ARGONAUT STORIES

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Under Flying Hoofs
The Colonel and “The Lady”

MOON FACE

BY JACK LONDON

John Claverhouse was a moon-faced man. You know the kind—cheek-bones wide apart, chin and forehead melting into the cheeks to complete the perfect round, and the nose, broad and pudgy, equidistant from the circumference, flattened against the very centre of the face like a dough-ball upon the ceiling. Perhaps that is why I hated him, for truly he had become an offense to my eyes, and I believed the earth to be cumbered with his presence. Perhaps my mother may have been superstitious of the moon and looked upon it over the wrong shoulder at the wrong time.

But be that as it may, I hated John Claverhouse. Not that he had done me what society would consider a wrong or an ill turn. Far from it, in any such sense. The evil was of a deeper, subtler sort; so elusive, so intangible, as to defy clear, definite analysis in words. We all experience such things at some period in our lives. For the first time we see a certain individual, one whom the very instant before we did not dream existed; and yet, at the first moment of meeting, we say: "I do not like that man." Why do we not like him? And we do not know why; we only know that we do not. We have taken a dislike, that is all. And so I with John Claverhouse.

What right had such a man to be happy? Yet he was an optimist. He was always gleeful and laughing. All things were always all right, curse him! Ah! how it grated on my soul that he should be so happy! Other men could laugh, and it did not bother me. I even used to laugh myself—before I met John Claverhouse.

But his laugh! It irritated me, maddened me, as nothing else under the sun could irritate or madden me. It haunted me, gripped hold of me, and would not let me go. It was a huge, Gargantuan laugh. Waking or sleeping it was always with me, whirring and jarring across my heart-strings and the very fibres of my being like an enormous rasp. At break of day it came whooping across the fields to spoil my pleasant morning reverie. Under the aching noon-day glare, when the green things drooped and the birds withdrew to the depths of the forest, and all nature drowsed, his great "Ha! ha!" and "Ho! ho!" rose up to the sky and challenged the sun. And at black midnight, from the lonely cross-roads where he turned from town into his own place, came his plaguy cachinnations to rouse me from my sleep and make me toss about and clench my nails into my palms.

I went forth privily in the night-time and turned his cattle into his fields, and in the morning heard his whooping laugh as he drove them out again. "It is nothing," he said; "the poor, dumb beasties are not to be blamed for straying into fatter pastures."

He had a dog he called "Mars," a big, splendid brute, part deerhound and part bloodhound, and resembling both. Mars was a great delight to him, and they were always together. But I bided my time, and one day, when opportunity was ripe, lured the animal away and settled for him with arsenic and beefsteak. It made positively no impression on John Claverhouse. His laugh was as hearty and frequent as ever, and his face as much like the full moon as it always had been.

Then I set fire to his hay-stacks and his barn. But the next morning, being Sunday, he went forth blithe and cheerful.

“Where are you going?” I asked him, as he went by the cross-roads.

“Trout,” he said, and his face beamed like a full moon. “I just dote on trout, you know.”

Was there ever such an impossible man! His whole harvest had gone up in his hay-stacks and barn. It was uninsured, I knew. And yet, in the face of famine and the rigorous winter, he went out gayly in quest of a mess of trout, forsooth, because he “doted” on them! Had gloom but rested, no matter how lightly, on his brow, or had his bovine countenance grown long and serious and less like the moon, or had he removed that smile but once from off his face, I am sure I could have forgiven him for existing. But, no, he grew only more cheerful under misfortune.

I insulted him. He looked at me in slow and smiling surprise.

“I fight you? Why?” he asked, slowly. And then he laughed. “You are so funny! Ho! ho! You’ll be the death of me! He! he! he! Oh! Ho! ho! ho!”

What would you? It was past endurance. By the blood of Judas, how I hated him! Then there was that name—Claverhouse! What a name! Wasn’t it absurd? Claverhouse! Merciful heaven, *why* Claverhouse? Again and again I asked myself that question. I should not have minded Smith, or Brown, or Jones—but *Claverhouse*! I leave it to you. Repeat it to yourself—Claverhouse. Just listen to the ridiculous sound of it—Claverhouse! Should a man live with such a name? I ask of you. “No,” you say. And “No” said I.

But I bethought me of his mortgage. What of his crops and barn destroyed, I knew he would be unable to meet it. So I got a shrewd,

close-mouthed, tight-fisted money-lender to get the mortgage transferred to him. I did not appear, but through this agent I forced the foreclosure, and but few days (no more, believe me, than the law allowed) were given John Claverhouse to remove his goods and chattels from the premises. Then I strolled down to see how he took it, for he had lived there upward of twenty years. But he met me with his saucer-eyes twinkling, and the light glowing and spreading in his face till it was as a full-risen moon.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "The funniest tike, that youngster of mine! Did you ever hear the like? Let me tell you. He was down playing by the edge of the river when a piece of the bank caved in and splashed him. 'Oh, papa!' he cried; 'a great big puddle flewed up and hit me.'"

