# The Story of a Grave

By WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



THERE is a place in the Great American desert where green grass grows. At the head of an estuary of the great dry sea, where a long arm of white alkali runs up among the foothills of the mountains, stands an inviting tavern. It is upon the hillside. Just below it, the garden hose and the landscape gardener, with water carried in troughs from the mountains, have wrought a miracle of green. Trees, blue-grass, flowers, wax strong and beautiful in the artificial oasis. Children and young men and maidens romp on the verdant mat, spread at the point of the estuary, and upon the hillside a score of languishing guests sit in the healing sun, and look down upon the picture, and out into the endless miles of white sand that stretch billowy and fantastic into the blue of the horizon.

Most of these idlers on the broad plazza of the tavern are invalids. It is a place of invalids. Here hundreds of wretched bodies are dragged by a tragic love of life. Here scores of souls watch other souls flicker and die out, and still hope on and wait, while the oil of life burns smudgy and low. There are those whom the sunshine and the dry, clear air win back to life. But the dead are there. On the broad veranda—a very citadel of life—the dead are embattled, fighting with time. It is a most hideous battle, and all so hushed and sepulchral are its maneuvers, that life takes no heed of the empty pageant.

Armed in such a combat sat Hawkins, the chief clerk, a grim man, dark, pallid, sinister. Of what, out in the world of life, Hawkins had been chief clerk, it does not matter now. He had been a busy man, firm, taciturn, self-contained, repellent. He sat now at his post in the battle, sneering at the folly of those about him who were trying to wrest a few mortal moments from eternity.

For a long time, as days go, Hawkins had been sitting in this sentry box, when his captain—the doctor—ordered him into the infantry, and told him to march for dear life. Hawkins left the guards upon the terrace with loathing. During the first week of his marching orders, he made exactly the same journey every day. He noticed everything along his path. He was interested in nothing. In his mind the objects he saw were catalogued, but never referred to by his memory. There was a huge bluff, a railroad bridge, a quarry, a barbed wire fence, enclosing a grave, a mud house, a herder, some sheep, a steep hill, a water trough, a cross road, and a pine grove, on the hill over which he came back to his starting point. None of these objects was dignified by a prominence in his mind. One day, attracted by the most unimportant detail in the landscape, Hawkins started to walk a few rods from his path, that he might examine more closely the grave, fenced in with barbed wire to keep the ghoulish desert beasts away. A second thought made the digression from the path the line of an ellipse, and he followed his course without veering.

There were days when Hawkins spoke to none of the hotel guests, and the lack of interest in the place weighed heavily upon him. As he sat for hours after his walks gazing between the hills that penned out the desert, the spot where the grave dotted the surface of the plain kept drawing his eyes to it, in an annoying manner.

As he took his lonely walk at the end of that fortnight, the grave began to irritate him. It aroused a certain curiosity within him, which was very distasteful.

One night, after his return from a walk, raging at his folly, the grave began to haunt his wakeful night-fancies. The next afternoon he walked over to the enclosure, thinking that he would be no longer disturbed by the thing if he examined it closely.

Hawkins saw only an adult's grave with a cactus upon it. At the head was a wooden board. At the foot was a broad peg. The barbed wire was torn away at one end—perhaps by some stray animal, wandering in the night. Hawkins did not approach nearer than a rod from the fence, and he turned quickly, as though he had overcome his weakness, when he had gathered these details in his mind.

The next day he came closer, and the day following, after a night in which he was kept awake, frenzied because of a gnawing ache to pick the cactus root out of the dead man's side, Hawkins came to the fence and leaned upon the post, looking back toward the hotel to see if the group on the veranda could see him. He did not touch the cactus, and not until he had straightened up to go did he so much as glance at the mound. He read the name on the headboard—and hurried away with fear dogging his steps. He looked behind by sheer force of will. It was the one name in the world that Hawkins loved to hate. With it came the recollection of the woman whom the grim man was proud that he had forgotten.

At the road around the hill he checked his nervous gait and walked slowly back to the hotel. But all the way up the hillside the headboard kept rising before him with the word "Zain" over the word "Thweke."

Hawkins sat in his chair on the veranda when he had returned, and looked over the white floor in the distance. It seemed magnified in his eyes. He fancied he could distinguish the headboard from the fence. Then he began to fight with the spell. He reasoned that it was an accident, and it came over him with a chill, that he had been drawn to the place by an irresistible force. At this conclusion he smiled sardonically and lighted a cigar.

He believed he had conquered the hallucination by giving it full rein. Then he began to hate his old enemy. Hawkins had not known that the man was dead until that day. He mused pleasurably upon the cactus. The doctor, seeing Hawkins in the sunset air with a cigar, swore at him, and the grim man went indoors. He was proud to be alive. His pride amounted almost to a thrill.

