

The Broad Highway

Jeffery Farnol

"Which We Call Life"

(Continued from yesterday.)

"Last Monday night, four on 'em sickened an' died!"

"Most unfortunate!" said I.

"An, the rest 'as never been the same since."

"Probably ate something that disagreed with them," said I, picking up my hammer and laying it down again.

Old Amos smiled and shook his head.

"You know James Dutton's pigsty, don't ye, Peter?"

"I really can't say that I do."

"Yet you pass it every day on your way to the 'Oller'—it lays just behind Simon's seat—use, as James 'isself will tell ye."

"So it do," interpolated Dutton, with an apologetic nod, "which, leastways, if it don't, can't be now!" having delivered himself of which, he buried his face in the belfer handkerchief.

"Now, one evenin', Peter," continued Old Amos, "one evenin' you leaned over the fence o' that pigsty an' stood lookin' at the pigs for 'n'ixty ten minutes."

"Did I?"

"Ay, that ye did—James Dutton see ye, an' 'is wife, she see ye, an' I see ye."

"Then," said I, "probably I did, well?"

"Well," said the old man, looking round upon his hearers, and bristling out each word with the greatestunction, "that their evenin' were last Monday evenin' as ever was—the very same hour as Dutton's pigs sickened an' died!" Hereupon John Pringle and Job rose simultaneously from where they had been sitting, and retreated precipitately to the door.

"Lord!" exclaimed John.

"I might 'a' known it!" said Job, drawing a cross in the air with his finger.

"An' so James Dutton wants to ax ye to take 'it off, Peter," said Old Amos.

"To take what off?"

"Why, the spell, for sure." Hereupon I gave free play to my amusement, and laughed, and laughed, while the others watched me with varying expressions.

"And so you think that I bewitched Dutton's pigs, do you?" said I, at last, glancing from Old Amos to the perspiring Apology (who immediately began to mop at his face and neck again). "And why," continued, seeing that nobody appeared willing to speak, "why should you think it of me?"

"Why, Peter, ye beant' like ordinary folk; your eyes goes through an' through a man. An' then, Peter, I mind as you come a-walkin' into Siss'—nurs' one night from Lord knows where, all covered w' dust, an' w' a pack on your back."

"You are wrong there, Amos," said I, "it was afternoon when I came, and the Ancient was with me."

"Ah! an' where did 'e find ye, Peter?"

"In the Hollow," I answered.

"Ay, 'e found 'e 'in the very spot where the Wanderer o' the Roads 'uns 'isself, sixty an' six years ago."

"There is nothing very strange in that," said I.

"What's more, you come into the village an' beat Black Jarge throwin' 'th' ammer, an' 'in the strongest man in all the South Country!"

"I beat him because he did not do his best—so there is nothing strange in that either."

"An' then, you lives all alone in that there ghastly 'Oller—an' you fights, an' struggles w' devils an' demons, all in the wind an' rain an' rearin' tempest—an' what's more of all—you come back—alive—an' what's more yet, w' devilmarks upon ye an' your throat all covered w' dust, an' Old Gaffer be doddern—doddern—'e be an' fulfil w' ye; 'e 'd ha' done much better to ha' left ye alone—I've heard o' folk sellin' themselves to the devil afore now, but I never heard o' the 'Evil Eye' afore now—ah! an' knows one when I see it."

"Nonsense!" said I sternly, "no sense! This talk of ghosts and devils is sheer folly. I answered, like the rest of you, and could not wish you ill—even if I would—come, let us all shake hands, and forget this folly!"

I extended my hand to Old Amos. He glanced from it to my face, and immediately lowering his eyes, shook his head.

"Tis the 'Evil Eye!' said he, and drew a cross upon the floor with his stick, "the 'Evil Eye!'"

"Nonsense!" said I again; "my eye is no more evil than yours or Job's. I never wished any man harm yet, nor wronged one, and I hope I never may. As for Mr. Dutton's pigs, if he take better care of them, and keep them out of the damp, they will probably thrive better than ever—come, shake hands!"

But, one by one, they edged their way to the door after Old Amos, until John Pringle was left; he, for a moment, stood hesitating, then, suddenly reaching out, he seized my hand, and shook it twice.

"I'll call for they 'oreshoes in the mornin', Peter," said he, and vanished.

"After all," I heard him say, as he joined the others, "tis summat to ha' shook 'ands w' a chap as fights with demons!"

CHAPTER XI

A Shadow in the Hedge.

Over the uplands, to my left, the moon peeping at me, very broad and yellow, as yet, casting long shadows athwart my way. The air was heavy with the perfume of honeysuckle abloom in the hedges—a warm, still air wherein a deep silence brooded, and in which leaf fluttered not and twig stirred not; but it was none of this I held in my thoughts as I strode along, whistling softly as I went. Yet, in a while, chancing to lift my eye, I beheld the object of my reverie coming towards me through the shadows.

"Why—Charman!" said I, uncovering my head.

"Why—Peter!"

