

[Tiverton Fisherman]

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The Yankee Fisherman

The twine shed was blue with tobacco smoke and the smell of tar made a pleasant odor as the men worked away catching up on the endless detail that keeps fishermen busy in the winter.

Sam poked some wood into the twine shed stove, spat neatly into it, then picked up his needle and went to work on a long funnel-shaped contraption made of twine while a young boy prodded him with questions.

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“What am I fixin' now? Well,?] [?] That's a flat-fish fyke. Goin' to set 'em soon's the weather's favorable. 'Bout the last o' February we set 'em off Island Park and all 'long shore, down as far as Oakland Farm, the Governor's place.

These fykes do look like giant funnels, but they have leaders and wrings just as a big fish-trap does. These big hoops keep the twine open and are made of walnut. You see about six hoops, each one a little smaller than the other, makes what we call the taper and those long iron rods keep the fykes on the bottom and prevent them from folding up or getting pockets.

“One year we set about a hundred of these in late February and the first night we got about twenty-five barrels of beauties [.?] a fine catch. We cleaned the fykes and set them over again but that night a wicked snow storm came up and along shore the snow was two to three feet deep, with drift six to eight feet in places. Ice formed thick in the bay and river and it was many a day before we saw our fykes again.

“When we finally got to them, some were torn by the ice, while others were nearly buried in the sand on the river bottom, but that's fisherman's luck and it does seem / as if we have all the bad luck at once. 2 “Oh, so you often wonder what fishermen do besides work and whether or not we have any fun? Well now if you want to come with me this evening, I'll take you over to my Uncle Jim's place. He's sorta expecting a few folks in for a country dance. He's my mother's brother, and all my ma's folks are plumb full o' music and dancing and the folks love to go to Jim's of a winter's night and hear that sweet music of his. He plays the accordion, banjo, fiddle, jew's-harp — 'most anything. # “You'll We have a nice time even if we haven't any movies here. You see the The rich folks, as have that've bought up a lot of the old places, try to keep the village very exclusive so if you what some real good entertainment, and don't belong to the rich crowd, you make it yourself. 'Course we have our radios, there's one in the corner, but daytime programs don't suit me, 'ceptin' that one from Boston as that broadcasts the boating and fishing news. That's a dandy, and sure good entertainment as well as full of information. [But tell you what, you stop over at

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the house tonight long about seven o'clock and we'll step up the road a piece to my Uncle Jim's place and there'll be an old fashioned shin dig. You see even the young folks like to 'swing it' they call it, to Jim's fiddlin'. See you at seen then.”

That evening the young man knocked at Sam's door, and with a hearty “Be with ye in a minute,” Same soon appeared through the side door and the two hurried across lots to an old house on the back road.

About half a dozen cars were in the yard and the noise coming from the house indicated that a good time was going on. The treble notes of the fiddle pierced the sharp air while the talking and laughter floated from a partly opened door.?)

“That'll be the Fisher's Hornpipe [.?] ,“Sam told the boy. Snappy! now hear him bear right down on it. Gosh that's music. Let's hurry in 3 and get partners. You'll know 'em all before the evening's over.

“Hello Sally. Here, you know Jim Round's boy don't you? Well, teach him the hornpipe.

“That's it.! Thats the old dance all right but what's that your putting with it? Oh! so-o you swings it! Well bless my buttons, No-o I'll take mine straight. Come on, Annie May — we'll do our'n plain 'thout any didoes.

“Here we go — forward— back— swing — turn — stamp. Hear those young'ns hollar.

“Well, five minutes o' this and we'll hit up some other step. “Whats he saying — a solo clog by Clint? He's a good one, watch him, click his heels in the air and turn. Like a cat now, aint he? A jim dandy dancer and you'd never think that he'd been pulling fykes all day down on the West Shore, would you? A handsome boy all right. I see Rosanny kinda thinks so too. Her Ma'd like that match what with Clint's paw having money and all. You can't blame her for trying to make a good match for her daughter, but Clint's got his own idees too. That school-marm there looks pretty nice to him. He told me so himself down

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at the wharf. Kinda gone on her I guess. But maybe [/ He'll?] get over it, from what I hear. Sho. Her beau aint here. I hear tell as how he's a lawyer fellar in Boston. You know who told me? Minnie. Yep, she's the one. Miss Hunt, thats the teacher, told Minnie 'bout him. Says he's all wound up in books and such and bein' so far away, I wouldn't wonder but what Clint might win out if he goes at it right. Oh! well love's a funny thing. What's that? Stop gossipin' and let's dance? All right.”

