

# PALLADIUM SHORT STORY PAGE

## A MIDSUMMER MASQUERADE

"SATAN," said Jeff Peters, "is a hard boss to work for. When other people are having their vacations is when he keeps you the busiest. As old Dr. Watts or St. Paul or some other diagnostician says: 'He always finds somebody for idle hands to do.'

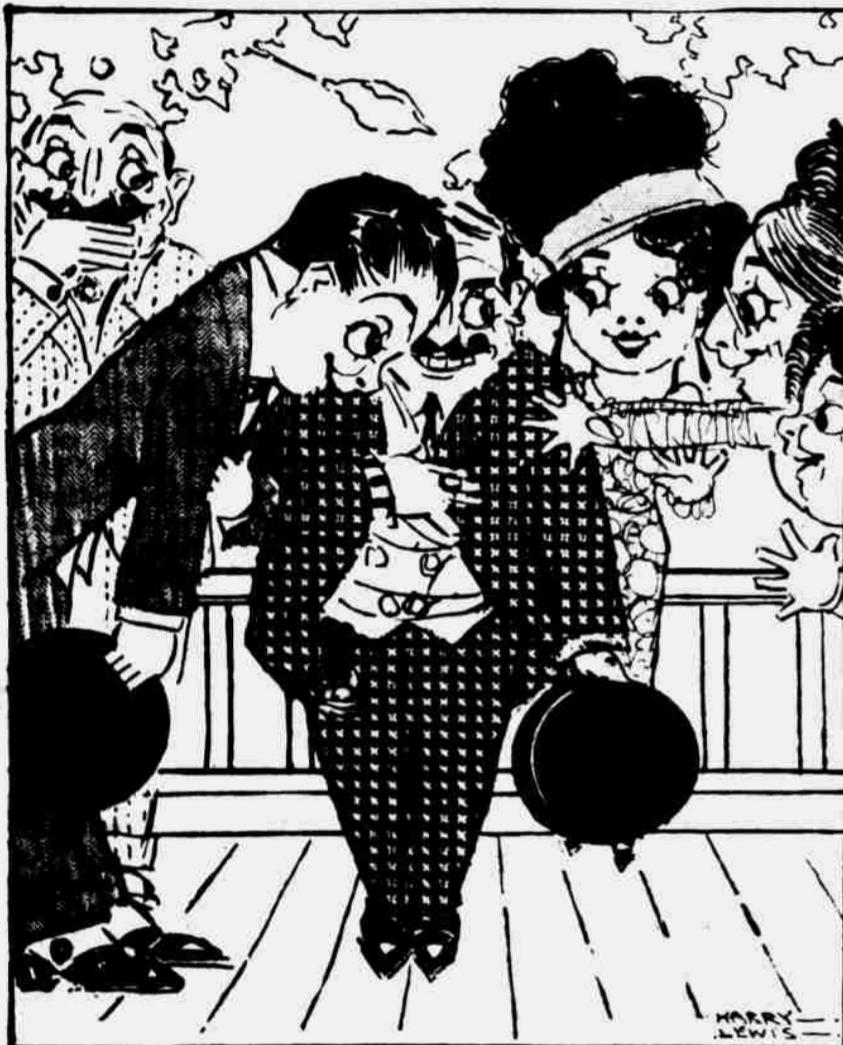
"I remember one summer when me and my partner, Andy Tucker, tried to take a layoff from our professional and business duties; but it seems that our work followed us wherever we went."

"Now, with a preacher it's different. He can throw off his responsibilities and enjoy himself. On the 31st of May he wraps mosquito netting and tin foil around the pulpit, grabs his niblick, breviary and fishing pole and hikes for Lake Como or Atlantic City according to the size of the loudness with which he has been called by his congregation. And, sir, for three months he don't have to think about business except to hunt around in Deuteronomy and Proverbs and Timothy to find texts to cover and exculpate such little midsummer penances as dropping a couple of looey door on rouge or teaching a Presbyterian widow to swim."

"But I was going to tell you about mine and Andy's summer vacation that wasn't one."

"We was tired of finance and all the branches of unsanctified ingenuity. Even Andy, whose brain rarely ever stopped working, began to make noises like a tennis cabinet."

"Heigh ho!" says Andy. "I'm tired. I've got that steam up the yacht Corsair and ho for the Riviera! feeling. I want to loaf and indite my soul, as Walt Whittier says. I want to play pinochle with Merry del Val or give a knouting to the tenants on my Tarrytown estates or do a monologue at a Chautauqua picnic



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in kits or something summery and outside the line of routine sandbagging."

