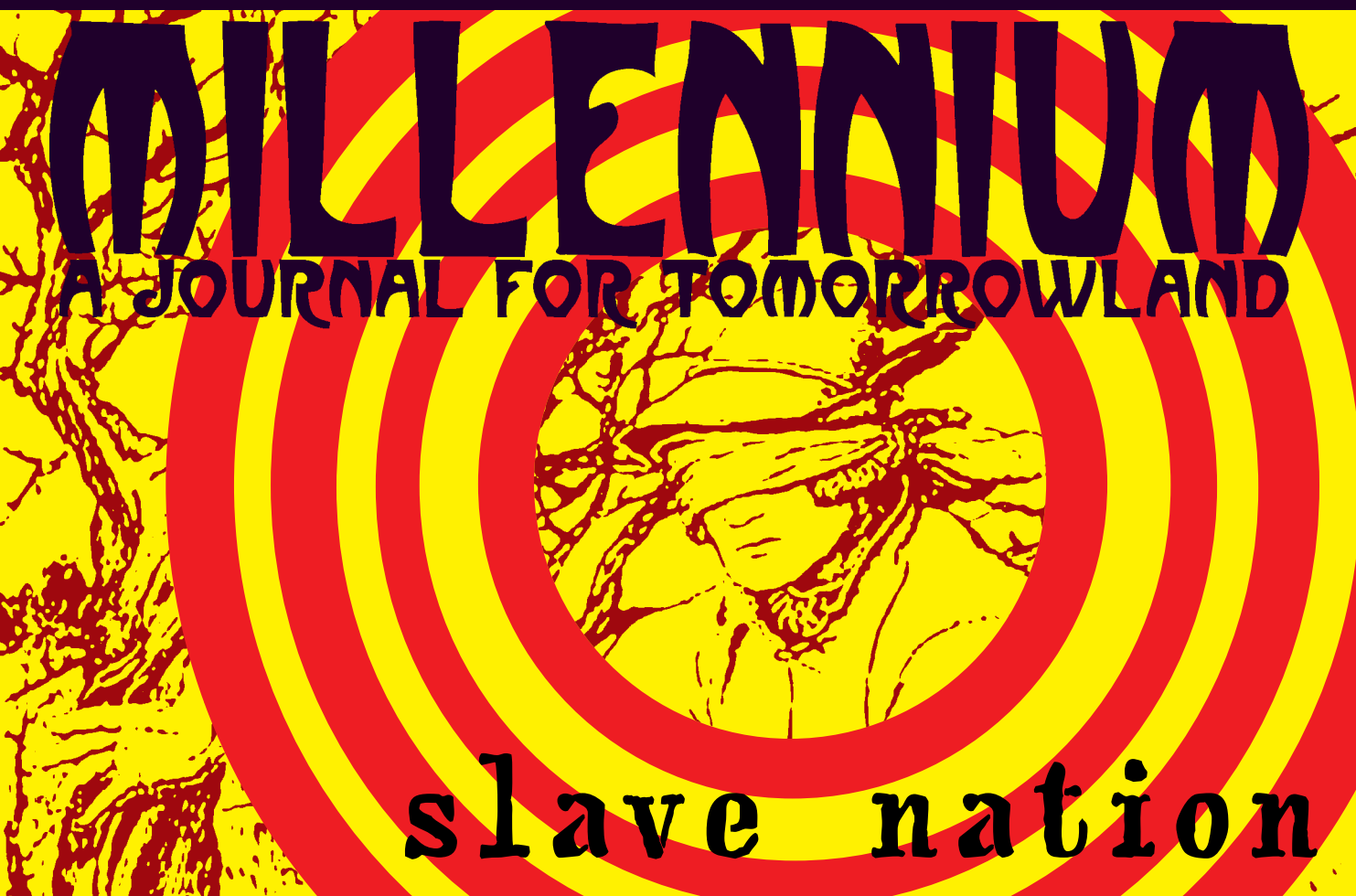
# MILLENNIUM

## A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND



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MILLENNIUM: A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND published whenever we are damn good and ready by DUCK SOUP PRODUCTIONS, RR1 Box 1990 Albion ME 04910. Volume 4, Number Zero, March 1999 issue.

# buffalo chips

My first encounter with fascism came in Mr. Burke's fourth grade class. We had learned about some animals that were extinct or close to being extinct, and the test that followed asked us about those animals. It was an ordinary test, with the exception of one question.

"Have you ever seen a buffalo?" the test asked.

At the time, I wasn't able to think: "that's a pretty subjective question for a standard issue test ripped out of the back of a textbook to be asking." But it did seem strange.

