

The Eyes of the Panther

A fate inexpressibly sad has befallen a young girl student of the University of California—a fate inexpressibly sad and strange to weirdness.

Miss Pearl Wagner, a sweet, gentle girl, a co-ed in last year's freshman class, has gone raving mad from fright at being pursued by a panther.

Here is a story of real life, a happening of today that is a parallel of Ambrose Bierce's weird tale "The Eyes of a Panther."

Four years ago Mr. Bierce wove into the warp of knowledge the woof of imagination with the shuttle of art and produced that strange tale of the panther's eyes. Four years ago it was printed in the Sunday Examiner. If you read it then no doubt you remember it now, for it is one of those tales that burn into the memory.

In that tale he relates a woman's awful, maddening experience with a panther alone in a cabin in the untamed wilderness—not quite alone, but worse; with her babe, and unprotected.

This incident is, as it were, the prologue to his story, and he tells it thus:

"One morning in mid-summer Marlowe took down his rifle from the wooden hooks on the wall and signified his intention of getting game."

At nightfall he had not returned. The woman prepared supper and waited. Then she put baby to bed and sang softly to her until she slept. By this time the fire on the hearth, at which she had cooked supper, had burned out and the room was lighted by a single candle.

This she afterward placed in the open window as a sign of welcome to the hunter if he should approach from that side. She had thoughtfully closed and barred the door against such wild animals as might prefer it to an open window—of the habits of beasts of prey on entering a house she was not advised, though with true female prevision she may have considered the possibility of their entrance by way of the chimney.

As the night wore on she became not less anxious, but more drowsy, and at last rested her arms upon the bed by the child and her head upon the arms. The candle in the window burned down to the socket, sputtered and flared a moment and went out unobserved, for the woman slept.

She awoke, trembling in the darkness of her cabin in the wood.

As a sense of her actual surroundings came slowly back to her she felt for the child and assured herself that all was well with it; nor could she forbear to pass a hand lightly across its face. Then, moved by some impulse for which she probably could not have accounted, she rose and took the sleeping babe in her arms, holding it close against her breast. The head of the child's cot was against the wall to which the woman now turned her back as she stood. Lifting her eyes she saw two bright objects staring the darkness with a reddish-green glow. She took them to be two coals on the hearth, but with her returning sense of direction came the disquieting consciousness that they were not in that quarter of the room, moreover were too high, being nearly at the level of her eyes—of her own eyes. For these were the eyes of a panther.

The beast was at the open window, directly opposite and not five paces away. Nothing but those terrible eyes were visible, but in the dreadful summit of her feelings, as the situation disclosed itself to her understanding, she somehow knew that the animal was standing on its hinder feet, supporting itself with its paws on the window ledge. That signified a malign interest—not the mere gratification of an indolent curiosity. The consciousness of the attitude was an added horror, accentuating the menace of those awful eyes, in whose steadfast fire her strength and courage were alike consumed. Under their silent questioning she shuddered and turned sick. Her knees failed her, and by degrees, instinctively striving to avoid a sudden movement that might bring the beast upon her, she sank to the floor, crouched against the wall, and tried to shield the babe with her trembling body without withdrawing her gaze from the luminous orbs that were killing her. No thought of her husband came to her in her agony—no hope or suggestion of rescue or escape. Her capacity for thought and feeling had narrowed to the dimensions of a single emotion—fear of the animal's spring, of the impact of its body, the bulleting of its great arms, the feel of its teeth in her throat, the mauling of her babe. Motionless now and in absolute silence she awaited her doom, the moments growing to hours, to

years, to ages; and still those devilish eyes maintained their watch.

"Returning to his cabin late at night, with a deer on his shoulder, Charles Marlowe tried the door. It did not yield. He knocked; there was no answer. He laid down his deer and went round to the window. As he turned the angle of the building he fancied he heard a sound as of stealthy footfalls and a rustling in the undergrowth of the forest, but they were too slight for certainty, even to his practiced ear. Approaching the window and, to his surprise, finding it open, he threw his leg over the sill and entered. He groped his way to the fireplace, struck a match and lit a candle. Then he looked about. Cowering on the floor against a wall was his wife, clasping his child. As he sprang towards her she broke into laughter, long, loud and mechanical, devoid of gladness and devoid of sense. The laughter that is not out of keeping with the clanking of a chain. Hardly knowing what he did he extended his arms. She laid the babe in them. It was dead—passed to death in its mother's embrace."

So runs the experience of that unprotected woman in the lone cabin in the wilderness in Mr. Bierce's tale.

In real life:

Miss Pearl Wagner, who has been driven mad by her fear of a panther, lives just across the bay, an hour's journey from San Francisco, with her sister and her sister's family, in a big, roomy, modern, well-to-do home at Peralta Heights.

She is a young girl, not yet twenty.

She is a graduate of the Berkeley High School and was accredited to the University of California. She was a bright and enthusiastic high-school girl, standing well in her classes and taking an active interest in the clubs and social doings of the school.

Last year she entered the freshman class at Berkeley.

