

ANDERSONVILLE

MacKINLAY KANTOR

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THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY

CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 55-8257

FIRST EDITION

WP 755

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ANDERSONVILLE

BOOKS BY MacKINLAY KANTOR

Fiction

DIVERSEY • EL GOES SOUTH • THE JAYBIRD
LONG REMEMBER • THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN
AROUSE AND BEWARE • THE ROMANCE OF ROSY RIDGE
THE NOISE OF THEIR WINGS • HERE LIES HOLLY SPRINGS
VALEDICTORY • CUBA LIBRE • GENTLE ANNIE • HAPPY LAND
AUTHOR'S CHOICE • GLORY FOR ME • MIDNIGHT LACE
WICKED WATER • THE GOOD FAMILY • ONE WILD OAT
SIGNAL THIRTY-TWO • DON'T TOUCH ME • WARWHOOP
THE DAUGHTER OF BUGLE ANN • GOD AND MY COUNTRY

Juvenile

ANGLEWORMS ON TOAST
LEE AND GRANT AT APPOMATTOX
GETTYSBURG

Autobiographical

BUT LOOK, THE MORN

Verse

TURKEY IN THE STRAW

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TO IRENE

“The future historian who shall undertake to write an unbiased story of the War between the States, will be compelled to weigh in the scales of justice all its parts and features; and if the revolting crimes . . . have indeed been committed, the perpetrators must be held accountable. Be they of the South or of the North, they can not escape history.”

—R. RANDOLPH STEVENSON, formerly
surgeon in the Army of the
Confederate States of America.

I

Sometimes there was a compulsion which drew Ira Claffey from his plantation and sent him to walk the forest. It came upon him at eight o'clock on this morning of October twenty-third; he responded, he yielded, he climbed over the snake fence at the boundary of his sweet potato field and went away among the pines.

Ira Claffey had employed no overseer since the first year of the war, and had risen early this morning to direct his hands in the potato patch. Nowadays there were only seven and one-half hands on the place, house and field, out of a total Negro population of twelve souls; the other four were an infant at the breast and three capering children of shirt-tail size.

Jem and Coffee he ordered to the digging, and made certain that they were thorough in turning up the harvest and yet gentle in lifting the potatoes. Nothing annoyed Ira Claffey like storing a good thirty-five bushels in a single mound and then losing half of them through speedy decay.

In such a manner, he thought, have some of our best elements and institutions perished. One bruise, one carelessness, and rot begins. Decay is a secret but hastening act in darkness; then one opens up the pine bark and pine straw—or shall we say, the Senate?—and observes a visible wastage and smell, a wet and horrid mouldering of the potatoes. Or shall we say, of the men?

In pursuit of his own husbandry on this day, Ira carried a budding knife in his belt. While musing in bed the night before, he had been touched with ambition: he would bud a George the Fourth peach upon a Duane's Purple plum.

Veronica was not yet asleep, but reading her Bible by candlelight beside him. He told her about it.

But, Ira, does not the Duane's Purple ripen too soon? Aren't those the trees just on the other side of the magnolias?

No, no, my dear. Those are Prince's Yellow Gage. The Duane's Purple matures in keeping with the George Fourths. I'd warrant you about the second week of July. Say about the tenth. I should love to see that skin. Such a fine red cheek on the George Fourths, and maybe dotted with that lilac bloom and yellow specks—

But she was not hearing him, she was weeping. He turned to watch

her; he sighed, he put out one big hand and touched the thick gray-yellow braid which weighted on her white-frilled shoulder. It was either Moses or Sutherland whom she considered now. Dully he wondered which one.

She said, on receiving the communication of his thought, though he had said nothing— She spoke Suthy's name.

Oh, said Ira. I said nothing to make you think—

The Prince's Yellow Gage. He fancied them so. When they were still green he'd hide them in the little waist he wore. Many's the time I gave him a belting—

She sobbed a while longer, and he stared into the gloom beyond the bed curtains, and did his best to forget Suthy. Suthy was the eldest. Sixteenth Georgia. It was away up at the North, at a place no one had ever heard of before, a place called Gettysburg.

