty night this side

the Shoals, what? I knew, I came up the same way you did and I had a boy. Only I forced him through the old coal-passer-to-glory way up—I tried to. He turned sailor on me and—well, you knew first officer Dingley."

Nate Brice endured it. The Dingley story was mossy. The loss of Chet couldn't be paired with Dingley's mere loss of self-esteem in his son's shift from aft to forward. The reason for this session, the dirty jibes and gossip at the yard, burned Nate up. Never had he rendered faulty judgment on a repair job, never slacked or quit or ducked a tough decision. Some inspectors had washed their flossy fists of junked machinery and engine rooms that he had insisted on putting in shape in the urgent demand for ships. Three such wounded vessels Nate had saved from the imminence of the scrapheap; he was a patriot, was Nate Brice.

But a father also. There's where they got to him and today, despite chagrin, censure and caricature, he gave in not one degree. "Yes, I am looking for word of my boy. I lived for him, I had plans. He vanished and I stood it more than three years; then I had to hunt. The yard put me where I met crews from all over the world so I took their cuckoo looks and jibes just to do my job right and keep asking for word of Chet." Nate's tight, folded hands dropped apart, his head lowered, his deep chest fell under an escaping sigh.

"If our kids only knew," Dingley murmured. More loudly he said, "They think your eyes are bad."

"Oh, they think, do they?"

MR. DINGLEY didn't follow that one up. He had an expert on his hands, an expert and a heartsick man in one. "Nate, we'll not attempt to reform that shipyard crowd; they'll learn plenty in

couple o' years of this going, what? You take a week's rest and—" He burst abruptly from the gentle reverie to disclose: "Brice, listen and keep mum. I've got my eye on three cargo jobs. Government charters. They've requisitioned my coastwise vessels, now I'll get into deepwater trade. Come see me in a week."

What Nate Brice was to do with himself and his problems one whole week became his newest concern. At least, the yard had kept him on the go.

The third afternoon he did what no ordinary mortal could have; he got aboard a ship at a pier. She was the first whole vessel he'd set foot on in more months than he could recall. Naturally he made directly for the after gang, engineers in the swim.

"We dam' near did swim," the chief admitted. "Skipper made 'em think their torpedo got us afire. No kiddin'. He had fires lit all over us. Being in the dead o' night, we got by long enough to make into Capetown. Mister, there's a human menagerie for you; more survivors from more ports than you can count on an old fashioned log ticker. Yep, when they stopped our goin' through the Suez, they went south there to catch us comin' around and up the east side of Africa."

"Here, come on deck. I'll show you the firepans we fashioned for him."

So it went. Two oldtimers breezing it out, but one mostly. For the other only bided his time until: "This Capetown. Survivors from everywhere, you say. Didn't run afoul of a Chester Brice by any chance, an engineer in his twenties?"

Late afternoon Nate crossed the gangplank. The chatter had lifted him out of his one-track monotony and that was refreshing. Now, however, he must return to the same old world, the same life without a word of Chet or his

whereabouts. Said the little woman, "That's your medicine. Put in the week aboard all the boats you can. You look ten years brighter for this!"

While she spoke, a mate on that visited ship also spoke. "Oh yes, chief, I saw you two on deck like two old dogs on one's garbage-can beat. Funny thing: remember the engineer I fetched aboard us that first afternoon in Capetown? The one off'n that converted Eastern Lines vessel? You know, the passenger job on her way east to—"

"Naw, I was ashore 'long o' the skipper that day. What about 'im?"

"Well, seeing him, then seeing your friend here today . . . I dunno, imagination maybe. Chester, he called himself, Nathan Chester."

"Ah foosh," the chief scoffed. "You always talk in riddles. Why don't you say what you mean? This man is a Brice, Chief Brice."

NEXT morning the phone rang. Nate fairly ran to the Eastern Lines building. "We're off in a cloud of dust and dividends!" cried Mr. Dingley. "Chief, your function is clear. And important. Three ships and a war charter. Keep the machinery in all three running prime. They've got to show eighteen knots if chased."