“He's callin' for a Virginia Reel. Here we be. This is goin' to be fun. There's old Doctor Waite and his wife over from Crandall Road.

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They're a great couple for dancing and partying around. How's Jim making out? Not bad. That's a pretty girl he's with now — Natalie Peckham, home from college up Boston way some where: Yes, sure that's the one, her father's bought the old Bliss place. Yes, lots o' money and you'd think they'd feel too good for their poor relations. Not them. Just like young Jim now, he loves to come to our house. Seems to like this shin dig by the way his face shines. Oh come you think its the Young lady, heh! Maybe a little of both.

“Well here we go — Swing your partners, bow — forward — back— reel — down the center — Ta-te-ta-te-dum-dum-dum. Well — once again — grand right and left and swing your partners across the — room.

“How's that? A skirmish and not a dance. You sho! Did you like it? 'Course. That'll put some color in your cheek and a sparkle in your eye.

“How about some refreshments? Come on into the kitchen and see what Aunt Hattie's got laid out for us to eat. M'm — that smells like hot cheese biscuit and 't won't go bad with some o' that cold tongue or stuffed eggs. There's preserved quince and watermelon pickle, brandied peaches, and conserve — which'll you have? ...All right — Aunt Hat will help ye and then I'm going to have chocolate layer cake with coffee. Yes, Aunt Hattie, I will try some o' those stuffed cookies. This is my Ma's rule, I can tell by the tag. Have a glass

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o' milk, Annie May — put some flesh on your bones. You don't seem the same gal since Zeke went away. Come on, girl, perk up — he'll be comin' back soon as rich as the best of 'em. What? That's what your're afraid of. Now look a here — Zeke's a great boy and that South American trip is just what he needs to make a man of him and I heard over at the bridge today that he's whole party'll be back come Spring. There now — go on in and dance some more. Here, 5 Charlie, take Annie May into the Quadrille. There he starts the Arkansas Traveler — Ready —

“Balance your partners — swing corners fo'ard and back — satchet — grand right and left — the other way — swing your partner — ladies in the center and the gents outside — make a basket — all hands around — grand right and left — gents in the center and the ladies outside — form a basket — all hands across the hall.

“Guess they'll keep that up all night. Aint that fun, tho, Look at that set swing it. Regular jitterbugs they call 'em. Looks like a free for all, but they are sure having fun.

“That was a fine set, Effy, and Cud tells me the next will be the Polka, you know he loves to get the schoomaker shoemaker and his wife up for this one. They are both from Vienna and can they hop it out. There they go, with one — two — three — hop — round and round. Come on, we aren't missing this one — I believe a polka myself.

“Where did I learn, you say? Down at Whitredge Hall. Don't you remember when Mame White came back to town married to that English dude, she started a dancing school for us benighted villagers. The proceeds helped to build the little church near the corners. Yes indeedy — Mame made a gentleman of me — for a season; but really we liked it and she made us love dancing — so we sure owe her a favor.

“That's the way with real Yankees they love to come home and help the kids they left behind — no patronizing mind yer, just honest to goodness trying to make their folks as fine as the next. Outsiders think that we don't care for anything but chasing the dollar but we know better — and say nothing. “hear that tune? It's “ Money Musk “, Watch Uncle Jim

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and his accordian. See him toss it then goes on stepping it out. You don't see anything like that in pictures — now do you? He's a whole show himself

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Wait he's going to sing: new line & indent “Oh the buxom girls that kissed the boys,

With nobler Helen's and Tumbler Troy's.” He'll sing, dance, play the accordian all at the same time. A great entertainer, but no one can get him to go up to the city for amateur hour. He'd be a hit, but says he's too old to show off to city folks, so they come down here — if'n they're asked.

“Now he's playing the Soldiers Joy — see them all get up, too — you can't sit still when he begins that one. Lets go. Whew — that's a rouser, limbers up the old joints and no mistake....