In recent awareness of bereavement had lain the germ of retreat and restlessness, perhaps; but sometimes Ira spirited himself off into the woods when he was fleeing from no sadness or perplexity. He had gone like that since he could first remember. Oh, pines were taller forty-five years ago . . . when he was only three feet tall, the easy nodding grace of their foliage was reared out of all proportion, thirty times his stature. And forests were wilder, forty-five years ago, over in Liberty County, and he went armed with a wooden gun which old Jehu had carved and painted as a Christmas gift for him. It had a real lock, a real flint; it snapped and the sparks flew. Ira Claffey slew brigades of redcoats with this weapon; he went as commander of a force of small blacks; he was their general.

Hi, them's British, Mastah Iry.

Where?

Yonder in them 'simmons!

Take them on the flank.

Hi, what you say we do, Mastah?

He wasn't quite sure what he wanted them to do. Something about the flank. His Uncle Sutherland talked about a flank attack in some wild distant spot known as the Carolinas. . . . Of course this was later on, perhaps only forty years ago, when Ira Claffey was ten. . . .

Charge those redcoats! They advanced upon the persimmon brake in full cry and leaping; and once there came terror when a doe soared out of the thicket directly in their faces, and all the little darkies scattered like quail, and Ira came near to legging it after them.

In similar shades he had been Francis Marion, and surely his own boys had scuttled here in identical pursuits. It was a good place to be, treading alone on the clay-paved path curving its way to the closest branch of Sweetwater Creek. God walked ahead and behind and with him, near, powerful, silent . . . *words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

He had budded the peach upon the plum as he wished to do, though he feared that it was a trifle too late in the season for success. He budded each of the two selected trees five times, and then went back to the potato field. Coffee and Jem were doing well enough, but they were plagued slow; Ira had been emphatic about the tenderness he required of them, and they handled the big sulphur-colored Brimstones as if they were eggs. Well, he thought, I shan't speed them on this. Better forty bushels well-dug and well-stored than eighty bushels bumped and scratched and ready to spoil as soon as they're covered.

Keep on with it until I return, and mind about no bruising. I shall look up some pine straw—where it's thickest and easy to scoop—and we'll fetch the cart after the nooning.

Yassah.

Frost had not yet killed the vines. Some planters always waited for a killing frost before they dug, but Ira was certain that the crop kept better if dug immediately before the frost struck.

He was newly come into his fifty-first year; the natal day had been observed on October sixth. Black Naomi chuckled mysteriously in the kitchen; there had been much talk about, Mistess, can I please speak with you a minute *alone*? He had to pretend that he was blind and deaf, and owned no suspicion that delicate and hard-to-come-by substances were being lavished in his honor. The fragrant Lady Baltimore cake appeared in time, borne by Ira Claffey's daughter because she would not trust the wenches with this treasure.

There they sat, the three surviving Claffeys left at home, sipping their roast-grain coffee and speaking words in praise of the cake, and now Ira had lived for half a century . . . fifty years stuffed with woe and work and dreams and peril. He sought to dwell in recollection only on the benefits accruing. With Veronica and Lucy he tried to keep his imaginings away from far-off roads where horses and men were in tragic operation.

The best I've tasted since the Mexican War.

Poppy, you always say that. About everything.

Come, come, Lucy. Do I indeed?

You do, agreed his wife, and gave him her wan smile above the home-dipped candles.

Yes, sir, chimed in Lucy. It's always the best and the worst and the biggest and all such things, but always dated from that old war.

After this night, said Ira, I presume that I should date everything from my fiftieth birthday?

Poppy, love, you don't look even on the outskirts of fifty. Scarcely a shred of gray in your hair.

Well, my dear, I don't have much hair left to me.

