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CALHOUN AND THE COLONEL

By Carroll Gambrell

Dedication

To Adam and Ryan
with love
from
G-Pop

Chapter I - The Colonel

I relate this tale to you just as the Colonel related it to the boys down at the White Star. The Colonel was always in an expansive mood, and of a mind that if he omitted the slightest detail he felt people might question his veracity. Therefore, he began at the beginning...the very beginning.

His ancestor, the first Colonel Bogey, was actually granted the rank of colonel by the Royal Governor in the days before our Independence from Great Britain. In those days, governors, who were appointed by the King, had the authority to do things like that as a means of gaining favor among the larger planters, whose support might be crucial during a political crisis or an Indian uprising; either of which might occur without warning.

In return for the Royal Commission, colonels were granted the dubious honor and privilege of raising, equipping, and feeding their own regiments. Consequently, since the colonel had to bear all expenses, regiments were often rather small, if indeed, they even existed at all. More often than not they were short on gunpowder, not to mention bacon, beans, and grog. Requiring the colonels to bear all costs and expenses was also a means of preserving the Colony's Treasury, which the Governor often regarded as his own, for more important things; such as carriages, palaces, perfumes, and trinkets for the Governor's lady.

The first Colonel Bogey was, himself, the fifth son of a low country vicar. Said fifth son, being somewhat of a scapegrace, had, in some haste, departed England for the Southern Colonies, after a misunderstanding involving some chickens claimed by the Lord of the Manor. In the new colony he made a small fortune trading cheap blankets for furs with the local tribes, wed the daughter of a prominent citizen, and retired to a fair sized plantation inherited from his father-in-law. A colonel's commission followed, and his obligation to raise a regiment, which he did from his three brothers-in-law, his wife's numerous relatives, near relatives, kissing cousins, and in-

laws, all of whom sponged off him, anyway. Whether they were in the field or not, his expenses stayed about the same. There is no record of his regiment ever having seen, let alone bagging, a recalcitrant Frenchman or a hostile Huron, both of whom were famous for stirring up trouble along the frontier at that time.

There is a lingering suspicion that men from his regiment once raided the public stores of a neighboring county, and in the guise of Indians, made off with three barrels of green rum, freshly arrived from the Barbados. When the Governor investigated, all fingers pointed toward the Colonel, which he stoutly denied as a complete fabrication fostered by jealous political enemies. However, an epidemic of diarrhea had broken out, as often happened when the regiment overindulged in strong spirits, and the strength of his argument was somewhat diluted, since it was made between trips to the outhouse.

In any case, the aggrieved citizens did not put the blame on the Hankapookies, a nearby tribe neither numerous nor fierce, who dwelt peacefully in the swamp so named for the tribe in question. Since that was the tribe the Colonel's Regiment was supposed to keep under control, the Regiment had little to do, except consume the Colonel's food and drink. The tribe was not only peaceful, it made a pretty good living selling trinkets, charms, and bootleg whiskey the settlers called Hankapookie Hooch, to wagon trains headed west toward the Blue Ridge and Kentucky.

The Indians themselves never drank the stuff, and thought the white man quite out of his mind to do so. Hankapookie housesquaws used it to scour cooking pots, as liniment for sore muscles, toothache, sprained ankles, small snake bites, diaper rash, lumbago, measles, chicken pox, poison ivy, ingrown toenails, squeaky axles, and the relief of hemorrhoids. It also made a fine smoke free fuel for lodges not equipped with chimneys. Still, if the white man wanted to drink the stuff instead of using it as the Great Spirit intended, that was his business. White man was strange, anyway, and there was no shortage of them willing to pay for Hooch in the wampum of the Realm. Although the Hankapookie never understood the invaders, they had an uncanny ability to adjust to conditions as they found them. Turning hostile was the last thing on the Hankapookie mind. Not only would it be suicidal, it would be bad for business, but in the Governor's untrustful mind, they might become aggressive at any moment, and had to be guarded against. Hence, the appointment of the first Amos Alonzo Bogey as Colonel of the Llewellyn County Volunteer Rangers, as they called themselves.

It mattered not that the Hankapookies were so devoted to peace there wasn't even a word for war in their language; or that they were dwelling in their ancestral swamp, which the white man did not covet. They were excellent trading partners, even though the trade deficit favored the Hankapookies by a large margin. The Governor said "guard", and the Llewellyn Volunteers, raised by the first Colonel Amos Alonzo Bogey, guarded our frontier with rusty bayonets and unfired muskets.

It should be noted, too, that along with the military appointment came the duties and responsibilities of Justice of the Peace, in those days a most prestigious position of the highest importance. In that capacity the Colonel wore a different hat, and was called on to settle disputes, punish thieves, perform hasty marriages, and send witches to the pillory.

Since the resident witch, one Lucretia Stutz, put the fear of God in the local gentry by threatening to put a hex on the Hankapookie distillery, if anyone so much as touched a hair on her nose, she was pretty much left to her own devices. If anyone suffered, it was the

newts, toads, frogs, and other wildlife that reputedly furnished the main ingredients of her potions.

There were, however, boundary lines and other disputes to adjudicate. There was hardly a land line in the County that hadn't been tampered with at one time or another. Court terms were filled with litigating neighbors, the winner usually being the one who had the most relatives on the jury. In case of a hung jury, the matter was often settled in the local tavern.

When the War of Independence erupted at the Battle of Alamance in North Carolina, the Llewellen Volunteers were not on hand, but soon after Lexington and Concord the Colonel proudly rode out at the head of his troops. The Regiment, having lived off the Colonel for years, served honorably, doing what it did best, scrounging food for the Continental Army. The Regiment consumed most of what it gathered, but it did manage to send some supplies to General Washington in the North and General Greene in the South, while avoiding combat.

They did make it to the final Big Show at Yorktown where the Regiment made a name for itself and scored a notable coup with a raid on the henhouse belonging to an alleged notorious Tory, making off with at least a dozen hens and a supply of eggs in spite of the withering blows from a broom wielded by the enraged proprietress of said hens.

Meanwhile, the Hankapookies, not having a dog in this fight, wisely stayed in their swamp, stills running full blast night and day to keep up with demand for their famous Hankapookie Hooch, which they sold to both sides. On at least one occasion this policy led to saving many lives when both sides, canteens full of the noted Hankapookie cure-all, became too inebriated to fight. To the relief of all, the battle was canceled by mutual consent, and the troops retired to nurse their hangovers. By the time the effects had worn off, Peace had been declared, and everybody went home.

The frontier moved west, and business got so bad the Hankapookies migrated north and disappeared from the pages of history until the events of this story brought them to life again. They did leave their name on the swamp, and although the formula for their highly regarded Hooch was lost with the disappearance of the Tribe, their foul brew remained in local memory and soon passed into legend.

However, a later Colonel Bogey claimed to have re-discovered the ancient formula, which he blended with a few spices, flavored it with peppermint, colored it with a generous portion of prune juice and sold it as a magic elixir to under-the-weather carpetbaggers. It proved to be a surefire way to put the Yankees on the run. Unfortunately, it came too late to affect the course of history. As it was, it exacted a certain amount of pay-back for the evils of Reconstruction, and raised enough Yankee revenue to pay the taxes on the old homestead.

Traditions die slowly in the Bogey family, and that of becoming a Justice of the Peace for the County persisted until the title became almost hereditary. However, it was four generations following the First Colonel Bogey before the wall of the Magistrate's Office was adorned by a framed parchment proclaiming to one and all that the recipient thereof had "read the law", and was competent to the practice of jurisprudence. Even so, had not a duly elected Governor bearing the colorful sobriquet of "Barbwire Bob" not adamantly insisted that certain academic preparation would be met with favor.

Since that day, the standards for the Office of Governor, as well as that of certain magistrates, have been made more liberal; some might say, lowered. Many duties and responsibilities of the governor have

been absorbed, and those of the Justice of the Peace have passed on to higher courts.

The upshot is that the present Colonel Bogey, the seventh in his line to occupy the office, enjoys the title, emoluments, and a certain amount of respect. The office affords him a great deal of leisure time, which he spends in various pursuits; one of which is playing the harmonica. He is quite devoted to the little instrument, and has grown to be a very proficient performer thereon. He also practices a little law, but not to the extent that he allows it to interfere with better things.

The Colonel relaxing in the shade of his broad verandah, knocking out a few tunes and enjoying the spring day, is about to learn that a goodly portion of his leisure time will soon be filled. His goodwife, Miss Gussie, has just returned from the mailbox. Taking a seat in her favorite rocker, she smiles in pleasant anticipation as she tears open an envelop from her sister, Mary Alice. She pauses and then exclaims, "Calhoun is coming!"

Chapter 2 - A Boy And His Frog

The Colonel and his goodwife, Miss Gussie, were sitting on his broad veranda taking in the late morning sun, when the mailman came by and stopped at their mailbox. Gussie left her rocking chair to see what he had left. Retrieving her seat, she tore open the flowered envelope, obviously not addressed to "Resident" or "Preferred Customer", removed the contents, and read a few lines. Her mouth opened and eyes suddenly brightened, and she jumped up, waving the letter.

"Calhoun is coming!" she exclaimed.

"That was news to me," said the Colonel later, around coffee at the White Star, a favorite meeting place of the town's leading citizens, "but perfectly typical of Mary Alice. She's Gussie's younger sister and the boy's mother, you know. She's always been, what you might say, a tad feather-headed. On second thought, make that a lot feather-headed."

The Colonel mopped his brow with a crumpled bandanna and, since no one offered to stop him, began relating the events that took place that day.

"That bit of news, broken to me as it were, without proper prior preparation, and didn't exactly fill my heart to overflowing. Gussie, on the other hand, was absolutely ecstatic; which I thought was overdoing it a bit."

The Colonel's hand trembled a little as he spoke. Polly, our amiable waitress, refilled his cup, and he paused to savor a fresh sip, wiped his mustache with the back of his hand, and continued:

"Whatever joy I might have experienced," rumbled the Colonel, "stemmed primarily from the fact that the boy's father is quite well off, one might even say, wealthy."

In an aside voice, he went on, "Not that I am given to pandering to the wealthy, you understand," all nodded assent, "but he is an excellent client, not overly demanding, and pays promptly for the small legal favors I am able to perform in his behalf. One does not choose to offend such clients."

Here the Colonel paused to light one of the long black stogies Charlie Jenkins orders for him special down at the drugstore. The effort produced a shower of sparks down his shirtfront, which the

Colonel quickly brushed away, but not before exposing another hole in the broad waistband. Much to his wife's chagrin, it was apparently a common occurrence.

"Another source of consolation," he continued, apparently unruffled "is that Calhoun will only be with us for the short time it takes his parents to sail down to south Georgia, and up the Suwanee River from the Gulf to Pago Pago, Georgia.

After a startled moment, it became clear to his listeners that the Colonel had confused the South Sea port of Pago Pago with the South Georgia town of Fargo. A natural mistake, but no one seemed willing to disabuse the Colonel of his error.

However, a new member of the group, who had not yet learned that one does not interrupt the Colonel, piped up, "Don't you mean Fargo? Pago Pago is in..." His voice trailed off when confronted by the silence and icy stares of the assembly, but with much aplomb the Colonel was perfectly able to handle the situation.

"No, son," the Colonel spoke with a note of condescension in his voice, "I mean Pago Pago. Everyone knows, Fargo is in North Dakota, which doesn't even have an ocean. How could anyone sail there?"

"But..." the young man would have continued had not the Colonel's upraised palm not told him the Colonel would brook no further interruption. The Colonel continued, thus:

"I could not imagine, however, why Gussie was looking forward to changing diapers again. She had not performed that task since our daughter, Martha, who is now in college, was an infant."

"Diapers!" Gussie exclaimed, "Amos, the boy is in the fourth grade and practically grown. Where have you been?"

"You mean he is no longer an infant? the Colonel was incredulous.

"That's exactly what I mean," Gussie affirmed.

"Ah, yes," the Colonel sighed, "Tempus fugit," and since it had been nearly a decade, tempus had clearly fugited in this case.

"We didn't have much time. Mary Alice's letter indicated Calhoun was to arrive on the morning train, and a consultation with my gold pocket Hamilton illustrated just how much Tempus had already fugited. Leave it to Mary Alice to give us plenty of notice. "The morning train has already blown for Dillworth's Crossing ten minutes ago," the Colonel informed her.

"Oh Lord," Gussie exclaimed, running to get her purse. "The poor child is probably waiting at the depot right now, wondering where we are."

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than the dust from the departing mail carrier's vehicle mingled with that of the arriving Ozzie Clodfelter's taxi. The venerable old station wagon ground to a halt by the front gate, disgorging the helpless child about whom the Colonel and Gussie had been so concerned. Apparently their concern about the nature of his helpless state had been a tad premature, for the helpless child immediately began giving Ozzie orders as to the disposal and care of his luggage, which appeared to be adequate for quite a long stay.

"Careful of that one," Calhoun cautioned, "it's my chemistry set, and it might explode."

If the Colonel found little comfort in that knowledge, Ozzie found even less. Pop-eyed, he frantically sought a soft place upon which to deposit the potentially lethal cargo. Gussie's begonia bed seemed the ideal spot. There it rested, squashing them flat.

Manfried Von Manxkie, a freeloading bobtailed cat of the Manx persuasion observed the excited arrival from a safe distance before

departing for parts known only to cats; thus exhibiting a perspicacity not possessed by the humans present.

Not being quite so wise and precognizant, the Colonel found himself burdened by four large oversized bags, following Ozzie, buried beneath the weight of a steamer trunk and two other jumbo bags. Gussie, unburdened, directed them to the guest bedroom. The suspected time bomb remained nestled among the begonias, awaiting removal to the tool shed, which Gussie assured its owner, would make a perfect laboratory.

The honored guest, upon whom Gussie was lavishing so much attention, might best be described as mostly red hair, freckles and frogs, for such an amphibian, fortunately as yet undiscovered by the boy's Aunt, was cocking an unblinking eye from the boy's shirt pocket, surveying his new surroundings with a sort of non-committal indifference.

In addition to the frog, Calhoun was wearing a coonskin cap, short pants, and argyle knee socks, one of which had fallen around his ankle. He was, one might say, an entirely unprepossessing youth, but one, the Colonel thought, who might benefit from wise counsel and stern discipline, which the Colonel assumed he would administer. Bogeys, through the ages, had long been noted for applying their brand of wise, loving, but stern discipline, much as a Marine Drill Instructor.

The Colonel's train of thought was interrupted by a piercing shriek. "YEEK!!" announcing that Gussie had discovered the occupant of Calhoun's pocket. Her shriek inspired a prodigious leap on the part of the frog; an arching trajectory calculated to land him in a safer haven behind the dresser. Gussie's reaction was to inscribe a trajectory of her own, ending with her standing on the chest of drawers on the opposite side of the room.

Calhoun sprang for the dresser and began delving for the adventurous amphibian, while the Colonel helped Gussie down from the chest of drawers and onto a seat on the bed. She was still striving to regain her composure when Calhoun emerged from behind the dresser, truant pet in hand.

"That's okay, Aunt Gussie, don't worry, he's not hurt, see?" he said, proudly presenting his green friend for her inspection.

"Oh, I...uh...see," said his Aunt weakly, shrinking away from the proffered pet. "I'm sorry...uh...ah..."

"Croaker. His name is Davy Croaker," Calhoun informed her.

"...Mr. Croaker..." she finished, fanning herself. "Er, ah...don't you think Mr. Croaker would be happier if he had a home of his own?" she asked. "I mean, somewhere besides in your shirt pocket," she added, hopefully.

"How about Hankapookie Swamp?" the Colonel offered.

Gussie shushed him with her most effective shushing glance, and he refrained from observing that Mr. Croaker's legs would go well on toast for lunch.

"How about that old birdcage in the attic," Gussie suggested. "Martha would be happy for Mr. Croaker to move in, since poor Petey expired, and it will do him just fine."

Needing no further hint or direction, the Colonel departed at once on a mission to retrieve "Poor Petey's" cage, while Gussie finished getting the honored guest settled. The Colonel welcomed the opportunity to enjoy the seclusion of the loft for awhile. He left the guest room in full confidence he would not be missed for quite some time. Gussie and Calhoun, Mr. Croaker seemingly forgotten at the moment, were happily chattering away, planning the afternoon's agenda.

The attic was warm, cozy, and dimly lit. The cage in question was nowhere in sight, but the Colonel's old favorite leather lounge chair was. The Colonel's eyes lit up. It was like finding an old friend he hadn't seen in years. It was moldy and covered in the dust of many years, and the stuffing was coming out of the well worn cushions, but it still looked pretty comfortable to its former occupant. He decided perhaps if he settled in for a short snooze before pursuing his original quest, no one would notice. After all, it had been a strenuous morning, and he deserved a little rest.

He was right, no one had noticed. When he came down some time later, much refreshed, and bird cage in hand, the house was deserted. Gussie and Calhoun had departed, but not before leaving a note on the kitchen table.

Gone to town. Calhoun needs sneakers and haircut.
Marigold is off today. Fix your own lunch. Put Mr.

C in cage, if you can find him.

G and Cal

"A fine how-do-you-do," the Colonel thought, "Fix your own lunch..." There he was, slaving away in the attic, seeking a bird cage for a frog, having to fix his own lunch. But, Bogeys have always been self-reliant, if anything, and he could adapt to any crises; even this one.

As he was setting out the ingredients of the tossed salad he was planning to have with some of Marigold's rice and cold chicken left over from yesterday, another phrase of Gussie's note came to mind. "Put Mr. C. in cage, if you can find him." What did she mean, "...if you can find him..."? That seemed to infer they had hidden old Croaker like an Easter Egg, intending the Colonel to enjoy the sport of the chase, in which case, they had another think coming. The Colonel had no intention of joining in their little game. He had his lunch to prepare, and without further ado, set about doing so.

While yet in this dark frame of mind, he was about to add some sliced cucumbers to the tossed salad, when, much to his surprise, it began tossing itself! Lifting a leaf of lettuce to investigate this startling phenomena, he was greeted with a shower of assorted greenery, and a colored projectile caromed off his forehead into a hanging flower pot, and disappeared into a clump of fern.