"Keep three—" Nate gasped.

"Three! You're port engineer or something, anything so long as they're not caught in breakdowns at sea."

Nate Brice had his time and hands full for days. And nights in engine rooms and boilers and pulverizers. Only between times did his brain whisk away from the fixed problem onto Chet. Somehow he found moments in which, he privately grouched; on this confining job he'd be sealed off from traffic coming in from sea. Mr. Dingley had rescued him from the

shipyard incident, yes, but now . . . the only good feature was the salary and the joy he got in working with marine machinery.

“Well,” remarked the little woman, “isn’t that just about what life for you always is—marine engines and pay?” She hoped it would so completely occupy his mind and heart that the futile hunt for Chet would gradually cease. As for herself, intuition—she called it—told her that Chet was okay somewhere and ten to one he’d turn up in long, laced boots from a big contract West. Wasn’t the government building huge plants there—and talking of a road to Alaska—and another down toward the Canal? Chet was inland . . . or was she whistling to convince herself?

Nate soon discovered that one of the three newly acquired ships was far from new. In years, okay; but she had lived one vessel’s span and lived hard. Raked with gunfire and near-missed with bombs and depth charges, she now had frames and machinery that had been sprung here a trifle and set back there. Her former owners had called her lucky, the lucky knight, but they’d sold her for a’ that and today Nate Brice knew why.

So did her new crop of engineers. They held a growl fest beside the lower engine. “Inches out o’ line!” one exaggerated. “Hell, no, not inches, but there’s a crack creeping across that second crankpin,” another contributed. Thus until the chief’s ears rang and he asked sarcastically, “You don’t think she’ll take us all to bottom ‘fore daybreak, do you?”

“Okay, how about getting the main squeeze down here again?”

“Chief Brice, eh? All right, I will.”

Nate came in denim. Within the hour all hands plus became the hustling parts of dissembled pump, eccentric rod, crankpin, tools and chainfalls—and a call for Chief Brice came aboard in their midst.

Twenty-six minutes thereafter, he reappeared on the top landing and he was white. He called the ship’s own chief topside. “Mac,” said he, “that was Dingley himself, no less!”

“Who’s dead?”

“This ship. And loading a hurry cargo to sail tomorrow noon.”

“O my gawd!”

NATE BRICE hadn’t been selected by Dingley so casually as met the eye. Dingley had known what he was buying for ships and kept Nate out of the way, then unloaded the inevitable problems onto him. And now Nate demonstrated how clever the maneuver had been. His skill and speed and knack of getting the mostest best out of men—well, they got the *Candaraugua* to sea within one hour of the specified time.

And Nate dragged his heels home. He was exhausted. With it came despondency, but this time he made no talk. His wife would only harp on a mother’s faith, why argue such nonsense? At least it kept her head up. Grinding labor combined with his emotional strain. Sleep became haunting dreams, tossed him on his bed, drove him into the streets to pace and to ponder. It was out there that he hit upon a smart new move, something better than worrying, than waiting. He wrote to Washington. Was there in all the records of licensed, American, marine engineers a Chester Brice, age twenty-seven?

Again he was waiting, but this time for something definite. He got the *Candaraugua* to sea; somehow he managed that overwhelming job. But she was hardly out of his sight when he boarded two newcomers awaiting their turns at the yard.

Late that afternoon, a chief solemnly winked and nodded to a yard official. The latter had told him about Nate’s quest and

the chief had an answer ready. He heard Nate's question and paused. Then: "Chester Brice. . . Brice, eh? Why yes."

Nate's head swam. Dizziness overtook him so completely that he braced himself against the after house. "Go on," he managed. "Where is he? What happened?"

"Well, let's see. Ahem! We had a round of drinks. Capetown, it was; lot of Americans in and out of there, they said. By 'm by some one spoke about a ship torpedoed. Up Mozambique Channel. Ayah." He talked like that, haltingly, as though it was an effort to put ideas together. "Anyway, one of her engineers had that name Brice. He got his fireroom gang out but he stood by too long. They made quite the hero out of him, I'd say. That's all I can recollect right now. Why?"

