# The Free Press Short Story

## **DEAD MAN'S GULCH**

By EARL REED SILVERS

EMBERS of the undergraduate | because of his ability to pass the stand how it was that Nathan Browning had been elected to membership in Cap and Bells in his freshman year. Although Nathan later developed into one of the greatest half backs Raritan ever had known and became a recognized campus leader, he was one of the greenest and most difficult youngsters ever to try for admission at the registrar's office.

During the past thirty years I have player out of him." been told many strange fales and have lived through many unusual experiences. but the case of Nathan Browning was one of the strangest of all.

Nathan came to college from a small high school. He was tall, rangy, and almost painfully thin. He had a shock of thick straw-colored hair, and pale blue eyes which held in their depths a reckless look which marked him as a young man who would need careful guidance.

I saw him first on the afternoon before the opening of the term. I was standing at the entrance to Kings Building, watching the students return from their summer vacation. Because I am something of a campus character, having been night watchman for the past thirty years, they all knew me and stopped to shake hands and exchange words of greeting. To the freshmen, of course, I must have looked like an ordinary workman, one of the janitors of ground keepers. No one had told them that I had once been a college man myself and that even the faculty treated me with respect. I was not surprised. therefore, when a tall youth carrying a battered suit case stopped in front of me and spoke rather arrogantly. old man, will you tell me where Willets

Hall is?" he asked. "Over there," I answered, and pointed to the ivy-covered dormitory. He regarded me indolently. "I'm tired," he said. "I'll give you two bits if

you'll carry my bag to my room. number sixteen.' For an instant anger flared up within me; then I smiled. "I'll go over with

you for nothing," I told him. We went together to his room on the third floor of the building, a single room which looked directly out upon campus. "Thanks, old chap." he said.

"Sure you won't take the two bits?" "No." I answered, and seated myself on the edge of his cot. "I'm not the janitor," I explained, "but the watchman, and I've held this job since before you were born. Everybody calls

me General Cobb. "I've heard about you from an old grad," he announced, and held out his

"Going to like it here?" I asked. "I shall if the sophomores let me alone," he said: "But if they try anything funny, they'll have a battle on

their hands." "What you'd better do," I told him gravely, "is to take what they give you without saying anything about it."

He shook his head. "Not for me. I'm standing up for my rights." "You'd better think it over," I sug-

Apparently, however, he decided to maintain his attitude of defiance to the established rules of class tactics. Before a week had passed, he became known throughout the campus as the most troublesome member of the freshman class. He refused to wear the black cap with its green button, refused to report for the big 'pee-rade" to football field on the second day practice, and failed to apear at the Quad Room on four successive evenings when the "fresh" were put through their

"If you don't mend your ways," I said to him one afternoon when we met on the campus, "you'll be selected for the special Hallowe'en celebration of the sophs."

"What's that?" he asked curiously. "Every year," I explained, "the freshman who has made the most trouble is taken out by the sophomores on Hal- of the chosen. I could not help com- door and took away his trunk. We have lowe'en. And what they do to him-

Nathan nodded thoughtfully. "Thanks the better man

for the warning. I didn't know." I was tempted to tell him more, but decided against it. For many years I noon, John Becker, chairman of the had been a witness to that special Hal- Sophomore Hallowe'en Committee, gathlowe'en ceremony. It was the custom ered together a group of his classmates stories of a large vacant house, but none freshest freshman," to dress him ludicrous uniform, and take him Monument Square in the centre of town. There he was put through a series of this year, "something that this fresh- cupied and several gardeners are emlooking on. At the end he was ducked as he lives." fountain and sent scampering back to the dormitory. I have never campus entrance nearest to town and ago. And no one is admitted to the who did not settle down after that.

ened somewhat by my words of warning, stopped at houses along the way for with baskets of flowers and fruit. These kept as quiet as possible during the next contributions of apples and candy. New weeks. He was already a marked man in his class, however, and the sophomore president told me that in all and strolled up College Avenue. In my 45 years he has refused all offers for probability Browning would be selected mind was the thought that possibly I the sale of the house and lands. as the "freshest freshman." Nathan old might talk with Nathan and urge him not know that, of course, and so he not to take the affair too seriously. reported for the football team and The night was dark, with scurrying the destruction of worms, Mother Graves'

body never could quite under- He was rather weak on defense, however, and so he was relegated to the second squad. He was disappointed a bit mortified, but he did not Watching him on the football field decided that he had in him the "makings" of a real man. He was absolutely fearless, and the wonder of it was that

> "If he could take on ten pounds," said the coach, "we'd make an All-Canadian

he did not receive serious injury.

Nathan was popular with the members of the squad, but the sophomores had marked him as their own. I was not at all surprised when, on the night before Hallowe'en Browning joined me at about ten o'clock while I was making a casual round of the buildings. "General,"

"For what?" I asked.

