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# Best Stories

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THE TRANSFERRED GHOST  
THE PASSING OF DIAMOND DICK  
THE INVADER  
GOOD-BYE SWEETHEART

EVERY STORY COMPLETE

# BEST STORIES

VOL. II

No. 7

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# CLOUDS IN A BLACK SKY

By ORVILLE T. BARNETT

Salesmanship with imagination can find more than  
one way to a man's purchasing department

**O**F course if he landed that six hundred thousand dollar order from Sheffield Steel Stamping, his troubles would be over. Mr. Peters would certainly lose that scowl, a scowl that made Johnny's insides hunt for a place to hide. And the commission, in addition to what the extra money would do for their over-extended budget, would put an end to Evelyn's innuendos which were fast becoming as bad as Mr. Peter's scowls.

Taking care not to wrinkle the sharp crease in his tan gabardine trousers, Johnny crossed his long legs and leaned against the breakfast table in order to peruse his newspaper in greater comfort.

Nothing he read made sense because his mind was completely occupied with the problem created by his inability to even see A. G. Hardey, Sheffield's purchasing agent. Giving up, he folded the paper and set it down beside his coffee cup.

He scratched his wiry black hair absent-mindedly until his mind relayed the message that Evelyn was going somewhere. Curlers in her hair, she must be. Monday, her day at the neighborhood Laundryette where she did their washing by putting a quarter in the slot, she couldn't be. As he finished his coffee, he decided to use finesse as he cross-examined her.

Starting with an indirect approach he said, "Today's wash day; isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Have much to do?"

"Quite a bit."

"What time is reserved for you?"

"Two o'clock."

"Are they still as busy as ever?"

"Yes, they are. Mr. Collins told me they have a tremendous waiting list. They're going to expand as soon as they can get some more machines."

"That's nice. How long do you think it will take you to finish our laundry today?"

"I don't know. I'm not going to do it."

"No?"

"No."

The indirect approach curled up its toes and died. He was right back where he started. Indirect approach? N.G. Direct approach? Maybe.

"What are you going to do today, sweetheart?"

"I'm going into town."

"With me?"

"With you."

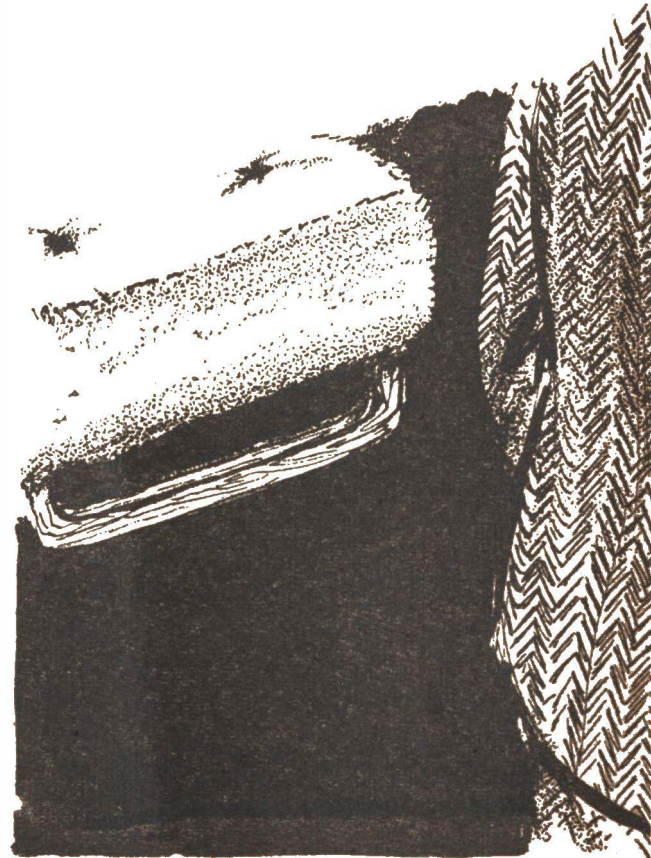
"Then what?"

"I'm calling on Mr. Samuel Peters right after lunch, about two o'clock. You told me he was always in a good mood then."

Johnny was shocked. He was unseeing as he looked at Evelyn. He no longer saw the curlers in her brown hair, he overlooked the lightning flashes in her green eyes, he had no eyes for her tightly compressed lips and he saw not the explosive action implied in her stance, legs apart and hands too firmly placed on very attractive hips.

"Mr. P-p-peters!" Johnny exploded like a delayed action bomb. "Mr. P-p-peters!"

"You heard me, Johnny. I'm going to see Mr. Peters at two o'clock when he's in his best mood after . . ."



*When she looked up he asked,  
"Do you know who took these  
pictures?"*



"No!" Johnny thundered. "You can't do this to me!" he insisted, rattling the dishes as he slammed the folded newspaper against the table-top for emphasis.

"But, Johnny, I have to ask him about your commissions."

"About my commissions?" Johnny echoed, weakly.

"Of course, darling. It's so simple I'm surprised you didn't think of it yourself. He promised you a salary and commission. You get your salary all right but Mr. Peters hasn't kept his promise, he hasn't paid you any commissions."

"But commissions are only paid when they are earned," Johnny explained patiently. "You see a commission is a bonus for extra good sales. You sell so much and meet your quota. Then you sell some more to get a bonus or commission. Business has been poor. That's why I haven't received any commission."

"Darling, you're just trying to confuse me. I know we need more money which Mr. Peters will give us as soon as I explain how hard it is to keep within my budget. Don't worry, Johnny, I'll fix everything up."

"O-o-oh," Johnny groaned as he visualized just how she would fix everything.

"What's wrong, darling? Are you sick?"

"Desperately."

"Poor Johnny. What can I do for you?"

"The laundry."

"The laundry?"

"Yes, the laundry. You do the laundry and keep away from Mr. Peters. I'll take care of discussing a raise with the boss while you take care of the house."

"You will?"

"Certainly."

"All right, Johnny, that's all I really wanted in the first place. You go see Mr. Peters about a raise today and I'll do the laundry. But if he says, 'No,' I'll have to go down to see him myself."

Johnny would have made a snail look like a greyhound as he drove into town. On the way he made a couple of leisurely calls, waiting with a newly discovered patience for the busy men he wanted to establish as customers. In the comfortable reception rooms he carefully refrained from thinking of Mr. Peters and the coming interview.

He knew he didn't deserve a raise. Somehow or other he hadn't gotten started, hadn't become oriented since his return to civilian affairs. But above all, he didn't want Evelyn to talk to his boss, either. Everything was crystal clear. Two choices lay before him: one bad, the other terrible.

After an unhurried lunch, Johnny arrived at his desk at a quarter to two. There he waited for Mr. Peters' return. And, just before two, he found himself hypnotized by the sight of the sales manager

entering his private office.

The time to see him was now. It was a matter of long historical record, without a single exception, that the tall, spare sales manager found relief from his ulcers between two and three in the afternoon. At all other times he was a snapping, snarling fox who growled at the best of news. In fact he was known throughout the stamping press industry as "the fox" not only because of his business acumen but also because his thin, pointed face made him look like Reynard.

With an altogether understandable reluctance to face the music Johnny arrived at the perfectly defensible position that his sales record wouldn't bolster a request for a raise even during the magic hour when Mr. Peters was almost human. Instead of attempting a useless discussion of the question, Johnny headed for the Engineers' Club. There, although he might possibly find a prospect for Perfection Positive Action Presses, he was sure of finding a very dry Martini, masterfully blended, with an onion of rare and delightful flavor at the bottom of the clear liquid.

On his way to the club, Johnny wondered why the laws of heredity had passed him by. Nothing would have suited him more than being a chip off the old block. For his father, Jonathan Powers, Sr., was known far and wide as the best machinery salesman in

the whole country. His deals, many of them running into astronomical figures even during the depression of the thirties, were described again and again by salesmen with all the awe and respect due a master of the art of trading. His father's deeds were rapidly approaching legendary proportions.

Most men in Johnny's spot would have run to their fathers at the earliest possible moment in order to obtain some free consultation from a recognized practitioner of sales engineering. But what most men would do and what Johnny would do were entirely different matters. For Johnny's relationship with his father was, to indulge in understatement, peculiar. Never had he been able to advance his own ideas against the flood tide of his father's strong personality.

The first Martini was up to specifications. Also the second. Nor was the third any less pleasing. In fact they were all excellent. Ere long Johnny flexed his muscles, gave his chest a few reassuring thumps and felt prepared to do combat with a lion in the barehanded gladiatorial style. He could even, and this was a high water mark of self assurance, go home and face Evelyn.

As soon as he got behind the wheel of his car, he noticed a fly in the otherwise smooth ointment. He was more than a little disturb-

ed at the way the road was oscillating back and forth in front of the car even before he started the motor. Something terrible was happening. An earthquake maybe.

But there, coming toward the car with a slight limp and faultlessly dressed as usual, was big Hank Thompson who lived next door to Johnny. Hank didn't seem to be upset about the strange behavior of the road.

"Could I bum a ride, old man?" asked Hank after he had limped up to the car.

"Sure thing. In fact you can drive."

By this time Hank was able to smell the Martinis and to welcome the opportunity of driving. As soon as they started, Hank said, "I see you've had a few."

"Yesh," admitted Johnny who suddenly noticed that his tongue was swollen horribly. "Yesh, I have."

"Entertaining a customer, old man?"

"Yesh." And then substituting a wish for a fact, he added, "A. G. Hardey of Sheffield Shteel Shtamping."

"He's a tough cookie; isn't he?"

"He's a . . ."

"Don't tell me, old man, I know all about him. But he's purring like a kitten now. There's one purchasing agent little old Hank doesn't have to worry about any more."

"No?" Johnny was stone cold sober in the car.

"No sirree. J. J. Revere, Sheffield's president, is a fraternity brother of mine. Met him one day at an alumni luncheon and he introduced me to Hardey at the plant after lunch. Gave me a great send-off to Hardey. What a break!"

"Could you . . . ?" Johnny began and stopped. "No, I don't suppose you could."

"Could what, old man?"

"Introduce me to Revere."

"Of course, I could. Matter of fact I have a date with J. J. on Friday. You plan on coming along."

Tuesday dawned bright with warm sunshine. Johnny's backbone was as straight as a ramrod, stiffened by a strange treatment. This sudden and unusual rigidity of his spinal column didn't come from anything that Evelyn had said because he hadn't asked for a raise or because he had come home smelling like a Martini factory. For Johnny couldn't remember anything that Evelyn had said, not a single word. She had looked at him with hardened green eyes. And Johnny had squirmed and wriggled and dodged because there was something about her look that was unpleasant. He would much rather talk to Mr. Peters than indulge in any more of Evelyn's looks.

He headed straight for the execution chamber, knocked on the door in a business-like manner



and, after the sales manager growled an invitation to come in, walked steadily right up to the fox's desk. Now all that Johnny had to do was request a raise in pay, anything at all, perhaps only a token increase, you see, Mr. Peters the wife . . .

"Well, Powers," barked Mr. Peters while Johnny was dismayed to see that his boss' face was a choleric purple instead of its customary hypertension red, "what do you want?"

"Er, er, Mr. Peters, I . . . uh . . . that is . . . I . . ."

"Stop!" commanded Mr. Peters as he raised one hand like a traffic cop and supported his obviously throbbing head with the other. "Johnny Powers, you are a dope. You are, I might add charitably, an unmitigated . . ."

"But, Mr. Peters . . ."

"Don't interrupt me!" bellowed the irritated sales manager. "I've been meaning to have a talk with you and this is as good a time as any. Your sales record, like your personality, is barren. Unless there is a marked improvement soon, I will delight in the outstanding pleasure of my heretofore dull and uneventful life by firing you with a few choice words that I promise you will long be graven on your granite brain. Now what were you going to say?"

Johnny didn't think that the interview ought to be concluded by his asking for a raise. The

time appeared to be inopportune. Something pleasant was required. He would try to lift Mr. Peters out of his gloom, to let in a little shaft of sunshine.

