

*John O'Hara*

**A RAGE TO LIVE**

To Toast our wants and wishes, is her way;  
Nor asks of God, but of her Stars, to give  
The mighty blessing, "while we live, to live."  
Then all for Death, that Opiate of the soul!  
Lucretia's dagger, Rosamonda's bowl.  
Say, what can cause such impotence of mind?  
A Spark too fickle, or a Spouse too kind.  
Wise wretch! with Pleasures too refin'd to please;  
With too much Spirit to be e'er at ease;  
With too much Quickness ever to be taught;  
With too much thinking to have common Thought:  
You purchase Pain with all that Joy can give,  
And die of nothing but a Rage to live.

—Epistle to a Lady BY ALEXANDER POPE

# A RAGE TO LIVE



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**A RAGE TO LIVE**

## **Books by John O'Hara**

APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA

THE DOCTOR'S SON

BUTTERFIELD 8

HOPE OF HEAVEN

FILES ON PARADE

PAL JOEY

PIPE NIGHT

HELLBOX

*To Belle*

## NOTE

The capital of Pennsylvania is, of course, Harrisburg, in Dauphin County, on the Susquehanna River. Harrisburg is one of my favorite cities; Dauphin County, where my mother was born, is the scene of some of the happiest hours of my childhood, and the Susquehanna is an important and pleasant river. But because this is a work of fiction I have had to obliterate Harrisburg and Dauphin and the Susquehanna and substitute Fort Penn and Nesquehela, county and river. I also have made a complete substitution of the population past and present of Harrisburg and Dauphin County, and anyone who thinks he sees himself or anyone else in this novel is wrong.

*J. O'H.*

*New York City, 1949.*

BOOK ONE





**I**T RAINED LIGHTLY on the morning of Wednesday, July 4, 1917, and the Festival Committee met to decide whether to postpone the Festival until the following Saturday. It was argued that Saturday was a better day than Wednesday, even if Wednesday did happen to be the Fourth. It also was argued by some of the Fort Penn businessmen that if the Festival was postponed until Saturday the merchants would be losing two and a half days that week: Wednesday, the Fourth; the regular Thursday half holiday which the Merchants Association members had decreed upon themselves; and now Saturday.

“The question is,” said one committee member, “are we running this thing for the merchants or for the Red Cross? If we’re running it for the Red Cross we have to take the weather into consideration. I mean, if it keeps on raining, the Red Cross will benefit by the postponement, even though the merchants might lose some sales. On the other hand, if we’re running this thing with the welfare of the merchants uppermost in mind, I say let’s have the God-damn thing today, rain or no rain, and if nobody comes to the Festival, we can sell the prizes and food and beer and sandwiches and soft drinks to the merchants at a big discount and they can get drunk and make pigs of themselves all night long, and that way they’ll have their Festival the way they seem to want it, and at the same time they’ll be feeling all right by Saturday morning, able to open their stores bright and early, and receive all the customers that turn up Saturday.” The speaker, a man named Miles Brinkerhoff, sat down, and immediately a man named Fred Bauer got up.

“Brother Brinkerhoff has strange ideas about we merchants. Strange. Brother Brinkerhoff now constitutes himself a farmer which we all know him to be, and we merchants, selfish, greedy, pig-like

merchants, only hope Brother Brinkerhoff will some day be able to make a success out of running a farm the way he did running a store that gave him sufficient of capital to retire and buy a farm and thereby cast aspersions on we merchants. When Brother Brinkerhoff was a merchant we all feared him as a competitor, those in business competition with him, and whereas I myself didn't compete with him in business, many's the time I did try and compete with him in who could put away the most beers. But if you take a good look at me, a merchant, weighing no more than a hundred and fifty pounds, and take a good look at Brother Brinkerhoff, weighing near twice that amount, you can make up your mind for yourselves who is more able when it comes to making a pig of themselves."

There was laughter and applause, including laughter and applause by Brother Brinkerhoff, and Bauer went on.

"The way I look at it," he said, "we do not postpone the Festival. We advertised rain or shine, though some may forget already, and people all over the county will be coming. Some started early this morning, they did their chores and hitched up and even as we sit here they are on their way. We have a band coming up from the south end of the county—I don't have to tell the committee what preparations have been made. Also I don't have to remind all of German extraction, which means most here, this Festival has to be a big success, put over with a bang, as the fellow says. I heard a speaker say the eyes of the world are on Fort Penn because of so many of German extraction. This I do not believe. I don't believe the eyes of Reading even are on Fort Penn. But the eyes of my son are on me, my son in the Army, and the eyes of all of you are on you when you go to sleep at night, and Brother Brinkerhoff don't know that any better than I do, but Brother Brinkerhoff likes to make jokes. Representing the Fort Penn merchants I here and now underwrite the Festival. We hope to show a profit of twenty thousand dollars, so we merchants will make up the difference between that amount and what the Festival takes in. I have no authority to do this, but I guess I am on safe ground."