"Did you come to meet me?"

"It must be nearly nine o'clock, sir."

"Yes, I had to finish some work."

"Did any one pass you on the road?"

"Not a soul."

"Peter, have you an enemy?"

"Not that I know of, unless it be yourself. Epictetus says somewhere that—"

"Oh, Peter, how dreadfully quiet everything is!" said she, and shivered.

"Are you cold?"

"No—but it is so dreadfully still!"

Now in one place the lane, narrowing suddenly, led between high banks crowned with bushes, so that it was very dark there. As we entered this gloom Charman suddenly drew closer to my side and slipped her hand beneath my arm and into my clasp, and the touch of her fingers was like ice.

"Your hand is very cold!" said I.

But she only laughed, yet I felt her shiver as she pressed herself close against me.

"Did I?"

"Ay, that ye did—James Dutton see ye, an' 'is wife, she see ye, an' I see ye."

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"I beat him because he did not do his best—so there is nothing strange in that either."

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"Nonsense!" said I again; "my eye is no more evil than yours or Job's. I never wished any man harm yet, nor wronged one, and I hope I never may. As for Mr. Dutton's pigs, if he take better care of them, and keep them out of the damp, they will probably thrive better than ever—come, shake hands!"

But, one by one, they edged their way to the door after Old Amos, until John Pringle was left; he, for a moment, stood hesitating, then, suddenly reaching out, he seized my hand, and shook it twice.

"I'll call for they 'oreshoes in the mornin', Peter," said he, and vanished.

"After all," I heard him say, as he joined the others, "tis summat to ha' shook 'ands w' a chap as fights with demons!"

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"Why—Peter!"

"Did you come to meet me?"

"It must be nearly nine o'clock, sir."

"Yes, I had to finish some work."

"Did any one pass you on the road?"

"Not a soul."

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"Your hand is very cold!" said I.

But she only laughed, yet I felt her shiver as she pressed herself close against me.

"And walked close beside me, so that you were between me and the shadow in the hedge?"

"Yes."

"And I thought—" I began, and stopped.

"Well, Peter!" Here she turned, and gave me a swift glance beneath her lashes.

"—that it was because—you were—perhaps—rather glad to see me?"

Charman did not speak; indeed she was so very silent that I would have given much to have seen her face just then, but the light was very dim, as I have said, moreover she had turned her shoulder towards me. "But I am grateful to you," I went on, "very grateful, and—it was very brave of you!"

"Thank you, sir," she answered in a very small voice, and I more than suspected that she was laughing at me.

"Not," I therefore continued, "that I shiver as you real danger."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"I mean that, in all probability, the man you saw was Black George, a very good friend of mine, who, though he may imagine he has a grudge against me, is too much of a man to lie in wait to do me hurt."

"Then why should he hide in the hedge?"

"Because he committed the mistake of throwing the town Beadle over the churchyard wall, and, consequently, in hiding, for the present."

"He has an ill-sounding name."

"And is the manliest, gentlest, truest and worthiest fellow that ever wore the leather apron."

Seeing how perseveringly she kept the whole breadth of the path between us, I presently fell back and walked behind her; now her head was bent, and thus I could not but remark the little curls and tendrils of hair upon her neck, whose sole object seemed to be to make the white skin more white by contrast.

"Peter," said she suddenly, speaking over her shoulder, "of what are you thinking?"

"Of a certain stark nasty ghastly promise for my supper," I answered immediately, mendaciously.

"Oh!"

"And what," I inquired, "what were you thinking?"

"I was thinking, Peter, that the shadow in the hedge may not have been Black George, after all."

CHAPTER XII

Who Comes?

"This table wobble!" said Charman.

"It does," said I, "but then I notice—"

"And—kept so close beside me."

"Yes."

"Yes, to be sure!" said I, and walked on in silence and now I noticed that she kept as far from me as the path would allow.

"Are you thinking me very—unnaturally again, sir?"

"No," I answered, "no."

"You see, I had no other way. Had I told you that there was a man hidden in the hedge you would have gone to look, and then—something dreadful would have happened."

"How came you to know he was there?"

"Why, after I had prepared supper I climbed that steep path which leads to the road and sat down upon the fallen tree that lies there, to watch for you, and, as I sat there, I saw a man come hurrying down the road."

"A very big man?"

"Yes, 'very tall he seemed, and, as I watched, he crept in behind the hedge. While I was wondering at this, I heard your step on the road, and you were waiting."

"And yet I seldom whistle."

"It was you—I knew your step."

"Did you, Charman?"

"I do wish you would not interrupt, sir."

"I beg your pardon," said I humbly.

"And then I saw you coming, and the man saw you too, for he crouched suddenly; I could only see him dimly in the shadow of the hedge, but he looked murderous, and it seemed to me that if you reached his hiding place before I did—something terrible would happen, and so—"

"You come to meet me."

"Yes."

"Tis the 'Evil Eye!' said he, and drew a cross upon the floor with his stick, "the 'Evil Eye!'"