"I thought that you would like to know that I am about to sell a little over six hundred thousand dollars worth of presses to Sheffield Steel Stamping."

"Fine. Very good," said Mr. Peters calmly before his mind was able to digest Johnny's startling announcement. His face faded from purple to red to white, a pale, chalky white, as he experienced the full impact of Johnny's report. "Great, my boy! Really wonderful!" Mr. Peters stood up, walked around his desk and draped a comradely arm over Johnny's quaking shoulders. "You know, Johnny, I've always had a hunch that you would be one of our best men. I can see you now, striding in your father's footsteps, hanging up record after record, becoming the hero of a thousand legends of selling. When you get that order, I'm going to call a special sales meeting where you can explain your technique to the other men."

"I'll be glad to," replied Johnny as he caught his boss' enthusiasm. "I'll have that order on your desk in a week or ten days at the most." Johnny heard the fateful words, recognized his own voice as having said them and prayed for deliverance from that horrible nightmare before it was too late.

"Good, Johnny. We'll have a little chat when you bring in that order, my boy."

Ingenuity had always been Johnny's forte. Therefore it was only natural for him to telephone Evelyn, to explain to her that he was unexpectedly called out of town and, in the confusion of packing, to drive all thoughts of his interview with Mr. Peters out of her head. His fantastic story succeeded beyond his fondest expectations. Thus did Johnny take up temporary residence at the Engineers' Club while he awaited the coming luncheon with J. J. Revere, an auspicious introduction to Mr. Hardey by the chief executive of Sheffield and, in due course, the juicy order he needed. At times life could be remarkably simple.

Wednesday passed without any break in Johnny's uneventful routine. By Thursday afternoon he was tempted to call Hank just to make sure that everything was all set. But after a short period of indecision, Johnny decided that calling Hank before the following morning was pointless.

Neither the driving rain nor the raw coldness of that early Friday morning could chill the cheering warmth Johnny experienced as he drove to the office. This was the day! He could hardly wait to get his hands on the telephone, to hear Hank's welcome voice and to devote a whole morning to joyous anticipation of

the beautiful life that lay ahead of him.

As soon as he got past Hank's secretary, he said, "Hank?"

"Right. That you Johnny?"

"Sure is. We have a luncheon date, you know."

"Why, no, we haven't. We did have. But I called it off only a few minutes ago. Something else came up that I have to take care of and, since Evelyn came over to the house last night and told us that you were out of town for an indefinite stay, I was sure you couldn't go either. When you learned that you would get back in time, you should have left a message with my secretary."

"Glug," gurgled Johnny.

"What was that?"

Johnny reached out toward a life preserver he hoped was bobbing in his sea of despair. "Maybe we can make another date with J. J. some time next week, Hank?"

"I'm afraid not, old man. J. J. told me he's leaving on a South American trip on Sunday and won't be back for six months."

"Fine," said Johnny weakly, "wonderful."

"So long, old man. Be seeing you."

Johnny rested his head in his hands and didn't even try to think. He sat at his desk for a long time. Eventually his subconscious mind nudged his conscious mind and suggested that Johnny bestir himself, that he

make a straightforward approach, that he go over to see Mr. Hardey all by himself. So he did.

The Sheffield Steel Stamping reception room was a two-story imposing structure with a glass brick front wall, with cream-colored stippled plaster side walls well covered with dramatic pictures of the company's products and with an extremely modernistic decor showing what nice buildings Uncle Sam bought during the war. There Johnny read a magazine while he waited.

When he tired of reading, Johnny looked about the room. Those pictures were really nice. He knew a little about composition and had to admit that whoever took those pictures was good. Some nice action shots, too. If he could find out who made the pictures, he might be able to get the photographer to address the Suburban Camera Club at one of the monthly meetings. Johnny, as program chairman, was always on the lookout for speakers.

"Mr. Powers?" the red-headed receptionist breathed in his direction.

"Yes," responded a suddenly alert Johnny.

"Mr. Hardey is still busy."

"Thank you," Johnny replied while his balloon of hope slowly sank back to earth.

Johnny stood up both to stretch his long legs and to take a closer look at the pictures. Good. Very, very good. Texture was perfect.

Tonal range took advantage of everything in the paper itself. There was photography at its best. Beautiful clouds, white against a grey sky where a yellow filter had been used and pure white contrasted against a velvety black sky when a red filter had been employed. Great photography. Johnny was anxious to learn who took the pictures as he simply had to get that bird out to a meeting of the club.

He walked over to the receptionist's desk, standing there in a cloud of exotic perfume, while she finished erasing a spot on a letter she was typing. When she looked up, he asked, "Do you know who took these pictures?"

"No. I'm afraid I don't."

Just before noon carrot-top informed him that Mr. Hardey was terribly sorry but he couldn't possibly see Mr. Powers that day. A very discouraged Johnny took one more look at the splendid pictures before he left. He sensed someone else alongside him doing the same thing.

"Beautiful things; aren't they?" said the impeccably dressed stranger who smelled faintly of pine cologne.

"Indeed they are!" exclaimed Johnny.

"I've often told Mr. Hardey he was wasting his talents as a purchasing agent."

"Mr. Hardey took these!"

"Yes, that's right."

"Well I'll be," said Johnny as

he staggered out the office door.

During lunch Johnny would have devoted all of his thoughts to Mr. Hardey's pictures except for the presence of Mr. Hardey, in person, at a table across the room. With the purchasing agent was Prescott Unger, Johnny's chief competitor for the stamping press business. Johnny's indigestion and his decision to consult with his father were both directly attributable to Prescott Unger's all too apparent success.

The brunette with the thick rimmed tortoise shell glasses who operated the switchboard told him to go right in. Even before he saw his father's bushy white hair, black eyebrows and out-thrust chin, he could see his long cigarette holder jutting up at its customary jaunty angle. His father sported a scarlet tie with his conservative, although richly tailored, double-breasted blue serge suit.

"Hi, dad."

"Hello, son. I'm certainly glad you dropped in."

"Thanks, dad. I want to talk to you for a few minutes if I can."

"Of course. Of course you can. But first let me tell you how proud I am of you. You're a born salesman, just like your old man. You see, I ran into Sam Peters yesterday and he told me how nicely you are doing. Asked me to tell him truthfully how much help I was giving you with that Sheffield order."

Johnny tried to talk. "But . . ."

"Don't worry, Johnny, I set him straight. I told him that I have never offered you any selling advice. I explained to him that we Powerses prided ourselves on standing alone. That we were individualists each of whom took a particular pride in accomplishing the impossible single-handedly. Why Sam should have known that salesmanship is spelled p-o-w-e-r-s; eh; son?"

Johnny, carried away by his father's vigorous talk, said, "Capital 'P', dad."

"Right you are, son. Now you'll have to excuse me because I have an important call to make in about fifteen minutes and I have to get my papers together. Glad you dropped in. Enjoyed your visit. Your conversation is very stimulating, son. Very. Remember, you'll have to bring Evelyn out for a week-end real soon."

"Yes, sir." Johnny had learned enough about selling to know when he was dismissed.

Johnny was strangely calm as he reviewed his position. He wasn't beaten, not by any stretch of the imagination. But he was bewildered. For the situation, which any right-minded person would have considered well nigh hopeless, was clearing. He was aware of a clarity of mind and purpose that had been missing since the day he folded his uniform in mothballs and put it away in the trunk in the attic. He was faced

with a problem that demanded his undivided attention. Right at hand was a challenge to his ability to get along as a civilian. There was no easy way out.

With his new found confidence Johnny went to the bank, where he withdrew his savings. Next he spent most of the afternoon and more than half of his cash at the Central Photo Mart. The remainder of his money and the afternoon were used up at Riley's Lumber Yard. After some argument he had been promised immediate delivery of the material he purchased. On the way home he visited the Engineers' Club, retrieved his clothes and continued on his way without even thinking of Llewellyn, the bartender, or his flavorsome Martinis. There was work to be done.

Once home, he outlined his plans to Evelyn. She shared his enthusiasm and his confidence. And he went right to the basement where he had to clean out some old bins before he could find the space in which to build his own darkroom. If his gamble succeeded, both his business and his hobby would prosper.

Close to three Saturday morning, an exhausted Johnny tumbled into bed. As he floated away into a deep sleep, he wrung his calloused and blistered hands together in a gesture of self congratulation. A light-tight darkroom, fully equipped, stood ready for the next scene.

Saturday and Sunday, he spent in the field where he exposed film after film, saying a prayer with each shot after singing a hymn of thanks because he was not handicapped with a bald-headed sky. Majestic white clouds rode the azure heavens while a golden sun spot-lighted his every composition. The whole world was showing a sympathetic co-operation that Johnny would never forget no matter what the eventual success of his undertaking.

Sunday night was spent in the darkroom which proved to be eminently satisfactory in every respect. Johnny considered the correctness of his plans as a good omen for things to come. After hours of work, he examined three salon prints through reddened, half-shut eyes and conceded that he had outdone himself. A few hours of sleep would make a new man of him. Then the acid test would come.

He was extremely anxious to get to the office. He couldn't eat breakfast at home. But it was too early to call Mr. Hardey when he arrived downtown. So, to consume some time he ate a tasteless breakfast in the cafeteria in the building. Because of his knotted stomach muscles, the food rested inside him like a heavy, indigestible lump.

Back upstairs, he was pleased to see that Mr. Peters was in his office thereby pushing the danger of an unpleasant interview with

the sales manager into the background. Johnny read some mail, read it again, read it a third time and finally gave up. The words didn't make sense. He was too nervous.

Nine-fifteen. He couldn't call Hardey before ten. Of course there would be a heavier than usual mail on Monday morning and Hardey might not get his mail until later. Still he had a hard and fast rule never to bother purchasing agents before ten in the morning. Nine-twenty-five. But this was terribly important. Nine-thirty-three. Extremely important. Nine-thirty-nine. Maybe Hardey would be waiting for something to do. Better catch him before he got started on his mail. Nine-forty-two.

That was all brother, that was all. Rules were made to be broken. After failing in four attempts to get his shaking finger to dial the right number, he gave up and asked the girl at the switchboard to make the call for him.

"Mr. Hardey, please."

"Just one moment."

"Mr. Hardey?"

"Yes."

"This is Johnny Powers."

"Yes, Mr. Powers."

"I have a very unusual request to make of you, Mr. Hardey." Johnny could see the rime forming on the telephone.

"You have, Mr. Powers?" was the chilly reply.

"Yes, Mr. Hardey. It is a per-

sonal matter and I wondered if we could discuss it at lunch so as not to interfere with your work."

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Powers, but I'm afraid . . ."

"But you are A. Gresham Hardey: aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you know that tonight at midnight is the deadline for getting prints off to the Master Photographers' Competition."

"Yes, that's right, Mr. Powers."

"I wanted some advice on some prints I've made up. I have three and the contest, you know, is limited to one. I thought we could discuss them at lunch."

"Oh, you want my opinion as to which one to submit."

"That's right."

"Harumph." Johnny nearly lost an ear when Mr. Hardey cleared his throat right into the mouthpiece of the telephone, "It would be a pleasure, Mr. Powers. Can you pick me up at twelve-fifteen?"

"I can and will. Thank you very much."

Johnny got up and did a brief and impromptu highland fling. He didn't see two of his cohorts make the usual sign denoting loose screws and mental depravity. Had he seen them, he wouldn't have cared.

The luncheon was a huge success as far as the pictures were concerned. Mr. Hardey thought two of them were good and he had trouble making a final choice.

Ultimately he decided upon the one with bright white clouds against a midnight black sky proving that Johnny's aping of the master's technique during his two day excursion in the field had not been in vain. But every time he tried to bring the conversation around to stamping presses, Mr. Hardey took off on another flight of photographic discussion. About the only success Johnny could report was a date with Mr. Hardey for the following Friday night meeting of the Suburban Camera Club. And Mr. Hardey had been interested in the construction details of Johnny's dark-room. Had he known how fast that basement structure had grown or for what single purpose it had been erected, he would have been amazed.