There was little doubt in the Colonel's mind that this was the fugitive frog referred to in Gussie's note. However, a search of the pot failed to produce a glimpse of the illusive renegade. The Colonel's search through the pot did manage to scatter a great deal of fern and potting soil on Marigold's formerly clean kitchen floor. No matter, Marigold could sweep it up upon her return in the morning. In the meantime, the Colonel felt he had been thwarted of his noon meal by a fugitive frog.

Although he was becoming a bit testy due to the mischance that cost him lunch, he was not particularly concerned about Gussie and Calhoun. She had been known to shop for hours without making a purchase, just for the sheer joy of shopping. However, the Colonel was still stewing about his lost lunch, when, about the middle of the afternoon, there came a rather insistent rapping on the front door.

Wondering who it was, but certainly in no mood for company, he quietly hastened to establish the identity of the intruder. Cautiously parting the window curtain and peeking out, he was startled to find himself peering eyeball to eyeball with the interloper, who was boldly peering in. His heart sank. It was no less than Mrs. Algernon du Fester, flanked by her two co-horts, Miss Pricella Beth Ainsley, old

maid and better known among her peers as "Prissy", and Mrs. Gladys Faye Mainwaring, all of the Ladies Aid Society For The Relief of Missionaries to Turkarovia, there, no doubt, to enlist the Bogey's in their cause. Had discovery not obviated his chances, he would gladly have concealed himself until they gave up and departed. Escape not being an option, there was nothing to do but admit the ladies and pray for Gussie's speedy return.

Please bear in mind, the Colonel had nothing against sending missionaries to Turkarovia. If they wished to stir up tribal unrest and become the main course at a clan clambake, that was their business, and the Colonel thought they ought to be allowed to do it. However, if it became his duty to entertain their matronly supporters in his parlor without the assistance of either shopping wife or absent daughter, he would wish upon them the same anguish of spirit he now felt. If there was anything he did not wish to do at that moment, it was to entertain those ladies. Putting it mildly, he felt very awkward doing so, and it was his fervent prayer that upon discovery of Gussie's absence, they would depart and come back later, if at all. Alas, his prayer went unanswered.

Brushing him aside, the ladies made their way to the parlor, announcing their full intention of awaiting Gussie's return. There was little the Colonel could do, except perform the task incumbent upon him as host, which was to entertain his guests.

Seeking first to put them at ease, he led off with what he deemed a rather safe topic of general interest. At least it was a rather general topic of discussion around his club, The Missing Links.

"Which horse do you like in the Sirloin Stakes coming up next week at Gulfhome Park, ladies?" he smiled, confident the question would spark some lively conversation. Much to his surprise and confusion, his remark invited an icy silence and rather frigid stares.

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs du Fester, peering down her long crocodile nose; expression not unlike that of the saurian carnivore she so closely resembled.

"I'm going with Limpalong Lou at thirty-eight to one," the Colonel rambled on, not realizing he had hit a very sour note.

"Colonel Bogey..." she began, but sensing she was about to question his choice of a horse burdened by unfavorable odds, he hastened to explain.

"Long odds, I know. But you have to plunge once in awhile, if you want to make the Big Bucks. Don't you agree?"

Agreeing did not fit Mrs du Fester's mood at the moment. "Colonel Bogey, if you think for one moment..."

The Colonel sensed it would take a more fulsome explanation to satisfy the ladies, so he quickly interrupted, "Actually, I must confess to a hot tip from my bookie, Arbuckle," he said

"I mean, Colonel Bogey, if you don't mind, we had rather not discuss it," Mrs. du Fester declared; not exactly the lively repartee the Colonel had expected. It was becoming a rather delicate situation. There was a long moment of silence while the Colonel sought desperately to regroup his thoughts, which was interrupted by a rather egregiously loud rumble from his stomach, protesting the unseemly neglect of the lunch he didn't have.

"I see," the Colonel replied, trying to put the best possible face on it, "you mean you have a tip on a better horse, and your bookie doesn't want you to reveal it for fear common knowledge will drive the odds down." He nodded, giving her a knowing wink, as his stomach rumbled again, even louder.

It was becoming impossible to ignore the demands of his delicate digestive system, a curse of the Bogey's for generations. "I understand perfectly," he nodded. "Relationships with bookies are a rather private matter, and often a person doesn't want to discuss it. I know just what you mean," he acknowledged in his most discerning manner, and congratulated himself for having handled a most fragile matter with astuteness and aplomb. Apparently he had misjudged.

"I mean, Colonel Bogey, WE do not even know a bookie! HURUMMPH!" She threw her long nose in the air and crossed her arms as if to say, "That is the end of it. We have no more to discuss."

This was a totally unexpected turn of events. In that situation there was only one thing to do, DROP IT!, but the Colonel compounded his original mistake by guessing wrong again. Since they didn't even know a bookie, he gallantly offered to introduce them to Arbuckle.

Granted, Arbuckle wasn't exactly what one might consider to be the Cream of Society, because the Cream of Society doesn't produce many bookies, but he does come up with a good horse once in awhile. The Colonel thought that might compensate for Arbuckle's social shortcomings. His generous offer was met by silence and three icy stares. The Colonel was completely mystified and had to admit he was totally unprepared for this kind of reception.

"Sir," Mrs du Fester replied in a tone calculated to wither a marble statue, "we have not come to discuss either Mr. Arbuckle or horses. We, I hope, are on a much loftier mission."

She had a point there. Arbuckle was definitely not what you might refer to as "lofty". It was while pondering this point, and desperately casting about for a less inflammatory subject, that the Colonel's eye became arrested by an object on the mantle directly behind Mrs. du Fester's head, which he had not previously noticed. It was a large, lifelike, ceramic frog, poised to leap; except a closer look revealed it wasn't ceramic. It had to be the missing, salad tossing, fern scattering Mr. Croaker, himself. His eye was focused upon the tip of the feather in Mrs. du Fester's hat. The Colonel's eye strayed from the frog to the feather in question, and back to the frog again.

The thought occurred to the Colonel at that moment that, if that feather twitched even slightly, old Croaker would leap for it. He was just that kind of frog, and his eye certainly had that leaping look. Even Mrs. du Fester could not maintain a frozen attitude forever. The feather would not long remain untwitched, though the Colonel fervently prayed it would.

It was not the Colonel's day for answered prayers. The Great Dispenser of Favours opted for calamity in the form of a distinctly audible rumble from the Colonel's protesting and grossly neglected digestive tract. Mrs. du F shifted uncomfortably, and assumed an even more disapproving manner, resulting in the inevitable twitch; thus setting loose the immutable Laws of Nature.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Mrs. du Fester inquired with a mixed note of alarm and suspicion; but she barely got the words out of her mouth.

Perceiving instantly that the grace period had expired, the Colonel, with a cry of warning, and Croaker, with a frogly "rivet", pounced simultaneously. The ladies, apparently heeding the Colonel's warning, screamed and scrambled for cover, upsetting a table, knocking over two lamps, several vases, and numerous odd knick-knacks in their haste to depart.

Mrs. du Fester, sad to report, held her ground like Horatio at the bridge. She apparently misinterpreted the Colonel's lightning

stroke in her behalf as an assault upon her person, perhaps provoked. by her unduly sharp rejection of the Colonel's polite offer of an introduction to Arbuckle. However, her mien was not one of repentance; far from it.

Fast as the Colonel's reaction was, Mrs. du Fester was pretty swift, herself. Letting loose a bellow much like that of an enraged water buffalo, which she closely resembled, she fetched the hapless Colonel a mighty wallop in the mid-ribs with her purse, as old Croaker disappeared into the cleavage of her ample bosom, and whatever recesses may be found therein.

It is hardly possible for mere words to describe or imitate the sounds emitted by matronly females when a frog becomes intimately involved with feminine undergarments. Imagine, if you will, the cacophony of several dozen tom cats all having had their tails rocked on at once, and you will have an idea of the din that assaulted the Colonel's ears. As for action, a barrel of eells would have placed a poor second in a squirming contest with that old lady. At the same time, she was raining blows like hail in a cyclone upon the Colonel's head with that terrible purse. It was amazing, it was awful, she never missed a lick.

Without question, the Colonel had never run into a woman quite so touchy and unreasonable. The Colonel was doing his best to explain that his intentions had been of the purist, and that he had gallantly sought to shield her from a most unpleasant surprise. Unfortunately, nothing in his background had equipped him to explain to an outraged member of the Ladies Aid Society for the Relief of Missionaries to Turkarovia, how a frog happened to get down her bosom, while seated in the Colonel's parlor. For that chore, it would take a better missionary than the unfortunate Colonel.

Meanwhile, although it was entirely unnecessary, as Mrs. du Fester was doing very well on her own, Gladys Faye and Pricella saw fit to aid and abet her with a few licks of their own. Being as charitable as possible, the Colonel thought all three women were behaving in a most unladylike manner.

Finally, the storm abated. With a final blow, a coup de gras, as it were, the aggrieved Ladies Aid Society left the Colonel a crumpled heap, and departed the premises in a huff of hastily repaired dishabille and head tossing; Turkarovian Missionaries apparently forgotten.

"What happened to the ladies?" Gussie asked, entering as the Colonel was picking himself off the floor. "They nearly knocked us over as we were coming up the walk. They looked right through us and refused to speak. Mrs. du Fester looked as if she had gone through a threshing machine."

"I haven't the foggiest notion," the Colonel replied, rubbing the knot on his head, "unless she was just overwhelmed at having met Mr. Croaker."

That answer didn't entirely satisfy Gussie, but before she could pursue that line of questioning, she became aware of the upturned table, the broken glass, and general disarray of the late battlefield.

"What happened here!" she exclaimed, surveying the ruin.

The Colonel, not wishing to get into a long explanation of an event not yet entirely clear to him, "Accident," he replied, ignoring the bump on his tongue, ". "I tripped over the table when entering the room."

"Tripped!" Gussie observed, "how many times?"

"We must get more light in here," the Colonel offered, though he knew he would have to supply more detail some day, but not now. Right then, with head pounding, stomach rumbling, and ears still ringing, was just not the time. Apparently Gussie sensed this, and with one more look around the room, mercifully ended the inquiry.

"Well, I'm glad you had to entertain them instead of me," Gussie said, "Mrs. du Fester gets on my nerves."

The Colonel massaged his sore shin and voiced agreement that an interview with the Ladies Aid might, indeed, have its trying moments.

"Look, Aunt Gussie, Davy Croaker is back! Uncle Bogey found him," Calhoun called from the kitchen.

To the astonishment of the Colonel, there was old Croaker, sitting in that bird cage, a little beat up, but none the worse for his encounter with Mrs. du Fester's corset stays. The Colonel swore there was a smile on that frog's face when he closed the door of the cage.

Gussie was staring with stern disapproval at the potting soil and remains of the fern scattered around the kitchen. The Colonel knew he would have to explain that, too, but he hoped to put it off until old age set in. Right then, he and Calhoun had something to do.

"Where are you going?" Gussie called as they went out the door.

"We are going to find some big juicy bugs for Croaker!" Calhoun called back. "Put some big lettuce leaves in his cage, too," the Colonel tossed back. "He likes to sit under them."

"Can we stop for a root beer float, Uncle Bogey?" Calhoun asked when they got outside.

"And a hamburger, too," the Colonel replied. "I haven't had any lunch."

His stomach rumbled in approval.

Chapter 3 - Music Hath Charm

The boys down at the White Star had not seen hide nor hair of the Colonel for several days, and were beginning to be concerned, when he walked in, or perhaps, "limped in" would be more accurate. Besides the limp, he was wearing a bandage around his head, and emitting an evil smelling redolence that made the eyes water, and, while it repelled, it also stirred the curiosity.

Some of the boys wondered if the Ladies Aid Society had struck again, but that wouldn't account for the rip-roaring redolence rudely running rampant around the restaurant. They were content to wait at a safe distance for the Colonel's explanation, which they knew would be forthcoming.

After graciously acknowledging their greetings, the Colonel took mercy upon the gathering and seated himself at the far end of the room. Clearing his throat, he began recounting the following chain of events as if he was addressing the Board of Directors with the news that the company just went bankrupt.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I would not have subjected you to this egregious assault upon your olfactory nerves had I not been aware that my prolonged absence would generate cause for your deepest concern. I will tell you, I was brought to this sad state by a series of misadventures, entirely out of my control."

Chairs began to scrape and squeak, as the men made themselves comfortable for what was coming. The Colonel, never spearing of detail,

had a reputation for spinning long yarns, and this one promised to be a dilly.

Someone opened a window to allow fresh air to circulate. The Newcomer, hoping no one would notice, began edging toward the door until frozen by a dark glance from the Colonel, and piercing black stares from others present. It was considered to be an extreme breach of etiquette to walk out on the Colonel. The Newcomer meekly took a seat.

"Music hath charm to soothe the savage beast, or perhaps it's 'breast', I was never quite sure," the Colonel continued, "but it doesn't make much difference. The following incident will illustrate the point."

Wondering what music had to do with the Colonel's present putrid predicament, the crowd sat on the edge of their seats and listened intently. The Colonel would soon answer the question, but until then it remained a mystery. The Colonel continued:

"There is nothing like music to appeal to the better nature of man or beast, and that includes little boys. Take my nephew, Calhoun, for instance. Nothing at all wrong with that young man that the influence of an iron will, firm but loving discipline, and a certain measure of responsibility, wouldn't cure.

Of course, in my presence he recognizes instinctively the iron will and force of character, which is a well-known Bogey trait, and his reaction is both positive and predictable.

As an example, you could detect it in his manner as he sprang to my aid this morning and nearly saved me from a rather nasty spill. One might easily have surmised he must have possessed some foreknowledge of my fall, so quickly did he react. It seems that somehow I had inadvertently tied my shoelaces to the chair leg during breakfast; although I don't recall tying my shoelaces at all during breakfast, but no matter. How easy it is for daily routine to pass unnoticed, making no impression whatever, when one's mind is occupied with more important matters. However that may be, I digress.

Taking note of this sign of the lad's precocious nature, I deemed it time to introduce him to the World of Music via my favorite instrument, the harmonica. It happens to be the most versatile and inexpensive of all musical instruments. Only the human whistle is less costly and more readily available for those with a proper pucker."

Here, the Colonel began to wax eloquently. In rapturous tones he continued:

"Ah, how easy it is to expound upon the profound excellence and beauty of this simple but ancient little device. Invented by the ancient Chinese long before Marco Polo's time, it was called a Ching by its ancient Asian inventors, and is one of the most soul-satisfying musical instrument ever devised."

At this point, the Colonel did not miss the faint nuance in the Newcomer's uplifted brow and questioning look. It was an affront not to be tolerated. He leaned forward and glowered at the questioner. When he spoke, it was in his most judicial and intimidating manner.

"A toy, sir?" as if reading the Newcomer's mind. "You deem it a mere toy with which to stuff stockings at Christmas? You would deem it otherwise, having heard the likes of DeFord Baily, Pete Pedersen, or Larry Adler, the Harmonicats, The Mulkays, or the great Stagg McMann trio. Sufficeth to say, if the harmonica is a toy, the violin is a mere doo-dad."

With that point having been made, the Colonel gave it added emphasis, as if it needed any.

"The harmonica fathoms the depth of the human soul. In proper hands, or mouths, as it were, the harmonica is capable of expressing every human emotion, except anger. You may be angry, or you may play the harmonica; but not both at the same time."

Here, the Colonel spoke in rapt terms. "It possesses the sweetness of the violin, the range of the piano, the vivacity of the piccolo, the clarity of the flute, the mellowness of the French horn, and the audacity of the trumpet. Toy? Hummph!"

The well chastened Newcomer spoke up in timorous voice to inquire, "But, Colonel, what has the harmonica to do with your limp and a patch over your eye?"

He had not yet perceived that, if he would just be quiet and listen, the Colonel, in his own good time, would connect the dots, and everyone's curiosity would be satisfied.

Regarding the inquisitor with a somewhat jaundiced eye, and the air of one who might tolerate the indiscretions of a child, but does not suffer fools gladly or otherwise, the Colonel glared down his nose. It was plain, he would tolerate no further interruptions from that quarter. Properly abashed, the Newcomer subsided, and after a long pause to gather the threads of his interrupted thoughts, the Colonel continued, thus:

"It had not escaped my notice that Calhoun had evinced more than a passing interest in my collection of mouth-organs. The discovery of this attitude was most agreeable, and I determined to cultivate and improve upon it. Calhoun, as you may imagine, was excited beyond measure to be offered the opportunity to learn the harmonica from an expert. He wanted to get started immediately, whereupon I seized the moment to swear him to a regimen of regular practice to which he enthusiastically agreed. Then and there, much to his surprise and overwhelming joy, I presented him with a bran new untested and unplayed upon ten-hole diatonic "Pocket Pal", Key of C.

At this juncture, Gussie suggested that in order to avoid any unnecessary interruptions, we should hold the initial lesson in the privacy of the deep woods. So saying, she handed Calhoun a bag of fresh baked molasses cookies, still warm, and ushered us out the door in what I considered to be a rather precipitous manner. Calhoun failed to notice the slight, so pleased was he with the cookies, and so eagerly did he anticipate the forthcoming harmonica lesson.

Without further adieu we took off for the woods to my favorite place in which to begin our project. Ah, youth! Calhoun, reminding me of my younger days, was frolicking ahead, happy as a lark, nimble as a deer, innocent as a newborn babe in the woods; which, come to think of it, he was. No thoughts of the vagaries of mankind had yet intruded upon his trusting soul "

Delighted with the pastoral scene he had just painted, the Colonel paused to allow his audience time to admire and absorb the similes he had crafted, anticipating more to come. The Newcomer shifted restlessly in his chair, and longingly eyed the Rest Room sign, but dared not further test the Colonel's patience. Waving aside Polly's offer to re-fill his cup, he merely crossed his legs, squirmed, and looked miserable, as the Colonel continued.

"Following the well beaten pathway across the meadow and through the woods, we eventually reached our goal. There in a small glen among fern shaded flowers and mossy rocks, rimmed by a forest of giants, where the icy clear brook cascaded over a small precipice into the quiet pool below, was the Edenic setting, perfect for our purposes. There we took a seat, I on a lichen covered boulder, and Calhoun on an

ancient log below. There, not unlike Socrates and the youth of Athens, the sage and his pupil commenced the lesson.

