

# The Edge of the Dark

BY EMERSON TAYLOR

THE big-framed man who opened the door of the old house eyed my sketching kit with a look that was vaguely distrustful, even before I had ventured to ask him for a few days' board and lodging.

"Will you have the goodness," he demanded, all in a breath, but with the mildest intonation, "to tell a sufferin' soul who the never-mind-the-names fool was who gave you to understand I kept a spare-room in this house?"

I explained that I was an artist and was very eager to do some sketching on his land, but because the village was a long five miles off, would find it hard to go and come every day. And I added an offer for board which was large enough to tempt any landlord in New England.

"Come in," he said, enlarging the opening of the door. "But be so very kind as to remember that your stay under my roof is a temporary one, and you will be gone as soon as the why-speak-of-it clock strikes twelve on Friday proximo."

"All right, Mr. —"

"Brace is my name," he said quickly. "An uncommon kind of name, but different from the hull-until-to-be-mentioned rest of mankind, I bet! But come in 'n' choose where you'll sleep, if you have the habit."

So I closed with him, and a couple of hours later, after I had pitched my bed and umbrella down by the little river, near the soft grey willows, I could have sung from sheer happiness. My work went smoothly and effectively, and the afternoon spent in prospecting for other bits and corners of landscape I could use was delightful.

But from the moment I returned to the house for supper the face of things altered. I was beset with a curious restlessness, which went far to spoil what otherwise had been a perfect day. I came ever and anon, you'll say, fancying that your shadow was alive—a friendly companion who shared your good times? That is all very well, but unfortunately the shadow sometimes becomes a haunting bogey. Well, hardly had I come back to Brace's house before I became conscious that this latter sort of shadow thing was near me every moment. And what was worse, I never saw it. During supper I could feel a burning pair of eyes on me. Later, I was sure that somebody or something was looking in at the keyhole of my little bedroom; and when I tore open the door to catch him, I could swear that the spy or the shadow had just whisked out of sight round a corner or upstairs to the attic. In the middle of the night I awoke from a most horrid dream to catch a glimpse, as I thought in my half daze, of a shape which slipped noiselessly across the porch roof and down a pillar.

Brace heard the tale of my fancies with a laugh.

"Haunted, eh?" he cried. "Guess you've got a not-fit-to-be-mentioned bad conscience, ain't you? There ain't no evil here, not unless you've brought it in."

"Sure?" I asked, lightly, and to my surprise the man blazed up in red anger.

"You didn't see nor hear nothin'," he insisted, "then I'll be damned, and went off into a long, rambling account of himself and his fortunes, perhaps to divert my overstrained attention. I grew interested enough to hazard the guess that at some time or other he had followed the same track as the mark the forest-leave on a man forever."

"Think so?" he grunted. "Well, there was a mate on three or four tramp steamers. Specially on the Sagamore. Oh, you there was a plenty good mate on her. Speakin' of which and all, ain't it most time for you to get out 'n' art some?"

"You're right, Mr. Brace." And I stood up.

He followed my example instantly. "Say," he confided, lowering his voice, "I didn't mean to be cross just now. But, my beloved brother, don't—don't go round sayin' there's ghosts in this house. It's things like that make scandal in the neighborhood, and besides, it ain't comfortin' for a man to hear what has to live by himself."

I promised with a laugh, for, to tell the truth, I was a good bit ashamed of my foolish notion, now that by daylight what I had been at work on had ceased their watch. But when I had gone to work in the open, the certain knowledge came back—call it instinct, what you will—that The Eyes were once more following my every motion. It wasn't a case of nerves, for I was never nervous in my life; it wasn't imagination, for I haven't any. All that day, and the next, and the one after that, that shadowy thing followed me afar off, I knew, until Friday morning found me tired out and unfit for anything like decent work.

It occurred to me, however, since I hate to let a day go by without making at least some little study or sketch, that a possible place of refuge could be Brace's cow stable. No ghost would be likely to walk there, for sure; and Brace's magnificent Holstein bull was an interesting subject for a painter like myself, much interested in cattle as material for pictures. I had no great heart for the work, to be sure; but at least it would fill some of the time I had left before my departure at noon.