Friday morning dawned with a bald-headed sky of intense blue from which the sun shone hotly. Johnny was on speaking terms with A. G. Hardey but not one sixty-fourth of an inch closer to getting that order for the presses. After the camera club meeting that night he was going to have to talk business with Mr. Hardey whether that was the place for it or not. If much more time passed without results, he'd hear all the disgusting details anent the great skill with which Mr. Unger, the so-and-so, sewed up the business. In addition, Johnny was having trouble stalling Mr. Peters.

After his first sales effort that

morning, Johnny phoned his office on a routine check. Mr. Hardey wanted him to call. Johnny hastily dialed the number.

"Mr. Hardey?"

"Yes?"

"Johnny Powers."

"Oh, Mr. Powers. There are two things on my mind. First, I must leave town this afternoon, rather unexpectedly, and I won't be able to go to that meeting with you tonight. I'm really very disappointed and hope that you will give me a rain check."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hardey. You know that I'll be most happy to take you to the first meeting you can attend."

"Thank you. And now the second thing: some of your specifications for those presses need further clarification. We'd like you to bring one of your engineers over this afternoon to meet Mr. Weber, our project engineer on the new construction program."

"Our chief designer is away today, Mr. Hardey. Suppose I come over instead?"

"No. You'd better not. Better wait until Monday. Mr. Weber insists on talking with an engineer. Mr. Unger made the same mistake that you're trying to make and I'm afraid his company has lost face with us. By the way did you know that Mr. Unger was a photographer, too?"

"No, I didn't."

"Not very good, though, Mr. Powers. Hardly in the same class

with you and me. Doesn't use filters, either. The minute I saw the way you used your filters, I realized that you were a good man."

"That's kind of you, Mr. Hardey."

"I told Mr. Weber that you were an alert and honest young man and that I was sure your equipment would be eminently satisfactory."

"Thank you very much."

"I'll give you a ring when I get back," Mr. Hardey promised. "I'd like to repay you for that nice luncheon the other day. By the way I have some new color transparencies that I can show you, too. Made three of them with a pola screen and got the bluest sky you've ever seen."

Johnny was tired. He had run a long tiring race, an obstacle race that must have been designed by the creature with the forked tail. He was neither elated nor let down. Merely tired. His body was worn out. His mind ached as though all the little wheels and cogs were starved for oil.

He studied the green billiard cloth that covered the conference table. There were, he noticed, several brown streaks where lighted cigarettes had fallen from the crystal glass ashtrays and had burned the cloth.

Mr. Peters, long winded and bombastic as usual, was addressing the group. Johnny sat back

and let the words flow by unchecked as Mr. Peters droned on and on. He had been sure that Mr. Hardey could be reached though their mutual hobby.

Those prints, particularly his use of filters, had proved to be the trumpet blasts that crumbled the impenetrable walls with which Mr. Hardey had previously surrounded himself. He had to acknowledge the help he had received from Tom Larson, Perfection chief designer, who had been quick to reach an understanding with Weber of Sheffield. Yet Hardey had been the key to that conference, too.

Through dull and tired eyes Johnny saw his father enter the room and take a seat at the long table. Mr. Peters neither faltered nor lost a word at this interruption. Johnny nodded to his father and received a nod in return.

Why didn't Peters wind up his speech and sit down? The sales cliches continued to drop like hailstones. Someday an enterprising soul would make a recording of one of Peters' stimulating talks and play the record back to Reynard.

"In conclusion," said Mr. Peters, scowling at Johnny when he let a too audible sigh of abject boredom escape, "I have the great pleasure of asking Mr. Jonathan Powers, Sr., to make an announcement for me."

Johnny's interest began to awaken as he watched his father



rise. His dad was wearing that scarlet tie again. A bit unusual, Johnny realized, for an outsider to attend a Perfection sales meeting.

The senior Powers, his face beaming, stood at the head of the table. As his father hesitated a moment to capture the full attention of the group, Johnny's pulse quickened in harmony with the mounting tension in the room.

"Gentlemen," his father said, "Mr. Peters has given me the finest present a father can ever receive. I want you to know that I will ever cherish the memory of this gathering.

"The Chinese, you will recall, have a proverb that says, 'One picture is worth ten thousand words.' My son improved upon the Chinese in his use of pictures. For pictures were the hobby of Mr. Hardey of Sheffield. Pictures, or photography, proved to be Mr. Hardey's Achille's heel. And like this man, every purchasing agent has an outstanding interest somewhere. Once you discover what it is, the rest is easy.

"But I didn't come here to deliver a lecture. Or to boast about my son, either. My sole purpose, and again let me thank you for this privilege from the bottom of my heart, Sam, was to announce to you men that Jonathan Powers, Jr., has been appointed assistant sales manager."

By this time Johnny had shed his tiredness as happily as a small boy discarding short pants. He heard the sincerity in the applause, thrilled to the extra meaning in his father's handshake, filled with pride beneath Mr. Peters' comradely arm around his shoulders and enthusiastically shook hands with the eager field men who pressed about him.

All the while he wondered how Mr. Peters could elevate him to such a responsible position on the strength of a single sale. For Johnny still didn't appreciate fully his changed stature. He couldn't quite get the perspective that was quite obvious to everyone else in the room. He didn't realize that he was a real chip off the old block.

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## PONDER FOR ELECTION

In our country, and in our times, no man is worthy of the honored name of statesman, who does not include the highest practicable education of the people in all his plans of administration.

—Horace Mann



# THE TRANSFERRED GHOST

By FRANK R. STOCKTON

The meddlesome antics of an unemployed spook bored with waiting for his new ghostship

**T**HE country residence of Mr. John Hinckman was a delightful place to me, for many reasons. It was the abode of a genial, though somewhat impulsive, hospitality. It had broad, smooth-shaven lawns and towering oak and elms; there were

bosky shades at several points, and not far from the house there was a little rill spanned by a rustic bridge with the bark on; there were fruits and flowers, pleasant people, chess, billiards, rides, walks, and fishing. These were great attractions; but none of them, nor all of them together, would have been sufficient to hold me to the place very long. I had been invited for the trout season, but should, probably, have finished my visit early in the summer had it not been that upon fair days, when the grass was dry, and the sun was not too hot, and there was but little wind, there strolled beneath the lofty elms, or passed lightly through the bosky shades, the form of my Madeline.

This lady was not, in very truth, my Madeline. She had never given herself to me, nor had I, in any way, acquired possession of her. But as I considered her possession the only sufficient reason for the continuance of my existence, I called her, in my reveries, mine. It may have been that I would not have been obliged to confine the use of this possessive pronoun to my reveries had I confessed the state of my feelings to the lady.

But this was an unusually difficult thing to do. Not only did I dread, as almost all lovers dread, taking the step which would in an instant put an end to that delightful season which may be termed

the ante-interrogatory period of love, and which might at the same time terminate all intercourse or connection with the object of my passion; but I was, also, dreadfully afraid of John Hinckman. This gentleman was a good friend of mine, but it would have required a bolder man than I was at that time to ask him for the gift of his niece, who was the head of his household, and, according to his own frequent statement, the main prop of his declining years. Had Madeline acquiesced in my general views on the subject, I might have felt encouraged to open the matter to Mr. Hinckman; but, as I said before, I had never asked her whether or not she would be mine. I thought of these things at all hours of the day and night, particularly the latter.

I was lying awake one night, in the great bed in my spacious chamber, when, by the dim light of the new moon, which partially filled the room, I saw John Hinckman standing by a large chair near the door. I was very much surprised at this for two reasons. In the first place, my host had never before come into my room; and, in the second place, he had gone from home that morning, and had not expected to return for several days. It was for this reason that I had been able that evening to sit much later than usual with Madeline on the moonlit porch. The figure was certain-

ly that of John Hinckman in his ordinary dress, but there was a vagueness and indistinctness about it which presently assured me that it was a ghost. Had the good old man been murdered? And had his spirit come to tell me of the deed, and to confide to me the protection of his dear —? My heart fluttered at what it was about to think, but at this instant the figure spoke.

"Do you know," he said, with a countenance that indicated anxiety, "if Mr. Hinckman will return tonight?"

I thought it well to maintain a calm exterior, and I answered:

"We do not expect him."

"I am glad of that," said he, sinking into the chair by which he stood. "During the two years and a half that I have inhabited this house, that man has never before been away for a single night. You can't imagine the relief it gives me."

And as he spoke he stretched out his legs, and leaned back in the chair. His form became less vague, and the colors of his garments more distinct and evident, while an expression of gratified relief succeeded to the anxiety of his countenance.

"Two years and a half!" I exclaimed. "I don't understand you!"

"It is fully that length of time," said the ghost, "since I first came here. Mine is not an ordinary case. But before I say anything

more about it, let me ask you again if you are sure Mr. Hinckman will not return to-night."

"I am as sure of it as I can be of anything," I answered. "He left to-day for Bristol, two hundred miles away."

"Then I will go on," said the ghost, "for I am glad to have the opportunity of talking to someone who will listen to me; but if John Hinckman should come in and catch me here, I should be frightened out of my wits."

"This is all very strange," I said, greatly puzzled by what I had heard. "Are you the ghost of Mr. Hinckman?"

This was a bold question, but my mind was so full of other emotions that there seemed to be no room for that of fear.

"Yes, I am his ghost," my companion replied, "and yet I have no right to be. And this is what makes me so uneasy, and so much afraid of him. It is a strange story, and, I truly believe, without precedent. Two years and a half ago John Hinckman was dangerously ill in this very room. At one time he was so far gone that he was really believed to be dead. It was in consequence of too precipitate a report in regard to this matter that I was, at that time, appointed to be his ghost. Imagine my surprise and horror, sir, when, after I had accepted the position and assumed its responsibilities that old man revived, became convalescent, and even-

tually regained his usual health. My situation was now one of extreme delicacy and embarrassment. I had no power to return to my original unembodiment, and I had no right to be the ghost of a man who was not dead. I was advised by my friends to quietly maintain my position, and was assured that, as John Hinckman was an elderly man, it could not be long before I could rightfully assume the position for which I had been selected. But I tell you, sir," he continued, with animation, "the old fellow seems as vigorous as ever and I have no idea how much longer this annoying state of things will continue. I spend my time trying to get out of that old man's way. I must not leave this house and he seems to follow me everywhere. I tell you, sir, he haunts me."

"That is truly a queer state of things," I remarked. "But why are you afraid of him? He couldn't hurt you."

"Of course he couldn't," said the ghost. "But his very presence is a shock and terror to me. Imagine, sir, how you would feel if my case were yours."

I could not imagine such a thing at all. I simply shuddered.

"And if one must be a wrongful ghost at all," the apparition continued, "it would be much pleasanter to be the ghost of some man other than John Hinckman. There is in him an irascibility of

temper, accompanied by a facility of invective, which is seldom met with. And what would happen if he were to see me, and find out, as I am sure he would, how long and why I had inhabited his house, I can scarcely conceive. I have seen him in his bursts of passion; and, although he did not hurt the people he stormed at any more than he would hurt me, they seemed to shrink before him."

All this I knew to be very true. Had it not been for this peculiarity of Mr. Hinckman, I might have been more willing to talk to him about his niece.

"I feel sorry for you," I said, for I really began to have a sympathetic feeling toward this unfortunate apparition. "Your case is indeed a hard one. It reminds me of those persons who have doubles, and I suppose a man would often be very angry indeed when he found that there was another being who was personating himself."

"Oh! the cases are not similar at all," said the ghost. "A double or doppelganger lives on the earth with a man; and being exactly like him, he makes all sorts of trouble, of course. It is very different with me. I am not here to live with Mr. Hinckman. I am here to take his place. Now, it would make John Hinckman very angry if he knew that. Don't you know it would?"

I assented promptly.

"Now that he is away I can be

easy for a little while," continued the ghost; "and I am so glad to have an opportunity of talking to you. I have frequently come into your room, and watched you while you slept, but did not dare to speak to you for fear that if you talked with me Mr. Hinckman would hear you, and come into the room to know why you were talking to yourself."

"But would he not hear you?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" said the other: "there are times when anyone may see me, but no one hears me except the person to whom I address myself."

