



# His Day Back

By Jack Brant

**T**HERE was a knock at the door. At my request it opened and in walked, or rather glided, my man, Mullbury. A strange thing about Mullbury is that he never knocks but that I realize instantly that I have something to say to him.

“Mullbury, pack my suit-case for a week of travel. I’m going West.”

Mullbury immediately withdrew. He is a most remarkable man, and save for the one time when he asked for an increase in wages because of the court’s decision that he should pay alimony, his sole object in knocking has been to take my expected command.

Why I should start for the West I could not understand. I knew no one in New Mexico. I had seen it on the map when a small boy—a square of pink, I think, though I am not sure now of the color, and learned that it was one of those lawless places called territories.

Beyond that, being what is known as a narrow man, which means that more vital interests absorb my attentions, I have never taken the slightest interest in New Mexico until startled by Mullbury’s knock. Then, moved by some unexplainable impulse, I threw away my cigar, telephoned for accommodations to Las Cruces, and started on the midnight express.

During the three days’ journey I had ample time to reflect on the folly of this move. I realized perfectly that I should not have left my business at this time. That I had always intended, when able to take a vacation, to visit my brother in Cuba.

Cuba would do me good, and I would have the opportunity to gratify an abnormal craving to see a cockfight. Yet I found it absolutely impossible to turn back.

On the afternoon of the third day I arrived in Las Cruces on a train I would not have caught but for the fortunate fact that it was twelve hours late. I took passage in what might have been the original overland stage, slightly modified, and was conveyed safely through the dust, to the taste of which I had become accustomed on the sleeper, to a one-story mud fort bearing the name “hotel” in red and black over its door.

I engaged a narrow but surprisingly cool stall. Then I ventured forth on the one long business street, still compelled by the unaccountable impulse, and purchased a complete costume more in accord with my surroundings than the one suit which I had brought with me, and which was already attracting more attention than was pleasing to a man of my retiring nature.

I also purchased an elaborate prospecting outfit, provisions to last several days, and a patent sleeping-bag. This last was forced upon me by an attractive Mexican maiden with perfect teeth who thrust it laughingly into my arms, repeating what appeared to be the only English she knew, “You buy! You buy!” as if it all was a huge joke.

And it was a joke. That bag would have been all right for a trip to the north pole, but was slightly unnecessary for the burning sands of New Mexico.

As a final act of folly I engaged

transportation with a mule-team which would start in the morning for Organ. Organ is a small mining settlement at the base of the Organ Mountains, which rise very much like the pipe-stems of an organ above the level desert in the east.

Rugged and steep the mountains look, like the edge of the world. I felt somewhere that they were my destination, and watched them with interest, gorgeously lighted with purple and gold by the brilliant sunset.

There was a great deal of mystery and awe about them—they seemed a fitting haunt for wild, inhuman spirits, whose unholy groans could echo through the deep cañons; for lone, ghostly shapes, floating sadly from their heights at dusk to bring terror and disaster at night to the surrounding world. Standing there so tall, and plainly outlined in the clear, dry air. I could scarcely believe when told that they were ten miles away, so near they seemed.

I never believed in fairies. At least, not very much. You can't if you happen to live in a city with proof on all sides that no such things exist. But I couldn't help thinking, as I looked at those mountains, that if there were any anywhere you would find them among those red and pink and purple rocks.

The next morning the hotel furnished me with a fine breakfast at daybreak, and I was relieved to find that my madness had not affected my appetite. I had not slept very well—a reddish stain on the wall over my head, framed by about a hundred and fifty disconnected red legs, had reminded me of what a man I picked up on the train had told me regarding tarantulas and centipede. But I don't think I saw any real ones.

I found my mule team and put my pack in and climbed up on the front seat with the driver. The first part of the drive was very pleasant until the sun discovered us and came a little nearer to see what a man of my make was doing with a prospector's outfit.

The desert, which had looked so flat in the distance, was a series of sandy hills partly covered with cactus and what I think was sage (I am not sure that I know what sage is, so it might have been sage), populated by lizards and horned toads and fat little prairie dogs and thousands upon thousands of long-eared rabbits. I understood what the man meant who said that when he got

out on the desert the ground got up and started to run away from him.

Every now and then we would come upon a bird about as big as a spring chicken, which looked like an over-grown and very unkempt sandpeep, employed in killing a snake or making a tasty breakfast off of centipeds and tarantulas. If I had to live in that country I would tame one of those birds and keep it with me constantly.

I tried to learn something of the country from the driver, but without success. He was cheerful enough, but his vocabulary was not much more extensive than that of the girl who had sold me the sleeping-bag. He was evidently used to prospectors of my type, for he made no comment when I asked to be put off just before reaching Organ.

He waved to me as I entered a deep ravine, and I waved back. Then I passed out of sight among the rocks, and found myself absolutely alone in the wildest country I had ever seen.

