

HOW DOES A CHINA RABBIT DIE?

Can a china rabbit drown?

Is my hat still on my head?

These were the questions that Edward asked himself as he went sailing out over the blue sea. The sun was high in the sky, and from what seemed to be a very long way away, Edward heard Abilene call his name.

"Edwaarrd," she shouted, "come back."

Come back? Of all the ridiculous things to shout,

thought Edward.

As he tumbled, ears over tail through the air, he managed to catch one last glimpse of Abilene. She was standing on the deck of the ship, holding on to the

railing with one hand. In her other hand was a lamp – no, it was a ball of fire; no, Edward realized, it was his gold pocket watch that Abilene held in her hand; she was holding it up high, and it was reflecting the light of the sun.

My pocket watch, he thought. I need that.

And then Abilene disappeared from view and the rabbit hit the water with such tremendous force that his hat blew off his head.

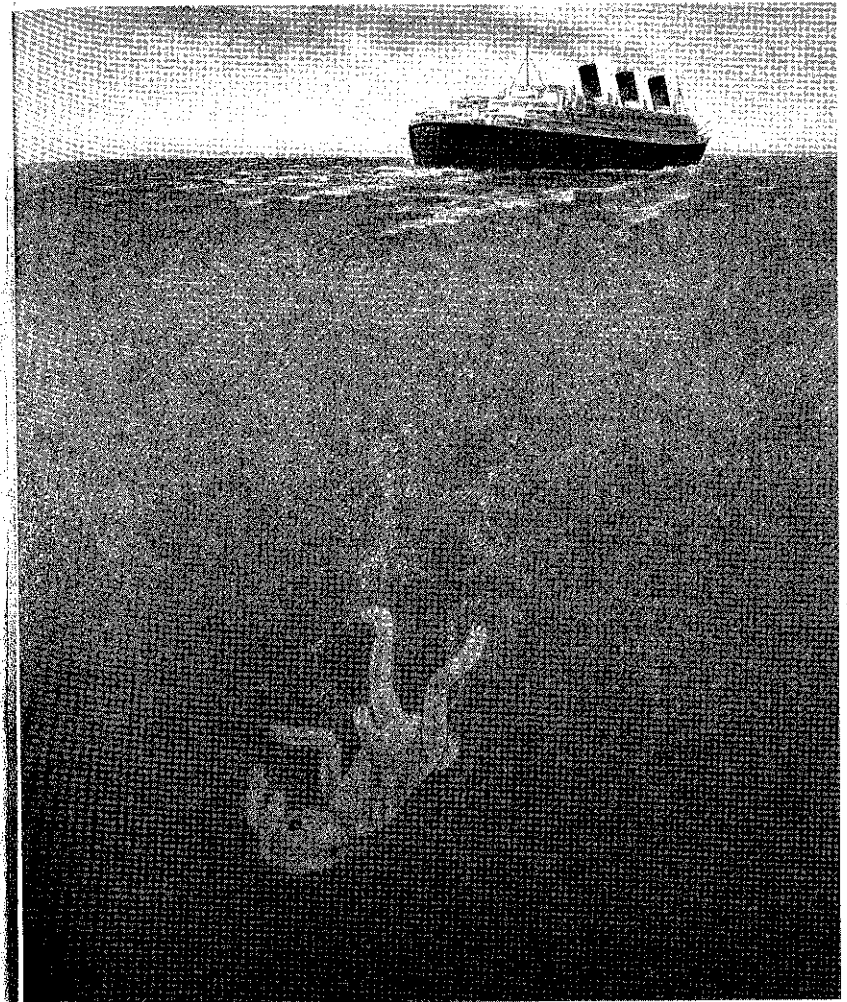
That answers that question, thought Edward as he watched the hat dance away on the wind.

And then he began to sink.

He sank and sank and sank. He kept his eyes open the whole time. Not because he was brave, but because he had no choice. His painted-on eyes witnessed the blue water turning to green and then to blue again. They watched as it finally became as black as night.

