

## **The Sting A' Otter Jack**

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Any other day Valerie come running through the stumps, knocking down fireweed and foxgloves, I would a' thought a yardline'd broke or a rigger'd fell or some, new, chain saw'd run itself cross a faller's leg. But last night the radio'd said Japs wouldn't put their emperor on war trial, and they hadn't surrendered, so Valerie didn't shock me none when she run onto the deck a' the splash dam and told me. "Jean Ellie, we dropped 'nother one on 'nother city, Nagasaki!"

She threw her arms round me as if the war was really over, won, but logs heaved and rolled 'gainst the dam, the river screamed like falls down a mountain, the deck shook, and the dam bowed out as if to bust. I said the hell with the crew and winch coming. I got my dynamite and caps and went below the dam to a spruce that was rammed cross the 'tire river, holding back a boom. Logs slapped up two-people high, slamming down as if to smash the riverbed, but the spruce was wide as a sidewalk and took my weight firm as ground. I chopped a notch and put in a bundle a' sticks, and salmon flashed fins all cross the rapids, bumping 'gainst the spruce, thinking they could swim past the timber camp and the narrows where Otter Jack used to put his willow traps, and they could lay eggs.

I flung mud hard on the charge: Otter Jack always said I'd been born a blue jay, meant to squawk and squabble and fly off, but ever since I was a girl, and I'd got over the terrible quiet a' his breath, I'd said I'd been born sorry too.

I lit the fuse and run 'hind a rock with Valerie, and the blast shook the stone, banging through the valley, clapping off hills. The roar whooshed up, chunks and splinters smashed

'gainst slash, and Valerie whooped cheers as we run into the stink a' powder. The dam snapped back straight, the river-scream turned to a gurgling hum, and logs rushed lickety-split through the gate. On to Seal City Mill! To London! To France! To rebuild Europe!

Valerie give me a giddy smile, and I felt proud as she clumb back to the cookhouse, knowing the crew could forget the winch and eat. But then chunks a' salmon slumped down the bank, a mass a' fish bobbed up dead 'tween logs, and I 'maged charred Japs floating in water, black stumps and lumps, black faces without hairs or eyes, and fires and rubble, and I hoofed 'bove the road alone. I sat in a stump field, and down through the valley I seen the mill smoke billowing 'gainst the soot a' sea clouds, and I thought a' Otter Jack looking hard at a speck a' gray in the sky last Sunday. He'd stood 'bove the berry bushes a' his beach cliff, just a stick a' an Indian ninety-year-old, his bullet-eyes flaming 'tween swollen lids. His red-checkered hat'd blown off, and he'd barked into howling air. "Out past Thunder Rock! Five trees high!"

I'd put my berry bucket down, and I'd braced his back, and the speck got bigger 'n bigger like a blimp coming, but it got rounder, lighter-colored too. A hot air balloon near wide as a rail car! It sailed 'bove us just like a man-round-the-world balloon, but 'stead a' bright colors, the cloth was white like a pleated blouse, and 'stead a' the man-basket, a black ballast ring and sandbags dangled down from the ropes.

The balloon soared in the wind-roar 'bove Otter Jack's cabin and smokehouse, 'bove his 'tatoes and beets, and then rip-whoom! It slammed 'gainst his cedar and fir and spruce, flames shot out the top, and the balloon shriveled and blew inside the trees.

The giant branches swayed in the wind like nothing hit 'em: the stand was near three-hundred-fifty-foot high, a good eight-hundred-year-older than the state a' Oregon itself.

I grabbed the back a' his overalls, but Otter Jack hunched 'head and let the wind push

him knock-kneed into the woods, and I shuffled after him, shoving through huckleberry, smelling tank gas, tasting it on my tongue. I told him I hadn't heard a' any Jap subs or mines on the coast lately, but we was fire-bombing their cities, and they'd do anything to get us back, even send poison.

Otter Jack wiped wind-water from his eyes like he didn't hear: the balloon'd slung itself cross a tall branch a' fir, and the ropes and ballast ring hung 'neath it in a shaft a' green-gray shadow that vaulted up 'bout halfway high as heaven.

"I'm going to get the Coast Guard," I said.

Otter Jack seen all the government branches the same, and he damped his breath, shaking his head no.

The balloon swelled and then shrunk 'gain, and 'side the ring I thought I seen tubes like long tin cans and a box wound with wires. "Captain Davison'd come," I said.

