

A House
Divided
Against Itself

Lucy Maud Montgomery
1930

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Montgomery, L. M.

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All the omens had pointed to it for days. Big George . . . who was five foot one . . . wondered how he could have been blind to them. Salt had howled dismally all Monday. On Tuesday Little George . . . who was six foot two . . . had smashed the mirror he had shaved by for forty years. On Wednesday Big George had failed to pick up a pin he had seen. On Thursday Little George had walked under Tom Appleby's ladder at the lobster cannery. And on Friday . . . Friday mind you . . . Big and Little George between them had contrived to spill the salt at supper. Was it any wonder disaster followed? Directly after that fatal meal Little George had sneaked off to the lottery at the Point and brought the thing home.

Big George was not superstitious. What did spilled salt and broken mirrors matter to a good Presbyterian? But he did believe in dreams . . . having Biblical warrant for the same. And he had had a horrible one two weeks previously of seeing the full moon, one moment burning black, the next livid red, coming nearer and nearer to the earth . . . waking, just as it seemed near enough to be touched, with a howl of agony that shattered the stillness of the spring night at Little Spruce for yards around. Big George, who had kept a careful and copious diary of his dreams for forty years, looked them all over and concluded that none of them had been as awe-inspiring as this one.

Then there was that peculiar sound the gulf had been making of late. When the Old Lady of the Gulf moaned like that, somebody was going to sup sorrow. But Little George did not connect it with his winning the fifth prize in the lottery Captain Leon Buote had been getting up down at Chapel Point in aid of the Old Sailors' Home. Little George had bought a ticket off Young Mosey Gautier, just to please the kid, and on the night when the numbers were drawn he thought he might as well saunter round to Chapel Point and see if he had any luck.

He had!

"Little" George Beelby and "Big" George Beelby were cousins. Big George was six years the older, and the adjective that had been appropriate in childhood stuck to him, as things stick in Rose River and Little Spruce Cove, all his life. The two Georges were old sailors and 'longshore fishermen and they had lived together in Little George's little house at Spruce Cove for thirty years. Big George had been born a bachelor but Little George was a widower. His marriage was so far in the dim past that Big George had almost forgiven him for it, though he occasionally cast it up to him in the frequent quarrels by which they enlivened what might otherwise have been the rather monotonous life of retired sea-folk.

They were not and never had been beautiful, though that fact worried them little. Big George had a face that was actually broader than it was long and a flaming red

beard. He could not cook but he was a good washer and mender. He could also knit socks and write poetry. Big George quite fancied himself as a poet. He had written an epic which he was fond of declaiming in a surprisingly great voice for his thin body. When he was low in his mind he felt that he had missed his calling. Also, that nearly everybody in the world was going to be damned.

“I should’a been a poet,” he would say mournfully to his orange-hued cat. The cat always agreed with him but Little George sometimes snorted contemptuously.

If he had a vanity it was in the elaborate anchors tattooed on the backs of his hands. He was a Liberal in politics and had Laurier’s picture hanging over his bed. He thought Little Spruce Cove the most desirable spot on earth and resented any insinuation to the contrary.

“I like to have the sea, the blue lone sea, at my very doorstep like this,” he boomed to the “writing man,” who had asked if they never found Little Spruce lonesome.

“Just part of his poetical nature,” Little George had explained aside, so that the writing man should not think Big George feeble-minded. Little George lived in secret terror and Big George in secret hope that the writing man would put them in a book.

By the side of Big George, Little George looked enormous. His freckled face was literally half forehead, and a network of large purplish-red veins over nose and cheeks looked like some monstrous spider. He wore a great drooping grey moustache, like a horseshoe, that did not seem to belong to his face at all. But he was a genial soul and enjoyed his own good cooking, especially his famous pea soups and clam chowders. His political idol was Sir John Macdonald, whose picture hung over the clock shelf, and he had been heard to say . . . not in Big George’s hearing . . . that he admired women in the abstract. He had a harmless hobby of collecting skulls from the old Indian graveyard down at Big Spruce and ornamenting the fence of his potato plot with them. He and Big George quarreled about it every time he brought a new skull home. Big George declared that it was indecent and unnatural and un-Presbyterian. But the skulls remained on the poles.

