



This book offers the life and opinions of Adam Obadiah Slope as reported by narrator Jonathon Eidobon.

# SLOPE

by John Combs

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JOHN COMBS

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a wooden rosary. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers wrapped around the beads. The rosary consists of a long string of small, dark wooden beads, with a larger wooden cross at the bottom. The background is dark and out of focus, showing the texture of a dark-colored garment, likely a priest's cassock. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the hand and the wood of the rosary.

Slope

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## **Chapter One**

### **A PLUNGING SLOPE**

**Or**

### **COCK AND BULL**

“I met my wife at her wedding.” So declared the Reverend Adam Obadiah Slope. I asked him how that could be.

Before we go any further, Reader, let me offer my first digression and my first caveat: On occasion, Slope can be deadly serious. However, at times he is given to flights of wild, imaginative stories which are simply untrue and most often ludicrous and incredible. Such is the case with his answer to my question. It is full of balderdash and bull fodder. So, at times, is Slope himself.

Slope replied, “A friend of mine, Robert Cuckle, when we were still friends, had asked me to officiate at his wedding to a woman I had not met, for she lived in another town. Her business affairs had prevented her from attending the rehearsal, and she arrived at the church just minutes before the wedding, with barely time to dress for the service. The first time I had seen her was when she came walking down the aisle with her father.”

At this point Slope seemed distracted. He stared off into space, apparently caught up in reminiscence of his first vision of the bride. I hated to interrupt his reverie, but I urged him to continue.

“The bride was the most incredibly beautiful creature I had ever seen. Her beauty and grace and charm would have put Helen of Troy or Cleopatra to shame, and they were so overwhelming that I was smitten.”

“Yes, please go on.”

“As the officiating minister, I assumed the power to re-order the liturgy. Therefore, when we reached the part of the service where I would normally say ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife,’ followed by ‘You may now kiss the bride.’ I decided to declare, instead, ‘I may now kiss the bride.’ And I did. Tongue and all. I grabbed the beautiful creature, pulled her close, and gave her my all. The groom, a rather poor sport, I thought, took exception to my extra liturgical activity. So did his parents. And even more ultimately problematic, from my point of view, the bride’s parents appeared a little miffed. Indeed, you, Eidobon, may think that I’d been a bit indecorous.”

“Then what happened?”

“In an effort to mollify the outraged groom and parents, I calmly suggested, ‘You people don’t get your drawers up your cracks, and I will get on with the wedding service.’ Albeit reluctantly (for remember, I was smitten by this kitten), I was prepared to continue with the pronouncement of marriage. And



even more regretfully, I would then say to my former friend, now my newly acquired rival, ‘You may now kiss the bride.’

“During the chaos which ensued from my minor breach of decorum, no one had paid attention to the bride. As I tried to re-establish order and prepared to finish the proceedings, the bride astonished the assemblage by announcing that she could not go through with the wedding. ‘I’m sorry, Bobby,’ she cried, ‘I just can’t do it.’”

At this point the Reverend interrupted his narrative with “Please pass the bottle,”\* which I did, simultaneously begging him to continue. Warmed by a couple of gulps of 90 proof and bolstered by the fervor of his story, he recounted: “Apparently, my kissing her had somehow convinced her of the inferiority, the unworthiness, indeed the undesirability of her prospective groom, and now she wanted no part of him.”

“Do go on.”

Slope continued, “As you might suppose, the situation had now become slightly awkward. For one thing, the bride’s parents had spent the proverbial mint on this wedding, just to please their little girl. I don’t want to sound immodest, but my lightning quick mind prevented disaster.”

“How so?”

And now another “Pass the bottle.”

After a couple of belts, Slope continued: “To avert the total loss of time and money spent on this glorious event—think of what guests had spent on gifts alone—and after consulting my notes to be sure of her name, Eve, I fell to my knees before the

bride and asked her if she would marry me. Fortunately, my new sweetheart's father was sitting close at hand—well, actually he was standing there tearing his hair and shaking his fist—so that I could ask him to withdraw the bird's, I mean bride's, hand from my former friend Robert, and give it to me. He did, and she consented, but only after asking me my name, for she did not want to marry a TOTAL stranger.”