"It only says to report at the river nine o'clock to-morrow night." "You know what it means,

you?" I asked. He nodded ruefully. "That I'm the freshest freshman, I suppose."

"Right you are," I said. suddenly he turned to me defiantly. they expect to get away with that, they have another think coming. I'm going to tell them all what I think of them." "No," I said, "you're going to take your medicine like a man. After ali,

you had it coming to you." He waited for quite a while, his hands thrust in his pockets, his lips a straight red line in the semi-darkness. Finally they had silenced him. he spoke. "All right," he said grimly. "I'll go through with 'it."

entered the dormitory. When he was that it was all for the best. I was not place, but Lane did not come." entirely sure, for Nathan, in spite of his early arrogance. was rather sensitive. The experience of making a spectacle of himself before several hundred people might possibly injure him beyond repair, might even ruin his college career. What he needed, I decided, was encouragement rather than humiliation. That reckless look in his eyes was not

There was nothing I could do about it, the door of the dormitory opened and to become a big campus leader, and you Lane Cornellus came out

Lane was also a freshman, a tall, him into Cap and Bells." sophisticated chap who had entered college from one of the larger preparatory schools. He was the same size as hand: "My name is Nathan Browning Nathan Browning, not quite so thin, but General is willing to sponsor him," he with the same brushy hair. however, the resemblance ceased, Lane was wealthy, self-assured, and very that Nathan had already been initiated much a man of the world. He was al- into Cap and Bells. They gave him the ready mentioned as a candidate for the grip and welcomed him as a fellow presidency of his class and was admit- member. Nathan, still dazed by the turn tedly one of the freshman leaders. In of events, took the pledge to uphold the spite of his many good qualities, how- honor of the society. ever, there was something about him which did not appeal to me.

which was not entirely natural. "Whither bound?"

"Nowhere especially,' I answered,

"I assured him that I could. with his elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands. "I have been elected to Cap and Bells," he annouced, "and have been requested to report for initiation to-morrow night."

"That's fine," I told him. He smiled-twistedly.

"I'm not going to go," he said.

He spoke so softly that I could barely hear him. "I'm afraid, General." membership in Cap and Bells. Only six sible to the dormitory. men would be elected, and he was one. The next day a truck came to the paring him with Nathan Browning, never laid eyes on Cornelius from that well, you'll be likely to learn that for Nathan had met his test without flinch- day to this; but it is just as well.

> All through the next day, however, I worried about him. Late in the after-

known one of these unfortunate victims watched curiously while groups of chil- gardens. Every morning the mansion dren dressed in every conceivable cos- gates are opened and the head gardener Nathan Browning, his deflance damp- tume marched down the street and drives out in a smart horse drawn trap,

showed some promise of developing into clouds obscuring the sky. When I came Worm Exterminator has proved a boon a good half back. If he had not been to the end of the avenue, I could not to suffering children everywhere. so thin, he would have made the team see him. As I waited indecisively I seldom fails.

discovered three vague figures on the river bank. I moved closer, for I knew that it was not yet time for the sophoevent was not scheduled until nine

me. "Freshman," said the voice harshly, "prepare to meet your doom."

For a moment I was puzzled: then suddenly I realized what had happened. The voice was that of Daniel Langley, ada. president of the Cap and Bells Honorary Society. Daniel and the others had misa black handkerchief.

most three decades ago. I had been side with modern carpenter work.

initiated into Cap and Bells.

said never a word. I knew that Lane the river in a canoe laden with vege- in the making of furniture. The many-Cornelius was a coward, and that table which were sold in Detroit, the hued leaves, which first strike the obthe biggest leaders that Raritan had and the other trials of the pioneers. She colored wood in the heart of the tree. ever known. So I permitted the initia- also recalls vividly the Fenian raids and tion to proceed. The sophomore mem- tells with gusto of the fight which prebers of the society led the freshmen to vented their getting to the mainland a field bordering the river, made them from Fighting Island, then known by duck for apples in approved Hallowe'en the Indian name of Des-Chree-Shoska style, and gleefully pushed their heads beneath the water. They made them bank at the end of College Avenue at sing songs, give speeches, and bat one another about the head with rolled newspapers. The paddling which Lane had mentioned had been discontinued

three years ago. When the horseplay had ended, Danie Langley read the constitution and the For a moment he was silent; then initiates took the pledge in unison Drawing off the black handkerchiefs; the members of the society then extended their hands to the new "brothers"-

and discovered Nathan! Indignantly they demanded explanation. Nathan had none to give. Until near the end, he had believed this to be a part of the Hallowe'en celebration; then, when he had started to protest

Puzzled, not knowing quite what to do. Daniel turned to me. "What about Without another word he turned and it. General?" he asked. "It's a case of mistaken identity,"

gone, I seated myself on the steps of said. "Undoubtedly, Nathan and Lane the porch and tried to convince myself were ordered to report at the same

"He was afraid of being paddled."

