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Title: Gourmet

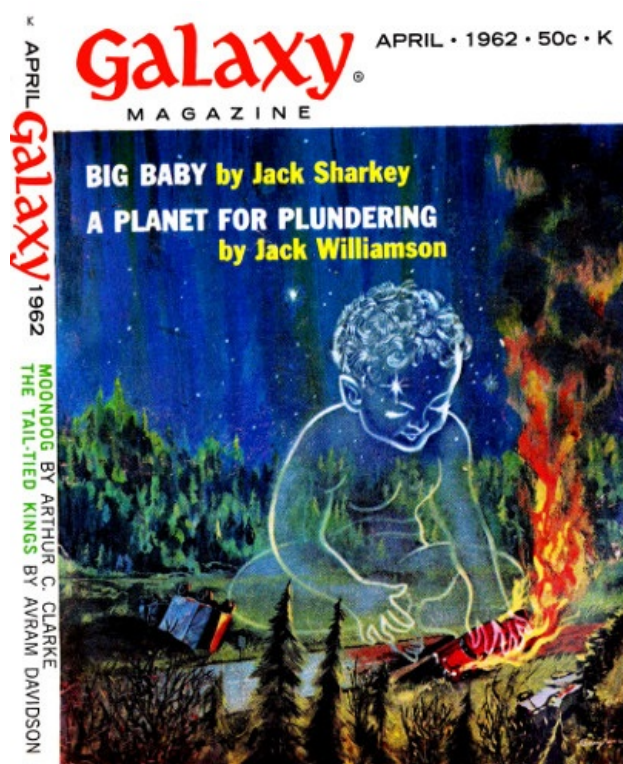
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Release date: March 29, 2016 [EBook #51597]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GOURMET ***



GOURMET

By ALLEN KIM LANG

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GOURMET

***This was the endless problem of all
spaceship cooks: He had to feed the men
tomorrow on what they had eaten today!***

Unable to get out to the ballgame and a long way off from the girls, men on ships think about, talk about, bitch about their food. It's true that Woman remains a topic of thoughtful study, but discussion can never replace practice in an art. Food, on the other hand, is a challenge shipmen face three times a day, so central to their thoughts that a history of sea-faring can be read from a commissary list.

In the days when salt-sea sailors were charting islands and spearing seals, for example, the fo'c's'le hands called themselves Lobscousers, celebrating the liquid hash then prominent in the marine menu. The Limey sailor got the name of the anti-scorbutic citrus squeezed into his diet, a fruit known to us mariners of a more sophisticated age only as garnish for our groundside gin-and-tonic. And today we Marsmen are called Slimeheads, honoring in our title the *Chlorella* and *Scenedesmus* algae that, by filling up the spaces within, open the road to the larger Space without.

Should any groundsman dispute the importance of belly-furniture in history—whether it be exterminating whales, or introducing syphilis to the Fiji Islanders, or settling the Australian littoral with cross-coves from Middlesex and Hampshire—he is referred to the hundred-and-first chapter of *Moby Dick*, a book spooled in the amusement tanks of all but the smallest spacers. I trust, however, that no Marsman will undertake to review this inventory of refreshment more than a week from groundfall. A catalogue of sides of beef and heads of Leyden cheese and ankers of good Geneva would prove heavy reading for a man condemned to snack on the Chlorella-spawn of cis-Martian space.

The *Pequod's* crew ate wormy biscuit and salt beef. Nimitz's men won their war on canned pork and beans. The *Triton* made her underwater periplus of Earth with a galley stocked with frozen pizza and concentrated apple-juice. But then, when sailors left the seas for the skies, a decline set in.

The first amenity of groundside existence to be abandoned was decent food. The earliest men into the vacuum swallowed protein squeezings from aluminum tubes, and were glad enough to drop back to the groundsman's diet of steak and fried potatoes.

Long before I was a boy in Med School, itching to look at black sky through a view-port, galley science had fulfilled the disgusting exordium of *Isaiah* 36:12, to feed the Slimeheads for breakfast

today what was day-before-yesterday's table-scrap and jakes-water.

