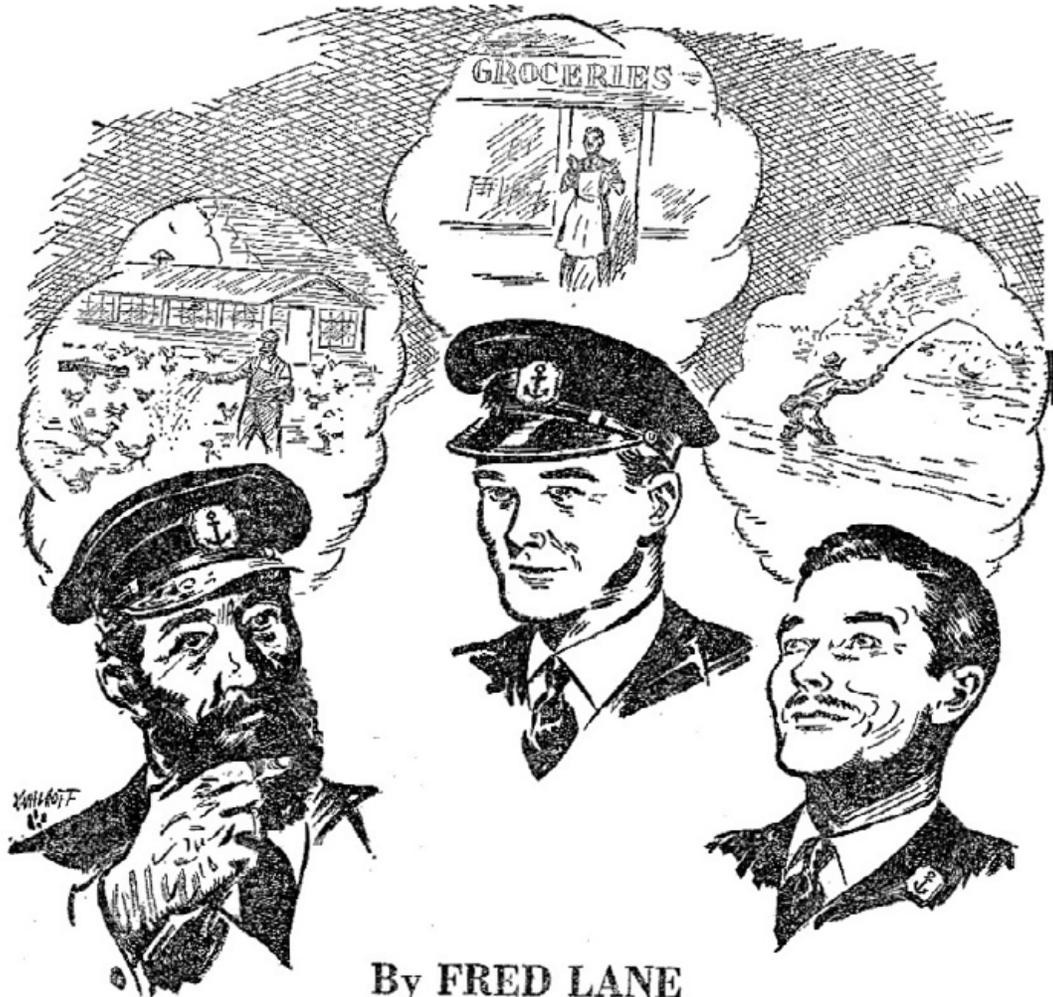


# ONE OF THESE DAYS



By FRED LANE

**S**KIPPERING a little grocery on the main stem of a whistle-stop is my idea of living, shipmate. Cap Willowby can have his egg-factory; and, as for Toby Scott, I wouldn't trade him a dried codfish for all the rainbow trout in his wonderful Lake Koochimoogi.