Now, I *might* have seen a buffalo in the zoo, as I had been to several good zoos. I had ridden on the back of an elephant, and as far as I was concerned that was *much* more exotic than just seeing any old buffalo. But I *had* seen buffaloes on television, which to a fourth grader is the next best thing to being there. It was fudging and I knew it was fudging, but it wasn't a lie. I knew that I *could* have seen a buffalo, somewhere. Not in my back yard, of course, but the test didn't mention anything about *where* I was supposed to have seen it.

I put down "yes."

Imagine my resentment when the test came back with the vital buffalo question marked "wrong." It was the one question I was certain that I'd aced.

I didn't say anything to Mr. Burke, of course: I was easily cowed by authority figures even then. But when I got home that afternoon I made sure to tell my mother.

"How does *he* know that I've never seen a buffalo?" I said in high dudgeon.

"You've seen buffalo," my mother said.

"The test only said 'Have you ever seen a buffalo.' He shouldn't have marked it wrong no matter *what* I put down."

I was angry about this for weeks afterward. Soon I realized that nobody else cared: and why should they? Why bother about a fourth grader and buffaloes when every day as grown-ups we have to deal with idiots in seven hundred dollar suits who believe that their reality is the only one that matters?

When it came to Mr. Burke, well, I did finally ask him about it. What was his answer? I don't remember the words. Maybe there were none. Because as far as he was concerned, if it was marked wrong it was wrong. Mr. Burke was no amiable chalk-pusher. He had the brains and personality of a brick wall. I couldn't have seen a buffalo because I couldn't have seen it. End of argument.

Classrooms don't exist to give us an education: they exist to provide us with a template of the real world, and I should have taken a lesson from that test. Instead, I have kicked and bit in the traces all the rest of my life, insisting on myself every time someone that I had the extreme displeasure of working for told me that I couldn't have seen a buffalo when I knew damn well that I had.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it. I may even propose a "Take Your Buffalo to Work Day." If I can get enough folks to participate we may finally have a stampede.

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fiction

# beyond the bayou

by kate chopin

The bayou curved like a crescent around the point of land on which La Folle's cabin stood. Between the stream and the hut lay a big abandoned field, where cattle were pastured when the bayou supplied them with water enough. Through the woods that spread back into unknown regions the woman had drawn an imaginary line, and past this circle she never stepped. This was the form of her only mania.

She was now a large, gaunt black woman, past thirty-five. Her real name was Jacqueline, but every one on the plantation called her La Folle, because in childhood she had been frightened literally "out of her senses," and had never wholly regained them.

It was when there had been skirmishing and sharpshooting all day in the woods. Evening was near when P'tit Maitre, black with powder and crimson with blood, had staggered into the cabin of Jacqueline's mother, his pursuers close at his heels. The sight had stunned her childish reason.

She dwelt alone in her solitary cabin, for the rest of the quarters had long since been removed beyond her sight and knowledge. She had more physical strength than most men, and made her patch of cotton and corn and tobacco like the best of them. But

of the world beyond the bayou she had long known nothing, save what her morbid fancy conceived.

People at Bellissime had grown used to her and her way, and they thought nothing of it. Even when "Old Mis'" died, they did not wonder that La Folle had not crossed the bayou, but had stood upon her side of it, wailing and lamenting.

P'tit Maitre was now the owner of Bellissime. He was a middle-aged man, with a family of beautiful daughters about him, and a little son whom La Folle loved as if he had been her own. She called him Cheri, and so did every one else because she did.

None of the girls had ever been to her what Cheri was. They had each and all loved to be with her, and to listen to her wondrous stories of things that always happened "yonda, beyon' de bayou."

But none of them had stroked her black hand quite as Cheri did, nor rested their heads against her knee so confidingly, nor fallen asleep in her arms as he used to do. For Cheri hardly did such things now, since he had become the proud possessor of a gun, and had had his black curls cut off.

That summer--the summer Cheri gave La Folle two black curls tied with a knot of red ribbon--the water ran so low in the bayou that even the little children at Bellissime were able to cross it on foot, and the cattle were sent to pasture down by the river. La Folle was sorry when they were gone, for she loved these dumb companions well, and liked to feel that they were there, and to hear them browsing by night up to her own enclosure.

It was Saturday afternoon, when the fields were deserted. The men had flocked to a neighboring village to do their week's trading, and the women were occupied with household affairs,--La Folle as well as the others. It was then she mended and washed her handful of clothes, scoured her house, and did her baking.

In this last employment she never forgot Cheri. To-day she had fashioned croquignoles of the most fantastic and alluring shapes for him. So when she saw the boy come trudging across the old field with his gleaming little new rifle on his shoulder, she called out gayly to him, "Cheri! Cheri!"

But Cheri did not need the summons, for he was coming straight to her. His pockets all bulged out with almonds

and raisins and an orange that he had secured for her from the very fine dinner which had been given that day up at his father's house.

He was a sunny-faced youngster of ten. When he had emptied his pockets, La Folle patted his round red cheek, wiped his soiled hands on her apron, and smoothed his hair. Then she watched him as, with his cakes in his hand, he crossed her strip of cotton back of the cabin, and disappeared into the wood.

