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DISMAL ROCK

Dismal Rock, a little below the Dam which impounds beautiful Nolin Lake and barely above the western tip of the Mammoth Cave National Park, is a precipitous sandstone cliff which rises abruptly from the water's edge on Nolin River and towers to a height of three hundred feet or more overlooking the narrow bottomland on the other side. Tradition has it that the Long Hunters tracked the deer and the buffalo here and that Boone wandered lonely along this meandering little stream more than two hundred years ago; and many are the tales of the pioneers who settled in these backwoods where hunting, fishing, moonshining and a little patch of corn supplied their every need.

On a Christmas Eve afternoon in the early 1890's a half-dozen or so loafers from the neighborhood are said to have assembled at the little country store at nearby Bee Spring, as was their custom, where they huddled around the red-hot, wood-burning stove and engaged in gossip and the spinning of yarns. After an hour or so, when the fire was getting a little low and conversation began to lag, the merchant poked up the embers, heaved in an armload of dry hickory, and then took down from the shelf a pint of "pure corn" and offered it to the one who would tell the "biggest lie".

Tom Toad Sanders, the most notorious wag of the neighborhood, jumped at the offer and proceeded forthwith to relate an absurdly exaggerated tale of a deer hunt which evoked guffaws that could be heard echoing half-a-mile down the hollow. The others followed with yarns which were entertaining enough, even if a bit less side-splitting. Whereupon, Tom Toad came through with another one even more fantastic than his first<sup>st</sup>.

"Fellers," he began, "I'm a-gonna tell you what I seen one day last summer when I was a-settin' down there on the bank of Nolin a fishin' for blue-gills.

"Well sir, all at once I heard hounds a barkin' and somebody a-

72

runnin' in the woods up there on top of Dismal Rock, and just as I looked up some man leaped right off of it and landed clean across the River over there in the bottom, — and his two hounds right with 'im. They must a-jumped five hundred feet."

The gang smiled; and some wag asked: "Did it hurt 'um?"

"Well sir," Tom Toad replied, "it killed both of them dogs dead as hell, but it never hurt him a damned bit. He just up and looked around a little and then took off down through the bottom as hard as he could tear. I never did have no idea who the old devil was".

The crowd smiled, shook their heads, and someone volunteered:

"Well, Tom Toad, you get the pint," and the others nodded in assent.

But the merchant replied: "Wait a munute. Uncle Jack there aint told one yet", and their glance focused on Uncle Jack Caswell, a little dried-up-looking fellow sitting on a nail keg over in the corner quietly smoking his corn-cob pipe.

"That's right, go ahead, Uncle Jack,<sup>o</sup> two or three chimed in.

After a spell of silence he took his pipe from his lips, spit a mouthful of ambeer into the ash-box, and remarked dryly: "I never did tell that, for I didn't think nobody would believe it; but now I've got a witness." Then with utmost unconcern he added: "That there feller was me."

When the uproar died down the verdict was unanimous. The merchant handed Uncle Jack the pint. Whereupon he removed the corn-cob stopper and with characteristic congeniality treated the gang to the last drop.