Once more, “Pash the bottle, pleaseh.”

“Did I mention that my friend Robert, the quondam almost groom, was also a clergyman?” Slope asked. “During the course of these nuptial events, he had accepted the inevitability of his loss and had reconciled himself to it. It turns out he was a much better sport than I had at first perceived him to be. Not only did he agree to change places with me and officiate at my wedding, but he also generously provided the wedding ring since I didn't happen to have one in my possession.”

So, according to Slope's account, “I met my wife at her wedding and married her. Now, years later, we spend a lot of time kissing. We have proved the poet wrong who wrote ‘a kiss is a kiss is a kiss.’”

For those of you who doubt the credibility of this account, I can only say, like Terence, “I tell the tale that I heard told.”\*\*

Let me share with you what may true about how Slope and his spouse met. He actually met Eve in a pub called, coincidentally, the Rooster and Bull, and he was smitten by her beauty.

*SLOPE*

It is true that she was affianced to another man. But after several meetings at the pub, Slope invited Eve to dine with him and attend an orchestra concert afterwards. After several such outings, Eve realized she had fallen in love with Slope, broke her engagement with the other fellow, and married Slope. They were not married by Cuckle, as Slope claimed in his yarn, but by another clerical colleague of Slope's. I am pleased to tell you they are happily wed. By this time, Reader, you surely realize that Slope can at times be full of seasoning,

AUTHOR. \*Shamelessly, I steal from Joseph Conrad this "pass the bottle" technique for reminding readers of the narrative present and to create suspense. If this doesn't work for you, blame Conrad, not me.

\*\*From A.E. Housman's "Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff."

## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **SLOPE THE COLLEGE MAN: YEAR ONE**

#### **1**

Upon his high-school graduation, Adam Slope desired to join his brothers and their new wives as students. So, he took an old trunk, painted it black, painted orange letters on it which said OOLOGAH STATE OR BUST, and packed all his earthly belongings in it, except for his dog Tipper. Father Slope drove Adam to the edge of Deer City, through which ran a major highway. Slope talked about his mode of transportation. “I placed my trunk so that drivers would see the orange message, and stuck out my thumb. In the four or five hitched rides it took to get to Big Rapids, I never had to wait even five minutes between rides.”

Adam moved into the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity house as a legacy pledge. A couple of years earlier, Esau and Buxton had pulled into Big Rapids with a mobile home which they had helped their father build, and which they had parked on the alley behind the Lambda Chi house. They befriended the fraternity members, and the fraternity inducted them into

membership. Thus, Adam became a legacy. Adam told me, “I set a record at Lambda Chi. I’m probably the only three-time loser in the fraternity’s history, and possibly the only pledge class president not to gain membership. In each of my three semesters at Oologah, I failed a course: first, physical science; second, American history; and third, believe it or not, military science. Though it was considered virtually impossible to flunk military science, I managed to do it.”

Because he liked Hereford cattle and Guernsey milk cows, Adam arrived at Oologah hoping to major in animal husbandry. Esau and Buxton talked him out of this notion by pointing out that he came from a dirt-poor family and would never be able to raise the capital necessary to get a start as a rancher or milk farmer. Adam looked to other fields of study. He explained, “I decided to see what aptitude test results would suggest. Along with some 1500 other freshmen, I sat the aptitude and placement tests in the field house, and I must confess that I paid a lot more attention to the pretty girls than I did to the tests. The tests revealed that my highest aptitude was mathematics, and a counselor told me I should major in engineering. Well, math might have been my highest aptitude, but my interest lay in fields requiring verbal skills, so I decided to major in journalism, and a semester later I changed to journalism advertising.”