He stopped and waited for me to join him in his infernal glee.

"I don't see any laugh in it," I said, shortly, and I know my face went sour.

He regarded me with wonderment, and then came the damnable light, glowing and spreading, as I have described it, till his face shone soft and warm, like the summer moon, and then the laugh—"Ha! ha! That's funny! You don't see it, eh? He! he! Ho! ho! ho! He doesn't see it! Why, look here. You know, a puddle——"

But I turned on my heel and left him. That was the last. I could stand it no longer. The thing must end right there, I thought, curse him! The earth should be quit of him. And as I went over the hill, I could hear his monstrous laugh reverberating against the sky.

Now, I pride myself on doing things neatly, and when I resolved to kill John Claverhouse I had it in mind to do so in such a fashion

that I should not look back upon it and feel ashamed. I hate bungling, and I hate brutality. To me there is something repugnant in merely striking a man with one's naked fist—faugh! it is sickening! So, to shoot, or stab, or club John Claverhouse (O that name!) did not appeal to me. And not only was I impelled to do it neatly and artistically, but also in such manner that not the slightest possible suspicion could be directed against me.

To this end I bent my intellect, and, after a week of profound and strenuous incubation, I hatched the scheme. Then I set to work. I bought a water-spaniel bitch, five months old, and devoted my whole attention to her training. Had any one spied upon me, they would have remarked that this training consisted entirely of one thing—*retrieving*. I taught the dog, which I called "Bellona," to fetch sticks I threw into the water, and not only to fetch, but to fetch at once, without mouthing or playing with them. The point was that she was to stop for nothing, but to deliver the stick in all haste. I made a practice of running away and leaving her to chase me, with the stick in her mouth, till she caught me. She was a bright animal, and took to the game with such eagerness that I was soon content.

After that, at the first casual opportunity, I presented Bellona to John Claverhouse. I knew what I was about, for I was aware of a little weakness of his, and of a little private and civic sinning of which he was regularly and inveterately guilty.

"No," he said, when I placed the end of the rope to which she was tied in his hand. "No, you don't mean it." And his mouth opened wide, and he grinned all over his damnable moon-face.

“I—I kind of thought, somehow, you didn’t like me,” he explained. “Wasn’t it funny for me to make such a mistake?” And at the thought he held his sides with laughter.

“What is her name?” he managed to ask between paroxysms.

“Bellona,” I said.

“He! he!” he tittered. “What a funny name!”

I gritted my teeth, for his mirth put them on edge, and snapped out between them: “She was the wife of Mars, you know.”

Then the light of the full moon began to suffuse his face, until he exploded with: “Well, I guess she’s a widow now! Oh! Ho! ho! E! he! he! Ho!” he whooped after me, and I turned and fled swiftly away over the hill.

The week passed by, and on Saturday evening I said to him: “You go away Monday, don’t you?”

He nodded his head and grinned.

“Then you won’t have another chance to get a mess of those trout you just ‘dote’ on.”

But he did not notice the sneer. “Oh, I don’t know,” he chuckled. “I’m going up to-morrow to try pretty hard.”

Thus was assurance made doubly sure, and I went back to my house literally hugging myself with rapture.

Early next morning I saw him go by with a dip-net and gunnysack, and Bellona trotting at his heels. I knew where he was bound, and cut out by the back pasture and climbed through the underbrush to

the top of the mountain. Keeping carefully out of sight, I followed the crest along for a couple of miles to a natural amphitheatre in the hills, where the little river ramped down out of a gorge, and stopped for breath in a large and placid rock-bound pool. That was the spot! I sat down on the croup of the mountain, where I could see all that occurred, and lighted my pipe.

Ere many minutes had passed, John Claverhouse came plodding up the bed of the stream. Bellona was ambling about him, and they were in high feather, her short, snappy barks mingling with his deeper chest-notes. Arrived at the pool, he threw down the dip-net and sack, and drew from his hip-pocket what looked like a large, fat candle. But I knew it to be a stick of "giant"; for such was his method of catching trout. He dynamited them. He attached the fuse by wrapping the "giant" tightly in a piece of cotton. Then he ignited the fuse and tossed the explosive into the pool.

