

PENROD By BOOTH TARKINGTON

The Greatest Stories Ever Written of a Real Boy and His Escapades X--The Empty House

ONE July afternoon, when the world outdoors was empty of everything except hot sunshine, Penrod Schofield, in the sawdust box of his father's stable, was as silently busy as a diligent young worm in the heart of a nut.

Favoring this comparison, the sawdust box was naturally almost as dark as the inside of a nut is believed to be; but Penrod worked by the light of a lantern, which raised the temperature of the box to a degree that would have frightened a stoker, but abstracted nothing from the fever of composition.

Penrod was writing.

He was writing CHAPTER TENTH of his secret novel, HAROLD RAMOREZ THE ROAD-AGENT OR WILD LIFE AMONG THE ROCKY MTS.

"Soon it was Mr Wilsons turn to be scared and he started being to be let off and said it was not his fault and how he had never done anything. Oh no sneered Harold you did not do anything to this poor old man Oh no but I guess the time has come now when you will have to be exposed so just look here a minute I have the papers to prove you committed the forgy your own self 16 long years ago that this poor old man got put in the penitentiary for and been 16 long years in a dirty cell with nothing but bread and water and a little rice.

"Yes said our hero and I have papers that prove he murdered your children and little baby daughter also

"I didn't either and you better look out how you talk said Mr. Wilson and puffed his soul before his father. No soon Harold saw a terrible looking cavern and went inside of it and put the old man down from carrying him. The cavern was all black and it smelled terrible Well said the old man this is the worst looking place I ever been in and I bet there is something terrible in here and then some animal jumped out from back in there and bit him where the ottomatick bullets had wounded him and he said Oh some animal is biting me right in my wounds Oh now it is biting me where my leg got broken

"Soon the old man died and went to meet his Maker Well said Harold I wonder what I better do So he went back in the cavern and there was some kind of something green back in there and he was afraid probly it was the old mans ghost and he saw something that looked like some eyes looking right at him--

"Musther Penrod!

This was a hail from the house. Della, the cook, emerged from the kitchen door and stood upon the back-porch in the sunset light. She addressed the silent stable.

"Musther Penrod! Youot there somewhere, why can't you answer me? Yer father an' mother's away fer dinner an' so's Miss Margrut an' I'm not goin' to wait all night, so if ye want anything 'eat ye better c'min an' eat it. 'Ts the last I'll cahl yet!"

However, she came to the door five times during the gradual dusk to shout "Musther Penrod" and various warnings; but the stable remained stolidly unresponsive. Finally she delivered a real ultimatum, and when it proved ineffectual, retired permanently.

Certainly her voice had reached the physical ear of Penrod, but it conveyed no meaning; his mind had not heard it. Penrod's self was in a horrible cavern in the Rocky Mountains with Harold Ramorez.

Like many another good soul moved to attempt the transmutation of vision into manuscript, this author was not aware how frail and treacherous are the processes of alchemy. The fact that words are fixed symbols of things concerned Penrod little; he thought



HE CAME TO A PAUSE IN A SITTING POSTURE AT THE FOOT OF THE NEWEL.

of all ghosts, this one had undergone a complete change of character since passing. Forgetting every former tie and all gratitude, it seemed wholly inimical to its former benefactor, and assuming the position of terror-in-chief of a place upon which, in life, it had pronounced an unfavorable opinion and for which it had shown no attachment whatever, it now appeared to have no affairs to call its elsewhere, nor any purpose in existence save to unsettle the reason of one who had shown it nothing but kindness. For, in truth, Harold Ramorez feared he might go mad--and Penrod's mouth opened and his eyes bulged fearfully as he wrote.

At that very instant the flame of his dejected lantern died absolutely. Harold Ramorez himself was not left in more complete eclipse. Instinct brought Penrod to his feet at a bound; and, as he looked out over the side of the sawdust box toward the open door, his state of mind was one that needed the immediate reassurance of sunshine. And bright, warm, July afternoon sunshine was what Penrod fully expected to see.

Instead he looked into Egyptian night.

Therefore, it is not surprising that when Penrod emerged from the stable, a very few seconds later, breathing somewhat disconcertedly, he bore in both hands, ready for all emergencies, an overweighy but certainly formidable weapon, which had come to his hand as he slid down from the sawdust box.

It was an ax.

There was no moon; there were no stars; there was no light in heaven; there was no light in a neighbor's house. The air was thick and black; shrubberies in the yard took curious, changing shapes, and Penrod kept a wary eye upon them as he threaded his way to the kitchen door.