"But why did you wish to speak to me?" I asked.

"Because," replied the ghost, "I like occasionally to talk to people, and especially to someone like yourself, whose mind is so troubled and perturbed that you are not likely to be frightened by a visit from one of us. But I particularly wanted to ask you to do me a favor. There is every probability, so far as I can see, that John Hinckman will live for a long time, and my situation is becoming insupportable. My great object at present is to get myself transferred, and I think that you may, perhaps, be of use to me."

"Transferred!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean by that?"

"What I mean," said the other, "is this: Now that I have started on my career I have got to be the

ghost of somebody, and I want to be the ghost of a man who is really dead."

"I should think that would be easy enough," I said. "Opportunities must continually occur."

"Not at all! not at all!" said my companion quickly. "You have no idea what a rush and pressure there is for situations of this kind. Whenever a vacancy occurs, if I may express myself in that way, there are crowds of applications for the ghostship."

"I had no idea that such a state of things existed," I said, becoming quite interested in the matter. "There ought to be some regular system, or order of precedence, by which you could all take your turns like customers in a barber's shop."

"Oh dear, that would never do at all!" said the other. "Some of us would have to wait forever. There is always a great rush whenever a good ghostship offers itself—while, as you know, there are some positions that no one would care for. And it was in consequence of my being in too great a hurry on an occasion of the kind that I got myself into my present disagreeable predicament, and I have thought that it might be possible that you would help me out of it. You might know of a case where an opportunity for a ghostship was not generally expected, but which might present itself at any moment. If you would give me a short

notice, I know I could arrange for a transfer."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "Do you want me to commit suicide? Or to undertake a murder for your benefit?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" said the other, with a vapory smile. "I mean nothing of that kind. To be sure, there are lovers who are watched with considerable interest, such persons having been known, in moments of depression, to offer very desirable ghostships; but I did not think of anything of that kind in connection with you. You were the only person I cared to speak to, and I hoped that you might give me some information that would be of use; and, in return, I shall be very glad to help you in your love affair."

"You seem to know that I have such an affair," I said.

"Oh, yes!" replied the other, with a little yawn. "I could not be here so much as I have been without knowing all about that."

There was something horrible in the idea of Madeline and myself having been watched by a ghost, even, perhaps, when we wandered together in the most delightful and bosky places. But, then, this was quite an exceptional ghost, and I could not have the objections to him which would ordinarily arise in regard to beings of his class.

"I must go now," said the ghost, rising, "but I will see you somewhere tomorrow night. And re-

member—you help me, and I'll help you."

I had doubts the next morning as to the propriety of telling Madeline anything about this interview, and soon convinced myself that I must keep silent on the subject. If she knew there was a ghost about the house, she would probably leave the place instantly. I did not mention the matter, and so regulated my demeanor that I am quite sure Madeline never suspected what had taken place. For some time I had wished that Mr. Hinckman would absent himself, for a day at least, from the premises. In such case I thought I might more easily nerve myself up to the point of speaking to Madeline on the subject of our future collateral existence; and now that the opportunity for such speech had really occurred, I did not feel ready to avail myself of it. What would become of me if she refused me?

I had an idea, however, that that lady thought that, if I were going to speak at all, this was the time. She must have known that certain sentiments were afloat within me and she was not unreasonable in her wish to see the matter settled one way or the other. But I did not feel like taking a bold step in the dark. If she wished me to ask her to give herself to me, she ought to offer me some reason to suppose that she would make the gift. If I saw no probability of such

generosity, I would prefer that things should remain as they were.

That evening I was sitting with Madeline in the moonlit porch. It was nearly ten o'clock, and ever since supper-time I had been working myself up to the point of making an avowal of my sentiments. I had not positively determined to do this, but wished gradually to reach the proper point, when, if the prospect looked bright, I might speak. My companion appeared to understand the situation—at least, I imagined that the nearer I came to a proposal the more she seemed to expect it. It was certainly a very critical and important epoch in my life. If I spoke, I should make myself happy or miserable forever, and if I did not speak I had every reason to believe that the lady would not give me another chance to do so.

Sitting thus with Madeline, talking a little, and thinking very hard over these momentous matters, I looked up and saw the ghost, not a dozen feet away from us. He was sitting on the railing of the porch, one leg thrown up before him, the other dangling down as he leaned against a post. He was behind Madeline, but almost in front of me, as I sat facing the lady. It was fortunate that Madeline was looking out over the landscape, for I must have appeared very much startled. The ghost had told me that

he would see me some time this night, but I did not think he would make his appearance when I was in the company of Madeline. If she should see the spirit of her uncle, I could not answer for the consequences. I made no exclamation, but the ghost evidently saw that I was troubled.

"Don't be afraid," he said—"I shall not let her see me; and she cannot hear me speak unless I address myself to her, which I do not intend to do."

I suppose I looked grateful.

"So you need not trouble yourself about that," the ghost continued; "but it seems to me that you are not getting along very well with your affair. If I were you, I should speak out without waiting any longer. You will never have a better chance. You are not likely to be interrupted; and, so far as I can judge, the lady seems disposed to listen to you favorably; that is, if she ever intends to do so. There is no knowing when John Hinckman will go away again; certainly not this summer. If I were in your place, I should never dare to make love to Hinckman's niece if he were anywhere about the place. If he should catch anyone offering himself to Miss Madeline, he would then be a terrible man to encounter."

I agreed perfectly to all this.

"I cannot bear to think of him!" I ejaculated aloud.

"Think of whom?" asked Mad-



eline, turning quickly toward me.

Here was an awkward situation. The long speech of the ghost, to which Madeline paid no attention, but which I heard with perfect distinctness, had made me forget myself.

It was necessary to explain quickly. Of course, it would not do to admit that it was of her dear uncle that I was speaking; and so I mentioned hastily the first name I thought of.

"Mr. Vilars," I said.

This statement was entirely correct; for I never could bear to think of Mr. Vilars, who was a gentleman who had, at various times paid much attention to Madeline.

"It is wrong for you to speak in that way of Mr. Villars" she said. "He is a remarkably well educated and sensible young man, and has very pleasant manners. He expects to be elected to the legislature this fall, and I should not be surprised if he made his mark. He will do well in a legislative body, for whenever Mr. Vilars has anything to say he knows just how and when to say it."

This was spoken very quietly, and without any show of resentment, which was all very natural, for if Madeline thought at all favorably of me she could not feel displeased that I should have disagreeable emotions in regard to a possible rival. The concluding words contained a hint which I

was not slow to understand. I felt very sure that if Mr. Vilars were in my present position he would speak quickly enough.

"I know it is wrong to have such ideas about a person," I said, "but I cannot help it."

The lady did not chide me, and after this she seemed even in a softer mood. As for me, I felt considerably annoyed, for I had not wished to admit that any thought of Mr. Vilars had ever occupied my mind.

"You should not speak aloud that way," said the ghost, "or you may get yourself into trouble. I want to see everything go well with you, because then you may be disposed to help me, especially if I should chance to be of any assistance to you, which I hope I shall be."

I longed to tell him that there was no way in which he could help me so much as by taking his instant departure. To make love to a young lady with a ghost sitting on the railing nearby, and that ghost the apparition of a much-dreaded uncle, the very idea of whom in such a position and at such a time made me tremble, was a difficult, is not an impossible, thing to do; but I forbore to speak, although I may have looked my mind.

"I suppose," continued the ghost, "that you have not heard anything that might be of advantage to me. Of course, I am very anxious to hear; but if you have

anything to tell me, I can wait until you are alone. I will come to you to-night in your room, or I will stay here until the lady goes away."

"You need not wait here," I said; "I have nothing at all to say to you."

Madeline sprang to her feet, her face flushed and her eyes ablaze.

"Wait here!" she cried. "What do you suppose I am waiting for? Nothing to say to me indeed!—I should think so! What should you have to say to me?"

"Madeline!" I exclaimed, stepping toward her, "let me explain."

But she had gone.

Here was the end of the world for me. I turned fiercely to the ghost.

"Wretched existence!" I cried. "You have ruined everything. You have blackened my whole life. Had it not been for you—"

But here my voice faltered. I could say no more.

"You wrong me," said the ghost. "I have not injured you. I have tried only to encourage and assist you, and it is your own folly that has done this mischief. But do not despair. Such mistakes as these can be explained. Keep up a brave heart. Good-by."

And he vanished from the railing like a bursting soap-bubble.

I went gloomily to bed, but I saw no apparitions that night except those of despair and misery

which my wretched thoughts called up. The words I had uttered had sounded to Madeline like the basest insult. Of course, there was only one interpretation she could put upon them.

As to explaining my ejaculations, that was impossible. I thought the matter over and over again as I lay awake that night, and I determined that I would never tell Madeline the facts of the case. It would be better for me to suffer all my life than for her to know that the ghost of her uncle haunted the house. Mr. Hinckman was away, and if she knew of his ghost she could not be made to believe that he was not dead. She might not survive the shock! No, my heart could bleed, but I would never tell her.

The next day was fine, neither too cool nor too warm; the breezes were gentle, and nature smiled. But there were no walks or rides with Madeline. She seemed to be much engaged during the day, and I saw but little of her. When we met at meals she was polite, but very quiet and reserved. She had evidently determined on a course of conduct and had resolved to assume that, although I had been very rude to her, she did not understand the import of my words. It would be quite proper, of course, for her not to know what I meant by my expressions of the night before.

I was downcast and wretched and said but little, and the only

bright streak across the black horizon of my woe was the fact that she did not appear to be happy, although she affected an air of unconcern. The moonlit porch was deserted that evening, but wandering about the house I found Madeline in the library alone. She was reading, but I went in and sat down near her. I felt that, although I could not do so fully, I must in a measure explain my conduct of the night before. She listened quietly to a somewhat labored apology I made for the words I had used.

"I have not the slightest idea what you meant," she said, "but you were very rude."

I earnestly disclaimed any intention of rudeness, and assured her, with a warmth of speech that must have made some impression upon her, that rudeness to her would be an action impossible to me. I said a great deal upon the subject, and implored her to believe that if it were not for a certain obstacle I could speak to her so plainly that she would understand everything.

She was silent for a time, and then she said, rather more kindly, I thought, than she had spoken before:

"Is that obstacle in any way connected with my uncle?"

"Yes," I answered after a little hesitation, "it is, in a measure, connected with him."

She made no answer to this, and sat looking at her book, but

not reading. From the expression of her face, I thought she was somewhat softened toward me. She knew her uncle as well as I did, and she may have been thinking that, if he were the obstacle that prevented my speaking (and there were many ways in which he might be that obstacle), my position would be such a hard one that it would excuse some wildness of speech and eccentricity of manner. I saw, too, that the warmth of my partial explanations had had some effect on her, and I began to believe that it might be a good thing for me to speak my mind without delay. No matter how she should receive my proposition, my relations with her could not be worse than they had been the previous night and day, and there was something in her face which encouraged me to hope that she might forget my foolish exclamations of the evening before if I began to tell her my tale of love.

I drew my chair a little nearer to her, and as I did so the ghost burst into the room from the doorway behind her. I say burst, although no door flew open and he made no noise. He was wildly excited, and waved his arms above his head. The moment I saw him, my heart fell within me. With the entrance of that impertinent apparition, every hope fled from me. I could not speak while he was in the room.

I must have (*More on page 49*)

# THE PASSING OF DIAMOND DICK

By WILBUR W. WHEELER

Put to the test, Jimmy's set of values did a double take when the gunman gave his orders

DICK SANSOME glanced from side to side swiftly, but without turning his head, like a hunted man alertly on guard against recognition. He didn't know he was so near to death. And yet, as he rode into the deserted street at dusk, it was with the feeling that hostile eyes were peering at the diamond-studded gun-butt on his low-slung belt.

"Reckon, Oldtimer," he muttered to his mustang, "I should have hid the tell-tale weapon while passin' through this strange burg."

Suntown, which in daytime suffered from an excess of natural light, confined its artificial lighting to the sheriff's office and the one saloon. And it was from a dusky void beside the dark bank that a subdued voice accosted Sansome: "Dick, lissen a minute, will you? I gotta talk to you."