It was late at night when Little George returned from the raffle, so the explosion was deferred till morning. Little George unwrapped something from the parcel he was carrying, looked at it dubiously, shook his head, and tried the effect of it on the clock shelf. Something in him liked it. Something else was uneasy.

“She’s got a real fine figger,” he muttered, with a doubtful glance at Big George sleeping soundly in his bunk with a yellow cat rolled up in a golden ball on his stomach. “But I don’t know what he’ll think of her . . . I really don’t. Nor the

minister.”

These considerations did not keep Little George awake. He fell promptly asleep and Aurora, goddess of the dawn, kept her vigil on the clock shelf through the hours of darkness and was the first thing Big George’s eyes rested on when he opened them in the morning. There she stood, her lithe, lovely form poised on tiptoe, smitten by a red-gold beam from the sun that was rising across the harbour.

“What the devil is that?” said Big George, thinking this was another dream. He flung himself out of his bunk, upsetting an indignant cat, and walked across the room.

“It ain’t a dream,” he said incredulously. “It’s a statoo . . . a naked statoo!”

The dog . . . whose name was Salt . . . that had been curled up at Little George’s feet, bounded to the floor after the cat . . . whose name was Mustard. He liked the cat well enough but he wasn’t going to have her sitting there on the floor grinning at him. The resultant disturbance awoke Little George, who sat up drowsily and inquired what the row was about.

“George Beelby,” said Big George ominously, “what is that up there?”

“Oh, that. That’s an alabaster statooette. I drew it for fifth prize at Captain Buote’s lottery last night. Rather pretty, ain’t it?”

Big George’s voice boomed out.

“Pretty! It’s indecent and obscene, that’s what it is. You take it right down and fire it out in the gulf as far as you can fire it.”

If Big George had not thus flown off the handle, it is probable that Little George would have done exactly that, being somewhat uneasy regarding the minister and the look of the thing generally. But he was not going to be bullied into doing it by that little runt of a Big George and he’d let him see it.

“Oh, I guess not,” he retorted coolly. “I guess it’s going to stay right there. Stop yelping now and let your hair curl.”

Big George’s scanty love-locks showed no sign of curling but his red beard fairly crackled with indignation. He began striding about the room in a fine rage, biting first his right hand and then his left. Salt fled one way and Mustard another, leaving the Georges to fight it out.

“‘Tain’t right to have any kind of statoos, let alone naked ones. It’s agin God’s law. ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven immidge . . .’”

“Good gosh! I ain’t made it and I ain’t worshipping it . . .”

“That’ll come . . . that’ll come. And a French gew-gaw at that.”

“No, ’tain’t . . . it’s made in Germany and her name’s there at the bottom . . . Aurorer. Jest a gal, that’s all.”

“Do you think the Apostle Paul ever carried a thing like that around with him?”

demanded Big George. "Or" . . . as an afterthought that might influence Little George . . . "Sir John A. Macdonald?"

"Not likely. St. Paul was kind of a woman-hater like yourself. As for Sir John, he was too busy defeating the Grits at every election to have time for the fine arts. Sir Wilfrid would have more probably. Now stop chewing your fists and pretend you're grown up even if you ain't, Georgie. See if you can dress yourself like a man."

"Thank you . . . thank you." Big George became ominously calm. "As for Sir Wilfrid, *he's* dressed. And I am entirely satisfied to be classed with the Apostle Paul. Entirely! My conscience guides my conduct, you ribald old thing."

"Been making a meal of the dictionary, it seems," retorted Little George, yanking his pants off their nail, "and it don't seem to have agreed with your stomach. Better take a dose of sody. Your conscience, as you call it, hain't nothing to do with it . . . only your prejudices. Look at that writing man. Hain't he got half a dozen of them statooos in his summer cottage up the river?"

"If he's a fool . . . and wuss . . . is that any reason why you should be? Think of that and your immortal soul, George Beelby."

