

# THE SQUAREHEAD AND THE SQUARE

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*The following story, describing the lengths a dedicated formist will go to salvage an imperfect nine-square, was originally published in The Eastern Enigma of June 1904 and reprinted in Ernestiana, a privately printed booklet in 1924. The Germanic dialect of the original has been rendered in standard English.*

Corporal Long told me that when the Squarehead applied for enlistment at the Baltimore Recruiting Office he was so unsophisticated that they had to lash him to a bunk and blindfold him before they could get leather shoes on him. Major Kelly, "The Colonel" of Salmagundi days, was the recruiting officer that accepted the latest immigrant from Schleswig, and thereby wove for himself a crown of thorns.

The Squarehead and I were sitting in the window of a nipa bahay in Cota, and the long breakers of the China Sea pounded the sand almost at our feet.

"They call me the Squarehead when my name is Sauerzapf, and that is all right, but why should a man want to call a mountain one thing when it is another?" As he sought enlightenment in the bottom of his bamboo cup of Scotch-and-water the Squarehead's face was a physiognomical question-mark.

I gazed indolently across the light green waters and vouchsafed no reply.

"You remember when we relieved you at Sariaya? You ought to. You and Major Kelly stayed there a week after the rest of the outfit left. Well, as we were coming to town on the Candelaria pike, we saw the little monkeys swing across the road in the trees. The boss monkey was as big as a man, and had whiskers as gray as my grandfather's. As he jumped he dropped a coconut that knocked off my hat. I made up my mind to catch him.

"Monkeys have streets and avenues of their own in the treetops, and I decided that I had seen a monkey boulevard. So next morning I went out after the guard was mounted, with a bamboo joint that would just hold two quarts of wine.

"I sat and waited, and there came three little monkeys, with Uncle Paul the grand marshal of the parade. They scattered when they saw me, and scattered more when I put the bamboo up to my mouth, and took a good drink. Then I set down the flowing bowl and started back for Sariaya.

"I didn't much expect that the trick would work, that old grandpa would get spifflicacious. But in three hours I went back and the booze was gone, and so were the little monkeys. So I put off catching him. On the way back to Sariaya, I met Fraulein Betelnut in the woods, and I held out my hands, and made her kiss me to get by.

"Fraulein Betelnut was old Betelnut's daughter, and she was a peach. Her eyes, ach, mein Gott! And shoulders like the bowl of a meerschaum. All that day I walked like I was drunk, and that night I went to see her. I was all excited. I could not wait. I slipped up to the house until I struck the lattice fence around it, and I felt along the fence until I found a hole, where the dogs and the

swine go through. There in the moonlight, half behind a banana tree, she stood. My heart beat like a headache. She stretched out her arms and beckoned. I could see her sweet smile and her white teeth. Then I crawled through.”

The Squarehead paused and extended a shaky, scarred hand for the bottle. He drank deeply.

“And her arms that beckoned were around my neck, and my hand was between the teeth that was white, where it had the opportunity that a dill pickle has between the tushes of a lady type-writer.

“Things had been occurring that day. The big monkey had got drunk as soon as I left, and about that time Major Kelly and a detachment came along. They lashed up old Silenus with picket ropes and carried him in to Sariaya, as far as old Betelnut’s shack, where the Major had the farrier make an iron collar, and they chained the monkey to a banana tree in old Betelnut’s back yard.

“Now when the googoes catch a monkey they torment him in a way that gives the shivers to the Cruelty Society. When old Betelnut and young Betelnut got through playing with that monkey, he wasn’t a monkey any more—he was a devil. And a devil is no fit pet to chain in the back yard.

“The surgeon sewed me together, and I waited for my revenge on Major Kelly.

“Pretty soon he went off on a scout with one hundred men and me. And we hiked and hiked, and we climbed a big hill, seven miles from that pit of the devil, Sampaloc. And there about three thousand natives surrounded us.

“After we had been besieged for two days, the Major sent for me. When I reported, he said ‘Stand to attention, damn you’ and I stood. And he said, ‘We are surrounded by googoes, and we are in for it. I want you to go tonight to Major Stone at Lucban, and bring reinforcements. If the googoes get you, they will push little sticks into your hide, and light them, and bury you in the ground, with some nice cold ground for chewing gum. So if you ever expect once more to stick your snout into a schooner of beer on the Bowery, you better watch out. And,’ he said grimly, ‘when Major Stone asks where we are, you say, ‘On Omoshante Hill—there is the paper with the name on it. You mind that. On Omoshante Hill. You tell Major Stone Omoshante. If you forget that, don’t go no farther than the googoo camp, for what the googoes will do to you will be sauerkraut and limburger cheese to what I will do. Auf wiedersehen.’

“So I went to Lucban that night. I took a googoo with me, that I met in the woods, with a bolo which he could not use as well as I could punch with my bare hands. And that googoo told me that name of that mountain was not Omoshante, but Dingin. I wondered why Major Kelly told me to say Omoshante, and I said to myself, ‘I will not say Omoshante.’

“And when Major Stone asked me where Major Kelly was, I did not say it. I said Dingin. And he telegraphed to Washington that Major Kelly was besieged at Dingin, and sent out Companies G and L, and they licked the googoes.

“When we got back to Tayabas Major Kelly sent for me to report. He was all shaken up. ‘Goddamit!’ he said, ‘why didn’t you tell them Omoshante?’ And I said, ‘Major, I forgot.’ And he said, ‘Goddamit! You won’t forget again! To the mill with you, and bread and water.’ I was released to-day at guard mount. But why did he want to call the mountain what it wasn’t?”

I sat up in my chair and regarded the Squarehead with a feeling of awed appreciation. But, poor fool, he never could know and never could understand his revenge.

I lay back with a sigh, and, slipping my fingers into my watch pocket, pulled out a frayed scrap of paper, on which The Colonel had jotted down, for my benefit, his great nine-square ruin:

M O N A C H I S M  
 O O S H A N T E  
 N O I S A N C E S  
 A S S E R T E R S  
 C H A R B O N N E  
 H A N T O I S I N  
 I N C E N S I N G  
 S T E R N I N A E  
 M E S S E N G E R

Then I called to the muchacho to bring another bottle of Dewar's.

### Another Word A Day

For eleven years Anu Garg has offered by email *A Word a Day*, each one accompanied by a definition, etymology, sample usage and commentary (<http://wordsmith.org>). The best of these were featured in his 2002 book *A Word a Day* reviewed in the Feb 2003 *Word Ways*; he has now published a second collection in *Another Word a Day* (John Wiley & Sons, 2005; ISBN 0-471-71845-9), again for the bargain price of \$14.95 in paperback.

The second volume is arranged like the first one; he presents words in related groups of five apiece. A sampling:

Words borrowed from Arabic: alembic, nadir, jihad, houri, talisman  
 Words about words: hapax legomenon, metaphor, metaplasma, vulgata, hyperbole  
 Words describing opponents: facinorous, ventripotent, dasypygal, saponaceous, yegg  
 Kangaroo words: indolent, rascalion, amicable, frangible, scion  
 Metallic metaphors: goldbrick, silver bullet, brassy, leaden, tin ear

Anu Garg is contained in *Gargantuan*, an apt description of his entire endeavor, as well as his readership (more than half a million). A fascinating book!