That's no certain indication of encroaching age. Is it, Mother? Take

Colonel Tollis. I declare, he can't be aged over thirty-one or two, and yet he's got less hair than—

Lucy. Do you consider it ladylike, to discuss baldness so—so intimately?

Well, I declare—

So it had gone; they uttered their little jests and remonstrances; they had their affection; the stringy candles sank and died in chipped gilt candelabra, and in the end Ira Claffey sat alone in his library and treated himself to port. He had tasted no port since the previous winter (there was so little of it left now) and he made a silent gesture and toasted each of his sons in turn as they stared from ambrotype frames beside him. His hand went down and rubbed along his right leg; it caressed his shabby fawn-colored pantaloons above the knotted hole which for years he had bandaged afresh each day. I'd be with you, fifty or no fifty, he tried to tell his sons, reaching to them across uncharted distances and dimensions. I'd be among the muskets if it hadn't been for Monterey. I wonder who that Mexican was! I wonder if he is living still—sorrowing as I am sorrowing, going through repeated and sometimes doleful mimicry. Still able to love, however? Not so frequently? But still able, and most eager at times.

The wine affected Ira Claffey because he drank so little of it in this time of strife and paucity. He thought of Veronica and the fever which came over him sometimes in darkness, the drawing up of her night-dress, the muffled hysteria of their encounter, the shame which she always admitted afterward because she had been taught that carnal enjoyment was lewd and Ira could never persuade her otherwise. He thought of the mistress he had had in Milledgeville when he was in the Legislature, he thought of pretty strumpets he'd known in the brief time when he was a soldier, he thought of the first brown girl he ever lay with at seventeen or thereabouts in age.

How do you countenance such goings-on? You, professedly a religious man—

I suppose each of us must be guilty of certain sins. We'd be less than human if we weren't blemished a bit. And I strive earnestly not to envy, not to grow little snips and slips and buds and seeds of jealousy. I deplore cruelty, and own no avarice—at least none I'm conscious of. But lust—

I'm steeped in that particular brand of iniquity. At least—when I was younger— And now, now, tonight, the night I'm fifty—

Silently he opened the library door and looked across the dark hall. Lucy and her mother were scraping lint at the big table in the crowded parlor; they had a servant helping them, but Lucy was yawning. He felt a fire as he saw that yawn. Soon, then— To bed, to bed! Incestuous sheets, sweet prince? Nay, my Veronica and I lie within the embrace of a mortal primness known as Holy Wedlock.

Thus we contrived eight children, and thus the four small graves within the red rusty fence—the longest no longer than my walking stick— Thus we had four children to grow to full stature—or close to it— Thus we came to another war.

I was a Stephens man from the first, but what possible difference can that make now, to Mr. Stephens or to me?

I was no Secessionist. Quite the contrary. But dress yourselves in gray, Suthy and Badger and Moses, and be off with your shooting-irons. Scrape the raw white fabric, Lucy. Put up the calves-foot jelly for the wounded, my Veronica. And cry and cry, and read your Bible, and pray again, and cry once more. . . .

Mist had condensed thickly after a chilly night, and Ira walked through it like a swimmer moving erect, walking rapidly though lamely, a man with broad round powerful shoulders, and carrying his head tipped forward as if to resist the weight of the flat-brimmed black hat pulled low on his forehead. His brow was channeled horizontally by four distinct wrinkles like deep narrow scars. His pale eyes shone from a covert of long dark lashes and coffee-colored eyebrows. His nose was insignificant, his wide full-lipped mouth the best feature in a round smooth face. Ira Claffey demonstrated the manner of a keen-eyed hunter who was forever on the watch for birds and expected that a covey would go crackling up and out, only a few steps ahead.

