

For The Land We Live In.

### Tales Around the Camp Fire. No. 2.

By CAPTAIN CHAS. A. J. FARRAR.

Sitting around the camp-fire on the shore of Sturdivant Cove, at the head of Umbagog Lake, one evening a number of years ago, the Colonel proposed that we should shorten the time that would intervene before retiring, by story telling, and that each member should relate some episode in his life. 'That's a good idea, Colonel,' replied the Judge, 'and as the Captain very kindly gave us a lead from his experience the other evening, we shall be pleased to hear you spin a yarn to-night.' 'Yes, Colonel,' added the Schoolmaster in the party, 'your proposition is a good one. Don't be afraid to back it up. Therefore we look to you to entertain us to-night, and you may as well begin at once.' And the paragon, having delivered himself of his opinion in the decided way in which he was in the habit of addressing his scholars, settled back on the pile of cedar boughs on which he reclined, into an easier position, and prepared to listen, again puffing away at his pipe, and sending large wreaths of smoke circling upward into illimitable space.

'When I made the proposition I did not expect to take the initiative,' answered the Colonel, looking at his friends with a quiet smile, 'but if you say so I suppose I must.'

'You are in for it, Colonel, go ahead,' added the Doctor, as he threw several sticks on the fire to increase the fading light.

The Colonel sat quiet and thought for a few minutes, running over in his mind the events of his past life, and then began.

'I suppose that at some period in his life every man has a narrow escape from death, and my life has not been an exception, for at one time I came very near slipping off this mortal coil, without having a voice in the matter.'

'Ah,' said the Doctor, 'we are to have a war reminiscence.'

'You are wrong, Doctor,' corrected the Colonel, laughing, 'my war stories have all been worn thread bare; and the events I am about to relate happened several years before the rebellion, when I was a young man in my twenties.'

'When you was young and foolish,' suggested the Judge, poking his friend in the ribs.

'I will plead guilty to being young at the time, but whether foolish or not my story shall decide.'

'At the time of which I speak, I was traveling in the Western States as an Insurance Agent for the C— Fire Insurance Company of New York.'

'And they fired you out on a trip once in a while, broke on the pedagogue.'

'No interruptions,' exclaimed the one merchant in the party, who had sat quietly listening all the while.

'On this particular day,' resumed the Colonel, 'I was in the Western part of the State of M—. About seven o'clock that evening, after riding hard all day, I pulled up before a large log cabin that stood a short distance from the road. Leaping from my horse, and fastening him to a post hard by, I went up to the house and knocked at the door. My signal was answered by a dark, coarse-featured, repulsive looking man, apparently about forty years of age. I respectfully inquired my whereabouts, and how far it was to the next village, for, to tell the truth, I had lost my way, and was in a state of bewildering uncertainty as to where I then was.'

'Guess it's about ten miles, stranger,' was the reply, 'but I think 'twill rain before you git thar. Just look at the clouds yonder!'

'I glanced at the heavens, and there, sure enough, was a mass of murky, ominous looking clouds scudding through the sky.

'My business had occupied my thoughts so much during my ride, that I had not

taken particular notice of the weather, and I was greatly surprised to notice the sudden atmospherical change that had taken place.

'You had better stop with me to-night, stranger,' resumed my would-be host, 'for it will be a bad night to be out, a tremendous tough storm 'cordin' to my way o' thinkin'. My accommodations ain't quite so good as you'll find at the village, but you're welcome to such as they are.'

'I hardly knew whether it was best for me to remain or not, for up in my person I had some five thousand dollars, which I was somewhat distrustful of the man's honesty—his appearance being by no means attractive—might prove so in case of a crime. It was a wild, dreary looking place where the cabin was located, far away from any other settlement, and seeming, to my eyes, a fitting place for deeds of darkness.'

'I was suspicious—I always am of strangers—and I had half resolved to mount my steed and brave the tempest, when a sharp flash of lightning, and the reverberation of distant thunder, assured me the storm was close at hand, and I decided to stay.'

'Saying that he would care for my horse, the man desired me to enter the house, where I would find his wife, who would render me such services as I might wish.

'Valise in hand I entered.

'Ye imps of purgatory! of all the vile, hideous looking bags on which my eyes ever rested, that man's wife was the culmination, but it would have required the pencil of a Dore to have delineated her features in all their classic ugliness.

'This specimen of humanity had an expression that denoted even to the most casual observer, an amount of latent evil, but seldom found in a human being. Perhaps her appearance prejudiced me against her; at any rate I resolved to be wary, and trust not implicitly to her tokens of friendship, should she proffer any.'

'Didn't feel inclined to mash her, did you, Colonel?' laughed the Doctor.

'No, he felt inclined to smash her,' put in the Judge, quickly.

Without noticing the interruption the Colonel continued.

'Previous to my entering the cabin, the man, upon whose hospitality I was thus, as it were, thrust, had remarked that as his wife was somewhat deaf, I should have to exert myself to make her hear.

