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My Friend in the Next World



Captain Marrand
was watching, his
face gray with
fear

When his harmless escapade ended in disaster, this lonely boy faced a wrecked life—without a living soul to help him. But in his agony he called the name of his dead comrade—and astonishing events followed

By JOHN C. FLETCHER
as told to
Harold Standish Corbin

"UTTER damned nonsense," cried my Uncle Raynor testily. "Old wives' tales, I tell you. I won't listen to it!"

"Why?" mused Captain Marrand. "You didn't say it was nonsense when you searched for that strange apparition frightening the natives in the Philippines—and couldn't find it. I tell you, Raynor, there is something to it. We're only at the edge of understanding the two personalities inhabiting each of us—the Conscious and the Unconscious Self."

"Utter damned rot!" snorted my uncle, conceding not one point and angrily stamping about the room. "Nothing beyond the grave. Asinine of you, Marrand. Blankness. Oblivion. Only women and children believe otherwise."

"I'm not so sure," replied Captain Marrand gravely.

"You're insane!" snapped Uncle Raynor. "I'll not talk with you. Sergeant!" He turned to Sergeant McComb. "Taps!"

A queer household in which I as a youngster lived, you see. My only living relative, Raynor Roberts, a retired Colonel of Artillery, proved a martinet if there ever was one. Unmarried, dour, taciturn, he would have no women about him except the servants. Women were weaklings, he said.

Royalties from patents on big guns allowed him to keep up Fairleigh Hall, the ancestral home in Princess Anne County, Virginia, where we lived, with more than the usual pretense. But the place was run strictly on a military routine, and this irked me. Uncle Raynor may have loved

me in a way, but he had little sympathy or understanding for a boy of sixteen. In his eyes I was only an overgrown awkward nuisance, too noisy, irresponsible and incorrigible—an object for strict military discipline. He could never realize that I needed counsel and help, rather than floggings.

Captain Marrand, also a bachelor, was a cavalryman and, therefore, forever contemptible in the eyes of my uncle. He came to live with us when a bad heart forced him to give up the rigorous life of a soldier, and cheated him of the promotion to a higher rank which he should have had. However, a strange and unaccountable friendship existed between these men, whose natures were so different. Marrand possessed a delicacy of thought and ideal exactly the opposite of Uncle Raynor's hard, militant temperament. He understood my wild, boyish yearnings and gave me the love and sympathy I sought.

The Colonel sent me away to school shortly after I was sixteen. I was glad to leave the old estate, even though I would miss its vast fields, the woods along the creek, the stables and the dogs. I loved every one of the dogs. They set up a mournful howling when I got ready to leave.

But I did not remain away long. As I look back, I feel a throb of pity for Uncle Raynor. Yet how could I know the head master of the school would take offense at what we did? To my comrades and me the bust of Shakespeare was much more lifelike with the coating of black paint we gave his beard, and the battered top-hat we placed upon his thoughtful brow. That being a climax to a series of boyish pranks, five of us were dismissed from the school.



In frenzy I jerked the reins—and tragedy resulted

Back at Fairleigh I faced the wrath of my uncle, and trembled as it broke.

"Out of sight, sir! Bread and water for two weeks. Confined to barracks for a month. Sergeant! Take him away!"

And Sergeant McComb, that gray, ruddy-faced old Army man who had been with the Colonel through many campaigns and in a hundred distant places, led me upstairs to my prison, teasing me a bit, trying to make my punishment seem lighter.

For days I was locked in a room over the broad verandah on the second floor. From its narrow window the creek called me, the woods whispered to me to come and roam among them, the dogs bayed out in the kennels, inviting me for a romp, and I could hear the horses stamping faintly as though entreating me to visit them and rub their velvet noses. These horses were another of my grievances. My uncle kept a stable full but he never would let me ride.

"What! Spoil a good hunter just to please a harum-scarum baggage not worth his weight in whips?" he would storm. "What for? In heaven's name, why can't you behave yourself and exercise an atom of common sense within that thick skull of yours?"