He would have been able to name the week—and possibly the day—of the year; he would have been able to name it by evidence before him if startled quickly awake from a century's repose. The long-leaved pines themselves, their banks of dark green plush in milky distance, with the outer tips of pine needles touched by autumnal tan, and yet this tan was invisible until you came close. Sunflowers, the little susie flowers still blooming spiritedly; sodden cornfields shrunken merciless, every ragged stalk of fodder soaked with mist; sandy, clayey bare spots in yard and gardens standing out silvery—irritant spots, never casual, but seeming to have been cleared and stamped recently, and for a special purpose . . . eight o'clock in the morning, as told by his silver watch, with the sun burning low and solid in a cloudless sky but with farthestmost groves still fogged; jack-oaks half green and looking withered and scrofulous; the scrub swamp gums well turned at this date, and some of them burning in artificial pinks; tulip trees half green; some of the buttonwoods verdant as in summer.

The air hung clammy, but still good because it was wild, unprovoked by many men or their machines or structures. Ira heard the squeal of a train whistle (the service was untidy and uncertain on this Southwestern line from Macon to Americus and Albany. Claffey could not have told you with accuracy just how many trains jounced

puffing up and down the line each day; at least he knew that the service was sadly confused because of military necessity) and far above the hill and western pines there frothed some woodsmoke as the cars halted at Anderson Station. Nothing much there except a wretched store, several houses, and a pyramid of old sawdust from Yeoman's mill, no longer operating.

. . . Air good because it was wild, and because deer had run through it, and turkeys also. It was long since the Creeks trotted those easy slopes, but you could still smell them when fall came on. Cold weather was their time, the time of Indian ghosts, and Ira loved to sense them; he loved the ghosts as well as any boy and better than some. More than the Indians, however: air was tanged with sweet-gum and persimmons and nut trees and dry goober vines and thistles. Ira Claffey worshipped vegetation; he understood the small or wide-spread miracles appurtenant to chlorophyll, photosynthesis . . . oh, list to the botanizing, the rub or splitting of cotyledons! . . . Any plant was his love, some were near to being his spiritual mistresses (he remembered making love and crushing infinitesimal purplish flowers while they did it; he and a slave girl, when he was young, when he was very young; but he could never get a white woman to lie with him in grass and blossoms, though he had tried. Ladies wanted beds). More than these affections, too: Ira had an enormous respect for vegetation beyond loving it; yet he was disciplined and sensible, and recognized that weeds must be ripped out, and some trees also.

Here, in the last field at his left hand, once the cotton had flourished . . . dry toughness of the stalks, the long long picking-sacks, the dark hands going like beaks to bite and swallow the cotton. No cotton now, markets were gone. A few good melon vines had volunteered and come running over the ground, squarely over the bottom rail of the fence; and more gourd vines and some pumpkins had volunteered from another quarter, and doubtless cucumbers as well, though Ira Claffey hadn't checked. They interbred as all gourds will. Now their awful progeny rotted amid visible ruins of a cotton planter's hopes. They were not melons, not pumpkins; they were monsters; not even the hungriest hand would eat them. Children came and kicked them loose and rolled them around. The green worms had come, too, and the green worms worked their especial penetrating assassination: once the air was admitted to these fruit, spoilage was hurried. The bastard product of vines lay exposed where leaves had fallen, like bulbous rotting bodies—skulls, perhaps—and they made an almost visible awfulness of odor. Ah, said Ira Claffey to himself, I didn't realize that this was such a horror. Well, there's no pride in having an old field turned into a sink, even though we have nothing to plant in it. Send Coffee down here post haste with a cart and let him get rid of these nuisances; he can dump them into the swamp

—bury them, if necessary. . . . No, Coffee's instructed with the Brimstones, I shan't take him from potato digging, I'll take Jonas from the woodpile and send him instead.

He left the orbs and jellies of noxious cross-breeds behind him thankfully, and turned north on a path which led from northern limits of his own plantation . . . pines cool in their brittle dignity, and a stile to be mounted over. This was a serious obstacle because his right leg could not be made to bend past forty-five degrees at the knee without pain. Something about a quadriceps tendon fastening itself to a femur; Ira did not know; he was no surgeon. He wrinkled his small nose, thinking of surgeons and probes which looked something like knitting needles—uncompanionable needles, to say the least.