It opened to his hand, revealing nothing save by remitscent odor; but there was a dim light in the dining-room. Thither he proceeded, his unsteady condition being at once improved by the sight of viands and vegetables, for there was a plate upon the table at his accustomed place, and food plentiful, though grown cold.

A conjunction of suggestions occurring as he ate, recalled something like an echo of Della's voice; gradually he became susceptible to an impression that his father and mother and sister had not dined at home. Then abruptly it struck him that he might be alone in the house.

"All alone in an empty house!" As the words formed in Penrod's mind, it was as if a husky voice had uttered them somewhere overhead. He was grievously startled.

"An empty house!"

At the upper end of the table was part of a cold ham, beside which lay a large, horn-handled carving-knife; and Penrod, after swallowing dryly once or twice, lunged suddenly at this implement, grasped it, and stood upon its defensive. He remained in a tense attitude, listening; and there was no sound, either within the house or without;

nothing could have been more ominous. Finally, carving-knife in hand, he went back to the kitchen, where he had left the ax, and returned to the dining-room doubly armed.

Again he stood to listen.

Suddenly Penrod whirled straight about, with ax and carving-knife both lifted to strike at something behind him.

Nothing was there except the side-board, so he 'bout-faced suspiciously again. Then, laying the ax upon the table, but keeping the knife in his right hand, he stepped upon a chair and extended his left hand to the gas fixture, meaning to turn the jet on full. But he pressed the key in the wrong direction, and for the second time within that half hour Penrod's light went out. To a person in his condition it was a disaster, and, uttering an exclamation of horror, he stumbled and fell from the chair with a light crash.

He was up again in an instant, cutting the air in all directions with the carving-knife; then he grasped for the ax, found it, and stood still once more, on the defensive, listening intently, expecting the worst and panting with an effect, upon that stillness, almost apoplectic.

He moved at last; tremblingly felt his way round the table and debouched to the mantelpiece, where matches were sometimes to be found in a small porcelain slipper, madly believed to be decorative.

A chill struck to his spine at a veritable sound behind him. This one was a false alarm, the result of some capillary action in the wooden floor, but so far as Penrod's nerves were concerned it might have been a shot.

Wheeling, he struck a frantic blow with the ax, which, completing a fine curve, miraculously failed to amputate the wielder's left foot at the ankle, but, as an incident, presently relieved all members of the household from troubling to put any more matches in the porcelain slipper.

Thereupon Penrod decided to go outdoors. The decision itself was a simple matter; action upon it was deferred because of extreme hesitation to move at all. But after a gruesome period of inertia he began to tiptoe backward in the direction of the door, keeping eyes, ax and carving-knife warily toward where the villainous creak had sounded. Thus retreating, he presently found himself in the side hall, which separated all the front part of the roomy, old-fashioned house from the dining-room and kitchen. The doors leading to the forward rooms were closed, and the thought of opening them filled him with horror; in his mind's eye he saw them, gaunt, huge, full of black shapes of furniture, lurking places that might conceal anything!

An empty house in the night-time has few attractions for a boy. Enclosed darkness sickens his soul and likewise has a discouraging physical effect, climaxing in the pit of his stomach--which is the seat of courage. This failed point, in the case of Penrod, was becoming more and more sensitive every moment. He suffered from an unpleasant conviction that he was surrounded by vital dangers which became the center for each slightest movement that he made. These dangers were all the more dreadful because they were undefined; the inscrutable darkness held secrets--and, putting off his hand to feel the wall near the kitchen door, he encountered one of them. His fingers, very, very briefly closed upon something that felt like a head of wet, cold hair. It sank from his touch, and there was a thick-sounding thud upon the floor.

"Oof!" moaned Penrod, the question of going out through the kitchen thus definitely settled, and when he became again conscious of his whereabouts he was on the second floor at the top of the back stairs.

Mops have driven greater than Penrod.

He was sorely shaken, but not disposed to linger in the vicinity of stairs that led toward a kitchen inhabited by surprises of this kind. He fled into his father's bed-chamber, bruising himself variously in the passage thereto, and abandoning his weapons for the moment, slid his hand along the wall until it came to a forbidden object that hung there.

It was an Enfield rifle, a muzzle-loading relic, last put to use by Penrod's grandfather on a day in the year 1852, and it was truly unloaded. Penrod got it down, pointed the muzzle waveringly in the general direction of the door by which he had entered, and whispered feeble and tremulously: "Now let's see whu-what you were goin' to do so num-much!"

