

A Note from the Library -

From *Some Notes and Reflections Upon a Letter From Benjamin Franklin to Noble Wimberly Jones, October 7, 1772* by Malcolm Bell, III, Ashantilly Press, Darien, Georgia, 1966.

“. . . I send also a few seeds of the Chinese Tallow Tree, which will I believe grow and thrive with you. 'Tis a most useful Plant." B. Franklin, London, Oct. 7, 1772 to Dr. N.W. Jones, Savannah, Georgia

The usefulness that Mr. Franklin anticipated was that "the white wax which encloses the seed of the plant would be gleaned and moulded into candles by enterprising Georgians." Both Benjamin Franklin and a Mr. John Ellis were fellows of the Royal Society of London. They were avid enthusiasts of importing plants from

Asia, studying methods for preserving their viability over long voyages, and dispatching them to America. Another exotic gardener in Georgia received tallow seeds from Mr. Ellis. He later reported that

"the Ou Cow or Tallow-tree will certainly succeed well here; it has stood the winter in the open gardens, and the plants that were out all the winter have thriven, and now look better than those that were housed."

According to the author, an American botanical reference from 1803 (Andre Michaux, *Flora Boreali Americana...II*, p. 213) stated that the tallow tree was spreading "spontaneously" into the coastal forests. Descendant trees of the original seeds were reported growing at Wormsloe State Historic Site in Savannah, Georgia (formerly Wormsloe

Plantation) at the time *Some Notes and Reflections* was published in 1966. In his writing, Mr. Bell waxes poetic about the Chinese tallow:

"Attaining a height of fifty to sixty feet, the tallow trees bend to the wind with a stiff grace like that of Chinese maidens, and the small leaves quiver and dance with the slightest motion of the air. The tree is perhaps most noted for its brilliant, almost garish fall colors, and its otherwise forgotten fruits can often be found decorating coastal houses. . . . The candles envisioned in London illuminated no Georgia houses. Only the burning colors of the tallow trees, offending the gloom of the swamps, testify to the common hopes of Ellis and Franklin."

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Notes From The Disturbed Edge

Chapter 3

Last night he'd dreamed that he was falling, tumbling headlong through layer after layer of clawing vegetation, crashing downward but never hitting bottom, grasping at crumbling branches and crackling leaves as he hurtled down and down.... memories of the invasive exotic vegetation he'd laid waste to, never ending, haunting his sleep.

Every morning he drove out of town, down a two lane road lined like some obscene botanical Champs d'Elysees of Australian pine, crossed ditches with banks infested with Brazilian pepper, past cypress heads draped thick with Old World climbing fern from floor to canopy, through neighborhoods landscaped with carrotwood trees and *Bischofia*, past abandoned ag lands that had become earleaf acacia and melaleuca tree farms. They loomed over and around him like silent specters, waded in the breeze like rank upon rank of the unstoppable barbarian hordes. Everywhere he looked they flaunted their superiority and dared him to take a swing.

He'd spend all day in the heat or the cold, the dust or the damp, or some other intriguing combination of the elements, and then climb back into his truck and make the drive home. What he saw along the way had hit him hard tonight. It was like he had enhanced perception, true-view, a special filter in his brain that distinguished good from evil, in a color-coded spectrum. Natives glimmered across the rainbow's spectrum, but the aliens stood flat black, moving like a storm cloud, consuming

the horizon. Was he insane? He'd never be able to overtake this monster. How could he ever think he was going to even make a dent, let alone instigate some drastic reversal? He was outnumbered, outgunned, powerless, useless. Who'd have thought a simple rural road could stir such passion? But it did. He could barely breathe.

Amidst the depths of his despair he heard her voice crackle across the radio. "Hey- I got done down there - I'm headin' home. You?"

He swallowed hard "Yeah, I'm headin'- somewhere..."

Uh-oh. She recognized that tone. "You OK?"

"I don't know..." he slowly answered "...Am I insane?"

"Hell yeah!" she shot back.

"No. I'm serious. How am I ever gonna do this, you know, really accomplish anything?"

There was a long silence. He felt embarrassed, whining over the radio. He never should have said anything. Should have just not answered her, just quietly quit and gone to look for a job where he could measure success in dollars and cents. But then her voice came across the radio again.

"I'll help you ..." He smiled as she continued speaking. "See you tomorrow? Same bat channel?"

"Yeah" he answered through a spreading grin, shaking his head, "see you tomorrow".

He ran a finger along the corner of his eye, adjusted his sunglasses and hat, and grinned at his reflection in the rearview. Disgusting. He stared out the window at the silent alien onlookers, took a deep breath, and raised a finger to salute them: "Manana, we dance". As for tonight, he decided, he would dream about fishing.

- J.A.

An excerpt from "The Adventures of Hack Garlon and his buxom sidekick Squirt."