Edward went down and down. He said to himself, If I am going to drown, certainly I would have done so by now.

Far above him, the ocean liner, with Abilene aboard it, sailed blithely on; and the china rabbit



HE SANK AND SANK AND SANK.

landed, finally, on the ocean floor, face down; and there, with his head in the muck, he experienced his first genuine and true emotion.

Edward Tulane was afraid.

CHAPTER SEVEN



HE TOLD HIMSELF THAT ABILENE would come and find him. She was certain to. This, Edward thought, is much like waiting for Abilene to come home from school. I will pretend that I am in the dining room of the house on Egypt Street, waiting for the little hand to move to the three and the big hand to land on the twelve. If only I had my watch, then I would know for sure. But it doesn't matter; she will be here soon, very soon.

Hours passed. And then days. And weeks. And months.

Abilene did not come.

Edward, for lack of anything better to do, began

to think. He thought about the stars. He remembered what they looked like from his bedroom window.

What made them shine so brightly, he wondered, and were they still shining somewhere even though he could not see them? Never in my life, he thought, have I been further away from the stars than I am now.

He considered, too, the fate of the beautiful princess who had become a warthog. Why had she become a warthog? Because the ugly witch had turned her into one – that was why.

And then the rabbit thought about Pellegrina. He felt, in some way that he could not explain to himself, that she was responsible for what had happened to him. It was almost as if it was she, and not the boys, who had thrown Edward overboard.

She was like the witch in the story. No, she *was* the witch in the story. True, she did not turn him into a warthog, but just the same she was punishing him, although for what he could not say.

On the two hundred and ninety-seventh day of Edward's ordeal, a storm came. The storm was so powerful that it lifted Edward off the ocean floor

and led him in a crazy, wild and spinning dance. The water pummelled him and lifted him up and shoved him back down.

Help! thought Edward.

The storm, in its ferocity, actually flung him all the way out of the sea; and the rabbit glimpsed, for a moment, the light of an angry and bruised sky; the wind rushed through his ears. It sounded to him like Pellegrina laughing. But before he had time to appreciate being above water, he was tossed back down into the depths. Up and down, back and forth he went until the storm wore itself out, and Edward saw that he was beginning, again, his slow descent to the ocean floor.

Oh, help me, he thought. I can't go back there. Help me.

But still, down he went. Down, down, down.

And then, suddenly, the great, wide net of a fisherman reached out and grabbed the rabbit. The net lifted him higher and higher until there was an almost unbearable explosion of light and Edward was back in the world, lying on the deck of a ship, surrounded by fish.

"Eh, what's this?" said a voice.

"Ain't no fish," said another voice. "That's for sure."

The light was so brilliant that it was hard for Edward to see. But finally, shapes appeared out of the light, and then faces. And Edward realized that he was looking up at two men, one young and one old.

"Looks like some toy," said the grizzled old man. He bent and picked Edward up and held him by his front paws, considering him. "A rabbit, I reckon. It's got whiskers. And rabbit ears, or the shape of rabbit ears at least."

"Yeah, sure, a rabbit toy," said the younger man, and he turned away.

"I'll take it home to Nellie. Let her fix it up and set it to rights. Give it to some child."

The old man placed Edward carefully on a crate, positioning him so that he was sitting up and could look out at the sea. Edward appreciated the courtesy of this small gesture, but he was heartily sick of the ocean and would have been satisfied never to set eyes on it again.

"There you go," said the old man.

As they made their way back to shore, Edward felt

the sun on his face and the wind blowing through the little bit of fur left on his ears, and something filled his chest, a wonderful feeling.

He was glad to be alive.

"Look at that rabbit," the old man said. "Looks like it's enjoying the ride, don't it?"

"A-yep," said the young man.

In fact, Edward Tulane was so happy to be back among the living that he did not even take umbrage at being referred to as "it".