The Ship's Cook, the man who accomplishes the daily miracle of turning offal into eatables, is in many ways the most vital man aboard a spacer. He can make morale or foment a mutiny. His power is paramount. Slimeheads remember the H. M. S. *Ajax* fiasco, for example, in which a galleyman leveled his Chlorella tanks with heavy water from the ship's shielding. Four officers and twenty-one Other Ranks were rescued from the *Ajax* in deep space, half dead from deuterium poisoning. We think of the *Benjo Maru* incident, too, caused by a Ship's Cook who allowed his algaecal staff-of-life to become contaminated with a fast-growing *Saccharomyces* yeast. The Japanese vessel staggered to her pad at Piano West after a twenty-week drunk: the alien yeast had got into the stomach of every man aboard, where it fermented each subsequent bite he ate to a superior grade of *sake*. And for a third footnote to the ancient observation, "God sends food, and the Devil sends cooks," Marsmen will recall what happened aboard my ship the *Charles Partlow Sale*.

The *Sale* blasted off from Brady Station in the middle of August, due in at Piano West in early May. In no special hurry, we were taking the low-energy route to Mars, a pathway about as long in time as the human period of gestation. Our cargo consisted mostly of Tien-Shen fir seedlings and some tons of an arctic grass-seed—these to be planted in the *maria* to squeeze out the native blue bugberry vines. We had aboard the Registry minimum of six men and three officers. Ship's Surgeon was myself, Paul Vilanova. Our Captain was Willy Winkelmann, the hardest man in space and very likely the fattest. Ship's Cook was Robert Bailey.

Cooking aboard a spacer is a job combining the more frustrating tensions of biochemistry, applied mycology, high-speed farming, dietetics and sewage engineering. It's the Cook's responsibility to see that each man aboard gets each day no less than five pounds of water, two pounds of oxygen, and one-and-a-half pounds of dry food. This isn't just a paragraph from the Spacer Union Contract. It's a statement of the least fuel a man can run on.

Twelve tons of water, oxygen, and food would have filled the cargo compartments to bursting, and left a small ship like the *C. P. Sale* no reason to reach for Mars. By allowing a colony of Chlorella algae to work over our used air, water and other effluvia, though, three tons of metabolites would see us through from Brady Station to Piano West and back. Recycling was the answer. The molecule of carbohydrate, fat, protein or mineral that didn't feed the crew fed the algae. And the algae fed us.

All waste was used to fertilize our liquid fields. Even the stubble from our 2,680 shaves and the clippings from our 666 haircuts en route and back would be fed into the Chlorella tanks. Human hair is rich in essential amino acids.

The algae—dried by the Cook, bleached with methyl alcohol to kill the smell and make the residue more digestible, disguised and seasoned in a hundred ways—served as a sort of meat-and-potatoes that never quite wore out. Our air and water were equally immortal. Each molecule of oxygen would be conversant with the alveoli of every man aboard by the end of our trip. Every drop of water would have been intimate with the glomeruli of each kidney on the ship before we grounded in. Groundling politicians are right enough when they say that we spacers are a breed apart. We're the one race of men who can't afford the luxury of squeamishness.

Though I'm signed aboard as Ship's Surgeon, I seldom lift a knife in space. My employment is more in the nature of TS-card-puncher extraordinary. My duties are to serve as wailing-wall, morale officer, guardian of the medicinal whiskey and frustrator of mutual murder. Generally the man aboard who'd serve as the most popular murder-victim is the Cook. This trip, the-man-you-love-to-hate was our Captain.

If the Cook hadn't problems enough with the chemical and psychic duties of his office, Winkelmann supplied the want. Captain Willy Winkelmann was the sort of man who, if he had to go into space at all, had best do so alone. If the Prussians had a Marine Corps, Winkelmann would have done splendidly as Drill Instructor for their boot camp. His heart was a chip of helium ice, his voice dripped sarcastic acid. The planet Earth was hardly large enough to accommodate a wart as annoying as Willy Winkelmann. Cheek-by-jowl every day in a nacelle the size of a Pullman car, our Captain quickly established himself as a major social hemorrhoid.

The Captain's particular patsy was, of course, young Bailey the Cook. It was Winkelmann who saw humorous possibilities in the entry, "Bailey, Robert," on Ship's Articles. He at once renamed our unfortunate shipmate "Belly-Robber." It was Winkelmann who discussed *haut cuisine* and the properties of the nobler wines while we munched our algaeburgers and sipped coffee that tasted of utility water. And it was Captain Willy Winkelmann who never referred to the ship's head by any other name than The Kitchen Cabinet.