Up and up I climbed, winding in and out through massive boulders and tangles of knotted and twisted trees. I had no idea where I was going, but the something that had brought me this far kept leading me on, and I followed passively.

Once in a patch of sand I saw tracks as big as my head, with claws; but I was not afraid. The reason that I did not feel worried I attribute to my belief in fate—since my marriage I have been content to take calmly whatever may be in store for me.

After scrambling over an impossible trail that branched from the main gorge—a thing no man would have done of his own free will—I found myself in a narrow defile between towering cliffs. I followed this until it ended in a circular platform shut in on all sides except the front by steep, unscalable walls of rocks.

I walked to the edge and peered over—and drew back hastily. There was a sheer drop of about five hundred feet, with ugly looking rocks at the bottom. The only means of access was the narrow defile through which I had entered. I could go no farther.

"Well, here I am!" I said aloud, perfectly unconsciously.

"It's about time," answered a gruff voice above me.

I sat down and mopped my brow. To be

expected at this place and at this time was a good deal of a shock, even to such a believer in fate as myself.

"Don't be alarmed," said the voice, less gruff this time and with a tone of amusement in it. "It's a little uncanny at first, but you will get used to it. I did."

This gave me courage to look up in the direction from which the voice came. There, some fifty feet directly over my head, sitting calmly on the only projecting piece *of* rock on that whole smooth surface, his legs swinging idly over the edge, was a man!

For a few minutes we looked at each other in silence. He was about my size, dressed in a prospector's outfit similar to my own, and as new. His face was kindly, showing nothing but amused curiosity, and I began to feel more at ease. There was something even familiar about him, and I wondered where I had seen him before.

"How did you get up there?" I asked, my wonder prompting the question.

"It's easy when you are in my condition," he replied casually. "Are you Mr. Bent?"

"Benjamin Bent is my name," I answered. "Who are you?"

"My name is Adams—Jonathan Adams. You have probably heard a great deal about me."

I gasped. Jonathan Adams was the name of my wife's second husband, the one before she married me.

"Not the Jonathan Adams who married Mrs. Hayes?" I stammered.

"The same," he answered. "You, I believe, had the pleasure of marrying her next."

"But," I remonstrated, beginning to feel dizzy. "you were supposed to have died five years ago!"

"That's right," said Mr. Adams. "I did die. I committed suicide by jumping off this very cliff, as Mr. Hayes did before me."

"See here," I said, trying to appear calm. "This is no time to joke. You don't expect me to believe that you are my wife's second husband's ghost!"

"That's just what I am," he answered with a grin. "Aren't you beginning to see through me?"

I looked at him closely. To my astonishment I could follow a crack in the rock behind him through his shoulders. I sat down and pressed my

head between my hands, trying to think.

"There, there!" said the ghost. "Don't take it so hard. I know just how you feel. I felt the same way when I first saw Mr. Hayes. But, good Heavens! there is nothing to be afraid of. I wouldn't hurt you if I could. I know what you have been through already. I came down here to help you, the same as Mr. Hayes did for me."

He was so reassuring and polite and apologetic that most of my fear left me, and my curiosity got the better of what remained. I looked *up* again with interest.

"I never saw a ghost before," I said, trying to explain my fright. "I suppose you just floated up to that rock?"

"Sure," answered Mr. Adams. "I'll come down to show you."

With that he slipped off the ledge and slowly floated to my side. He put out his hand, but drew it away hastily when I reached out to shake it. I recognized him now from his likeness to the big picture in the gilt frame which my wife kept hung in the sitting-room beside the one of Mr. Hayes.

"I'm sorry," he said, referring with evident confusion to his action in withdrawing his hand. "but I can't get over some of those habits. Of course, you couldn't shake hands with me, for there is nothing there to shake."

I saw he was sensitive about it, so I merely laughed, though I was curious to try the effect.

"It's mighty good of you to take it so well," he continued. "I was in a blue funk for quite a time before Mr. Hayes could comfort me. A very nice man, that Mr. Hayes. Have you ever met him?"

I shook my head.

"Well, never mind; you will. He didn't come now because he thought two of us might be too much for you. But we are always together, and I am sure we three will be great friends. Bond of sympathy, you know."

He sat down beside me and asked me to fill my pipe. It all seemed so natural that I did this with as much unconcern as if he had been Jonathan Adams in the flesh. He apologized for not joining me in my smoke, saying that he had lost his taste for it.

"It's not a very long story," he began, after I was nicely started, "and my being here is all through Mr. Hayes. He was Amelia's first

husband, you know. He stood it as long as he could, which was just five years. Then he came out here, discovered this place where we are now, and jumped over.

"It was taking awful chances, when you think that he didn't know anything of what was coming after. But he was a nervous, high-strung man, and had reached the point where he was willing to take chances.

"He says now that he would have done it two or three years earlier if he had known the relief and rest he was going to get. It was perfect bliss, all right, after his five years of married life. For a number of years he just sat back and enjoyed it.