"This ain't my day for thinking," retorted the imperturbable Little George. "Now that you've blown off your steam, just set the porridge pot on. You'll feel better when you've had your breakfast. Can't 'preciate works of art properly on a empty stomach, Georgie."

Big George glared at him. Then he grabbed the porridge pot, yanked open the door and hurled the pot through it. The pot bounded and leaped and clattered down the rocks to the sandy cove below. Salt and Mustard fled out after it.

"Some day you'll drive me too far," said Little George darkly. "You're just a narrow-minded, small-souled old maid, that's what *you* are. If you hadn't a dirty mind you wouldn't be throwing a fit 'cause you see a stone woman's legs. Your own don't look so artistic, prancing around in that shirt-tail, let me tell you that. You really ought to wear pajamas, Georgie."

"I fired your old pot out to show you I'm in earnest," roared Big George. "I tell you I won't have no naked hussy in this house, George Beelby."

"Yell louder, can't you?" said Little George. "This happens to be *my* house."

"Oh, it is, is it? Very well. Very well. I'll tell you this right here and now. It ain't big enough for me and you and your Roarer."

"You ain't the first person that idee's occurred to," said Little George. "I've had too many tastes of your jaw of late."

Big George stopped prancing and tried to look as dignified as a man with

nothing on but a shirt can look as he laid down the ultimatum he never doubted would bring Little George to his senses.

“I’ve stood all I’m a-going to. I’ve stood them skulls of yours for years but I tell you right here and now, George Beelby, I won’t stand for that atrocity. If it’s to remain . . . I leave.”

“As for leaving or staying, suit yourself. Aurorer stays there on that clock shelf,” retorted Little George, striding out and down the rocks to rescue his maltreated porridge pot.

Breakfast was a gloomy meal. Big George looked very determined, but Little George was not worried. They had had a worse row than this last week when he had caught Big George stealing a piece of raisin pie he had put away for his own snack. But when the silent meal was over and Big George ostentatiously dragged an old, battered, bulging valise out from under the bunk and began packing his few chattels into it, Little George realized that the crisis was serious. Well, all right . . . all right. Big George needn’t think he could bully him into giving up Aurorer. He had won her and he was going to keep her, and Big George could go to Hades.

Little George really thought Hades. He had picked up the word from the minister and thought it sounded more respectable than hell.

Little George watched Big George stealthily out of his pale woolly eyes as he washed up the dishes and fed Mustard, who came scratching at the window pane. The morning’s sunlit promise had been delusive and it was now, as Little George reflected testily, one of them still dark misty days calc’lated to dampen one’s spirits. This was what came of ladders and looking-glasses!

Big George packed his picture of Laurier and the model of a ship with crimson hull and white sails that had long adorned the caticorned shelf above his bunk. These were indisputably his. But when it came to their small library there was a difficulty.

“Which of these books am I to take?” he demanded frostily.

“Whichever you like,” said Little George, getting out his baking board. There were only two books in the lot he cared a hoot about anyhow. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* and *The Horrible Confession and Execution of John Murdock (one of the Emigrants who lately left this Country) who was hanged at Brockville, Upper Canada, on the third day of September last for the inhuman murder of his own brother.*

When Little George saw Big George pack the latter in his valise, he had much ado to suppress a grisly groan.

“I’m leaving you the Martyrs and all the dime novels,” said Big George defensively. “What about the dog and cat?”

“You’d better take the cat,” said Little George, measuring out flour. “It’ll match your whiskers.”

This suited Big George. Mustard was his favourite.

“And the weegee board?”

“Take it. I don’t hold no dealings with the devil.”

Big George shut and strapped his valise, put the reluctant Mustard into a bag and, with the bag over his shoulder and his Sunday hat on his head, he strode out of the house and down the rocks without even a glance at Little George, who was ostentatiously making raisin pie.

Little George watched him out of sight, still incredulously. Then he looked at the white, beautiful cause of all the mischief exulting on the clock shelf.