So he would talk to me and I passed the point of writhing inwardly and openly hated him. And all this while, my beloved friend and counsellor, Captain Marrand, fought his weakening heart, uncomplaining, like a good soldier, but knowing that he fought a losing battle and that some day he must capitulate, bowing to the enemy, retreating into the Twilight upon which he loved to speculate and which became to him more realistic as the days swept by.

And then there came the incident of the horse, Commander, and the strange events that followed it.

Commander was my uncle's favorite hunter, and as pretty as a picture. An Arab strain in him, I think, crossed, perhaps, with a Morgan. Anyway, he was a beauty—dark bay, almost like black velvet, powerful and fleet.

A frosty October morning, shortly after my dismissal from school and while I still was "confined to barracks," brought the hunt. I was awakened shortly after daylight by the clear call of the hunting bugle. Instantly I was out of bed and at the window, gazing down into the driveway below. Confusion and noise reigned there. Guests were gathering from all the countryside—fine ladies in their riding habits, some astride and some gripping side-saddles with shapely knees—lovely ladies all, whom I wanted to run out to, to talk with, and admire. I watched the men assisting the ladies to dismount and escorting them to our great living room for a coffee royal, if they desired, or a bite to eat to "stay their stomachs" before the hunt and the later victorious return to the tremendous breakfast our negro servants even now were preparing in the kitchen just beyond.

ALREADY Sergeant McComb had gone on ahead to release the fox, and the yelping dogs, nervous with excitement and catching a scent now and then of the prey, clamored and strained at their leashes, tonguing bell-like, eager to be away. The master of hounds, in his red coat and with the bugle occasionally to his lips, fascinated me. I thrilled with the glamour of it all. And I wanted to ride—ride at the head of the field, to be first in at the kill, whipping the dogs out of their snarling tangle, holding up the brush as my prize and then presenting it gallantly to the lady of my choice.

But there I was, locked in my room in disgrace, weary,

days of imprisonment and loneliness ahead of me still!

Captain Marrand came to me after the hunt had left, and attempted to console me. But it was difficult to do so. He seemed more than ever belonging to some other world, for his heart gave him new trouble and his face, pain-racked and worn, told only too well, had I cared to observe it, that I would be missing my friend in a little while.

But I was too intent on the distant notes of the bugle out there in the woods. The fox was circling now, the master calling the riders. The clamoring dogs had found the new scent. Out beyond the stables a mile from the house lay the fox's den. I knew where it was. The animal would circle back toward it, then branch away, circle again, scurrying through thickets, leaping the brook in order to throw the dogs off his trail.

So I paid little attention to what Marrand said to me, and after a while he left.

The picture of the hunt's return lingers with me to this day—my uncle at the head, the dogs tired and tongue-lolling, the guests disheveled from their ride but happy and hungry, the horses in a lather. I saw them all dismount in the driveway below and heard the gay laughter, the clinking of glasses, the clatter of great dishes of viands as the guests went in to breakfast.

I resolved firmly then and there that I would ride, despite my uncle's ban upon it, just as soon as my prison days were over.

The opportunity came shortly. Uncle was called to Washington to confer about some of his patents, and Sergeant McComb let me out of my prison just as soon as my uncle left. I needed no further inspiration. The way was clear.

Watching my chance, I went to the stables and looked over the horses. They were all excellent mounts, but none appealed to me so much as Commander, my uncle's favorite. None held his head so gallantly, none showed so much fire and spirit.

Not for a second did I think of the consequences of my action. Such is the way of youth. My uncle was away; I knew I could ride Commander, though I never had tried. Hadn't I seen my uncle sit him a hundred times, straight, easily, glued to the saddle? I could do it, too. Why not?

McComb would have scalped me, had he known. But he was busy elsewhere about the estate. Captain Marrand would have chuckled, and advised against it—but I did not ask his advice.

STEALTHILY I led Commander from the roomy box stall which he occupied. I got down Uncle Raynor's best saddle, strapped it on the horse, fitted the bit to his mouth. My knees weak with excitement lest somebody hear me, I led Commander to the door and leaped to his back.

Almost before I could gather the reins, he was off like a shot, flying hoofs drumming down the lane, the wind whistling past my face like the rush of an express train. McComb came running, waving his arms and crying out things I could not hear. I could not have stopped the animal had I wanted to. He was a magnificent meteor, spurning the earth with his hoofs, eyes blazing, tail aplomb. I clung to the saddle now, a bit frightened at the realization of what I had done.

