

Haunted by Fear

Written for the Western Home Monthly, by W. R. Gilbert

I HAD gone to Le Croisic to recruit. My doctor told me (though I did not believe him) that I had been overworking; anyway, I found myself in the little Breton fishing village at the beginning of a coldish June. I suppose, as a matter of fact, I must have been a bit run down, for almost at once I began to feel myself a different man. Ideas came readily and strongly instead of in wayward and useless flashes; I was able to take long walks and stand long nights out with the fishing-fleet; and soon I was writing happily, with the material under my eye.

And certainly Le Croisic was inspiring. The salt-marshes had a continual fascination for me. Those grey and scummy rectangular pools divided by broad, flat banks, stretching on and on until the ground rose to the church spire of Guerande, three miles away, had an unnamable mystery. In sunlight the domed or conical piles of salt looked like some strange primeval neoliths; when twilight crept stealthily across the plain they looked like the tents of a great army. There was a kind of sinister romance in those marais-salins, and at night one fancied that strange phantasms paraded there.

Then, in the little harbor, there were the graceful sardine-boats, with fine, pale blue nets hung from their masts to dry, which floated lightly and exquisitely in the air like briar veils. And there was always the moving life of the little port, the aloof fishermen, queerly garbed in yellow and blue, the garrulous fisherwomen, immaculately neat and white-capped, and, as a kind of pulse of the community, at intervals of two hours, the summoning-bell of the poissoniere.

There was only one other Englishman in my hotel, and, indeed, I saw no other about the neighborhood. We exchanged a casual word or two now and then, but he did not appear anxious to get on closer terms, nor, for the matter, was I. Moreover, he always sat at a table by himself near the window, and appeared to keep a wary eye upon the quay and the passers-by. It was as though he were always looking for someone, not with eagerness, but with a kind of fixed expectancy. This rather got on my nerves, and I, also, fell to watching. Possibly I thought Le Croisic guarded a mystery.

All at once he became more friendly, and invited me to sit at his table. I learnt that his name was Rosewarne, that he had travelled widely, and that he had come to Le Croisic to study certain marine flora. I also discovered that at times he suffered from an almost intolerable stress of nerves. He was a picturesque and fluent talker, but at these times he would make long and painful pauses, fall upon a word, and stare before him with stricken eyes. Once when I tried to help him back to the subject, he rose abruptly and fled from the room. At that moment a newcomer, obviously an Englishman, passed the window.

The next day Rosewarne asked me to walk with him, and we took the winding road across the salt-marshes. As we almost imperceptibly neared Guerande he took my arm and said abruptly—

"Have you ever been afraid?" The question was so unexpected that I paused and looked at him.

"Afraid? What do you mean? Afraid of what?"

"Have you ever been haunted by a great fear?"

"No," I said. "You mean, I suppose, an obsession, a fixed idea, possibly a delusion?"

"There can be no delusion about fear," he said emphatically. Then, as we moved on, "Listen. I shan't bore you. Thirty years ago I was in Rio. I was a youngster then, and no more business in Rio than anywhere else. I imagined I was going to do something. I imagined I had ambition. But I also had money; I've always had money, curse it."

"Well," I said, "you can get rid of that easily enough."

"Ah, but I've never been a fool, except the once I'm going to tell you about, and then I wasn't so much a fool as a madman." He stopped and looked about him, taking deep breaths of the salt-charged air. I confess that I was a little disturbed, uneasy; there was something queer about all this, and the immense solitude of the marshes weighed upon me. Only one other figure was in sight, that of a woman, whose body rose and bent rhythmically as she worked the wooden scraper over one of the dried salt pools. We moved on again.

"In Rio," Rosewarne continued, "I set out to see what I called life. And the adventurous spirit took me into strange, unholy places. One night I was in a cafe in a narrow street near the harbor; it was a clear night, and I remember three English warships lay in the harbor. The cafe was a low, riff-raff hole, but there was enough gilt and glass and velvet about it for a theatre. And there, because I was seeing life, God help me, I began to drink. I suppose the drink must have been damned bad; it soon began to hum on me. I happened to sit down at the same table as an Englishman—not one of my sort, but still I could talk to him. Even before I joined him I fancy he'd had enough, but he carried it well."

Rosewarne stood still again, and again breathed deeply. The sweat trickled from his forehead in great beads.

"We drank together, and toasted a girl who sat near. I can see her now. She just sat smiling, and watching us with eyes, great black eyes, that had a look of hell in them. She just watched, I tell you. Then we began to quarrel about her, and she watched, always smiling. All at once the man sprang at me, and I saw a flash of steel. I swung aside, and the knife fell. It was in my hand! I felt it strike into his body. I saw his white sneering face below me as he struggled, and on a devil's impulse I slashed him straight across from ear to nose. When the blood spurted—" He stood still again and leant heavily upon my shoulder. I did not care to look at his face.

