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FLAMINGO

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Frontispiece by J. A. Gowdy

THE FLAMINGO

"DON'T STRIKE TWICE"

JOHN DAVENPORT

OUTSIDE the dugout, the war grumbled remotely. The three men in the shelter were oblivious to its continuous refrain, so familiar as to be unnoticed. On the plank-board table the flame of a guttering wax candle trembled sensitively in sympathy to each reverberation. Its light painted Sgt. Brillig's drunken face even more ruddy. Brown, also seargent, and Hastings of the Headquarters Staff sat about like jackals in the dull light.

"Not often we see you drunk, eh, Brillig? Doesn't seem like you to drink. But you would do it alone, wouldn't you? You'd do anything alone. Not a social creature, you aren't. Well, I'm glad to see it. Makes you a little more human—much as it's possible." This was Brown speaking, the way a man can speak to a drunken superior.

Then Hastings's voice out of the half-dark: "Go easy. Liquor makes a man himself. Brillig's all right drunk. Doesn't open up any more than when he's sober, but still you know he's different."

Brown broke in again, hoarsely; "Yeah, but that doesn't improve him all the time—not in this damn fracas. And where'd his citations be if he was drunk on duty? Ever hear of a drunken sniper? No."

Brillig sat hunched at the table, head in his hands, and the other two spoke of him as though he were no more animate than the wood supporting his head. Hastings said noncomitally:

"Jolly good sniper, anyway."

Brillig straightened himself stupidly in his chair. "Jolly good sniper? I'm a damn good sniper. Best in the regiment. Hear what I say? Best in the whole blasted English army. Know why? Want to know why? I'll tell you. You blighters 've been here a year now, maybe more. Ever been in a charge. Ever seen the man you've killed? Ever felt the blood spurting warm on your puttees when you pull out your bayonet? Hell no. You swear away at the hun, the Boche. You hate them, and you've never even seen any but prisoners. You hate the whole damn race. Me, I can look through my sights and see their filthy faces, and call them by name, and hate each jolly little Fritz when I shoot him. And I see him squirm and die—You, you're soldiers. You'll die. I'm a sniper and I won't. I'll just go on killing, killing—"

Brown and Hastings were silent and almost afraid. Brillig, more sober now, rose and crossed the mud floor of the dugout with studied precision, muttering and swearing. The mumbling above ground became staccato, full-throated crescendo, as the heavy door was opened and left ajar. Hastings got up to close it.

The sniper followed the thread of trench through the reverberating Argonne atmosphere to the sheltered vantage point of his nest. The cold autumn air, rancid with smoke from the light ordinance and the depression below, cleared his head. He spread himself prone on the specially constructed platform, locked and unlocked the mechanism of his rifle, adjusted his telescopic Ziess sights through the aperture, studied the German lines intently, drew a slow bead, squeezed carefully on the trigger, held his aim, fired. Death.

Espionage had reported plans of a German advance to clear the Argonne, scheduled at mid-afternoon. But

that meant nothing to Brillig. He was a sniper, who disregards attacks and advances. He merely killed.

The German was prompt. At four o'clock he threw out a curtain barrage. It came like rain down the valley, magnificently blotting out the world behind it, scrambling together forest and earth. Into the whirling chaos belched line after line of grey clad soldiers.

Brillig shot more frequently.

The seething, churning plow of heavy guns advanced irresistibly. The rent air screamed. The cosmos burst. Retreat! The English retreat! Order? To hell with order! Retreat!

Brillig rested. His gun was hot. He said aloud; "Smoke. Eyes sore. God, what a noise." He couldn't hear his own voice. His thoughts rambled on; how can you shoot in this hell-field? Whole world's a shambles. Maybe better get out. Shell coming over. Duck, man, duck. Whew—mighty close. Can't check out for now. Place full of shrapnel. Barrage coming over now. Better get out of this kennel. Shell hole—shells don't strike twice—same place. Ready—let her go—run—dodge—here—down—down, man! Mud. Water. Thick soup. Safe through. Jesus, this is no man's land—don't strike twice. Hope not. Gas mask? All shot to hell. Getting dark. Can't see much. God, I hurt. All over, I hurt. My hand—my arm! I have no arm! Why am I laughing? This is tragedy. No arm. Crippled. And I'm bleeding. Bleeding to death. Slowly. Feeling sleepy, tired, cool. I can think clearly. I know I don't want to die Yes, I've killed often—many. Was their death like this? Did they want to live this bad? To hell with them. It's me now Not a bad death my hand hurts. That's funny. I have no hand and still it hurts. Not so much now as it did. I must be loosing conscious-

ness. Like going under ether, but I'm losing life too. I won't wake. God, I don't want to die. God? Did they call on their German God when I killed them? . . . I never thought death would be like this. It's not just death, but not living. Not breathing, not eating. I want to breathe life into my lungs in great big gulps but I'm dying, I can't move. Its just my mind that lives. I can see. I can still see . . . I can see that German bastard, crawling, crawling on his belly, crawling towards me into the shell hole. I've killed him a dozen times and now he's coming to get me. I can't move to kill him again. He'll kill me. I'm dead now, and still he'll kill me. God, how funny . . . he's crouched in front of me. I can't scream . . . Gas is rolling in yellow billows into the hole. Now I can die three times! The blasted fool's taking his mask off. The gas! Doesn't he see it? He'll die too. We'll both die. I want to laugh . . . he's right over me with the mask in his hands. He's putting it on me . . . Everything is going black . . .

Lighter now. I can open my eyes. White? White beds. Hospital beds . . . Sleepy. . . .



A POSITIVE PORTRAYAL

MARIAN TEMPLETON

Y'KNOW, being trusty in this institution isn't a bad job at all though the sympathetic sisters keep peckin' at us to give the inmates feather beds 'n candy. But I'm glad to see a big man like you, Mr. Pettigrew, taking such an interest in us."

"This is a worthy cause, Trusty Screw, a worthy cause," I said. "As years pass, I hope to devote more of my time and energy toward helping these poor dear creatures."