At the end of the lane lay a quick turn to the highway. It was the custom for the hunt never to turn, but to leap the creek. Whoever failed to take this hazard at the start found himself not only disgraced but ignominiously out of the hunt.

Commander knew this—or sensed it. Here Uncle Raynor, leading the way and assuming the graces of an English country squire, never failed to raise one arm, call back to his guests and then sail majestically over the creek.

I could not have turned the horse away from that barrier, had I possessed the strength of Hercules. Bit in teeth, head thrust forward, eyes blazing, he gathered himself for the leap. For one brief second I thought of toppling off, taking my chances beneath his iron-shod hoofs. At that instant I caught sight of a familiar figure on the other side of the creek. Captain Marrand was watching, his face gray with fear.

Before I could make up my mind what to do, Commander was off the ground. A cry escaped my lips. I clung to the saddle.

Had I let the horse alone I am sure he would have gone over safely. But I had seen my uncle gather the reins and, by sheer will-power, almost lift the horse over the obstacle.

In a frenzy I jerked the reins—and tragedy resulted. In mid-air the horse's head snapped back. It threw him off his balance. Before I knew what had happened the great animal lost his poise and came crashing down, floundering in the mire and shallow water of the creek, kicking, neighing, a tangled mass of flying hoofs and heaving body.

I myself was flung twenty feet away, to smash into insensibility on the greensward beyond. For a second I saw the earth rising to meet me. Then it gathered itself into a cloud of blackness into which I seemed to sink a thousand miles.

WHEN I opened my eyes, I found Captain Marrand standing over me, the pallor on his face deepened, in his eyes a haunted look. He seemed more than ever the mystic—half earthly, half ethereal. He said no word but observed me meditatively as I lay on the frost-seared grass.

And over beyond him, as my gaze strayed away from his face, I saw McComb bending over the body of Commander, which lay half on the bank and half in the creek. Even as I looked, my breath caught in my throat and my blood went cold. McComb's face was ashen gray and he wiped away the perspiration from his forehead with one hand.

But it was at the other hand I stared. It held his service revolver, and plainly he was nerving himself to use it on the horse.

"Is he—is he—going to kill him?" I managed to ask at last.

Marrand nodded sadly, his gaze fixed on my face.

"Right foreleg crumpled to splinters. We can't save him. Oh, Jack," he cried, "why did you do it? Your uncle never will forgive you. It means banishment aboard a training ship. You'll be lucky if he doesn't whale you within an inch of your life."

I staggered lamely to my feet.

"He'll never whale me," I cried hotly. "He's hated me ever since I came here. I'm sorry I—I killed his horse. But I'll run away. I'll get a job somewhere and support myself."

Marrand studied me quietly.

"No, I can't let you do that," he said after a moment. "Before your mother died, Jack, she asked me to look out for you. She knew

you probably would come here. She knew, too, that your uncle wouldn't understand you. I gave her my promise. I can't let you run away."

Suddenly behind us sounded the shot. I went sick and cold inside. I knew Commander, so fleet of limb, so bounding with energy, would never run again.

Sadly Marrand and I started toward the house. Neither of us looked around, neither said a word.

I went to my room—that prison that had become so hateful to me—and brooded. At first I wanted to kill myself. When that feeling passed I set about hating my uncle with a new and venomous intensity.

He did not return for several days and I kept to myself. Marrand was ill again, but he came to me at last.

"Jack," he began, "I've come to a decision about the horse.



I loved the animal almost as much as your uncle loved him. It never will do for you to take the blame—and I'm about through. I'll tell your uncle I did it. I'll say I wanted one last ride, and that the horse ran away with me. McComb won't tell if I ask him not to."

"I'll not let you take any blame of mine," I cried. "I killed the horse and I'll either run away or tell Uncle Raynor what happened. I won't let you take the blame!"