Slope told me, “Maybe you’re curious about how I could have flunked a course each semester, especially courses that did not pose a lot of difficulty. My immaturity played a big part in

my failure. Here I was, at 17, flown from my strict parental nest, required to make my own decisions, and I reacted to my new-found freedom by going to the extremes. In my freshman year, I probably did not have a single sober weekend, and, as for studies, I rarely cracked a book. As for the Physical Science course, I flunked because of my ineptness as cheating. My sole venture into cheating ironically turned into disaster. Actually, I had a 'C' average going into the final exam. Professor Reasoner taught the class, and the students called him 'Mushmouth,' for he often forgot to put in his false teeth before coming to class. Considering that I never consulted the textbook, my 'C' represented a fair achievement. Just before the final, a classmate asked me if I would like a copy of the exam. Seems this fellow had a football player friend whose girlfriend served as Mushmouth's student assistant, and she had generously shared the final exam with her boyfriend, who in turn shared it with the guy who offered it to me. The exam comprised 100 true/false questions. It took me only a few minutes to memorize the correct answers. My classmate's generosity had also provided me a key to the test. When Mushmouth handed me my test paper, I promptly filled in the correct answers. Then I thought to myself: I have a 'C' average in this course, and if I make 100 on this final, it will arouse Mushmouth's suspicion. So, I cleverly went through the test, changing 30 answers so that I would score a 70, which would probably give me a 'C' or even a low 'B' on a scoring curve. Apparently just about everyone in the class knew the football player or his friend, for

70 turned out to be a failing grade on the final. Therefore, I failed the exam and the course in one fatal cheating swoop. And this muffed effort to cheat kept me out of the fraternity's initiation at semester's end."

Slope continued, "Second semester. American History. MWF, 8:00 a.m. Professor Singer. Again, I did not bother to study, and I found it difficult to stay awake in class. For spring semester, I had surrendered my job as houseboy at the fraternity and had taken a job at a Mobil service station. Between that job and weekend drinking sprees, I ran pretty low on sleep and energy. And Singer's monotone induced a most soporific effect. Professor Singer twice invited me to be his special guest in his office. The first time he conducted a motivational conference. Among other counseling gems, Singer said to me, 'Slope, on the last test you made the next to lowest score in my two sections of this course.' That might not have been so bad, but he added, 'the person who made the lowest score is just plain crazy.' At my second guest appearance, Singer seemed a bit snippy. He told me, 'Slope, every time I look at you in class, you're asleep. Boy, don't you know that you can't sleep in my class and pass?' Turns out Singer was a prophet. I did fail his course, and there went my second shot at fraternity membership."

Now Slope needed to explain his third course failure. "Generally, the frat's policy was 'two times and you're out.' However, because I was a legacy, the members declared an exception and allowed me to pledge for the third time. My

fellow pledges elected me pledge class president, which was hard on my tail, for every time some pledge screwed up, it was my butt that received the inevitable paddling. Many of those butt beatings I could have avoided by identifying the offender, but I always refused to rat on a fellow pledge.”

He went on to say, “Military Science was my third semester Waterloo. My history with ROTC was not a pretty one. On my first day in ROTC, which was compulsory at this Land Grant school, we first-year cadets stood in formation for a long time on a hot, sunny September day, just alongside the football stadium. We stood at attention so long that several cadets passed out because of the sun’s heat bearing down on us. When the poor devil standing next to me crumbled to the ground, I bent over to help him up, and a cadet officer started yelling at me, ‘You’re at attention; get your ass back into formation.’ I replied, ‘You can just go to hell. This guy passed out, and I’m going to pull him to the shade.’ Which I did. Who the hell did that cadet officer think he was? A real soldier? “That incident was not my only misstep with ROTC. When I got to college I did not own a good jacket, and the ROTC issued me a quite suitable field jacket along with my uniform. However, ROTC allowed students to wear those jackets only on Tuesday and Thursday, the class days for Military Science (we drilled on Tuesday afternoons). Since the campus swarmed with war veterans, many of them wearing their army field jackets, it occurred to me that I could wear mine every day if I did not sew the ROTC shoulder patch on it. At every drill I was commanded



to sew the patch on my jacket, but I managed to go three semesters without sewing a single patch. Admittedly, I had a bad attitude. Since I belonged to the U.S. Naval Reserve, I couldn't understand why I had to be in ROTC. My cousin, Johnny Aston, was a hotshot cadet lieutenant, and I couldn't bear the thought that I would ever have to take an order from him. That thought extended to other cadet officers. When an officer gave us the order to ground our rifles, I would let mine slide out of my hands until its butt hit the ground, and then I would reach out and grab the barrel. During inspection, cadet officers would order me to clean and oil my dirty rifle, but, again, I went three semesters without bothering to follow their orders. Ever since I shot the crane or stork in high school, I'd had an aversion to firearms anyway."

