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Forum

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An Arrival

Chapter 1 of the novel,
"The Veteran in a New Field"

by W. H. Payne

'Seamus Delaney', he wrote in a respectable, but not too ornate hand.

The clerk, in his stiff white collar, craned his neck around to read the register as Seamus signed in.

"See-Amos," the clerk mispronounced.

"Irish?" he said. Distaste was in his tone.

"No, 'SHAY-mus'," replied Seamus, "American."

He completed his signature; 'Lieut. Col., 69th Regt. N.Y. Vols.', and quickly spun the register book around on its rotating frame so that the clerk could crane less and read more easily.

When the clerk looked up from the page, he found a pair of curiously expressionless eyes fixed on his. From behind those eyes came a soft voice;

"They did not have the 'No Irish Need Apply' notice out at Gettysburg did they,

sonny?"

"I do not know . . . ah . . . I was not there," the clerk fumbled, "I . . . ah, did not serve."

"Really?" said Seamus. The clerk had no response and so Seamus went on.

"You will have my trunk and bag taken up," he said, "and dinner is at . . .?"

"Yes, sir." The clerk looked down, avoiding the pale gray eyes. "Um, half-past eleven until one o'clock, sir, and supper from five until seven o'clock, front!" He struck a small bell on the desk and a porter in green and white livery appeared from the office behind the counter.

"My key." said Seamus.

"Yes, sir! Here you are, sir."

"Thank you," said Seamus. He leaned across the register book and spoke into the clerk's face. "Times are changing. You should change with them."

"Yes, sir." said the clerk. To his relief, the agent of his discomfort faced left and strolled unhurriedly down the long central hall toward the piazza.

The clerk found it necessary to blot with his handkerchief the sweat beaded on his brow, although the heat of the day had not yet arrived here on the mountain top.

He began to fulminate in a low and testy voice to the young porter.

"One has to be so careful around these returning war veterans," he said.

He busied himself about his small empire in the little wainscot paneled corner with its numbered pigeon holes for mail and keys and the big steel safe on cast iron wheels.

"One hardly knows what to say to them, they are so . . . strange . . . so . . . dangerous . . . and now an Irishman, of all things, staying at the Cauterskill Mountain House, the premier resort in the nation." The clerk threw up his hands, and went on.

"Surely this is unprecedented . . . except for Mr. Tyrone Power's stay here and even that was some time ago, before my time to be sure,

and Mr. Power was an actor of note and probably not a Catholic."

The clerk was interrupted in his sweaty grumblings by the approach of man clad in a suit of black broadcloth and wearing a tall silk hat. The man's gray hair was combed straight down, in the old style and partly covered his ears. His chin was wreathed by a nearly white beard, and the absence of a mustache gave him the appearance of an antique Quaker.

"I overheard your comment," he said, "on that guest's nationality and religion and I warn you that your bigotry and prejudice will bring ruination only to yourself. Times ARE changing, and this house will be open to all. Courtesy and welcome are our stock in trade and in this case Colonel Delaney is my special guest. You will accord to him all the service and cooperation which you would to me were I to be guest here. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir." said the clerk.

For his part, Seamus had halted in his walk down the hallway, both to admire a plaster bust of Daniel Webster displayed upon a marbleized wooden pedestal, and, by force of habit, to eavesdrop on the clerk's protestations to the porter and the ensuing conversation with the man in the tall hat.

As he stood, Seamus looked at his dim reflection in the window of a door marked in burnished brass letters; 'Reading Room.' He smoothed his mustache with his fingers and performed the same function upon his unruly forelock, adjusting the hair to cover the scar on his right temple.

Seamus recognized the older man at the desk from an engraved portrait in the guidebook he had read on the night boat from New York City the previous evening.

Before the clerk stood Mr. Charles Beecher, the owner of all the stage coach lines on both sides of the Hudson River between New York and Albany, most of the presently expanding railroads in roughly the same geographic area, most of the steam-boats on the great river and, not incidentally, this vast hotel.

Mr. Beecher was the clerk's employer.

"Then, Mr. Twilling," said Mr. Beecher, "if we are of an understanding, we need speak of this no more."

"No, sir!" said the clerk.