He had boasted of the things he was going to do with his gun out there.

"You think they got plenty deer in the wood, La Folle?" he had inquired, with the calculating air of an experienced hunter.

"Non, non!" the woman laughed. "Don't you look fo' no deer, Cheri. Dat's too big. But you bring La Folle one good fat squirrel fo' her dinner to-morrow, an' she goin' be satisfi'."

"One squirrel ain't a bite. I'll bring you mo' 'an one, La Folle," he had boasted pompously as he went away.

When the woman, an hour later, heard the report of the boy's rifle close to the wood's edge, she would have thought nothing of it if a sharp cry of distress had not followed the sound.

*When she was at the bayou's edge she stood there, and shouted for help as if a life depended on it...*

She withdrew her arms from the tub of suds in which they had been plunged, dried them upon her apron, and as quickly as her trembling limbs would bear her, hurried to the spot whence the ominous report had come.

It was as she feared. There she found Cheri stretched upon the ground, with his rifle beside him. He moaned piteously:--"I'm dead, La Folle! I'm dead! I'm gone!"

"Non, non!" she exclaimed resolutely, as she knelt beside him. "Put you' arm 'roun' La Folle's nake, Cheri. Dat's nuttin'; dat goin' be nuttin'." She lifted him in her powerful arms.

Cheri had carried his gun muzzle-downward.

He had stumbled,--he did not know how. He only knew that he had a ball lodged somewhere in his leg, and he thought that his end was at hand. Now, with his head upon the woman's shoulder, he moaned and wept with pain and fright.

"Oh, La Folle! La Folle! it hurt so bad! I can' stan' it, La Folle!"

"Don't cry, mon bebe, mon bebe, mon Cheri!" the woman spoke soothingly as she covered the ground with long strides. "La Folle goin' mine you; Doctor Bonfils goin' come make mon Cheri well agin."

She had reached the abandoned field. As she crossed it with her precious burden, she looked constantly and restlessly from side to side. A terrible fear was upon her, —the fear of the world beyond the bayou, the morbid and insane dread she had been under since childhood.

When she was at the bayou's edge she stood there, and shouted for help as if a life depended upon it:— "Oh, P'tit Maitre! P'tit Maitre! Venez donc! Au secours! Au secours!"

No voice responded. Cheri's hot tears were scalding her neck. She called for each and every one upon the place, and still no answer came.

She shouted, she wailed; but whether her voice remained unheard or unheeded, no reply came to her frenzied cries. And all the while Cheri moaned and wept and entreated to be taken home to his mother.

La Folle gave a last despairing look around her. Extreme terror was upon her. She clasped the child close against her breast, where he could feel her heart beat like a muffled hammer. Then shutting her eyes, she ran suddenly down the shallow bank of the bayou, and never stopped till she had climbed the opposite shore.

She stood there quivering an instant as she opened her eyes. Then she plunged into the footpath through the trees.

She spoke no more to Cheri, but muttered constantly, "Bon Dieu, ayez pitie La Folle! Bon Dieu, ayez pitie moi!"

Instinct seemed to guide her. When the pathway spread clear and smooth enough before her, she again closed her eyes tightly against the sight of that unknown and terrifying world.

A child, playing in some weeds, caught sight of her as she neared the quarters. The little one uttered a cry of dismay.

"La Folle!" she screamed, in her piercing

treble. "La Folle done cross de bayer!"

Quickly the cry passed down the line of cabins.

"Yonda, La Folle done cross de bayou!"

Children, old men, old women, young ones with infants in their arms, flocked to doors and windows to see this awe-inspiring spectacle. Most of them shuddered with superstitious dread of what it might portend. "She totin' Cheri!" some of them shouted.

Some of the more daring gathered about her, and followed at her heels, only to fall back with new terror when she turned her distorted face upon them. Her eyes were bloodshot and the saliva had gathered in a white foam on her black lips.

Some one had run ahead of her to where P'tit Maitre sat with his family and guests upon the gallery.

"P'tit Maitre! La Folle done cross de bayou! Look her! Look her yonda totin' Cheri!"

This startling intimation was the first which they had of the woman's approach.

She was now near at hand. She walked with long strides. Her eyes were fixed desperately before her, and she breathed heavily, as a tired ox.

*She reeled for an instant. Before a sustaining arm could reach her, she fell heavily to the ground...*

At the foot of the stairway, which she could not have mounted, she laid the boy in his father's arms. Then the world that had looked red to La Folle suddenly turned black,--like that day she had seen powder and blood.

She reeled for an instant. Before a sustaining arm could reach her, she fell heavily to the ground.

When La Folle regained consciousness, she was at home again, in her own cabin and upon her own bed. The moon rays, streaming in through the open door and windows, gave what light was needed to the old black mammy who stood at the table concocting a tisane of fra-

grant herbs. It was very late.