"Good boy!" Marrand murmured. "I like your spirit. But it isn't the best way. Your uncle is an old man. He'll be needing you soon, Jack. I won't be here. Please let me handle this—I know best, Jack. You're all he has left, and after all, you owe a duty to him as his only living kin. Besides, it may save him and you both from—well, going to hell. No, Jack, I'm going to tell him I did it. As a most extreme personal favor, I want you to leave this with me."

I continued to argue. But because I was a boy, desperate with fear of my uncle, driven to a point where I could not see ahead, at last I consented.

My uncle returned the following day.

Almost the first thing he did was to go to the stables. I saw him from my window—and I saw him come back to the house, walking quickly, his hands clenching and unclenching, his face white with anger.

HE sent for me at once, and I faced him in the study. His lips, set in a thin line, seemed bloodless. Perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" he snapped, as I stood before him.

"Nothing," I replied.

"Nothing? Good God! Nothing, when my best saddle horse has been ruined—killed! You have the temerity, sir, to stand there and tell me you have nothing to say? Why, by hell's bells on the mountain, sir——"

I thought he would rise from his chair and tear me to pieces. But at that moment Marrand came into the room feeling his way along the wall, catching at chairs to support himself, one hand clutching at his heart.

"Wait, Raynor," he panted. "The boy didn't—do it."

My uncle leaped to his feet.

"Captain Marrand!" he exploded.

"I swear it, Raynor. You hear—me?" His words came in gasps. "The—boy—didn't——"

He stopped, his voice cut short. For before he could go on to tell my uncle he was responsible—before he could finish what he wanted to say in my behalf—Death's hand reached out and caught him. With a weird cry his head fell back, there came a gasp, and he fell at my uncle's feet.

Grief that settled over the household following Marrand's tragic death—for he was well beloved by everyone—gave me a temporary respite from my uncle's anger. I saw them bear Marrand to the family plot at the edge of the estate, where a long line of my uncle's forebears slept. According to Uncle's direction the funeral was a military one with a flag draping the coffin and a firing squad from Old Point Comfort to fire a volley over the grave.

The house seemed strangely lonely, afterward, with my friend and comrade gone. I kept to my room, avoiding my uncle—a boy hard pressed, remorseful, penitent, but afraid, knowing not which way to turn.

Then strange things began to happen.

Desperate, driven to distraction, I determined to leave

Fairleigh Hall forever. I threw a few clothes into a bag, and that night, when everyone was in bed, I planned to let myself out of the house, make my way by whatever means I could to Norfolk, and court Fortune's frowns or favors through whatever chance might present itself.

I did not go down to supper. From my window I watched the sun decline, and darkness gather. No one had come to call me. No one seemed to care whether I existed or not.

But in that vague period of twilight, between daylight and dark, footsteps suddenly sounded in the corridor. They stopped outside my door. I knew someone was there. But whoever it was neither rapped nor called.

I stared at the door questioningly. If my uncle, or McComb, had come for me, why did they not enter? And if it were one of the servants, why was there no knock?

Unable to bear the suspense longer, I rose quickly and opened the door.

The hallway was empty!

I stared into the shadows, my eyes widening in surprise. Then I stepped outside the door, peering the length of the hall. But I could see nothing, nor was there any place for a person to hide.

I could not understand it. I was certain I had heard the steps. Where, then, had the person disappeared to?

As I hesitated, striving to suppress the fear that made tremors shiver up and down my spine, there came to my ears, from outside my window somewhere, the nicker of a horse.

It started as a nicker, soft and gentle—a nicker of eagerness. But in a second it rose shrill and high into a whinny of impatience. It was the sound of a horse impetuous to be off, calling his rider to be going. And the whinny was not that of Lightning, or Water Lass, or Field Queen, or any of the others in the stable. I knew them all, their temperaments and their inflections. This was the whinny of Commander, imperious, demanding—the big, black horse that was my uncle's pride—the horse I had ridden to destruction!

Had I been older, I might have attributed the footsteps to an errant echo from some other part of the house, the whinny of the horse to one of the hungry animals that McComb would shortly feed. But to me, trembling in the darkness of my room, the footsteps were real, the

presence I had felt outside my door a tangible thing, the neighing of the horse the voice of Commander, and none other!

At that moment a greater fear than I had ever known before came over me—fear of myself, fear of the dark, fear of my uncle—and fear of something I had felt but could not see, out there in the hallway.