Sansome halted Oldtimer in the darkness, near the hitching rack in front of the sheriff's office. At the same time, a flick of his right hand downward was correctly appraised by the speaker in the shadows. And, his hands upraised, his pony's reins caught in the crook of an arm, a boy moved forward trying to control his nervousness before the weapon trained on him.

"Don't," he pleaded, "shoot a friend. Jimmy Rye's my name."

He stopped in the zone of light that shone faintly out through the sheriff's dusty window. And Sansome saw that the handsome blond face was harried, even though he couldn't be over eighteen.

"How'd you know my first name?" Sansome asked tersely. "Recognize me from the next county west?"

He had a middle-aged leathery face, unshaven; his mouth clamped tightly, and in his gray eyes there was a gleam that held the threat of velvet-covered steel.

"I was standin' here, wonderin' what I'd do tonight," explained Jimmy earnestly, "when you come ridin' past the saloon, with that gun-butt glitterin' in your holster like a star. 'Course, I knew you was Diamond Dick, because nobody's got a diamond-studded gun 'cept that outlaw. I thought o' shootin' you down and claimin' that five thousand dollar reward on your head, but then I got a better idea."

Sansome nodded. "Put 'em down," he ordered, "and tell me what's on your mind."

Jimmy lowered his hands. "I ain't got no record, Dick," he said eagerly. "But I learned about a job this afternoon to start our partnership with. Providential you should meet up with me right now, ain't it?"

"Yeah," Sansome said slowly. Then quickly: "where's your home, Jimmy?"

The boy sighed. "I ain't had no folks since Pa died last year out Panhandle way. I jest been punchin' around since then. But I wanta git a lotta fun outa life—like you do."

Sansome nodded again, slowly. "Well, what's the job, kid? Talk."

The light from the sheriff's window was cut off by the body of a man who stared out into the

night, as if to locate the buzz of voices at the front of the office.

"That's the sheriff," Jimmy warned in a whisper. "I better talk while we're ridin' away."

Sansome slipped the diamond-studded gun into its holster. "Well," he said doubtfully. "I'll test you out, Jimmy."

Five minutes later they were heading into the low range of moonlit hills which half-encircled the town to the west—and the enthusiastic boy had begun to give the details of his job to the stolid man at his side.

"Soon after I rode into town today, Dick, I saw an old fella come outa the bank, stuffin' currency into his pants pocket. And when he was gone, I asked the sheriff who he was, sayin' I was lookin' for a job punchin' hereabouts. Well, his name is Sam Kane, and his ranch is right ahead."

The horses rounded the shoulder of a hill, and before the riders there loomed the dark shape of a cabin.

"He's out," Sansome guessed as they drew rein under a spreading tree. "An' I'm not goin' in. This is your test."

Jimmy swung off his pony, drew his own gun and crept stealthily toward the cabin. The moon went behind a cloud-bank, and the darkness swallowed him.

Sitting on his horse, motionless, Sansome heard the rap of knuckles on the door—then a

pause, the rattle of the latch. A moment later there came the thud of a shoulder against wood—a cracking sound, and a crash as the door went down.

Sansome's lips tightened as the fitful fire of a match feebly illuminated the windows. Out there in the quiet, twenty yards away, he could hear the clumping of boots on the board floor and every rustle of the things that Jimmy fumbled in his search. Then running feet padded across the grass, and the boy drew up under the tree, panting.

"Got it," he gasped. "Outa a tin box. Right there on the mantel-shelf."

Sansome reached down and took the roll of money. "Got another match?" Jimmy struck one and, gloating, watched while the man swiftly counted the bills. "Five hundred dollars," Sansome said calmly. "I'd better carry it, Jimmy."

His gray eyes turned downward and focused coldly on the eager upturned face. Then as Jimmy nodded and watched, Sansome stowed the bills in a pocket of the belt next to the gun. His hand hesitated over its diamond-studded butt as the match went out.

The boy mounted then and looked around uncertainly. "What's that?" he whispered excitedly. "I heard somebody talk."

Sansome listened a moment. "Prob'ly old Kane," he said quiet-

ly. "But he can't see us, under this tree."

There were two riders—a man and a girl. They were laughing as they approached the rear of the cabin, where the stable stood. They put up the horses; then their words came clearer to the listeners, as they walked toward the cabin's front door.

"I feel mean about going off to college, Dad," said the girl. "You're going to have a hard time running the ranch without my help."

"Tut, Mary," said the man. "My rheumatism's better an' mebbe I can find a man to help—Where'd I put the key?"

There was a silence, broken by grunts as Sam Kane contorted himself in the search of his pockets. Then Mary spoke, and the tone of her voice was the more heart-rending for the restraint she was putting on it.

"Why, the door's broken down, and——"

There was a hoarse cry from the old man, boot-heels stumbled across the boards, and a match flared. Its faint light showed the girl standing in the doorway—a darkly pretty little girl—while beyond the wreckage of the door a bent figure with silver hair tottered away from the mantel-shelf. In one hand he held the flickering match, in the other a tin box.

"Mary," he choked, "the money's not here. It's gone!" Jimmy drew a breath through

his teeth and moved uneasily in his saddle. Instantly a hand, with a grip like steel, was on his wrist, and the order came sharply: "Quiet!"

"Oh," came Mary's voice, trembling with repressed tears, "We should have taken the money to prayer-meeting, Dad."

Her father hunched in a chair by the fireplace while she struck a match and lit the lamp on the table.

"Two years you've worked to save," he groaned aloud. "An' now whoever the thief is that wastes your money, I curse him."

Mary put her hand over his mouth. "Lie down on your bed," she got out, "while I make some coffee."

Gently, she led the old man out of the watchers' line of vision, and Sansome at once pulled his bridle. "Safe to go now." His horse moved a few paces, out from under the tree, but Jimmy's did not. And the man turned in his saddle. "Aren't you comin'?" he asked surprisedly.

The boy urged his pony forward until it stood side by side with Sansome's horse.

His voice was slow and meditative: "You didn't have no trouble gettin' that money, Dick, so you don't lose nothin' if I take it back."

"Suppose," Sansome sneered, "I think different?"

"Then," snarled Jimmy, "make a move and I'll blow your head

off! So you'd better sit tight."

His gun muzzle under the man's nose, the boy snapped open the pocket of the belt and extracted the bills. Then, regardless of a possible shot in the back, he swung off his pony and hurried into the cabin. Sansome sat motionless looking at the door, from which now came a murmur of voices harmonizing joyously with the half-heard song of the night wind.

A quarter of an hour later, Jimmy reappeared in the doorway, alone, and hurried forward through the silence toward his pony. Sansome sat perfectly still. And the boy did not mount.

"I'm sorry, Dick," he said, reaching a hand to Sansome's arm. "But Mr. Kane has offered me a job punchin', an'——"

"I'm not sorry," Sansome broke in with relief in his tone. "Makin' you stay an' watch was part of the test—an' I can see now that you didn't pass it."

The moonlight lay bright on the face of the man as he turned it, smilingly, toward the boy.

And Jimmy Rye gulped: "Anyway, I'm glad I didn't kill you for that five thousand dollar reward, Diamond Dick."

Sansome shook the hand of the boy, and his words came brusquely: "I'm goin' to collect it myself—for killin' that outlaw. I'm ridin' on into the next county west. I'm the sheriff there, my friend. Drop around sometime."

# THE INVADER

By ROBERT ANDERSSON

Dormant yet palpably there, was the new invading force of the golden-haired girl

**S**VEINN and Hoskuld, joint owners of the Hraun farm, had parted company down on the homefield and each walked towards his own house. Together they had been working down by the sheepcotes near the beach, covering a small haystack with dry sods. For lack of barn space, they had been forced to stack the last harvest behind the cotes. Turfing it up was an ancient device they had never relinquished in favor of the more expedient manner of protecting the hay with canvas.

They had just finished in time for while they were arranging the last sod, the sleet began to fall and a cold autumn blast sweeping along the Icelandic coast, increased noticeably and made it difficult to handle the turf.

Funny about that last sod, though. It could have been the wind. Sveinn had handed the sod to Hoskuld who was kneeling on top of the stack. Then he bent forward to reach for a pitchfork on the ground. All of a sudden the sod came bounding down towards him. It hit him between the shoulders, almost staggering him head forwards into the mud. "Sorry, it's getting impossible to handle the turf in this weather." Hoskuld's apology rasped through the wind with a curiously harsh and mocking intonation. At least that was what Sveinn felt and his knuckles whitened on the forkshaft. Instinctively he felt that Hoskuld was leering at him from up there through the sleet, and he dug the fork in until the prongs disappeared in the



ground. Then slowly he picked up the sod and handed it back. There was no more talk.

Their houses stood only fifty yards apart and yet two things happened before each man reached his doorstep. First, Helga, the new maid at Sveinn's place, who standing by the window alternately watching the storm shake and bend small birch trees in the lava west of the farm, and the two figures approaching through the sleet, suddenly noticed something peculiar in Hoskuld's manner.

It was a queer gesture, indistinct in the grey mist. He seemed to move his arms as if he were going to strike out after Sveinn who was already at some distance. And secondly, a few moments later Sveinn himself had the feeling that Hoskuld had stopped and was leering at him as before when the sod hit him.

It shot through him like fire and heated his blood. He wheeled around but Hoskuld was already disappearing into the house.

On the frontstep Sveinn paused for a while, removing his work gloves and beating them against the post. They left a brown, grimy mark, and a piece of crystallized snow fell from the eaves and hit him in the face. It was beginning to freeze. It struck him that the sheep would have to be housed before nightfall.

Inside he took off his wind-breaker coat and hung it up in front of the kitchen door. It slip-

ped off the hook and fell on the floor with a dull slap, limp and wet. He bent down to pick it up, and his back ached. Again anger shot through him, absurd and pointless. He thought of Hoskuld and the incident down by the haystack.

The door opened, and Helga, the new maid appeared in the rich orange light of a kerosene lamp on the kitchen table.

He looked at her sideways as he stooped over the coat and felt suddenly clumsy and a little flurried like a man caught in the act of doing something undignified.

"I dropped the coat," he said in an irrelevant tone, while his eyes rested on her, blinking slightly at the light and golden mass of her hair flung loosely back over her shoulders.

She made a resolute gesture. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"No, thank you," he said awkwardly, straightening up, involuntarily supporting the small of his back with the left hand. What has gotten into Hoskuld, he wondered. It occurred to him that ordinarily they would have discussed the matter of housing the sheep before they parted.

Their cooperation had always been easy, he felt. Hoskuld usually took the lead, and Sveinn agreed, perhaps from a vague sense of necessity for a state of equality and balance in the small world of the farm. He had always been the stronger, physically.

Perhaps Hoskuld didn't drop the sod intentionally after all. But it was the malicious, recalcitrant animosity in Hoskuld's bearing these past days that puzzled him. And then the sod.

There was some dinner on the table, cold meat, rye bread and a bowl of rice pudding. They sat down opposite each other silently. You talked very little on Sveinn's farm. There was a sort of rigid orderliness about the scanty household things and a defiant tincture of scouring on the walls and floor that seemed to simplify your mind and silence you. That was how his mother had kept it.

For a moment, he wondered how this girl with the elfin hair and thin, nervous hands had come into this bleakly scrubbed house. Where was she from? Somewhere in the west he'd understood, although he'd never really asked her.

After his mother died in the spring, he'd tried to get on alone for a few months. But in the autumn he gave it up, and one day he rode into town with an extra horse, looking for help. Someone recommended this girl. She was a newcomer in town and out of a job.

Vaguely disturbed then, as ever since by her fragility and long painted nails, he told her about the farm. "It's lonely out there—almost outside civilization," he said, more as if expressing a commonplace notion about the farm,

than voicing his own opinion.

But she looked alien, a city girl, perhaps, although he had never really seen one. Still he needed help badly and she appeared anxious to go. "I like the country," she said simply, "especially rugged places."

But he looked at her long, pale hands and didn't believe her.