"Well?" I said.

"No one had stirred in that accursed place; it was a game to them; the room was as quiet as this marsh. I got up and ran for my life."

"And you escaped?"

"There was nothing like a real hue-and-cry. Such things were not uncommon in that quarter, and I had a friend who knew the ropes. I was safely up country in a week."

"Did the man die?"

"No, he recovered. I took care to find that out."

"Well," I said, looking towards the spire of Guerande that seemed to float in the blue. "I don't see what you have to trouble about. The fellow made a murderous assault on you, and was hoist with his own petard. If you hadn't settled him he'd have been at you again."

"I know all that, I know all that," Rosewarne said in a tone that might have been petulant if it had not been so infinitely weary.

"Why on earth should you be afraid now after thirty years?"

"Don't you see?" he said, his breath labouring; "don't you see that somewhere about the world there's a man scarred from ear to nose searching for me? I had a right to defend my life, but not to make that devilish slash. And, my God, don't I know that some day he'll find me, and strike home? And I shall have no right to defend myself then."

"This is nonsense," I said, shivering nevertheless. "This is sheer nonsense. Its obsession, madness. Pull yourself together, throw it off. Probably the man's dead long ago."

"I'm not dead," he said bitterly, "and if he were, don't you suppose I should have known?"

BEST ENGLISH BOOTS

Direct from the Factory to You.

Boots of equal quality at such reasonable prices CANNOT possibly be obtained in any Canadian Store. To get the very best material and workmanship combined you MUST send your order by post to our Northampton (England) Factory, the very centre of the world's boot and shoe industry.

We guarantee to send you by return mail a pair of these magnificent boots immediately on receipt of remittance. All you have to do is to fill in the coupon and send to us with a Post Office Order, and no matter in what part of Canada you may live, the goods will be despatched to you without delay.

Every pair is a triumph of the bootmaker's art and a revelation in the matter of down-right solid value. Further, if you are not more than satisfied with your bargain, if you do not feel that the goods sent are worth double the amount we are asking for them, send them back at once and we will return your money in full and pay cost of postage in addition. Could anything be fairer?

FULL DESCRIPTION.

Boot No. 1651.—Splendid quality selected Box Calf Derby pattern, unbreakable backstrap, straight toe-cap as illustrated, leather lined throughout, specially selected hard-wearing solid leather soles, 1/2 inch, in thickness, sewn and stitched. Best make and finish throughout.

The "Barratt" System of Sizes

GENTLEMEN'S "Footshape"

Boots are made in eight different sizes: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 (size 12 25c. extra). Each size in four different widths: No. 3 (width for slender feet); No. 4 (medium); No. 5 (wide); No. 6 (extra wide).

HOW TO ORDER.—Fill in the attached Order Form, stating size (length), usually worn, then the width according to the shape of your foot. If narrow, order No. 3 width; if medium, No. 4 width; if wide, No. 5 width; if extra wide, No. 6 width.

SPECIAL NOTE.—Applications for Catalogues (which by the way will save pounds in your Boot Bill) should be sent to W. Barratt and Co., Ltd., Dept. WMBox, 101 P.O., Montreal, but all orders and remittances must be sent to—

W. BARRATT & CO., LTD.

Boot Manufacturers,

(Dept. WM), Footshape Works, NORTHAMPTON, ENGLAND.

Our 144 page Boot Catalogue will be sent free. Address: BARRATT & CO., LTD., Dept. WM Box 101 P.O., Montreal.

PRICE OF BOOTS \$2.75

POSTAGE 0.50

TOTAL REMITTANCE 3.25

Send this Coupon with your Order

COUPON.

To Messrs. W. BARRATT & Co., LTD., Northampton, Eng. Please forward one pair of All-Leather "Footshape" Boots, No. Size Width for which I enclose Postal Order Value Name Address Box Calf, \$ 3.25.

Parowax

(Pure Refined Paraffine)

is perfectly splendid. It makes linen spotlessly white without any hard, wearing rubbing. You really ought to try it.



Parowax is easy to use and inexpensive. One pound is enough for 16 boilers of wash. Full directions with every package.

Parowax is also invaluable for sealing jellies and preserves, forming an air-tight, mold-proof seal.



The Imperial Oil Co., Limited

Toronto	Montreal	Winnipeg
Vancouver	Edmonton	Saskatoon
Ottawa	Quebec	Calgary
Halifax	St. John	Regina

We have a few vacancies for subscription agents. The work is pleasant and profitable. Write us for particulars.