Others who had come, and found that the stupor clung to her, had gone again. P'tit Maitre had been there, and with him Doctor Bonfils, who said that La Folle might die.

But death had passed her by. The voice was very clear and steady with which she spoke to Tante Lizette, brewing her tisane there in a corner.

"Ef you will give me one good drink tisane, Tante Lizette, I b'lieve I'm goin' sleep, me."

And she did sleep; so soundly, so healthfully, that old Lizette without compunction stole softly away, to creep back through the moonlit fields to her own cabin in the new quarters.

The first touch of the cool gray morning awoke La Folle. She arose, calmly, as if no tempest had shaken and threatened her existence but yesterday.

She donned her new blue cottonade and white apron, for she remembered that this was Sunday. When she had made for herself a cup of strong black coffee, and drunk it with relish, she quitted the cabin and walked across the old familiar field to the bayou's edge again.

She did not stop there as she had always done before, but crossed with a long, steady stride as if she had done this all her life.

When she had made her way through the brush and scrub cottonwood-trees that lined the opposite bank, she found herself upon the border of a field where the white, bursting cotton, with the dew upon it, gleamed for acres and acres like frosted silver in the early dawn.

La Folle drew a long, deep breath as she gazed across the country. She walked slowly and uncertainly, like one who hardly knows how, looking about her as she went.

The cabins, that yesterday had sent a clamor of voices to pursue her, were quiet now. No one was yet astir at Bellissime. Only the birds that darted here and there from hedges were awake, and singing their matins.

When La Folle came to the broad stretch of velvety lawn that surrounded the house, she moved slowly and with delight over the springy turf, that was delicious beneath her tread.

She stopped to find whence came those perfumes that were assailing her senses with memories from a time far gone.

There they were, stealing up to her from

the thousand blue violets that peeped out from green, luxuriant beds. There they were, showering down from the big waxen bells of the magnolias far above her head, and from the jessamine clumps around her.

There were roses, too, without number. To right and left palms spread in broad and graceful curves. It all looked like enchantment beneath the sparkling sheen of dew.

When La Folle had slowly and cautiously mounted the many steps that led up to the veranda, she turned to look back at the perilous ascent she had made. Then she caught sight of the river, bending like a silver bow at the foot of Bellissime. Exultation possessed her soul.

La Folle rapped softly upon a door near at hand. Cheri's mother soon cautiously opened it. Quickly and cleverly she dissembled the astonishment she felt at seeing La Folle.

"Ah, La Folle! Is it you, so early?"

"Oui, madame. I come ax how my po' li'le Cheri do, 's mo'nin'."

"He is feeling easier, thank you, La Folle. Dr. Bonfils says it will be nothing serious. He's sleeping now. Will you come back when he awakes?"

"Non, madame. I'm goin' wait yair tell Cheri wake up." La Folle seated herself upon the topmost step of the veranda.

A look of wonder and deep content crept into her face as she watched for the first time the sun rise upon the new, the beautiful world beyond the bayou.

fiction

# the man that corrupted hadleyburg

by samuel clemins

It was many years ago. Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright town in all the region round about. It had kept that reputation unsmirched during three generations, and was prouder of it than of any other of its possessions. It was so proud of it, and so anxious to insure its perpetuation, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealing to its babies in the cradle, and made the like teachings the staple of their culture thenceforward through all the years devoted to their education. Also, throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone. The neighbouring towns were jealous of this honourable supremacy, and affected to sneer at Hadleyburg's pride in it and call it vanity; but all the same they were obliged to acknowledge that Hadleyburg was in reality an incorruptible town; and if pressed they would also acknowledge that the mere fact that a young man hailed from Hadleyburg was all the recommendation he needed when he went forth from his natal town to seek for responsible employment.

But at last, in the drift of time, Hadleyburg had the ill luck to offend a passing stranger—possibly without knowing it, certainly without caring, for Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself, and cared not a rap for strangers or their opinions. Still, it would have been well to make an exception in this one's case, for he was a bitter man, and revengeful. All through his wanderings during a whole

year he kept his injury in mind, and gave all his leisure moments to trying to invent a compensating satisfaction for it. He contrived many plans, and all of them were good, but none of them was quite sweeping enough: the poorest of them would hurt a great many individuals, but what he wanted was a plan which would comprehend the entire town, and not let so much as one person escape unhurt. At last he had a fortunate idea, and when it fell into his brain it lit up his whole head with an evil joy. He began to form a plan at once, saying to himself "That is the thing to do—I will corrupt the town."

Six months later he went to Hadleyburg, and arrived in a buggy at the house of the old cashier of the bank about ten at night. He got a sack out of the buggy, shouldered it, and staggered with it through the cottage yard, and knocked at the door. A woman's voice said "Come in," and he entered, and set his sack behind the stove in the parlour, saying politely to the old lady who sat reading the "Missionary Herald" by the lamp:

"Pray keep your seat, madam, I will not disturb you. There—now it is pretty well concealed; one would hardly know it was there. Can I see your husband a moment, madam?"