"In my third semester of Military Science," Slope continued, "I had a class with a Major who decided to flunk me because I drowsed off in his class one day. The night before, I had worked a midnight sneak preview at the Leach movie theater, and did not get to bed until about 3 a.m. My Military Science class met at 8:00 a.m., and I was sorely tempted to skip it that day, but finally roused myself enough to put on my uniform and make it to class on time. About halfway through the class I heard the Major say, 'Arburger, wake Slope up.' Arburger was a fellow Naval Reservist, incidentally. Immediately, I was wide awake, but it was too late. The Major required me to come up beside his desk and stand at attention facing the other students 'til the end of the period. After class I

went to his office to apologize and explain about the sneak preview. He seemed sympathetic, but he flunked me anyway, despite my ‘C’ average on his tests. Thus, my last chance at Lambda Chi went gushing down the drain. I decided to transfer to another school rather than face a fourth semester of ROTC. But I’m getting ahead of myself.”

At this point, Slope realized he had drifted a bit from his telling about his first year in college, so he backed up a bit.

## 2

As a part of what Adam Slope called “my brilliant military career,” he said he was at one time associated with three branches of the service—all within one week. How could he do that? I asked. Slope replied, “At the beginning of my second semester, I changed my major to journalism advertising, and this automatically changed my ROTC status from Army to Army Air Force. Since I was a Seaman Recruit in Navy Reserve, I was in the Navy, Army, and Army Air Force—all within a week to ten days.”

Though Slope had answered my question about his three-branch involvement, he seemed to want to talk more about his military career. Maybe he wanted to talk about it because he recognized the basic conflict between his military service and his pacifism. At any rate, he continued talking about it: “My brother Buxton, a naval officer during the second war, applied for and landed the job of establishing a Navy Reserve unit in

Big Rapids (Lake Black, the largest body of water anywhere close, was hardly an ocean). Naturally, he considered me a prime candidate for his recruiting. My poor vision, 20/400 without specs, obviously disqualified me, but he solved this rather negligible problem by administering my physical exam himself and asking a doctor friend to sign the exam form. When he gave me the eye exam, he asked two enlisted men to grab my wrists. With my toes on the regulation line, the enlisted men leaned me over until my face was close enough to the eye chart that I could read every letter—perfect 20/20 vision.”

“Though I had to attend ROTC drills,” Slope told me, “I rarely went to a Navy drill. As a Seaman Recruit, I was supposedly training to become a radioman, but instead of going to drills, I would occasionally sleep at the Naval Armory when one of the regulars wanted some time off. The Navy required that someone be in the armory at all times. As the CO’s brother, I had first shot at substituting. I could receive credit for four drills by sleeping one night at the armory, and that’s how I did nearly all my drilling.” Slope seemed animated as he talked about his experience with the military.

“One of the Navy Reserve benefits took the form of a Caribbean cruise, *gratis* Uncle Sam. In the summer of 1948, I left New Orleans on the USS English, one of the four destroyers in a convoy, with stops at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba (I didn’t see any torturing there) and Ciudad Trijillo (Santo Domingo) in the Dominican Republic. At Guantanamo Bay, I watched a movie in an outdoor theater, and the paint on the seats turned

the back of my white uniform green. Also, at the canteen I drank four 17% beers. Between that consumption and my newly acquired sea legs, I staggered and reeled my way back to my bunk aboard ship. At Guantanamo base exchange I spent practically all my money on highly discounted Chanel #5 perfume. I intended to save one bottle of this precious essence for a future dream girl, yet to be found and named. Another bottle I gave to Buxton's wife Maggie. Over seventy years later, when she died in 2019 at the age of 91, she still had it."