As the trusty and I walked along the corridor, we stopped to pay a few calls. Shadows from three window-frames made crossbar patterns on the grey painted floor.

Evidently Fanny Squire was bored with her own company despite the fact that her room was upholstered all over. She stuck a hand through her door and plucked the trusty's sleeve. "Good morning," she beamed, "I see you've caught another nut. Isn't he nice?" Her hand clawed toward me as she laughed shrilly.

I choked audibly and blurted out: "Who? Me? A nut? Does she think I'm crazy?"

"Yes," sighed Screw, "that's her peculiar ailment. She thinks everyone but herself is crazy. That's why her family had her sent over here. They just couldn't have her around showing up their nutty habits."

"Has the president come in yet?" pursued Fanny. "Did you give him my letter?"

The trusty bowed deeply before answering. "I'm sorry, Miss Fanny, but the president is in Jamaica,

and anyway, he can't read." Fanny's weak, disappointed "oh" died out as we walked pompously down the hall.

"Say, whatever became of Wild Bill? I don't see him wandering around anywhere. Didn't get too obstreperous and have to be shot, did he?" There was some difficulty in getting my pince-nez to stay on my nose. Beastly things—glasses!"

"No, he died—from eating stove polish. A lot of people never thought Bill was crazy", answered the trusty, chewing slowly on a match end. Then he flicked a minute speck off my lapel before continuing. "Bill was the pet of all the sob sisters. He could write more prevaricating letters about this here institution than any of the others. He'd kick about the diet of corn bread and beans, and the straw mattresses."

"And the fussy ladies just lapped it up," I added, rocking on my heels.

"Not only that—they actually petitioned the governor to release Bill."

"Not really?" I was very amazed. Wild Bill free? Dear me!

"Yes, and they would have succeeded if I hadn't pulled a little trick of mine." Screw rocked back and forth on his heels and swung his ring of keys in a circle. "Well, Bill was pretty sane, all right, except on one subject, the American flag. He was soft as putty until some one mentioned the Stars and Stripes—and then he went off like dynamite. Plumb mad, I tell you!" Each statement was emphasized with a blow of his fist on my shoulder.

"Imagine!" I wiped my head with the sleeve of my new frock coat. I perspired with fear at the thought of Wild Bill's rages.

"Shut up down there or I'll whale the daylights outa you!" bawled Screw.

I jumped and tried to cover my ears from his yelling. "Who me?" I cried.

"Oh no, my dear Mr. Pettigrew. I was just silencing Demosthenes. You wouldn't be able to hear my story above his orating."

With a deep bow I acknowledged his kind explanations. "Do go on, Mr. Screw."

"As I was saying a couple of missionaries and some delegates from the Ladies S. P. C. A. came over to call on Bill and to hear his tales of cruelty. I brought him out into the hall here, and he talked real nice to them about us abusing him and keeping him here against his will."

"Of course he was too much of a gentleman to mention names?" I ventured solemnly.

"Quite right, Mr. Pettigrew. Edie was a lady. I mean, Bill was a gentleman." Screw fawned toward me with his toothsome smile.

"I understand. Proceed, Trusty Screw."

"Well, I slipped up to one of the deacons who'd been talking to Bill and—you know, deacons wear the most novel hats—all stiff and black and round and—"

"About—the—deacons—talking—to—Bill," I interrupted softly.

"To be sure. Oh yes, I asked him if he would like to give Bill something he craved, something to put in his bunk. If so, to ask Bill if he'd like the Stars and Stripes hung over his bed." Screw gave me another affectionate, playful pat on the shoulder. I ignored it carefully and let him continue. "Sir, when Bill heard those words, Stars and Stripes, he roared like a tiger and jumped on the dear deacon and started biting him. I nearly died laughin' I did."

"Extraordinary, Trusty Screw. I trust no one tried to get a release for Bill after that." What a horrid thing—my cigarette lighter wouldn't light.

"Have you a cramp in your thumb, sir?" said Screw with deep concern after watching my twitching digit.

"No, my dear fellow. Can't you see I'm trying to light my lighter? I feel the need of a smoke after your entertaining story. You don't mind, I suppose?"

"Not at all, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Perhaps you'd like a Marlboro?" I queried.

"You're too kind, sir. I regret to say I prefer snuff only."

"Ha-ha—snuff!" I laughed. "Tricky habit that—taking snuff. You don't use the brand called Snow by chance?"

Screw shook his head slowly: "No, not any more. The governor only let's me have Sailor Jack now. But it's very satisfactory."

"Where's my army? Where's Murat?" bellowed some one behind us.

"Dear me," sighed the trusty, "there's Napoleon calling in his generals. Excuse me a moment."

I turned around to notice a small dark man with his hair parted in the middle, tramping up and down within a small space. He wore the most extraordinary shiny boots and clicked his heels together in military salute every ten or fifteen steps. He began to roar again as his generals failed to appear. Trusty Screw answered roll, however, and silenced him by accepting an order to mobilize for grand attack and then stepped down the hall a way. He returned in a few moments to say that the order had been executed. Napoleon turned on his heel and was silent.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Pettigrew, but you know how it is," gurgled Screw.

"Quite all right. Rather diverting, eh?" There was

a knot in the ribbon attached to my glasses. I pulled and pulled—and couldn't get it out. My face darkened in anger.

"Now, how would you like to see our most interesting case?" Screw said, leading me toward another man who stood as if giving the benediction.

"Who are you, my good man? I asked pleasantly. It was part of my policy to become acquainted with the guests of the institution. The fellow opened his eyes slowly and said in a low monotone: "I'm John the Baptist". Then he closed his eyes again and retained his motionless position.

I was horrified, shocked, chagrined. "That's not so," I blubbered.

The trusty turned towards me and added in sobbing tones "You're right, Mr. Pettigrew. That's not so. I'm John the Baptist." Screw leaped on the first John to emphasize his point.

This was too much for me. I screamed frantically and tore at his back. I simply had to jump onto both of them. "You fools! You insane idiots." How can you say that when you know I'm John the Baptist!"