Bailey tried to feed us by groundside standards. He hid the taste of synthetic methionine—an essential amino acid not synthesized by Chlorella—by seasoning our algaecal repasts with pinches of oregano and thyme. He tinted the pale-green dollops of pressed Chlorella pink, textured the mass to the consistency of hamburger and toasted the slabs to a delicate brown in a forlorn attempt to make mock-meat. For dessert, he served a fudge compounded from the dextrose-paste of the carbohydrate recycler. The crew thanked him. The Captain did not. "Belly-Robber," he said, his tone icy as winter wind off the North Sea, "you had best cycle this mess through the tanks again. There is a pun in my home country: *Mensch ist was er isst*. It means, you are what

you eat. I think you are impertinent to suggest I should become this *Schweinerei* you are feeding me." Captain Winkelmann blotted his chin with his napkin, heaved his bulk up from the table, and climbed up the ladder from the dining-cubby.

"Doc, do you like Winkelmann?" the Cook asked me.

"Not much," I said. "I suspect that the finest gift our Captain can give his mother is to be absent from her on Mother's Day. But we've got to live with him. He's a good man at driving a ship."

"I wish he'd leave off driving this Cook," Bailey said. "The fat swine!"

"His plumpness is an unwitting tribute to your cooking, Bailey," I said. "He eats well. We all do. I've dined aboard a lot of spacers in my time, and I'll testify that you set a table second to none."

Bailey took a handful of dried Chlorella from a bin and fingered it. It was green, smelled of swamp, and looked appetizing as a bedsore. "This is what I have to work with," he said. He tossed the stuff back into its bin. "In Ohio, which is my home country, in the presence of ladies, we'd call such garbage Horse-Leavings."

"You'll never make Winkelmann happy," I said. "Even the simultaneous death of all other human beings could hardly make him smile. Keep up the good work, though, and you'll keep our Captain fat."

Bailey nodded from his one-man cloud of gloom. I got a bottle of rye from Medical Stores and offered him a therapeutic draught. The Cook waved my gift aside. "Not now, Doc," he said. "I'm thinking about tomorrow's menu."

The product of Bailey's cerebrations was on the mess table at noon the next day. We were each served an individual head of lettuce, dressed with something very like vinegar and oil, spiced with tiny leaves of burnet. How Bailey had constructed those synthetic lettuces I can only guess: the hours spent preparing a green Chlorella paste, rolling and drying and shaping each artificial leaf, the fitting together of nine heads like crisp, three-dimensional jigsaw puzzles. The *pièce de résistance* was again a "hamburger steak;" but this time the algaecal mass that made it up was buried in a rich, meaty gravy that was only faintly green. The essence-of-steak used in these Chlorella cutlets had been sprinkled with a lavish hand. Garlic was richly in evidence. "It's so tender," the radioman joked, "that I can hardly believe it's really steak."

Bailey stared across the dining-cubby toward Winkelmann, silently imploring the Captain's ratification of his masterpiece. The big man's pink cheeks bulged and jumped with his chewing. He swallowed. "Belly-Robber," Winkelmann said, "I had almost rather you served me this pond-scum raw than have it all mucked-up with synthetic onions and cycler-salt."

"You seem able enough to choke down Bailey's chow, Captain," I said. I gazed at Winkelmann's form, bulbous from a lifetime of surfeit feeding.

"Yes, I eat it," the Captain said, taking and talking through another bite. "But I eat only as a man in the desert will eat worms and grasshoppers, to stay alive."

"Sir, what in heaven's name do you expect from me?" Bailey pleaded.

"Only good food," Winkelmann mumbled through his mouthful of disguised algae. He tapped his head with a finger. "This—the brain that guides the ship—cannot be coaxed to work on hog-slop. You understand me, Belly-Robber?"

Bailey, his hands fisted at his sides, nodded. "Yes, sir. But I really don't know what I can do to please you."

"You are a spacer and a Ship's Cook, not a suburban *Hausfrau* with the vapors," Winkelmann said. "I do not expect from you hysterics, tantrums or weeping. Only—can you understand this, so simple?—food that will keep my belly content and my brain alive."

"Yes, sir," Bailey said, his face a picture of that offense the British term Dumb Insolence.

Winkelmann got up and climbed the ladder to the pilot-cubicle. I followed him. "Captain," I said, "you're driving Bailey too hard. You're asking him to make bricks without straw."

Winkelmann regarded me with his pale-blue stare. "You think, Doctor, that my cruelty to the Belly-Robber is the biliousness of a middle-aged man?"

"Frankly, I can't understand your attitude at all," I said.

