

The Meetin'

ROBERT CORNETT

The folks in the little meetin' house was beginnin' to git the sperrit. The meetin' was goin' along just like the Lord would want it to go. It was hot in that little one-room buildin' settin' there on the side of the mountain, but nobody cared about that. Fact is, folks had to be a little too warm to really git the sperrit.

Little, short, chunky "Shoutin'" Isaac was havin' more influence on the people though, than the weather was that night. He was doin' the preachin'. His little jay-bird eyes was flashin' as he stormed back and forth across the floor, stoppin' ever now and then to jump up and down when he was overcome by the Sperrit. The words was just leapin' out of his mouth and tumblin' over each other, they was in sech a hurry to convert somebody.

"Ther ain't a one uv ye here tonight that ain't hyeard this gospel preached before," he was sayin'. "Why do ye set back there like ye've never hyeard it, and don't know what it's fer? Oh, bruthern, I'll tell ye why. It's the old devil a-holdin' ye back. That's what it is."

Somebody back in the corner said, "Amen." The Sperrit was really beginnin' to work on some of 'em. One of the women began clappin' her hands and rockin' back and forth, with her eyes shut an' her lips movin', but nobody could understand what she was sayin'.

All this made old Shoutin' Isaac just preach that much harder. He was breathin' real fast now, just like he didn't have any time to waste in gettin' his breath. The words was just pourin' out of his mouth; almost sounded like he was singin' as his voice went up and down. A lot of his words he was just sayin' over and over,

and they didn't add any meanin' to what he was sayin', but that's the way a good preacher's supposed to preach, and the faster he c'n talk the better preacher he is. Well, Shoutin' Isaac shore was a good one. He never wanted fer anything to say. If I ever seen anybody full of the Sperrit and runnin' over, it was Shoutin' Isaac.

"Yes bruthern, it's the ole Devil there in yore heart," he was sayin'. "It's him a-tellin' ye, praise the Lord, that there ain't nothin' in what I'm a-sayin', and Amen. It's him a-tellin' ye to keep on a-wanderin' out there in darkness an' sin, strayin' out yonder on the mountain, away from the Shepherd's fold, Hallelujah! Out there on the mountain, bless the Lord, lost in darkness and sin, Amen. Yes, sir, lost in darkness and sin. That's where ye are, my bruthern, when ye turn thet bottle up to your lips and drink that poison that'll send yore soul to the depths of Hell, praise the Lord; "where the worm dieth not and the fire is never quenched!" I know bruthern, "cause I've been through it all myself. Yes, praise His name, I've been through it all. Oh, how I suffered when I was bound in the fetters of sin and my soul was goin' down the valley to the eternal fires of Hell. There was no hope fer me, praise the Lord. I was lost! lost!! lost!!! — And then I hyeard this glorious gospel, and now I'm a free man tonight, Hallelujah Praise His name!"

All at once a pistol shot rang out in the night outside the buildin'. It was follered by another, and another, and somebody hollered loud and high, kinda like a dog howlin' but not exactly. You could tell it was *somebody*.

Shoutin' Isaac stopped fer a minute,

but only fer a minute. I guess he figgered that now was the time to prove which was the strongest, the Lord or the Devil, so he started preachin' again, just like he was before, only louder.

He was preachin' on the Devil that night, and outside, from what some of the boys told me later, and from what I actual seen myself, some of the boys was full of his subject. I'm not meanin' to be funny, but I reckon if ever any boys was full of the Devil, them boys was. I hieard later about what happened outside, before what I'm goin' to tell ye about really happened.

Dan MacDowell was one of the boys out there (I was on the inside all the time, so I didn't see this, I only saw what happened later, but I found out from good sources that this's how it all started.) Dan MacDowell was the one who shot the pistol and hollered out like that. He was a big tall, broad feller. You couldn't help but like him, when he wasn't drunk but when he was drunk he would do just about anything. He had a kind of a sparkle in his eyes that made you like him, but he usually carried a pint bottle 'a moonshin in his hip-pocket and that was all time gettin' him in trouble.

"Come on, boys," he said to some of the others standin' around ther. "Let's get thangs a-movin' hyere." He pulled his pint bottle out'a his pocket. "Right hyer's some of the best 'white mule' this country's ever seen. Hyere, boys, take some uf it. Wet your whistles a little."

All the boys took a drink, some uf 'em givin' a little whistle after they swallered it and one or two uf 'em kinda coughin' a little like it just about strangled 'em.