To reach the stall where Mr. Bull was waiting to have his portrait painted, I had to walk down a passage some twenty feet or more, the length of the well-lighted, dingy cow-shed, so that, as I sat painting, my back was to the entrance. It was a kind of blind alley, you understand, ending in the rough pen where lay the bull, with no exit whatever, unless you retraced your steps to the door. Well, I had been at work an hour or so, I suppose. At any rate, my sketch had begun to take pretty definite shape. The great black and white beast, the yellow-gray straw, the darker woodwork, were all set down; all the thing needed was to be "pulled together," when suddenly, right in the midst of my good time, I heard somebody open and shut the door behind me. I supposed it was Brace, and kept at work.

"Hello!" I cried. "Come and have a look."

But when no answer came I sprang to my feet and faced about. It was not Brace. It was a giant of a boy that stood there, filthy and terrible to look at, with his mat of clotted hair and torn clothes, the gray dirt on

his feet and face. But the worst thing about him was not his empty yet cunning madman's eye, but the fact that he stole along by the wall with his enormous hands crooked and outstretched, as though ready to tear or squeeze.

"Stand back!" I yelled, catching up my stool. I tell you that my stock of courage was bankrupt, all right. "Clear out!"

"Why did you look round?" he complained, whinnying, dropping his ugly hands. "They always look round, too soon—all chickens. But some day," he went on in that uncanny croon of his— "Ah, this way!"

For his restless eye had caught sight of a hen which had strayed into the cowshed and was now jerking and picking its way along the passage. And instantly, with a chuckle, he turned from me and went to stalking her. It sounds silly enough when I tell it, but, by heaven! it was wicked to see until with a horrid yell he pounced upon his prey. Then I looked away, faint and sick.

He came back, rubbing his hands on his shirt.

"I'm good," he announced, dropping down by my easel. "Make another bossy picture, I like pictures. I saw you make them outdoors, chicken. But you were always looking round, so's I couldn't get you. Make a picture now."

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Right there is where I ought to have picked up my traps and gone back to town—on foot, if need be. My time was nearly up, anyhow, for I had asked the rural-delivery man to have a town scout out from the village at noon, and it lacked only a little of that hour. But I was extremely curious as to what that

you may be sure. "He strays over here from the Neck Road, Bill does, lookin' for the Right One, whatever that is. Seems like he likes to kill chickens. He's what folks round here call a harmless."

"I don't like the way he carries his hands, then," I retorted. "Nor the look in his eye when he's sneaking up behind a human being." And I told him my tale. "The brute meant to strangle me," I concluded hoily.

"Him? You're nervous. And—say, this little affair may be a secret between us, eh? After you get back to town, Bill's folks 'd feel awful about his gittin' out o' bounds this way."

Of course I agreed. This tale would not have been told at all unless certain things had happened, which, so far as I can see, quite released me from my promise.

Brace followed his queer chattering out into the yard, with me at his heels, and with a comforting wink in my direction, he started off with him round the house, ostensibly down the road. But it seemed to me that the two of them disappeared with strange rapidity, and I thought I heard in the upper part of the house something like a scuffle and a shout of laughter. But I stayed where I was, struck by a sudden scruple, born perhaps of the man's rough tenderness for his helpless son, for such I was sure the boy must be.

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"And the kittens," he added, solemnly.

Blank silence again, I listening to the noise of the rain and wishing I was home, Brace sitting with his eyes fastened on the door, the two of us talking about nothing at all. For perhaps an hour we sat there, when suddenly I was rescued from the depths of utter boredom by a short rap on the door.

"Rap, rap, rap, it went, and then twice again.

"Leave the room!" said Brace to me, curtly. But the next second he cried: "Stay here. I'd rather you did."

Rap, rap, rap, and then two more of them.

The rain was roaring on the roof. Brace sat perfectly still. Only his hand travelled to his coat pocket, and I distinctly heard the click of a revolver being cocked—or thought I did, at any rate.