AS I crouched there on my bed, waiting, afraid to turn on a light, yet fearing the shadows that seemed to creep out of dark corners toward me, I felt again a strange presence somewhere about me. I peered at the knob of the door until my eyes became strained, expecting it to turn. But the room remained as still as death and out in the hallway nothing moved.

There stole over me the feeling that some queer thing was about to happen, that some act in an uncanny tragedy was about to take place.

In panic at last I caught up my bag and, despite the tremors that seized me, tiptoed across the room. Summoning

A Bad Boy's Weird Adventure

He wasn't really vicious—just mischievous, high-spirited and—lonely. But his tyrannical uncle, the Colonel, thought he needed constantly to be flogged and locked up, for the good of his soul.

The lad had only one friend in the world—Captain Marrand, the gentle old invalid—and it seemed that all hope was at an end when Marrand's spirit passed out into the Unknown.

How could the boy know that his friend would keep faith even though the mists of Death separated them?

all my courage, I once more threw open the door. I stepped back. Nothing moved. The house seemed silent and deserted.

Perspiration stood out all over me. My body became hot and cold by turns. I stole out of the room, felt my way along the corridor and down the stairs. There I turned, to look upward into the darkness whence I had come. Was someone there, just beside the old carved banister, peering down at me? Did a figure stand silently there, watching me?

I gulped. The old house was so strange, so silent, so fearsome, with Captain Marrand away. Suddenly, in greater panic, I fled through the darkened rooms, letting myself out of the great door to the porch, pausing a moment to gaze about me.

It was lighter there. The moon had risen well above the trees now; the night was chill, with a tang of frost in the air. I shivered. As I hesitated there came a stamping noise, and the click of gravel, as though a horse's hoof, pawing impatiently, had kicked up a bit of the broken stone in the drive.

QUEER! I listened but heard no more. Quickly I moved across the porch and down the steps. In the drive, with the moon full on me, I felt less nervous. I paused for one last look at the old house that had held so many sorrows, so much of misunderstanding and turmoil for me, and then I started down the drive, hurrying as fast as I could without breaking into a run. Once down the lane, past the corner where Commander had fallen, and I would be on the high-road, safe at last to win my way to whatever Fortune might dictate.

But I did not get far.

Suddenly the gravel crunched in front of me. A figure—the figure of my uncle—stood barring my path. In the shadow I could not see his face, but I did observe that he wore his riding habit and carried a heavy crop in his hand. My heart sank. For an instant we stood surveying each other. Then his voice came, crisp and hard.

“So! Running away, eh? Running away, like a cowardly traitor! And you *did* ruin Commander! I knew it, in spite of what Marrand, that unspeakable cad, tried to say. Ah, you don't deny it—eh?”

I stood speechless, too chilled with fear to utter a word.

He took a step nearer me.

“Come—speak up!” he raged. “In God's name, must you stand there like a dunce, without a tongue in your head?”

Still I could not speak. My knees grew weak beneath me, my body sagged. Before the terrible rage, the burning insults of this man, I could not defend myself.

He seized me by the collar and swung me roughly about, shoving me ahead of him along the broken stone of the drive.

“By the gods, we'll see about this,” he fumed. “Attempting to run away, eh? Deserting your post in the face of duty. Well, I'll discipline you. McComb!” He raised his voice to a bawling command. “Sergeant McComb! Report at once.”

He shoved me as far as the steps of the porch. There he waited for McComb. But the man *did* not appear. Again my uncle bawled his order.

“McComb! I say, McComb!”

His voice carried far through the night. There was no answer. The man did not come.

My uncle grew furiously angry, more angry than I had ever seen him. He was like a madman.

“Insubordination to my command—eh?” he snarled. “First it's you, then it's McComb. Well, I'll teach you, sir. I'll discipline you. Then I'll find McComb and, by God, I'll discipline him, too. I'll teach you, sir.”

He flung me from him. Before I had a chance to recover my feet, he stood over me, the heavy crop raised, already bearing down on me.

In an agony of fear I cried out. If that heavy weapon descended, it would brain me. From the deep agony of my

soul I called a name—the only name I could remember of anyone who had ever befriended me.