When they rode homewards, he marveled silently at the fact that she was a good horsewoman. But he said nothing, and she didn't seem to mind his taciturnity. He was grateful for that. A strange woman, he had feared, might fill the house with words, empty, clattering sounds. That was only two weeks ago.

Things soon fell into a routine and there was little to discuss. And still Sveinn felt that there was a new edge on things—a sort of precariousness that had entered the household, a brisk almost dangerously off-hand treatment of plates and silverware, a fresher and sharper taste to the cooking and a sound of swift footsteps around the house. Funny, when he told Hoskuld about the new help, he didn't say a word, simply went back to his house and kept on doing his own cooking, living alone all by himself.

Suddenly, while handing him the blue-painted cinnamon-and-sugar bowl for the pudding, she asked, "What is Hoskuld like?"

The question stung him maliciously, for he had again been puz-

zling over Hoskuld's behavior. He looked at the girl with surprise and perhaps a tint of suspicion.

"Hoskuld, he's all right," he said quickly, repressing a sudden inclination towards saying that he really didn't know what Hoskuld was like. "Hard working," he added, by way of expressing something positive.

"Has he always lived alone like that?" she asked again.

"Since his parents died," he said more slowly, temporarily relieved at being able to state simple facts. "That was several years ago. Left him a good deal of money to house the farm. He never took any help. Sometimes, mother used to go and do the housework for him. Hard for a man to take care of the indoor work too, cook and keep the house clean and everything."

Sveinn paused as if he had abruptly exhausted Hoskuld's record. He started on the pudding.

"I see," Helga remarked casually, "a hardened bachelor. By the way, do you ever quarrel?" she asked with the same, indifferent air.

A few days ago the question would have struck Sveinn as utterly irrelevant, even absurd. Why should they quarrel? In his slow way it occurred to him while he sat there and chewed on the disagreeable taste of her question that if he and Hoskuld ever really quarreled they would have a hard

time making up. They were both like that.

"No," he said slowly, "we never do. Where there's only two men, there isn't room for it. Not here on the farm. Why do you ask?" he continued suddenly, overanxious in spite of himself.

"No reason really," she said, "I just wondered."

He looked up with a sudden feeling that she was grinning at him, but her face was indifferent, and she was beginning to remove the dishes from the table with that distractingly careless ease of hers. He felt an urge to press her further for the reason why she'd asked, but he brushed the thought aside. That incident with the sod was beginning to seem almost ridiculous anyway.

"You are talking like mother," he said smiling for the first time during dinner. "She used to think Hoskuld was too aggressive. I don't think she ever liked him. But then that was probably her way of driving me on."

"I don't like him either," the girl said simply.

Sveinn looked as if he had stumbled over something. He didn't answer, but as he walked towards the door, he said, "I had hoped you would be willing to go over to Hoskuld's now and then and tidy up for him like mother used to."

The girl looked at him sharply: "Why don't you let him ask you first?" Puzzled, Sveinn ignored

the challenging tone of her voice. "All right," he said, "maybe that's better."

Sveinn reached for his wind-breaker coat, put on a fur cap and searched for a pair of woolen gloves.

The girl came out of the kitchen with a fresh pair of gloves in her hands. "Going out for long?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "I have got to house the sheep. Sounds like it's turning into a gale." He took the gloves and gazed towards the door, hiding a shy, masculine embarrassment at her considerateness under the pretense of listening for the sound of the storm.

"I would like to go with you," she said naively, "I can help you round up the sheep."

"Thanks," he said, "it isn't necessary," and felt afterwards that perhaps he should have told her that this was no weather for women.

"Is Hoskuld going too?" she asked suddenly.

"I expect he will. I am going to drop by and see him." With a quick jerk, he wrenched the frosty door open and stepped knee high into soft snow.

For a few steps he ran, anticipating a shiver from the biting cold. Halfway over to Hoskuld's house, he became fully conscious of having seen her extend her arm and start to say something as he swerved through the door. It was a cautionary gesture, he

thought dimly, a sort of warning and a call back circumscribed by a hesitant motion of her arm.

The two men walked straight towards the beach kneading the freshly fallen snow with heavy short steps. The wind was strong and between loose, billowy drifts the snow was batted into thin, crisp layers.

Walking at arm's distance from Hoskuld, Sveinn kept slightly ahead. His tiredness was gone, and he felt a certain keen pleasure in the biting storm, something he hadn't felt since he was a boy, playing in new-fallen snow. A vague remembrance of going out into snowstorms, jumping the drifts, letting the wind roll you over the crisp layers in between, came back to him as he plodded on.

Hoskuld remained obstinately silent during the walk. Ordinarily, perhaps part of his unconscious tactics of balance in their companionship, Sveinn, the stronger one, would have walked behind. Yet now, he found a satisfaction in going first and recalled with a somewhat stealthy feeling of superiority that Hoskuld had always disliked playing in the snow.

Hoskuld's voice reached him from behind, harsh and brutally reshuffled by the storm: "We had better stop by the cotes and see if any of the sheep has come in."

Sveinn kept on walking steadily. "There is no need to. Most

of them will still be down on the beach." The wind gave a cut and angry intonation to their words.

On the declivity near the sand, Hoskuld caught up with him and they walked side by side. Suddenly Hoskuld slipped, reclining backwards, then swaying to the side. Sveinn grasped his arm, perhaps more tightly than necessary. Hoskuld grinned. "Thanks," he said. "You might be careful of my arm. It's not made of iron, you know."

Sveinn loosened his grip. Then he laughed, nervously, unskilled in parrying malice. "Perhaps I should have let you ask me to help you first." The words came rapidly, parrot-like. It was like somebody else speaking for him. Those were the words the girl had used. It puzzled and amused him. He felt gayer than usual and indifferent to Hoskuld's unaccountable behavior.

A large group of sheep was huddled together in the hollow under a thin jutting cliff. They stood apathetic, chewing the cud while now and then the wind hurled eddies of fine, loose snow into the hollow. At a distance they looked like a cluster of small mounds under a blanket of snow.

Without a word Hoskuld turned off towards the hollow to arouse the sheep, counting them as he drove them out into the storm.

Masses of loose seaweed, wash-

ed ashore by the autumn waves, formed huge banks along the beach, building a superstructure upon the rocky, uneven sand, a sort of artificial coastline with inlets and headlands. Walking along the banks and coming upon a few stray sheep still feeding on the algae, Sveinn drove them one by one towards the main group. Suddenly, after following the edge of the main banks, he noticed a small ewe cornered in one of the inlets below. Evidently the animal had strayed in there during the ebb and unable to climb up the slippery bank, found itself caught by the advancing floodtide. It had obviously received bad splashes for its wool was dripping and matted with sand and algae leaves. For a moment Sveinn thought of calling Hoskuld to help him get the sheep up. Then he changed his mind and jumped down below.

He stumbled and hit his hand against the sand. Holding the ewe by the horn, he scanned the bank for a possible access. It was steep and slippery like an oily canvas. Unburdened, a man might be able to make it on a run by grabbing hold of the jutting algae stems here and there and swinging himself up to the edge. He tried to push the sheep up the side, but the animal was exhausted and dripping with seawater and lay limp like a dead object on his hands. If he could hold the sheep above his head, Hoskuld might

reach it from above and pull it up. Swallowing his pride, he called Hoskuld hesitantly, almost tentatively, like a man afraid of committing himself. That was childish he felt, and called again, louder.

The flood came rolling inwards swiftly, an immense, brownish, whitestreaked carpet, rolling over itself and under, around an immense axle, like wool in a carding machine. The swell broke a few yards from the banks, and a hissing, eddying stream of white sea rushed forward. Sveinn dug his feet in the sand and tightening his grip around the ewe's horn, he grabbed hold of a long algae stem jutting out from the bank. Then it hit them. The ewe jerked hard and was cast against his thigh.

His head went under for a moment only in the first rush, and then the inlet was a bubbling, spurting cauldron of water up to his shoulders. Suddenly it receded, licking the sand from under his feet and dragging him down on his knees. The ewe hung its head, gasping slightly.

From where he lay on his knees, he watched for a second, blank-faced and still how the sea gathered new force out on the sand. The next one would be worse. It started out more slowly than the first, and superstitiously he felt certain that the second one was always worse. Had Hoskuld heard him? Without rising yet, he took a deep

breath and called again. Loose snow drifted down over him. He jumped up. Hoskuld was standing above him on the bank, deathly still, his arms limp at his sides. Actually, they seemed to dangle a little back and forth in the wind, the palms forward. His face was blank, stupid even. Perhaps he had been standing there all the while.

The two men stared at each other for a moment. Sveinn with his mouth open, the lips moving slightly as if he were speaking, Hoskuld absolutely still, white-faced. Suddenly Sveinn became intensely aware of the din of sea-water approaching, the steady ubiquitous sound that is almost equivalent to soundlessness, like the noise of crowded streets coming in through heavy walls.

"Reach for her," he shouted, "I'm handing her up. Then haul me up," he added violently. "Hurry." With a powerful grip he lifted the ewe above his head, holding her against the bank.

But Hoskuld made no move except for the arms dangling slightly as it were in the wind.

With a furious effort, Sveinn dug his foot into the bank and gained a momentary foothold. Standing on one leg, he pushed the sheep up to the edge. The ewe fumbled with its forefeet and staggered up. He slid down again, held his breath and the swell submerged him. Something bumped against (*More on page 59*)

# GOOD-BYE SWEETHEART

By EVANTHA CALDWELL

Either choice was going to hurt someone, so Lulie buried her pride and her love in her pocket and decided to leave

SITTING on the back steps of Tate Shelby's cottage Lulie Deane watched her father and Tate come up from the pasture, which covered most of the ten acres Tate had now. Being outlined against the bright September sunset accentuated the difference between the two figures, her father smaller and not so quick-stepping as long-legged, confident young Tate.

Confident! The thought was the cue for her conscience, and even for a Deane, Lulie's was a stubborn one. It refused to see that until Tate actually asked her to marry him, she couldn't say, "I have to go with Pap. When his grief for Buddy gets bad, I must be with him," at least directly enough to show Tate she meant it.

Uneasily she retied the ribbon about her shoulder-length hair and smoothed her slim-fitting frock, pale rose to suit her creamy skin, dark brown hair and eyes.

The two were coming up the cedar-arched path from the barns now, Tate's red head burnished by the low sun. He was talking. A frown clung like a cocklebur between his deep blue eyes. Her father seemed only half listening.

As they came up Tate looked at her. "I'll lock Pap in the garage next time I leave. He tries to kill himself working when I'm gone."

A brief twinkle lighted Pap's sober gray eyes. "Maybe I can still totter as far as the store and chin with old Doc Galloway till you get over your peeve about me finishing the fence, son. I'll be back." He walked off with an exaggerated spryness, a pretended gaiety that never failed to frighten Lulie.

Tate watched him go. Then he turned to Lulie, his eyes speaking.