"You accuse me of driving a man to make bricks without straw," Winkelmann said. "Very well, Doctor. It is my belief that if the Pharaoh's taskmaster had had my firmness of purpose, the Children of Israel would have made bricks with stubble. Necessity, Doctor, is the mother of invention. I am Bailey's necessity. My unkindnesses make him uncomfortable, I doubt that not. But I am forcing him to experiment, to improvise, to widen the horizons of his ingenuity. He will learn somehow to bring good food from Chlorella tanks."

"You're driving him too hard, Sir," I said. "He'll crack."

"Bailey will have some fifty thousand dollars' salary waiting when we ground at Brady Station,"

Captain Winkelmann said. "So much money buys many discomforts. That will be all, Doctor Vilanova."

"Crew morale on the ship...." I began.

"That will be all, Doctor Vilanova," Captain Winkelmann repeated.

Bailey grew more silent as we threaded our way along the elliptical path to Mars. Each meal he prepared was a fresh attempt to propitiate the appetite of our splenetic Captain. Each such offering was condemned by that heartless man. Bailey began to try avoiding the Captain at mealtimes, but was frustrated by Winkelmann's orders. "Convey my compliments to the Chef, please," the Captain would instruct one of the crew, "and ask him to step down here a moment." And the Cook would cheerlessly appear in the dining-cubby, to have his culinary genius acidly called in question again.

I myself do not doubt that Bailey was the finest Cook ever to go into Hohmann orbit. His every meal established a higher benchmark in brilliant galleyman'ship. We were served, for instance, an *ersatz* hot turkey supreme. The cheese-sauce was almost believable, the Chlorella turkey-flesh was white and tender. Bailey served with this delicacy a grainy and delicious "cornbread," and had extracted from his algae a lipid butter-substitute that soaked into the hot "bread" with a genuinely dairy smell. "Splendid, Bailey," I said.

"We are not amused," said Captain Winkelmann, accepting a second helping of the pseudo-turkey. "You are improving, Belly-Robber, but only arithmetically. Your first efforts were so hideous as to require a geometric progression of improving excellence to raise them to mere edibility. By the time we are halfway 'round the Sun, I trust you will have learned to cook with the competence of a freshman Home Economics student. That will be all, Bailey."

The crew and my fellow-officers were amused by Winkelmann's riding of Bailey; they were in addition gratified that the battle between their Captain and their Cook served to feed them so well. Most spacers embark on an outward voyage somewhat plump, having eaten enough on their last few days aground to smuggle several hundred calories of fat and many memories of good food aboard with them. This trip, none of the men had lost weight during the first four months in space. Winkelmann, indeed, seemed to have gained. His uniform was taut over his plump backside, and he puffed a bit up the ladders. I was considering suggesting to our Captain that he curtail his diet for reasons of health, a bit of advice that would have stood unique in the annals of space medicine, when Winkelmann produced his supreme insult to our Cook.

Each man aboard a spacer is allowed ten kilograms of personal effects besides his uniforms, these being considered Ship's Furnishing. As his rank and responsibility merit, the Captain is allowed double this ration. He may thus bring aboard with him some forty-five pounds of books, playing-cards, knitting-wool, whiskey or what have you to help him while away the hours between the planets. Bailey, I knew for a fact, had used up his weight-allowance in bringing aboard a case of spices: marjoram and mint, costmary, file powder, basil and allspice, and a dozen others.

Captain Winkelmann was not a reader, and had brought no books. Cards interested him not at all, as card-playing implies a sociability alien to his nature. He never drank aboard ship. I had supposed that he'd exercised his option of returning his personal-effects weight allowance to the owners for the consideration of one hundred dollars a kilogram. To collect the maximum allowance, spacers have been known to come aboard their ship mother-naked.

But this was not the case with Winkelmann. His personal-effects baggage, an unlabeled cardboard box, appeared under the table at noon mess some hundred days out from Piano West. Winkelmann rested his feet on the mysterious box as he sat to eat.

"What disgusting form does the ship's garbage appear in today, Belly-Robber?" he asked the Cook.

Bailey frowned, but kept his temper, an asceticism in which by now he'd had much practice. "I've been working on the problem of steak, Sir," he said. "I think I've whipped the taste; what was left was to get the texture steak-like. Do you understand, Sir?"

"I understand," Winkelmann growled. "You intend that your latest mess should feel like steak to the mouth, and not like baby-food. Right?"