"Good stuff, ain't it?" Dan said.

I guess they all thought so because they passed it around again and ever-body took another drink.

Dan walked over to one of the winders and looked into the church. "Old Isaac's

struttin' his stuff tonight, ain't he?" he said.

"Yeah, I think he's a little too cocky fer his own good." Bert Jones was the one that said that. He was a tall, lanky, stoop-shouldered feller. He always wore a old broke-billed cap and his yaller, stringy hair hung out from under it, and he was always prushin' it back out of his eyes and wipin' his nose with the back of his hand. He was just plain mean and nobody liked him.

One of the other boys, Abe Somers, said, "Well, we could take some of that out of him." His head was kinda down as he said it, he'd been whittlin' on a stick, and he just kinda looked up without raisin' his head and rolled his eyes around at all the boys, then spit out of the corner of his mouth and went on whittlin'. Nobody said anythin' fer a minute, just kinda looked at Abe and watched the ambyer trickle out 'a the corner of his mouth and drip off his chin as he shifted his chew from one side of his mouth to the other.

After a minute Dan said, "I think it's a good idy, fellers. Let's break 'er up, and throw Isaac out."

Well, that was what started it, I reckon, and the rest of it I seen with my own eyes. The first thing I knew about what was goin' to happen was when I hieard a scufflin' on the steps. Of course, I was about the only one that hieard it because I was settin' on the back row and then ever-body else was tryin' to get saved or shoutin' because they was saved. Some of 'em was on their knees prayin'. Others was dancin' around, throwin' their hands in the air. A little group was gathered around one of the women prayin' over her and cryin', tryin' to get her saved, and Isaac was still prancin' back and forth across the floor and makin' things purty hot fer the Devil. It was sech a noisy place that it's a wonder I ever hieard them comin' in.

And they didn't waste any time after they got in. Dan fired his pistol a couple of times, shootin' two holes in the ceiling and one of 'em yelled out above the clamor, "Look out, Isaac, hyere we come!"

Of course the shoutin' and prayin' stopped as soon as the pistol was fired an' the boys had Isaac and was already draggin' him out before he, 'er anybody else, knowed what was happenin'. But when Isaac did realize what was goin' on he began to kick and struggle fer all he was worth. It just looked like he was fightin' against the Devil and didn't figger to give in to him. Then some of the men who had been shoutin' and prayin' just a minute before got a different kind 'a light in their eyes and they grabbed them boys,

and I tell you, you never seen such a fight in all yore life as they fit right there. All the women and children got back out of the way, up in front of the buildin'.

Well, finally, you could tell that the men was gittin' the best of the ruckass. Isaac was on his feet now and joinin' in the fight. One by one the boys was forced outside. The fightin' went on out there fer a minute 'er two, but the boys purty soon gave up when they seen that they was outnumbered. Purty soon the men started comin' back in and I could hyear Isaac sayin' somethin' out on the steps, about gettin' the sheriff after 'em. Then he come back in, went up in front and kinda pantin' a little, said, "Somebody start a good ole song. How 'about you, Sister Mary."

An Afternoon

MARY CHAPPELL

Now the cab was leaving the downtown area and was entering the residential district. I sat forward in my seat and looked out the window. Apparently this was not a fashionable neighborhood, but middle class and decaying. I had never been there before and looked at the big, dirty frame houses, old, stone churches with dead ivy clinging to them, and maples, bare of their leaves and dripping in the rain.

The afternoon, the dreary neighborhood, the strangeness of the whole situation both depressed and frightened me. I had spent the morning and night before on a dirty day coach crowded with soldiers. Now through my tired brain wandered irrelevant memories — the blond soldier who had sat next to me, the flat, meaningless landscape, the bewildering station, this cab taking me somewhere to a room

Stephen had reserved for us. And I was so utterly alone. The houses I saw from the cab window became great living things, hunched together and aching in the November rain. The maples, too, were living things; didn't they look like human beings standing sad and resigned in an indifferent world?

Why couldn't I think of Stephen? I twisted the wedding rings on my finger. Why couldn't I think about how happy we'd be together tonight? The weather, the neighborhood wouldn't matter when we were together, and we had been apart so long! But it was useless to try to think of him. Somehow he didn't exist now for me; he wasn't a reality. I was in a strange city, alone, and I was frightened. The cab stopped in front of a tall narrow house, once painted white, but now gray and wet in the rain,