

Great News from the Mainland, Ernest Hemingway

"Great News from the Mainland" is another completed short story set in Cuba.

Great News from the Mainland

FOR THREE DAYS IT BLEW OUT OF THE south bending the fronds of the royal palms until they were parted in a line forward and away from the grey trunks that bent with the heavy wind. As the wind increased the dark green stems of the fronds blew wildly as the wind killed them. The branches of the mango trees shook and snapped in the wind and its heat burned the mango flowers until they were brown and dusty and their stems dried. The grass dried and there was no more moisture in the soil and it was dust in the wind.

The wind blew day and night for five days and when it stopped half the palm fronds hung dead against the trunks, the green mangos lay on the ground and on the trees and the blossoms were dead and the stems dry. The mango crop was gone along with all the other things that went that year.

The call he had put in on the telephone came through from the mainland and the man said, "Yes, Dr. Simpson," and then heard the cracker voice say, "Mr. Wheeler? Well sir that boy of yours certainly surprised us all today. He really did. We were giving him the usual sodium pentothal before the shock treatment and I've always noticed that boy has an unusual resistance to sodium pentothal. Never took drugs did he?"

"Not as far as I know."

"No? Well naturally one never knows. But he certainly put on a performance today. Threw five of us around just as though we were children. Five grown men I tell you. Had to postpone the treatment. Of course he has a morbid fear of electric shock that's completely unjustified and that's why I use the sodium pentothal but there was no question of administering it today.

Now I regard it as an excellent sign. He hasn't revolted against anything Mr. Wheeler. This is the most favorable sign I've seen. That boy's really making progress Mr. Wheeler. I was proud of him. Why I said to him, 'Stephen I didn't know you had it in you.'

You can be proud and satisfied at the way he's getting along. He wrote me one of the most interesting and significant letters right after the incident. I'm sending it over to you. You didn't get the other letters? That's right. That's right there was a little delay in getting them off.

My secretary has been literally swamped, you know how it is Mr. Wheeler and I'm a busy man. Well he used the vilest language of course when he was resisting the treatment but he apologized to me in the most gentlemanly way. You should see that boy now Mr. Wheeler. He's taking care of his appearance now. He's just the typical fashion plate of a young college gentleman."

"What about the treatment?"

"Oh he'll get the treatment. I'll just have to double up on the quantity of the sodium pentothal first. His resistance to that is simply amazing. You understand these are extra treatments that he requested himself of course. There might be something masochistic in that. He even suggested that himself in his letter. But I don't think so. I think that boy's

beginning to get a grasp of reality. I'm sending you the letter. You can be very encouraged about that boy Mr. Wheeler."

"How's the weather over there?"

"What's that? Oh the weather. Well it's just a bit off from what I'd describe as typical for this time of year. No it's not entirely typical. There has been some unreasonable weather to be frank. You call up anytime Mr. Wheeler.

I wouldn't be upset or worried about the progress that boy's making for a moment. I'll send you his letter. You could almost describe it as a brilliant letter. Yes Mr. Wheeler. No Mr. Wheeler I'd say everything's going finely Mr. Wheeler. There's nothing to worry about. You'd like to talk to him? I'll see that your call goes through at the hospital. Tomorrow is better perhaps. He's naturally a little exhausted after the treatment.

Tomorrow would be better. You say he didn't have the treatment? That's quite correct Mr. Wheeler. I had no idea that boy was capable of anything like that strength. That's correct. The treatment is for tomorrow. I'll just increase the sodium pentothal. These additional treatments he requested himself, remember. Give him a call day after tomorrow. That's a free day for him and he will have had a rest. That's right Mr. Wheeler that's right. You have no cause for anxiety. I would say his progress could not be more satisfactory. Today's Tuesday. You call him on Thursday. Any time Thursday."

The wind was back in the south on Thursday. There was not much it could do now to trees except blow the dead brown palm branches and bum the few mango blossoms whose stems had not died. But it yellowed the leaves of the alamo trees and blew dust and stripped leaves over the swimming pool. It blew dust through the screens into the house and sifted it into the books and over the pictures. The milk cows lay with their rumps against the wind and the cuds they chewed were gritty.

The winds always come in Lent, Mr. Wheeler remembered. That was the local name for them. All bad winds had local names and bad writers always became literary about them. He had resisted this as he had resisted writing that the palm branches blew forward making a line against the trunk as the hair of young women parts and blows forward when they stand with their backs to a storm.

He had resisted writing of the scent of the mango blooms when they had walked together on the night before the wind started and the noise of the bees in them outside his window. There were no bees now and he refused to use the foreign word for this wind. There had been too much bad literature made about the foreign names for winds and he knew too many of those names. Mr. Wheeler was writing in longhand because he did not wish to uncover the typewriter in the Lenten wind.

The houseboy who had been a contemporary and a friend of his son when they were both growing up came in and said, "The call to Stevie is ready."

"Hi Papa," Stephen said in a hoarse voice. "I'm fine Papa really fine. This is the time. I've really got this thing beat now. You have no idea. I've really got a grasp of reality now. Dr. Simpson? Oh he's fine. I really have confidence in him. He's a good man Papa. I really have faith in him. He's more down to earth than the majority of those people.

He's giving me a few extra treatments. How's everybody? Good. How's the weather. Good that's fine. No difficulty about treatments. No. Not at all. Everything's fine really. Glad everything's so good with you. This time I've really got the answer. Well we mustn't waste money on the telephone. Give my love to everyone. Good-bye Papa. See you soon."

"Stevie sent you his best," I said to the houseboy.

He smiled happily, remembering the old days.

"That's nice of him. How is he?"

"Fine," I said. "He says everything is fine."

The End