No, he was gone to Brixton, and might not return before morning.

"Very well, madam, it is no matter. I merely wanted to leave that sack in his care, to be delivered to the rightful owner when he shall be found. I am a stranger; he does not know me; I am merely passing through the town to-night to discharge a matter which has been long in my mind. My errand is now completed, and I go pleased and a little proud, and you will never see me again. There is a paper attached to the sack which will explain everything. Good-night, madam."

The old lady was afraid of the mysterious big stranger, and was glad to see him go. But her curiosity was roused, and she went straight to the sack and brought away the paper. It began as follows:

"*To be published*, or, the right man sought out by private inquiry—either will answer. This sack contains gold coin weighing a hundred and sixty pounds four ounces—"

"Mercy on us, and the door not locked!"

Mrs. Richards flew to it all in a tremble and locked it, then pulled down the window-shades and stood frightened, worried, and wondering if there was anything else she could do toward making herself and the money more safe. She listened awhile for burglars, then surrendered to curiosity, and went back to the lamp and finished reading the paper:

"I am a foreigner, and am presently going back to my own country, to remain there permanently. I am grateful to America for what I have received at her hands during my long stay under her flag; and to one of her citizens—a citizen of Hadleyburg—I am especially grateful for a great

kindness done me a year or two ago. Two great kindnesses in fact. I will explain. I was a gambler. I say I *was*. I was a ruined gambler. I arrived in this village at night, hungry and without a penny. I asked for help—in the dark; I was ashamed to beg in the light. I begged of the right man. He gave me twenty dollars—that is to say, he gave me life, as I considered it. He also gave me fortune; for out of that money I have made myself rich at the gaming-table. And finally, a remark which he made to me has remained with me to this day, and has at last conquered me; and in conquering has saved the remnant of my morals: I shall gamble no more. Now I have no idea who that man was, but I want him found, and I want him to have this money, to give away, throw away, or keep, as he pleases. It is merely my way of testifying my gratitude to him. If I could stay, I would find him myself; but no matter, he will be found. This is an honest town, an incorruptible town, and I know I can trust it without fear. This man can be identified by the remark which he made to me; I feel persuaded that he will remember it.

"And now my plan is this: If you prefer to conduct the inquiry privately, do so. Tell the contents of this present writing to any one who is likely to be the right man. If he shall answer, 'I am the man; the remark I made was so-and-so,' apply the test—to wit: open the sack, and in it you will find a sealed envelope containing that remark. If the remark mentioned by the candidate tallies with it, give him the money, and ask no further questions, for he is certainly the right man.

"But if you shall prefer a public inquiry, then publish this present writing in the local paper—with these instructions added, to wit: Thirty days from now, let the candidate appear at the town-hall at eight in the evening (Friday), and hand his remark, in a sealed envelope, to the Rev. Mr. Burgess (if he will be kind enough to act); and let Mr. Burgess there and then destroy the seals of the sack, open it, and see if the remark is correctt. If correct, let the money be delivered, with my sincere gratitude, to my benefactor thus identified."

Mrs. Richards sat down, gently quivering with excitement, and was soon lost in thinkings—after this pattern: "What a strange thing it is! . . . And what a fortune for that kind man who set his bread afloat upon the waters! . . . If it had only been my husband that did it!—for we are so poor, so old and poor! . . ." Then, with a sigh—"But it was not my Edward; no, it was not he that gave a stranger twenty dollars. It is a pity too; I see it now. . . " Then, with a shudder—"But it is *gamblers'* money! the wages of sin; we couldn't take it; we couldn't touch it. I don't like to be near it; it seems a defilement." She moved to a farther chair. . . "I wish Edward would come, and take it to the bank; a burglar might come at any

moment; it is dreadful to be here all alone with it."

At eleven Mr. Richards arrived, and while his wife was saying "I am *so* glad you've come!" he was saying, "I am so tired—tired clear out; it is dreadful to be poor, and have to make these dismal journeys at my time of life. Always at the grind, grind, grind, on a salary—another man's slave, and he sitting at home in his slippers, rich and comfortable."

"I am so sorry for you, Edward, you know that; but be comforted; we have our livelihood; we have our good name—"

"Yes, Mary, and that is everything. Don't mind my talk—it's just a moment's irritation and doesn't mean anything. Kiss me—there, it's all gone now, and I am not complaining any more. What have you been getting? What's in the sack?"

Then his wife told him the great secret. It dazed him for a moment; then he said:

"It weighs a hundred and sixty pounds? Why, Mary, it's for-ty thousand dollars—think of it—a whole fortune! Not ten men in this village are worth that much. Give me the paper."