"Would you mind openin' the door?" he asked blandly. "You're next to it. It's probably the man from Clinton way about the bull."

But it was no farm-rod specimen who stood on the porch, dripping, before the door. Even in the darkness I could see that he was a squarely built Portugee-looking chap, with little earrings and he was asking if this was where Meestare Brace lived.

At his answer he sighed happily, and his teeth flashed in the widest of smiles. "I'm some so far to a see heem!" said the visitor, plaintively.

"Let him in!" came from Brace at that moment, and the stranger passed me, drawing from his pocket a letter addressed but not stamped. There was scrawled on it a rude drawing of a skull and cross-bones.

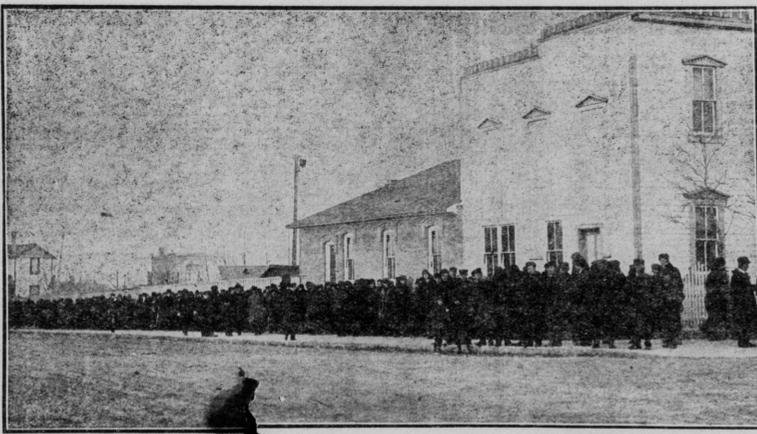
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## Seekers for Free Land



Landseekers lined up at the Lethbridge Dominion Lands Office



The Homesteader's Rush at Lethbridge. Only a Brick Wall Separates Them From the Coveted Place at the Desk

Never did I do anything quite so quickly as picking up my palette and brushes. And nobody knows what kind of a reason for being shipped off at noon on that particular day. And to cap all, there had started in one of those fine northeast rains which evidently was going to prevent a team coming for me, after all, as I decided about one o'clock.

"I'm afraid I've got to stay a little longer," I said to my host.

"Well, why not?"

"I thought you wanted to get rid of me today," I could not help remarking. "I supposed you were expecting some other guest."

That was purest guesswork on my part; but Brace started as though stung. "Who'd you think'd come to see me?" he growled. Had he forgotten what he had said to me on my arrival? It looked that way. He flushed a dull crimson, biting his lip under his beard.

"It may be a man'll come from over Clinton way," he added, slowly, his steady look daring me to question the truth of what he told me. "I—He talks of buyin' my bull."

The day dragged along slowly enough. I tried finally of seeing an imaginary criminal revealing himself in each of my host's stupid commonplace; tired of trying to get excited over the "mystery," for, after all, what mystery was there—connected with the man and his doings. And I think, too, that I was growing heartily sick of my self-appointed role of spy, when just after supper I noticed a fresh-looking, eight-ounce bottle standing on the mantel-shelf beside the clock, and idly enough asked what was in it.

"In that bottle?" he studied it as though trying to recall where he had ever seen anything like it before.

"Medicine?" I hazarded.

"Now what a lot of questions you can ask!" he exclaimed, not ill-naturedly. "That's chloroform, my son."

"For the cat?"

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I waited outside, thinking of the cocked revolver in Brace's pocket. And in my fancy I conjured up a picture of the interview between the two men—between the cruel mate of the Sagamore, the pirate chief, the thief, the leader of a gang, or what not, and a member of his cheated or revengeful crew. Something of the sort they must be—that pair in the little room, which was so very quiet. Nonsense, wasn't it, to believe any such foolishness about them! But—well, I've often wondered since what it was that Portugee really wanted, and why Brace had waited for him half in fear, half in eagerness, so very long. Why had he decided to let me stay near, after all, at the close of the waiting time?

