A Note from the Library -

From Some Notes and Reflections
Upon a Letter From Benjamin Franklin to
Noble Wimberly Jones, October 7, 1772
by Malcolm Bell, III, Ashantilly Press,
Darien, Georgia, 1966.

“. . . I send also a few seeds of the
Chinese Tallow Tree, which will I believe
grow and thrive with you. ‘Tis a most
useful Plant.” B. Franklin, London,
Oct. 7, 1772 to Dr. N.W. Jones, Savan-
nah, Georgia.

The usefulness that Mr. Franklin
anticipated was that “the white wax
which encloses the seed of the plant
would be gleaned and moulded into
candles by enterprising Georgians.”
Both Benjamin Franklin and a Mr.
John Ellis were fellows of the Royal
Society of London. They were avid
enthusiasts of importing plants from
Asia, studying methods for preserving
their viability over long voyages, and
dispatching them to America. Another
exotic gardener in Georgia received
tallow seeds from Mr. Ellis. He later
reported that

“The Ou Cow or Tallow-tree will cer-
tainly succeed well here; it has stood
the winter in the open gardens, and the plants
that were out all the winter have thiven,
and now look better than those that were
housed.”

According to the author, an Ameri-
can botanical reference from 1803 (Andre
Michaux, Flora Boreali Americana...II,
p. 213) stated that the tallow tree was
spreading “spontaneously” into the
coastal forests. Descendant trees of
the original seeds were reported grow-
ing at Wormsloe State Historic Site in
Savannah, Georgia (formerly Wormsloe
Plantation) at the time Some Notes and
Reflections was published in 1966. In
his writing, Mr. Bell waxes poetic about
the Chinese tallow:

“Attaining a height of fifty to sixty
feet, the tallow trees bend to the wind with
a stiff grace like that of Chinese maidens,
and the small leaves quiver and dance
with the slightest motion of the air. The
tree is perhaps most noted for its brilli-
ant, almost garish fall colors, and its
otherwise forgotten fruits can often be
found decorating coastal houses. . . . The
candles envisioned in London illuminated
no Georgia houses. Only the burning
colors of the tallow trees, offending
the gloom of the swamps, testify to the
common hopes of Ellis and Franklin.”

Karen Brown
University of Florida
Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants

Notes From The
Disturbed Edge

Chapter 3

Last night he’d dreamed that he was falling, tumbling
headlong through layer after layer of clawing vegetation,
crashing downward but never hitting bottom, grasping
at crumbling branches and cracking leaves as he hurtled
down and down,... memories of the invasive exotic
vegetation he’d laid waste to, never ending, haunting
his sleep.

Every morning he drove out of town, down a two lane
road lined like some obscene botanical Champs d’Elysees
of Australian pine, crossed ditches with banks infested
with Brazilian pepper, past cypress heads draped thick
with Old World climbing fern from floor to canopy,
through neighborhoods landscaped with carrotwood
trees and Bischofia, past abandoned ag lands that hadecome earleaf acacia and melaleuca tree farms. They
loomed over and around him like silent specters, waved
in the breeze like rank upon rank of the unstoppable
barbarian hordes. Everywhere he looked they flaunted
their superiority and dared him to take a swing.

He’d spend all day in the heat or the cold, the dust or
the damp, or some other intriguing combination of the
elements, and then climb back into his truck and make
the drive home. What he saw along the way had hit him
hard tonight. It was like he had enhanced perception,
true-view, a special filter in his brain that distinguished
good from evil, in a color-coded spectrum. Natives
glimmered across the rainbow’s spectrum, but the aliens
stood flat black, moving like a storm cloud, consuming

the horizon. Was he insane? He’d never be able to overtake
this monster. How could he ever think he was going to
even make a dent, let alone instigate some drastic reversal?
He was outnumbered, outgunned, powerless, useless.
Who’d have thought a simple rural road could stir such
passion? But it did. He could barely breathe.

Amidst the depths of his despair he heard her voice
crackle across the radio. “Hey- I got done down there –
I’m headin’ home. You?”

He swallowed hard “Yeah, I’m headin’- somewhere...”
Uh-oh. She recognized that tone. “You OK?”
“I don’t know...” he slowly answered “...Am I insane?”
“Hell yeah!” she shot back.

“No. I’m serious. How am I ever gonna do this, you
know, really accomplish anything?”

There was a long silence. He felt embarrassed, whining
over the radio. He never should have said anything.
Should have just not answered her, just quietly quit and
gone to look for a job where he could measure success
in dollars and cents. But then her voice came across the
radio again.

“I’ll help you ...” He smiled as she continued speaking.
“See you tomorrow? Same bat channel?”

“Yeah” he answered through a spreading grin, shaking
his head, “see you tomorrow”.

He ran a finger along the corner of his eye, adjusted
his sunglasses and hat, and grinned at his reflection in
the rearview. Disgusting. He stared out the window at the
silent alien onlookers, took a deep breath, and raised a
finger to salute them: “Manana, we dance”. As for tonight,
he decided, he would dream about fishing.

An excerpt from “The Adventures of Hack Garlon and
his buxom sidekick Squirt.”

J.A.