"Patience," says I. "You'll have to climb higher in the profession before you can taste the laurels that crown the footprints of the great captains of industry. Now, what I'd like, Andy," says

I, "would be a summer sojourn in a mountain village far from scenes of larceny, labor and overcapitalization. I'm tired, too, and a month or so of sinlessness ought to leave us in good shape to begin again to take away the white man's burdens in the fall."

"Andy fell in with the rest cure idea at once, so we struck the general passenger agents of all the railroads for summer resort literature, and took a week to study out where we should go. I reckon the first passenger agent in the world was that man Genesis. But there wasn't much competition in his day, and when he said: 'The Lord made the earth in six days, and all very good,' he hadn't any idea to what extent the press agents of the summer hotels would plagiarize from him later on.

"When we finished the booklets we perceived, easy, that the United States from Passadumkeg, Maine, to El Paso, and from Skagway to Key West was a paradise of glorious mountain peaks, crystal lakes, new laid eggs, golf, girls, garages, cooling breezes, straw rides, open plumbing and tennis; and all within two hours ride.

"So me and Andy dumps the books out the back window and packs our trunk and takes the 6 o'clock Tortoise Flyer for Crow Knob, a kind of a dernier resort in the mountains on the line of Tennessee and North Carolina.

"We was directed to a kind of private hotel called Woodchuck Inn, and thither me and Andy bent and almost broke our footsteps over the rocks and stumps. The Inn set back from the road in a big grove of trees, and it looked fine with its broad porches and a lot of women in white dresses rocking in the shade. The rest of Crow Knob was a post office and some scenery set at an angle of forty-five degrees and a welkin.

"Well, sir, when we go to the gate who do you suppose comes down the walk to greet us? Old Smoke-'em-out Smithers, who used to be the best open air painless dentist and electric liver pad faker in the Southwest.

"Old Smoke-'em-out is dressed clerico-rural, and has the mingled air of a landlord and a claim jumper. Which aspect he corroborates by telling us that he is the host and perpetrator of Woodchuck Inn. I introduces Andy, and we talk about a few volatile topics, such as will go around at meetings of boards of directors and old associates like us three were. Old Smoke-'em-out leads us into a kind of summer house in the yard near the gate and took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with his mighty right.

"Gents," says he, "I'm glad to see you. Maybe you can help me out of a scrape. I'm getting a bit old for street work, so I leave this dogdays emporium so the good things would come to me. Two weeks before the season opened I gets a letter signed Lieut. Peary and one from the Duke of Marlborough, each wanting to engage board for part of the summer.

"Well, sir, you gents know what a big thing for an obscure hustler it would be to have for guests two gentlemen whose names are famous from long association with icebergs and the Coburgs. So I prints a lot of handbills announcing that Woodchuck Inn would shelter these distinguished boarders during the Summer, except in places where it leaked, and I sends 'em out to towns around as far as Knoxville and Charlotte and Fish Dam and Bowling Green.

"And now look up there on the porch, gents," says Smoke-'em-out, "at them disconsolate specimens of their fair sex waiting for the arrival of the Duke and the Lieutenant. The house is packed from rafters to cellar with hero worshippers.

"There's four normal school teachers and two abnormal; there's three high school graduates between thirty-seven and forty-two; there's two literary old maid and one that can write; there's a couple of society women and a lady from Haw River. Two elocutionists are bunking in the corn crib, and I've put cots in the hay loft for the cook and the society editress of the Chattanooga Opera Glass. You see how names draw, gents."

"Well," says I, "how is it that you seem to be biting your thumbs at good luck? You didn't use to be that way."

"I ain't through," says Smoke-'em-out. "Yesterday was the day for the advent of the auspicious personages. I goes down to the depot to welcome 'em. Two apparently animate substances gets off the train, both carrying bags full of croquet mallets and these magic lanterns with pushbuttons.

"I compares these integers with the original signatures to the letters—and, well, gents, I reckon the mistake was due to my poor eyesight. Instead of being the Lieutenant, the daisy chain and wild verbena explorer was none other than Levi T. Peevy, a soda water clerk from Asheville. And the Duke of Marlborough turned out to be Theo. Drake of Murfreesborough, a bookkeeper in a grocery. What did I do? I kicked 'em both back on the train and watched 'em depart for the lowlands, the low.