His eavesdropping concluded, Seamus continued, hat in hand, toward the open double-door at the end of the hall.

The hall ran completely through the building from the rear entrance to the eastward facing front. The decoration was sumptuous; rich curtains in red velvet hung at the windows and doorways off either side of the central corridor, the floor was deeply carpeted.

He came to the end of the hall and there, to the left of the small front lobby, a beautifully executed double oval staircase spiraled up from this, the ground floor.

He paused for a moment to admire the delicate workmanship of the staircase; the banisters painted the color of cream, the turkey red carpet with fleur-de-lis pattern complimenting the red damask wall coverings of the curving stairwell. Shimmering roses stood out in shallow relief on the wall paper, creating depth and texture.

Even the air he breathed, it seemed to Seamus, held a certain richness. The freshness of the outdoors had been brought into the building by the clever agency of festooning garlands of evergreens along the corridors. The perfume of cedar and pine was everywhere.

Well, Seamus my boy, you have arrived, he thought.

He had been to Willard's Hotel in Washington City, which had been designed with considerable modern flash and snap, but which could not compare to the traditional taste and style of this venerable establishment.

Yes, he thought, I have arrived, through famine and pestilence, wars and wounding and murder, half-way 'round the world. And here I am and why?

There must be a reason why I have been spared, and not just to give the poor clerk such a difficult morning.

Seamus already regretted his rough response to so small a slight.

Yet, he thought, there should be just treatment for all, myself included; and I will not be pushed, not anymore.

More humility would also do you some good, the better side of his nature told him.

He went back to considering his reason for being where he was. The answer was simple enough. He was at this grand hotel because the Secretary had insisted, had virtually ordered him to take a rest. The Secretary had made reservations for Seamus via the telegraph and was financing an indefinite stay at this resort. Mustered-out volunteer Lieutenant Colonels could hardly afford this kind of luxury.

And that was another question, thought Seamus, am I indeed mustered-out or not? I still receive a salary through the regimental paymaster.

In any case, the Secretary still gave orders and Seamus still followed them, and the Secretary had told him that he had much to learn and that he particularly needed to learn how to be at peace.

Well, he thought, I have not made a very good start to that lesson, going to war with the clerk as soon as I arrive and calling him 'sonny'. Surely he is not much younger than I; about age twenty-seven. And then why was he not at Gettysburg with the rest of us?

So his thoughts went, battling back and forth until at last he commanded himself to leave off this useless thought and to step out into the cool air and bright sun beyond the wide door.

There he found himself on the lower level of a broad open porch or piazza. Stout square pillars, supported the upper story porch and marched away at intervals on each side. Guests sat in the shade on wicker arm chairs and straight-backed rockers gazing out at the far distant horizon to the east.

To his right front was the base and back wall of a wide staircase case which descended

from above and also faced the east. He walked past the staircase, across a strip of grass and a flagstone footpath to the cliff edge, where he was presented with a magnificent view. The view which alone had caused the Mountain House to be constructed on this ledge overhanging the Hudson Valley.

Looking down, Seamus saw that the ledge itself had been carved and inscribed with the names, initials and dates of passage of many travelers over the years. Cryptic ciphers blended with heraldic crests, coats of arms, and the names of hometowns; a history written in stone.

He turned his attention again to the view. The sun burned in a bright blue sky. Across the Valley of the Hudson, not quite lost in the azure haze, were the mountains of far away . . . what? he wondered; . . . Massachusettes, . . . Vermont . . . ? Yes, both, he answered himself . . . and perhaps New Hampshire as well.

Beyond the foreground of regular, cultivated fields of green and amber coursed the deep blue Hudson River dotted with innumerable white sails. The progress of steam boats was marked by plumes of white or gray or black smoke. On the far shore, perhaps fifteen miles distant, a string of railway cars could be seen heading south behind a laboring, smoke-trailing locomotive. A column of smoke and steam rising straight up, also on the far shore, betrayed the presence of a train stopped at a station.

Individual farms and communities could be discerned amid the rolling fields and as yet uncut stands of timber

To the north appeared the spires of the state capital at Albany and to the south the hills of the Hudson Highlands, the home of the Military Academy at West Point and still further south the City of New York was evidenced by a brown cloud of soot.