“Captain Marrand!”

But Marrand was dead. I covered my face, flattening myself against the driveway, waiting for the blow.

I waited what seemed a long time. The blow did not fall. I could not understand. Slowly, bit by bit, I uncovered my face, venturing to look upward at my tormentor.

The moon shone brightly. It lighted all the garden in front of the old house—the driveway leading to the lane, the clumps of shrubbery set in the horseshoe formed by the drive, the woods out beyond, the glimmer of the moonlight on the creek where it showed through the denuded trees.

I saw it all in a glance. But it was at my uncle that I stared.

He stood there like a carved image, his right arm raised high, the riding crop suspended, about to fall. But he held it there. He had forgotten me. He had forgotten the position in which he stood. All his concentration, all his thought, was directed toward the porch. And gradually I turned my head to look, even as he was looking.

I gasped in surprise and terror. On the porch, just in front of the open doorway, as though it had emerged from the house, stood another figure—a dim, intangible figure that seemed as thin as a wisp of smoke. It stood there, without moving, gazing at my uncle.

And though it stood fairly within the shadow where the moon's rays did not penetrate, I knew it at once for the figure of the man whose name I had called—Captain Marrand, my friend and counsellor.

My uncle recovered himself. A curse leaped from his lips. The figure on the porch swayed slightly, as though a breath of wind disturbed it. My uncle turned his gaze away, as if he did not credit the thing he saw there on the porch—as if it were a mirage, a figment of his imagination. He caught sight of me—stooped and quickly yanked me to my feet. Once more his arm flew up to strike me with that heavy crop.

And once more he hesitated. A groan escaped his lips. He seemed to be fighting, straining against some power that held him bound. Through clenched teeth he mouthed a curse. His eyes blazed wildly and it seemed as though in the effort to release himself from the spell that held him he would burst an artery and collapse.

Then strangely his name was spoken. We both heard the voice.

“Raynor!”

Firm, but kindly, impressing but appealing, the voice held nothing of censure.

“Raynor!”

THE word seemed to be borne in on our consciousness, as though it came distantly down the path of the gorgeous moon that lighted the front of the old house.

My uncle stood transfixed. Then slowly the dim figure moved from the porch, gliding toward us without apparent effort. As it moved into the moon's radiance we saw that it had no substance, but was a mere outline, as if a phantom artist had sketched it in mist. And all around it shone an aura of light—not bright, but as if it caught an atom of the moon's silver sheen.

The figure passed us, gazing straight ahead. It made no motion or sound. But as it passed, suddenly my uncle seemed once more to forget me.

“Marrand!” he breathed. “My friend! You have come back? Wait for me, Marrand.”

Even the stare on his face was set, transfixed. Like an automaton, he turned and followed the figure down the drive. Awed beyond conception, I stood there, watching—a boy viewing an amazing thing, and, boylike, not knowing what to do.

Down the moonlit drive they passed—a living man following a specter—down the lane to the place where Com-

mander had floundered in the mire and McComb had ended the stricken animal's life. And once more the silence of that moon-enchanted place was broken by the shrill whinny of a horse. It came from the direction of the lane as though Commander himself waited there, eager to be away, greeting his master, waiting to be mounted and off.

I stood spellbound. I saw my uncle disappear with that strange phantom of his friend—and mine—behind a copse of higher shrubbery. I waited, eager to see what would happen, held immovable, amazed.

What went on behind that copse I never knew. Whether that phantom spoke as mortals may speak by word of mouth or whether it found some way to convey its thoughts to my uncle, I do not know. Nor what was said, if anything, for my uncle kept silent about it afterward and I did not question him.

I only know that after a time I saw my uncle returning toward me—alone. And what a change in him! No longer was he the automaton. The spell had left him. He seemed shrunken, stooped. He staggered, his hands pressed over his face.

HE no longer carried the riding crop, but I thought that as he approached he intended to strike me with his fist, to make good the threat that he would thrash me within an inch of my life.

And as I was about to dodge, to flee from him, he suddenly went to his knees, there in the drive, reaching blindly for my hands, strange sobs striving to release themselves from his constricted throat.