The visitor came backing out of the door again.

"It must be so," he said, not threateningly at all, but as if merely stating a fact.

"All right," Brace answered, steadily. "Tell Smith I understand. Will you see him soon?" he added.

"Maybe in an hour."

"Maybe," said Brace. "Wait here a minute," he ordered, when the Portugee had vanished out into the rain and the dark, and then stepped out into the kitchen, whence a ladder led to the upper floor. In less than a minute he was back again. He stood over by the door, apparently listening. Unconsciously I glanced out the window, and what I saw there brought me to my feet. For there had crossed the light a huge figure. I did not see it distinctly—only enough to make me feel cold about my heart. But the figure moved at the same sneaking, sliding pace I had heard behind me that morning in the barn; and I had a glimpse of an eager, grinning mask.

"I must have eried out, for the first I knew Brace had pushed me back into my chair.

"Sit still," he growled. "What you makin' all that noise about?"

"The boy!" I cried, making for the

door. "I saw him. He'll do murder. Stop him, Brace."

But he held me back with an arm which felt like a bar of steel against my breast. For a moment I struggled desperately, fighting to warn that poor devil who was being tracked like a chicken out there in the night. But it was no use. The steel bar turned to a coil of wire rope, twisted round me, and jerked me across the room.

"I said," remarked Brace, smiling evilly, "for you to keep quiet."

"The boy!" I cried again.

"What do you mean?" he asked, coolly. "There's nobody left the house since the Portugee."

"Yes!"

"No!" he replied, his eyes narrowing.

"You—murderer!" For in a flash the whole of the man's villainy showed before me in letters of fire.

"Can you prove it, son?"

"You set the boy on him! You trained him to wait for the Right One!"

"In a court of law?" he continued, finishing his sentence composedly.

"I suppose you don't know anything about that bottle of chloroform, either?" I went on wildly. "It's lucky that Portugee didn't want to sleep here tonight. He'd have never waked up, you would! He's lucky to have even the chance he's got now. You—"

But I stopped short. Out of the darkness came a horrid yell of joy and a volley of laughter I heard in the stable.

For what seemed an hour we sat in frozen stricken silence. The roar of the rain was like thunder.

"I'm goin' out," said Brace, presently. "Wonder who it was that laughed just now," he added, game to the last.

"For God's sake, stay here!" Somehow I could not bear the thought of even this rascal's going out to meet that cruel, creeping shadow. "You mightn't turn round in time."

"I don't know what you mean," he answered, and with that black lie on his lips he resolutely stalked out into the night.

In an agony of fear and helplessness I waited alone. The noisy clock ticked off five, eight, eleven minutes; but still no sign of him. I watched the black square of window till my eyes ached; my heartbeats I could hear. Would Brace come back alone? Would—and I whirled round, stung sharply by some horrible presentiment, remembering that the door to the kitchen was unlocked.

And there he stood, with his cruel hands opening and shutting, his pale eyes aghast. There was no laughter in his face now. I darted behind the table, searching desperately for the least weapon. But by a foolish irony the only things my eyes lighted on in that whole room were the bottle of chloroform and my canvas-bound sketch-book. The idiot took a couple of steps toward me, grinning.

"I looked round!" I yelled, hoping against hope.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he laughed, tiptoeing over the table. "One I caught in the road. One I caught in the yard—a big one with a beard. And I'll catch you, too, chicken. Don't you run away. I'm strong—strong."

"Mighty strong!" I assented. "But you can't break that chair, Bill." I added, pointing to the chair.

"That's stronger than you gettin'!"

In a second the chair was in splinters. He tore it apart and smashed it as I might a paper box, then kicked the pieces aside in an excess of ferocity, as if he hated them.