EPITAPH FOR A BOOK

GILBERT MAXWELL

SHOULD these quick words live after me,
Think not that you shall find me snared
By rhetoric or fantasy
In any grief my heart has bared.

I shall not need for sustenance
Myself immortal in a phrase;
I shall be back, as I was once,
Where sorrow neither goes nor stays.

What I have written is not mine.
It is a thorn plucked from my side—
It is the simple countersign
To that which would not be denied.

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NOT YET ALL

ELIZABETH MARSHALL

A MONTH ago they had told her. Oh, not all at once, but a little at a time, thinking they were breaking it gently. They did not know how small a thing is the understanding. Her understanding had closed tightly way back a month ago when they had started so gently to tell her. She had closed her eyes and pushed away all the thoughts they had brought with them.

Now her mind was like the ceiling above her, smooth and white and empty. But a month is a long time, a part of eternity, and she turned her head. The ceiling ran around an angle and became pale green walls stretching down into the room. It was a little startling after so long a time of white ceiling.

After a while someone turned her so she lay on her side, and there were more green walls, lots more and some furniture. There was a bureau with flowers on it, and an upholstered chair by a window. Not at all the right sort of room, Peggy thought, no books or pictures that she could see. She turned her head to see the rest of the room. There were two doors, a green silk screen, and a straight chair. The flowers were the best to look at, so she turned back to them. The light faded in the room, and the flowers, which had been a flaming yellow, dimmed out to a mellow spot in the dusk, and she dozed.

When Peggy awoke a nurse was in the room. She said, "You are better tonight, Mrs. Murray. I have some soup for you." And she fed Peggy through a tube. The soup was warm and pleasant, but Peggy,

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resented the tube. Then the nurse went out leaving the room lighted softly.

Peggy tried to think. What was this all about? She must have been ill, but somehow she had the impression that she had always been extraordinarily healthy. Someone had commented on that to her. She could hear a voice say, "Mrs. Murray, you have always been extraordinarily healthy." She repeated it. "Mrs. Murray, you have always been extraordinarily healthy." She stopped herself. She was Mrs. Murray, but she was hardly extraordinarily healthy at the moment. She was Mrs. Murray. Now she remembered Bill Murray, her husband, was dead. She had been here in the hospital, and they had said, "Mr. Murray has telephoned that he feels tired tonight, and sha'nt be in." "My dear, Bill is very ill." That had been Aunt Betsy. Then the doctor had told her, "I am afraid you must know, my dear, that your husband died yesterday, two hours after your son was born." And then they had said, "For the first few days a baby's life is none too certain, and your baby has died in its sleep."

Now she realized what they meant. Bill was gone. She would never see him come laughing toward her again. There was no little Bill to grow up with that smile. She was alone. All alone. That was what this room devoid of personality meant. She feebly beat the pillows and cried her misery.

In the morning she was dazed with drugs. But the reality lay with her like a sword, each time she roused it cut her. But they did not let her stay quietly with her grief. In the afternoon the nurse said, "Mrs. Murray, your mother is here to see you." Her mother. Her mother came in and held her hand. Her face was tense with unspoken words. Then finally she spoke.

"I am sorry, Peggy, that this came to you. But you must get well and strong again. I need you. There is so much to be done, and I have so missed you about the house. Maids are so stupid. I have to watch them all the time. And no one fixes the flowers the way you do. Then there's the garden. James is hopeless. Actually the tulip beds have bloomed, one orange and black, and the other yellow, pink, and red. And I'm sure I gave him the color charts I made out. And Mary's wedding is only three months off. I need you terribly. As soon as Dr. Wintle will let you be moved, you must come back to your own room. I'm sure you'll get strong very quickly in your own home."

Peggy's mind was too dazed to place ideas, and she only answered, "I don't know, Mother." And soon the nurse took her mother away.

During the next week her mother came every day bringing with her household problems, an odor of lavender, and some of Mary's wedding invitations to address, "since you have so much time, and such a good hand." The nurse took them, looked at Peggy, and put them neatly away in a drawer. Peggy was grateful to be left to look out of the window. Waking early in the morning, she watched the sky brighten for the dawning of another day, and without emotion she saw it fade away at night.

Toward the end of this week the nurse announced Bill's mother. She came into the room handsome in her deep mourning. Peggy wondered if they would expect her to wear black.

"Dear Margaret, I wanted to see you long ago, but they wouldn't let me. It was ridiculous. Why, you and I are the only Murrys now. The family has descended from James Murray in the 16th century." She sighed and smoothed her white kid gloves in her lap. "Women used to be stronger in those days, and there

has never been a scarcity of male children. You and I have failed to protect the line of descent." She looked up at Peggy defiantly. "But my one son was always wonderful to me. William was more to me than twenty sons. To think of William's brilliant promise, all the promise of his career, all the beauty and joy of his life, cut short. Really, Margaret, it is too horrible. His wonderful life cut short. You must come to me soon, and we must face the world together—the last two Murrays."

"I don't know", Peggy answered.

"What do you mean, 'you don't know'? When you married a Murray you took on the name and responsibilities of an old and respected family. Unfortunately you have been unable to assist in carrying on the family. But at least you will help me to carry out the Murray traditions through my life, and I hope carry them on yourself, as long as you live. Poor William could not expect less of you." And as she was ushered out by the nurse, her parting remark was, "I shall expect you, Margaret."

Peggy wondered. Her mother considered her life broken, tragic, but still useful. She was in no way changed. She had a grief, a loss. But she had had a wonderful year with Bill. She wondered. What was the tragedy for Bill? Was there an immortality? In no picture of heaven which had been drawn for her could she remember the soul in lonesome misery, mourning for those who lived. She doubted immortality anyway. For Bill she saw oblivion, absence of strife, ambition, or yearning. For Bill then, was peace.

Peggy could not remember what the baby they had shown her had looked like. That life had never grown to a personality, had never known a loss. It was she who had lost two lives, a brilliant career, and the promise of growth and who knew what? She could not feel

failure in the baby's death. The window was open at the top, and she saw stars, three stars against the blackness of the sky. Had Bill's mother ever seen the stars? She wondered about the idea of family pride. What was personal pride while there were stars in the sky?