Like a flash, Bellona was into the pool after it. I could have shrieked aloud for very joy. Claverhouse yelled at her, but without avail. He pelted her with clods and rocks, but she swam steadily on till she got the stick of "giant" in her mouth, when she whirled about and headed for shore. Then, for the first time, he realized his danger, and started to run. As foreseen and planned by me, she made the bank and took out after him. Oh, I tell you, it was great! As I have said, the pool lay in a sort of amphitheatre. Above and below, the stream could be crossed on stepping-stones. And around and around, up and down and across the stones, raced Claverhouse and Bellona. I could never have believed that such an ungainly man could run so fast. But run he did, Bellona hot-footed after him, and gaining. And then, just as she caught up, he in full stride, and she leaping with nose at his knee, there was a sudden flash, a burst of smoke, and terrific detonation, and where man and dog had been

the instant before there was naught to be seen but a big hole in the ground.

“Death from accident while engaged in illegal fishing.” That was the verdict of the coroner’s jury; and that is why I pride myself on the neat and artistic way in which I finished off John Claverhouse. There was no bungling, no brutality; nothing to be ashamed of in the whole transaction, as I am sure you will agree. No more does his infernal laugh go echoing among the hills, and no more does his fat moon-face rise up to vex me. My days are peaceful now, and my night’s sleep deep.

A CAGED LION

BY FRANK NORRIS

In front of the entrance a "spieler" stood on a starch-box and beat upon a piece of tin with a stick, and we weakly succumbed to his frenzied appeals and went inside. We did this, I am sure, partly to please the "spieler," who would have been dreadfully disappointed if we had not done so, but partly, too, to please Toppan, who was always interested in the great beasts and liked to watch them.

It is possible that you may remember Toppan as the man who married Victoria Boyden, and, in so doing, thrust his greatness from him and became a bank-clerk instead of an explorer. After he married, he came to be quite ashamed of what he had done in Thibet and Africa and other unknown corners of the earth, and, after a while, very seldom spoke of that part of his life at all; or, when he did, it was only to allude to it as a passing boyish fancy, altogether foolish and silly, like calf-love and early attempts at poetry.

"I used to think I was going to set the world on fire at one time," he said once; "I suppose every young fellow has some such ideas. I only made an ass of myself, and I'm glad I'm well out of it. Victoria saved me from that."

But this was long afterward. He died hard, and sometimes he would have moments of strength in his weakness, just as before he had given up his career during a moment of weakness in his strength. During the first years after he had given up his career, he thought he was content with the way things had come to be; but it

was not so, and now and then the old feeling, the love of the old life, the old ambition, would be stirred into activity again by some sight, or sound, or episode in the conventional life around him. A chance paragraph in a newspaper, a sight of the Arizona deserts of sage and cactus, a momentary panic on a ferry-boat, sometimes even fine music or a great poem would wake the better part of him to the desire of doing great things. At such times the longing grew big and troublous within him to cut loose from it all, and get back to those places of the earth where there were neither months nor years, and where the days of the week had no names; where he could feel unknown winds blowing against his face and unnamed mountains rising beneath his feet; where he could see great sandy, stony stretches of desert with hot, blue shadows, and plains of salt, and thickets of jungle-grass, broken only by the lairs of beasts and the paths the steinbok make when they go down to water.

The most trifling thing would recall all this to him just as a couple of notes have recalled to you whole arias and overtures. But with Toppan it was as though one had recalled the arias and the overtures, and then was not allowed to sing them.

We went into the arena and sat down. The ring in the middle was fenced in by a great, circular iron cage. The tiers of seats rose around this, a band was playing in a box over the entrance, and the whole interior was lighted by an electric globe slung over the middle of the cage. Inside a brown bear—to me less suggestive of a wild animal than of lap-robes and furriers' signs—was dancing sleepily and allowing himself to be prodded by a person whose celluloid standing-collar showed white at the neck above the green of his Tyrolese costume. The bear was mangy, and his steel muzzle had chafed him, and Toppan said he was corrupted of moth and

rust alike, and the audience applauded but feebly when he and his keeper withdrew.

After this we had a clown-elephant, dressed in a bib and tucker and vast baggy breeches—like those of a particularly big French *Turco*—who had lunch with his keeper, and rang the bell and drank his wine and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief like a bed-quilt, and pulled the chair from underneath his companion, seeming to be amused at it all with a strange sort of suppressed elephantine mirth.