Seamus could see, as did a bird, places which could take hours or days to reach on foot or on horseback, and all in an instant of time.

He found that fact alone inspiring and even more so the notion that all before him lay in peace. Thousands of citizens were pursuing constructive enterprises across this countryside, going about their lives unseen and unheard and unmolested.

During the last several years, Seamus had viewed many such vistas; Chattanooga from Lookout Mountain, the Valley of the Antietam and the ridges of the Shenandoah came to mind, as did other scenes farther afield.

Each of those sites, as Seamus beheld them with memory's eye, was, however, filled with masses of marching men, racing squadrons of cavalry, clouds of gun smoke and shells bursting orange and black in the air. All accompanied by the deafening blast of artillery, the unending roar of musketry, the screams of horses and the simultaneous groans of thousands of souls.

Here all was at peace and overlaid with a comforting quiet which seemed to rise from the valley to the highest heavens. And, thought Seamus with some satisfaction, I had a part in securing that peace.

As the sun climbed toward the zenith, Seamus roused himself and thought to don the hat which he held in his hand. It was a wide-brimmed old cavalry article which he had inherited from a friend with whom he had served while detached to duty on Phil Sheridan's staff. Since the peace, he had removed the crossed saber insignia from the front, but had left the gold bullion cord around the crown. The impression of the insignia was still evident, however, against the dark felt material.

He looked down to the left from where he could hear the muted sounds of wagons and coaches on the steep winding road which climbed from the valley floor. He could just pick out the movement of the vehicles through the tops of the trees on the shoulder of the heavily wooded mountain. The road led from the Village of Catskill; about four hours away, on the west shore of the Hudson. It was from

that road that Seamus had caught his first near glimpse of this great hotel that morning as his coach had rounded a bend.

The building had been visible as a small white square close to the summit of the mountain during the entire journey across the plain of the valley, and indeed from the deck of the night boat even before she had docked at the Catskill to connect with the regularly scheduled coach. The white square and the mountain itself had grown in size and definition by the hour as the coach had approached this escarpment of the Catskill range known as the Wall of Manitou.

Seamus had seen the sparkling white facade from the last turn in the road, where it had appeared above and at an oblique angle. With the green timbered brow of the summit behind it, the building had looked to be jarringly out of place. The hotel, with its thirteen Corinthian columns across the front, could have been placed most comfortably in Washington City, alongside the Executive Mansion or the newly completed Capitol. Here, amid the wild pine forest, precipitous cliffs and gloomy chasms, the effect was startling.

He turned his back to the valley and surveyed the architectural apparition.

The columns spanned the central portion of the building. Each stood on one of the square pillars and rose two stories to support the roof of the upper porch. Above and behind the pediment of the porch roof was yet another story of rooms forming the fourth and topmost story of the central wing. On either side of the center section was a three story wing of rooms not fronted by the piazza, but presenting only row upon row of tall windows, each framed by open black shutters. The whole effect was again reminiscent of the President's House in Washington, but on a much larger scale.

Set as it was in the middle of a virtual wilderness, the building gave an even greater impression of luxury, elegance and power, than

had it been situated in the more likely location of a city or even in a cultivated agrarian district.

Seamus had seen plantation houses in this Neo-classical style at the South during the war, but none so large as this. Few had been intact.

Yes, he thought, grand it is, but it could all be brought to nothing by one lucifer match, or time, or both. In Ireland he had been brought up among the gutted remains of castle and keep, built only God knew when, by the elegant and powerful and now they stood as ruined monuments to something no one living could remember. Drear roosts they were for carrion crows, their decaying walls grown over with ivy. All the things of this world pass, he thought, picturing in his mind the hollow castle of the Clanricardes on the River Shannon and the O'Connor keep at Roscommon holed by Cromwell's cannon.

But, for now, scores of visitors to this great wooden palace were enjoying their late morning stroll on the upper piazza. Ladies and gentlemen stepped along slowly or stood by the rail of the porch and studied the view.

Seamus could not get out of the habit of counting quantities of things he observed, estimating heights, distances, ranges and of timing movements, rates of transit. This habit had comprised an important part of his craft for many treacherous years, when a degree of elevation, or the width of a river, or the time it took to get from here to there, could mean the difference between life and death for hundreds or thousands of his comrades. He now estimated the piazza to cover about ten rods, or one hundred and fifty feet of the frontage of the Mountain House. He had cast his eye again to the left and right of the base of the stairs ascending to the upper piazza when he looked up and saw her.