The next day Aunt Betsy stalked into the room as comfortable and right in her tweed suit as the Scotch terrier at her heels. She began with, "What are you doing in bed, Peggy?" And went rapidly on—"In a fortnight I'm leaving for my place at the shore. You are coming with me, Peggy. And we'll pick you out a young man. It's just the right spot and you're really very attractive thinned down a bit. I must show you off before you get so robust you'll scare everyone."

"Mother expects me to help with Mary's wedding. And Bill's mother feels I've failed the Murrays in not being able to keep the heir I produced. She seems to think I must come and atone by supporting the Murray traditions as long as I live. I don't know."

Don't be a fool, Peggy. Mary didn't devote her time to your wedding, and your mother overruns her house already. As for Suzan Murray, she's a fool. I'm glad your baby didn't live. With a Murray child to tie you to Suzan Murray you never could have lived again. I want to see you happily married, and if not to Bill, then to someone else. I shall tell both of them that I'm taking you, and that will be that. A fortnight from Thursday. The doctor says you will be able to come with me then. Don't forget, Peggy." And she was gone.

The shade beat gently at the window, and the curtains had been drawn back. There was a glimpse of blue sky. Peggy pushed all these problems back and turned her blanked mind to the window. She absorbed the blue sky and cherished a glimpse of white cloud.

Dusk came and robbed her of her sky, but it brought more clearly the sounds of the world going home. She strained to hear every jangling sound of life. There was a joy in the world, a composite joy, beyond the individual. And as dusk deepened to dark, the outside world stole in through her window, and she felt herself absorbed into the night. There was a thrill in her mind as she went to sleep.

EXODUS

SOCRATES CHAKALES

A SOOTHING coverlet of
Transparent mist
Shadows uneven contours
Soft and yielding
Are the vaporous globules
Of unreality
All is calm.

Piercing blazes of fire
Hail the days debut
Mystic morn dispels
Into glaring reality
All moves.

"WHERE WE GOIN'?"

JAMES GOWDY

WAL I s'POSE you folks down here would say that he was a little bit queer. That's what they thought out in Iowa where he come from. I reckon that very fact's one reason why he's down here. Now don't fer a minit think that I ain't goin' to tell you the rest of the reasons. That'll all come in good time. I never was a person fer rushin' matters much. I always figures that things will come along when they're s'posed to, and it don't do a bit of good fer me or anyone else to try and hurry them along.

Now, gettin' along with this feller. 'Course folks always is inclined to exaggerate about things they hear, but them humans out in Iowa, if they was humans, just made it impossible fer that poor feller to live there any longer.

I talked to one or two that knew him up ther and they say that before his trouble come on him he was a tol'able good lookin' young chap. His misfortune must have been great enough to kill any ordinary man, and pretty soon you'll see that he wasn't no ord'nary man. Wal, this trouble shore made a wreck out of his looks, 'cause when I first seen him he 'peared to me to be a long throw from handsome.

He had a long, bony skeleton-like frame, you know, the kind that looks like a wind battered cornstalk that some how oruther's been able to stand against the autumn blows. If you was to see him you'd first notice his long arms and his paddle like hands.

It's his head that struck me as bein' the most cur-

ious part of him. The mop of hair that he had on it looks like a mess of spanish moss smeared with orange paint. His eyebrows sort of give me the impression bein' drippin's offen his thatch. Underneath these drippin's set 'way back, like a lake in a swamp, he had a pair of eyes that you'd just know'd had seen all manner of tribulation but could still muster up a friendly twinkle. Aside from that there's nothin' about him that you'd notice 'less it'd be that long ang'lar jaw-bone of hisn.

If you'r a mite curious 'bout this poor devil I 'magine that I could arrange it with myself to tell you a bit more. Jest hand me that jug over ther behind you—no, that one there in the corner. Much obliged to you. Care fer a snifter? Wal, don't mind if I do. Let alone warmin' up your carcass, this likker sorta makes your soul feel fitten too.

Let's you and me drift back into the past 'bout sixteen years. Le' see that'd be around 1918 or '17. Wal, never mind how many years ago it was. Let it go as it's bein' the year '17. By the way, Ellery Jones' his name. That didn't do much good either, cause everyone'd call him jest plain "El". Sorta had a double meaning' too, 'counta he had to duck under every door to keep from hitten' the beam.

Ol' "El", (he really weren't ol'. That's jest my way of refferin' to folks sometimes) had had a fair bit of edication, so he got himself a job on the weekly paper out there in his home town which I don't reclect the name of. He was doin' right well, too. Had one of the purtiest girls in town jest plumb crazy over him, and if she'd asked him to bring her the sun I reckon he'd still be trying to do it. Folks say that it was one of the sweetest sights they ever seen, jest catching a glimpse of them two walkin' past the ol' warehouse

down by the railroad tracks at sunset. They used to say too that it wasn't so much that you could actually see their faces, 'counta they was always walking into the sun, but they'd jest know that them two youngsters stood fer all that man or woman could ask fer, peace and contentment.

T'weren't long how-ver 'fore fate, or whatever 't is that us humans blame when things runs amuck, come along and throwed his foot in the soup. Fer's I know, an' I ain't heard a lot 'bout the sitiation, somebody commenced an awful fuss over in Erope. Wal, first thing you knowed, purty near every country in the hul world was in on it. You know, just like these here grass fires spreads, only this weren't burnin' haf so fast. Ol' "El", he held out on his patritism 'till he nigh felt like bustin'. T'were mighty hard fer him to say good-by to Lucy, that were his girl's name. 'Specially so, counta he'd just married her 'fore he took off fer the fightin' land.

After he got on the train there in Iowa nothin' was heard from "El" fer about five or six months, then one day a letter come to Lucy an' it were jest smeared all over with official lookin stamps, seals, an' things like that. I seen the letter and it were a wonder to me that they could make out the address on't. Wal, if abody hed seen Lucy readin that letter he coulda seen that "El" were tryin' to cheer her up, but somehow Lucy knowed that "El" were havin his share of mud and filth and slime and particular hell. While she was readin' it you could see her face light up evry now and then, but once or twice it'd sorta cloud up, and' a couple o' narra furrows would kinda creep through her forehead. When she finished readin' it she jest leaned back in her chair an' shet her eyes, settin' there dreamin'.