Otter Jack squeezed his face tight, mocking the B.I.A. man who'd first brought him papers. "What you?" said Otter Jack. "You Umpqua, you try Grand Ronde 'Servation, you get you're 'lotment there. You born Takelma, you try at Siletz. You Coos, full-blood? You 'titled twenty acre 'tween South Slough and Empire Lumber section thirty-eight. You half-blood? No 'lotment! What you? Lower Coquille? Upper Coquille? Rogue?"

He blinked like I'd hurt him extra bad, like I didn't know he was seventy-five 'fore the B.I.A. okayed him a place. "The government hear, they come like crabs from 'neath rocks," he said. "They poke that dirt and measure it. They put up radar, telephones, wires, poles, and then they push me out."

*Tick-a-tick. Tick-a-tick.* Otter Jack didn't hear, but jays glided cross the top a' the woods, a swarm a black-blue shapes jabbering soft 'side the green-gray shadow. They lit on

branches 'bove the balloon, bent their heads as if to eye it, hopped down to it one by one, 'peared to stick their bills into the cloth.

*Squawk-a-wock!* The jays flew in a howl a' wind, ropes blew, I thought I made out a black nosepiece 'hind the hanging cans. "Look at it 'gain," I said. "Look at it good."

Otter Jack spat and wrinkled up his cheeks nasty. "What you?" he mocked. "Who your father? Who your mother?"

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I felt my wind die in me, felt weak and skinny and old as him, and then Valerie hammered on the cookhouse bell, ending lunch, and Dottie the whistle punk screamed from the road, making sure I wouldn't loaf. "Ellie, Jean El-lie!" And I sunk 'gainst my stump, 'membering Dottie's girl-voice, "White House El-lie! Steam Train Smel-lie!"

Dottie'd always dressed pretty at school, but one day after class she'd bucked her shoulders like a bulldog, hollering from the wood-plank road, and I'd hid 'hind Auntie's hydrangea, squeezing myself 'gainst the house. "White House El-lie!" yelled Dottie. "Paddle Wheel Nel-lie! Who's your mother? Who's your father?"

Auntie's heels rapped on the street, and Dottie run off, and then Auntie reared front a' our walk, steadying herself, looking proper for the phone company: black-beaded stockings, stiff black dress, white-ruffled collar, hair in waves'd looked like wax. Auntie scowled after Dottie, and then her heels rapped up the walk, and she went up the steps crying, and I slumped 'neath the bush and cried too.

A' course Auntie'd told all a' Seal City how she'd got me. Her sister'd died, and

Auntie'd took a train and got off so near the Atlantic she'd smelled the tide, and a church had me waiting in a white wicker cradle. Auntie'd carried me up Pennsylvania Avenue, bumped by sea and a' people, and then gold-lace officers marched by, Marine and Navy bands played, and Calvin Coolidge 'proached from his 'nauguration, looking strained and dead-faced, standing in his car, bare' tipping his hat.

Auntie lifted me 'bove a streamer, and I shut my lashes so sweet the president laughed and nudged Mrs. Coolidge like he wanted to take me home. But he'd just kissed the Bible at his speech, and he knew the Lord, the Eighth Commandment, and he saluted Auntie and went on.

Auntie hurried me to the train, and 'long the Potomac and cross the Ohio and Mississippi and Rockies I slept with such peace the porter wanted me, but the Lord told him too, the same Commandment.

Auntie boarded me on a stern-wheeler at Philo's Landing, and all the way here Seal River fog drenched the deck, blowing salty and cold, and I fussed so little Captain Ames asked if he could take me. But the Bible was in his pilot house, saying so 'gain. Thou shalt not steal, or thou shalt be punished.

*White House El-lie. Stream Train Smel-lie. Paddle Wheel Nel-lie.*

I hated the story, and then I near leapt from 'hind the hydrangea. Bullet-eyes flared at me from 'hind a cart a' wood, peering from a withered brown face.

The old Indian'd been spying me I didn't know long, his nose hooked so terrible, his lips set so still I didn't move. I glared at him pushing his cart round the house, and then Auntie opened the door, and I come in and hung my head.

“I have told you, Jean Ellie Osborne, hiding begets misgivings.”

I scrubbed my hands in the basin, sneaking looks out the window, watching Otter Jack

stack logs by the fence.

“Did he call out to you?”

I spoke mannered. “He didn’t see me at all.”

“Indians don’t know soap. He doesn’t wash himself. He brings good wood, but you mustn’t talk to him.”

