

[I hear that Brown lost his job today]

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“Clockmakers.”

Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Conn.

January 11, 1939 Mr. MacCurrie

“I hear that Brown lost his job today,” says Mr. MacCurrie. Brown is the manager of one of our chain stores. He has been in town for sufficient number of years to allay the mistrust with which native Thomastonians regard strangers and has come to be accepted as a

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“local man.” This is not a status to be easily attained and the fact that Brown has been accepted after a comparatively short probationary period (ten or a dozen years) marks him as a sterling character, indeed.

“They'll regret it,” says Mr. MacCurrie, “lettin' him go. He has a good many friends here. You can never tell, with them chains, what they're goin' to do next.

“Though, all in all, I think they've been a good influence. Why goddomit, I remember before they come in here, the merchants in town would get together every day. One would call up another. ‘What're you goin' to charge for butter today?’ he'd say. That's the way they'd keep the prices up. Now they can't get away with that stuff.

“You know they had stories around, when these chains first started comin' in, that they were givin' people short weight, that they were chargin' less because they gave less and that you could buy better from the independents, when it came to quantity. That was all propaganda.

“I was readin' an article about the A and P stores not long ago in the Saturday Evening Post. Told about the fight to put them out of 2 business. The company is owned by two brothers. They've got the control -- controlin' stock in it. Maybe you've seen some of their advertisements in the papers about this Patman bill.

“Goddomit, I don't think it's right to legislate against them. After all, they employ a good many thousand people. Do you think it's right to put them all out of work. Of coorse I don't know anything about this outfit that Brown worked for. From what I hear, they didn't give him much of a chance.

“They tell me he came in to work this mornin' and found another lad in his place. Didn't give him very dom much notice, did they? Well, I feel sorry for him. Jobs ain't to be picked up everywhere these days.”

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Mr. Maccurrie produces the snuff box from an inner pocket, a signal that the subject is about to be changed.

“See where Bob Woods got hit by a car last night. Right oot here on the crosswalk. He wasn't hurt. Just shaken up a bit. Goddomit, the way some of them tear through town, it's a wonder there's not more accidents. It was a lucky thing this fella happened to be goin' slow.

“You've got to judge your distance these days. Sometimes you think you can make it, but they come so dom fast they catch you aboot halfway between. I'm gettin' so I hate to cross the road. I'm not as fast as I used to be. They won't slow doon a goddom bit, either.

“They say the pedestrian has got the right of way. They took it to the supreme coort and they ruled in favor of the pedestrian. But you can't argy with a fella in a car. What's the use of standin' up for your rights if it's going' to kill you,”

Mr. MacCurrie peers out the window.

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“This looks like Coburn comin.' He'd ought to be able to tell us somethin' about Brown.”

Mr. Coburn enters and we “pass the time of day,” according to immutable custom. This includes a detailed discussion of the weather. Then Mr. MacCurrie broaches the subject of our recent conversation.

“What do you hear about Brown,”

“Well,” says Mr. Coburn, “I was up to Birdsall's having a milk shake this mornin' and Brown come in. He says, ‘Me and the Big Boss have agreed to disagree.’”

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“Birdsall says ‘What's the trouble,’ and Brown says ‘Well, they wanted me to work for some other guy for a while to see if it made any change in business.’

“Birdsall says, ‘You mean they're takin' the managership away from you,’

“That's the idea,’ says Brown. ‘So I told them I was through. I been here a long while. I know business is bad, but it ain't my fault. None of the rest of them around here are getting rich.’

“Birdsall asked him what he was goin' to do, and he said he didn't know.

“But I know Brown. He'll get over bein' mad by tonight and go down to the Boss tomorrow and tell him he'll take up his proposition.”

“Mr. MacCurrie: “So that's the way it was, hey. Well I think he was kind o' foolish. Maybe there's a chance there for a job for you.”

Mr. Coburn: “Naw, they've already got a guy in there. But I see the district manager. He told me to go to see the Boss tomorrow, there might be a job for me. I said Okay, but I won't work for no 4 goddam twenny five cents an hour like you offered me the last time, seventy hours a week. He says Go see him anyway.’ So maybe I will, I don't know.”

Mr. MacCurrie: “Business must have fallen off quite a bit with Brown.”

Mr. Coburn: “It's just like he said, it ain't too goddam good anywhere right now. Well, I got to be movin'. I just stopped in for a look at the paper. It come in yet,”

Mr. MacCurrie says he hasn't seen it, and Mr. Coburn says he guesses he won't wait. After he leaves Mr. MacCurrie remarks:

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"I kind of look forward to it myself every day. I wonder what the politicians have been up to today. It's a great show -- one goin' on over there in Hartford and the other doon in Washington.

"I see yesterday where the Democrats are gettin' together with the Republicans over in Hartford. It looks to me like the same old business. What they call the double machine. You do me a favor and I'll do you one. And the people be dommed.

"There's that truck from Branford," Mr MacCurrie points to a huge vehicle rolling slowly to a halt at the bottom of the incline on "the other side."

"They're supposed to come back to fix the doors," he explains, craning his neck to look at the workmen, who enter the door to the Hose Company quarters. It is plain that the reparimen are not, for the present at least, coming our way, and Mr. MacCurrie turns from the window to amplify his last statement.

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"These new doors -- the slidin' doors," he says. "They don't slide. First time they had a fire after they was put in, the boys had to push them up from the bottom. The way they're supposed to work, the driver sits up on the truck and pulls that cord you see there, and they slide right up. But they won't do it. After they painted 'em they swelled up."

Mr. MacCurrie turns once more towards one of the small panes in the sliding door that doesn't slide, and is silent for a while. Then he is perceptibly on the qui vive. "This looks like the paper boy, he says. "Ys, b'God it's him at alst. "He moves briskly toward the door to take the paper from the boy's hand.