“Lets you and I sit down now and watch the men around the wood stove. Quite a collection, now, aint it? There's Jim and the college kids in dress clothes, then the fishermen in dark suits, then the man wearing the old leather boots and frock coat is Squire Cook — rich old codger, — the one over there with the queer hair comb is Jud Sanford — went to Washington last winter just to tell the President a few things. The man with the bald head is a [retired?] cotton broker and chairman of the town Council. Not as I voted for him, for I didn't. He's from the city but married Eben Hall's daughter, so set himself up as an authority on various subjects. However, he's doing a good job on the council. Have to give him credit. No doubt it's his wife as coaches him, she being a local girl. That small fellar is Lou Snell — his father was Tom Snell the man that disappeared here about ten years ago. No one knew why he went but my Dad had a letter from him a few years back, Ma teased Pa a lot about that letter, Seems Tom began the letter by saying “My dear bosom Pal — Being far from Home and without money, I'm relying on our kinship etc.”

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“How father raved! Since when said he, was I ever a pal of that varmint — as for being kin to him — well maybe somewhere's theres kinship, but it'll do him no good, the rattlesnake.

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“Ever after when Ma wanted to get Pa going she'd say — “My dear bosom Pal', and we kids would have a good laff at Pa's expense.

“Yes, there's quite a collection of men folks. Take the old fellar with the long whiskers — can you see what he's got under his coat? Look sharp now. Yep, that's it. A chicken! He carries that pet o' his'n all around with him and feeds it peanuts or whatever's handy. If'n we ask him he'll let it roost on his finger whilst he talks to it. He says the blame chicken likes radio music too.

“Say — Abijah — lets see your chicken!

“See — What did I tell you? See him perch on his finger just like Suky's parrot, ceptin he can't talk. Oh — he can talk! Well I want to know —

“What's he sayin' now, Abijah? Says he likes the party, hey? Pretty diplomatic chicken, anyhow.

“How's that, Frank — you say they found a long box full of bones down near Powder House Point? In the field? No? Well I swam on the beach below low tide mark. Shucks! What did the police say? Been there some time, hey? Well gosh a mighty. They was a woman's bones you say? Whose did you say they might be? What, after all these years? Well we knew that old Jock must of done away with his wife but could never prove it. He always said that she ran away with a pedler but some one saw the pedler later and he knew nothing about the woman. Well Jock's dead too, so no use rakin' all that up again. Queer tho how things come to light now, ain't it?

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“Yes, some things are as well forgotten. What's that you say? Is that man a farmer? Yes since, and a good one too. He made his money tho in the Yukon Gold rush along with Abijah there. They do say as both of 'ems 8 as rich as all get out but you'd never know it.

“Yes there is an odor of barn about him but we have to overlook that. It's a good healthy odor they say. You see he won't drive at night in his machine, takes out the horse and buggy to drive around in. Not so foolish as you might think, specially if he gets too much hard cider. The hoss'll take him home all right 'thout any fear of accidents.

“Hello — who's this driving in? Sho — it's the Guv'ner and his folks from across the bridge. Must be somethin' important to talk over tonight. Yep.

“Howdy, Guvner and Mrs. How's all the family? Thats good....

“Yes, ma'am. Tis a likely gatherin' o' plain country folks. That's right, ma'am, we do make up the backbone of our land and we're aimin' to make the young'uns feel that a way too. Guess the Guvner's got somethin' on his mind by the way he's talkin' to Steve Lowry. Well, wants to speak to me too? All right ma'am. I'll go right over!”

A half hour passed by before Sam returned to his seat by the stove and although the young man knew that something of importance was in the wind, still Sam gave no sign of it and opened the conversation by asking the boy if he liked to skate.

“Now, I'll tell you, Jim — the young folks is planning a skatin' party up at Uncle Daniels tomorrow night, and there'll be a bang up time. Looks now as if they'll wear themselves plumb out dancin', but they'll bob up, all smart as crickets. I've got to be gettin' back, myself, but you stay and enjoy yourself, cause your Cousin Sam's got to turn in. Got to see some one tonight yet.

“Is it important? Well rather. Lots of things to come up at financial town meetin' and we got to fix up a slate.

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“So long son, see you in the mawnin. Good night folks. Be good!”