They took a vote and it was unanimously decided to hold the Festival, rain or shine. One more member got up. "I don't know about you merchants," he said, "but here's one lawyer that's going downstairs and get a beer." The meeting, which was being held in the card-room of the Fort Penn Athletic Club, then was about to adjourn, when Brother Brinkerhoff rose.

"Here's a reformed merchant that wants a beer too, but oughtn't

somebody call Mrs. Tate and tell her the Festival isn't postponed? After all, gentlemen, it's her farm."

"The proper thing would be to call Sidney Tate, not his wife," said Fred Bauer.

"Well, all right, Fred. You do it," said Brinkerhoff.

"He's your neighbor, Miles," said Bauer.

"That's exactly why I want you to do the telephoning," said Brinkerhoff.

"Very well, I'll do it."

As the committeemen went downstairs the sun came out.

The social stationery and business letterheads said Riverside Farm, but the place was not called by that name. To some it was known as the Caldwell farm or Caldwell's farm; in more recent years the designation the Tate farm had caught on, to the degree that Grace Caldwell became known as Grace Tate. On the posters and in all other advertising for the Red Cross Festival the directions were given with that ambiguity in mind: "11 miles N. of Fort Penn on Nesquehela Pike. Turn at entrance to Tate Farm (old Caldwell place)."

It would have been impossible for anyone on the Nesquehela Pike that day to miss the place, no matter what name he knew it by. The real farmers, of course, had not been deceived by the light rainfall of the morning, and they had begun arriving as early as ten o'clock, while the committeemen still were deciding about a postponement. The early ones came in spring wagons and hay wagons and truck wagons, some drawn by draft horses, some by teams of mules, some by mixed teams of horse-and-mule; and the next to arrive were farmers more prosperous than the earliest, and they came in buggies and buckboards and democrats and surreys and barouches and cut-unders. There was even a team of goats from a neighboring farm, a nice turn-out with real leather, not web, harness and a small-size truck wagon. Then a little later came the trucks and automobiles: Ford cars and Maxwells and Chevrolets and Partin-Palmers and Buicks and Hahn trucks and Maccars and Garfords and Autocars and Vims, and a few Cadillacs, Franklins and one Locomobile and one Winton. And all this time there would be farm boys on horse-back—some with English saddles, some with stock saddles, some with Kentucky saddles, some with a blanket-and-surcingle, and some bareback—and among these were a few fine saddle horses, but mostly they were work horses and mules, with one-piece ear-loop

bridles and work-harness bridles with laundry rope for reins. And all day long too there were the farm boys with their bicycles, singly and in pairs, but more often in groups as large as twenty in number, causing their own particular sound, which was the hum of the wire wheels, and the sound of one bell quickly followed by twenty other bells. They were the grim ones, these boys, not quite of draft age, breaking the silence in their ranks to call out words in Pennsylvania Dutch, but ironically resembling the Belgian army cyclists, whose cousins the farm boys' cousins had beaten in war. The boys on horseback laughed; the boys on the bicycles had no laughter. Everything was clean and shining: the Dietz lamps on the wagons and trucks and buggies, and the nickel studding on the work harness, and the silver conchos on the stock saddles, and the automobile radiators, and the sprockets on the bicycles, and the snaffle bits and curb chains and the ferrules on the buggy-whips and the painted hooves of the horses and the yellow fellos on the wheels of the cut-unders and the black leather dashboards and the white painted canvas tops of the spring-wagons and the brass-bound hose of the bulb horns and the three-by-six-inch windows in the barouches and the Prest-o-lite tanks and hub-caps of the automobiles, and the scrubbed faces and foreheads of the men and the women and the boys and the girls.

In the beginning there was a single trooper of the State constabulary stationed where the Tate farm lane met the Nesquehela Pike. At intervals he would hold up a hand to halt the northbound traffic, allowing the southbound to enter the lane, and then he would stop the southbound people and let the northbound go in. It was not hard work, but it was a muggy, gummy day from the time he took his post, and his uniform and equipment were enough to keep him sweating without even the limited exertions of directing the traffic. He wore a gray felt hat with a chin-strap and with the brim turned up on the left side, his whipcord tunic had a high collar, and he wore whipcord breeches and black puttees and heavy shoes with spurs, and around his waist he had a wide leather belt with cartridges for the .45 revolver in the open holster. His horse was somewhat better off; when the sun came out the sorrel gelding stood in the shade of one of the walnut trees that lined the lane. The trooper's feet cooked in the Tarvia-B with which the Pike was paved, and the dust from the lane kept the black uniform the color of the hat. Every hour or so a sprinkler cart would come down the lane and go back again, but the dust never settled for long, and when the crowd from Fort Penn began coming it never settled at all.

