

## LOST—AN ECHO

BY

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

**H**E stood at the bar of a Bowery café, cheek by jowl with me, gazing mournfully into his empty stein; his eye was moist and his face florid, also a tear coursed down his bulbous nose and hung tremulous at the end.

"Hard luck, partner?" I ventured.

"Hart luck? Ach Himmel, de vorst ever! Don't you could see it?"

"Hm-m-m, well, you *do* look a little to the bad. Tipping your elbow, or how?"

"Elbow, ja . . . und teuf'lish luck. I don't look like I vonce vas somedings, eh? But I vas, sure t'ing; I useter get drei tollar a day und all de beer I wanted—I vas a *echo* vonce! Now vot vas I? Nix! Absolutely nix, ach Gott!"

"You were a—a *what*?" I felt decently familiar with most of the symptoms, but this was a new one on me.

"A echo, ja—drei tollar a day und Pils'ner, down to Blatz's Biergarten at Sout' Orange. Hundurts of Chermans useter come dere on Sundays und sit und trink by leetle round tables, trink und holler und jodel. Blatz he gif me drei tollar a day (und beer) to set on a ledge behind de bushes at de odder side de ravine, ain't it, und be der echo. Fourteen times I echoed, each time fainter as de last; I had a strong voice in dem days, also I could jodel goot. It vas hart on de t'roat, some of dem hot Sundays, but it vas a goot job, yust de same, drei tollar a day und beer, ja! Und now—"

He gazed critically at the bottom of his stein.

"Kellner!" I commanded, "here, fill this up and keep it full!"

Presently he resumed, sighing.

"Chermans vas great peoples, you know, to vander 'round lookin' at de sceneries, und trink und jodel und make echoes. So venn Blatz's Biergarten opened mit de announcement dat dere vas a fourteen-times echo in der glen opposite, de business growed like prairie-fire, und ve both made goot moneys, 'specially me, mit mine drei tollar a day und—"

"Yes, yes," I interposed, "I know all about

that! But what happened? What loosened up your hold on the cinch?"

"Und beer," he concluded, undisturbed. "De business growed und ve vas happy—till Schwartz come! You see, noboddy never knowed noddings about it except'n' me und Blatz—und Schwartz!"

He blew froth from a fresh bumper.

"Ach, Schwartz! If dere vas any Hell, I hopes me Schwartz he sizzle up pooty black in de bottom part, *nicht wahr*? Blatz vas to blame, al-so, dough he never meant no harm. Blatz vas a goot man, foist rate! He pick me up after mine Elsa skip out mit some rich feller und take all my savings vot I had in der Chermania Bank und leave me auf mine uppers. Yes, he take me in yust venn de Biergarten open und gif me de job as echo. Two summers I stayed mit him, und all de time der Biergarten gettin' more und more famous, till Turnvereins und Schützenfesters begun to come from all ofer Essex County. Der second summer dey voiked me pooty near crazy, for a fact, but my t'roat vas strong und I vas villin', mit drei tollar a day—und beer!

"Vell, one day in Yuly, a stranger—dis Schwartz—dropped in mit a big thirst; he come in, set down to a round table und ordered some bier. Dere vas only two or t'ree odder people dere; it vas a veekday, und dull. After he drunk him a few he call Blatz und say:

" 'I hear me you got one goot echo in dis here ledge, eh? "

" 'Sure t'ing!' say Blatz, rubbin' his hants togedder und schmilin', so. 'Sure t'ing! Dere ain't no echo dis side of der Schwabenwald can touch dis one! "

" 'So?' say der stranger. 'So? I try me him, ain't it? "

"He stood up, took some long breat's, opened his mout', und holler like one of dem steam-sireens:

" 'Ooohé-e-e-ee! *Yoch-hé-e-e-ee!* "

" '*Yoch-hé-e-e-ee . . . ée . . . hé . . . ee . . . !* ' Fourteen times I went me so, *Yoch-hé!*

" '*Ei du lieber Augustine!*' went der stranger, more loud.

“ ‘Augustine . . . tine . . . ine . . . ine . . . !’ went me.

“ ‘How you like dat?’ say Blatz, grinnin’ like a cat eatin’ cream. ‘Dat vas pooty goot, ain’t it?’