Hawkins went to sleep early that night. When the lights in the hotel were extinguished he wakened from a dream about figures and business, and felt that there was something important on his mind. Then he remembered the discovery on the headboard. He trailed over his treasure with the harrow of his hate. He tried to think of something else; he began counting, finally it came. A sentence formed in his mind: "Was it the dead man's spirit?"

When he aroused himself his mouth was dry, and he was wet with perspiration. Hawkins' normal mind then took control of his fancy and his hate for the conquered foe burned fiercely. The woman kept coming into his malignant speculations. He wondered if she had taken the man's name. He was curious to know if she had come with his enemy into the desert where he died. Hawkins pictured them together on the terrace. Then his sick fancy painted them in the very room where he was lying. For a moment he was in mental hell. A footfall startled him. He sprang to the floor to ring the bell and to ascertain if his imaginings had any foundation in fact. When the boy came Hawkins asked for ice water, and upon getting it sipped it, as he stood looking out at the quiet stars and the moon, and listening to the sheep-bells and to the dogs barking out on the floor of the desert, beyond the grave. This soothed him, and he slept.

The day following that night, and for many days thereafter, Hawkins stood gazing at the ugly sand heap in its barbed wire prison, exulting in his heart at the dead man's desolation. The moments he spent thus were almost happy ones for the grim man. His fancy made morbid pictures; and the figures of the man and woman danced before his eyes in a thousand horrid day-dreams. Once he kicked the headboard and sneered at himself for so doing. Then Hawkins saw how like a cur he was.

After that there were three in his circle of hate.

One day, loathing himself, he began to wonder what had ever induced the woman to promise to love and honor him. He recalled cowardly words he had spoken to her. Revelations of his own cruelty and meanness were made to him, and ghostly memories that he had strangled years before came flitting back.

He was oppressed with a sense of having done a terrible wrong. The face of the woman whom he had forgotten, rose and floated on his stagnant fancies. Dialogues, that he had crowded into what seemed to him oblivion, came trooping back, and whispered themselves into his ear. In each of these pictures and voices he saw his own selfishness. Hawkins began to know himself as he was known. A love that he had trampled out with his physical heel in a fit of rage, began to glow and warm his being.

A miracle was wrought on the day that a shriveled tear trembled in his eye. He went to the grave, and stood a longer time than usual after that. He left the place with a sigh and walked slowly with his eyes upon the ground. He walked slowly, partly from choice, partly because his former gait sapped his strengtth. On the veranda they were counting the weeks left him.

He now went to the mound every day for company. To those whom he met in the routine of his physical life, Hawkins preserved his cold exterior. His habit of austerity was not broken. Yet strange things were working within his breast. He had lived his life alone, and no one outside himself could know of the softening of his heart. The visits to the grave grew necessary to his happiness. For the first time in his life Hawkins felt as desolate as he really was. He visited the grave, as a man of ordinary temperament would call upon a comrade. When his strength permitted a trip every other day, only, he sat in his room looking out between the hills at the plain, and at the fascinating dot upon the white stretch of sand and alkali.

It was at these times that Hawkins began to try to recall the possible good qualities of his dead enemy. Hawkins remembered how he had condemned the man out of hand, when his name was first brought up because Thweke wrote a copybook hand. Hawkins remembered that he had sneered at the man on account of a certain curl of the mustache; and that the fellow had incurred a husbandly hate, by knowing how to play the piano. Remembering these prejudices, Hawkins tried to make some entries on the other side of the account.

As the Shadow flitted nearer and nearer to the grim man, now confined to his barren room more closely than before, he began to lose the horror he once felt at what he fancied might be the presence of the dead. One day he found himself curiously listening to some token from the dead man in the grave. His mood was not one of horror, but of longing. He reasoned that his strange finding of the grave, the inexplicable power that drew him against his will and against his nature to the lonely spot, and the influence which it had wrought upon his life indicated the presence of some outside power. He built up a theory of hypnotism from disembodied spirits, and sat watching for a signal to verify through his material senses the existence of the supernatural force with which his spirit seemed to have been communing. In this frame of mind he forgot the wasting of the flesh. He sat by his window, overlooking the desert, and mused by the hour upon life and the coming of the end. His whole being was softened by the approaching dissolution of his body.

He longed for some sign that would tell him that he had fellowship—real and palpable—with the spirit of the man in the deserted grave. But the sign did not come. He traced false signs to their natural causes, and was sad. The habit of a lifetime, as a scoffer, strangled credulity, even though it was the child of hope. So Hawkins sat in the silence, listening and waiting for the greater silence.