She was standing by the column to the left of the top stair. Her gloved right hand rested on the banister as if she were about to descend. In her left hand she held a folded

parasol. She wore a hoop skirt in light blue and gray plaid with a short jacket of the same material. On her head was a small round hat of yellow straw set off by a black velvet band. She was looking down at Seamus and he looked right back up into her blue eyes. Her eyes were so blue that the irises seemed to fill up the whites with blue. Her hair was chestnut and gathered in a net.

Seamus registered this all in a moment, and he continued to look into her eyes and she into his. When he thought to take off his hat, he felt compelled to speak, but hesitated to be so rude as to address a lady to whom he had not been introduced . . . never even seen before . . . and so he stood there with his hat in his hand.

And then, a look of recognition came into the young lady's eyes. Her face had remained expressionless, but now a look of knowing, a kind of familiarity dawned.

He could not bring himself to look away despite his fear of seeming impolite. He began to be aware, however, of a metallic tapping sound off to his left; *clink*, . . . *clink* . . . *clink*, . . . *clink*, *clink* . . . *clink*, regular and rhythmic. He realized that the sound had been there before, but only now had caught his attention. He glanced reluctantly away to see the source of the tantalizing sound.

A man in shirt sleeves, perhaps twenty paces away along the ledge, in front of the south corner of the building, was on his knees carving with a hammer and chisel on the rock cliff. He was surrounded by a small group of spectators. When Seamus looked back the lady was gone; vanished. She had stepped into the concourse of visitors on the piazza, or she had entered the building itself, but she was gone.

His first thought was to pursue her, but he immediately checked himself.

That would be fine, he thought, chasing some young lady you have never met through a first class hotel. The management would be justified in having you ejected. But still and all, he thought, who is she, how does she know me? Or am I just imagining that she does know

me. Don't I wish that she DID; she is quite lovely.

The *clink, clink . . . clink* continued and Seamus turned and walked the few steps to investigate the activities of the man with the hammer and chisel.

He joined the circle of onlookers to observe the carver putting the final flourishes on the inscription:

SMITH'S CORONET BAND
1866

The carver's task complete, he rose, and handed his hammer and fine chisel to another young man who had been holding a white linen coat. Having exchanged tools for coat the erstwhile carver donned the garment, adjusted his pince-nez spectacles and addressed the group.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have the honor to be at your service. I am Otis Simpson Smith, the leader of Smith's Coronet Band."

He again adjusted the spectacles upon his nose, which organ itself rested above a substantial mustache, the ends pointed upward in the French Imperial manner.

He continued, "Our band is composed entirely of veterans of the late War for the Union, and as such represents a collation of the finest field musicians of the leading regiments of the army.

"We will be playing tonight in the casino commencing at eight o'clock, and invite you to join us to listen to and to sing along with our renditions of the popular tunes of the day. We will also be providing sacred music for tomorrow's traditional Saturday Sunrise Service as well as for the Sabbath Service on Sunday morning.

"We invite one and all to join us tomorrow night in the Grand Ballroom for a hop starting at eight o'clock at which waltzes, polkas, gallops and reels of the very finest

quality will be performed.

"Thank you for your kind attention, and we look forward to seeing you all this evening and at our subsequent performances at your pleasure."

Mr. Smith's speech completed, the small crowd of guests drifted back in the direction of the piazza as dinnertime approached.

Seamus lingered and engaged his fellow veteran in conversation. He introduced himself, briefly noting his rank and regiment. In Seamus experience, veterans stood on little formality with one another. Having shared the experience of war, they hardly felt as strangers; much more as brothers.

"Professor," he addressed the bandleader as was customary, regardless of the actual academic achievement of the musical conductor, "who were you with?"

"Well, Colonel," Professor Smith replied, "while you and the Irish Brigade were at the Sunken Road at Antietam, I was field music and bugler with the 11th New York; the Fire Zouaves, as we strove to take the bridge across the creek. Later in the war, I served with Duryea's Zouaves."