Lucy got a lot of letters after that first one. Each of 'em tellin' her how lonesome he was and how he

wished he was back home walkin' into the sunset with her. None of the letters spoke much of the fightin' he was doin'. One time I reclect that he told her about a short vacation that he had, and it said that he went out into some country side way back from the fightin' part an' spent the whole day jest walkin through the meadows an' over the hills. Even in them letters you could tell that the war were doin' somethin' to his mind.

Finally, and it musta been jest like someone hangin up on one of them there telephones, his letters stopped comin'. I guess it was jest 'bout a year went by without her even hearin' as much as a word from "El" or even 'bout him, when one day when she went down to the Post Office (she always went there even when she knowed there'd be no mail, jest a kinda undyin hope I guess) there was a letter fer her from the govment. I reckon you've seen them gov'mint letters. Sorta formal like, as if they was 'fraid of wastin' time or ink or somethin. Wal, anyhow, this here letter went on to say that "El", had been wounded an' had got a case of shell-shock (whatever that be) and he wouldn't be comin' home with the rest of the boys (see, the war was done by the time that letter come), and they was keepin him in some layin' in hospital or somethin 'til he were a bit better so's he could travel.

Course I heard 'bout this lots later, but it seems that "El" had got shot in the back and it had knocked a hunk outen his bones there. This shot kinda made him walk sorta bent nigh double after he was able to walk. That shock he got from all that shootin' seemed to make him forget who he were or where he belonged at. All that he could think of was that battered old type writer that he used to set at down in the newspaper office.

"El" stayed in that hospital fer—I reckon t'were 'bout three months, and them doctors finally 'greed

that he wouldn't get no better there, and they figured that mebbe it'd do him good to get back to home where perhaps seein' old surroundins an' ol' faces would fetch back his reclectin machinery. So they put him on this train that were aheadin' fer Iowa, an' they sent along with him a young feller who had sorta gained "El's" confidence. It were up to this here feller (I think he were what you'd call a interne or somethin' like that) to se that "El" got 'stablished in good shape. After hearin' bout that trip back, I felt mighty sorrowful 'bout that young chap, 'cause "El", he weren't no more like a man o' thirty than I be, an even though I'm purty spry fer an ol' gent, I still ain't nothin like a thirty year ol'. As I was tellin' you, "El" he jest gave this poor chap fits. "El" was all time inquiren o'where he was goin'. An' one time when the train stopped in Chicago and they got out fer a little walk, "El", he didn't bother to find out—he jest went off. Wal, y' know it took that interne 'bout three hours to find him, and when he did "El" had swapped places some ol' bootblack in one o' them big hotels. Guess the nigger thought "El" were drunk. T'were jest luck that they caught the train, but they did.

On the train "El" still kept inquiren'.

In the mean time, Lucy (hope you'l 'scuse me fer jumpin' back and ferth like this, but it's the only way to tell the story) had heard that "El" were comin back to her, and she spent the whole mornin' sprucin' up fer him. She even was down to the station a hul hour 'fore the train were due to get there.

Finally she heard that ol' whistle toot fer the crossin' out by Simpkins' place an' she could hardly keep from jumpin' up and down and even brushin' away a mite of a tear now and then.

The train whooshed to a stop an' Lucy kept runnin up an down the platform to see if she could see him

'fore he seen her, and she spied him and that young chap.

"El" was kinda hesitatin' bout lightin', an he even started to get back into the car. The young feller pulled him out again an Lucy threw her arms all 'bout him, but when "El" didn't do nothing but stand ther like a statue, she fell from him and stood there plumb out on her feet as if'n a bolt o' lightnin' had hit ner, and "El" turned stupid like to the interne an he says:

"Where we goin'?"



A DESCENDANT OF BARAK

JOHN BILLS

THE THREE room shack nested in the fringe of Big Cypress Swamp, close by the St. Johns River. In front there were wild flowers, bananas, a patch of sweet potatoes; in the rear a crude brick oven, a wash bench and tubs, a pile of fat pine drying, all covered by a palmetto thatched roof. The sand beneath was clean swept and hardened by the treading of bare feet.

"Us kin contrive 'long heah", Tarsus Mabley had pleaded with Molly eight years before. There was no money for a license or a minister but their friends understood. The colored folks in the Big Cypress community had stripped life to the raw.

When Amos Ben was born Tarsus and Molly added the third room. Nine years passed and on the crude cot by its window she had given birth to four babies.

Enoch fished on the river and timbered for young Mr. Edwards and grubbed orange trees in May and June. During those months he was home for dinner before it was dark and rode little Amos on his back out in the front yard during the short twilight.

Then the masked white men came.

Amos' boyhood ended that night. He saw his mother pushed and fall unconscious. He shivered under his blanket as wire thongs tied his father's hands. Hiding in the shadows, running from cluster to cluster of saw palmetto, he followed the silent men through the swamp to the river flats. Then while the moon was clouded he wriggled through the grass and over the mud to the shelter of the clustered palms on the shell mound. He crawled between the trunks; he heard the muffled voices and his father's shrill pleas. He was close to the oak about which they were gathered.

"Pull him up." Amos recognized the voice. It was Edwards, the man his father was working for. The black folks all feared him.

Racing clouds parted and the moon shone clear. From a limb of the oak tree hung a man; it was Amos' father. The legs twisted, the body wriggled; then became limp. The night breeze swayed it gently. The masked men separated and slunk away, all but the young man Edwards. From a muck pocket by the mound he scooped a handful of mire; he threw it in the dead man's face.

Some of the men passed close to the boy but they did not see him. Some had removed their masks; their face like the night lilies in the moonlight. But the half drunken Edwards shook his fist at the swaying body and cursed it in the vile tongue of the river men. Little Amos heard and shivered; the blood thirst of the jungle gripped him, the fear of the alley cat shook him.