Paying close heed, Calhoun made extraordinary progress, picking up the rudiments of harmony at once. He quickly progressed from simple scales to fairly uncomplicated tunes. No question, the boy had talent. Modesty, however, forbids me from dwelling overmuch upon the efficacy of superior instruction upon the attentive student. Nevertheless, the facts speak for themselves.

Not wishing to overload my star student with a plethora of instruction, I left him to seek out those dulcet tones for which we all aspire. I stretched out on a bed of moss and ferns for a short mid-morning snooze.

It seems I had hardly dropped off, before a plaintive wheeze, much like that of a long-tailed alley cat in a room full of elders in rocking chairs, alerted me to the possibility that all might not be going well."

.Here, the Colonel paused for a moment to light a fresh stogie. While he puffed the cigar to life, the Newcomer wisely seized the moment to make a mad dash for the rest room, nearly taking the door off the hinges. Whether or not he made it in time, no one knew. They were primarily interested in the Colonel's next words, which would at least clear up the mystery of the strange noise..

"I had hardly shaken the cobwebs from my head when Calhoun handed me his harmonica with the news that it wouldn't play anymore. He thought it was choked on something. A gross understatement, if there ever was one.

A cursory inspection revealed it was full of molasses cookie crumbs! Alas, I had tragically neglected to impress upon the boy that you can't be mad and play the harmonica, nor can you eat and play without turning the instrument into a cafeteria. Repairing the damage appeared to be a forlorn hope, but I would give it a shot."

"I got hungry," a remorseful Calhoun offered by way of excuse and explanation, "and besides, you told me to keep trying to get the sweet tones, and Aunt Gussie's molasses cookies are about the sweetest things around."

"I had to admit, he had me there, but digging molasses cookies out of a harmonica with a twig is like trying to tame a tiger with a fly-swatter. Finally, after an hour or so of diligent effort on my part, and the removal of about a hatfull of molasses cookie crumbs, I did get an off-key wail more or less like that of an asthmatic mouse. That, in itself was a kind of triumph, but that note was the Pocket Pal's death rattle.

In the meantime, while I was presiding over the demise of the harmonica, Calhoun, as boys will, was off seeking other entertainment. He wandered quite a ways in his quest to discover new and unknown flora and fauna, but I could still hear him in the distance turning over rocks, kicking stumps, and rattling bushes. The boy's insatiable curiosity would keep him busy. I am sure, had Columbus not discovered America, Calhoun certainly would have.

Meanwhile, the futility of cookie crumb removal and the warm spring air mingled with the buzzing of the bees and twittering of the birds induced me into a rather somnolent mood, and I resolved to resume my interrupted nap. Calhoun would be occupied and I didn't consider that he could get into too much trouble in the woods.

So saying, I folded my light jacket into a pillow, and once again sought repose upon the soft mossy bosom of Mother Earth. Soon I was once more enfolded in the ever loving arms of Morpheus."

While the Colonel slept, with no thoughts whatever of the late lamented Pocket Pal, Calhoun was exploring and discovering the flora and fauna of the Region. He waded the branch and caught crawdads. He turned over rocks and discovered strange insects hidden among the lichens that flourish from the far northern tundra to the very tip of South America. He picked a bouquet for his Aunt Gussie.

Then, parting the bushes, he found himself face to face with a pink nose and two little beady eyes. Startled, Calhoun fell back, but the adventurous pygmy porker, to whom the beady eyes belonged, gave a piglet snort and took off through the brush loudly squealing a porcine version of MAY DAY! MAY DAY! Calhoun stayed hot on its heels, and had just caught the baby piney woods rooter by a hind leg when a mad Mama, followed by the rest of her squawling brood, suddenly burst onto the scene in answer to her wandering offspring's distress signal.

Calhoun did a quick about face, dropped the squealing piglet, and lit out toward the glen where the Colonel was sleeping, leaving mad mama and her irate brood in his wake, but rapidly closing the gap.

At this point the Colonel continued his narrative:

"Once again my peaceful slumber was shattered by a cacophony of squeals, grunts, and confusion. In my half awake state, I knew not from which quarter it emanated, but I knew trouble when I heard it, and it was coming up fast.

Suddenly Calhoun burst into the opening, with a wall of outraged pork hot on his heels. 'Run, Uncle Bogey!' Calhoun shouted.

Being the quick thinker I am, I instantly sized up the situation, and the wisdom of flight did, indeed, seem to be the better choice, since no other option presented itself at the moment.

Run for the tree! I shouted, making a dive for the ancient gnarled oak at the center of the glade, arriving just a hair before Calhoun. Exercising my rights of seniority, I endeavored to shinny up the tree ahead of him. However, a burst of energy inspired by the all too near presence, hot breath and snapping jaws of that ham-on-the-hoof enabled him to pass me by about half way to the lowest branch and safety. Lost in the commotion and confusion were the twittering of the birds, the humming of the bees, the gentle murmur of the brook. The serenity of an abundant Nature had given way to pure Bedlam..

Reaching the first limb, our immediate goal, we found it to be a sturdy specimen larger than most trees, we paused to catch a breath and found little cause to climb higher. It was our good fortune that Mama pigs, no matter how insulted, incensed, and irate, simply do not fly or climb trees.

Given the temper of the mad matriarch menacing the world beneath us, we were especially relieved to be safe. So saying, I am not ashamed to say we at once uttered a brief but most fervent prayer of thanksgiving.

It was in the midst of that brief prayer that a thunderbolt in the form of a bee hit me squarely behind the left ear, nearly dislodging me from my haven on the limb. I will have to say the Voices of Nature immediately returned to our consciousness in the form of the angry buzz of honey bees who had a hive in the hollow of the tree not five feet from my head. It seems that in my haste to ascend the tree I had inadvertently stuck my foot into the portal of their domain. I assumed the sticky mess dripping from my shoe to be their insurance against a long winter, the onset of which was yet several months away. I also wish to observe that the denizens of that hive were a particularly short tempered bunch that took umbrage far in excess of the small amount of damage I had inflicted.

Meanwhile, down below a face-off of an entirely different nature was beginning to develop. A polecat parent and her four little stinkers on their way to the branch to dabble for crawdads were rudely accosted by mama sow blocking their path. Now, had the polecats altered course, all would be well. However, skunks, considering their social position to be unassailable, are not noted for either disecration or beating hasty retreats. Members of the swine community, not being particularly influenced by eau de civet, were not inclined to avoid an encounter, either.

To a casual observer, inasmuch as one could possibly be casual in such distinguished company, this would appear to have the makings of a real Mexican standoff. It would be difficult to say who fired the first shot, but one does not survive in Nature by being hesitant. The impasse' ended almost as quickly as it began. Mama pig led the charge only to be met by a salvo of chemical warfare. Though pigs can't fly, skunk spray did; copious amounts of it from five different sources. The little stinkers were armed, too. Not all of it, I fear, reached the intended target. A goodly portion of the foul brew flew into our refuge soaking everything in sight. Calhoun and I, though busy swatting bees at the time, were given a baptism we are not likely to forget, as salvo after salvo rained upon us.

Obviously, it is most difficult to remain entirely indifferent to events while clinging for dear life onto a tree limb, while simultaneously swatting at bees and dodging polecat residue. Although we had ringside seats to the action below, we were not the happiest of spectators."

"Do something, Uncle Bogey," Calhoun called.

"Do what!" I yelled back between swats.

"Play something to soothe these savage beasts, like you said," he begged with a note of desperation..

"In retrospect I suppose it was as sound an idea as one might come up with, given our precarious situation. So saying, I removed the little Pocket Pal from my pocket and gave it a manly effort. I could say the wistful strains of Claire de Lune wafted into the scented air, but it wasn't. All I could produce on the cookie clogged instrument was a feeble effort somewhat less than that of the Philadelphia Philharmonic on a bad night. Clinging to a limb in a swarm of mad bees and a cloud of polecat pee is not conducive to a concert quality performance.

While it might not have exactly soothed the savage beasts, they could not abide the racket and soon vacated the premises. Mama hog trotted off into the woods followed by her brood, and the completely discharged polecats left in the opposite direction. The bees, perhaps subdued by the aroma rising from our very pores, subsided into their hive

Calhoun and I dropped to the ground from our erstwhile refuge from the very low limb we previously occupied without further disturbing the fractious honey-makers. After dabbing our wounds with the cooling mud from the creek, we made our weary way home.

Gussie, you might assume, was more or less overwhelmed to see us, although she was careful not to greet us with open arms. Since we had approached the house from the upwind side, she had caught a whiff of the redolence emanating from our persons long before she saw us.

Making certain we didn't enter the house, Marigold interposed her considerable bulk in our path. As a consequence, we have been occupying the toolshed at the back of the house for the past several days and taking daily baths to try with only limited success to stem the stench

that seemed to cling to us with unusual tenacity. Gussie burned our clothes and tossed us some old rags to wear until the results of our adventure become less obvious.

Marigold leaves our meals at the door, and I sleep on a cot. Calhoun swung a hammock in the corner. What the heck, it isn't so bad. Calhoun has plenty of time to practice. My head is still too swollen to get a harmonica in my mouth, and in the meantime you may be sure nobody disturbs us."

An anguished sob from the Newcomer broke the silence that followed the Colonel's narrative, as he bolted toward the restroom door. The Colonel's brow lifted at this reaction. "Poor fellow," he said, shaking his head sadly. "I didn't know my story was quite so dolorous. I suppose some people are just sensitive that way."

Chapter 4 - The Colonel Has A Visitor

Ozzie Clodfelter's venerable old cab arrived at the Colonel's front gate in a cloud of dust. Ozzie Clodfelter's taxi cab always arrived in a cloud of dust, even on rainy days. Ozzie's taxi carried its own dust and hadn't been washed since before the Hoover days. Ozzie, being of the opinion that its coating of grime protected the paint and wooden sides from the elements, never washed it. As a result, several layers of Keowee County mud had hardened upon the exterior over the years. As it had been years since wood or paint had been more than barely visible hints beneath the veneer of mud and marl, no one could prove or disprove his theory.

Ozzie hurried around to open the passenger door and help his passenger dismount. It was a service Ozzie performed with practiced aplomb ending with his hand extended, palm up, just as he had seen it done in the picture show. Sometimes it paid off with an extra tip if the fare was from somewhere "up north", like Raleigh or someplace good. He performed the same service for locals, too, but so far the most he had received from them was a warm handshake.

He still had to open the door for them, unless they happened to be carrying a monkey wrench. Otherwise, they couldn't get out. The door wouldn't open from the inside without the use of at least a pair of vise-grips. Of course, he saved the parade of ostentation for "them what appreciates it"; meaning out-of-towners. His present fare was obviously an out-of-towner, who might be inclined to part with a generous gratuity, given the proper treatment..

Ozzie was not disappointed. The swarthy, clean shaven, richly dressed, athletic young man who alighted from Ozzie's ancient chariot exuding self-confidence, did indeed press a crisp new bill into Ozzie's outstretched palm. Wow! That was a New York tip. Ozzie had never gotten one of them, not even from somebody from as far north as Richmond or Nashville. It was a gen-u-wine red letter day for Ozzie.

The dapper young stranger made a valiant, but futile, attempt to brush the dust from the dark pinstripe three piece suit he wore. Straightening his school tie and stomping the dirt from the alligator Gucci's, he flicked a not-at-all imaginary fleck from his sleeve and adjusted the Homburg on his head.

The custom fitted suit clung to his lithe frame without a wrinkle. His features were those of a man of purpose, not to be taken lightly or opposed. Character was apparent in the strength of his square jaw. No one could doubt for a moment that he was plenty able to

accomplish whatever he set out to do. His countenance was further enhanced by a smooth swarthy complexion. Keen brown eyes above high cheek bones penetrated to the very soul. A wide mouth that smiled the generous easy smile of the graceful winner beneath the slightly hooked aquiline nose gave him the look of a hungry hawk. There were people more inclined to believe it was the visage of a vulture waiting for something to die, but they were in the minority.

Leaving Ozzie gaping at his newfound wealth, he proceeded up the walkway. A slim leather attache' case and a small black bag constituted his only visible luggage. Pausing at the top step, giving his eyes a chance to adjust to the deep shade of the veranda, he strode across the porch and rapped sharply on the door. It was not the hesitant rap of the uncertain, but the confident insistent knock of a man who meant business. Who was accustomed to confrontations, and victor of most..However, such confrontations had merely involved high powered international financiers. He had never before encountered the likes of Marigold in her own ball park, so to speak.

The embodiment of the word "formidable" was at that very moment approaching, as evidenced by the heavy tread and the vibrations of the flower box by the door frame. The door flew open, revealing Marigold standing straight as a Prussian Drill Sergeant and firm as the Rock of Gibraltar, potholder in hand.

"The Colonel say he don' want no mo' in-shorance," the Collossus announced without preamble and prepared to shut the door. Marigold was a firm believer in not wasting her time or anyone else's. Her abrupt announcement had the same effect on the young man's confident aplomb as a salvo of heavy artillery has upon troops just before they launch an attack.

"Wha-? No! Wait a minute. I'm not selling insurance," the startled young man called through the screen door. "Here's my card," he said, proffering the small square of highly embossed cardboard. "Look".

Marigold cracked the door a tiny bit, enough to admit the card if not the bearer thereof. She studied the missive through squinched eyes, adjusting the focus through outstretched arm. She read:

Thomas T. Drumm
Securities, Stocks, Bonds
Member NYSE

"S'curities, huh? He ain gone be intrested in no bugglar 'larms, neither," she said, shoving the card back through the crack.

"Bugglar alar...No! Please! I...uh...er...ah, I think you misunderstand, madame. I am in secur...Uh, no, I...May I just see the Colonel for a moment, please? I am sure he will be interested, once I introduce myself."

Marigold stood her ground, and she took up quite a bit of it. "Well, if you're selling magazines, I can tell you right now he ain't gone be intrested a-tall."

"Magazines?...No...I...uh...ah..." he stammered, completely undone.

"He's already gettin' The Aggressive Farmer, an' Fishin' For Food and Fame, an'..."

"Please, madame," he broke in, regaining some of his aplomb. "I promise I am not selling anything, but I must see Colonel Bogey about a matter of the utmost importance. If you would please tell him I am here."

"Utmost, huh? Too bad. I can't tell him. He ain't here." With that, Marigold considered the matter closed, and turned to go back to her business which the stranger had interrupted.

"Wait! Can he be reached?" Thomas T. Drumm persisted. He did not earn his reputation as the chief Wall Street raider by being easily discouraged.

"Well, I suppose if you had a long enough pole you could reach him. I don't think you would want to use a short pole."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see. He's back in the too' shed."

"Ah, thank you very much." Drumm was pleased to know he was at least on the premises. "Now, if you will please direct me to Shed Number Two, I would be most grateful."

"Say what?"

"Shed Number Two," he repeated. "Isn't what you just said?"

"You tryin' t' be funny, man?" she glowered.

"Ah...er...no, no...I just thought...that is...er..." poise crumbling before the ebony tsunami about to engulf him for no earthly reason he could perceive.

"Listen, man. We got a tractor shed, a smoke house, a corn crib, a barn, a hen house, a blacksmithy, a well house, a pig sty, a place where we sto' shovels and hoes, and an outhouse what we don't use no mo', but we ain't got nuthin' like no shed number two. I said he's in the too' shed. Pay tenshun! I said he's in the too' shed! The too' shed! Understand?"

"Right," he said, as if he did understand, which he didn't. "Two shed," he mumbled, backing away, "and where did you say it was?" he inquired, smiling and tipping his Homburg.

"'Round back," she roared. "Jus' follow yo' nose. You can't miss him. You sho' can't miss 'im," she called after the hastily retreating figure. "Hee hee."

He truly did not want any more of that dark scowling Vesivius, primed to erupt. He didn't understand why she seemed so pleased with that last remark, but he was glad she wasn't roaring at him..

"What do you want me to do with all this gear?" Ozzie called from the taxi.

"Bring it around to Shed Number Two," Drumm called back.

"Shed Number Two," Ozzie puzzled to himself. "What is he talking about? The privy, maybe? That's for number two, all right, but what does he want to put his stuff in the privy for?" Ozzie scratched his chin and pondered a moment. "So what," he shrugged, "anybody that tips like he does can put his bags anywhere he wants 'em, as far as I'm concerned." He headed for the privy.

Drumm continued to the rear of the house, as directed. There he found several outbuildings, just as Marigold said, including barn, corn crib, tractor shed, well house, and an ancient privy overgrown with honeysuckle and kudzu, but nothing designated as Shed Number Two. He wasn't about to risk knocking on the door and asking for further directions, so he decided to do what she said and "follow his nose".

A foul odor coming from a building well upwind from where he stood offered the best opportunity for following one's nose. Considering he hadn't smelled anything quite like it since the height of a New York City garbage strike, he concluded that must be the building.

Although it made his eyes water and his nose rebel, he walked resolutely toward the source of the pollution. Thomas Drumm, not to be detracted, was clearly a man on a mission. He rapped firmly on the door, which was opened by a pink faced, rather rotund gentleman of obvious distinction, taste, humor, and breeding.

"Colonel Amos Bogey, I presume," Drumm gasped in the putrid atmosphere.

"The same," said he, grasping the proffered hand. Drumm's quest had ended.

"The knock on the door was somewhat of a surprise to Calhoun and me. Since our exile to the tool shed, visitors have been understandably in short supply. Except for my brief appearance at the White Star, we had not left the premises.

Calhoun and I thought ourselves to be presentable by now, but Gussie and Marigold waved us off that morning when we came to the back door seeking breakfast. I supposed we had become inured to eau de polecat by now, but Marigold and Gussie decidedly were not.

Their answer to our predicament was to toss us fresh towels and lye soap, and advise us to bathe in the creek until the redolence of our latest misadventure wore off. Meanwhile, we were not allowed to pollute the pure air in their kitchen.

I opened the door in response to the knock and beheld a dapper young man, admittedly a little green around the gills, inquiring if I were the noted Colonel Bogey.

