

linger. "God knows how necessary here right now. But first, cub, an assignment. You heard it right the first time. It may<sup>be</sup> an important one, and I may be staking my life, my desk life, in your hands. The fire last night," Mr. Doaks rushed on. "There is a human-interest story - the janitor! The firemen had to drag him out by main force from the collapsing building. He just refused to leave. Why? Report from Maine General Hospital he is pretty bad in. Know him George?"

"I was with him yesterday morning. He passed out with what had seemed a heart attack. Muttering as in a fog, a vision of fire: 'the school going up in flames'. A haunting shadow of flame, or should I say smoke, that seemed to envelope him."

"I don't understand."

"You will when you read the report," George said.

### CHAPTER III

"And God Said, Let There be Fire!"

How to pick your way in the tumult and confusion and beat of reportorial words! How to think on the infernal machine of a typewriter in the all absorbing clamor and noise of this clearing house and manufactory of columns and words, editorials and public opinion; the hustle of flying linotype, the clatter and deep burrowing boom of the distance presses; the tinkling of the telephone, the chatter of telegraph and teletype; the whine of the wheel; the sputtering charges of the stentorian command; the timid pipings of the underling and neophyte in the consuming uproar, blare and screaming pandemonium! "Think, think,

and think fast," Jack says. And Jack knows, and Jack is his friend. How to think, how to adjust your thoughts in this storm of maladjustment, how to form them in this formless fog! "Concentrate hard, with all your five senses." First comes a thin trickle, then a mighty flood. First, a thin pencil line, like a ray of light in the darkness of mist, then a sunburst that burns and clears everything before you. Then the silence and loneliness of the quiet wood. You are alone with your thoughts, and you pound away on your typewriter, and you hear only the echoes of the words you create. You are in a vacuum, a blue curvature; a spheroid enclosing and insulating you from extraneous sounds. And with every beat of your heart new thoughts are created and new words, the essence of your being; and you labor and gasp and sweat in that vacuum; and you labor and create and precreate; and you populate that vacuum, your own sphere, your own universe; and you are overwhelmed by a sense of purity and clearness as you are alone with your creations; and you are yourself, and you create in your own likeness.

When Mr. Doaks' eyes caught the caption on George's story he flew into a rage. "It's a direct misquote of the text, and a sacrilege," he stormed. "God said, 'let there be light', not 'fire'. Besides, the idea is idiotic."

The little man presiding at the round desk in the office where headlines are made protested mildly, "Well I..."

"Well, cancel it at once," the other shouted.

"Sorry, but..." Pause. "Perhaps if you read the story,--"

"The story has nothing to do with it."

"Well, it's too late. It's on the presses. At any rate, it's not my caption. George titled it himself...."

"He did, eh? That fellow!" Suddenly a smile broke on his face and he poked the little man in the side. "That fellow... Maybe I was

too hasty. But I should have seen it before it went to press."

"The Boss called for it - and approved."

"I see where that fellow will cause me many a sleepless night." Picking up the galley-proof, and reading it. "Well...! Well, let me tell you, if I gauged him right my troubles will bear dividends."

"More trouble?"

"You'll see, wise guy. And don't tell me I haven't discovered him."

"From what I hear the Chief claims half-interest. If you're satisfied with half you can start gathering your interest now. Mr. Barton ordered the story on the front page - Prime Display."

Mr. Doaks caught his breath. "Well, it seems I am the idiot in the case." And he chuckled. "But it'll be a proud day for George. Sure!"

Maybe God did create fire one wink before light, to give the sun and the moon substance and content. Fire is the great servant and benefactor of everything that is life. And who can argue with that? Mr. Doaks was forced to admit. "Anyway," he was heard commenting later, "anyway, this fellow can argue himself into and out of anything he makes up his mind to. But the human-interest angle I asked him to stress - the janitor! Well, if anything ever had been written with greater skill, heart-felt sincerity and pathos I have yet to see ~~it~~! No wonder the Boss has ordered it on the front page. The public response was immediate. Funds, and demands for the reinstatement of the janitor! An extra was even considered, but the Chief vetoed it. And where do you think George was all that time? Why, walking the streets. It seems he feared he had botched his first assignment. When he finally turned up at the office, he was a puzzled fellow. It came out he hadn't read his own piece. And was he elated by all the excitement? Not he. He was glum, and shut up like a clam. Not a word. So damn unpredictable. That boy never seems... Or I didn't know him."

"Maybe you don't, my dear Doaks," Jack said.