"I'll kill dat man" he swore, trembling.

In body Amos was ten; in mind he had reached his maturity. The years passed and his body grew but his mind had stopped.

Before dawn Molly gave birth to a sickly baby; Amos stumbled through the dark and brought help. The next day he hoed orange trees for old Mr. Sutton who knew that Molly and the babies must have white bacon and grits. His play house by Little Run Creek rotted and the river sows suckled their young in it.

Six months later Mr. Sutton gave Amos boards with which to make a tiny casket. A year later he paid the undertaker who came to the shack by Big Cypress Swamp to take Molly. And there were two fresh graves on the knoll in the negro cemetery, the knoll which sloped to the east and the sunrise. The old negro minister patted Amos on the head and said, "Youse de head ob de fambly now, Amos."

Work when there was work, long hours and hard work. The boy's slender shoulders broadened, deepened . . . and stooped. Tempered steel moved under the tar black skin of his long arms; his thick neck tapered to a close clipped head, the face masked save for rolling eyes. Two hundred and twenty pounds of dinosaur bone and gorilla muscle labored with the hoe, the turpentine chisel, the axe. The younger children went to the crumbling school at Big Cypress Center three to four months each summer until they were fourteen. Then they drifted away, married and besought Amos' help to feed their little ones. Amos had never been to school. When he signed the church book his big hand, as steady as an oak in a calm when he gripped the axe handle, quivered like a sapling in a storm when he clutched the sliver of a pencil. He signed with a cross.

So as Amos approached thirty the three room shack by Big Cypress Swamp was lonesome, quiet. The

laughter and sobs of the picaninnies were gone. Only the simple minded negro and his old hound remained. There was an understanding, a sympathy between them, that mongrel dog and his master; they were both flotsam of the river, serving dumbly and asking no reward. But the slovenly animal, having found the scent, followed it to his quarry; the man lacked the courage to follow through.

Perhaps the negro sensed his need of the dog, of the brute courage of the misbegotten hound. Perhaps the dog sensed his master's feebleness of spirit and watched more tenderly, like a collie with a creeping babe. The man fed the dog; the dog inspired the man.

"Built like a bull" said Edwards, then boss of the timber operations in Big Cypress Swamp, "but he's got calf's guts."

In the lean days Amos had often worked for Edwards. His youngest sister was widowed, sickly; her babies had to be fed. His axe bit into the hard logs as though they were punk wood; his grab hook rolled them as though they were saplings. But he never looked his employer in the face. The great oath of his tenth year never left him, but misty fear smothered the smouldering sparks. Then at night he would pat the hound's head.

"Dawg, if you-all was me you'd a got him 'foah now. Maybe us'll git him tomorrow". But the day of reckoning was ever put off.

Edwards did not know that his giant timberman had seen the hanging on the shell mound. He only knew that the negro was a mighty workman. So when his operations started in Big Cypress Swamp he set Amos to work building a cabin on the mound. The white man wanted to be near his work and the mound was only a quarter mile distant from the swamp.

In levelling the shell for the cabin's foundation Amos

dug up bones—human bones. He had never known where his father had been buried. He picked up the skull and looked at it long, his heavy features as motionless as though modeled in clay. Edwards strode up.

"Injuns", he said, "Th' Seminoles used these here mounds fer buryin'. Th' sun hits 'em first mornin's an' shines on 'em lingerin' like after th' flatwoods is darkenin'. Th' Injuns thought th' sun was God."

Amos looked straight at his boss for the first time. His frame shook with wild anger. He knew that the skull in his hands was not that of one of the long departed tribe. But he only laid it down tenderly and filled in the shallow excavation. With his back to the wondering white man he spoke.

"Please, Massa Edwards, put de cabin on other place".

Laughing coarsely, Edwards yielded to what he thought was the negro's superstition.

* * * *

In the colored Methodist Church, where the negroes of the Big Cypress community worshipped, the Rev. Ephriam Potter balanced his paunchy torso back of the deal pulpit, rocking slowly on his heels. Fifty black faces watched him, all breathing tensely. The spirit would soon move; when the swaying figure swung faster, when the screechy voice rose higher, they would all shout.

"De tex' dis ebenin'" shrilled the Rev. Ephriam, "am a fightin' tex'. De Lawd lobed good fightin' when de Isrelites—which was brown folks den—got persecuted by odder peoples. Read de holy Book ob Judges an' see how He rise up strong men ob valor like Samson an' Gideon an' Barak. Read what de Lawd inspire, 'Wake up, wake up Deborah, sing a song; arise Barak an' led yuh captors captive . . .'"

The oil soaked rag in the tomato can beside the pulpit smoked, flickered. As the squat figure of the minister swayed back from it, the blurred shadows on the white washed walls became sharper cut in dark silhouette. The fifty dark faces watched intently; the swaying figure and the moving shadows aroused them. It would not be long; the big spirit would soon move and they would all rock and shout.

"An' Barak were a brown man", the screeching voice continued, "like all de sons ob God in de Book ob Genesis; an' he was fill ob de Holy Spirit an' went out an' fit wid de Amonites an' slewed dem an' he done it like de Lawd said."

Breathless the minister called for a song. The spirit was slow in coming. A quartet of young negroes sang.

"Oh, de Lawd, He walk wid Enoch;
De Lawd, He walk wid Enoch;
De Lawd, He walk wid Enoch;
An' sometime He walk wid you.
Oh, de Lawd, he done took Enoch;
De Lawd, He done took Enoch;
De Lawd, He done took Enoch;
An' sometime He take me too."

Amos moved restlessly on a collapsible chair in the rear row. He crossed his legs and the chair whined, complaining at his weight. When the fat figure of the Rev. Ephriam swung forward into the brighter glow of the lamp, his legs recrossed. Huge fingers tapped his patched knees; they interlaced, gripped and tapped again. Memories twenty years old, mind pictures as clear as on the night when he saw his father hanging from the oak were with him. Dully the mind of ten was sensing the great strength of his massive body. His face was blank but his scarred fingers bit deeper into his palms. His boyish oath crystalized; it was

a man's resolution. And the hound growled just outside the door.