“Well, he didn’t get you out, my beauty, and I’m jiggered if he’s ever going to. No, siree! I’ve said it and I’ll stick to it. Anyhow, my ears won’t have to ache any longer listening to that old epic of his. And now I can wear my earrings again.”

Little George really thought Big George would come back when he had cooled down. But he underrated the strength of Big George’s principles or stubbornness.

The first thing he heard was that Big George had rented Tom Wilkins’ old shanty at Upper Spruce and was living there. But not with Mustard. If Big George did not come back, Mustard did. Mustard was scratching at the window three days after her ignominious departure in a bag. Little George let her in and fed her. It wasn’t his fault if Big George couldn’t keep his cat. He, Little George, wasn’t going to see no dumb animal starve. Mustard stayed home until Sunday when Big George, knowing Little George was safely in church, came down to Little Spruce and got her. All to no purpose. Again Mustard came back . . . and yet again. After the third attempt Big George gave it up in bitterness of soul.

“Do I want his old yeller flannel cat?” he demanded of the writing man. “God knows I don’t. What hurts my feelings is that he knew the critter would go back. That’s why he offered her so free. The depth of that man! I hear he’s going round circulating mean false things about me and saying I’ll soon be sick of living on salt codfish and glad to sneak back for a smell of good cooking. He’ll see . . . he’ll see. I ain’t never made a god of my stomach as he does. You should ’a’ heard the riot he raised one day last month ’cause I et a piece of mouldy old raisin pie he’d cached for himself, the greedy pig. And saying it’ll be too lonesome here for one of my gabby propensities. Yessir, he said them words! Me, lonesome! This place just suits

me down to the ground. See the scenery. I'm a lover of nature, sir, my favourite being the moon. And them contented cows up on the Point pasture. I could gaze at 'em by the hour. They're all the society I want, sir . . . present company always excepted. Not," added Big George feelingly, "but what Little George had his p'int. The blueberry puddings that man could make! And them clam chowders of his stuck to the ribs better'n most things. But I had my soul to think of, hadn't I? And my morals?"

The quarrel and separation of the Georges caused quite a sensation in Rose River and along the coves. Few thought it would last. But the spring and summer passed without a reconciliation and people gave up expecting it. The Beelbys had always been a stubborn gang. Neither of the old men preserved any dignified reserve regarding their mutual wrongs. When they met, as they occasionally did, they glared at each other and passed on in silence. But each was forever waylaying neighbours and passers-by to tell his side of the story.

"I hear he's going about telling I kicked the dog in the abdomen," Little George would snort. "What's abdomen, mister?"

"Belly," said his victim bluntly.

"Look at that now. I knew he was lying. I never kicked no dog in the belly. Touched his ribs with the toe of my boot once, that's all . . . for good and sufficient cause. Says I lured his cat back. What do I want of his cat? Always bringing dead rats in and leaving them around. And determined to sleep on *my* abdomen at night. If he'd fed his cat right she wouldn't 'a' left him. But I ain't going to turn no broken-hearted, ill-used beast out of my door. I hear he's raving round about moons and contented cows. The only use that man has for moons is to predict the weather and as for contented cows or discontented cows, it's all one to him. But I'm glad he's happy. So am I. I can sing all I want to now without having someone sarcastically saying, 'A good voice for chawing turnips,' or 'Hark from the tombs a doleful sound,' or maddening things like that. I had to endure that for years. But did I make a fuss about it? Or about his yelping that old epic of his half the night . . . cackling and chortling and guffawing and gurgling and yapping and yarring till I felt as if I'd been run through a meat chopper? Did I mind his always conterdicting me? No, it kept life from being too tejus. Did I mind his being a fundamentalist? No, I respected his principles and I give up wearing these earrings because he didn't think they was Presbyterian ornaments. Did I mind his getting up at unearthly hours Sunday mornings to pray? Very devowt! I did not. Some people might 'a' said his method of praying was irreverent . . . talking to God same as he would to me or you. I didn't

mind the irreverence but what I didn't like was his habit of swinging right round in the middle of a prayer and giving the devil a licking. Still, did I make a fuss over it? No, I overlooked all them things and yet when I bring home a beautiful statooette like Aurorer there, Big George up and throws three different kinds. Well, I'd rather have Aurorer than him any day and you can tell him so. She's easier to look at for one thing and for another she don't sneak into the pantry unbeknownst to me and eat up my private snacks. I ain't said much about this affair . . . I've let Big George do the talking . . . but some day when I get time I'm going to talk an awful lot, mister."