Halfway down the northern slope of this ridge was where the stile bothered him; now he lurched on a downward path through land belonging to the McWhorters, the Yeomans, the Biles. Wilderness barely fit for pasture, these eminences were; no one was ever quite certain just where the joining lines ran, and no survey had been made since the earliest times. The McWhorter heirs lived in Americus and did nothing about their woodland except to pay microscopic taxes; the Yeoman place no longer operated as a plantation, with both the young-middle-aged men gone to the army and their wives dwelling with cousins in Tattnall County. The Biles were old, sedentary, retiring—their house stood two miles away, and they lived off their garden-patch with two slovenly house servants to bear them company. Ira Claffey himself had given them meat as a neighborly gift in winter and trusted that some other folks had done the same.

Irvine Yeoman, aged forty-one, had died in the same battle which claimed Sutherland Claffey—that Gettysburg place. For the moment Ira had forgotten.

In speculation on death (even secret half-realized contemplation of the misery) and on the scrawny barrenness which fell over remote holdings like this when war ruled, Ira desired keenly all faith and sustenance which the forest might give. . . . No deer here nowadays; one had not been shot in these woods for years. Raccoons and bobcats and other vermin, the spotted skunks and weasels darting at night on urgent autumnal errands . . . but lean stringy dancing legs of the deer went piercing other thickets. It was a miraculous thing how a deer could be frightened loose and go rising and plunging through tough jagged windfalls from some old hurricane; then you'd go and examine the route where he'd run, and you wouldn't think that a rat could have gotten through there; but the deer had, and the remarkable mechanism of his small hooves and elastic sinews was even now carrying him at a fool's pace through tighter fences of tumbled roots and pine boughs at the other end of the wilderness.

The Sweetwater branch to be crossed, a fine fair small stream to visit, generous in its treatment of roots of gums and willows which marked its way. Ira went across on the trunk of a tree he'd had his hands fell for that very purpose: to make a bridge where strollers could pass dry-shod. This portion of the valley belonged definitely to the McWhorters; Ira requested and received permission for the tree to be cut. It was a willow, hurt badly by lightning, and no great sacrifice in any event. He thought of kneeling to drink from the clean black water, he knew that this branch of Sweetwater would taste cold and leaf-mouldy, it would be a balm to mouth and tongue and throat and would pour slowly and darkly as if rinsing at a gentle course through his whole big body, into every extremity. He had risen before sunrise and worked long and well, and he needed a drink.

But better to try the spring beyond. Only a short way above the marshy plashy boundaries of the creek there stood clay and brown boulders exposed. . . . Here, he explained once to Lucy when he took her that way— Here is where the fairies live.

What kind of fairies?

Good ones, my dear. They are wet, very tiny, very green—

As big as me, Poppy?

Heavens, no. Miniature fairies of the damp sort, scarcely as big as your finger.

Where do they sleep?

Ah, there's that moss. Where do you think?

Yes, Poppy, I think they use the moss. And for table linen, too. Would they let me drink their water?

Assuredly. That's the reason they keep it running. Here, child, I'll make a cup of my hand. Beneath this rock, so. Now you bend down—take care, don't wet your boots and skirts— That's the way.

She faced him with plump pink face dripping, and said, I saw one, whilst I was drinking.

Where was he?

In the moss.

Alone he squatted now amid kindly memories and held out his hand. The water looked like a sheer fluted icicle. Ira had seen icicles long before, when he went to Washington City in winter. Water drenched his heavy hand, and curled along his wrist and tried to make its way up his sleeve, and he laughed and drew back his hand and shook it. This was the smallest, loveliest spring of several which he knew in these few square miles of domestic woodland. Especially the moss . . . his daughter was too grown-up to dream about fairies; she was twenty; the youth she loved had died of fever in the Yankee prison pen at Camp Douglas, Chicago, the winter before . . . or maybe she did dream secretly about fairies still. She owned a pretty mouth filled with all the young lady chatter and some of the young