"Yes, Sir," Bailey said. "Well, I squeezed the steak-substrate—Chlorella, of course, with all sorts of special seasonings—through a sieve, and blanched the strands in hot algaean oil. Then I chopped those strands to bits and rolled them out. *Voila!* I had something very close in texture to the muscle-fibers of genuine meat."

"Remarkable, Bailey," I said.

"It rather throws me off my appetite to hear how you muddle about with our food," the Captain said, his jowls settling into an expression of distaste. "It's quite all right to eat lobster, for example, but I never cared to see the ugly beast boiled before my eyes. Detail spoils the meal."

Bailey lifted the cover off the electric warming-pan at the center of the table and tenderly lifted a small "steak" onto each of our plates. "Try it," he urged the Captain.

Captain Winkelmann sliced off a corner of his algal steak. The color was an excellent medium-rare, the odor was the rich smell of fresh-broiled beef. Winkelmann bit down, chewed, swallowed. "Not too bad, Belly-Robber," he said, nodding. Bailey grinned and bobbed his head, his hands folded before him in an ecstasy of pleasure. A kind word from the Captain bettered the ruffles-and-flourishes of a more reasonable man. "But it still needs something ... something," Winkelmann went on, slicing off another portion of the tasty *Chlorella*. "Aha! I have it!"

"Yes, Sir?" Bailey asked.

"This, Belly-Robber!" Winkelmann reached beneath the mess-table and ripped open his cardboard carton. He brought out a bottle and unscrewed the cap. "Ketchup," he said, splattering the red juice over Bailey's masterpiece. "The scarlet burial-shroud for the failures of Cooks." Lifting a hunk of the "steak," streaming ketchup, to his mouth, Winkelmann chewed. "Just the thing," he smiled.

"Damn you!" Bailey shouted.

Winkelmann's smile flicked off, and his blue eyes pierced the Cook.

"... Sir," Bailey added.

"That's better," Winkelmann said, and took another bite. He said meditatively, "Used with caution, and only by myself, I believe I have sufficient ketchup here to see me through to Mars. Please keep a bottle on the table for all my future meals, Belly-Robber."

"But, Sir...." Bailey began.

"You must realize, Belly-Robber, that a dyspeptic Captain is a threat to the welfare of his ship. Were I to continue eating your surrealistic slops for another hundred days, without the small consolation of this sauce I had the foresight to bring with me, I'd likely be in no condition to jet us safely down to the Piano West pad. Do you understand, Belly-Robber?" he demanded.

"I understand that you're an ungrateful, impossible, square-headed, slave-driving...."

"Watch your noun," Winkelmann cautioned the Cook. "Your adjectives are insubordinate; your noun might prove mutinous."

"Captain, you've gone too far," I said. Bailey, his fists knotted, was scarlet, his chest heaving with emotion.

"Doctor, I must point out to you that it ill behooves the Ship's Surgeon to side with the Cook against the Captain," Winkelmann said.

"Sir, Bailey has tried hard to please you," I said. "The other officers and the men have been more than satisfied with his work."

"That only suggests atrophy of their taste buds," Winkelmann said. "Doctor, you are excused. As are you, Belly-Robber," he added.

Bailey and I climbed from the mess compartment together. I steered him to my quarters, where the medical supplies were stored. He sat on my bunk and exploded into weeping, banging his fists against the metal bulkhead. "You'll have that drink now," I said.

"No, dammit!" he shouted.

"Orders," I said. I poured us each some fifty cc's of rye. "This is therapy, Bailey," I told him. He poured the fiery stuff down his throat like water and silently held out his glass for a second. I provided it.

After a few minutes Bailey's sobbing ceased. "Sorry, Doc," he said.

"You've taken more pressure than most men would," I said. "Nothing to be ashamed of."

"He's crazy. What sane man would expect me to dip Wiener schnitzel and sauerkraut and *Backhahndl nach suddeutscher Art* out of an algae tank? I've got nothing but microscopic weeds to cook for him! Worn-out molecules reclaimed from the head; packaged amino acid additives. And he expects meals that would take the blue ribbon at the annual banquet of the Friends of Escoffier!"

"Yours is an ancient complaint, Bailey," I said. "You've worked your fingers to the bone, slaving over a hot stove, and you're not appreciated. But you're not married to Winkelmann, remember. A year from now you'll be home in Ohio, fifty grand richer, set to start that restaurant of yours and forget about our fat Flying Dutchman."