"The same," said I, "and may I present my nephew, Master J. Calhoun Pickney."

"Hi," Calhoun said, stepping forward and extending his hand, showing both poise and good breeding. At that simple gesture the stranger's eyes began to water. I didn't think it was all that unusual for a well bred young man of Calhoun's tender years to shake hands, but maybe children in the stranger's part of the Country weren't so well schooled in proper manners.

"Isn't it kind of close in here?" the stranger asked. As a matter of fact I suppose it was, but Calhoun and I had grown so accustomed to we, we didn't notice.

"Just keep low, and don't breathe too heavily," I advised. "This air does take some getting used to. Calhoun, open another window, and take Mr..er...ah...Mr..." I was completely baffled.

"Drumm," he said, offering his card.

"...Drum's hat and coat. Mmmm," I said, "studying the richly embossed card, "Not from around here, judging from your accent, attire, and card."

"No, but my ancestors were," he said, "and please note, I am no longer in securities."

"I am glad to hear that," I said, "we already have a flock of geese to take care of that."

"Geese...?" he said, looking somewhat confused, "but what's that got to do with...?"

"Certainly, sir, geese. Isn't that what you're selling? Surely, if you have anything to do with the security of livestock, you know about geese."

"No, I didn't know...? Geese? Sounds like a commodity to me, and I never dealt in commodities...Geese?"

From his reaction, I was beginning to wonder if he was who he said he was, or knew anything at all about the security business.

"Son, everyone knows you might drive a stolen pig past a sleeping dog, but you can't sneak a dead mouse past a gaggle of geese. Perhaps that is why you are no longer in the business," I suggested.

"Geese...", he repeated faintly. "Oh, yes. Now I see...geese...security..."

"We have an ample flock," I assured him. "We won't be needing anymore geese," I said with a finality that left no doubt we were not in the market for geese. Bogeys can be very firm if they wish. It is a mark of the clan.

"Actually, I was never that closely involved with geese," he said. "I bought and sold stock."

"You mean like cattle and horses?" Calhoun drew closer. Although the man didn't look it, Calhoun thought there might be a cowboy story in the offing.

"We have a nice herd of them, too," I said. "In fact, we might sell you a few."

"No, no. Not cattle," he said. "Not that. I don't need cows. I mean, I sold stocks and...Well, come to think of it, I did sell a couple of real turkeys at that."

"I thought so," I crowed triumphantly. "I thought we would get around to the nubbin of the matter sooner or later. Livestock and turkeys, too. I'll tell you straight, we don't need any turkeys to feed, and as long as my neighbor's bull keeps jumping the fence, we won't need a bull, either."

Subject closed," I said with a finality that left no doubt."

"Look," he said, with what I thought was unwonted asperity, "I didn't come here to sell cowsgoatshorseschickensturkeyshogssheeporbulls..." There, he took a deep breath, and immediately regretted having done so. When he got through gagging, he managed to continue in a rather husky voice.

"I came here to talk about my ancestors and my birthright," he gasped.

I will have to say, Calhoun and I were not prepared for this turn of events, and he immediately got our undivided attention. A man that willing to talk about his ancestors deserves no less.

Clearing his throat and wiping his eyes with an expensive linen handkerchief, he sniffed a couple of abbreviated sniffs before beginning his tale. Calhoun and I were all ears.

Chapter 5 - Drumm's Tale

"Fine," I said. "I always like to see a man interested in his family, but I don't recall ever having known any Drumm's around here."

"They departed this area many generations ago," Drumm said, "but, in order to fully understand my mission, you must first hear the history of the Hankapookie Hex that plagued my forebears up until the present day."

I must warn you, it is a long, sad, and sometimes unbelievable saga. I am a first hand witness to the workings of this dreaded curse, and other incidents through the ages have been handed down by people of impeccable character. I think you will find it of interest."

"Continue, sir," I adjured him. "You will find Calhoun and I have all the time in the world, and I assure you we shall not miss a single word of your narrative."

Calhoun, sensing something different about to happen, hastened to bring the stranger a cushioned chair. Then, snuggling down in the old flea bitten, moth eaten bearskin rug at the stranger's feet, stared up in rapt attention, so as to miss nothing.

As for myself, I settled back into my old well worn easy chair, lit a fine Cuban cheroot to make the air more breathable, and, with everything in readiness, with a nod I bade our guest to begin.

"My father was the great Metropolitan Opera star, Basil Drumm, whom the press insisted upon referring to him as 'Bass Drumm', as that was his forte", he began.

His words stirred a vague memory of having seen his name in the papers. "I seem to recall he was involved in some sort of tragedy during a performance."

"Precisely," Drumm said. "Only the Curse that has bedeviled my family for generations could have been responsible.

"What happened?" Calhoun asked.

"He was done in when a fourhundred pound diva fell on him in the middle of her death scene. The audience thought it was part of the show, and never knew my father was being crushed under a mezzo-soprano behemoth.

"How tragic," I commiserated.

"Yes. It took the entire army of spear bearers to get her off him. Had she allowed them to touch her before she had finished her aria and two encores, my father might still be alive. But, as it was, he expired somewhere between her death song and the second encore.

In the finest tradition of show business, 'The show must go on', but by the time anyone discovered what was happening, it was curtains for Pop."

"Touching," I said. "What about your Mother?"

"I'm afraid Mom departed in my early youth," he said.

"I am sorry," I offered with the deepest sympathy. "Cut down in the Glory of her youth. So tragic. Do you think that was also part of the Curse?"

"Oh, no. She's not dead. She departed with an Italian Count. Last I heard they were living it up on a small villa outside Perugia, where they stomp their own grapes, grow most of what they eat, and make their own cheese.

Turns out he wasn't a very rich Count, but they make do. They run a little souvenir shoppe where they do pretty well selling trinkets to tourists, and the Count sometimes drives a tour bus. I send them a check once in awhile to tide them over during the off season."

Sensing that further comment was unnecessary, I made none. He continued.

"My Grandfather, Breckenridge Drumm, worked at Mr. Ford's right hand, developing the automobile. He was a keen inventor, making a fortune with his doo-dads, but one proved to be his downfall."

"What was that?" Calhoun asked, but needn't have. Drumm was on a roll.

"His specialty was safety equipment, notably brakes. The press and his friends referred to him as 'Brake' Drumm.

"That seems appropriate," I commented.

"Yes, but I am afraid Grandpa overdid it," Drumm shook his head sadly.

"How so?" I enquired.

"He put his entire fortune, every cent he had, into developing a brake that would stop a car on a dime."

"A laudable endeavor."

"Yes, but wait. He was demonstrating his invention for a bunch of prospective investors when the fatal accident occurred.

"The curse again," Calhoun said.

"I am sure it was," Drumm nodded. "According to reports, Grandpa was doing about a hundred and thirty, a new speed record for the time, when he applied the brakes."

"They failed and he crashed," I said in anticipation, hoping to spare our narrator of a painful moment.

"No, the brakes worked to perfection. The car did stop on a dime, and they had to scrape Grandpa off the windshield with a putty knife. There wasn't enough money left to bury him, so, they slipped him into a number 10 envelop with no return address and mailed him to a false address in the mid-west. I suppose Grandpa is reposing yet in the Dead Letter File in Oglala, Nebraska, unless they found someone to deliver him to."

"A pity he didn't invent the seat belt first," was my only comment.

Drumm continued: "His father, Great-grandpa Earl Drumm, was a rough and tumble old wildcatter known as 'Crude Earl', who made a fortune in Okalahoma crude, but he couldn't let well enough alone.

"What happened to him?" Calhoun asked.

"He joined the Klondike Gold Rush, made it over Chillikoot Pass, and struck it rich in the Klondike."

"Sounds good to me," I injected.

"All went well for a time, but one day he simply disappeared under rather unusual circumstances."

"Tell us more," Calhoun fidgeted.

"His partner, one Honest Lucky Luciano, claimed Earl fell out of his canoe while on the way to deposit his gold in the bank in Dawson. Unfortunately the gold was in his pockets and he sank like a rock. Honest Lucky was able to recover the gold, but they never found Crude Earl. Coincidence? You tell me."

"Do you think three tragedies constitute a Curse?" I asked.

"There is more," Drumm said. "Great Uncle Ward Drumm, an international arms dealer, sold guns to Balkan Princes."

"What happened to him? Was he killed in one of his wars?" Calhoun wanted to know.

"No. He booked his return trip on the maiden voyage of the Titanic."

"Scratch Uncle Ward," I said.

"Then there was Uncle Bongo," Drumm went on, "He thought guns were responsible for all the mayhem in the world.

I guess he was ashamed of Uncle Ward, and was trying to make amends by going on a purely photographic expedition to Africa."

"Laudable," I said.

"He was grinding away on the greatest shot he ever took, when he was impaled upon the horn of a charging rhino."

"Disaster," was my comment.

"The irony was, he not only didn't have a loaded gun, he also forgot to load the camera."

"One should pay attention to such details," I commented, as Drumm continued his sad litany of family tragedies.

"There was Aunt Earline, old Earl's daughter. She was a noted world traveler, society woman, and high roller in the capitols of Europe. While gambling for high stakes in Monaco, she won a window seat on the Hindenburg's last journey.

Aunt Ear, as we called her for short, ended up a charred heap in Lakehurst, New Jersey."

It was becoming more and more apparent that, unless they were particularly accident prone, something sinister was at work among this family.

"Cousin Kettle was a very successful pots and pans salesman. He had itchy feet, and eye for the ladies, and an urge for the Main Chance, which proved to be a fatal defect."

"How's that?" Calhoun asked.

"He would make a sale and get out of Dodge, leaving behind a trail of broken hearts. Several fathers, brothers, husbands, and boyfriends were apt to be enquiring after him at any given time.

At any rate, since he didn't do much repeat business, he traveled all over the world, breaking hearts and seeking greener pastures in which to peddle his wares.

Eventually he ended up in New Guinea where a chance meeting with the father of a girl he had wronged back in Peoria changed his life."

"The father shot him?"

"No. He forgave old Kettle, and to prove his good faith, he informed Kettle of excellent opportunities among a tribe back in the hills.

"The Main Chance!"

"Yes, and he grabbed it and lit out for the hills. In a way I suppose it was good advice, because right off the bat he made a big hit with his dusky friends and sold them his largest king-sized cooking pot, with which they were so delighted they invited him to stay for dinner."

"A fatal mistake?"

"He was the main course, and by all accounts, was delicious when served rare."

"I am convinced there has been a most peculiar set of circumstances at work in your family," I said, "but what has that to do with your family being from these parts. Furthermore, what does that have to do with me?"

"I am coming to that, but you will have to hear me out in order to fully appreciate my position."

"Let him finish, Uncle Bogey," Calhoun urged, completely enthralled. "I want to hear the end."

"You have heard the fate of my more recent ancestors and kin," Drumm went on. "The curse reaches back into the days of antiquity.

Several greats back, and my direct ancestor, was Snare Drumm, a leading Mountain Man of his day. He led men in the opening of the West, and is almost personally responsible for wiping out the beaver in many parts of the Rockies.

Some say Mr. Astor could not have made his millions without Snare Drumm's beaver pelts."

"I'll bet he was killed by Indians," Calhoun said.

"No. Being an Indian, himself, he got along very well with his aboriginal bretheren. According to a band of fellow Mountain Men, he was on his way from the Fur Trapper's Rendezvous with a bag containing a large sum of money he got for his furs, when he met his untimely end.

His buddies all agree on the details. It seems he mistook a hibernating grizzely for a fur coat someone had lost. When he grabbed the collar and tried to drag it out of the snow the bear woke up and a terrific fight ensued in which old Snare was holding his own. The end came when the bear grabbed him in a grizzely bear hug and burped a grizzely bear snort in his face, grabbed the bag of money which he thought must be something to eat, and went back to bed.

That one snort of grizzely bear morning breath was enough to shrink Snare's brain to the size of a pea and put him away. After all the bear had been sleeping nearly two months. It was a quick but horrible end for Snare.

None of the onlookers were to anxious to tackle that mad grizzely. That is why they never recovered Snare's money bag. The manner of Snare's demise affected the men greatly. They never got over it, and most of them stayed drunk the rest of their lives, trying to erase the memory.

Snare's father, my direct ancestor, as I told you, once lived in this area, and it was he upon whose head the Horrible Hex was laid. You have heard some of the catastrophic results that have plagued us through the Ages. Now, I will tell you how the Hex came about and you will see why I came to you whose family is among the oldest citizens of the Region."

Calhoun and I sat forward. This is what we had been waiting to hear.

Chapter 6 - The Hex

"What about this Hex," I asked.

"Yeah, how about it?" Calhoun echoed.

"Snare's father, and my direct ancestor, was the Medicine Man of the tribe, and therefore a very powerful and influential leader," Drumm began. "No great tribal decisions were made without consulting him."

I didn't see what that had to do with a Hex, but it was Drumm's story and we were anxious to hear it. I chose to remain silent, and cautioned Calhoun with a shake of a finger to do the same.

"He was not only a chief, he was the tribe's spiritual leader. He took care of their ills, officiated at births and circumcisions, pulled teeth, and reputedly had enough clout with the Great Spirit to cause it to rain, foretell the future, and cure the gout.

The problem was, he could never remember the words to the sacred incantations, so he just hummed along and faked it, hoping for the best. That is how he got his name."

"Hope Drumm?" Calhoun queried.

"No. Hummm Drumm. The name stuck, and he was quite well known in his time."

"You mean the magic stuff really worked?" Calhoun asked.

"Apparently it was effective enough, or he was a very shrewd guesser, and when it didn't work, he just told the tribe the Great Spirit said 'No'. The peace-loving Hankapookies had implicit faith in him."

"If they were so peace loving, how did they get into so much trouble?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that," Drumm said. "It was a matter of economics. The Hankapookies were poor and starving until the white man came and rid the country of the fierce and war-like tribes that had pushed the Hankapookies around and forced them to live in the swamp. They had pretty much gotten the short end of the stick, but when the others left, the Hankapookies stayed put."

"How did that happen?" I asked.

"Simple. First of all, nobody wanted their swamp, and the Hankapookies were always a trading Nation. In fact, they found they had a knack for out-trading the white man. Trading is in their blood. They

got rich on blankets, trinkets, and other souvenirs they manufactured for trade to the folks in the neighborhood and the wagon trains moving west. The settlers all loved them."

"They had rather swap than fight, I take it," I offered, in an attempt to lighten the moment. However, my effort fell a little short.

"Exactly," Drumm continued. "You think the Dutch are good traders because they purchased Manhattan Island for \$24 dollars worth of beads? Not so fast. What the world doesn't know is they bought the island from a Hankapookie, who didn't even own it! Now, who do you think is the best trader, the guy who bought it or the Indian who sold real estate he didn't own? He was ahead \$24 bucks, and they are lucky he didn't get them to throw in the deed to Amsterdam, to boot!

Trading is how I made a bundle on Wall Street," Drumm acknowledged modestly. That also explained the pin stripe suit, the narrow tie, the Gucci alligators, and the mix-up about the stock; but it didn't explain the Horrible Hankapookie Hex..

"They also had an ace-in-the-hole, which the white man called 'Hankapookie Hooch'. When the white man drank it, he did all sorts of foolish things. Hankapookie squaws used it to clean pots, soothe diaper rash, a lineament for sore muscles, bee stings, and snake bite. It was also useful for greasing axles, tanning leather, waterproofing wigwams, and starting fires. They would never think of drinking the stuff, but if the white man wanted to, we didn't think it was a good idea, but that was his business.

So, they prospered among the new settlers, until the Hex was pronounced upon them"

"Is there really such thing as a 'hex', Uncle Bogey?" Calhoun asked.

I answered with a confidence I truly did not feel, "Not to worry, Calhoun, just a long series of coincidences."

Calhoun caught the grain of doubt, even though it was of the tiniest nuance, but he subsided, not quite satisfied. I had to admit to myself, I wasn't so certain I would wager the farm, even at Arbuckle's odds.

"Perhaps not," Drumm acknowledged, "But is a string of coincidences that has persisted through nearly two centuries."

I was forced to concede he had a pretty good point there.

"How did they get hexed?" Calhoun asked, all ears once more, and growing a little impatient.

"Patience, my boy, and don't interrupt. He will tell us in good time," I cautioned.

"Not only were the Hankapookies great traders," Drumm went on, "they were also constant tinkerers. Cooped up in their swamp, they had to be clever inventors simply in order to survive.

The trouble began when Humm, himself, invented a combination ear trumpet-geese call for deaf white men who wanted to go hunting."

"Sounds like a great idea," I prompted.

"Did it work?" Calhoun asked.

"I suppose that depends on your point of view," Drumm answered doubtfully. "For a cock-a-mamie scheme, it sold pretty well on the very narrow local market.

However, it wasn't entirely fool proof. It had a few flaws that would have made it carry a warning label nowadays, and he could never have gotten Good Housekeeping's Seal of Approval. Humm never actually field tested it, himself. He saw no need. People wanted it, and he sold it.

It seems an old geezer named Ebenezer Greasley bought one and went out on the marsh one day to try his luck.

"What happened?" Calhoun asked.

"He gave a toot at a high flying flock of geese, then put the trumpet end to his ear to see if they were answering him." At that Drum paused, looked down, and shook his head sadly.

"He never knew what hit him," he said, still shaking his head as if to drive the image away.

"What did hit him?" Calhoun and I inquired simultaneously.

"They were never sure, but apparently Humm made a better moose call than a goose call, and it wasn't worth a flip as an ear trumpet, because he never heard it coming. That thing hit him so hard it drove the trumpet clean through one ear and out the other, and nailed him to a gum tree where his body swung in the breeze like a bell clapper for three days before anyone ever found him."

"Was that the beginning of the Hex?" Calhoun wanted to know.

"Not exactly. First old Greasley's widow wanted a refund, but the Hankapookies weren't coming. They said, first of all, it was now damaged goods, and secondly, they only guaranteed that it would attract game, and it had certainly done that. It wasn't their fault old Eb got done in by the game it attracted. The old man had gotten his money's worth and then some. Furthermore, they accused the widow of trying to make Indian-givers out of them.

