A Change of

Profession.

By HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS.

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crew to reach the roof of the sixteen

story mansard building. They had the

nozzle of a line of hose that was being

laid from the standpipe of the top

floor to wet down the north wall of

to the night, dragging their length of

the line, to face a gale of wind that

took the breath from between their

through the darkness, toward the light

of fire over the parapet, and they

looked down there through the smoke

at the flames in the roof of an adjoin-

ing clothing house twelve stories be-

Captain Ball had followed them

"Turn on your water!" he bellowed

above the storm to the men behind

them, and in a moment a feeble

stream swelled the line of hose and

gushed from the "pipe." He swore

at it, "It can't spit past its chin," he

It straightened slowly as they

watched it. "Keep wettin' her down!"

he shouted in Gorman's ear. "Get up

another line!" he cried to the rest of

The rushing of the wind drowned

their answer, but they hurried below

to obey him. He remained with Gor-

man and Haurahan, watching the fire

spread and brighten in the roof of the

clothing house. German was still

grinning at his "Can't spit past its

They were 200 feet above the street

level, and the storm, burling itself

across the huddled roofs below them.

drew up a dreft of heat and smoke to

them as if they were looking down a

chimney. They could guess what the

heat must be in the street, for across

the road the woodwork of the win-

dows of a five story building had

caught fire without the touch of any

flame, and a pygmy crew were drench-

ing it with a stream which they shot

up straight from the sidewalk. Officers

the size of manikins ran up and down

in the ruddy glow, waving their little

arms. The fire flowed over the roof as

if it were a burning oil, and the smoke

came up to them thicker and the heat

Their weak stream dribbled down

the wall to dry out on the hot bricks

before it touched the point of danger,

and Gorman leaned over the parapet

to see that the paint was beginning to

peel off in great scales far below. Han-

rahan and he tried hopelessly to reach

these by swinging the pipe from side

tried to irrigate a desert with it. Their

The rest of the crew came up again,

Captain Ball turned to the lieuten-

whole blamed buildin'. Fireproof?

The men went back with their hose

"Do the best you can up here," he

advised Gorman. "Chief's orders to

wet her down. Look out for the air

Gorman caught the first of these in-

structions, but the wind carried away

that last warning of danger, and the

unconscious of the catastrophe which

The air shaft, in fact, was acting as

a sheltered fine for the flames. It cut

a deep groove into the wall of the

straight aloft, blowing up sparks like

the draft of a blast furnace. Gorman,

watching only the wall and the win-

work in the street. He was wishing

he did not chew. He had been nick-

named "Delicate Pete" by his fellow

probationers at fire headquarters, and

man, being the big man of his class,

had despised him from the day that

ing ladders, had then publicly com-

in point of nimbleness because Han-

These two were being "broken" to-

gether with all the hard work of the

company, but there was no friendship

between them. They rarely spoke to

each other, for Gorman had found

Hanrahan's conversation all "hot air

an' free silver" and had quarreled with

him about this wearisome enthusiasm

remembered with exasperation that again.

and the wind, rushing into it, rose yer yap.

was preparing for them.

eyes were dry and beginning to smart.

dragging a second line.

the air shaft there!"

shaft."

more stifling with every breath.

low them.

said.

the crew.

They struggled against it.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

ORMAN and Hanrahan, the

two probationers newly as-

signed to Engine Company

No. -, were the first of their

tered the smoke to see another blaze

below. Then suddenly the stream from

their hose weakened and fell short. It

was plain that the crews were using

an eath. That shaft, he knew, lit

the stairway from the ground up and

cut them off from the elevator shaft

dropped the line and ran to the door.

blaze that could not be faced.

flames. Hanraban groaned.

out of this!" he gasped.

found another coping.

and the flying embers.

down," he said,

smoke.

mouth. The voice was lost in the roar

of the wind. He saw him take off his

He came running back to Gorman

came on a scuttle there and raised it.

to find that the tank was almost full.

He took of his rubber coat and dipped

it down, and it came up dripping. He

rubbed it over his face and licked at

the moisture on the smooth tarpaulin.

reached down with his belmet, drew it

head and down his back again and

gulps, sighing with satisfaction.

again. Then he drank it in great

The relief brought back his energies.

The tank ladder took his eye, and it

occurred to him that if he could get it

loose he might be able to reach a

lower window with it. He took hold

of it in his hage hands, drew a long

breath and strained to wrench it from

"don't let us burn alive up here!"

"Y' all right?" Gorman asked him.

the water on the lower floors.

good up here now,"

the door of the stairs.