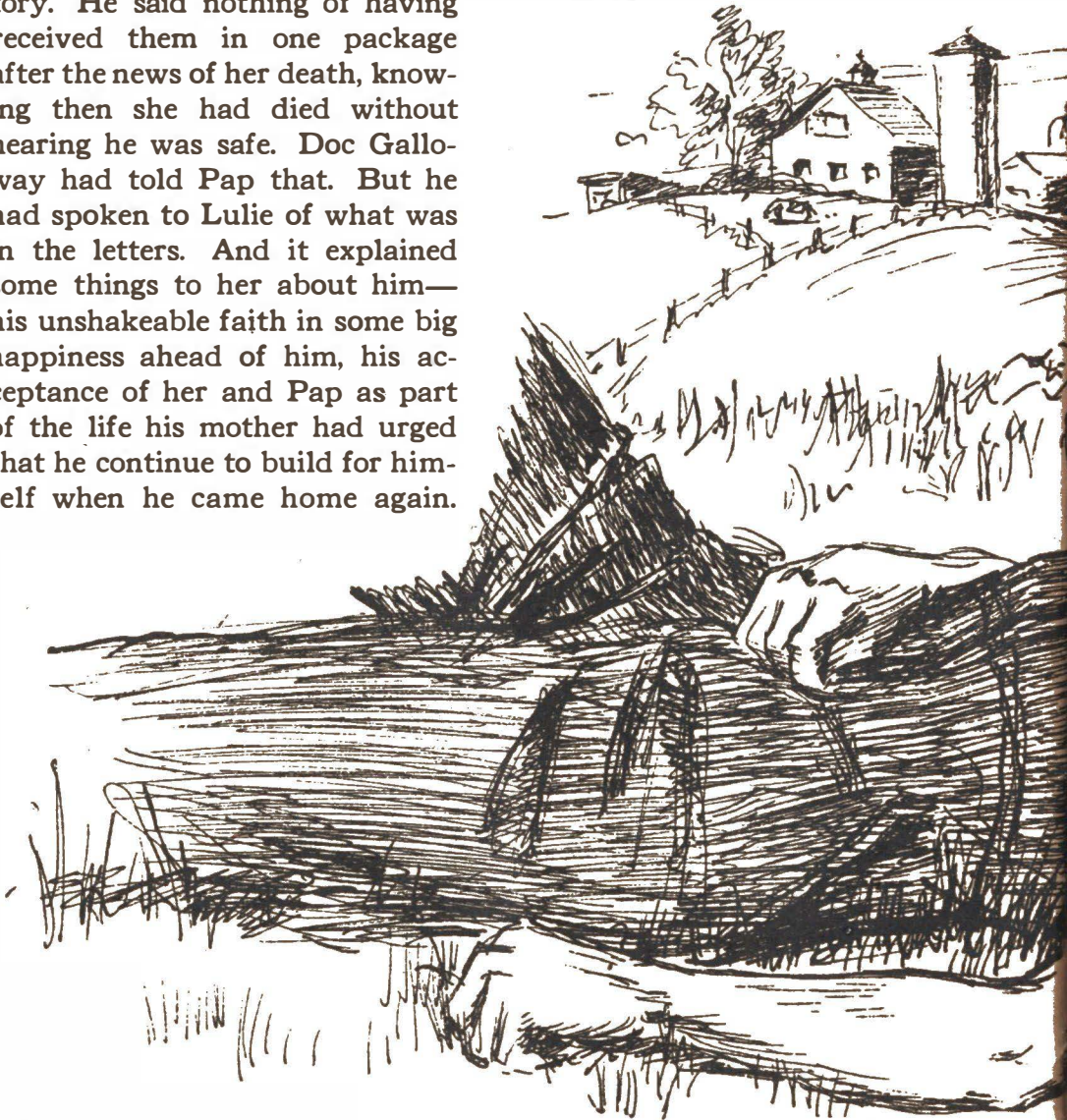
Though it made her heart do crazy things, she thought, "Quit looking at me like that, Tate

Shelby, or for Pete's sake, say something I can answer in plain words!"

She knew Tate was glib enough at ordinary talk, slow only in expressing what he felt deeply, as when he tried to tell her about the letters his mother had written him regularly while he was reported missing over enemy territory. He said nothing of having received them in one package after the news of her death, knowing then she had died without hearing he was safe. Doc Gallo way had told Pap that. But he had spoken to Lulie of what was in the letters. And it explained some things to her about him—his unshakeable faith in some big happiness ahead of him, his acceptance of her and Pap as part of the life his mother had urged that he continue to build for himself when he came home again.

"Pap's just trying to do all he can for you before we leave," she said quietly, adding, "He's stayed here longer than any other place since—Buddy was killed."

*"You know most of it, I guess," she began, "except maybe one thing. When the news came about Buddy, Pap began to die. Not slowly, Tate, fast. It was terrible to see him."*







"He says it's like home here, Lulie." Tate smiled down at her.

Lulie shook her head. "Not lately, Tate."

Still, it was like home a little, especially the trees. She looked across the yard to the pecan grove. "I used to have a doll house under a big pecan tree like that when I was a little girl," she said.

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet. They walked to the grove. "We could have a doll house here sometime, white with a red chimney, with a little walk from the door to our back steps—for damp days," he added gently.

She turned to him in protest. But his eyes stopped her.

He drew her close and put his face against her hair. "Doc Galloway told me today he wasn't taking up the option on the two hundred acres, so I'm getting it back when the lease is up. I can start real farming in the spring—but we needn't wait till spring to be married, Lulie."

She must tell him now. She looked up.

Tate kissed her. He had never kissed her before, even casually, even in fun, even teasing her in the kitchen as they did the dishes together, or working in the flowerbeds. When they returned from dances at Oak Island or from shows in town, his only beau-like gesture would be seeing her to the front porch before putting up his car. There under the vines,

he'd pull a lock of her hair and say, "Goodnight, sweetheart. See you in the morning." But never one time had he kissed her till now. And the joy of it came as a shock.

She tried to swallow the lump in her throat to ease its tightness, so that she could speak calmly.

"You're worried about Pap. That's the trouble, isn't it?" he said.

She drew away and looked at him levelly. "Tate, Pap is going to leave—soon, I'm afraid. I can't let him go alone. I must always be free to go with him. I can't marry you. I've tried to tell you."

"You've told me over and over, Lulie. That's why I waited to say anything. I wanted to be sure you were wrong about him, reasonably sure, and I am now."

"Why? Why do you say that?"

"He's happy here, I tell you. I know."

"When he's happy he whistles and sings and jokes. You've never seen him happy, Tate."

"Well, contented, then." Tate amended. "He says I remind him of Buddy. He called me Buddy today once."

Lulie's bright brown eyes flew wide open in alarm. "It was a slip. Don't you see? Don't you understand? Buddy's on his mind again. That's what I was afraid of. He won't stay much longer, Tate. Don't count on it, darling." She put her hand on his arm.

"Please don't count on it."

"Let's talk it over, Lulie."

They sat down together on the thick lush grass, carpet grass he had coaxed to grow under the trees. Then he stretched himself out full length, his bright head flat on the vivid green, so near her knee that his hair blowing against it paled the color of her dress to a rosy cream. It was surprisingly cool and soft to her touch.

"Now," he said, "just tell me everything about it."

"You know most of it, I guess," she began, "except maybe one thing. When the news came about Buddy, Pap began to die. Not slowly, Tate, fast. It was terrible to see him. Buddy was nineteen. He was in a prison camp. We never knew exactly how it happened." She paused and looked away for a moment. "I guess Pap couldn't keep from thinking and thinking. He began selling off things about the place, crating up other things. One day he said, 'Kid, suppose we sell out lock, stock and barrel and just travel around—see different things. How about it?'

"That's what we did, Tate. Oh, I've thanked God for that ramshackle Ford many a time when I was almost too tired to sit up in it. That was over two years ago. I think we've been in every county in Texas. And we've never cut back anywhere. We've stopped at all sorts of places. But

you know about that, I think."

"Just bits here and there, Lulie. Tell me."

"Well, we'd usually stay from one to six weeks, as Pap wanted. He could always get work. Sometimes I did. So we didn't use the money he got for the house. He liked the plains. He said the wind charged off like it was looking for something it couldn't find, as he was. And he liked the wild country around Fort Davis. He said it was almost as good as traveling to watch the Chisos Mountains changing every hour of the day. He thought of buying a little place there but—we moved on. We stayed two months in the little town of George West last winter, the longest stay anywhere till this one. We stopped a dozen places in the Rio Grande Valley during the citrus season. Then here.

"We'd had a long hot drive up through the caliche country when we first saw this place. It looked so nice and cool. It kept playing hide and seek with us, slipping behind trees and into hollows. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Pap to nose the Ford in at your gate and say hello. And you came out."

Lulie paused, remembering how Tate had looked that day, a tall red-headed young man in striped overalls with a hammer in his hand, limping then, and smiling. He had called "Good evening. Drive in, sir," as if he

had been waiting for them. And Pap said under his breath, "But for that color hair he'd look like Buddy, wouldn't he, Kid?"

"That was four months ago," Tate said. "And even then I knew you were the girl for me. Did you feel that way, Lulie?"

"Not at first, maybe." Lulie flushed. Then she said, "I won't lie to you, Tate. I did feel that way. I tried to persuade myself it was the house looking a little like the one we'd had, and the big trees, but after a while I knew it was you. But, you see, I knew too I'd have to leave, no matter what."

"Skip that part," Tate said.

"When Pap asked you if you needed any help about the place, I held my breath afraid you would think we were tramps. Then you said you needed help if any poor mortal ever did—"

"What else?" exclaimed Tate. "With you flashing those big brown eyes at me just daring me to turn your Pap down—and trying to get that hair up under that lopsided hat—and a blister on the tip end of your nose! How in the world did you manage to impress me that day that you were the prettiest girl I had ever seen in my life?"

Lulie laughed softly. "It wasn't easy. Do you remember what you said to me?"

"Of course I do. What was it?"

"You said, 'Young lady, can you make biscuits? I've a steak

in the icebox that refuses to be served without hot biscuits and French fried potatoes.'"

"That's when your eyes began going off like Christmas sparklers."

"Well, Pap was pleased. And nobody was feeling sorry for us."

"And when you saw me eat, you started feeling sorry for me."

"Tate!"

"Living here alone," Tate said, "trying to build something from things—just things!"

"It was magnificent, Tate. You hadn't wasted a day since your discharge. The whole place showed it inside and out—fences repaired, barns painted. Everything seemed so forward-looking, so loved."

"Lulie, let me say something to you—about Pap."

Lulie listened.

"Now, don't think I consider Pap an old man. He never will be old. But winter will be along. Roads may be bad. Stopping just anywhere in cold weather—"

"I know," Lulie interrupted. "I learned that the first winter. That's why I coaxed him last winter to rent the house in George West. I got a job and told him I'd promised to work till spring. I made friends and went to parties. I'd come home and tell him what a good time I had and how much nicer this was than pulling over sloppy roads. I stuck it out during the two raw months, but I couldn't do it again. He got

so lost, so white and thin, so old-looking. When I told him I was free to go, he became another person almost overnight. He ate. His step had spring. He became what he was when you first saw him, what he is now—sure, sure of something. I don't know what it is unless it's escape from loneliness, for Buddy gets too much for him. Oh, Tate, you've just got to see Pap cooped up and sort of frightened about it to understand what it does to him."

"But, Lulie, do you ever think of the time when Pap can't run away, maybe?"

Lulie shook off the thought. "He's so restless now, Tate. And all this walking to the store—maybe he just goes to the top of the hill and stands looking off down the road, as we saw him yesterday. When it gets hard for him like that I can't think. I'm just scared."

"Would you be unhappy to go, Lulie?"

"Don't!" She shuddered. "Let's not think about that now."

"With you unhappy what would Pap have left, on the road or anywhere else? You're all he has now, Lulie. Don't you see how unfair all this is to him? Now, if I should go to Pap and tell him—"

Lulie clutched Tate's shoulder in sudden panic. "Oh, no!" she cried out sharply. "You mustn't do that! Anything might happen. He might slip away alone some-

time. He might—You won't tell him. Promise me!"

Tate caught her wrist. He sat up slowly and looked at her. Astonishment made his voice sound queer. "Lulie, you're quivering! You're pale! Don't look at me frightened like that. You know I wouldn't do anything to hurt you or Pap either. It's wrong, Lulie, wrong for him and for us—but if that's the way you feel, of course, I can't say anything."

They got up then and walked back to the house. At the steps Tate stood thinking. Then he said, "Lulie, this is the place for Pap. We shouldn't let him leave here. He's changed a lot in his feeling lately. He's alive now."

"How, Tate?"

"Well, for instance, he was as thrilled as I was at getting back the land Mother leased to Doc Galloway. And when I spoke of putting in a young orchard he was keen for it. He paced me off what he called some cracking good fruit land out beyond the live-oaks. I said, 'Pap, when the orchard's started, it will be your baby.' I could see he liked that. After a while he said, 'An orchard can be lots of company to a man, son!' It wouldn't be long, Lulie, till he'd put down roots here. And that's what he needs. Let's tell him."

