

PARODY



O. Henry

(1862-1910)

Blue Blotch of Cowardice (1896)

(An incident of the Pursuit of the Insurgents, with Profuse Apologies to Mr. Stephen Crane.)

I

Above, the air hung like a custard pie, in a burnt blanket. A Spanish cavalier, muttering mild green curses, stood near. He was stewing the last dish of leeks which his mother had given him before he left home. From a clump of sordid trees two miles off came the happy cackling of muskets.

"There will be death today," said the youth. "Dark brown death." At this point the cavalier's chameleon curse turned to a light yellow, owing to the proximity of a pot of Spanish mustard.

II

Slowly the baby's rattle of rifles opened into a Fourth of July. The youth gradually awoke, being kicked violently in the stomach by a baby-faced lieutenant.

"Get up, you," said the latter, with a small blue black curse. "The insurgents are retreating in our direction."

"I presume this is what they call war," muttered the youth, stupidly, with his chin in his hands. "We have been chasing the insurgents for three months, and we haven't had a thing but our backs to 'em the whole time."

He looked over his stock of oaths, but could find none of the precise shade that he wanted.

III

Shapeless chunks of rifle smoke were kicking about in the grass. The regiment had been fighting like demons. Here and there were men squirming horribly in the grass. This was because sundry red ants had found lodgment between their shoulder blades.

"The terrible loss to the insurgents in this battle," said a Spanish officer, who was preparing news for the press, "can not be less than three killed and four wounded."

IV

With frantic leaps a horse, bearing a huge Spanish general, came down upon them, each jump biting off large sections of the horizon. Behind him, on foot, came a small dark man, waving a machete.

“The regiment ran and ran, intuitively, with mouths closed, and long, practiced strides.

An undreamt of frenzy seized the youth. He deliberately stopped and looked back—then ran on.

“I have seen an insurgent,” he burred, triumphantly. “I need no longer feel upon my heart the blue blotch of cowardice.”

He was still running when far off on the chin of the horizon dimpled the smile of the next morning.