“ ‘Ja, goot, goot, very goot. I been all ofer de woild huntin’ der best echoes, und I ain’t never found noddings no better as dis. Vait! I try me a jodel on him!’

“ ‘Laa-lee-oo-lee-oooooooo . . .’

“ ‘Laa-lee-oo-lee-ooo-OO-OO-oooo . . .!’

“ ‘Ausgezeichnet! Fourteen times! Und so loud! She have de real kvality of der human voice, al-so—der *timbre*, vot? I always say, venn I find me a echo mit der *timbre*, den I buy me dot spot und build me ein house—I live dere und echo him mornings, noons, und nights. All ve Chermans like an echo, but I, I *lofe* it! She vas mine hobby! Haf you effer fought you sell dis place, eh?’

“ ‘Um-m-m, vell, no,’ say Blatz, lookin’ ferry gloomy, dough I knowed his heart vas yumpin’ fer choy. ‘No, der place vas a pooty goot investments und I like to hold on; still, I might possibly consideration it, if you vas villin’ to pay vat it’s vorth. I got a goot Biergarten here, *gewiss*, all on account of dot echo—folks dey comes for miles aroundt, Schutzenfesters und all sorts Vereins; it’s a goot business. I ain’t sure I vant to sell out; still I might.’

“ ‘Vell, I ain’t sure I wants to buy—not yust yet, alretty. I knows me anodder place I get der same number of echoes out in Ohio, und I can buy dirt cheap. Money ain’t no special objections to me, sure, but still, I ain’t vant to t’row it away. I drop in again in a few days und try him vonce more, ain’t it? Goot-by!’

“ ‘Den he vent away, dat stranger. I vish me he *stay* away, oi! oi! Perhaps den I haf me der sinch now und not be a Bow’ry bum. Ach Gott!’

“ ‘Dat night, after shuttin’-up times, Blatz he make some talks mit me.

“ ‘You hear vat dat feller ask?’ he say. ‘He’s sure got der echo-bug in his head und he vant to build him a house here—money ain’t no considerationments vatsoeffer. If he vas only pleased he buy der place, ten, fifteen t’ousand, perhaps, vat only cost twelfe hundurt. He’s got more money dan anyone can have und be decent, und ve—dat is *I*—vant to pry off a goot bunch. I do de right t’ing by you; I gif you a hundurt tollar cash if you keeps dis up—I write it in a contract! Only echo anodder veek, und

you makes easy money.’

“ ‘*Vat?*’ say I, mit outraged honesties. ‘*Vat?* You vas tryin’ to corruptionate me for ein hundurt tollar? Nix on your life! Effery man has his price, mine freund, und I—vell, I ain’t runnin’ no bargain-counter! Ein hundurt? Aber nit! Who vas makin’ dis real estate waluable, you oder me? Who vas all der cheeses? ME! Venn I don’t echo no more, dis place vas nix vorth. *Two t’ousand tollar* vas more like somedings, ja! *Zwei t’ousand*, or I don’t echo me, not vonce more yet, sure t’ing!’

“ ‘*Zwei t’ousand?* Ach Gott im Himmel! You wants to ruination me, eh?’ Blatz he twist his hands togedder like dey vas fly’s legs und almost make some real tears come out of his pig-eyes. Dere vas some Yiddisher in Blatz, somewheres; pullin’ teeth vas pretzels und beer ‘side of makin’ him loosen up on der currency.

“ ‘I had one hard time mit Blatz, a reg’lar inverted auction, ja, und had to t’reaten him somet’ing fierce before I could bring him to a compromise of fifteen hundurt. I knowed vell und he knowed I knowed he couldn’t find anodder goot echo inside of a veek at de shortest; der stranger vas comin’ in a couple of days, al-so. Blatz vas sure in one tight place, ain’t it, so venn I wrote out der agreement he signed her mournfulsome, sweatin’ blood at effery pore.

“ ‘Aber, *fifteen* times you echo for dis! Mind now!’ he say savage, glarin’ out der eyes. ‘*Fifteen* echoes or de contract don’t went!’ I say ja, all right; it vas in der contract written, all dat und a lot more.