"And now that chicken!" he giggled, making a sudden snatch at me across the table. I owe my life to the fact that my coat was buttoned tight, his big paw swept so close to me. And I thank all the gods that his lurch against the table only set the smoky lamp rocking on its base, for if it had been put out—I shiver still, thinking of that darkness! I flung myself backward out of his reach, when right in the midst of my terror a thought flashed to me which seemed to hold out a ray of hope. I should have watched my grisly opponent's every motion; but instead I leaned forward again recklessly, and snatched up my sketch-book from the table. By sheer good luck he held off.

"Pictures, Bill!" I shouted gayly, fluttering the pages. "The bull! Let's make some pictures!"

There was a dreadful pause of doubt. Then without the least warning the giant dropped his horrible hands and gave a grin that was not ugly at least.

"You're a good chicken!" he said, as if disdaining the very thought. "You make bossy pictures."

Till then I thought I had passed through as many dark hours as fall to the lot of the average man; but the whole of it followed—I can never tell. Much of it is undesirable to relate at all. What I need recall for you is the fact that for upward of two hours by the clock I sat drawing cattle—dancing, drinking, standing on their heads, anything—while all that time the man stood behind me in absolute silence save for his noisy breathing; and all the time his terrible hands rested on my shoulders, to travel up now and then and tighten experimentally round my throat. If for a single second my invention flagged or my hand wavered.

At length I had filled the book.

"Make another," he pleaded, sadly, tightening his grip again.

Raising my eyes, I saw the bottle on the mantelpiece, and conceived a most fantastic hope.

"Do you want a big one?" I asked him. "Bigger than the bull?"

He gave a kind of skip of joy and unlocked my throat.

"So-o big!" I explained, stretching out my arms. Rising cautiously, and keeping my arms extended as if to measure something very big indeed, I edged to the fireplace. I felt along the mantel-shelf behind me, and my fingers closed on what I wanted.

The idiot watched me intently, scrapping his teeth along his furry jaw.

"The big bossy!" he queried, doubtfully.

"Come on!" I answered, briskly, crossing the room to the widest stretch of plaster wall, and planting two chairs in front of it side by side. "All ready, Bill!"

"All ready!" he echoed, sliding across the room. "Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" My laugh was as good as his.

"So-o big!" he flung out his arms with another laugh, as I had.

"Now then!" My prayer was that he keep on doing just what I did.

"Look, Bill!"

I tied a handkerchief about the low-

er part of my face, and he doubled up with mirth. I tore a sleeve out of my shirt, and with what courage I could muster, and with shouts of joy in which he joined whole-heartedly, I knotted the linen strip around his nose and mouth. Then I wrenched out the cork of the bottle, stopping it with my thumb.

"Now!" With a sweeping stroke of my crayon, the bull's head and shoulders were set down in profile on the wall. "Ha!" And I pretended to tip up the bottle against my mask. "Ha!" I was able to wet my companion's thoroughly. "Now sit down."

I could see his eyes smile as he drew in the sweet, numbing odor. He dropped down into the chair at my side.

"Watch, Bill!"

I drew at lightning speed, now here, now there, stopping every few seconds to renew my own pretence and to keep my jailer's mask well soaked with the drug.

"Look, Bill!" I was making circles now at the full stretch of my arm, and as fast as I could. His eyes dropped once or twice. "Look, look!"

The circles grew smaller and even more rapid. I whisked some more drops under his nose; he took no notice. I held the bottle right against the cloth; his head rolled from one shoulder to the other; the eyes he turned up were merely grey blurs. There came from him some inarticulate murmurs, and his great bulk pitched forward from the waist. I jumped back as he recovered himself, hardly daring to believe even then that my plan was succeeding. The next second I was at the door. Looking back, I saw the giant half rise and stretch out his hands in the old, cruel gesture. He wavered toward me blindly, but I dodged outside to hear him go crashing to the floor. And then I came off, in a stumbling, fear-struck run through the darkness and the rain.

That's all. That's why I'm tired of painting cattle, since you've asked the question.

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## Sporting News

PAUL TAKES ACOOSE doesn't appear to be melting the snow off the surrounding landscape with his warm performances back East. Indeed, since that first wild whoop about his being second in a record-breaking race, there has been no news of the carpet tacks expert except what might be extracted from an announcement that he was to run in races against other men—not addicted to the tack habit.