And then, after they had both made their bow and gone out, in bounded and tumbled the dogs, barking and grinning all over, jumping up on their stools and benches, wriggling and pushing one another about, giggling and excited like so many kindergarten children on a show day. I am sure they enjoyed their performance as much as the audience did, for they never had to be told what to do, and seemed only too eager for their turn to come. The best of it all was that they were quite unconscious of the audience, and appeared to do their tricks for the sake of the tricks themselves, and not for the applause which followed them. And, then, after the usual programme of wicker cylinders, hoops, and balls was over, they all rushed off amid a furious scrattling of paws and filliping of tails and heels.

While this was going on, we had been hearing from time to time a great sound, half-whine, half-rumbling guttural cough, that came from somewhere behind the exit from the cage. It was repeated at rapidly decreasing intervals, and grew lower in pitch until it ended in a short bass grunt. It sounded cruel and menacing, and when at its full volume the wood of the benches under us thrilled and vibrated.

There was a little pause in the programme while the arena was cleared and new and much larger and heavier paraphernalia were set about, and a gentleman with well-groomed hair and a very shiny hat entered and announced “the world’s greatest lion-tamer.” Then he went away and the tamer came in and stood expectantly by the side of the entrance. There was another short wait and the band struck a long minor chord.

And then they came in, one after the other, with long, crouching, lurching strides, not all good-humoredly, like the dogs or the elephant, or even the bear, but with low-hanging heads, surly, watchful, their eyes gleaming with the rage and hate that burned in their hearts, and that they dared not vent. Their loose, yellow hides rolled and rippled over the great muscles as they moved, and the breath coming from their hot, half-open mouths turned to steam as it struck the air.

A huge, blue-painted see-saw was dragged out to the centre, and the tamer made a sharp sound of command. Slowly, and with twitching tails, two of them obeyed, and, clambering upon the balancing-board, swung up and down, while the music played a see-saw waltz. And all the while their great eyes flamed with the detestation of the thing, and their black upper lips curled away from their long fangs in protest of this hourly renewed humiliation and degradation.

And one of the others, while waiting his turn to be whipped and bullied, sat up on his haunches and faced us and looked far away beyond us over the heads of the audience—over the continent and ocean, as it were—as though he saw something in that quarter that made him forget his present surroundings.

“You grand old brute,” muttered Toppan; and then he said: “Do you know what you would see if you were to look into his eyes now? You would see Africa, and unnamed mountains, and great stony stretches of desert, with hot blue shadows, and plains of salt, and lairs in the jungle-grass, and lurking places near the paths the steinbok make when they go down to water. But now he’s hampered and caged—*is* there anything worse than a caged lion?—and kept from the life he loves and was made for”—just here the tamer spoke sharply to him, and his eyes and crest drooped—“and ruled over,” concluded Toppan, “by some one who is not so great as he, who has spoiled what was best in him, and has turned his powers to trivial, resultless uses—some one weaker than he, yet stronger. Ah, well, old brute, it was yours once, we will remember that.”

They wheeled out a clumsy velocipede built expressly for him, and, while the lash whistled and snapped about him, the conquered king heaved himself upon it and went around and around the ring, while the band played a quickstep. The audience broke into applause, and the tamer smirked and bobbed his well-oiled head. I thought of Samson performing for the Philistines and Thusnelda at the triumph of Germanicus. The great beasts, grand though conquered, seemed to be the only dignified ones in the whole business. I hated the audience who saw their shame from behind iron bars; I hated myself for being one of them; and I hated the smug, sniggering tamer.

This latter had been drawing out various stools and ladders, and now arranged the lions upon them so they should form a pyramid, with himself on top.

Then he swung himself up among them, with his heels upon their necks, and, taking hold of the jaws of one, wrenched them apart with a great show of strength, turning his head to the audience so that all should see.

And just then the electric light above him cackled harshly, guttered, dropped down to a pencil of dull red, then went out, and the place was absolutely dark.

The band stopped abruptly, with a discord, and there was an instant of silence. Then we heard the stools and ladders clattering as the lions leaped down; and straightway four pair of lambent green spots burned out of the darkness and traveled swiftly about here and there, crossing and recrossing one another like the lights of steamers in a storm. Heretofore, the lions had been sluggish and inert; now they were aroused and alert in an instant, and we could hear the swift *pad-pad* of their heavy feet as they swung around the arena, and the sound of their great bodies rubbing against the bars of the cage as one and the other passed nearer to us.

I don't think the audience at all appreciated the situation at first, for no one moved or seemed excited, and one shrill voice suggested that the band should play "When the Electric Lights Go Out."

"Keep perfectly quiet, please!" called the tamer out of the darkness, and a certain peculiar ring in his voice was the first intimation of a possible danger.

But Toppan knew; and as we heard the tamer fumbling for the catch of the gate, which he somehow could not loose in the darkness, he said, with a rising voice: "He wants to get that gate open pretty quick."