The Fort Penn citizens came by private automobile, jitney, inter-urban trolley, special railroad train, bicycle, motorcycle and on foot, and at the river edge of the farm they also were arriving by naphtha launch, motorboat, outboard, flatbottom, and canoe, the only size craft the depth of the river would allow.

From the Pike and, in considerably less numbers, from the Nesquehela River, they came rather steadily from about ten in the morning to four in the afternoon, the high point being around twelve-thirty, when the picnic parties came and the families who would eat dinner in the church-sponsored tents (to the relief of those women who would not have to do any cooking on this one day). The program was an all-day affair, although the big doings were scheduled for afternoon and evening. In the forenoon it was possible to spend money on home-made fudge, home-made root beer, home-made sarsaparilla, pony rides, embroidery, lucky-number games for fancywork, beer, ale, porter, frankfurters, somersausage, Ferris wheel, merry-go-rounds, train rides, .22 rifle shooting, tests of muscle, and other simple pleasures. The afternoon program included band concerts by two bands, loop-the-loops and other stunt flying by two biplanes of the Pennsylvania National Guard, a trotting race for county horses under the three-heat plan, a baseball game between the Pennsylvania Railroad Car Shops team and the Fort Penn Fire Department team, and the simple pleasures of the forenoon. Also scheduled were speeches by the Hon. Walter B. Buchwalter, County Chairman of the Red Cross; the Hon. Fred J. Bauer, president of the Fort Penn Merchants Association; Captain T. M. W. Smollett, M. C., of the Royal Flying Corps; Sergeant-Major A. V. Gudge, V. C., of the Royal Engineers; Colonel Hamilton J. Schoffstal, U. S. R. (formerly of the National Guard of Pennsylvania); Dr. J. J. O'Brien, chief of staff of the Fort Penn Misericordia Hospital and Surgeon-General of the newly formed Pennsylvania Militia; Mrs. Sidney Tate, Vice-Chairman of the County Red Cross, and His Excellency the Hon. Karl F. Dunkelberger, Governor of the Commonwealth. Supper would be served in the church tents from five to eight and at nine o'clock there would be a giant pyrotechnical display lasting for a full hour, and from seven to eleven there would be dancing to the music of Prof. Louis Kleinhans' augmented orchestra, alternating with the Pennsylvania Railroad Car Shops Band. It was announced that there would be a refreshment tent for those over twenty-one. (An unannounced and unscheduled feature of the afternoon was the presence of two girls from Mae Brady's place in Terminal Street, Fort

Penn, who, with the co-operation of Mrs. Tate's hostler, Higgins, set up business in a clean, vacant box-stall in the Tate stable until discovered by two county detectives.)

At ten minutes of five Captain Herman F. Ludwig, commanding officer of Troop A of the state police, cantered down the Tate farm lane to the Pike. Trooper Duffy, still on duty, saluted the officer on the gray, and Ludwig returned the salute. "One-way traffic for the next half hour, Duffy," said Ludwig. "Let in ten cars at a time and then stop the others. Don't let any more in till five come out. That way we'll keep the lane pretty clear. We just got word the Governor's on his way out, left about five minutes ago, so he'll be here in about fifteen minutes."

"Yes sir," said Duffy.

Ludwig dismounted and hitched the gray to a whitewashed fence-post. He smoothed down his tunic and slapped off the dust, and took out a bandanna handkerchief and wiped the dust off his black boots and shook the bandanna and wiped the chinstrap and sweat-band of his hat. "Jesus Christ, it's hot," he said, standing beside Duffy.

"I'll tell the world," said Duffy. "It's a piss-cutter."

"Who's your relief?" said Ludwig.

"Bollinger."

"That's tough luck!"

"Why?"

"Some little bastard fell in the river and Bollinger had to go in after him."

"With his clothes on?" said Duffy.

"Everything. Everything but his hat, and some son of a bitch swiped that," said Ludwig.

"Son of a bitch. New breeches, new tunic, new hat. Bollinger lose his .45?"

"It's in the river somewhere around," said Ludwig.

"Well, bye-bye a hundred smackers for Bollinger. Can't you put in for it, Captain?"