Seamus imagined the professor in the exotic uniform of the Algerian Zouave, with scarlet fez and broad pantaloons. He took an instant liking to the man, who as their further conversation revealed, had survived some of the war's most brutal engagements.

The two, as it turned out had shared other battlefields besides Antietam. They remained on the ledge for a time reminiscing and examining the other inscriptions, some of which dated back to the 1820's. Professor Smith then excused himself to an early lunch with his musicians and rehearsal for the remainder of the afternoon in the ballroom.

Seamus walked back along the ledge to the foot of the staircase and took his room key from his pocket. The numerals "135" were stamped on the brass tag attached to the key, his room was on the second floor.

He ascended the left side of the stairs to

the upper piazza. At the top of the stairs his hand rested briefly on the banister where the unknown lady had rested hers. He paused and lifted his hand, turned to look up at the deep blue sky, and turned again and entered the hotel.

In this, the second floor lobby, the oval staircase stood to his right. Beyond the stairwell, were the open doors of the Grand Ballroom. Seamus put off the search for his room and entered the beckoning doorway.

The room was wide and long and empty of persons except for two black men dressed in hotel livery, who were setting up chairs and music stands before the French doors at the far end. The ceiling was high and domed above an ornate gilt molding; from it hung a row of crystal chandeliers. All was spacious, light and airy, the result of large floor to ceiling windows spaced about every ten feet along the side walls. Gold brocade sofas stood against the walls between the windows.

Seamus walked to the nearest south facing window and found that the sunlit effect was achieved, despite the fact that the room was situated in the very center of the hotel, through the use of interior courtyards about which the building had been constructed.

He looked out the window and down into a neatly designed patch of lawn where grew beds of flowers, shrubs and even a few small trees. The court was surrounded by clapboard walls and rows of windows reaching up to the fourth floor. Directly above, the sky and a billowing white cloud could be seen.

He continued along the south wall to the end of the room. Behind the assembled chairs and music stands, the French doors opened onto a balcony, the smaller cousin of the grand piazza, with four Corinthian columns supporting a little roof. From that vantage could be seen the broad lawns and circular drive behind the hotel. In the distance, dark green mountain ridges framed the intense blue of two pine fringed lakes. The view out the north facing windows was similar to that of the

south courtyard revealing a miniature garden. It was, Seamus thought, very pleasing to the eye, but not to be compared to the natural magnificence to be seen from the windows on the outside perimeter, especially those which overlooked the valley.

He completed his circuit of the ballroom and considered that the rooms facing on the inner courtyards must be the least desirable and therefore the cheapest to rent. He hoped that the Secretary had not stinted on the price of his room. It would be pleasant to awake in the morning to the sun rising over the valley, framed in the window of one's room.

As if having read his thoughts, one of the porters approached and said, "If I may be of assistance, Colonel Delaney, your room is down the corridor to the right."

Seamus followed the stocky, powerfully built young man across the second floor lobby and through a hallway with room doors on the left and right. Those on the right Seamus now knew looked down into the south courtyard and those on the left looked to the east and the excellent view. He was delighted therefore when his guide stopped at the last door on the left and opened it with a pass key.

"Yes, Colonel," said the porter, "this is one of our very best rooms."

He ushered Seamus into the room, opened one of the two windows and introduced himself.

"I am Sampson," he said, "and if I can be of further assistance, please call for me."

Sampson appeared to be a distinctly studious youth, an impression enhanced by the silver-framed spectacles which he wore. He politely declined the offer of a gratuity and left.

Seamus noted that his trunk and carpetbag had been brought up. The former stood at the foot of the brass and iron bed against the interior wall and the latter stood next to the simple pine washstand to the right of the bed. Next to the washstand was a chiffonier of blonde, buck-eye maple with a curved front. An armchair, a straight-backed

chair, a hall tree in the corner by the door and a gilded mirror on the wall behind the washstand completed the furnishings. The walls were papered in vertical stripes of cream alternating lines of roses. He hung his hat on the hall tree and stood before the mirror.

"Well my lad, you have truly and indeed arrived," he said aloud to his reflection.