There came a time when he rallied—when he left the window for the veranda. Then it was that a great yearning came to his heart to go and lie prone upon the grave and to be as simple as a child in grief. He could not explain this yearning; he did not try to analyze it. He felt some way that it was a thing the woman would have done, and the desire became a master passion. It seemed cold to him on the porch; but out on the desert the sun shone gayly and seductively. Day after day he walked the length of the veranda. He seemed to be gaining strength. There was a day when he walked the entire distance around the hotel twice, without sitting or resting. It was a day of triumph. That night he planned his journey to the fence and the mound between the foothills.

His mental strain brought a slight relapse in his malady. He did not notice it the next morning. He kept his plans to himself. That afternoon he slipped away. Slowly, slowly, he crept down the terraces. He sat down often by the wayside. A notion that he was making a pilgrimage that she—Hawkins only thought of the woman as "she," now—would have him make, warmed something in his grim heart, not unlike a tenderness. He was very weak, and his emotions were loose.

Once he fainted when he sat down by a stone. When he returned to consciousness he hurried on in a dazed, fumbling sort of way. He felt then that it would be his last visit to the grave, but he was not sad. He was only glad that he had come in her name. Pride was purged from his flesh. His heart was that of a little child. He uttered foolish little prayers that were bargains with God for strength to reach his goal. When he reached it, he crawled into the wire enclosure, weak and panting. There they found Hawkins at the close of day, grim, repellent of feature, apart from his kind, alone in his very death. Men said it was a fitting end for him.


"Upon the Hillside Languid Guests Sit in the Healing Sun."

## DOGS ONLY WARNED

A small boy out Brookland way put a bird bath in the home garden—a friendly custom of the residents of that section where gardens are many and green. The intent was beautiful, but, as a working idea, the scheme was a failure—so far as the birds were concerned. For, also, there are dogs out Brookland way—and only the creator of dogs could know how grateful they were for the refreshing drink seemingly offered as free as the cup of Scripture, in that cool and quiet place.

The trouble was that the water was put there for birds. And the small boy, feeling the necessity of protecting their interests, posted a notice:

"This is a bird bath. Dogs please do not drink."

A word to the wise is sufficient.—Washington Star.

**Moral: Don't Invite Trouble.**

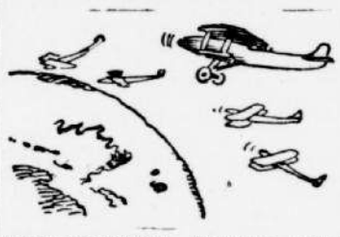
I saw a delicate flower had grown up two feet thigh, between the horses' path and the wheel-track. An inch more to the right or left had sealed its fate, or an inch higher; and yet it lived to flourish as much as if it had a thousand acres of untrodden space around it, and never knew the danger it incurred. It did not borrow trouble, nor invite an evil fate by apprehending it.—Henry D. Thoreau.

**Thought for the Day.**

When you can't be happy by yourself, how can you expect others to be happy with you?

# Washington Sidelights

## American Airplanes to Circle the Globe?



WASHINGTON.—Tentative plans for an attempted flight of army airplanes around the world have been under consideration for some months by air service officials, although the project has not as yet passed the preliminary survey stage.

Valuable data on available routes in both directions have been obtained, however, and ultimately it is hoped to send a considerable aerial squadron on the voyage. The project will not be laid before Secretary Weeks for approval, it was said, until it takes much more definite form.

Two of the routes considered are that from the Atlantic coast via Iceland and Ireland, and that from the Pacific via Alaska, the Aleutian islands, Siberia and home, via Ireland and Iceland.

Air service officials said the route offering the most favorable conditions as to prevailing winds would be selected, should the flight be ordered, and it would then become necessary to obtain permission of each of the countries to be traveled before the squadron could start.

The question of air navigation by pilots of one country over the territory of another nation has been considered by the council of the League of Nations in order to establish uniformity of practice.

Army flyers conceived the world-circling flight plan in line with the reasons which prompted President Roosvelt to send the fleet around the world in 1908, it was said. It would have value both as a step in providing aerial defense through training and in giving the world a better understanding of American post-war developments. Possibly a special act of congress to authorize a flight and make necessary appropriations would be required should administration officials approve the scheme.

## "Stormy Petrel" Sims on America's Navy


OUR navy was not prepared for war in 1917, is no better prepared today than it was then, and never will be prepared under the present organization plan, declares Admiral William S. Sims, recently retired from the navy.