“ ‘All right, *gewiss!*’ say I. ‘Bring on your man, und venn he don’t go right up to Z, I’ll handle him. Bring on your lamb; I sheer him, jawohl!’

“ ‘On der third day de stranger he drop in und he echo me ‘most to death. Blatz set him in a different place where he could fifteen echoes get, und he got ‘em, effery one. Himmel! I vas all of a sweatiness venn he finish—ein hour und forty minutes, mit jodels und foolishnesses. My t’roat feel like someone tip ash-barrels down it hinunter; I vas nigh to boisting, but I t’ought me of der fifteen hundurt und hung on. At last der stranger got enough und quit; him und Blatz had some long talks; denn he vent away.

“ ‘His name vas Schwartz und he’s yust about make up his mind to buy,’ say Blatz to me, venn I come strollin’ in accidental-like, dat evenin’. ‘He like der *timbre* better as effer, und he’s tickled to death mit der fifteen times. Dere vas only one fly in der honig, ain’t it? Dat is, he know a place in Sout’ Car’liny where he get him *sixteen* echoes, only down dere de *timbre* vas no goot. But der sixteen times vas a great inducements. Don’t you could make sixteen venn dis here chunk of ready money drops in termorrow? He vas yust about ripe enough to pick und ve don’t must let him went.’

“ ‘Sixteen?’ say I. ‘*Um Gottes Willen!*’

“ ‘Ja, sixteen,’ plead Blatz. ‘Strain your t’roat yust dis vonce und gif him so many vot he find in Sout’ Car’liny. Money, man, money! It mean great big money! Yust so soon ve close out for cash, you gets your fifteen hundurt und ve both fade away sudden for some place where dere don’t vas no extraditionments! For Gott’s sake, keep it up!’

“Vell, oi! oi! I remembers me dat last day still! Golden Fortune yust at de finger-ends und flyin’ avay quick; broken ribs und gebusted Zukunft—vat you call de future, nicht wahr? All dat voik und sweat und damage to der vocal strings, vot for? Nix, mine freund, absolutely nix, except eggsperience und bitter knowledges, ach, bitter, bitter!

“Der stranger, Schwartz, he come again nex’ day, like he said, und ach Himmel, what for a miseries! All de odder voik vas noddings side of dat. But de voik wasn’t der vorst part, like you vas goin’ to see pooty soon alretty. Blatz he took der stranger to anodder spot, which he told him vas a secret, und say:

“ ‘Now turn loose, mine freund, und you goin’ to see she echo ‘bout one t’ousand times better as Sout’ Car’liny, sure thing!’

“Oh, it vas *schrecklich!* Der high C, der jodelling, der grand opera! I done it goot, effery bit; I vould haf done it *all* goot till de very end, sixteen times, weaker und weaker, so—but, oi! oi! der stranger begun to sing him one song, ‘*Oh, Jugendslieb,*’—my song, *our* song! Elsa und me used to sing it, no one but us! I wrote it for Elsa, I taught it to her—ve used to sing it in der moonlight in Schwaben, long und long ago.

“Venn I heard dat, heard ‘Oh, Jugendslieb,’ mine heart yump up like a *gemsbock*, yump

und leap, und some chills run around my spinal backbone like a ants’ nest mit der cover off; but I stilled mine heart so quick I could, und echoed—a poor, veak echo it must have been, dough. I felt so shaky und queer-like I can’t tell it; yet I peeked out der bushes und looked across at der stranger, Schwartz. He vas not pleased, he turn to Blatz und say:

“ ‘Vat’s der matter mit your echo, eh? She got some tonsilidis, maybe? Pfui! She sound like she got one frog in her t’roat!’

“ ‘Der vind don’t vas right, I guess,’ say Blatz, frownin’, ‘but try her again. P’r’aps she do better alretty!’

“Dat stranger, Schwartz, vat he do den? He open wide his mout’ und holler mit a jodel:

“ ‘Oh, Elsa-a-a-aa! Yoché, Elsa-a-a-aa!’

“Gott im Himmel! A red-faced bloat like him hollerin’ mine Elsa’s name at me! Someding vent like blood before mine Augen—I knowed *efferyding*, *all!* I yumped, ein, zwei, drei yumps, down to der bottom of der ravine; I climb, scramble, tear mine way up der odder side—I rush among der tables! I run mit rage against dat stranger, Schwartz, him starin’ mit eyes of wonder, like Blatz, too, both breat’less.