Still talking about his cruise, Slope went on. "In our cruising around, we saw several land masses, including Jamaica, at a distance. We also sailed smack through the eye of a hurricane, and this practically scared the crap out of me. As an Okie, I had seen plenty of tornadoes, but never a hurricane. At one point, the destroyer did a 37½ degree list. The regulars claimed that at 45 degrees the destroyer would keep going until it was on its side or upside down. After we went through the worst of the storm, one of the other destroyers reported that it had blown a boiler and needed water. A sailor on our ship shot a harpoon with a cable tied to it across to the other ship, and the enlisted men in our crew had the job of holding the ships together in an extremely rough sea while water was pumped from our ship to the other. Early on the cruise, I noted that when muster was called on deck, after which we were set to the Sisyphean task of chipping and scraping paint or swabbing decks, many of the men were missing. So, instead of attending muster, I sometimes went up on the top deck and found a snug

place to nap under the big guns. I was there when the sailors mustered to hold the two ships together. Conscious that something unusual was happening, I went to the deck railing to observe. I had stood there only a minute or so when the officer standing next to me asked, ‘What are you doing up here?’ Without waiting for an answer, he ordered me, ‘Get your ass down there and help with that line.’”

It struck me that Slope derived a sort of perverse joy out of defying military rules. He considered strict regulations to be an infringement on his free, spontaneous nature. With a bit of glee in his voice, he continued his description of his cruise experience. “For three or four days I had to serve on KP, and I derived a kind of morbid pleasure out of serving mashed potatoes. It was great fun to take a ladle full of potato and see where I could hit a tray by casting it two or three feet through the air. Occasionally some sailor would complain, ‘Aw, you hit my meat with the mashed potatoes,’ but generally I was pretty accurate. When I did miss, I would tell the complainer, ‘Move along, Buddy.’”

“I entered the Navy Reserve as a Seaman Recruit. Several years later I received my honorable discharge as a Seaman Recruit,” declared Slope, rather proudly I thought. “Certainly I was eligible for promotions, but never bothered to sit the simple little tests that would have secured them. I felt some pride in the thought that I might be the Navy’s only Seaman Recruit with a seaman’s stripe on his uniform, signifying that he had been to sea. During the Korean War my enlistment in the Navy was

frozen and the draft board classified me One A, but I was not called up by either. I might note that neither the ROTC nor the Navy decorated me with a distinguished service medal,” Slope concluded.

3

When Adam Slope went off to the university, he so much wanted to become a lady’s man. Odds stacked against him. At Oologah in 1947, men, the majority war veterans, outnumbered women seven to one. Few of the women wanted to date a 17-year-old boy when so many men were about. And it should be apparent by now that Adam was no Casanova or Don Juan. As Slope expressed his desperate situation, “On a campus flooded with veterans, what woman wanted to date a boy when she could easily go out with a man? For a pubescent like me to get a date, I had to try several weeks in advance. Sometimes I would resort to a rather primitive attempt, like calling up a sorority and saying to the woman who answered the phone, ‘Hello, there. This is Adam Slope at Lambda Chi. Are there any girls there who would like to go out on a date?’ With this ingenious ploy, I batted exactly zero, zilch, nada. After many attempts to find a date, I finally arranged a coke date with Alpha Delta Pi Nancy Hentfort, a Tulsa girl. We hit it off fairly well, and I went out with her two or three times—on foot, of course, for I was far too poor to own a car. On our last date, I summoned up the courage to hold Nancy’s hand as we walked along a campus sidewalk

beside Theta Pond, reputedly the only rubber bottomed pond in America. And then, disillusionment struck. A few days after that, I went to a local motel to see Joe Bob Larkin, a high-school buddy who was visiting Big Rapids. When I came out of Joe Bob's room, I was astonished to see Nancy coming out of another room with some other guy. Later I learned from some fraternity brothers that Nancy loved sex like a mink, that she would put out with virtually anyone who asked, and had, indeed, had intercourse with some of them.

“Well,” Slope concluded, “I got to hold her hand.”