He skimmed through it and said:

"Isn't it an adventure! Why, it's a romance; it's like the impossible things one reads about in books, and never sees in life." He was well stirred up now; cheerful, even gleeful. He tapped his old wife on the cheek, and said humorously, "Why, we're rich, Mary, rich; all we've got to do is to bury the money and burn the papers. If the gambler ever comes to inquire, we'll merely look coldly upon him and say: 'What is this nonsense you are talking? We have never heard of you and your sack of gold before;' and then he would look foolish, and—"

"And in the meantime, while you are running on with your jokes, the money is still here, and it is fast getting along toward burglar-time."

"True. Very well, what shall we do—make the inquiry private? No, not that; it would spoil the romance. The public method is better. Think what a noise it will make! And it will make all the other towns jealous; for no stranger would trust such a thing to any town but Hadleyburg, and they know it. It's a great card for us. I must get to the printing-office now, or I shall be too late."

"But stop—stop—don't leave me here alone with it, Edward!"

But he was gone. For only a little while, however. Not far from his own house he met the editor—proprietor of the paper, and gave him the document, and said "Here is a good thing for you, Cox—put it in."

"It may be too late, Mr. Richards, but I'll see."

At home again, he and his wife sat down to talk the charming mystery over; they were in no condition for sleep. The first question was, Who could the citizen have been who gave the stranger the twenty dollars? It seemed a simple

one; both answered it in the same breath -

"Barclay Goodson."

"Yes," said Richards, "he could have done it, and it would have been like him, but there's not another in the town."

"Everybody will grant that, Edward—grant it privately, anyway. For six months, now, the village has been its own proper self once more--honest, narrow, self-righteous, and stingy."

"It is what he always called it, to the day of his death—said it right out publicly, too."

"Yes, and he was hated for it."

"Oh, of course; but he didn't care. I reckon he was the best-hated man among us, except the Reverend Burgess."

"Well, Burgess deserves it—he will never get another congregation here. Mean as the town is, it knows how to estimate *him*. Edward, doesn't it seem odd that the stranger should appoint Burgess to deliver the money?"

"Well, yes—it does. That is—that is—"

"Why so much that-*is*-ing? Would *you* select him?"

"Mary, maybe the stranger knows him better than this village does."

"Much *that* would help Burgess!"

The husband seemed perplexed for an answer; the wife kept a steady eye upon him, and waited. Finally Richards said, with the hesitancy of one who is making a statement which is likely to encounter doubt,

"Mary, Burgess is not a bad man."

His wife was certainly surprised.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed.

"He is not a bad man. I know. The whole of his unpopularity had its foundation in that one thing—the thing that made so much noise."

"That 'one thing,' indeed! As if that 'one thing' wasn't enough, all by itself."

"Plenty. Plenty. Only he wasn't guilty of it."

"How you talk! Not guilty of it! Everybody knows he *was* guilty."

"Mary, I give you my word—he was innocent."

"I can't believe it and I don't. How do you know?"

"It is a confession. I am ashamed, but I will make it. I was the only man who knew he was innocent. I could have saved him, and— and—well, you know how the town was wrought up—I hadn't the pluck to do it. It would have turned everybody against me. I felt mean, ever so mean; ut I didn't dare; I hadn't the manliness to face that."

Mary looked troubled, and for a while was silent. Then she said stammeringly:

"I—I don't think it would have done for you to—to—One mustn't—er—public opinion—one has to be so careful —so—" It was a difficult road, and she got mired; but after a little she got started again. "It was a great pity, but— Why, we couldn't afford it, Edward—we couldn't indeed. Oh, I wouldn't have had you do

it for anything!"

"It would have lost us the good-will of so many people, Mary; and then—and then—"

"What troubles me now is, what *he* thinks of us, Edward."

"He? *He* doesn't suspect that I could have saved him."

"Oh," exclaimed the wife, in a tone of relief, "I am glad of that. As long as he doesn't know that you could have saved him, he—he—well that makes it a great deal better. Why, I might have known he didn't know, because he is always trying to be friendly with us, as little encouragement as we give him. More than once people have twitted me with it. There's the Wilsons, and the Wilcoxes, and the Harknesses, they take a mean pleasure in saying '*Your friend* Burgess,' because they know it pesters me. I wish he wouldn't persist in liking us so; I can't think why he keeps it up."

"I can explain it. It's another confession. When the thing was new and hot, and the town made a plan to ride him on a rail, my conscience hurt me so that I couldn't stand it, and I went privately and gave him notice, and he got out of the town and stayed out till it was safe to come back."

"Edward! If the town had found it out—"

"*Don't!* It scares me yet, to think of it. I repented of it the minute it was done; and I was even afraid to tell you lest your face might betray it to somebody. I didn't sleep any that night, for worrying. But after a few days I saw that no one was going to
suspect me, and after that I got to feeling glad I did it. And I feel glad yet, Mary—glad through and through."