“I didn’t.”

“Indians pass disease. We mustn’t pay him any mind.”

Auntie give me a scone, ’couraging me to listen, to ’void him. But ever’day after school Dottie waited on a diff’rent street, itching to snicker and laugh, and I took to walking home ’hind the mill, and one day smoke come low through bushes, skunky-smelling, and I scooted past a sign. PROPERTY OF SEAL CITY LUMBER. I went ’long an elk trail and then sideways through sand pines, and ’tween trunks I seen a campfire a’ green limbs on a high bank, and Otter Jack bending ’yond it, cutting something in his cart.

I ducked ’neath a branch and lied down low on a needle-bed, knowing I shouldn’t, and then Otter Jack flicked an arm, and a ball a’ fat splat’d in dirt.

*Squeck-a-weck-weck! Weck-weck!* A jay swooped down, snatching the fat, and ’nother landed on the cart, and there was the sad-dog face a’ the dead seal, its chin flat ’gainst the tailboard, its eyes wet and black, glowing like they was still alive.

Otter Jack worked with a black-stone knife, and then he carried a heart in his hands, and he sat on a seat a’ black stones and sung strange words, looking down the river and out to sea. He got quiet as a candle, bowing and bobbing his head, chewing, and he went back to the cart, his throat moving like he’d swallowed nothing more’n clams.

Shells hung round his neck, bouncing ’gainst a mud-slopped mackinaw, and he put slabs

a' meat on sticks and stuck 'em round the fire. Jays crowded after him, and he tossed more fat from the cart and then stood with the bones a' the seal and carried 'em over the bank, and I listened to my heart pound 'side my head, seeing a chance to go. But down at the river his voice chirped high like a fish hawk, he sung, and then the bones splashed into water.

Jays boomed up sudden from the cart, and 'nother man yelled below, "Hey, what the devil!"

Otter Jack come running, waving hands 'hind his head, batting at fists a-beating him. He crashed down on his chest, and a gray-vested man thumped on top a' him, yanking his hair, ramming a pistol 'gainst the front a' his scalp.

"I tell you before?" said the man.

Otter Jack stretched up his chin, trying to nod.

"Burn fire here, who lose his job?"

"Watchman."

"Who lose his brains?"

"Indian."

"Where you make ceremony?"

"Not here."

"Where you sleep?"

"Not here."

The man pulled the pistol away, took a nightstick from his belt, pushed Otter Jack's face flat 'gainst the ground. The man climbed up slow from Otter Jack, and then he looked round fast, his eyes flashing big like a bear's, bluer'n than the river. He drug the cart and tilted it. Shoosh! The rest a' the seal swamped the fire. Bonk! Bonk! Bang! The watchman sent the

stone seat flying from his club and then stomped bow-armed down the bank, cussing.

His engine-string clunked and slapped, his boat roared 'way, and I give out a breath. Otter Jack didn't budge. He lay in a long, sunk lump 'neath a cloud a' wet, dirty smoke, his eyes 'gainst the ground, his mackinaw not moving, not his cheeks neither.

I felt a branch prickling my back, and I raised myself 'gainst it, a cat ready to scream or claw or scat, and then he looked up, needles and sand mashed cross his skin. He spit grit from his lips, and then his gawk lit cross the ground, flaming into me. "Jean Ellie," he said. "Why you here?"

I held myself stiff, 'fusing to back down to any innard-eating Indian without no true home. "Why you?" I said.

\* \* \*

I said the hell 'gain. I told the boss Auntie'd so many war calls I had to help at the switchboard. I got on the crummy and rode to town 'side the Seal, the river slowed 'gainst tidewater, got smoky with mist, and *Chirrp! Chree-eee-eee!* A fish hawk soared through fog, and I 'membered Otter Jack shouting the cry, telling his Creation.

He'd told me in Auntie's garden digging up dirt. On his bench front a' the hardware. On the beach watching tankers. On his dock a' stove wood watching the Seal.

There was just fog and surf, not light, not darkness, not any life neither. And then a breeze come, and Seal Island Rock 'peared 'side the mouth a' the river, jagged-looking and high as the cliffs 'bove the beach.

Dawn glowed white 'hind the fog, and the rock glowed with specks like black glass, and



Seal swum out from a crack, and he and his wife put pups 'long Seal River Bar.

But Seal and his wife got eyes that run thick like Otter Jack's, they wheezed, the tide come in, they floated to the beach. Vulture come, and the pups watched sad from waves. Sea Otter 'peared from a hole in the rock, carrying a black-stone knife, and Puffin come out too, carrying fire.