4

Adam's freshman year brought him several sexual revelations. For one thing, he learned that had his ambition been to be a man's man, rather than a lady's man, he would have found it easier to fulfil his ambition. One of the fraternity brothers, a married man with a small child or two, was homosexual. Slope recounted what had been for him a shocking experience. “It had never occurred to me that a person might have sex with a person of the same gender. One night late, on one of the rare occasions when I actually opened a textbook, I was sitting at a desk looking at a page when this fellow dropped by the frat house. He asked if I would like to go get a beer. That sounded much more appealing than the book I was reading, so I said yes. ‘Don't bother to put your shirt on,’ he said, ‘It's really hot outside.’ After he had stopped for a six pack, he said, ‘Now

we'll drive out to the park to get off the cops' beat.' That aroused a hint of suspicion in me, for who in a college town like Big Rapids needed to get off the police beat to drink beer? After he parked, dialed some music on his car radio, and opened a couple of beers, he reached over and placed his hand on my thigh, to my total astonishment. I asked him, 'Jim, aren't you married?' And he acknowledged that he was. 'Then why don't you go home and make love to your wife?' I asked, and I took his hand and flung it away. He asked me not to mention this incident to anyone, but this was something new to me, something disturbing, so I talked to Esau and Buxton about the experience. I don't know what they did, if anything, but I never saw Jim again. I suspected that he was drummed out of the fraternity for making passes at a pledge, but I don't know for sure. I did feel sorry for him, and I had not meant to cause him any trouble. If I had it to do over again, I would just explain to him, "I'm straight. Let's just drink our beer, and then you can drive me back to the frat house."

5

From the brothers living in the frat house, Adam learned about transmittable diseases. Not that he had any personal worries. At least that represented one benefit of failing in love. But such was not the case with Walter Flaggett, one of the fraternity members, the son of a big shot in the Kansas City stockyards. Slope said, "Whenever Walter would catch



gonorrhoea, which he did with considerable regularity, he would get on the hallway telephone, and we could all hear him whining to his father, ‘Daddy, I got the clap again.’ His father would tell him to go get a shot at the doctor’s office and have the bill sent to him. One Friday Walter told me he was going to Oklahoma City to spend the weekend with a girl, but all of his underwear was dirty, and could he borrow two or three pairs of shorts from me? Somehow, I didn’t find the idea too appealing.”

## 6

In his second semester at Oologah, Adam became a suspect of criminal activity. Let Slope explain this in his own words: “In my second semester of my first year, I gave up my job as fraternity houseboy and started working at Johnny Muenster’s Mobil service station. I performed the usual stuff: grease jobs, flat tire repairs, gas tank fueling, etc. At the end of the workday one Sunday when I was running the station by myself, another of Johnny’s employees dropped by with his brother and asked if they could help me lock up, and they locked the service stalls while I took care of closing up front. Late that night, sheriff’s deputies picked me up and took me to their courthouse headquarters for questioning. They scared the holy shit out of me. I must say they did a good job of working me over in their efforts to gain my confession that I had robbed the service station. It was just the kind of stuff you see cops doing in

movies. ‘Son, it would be a lot better for you and for us if you would just go ahead and confess.’ After about 30 minutes of grilling, they decided I had not been involved in the crime. Later they picked up the guys who had ‘helped’ me lock up, and they recovered the missing money.”

“Apparently, I was more suspected of criminal acts that I had realized,” said Slope. “Several years after I left Big Rapids, I went back to visit my brothers who had taken up residence there. I dropped by to see Johnny Muenster, and he offered me his own confession and apology. There had been another occasion when the day’s take had come up \$20 short, and Johnny concluded that I had pocketed it. Many days later he had discovered a \$20 bill under the cash box. He felt guilty for suspecting me, but he sure as hell waited a long time before sharing this incident with me.”

7

I found it difficult to keep Adam Slope off the subject of women and sex for very long. As I’ve already explained, he had a perpetual problem finding some woman to date in Big Rapids because of the lopsided male/female ratio. In spring semester he faced a huge problem. How could he arrange a date for the Lambda Chi spring formal dance. The answer was obvious. He would import someone from out of town. The first prospect to come to his mind was the lovely Georgette Hassett, a Delley girl with whom he had finished high school and who had

become a student at Oklahoma University. Slope recalled, “When Georgette accepted my invitation, I was both surprised and overjoyed. I scraped and saved, scraped and saved, until I had amassed \$118, big money in 1948, to import Georgette and show her a good time. I bought her a round-trip bus ticket from Norman to Big Rapids and a nice corsage for her evening gown. Soon after the dance started, my dream balloon popped. It quickly became apparent that Georgette had not come to see me, but to see Bill Wyman, one of the fraternity’s members, whom she had, unbeknownst to me, dated before. I had not known that they even knew each other. At any rate, she danced most dances with Bill Wyman and disappeared with him before the dance ended. In fact, I never saw her again and haven’t seen her to this day.”