"I hate him," Bailey said with the simplicity of true emotion. He reached for the bottle. I let him have it. Sometimes alcohol can be an apt confederate of *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing power of nature. Half an hour later I strapped Bailey into his bunk to sleep it off. That therapeutic drunk seemed to be just what he'd needed.

For morning mess the next day we had a broth remarkable in horribleness, a pottage or boiled *Chlorella vulgaris* that looked and tasted like the vomit of some bottom-feeding sea-beast. Bailey, red-eyed and a-tremble, made no apology, and stared at Winkelmann as though daring him to comment. The Captain lifted a spoonful of the disgusting stuff to his lips, smacked and said,

"Belly-Robber, you're improving a little at last."

Bailey nodded and smiled. "Thank you, Sir," he said.

I smiled, too. Bailey had conquered himself. His psychic defenses were now strong enough to withstand the Captain's fiercest assaults of irony. Our food would likely be bad the rest of this trip, but that was a price I was willing to pay for seeing destroyed the Willy Winkelmann theory of forcing a Cook to make bricks without straw. The Captain had pushed too hard. He'd need that ketchup for the meals to come, I thought.

Noon mess was nearly as awful as breakfast had been. The coffee tasted of salt, and went largely undrunk. The men in the mess compartment were vehement in their protests, blaming the Captain, in his absence, for the decline in culinary standards. Bailey seemed not to care. He served the algaeburgers with half a mind, and hurried back into his galley oblivious of the taunts of his crewmates.

There being only three seats in the *Sale's* mess compartment, we ate our meals in three shifts. That evening, going down the ladder to supper, my nose was met with a spine-tingling barbecue tang, a smell to make a man think of gray charcoal glowing in a picnic brazier, of cicadas chirping and green grass underfoot, of the pop and hiss of canned beer being church-keyed. "He's done it, Doc!" one of the first-shift diners said. "It actually tastes of food!"

"Then he's beat the Captain at his game," I said.

"The Dutchman won't want to mess ketchup on these steaks," the crewman said.

I sat, unfolded my napkin, and looked with hope to the electric warming-pan at the center of the table. Bailey served the three of us with the small "steaks." Each contained about a pound of dried Chlorella, I judged, teasing mine with my fork. But they were drenched in a gravy rich as the stuff grandma used to make in her black iron skillet, peppery and seasoned with courageous bits of garlic. I cut a bit from my steak and chewed it. Too tender, of course; there are limits to art. But the pond-scum taste was gone. Bailey appeared in the galley door. I gestured for him to join me. "You've done it, Bailey," I said. "Every Slimehead in orbit will thank you for this. This is actually *good*."

"Thanks, Doc," Bailey said.

I smiled and took another bite. "You may not realize it, Bailey; but this is a victory for the Captain, too. He drove you to this triumph; you couldn't have done it without him."

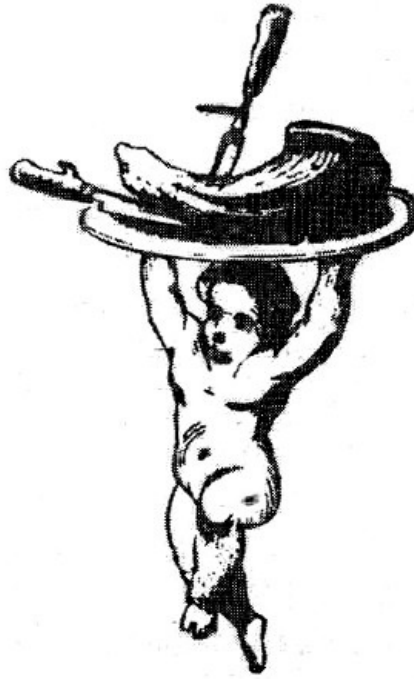
"You mean he was just whipping me on, trying to make me do better?" Bailey asked.

"He was driving you to do the impossible," I said; "and you did it. Our Captain may be a hard man, Bailey; but he did know how to coax maximum performance out of his Ship's Cook."

Bailey stood up. "Do you like Captain Winkelmann, Doctor?" he asked.

I thought about his question a moment. Winkelmann was good at his job. He persuaded his men by foul means, true; but it was all for the good of the ship and his crew. "Do I like Captain Winkelmann?" I asked, spearing another piece of my artificial steak. "Bailey, I'm afraid I'll have to admit that I do."

Bailey smiled and lifted a second steak from the warming-pan onto my plate. "Then have another piece," he said.



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