Amos slunk from the church, the dog close at his heels. He stumbled along the sand trail to the highway. There were lights in the big house on the corner and young white folks dancing, but he did not notice. Dully he trudged on . . . on to the three room' shack by Big Cypress.

The hound growled; he knew that his master was on the scent. The brute mind seemed to know that it was not quail or rabbit, that it was a man hunt. The Mongrel was urging him on. And in his ears echoed the ringing words of the man of God, "Arise Barak and lead thy captors captive". The words were meaningless to him, the sensation was mighty.

"Dog, you-all stay heah an' watch de house."

Amos took a rope from the wall and wound it about his body. He trimmed a palmetto frond and whipped the grass with its lith stem. He took off his shoes and tossed them under the shack. Then he entered the dark swamp trail. His toes gripped the mud and his progress was rapid. A rattle close beside him like dried peas in a pod. Death swayed with a forked, darting tongue but the black man's switch was swifter than the fangs.

He came out from the swamp to the river flats. The waters were low and the grass hip-high. He waded into it, his eyes staring, his supple muscles tense. The grass bowed in the gentle night breeze like the smooth waves of a flood tide. The grass shortened, dwindled. There were shiny patches of mud left by the receding river. The stars were reflected in them.

The palm covered shell mound loomed before him. Edwards was there and he was alone.

But the dog had not obeyed. As Amos had done

twenty years before, he kept to the shadows and followed.

Amos crept up to the glassless window. The man that he hated sat by a crude table, a bottle and a glass beside him, a coal oil lamp burning. His eyes were staring, his sun-cankered lips hung loose, his body sagged. Edwards was drunk. The black man crouched motionless. The twenty-year old oath, the wild anger aroused at the church, the vicious hate, were not enough. He knew that he could take the white man in his mighty hands and crush him. The tense muscles were ready but the heart was paralyzed.

Something rubbed against his leg. It was the hound. A low growl broke the stillness. It fired Amos to action but it also aroused Edwards. As the huge body of the negro lunged through the window, the drunken man snapped alert. He pulled a revolver from a table drawer and fired.

For a second Amos shivered and stood still; the bullet had entered his chest. But as Edwards fired a second time, the black man lunged at him. The bullet went wild; a hairy thing with frothing jaws had leaped through the window and fastened his fangs in the white man's throat.

Amos' big hands gripped Edwards' neck. He shook off the dog. He kicked open the door. He dragged the body of the screaming white man to the old oak. And as the moon broke from behind slow moving cloud banks he hung him to the limb and watched his body quiver and become quiet. Then he scooped up mud from beside the mound and threw it in the white man's face and cursed him in the vile tongue of the river men. The hound growled.

But the negro was mortally hit; his shirt front was crimson. To the east in the path of the moonlight was a sink hole, a plastic, sucking sore on the surface of the

land. In its bottomless belly were the bones of mighty mastodons, the skeletons of many an unwary cow.

And down that moonlit path, over the flats, staggered the man. The dog was at his heels. He came to the edge of the quicksands; the moonlight glimmered on the glassy surface. He tensed the spring steel of his muscles and jumped forward. The hound whined as the viscous surface closed and smoothed above him.



PROBLEM

DOROTHY PARMLEY

ALTHOUGH it seems a little thing
I cannot understand
Why plates and cups go crashing down
From out my shaking hand.

But I can pluck a lily
That's pale and soft and blue
And not disturb a single leaf
Nor move a drop of dew.

SHOP TALK

VIVIAN MAXWELL

THE GREEN Glass Salad Bowl fairly shook with indignation as she turned to her neighbor, the China Comport, to say, "Thank heaven that hussy has gone! She may be a good Pitcher, but I doubt it. Her shape is positively indecent with those voluptuous curves, and bold,—it made me seethe with disgust to see how she attracted the men and let them pick her up,—no less than three this afternoon, and one has just carried her off!

The little Comport timidly agreed, adding; "But she was pretty, such gay, vivid coloring and a lovely mouth."

The old Salad Bowl bristled again. "Bah!" Those Italian imports are all the same; a purely artificial attraction,—underneath it all you find only common clay, but the World being what it is today, no one stops to consider whether it pours well, or holds it's beauty with the years. Really, my dear Comport, you can't imagine the changes I've seen here. It used to be that Wedding presents were chosen with thought and care to the beauty and value, and once sent they stayed in their new home, but now it's a purely commercial, material transaction with absolutely no guarantee that one won't find oneself back on the table in two days."

"I know," murmured the little Comport, "only Tuesday I was sent to 77 Park Avenue, and Thursday I was back on sale again; the disgrace of it, never knowing one's fate—I thought I was settled in the right part of town and now I may find myself on the West side—"

"Heaven forbid!" broke in the Salad Bowl. "Nothing from this Table ever stays very long in that section. We must have food to be useful and everything there is a Kitchenette."

"That's all very well for you, Madame Bowl, but one never knows what use may be made of me. My brothers and sisters have been put to all sorts of degrading positions; even to being used as common flower pots with bulbs and horrid black earth covering all our beautiful gilt!" The Comport shuddered at the thought of thus being buried alive.

Madame Bowl grunted. She was not very sympathetic for she felt that her neighbor was far too gilded to be anything more than a lure, and after all, she was a bit superfluous, nothing like as substantial and plain as the Lemonade Sets and the Cake Plates. Madame Bowl believed in large families; she had done her best to raise her twelve little plates, but Fate had been unkind; in a cyclone of frenzied buying one day, six had been grabbed up and hurried away before anyone had even realized it. It couldn't have happened, of course, if the Bowl herself hadn't been lifted up and carelessly set upside down, so that she had been quite helpless for almost an hour. The tragedy had almost crushed her, and day after day she had hoped that the little ones might come back, but to no avail.