"Now you see the fix I'm in, gents," goes on Smoke-'em-out Smithers. "I told the ladies that the notorious visitors had been detained on the road by some unavoidable circumstances that made a noise like an ice jam and an heiress, but they would arrive a day or two later. When they find out that they've been deceived," says Smoke-'em-out, "every yard of cross barred muslin and natural wavy switch in the house will pack up and leave. It's a hard deal," says old Smoke-'em-out.

"Friend," says Andy, touching the old man on the oesophagus, "why this jeremiad when the polar regions and the portals of Blenheim are conspiring to hand you prosperity on a hall-marked silver salver? We have arrived."

"A light breaks out on Smoke-'em-out's face.

"Can you do it, gents?" he asks. "Could ye do it? Could ye play the polar man and the little duke for the nice ladies? Will ye do it?"

"I see that Andy is superimposed with his old hankering for the oral and polyglot system of bungoing. That man had a vocabulary of about 10,000 words and synonyms, which arrayed themselves into contraband sophistries and parables when they came out.

"Listen," says Andy to old Smoke-'em-out. "Can we do it? You behold before you, Mrs. Smithers, two of the finest equipped men on earth for inveigling the proletariat, whether by word of mouth, sleight-of-hand or swiftness of foot. Dukes come and go, explorers go and get lost, but me and Jeff Peters," says Andy, "go after the come-ons forever. If you say so, we're the two illustrious guests you were expecting. And you'll find," says Andy, "that we'll give you the true local color of the title roles from the aurora borealis to the ducal portcullis."

"Old Smoke-'em-out is delighted. He takes me and Andy up to the inn by an arm apiece, telling us on the way that the finest fruits of the can and luxuries of the fast freight should be ours without price as long as we would stay.

"On the porch Smoke-'em-out says: 'Ladies, I have the honor to introduce His Gracefulness the Duke of Marlborough and the famous inventor of the North Pole, Lieut. Peary.'

"The skirts all flutter and the rocking chairs squeak as me and Andy bows and then goes on in with old Smoke-'em-out to register. And then we washed up and turned our cuffs, and the landlord took us to the rooms he'd been saving for us and got out a demijohn of North Carolina real mountain dew.

"I expected trouble when Andy began to drink. He has the artistic metempsychosis which is half drunk when sober and looks down on airships when stimulated.

"After lingering with the demijohn me and Andy goes out on the porch, where the ladies are to begin to earn our keep. We sit in two special chairs and then the schoolma'am and literators hunched their rockers close around us.

"One lady says to me: 'How did that last venture of yours turn out, sir?'

"Now, I'd clean forgot to have an understanding with Andy which I was to be, the duke or the lieutenant. And I couldn't tell from her question whether she was referring to Arctic or matrimonial expeditions. So I gave an answer that would cover both cases.

"Well, ma'am," says I, "it was a freeze out—right smart of a freeze out, ma'am."

"And then the flood gates of Andy's perorations was opened and I knew which one of the renowned ostensible guests I was

By O. Henry

supposed to be. I wasn't either. Andy was both. And still furthermore it seemed that he was trying to be the mouthpiece of the entire British nobility and of Arctic exploration from Sir John Franklin down. It was the union of corn whiskey and the conscientious fictional form that Mr. W. D. Howells admires so much.

"Ladies," says Andy, smiling semicircularly, "I am truly glad to visit America. I do not consider the magna charta," says he, "or gas balloons or snowshoes in any way a detriment to the beauty and charm of your American women, skyscrapers or the architecture of your icebergs. The next time," says Andy, "that I go after the North Pole all the Vanderbilts in Greenland won't be able to turn me out in the cold—I mean make it hot for me."

"Tell us about one of your trips, Lieutenant," says one of the normals.

"Sure," says Andy, getting the decision over a hiccup. "It was in the spring of last year that I sailed the Castle of Blenheim up to latitude 87 degrees Fahrenheit and beat the record. Ladies," says Andy, "it was a sad sight to see a Duke allied by a civil and litigious chattel mortgage to one of your first families lost in a



"The women boarders all left the next morning"

region of semiannual days." And then he goes on, "At four bells we sighted Westminster Abbey, but there was not a drop to eat. At noon we threw out five sandbags, and the ship rose fifteen knots higher. At midnight," continues Andy, "the restaurants closed. Sitting on a cake of ice we ate seven hot dogs. All around us was snow and ice. Six times a night the boatwain rose up and tore a leaf off the calendar so we could keep time with the barometer. At 12," says Andy, "with a lot of anguish in his face, 'three huge polar bears sprang down the hatchway, into the cabin. And then—'

"What then, Lieutenant?" says a schoolma'am, excitedly.