"Then he— Then Brice didn't—" Nate couldn't finish it.

The chief nodded reluctantly. "Yeah. By the looks, he went down in her. None of 'em laid eyes on 'im again."

Nate accepted a bracer; he had to get ashore and away. Chet was dead. Chet had gone to sea and forfeited his life. No more Chet. What would this news do to his mother? After kidding herself for months he was out West. Now her hunch was nothing but wishful junk. Could she take it?

He decided not to tell her. Let her go on hoping until time should gradually bring home the ugly truth. So he worked late in his office, pored in his misery over bills and federal releases and directives that his brain scarcely registered at all. For Nate Brice faced sterner facts—Chet was no more.

Thus until the phone rang him out of a doze. Yes, yes right away. He had gotten the *Candaraugua* to sea, sure, and worked up the papers on her repair bills. Now he'd come right home.

Had he suspected the flock of bugs to

confront that vessel's beset engineers ere she got back here, it might have served him well. Certainly it would have diverted some of his thinking and slightly dulled the sting of grief which threatened to engulf him tonight.

THE S.S. *Engleford* had made three trips into the Mediterranean before war closed the Suez Canal and so the route to the East by that ditch. Four times she had sustained attack in convoy and once barely escaped sinking. Then her owners had her surveyed. Figuring the cost of overhaul plus the inevitable time to be lost in priority delays, they called quits. They sold her to Eastern Lines as was.

Now, as the *Candaraugua*, she limped home with a spliced shaft, a leaky stuffing box, blade nuts suspected of being loosened, a faulty cylinder head— "And," said her Second, "that's not even mentioning the—boilers and steam lines. I'd like to know who the hot hell made up the formula for this here pipe stock."

Replied the chief characteristically, "You have to admit these piperails aren't bad."

"How long d' you guess we'll wait for priorities and drydocking, chief? I live in Chicopee."

"Wait till Chief Brice hears you ask that one!"

"Thanks for the tip, chief."

To the amazement of all hands, it was Mr. Dingley who boarded her when but two lines were ashore and he bee-lined it into the engine room. But even then he found Nate Brice down there; Nate had gone out aboard the tug which met her. And within the hour his ears rang. So did Dingley's. Then Dingley quit hearing; he'd been judging Nate as carefully as the machinery around him, and his mind was made up.

That night the little woman heard

Nate's tale of woe. It drew quick fire. "Nate, let's be realists. Let's put our minds strictly on our work. You've walked the streets of nights and I've played hunches; neither renders any satisfaction or even a moment's relief. Chet is alive—or not. If not, we can do nothing about it at all; he's in God's care." Her brave voice broke, but she went on. "If alive, he is in God's care and we still can contribute nothing. Now! That ends this siege and the quicker we both give all our attention to your splendid new position, the longer you'll hold it. Haw about it?"

Nate's brain okayed her reasoning, but his big heart ached. Almost he blurted out, "I can't keep it secret from you!" But he didn't and in that taut moment he actually regretted home life. He belonged to sea.

Next morning he took a second mauling. "Chief," said Dingley, "I had an eye on you yesterday and it made me sick. In the midst of that terrific mess aboard her, you mooned—listen to me. I got you into the shipyard and out of it; still you mooned around about the boy. I appointed you supervisor with one tough ship to claim all your best thought and labor; you barely got her fit enough to leave port and here she is, back again with a dozen serious defects in her machinery.

"And what was your final decision regarding those extremely vital matters? You offered none. Ye gods, man, this is your biggest job ever!"

Nate sweat in his thick palms. His wife's joined up with Dingley's to din in his ears, just at a time when he had to force himself to face alone what he alone among them knew—Chet had died at sea. But he was really on the carpet now. It was serious. If Dingley should fire him—after the yard had rid itself of him?

"Nate Brice, I want that vessel repaired. And quickly. Get priorities, pull a few legs, spend money where it'll count,

put her in shape. And when she does sail, God help you if she doesn't arrive!"