She was a pretty girl, gentle, amiable, sweet, sensitive and fragile. Her prettiness and gentleness and amiability made her popular, and she was welcomed to share in all the gaiety of student life. She was ambitious, too; so, what with her studies, and what with the going about that a Varsity girl must do, there was a greater strain on her than on one such fragile, sensitive, high-strung little maid could stand. She came out at the end of the term very pale and thin and nervous, and there was a family council at which it was decided that Pearl, must go to the mountains and build up; that she must let books and ambitions and schoolgirl worries alone and just loaf and ride about the mountains and get sound and strong and sunburned. So she was packed off to her father's mine up near Colville, in Trinity county, and told to come home fat and happy.

That was at the beginning of vacation.

She did her best to obey, and all went well. She was given a horse to ride; a horse she admitted to her sister she was secretly afraid of, but with girlish pride she wouldn't show the white feather, and rode him whenever she had occasion to go about.

The camp is wild and lonely. The howling of the coyotes and the strange cries of wild animals of the wood tore the stillness of the night and troubled her with fears she tried to laugh away in the daylight.

Yet all went well with her—until that day a month ago.

She ate the midday dinner that is the custom of the camp, and then, having a visit to make, she rode away over the mountain road. She mounted gaily, laughed a cheery good-bye and galloped away in a cloud of dust.

Two hours later she was found by a party of men riding out from the camp. They met her, to their great surprise, a couple of miles out from camp on the narrow, rough, dangerous mountain road that is little more than a trail. Her horse was plunging madly along, she was clinging to his mane and neck, disheveled, panic-stricken, wide-eyed with terror, with foam on her lips.

There was foam, blood-flecked, on her horse's mouth, too. He was in a tather, his sides were heaving; his eyes starting from their sockets. When his fragile little rider was lifted down he dashed away and was not seen again for two days.

Very tenderly she was lifted from the saddle and taken to camp, where she lay unconscious for a long time, only to awake to delirium in which she babbled incessantly.

The day was very hot and it was

believed that she had suffered a sunstroke.

A man rode fifty miles to call a doctor. The women of the camp nursed her tenderly, but she only grew worse. Reason did not return and she babbled day and night of her school days, her university days and even of the old familiar things of her little girlhood; but ever, also, of her fears and of a pursuing panther— shrieking, crouching, apprehending in terror, crying out to be saved.

As soon as she could be moved she was brought away from the camp and taken to her sister's home at Peralta Park.

There she recognized her sister, her sister's little children, all the members of the family, the friends who called to see her. She seemed better and was rational at times. At these times she tried to tell the story of that ride.

Little by little her sister pieced it together.

"I went out," she told her sister, "and I rode the horse I had, although in my heart I was afraid of him, and he knew I was afraid of him. It made me nervous to ride him, but it was so hot that I would rather do that than walk. While I was riding along I saw a snake in the road and that made me more nervous. And then, and then I saw a panther above me on the bank by the roadside, and the panther followed and I could not get away from it and the horse went wild with fear, and I just hung on and the horse ran and—"

"And when she gets that far," says her sister, "she gets so excited and talks so fast and so wild and her eyes stare so, and she seems so terribly frightened, that no one can follow what she says or make it out. She just loses all control of herself and breaks down."

"Sometimes," her sister says, "she insists that the panther got at her and tore her stomach out, and for that reason she can't eat."

"At night, when she hears the dogs bark or any of the eerie cries or sounds of the night, she falls into a frenzy of fear."

"When she hears the baby cry"—you know a panther's cry is like the wail of a little child—"she tells me sharply not to let it cry, to take it up at once, as though she can't endure the sound, and she wants to make sure it is the baby."

All the fears that a consciously powerless, sensitive, high-strung, timid girl would have with such a danger lurking velvet-footed, in the wood, ever on her flank, ever watchful-eyed, ever malignant, ever ready to spring, to tear, to kill—all such fears were hers. And again and again, by day and by night, she lives over the terrors of that agonizing ride. By day and by night she sees again those hungry, pursuing, relentless, shining eyes upon her; she sees that sinuous, tawny form gliding nearer and nearer behind the trees; she sees it crouching, ready to spring; she feels the cruel claws sinking into her tender flesh; she feels her last despairing cry stifled by the closing of the snapping jaws on her throat.

Again and again she lives it over, and when the spasms of fear pass she is her gentle, soft-smiling self again. She can sit at the piano and play for half an hour her most difficult music. She can select the score from the scattered pile of music, and read it as rapidly as ever she could, and as accurately; she can detect the faults of execution and lead the good-natured laugh at them.

While I was talking with her sister she came voluntarily into the room, moved perhaps by a little girlish curiosity—a tall, slight wisp of a girl, very, very pale, with troubled, puzzled eyes, hair close cropped like a boy's, and the flickering half smile of an uncertain child—and gave me a thin, icy-cold hand in greeting. Then she sat down and straightway forgot me.