"Nonsense!" said I again; "my eye is no more evil than yours or Job's. I never wished any man harm yet, nor wronged one, and I hope I never may. As for Mr. Dutton's pigs, if he take better care of them, and keep them out of the damp, they will probably thrive better than ever—come, shake hands!"

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that the block is misplaced again."

"A book is so clumsy—" I began.

"Or a book? Why not cut down the long legs to match the short one?"

"That is really an excellent idea."

"Then why didn't you before?"

"Because, to be frank with you, it never occurred to me."

"I suppose you are better as a blacksmith than a carpenter, aren't you, Peter?" And, seeing I could find no answer worthy of retort, she laughed, and, sitting down, watched me while I took my saw, forthwith, and shortened the three long legs as she had suggested. Having done which, to our common satisfaction, seeing the moon was rising, we went and sat down on the bench beside the cottage door.

"And—are you a very good blacksmith?" she pursued, turning to regard me, chin in hand.

"I can swing a hammer and shoe a horse with any smith in Kent—except Black George, and he is the best in all the South Country."

"And is that a very great achievement, Peter?"

"It is not a despicable one."

"Are you quite satisfied to be able to shoe horses?"

"It is far better to be a good blacksmith than a bad poet or an incompetent prime minister."

"Meaning that you would rather succeed in the little thing than fail in the great?"

"With your permission, I will smoke," said I.

"A really good one," she went on, nodding her head, "surely it is no nobler to be a great failure rather than a mean success?"

"Success is very sweet, Charman, even in the smallest thing; for instance," said I, pointing to the cottage door that stood open beside her, "when I built that door, and saw it swing on its hinges, I was as proud of it as though it had been—"

"That, obviating the necessity of a continuation of your approval in the final election on April 24 I will to the best of my ability endeavor to carry out your wishes in the administration of whatever work I may be called upon to perform."

I respectfully solicit your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR W. SHARP.

TO THE ELECTORS OF THE City of St. John

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am naturally very much gratified with the hearty support which you have tendered me in the primary election. To those who so generously supported me I desire to extend my thanks, and to the voters as a whole I wish to say that if favored with a continuation of your approval in the final election on April 24 I will to the best of my ability endeavor to carry out your wishes in the administration of whatever work I may be called upon to perform.

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SYNOPSIS OF CANADIAN NORTH-WEST LAND REGULATIONS

The sole head of a family, or any male over 18 years of age, may homestead a quarter-section of available Dominion land in eight of the provinces of Canada. The applicant must appear in person at the District Office, or by proxy, for the purpose of making a declaration of intention to settle on the land. The land must be in the Dominion Lands Agency, and not in the hands of a private owner.

Duties—Six months residence upon cultivation of the land in each of three years after settling homestead. Nine miles of his homestead on a farm of at least 40 acres on certain conditions. A habitable house is required except where residence is performed in the vicinity.

In certain districts a homesteader in good standing may pre-empt a quarter-section alongside his homestead. Price \$20.00 per acre. The homesteader must reside on the land for six months in each of three years after settling homestead. Duties—Must reside six months in each of three years after settling homestead. A habitable house is required except where residence is performed in the vicinity.

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W. W. COBY, C. M. G., Deputy of the Minister of Interior.

R.—Unauthorized publication of this advertisement will not be paid for—\$100.

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Coal mining rights of the Dominion, in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories and in a portion of the Province of British Columbia, may be leased for a term of twenty-one years renewable for a further term of 21 years at an annual rental of \$1 an acre. Not more than 2,560 acres will be leased to one applicant.

Application for a lease must be made by the applicant in person to the Agent or Sub-Agent of the district in which the rights are to be leased.

In surveyed territory the land must be divided into sections, and in unsurveyed territory the tract applied for shall be staked out by the applicant himself.

Each application must be accompanied by a fee of \$5 which will be refunded if the rights applied for are not available, but not otherwise. A royalty shall be paid on the merchantable output of the mine, to be determined by the Agent or Sub-Agent of the district in which the rights are to be leased.

The person operating the mine shall furnish the Agent or Sub-Agent with a return for the full quantity of coal mined and pay the royalty thereon. If the coal mining rights are not being operated, such returns should be furnished at least once a year.

The lease will include the coal mining rights only, reserved by Chapter 57 of 1-3 George V. assented to 12th June, 1914. For full information application should be made to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Ottawa or to any Agent or Sub-Agent of Dominion Lands.

Deputy Minister of the Interior.

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Oranges Oranges

Landing, five cars new crop California Navel Oranges.

A. L. GOODWIN

APPLES

Apples for sale at

JAMES PATTERSON,

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St. John, N. B.

BELTING

Our new improved Rubber Belting is made to take the place of Leather Belting for small pulleys. Dampness or moisture, of course, does not affect it. Rubber Belting, of all widths and sizes—the high grade kinds, Belting made to special order.

ESTES & CO., No. 49 Dock Street.

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