That made her mad and she hired the local witch, one Drucilla Barfly, to hex the Hankapookies. She didn't want just a common ordinary run of the mill hex.that made them break out in a rash and itch. She wanted a super hex that would last awhile. It cost her a bundle and decimated the population of tree frogs, newts, polliwogs, dead cats, and whatever else goes into the mixture for a super hex.

That is the story of how the hex began and just a few of the terrible consequences."

"Is that why the Hankapookies left the country, leaving nothing behind except the name of the swamp that had been their home?" I asked.

"No, they weren't at all that concerned about the hexes cast by whites, although they grossly underestimated the power of old Drucilla. They hung around quite awhile after that, but got restless when business began to fall off, and started searching for greener swamps, so to speak..

A few people died of small pox, and they began to wonder if there wasn't something to this hex thing. Still they hung on, hoping for a better day, but those hopes were dashed when a hell fire and damnation preacher came through this part of the Country. I guess it was a better year for preachers than for bootleggers. That preacher scared the pants off most of the drinking population. Everyone signed the pledge, and the Hankapookie Hooch business went down the tube. That was the straw that the bull choked on, as it were. The Hankapookie decided to saddle and ski-daddle. The only thing they left behind was their name on an impenetrable swamp and a lingering taste for a Devil's brew that nobody knew how to make."

"Where did they go?" Calhoun asked, being very involved in the story.

"They drifted north on what became known in tribal lore as the old Hex Highway, because they kept dieing off for one reason or another. Others knew it as the Trail of Trades, as that is how they made their living along the way. They lived like a bunch of Gypsies. After a period of homeless wandering, they finally ended up in the

jungles of Manhattan where they naturally gravitated to the trading pits of Wall Street.

"Naturally," I said dryly. My skepticism was melting with every ever disaster he related.

"Did they get away from the hex?" Calhoun wanted to know.

"Well, they did fairly well in the stock market, but an accident here, and a disaster there; one by one they kept dieing off until now.

"Until now?" I prompted.

"Yes, until now. Gentlemen, I am here because of the Hex."

"You have come home to die," I commented gravely in an appropriately hushed voice, thinking of the fresh faced young man before me, dieing so young, full of promise.

"Heck no. I've come home to live," his voice was not without a strong note of determination and resolve. "If there is any way to lick this horrible curse, I am going to find it, and the best place to start is at the source."

You certainly have to admire and encourage anyone with that kind of spunk. "Bully for you, son," I said, clapping him on the back.

"Where are you planning to live while you conquer this hex?"

"I am reclaiming my birthright, the fifty-five thousand acre Hankapookie Swamp. I am getting out of that stupid Wall Street rat race, and I'm going to live like an Indian should, by my wits, unfettered, and free. I will live off the land as the Great Spirit intended.

"Are you sure you want to do that? You said they were starving," I reminded him, not wanting him to bite off more than he could chew. Although he was healthy and determined, his outdoor survival experience appeared to be minimal at best.

"They were starving before the white folks came. Now I have plenty of white folks around here to trade with, black folks, too," he added, thinking of Marigold, but he wasn't too anxious to take her on again any time soon..

"There is one other little problem," I cautioned. "Some of these people aren't going to take too kindly to moving off land they have been farming for eight generations. They might think they have established a pretty good claim to it."

"I hope to live in peace with all those around me, just as my ancestors did," he assured me. "I don't think anyone will have to move off a farm. Nevertheless, I do have a little leverage here, in case there is any questions." Opening the briefcase, he produced a large scroll of yellowed parchment bound with a rawhide thong.

"Look at this, Colonel," he said, spreading the scroll where we could all see.

It proved to be an ancient map with deed attached. It took a few moments to get oriented, but, seeing a few familiar landmarks noted on the map, it quickly became obvious what it was. "Why, this is a plat of Hankapookie Swamp!" I exclaimed.

"Precisely, sir, and you will note," he said, laying the papers in the blue cover before me, "that these documents attested to by six bureaus and three Departments of the United States Government that this swamp is as nearly worthless as any land on the North American Continent. None of them had the slightest hesitation in awarding me sole possession of it in fee simple.

The Great Hankapookie Nation now has title to Hankapookie Swamp, all Swamp rights, and all the privileges thereunto appertaining; as long as the grass shall grow and waters shall flow to the sea...it says here.

If white man doesn't speak with forked tongue, I guess it's mine," he said.

"You mean you are now the sole proprietor of fifty-thousand acres of impenetrable briars, weeds, tyty, sawgrass, and mush," I said, with only the slightest hint of irony.

"That's about it," he acknowledged. "No banker in the world would loan me the price of a cup of coffee on that swamp, but it now belongs to the Great Hankapookie Nation, or what is left of it.

This deed, was signed in 1769 by Lord Thistlewaite, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to King George III, and attested to by Colonel Amos Alonzo Bogey, Justice of the Peace for Keowee County and a kinsman of yours, I presume. Our claim is legal and hereby validated.

This X here," pointing to a squiggly smudge in the center of the parchment, "was made by my honored forebear, Humm. These X's here are the marks of other movers and shakers of the tribe, including that of Early Morning Drumm, Humm's wife. They called her 'Ear', for short, because she was always pulling Humm's ear for something. Squaws were very powerful in Hankapookie Society, and voted in their councils same as men."

"Ahead of their time," I commented.

"Colonel," he said, turning to me, "even with all the Government's assurances, since your ancestor signed the original deed, I won't feel entirely secure in my claim until you give it your blessing."

After carefully examining the signatures, I could readily see that it was, indeed, that of my illustrious forebear. "Son," I said, "you have nothing to fear. If a Bogey signs it, the deal stands. Bring on your tribe."

"The 'tribe', as you say, stands before you."

"You mean..."

"Yes. I am the Last of the Hankapookies."

Chapter 7 - Drumm Strikes a Bargain

Fifteen minutes after announcing that he was the Last of his Breed, Thomas Thompson Drumm, or Tom Tom, as he now preferred, presented himself stripped to the waist. Clad in breech clout, hatchet in hand, feather in headband, feet still in Gucci alligator loafers and argyle socks, he stood prepared to explore his newly claimed birthright.

Other than the Ray-Ban shades, Rolex watch, and Gucci alligators with the argyles, he appeared to be every inch the image of Rousseau's square-jawed Noble Savage, ready to pit his wits against the Forces of Man or Nature.

Ozzie Clodfelter was careful to stand upwind of us as we examined the several bundles he had unloaded in the barnyard.

"...And you want to tote this stuff into the swamp?" Ozzie asked, dubiously.

"Yes. I would like to set up camp as soon as possible."

"You are going to need help," Ozzie observed, scratching his head.

"I say, Drumm," I interjected, "it's pretty damp back in that swamp. What do you plan to do, roost on a limb?"

"I mean, a lot of help," said Ozzie, contemplating the numerous bales.

"Not exactly, Colonel," Drumm answered, ignoring Ozzie for the moment, "according to an old tribal tradition, there are several islands back in there where the tribe would take refuge when the other tribes got too frisky."

"I can probably get Bushrod Barfly to help, if he is sober," Ozzie muttered.

"There is a place we call the Buzzard Roost, but no one ever goes out there," I offered, trying to be helpful.

"Why is that?" Drumm asked.

"There's another load of this stuff back at the depot," Ozzie said to no one in particular, since no one seemed to be paying him much attention. "Drunk or sober, he'll be hanging around Shorty's Pool Room, if he's not in jail," he added, referring to Barfly.

"I suppose nobody ever thought it was worthwhile to fight their way through that thicket," I observed.

"Barfly knows how to get there," Ozzie went on.

"Is it that bad?" Drumm asked. "Could we break through with a heavy boat?"

"Wait 'til you see it," I answered. "It's so thick you can't even shoot a bullet through it. I mean, it is dense."

"That is just where I want to go," Drumm announced with a determination born of a monumental ignorance of Southern swamps. "Can you show me where it is?"

"No, but I know someone who can, if he's not drunk or in jail." Turning to Ozzie, I asked, "Do you suppose you could find..."

"If he's not at Shorty's, Sam will probably have him in the tank," Ozzie said, already on his way to his cab. "Back in a jif," he called over his shoulder, as he departed in his usual cloud of dust.

"What in thunder is in these bales, Drumm?" I asked, prodding one with my toe.

"Trade goods mostly. You know, beads, pots, pans, mirrors, brightly colored cloth, feathers, shiny things women around here might like."

"What's this?" I asked, prodding a particularly large bundle with my big toe.

"That is some Navajo type blankets I picked up at a bargain from a guy named Schultz, who was teaching his son how to go out of business for himself."

I acknowledged he was probably on the right track. It appeared young boys had an eye for brightly colored cloth, too. Calhoun had spotted the bale of blankets and was running toward me wrapped in one of the gaudier models. "Can I have this, Uncle Boge?"

"Let me see that," I said, fingering the blanket. "Mmmm...Feels a bit thin to me."

"It's a summer blanket," Drumm said, "any heavier and it would be too warm."

"Sounds plausible to me, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," Drumm replied, "it was made by natives with many years experience."

"Says her it was made in Hong Kong," I said thinking I had him there.

"That is exactly what I meant," Drumm replied quickly. "It was made by natives of Hong Kong, who really know how to weave a blanket, and I will tell you something else," he went on, "there is not one shred of common ordinary sheep wool in that blanket; so, there is no danger of catching the dreaded sheep pox or an ovine rash."

Although I didn't know what an ovine rash was, and had never heard of anyone catching the dreaded sheep pox from a blanket, it was good to know it wouldn't happen to us. Fact is, I had never even heard of sheep pox, either, but I did not know much about medical things.

"What is it made of?" I asked.

"It is woven of 100 percent pure virgin acrylic," Drumm announced proudly. "It will not shrink, absorb water, or burn. That is one of our safety features. It just melts down to a sticky goo, if it gets too hot."

"It sure looks neat, Uncle Bogey," Calhoun said, admiring himself in one of Drumm's trade mirrors. "I could use these moccasins, too."

"Made by Hong Kong natives?"

"Actually, they came from Singapore," Drumm acknowledged.

"Famous for footwear, no doubt."

"Oh, very," was his answer.

"I don't know," I said, rubbing my chin.

"Please, Uncle Bogey," Calhoun prodded. "This is really neat stuff, and Aunt Gussie said I needed some new shoes."

"I thought you all bought new shoes the first day you were here," I reminded him, shuddering at the memory of old Croaker mixing it up with Mrs. du Fester, and she thinking I had something to do with it.

"We did, but they were Sunday-go-to-meetings," he said.

"Please..."

I was about to remind him they were sneakers, and you don't wear sneakers to church, when Drumm broke in.

"Colonel, if you want to buy the blanket, I'll throw in the moccasins and a feathered headband."

"Wow! Did you hear that, Uncle Boge! Moccasins and a headband! Wow!"

"How much?" I asked, not too anxious to be sucked in by a shrewd Yankee trader.

"Cheap."

"How cheap?"

"I am practically giving it to you."

"I'm listening."

Only \$3.95..."

"Holy smoke!" I thought. "He is practically giving it to me!" There comes a time when a wise trader knows when to close the deal, and this was that time. "We'll take it," I said before he had a chance to back out.

"...down," he continued, "and only \$10 a month for the next twelve months, plus carrying charges."

Like magic he produced a clipboard containing a pink form and a pen. "Sign right here, Colonel."

"Not so fast, son. I don't sign anything until I read it."

"Certainly, Colonel."

I couldn't really see the document too well without my specs, but I wasn't about to let Drumm know that. I made out enough to wits and whereas to feel it was probably in proper form; but I couldn't let him think it was totally acceptable.

"You will have to change this to something more satisfactory," I said, pointing to what I thought might be an offending phrase.

Taking the clipboard, he examined I had indicated with a puzzled expression. "You want me to change the date?"

"Well, nevermind," I said, grabbing the pen. "Perhaps it's not so important, after all."

Calhoun grabbed up his prizes and headed for the woods, as Drumm tore off part of the paper and handed it to me.

"Colonel, you have trimmed me good on my first trade back in my homeland. I hope this is not an omen."

"Don't worry, son," I smiled, pocketing the paper. "When it comes to trading, women around here aren't nearly as sharp as I."

"I do pray that is true," Drumm said, putting the money I had given him into his lizza-gator wallet.

"You have to get up pretty early to outwit a Bogey."

"Who is this Barfly fellow Ozzie has gone to fetch?"

"He is the one person I know of who can get you back to where you want to go, if he is willing to do it."

"And if he isn't willing?"

"You won't get there, and that is a fact."

"Why wouldn't he be willing to guide me, if I am willing to pay?"

"Well, he is a pretty independent fellow, and he might not be in the notion. Money can't buy everything, you know."

"You mean my future depends upon the whims of a drunken bootlegger!" Drumm felt his heart sinking.

"It does if your future depends upon your getting through that swamp. Besides, Bushrod isn't exactly a bootlegger anymore. When his daddy died, Bush got to drinking it faster than he was making it. There was some trouble, and he ended up doing a stretch in the pen. Anyway, old habits die hard, and he might not be too anxious to reveal his hiding places to a Yankee Trader."

"You mean, my fate is in the hands of a bootlegger and a jailbird, too!"

"Ex," I said.

"Whatever," Drumm answered, "I still think it is pretty risky."

"Maybe not. He came out a different man in a lot of ways."

"Different...?"

"Maybe 'tamer' is a better word. Now, he is merely the Town Drunk, but sometimes he disappears into the woods for weeks and months at a time. No one knows where he goes or when he's coming back, but when he does show up, he is clean, well fed, and sober."

"What does he live on?"

"I don't know for sure, but he always comes out healthier than when he went in. He knows what's good and what's poison, and he knows where and how to find it. He knows how to trap game, where to find good water and nuts and berries. Get right down to it, that boy lives pretty good in the woods. He is about the finest woodsman in this part of the Country."

Ozzie's taxi was turning in the gate, but I didn't see any sign of a passenger. "Looks like we'll have to bail him out," I observed.

"That figures," Drumm said, not looking too happy.

Ozzie confirmed that thought immediately. "Sam Hundley's got him in the slammer for breaking old Jim Barrens' head for him as he was tryin' to slap old Shorty's waitress around."

In answer to Drumm's quizzical look, I said, "Jim Barnes is a bully; never picks on anybody he thinks might lick him, and Bush probably just couldn't stand it."

"You got that right," Ozzie chimed in. "Bush told him any man that would hit a woman would suck eggs and bark at the moon."

"That must have made Barnes happy," I said.

"Bush told Barnes right nice to 'cease and desist', but Barnes took exception to it, and went after the 'Town Drunk', thinkin' it would

be easy. He'd of been a heap better off if he had just kep' his mouth shut and gone on home. Bush liked to have killed him."

"Seems like our 'Town Drunk' has some good qualities, too," Drumm observed.

"Barnes' wife swore out a warrant for Bush's arrest, and Sam had to put him in the cooler," Ozzie informed them. "He was soused again by the time Sam found him."

Sheriff Sam Hundley was busy leafing through a stack of wanted posters when the four of us walked into his office. He wrinkled his nose before looking up and surveying the motley crew before him.

"What is this, Colonel, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show?" eyeing Drumm and Calhoun. "Smells like you got a dead buffalo with you. Time you got a fresh one."

Ignoring his well deserved remark about the dead buffalo, I just stated our business as briefly as possible.

"That's a relief," he chuckled, "I thought you might have come to scalp me and help him escape.

None of my business, but what do you want Bushrod for? He can't be very much help, the shape he's in right now."

"Mr. Drumm here is the Last of the Hankapookies," Drumm nodded, "and he has come to take possession of Hankapookie Swamp. First, he has to get back in there to make some kind of 'improvement' in order to validate his claim. He needs a guide, and Bush is the best qualified guide I know of."

"Draining that place is the best improvement I can think of, but Bush is the man.. That swamp is really wild. I expect he will need a guide to get him back out, too," Sam said, shaking hands with Drumm. "Come on back and see what you are getting. You might not want him."

Sam led the way down a long dark corridor lined with empty cells on either side. The noises coming from the last cell might have been made by a starved out lion at feeding time.

Sprawled out on the bunk was either a large sleeping man or a small hibernating grizzly bear. Whatever it was smelled even worse than either Calhoun or the Colonel. Sam opened the cell door and threw a bucket of cold water on the sleeping form.

"Wake up, Bush! Folks here to see you."

"Holy Mackerel, Sam! Can't a feller even take a nap around here without you trying to drown him?"

"These folks here say they want to bail you out, but I don't know why, unless they want to enter you in an ugly contest. You'd be a sure-fire winner."

Bleary-eyed, bearded, hair all frizzled out as if he had just been pardoned ten seconds after they threw the switch; it was pretty evident old Bushrod wasn't in the best shape I had ever seen him.

Drumm said nothing, but his open-mouthed stare and blank look told us he had just as soon trust his fate to General Custer as to the sorry specimen of humanity before him. Bushrod struggled to his feet and stood trying to focus his gaze, while swaying like a palm tree in a hurricane. Drumm, looking sad, was convinced the Hankapookie Hex was about to strike again.

"H'lo Colonel," he said by way of greeting. Then, making a face as if he had just found half a worm in half an apple, said, "Phew, Colonel! Pardon me for saying so, and no offense intended. I know I don't smell like a rose bush myself, but you and the young fella there smell awful! Why don't you take some vinegar and wash off that skunk juice. We like to keep the jailhouse clean. It's my home away from home, you know.

Vinegar! So that was the answer! We might have known Barfly would have a simple solution..

"Mr. Drumm, here," I motioned toward Drumm, resplendent in his tribal regalia, "has a business proposition for you of the utmost urgency. That is why we rushed right down here as soon as we heard about your problem with Barnes."

"I guess he won't be bothering anybody for awhile," Barfly said .

"At least not until he gets out of the hospital," I assured him.

Barfly apparently finally noticed Drumm for the first time. "Holy Cow!" he yelped, and fell back on his bunk. "Where'd he come from!"

"Wall Street," I replied, which did nothing to clear Barfly's already confused mind. He wasn't prepared at the moment to digest all that was before him. About that time Calhoun stepped forward, wrapped in his Hong Kong blanket, headband and feather in place, and he had added a coat of fierce luminous chartreuse enamel warpaint.