The reflection presented a face of naturally fair complexion but now rather weathered and reddened, mostly from the sun. His hair was dark with some wave to it. The eyes were cold, but the rest of the face seemed to be perpetually on the verge of a smile. The nose was straight with a barely noticeable bump in the middle; the result of a lucky punch years ago on a different continent. The forehead was unlined, except for a crease running back from the corner of the right eye brow into the hairline at the right temple. Fortunately, fashion permitted him to wear his hair long enough in the front so that he could keep the scar pretty well covered.

"Don't be vain," he said to the face in the mirror, "as scars go you have been getting off easy."

That self-same vanity had dictated the retention of a luxuriant mustache, which also served the purpose of covering a laceration of the lip that predated the broken nose, and which had resulted from an even earlier lucky punch.

The chin was unremarkable and was no longer concealed by a beard.

Over the last years, Seamus had variously worn a full beard; *a la* General Grant, muttonchops, or Burnsides; *a la* that occasionally successful general, or a Van Dyck goatee; *a la* the typical rebel cavalry officer, like the one he had recently seen depicted in one of Mr. Homer's paintings at the National Academy of Design. His barbering had depended, in each instance, upon the vagaries of style or the imperatives of his assignment at the moment.

He returned to the eyes gazing back at

him.

The eyes of a killer, he thought. Well, perhaps a killer but not a murderer, he answered himself.

In two wars, on two continents, while serving in two different armies, he had never intended to take the life of a man, except on one occasion. He had given orders, of course, which had resulted in the deaths of the enemy's troops and for that matter the deaths of his own men. He had lead troops into battle on many a field and had led some of them inevitably to their doom. In certain tight places, in the Wheatfield at Gettysburg, for example, he had fired his pistol more or less blindly into the mass of the enemy and had probably hit some poor soul, but only once had he taken careful aim at a particular individual and fired with deadly intention. Among a myriad of horrors, that one solitary moment had remained for him the focus of all horror. He thought back on that occasion, all the time holding his own eyes with steady gaze in the mirror.

It had been at the great battle at Antietam, on that bright clear September day, four years ago now, in front of the Sunken Road. The green fields rolled before him and the Irish Brigade was down. The rebels, well defended behind the parapet of the road, were delivering a galling fire.

Seamus, lying on his belly, looked over to his cousin Felim Duffy, recumbent beside him, pale face toward heaven, staring up through dead eyes.

Seamus himself barely able to move, a ball through his thigh, looked toward the rebel line to see another eruption of smoke and fire from the split-rail fence along the road. The bullets whistled overhead and the rolling report thundered in his ears.

"I have to do something to stop this," he said to himself or to the unheeding Felim.

He saw a rebel officer, just visible from the chest up, directing fire in the road.

If I stop him, thought Seamus, on the verge of insensibility, I will stop the battle.

He lifted his .44 caliber Remington Army Model revolver in his right hand, cocked it, and steadied his aim with his left hand. He planted his elbows in the Maryland soil. He carefully pictured his target, placed his point of aim below the officer's left eye and slowly squeezed the trigger as the rebel raised his arm, sword in hand. He saw the glitter of the gold trim on the officer's sleeve, the fair mustache and thin beard on the gaunt face.

The shot blasted from the pistol, a cloud of blue-white smoke issued forth and was blown away in the breeze.

The rebel's head snapped back, blood exploded from his face, his gold embroidered gray cap fell over his eyes. He pitched forward out of sight behind the fence.

"My Jesus mercy," Seamus had prayed and then himself slipped into unconsciousness.

And Seamus still knew that he had never deliberately killed another human being. In time, he had been able to determine that his target had almost certainly been Colonel John B. Gordon, who survived that awful wound to the face, as well as several others which he had received earlier in the day. Gordon had gone on to become a General, to serve for the rest of the war, notably at Gettysburg, and had been present on other fields where Seamus had also served, including Appomattox. General Gordon was still living, presumably in some comfort, in his native Georgia. It was that happy end to the story that allowed Seamus to examine the episode at all. For months after Antietam, until he had chanced to learn of Gordon's survival, he had thought himself a murderer. The Sunken Road was eventually taken by Union forces and whether Seamus' accurate pistol work had contributed to the victory was debatable. In no case, however had the victory or his part in it given him any solace for what to him had continued to be an act of murder on his part. Now, when he awoke mornings from his nightly return to the Sunken Road, he did at least have the comfort of the fairly certain knowledge that his victim had not

died.