"Jack," he cried at last. "Jack! I didn't understand. I—I never knew, I—never realized. Forgive me. I'm a wicked old man, to harm a boy. Jack! Forgive me."

I stared at him in amazement. I could not believe my eyes. This martinet who was my uncle, whose rage had put the fear of death in my soul—here on his knees before me, pleading for my forgiveness! It could not be possible.

Yet it was. Tears streamed down the old man's face now. He still knelt in the drive, clinging to me. Then, at last, he seemed to recover a part of the austere dignity that always cloaked him. Warily he arose. Alert, I sensed new danger. But it did not come.

Mastering himself with difficulty, he stood beside me, hesitatingly, awkwardly slipping an arm about my shoulders. He spoke quietly.

"Jack," he began, "I've been a hard, unyielding old man, irascible, foolish. I did not realize it. Nor did I realize how you longed for sympathy, for the friendship of someone who understood. I should have been that person—for the sake of my dead sister—and her son.

"But—but—" With difficulty he steadied his voice. It was an effort for him—this confession. "Somehow I've failed. I want to do better, Jack. Something that happened tonight has opened my eyes. Marrand showed me. Will you—will you promise me to stay, Jack, and let me try again? Will you let an old man make it up to you—son—if he can?"

Not until long years afterward did I understand how hard it was for him thus to subdue his pride. But he hesitated only a moment.

"Jack," he pleaded, "I want you to stay. It does not mat-

ter about—about Commander. Marrand wanted to take the blame, but I saw through it all—I see through it now to my utter shame, that it should be necessary for a man to take the blame for a boy's mistake, to save that boy from such a beast as I. Say you will stay! Tell me that, Jackie—my son. Here's my hand. Will you—will you take it?"

As in a daze I reached out and did as he wished. As he gripped my hand, a sob, which he could no longer restrain shook from his throat. Suddenly his arms were about me, pressing me to him. In the moonlight I saw his face working strangely, but in his eyes was a glad new light—a light I never had seen there before.

"Thank God for this night," he breathed fervently. "Marrand!" His voice quavered as he raised it, looking off toward that copse of shrubbery. "Marrand! Thank you, Marrand!"

Suddenly I heard again the whinny of a horse. Even as we stood there, my uncle's arm about my shoulders, intangible, swiftly moving figures appeared in the pathway. I thought we could hear the rush of air past them—the man astride the horse. And as I gazed at them, I saw that the horse was Commander, and that the rider was my friend, Captain Marrand. Both intangible. Both phantoms. Commander with flying hoofs, head thrust a little forward, straining at phantom reins—Captain Marrand no longer ill, something luminous about his features, joy in his look, riding Commander.

"Look!" cried my uncle. "They're going away together. Marrand and Commander. They've found each other in the spirit world! God, what a picture!"

I saw that Marrand, clad in his captain's uniform, sat his horse as only a cavalryman can. Headlong in a glorious mad rush, but soundless as a wisp of fog, Commander dashed down the lane, straight for the barrier where he had been thrown. He did not falter, did not hesitate. Straight at it! I saw him leap. This time a steady hand was on his rein. Commander soared upward in a beautiful leap. At the top of the jump Marrand turned and waved. And strangely they did not land on the other side, but horse and rider, ghosts together, seemed climbing, climbing, up into the path of the moon, even as Marrand waved back at us.

My uncle snapped to attention, straight and stalwart, beside me.

"To the trail, sir," he called, his voice still a bit tremulous. "To the trail! And—and Good Luck, sir!"

Just as in the old days, you see, when he had parted with a brother officer assigned to an important mission, and had wished him well.

Gone were that strange rider and his horse. My uncle stared about him, as if awakening from a dream. Then it was that he discovered McComb, who had come up quietly and had observed it all. My uncle addressed him.

"Sergeant!" he said, his voice striving to be brave, "dismiss the company. And Sergeant!"

"Sir?"

"Taps."

Together we stood silent, as the Sergeant unslung the bugle at his waist and sounded the call that sends the tired soldier to his rest—*asleep or in death*. When the last silver note had died away, sweetly, musically, my uncle and I, our arms about each other, turned back into Fairleigh Hall.