"Great Scott! Another one. A pygmy Indian on the warpath! I'll never touch another drop. I must be having a bad case of the DT's."

He shook his head as if to clear it of cobwebs and stray Indians, and reveal a Wall Street type more in keeping with his idea of Wall Street types.

Turning to me, and in a most desperate voice that quavered, "Are you sure..."

"Trust me," I assured him, "This is absolutely the only man who can."

"Can what, Colonel?" Barfly said, rising from his bunk, still slightly under the influence, eyes not exactly lining up with the holes in his head.

Addressing the trembling mound of jelly, I said, "Bushrod, the reason you think you see Indians is because one of them is one, and the other happens to be my nephew, Calhoun, and only a temporary Indian.

"Can what?" he repeated, not fully understanding what I was saying.

"Take Mr. Drumm, here, back into the Buzzards Roost, and teach him how to be an Indian. He is one, but he just doesn't know how to be one."

"I dunno," he hesitated, "it's pretty woolly back in there, an' I never took nobody there but Pap...an', an' it ain't no place for a Greenhorn." It was plain he didn't relish the idea of taking anybody back there; especially a stranger.

Barfly was still shaking his head and stammering excuses when Sam entered the cell. "Bush, Jim Barnes is puttin' out word all over town to anybody that will listen, that he will shoot you down like a dog, if he sees you, once he gets out of the hospital."

"I ain't afraid of Jim Barnes," Bush answered.

"I know you're not, but your back ain't bullet proof, an' that's exactly where that snake will shoot you, if he shoots at all. I think we'd better keep you here under protective custody until this thing blows over."

"Good Lord, Sam! I don't want to stay in jail until that fool decides to go home."

"And I don't want no killin' on my hands, either," Sam answered. "Besides, Mrs. Barnes hasn't dropped the assault charges."

"I didn't assault him, he assaulted me, and you know it, Sam"

"That's up to the judge," Sam noted. "Until then, you are in the custody of Keowee County, meanin' me, an' I ain't goin' to let you get yourself killed. That's final."

"Wait a minute, Sheriff," Drumm spoke up. "Couldn't you release him to the custody of a responsible citizen?"

"If he was a responsible citizen, willin' to put up a hundred dollar appearance bond. But, you're a stranger. I ain't about to, an' I ain't about to let him go off with no stranger."

"I didn't mean me, Sheriff, but you would release him to the custody of the Colonel, wouldn't you?"

"Just a minute..." I started to protest, but Sam cut in.

"I don't see why not."

Turning to Barfly, Drumm said, "If we do it, I'll be expecting you to get me back to the Buzzards Roost."

"Fine," Barfly said, all objections removed.

"Barfly ain't got no say so," Sam said. "How about it, Colonel?"

Things over which I had no control were happening awfully fast
"Well...er...ah..."

"I'll pay," Drumm said, and produced a hundred dollar bill from some unknown region, as his breech clout had no pockets that I could see."

Unable to field a single objection, I had to agree; but I felt I would live to regret it.

"You understand, Colonel," Sam cautioned, "you will have to get him out of town. I don't want no shooting."

"We are going to be going to the Buzzards Roost, Sheriff," Drumm smiled, "and as I understand it, nobody is foolish enough to follow us out there.

It also means you will have to go out there with them, Colonel," Sam reminded me. "I was already beginning to regret it."

"Whooo-pee!" Calhoun shouted. He had been busy making friends with Barfly, while we were busy deciding Bushrod's fate. "We are going out to the Buzzards Roost."

"I'll send him out to you first thing in the morning, Colonel. He doesn't appear to be in shape to go anywhere, right now."

It seems our intrepid guide had fallen back on his bunk, and was sleeping off the rest of his hangover.

Chapter 8 - Help Wanted

Calhoun and I came out smelling like dill pickles after bathing in vinegar, but, feeling much improved, we were once again allowed into the house. Evidently Gussie and Marigold had no objection to dill pickles. Calhoun, however, chose to camp out in the barn with Drumm to help keep an eye on his trade goods. That arrangement suited both parties just fine

Ozzie went off about his taxi business, promising to return in the morning bright and early with Barfly and all the help he could muster in the meantime. He stopped by all the local hangouts, the White Star and Shorty's Pool Room, without having much luck. The mere mention of the Buzzards Roost had a chilling effect on the locals. Even the Bohannon boys, who were usually game for anything, weren't too interested in slogging through Hankapookie Swamp.

Ozzie had about given up his quest for helpers when he decided to cruise over to the depot and try his luck with passengers on the evening train. This time he wasn't disappointed. Bouncing off the train like a pair of golf balls on rough pavement and heading straight for his cab were two high spirited young men in a jovial mood, obviously

fueled by the contents of whatever was in the fruit jar they were sharing.

The delightful duo was dressed in the local manner, and carried only light luggage in the form of two flour sacks. As they jostled and bantered their way toward the cab, Ozzie quickly sized them up with an eye long practiced at doing so. Ozzie had once read a story about a detective named Holmes, who could practically read a person's whole history at a glance. That had impressed Ozzie, and he had practiced doing so until he thought he was pretty good at it. Proud of his own powers of deduction, he deduced that men dressed as laborers preferred to walk the short distance to their boarding house, thus, saving cab fare.

Ozzie, judging from their light hearted manner, deduced these guys were looking for a good time, and would no doubt ask for a tour of the local dives. There wouldn't be much of a chance for a sizable tip from these jokers, but, if they were available for work, Ozzie could certainly oblige them. Drumm would take care of the fare and hopefully provide another generous tip.

Ozzie jumped out and held the door for the two young flies about to be tangled in his web. Yes, Ozzie Clodfelter was nothing, if not Clever (with a capital C), and somewhat devious (with a small d). He might have felt a twinge of pity for his unsuspecting prey, but he wasn't really bothered by those feelings. He would be as hard hearted and merciless as a lion stalking its prey. He also suspected the boys might have already primed themselves for the evening with a belt or two, but that would make his job that much easier.

"Where to, gents," Ozzie inquired, as he pulled away from the curb.

"You tell him, Pete," said the skinny one to his more rotund partner.

"I don't know, Arthur," Pete demurred. "You tell him."

"Are you gents here on business or pleasure?" Ozzie asked only as a matter of form, since he had already deduced they were obviously pleasure seekers. "How about Shorty's Pool Room? That's always a good place to start a fun evening."

To Ozzie's utter surprise, Arthur replied, "You might not believe it, but actually, we are here on business."

"But we mean to have a little pleasure while we're doing it," Pete chuckled.

"Right on," Arthur heartily agreed. "Pete, give the man a cigar. No point in our having all the fun."

"Okee-dokee," said Pete, whipping out a big fat stogie and offering a light, while Arthur took a long pull on the fruit jar that seemed to have appeared from nowhere.

"You still ain't said where you want to go," Ozzie reminded them, after taking a heavy drag on the cigar. "Man, this is a good cigar."

"Ought to be," Pete said. "Them's three-for-fifty."

"Whooeee! I ain't had no three-for-fifty like this 'un for awhile."

"It's a good'un, all right," Arthur agreed. "Pete gets 'em special made."

"What kind of business are y'all in, anyhow?"

"I 'spec you might say we are in the chicken business, an' we want to look over the country for opportunities," Arthur said. "How 'bout jus' takin' us out in the country, and let us look it over."

"At night?" Ozzie puzzled. "It's gettin' near sundown now."

"Oh, that's the best time," Pete said. "We don't want the competition to be able to spot us, hee, hee."

"Makes sense," Ozzie wondered what the giggling was about, but he wasn't about to let opportunity slip away. "If y'all are looking for opportunity to work in the meantime, I can oblige you."

"Whut doin'," Arthur inquired.

"Ah ha," Ozzie thought to himself, "I've got 'em interested. I didn't think they looked like no high powered executives."

"Yeah, like whut," Pete chimed in.

"Like he'pin' some fellers tote some stuff tomorrow."

"Whut kind of stuff," Arthur, the chief negotiator for the pair, queried with a strong note of doubt and suspicion in his voice. "We ain't goin' t' break our backs."

"Oh, just general kind of stuff. B'longs to an Injun, an' Injuns don't have no heavy stuff, much."

Ozzie took another puff on his three-for-fifty, and sat back. If things went along as he thought, he would be able to hit Drumm up for a pretty hefty fare, plus a tip. "That Injun is depending on me to recruit jus' the right kind of he'p, and you all look like right likely prospects. You might pick up some pretty hefty change, too." Ozzie was, indeed, the sly one.

"Injuns ain't got no money," Arthur half sneered.

"This 'un does," Ozzie assured him, "he's a Noo Yawk Injun."

"Let's he'p him out, Arthur," Pete put in. "We can tote stuff, an' besides, I ain't never seen a Noo Yawk Injun."

"You ain't never seen too many Noo Yawk people of any kind," Arthur observed.

"You could say that only because it's true," Pete acknowledged, and they both broke into a fit of rib-digging laughter.

When the laughter subsided and they got semi-serious again, Arthur, the negotiator, offered, "Tell you what we'll do. You take us where we are goin' for free, and we'll he'p you out tomorrow."

"Dang!" Ozzie thought. "These boys are a tougher nut to crack than I thought" Then aloud, he countered, "Ain't goin' t' do it for nuthin', but I'll do it for half." Since Drumm was going to pay the fare, anyway, Ozzie figured he didn't have much to lose.

"You drive a hard bargain," Arthur conceded, "but we'll do it, anyway. You take a check?"

"No checks," said Ozzie, hard nosed negotiator.

"We're a little short of cash right now. How's about you trust us, an' we'll pay you out of what the Injun pays us."

Ozzie pondered that offer for awhile, and concluded that Drumm was going to pay the fare, anyway. Therefore, if he kept his mouth shut, he stood to collect a fare plus a sizable tip from Drumm, and a half fare from the boys. He wasn't expecting much of a tip from them. Either way, he would come out way ahead of the game.

"Okay," he said, "you got it," but he was a tad miffed the boys weren't quite as easy as he first thought.

"You boys got a behind name to go with Pete and Arthur?" He was being a bit nosey, but that never bothered Ozzie a whole lot.

"We're the Gilroy boys from over at Pickens," Pete answered, "and we ain't braggin, but we can truthfully say most everybody over there knows us." He might have given that as a reason for showing up in Luthersville, but for reasons known best to himself and his brother, he decided to withhold that little gem of information.

BLAM-YOW!! The cigar exploded in a blinding flash and a huge puff of smoke.

"JAY-SUS!!" Ozzie shouted, the stub of the smouldring three-for-fifty clinched between his teeth.

Flying blind, Ozzie swerved off the road, bounced off a boulder, taking off a headlight and crumpling a fender.

"Whoopeeee!" Pete bellowed.

"Hang on!" Arthur shouted. "Yeehaaa, look out!"

The cab swerved back across the road and through a five strand pasture fence, uprooting a bunch of fence posts before burying itself in a haystack from which several cows had been placidly grazing before being scattered by the intruding missile..

Ozzie sat white-eyed in stunned silence, soggy three-for-fifty smouldering butt hanging from lower lip, white-knuckle death grip frozen to the wheel, brows and hair singed and smoking. A moment of silence, broken only by the hiss of escaping steam.

"Wha...wha hoppen," a dazed Ozzie croaked.

"Pete must of added a little extry gun powder to that cigar," Arthur chortled.

"You goin' t' hafta watch that stuff, Pete. You liked to of got us kilt."

The brothers dissolved into fits of laughter, but Ozzie was too stunned to move. Somehow the humor of the situation escaped him.

The small herd of cattle, whose peaceful evening routine had been suddenly shattered by the intrusion of the runaway cab, began returning. They surrounded the scene and stared at the intruders as solemnly as the losing crowd at a ball game.

An old black and white muley-headed heifer, the leader in their bovine hierarchy, broke away and headed toward the wide open gap in the fence, and the corn field across the road. It wasn't long before the rest of the herd began drifting along behind her. A gap in the fence just naturally attracts cows.

Bouncing out of the cab like two blobs of silly putty, the Gilroy Brothers surveyed the scene of mayhem in the late evening sun. They could see the right headlight was missing, but the left was still working. One being deemed sufficient, they gave no more thought to the missing headlight or to the cracked windshield or the missing hubcaps or the beat up bumper. That didn't hurt the running of it.

The biggest problem was the right fender, which was crumpled against the tire, but they could pry that off, given a proper pry-pole, such as one of at least a half dozen fence posts recently jerked out of the ground.

The radiator from which escaping steam made a noise somewhat akin to a neglected tea kettle, might be a problem for most folks, but not the Gilroy boys. Whenever you make use of whatever is handy in order to solve a problem, the army calls it a field expedient. The Gilroy boys were nothing if not old practiced hands at field expedience.

A little mule manure, with which the pasture was well supplied, and fresh water from a nearby stock tank added to the radiator did the trick. It wouldn't improve the atmosphere any, but it stopped the leaks; besides, you can't have everything. After they pried the fender off the tire, they conceded the front wheels might be a bit wobbly, but, without the means to straighten the axle, there wasn't much they could do about it. They would just have to live with it.

With a much disgruntled, morose, and sullied up Ozzie at the wheel, the boys pushed the cab back onto the road, and let it roll down a little grade in order to let the engine catch up. Ozzie was having a hard time steering now, with the front end doing a cross between a hula and a Mexican fandango, but when he popped the clutch, the old engine

sputtered to life. The boys caught up and scrambled aboard, and they were off once more into the gathering dusk, although Ozzie would have been just as happy to have left them behind..

Ozzie was a far cry from sharing the mood of his ebullient passengers. His pampered prize had never had to suffer the indignities of a crumpled fender, a cracked windshield, a missing headlight, a beat up bumper, two missing hubcaps, a floundering front end, and the crowning insult of mule manure in the radiator! Furthermore, he had never had a three-for-fifty explode in his face. He was beginning to believe he might have misjudged the pair of Happy Jacks occupying his back seat. They were definitely beginning to grind on his nerves.

"Aw, c'mon ole Ozz, be a sport," said Pete the diplomat, "We didn't mean no harm."

Ole Ozz remained silent.

"Hey Oz," Arthur called. "You know what the farmer said when he fell out of the barn loft?"

Silence...but that didn't bother the boys. They were having fun.

"Well, I guess I'll hit the hay! Wooshee hee hee haw!" slapping Ozzie on the back, and digging Pete in the ribs.

"Guess I'll hit the hay! Get it?" Pete gurgled.

"He must of been a-feelin' his oats," Arthur offered.

"Just barley", Pete shot back, and they broke up again, stomping the floor and slapping Ozzie on the back until his ears rang, so pleased were they at their own wit.

"Get it?" Arthur gasped. "I said 'feelin' his oats' and Pete said, 'Just barley' Oooh, hoo hoo hoo! I can't laugh no more. I think I'm goin' t' be sick!"

Ozzie thought the corn on the side of the road wasn't nearly as ripe as the corn on back seat. "I think I'm going to be sick, too," he muttered under his breath. Drumm was going to have a heck of a bill to pay for these two birds.

Hey old Ozzenfelter," Pete called out, and Ozzie winced at the butchering of his name. "Did you ever hear about the guy who invented a bread slicer that could slice up four loaves at a time?"

Ozzie remained adamantly silent.

"It was the first four loaf cleaver, ooh haw haw haw," more rib-digging, back slapping, and floor stomping laughter in which Ozzie failed to join.

At last Pete sang out, "Stop! Stop, the car, ole Ozzenfelter. This is the place we been lookin' for."

By then the lone headlight was assisted greatly by a full yellow moon bathing the whole world in its silvery blue sheen. There was no place in sight where the boys might 'do business', except perhaps at a nearby farmhouse, which was unlit. The boy's behavior had been so unpredictable, Ozzie thought nothing of it. If they wanted to do business in the dark, it was all right with him.

"Jus' wait right here and keep the motor running," Arthur suggested in a hoarse whisper.

"We won't be long," Pete added in a whisper. Ozzie could hear the brothers laughing and joking in muted tones as they ducked into the cornfield alongside the red clay road..

Ozzie sat back and relaxed for the first time since these two jokers climbed into his cab. While he awaited their return, he decided to flick on the old Atwater-Kent and tune in the happy voice of Smilin' Eddie Hill piped in direct, unless Smilin' Eddie was fibbing, from WLAC in Nashville, Tennessee. Hot dog! It was Ozzie's favorite program. He drummed his fingers to the delightful rhythm of Chet Atkins playing

Jada. Nobody had a touch on the guitar like Chet. Ozzie found himself smiling for the first time since the three-for-fifty blew up in his face.

"I wonder what happened to those guys?" Ozzie mused to himself while drumming to Chet. "I mean, how long does it take them to drain their lizards, anyway? Oh well, maybe they had to take care of some Big Business. I hope a snake doesn't bite them, it will surely die, if it does."

He considered leaving them, but he was in so deeply now, he figured he just had to get them to Drumm, now. There was no way he could come out even, but if he could charge Drumm enough commission for finding them, he could at least cut his losses.

The moon was high, the stars were out, and a thin mist was rising from the creek along the corn bottoms. Patsy Cline was singing Crazy as only she could. She was suddenly lost in a welter of cackles, curses, and hoofbeats coming from the direction of the farmer's henhouse behind the sleeping farmhouse.

A light suddenly flashed on in the farmhouse and a window flew open. Ozzie sat wide-eyed and frozen, hair on end. BAH-ROOOOOOOM!! BAH-ROOM!! The unmistakable roar of a double barrel twelve gauge let loose both barrels rent the cool, clear night air. Bird shot scattered oak leaves, acorns, and twigs from the trees under which Ozzie was parked. Puffs of dust rose from the wooden sides of the already badly wounded taxi to mark where the shot had hit.

Holy Smoke!!! Ozzie yelped, his world coming to an end. This time the Captain of the Titanic was more than willing to abandon his passengers. Whatever they had gotten themselves into, they could jolly well get themselves out. He dropped it into gear, and was slinging gravel in a tight circle, when Pete, with a well filled sack over each shoulder piled into the back seat amid a blizzard of chicken feathers and bird shot.

"Whooeee!" he yelled. "Let's git." Ozzie needed no encouragement, but in a moment Pete realized Arthur, who was not as agile, was not aboard. "Wait, don't leave Arthur!"