"Well," he said to his reflection, "let off the reminiscences or you will surely return to Antietam tonight."

He would probably return there in his dreams tonight, anyway, he knew. He busied himself unpacking his carpetbag until the sound of a gong floated up from below, signaling that the midday meal was served. He hastened to the washstand, bent and lifted the big porcelain pitcher from the bottom shelf. He poured cool water into the matching red, Chinese patterned bowl which rested on top of the stand and scrubbed his hands and face. Hunger spurred him on and he quickly combed his hair and smoothed his mustache.

He left the room after setting it in order, as was his routine. He locked the door behind him and noticed that an interior stairwell descended on the south-most wall of the building. The entrance to the stairs was at a right angle to his room door. He considered that if it had not been for the backstairs, his corner room would have also had a south facing window instead of a blank wall with the stairs behind it.

He had noticed that the dining hall was on the ground floor, so he went back the way Sampson had lead him toward the oval staircase. Passing the open doors of the ballroom, he saw the Professor and his bandmen milling about the music stands.

Seamus descended, and turning by the door to the piazza, gained the passageway to the main dining hall. At the head of that corridor, on the right, was a door framed in red velvet draperies. A polished brass plaque on the door read; 'Private Dining Room'. As Seamus passed, the door opened and an elderly black man, in a crisp apron, exited carrying an empty silver tray. In the moment before the door swung shut, Seamus caught a glimpse of she whom he had seen earlier on the piazza. The lady sat alone in the room eating her solitary meal.

He continued toward the dining hall,

the question now incessant in his mind; Who is she? Who is she?

He entered the bright doorway in front of him and found the main dining salon to occupy an immense space, as befitted the scale of the hotel. The hall took up the entire front half of the north wing. Tall windows in the east wall provided abundant light and a splendid vista of the valley to those who were seated along that side of the room. The brightness was enhanced by the powder blue paint on the walls. The white enamel on the moldings, baseboards and trim work, put one mind of the antique pottery of the English Wedgwood factory. This impression was heightened by the rows of white enameled cast iron columns; miniatures of those on the exterior porches, which supported the lofty ceiling. The decoration was complimented by several examples of the actual Wedgwood on the marble mantel and in niches in the corners. Several hundred of Seamus' fellow guests had already sat down to dinner at long tables spread across the gleaming hardwood floor. There was a pleasant clatter of dishes and a cheerful hum of conversation. He chose a small, lone table before a window, seated himself and looked down into the valley thinking still; Who is she?

Yes, indeed, who is she? And how does she know me? And how am I so well known when I have never been here before?

Seamus considered that if the war were still on, and if he were, as he often had been during that time, in enemy territory, plying his trade of scout . . . or *vidette* . . . or well, yes . . . of spy, he would start planning a hasty retreat had he found himself to be so familiar to the local population.

No surprise, he thought, that once he had signed in, Sampson would know his name and rank. Black people in America had, perforce, made it their business to know more about white people than the white folks knew about themselves. This was for the same reason that the Irish in Ireland made it their business to

know all about the English in Ireland; intelligence may be the only weapon of the captive. That was why Seamus had included many Africans in his network at the South. They were absolutely fearless in the cause of freedom, and they made excellent scouts, *videttes*, spies, and partisans.

But Seamus wondered still; How did the lady on the piazza know me? How did Mr. Beecher know me, when we have never before met, and how is it that I am his special guest?

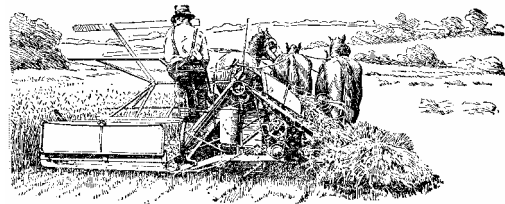
He pondered these questions until the waiter brought the bill of fare and then he set himself to briefly pondering it.

As it was Friday, he ordered the smoked mackerel.

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This is Chapter 1 of the novel, "The Veteran in A New Field," by W.H. Payne, available at <http://www.lulu.com/content/1175387> and at fine bookstores.

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