Dingley said a lot more, but you get the drift. So did Nate. When the din ceased, he departed in a daze, startled, scared, thoroughly shaken. He had very nearly wrecked career and home and the little woman's life. "Fool," he gasped, "damned fool!" Why, Chet had done a big thing, Chet was a hero, and here his father. . . .

It was in the nature of a Brice to ultimately face the cold facts of an issue, to weigh relative values and thereby return at long last to hard reality. Nate had it out with himself. The struggle wasn't easy.

FROM that day he firmly concentrated on his job. He wangled a machine shop spot for the *Candaraugua* out of officials at the very yard where he had not merely become a character but had established a top high reputation as engineer. Objections piled up against him; no men were available. "I've got engineers and they're all union men," Nate fired back at them. "Give us the parts and a few special tools and a chance in a shop for a few hours. Sufferin' hell, man!"

He wangled, all right, and he wore them down. He and the ship's four engineers, her oilers, more engineers' appropriated from another Eastern Lines ship just in—oh yes he had a crew. Time and overtime they worked because Mr. Dingley came down into their midst and boomed: "Men, this trip's earnings are a secondary consideration. She's to deliver a cargo that'll mean life or death for you and me and all of us. I cannot reveal the circumstances but you'll know them within a few weeks."

When the *Candaraugua* did leave shop, her compass got the works, she warmed up, she made a trial run in haste. Then she loaded. And when she sailed,

Nate Brice went in her. After Dingley's threat, he dared risk no less; he refused to stay behind and worry at a distance. He lived, moved and had his being in that vessel's ability to reach the out port—and he well knew by then that if there was a cure for his grief, it lay in hard work, in dangerous work at sea.

New steam lines, new cylinder heads, new tailshaft, gland, propeller cone and bolts, main shaft, pins—it all sang an old familiar song in his ears. It was smooth. His only worry was the haste in which all had been built into place; had the men skimmed anything? In their exhaustion during overlong hours of hard, grinding, exacting work through hot nights beside the shop pier?

Once daily he drove her at eighteen knots for one bell and chuckled. She could take it! This would be the payoff if she had to race out of U-boat range. Did I say he chuckled? In his gray eyes persisted that grief; eighteen-knot speed could not erase it. But every little incident must help, so he worked and devised and invented assiduously, conquering himself.

The *Candaraugua* hugged the Brazilian coast. When she crossed over, Nate's heart did a somersault. Going into Chet's area, to Capetown for bunkers! But Chet was gone, doggedly he must accept that, and when she did arrive he had to decline the skipper's offer to show him the City. Nate Brice could take plenty, but not that much.

By night he viewed the port, the ships anchored around him. By sailing time he wanted desperately to be gone. Where next? Only the skipper knew.

ONE morning rough weather roused him; the fierce monsoon was blowing. He discovered she was heading north. "Mozambique Channel!" he groaned. Then great following seas came

curling at the ship's stern and the throttle required careful handling. "To think I'd come away out here, to Chet's very graveyard!" he groaned and he spoke the ship's chief. He took over. He stood to the butterfly, warning himself that Dingley expected him to make her engine, shaft and screw get her to port. Hour after hour he stood that watch, a fearful, prolonged strain until it did become a blessing in disguise. He did manage to become so wrapt up in the work that he—or it—shoved Chet's death out here into the background.

In fact he emerged from the ordeal with a better courage. Henceforth it was the ship that mattered, nothing else. And as though to extend the diversion, a pair of masts appeared on the horizon astern, a light warship's masts, and Nate drove her at eighteen.

The masts fell away and Nate recalled what that other chief had done with oilpans to simulate a ship afire. He won the skipper to the idea. He fashioned pans in the lathe room and secured them, covered, at certain spots along the bulwarks. If she did get hit, he'd lead a small volunteer crew of helpers to touch off oil fires in these so that the ship would give the appearance of burning beyond control—he hoped. In extremities, they might even lower away boats, leaving gun crews to blast the foe when he came close to finish her off.