Ozzie's better told him to keep on truckin', but his better nature won out. He cut the wheel hard, the old cab jumped the side ditch, and took up two rows of corn before it lurched across the road and back toward the barnyard on a search and rescue mission.

The single headlight caught a wide-eyed Arthur burdened with two bulging sacks legging it away from the henhouse, short legs churning as fast as they could toward a rendezvous with the taxi.

Ozzie cut another tight circle, spraying rocks, sticks, sand, and gravel in a wide arc against the house, raining down upon an outraged figure in a nightshirt brandishing a huge weapon.

BAH-ROOOM! BAH-ROOOOM! The shotgun cut loose again. This time shattering the remaining headlight, but propelling the hard pumping Arthur the last fifteen feet onto the shimmering hood of the wildly careening taxi. He glomped on like a leech, and stayed there until Ozzie could be persuaded to stop some five miles from the scene of the crime.

Wending their way back to town by moonlight along unused by-ways, they succeeded in avoiding the attention of any wandering minions of the law. The Gilroy boys, pretty well spent, but with spirits intact and undamped, were serenading in their version of close harmony, By the li-eet of the sil-very muuune. Billy Vaughn would not have appreciated their efforts, and it is doubtful he would have recognized it. They had

just gotten to Honey-mune, keep a-shoi-ning in Joooon... when Ozzie let them out at the truck stop.

He didn't want to attract Sam Hundley's attention and have to explain a pair of well oiled passengers, a shot up cab full of chicken feathers, and several fugitive chickens roosting here and there around the vehicle. Sam was known to be unusually curious about the unusual, and Ozzie's cab was certainly more unusual than ever.

The last Ozzie saw of the Gilroy boys, they were trying to persuade a trucker bound for New Mexico that they would be a lot of help and good company on the trip. The driver opened the door, and the boys, waving a fond farewell, scrambled aboard.

It was mighty poor pay, considering the wear and tear of his late adventures, but Ozzie got to keep the four or five stray hens that decorated his cab.

Next morning he went out to crank up, and sat on a freshly laid egg. "I guess that was my tip," he said, and drove off to the jailhouse to pick up Barfly. 1-336-522-8999

Chapter 9 - A Secret Path

The Colonel continued his story: "When Ozzie showed up with Barfly early the next morning, Barfly appeared bright-eyed and bushy tailed, but I will have to say both Clodfelter and his vehicle looked as if they might have had a brush with Mrs. du Fester and the Ladies Aid."

"Ran into a haystack," was his only explanation, but I wondered what was in the haystack, and how many times did he run into it?

"Haystacks shoot bird shot at you?" Barfly asked, flicking a No. 7 1/2 chilled shot out of the woodwork where it had struck. "Look at all them shot holes," Barfly added. "Cab looks like it has chicken pox." Ozzie winced at the mention of the word, "chicken".

"Termites," Ozzie commented wryly, and began unloading the rest of Drumm's supplies he had picked up from the depot.

"Termites eat your headlight, too? I'd say it must've been about a three hundred pounder to do all that damage to your fender and bumper," Barfly went on.

Since Ozzie didn't respond, Barfly sensed the subject was just too painful for Ozzie to pursue any further right now. He mercifully decided not to play anymore on that theme, and began sorting supplies into manageable bundles.

Drumm was itching to get underway. "Just take what is needed to pitch a decent camp," Drumm ordered, which was fine, as long as he thought he was in charge, but that was apt to change as soon as they hit the swamp. He could navigate the wilds of Wall Street better than most, but the wilds of a Southern swamp required entirely different skills. "With the Colonel's permission, we will leave the trade goods in his barn," Drumm added.

"Be my guest," I assured him. It was the least I could do after the licking I had given him on that blanket deal.

After the goods were sorted and the bundles made, we repaired to the house for one of Marigold's delicious rib-sticking breakfasts. When you take one of her mouth watering golden brown whole wheat biskits and apply a mixture of cane syrup and butter, which we refer to as a gray horse, you have just sampled the absolute best the world has to offer.

Tamp that down with red-eye, ham, eggs, and grits, and you have a breakfast that will stick with you. .

Being of a somewhat delicate constitution and a desire to watch my waistline, I limited myself to a mere four biskits and gray horse, two eggs sunnyside, a few spoonfuls of red-eye, a slab of ham, and a single bowl of buttered grits, but I was happy to see the boys dig in and take care of the rest. Marigold appreciated it, too.

Having fortified ourselves for whatever lay ahead, we were off. Barfly led the way with the most burdensome of the bundles, followed by Drumm and Clodfelter. Calhoun and I, each with what we might safely carry, brought up the rear. We followed a well beaten path across the pasture and through the woods past the well known glade of recent ill memories, and on for a couple of miles before we topped a ridge and down along a bluff to the edge of the swamp.

From that point onward we were strictly dependent upon Barfly, our intrepid guide, for none of us knew the route to the Buzzards Roost, although we knew approximately where it was. The Swamp, in its sinister beauty, seemed to beckon us to enter and discover its dark and arcane world of hidden mysteries. The high ground, known as the Buzzards Roost, is hidden from sight by a dense growth of black gum, cypress, an impenetrable growth of briars, sawgrass, water lilies, and an endless quagmire of coffee colored swamp water. None of us would have vaguely considered tackling that bog without a qualified guide. Our faith was in Barfly, often labeled the town drunk. You may think that to be a slender thread upon which to rely, but, in the woods Barfly was the unchallenged king.

"We're going to have to slog it from here, folks," he announced. "I guess we better rest up a little bit before we set out." With that, he set his burden down and sprawled out on the grass. The rest of us gladly followed suit.

"Isn't there a dryer way to get out there?" Drumm asked, somewhat doubtfully, surveying the damp domain before us.

"'Fraid not," Barfly answered. "I have to feel the pathway with my feet, and I couldn't do that from a boat."

"What pathway?" Ozzie asked. "I don't see no pathway."

"It's all underwater," Barfly replied. "It is solid bottom and stepping stones, and has more crooks and turns than a dog's hind leg. You always think you are headed straight into a wall of sawgrass, but stick to the pathway and it will twist and turn and guide you right through without a scratch. The pathway is very narrow. The builders planned it that way as a means of confusing their enemies. The bottom on either side of the path is soft mushy mud and quicksand. It was laid out centuries ago by the Hankapookies to keep enemies out of their safe refuge."

"You mean my ancestors did this to protect themselves?" Drumm asked.

"Yep. They were very clever, but they weren't fighters; they were traders and survivors."

"Amazing, and they managed to hide their safe haven," Drumm said.

"The secret is knowin' where to start," Barfly said.

"Well now, how'd you ever find where to start? Ozzie asked. "I don't see no rocks.."

"'Course not," Barfly replied. "If you could see the rocks, it wouldn't be a secret, now, would it? And, every durn Indian in the Country would have been out there on the island, murdering Hankapookies. The rocks and the path is all under water. You can't see them."

"Well, how'd you find it?" Ozzie repeated.

"I didn't. Pa found it by accident in a desperate moment one night when the revenoors got after him. They'd done cut his still, and had him surrounded with his back to the swamp. Pa figured it was either jail or the swamp, and he never did favor goin' to jail. He chose the swamp, and just happen to hit on the right place, and he right away realized if he just kept walkin' on those rocks, he would be safe. The revenoors weren't goin' t' come after him in the swamp. They had better sense than that.

He eventually came out at the Buzzards Roost, and the revenoors went home, thinkin' that Pa had run his last sip of 'shine, or was either drownt or eat up by alligators. Alligators didn't get him, but the 'skeeters liked to have sucked him dry before he could build a fire and smoke 'em out."

"Thank Goodness the 'gators didn't get him or we wouldn't know how to get out there now," Drumm said.

"Pap just laid low for a few days, and when he come out, he decided to move his whole operation out there to the island. There couldn't have been no safer place. We was the only ones knew how to get out there, and Pap was always close-mouthed about where his still was. Me 'n him made 'shine out there for years mostly at night so the revenoors couldn't spot the smoke, and we never had a single visitor."

"Is there any shelter out there, now?" Drumm asked.

"There ain't no motels, if that's what you mean, but me 'n Pa built us a lean-to against a cave in a bluff that was right cozy."

Calhoun, who hadn't been talking much during the whole trek, took all this in with wide wondering eyes. He didn't want to miss a thing this woods-wise semi-derelict could teach him. Barfly had sensed that and the two had formed a bond not unlike that of professor and very bright student. Youth is innocent, and I hoped Barfly would be circumspect in the knowledge he imparted to this alert youth. I needn't have been concerned. Barfly was always very circumspect. Strangely enough, Barfly, for all his checkered past had retained a large measure on innocence, himself.

"We didn't sleep in it much," Barfly continued, "just when it was cold and rainy. Pap, he always liked to sleep out in the open, and I do ,too. In Pap's case, I think it was force of habit, and he didn't want nobody sneakin' up on him by surprise.

To answer your question, I don't know what kind of shape it's in right now. I haven't been out there since...well, since Pap died. I hadn't had the heart; which might bring up another problem."

"What's that?" Drumm asked anxiously.

"I ain't never made this trip in the daytime. Me and Pap always made it at night. Pap was afraid we might be followed, otherwise."

"I thought you said you could find it in the dark."

"I did. I can find it in the dark, but in the daylight I might get confused. I'm telling you, that path has some funny twists an turns, and even some false leads that end in holes forty feet deep. Those Hankapookies thought of everything."

"I guess about the only thing you can do is close your eyes and pretend it's dark, if you get in trouble," Drumm offered.

"And, if you disappear, the rest of us will wait where we are 'til you come back up if it takes three days," Ozzie put in.

"Thanks. It's nice to know you all will be waitin'," Barfly said drily.

"What are friends for," Ozzie said, remembering the needling Barfly gave him about the bird shot.

"Let's get this show on the road," said Drumm, shouldering his bundle and breaking into that little tete'. He was anxious to get moving, and we began shouldering our burdens and getting prepared to step into the unknown; at least unknown to all but Barfly. It was a daunting prospect. The pathway lay unseen and cleverly hidden beneath the dark waters of Hankapookie Swamp. To unravel its mysteries, we were placing our trust in a man whose reputation was somewhat less than sterling, and whom, by his own admission, might get confused in the daylight. Therefore, it is understandable that it was not without some feelings of trepidation that we set forth on this journey.

Anticipating the forthcoming damp journey, during the rest period I had donned my waders, normally worn only while fly casting up on the beautiful Chattooga River. They had never been tested in swamp water before, but I am happy to report they performed beautifully, nary a leak. Calhoun, however, had no need for such paraphernalia. Wrapped in his Hong Kong Navajo Indian blanket, feathered headband cocked at a jaunty angle, he and his small bundle perched upon my shoulders, thereby easing his discomfort while adding immeasurably to my own. The others had merely taken off their shoes in preparation.

"Stick real close together now," Barfly cautioned, wading into the water, which quickly closed over his waist. "Stay on the path. It gets real mushy on either side, if you lose the path. Don't worry about the bundles, I waterproofed 'em, they will probably float, but I wouldn't count on it."

Single file we set out in the original order, Barfly in the lead, Calhoun and I bringing up the rear. The first couple hundred yards in waist deep water was slow but uneventful. Then Clodfelter wandered slightly off the path and disappeared. Fortunately his pack bobbed to the surface with Ozzie hanging on for dear life, enabling Bushrod and Drumm to drag him, coughing and sputtering, back to the safety of the path.

"I told you it was mushy off the path, and not to go wandering off by yourself," Barfly chided his friend after he stopped sputtering.

"This darn highway of yours ought to have guard rails and a centerline," Ozzie shot back.

"I'll flag it with rags so's you can find your way back. Can't risk losin' your bundle, you know."

In water sometimes up to our chests, and often only knee deep, it took the better part of an hour to negotiate the trail, and another fifteen minutes to penetrate the thicket surrounding the island and dry land we called the Buzzards Roost. Because of the many twists and turns and towering grasses, one could not see more than a dozen or so yards back along the pathway by which we had come. The pathway was hidden from air and ground, and the twists and turns much too short to be followed by canoe. It was truly a secret pathway, known only to the Hankapookies.

When we finally broke through the protective thicket, the rest was comparatively easy. The hard sandy bottom sloped gently upward to a sunny meadow, where we set our burdens down and took a well earned breather.

"Right over there is where me 'n Pap had our still," Bushrod pointed toward a clump of trees further up the slope. "Might take a little fixin' up, but it is a dandy campsite. There is a right cool spring flowin' out of the bluff nearby, so we'll have plenty of the best drinkin' water I ever tasted. Me 'n Pap used to water our still with it, and it takes pure water to make good likker. If it has too many minerals and especially if it is sulfery or tastes like copper, it

won't do to make likker. Makes the likker taste awful. Pap was always careful about things like that."

While Bushron and Ozzie "fixed up" the camp site, Calhoun and I helped Drumm take stock of his new home. Drumm was probably the only Indian in existence who had his own private reservation. Wet as it was, he meant to make something of it.

For reference he unfurled several large scale U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey maps of the Hankapookie Swamp area. One map couldn't cover it all. He pointed to some squiggly shaped contour lines surrounded by nothing but map symbols for swamp and marshland, with several blue indicators for open water.

"This looks like my island, Colonel. It seems to cover two or three hundred acres"

"That's the Buzzards Roost, all right," I observed. "And the rest of it looks like your swamp. I hope you aren't planning to take up large scale farmin', unless you want to raise catfish and alligators."

"Plenty of room on the island to raise all I need. After all, Colonel. Remember, it once supported the whole Hankapookie Nation. Granted, it was a small Nation, but nevertheless it supported them."

Casting his attention back to the maps, "According to the map, the island isn't very far from the mainland, as the crow flies."

"Or as the buzzard soars," I added, pointing to a flock of that species circling overhead. "I hope they don't know something we don't."

"They sure know a better way to get out here than we do, Colonel. I've got to figure out an easier way to get back and forth than the Hankapookie Path, which, in itself is absolutely an ingenious and a marvelous engineering feat."

"I'll certainly agree you won't have many visitors, if that is the only way they can get out here."

"Actually, I don't care about entertaining too many visitors; only the people I want to see. I think I have just the ticket"

"What do you have in mind?"

"I'll tell you about it later, Colonel. Right now Calhoun wants to go exploring, and to tell the truth, so do I," Drumm said, folding the maps. "Let's go, Calhoun!"

Chapter 10 - The Island

While Drumm and I were trying to determine the best way to get through the seemingly impenetrable brush that covered this part of the island, Calhoun, who had scampered ahead to do a little exploring of his own, made up our minds for us.

"Look, Uncle Bogey, I've found a trail!" he yelled, and indeed he had. "C'mon, Uncle Bogey, let's go 'splore it," the impatience of youth urged, but these old bones rebelled. He would have to learn to bide his time, where I was concerned. I simply responded as fast as I could without hurrying.. .

He had stumbled upon a game trail that tunneled through the brush covered area. As all game trails do, this one seemed to wander aimlessly as the animals sought to follow the path of least resistance. It was joined from time to time by other trails coming in, and also confused by random trails branching off. We stuck to what appeared to be the main trail.

The overhanging vegetation along the trail was above the level of Calhoun's head, but well below the level of our own. Calhoun could walk

upright, merely ducking his head from time to time, while Drumm and I had to crouch and practically crawl, slowing our progress considerably. Therefore, we were compelled to rely upon Calhoun to be our guide.

It was during this episode I discovered my Fruit-of-the-looms were woefully inadequate briar-proofs. However, the butterfly net Calhoun insisted we bring along, when looped over my sun helmet with the handle trailing along behind, made a dandy mosquito net and thwarted the stings of deer flies and more ambitious bugs. Drumm's breech clout afforded no such protection, and he was a mass of stings and scratches by the time the trail broke into the open.

We found ourselves at the base of a ridge that, according to the map, ran the entire length of the island a full seventy-five feet above swamp level. The open grassy slopes were dotted here and there with clumps of giant liveoaks spreading their branches and shading a good half acre. The lower elevations around the perimeter of the island supported a lush green forest of tall loblolly pines that, along with the tupelo and cypress of the swamp, hid the island from view on the landward side.

While Drumm and I sprawled in the shade of a liveoak and licked our wounds, so to speak, Calhoun, who was not so weary, decided to explore our vicinity on his own. Cautioning him not to stray too far, we watched him disappear around a huge boulder at the base of the bluff. No sooner had he turned the corner that there was a crashing and threshing of many heavy bodies making a mad dash through the brush.

Drumm sprang to his feet. "Holy Mackerel, what was that!!".

Running to where we had last sighted Calhoun, we found him transfixed, staring wide-eyed in the direction the stampede had taken. "Wow! Did you see that?" he breathed in awed tones, pointing toward the settling dust cloud.

"What in Sam Hill was it?" Drumm wanted to know. "It sounded like all the bulls on Wall Street cut loose."

"Unless I miss my guess, it was probably some of your future meals on the hoof," I suggested

"What are you talking about?" Drumm puzzled.

"That, my boy, was a herd of deer," I informed him. "A big herd."

"It was, Uncle Bogey. I guess I must've scared them when I walked up on them all of a sudden," Calhoun confirmed. "They scared me, too. I've never seen that many at one time. I couldn't even count them."

"It was like rush hour at Grand Central," Drumm said.

"I would say there was at least a dozen or more, not counting fawns," I said. "That ought to keep you in meat for a long time."

"But, I don't know how to hunt deer or any other game," Drumm confessed.

"You want to be an Indian, don't you?"

"Precisely why I am here. I have already announced I came to reclaim my heritage. I intend to live as my ancestors did, eat what Mother Nature provides; and do as they did."

The last was spoken with all the bravado of the innocent. I didn't doubt he meant every word, but he was obviously woefully unprepared for such an undertaking.

"In that case, I would advise you to listen to Barfly and keep him as close to you as possible. He will teach you everything you need to know about living off the land."

"Are you telling me to learn how to be an Indian from the town drunk?"

"You couldn't do better," I assured him. "He brought you out here when nobody else could, didn't he? Just think about it, while you were

in college learning how to skin a banker, Barfly was in the woods learning how to skin a rabbit, and how to live off the land, and what worked and what didn't."