Otter cut the skins, reached in for the hearts and got the wet webs 'tween his fingers. Puffin blew on a wet-wood fire, and the tip a' her beak turned red. Otter put slabs a' meat over smoke, and *Chirrp! Chree-eee-eee!* Fish Hawk hovered 'bove the beach and then took the bones in his claws. He dropped 'em over the river-mouth, fins flashed 'bove the swells, and the pups leapt through the waves, eating salmon, growing big on the first run.

Two slabs a' meat pulsed 'bove the wet-wood smoke, shaking from surf-thunder, dancing. One 'come Man, one 'come Woman.

Man found a washed-up cedar and dug out a canoe with the black-stone knife. Woman found a washed-up spruce, split roots and wove a cradle, and the two paddled up the Seal River, and wherever camas grew to 'vide 'tatoes for salmon soup, they left a new band a' Seal Indians.

But Man and Woman got runny eyes. They floated 'gain to Seal Island Rock, drug the canoe to the top, lied down in it and then crumbled with it, blowing into the sea.

And seal pups poked faces from waves, watching people as close as a mother, a father. People felt their own eyes get dark and heavy like Seal's, they put on Otter capes and Puffin hats. They danced to mother, to father. They sung for Seal to 'come Indian, Indian to 'come Seal. They sung many lives after deaths, they heard a' Jesus men and Boston men coming, they seen copper and steel on the beach.

Whole families coughed blood, died a' strange fever and pox, but trade ships 'voided

Seal River Bar and Seal Island Reef. Horses and wagons 'voided Seal River Mountains, and even by the time a' White Father Pierce, no settlers come. Still Mother and Father threw in bones, and the bands come to the river-mouth for salmon. Still dawn glowed white 'hind fog, Father paddled 'side his fish dam, and Mother knelt 'bove sand, blowing flames 'neath her drying rack.

*Squeck-a-weck! Weck-a-weck!* Mother squeezed hanging fish, tossed a flake to a jay. *Tick-a-tick. Buzz-a-buzz.* She rubbed salmon meat, opening cracks to alder smoke. *Squawk-a-wock! Wock!* Mother looked up, a whisper run 'hind her. Flames clumb the cedar-plank house and the frame a' Sister's rack. A shot rung out, Mother flew backward. Pop! Father fell, the canoe splashed, Uncle dove. Another shot. Uncle sunk, slapping arms 'tween salmon.

Lodges burst 'part, smoking, and horses pounded all round. Warriors run out, and whites galloped from sea cliffs, raced 'long the river, trained muzzles from the marsh, threw torches. Children screamed in lodges, and whites stuffed cannons and shot and shot and shot.

Moans died 'side the village and fish camps. Wails, even whimpers stopped, and the graves was begun.

The fog flashed yellow, booming, and Seal Island Rock flew round like pebbles. Grizzly Beards pulled planks from lodges, pounded 'em t'gether 'bove wheels, pried boulders onto the wagons, dumped and piled the rocks into a wall on Seal River Bar, and then a ship sailed in safe to the river.

A baby cried, and Grizzly Beards 'proached a spruce-root cradle hanging 'neath a cedar bough.

“Ugly little otter, ain't it?”

“Hey, don't kill it. Now we'n put him on a boat.”

“To where?”

“The last one? To a mission, I suppose, or a fort.”

“Anywhere they ain’t gold, and they ain’t pasture.”

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Otter Jack’d been a boy reaching into a fish trap on the Yachats ’Servation, and a man’d come out a’ beach fog, his eyes leaky like sap, shells shaking ’gainst a seed-sack shirt. His left hand’d been gone, and Otter Jack hadn’t known if the man’d been punished at a California mission, or if he’d come from Grand Ronde or where, but he’d talked ’bout Seal Village. He’d said Baby Otter Jack’d been brought to Yachats ’Servation, and Coquille women’d give him their milk and spit camas in his mouth, but then they’d left to marry whites. He’d told Otter Jack to give ’way his first salmon, his first elk and bear, and look out for Howling Woman who lived ’side waves, ready to eat children who dared her.

The man’d cooked crab in kelp and then’d gone ’way quiet as a back-slosh ’neath mist: a dream or a ’xaggeration like the ’naugration or maybe real as rock. I couldn’t decide, and then the crummy dropped me off and rolled way’ into gray soup, I clumb cross the jetty, and the tide seeped down, hissing soft ’tween boulders. The black rocks glowed wet with shiny specks, and then Auntie yelled ’bove me. “Jean Ellie!”