“ ‘Elsa! Yoché, Elsa!’ I holler loud like some thunderings. ‘Take *dat* for Elsa! Take *dat* for Jugendslieb!’ Den I smeck him mit all der muscles of de arms, so, on der fat mout’, der mout’ dat sing und jodel und kiss avay mine Elsa. ‘Take *dat,*’ I holler, ‘you jodellin’ robber, you Schweinhund, you!’

“Der stranger, Schwartz, he fall down pooty quick onto der back und bleed und bleed out of der mout’, und look like he vas dreamin’; und I stand ofer him shakin’ my fists und bellowin’ und darin’ him to get up so I can knock him hinunter once more yet, harder as before.

“ ‘Ho, stand up, stand up, you echo-lover!’ I hollers. ‘Stand up once again und I fix you! I vas a echo mineself und I veigh two hundurt und fifty. You steal mine Elsa und my moneys vat I had in der Chermania Bank! You voik me mos’ to death t’ree days! Now I get me even, mit mine hands! Get up, get up!’

“He still laid dreamin’, so I double up my fists hard und smeck him where he vas on der ground—but Blatz, mit a roar, hurl himself on my back mit a strangle-hold. Blatz he must haf weighted close onto t’ree hundurt, so I fall down on der ground mit him on de top of me.

“ ‘*Gewalt!*’ holler Blatz. ‘Help! Help mit der crazy man! *Gewalt!*’

“Der stranger, Schwartz, managed someway to vake up yust so soon he see help vas at hand; he get up sort of dazed, ain’t it, still spittin’ blood, but mad like some bees venn you poke ‘em in der house alretty.

“ ‘Ach, Blatz, you *Lügner!*’ he hiss. ‘You lyin’ hypocrite! You’ll went in der chail for dis conspirations! But first you settle mit *me!*’ Und he yump on Blatz, like sev’ral t’ousands of bricks hinunter.

“Der fight vas triangular, ain’t it, mit me at der base. Der stranger he vas fightin’ Blatz (und me); Blatz he vas fightin’ der stranger (und me); *I* vas fightin’ efferyding in sight, ach Gott! It vas a hot day, too, und very dusty, rollin’ round mit der tables, chairs, steins, und stale beer, all tipped ofer promiscuous. Pooty soon I don’t can see noddings, but I keep both fists busy und mine teeth al-so; I got sev’ral goot bites on some leg, und all I know is dat it vasn’t mine. I vas *verrück*t, ja—I fought like a t’ousand teufels. Und it lasted quite a while.

“Ve fought all over der place und come to der edge of der ravine, where de steep part is.

“ ‘Ofer mit him!’ I heard Blatz grunt. ‘Ofer mit der crazy man dat say he vas a echo!

Heave-*ho!*

“Someding hit me auf mine jaw so I let go mine hold; den dey t’rowed me down der ravine hinunter, und I rolled, und der bushes vas pricklesome und der rocks vas sharp; der bottom vas deep down, al-so. So I broke me t’ree *Rippen*—ribs, you say?—und cut mine head und didn’t know noddings until I vaked up in der crazy-house, ain’t it? Ach Himmell! Me in a bed in der crazy-house mit rags onto mine head—me mitout a chob und locked in der bug-house, for why? Yust because I smeck der man dat stole mine Elsa mit all de money in der Chermania Bank und den vanted me to echo aboutt it, *nicht wahr?*

“Dey let me out in six mont’s, mitaus money nor voik nor noddings. So I vander on der Bow’ry und Park Row und trink me stale beer. Where der stranger go? I neffer knowed; but I heard Blatz he haf to shut down soon on account of der public indignations. Elsa? Pfu! Don’t talk aboutt *her!* *Was weiss ich*, anyvay? Nix! All I know is I got me no chob nor money nor noddings alretty. I vish der stranger, Schwartz, he neffer haf der echo-bug und come into Blatz’s Biergarten; I vish I still got t’ree tollar a day (und beer); I vish, oi! oi! I vas a echo once more yet, ain’t it?”