He maintained this attitude until the weight of the extended rifle became intolerable; then he grounded arms and leaned back against a bureau, breathing even more vehemently than before. His elbow touched a bottle; he seized upon it and smelled the contents--spirits of camphor. Suggestion was immediately roused by the memory of an unpleasant experience in the past. He rechecked the bottle, placed it under his arm, and muttered:

"You betcha! Guess they won't like this so much! Sprinkle it in their ole eyes!"

It now became his purpose to make his way cautiously to the front staircase, descend to the front hall, and thence, by the front door, reach the outer air. So, with slow and noiseless motions, he put himself once more in possession of his ax and carving-knife, thrust the latter in the breast of his jacket, and, though encumbered to the point of difficulty by the ax, the gun and the camphor bottle, returned to the upper hall and began an advance in force.

He went forward a dozen steps with some confidence, then halted abruptly. What stopped him was something altogether inside himself. In the darkness a green vapor appeared (though not at the other end of the hall, where he thought it did) and there emerged from it the shocking figure of an Old Man lying in the rain at the mouth of the sawdust box--spirited, like all other visions--chosy this particular moment to recur to the author of "Harold Ramorez."

He was standing by the portal of his own bedroom. Gasping, he hopped across the threshold, kicked the door shut, and maintaining possession of his armory, though perhaps, not of his faculties, huddled himself upon the bed and buried his face in the pillow.

It is not altogether creditable to a boy in the dark that he sometimes imitates an ostrich. But it is unfortunate, because, when one is already in the dark, very little relief can be obtained by closing the eyes.

Penrod, burrowing into his pillow, could see the Old Man rather more plainly than if he had allowed his eyes to remain open. He saw him through the pillow and through the wall; it seemed that the Old Man was lying on the hall rug just outside the closed door, and that before long he would get up and come into the bedroom and bend over the bed and-- But here imagination halted in ultimate horror.

Without lifting or turning his face Penrod managed to squirm inside the bedclothes and to cover himself completely, as far as the top of his head, for the Old Man was but one of the monsters that threatened.

Burglars!

Burglars were creeping through the halls upstairs and downstairs; the air of the whole house became murmurous with their whippers and rustlings.

Penrod, still not moving his head, pulled the ax and the camphor bottle beneath the sheet; slid the gun off the coverlet, and pushed it as far under the bed as he could. Burglars might be more merciful if they believed him but a little lonely sleeping child intending no resistance.

He gulped lamently, and a poignant bitterness began to form no inconsiderable part of his condition.

What kind of parents were they, he asked himself, who could so blithely let and leave a little lonely child to be found by burglars--and other things--in a great, horrible, hollow, empty house? Probably his father and mother were somewhere with a whole crowd

STORIES AND PICTURES FOR THE LITTLE ONES

A Gopher Peacemaker

Did you ever see a gopher? It is a tiny little animal, formed very much like a squirrel, only it is much smaller.

It lives in the ground, burrowing holes for his home.

Out on the prairies, where most gophers live, you can often see a tiny head or two peeping up from the flat ground. If you stand very quietly they will watch you carefully and then, if you seem harmless, they will come out of their holes a little more and a little more, till suddenly they will slip clear out and go scurrying across the prairies.

One morning a little gopher named Keen waked up early and peeped out of his hole to see what kind of a day it was. The sun shone brightly, the sky was blue and he had just decided to start out to hunt some breakfast when some conversation attracted his attention.

"I found it first, let me have it."

"I don't care who found it, I've got it."

"Don't you eat it up, it's mine."

He looked around and there behind a couple of big weeds were two robins fighting and quarrelling over one poor, wigly worm.

"Let go and give it to me," said the first robin.

"Indeed I'll not," said the second, as he started to eat the worm.

Keen decided he didn't care for that kind of quarrelling so near his home--he was a good-natured little fellow himself and thought everybody else should be the same. So he darted out like a flash--gophers go very fast--the way they get their names--darted right under the greedy robin. Mr. Robin was so frightened he dropped the worm and started to fly away, when Keen said, "You don't need to go away, stay here and be a gentleman."

At that the first robin said, "If he's hungry, he can have half, but I want some of it."

"Dear me, dear me," said the gopher,

"what a fuss over one worm, don't you know the ground is full of them?"

"I never thought of that," said the greedy robin, looking very sheepish, "here, you eat this one and I'll find another."

So they both set to work very happily and soon had all the worms they wanted, and the little gopher, seeing them good friends again, scurried off to get his breakfast.