With rather sad demeanor, Slope continued his sorrowful tale. “After the dance I went to drown my disappointment at a post dance party at Buxton and Maggie’s apartment. Everyone there got smashed, and every time someone would call the bootlegger, I was asked for my wallet. After I became totally plastered, I decided in a righteous moment to quit smoking, and I gave my brother Esau almost a full carton of Camel cigarettes and my lighter. When I sobered up the next day, I regretted my decision, and I asked Esau to give me back my fags and lighter, and he said, rather politically incorrectly, ‘No, you’re not going to be an Indian giver with me.’”

Slope summed up his spring formal experience, “I finished the festive spring prom with no money, no cigarettes, no lighter, no pride, and—no girl.”

8

Their second cousin Johnny Astin was also a student at Oologah when Adam and his brothers were there. Johnny was a cadet officer in the ROTC, and he thought this made him really hot, but he also loved to wear his Nazi uniform jacket, swastika and all, and his Nazi helmet, and “Heil Hitler” his friends—all as a joke, of course. Johnny owned a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and he asked Adam one day to go with him to Norman to pick up some girls. Slope described their outing: “At Norman we knocked around for a while near the University, but the anticipated flock of beautiful women did not gather around us and Johnny’s Harley. Having failed in our primary mission, we shot snooker in a Norman pool hall just off campus, and once when it came my turn at the table, as I stepped off the bench platform, my foot caught the edge of a spittoon, sloshing disgusting tobacco juice all over my pants leg. Naturally we were traveling light on the motorcycle, and I did not have a change of clothing, so I wore those soiled, reeking pants for the rest of our expedition. After it became obvious that we were not attracting the expected horde of women, Johnny asked me if I knew any girls at O.U. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I know Georgette Hassett.’ The only girl to come to mind was Georgette, and I

wasn't in much of a mood to see her, having financed her tryst with Bill Wyman, so I said, 'No, but the girl I dated my senior year in high school now lives in Oklahoma City.'

"Let's go see her," declared an eager Johnny, "Maybe she has a friend for me," and we mounted our Rosinante again and tore off for Oklahoma City. We were fortunate to find Carla Edgewise at home, but it did not take Johnny long to mess over any chance we might have had to go out with her and her friend. When I introduced Johnny to Carla, he pinched her cheek and told her how sweet and cute she was. Carla took umbrage to this kind of forwardness on the part of a complete stranger, and she slapped Johnny so hard that it left a big red mark on his face.

When things cooled a bit from this false start, I pled with Carla to forgive Johnny and to call a friend so the four of us could spend the evening together. 'For old time's sake, please,' I begged. 'Well, all right, I do know a girl I can call.'

Of course we heard only her end of the phone conversation, but that part was quite memorable. 'Hello, Barbara. There are two idiots here who want to take us out tonight. One idiot is wearing pants soaked in tobacco juice, and the other one, an even bigger idiot, is wearing one sock of one color, and the other sock of another color, and I don't think I want to go out with them. Do You?'

A couple of hours later we were back in Big Rapids, Johnny undaunted and me pissed off at Johnny for making a pass at Carla the moment he met her. That, incidentally, was the last time I ever saw Carla."