"Have you ever skinned a rabbit?"

"Nope. Only bankers, and they are too tough to eat."

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it. Barfly will teach you all you need to know, if you will listen to him."

"But he's a dr..."

"Son, " I interrupted rather sharply. There is nothing more exasperating than trying to help somebody that won't be helped, and I was definitely becoming exasperated with this stubborn young know-it-all. "you might know your way around Wall Street, but, in case you haven't noticed, this isn't Wall Street. Drunk or sober, this is Barfly's back yard. Considering the fact that before he was twelve he could knock the undercarriage off a gnat at a hundred yards with his slingshot or his Pappy's 30-30; make a rabbit snare with vines; start a fire without matches, call a turkey into his hip pocket; cure snake bite, croup, pip, rheumatiz and Charley Horses. He also honey cured the best hams in the Country, and made the smoothest moonshine anywhere. Notwithstanding the fact that he is apt to go off on a toot from time to time, he could have probably taught Sitting Bull a thing or two, and he will teach you, if you will just pay attention."

"You've got a point there," Drumm conceded.

"You're beginning to catch on," I said, much mollified after my tirade. The boy might be a tad slow, but he wasn't entirely stupid. You just had to get his attention.

While we were talking, Calhoun had scaled the big boulder, and was halfway up the slope near the crest of the ridge when we spotted him again. "Hey!" he called, "come up here, Uncle Bogey. You can see the whole island."

Drumm was already on the way. Being younger, of a lithe build, and accustomed to daily workouts in fancy gyms and squash courts, he was well ahead of me. Climbing mountains and slam dunking basketballs is not my forte. I did finally join Drumm and Calhoun at the summit from which we could indeed survey Drumm's entire domain.

The island was shaped like a giant moccasin with the rocky spine of the ridge running the whole length of the island to an height of about seventy-five feet above the swamp. Although the island appeared to span about twenty-five or thirty acres, it was a mere dot when compared to the expanse of the surrounding swamp and marshland. As if mud had dripped from the moccasin that formed the main island, a chain of smaller islands trailed off into the distance. Miles away in the blue mist the river made the broad sweep around Boyette's Bend carrying its load of swamp nourished waters to a rendezvous with the sea..

Looking back to the west I was surprised to note the relatively close proximity of the island to the bluffs on the mainland marking the edge of the swamp. The island was separated from the bluffs by an ox-bow lake only a few hundred yards wide, which, eons ago had been the river bed. It would have been much shorter to simply take the direct route from the mainland to the island had not the approaches been blocked by an impenetrable wall of bamboo briars, vines, and sawgrass. The Hankapookies aboriginal enemies didn't deem it worthwhile to tackle that barrier, and certainly no one on a mere sightseeing tour would endeavor to breach those thorny ramparts. It took a stroke of luck and a desperate moonshiner to discover the ancient Hankapookies best kept secret, the avenue to their safe haven. Not a whisper ever escaped

their lips, and the pathway lay concealed beneath the murky waters of the swamp for centuries.

Beyond the bluffs of the mainland, miles to the northwest a thundersquall marched across the horizon. Scowling anvil topped clouds appeared laced to earth by sheets of rain resembling silken caterpillar legs. Lightning flashed within the anvil head, sometimes striking the ground, other times escaping to run amok from cloud to cloud. The distant roll of thunder echoed as an artillery barrage.

Far in the opposite direction, plainly visible to the naked eye, was the flash of sunlight reflecting off the white plumage of a large flight of snowy egrets in flight. On the island off the toe of the moccasin, a pair of ospreys had built a nest in the top of the tallest tree. They were viewing us even as we viewed them, but showed no sign of alarm.

In the solitude of the place we became acutely aware we were completely immersed in a sea of silent sound. It was not the sound of Nature disturbed, but the steady heartbeat of life in teeming abundance pulsating in triumph from the forest below. It was the chirring of insects, the chirping of tree frogs, the rasp of a squirrel's bark, the scurrying of small furry creatures, birdsong, the breeze in the tree tops, and the snort of the regal buck seeking to collect his scattered harem. It was as if the whole island was rejoicing in Nature's version of a ticker tape parade, greeting the return of one of its own after a prolonged absence.

"This will hereafter be known as 'Humm's Island'," Drumm declared in a husky, barely audible voice, and it was so known forevermore.

For a long time no one spoke, and we left him staring off in the distance..

* * * * *

It was mid-afternoon when Calhoun and I returned to the campsite. Drumm chose to linger on the ridge awhile longer. Calhoun might have stayed, too; but I sensed that Drumm preferred to be alone with his thoughts. We would not intrude.

Barfly and Ozzie had cleared off the still site, swung a couple of hammocks, constructed a makeshift table, and repaired the old lean-to into which they stored the supplies. Barfly was putting the finishing touches on a stone fireplace, and Ozzie arrived with an armload of firewood, just as we walked up.

"Pap's old still," Barfly pointed out in answer to our inquiring looks. "It'll make a dandy stove. Supper'll be ready soon as I can gather it up."

"I'm afraid we can't stay," I demurred. "Gussie will be worried to death about the boy if we don't show up for supper." I was pretty sure she wouldn't be too concerned about my welfare. She is accustomed to my staying out all night on coon hunts and such, but Calhoun was the apple of her eye, and an altogether different matter. Women are like that.

"Let's stay, Uncle Bogey," Calhoun pled his case. "Bush said he would show me how to gather up a whole feast right here on the island, and I like this Indian stuff."

"Well,,," I began a little too hesitant. It showed there was a chink in my armor.

"Couldn't hurt the boy," Barfly put in, "and besides, he might learn a few things."

I had to acknowledge, they were building a pretty good case, but I still had to consider Gussie, when Ozzie cleared the air and made up my mind for me.

"I know I've got to go. Eva Mae will clean my clock if I don't show up for supper. We're having chicken tonight," Ozzie said sadly, "and probably the next several nights. I don't care for chicken too much, but she insisted.

Since I left the taxi at your house, anyway, Colonel, it wouldn't be no trouble a-tall to go by and let Miss Gussie and Marigold know you all decided to stay the night."

"You can have one of the hammocks, Colonel," Barfly said, an offer hard to refuse. However, everyone knows of my resolute nature, firm and unbending. Once my mind is made up it seldom changes, but the look in a small boy's eyes when told an enormous adventure must end, would melt the horn off a rhinoceros's nose. Besides, I must admit I was having a pretty good time, myself. Accordingly, and because I thought it would be good for Calhoun to be free from his Aunt's apron strings for awhile, I was convinced. "I accept your most generous offer, Barfly," I said, offering him my hand..

Yaaaay! Bush!" Calhoun shouted. "Let's go find supper!"

"Hold it, Little Buddy. Let's not jump the gun, now. Let me get this fire started first, so it will be burnt down to just about right by the time we get. back."

Calhoun, who was making a dash for the woods, stopped in his tracks at Bushrod's calm, reasonable, commanding voice. The boy was certainly full of the impulses of youth, but I was happy to see that those impulses gave way to the voice of authority, probably as a direct result of my influence.

There was no doubt Barfly could show him things about forest survival of which I knew nothing. In any case, Barfly got the fire going, asked me to get some water boiling and maybe throw on a stick or two of hickory, if needed.

Bushrod grabbed a sack, an empty lard bucket, and a stout stick for digging, and the two of them headed for the woods, Calhoun babbling excitedly. Ozzie had already departed in the opposite direction, confident that he could safely follow the old Hankapookie path back to the mainland.

* * *

"You ever been lost in the woods, Bush," Calhoun asked, while picking up groundnuts as Bushrod's stick revealed them.

"Not exactly," Bush answered. "I've been three or four days knowing exactly where I was, but everything else was kinda off center. Took awhile to get things back to normal, but I always knew where I was."

"What did you do?"

"When?"

"When things weren't where they were supposed to be."

" I jus' kep' on goin' 'an d'rectly the world get's things straightened out again. It just took a little longer this time.

Now, I'll ask you something. What would you do if you got lost?"

"I don't know. What should I do?"

"Well, first you should have a plan, case you do get lost. Think about it. You know the Colonel, Miss Gussie, and Marigold, and everybody else in the Country are going to be a-lookin' for you, soon as you don't show up. You ought to make it easy for them to find you. What could you do?"

"Well, I could break off bushes and leave a trail."

"That's good. What else?"

"I guess I might build a fire, if I have matches."

"I'll show you how to build a fire without matches," Bushrod said. "What else could you do?"

"Will Uncle Boge be looking?"

"I'm sure he would be."

"I could blow a tune on my new harmonica, the old one got full of cookie crumbs."

"That's it. Make lots of racket, but listen for the folks huntin' you. They will be yelling, too. What else can you do?"

"I could climb a tree and shout."

"That's good. What else?"

"I could tear up my shirt and leave a trail of cloth."

"That's good, but you might need your shirt if it turns cold at night. What else can you think of?"

After a long pause, Calhoun, who was running out of ideas, brightened up. "I guess I could hang a cow's bell around my neck."

"You might get lost, Calhoun, but I doubt if you would stay lost very long," Bushrod chuckled. Bush decided he couldn't top that one, and the hunt for edibles continued.

"I bet you could live a year without going to the grocery store, Bush," Calhoun said as he gathered some greens Barfly had indicated.

"Folks were livin' off the land a long time before A & P came along."

"It's sort of like the whole world is a garden, isn't it?"

"That's about it, but you have to be awfully careful when you go shopping. F'rinstance, some things, like those mushrooms there, look pretty, but they are pure poison. Some good things have stingers, others have thorns, and some people are worse poison than those mushrooms. You sure want to stay away from them."

"Is poison people why you drink so much, Bush?"

The question posed by the innocent youth caught Barfly off guard. A cloud crossed his face, and he shot a glance at Calhoun as if he had just discovered a deep dark secret Bushrod thought was buried and out of sight. Then he quickly looked away, and was silent for a long moment. Looking down and sighing briefly, in a soft hollow far-away voice said, "The world just ain't always the way you want it to be, Calhoun."

Then, reluctant to let the happier mood slip away, Barfly brightened, "Hey! Let's go see what we can rustle up for the main course."

"Yeah! Let's go!" The somber moment had thankfully expired, and enthusiasm of youth once again bubbled over.

"I bet if we dig deep enough we can find some Loo-si-ana lobsters."

"What is a Louisiana lobster, Bush?"

"Some people call 'em crawdads, and others call 'em po' man's lobster, but I know a Loo-si-ana lobster when I see one."

"Aw, I know what a crawdad looks like, Bush, but I thought they were too ugly to eat."

"Well, a hog ain't no purty thing either, but you like bacon with your eggs every morning, don't you? Do you remember what I said about some good things having thorns? Well, I guess being ugly is like a crawdad's thorn, but wait 'til you taste one."

* * * * *

The fire had been reduced to a hot bed of shimmering white-hot embers, and the Colonel had a big copper boiler of spring water bubbling by the time the foragers returned, laughing and joking from their obviously trip to Nature's Super Market, loaded with Nature's bounty.

"Look what we got, Uncle Boge," Calhoun said proudly, hefting the honey filled lard bucket, and a small sack bulging with other goodies.

"I think we got supper," Barfly said, as he dumped the contents of the large bag onto our makeshift table.

"I didn't know you could find so many different things to eat that just grow wild, Uncle Boge..It's all in knowing how and where to find them, huh, Bush."

"I guess that's it, Calhoun."

"Just stick your hand in this bag and see what you find, Uncle Boge."

"What is it?" I asked, as I reached into the sack, and, to Calhoun's delight, just as quickly removed it with a mad crawdad hanging onto my thumb.

"Bush says they make good eating," Calhoun said, as he scampered through for the fugitive thumb-pincher.

"He's right about that. This one nearly ate my thumb off."

"And that's not all, Uncle Boge. Bush killed a rabbit with a rock. Just whizzed that thing, and knocked him right off."

"Lucky shot, Calhoun," Bushrod said modestly. Turning to me, he suggested, "What say we have Loo-si-ana lobster and roast rabbit, Colonel? I can fix a dandy salad to go with it, and bake a pone of bread with cattail pollen."

Not waiting for anyone's assent, he was already at work, even as he spoke. "Go wash these greens, Calhoun, while I skin the rabbit and get the lobster started."

Calhoun grabbed up the pile of greens and scooted off to fulfill his assignment, happy to be useful. Barfly called after him, "Be sure to wash out all the grit and bugs."

With Barfly and Calhoun busy fixing supper, I had very little to do. While I relaxed against a nearby tree, Drumm came down with a sketch pad under his arm, which he brought over for me to examine.

It was a rough drawing of what looked like a plan for some kind of ski lift. As an investment, I had to tell him I didn't think it had much of a chance down here, since it seldom ever snowed, and not many people skied..

"Oh, it's not a ski lift at all, Colonel," Drumm pointed out "It's just a better way of getting to the island without getting wet."

He spread the sketch on the ground so I could see it better.

"These are the bluffs we saw over on the mainland, and this tower here is on the crest of the hill we were on this afternoon," he pointed out. "If we stretch a cable from a tower on the mainland bluffs to a tower on the hill, and swing a breeches buoy from it, we can come and go with ease whenever we wish, and not get our feet wet."

"Why a breeches buoy," I asked.

"It is able to carry only one person at a time, and I won't be invaded by people I don't want to see."

"I'll admit swinging in over the trees is better than slogging through the swamp," I told him. "but there is just one problem."

"What problem?"

"The mainland bluffs belong to Squire Greasley."

"Will he sell or lease me enough land to put up a tower? The land is rocky and no good for pasture or crops. All it is doing is costing him taxes."

"I don't know. He's not famous for lettin' go of anything he ever owned."

"Hmmm," Drumm scratched his chin. "Would you be willing to intercede in my behalf?" he asked. "Maybe you can convince him."

"No harm in askin'. I might do it at that. He is rather anxious to promote a union between his son and my daughter, Martha, who is not at all a willing party to that scheme. The Squire might feel that by cooperating with me, it would soften Martha's stance somewhat."

"I would appreciate your doing what you can, Colonel," Drumm said, "but don't make any promises you might regret."

* * * * *

I am not sure a flock of starved out grizzly bears could have eaten all the repast Barfly sat before us that night.

"I hope you weren't too disappointed," Barfly said, "Spam and beans just didn't have much appeal to me

"I'll never think of Spam and beans again," Drumm declared. "How about if I swing my hammock down on that little beach by the water where we came ashore?"

"You sure that's where you want it?" Barfly inquired.

"Any reason why not?" Drumm asked.

"Well, it's a little breezier up here," Barfly replied.

"And smokier," Drumm added.

Nothing more being said, Drumm carried his hammock down to the waters edge, about a hundred yards down the slope, and swung it between two sturdy liveoaks. Soon after he turned in, and nothing more was heard from him.

"Do you think he will be all right down there?" I asked Barfly, thinking that Drumm was the rankest of tenderfeet, and probably a stroll in Central Park was the only thing he ever did to prepare him for a life in the wilderness.

"Well, the 'skeeters will probably eat him alive, but I doubt anything else will," was the laconic reply.

"'Skeeters! Why didn't you warn him?"

"I did. 'Skeeters don't like a breeze, and they don't like smoke, and we got both up here and no mosquitoes."

"Poor fella."

"He's got to learn, and this will probably his first lesson.

C'mon, Calhoun, let's hit the sack."

"Good idea, Calhoun," I said. "Big day tomorrow."

It was a warm night, but a faint breeze wafting across the camp kept it from being muggy. The sparkling lights from a million fireflies blended with the stars of the Milky Way into a bejeweled blanket of indigo velvet. A rising full moon breathed a soft golden wash over the scene. A symphony of night sounds played to the cadence of bullfrogs. Our vessel of somnambulance launched forth up this Sea of Tranquillity.

Tomorrow will be a Big Day.

Chapter 11 - The Terrarium

Next morning I was awakened by the morning sun, bacon frying, and the coffee pot perking. Had I not slept so soundly last night, I might have observed an exhausted mosquito bitten Drumm, lately of Wall Street, New York City, dragging himself into camp and flopping down on the ground near the fire. He was still there this morning, curled up in one of his Hong Kong Navajo blankets on the bed of soft ferns Barfly had prepared for him, sleeping the sleep of the utterly drained.

"Let him sleep, Colonel," Barfly said, indicating the supine form, "those swamp 'skeeters are mighty viscious. He's plumb et up."

"Why didn't you warn him?"

"I figured it best if he found out for himself. That way, he won't forget."

"I'm sure that's one lesson he won't forget."

"Biskits in the Dutch oven; grits about done, coffee in the pot. How do you want your eggs, Colonel?"

"Eggs? I wasn't aware we had eggs, unless there were powdered."

"Nope, they're not powdered. Calhoun found a clutch of turkey eggs this morning while he was rustling up the firewood. We stole a few of 'em. There're fresh laid. Mama turkey will probably lay more. They might be a tad rich, but they're better 'n powdered..How about I make an omelet? That ought to suit everybody."

That sure suited me, and after a delicious morning repast, Calhoun reluctantly expressed a willingness to go home. I suppose he'd had enough of adventure for awhile. I donned my waders, and after a semi-arduous journey throught the swamp, we reached home about mid-morning to be greeted by Gussie and Marigold, anxious to hear about Calhoun's Big Adventure.

Small boys of Calhoun's bent have a tendency to collect things. In Calhoun's case it was pets; anything that moved, whether it had fur, fins, feathers, or fangs. Earlier he had taken a fancy to Manfred, the bob-tailed cat. Manfred, however, was not the sort of cat that enjoyed being collected, and he took great pains to avoid that stigma. Even at that, they got along reasonably well, until Calhoun crept upon him, while Manfred was in the midst of a cat nap, and clapped his hands and yelled. Manfred ended up on the roof of the barn, and never really trusted Calhoun after that. I suppose you might say, Manfred was decidedly uncollrctable, especially as far as Calhoun was concerned.

But, one failure did not dampen Calhoun's urge to accumulate pets. He specialized in the most un-cuddly of God's crittersh. Witness, the hapless Mr. Croaker, nothing cuddly about him.

Calhoun's sojourn on the island provided many opportunities and proved to be a bonanza.