Stop a minute: there was something about the Greenfull no-wonder quitting in the ninth mile, after being lapped a few times, because he had on running shoes instead of the faithful moccasins that his feet were accustomed to. Of course he didn't stop merely because the other chaps were a few laps ahead, or because he couldn't run fast enough to keep within calling distance—in case someone tried to puncture his tire with the tack game—but only because he had on shoes and his delicate footies were not used to anything so harsh. But he quit, just the same, and you may have your choice of the whys; I've made my guess, and it is because the Greenfull Indian is like most other Indians—yellow underneath the red.

Incidentally, Mr. Fred Meadows is shining as brightly as Acoose is failing conspicuously. Meadows has the build and gait of a runner, and the race that he and Sellen put up against Acoose out at Happyland, last summer, shows that the Meadows headpiece is located in the right spot for the business.

It is just a trifle amusing, though, to see Meadows referred to as "the little Guelph wonder." Freddie must be all of five feet ten, and should make the bar wobble at about a hundred and sixty-five. This isn't so very small, especially for a runner, but some of these sport dopists would refer to Zbysoo as "the wonderful little Galician" if they wished to express their admiration for him. Nevertheless, Meadows is a good man and the way that he ran Acoose and Sellen off their feet at Happyland—chewing a toothpick by the way—was clever and some running, too.

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It is just a trifle amusing, though, to see Meadows referred to as "the little Guelph wonder." Freddie must be all of five feet ten, and should make the bar wobble at about a hundred and sixty-five. This isn't so very small, especially for a runner, but some of these sport dopists would refer to Zbysoo as "the wonderful little Galician" if they wished to express their admiration for him. Nevertheless, Meadows is a good man and the way that he ran Acoose and Sellen off their feet at Happyland—chewing a toothpick by the way—was clever and some running, too.

PAUL TAKES ACOOSE doesn't appear to be melting the snow off the surrounding landscape with his warm performances back East. Indeed, since that first wild whoop about his being second in a record-breaking race, there has been no news of the carpet tacks expert except what might be extracted from an announcement that he was to run in races against other men—not addicted to the tack habit.

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HENRI ST. IVES sure has our John's goat. None of us who saw it has forgotten the distance trimming that the pudgy Frenchman gave John D.—our John—out at Happyland last summer, and now he's done gone and done the same thing down at Los Angeles. In this last race, St. Ives was a mile to the good at the end of the race—Marathon distance—and Fitzgerald—Miss Ladylike Fitzgerald, erstwhile of Edmonton—must have been more than that behind our John D.

As nearly as can be made out from wire reports on the race, John D.—our John—tried to mix it with Hotfoot Henri in the earlier stages of the game, and Henri put him away back for the distance flag. Of course, John D.—our John—should have known better, but his is a stubborn old head which it takes more than one lesson to knock conviction of fault into it, and I daresay that he'd go out and try the same thing tomorrow or the next day if a body offered him the chance.

But he's having a right good time of it, is our John. He gets into good races, the papers refer to him as "the Canadian champion," and he is seeing a lot of the country. More than that, he must be making a fairly good bit of money and—best of all—he's doing the thing that his heart is in, and when he gets through, he'll be satisfied to settle down and do something in the line of work, and what a bunch of stories he'll have to beguile the prosy hours!

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## THE SIZE OF AN EARTHQUAKE

SEISMOLOGISTS say that every great earthquake causes pulsations which extend for thousands of miles in all directions on the globe, and one eminent authority has likened such pulsations to the long, low swells that sweep across the ocean. Not long ago an attempt was made to measure the height and length of the waves of an earthquake that occurred in Greece, the pulsations of which were perceived by the aid of a specially constructed pendulum at Birmingham, in England. The pulsations, or waves, passed through the rocky crust of the earth with a velocity of about two miles a second, and each of the largest of them, according to the investigator, must have been about twenty-eight miles in length, but only half an inch in height!