She stood ’top the jetty, cocking her feather-trim hat serious. “Did you...quit?” she said.

I felt so mean I didn’t answer.

“Why are you down there in the middle of the day?” she said.

“Why you?” I said.

She come down 'neuvering her heels nimble 'tween rocks, and she opened *The Fir County Reader*. NIPS ATOM'D AGAIN! "Mister Simpson sent me to get the extra."

"Do you think they'll surrender?"

Auntie pumped her head yes. "All the men will be back for their jobs, you know."

Not those'd been rolled onto the dock 'neath pine, I thought. But I knew what she meant, and I shut my trap.

"Miss Barnes is engaged," said Auntie. "She won't teach next year, and no one charms children like you."

I 'nored her, spying Mister Simpson's paper, thinking how the mill smoke towered up and up and then mushroom'd out 'fore it sailed in 'mense clouds down the coast.

Auntie wagged her chin at the mill. "You watch, people will produce these new bombs like they produce floorboards and battery separators and cars. The companies will. The men will. You wait and see."

She whisked herself back up the rocks, and *wock-a-wock!* I seen her as a blue jay too, bossing, knowing too much to ever marry any man, and sudden' I felt sad and 'sponsible, and I watched Auntie go 'til a shiver shook me hard.

Who cared 'bout a job anyway, 'bout eating? Couldn't we sing Yanks to 'come Nips, Nips to 'come Yanks?

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The sun come out 'gain and lit up logs all 'long the beach like they was bones, and when I clumb the cliff to the 'lotment, that ancient Howling Woman seemed to shriek a bomb-blast a'

her own, screaming wind through the big trees. I peered in: the balloon gusted up like a giant lung 'bove the ground, whumping 'gainst trunks, jerking ropes tied to trees. It caved in and lashed huckleberry and devil's club. It gusted full, caved in, gusted full...

Smells a' grease, leeks and venison blew from the open door a' the cabin, and Otter Jack slept inside, lying flat 'neath a wool blanket, rasping heavy through his nose. Pieces a' plump brown meat lay on his plate 'side his bunk, and his right hand rested 'side the blanket, the ball-bone 'normous in the flaky skin a' his wrist.

He smacked cracked lips and give me a sudden grin. Game laws didn't 'ply to his land, but I wanted to keep him fresh. "You been poaching?"

"She kept on nosing the glue on the seams."

"The balloon dropped down?"

"It near broke my arms, dragging me when I tied it."

I told him 'bout Japan, and he turned sulky, gawking out the door. "Blow up a city in a second?" he said.

I took his hand, feeling his fingers thin as trout bones. "Someone got to know 'bout the balloon."

He gulped stubborn, wiping phlegm from his eyes.

"It might a' come from a ship or sub," I said. "Or from a plane, and maybe's there's more."

"Look in my box," he said. "Look it in good."

I knelt in the corner 'neath his coat hooks, opened his old tool box, seen it jammed with fat white envelopes. "You sign for these, and you don't read 'em?"

He grunted, and I opened the latest letter. The county wanted land taxes, and he'd missed

court dates.

**Title to the west half of the southwest quarter of  
section twenty-four, Cape Francis Drake Township,  
was sold to Seal City Lumber, August 1, 1945.**

**Jackson Taylor Ottman must vacate property in thirty days.**

Otter Jack sat up, mummying covers round his neck, and I wanted to bust something in half: bigwig signatures, tiny print, my rising blood, the county seal, the mill itself.

“How they want me to work? To pay? Tell me, Ellie!”

“Tell you? Whyn’t you tell me! I would a’--” Done what? Give him, not Auntie, money ev’ry month?

He stared at me, rasping slow. “I didn’t think they would ever--”

“I’ll figure.” I went outside and watched waves glimmer clear cross the Pacific, and then I got his ax and went back into the trees. The balloon whipped round, and I followed the clinks a’ clips ’til I seen the ballast ring lying cross a downed cedar, the sandbags heavy on the crumbling wood, the tin-can bombs like tubes a’ shadow.

I hacked his knots, and the balloon collapsed complete and yanked at a couple, long, chunky wires I wouldn’t dare chop. Springs and disks and coils was littered all round, a crack in a battery case showed the last a’ some leak, the dry cell looked dead. Jap labels run cross the can-bombs, a pinhead stuck out halfway down each, and one bomb was bigger’n four others, ugly with a nosepiece, lined with hard-glass slots filled with yellow crystals that looked wicked as Hitler, hid’ous as Hirohito.