"I'm told that poor ass of a Little George spends most of his spare time imagining he's strewing flowers on my grave," Big George told the minister. "And I hear he's been making fun of my prayers. Will you believe it, he had the impidence to tell me once that I had to make my prayers shorter 'cause they interferred with his morning nap? Did I shorten them? Not by a jugful. Spun 'em out twice as long. What I put up with from that man! His dog nigh about chewed up my Victory bond but did I complain? God knows I didn't. But when my cat had kittens on his shirt he tore up the turf. Talking of cats, I hear my cat has kittens again. You'd think Little George might 'a' sent me one. I hear there's three. And I haven't got a thing except a couple of ducks. They're company . . . but knowing you have to eat 'em up some day spoils things. Look a'here, minister. Why did Jacob let out a howl and weep when he kissed Rachel?"

The minister didn't know, or if he did he kept it to himself. Some Rose Riverites thought the minister was too fond of drawing the Georges out.

"Because he found out it wasn't what it was cracked up to be," chuckled Big George. He was happy all day because he had put one over on the minister.

But Big George was soon in no mood for joking about kisses ancient or modern. He nearly had an apoplectic fit when he heard that some of the summer boarders up the river had gone to Little George, under the impression that *he* was the poet, and asked him to recite his epic. The awful thing was that Little George did. Went through it from start to finish and never let on he wasn't the true author.

"From worshipping immidges to stealing poetry is only what you'd expect. You can see how that man's character's degen'rating."

"Mebbe the Widow Terlizzick'll reform him," chuckled his auditor.

"What's that?"

"Didn't you know Little George is going to see her Sunday nights? Folks think it will be a match."

Big George was literally struck dumb for a time, but after that he turned himself loose on the subject to the delighted Riverites and Covites.

“Wants to work another wife to death, I s’pose. I really thought Little George had more sense. But you can’t trust a man who’s been married once . . . though you’d think he’d be the very one to know better. And him the ugliest man on the north shore! Not that the fair Terlizick is any beauty with that big hairy mole on her chin and her sloppy ankles. I’d say she looked like a dog fight. And fat! It’s well he’s not buying her by the pound. She’s been married twice already. Some folks never seem to know when to stop. Her father got drunk once and walked up the church aisle in his nightshirt. Nice thing to have in the family. I’m sorry for Little George but it’s certainly coming to him. I hear he sits in church and looks at her like an intoxicated dog. Next thing he’ll be serenading her. Did I ever tell you Little George thinks he can sing? Once I says to him, ‘D’ye call that yowling music?’ But the Terlizicks never had any ear. Well, she’ll have her troubles. I could tell a few things if I wanted to.”

Big George took Little George’s matrimonial designs very much to heart. When he was observed standing on a rock waving his short arms wildly in the air, it was a safe bet that he was not, as heretofore, shouting his epic out to waves and stars, but abusing the Widow Terlizick. She was, he told the world, a hooded cobra, a big fat slob, a rapacious female animal and a tigress. He professed profound pity for Little George. The poor fellow little dreamed what he was in for. Taking two men’s leavings! But them widders did bamboozle people so. And the Terlizick had so much experience. Two husbands done in. A lady really orter be more economical with husbands.

All these compliments, being duly reported to Little George and Mrs. Terlizick, may or may not have pleased them. Little George kept his own counsel and brought up Mustard’s three kittens ostentatiously.

The white goddess of the morning still stood tiptoe on the clock shelf but the dust had gathered on her shapely legs. When Captain Leon started up another lottery at Chapel Point, Little George said it orter be stopped by law and Mosey Gautier had to run for his life when he tried to sell a ticket to him.