"So do I, now, for it would have been a dreadful way to treat him. Yes, I'm glad; for really you did owe him that, you know. But, Edward, suppose it should come out yet, some day!"

"It won't."

"Why?"

"Because everybody thinks it was Goodson."

"Of course they would!"

"Certainly. And of course *he* didn't care. They persuaded poor old
Sawlsberry to go and charge it on him, and he went blustering over there and did it. Goodson looked him over, like as if he was hunting for a place on him that he could despise the most; then he says, 'So you are the Committee of Inquiry, are you?' Sawlsberry said that was about what he was. 'H'm. Do they require particulars, or do you reckon a kind of a *general* answer will do?' 'If they require particulars, I will come back, Mr. Goodson; I will take the general answer first.' 'Very well, then, tell them to go to hell—I reckon that's general enough. And I'll give you some advice, Sawlsberry; when you come back for the particulars, fetch a basket to carry what is left of yourself home in.'"

"Just like Goodson; it's got all the marks. He had only one vanity; he thought

he could give advice better than any other person."

"It settled the business, and saved us, Mary. The subject was dropped."

"Bless you, I'm not doubting *that*."

Then they took up the gold-sack mystery again, with strong interest. Soon the conversation began to suffer breaks—interruptions caused by absorbed thinkings. The breaks grew more and more frequent. At last Richards lost himself wholly in thought. He sat long, gazing vacantly at the floor, and by-and-by he began to punctuate his thoughts with little nervous movements of his hands that seemed to indicate vexation. Meantime his wife too had relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and her movements were beginning to show a troubled discomfort. Finally Richards got up and strode aimlessly about the room, ploughing his hands through his hair, much as a somnambulist might do who was having a bad dream. Then he seemed to arrive at a definite purpose; and without a word he put on his hat and passed quickly out of the house. His wife sat brooding, with a drawn face, and did not seem to be aware that she was alone. Now and then she murmured, "Lead us not into t . . . but—but—we are so poor, so poor! . . . Lead us not into . . . Ah, who would be hurt by it?—and no one would ever know . . . Lead us . . . " The voice died out in mumblings. After a little she glanced up and muttered in a half-frightened, half-glad way -

"He is gone! But, oh dear, he may be too late—too late . . . Maybe not—maybe there is still time." She rose and stood thinking, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. A slight shudder shook her frame, and she said, out of a dry throat, "God forgive me—it's awful to think such things—but… Lord, how we are made—how strangely we are made!"

She turned the light low, and slipped stealthily over and knelt down by the sack and felt of its ridgy sides with her hands, and fondled them lovingly; and there was a gloating light in her poor old eyes. She fell into fits of absence; and came half out of them at times to mutter "If we had only waited!—oh, if we had only waited a little, and not been in such a hurry!"

Meantime Cox had gone home from his office and told his wife all about the strange thing that had happened, and they had talked it over eagerly, and guessed that the late Goodson was the only man in the town who could have helped a suffering stranger with so noble a sum as twenty dollars. Then there was a pause, and the two became thoughtful and silent. And by-and-by nervous and fidgety. At last the wife said, as if to herself,

"Nobody knows this secret but the Richardses . . . and us . . . nobody."

The husband came out of his thinkings with a slight start, and gazed wistfully at his wife, whose face was become very pale;

then he hesitatingly rose, and glanced furtively at his hat, then at his wife—a sort of mute inquiry. Mrs. Cox swallowed once or twice, with her hand at her throat, then in place of speech she nodded her head. In a moment she was alone, and mumbling to herself.

And now Richards and Cox were hurrying through the deserted streets, from opposite directions. They met, panting, at the foot of the printing-office stairs; by the night-light there they read each other's face. Cox whispered:

"Nobody knows about this but us?"

The whispered answer was:

"Not a soul—on honour, not a soul!"

"If it isn't too late to—"

The men were starting up-stairs; at this moment they were overtaken by a boy, and Cox asked,

"Is that you, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir."

"You needn't ship the early mail—nor *any* mail; wait till I tell you."

"It's already gone, sir."

"*Gone?*" It had the sound of an unspeakable disappointment in it.

"Yes, sir. Time-table for Brixton and all the towns beyond changed to-day, sir—had to get the papers in twenty minutes earlier than common. I had to rush; if I had been two minutes later—"

The men turned and walked slowly away, not waiting to hear the rest. Neither of them spoke during ten minutes; then Cox said, in a vexed tone,

"What possessed you to be in such a hurry, I can't make out."

The answer was humble enough:

"I see it now, but somehow I never thought, you know, until it was too late. But the next time—"

"Next time be hanged! It won't come in a thousand years."