Lulie was silent. She was seeing Pap out in the spring sunshine tending young trees and whistling again, maybe. Tears filled her

eyes. But she shook her head. "I couldn't ask him to stay, Tate, unless I was sure, very sure. I'd be afraid."

It was at breakfast the next morning that Pap said, "Well, Kid, suppose we start rolling again. Tomorrow, say."

After a breathless moment Lulie answered, faintly, "O.K. Pap."

The expression on Tate's face then was something she did not want to remember. But it stayed with her all day long. It kept her awake far into the night, tired as she was from packing and giving the little house a final once-over. At dawn Pap waked her working with the Ford in the driveway outside her window.

She sprang up quickly, dressed in her slacks and jumper, giving herself no time to think, no time to regret anything. She did her hair in a shining coil that would go under her hat. She hurried to the kitchen to get their breakfast. Tate's room door stood open. He was nowhere about the house.

He still hadn't returned when Pap came in to eat. They didn't wait. Pap was in a hurry. He kept watching the path that curved out from between the cedars. Lulie had never seen him so tense about getting away.

As she set Tate's breakfast where it would keep warm, Pap said, "Tate spoke of running down early to get the Galloway sons started digging the ground tank.

He'll be in directly, I guess."

Lulie didn't answer.

"That boy's all whipped out, Lulie. Did you notice it?"

"Yes," Lulie said, "I noticed it."

"He's getting back some of the old farm hands when he gets back the land. I told him I wouldn't go while he needed me."

"What — what did he say, Pap?" Lulie asked softly.

"He just said he knew it. He said he understood."

Pap got up and started out. "By the time I get that crated stuff fixed so I can close up the back end, I guess Tate'll be here."

"All right, Pap," Lulie said. "I'll be ready."

She straightened the kitchen and took a quick peep into Pap's quarters. Tate's room had never been her responsibility. He kept that. She hurried to her own room. Her bags were in the car. She crammed a few extras into her overnight case and tidied up here and there. Then taking her case and hat she went out, not looking back, and closed the door.

Though it would have been nearer through the kitchen she tiptoed through the little hall to the front porch. She wanted a moment for herself there under the vines. They were past their summer blooming but were still luxuriantly green and cool. She wouldn't get to see Tate alone again. But he would guess that here, where he had always said

"Goodnight, sweetheart," would be the place where she would leave her special wishes for him and her love. Some men might not think of it, but Tate would.

Tate had thought of it. His note was pinned to the vine. It said, "Goodbye, sweetheart." That was all.

That was all, completely all. The ghastliness of it was like a blow. A cold wind seemed to strike across her face. Her knees felt queerly weak. She sat down on the porch bench, a strange black emptiness closing over her.

She pulled herself together. What was the matter with her? Was this a surprise? Had some secret and childishly sheltered part of her been believing all the time it would never quite come to this? Tate had known. Tate had known when he promised not to tell Pap. And when Pap said he was going. But she hadn't realized it fully. She knew now she hadn't.

But what difference did it make? She had had no choice then. She had none now. She had told him she must go with Pap. She still must go with Pap. Whether she realized it then or now or ever it was the same. For both of them it was the same—this, as he had written it.

Pap came out onto the porch from the hall. Instinctively Lulie's fingers folded the small paper. Pap sat down in a chair opposite her. He looked tired and

worried. Pap was fond of Tate.

"We'll wait a little longer for him, I guess," he said.

"He—he— isn't coming, Pap. He left a note."

"Left a note!" Pap was surprised. "Where is it?"

"It was—for me, Pap."

"For you? Just for you? Well, that's fun—ny!"

The glimmer of understanding slipped into the middle of the last word. Tears surged into Lulie's eyes, blinding her.

When she could see Pap again, he was leaning a little forward, a hand on each knee, astonishment of complete knowledge all over him.

"Well," he said at last humbly, "I don't know what was the matter with me that I didn't see. I guess I didn't figure you were that grown up, Kid."

Lulie was afraid to try to tell him it was all right, that they'd go anyway. The tears might start again and she might not be able to stop them.

"You're leaving the man you love to go skittering over the country with your Pap. That's it, isn't it?"

"I love you too, Pap. I couldn't let you go alone."

"Kid," he asked directly, "can you stand another stiff jolt?"

"I—guess I can, Pap," she answered numbly.

"Well, here it is. I don't want to leave any more than you do."

That was no jolt. She had

known he would say that. She gave him a quick, disbelieving half-smile. But Pap looked as if he was packed full of sunrise and letting it out slow, through his eyes.

"Then why did you say—?"

"Conscience."

"Consciencel" What sort of a story was Pap going to make up?

"Yep, conscience, starting late and working overtime. It didn't cheep till my very bones knew this was home." The sunrise look was spilling over his face. "I went off down the road and looked over the hill as far as I could see, testing myself out for the old fever to be rolling again. It was gone, Kid, clean gone. I settled down inside myself thinking now I could rest, I could live again, maybe, now. And conscience reared up and looked me in the eye and said, 'Why, you consarned old cuss, you! What about the Kid? What about the good time she had in George West last winter? What about the way she's trailed over the world with you, from the Panhandle to the Gulf, from El Paso to the Piney-woods? What about a little fun for her now?'" He paused. "That's what I was going to do, Kid. Rent us a house in town somewhere and let you—"

Lulie had been listening unbelieving. Now she sprang up and leapt at him, her eyes shining. She grabbed his shirt fronts and twisted them into two tight knots.

"Is that the truth? Is that the gospel truth? You lie to me, Pap, and I'll smack you if it's the last act of my life!"

Pap turned his sunrise loose. It wrinkled his cheeks deeply and crinkled up around his eyes. It even did something odd to his ears. "I wouldn't lie to you about it, Kid. I'd just about got old Doc Galloway beat down to my price for the store. I thought if we owned that, it would make us a living, and I could still fool around with the orchard and things for Tate. Why—you wild tornado!"

Lulie dashed into the house. The kitchen was suddenly miles across, the back porch acres wide. Already she was flying out across the pasture to the ground-tank. She was finding Tate. She was telling him the news. Only here she was still creeping, snail speed, down innumerable back steps. At this rate, the world would come to an end before she got as far as the cedar path. Why were feet so slow? Why didn't they suddenly sprout wings as hearts did?

At the bottom of the path she met Tate rushing through the gate as if he thought the house was on fire. She grabbed his arm.

He tried to shake her off. "It's no use, Lulie. Pap's just not the kind of man to be treated in any such way, and, promise or no promise, I'm telling him!"

"But, Tate," he wants to stay. He's buying Doc Galloway's



store! He says he wants to!"

The arm Lulie clung to went limp. He turned to her, his face greenish, with freckles jumping out on it like little brown tree-frogs.

"Get your breath, Lulie!" He got his own in jerks. "Try to be calm, now. What did you say?"

Lulie leaned against him laughing. "I said kiss me exactly as you did day before yesterday down by the—the doll-house!"

Color returning to Tate's face, rising up from under his open shirt collar and spreading to his gorgeous red hair line, almost obliterating it. His arm closed around her like a vise. Laughter bubbled in the blue depths of his eyes and spread his mouth in a wide beautiful grin. "Exactly,

did you say, my girl?"

"Exactly! Later, I'll try your other styles, but for now it has to be exactly that one. And for Pete's sake, start quick before—"

Sometime later, when he was helping Pap unload his small home treasures from the Ford, and uncrate them, he remembered and stopped suddenly laughing.

"Lulie!" he called.

Lulie came to the window and looked out. She had changed into a blue and white checked dress with a ruffled apron and a blue ribbon around her loose hair.

"Start quick before what?" he asked.

Lulie cut her brown eyes at Pap wickedly. "Before mine and Pap's consciences cook up something else!"

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(From page 27) turned pale; and I gazed steadfastly at the ghost, almost without seeing Madeline, who sat between us.

"Do you know," he cried, "that John Hinckman is coming up the hill? He will be here in fifteen minutes; and if you are doing anything in the way of love-making, you had better hurry it up. But this is not what I came to tell you. I have glorious news! At last I am transferred! Not forty minutes ago a Russian nobleman was murdered by the Nihilists. Nobody ever thought of him in connection with

an immediate ghostship. My friends instantly applied for the situation for me, and obtained my transfer. I am off before that horrid Hinckman comes up the hill. The moment I reach my new position, I shall put off this hated semblance. Good-by. You can't imagine how glad I am to be, at last, the real ghost of somebody."

"Oh!" I cried, rising to my feet, and stretching out my arms in utter wretchedness, "I would to Heaven you were mine!"

"I am yours," said Madeline, raising to me her tearful eyes.

(From page 38) his head, a loose rock he thought, and for a second, he felt airy and light as if he were floating up and away at great speed. He caught hold of an alga.

It seemed like a very long time. He thought of Hoskuld, and he made up his mind about Hoskuld, quite calmly and reasonably, he felt. Then one thought took hold of him and came and went and recurred like a flash, faster and faster. "If I drown, there will be only the two of them on the farm. Hoskuld and the girl. Hoskuld and my girl." He clutched the alga stem until his hands felt numb. His arms were strained, his breath was giving up, and he began to swallow. His left side ached intolerably under the ribs, and the pain increased steadily like the din of the approaching water, louder and louder.

A strong hand grasped his arm against the bank face forward, and pulled him on his feet. Hoskuld had jumped down beside him, and the two stood shoulder high in water. A last backwash submerged them and flung them against the bank face forward. Sveinn's feet gave way, but Hoskuld pulled him up again.

Then the water receded, scraping away the sand down to rock in the middle of the inlet. Quickly Hoskuld lifted Sveinn up until he could place his elbows squarely on the edge of the bank. He swung himself up laboriously. Then he reached down again to

give Hoskuld a hand.

The two men stood for a moment face to face on the bank. Then Sveinn broke off and started towards the sheep. Hoskuld caught up with him. "Are you all right?" he muttered thickly. Sveinn nodded.

They drove the sheep up the path towards the cotes, each taking turns at pushing the flock, while the other ran up and down the acclivity to keep warm.

Inside the cotes, the air became warm with emanations from crowded sheep. Standing by the door in the faint gleam of a kerosene lamp, Hoskuld spoke with hoarse deliberation. "I have been thinking of moving to town this fall, that is, if you would be willing to take care of my sheep until spring when I can sell out?"

"What will you do in town?" Sveinn asked distractedly.

"Oh, carpentry, anything."

Suddenly, the door swung open, and the girl appeared in the light, windbeaten, slender and a little absurd in a man's fur cap, with a long twisted scarf blown back over her shoulders. Hoskuld stepped aside, blankfaced.

She glanced at him briefly, then walked straight to Sveinn.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked gaspingly, as if awaking from a daze. "I was afraid," the girl began, looking back over her shoulder.

The door swung closed, and Hoskuld was gone.

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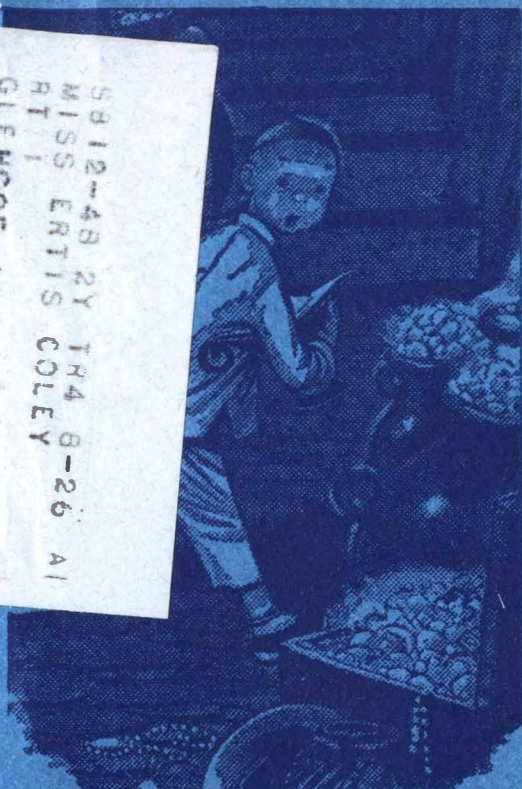
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