The Bowl seemed to have settled down permanently. She had grown heavy and her angles sharper, so that invariably if she was picked up, she was put down immediately with the remark; "Much too large,—the plates are rather delicate but the Bowl doesn't seem to match." That always caused a twinge, for the poor old Bowl trembled lest the neighbors should hear and begin to wonder on their old account. She had fought for her position and she had no desire to let herself be

food for scandal at this day. No one stood more firmly for Morals and Manners than Madame Bowl. She might almost be considered the spokesman for the Table; at least she was the undisputed leader of the Conservatives. Of course there was always opposition to be found in the Cocktail Set, but everybody knew they were wild,—and their Mother a Shaker! There seemed small chance of ever getting rid of them, for though they were constantly being chosen, they invariably came back with a shameless grin.

"No luck; too many of us! Why, there were ten shakers and fourteen dozen glasses, and of course only the biggest ones stayed,—rather glad we were so small, it looked as though we never would have had a chance to sleep,—this being up all night is no joke."

"Good for nothing trash", the Green Bowl called them, for in the old days they wouldn't have been found on any respectable table, and she sighed for those same days when there had been plenty of air and space to move about a bit, congenial neighbors with respectable professions: no it was a hodge podge jam, anything that could be sold for seven-fifty had the entree; her musings were interrupted by the little Comport.

"Is it true that the old Brass Candlesticks have separated? They seemed so well matched; I can hardly believe it."

"Quite so, my dear; to the casual observer they seemed an ideal pair, but I always knew that she was lighter. Old Brass had a very substantial base and no sense of humor and one day a new salesman lit them up for a customer and Amelita, she was of Spanish design you know, flickered and blinked so brazenly that her husband accused her of ogling, and got himself transferred to the other end of the table,—that was the beginning of the end. She was soon bought, but, my dear, she was only kept a month and finally

came back quite tarnished,—none of the old crowd are speaking to her.”

“But does one never stay?” queried the Bronze lighter; being something quite new he was eagerly listening in, anxious to learn.

“As I was saying,” Madame Bowl continued, glassily ignoring this interruption, “one can’t be too careful, with Society so mixed and all these electrical upstarts crashing the doors,—matches have always done the work very satisfactorily and I see no reason to change. Well, young man,” she snapped “did you ask me a question?”

“I beg your pardon Ma’am, I didn’t mean to be rude, but you see it is all so new to me; I spoke before I thought.”

“Quite so, I’m glad you appreciate it; if you stay here long enough your manners may, in fact I might say, must improve. Of course we eventually find a home, some of us more easily than others. The poor old hors-d’oeuvre dish holds the record; she’s crossed forty nine thresholds in three years, and there’s little she can’t tell you about brides and their Wedding presents. She always likes to arrive promptly after the cards are out for then she’s sure of a gracious reception. She comes back positively stimulated and pinker than ever, but if she’s a rush order she may not see the Bride at all and misses the reception, perhaps never even gets out of the box. You’d think she’d be discouraged but she always hopes that she may be sent to a French family who will appreciate her.”

Just at that moment there was somewhat of a stir and a voice said acidly, “Ah, Madame Bowl, you’ll be interested to hear that I’ve just been sent back from Mrs. Van Astorbilts. She’s just got her divorce and is marrying Jimmie Van Slide,—a very grand affair; naturally an old cut glass vinegar cruet wasn’t at all the

sort of thing she was looking for in the way of a present, so I was soon packed up and away, but as one of the parlor maids opened me, I was on exhibition a few hours; long enough to look over the batch from the first wedding three years ago, and who should I see but the gay old pale green Cake Plate with the silver edge! You remember, Madame Bowl; he used to be quite the Beau of the Table and in constant demand.”

One could scarcely fail to notice that the Green Salad Bowl was visibly vibrating and her efforts to control her emotion caused quite a clatter among her six plates.

“He’s failed so,” the Vinegar Cruet rattled on, “you’d hardly know him, decidedly faded and the silver almost entirely gone, but he seemed pathetically glad to see me and almost his first words were, “I don’t suppose that handsome rich green Salad Bowl is still in the store?” “Indeed she is,” I told him, “and a hard life she’s had. It’s no life for a lone Bowl with six plates.” “Six plates did you say?” and his voice fairly trembled with emotion. “Oh there were twelve, but six were taken away.” I thought he would leap from the pantry shelf; “Mon Dieu,” he cried; you know how easily he used to slip in a French phrase, “it can’t be!” —By this time the entire table was crowding about and there was such a clattering up and down that no one noticed Madame Bowl slowly vibrating towards the edge of the Table,—not until too late; a moment and she disappeared,—a terrific crash and the awed, stunned crowd turned to comfort the six sobbing plates. Only the Vinegar Cruet acidly mused; “I suppose the World will call it accidental, but there’s usually a reason behind such cases.”

ANNOUNCEMENT

FIRST PRIZE \$100

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in the

COLLEGE SHORT STORY CONTEST

*Open to all registered students of colleges
and universities in the United States.*

TERMS OF THE CONTEST

Stories submitted must be not less than 1500 nor more than 6000 words in length.

Each entry must be certified by a member of the faculty of the institution.

No college or university may submit more than two entries.

All entries must be mailed to STORY on or before April 15, 1934.

The submitted stories are to represent the best selection, by qualified judges, of the work of students of the school year 1933-1934. Such stories may be selected from the work done in English courses or they may be drawn from a contest specially designed to afford a selection. The story may or may not have first appeared in a college publication during the contest.

The editors of STORY suggest the following procedure in the selection of stories to represent any institution: The English department may officially conduct the contest, extending throughout the school year, or calling for entries that may be judged in time to have the selected two stories sent to STORY by April 15, 1934. The English department in such cases may select judges for the campus contest. Or, if the English department does not wish to engage in the matter officially, a contest may be arranged through the application of some member of the faculty, or of the campus literary periodical, or of a campus literary group or association. In the latter case faculty members should be represented on the Board of Judges.

All stories must be legibly written, preferably typewritten, on one side of the paper.

The winning story will be published in STORY September, 1934. STORY reserves the right to allow reprints of the winning story in short story anthologies.

(The Flamingo has arranged to sponsor the contest on this campus. Submit your entries before April 1st. Judges to be announced later.)

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