"Andy gives a loud sob."

"The Duchess shook me," he cries out, and slides out of the chair and weeps on the porch.

"Well, of course, that fixed the scheme. The women boarders all left the next morning. The landlord wouldn't speak to us for two days, but when he found we had money to pay our way he loosened up."

"So me and Andy had a quiet, restful summer after all, coming away from Crow Knob with \$1,100, that we enticed out of old Smoke-'em-out playing seven up."

## JUDGMENT

JOHN CRANE looked down on the motionless figure of his wife, while the mist that had obscured his brain slowly drifted away, and the doctor's parting words hammered in his ears.

"She must have good food—fruit, champagne, poultry—the best of everything, in fact. Then when she is sufficiently recovered you must get her away to the South of France. Do these things and she may live!"

Fruit, champagne, poultry! The husband shuddered, for the doctor might just as well have ordered the moon for the sick woman. Out of work, ill himself, how could he hope to get these things? Only yesterday the wedding ring, which had slipped from her wasted finger, went to provide the fuel that burned dully in the dirty grate. Hardly any of their little home was left.

He flung his hand Heavenward with a wild, impassioned gesture, and cursed the cruel city that had lured him from his country home. The great and unknown world had beckoned, and at last, fascinated by the stories he had heard of its light and glitter, he had come. With hope in his heart he had trudged the crowded streets; had waited hours in long lines of men, from which one only would be taken to fill an ill-paid position. But he never wavered, never lost hope until one day he noticed that the roses had faded from her cheeks, and the thin gold band she wore was loose upon her finger.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. His hands were clenched, his face was white, but determination blazed in his haggard eyes. She should have the things that meant life to her, should have them at any cost.

As the Brighton express drew slowly out of the terminal David Moore—company promoter by profession, and knight by virtue of his success as a well-advertised philanthropist—glanced

from his paper and glared angrily at the man who had just sprung in. Then, making a mental note to the effect that he must write to the manager of the line and report the negligence of his subordinates in allowing one of the common herd to invade the privacy of the "first smoker," in which he travelled, he turned once more to the perusal of his paper.

The newcomer shot quick glances at him, then edged a little nearer. The train thundered on, swaying from side to side, and David Moore made another mental note, relating to the excessive speed and the increased danger in travelling.

The compartment was becoming hazy with cigar smoke, and the stranger coughed with a dry, hacking cough that left a red stain on the white rag he held to his lips, and as he listened David Moore smiled; evidently his companion was not finding the journey quite so comfortable as he thought it would be. Suddenly his satisfaction turned to anger as he saw the man rise, and with outstretched hand approach the window. Excitedly he sprang up and expostulated against it being opened; then he saw the mad light



"Fingers, strong in desperation, clutched his fat throat."

Then, re-arranging the cushions and his own disordered clothing, he sat down to await the journey's end.

By Ivan B. Gore

It was close to midnight when John Crane, his arms full of the things the doctor had ordered for his wife, returned to the house beneath the roof of which lay the one room he now called home.

His hand trembled as he fitted the key into the lock, and he reeled against the lintel as the door opened, but, steadying himself, he closed it softly and climbed the stairs.

How quiet the house was!

At the door of their room he paused. Inside she was waiting. As he stood on the threshold trying to shake off the effects of the liquor he had tried to drown his memory in, the door suddenly opened and the landlady faced him. As she recognized her lodger she put her apron to her eyes and burst into a violent fit of sobbing, but he thrust her roughly to one side and entered.

The room was illuminated by a single guttering candle, but the light was sufficient for him to see the cold pallid face upon the pillow; the neatly crossed hands upon the wasted breast. For a minute he stared at the sight, then his jaw dropped, and with a wild cry he flung forward across the bed.

With the first gray light of the morning heavy footsteps sounded on the stairs. They mounted higher, to stop at last before the door which shielded the dead woman and the murderer. For a moment all was silent, then a sharp command to open rang through the quiet house, but no answer came. With a whispered warning to those who accompanied him, the speaker wrenched the door open and entered.

The light poured in, showing the uniforms of the police who stood stolidly guarding the doorway, the silent figure of the dead woman, and the man who lay beside her.

With an exclamation the Inspector strode forward and shook the man roughly.

As he did so the body slipped from his hands to the floor, and then the police knew that a Greater Power than they had stepped in during the night and called the murderer to trial.