I seen no pinhead on the big bomb, so I hacked huckleberry branches, snugged a little bomb 'gainst the crystal one and tied 'em tight t'gether, figuring the small bomb would 'nite the big. I lugged 'em both out the back a' the woods, feeling 'em cold as tide rocks 'gainst my gut, and I laid 'em neath the gate a' the stump field that sloped down to Roosevelt Highway.

PROPERTY OF SEAL CITY LUMBER.

The watchman'd come this way, I was sure, and I dug a hole with the ax and set the bombs easy in. I peeled a branch-tip 'part and threaded it round the pinhead, and I knotted the other end a' the huckleberry branch to the bottom a' the gate, sweating, sighing 'gainst any flinch. I let dirt trickle from my fingers onto the bombs and then leaned limbs 'gainst the gate, so the wind wouldn't trigger nothing, and pop! A muffler spit down at the bottom a' the stumps, an Army-issue jeep revved its way up the hill, I got up slow 'bove the branch, wiping my hands.

The jeep stopped, and Harold J. Jameson got out, blond hair blowing fine 'bove a big broad forehead, shoulders lurching up burly in his dark Swede suit. Mister Seal City Lumber himself, controlling partner. He 'proached the gate, looking at me like I didn't belong, and I barked to stop him. "There's a new Jap weapon here!"

"We know, Miss Osborne."

I nodded sharp, and he pulled up short, seeing a rim a' the little bomb sticking out a' dirt. He begun to turn, and I barked 'gain. "Go on, get your law!" I edged my foot nearer the branch, and Jameson twisted up his mouth like Auntie would. "See if I won't stomp down, and I didn't learn my work," I said. Jameson stood back a ways, gaging me, and then there was taps like raindrops hitting dust.

*Squewk-a-weck! Squewk-a-weck!* A jay lit on the ground, cocking its head toward a raw nub a' meat. I turned halfway round, and Otter Jack come out a' the woods, ripping deer flesh

like I never seen, tearing it wild, throwing pieces everywhere. He glowered at my heel poised 'bove the branch, and I knew he'd seen what I'd took from the balloon.

His bullet-eyes flamed at Jameson. "You think you got the right to steal these trees and drive me off?"

"We bought the land, but we won't force you off," said Jameson. "We'll see to it you can stay in your cabin."

"Fancy that," I said, and *weck-weck-WECK!* Jays dropped out a' trees, and one lit top a' the fence, eyed a limb 'gainst the gate and then flapped down 'side my foot. It looked up at me, a chunk a meat hanging from its bill, and I held still, and it hopped 'neath the branch and stuck its bill into the far end a' the dug-up dirt. It poked the bill in gentle 'til the meat was buried, it pulled its bill halfway out, and then it froze, feeling the heat a' our stares and maybe even the horrible warm bubble rising inside my skin. The wind fluffed up feathers on the jay's back, but it was like a hawk was staring down from a spruce. All the jays was dead quiet, their black eyes glowed extra bright, they did not blink. My ankle got stiff. My boot got heavy. In my mind I heard Otter Jack. "Jean Ellie, what you?"

"Bastard bitch," muttered Jameson. "Illegitimate--"

I crumpled inside, the air flashed blue, I was hurled high by a banging blast. I saw my arm in its sleeve shoot past a face a' blood, saw Jameson split 'part, Otter Jack's legs splat 'gainst one tree, his head and chest smash 'gainst 'nother, and blackness fell round me, I was dead, but a hot-bloody brine rushed down my nose, and I beat my tail hard and swum up toward a watery red glow, and I poked my head 'bove popping waves, and Jameson muttered 'gain. "Your damned jay hit your damned branch."

We'd turned into seals, all right, but a hot goo bubbled across our cheeks, it poured like



burning oil 'gainst our bones, and we died 'gain. We swum up and poked out our heads 'gain, and everywhere we looked, steaming flesh floated way from wiggling salmon, and men and women and boys and girls cried out and sputtered pus, rolling as thick as bloated beans in stinking soup. Our cheeks bubbled, our bones boiled, we died and come up 'gain and 'gain.

“Why in hell?” said Jameson.

We swum backward and seen cedar-plank lodges burn on the beach and the rock blow high at the mouth a' the river.

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