"Then he got to thinking, in his generous way, that perhaps some poor fellow was suffering just as he had suffered. This thought kept bothering him so much, being of a tender nature, that he made inquiries and found out about me.

After that, the knowledge of my troubles bothered him still more, till at last he couldn't stand it any longer and began to plan how he could help me out.

"Now there is a rule where we are that every five years we can come back to earth on the same day that we snuffed out. There aren't many of us that do it, because we are satisfied where we are and are content to let the worth go its way undisturbed. But Mr. Hayes was so worried over my troubles that five years ago this very day, which was his 'day back,' as we call it, he made arrangements to meet me here.

"We met. It was a meeting that I will never forget, and it took me a long time to get over it. But finally I became accustomed to him, and in an hour he had convinced me, and I jumped off. And I may say that I have never regretted it since.

"Then through some mutual friend we found out about you, and we agreed that it was only fair that you should have the benefit of our experiences. So I have come back to clear up any of the points you may be in doubt about.

"Of course, there are some drawbacks, and we don't get all the privileges of those who pass out naturally. But it's so much better than the life you have been leading that there is no comparison."

Here I stopped him with a gesture of my hand.

"Mr. Adams," I said brokenly, "I think I

understand what you are driving at and I am very grateful. But did you know that I buried my dear wife last Tuesday?"

"No!" he cried, "You don't mean to tell me that Amelia is dead?"

For a few moments he remained silent. His head bowed.

"Dear, dear!" he finally said. "I should read the papers more thoroughly. Allow me to condole with you."

Mechanically he extended his hand. I reached out to grasp it, but my fingers closed on the empty air. He was too much worked up to notice it.

"I will take the news back to Mr. Hayes," he said quietly.

"I am very grateful to you both," I said after a few moments of respectful silence, "for your kind intentions and your interest in me. Please express to Mr. Hayes my deepest gratitude."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Adams a little absently. "I have enjoyed meeting you, and it is somewhat of a disappointment that you are not to join us. But, of course, I will not urge that now."

"Poor Amelia!" was all I could say.

"And now," said Mr. Adams, straightening up, "if you expect to get back before dark I will not detain you longer."

He was right—time had gone faster than I had noticed. I turned toward the pass through which I had come. Then we both jumped with fright.

A deep growl came rolling up among the rocks!

Mr. Adams was the first to recover himself.

"Grizzly!" he said, smiling. "Funny how strong habit is. Of course he can't do a thing to me, yet for a moment I was as frightened as if I was alive."

"How about me?" I asked, still trembling.

Mr. Adams became serious at once.

"I think I can manage it," he said. "The bear smells you, but he can see me, and if you will step behind that rock I may be able to decoy him off. He will think it is me he smells. So I will say good-bye, for I may have to leave hastily."

I dropped obediently behind the rock, but peered over the top to watch developments. If Mr. Adams failed I preferred jumping off the cliff to being eaten gradually by a hungry bear.

The shaggy head and shoulders of a huge

grizzly appeared round the corner. I knew he was a grizzly from a rug which we once owned. Mr. Adams approached him fearlessly and he opened his mouth to receive him. I shuddered with horror.

But when within only a few feet of the bear Mr. Adams jumped lightly over his head and landed somewhere behind him. The effect on the grizzly was astonished disappointment. He turned quickly round and dashed after Mr. Adams, who was disappearing round the corner.

After a few minutes had elapsed I rose from my hiding-place and followed them.

There was no sign of them in the narrow defile and I did not see them again until I reached the main ravine. There I caught sight of them far up the mountain. Mr. Adams sailing serenely over the rough ground, the bear panting in hot pursuit a few feet behind.

Mr. Adams turned and waved me a polite farewell, which I returned. Then I walked quietly to Organ, chartered a mule-team, and three days later arrived back in Boston.

The first thing I then did was to visit a famous brain and nerve specialist. If science had any explanation for my experience I wanted to hear it before I began boasting about my acquaintance with real ghosts.

“My dear sir,” said the specialist after I had told him everything, “your case, though interesting, is not at all unusual. It has nothing to do with mental telepathy or telegony which are the only so-called supernatural effects recognized by science. You are no doubt familiar with the phenomenon of walking in the sleep, the walker being awake to all appears and with eyes wide open.

“You have the opposite malady of dreaming while you are actually awake. I prescribe complete rest and a change of climate.”

“But, doctor,” I expostulated, “if it was all a dream, why did the bear follow Mr. Adams out of the cañon?”

“Do not think,” answered the wise doctor, “that because the bear ran out of the cañon that he was necessarily following any one. Unless cornered or wounded, they are timid animals, and your sudden appearance in a prospector’s outfit would ordinarily be enough to protect you. And then it is possible that this was also part of your dream and there wasn’t any bear.”

This was all I could get out of him.

Of course he is right, and there are no ghosts.

But he’ll never get me to believe it, just the same!