Since Adam struck out in his quest to be a ladies' man, and since he didn't waste a lot of time studying, and since he couldn't stay perpetually drunk, he needed some diversion to occupy his time and energy. So he thought he would join a pep organization. In his first semester he decided to join an all-male organization called Pi Epsilon Pi, popularly known as 'Hell Hounds.' Adam said, "Those of us aspiring to be Hell Hounds numbered 150, but because of the rough hazing, only 45 of us actually reached the initiation into membership. At the time, I considered the 105 who dropped out to be big sissies. In retrospect, I could see that they were the smart ones. The trial period was hellish. For example, at one gathering the members built a fire several yards from Theta Pond (putatively the only rubber-bottomed pond in the world), and required the prospective Hell Hounds to duck walk from the fire to the pond, suck up a mouthful of water through a straw, and duck walk back to the fire with the object of extinguishing it. When we would get even close to putting out the fire, the members would pour gasoline on it. At the conclusion of this futile activity, they required us to lie on our backs with a mouthful of chewing tobacco. They ordered us to chew vigorously and would not allow us to spit. When our mouths became well-juiced, they broke raw eggs and put an egg in each of our mouths, on top of the tobacco juice. They clamped our jaws and forced us to swallow the tobacco/egg concoction. Then they ordered us to

run around Williams Hall, a women's dormitory, assuring us that the last one back would take a butt-beating with a paddle shaped like a bone. Thankfully, I was still in good enough shape to stay up front in the race.

“The Hell Hounds required us to carry a bone-shaped paddle with us at all times and to wear a dog collar. Whenever we met a Hell Hound on campus, we were to go down on all fours, hike a rear leg as though we were pissing dogs, and bark. Also, we had to gain certain signatures on our bones.

“A rival pep organization called itself Ruff Necks, and that group required its pledges to take bone paddles away from Hell Hound pledges, and loss of that bone to a Ruff Neck resulted in severe punishment. As I walked across campus one day, a Ruff Neck pledge ambushed me. Attacking full speed from the rear, he rode me down flat on my face. Somehow I managed to get both hands around my dog bone, and though my attacker tried desperately to take the bone from me, he could not pry it loose. In addition to hitting the backs of my jaws with his fists, he would take my forefingers and bend them back. I screamed bloody hell and yelped as if in pain. In reality I had extremely limber fingers which I frequently bent all the way back to my wrists (when I was a kid, my father often asked me to perform finger tricks for kids attending youth meetings in his churches), so this ploy of his inflicted no pain, but I figured that if he thought I was suffering, he'd keep bending my fingers rather than doing something that would cause real pain. Eventually he gave up and left me with a severe cursing, two sore jaws, and a

loss of dignity, but with my Hell Hound bone still in my possession.

“As another Hell Hound pledge activity, members required pledges to secure a date with a redhead, not an easy requirement considering the shortage of females to begin with, and an even more severe shortage of redheads. After several abortive attempts through usual channels, I finally resorted to stopping redheaded girls on campus walkways and begging them to help me, to no avail. Finally, I pursued a redhead up the steps of a women’s dormitory, stopped her, and explained my problem. She said, ‘I wish I could help you, but I can’t. I’m married. I was just going into the dorm to see a friend.’ In my desperation, I begged her, ‘Please ask your husband if I can take you to the drugstore for a steak sandwich and a coke. I promise you and him I won’t try any funny stuff.’ She asked; he consented; I had my date with a redhead. A part of the requirement was to buy the date a steak sandwich and to eat an onion sandwich while she consumed the steak. In the end I was thankful that my date was compassionate and that her husband was not the jealous sort.

“At the Hell Hound initiation in December, in the Big Rapids City Park, we 45 survivors gained full membership in PEP, and the initiation was followed by a beer bust. I had brought a quart milk bottle from which to drink beer, and I filled and emptied it several times. After we became totally whacked, two or three of us stripped our clothing and took a dip in the creek that ran through the park, and we hardly noticed the



water's frigidity. When we left the park, walking back to campus, several of us started playing football, using my milk bottle as the ball. We passed the bottle back and forth for a while, and then I decided it was fourth down and I needed to punt. Declaring that I planned to punt the ball at least 65 yards, I kicked the bottle so hard that it broke. I looked down and saw blood gushing from my shoe, but I was so drunk that I felt no pain. My fellow drunken Hellhounds escorted me to the college infirmary where I received several stitches. I still have the scar on the arch of my foot. Would you like to see it?"

After I respectfully declined Slope's offer, he said, "Sadly, my punt covered only two or three feet." He then concluded, "Joining Hell Hounds brought me considerable pain, but I was surely proud of my orange member's jacket."



This book offers the life and opinions of Adam Obadiah Slope as reported by narrator Jonathon Eidobon.

# SLOPE

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