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for politics. They continued stolidly its iron sockets, tightening on it slowat their work now in the silence of muly until the blood drummed in his ears. He bent the upright of it, but the socktual indifference. The growing strength of the stream threatened to tear the et held it still. When he paused for nozzle from their hands, and they breath he remembered Hanrahan and raised the hose to their shoulders to shouted to him for aid. bend it in a swan's neck arch that He got no answer, and he descended sent the water hissing down the bricks. the roof to find him lying on his face They were busied so when they saw in the worst of the heat that blew a bluish green flame flash in the red from the air shaft. He dragged him of the fire in the roof below, and a back from it and emptied a helmet full beich of smoke rolled up to them on of water on his face. the burst and echo of an explosion. Hanrahan rolled his head from side Before it reached them they heard anto side, muttering to himself. other roar beneath it. The cloud of "Better get up to the tank an' take smoke was split with flame, and they a dip. I want you to help me get that leaped back from the parapet as if ladder loose. Here, take a drink,' said Gorman. from the crater of a voicano and threw themselves on their faces as the burn-

against each other in a race with scal- fever flush of thirst through him. He

pared Gorman to a baby hippopotamus up half full and emptied it over his

Hanrahan caught at his collar, thrust ing aside the water. "Get me down, he said. "You get me down, Bull. I'll make it good. I'm right in with the gang. Dorgan said"-Gorman threw him from him with curse. "I can't get you down!" he ery window curtain, window sash and yelled at him. "What's the matter of the ladder, and each took a twist "frim" in its north wall, rolled over with you?"

them in a heat that nipped their ears | Haurahan fell back heavily and lar

Gorman pinned down the pipe that breathing hard, with open mouth. A was thrashing about the roof and puff of smoke blew down and choked staggered back to the parapet with it. him with a sob. The beat of heat was unendurable, Gorman dragged him across the roof and he could see nothing for the to the tank and sat down beside him, smoke that blinded him with tears. He did not know that the gale was

uncertain what to do, with his back to the parapet and his face to the light carrying a solid tongue of fire into the well. The heat swam over them in hidden air shaft and that every wina suffocating current. Hanrahan threw dow on that shaft was already spitout his arms and lay as if stretched on ting flames. He could just see that a cross, rolling his head from side to the woodwork of the window below side, agonized and speechless. him was afire, and he called Hanrahan He began to recite the confession to train the pipe on it with him. They doused it black at once and scat-

of a Roman Catholic, beating his breast with a whispered "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." Gorman scowled. The smoke irritat ed him; the heat pricked him. "Can't

you shut yer yap for half a minute?" "We're wanted down below," I he complained. guess," Hanrahan said. "We're no Hanrahan groaned and turned to him. "Do you think there's any hell?" Gorman nodded. They shut off the

he asked in a husky whisper. nozzle and turned to drag the line to Gorman laughed. "Aw, cut it out," he said. "You're scared. That's all They were too late. Gorman saw that's wrong with you." the blaze in the air shaft and cried out

There was a crash of breaking windows in the air shaft. The flames roared up, flapping like a banner in the

in the center of the building. They "Help!" Hanrahan screeched. "Help! Smoke was pouring from it, and flame

Gorman stood up in the thickening was behind the smoke. Gorman ran smoke and looked down on him. "Say, back for the hose, turned the neck he said, "if you got any breath to guard of the helmet over his face and, waste, you'd better save it fer yer with the water to open the way for him, fought down three steps into a



Gorman dragged him across the roof to the tank.

prayers. This roof's goin' to drop you helmet and try to throw it down into in a hole so hot it won't leave enough the street and the cale snatched it of you fer the devil to raise a blister from his hand, tossed it aloft and blew

on. Shut up, will you?" it away to the south with the smoke He turned away from him and climbed the ladder to the top of the tank, so that he might sit down there "For the Lord's sake, Bull," he cried. in quiet. He could hear the engines in the street whistling frantically for coal Gorman shook his head. "I can't get from the fuel wagons, and they sounded very far away. He reached down He could see that there was nothing into the scuttle and drank from his on the brick roof to burn. The heat helmet again. The air came up cool from the tank. He lay with his face in the draft of it and shut his dry eyelids

on his aching eyes. from it there was an enormous water Although he had threatened Hanrahan with the collapse of the roof, he and supported across the angle of the had spoken in anger to terrify him into walls on steel beams, so that, even if silence and not because he believed the roof should fall, the tank would that either of them would lose his life. not go with it. Here was the greatest He was not a man of imagination, and safety. They would have water to his breath was too strong in his body prevent the heat from baking them for him to realize the possibility of alive, and they would have the tank death. If the crew below did not find to shelter them from the drift of some means of reaching him, he hoped to live out the fire where he was Gorman went over to it and crouch-Chiefly he was angry and bewildered ed to peer beneath the beams. Hanraby his own anger because Hanrahan han stumbled against him, "Bull," he had gone to pleces and made such a whimpered, "I can't-I can't get down," noise. He could not think. The heat Gorman thrust him aside, "Well, was wearing on him. He lay there who said you could?" he snarled.

waiting. "You're up here to stay. You better And, in fact, the men below were almansard building at Gorman's left, make up yer mind to that an' shut ready planning to reach him. For a time Captain Ball had been so busy Hanrahan threw up his arms and fighting back the flames on the twelfth screamed at the sky in a high, dry floor that he did not think of the two voice, clutching with his fingers and men whom he had left on the roof. It dows below him, pitied the crews at snapping like a dog with his teeth. was not until sparks and burning Then he pitched forward into the woodwork began to pour down the elesmoke on a run for the street parapet vator shaft that the possibility of the situation occurred to him. Fortunate-Hanrahan would have none. That was Gorman climbed slowly up the iron ly the building was "fireproofed," and ladder to the top of the tank. He the progress of the flames would be

He called two of his crew to get scaling ladders, and, leaving his lieutenant in charge of the pipes, he ran to the southwest end of the building to be farthest from the fire and, opening a window there, looked up. He could see no signs of fire in any window above him. "Looks all right," he told the men. "But you'll have to be quick. Keep your eyes open for the windows behind you."