The Navy department at Washington bungled and mismanaged the fleet during the war, and since the war there has been no clear indication of a disposition to put the navy in fighting trim, Admiral Sims asserted.

"The navy has not been properly handled," Admiral Sims said, "because of mistakes made at Washington. You know nothing of these except that those in control at Washington wanted you to know. A congressional investigation was made after the war and all the Republicans were certain the majority report was correct and all Democrats unhesitatingly accepted the minority report.

"Don't blame congress for American unpreparedness. Congressmen do only what their constituents want them to do.

"Under the arms conference agreement we are allowed 86,000 men to man a navy that requires 120,000 men," Admiral Sims continued, referring to a merchant marine. "This next congress will have before it a bill to remedy some of these things, but unless public opinion is crystallized to support an efficient navy and marine we will never have it.

"We must also have an efficient merchant marine to support our navy because they are interdependent.

"Today we have a merchant marine carrying 20 per cent of the world's tonnage. In 1914 we had only 5 per cent. However, we are losing $50,000,000 annually under the present system of operation and this cannot go on."

## U. S. Court of Claims to Be Kept Busy


THE United States Court of Claims has a large calendar of important cases for the winter term. Actions involving approximately $350,000,000 arising out of the country's activities during the World war are pending and the influx of these cases has hardly begun. The ultimate aggregate of such claims is estimated by the attorney general at between $2,000,000,000 and $3,000,000,000.

These actions are brought into the court by plaintiffs having claims against all departments of the government, including actions for requisitioning of ships and railroads, transportation of troops, ammunition and supplies; infringement of patents for high explosives, submarine boats and torpedoes, wireless and radio apparatus, contracts for anti-aircraft engines and guns, military and naval supplies and ammunition, appropriation of camp sites and naval bases, together with contracts for manufacturing and acts of commandeering of almost endless diversity.

The petition of one inventor claims $1,000,000 for the little pocket books of stamps which are sold at every post office. Another claims that as early as 1905 he invented a gliding machine involving the principles upon which every airplane operated by the government is constructed and if successful he may recover $10,000,000. About $1,000,000 is asked for infringement in the manufacture of torpedoes and about $30,000,000 for radio apparatus.

One test case is brought by a savings bank to determine the liability of the government for stolen government bonds and coupons, and if successful will result in other suits which it is estimated will swell the government's liability to $150,000,000.

## Secret Passages Under the Capitol?

FOR a century there have been legends of the secret passages and concealed apartments of the old Capitol building. The other day a piece of masonry at the capitol became dislodged and showed an opening, wholly unsuspected by the superintendent. A small block of masonry dropped from its place and disappeared. According to all reasonable calculations the stone should have fallen into a known passage below. It did not, but crashed through the ceiling of a room on a lower floor. To do so it must have fallen through a shaft the existence of which had not been known. The accident has started investigations which are now in progress and which are expected to reveal a few of the structural secrets of the building.

The capitol is a vast structure, portions of which have been constructed at different periods. It will be recalled by every schoolboy that the British burned the old capitol in the War of 1812. A new building was reared on the old foundations. These were extended and utilized and the new mingled with the old in such a way that no complete plans exist.

Dr. William Thornton, the architect of the part of the capitol built following the fire, was a builder of the old school and doubtless followed old English traditions which leaned strongly to the idea of secret passages and apartments. There has long been a legend that somewhere beneath the great terrace on the west side of the capitol there is a secret chamber which contains treasure secreted there when the British were marching on Washington.

## To Save America's Forests of Redwood

AMERICA'S redwoods are to be saved as a matter of good business. What is said to be the most important step on the part of private lumbering companies toward the preservation of redwoods has been announced by the National Lumber Manufacturers' association. The Union Lumber company, the Pacific Lumber company and the Mendocino Lumber company, the principal private companies owning the California redwood forests, have agreed hereafter to conduct their lumbering operations on the principle of continuous production and maintenance of the forests as a whole.

This decision, says a statement of the association, means that the redwood forests will be maintained indefinitely as an economic factor in the life of the nation and as one of the wonders of America.

The method of preservation of the forests, it is understood, includes cutting of timber in more scattered stands, while every precaution is taken against ground and high fires, and reforestation will follow upon the steps of the lumbermen.

Ample areas of the forests will be preserved forever in the same state of aged maturity as they have been ever since the coming of the white man and possibly for thousands of years before.

The redwoods (Sequoia sempervirens) are first cousins of the Big Trees (Sequoia Washingtonea), which are safe from the lumbermen in Yosemite, General Grant and Sequoia National parks. The redwoods are scarcely less impressive than the Big Trees, which are the oldest and biggest living things on earth.