Spring and summer passed; autumn wore away. The Rose River folks banked their houses with seaweed and the summer boarders departed . . . all but the writing man, who always hung on to his shanty till the gulf froze over.

One evening Big George set out to walk around the shore to Lighthouse Point. It was a long walk and he had various rheumatic spots about his anatomy, but there would be some cronies at the lighthouse and Big George thought an evening of social intercourse would be better for his nerves than playing tit-tat-x, right hand against

left, at home. These short days and long, early-falling evenings were depressing, he admitted. And the Wilkins' shanty was draughty. The lighthouse keeper's wife might even give them a bite of lunch. Big George's cooking had not improved much. He had an uneasy suspicion that he was too old to learn. But he would not let his thoughts dwell on Little George's suet puddings and clam chowders and hot biscuits. That way madness lay.

There had been a skim of snow that morning, melting into dampness as the sun rose for an hour or two of watery brightness before shrouding himself in clouds. The brief day had grown cold and raw as it wore on, and now land and sea lay wrapped in a grey brooding stillness. Far away Big George heard a train whistle blow distinctly. The Old Lady of the Gulf moaned now and then. A storm was coming up but Big George was not afraid of storms. He would come home by the river road; the tide would be too high on his return to come by the Hole in the Wall.

As a matter of fact, when he reached the long red headland known as the Hole in the Wall, he blankly realized that the tide was already ahead of him. There was no getting around it. He could not climb its steep rugged sides, and to go back to where a road led down to the shore meant a lot of extra walking.

A daring inspiration came to Big George. Since he could not get around the Hole in the Wall, could he go through it? Nobody ever had gone through it. But there had to be a first time for anything. It was certainly bigger than last year. Nothing venture, nothing win.

The Hole in the Wall had begun with a tiny opening through the relatively thin side of the headland. Every year it grew a little larger as the yielding sandstone crumbled under wave and frost. It was a fair size now. Big George was small and thin. He reckoned if he could get his head through, the rest of him could follow.

He lay down and cautiously began squirming through. It was tighter than he had thought. The sides seemed suddenly very thick. All at once Big George decided that he was not cut out for a pioneer. He would go back to the road. He tried to. He could not move. Somehow his coat had got ruckled up around his shoulders and jammed him tight. Vainly he twisted and writhed and tugged. The big rock seemed to hold him as in a grip of iron. The more he struggled the tighter he seemed to get wedged in. Finally he lay still with a cold sweat of horror breaking out over him. His head was through the Hole in the Wall. His shoulders were tight in it. His legs . . . where were his legs? There was no sensation in them but they were probably hanging down the rock wall on the hinder side.

What a position to be in! On a lonely shore on a fast-darkening November night with a storm coming up! He would never live through it. He would die of heart failure

before morning, like old Captain Jobby, who tried to climb through a gate when he was drunk and stuck there.

Nobody could see him and it was no use to yell. Before him as behind him was nothing but a curving shadowy cove bounded by another headland. No house, no human being in sight. Nevertheless, Big George yelled with what little breath he had at command.

“Wouldn’t you just as soon sing as make that noise?” queried Little George, sticking his head around the huge boulder that screened him.

Big George stared at the familiar spidery nose and huge moustache. Of all the men in River and Cove to catch him in this predicament, that it should be Little George! What the devil was he doing squatted here a mile away from home on such a night?

“I wasn’t aiming to sing, not being afflicted as some folks are,” said Big George sarcastically. “I was just trying to fill my lungs with air.”

“Why don’t you come all the way through?” jeered Little George, coming around the boulder.

“Cause I can’t and you know it,” said Big George savagely. “Look here, George Beelby, you and I ain’t friends but I’m a human being, ain’t I?”

“There are times when I can see a distant resemblance to one in you,” acknowledged Little George, sitting calmly down on a jut of the boulder.

“Well then, in the name of humanity, help me out of this.”

“I dunno’s I can,” said Little George dubiously. “Seems to me the only way would be to yank you back by the legs and I can’t get around the Point to do that.”