They had a coll of life line and two ladders. They used but one of the latter, going up together for greater speed. At their first window they saw the wisdom of Captain Ball's instructions. The room within was stifling with smoke and heat, and as soon as they opened a vent in it the fire showed in the darkness. At the fourteenth story a light of

flames was already glimmering behind the broken pane. The smoke poured out on them as they beat in the glass and hauled up the ladder. They went ahead, however, and while they were climbing up the wall from that window they heard the rush of a back draft below them and looked down to see the flames in the thirteenth story cutting them off. A cry of warning from Captain Ball

was answered by a faint shout above them. They looked up to see Gorman peering down over the edge of the water tank. Captain Ball shouted to them, "Come down the rope!" They looked down to see him waving to them. They looked up to see that Gorman had disappeared.

"Jim," the upper man said, "we can't reach 'em." They tied the end of their rope hurriedly around the shaft dropped.

smoke, blistered and blinded, to Captain Ball, who caught each as be came and drew him in the window, A fireman sent by the lieutenant came up shouting, "Fire's at the elevator shaft!" They turned and ran.

Gorman had gone down to the roof to get Hanrahan and found him lying

on his face on the bricks. "The men 're comin' up the ladders," he said. Hanrahan sprang to his feet with this new hope of life and followed him around the tant to the parapet. They looked down, to see the empty

ladder, twenty feet below them, banging in the flames, with a blazing rope daugling from the center of it into the smoke. "Hell?" Gorman said disgustedly.

Hanrahan stared at the abandoned apparatus. "I guess," he said in a

new volce. He turned back with Gorman to the front of the tank again. There was a lull in the wind; the smoke and the flames rose up straight on two sides of the roof, and the bricks were hot under their feet. There was no escape now. "We got one chance left." Gorman said. "We can get in the

Hanrahan shook his head. "No use, Bull," he answered. "I got to cash in,

Gorman cursed him. "Well, I ain't," he said. "Get a hold of this ladder." He braced himself with a foot against the tin covering of the tank, bent his back and tugged to loosen the ladder from its fastenings. Hanrahan helped him. They strained and struggled with all the strength of every muscle, and the great screws in the sockets of the uprights came out slowly, as if they had been sunk in wax. Once having loosened its hold, they levered the ladder, twisted it and wrenched it free. Gorman crawled under the steel beams and turned of the stopcock there. Then they both climbed aloft, lowered the ladder into the tank and slid down, one on each side of the rungs, into the water. They

drank together, sunk to the teeth. Gorman ducked. "You'd better the yourself on," he spluttered. "We'll be entin' smoke here before long."

The scuttle was a red square of light above them, and they could see each other's face as pale blurs of no recognizable feature in the darkness. They stripped off their upper clothing and bound themselves under the arms to the ladder.

They could hear the crackle and roar of flames outside. There was a pecking of scattered rain on the tin above

"I wish I had somethin' t' eat," Gorman said. Hanrahan sighed again. "I'd like something to breathe better,"

He was choking with heat and smoke. He rested his chin on the rung of the ladder. He was tired and dizzy. He seemed to be drifting on clouds of emoke, blown about in storm and heat, a glowing spark above the flames. His mind wandered in a delirium of suffocation. He heard Gorman's voice, at a great distance, say, "Wind changedsouth."

Daybreak found the "fireproof"

mansard building a smoking and

blackened shell above its tenth story, with the firemen putting out the last smolder in the gutted rooms. They fought their way up slowly from floor to floor until by noon Captain Ball and a squad of his company, looking for their dead, reached the stairs leading to the roof. They found there the blackened nozzle which Gorman had abandoned to the fire. They went up the stairs

hopelessly and burst open the door, to see Gorman himself, red eyed and dripping and stripped to the walst, sitting on the edge of the tank, beating with his beels on its sides and singing crazy nothings in the voice of insanity.

Captain Ball went over to him and called up, "Where's Hanrahan?" He winked and pointed down into

the tank. "I'm the king of the castle." he sang. "I'm the king of the castle. I'm the king-what's Hanrahan? Pete. Pete, Delicate Pete! Oh, he's a spellbinder," he said with a grin, "He's a spellbinder, talkin' hot air. Comin' up? Come on up. It ain't as hot up here as it was."

And they found Hanrahan, unconscious, but alive, still tied to the lad der and floating with his head between the rungs

Two weeks laier, when Gorman reported for duty at the engine house, his first question was for "Dilicate Pete." "Him?" the lieutenant said. "Oh, he's quit the department. He's soin' to join the police."



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