The *Candaraugua* did, however, cross the Line into the sultry north, did discharge her precious cargo where bald hills and a barren land met the sea. And Nate Brice found himself in a new vacuum of living—until the skipper confided: "That patrol we escaped will be there, I reckon. We might get it yet."

That reminder did something to Nate. Suddenly he wanted to live, to get home and tell the little woman the truth, to live

to take the sting out of the years before her. Home was the place for him, at least for a time. He had a new lease on life. So he tested his peculiar fire scheme, drilled his volunteers and forgot the awful heat. Down across the Line again, south to Mozambique Channel went the *Candaraugua* in ballast and a head wind.

Fog beset her soon after the Comoros showed ahead. Some lookout sighted a ship astern. Through glasses it looked to be a long, low passenger job, but who could make anything out of that type of ship now to converted to several sorts of war use? The *Candaraugua* took to her everlasting heels—but yes!

Speed. Eighteen wasn't enough. Nate nodded to her chief and he switched her onto direct feed. The fog should help, but it was full of long pockets and twice that following ship showed hazily in them like the Flying Dutchman after a victim with his touch of death.

Then, out ahead at the far end of another long hole appeared a small warship. Shells sang aloft, raised geysers all around. The *Candaraugua* wheeled west into the fog wall, rolling in a beam sea and throbbing mightily.

The rest of that evil day she dodged and ran for her life, but the gunboat had her number. The port wing of her bridge blew to pieces. Shells raked her boats, her wheelhouse, her funnel, her radio room. When would they get down to her waterline? Lower?

She was doing twenty knots when Nate got the call: "Man your firepans! We'll try anything." All the while, that mysterious ship last seen astern; where was she? Had the *Candaraugua* been maneuvered between two foes? Or had the one astern, an Allied vessel, seized this opportunity to bypass the danger, off into the east?

Nate and his helpers ran on deck in thick fog to touch off their fires, more to get from them a possible smoke screen than to deceive. Before they could touch off one fire, the *Candaraugua* broke into the clear again and there stood the enemy like a waiting bloodhound. His guns blazed, that time for the hull. Rough seas somehow bobbled his aim. "Only Japs 're that punk!" a shrill voice screamed and the *Candaraugua's* own gunfire shook the air.

NATE heard it all, knew what danger he was running into, but he heeded nothing. A shot splintered a length of guardrail almost in his face. He crouched to a pan; smoke rose to the wind. More fires, plenty of smoke streaking aft; then something whistled through the bulwarks close behind him, another just ahead of him. Suddenly oil, smoke, fire and a shattered pan flew up at him and bounded on toward his helpers. Men became human torches! Over and over they rolled to midship winches.

Nate ripped out of his jumper and fought fire, fought for his face, his eyes. His men, trained for this emergency also, did likewise. Others came running. The *Candaraugua's* guns ceased their noise abruptly as she got inside the fog again, a respite.

But something happened back there in the open. The gunfire became terrific and it was different guns—that mysterious ship was the answer. Bursting into the open beyond the gunboat in acres of foam, she let go everything. Very quickly the Japs, confronted with the totally unexpected, were raked with shells, out of action and on the run before they could solve the riddle.

And Nate Brice's eyes were under bandages when the noise in the distance subsided.

Long afterwards, the skipper exchanged blinker messages with that other southbound ship. Yes, he did have injured men; three were badly burned—oh, a doctor! Splendid.

Thus it eventuated that men were transferred to the S.S. *Concord Bridge* for medical attention. On their way over, Nate Brice's rising fever got the better of his tongue.

"Anyway, Dingley, we got it to the Russkies," he kept muttering. "They'll stop the Krauts in the Caucasus. Home. I must get home. Anyway, Ding—"

A FEW crew members in the passageway watched a doctor unwinding the bandage off the oldest one's face, but they couldn't hear the patient asking the ship's name.

"Our name, eh?" the doctor evaded.

"Well, chief, she used to be the *Cottage City*—Easy there! Now you lie quiet."

An engineer just off watch in the passageway gave Nate's freshly revealed profile one sharp stare, clapped a gloved hand over his mouth and exclaimed: "It's Pops!"