“If you can get a good grip on my shoulder or on my coat, you can yank me out this way. It only wants a good pull. I can’t get my arms free to help myself.”

“And I dunno’s I will,” went on Little George, as if he had not been interrupted.

“You . . . dunno’s . . . you *will!* D’ye mean to say you’ll leave me here to die a night like this? Well, George Beelby . . .”

“No, I ain’t aiming to do that. It’ll be your own fault if you’re left here. You’ve got to show you’ve some sense if I’m going to pull you out. Will you come home and behave yourself if I do?”

“If you want me to come home you know all you’ve got to do,” snapped Big George. “Shoot out your Roarer.”

“Aurorer stays,” said Little George briefly.

“Then I stay too.” Big George imitated Little George’s brevity . . . partly because he had very little breath to use for talking at all. Little George took out his pipe and proceeded to light it.

"I'll give you a few minutes to reflect 'fore I go. I don't aim to stay long here in the damp. I dunno how a little wizened creature like you will stand it here all night. Anyhow, you'll have some feeling after this for the poor camel trying to get through the needle's eye."

"Call yourself a Christian!" sneered Big George.

"Don't be peevish now. This ain't a question of religion . . . this is a question of common sense," retorted Little George.

Big George made a terrific effort to free himself, but not even a tremor of the grim headland was produced thereby.

Little George jeered, "You'd orter see yourself with your red whiskers sticking out of that hole. And I s'pose the rest of you is sticking out on the other side. Beautiful rear view if anyone comes along. Not that anyone likely will this time of night. But if you're still alive in the morning I'm going to get the writing man to take a snap of your hind legs. Be sensible, Georgie. I've got pea soup for supper . . . hot pea soup."

"Take your pea soup to hell," said Big George.

Followed a lot of silence. Big George was thinking hard. He knew where his extremities were now, for the cold was nipping them like a weasel. The rock around him was hard as iron. It was beginning to rain and the wind was rising. Already the showers of spray were spuming up from the rocks when the waves struck them. By morning he would be dead or gibbering.

But it was bitter to knuckle under to Little George and that white-limbed hussy on the clock shelf. Big George tried to pluck a little honour from the jaws of defeat.

"If I do come back, will you promise not to marry that fat widow?"

"I ain't promising nothing . . . but I never had any intention of marrying any widow, fat or lean."

Big George could not repress a jeer.

"I s'pose that means she wouldn't have you."

"She didn't get the chance to have me or not have me. I ain't contracting any alliance with the house of Terlizick. Well, I'm for home and pea soup. Coming, Georgie?"

Big George emitted a sigh, partly of exhaustion, partly of surrender. Life was too complicated. He was beaten.

"Pull me out of this damn hole," he said sourly, "and I don't care how many naked women you have round."

"One's enough," said Little George.

He got a grip somehow of Big George's coat over his shoulders and tugged

manfully. Big George howled. He was sure his legs were being torn off at the hips. Then he found they were still attached to his body, standing on the rock beside Little George.

“Wring your whiskers out and hurry,” said Little George. “I’m afraid that pea soup’ll be scorched. It’s sitting on the back of the stove.”

This was comfort now . . . with the cold rain beating down outside and the gulf beginning to bellow. The stove was purring a lyric of beech and maple and Mustard was licking her beautiful family under it. The pea soup was sublime. After all, them earrings rather became Little George . . . balanced the moustache, so to speak.

And Aurorer . . . but what was the matter with Aurorer?

“What you been doing with that old heathen graven inmidge of yours?” demanded Big George, setting down half drunk his cup of militant tea with a thud.

“Give her a coat of bronze paint,” said Little George proudly. “Looks real tasty, don’t it? Knew you’d be sneaking home some of these long-come-shorts and thought I’d show you I could be considerate of your principles.”

“Then you can scrape it off again,” said Big George firmly. “Think I’m going to have an unclothed nigger sitting up there? If I’ve gotter be looking at a naked woman day in and day out, I want a white one for decency’s sake!”

[The end of *A House Divided Against Itself* by L. M. Montgomery]