Speaking of Toby, it was no surprise to me when he married the boss's daughter; nor when he eased into the marine superintendent's berth of the Benson Line. I saw Toby in action when we were on the

coaster *Snohomish* together. That was the voyage when, running north from the Golden Gate, we snagged onto the salvage job that financed Cap Willowby's chicken ranch and sweetened up my grocery-store pot.

It was all Toby Scott's doing. He was a chop chop lad, that one. Six feet tall, Toby was, with close-cropped brown hair and a chin like a tugboat's snout. We got him as relief man when our regular third mate took time off to do his pacing in a maternity ward waiting room instead of a

ship's bridge.

The first night out, Sparks, the chief engineer and myself were hustling through chow, hoping to finish before Cap Willowby appeared to deliver his mighty commentary on chicken raising, a subject dear to his heart. We were lowering the tide on our onion soup when Toby Scott joined us and quickly made it clear that he was going places in this man's world.

"This voyage is a stop-gap for me," he said airily. "I'm assigned to the *Bensonia* soon as she's fitted out. I'd intended to use the layover to do some fishing at Lake Koochimoogi, but as I told Sally—she's Mr. Benson's daughter—I could better use the time learning something of the line's coastwise service." He glanced around eagerly. "Any of you fellows fished Koochimoogi?" he asked.

None of us had "fished Koochimoogi," whereupon he went on, "I haven't either, yet. A man has to pack in for twelve miles to reach the lake, but it's worth it. A wet fly's the best bet at Koochi, you know. You let the line sink, timing it with a stop watch according to depth before retrieving. The largest rainbow caught—"

That was when Cap Willowby lumbered in, took his place at the head of the table and cleared his throat for action. Toby Scott paused just long enough for a "Good evening, Captain," then continued with data on record fish caught, tapered lines, special leaders, and a lesson in the art of fly-casting. The captain, itching to gabble about hens and roosters, kept pulling at his beard nervously. He opened his mouth a couple of times, but he didn't get the floor until Toby paused to inhale some soup.

"I tell you, boys," Cap Willowby boomed happily, "owning a little chicken ranch in the country's the only way to live. Of course, a man has to chart his course and it ain't every lubber as can make a go

of it. Take candling, for example. You, Scott—likely you figure candling is lighting up a chicken house at night. But it ain't—"

Toby tried to get the helm again, but he didn't have a chance. Cap Willowby can outquack a pondful of ducks once he gets under way. Later, when Toby relieved me on the bridge, he shook his head and remarked, "Cap Willowby is certainly hopped up on raising chickens. When's he retiring to his little ranch in the country?"

"He's been spouting about it ever since I signed in this packet four years ago," I said. "He's got every book on the subject, government pamphlets and whatnot. One of these days, when he figures he's really up on chicken farming and has enough cash saved, I suppose he'll—"

"He will not," Toby interrupted. "At least, not until somebody gives him a push. That's the trouble with some people. They want something so badly it hurts, but haven't got the extra ounce of energy needed to get it."

As I started below, he called after me, "By the way, drop around sometime and see my rods and fly-hook. I brought 'em along in case I get a chance to whip a stream or two up north."

I DIDN'T see Toby Scott's precious rods for a long time. The next day a stiff sou'wester put a head on the sea and then kept trying to blow it off. Not that it bothered us much. Foul weather is routine in the coasters. But the blow was giving the *Sourabaya*, a small Dutch motorship, a bad time.

According to Sparks, the Dutchman was anchored north of Shark Point, with a damaged propeller and a smashed rudder. "She wanted to know what ships were around in case the blow gets worse," the operator said. "A tug's running down from Indian Bay and a Russian freighter is

making for her, too.” He handed over the ships’ positions.

Cap Willowby leaned over the chart and Toby Scott peered over the skipper’s shoulder. “She’s in the lee of Dog-Nose Island,” the captain said. “Safe enough if the wind doesn’t worsen or shift. That tug’s bucking a headwind, but she ought to get there before the Russian.”