'The furniture of the apartment was in keeping with its occupants. A table standing uneasily upon three legs, two or three dilapidated chairs, a trunk or chest in one corner, and fragment of a looking glass, completed the visible portion of the furniture of the establishment.

'As I did not feel much like talking, especially to a deaf person, I sat still and watched the old woman get supper.

'Just as it was ready in came my host with my saddle-bags. I told him to put them on the floor, and asked him if he had taken care of my horse properly.

'He replied in the affirmative, and after he had doffed his jacket and hat asked me to sit down to supper.

'By this time it had begun to rain, and it poured down as if the fountains of heaven were opened. While we were eating supper the man asked me my name, where I was from last, and many other questions.

'When we had finished the repast, I looked at my watch and found it was almost nine o'clock, and as I was greatly fatigued, I asked my host to show me to my room.'

'Lighting a candle, he led the way into a wash room, where I followed him, having first taken my saddle-bags and valise.

'After entering the room, he said 'you'll have to sleep in the loft overhead, as myself and the old woman uses this place.'

'A ladder led to the loft overhead. We ascended this primitive stairway, opened the trap-door, and stepped into the loft. My host set down the candle, and with a short 'good night,' immediately retired, closing the trap-door as he descended the ladder.

'For a moment after he had departed I stood irresolute, the aspect of things looked dubious. I could not understand why the blood rushed through my system with such velocity, or why a feeling so near akin to fear disturbed my whole being. It was very much such a feeling as I experienced on the eve of my first battle while in the army.

'I glanced around the gloomy apartment. The accommodations for sleeping were not of the best. Such as they were, however, I was forced to content myself with, and wearied and tired I endeavored to compose myself to sleep. Notwithstanding my resolve to maintain a strict vigilance over the movements of those below me, I soon lost consciousness, my head resting upon the valise containing my money. I may have slept for hours—the exact time I had no means of determining—I only know that after a restless, broken slumber, in which visions of evil constantly haunted me, I awoke from my rest. My candle had expired, all was darkness within the attic. The rain still pattered upon the roof with a dull, dismal murmur, while great drops would find their way in upon me. All seemed dreary; the dreariness of death; nothing to relieve the monotony of the hour.

'Suddenly beneath me I heard a movement, then voices, and then I could distinguish my host and her he called his wife, in conversation. I listened intently, not with the idea of eaves dropping, but with an intense conviction that I was the subject of their conversation. Every respiration of my lungs was made carefully. I dared not breathe. Doubt, uncertainty, apprehension, all crowded at once upon my mind. I am not a nervous or excitable man; but the equivocal situation in which I was placed made the great, beaded drops of perspiration start to my forehead.

'He's got money, Nan, and we can just split his weazen same as the others,' uttered the man in a cold, reckless, blood-thirsty manner.

'Same as the others,' I mentally soliloquized, 'ah, then I am not the first one.'

'Spouse ye'll knife him then,' responded the deaf woman, in an indifferent manner, while it occurred to me that her hearing had grown wonderfully acute in a few hours.

'I alters does my jobs up right,' was the business like answer.

'There's no doubt but that he's the Insurance Agent?'

'None at all; I tracked him from C—, and should have drawn his claret afore, but sumthin' seemed alters to prevent.'

'A cold shiver ran over me, as I realized that the shadow of death had hung over me for many hours.

'Five thousand dollars, you said?' musically queried the woman, as it calculating the magnitude of the sum.

'Yes, I'm sure of it.'

'Then,' and her words were fearfully emphatic, 'I wyl knife him!'

'A mist appeared to enshroud my brain, a haze came over my faculties, as I heard the man answer as decidedly:

'I shall do it!'

'While I was startled at the summary manner in which they had determined to dispose of me, I could not help congratulating myself on my ability to defeat their plans. As quietly as possible I rose from my couch and examined my pistols. They were loaded, capped, and ready for use.

'Then I anxiously awaited farther demonstrations.

'A moment or two later I heard steps ascending the ladder, and then the trap door was gently raised, cautiously it was opened wide. Then I heard a body creeping stealthily along toward my bed. I nerved myself up and awaited the result. The storm had suddenly ceased, and the silence was painful. At that moment a ray of moon light shone in through a crack in the roof, while simultaneously the villain raised his knife, and then with the muscular force of a brawny arm it descended into—the bed clothes, at that instant I discharged my pistol at

my would be murderer. A groan, a brief struggle, and all was over. Descending into the lower apartment I found it unoccupied. The croon, hearing the report of my pistol, had fled, whither I knew not; and from that day to this I have never heard what became of her.

'The following morning after this tragic event, which resulted so fortunately for me, I resumed my journey, sending back from a neighboring town, assistance to see that the body was properly interred.

'Comrades, my story is ended, and I am going to turn in.'

'So say we all of us,' sang the Judge, as the circle broke up for that night.

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