"He's been fresh," I said evenly, "but wants to make up for it. In another two years he's going to be a great football player, and I've heard that he was however, and I had just stood up to an all-star centre in basketball. Al start another round of inspection when that he needs is some encouragement have given him that to-night by taking

"Do you think he deserves it?" "Yes," I said.

There, announced. "What do you men say?" for They decided, after brief conference,

The fact that in his senior year he was elected captain of the football team "Hello, General," he said in a voice and voted "the man who has done most for the college" has no particular place

in this story. Lane Cornelius has. Lane, it seems, "Can you spare a little time with although standing by his decision, became imbued with a great curiosity." Shortly before nine o'clock he walked to We sat down on the top step, Lane the end of College Avenue and stood at the river bank. A few minutes later the sophomores came for Nathan Browning and found Lane there.

They waited for a time, keeping Lane with them. Angered finally at Nathan's failure to appear, they decided to substitute the other freshman who had so miraculously been waiting at the desig-

nated meeting place. They joined their classmates on the campus, lighted their torches, dressed For the next half hour I tried to Lane as a country maid, and carried convince Lane that he was making a big out the programme as planned. Lane mistake. The highest honor that could angry but helpless, played his part with come to a freshman, I explained, was poor grace and escaped as soon as pos-

ing, and Lane had failed. Nathan was have little use for cowards at Raritan.

# LONELY HOUSE MYSTIFTES

Hayes, England, has many strange "the and collected all the old barrels and can be vertified. Today its large walledin other inflammable material they could in gardens are ablaze with exotic flowers, to find. John explained to me that they and rows of hothouses contain choice were going to have a real celebration fruits and flowers. Both lodges are ocstunts, with several hundred townfolks man Browning will remember as long ployed. At night large dogs patrol the lonely grounds. No one has set foot in When darkness fell, I stood at the the house since it was closed 45 years he takes to the owner of the house, an Against my better judgment I left the elderly man who lives in seclusion main campus shortly before eight-thirty another large house in Beckingham. For

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#### YOUTHFUL AGE

Ignoring the orders of doctors about mores to come after Nathan. The big the dist she should observe and proud there is a forest where the trees, in-Out of the shadows a voice reached recently celebrated her 104th birthday bow. Here one can find leaves of a rich tario, near Windsor.

the oldest living white woman in Can-

Three other students came down the Girard and they lived in a log cabin has been colored. Some years ago a out of the shadows and joined them. place has been modernized to a marked desired shade. An enterprising forester They glanced up in indignant surprise; extent but the old log house is there decided to try the plan on a wood

I should have told them, of course, British soverigns, she recalls the ac- first belts are now almost ready. that they had the wrong man; but I tivities of early days, the trips across

Her car had broken down on the road opposite a field where a farmer was plowing with a four-horse team. The farmer ame over and offered to pull the car to the nearest garage with his team. than I can tell you." the lady in distress

#### BAINBOW TREES

of the fact that she enjoys her meals stead of being green, have foliage brilthree times a day, Mrs. Matilde Girard liantly colored in all shades of the rainat the home of her son in Lassalle, On- orange shading into a delicate primrose. There are also wonderful shades of Friends and relatives believe she is mauve, purple, dark blue, and crimson.

In 1848 she was -married to William only the leaves, but finally the wood then, recognizing me, they nodded. Al- covered with clapboards and lined in- saplings which had only started to grow

The wood from this forest will be used Nathan Browning needed only the war cries of the Iroquois and-Huron servers, are not of great importance, proper encouragement to become one of Indians, the howls of the timber wolves What matters far more is the wonderful

Department of the Canadian National "I appreciate your kind offer more Railways, is a combined apple cleaner and polisher. It is attached to the gradbrushes gently but effectively cleans and brushes the apples as they whirl along into the grader.

This sounds as if the wood belonged to fairyland, but the trees showing these Born in 1828 in the French-settle- marvellous colors have simply been subment where she still resides on the banks jected to a scientific process which has taken Nathan for Lane Cornelius. The of the Detroit River not far from nothing magical about it. Special chemtwo were the same size, and had the Windsor, she was the daughter of a leals have been dug into the soil round same bushy hair. Already Nathan's face captain in the British army. He served the roots of the trees and these have was covered from forehead to chin with in the British forces in the War of 1812. been drawn up with the sap, so that, not road. leading five candidates. When which is now occupied by the son and scientist discovered that it was a simple 1 all had gathered in a group, I stepped his family with whom she lives. The matter to tinge growing wood with any into trees. The staining of the trees in Having lived during the reigns of five this way naturally takes time, but the

before, art is being used to assist nature someone quote from it, he usually begins in beautification, a machine has been "Jesus said" or "John said" or "Noah installed in some of the apple packing did." That is because the teachings of plants at Berwick, Nova Scotia, which the Bible are more interesting when provides a beauty treatment for the fam- the people who say them are pictured ous Annapolis Valley apples. The in your mind. machine, according to the Agricultural er and by means of a series of rotating

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