"About the only way we get extra uniform allowance is if we can show a bullet-hole. You oughta know that by now. That's why we gotta kiss this Governor's ass. Maybe squeeze out a little extra appropriation if he's in favor of it."

"That won't do Bollinger any good this year," said Duffy. "They don't vote on those appropriations till the end of the session."

"Just between you and I and that hitching-post, Duffy, Bollinger's gonna be okay, or I think he is. If I get a chance to talk to Sidney Tate alone, he'll make it up to Bollinger. He likes us, a friend of ours, that Tate."

"He's all right," said Duffy. "Where's Bollinger now?"

Ludwig laughed. "Bollinger? In the First Aid Tent, waiting for dry clothes."

"Nurses in that tent?"

"Nurses in that tent? No. Not nurses. But they got some young society kids in nurses' uniforms. They better stick together. Bollinger with that thing of his, sitting around like a hero with nothing on but an army blanket."

"Bollinger, the original one that fell in the manure pile and come up covered with diamonds. He saved the kid, eh, Captain?"

"Sure," said Ludwig. "I know what I'll do to that lucky bastard. I'll get him a bathing suit or a pair of overalls and make him find that .45."

Duffy, for the first time, laughed. "Captain," he said, "I was thinking. I been here since ten o'clock this morning, not even a lemonade did they send me, and I was thinking of Bollinger, on post over at the River, in the shade and nice and cool, and supposed to relieve me at four o'clock. Then I hear he falls in the water, saves a kid's life, has to take his clothes off for all those society quiffs—I hope that .45 is six foot deep in silt."

"Regulations," said Ludwig. "No such thing as losing your revolver . . . I thought that would take the fig out of your ass, Duffy."

"Thanks, Captain." Duffy was still half grinning when the gubernatorial Pierce-Arrow touring car, license Number One, halted before entering the lane. Duffy and Ludwig saluted and Ludwig stood at the rear door of the car. "Captain Ludwig, A Troop, Your Excellency. Madam."

The bulky man in the crumpled white linen suit and black vicid oxfords and black shoestring tie took the greeting with a wave of his panama. The woman beside him bowed. "Good afternoon, Captain Ludwig, happy to see you again, sir." He turned to his wife. "Captain is state police, Irma. I had the pleasure many times before."

"Thank you, sir," said Ludwig. "If the Governor's ready, we've arranged to proceed up the lane to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Tate and after that we'll leave you in their hands, sir. After the Gov-



ernor's visit and speech I'll be standing by to escort you back to this intersection again."

"Very good, Captain. Whatever you say. You get in with Percy there."

"Yes sir," said the captain. He sat in the left front seat beside the chauffeur, slightly disappointed at not being asked to occupy one of the strapontins, but made happy by hearing the Governor muttering to his wife: "Efficient, courageous, experienced officer. Stern disciplinarian, but loved by his men. Fair and square. Tracked down some great murderers. Mixed up in some historical cases," while Mrs. Dunkelberger softly said, "Yes, Karl, uh-huh," to everything the Governor was saying.

It was a clay road under the double line of walnut trees until the lane curved, just before coming to the Tates' house, and the surface became gravel and there was plenty of room for the big cars to turn around. The turning space was vacant now, and Percy, the chauffeur, made a wide swinging approach to the porte-cochere of the big, rambling, white pine-and-fieldstone house. At the crunching sound of the wheels on the gravel, the double screen-door was opened and a man and a woman waited for the Governor and his lady.

The man was almost completely bald, darkly tanned and with large, strong teeth. He was slender, sparsely built, and he appeared to be shorter than he was. He was wearing a Norfolk jacket, white flannels, white buckskins (now grass-stained), a soft white shirt with a gold safety-pin in the collar and a striped necktie. A white linen handkerchief was tucked in the panel of his jacket, and as the car came to a stop he knocked his pipe empty and from habit rubbed the warm bowl on the side of his nose before dropping the pipe in his pocket. He was forty, a friendly, unsuspecting man, accustomed to being liked. He had a long history of regular meals, none ever missed except by choice, and of good digestion and fifteen thousand baths.

The woman beside him on the steps was in a blue-and-white muslin Red Cross canteen uniform. She was slightly taller than the fashion of the day and would have been still taller if she had not been wearing "sensible" heels. At first she seemed to be achieving chic without departing from strict uniform, and with no jewelry but a plain gold wedding band and a Tiffany-setting engagement ring, but on her wrist was a man's watch-chain, wrapped twice around and with a small collegiate charm dangling from it, and under the band of her nurse cap her widow's peak was showing, and it directed attention