Toby Scott exploded. “Why, we’re as close to the *Sourabaya* as either of them. And, we’ve a following wind, too. Crowd on more steam and we’ve got a salvage job. Don’t you realize what that means, Captain? A salvage award to pay for that chicken ranch you’ve been dreaming about.”

The captain blinked, stroked his beard and looked at the chart again. “We might run up between Dog-Nose Island and Shark Point,” he said slowly. “Maybe—”

“No maybe about it,” Toby broke in.

There wasn’t, either. He was a chop chop lad, that Toby Scott. We had a short argument with the Dutch skipper, who wanted to make a deal on a straight towage basis, but with the gale rising and his anchors dragging, he had to agree to straight salvage. We got a hawser on the *Sourabaya* in time to jeer at the tugboat and thumb our noses at the Russian, and hauled the Dutchman into Indian Bay.

We finished the voyage, discharged our cargo, and then got orders to go into drydock to have the weed and barnacles scraped off the *Snohomish*’s bottom. This item, I found, was another Toby Scott arrangement. “Mr. Benson wanted to put it off,” he told me, “but I convinced him that it should be done right away.”

“Which gives you a chance to fish Koochimoogi,” I suggested.

“I’d like to,” Toby said, “but first I have to get Cap Willowby fixed up with his chicken ranch. It’ll be some time before the salvage award is decided, but

no reason why Cap should wait. I’ve located an ideal spot owned by an elderly couple who were thinking of selling out and going back to Wisconsin, but never got around to doing it. It’s all arranged for Cap Willowby to take over on a rental basis. The old folks will stay on and show Cap the ropes. When he gets his salvage money, he can buy the place outright.”

That was Toby Scott for you. A chop chop lad who got things done. He even organized a surprise chicken-house warming, with the ship’s crew and most of the Benson Line’s office staff on hand. It was quite an affair. There were refreshments, a barn dance and finally a speech by Mr. Benson himself, as he presented Cap Willowby with the option papers.

Cap seemed kind of bewildered as we all shoved off, leaving him there with the old couple and all those chickens. He didn’t look to me like a man who’d had his dream come true, but I put that down to the sudden shock of his good fortune.

With Cap Willowby set to gather eggs for the rest of his days, I stepped up into the skipper’s berth; and so, when the *Snohomish* came out of dry dock, I went aboard to clear all those chicken-raising manuals from the captain’s quarters to make room for my own gear. I was about to toss a bunch of them through a port when a familiar voice bellowed, “Put those back where you found ‘em, mister.”

It was Cap Willowby, back aboard, bag and baggage.

“Cap,” I said, “you sure got fed up with your little feathered friends in a hurry.”

He cleared his throat and got interested in opening a suitcase. “It wasn’t that,” he began slowly. “It was—well—that old couple. Even if they didn’t show it, they were fond of that ranch. I didn’t have the heart to force the deal through. Besides,”

he picked up speed, "I want to read up more on the feather follicle method of vaccination. Lots to learn in the chicken business. Take vitamin supplements, for instance. Or, the gizzard factor—"

It was an hour before I could get away from him.

**I**T WAS quite some time before I saw Toby Scott again. He'd married the boss's daughter, and later eased into the marine superintendent's swivel chair. Hearing about his promotion, I dropped in to congratulate him.

After he shook hands, he said eagerly, "I never did show you my rods, did I? Got 'em right here." He took one out, fitted it

together and said proudly, "Heft that. Feel the action."

I hefted it and remarked, "I suppose you've latched onto plenty of rainbows with this rod at Lake Koochimoogi?"

"Not yet." He smiled dreamily. "Haven't had the time. But I will, one of these days."

Well, one man's meat is another man's poison, I always say. I wouldn't trade a dried codfish for all the trout in Koochimoogi. Skippering a little grocery on the main stem of a whistle-stop is my idea of living. I've got me a nice little stake saved, shipmate and, one of these days—