Legends of the Narcissus

EDITH left her governess sitting under a tree and ran off into the woods to gather flowers for her mother. An hour later she returned, weighted down with beautiful blossoms of all colors. She placed them on the mossy ground--all but one spray of white flowers. This she gave to her nurse, saying: "Isn't this lovely? Do you know its name? I found it growing by the side of a little brook in a very shady place. I'd love to know what it is called."

"Indeed I can tell you more than that," answered the governess, "his name is Narcissus, and it is an ancient flower about which the poets of all times have sung. It bloomed even as long ago as when the gods and goddesses were supposed to live on earth. The old Grecian legends say it was the flower which the maiden Proserpine was gathering when Pluto took her away to his dark home under the ground."

"How very interesting, do you know any other story about my pretty flower?" asked Edith, kissing the white blossom.

"Yes, there is another legend," answered the governess, "about a beautiful youth named Narcissus. His father was a river god named Cepheus and his mother a nymph called Sirope. The wonderful beauty of the youth caused many to fall in love with him, but he was cold and indifferent to all.

"A poor little nymph, called Echo, loved him so dearly that she pined away and died, because he would not care for her; and now there is nothing left of Echo but her voice, which you can sometimes hear answering your call in a still woods."

"At last Nemesis, the god of retribution, decided to punish Narcissus for his hard heart. He was made to fall in love with his own image as he looked into a stream, and as he could never reach this beautiful reflection, he gradually perished with hopeless love. His body was changed into this flower, which has ever since borne his name. And that is why the Narcissus always grows beside a stream--so he can see his own image in the water."

"I'm mighty glad I happened to find this spray of Narcissus," said Edith, arranging the flowers in a bouquet to take home to her mother, "because I might never have heard the legends, if I hadn't."

Weather Proverbs

WE look to the "weather-man" to foretell the coming state of the weather, but in olden times there was no such man, and there wasn't any weather bureau, so the people had to depend on the old-country farmers. They were looked upon as wizards and any expression they gave was about right.

The following are some of the sayings of these wise men--of the month of April the following adage is both old and familiar:

"April showers
Bring May flowers."
And again--
"A cold April
The barn will fill."
"If March comes in like a lion it goes out like a lamb; if it comes in like a lamb it goes out like a lion."
"If the grass grows in Janiver
It grows the same for all the year."
"Of all the months in a year
Comes bad a fair February."
A prolongation of the March winds into April was always regarded by the ancients as a good omen--
"When April blows his horn,
'Tis good for hay and corn."
The months of May and June were awarded the following couplets--
"Mist in May and heat in June
Make the harvest come right soon."
"Who doffs his coat on a Winter's day
Will gladly put it on in May."

Little Stories of Great War

Royal Nurses--
SOME of you girls have often wanted to be nurses--and, above all, Red Cross nurses. This war has put many a sweet, eager young woman to a severe test. She has been under fire; she has rescued the injured from burning houses; she has defended the wounded from those who wanted to kill the helpless because there seemed no time to look after them. There have been many nameless heroines, but one is glad to know that the courage and devotion of a young French girl, Mademoiselle Eugenie Antoine, was brought to the notice of King George.

While the village of Valli-sur-Aisne was under fierce shell fire this faithful nurse cared for and tended the British wounded with never a thought of self. And now she wears in her breast something very precious--a King's gift--"The Decoration of the Royal Red Cross."

But, speaking of nurses, there are three distinguished women who wear no orders, working in a Russian hospital; they are known only as Sister Alexandra, Sister Olga, and Sister Tatiana, the last two being young girls. After weeks of hard work they have only just been allowed to assist in operations. "Their high station as wife

OUR PUZZLE CORNER

HAT PUZZLE.
This old gentleman has lost his hat in a sudden gust of wind. See if you can find it by cutting out the black spots and fitting them together.

HIDDEN STATES.
Each of the following sentences contains a hidden state of the Union:
1. Then Eva, Dan and I ran.
2. I told her not to miss our interesting lecture.
3. Pretending not to know he was ill, I noisily entered the house.
4. The news caused Alma inexpressible grief.

COLOR PUZZLE.
If the following are written, one below the other, their central letters will spell the name of a color:
1. An article of food.
2. A verb.
3. A word meaning moist.
4. A number.
5. A writing instrument.

Answers.
HIDDEN STATES--1, Nevada; 2, Missouri; 3, Illinois; 4, Maine.
COLOR PUZZLE--Green, 1, Egg; 2, Arc; 3, Wet; 4, Ten; 5, Ink.



Solution of Hat Puzzle.