In her quiet hours she is vaguely conscious of some change in herself, of her spasms of fear, and she asks her sister:

"What is the matter with me? Am I insane? Do you think I am becoming insane?"

And as often as she asks the sister answers: "There is nothing—at least there is very little the matter with you. You have been very sick and you are getting over that sickness now. You are not insane. You will be all right soon—if you will be good and do what you are told to do."

For a little while this contented her.

She doesn't worry about going to the university. She has comprehended that the new term has begun; that her classmates are back, but she shows no impatience or regret about that. Yet, every now and then the old anxiety, the old distrust of herself that has pervaded her illness, comes up, and she asks the question again:

"Am I insane? Am I becoming insane?"

She tries to do little things about the house in her old way, but physical weakness and mental obscurity stay the wandering, eager hands, and presently she forgets everything again in the returning memory of that awful ride, and needs to be comforted.

"We hope," the sister told me of the day of my visit, "and the doctors tell us to hope. They tell us not to be impatient, that these things take time, and that the quiet and the balminess of Peralta Heights may restore her."

When I looked back at the family group on the veranda to make my last farewell the young girl who had been so wrecked by her awful experience sat in a rocking chair laughing heartily and appreciatively with the rest of the family at the antics of two small nephews on a hobby-horse.

Then it seemed that the sister might well hope, and the doctors whisper encouragement.

Forty-eight hours later the poor little tortured slip of a girl was a raving maniac, with the doctors saying she is hopelessly mad, with her family sadly consenting to her removal to an asylum; with a future before her, at the age of twenty, to be spent in futile, frantic flight from a slinking, haunting, pad-footed, "The eyes of the panther" had tawny, gleaming-eyed enemy.

done their evil work.—Helen Dare in Examiner.

The Happiest Woman.

Probably few women of her generation touched a larger circle of friends and acquaintances than Mrs. Fanny Kemble Butler. Her selection, therefore, of the person whom, looking back over seventy years of her life, she unhesitatingly described as the "happiest human being" she had ever known, is a remarkable choice.

Adelaide Decamp—"Aunt Dill," as she became later to all who knew and loved her—was a sister of Mrs. Charles Kemble, Mrs. Butler's mother. She inherited her share of the family beauty, and obliged, like the rest of the family, to earn her own living, turned naturally to the stage.

She found employment with Mr. Stephen Kemble, at that time manager of a theater at Durham, and Stephen Kemble's beautiful daughter Frances became her inseparable companion.

It was a simple, light-hearted life that the two girls led, making pies and puddings, patching, darning, and devising their own gowns in the morning, merrily changing to painted heroines at night, and meeting hard work and easy alike with unflinching gaiety.

Then suddenly life took a deeper note. Two young officers fell in love with the two young country actresses. Frances Kemble in a short time married Robert Arkwright, and went to a life whose luxury never spoiled her sweet sincerity.

There was to be no ease or luxury for her laughter-loving comrade, Adelaide's suitor cruelly disinherited and disgraced by his father, went to India, and she never saw him again, and Adelaide herself left the stage and went to her sister's home.

Almost a lifetime later her niece, so well known as Fanny Kemble, wrote of her:

"My aunt began her new life with a bitter bankruptcy of love and friendship, happiness and hope, that would have dried the sap of every sweet affection, and made even goodness barren in many a woman's heart forever. Without any home but my father's house, without means of subsistence but the small pittance which he was able to give her in his most grateful acknowledgment of her unremitting care of us, without any joys or hopes but those of others, she spent her whole life in the service of my parents and their children, and lived and moved and had her being in a serene, unclouded, unvarying atmosphere of cheerful, self-forgetful content that was heroic in its absolute unconsciousness.

"I have never seen either man or woman like her in her humble excellence, and I am thankful that, knowing what the circumstances of her whole life were, she yet seems to me the happiest human being I have ever known."

A homely, commonplace story; and the secret is homely and commonplace, too, but one cannot repeat it too often. The source of true happiness is neither love nor fame, wisdom nor wealth, but self-forgetful service for others.—Youth's Companion.

Mr. Moody's Picture

At the time of the great fire in Chicago, Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, was living in that city, and had just returned to his home for a night's rest when the call came for him and his neighbors to hurry away. The fire had crossed the river and was rapidly advancing.

It was too late to think of removing any heavy articles, but one thing Mrs. Moody determined to save—a portrait of her husband, presented to him by the artist, Healy. This she prized above everything else the house contained. A stranger who had entered the room helped her to take it down from the wall. Then the wife called her husband and begged him to save it for her.

Notwithstanding the horror of the situation and the increasing terrors of the night, the ludicrous side of the matter at once appealed to Mr. Moody.

"Take my own picture!" said he. "Well, that would be a great joke. Suppose somebody meets me in the street and says, 'Hello, Moody, glad you've escaped! What's that you've saved and are clinging to so affectionately?' Wouldn't it sound well to answer, 'Oh, I've got my own portrait!'"

No entreaty could move him; the canvas was hastily knocked off its heavy frame and carried by Mrs. Moody herself. It was the relic rescued from their home.

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