

In the Green Mountain Country

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New Haven

Yale University Press

1934

He got up at seven as usual, and he and his wife had breakfast together. At half past eight he went to his office in the town. His old friend and partner was already there when he entered. They were both early risers. They spoke with each other for a moment and then he went to his desk.

He was not feeling quite well. He said nothing about it. He had no idea that this was his last day of life.

There were a number of letters and other matters for him to go over and settle. He went to work methodically at them. He disliked to leave things undone. All his life he had attended to his duties, large or small, systematically. He was a sound, seasoned New Englander of sixty, and he had accomplished a lot.

By ten o'clock he had finished. He still wasn't feeling any better. He said to his secretary, "Mr. Ross, I guess we'll go to the house."

They motored back together through the streets and under the bare, spreading trees, till they came to the beeches and elms that surrounded his home. He had lived in half of a two-family house most of his life, but it had no grounds around it, and when he was fifty-eight he had moved; "so the doggies can have a place to play," he had said.

His wife was out—she had gone down town on foot to do some shopping. He and his secretary went to the library. He toyed with a jigsaw puzzle a moment. They spoke of the partridge hunting they had had in October, and of the hay fever that had bothered him in July—a "pollen attack" he called it. He made little of it. He had been lucky—he had had very few illnesses.

As they sat there talking he said he was thirsty. The cook and maid were at hand and so was Mr. Ross, but he didn't like to be waited on—he went to the kitchen and got a glass of water himself. He heard the gardener in the cellar and he went down there to say something to him. The gardener was the last man he spoke to. When people asked him later what his employer had said he couldn't remember. He told them that it was something about the house or the grounds, and that it had not seemed important—to him.

Leaving the gardener this man went upstairs to his bedroom. He took off his coat and waistcoat to shave, but sank to the floor. He was dead.

The news spread through the town. Children on their way home from school stopped to look through the gates. A few policemen arrived. When reporters and camera men came the Chief of Police took them aside and asked them not to bother the family. He left one policeman on guard and everyone else went away.

The flag on the schoolhouse had been lowered. Now, on all public buildings, other flags went to half-mast. In town after town, and city after city, the flags fluttered down.

The next day the guns began booming. For thousands of miles throughout the nation, and at its army posts over-seas, at half hour intervals all day long, cannon by cannon they spoke. And when evening came and the bugles had sounded retreat, there were last, long, slow salutes everywhere of forty-eight guns, one for each of the forty-eight States of his country.

The hotel in Northampton was crowded that night. Friends of his had arrived for the funeral, and there were many reporters. The reporters swapped stories of the days before he had retired. One time when he had been suddenly needed, they said, for some national conference, and when nobody knew where he was, he had been found down in the storeroom, fishing a pickle out of a jar with two fingers. He had liked homemade pickles and people had sent him quantities of them, but he never got any at table, they were all kept on shelves in the storeroom, because of the chance that cranks might send jars that were poisoned.

Early in the morning the long special trains came rolling in. The President and his wife, the Vice-President and the Chief Justice, several Cabinet members, and committees of Senators and Congressmen got out of the sleeping cars from Washington and walked through the crowd at the station. Governors of near-by States and other officials arrived in their motors. They went to the Congregational Church and sat in its plain oak pews.

The service was brief. There was no eulogy, no address of any kind. Two hymns were sung, parts of the Bible were read, and the young minister prayed. He rose, and gave the great in the land who stood before him his blessing. They filed slowly out.

The streets emptied as the visitors left. The motors and trains rolled away.

When the town was alone with its own again, six sober-faced policemen lifted the coffin and carried it out to the street. Light rain was falling. Drops glistened on the coffin

as it was placed in the hearse. A few motors fell in behind it, and the little procession moved off along the old country roads.

In every village they went through, there were small troops of boy scouts and veterans of the great war, standing at attention in silence as the motors sped by. In the yards of factories and mills, workmen stood in groups, waiting. Men held their hats or caps to their hearts, women folded their hands. Farms and fields on the road had been tidied up, as a mark of respect, and at a place where carpenters were building a house they had cleared away the lumber and chips.

The rain stopped for a while. The mists that had drifted low over the mountains gave place to blue sky. White, straight birch trunks glistened, and ice began to melt in the sunshine. But as they drove on, deeper into the Green Mountain country, black clouds spread and rain fell again, harder. The red tail lights of the cars gleamed on the road in the wintry and dark afternoon.

When the cars reached the end of the journey, the skies lightened palely a moment. The burying ground was outside the village where the dead man was born. Generations of his ancestors had been laid to rest there, in graves on the hillside. The cars climbed the steep road and stopped. The family and a handful of friends got out and stood waiting.

Across the road, in a rocky field, the men and women of the village had gathered. They were not the kind of people to intrude or crowd nearer, and they kept complete silence. The young minister said a few words as the coffin was lowered. A sudden storm of hail pelted down.

The widow, who had tried to smile that morning coming out of the church, could no longer hold back her tears.

The cars left. The bent shouldered sexton signaled to his helpers. They filled in the grave. Four country militiamen took up their positions on guard. Snow fell that night on the hillside and the slopes of Salt Ash Mountain.

The headstone that now marks the quiet spot bears no inscription but the name, Calvin Coolidge, the dates, and the President's seal.