Then the friends separated without a good-night, and dragged themselves home with the gait of mortally stricken men. At their homes their wives sprang up with an eager "Well?"—then saw the answer with their eyes and sank down sorrowing, without waiting for it to come in words. In both houses a discussion followed of a heated sort—a new thing; there had been discussions before, but not heated ones, not ungentle ones. The discussions to-night were a sort of seeming plagiarisms of each other. Mrs. Richards said:

"If you had only waited, Edward—if you had only stopped to think; but no, you must run straight to the printing-office and spread it all over the world."

"It *said* publish it."

"That is nothing; it also said do it privately, if you liked. There, now—is that true, or not?"

"Why, yes—yes, it is true; but when I thought what a stir it would make, and what a compliment it was to Hadleyburg that a stranger should trust it so—"

"Oh, certainly, I know all that; but if you had only stopped to think, you would have seen that you *couldn't* find the right man,

because he is in his grave, and hasn't left chick nor child nor relation behind him; and as long as the money went to somebody that awfully needed it, and nobody would be hurt by it, and—and—"

She broke down, crying. Her husband tried to think of some comforting thing to say, and presently came out with this:

"But after all, Mary, it must be for the best—it must be; we know that. And we must remember that it was so ordered—"

"Ordered! Oh, everything's *ordered*, when a person has to find some way out when he has been stupid. Just the same, it was *ordered* that
the money should come to us in this special way, and it was you that must take it on yourself to go meddling with the designs of Providence—and who gave you the right? It was wicked, that is what it was—just blasphemous presumption, and no more becoming to a meek and humble professor of—"

"But, Mary, you know how we have been trained all our lives long,
like the whole village, till it is absolutely second nature to us to stop not a single moment to think when there's an honest thing to be done—"

"Oh, I know it, I know it—it's been one everlasting training and training and training in honesty—honesty shielded, from the very cradle, against every possible temptation, and so it's *artificial* honesty, and weak as water when temptation comes, as we have seen this night. God knows I never had shade nor shadow of a doubt of my petrified and indestructible honesty until now—and now, under the very first big and real temptation, I—Edward, it is my belief that this town's honesty is as rotten as mine is; as rotten as yours. It is a mean town, a hard, stingy town, and hasn't a virtue in the world but this honesty it is so celebrated for and so conceited about; and so help me, I do believe that if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its grand reputation will go to ruin like a house of cards. There, now, I've made confession, and I feel better; I am a humbug, and I've been one all my life, without knowing it. Let no man call me honest again—I will not have it."

"I— Well, Mary, I feel a good deal as you do: I certainly do. It seems strange, too, so strange. I never could have believed it—never."

A long silence followed; both were sunk in thought. At last the wife looked up and said:

"I know what you are thinking, Edward."

Richards had the embarrassed look of a person who is caught.

"I am ashamed to confess it, Mary, but—"

"It's no matter, Edward, I was thinking the same question myself."

"I hope so. State it."

"You were thinking, if a body could only guess out *what the remark was* that Goodson made to the stranger."

"It's perfectly true. I feel guilty and ashamed.

And you?"

"I'm past it. Let us make a pallet here; we've got to stand watch till the bank vault opens in the morning and admits the sack. . . Oh dear, oh dear—if we hadn't made the mistake!"

The pallet was made, and Mary said:

"The open sesame—what could it have been? I do wonder what that remark could have been. But come; we will get to bed now."

"And sleep?"

"No; think."

"Yes; think."

By this time the Coxes too had completed their spat and their reconciliation, and were turning in—to think, to think, and toss, and fret, and worry over what the remark could possibly have been which Goodson made to the stranded derelict; that golden remark; that remark worth forty thousand dollars, cash.

The reason that the village telegraph-office was open later than usual that night was this: The foreman of Cox's paper was the local representative of the Associated Press. One might say its honorary representative, for it wasn't four times a year that he could furnish thirty words that would be accepted. But this time it was different. His despatch stating what he had caught got an instant answer:

"Send the whole thing—all the details—twelve hundred words."

A colossal order! The foreman filled the bill; and he was the proudest man in the State. By breakfast-time the next morning the name of Hadleyburg the Incor-ruptible was on every lip in America, from Montreal to the Gulf, from the glaciers of Alaska to the orange-groves of Florida; and millions and millions of people were discussing the stranger and his money-sack, and wondering if the right man would be found, and hoping some more news about the matter would come soon—right away.

## II

Hadleyburg village woke up world-celebrated—astonished—happy—vain. Vain beyond imagination. Its nineteen principal citizens and their wives went about shaking hands with each other, and beaming, and smiling, and congratulating, and saying *this* thing adds a new word to the dictionary—*Hadleyburf*, synonym for *incorruptible*—destined to live in dictionaries for ever! And the minor and unimportant citizens and their wives went around acting in much the same way. Everybody ran to the bank to see the gold-sack; and before noon grieved and envious crowds began to flock in from Brixton and all neighbouring towns; and that afternoon and next day reporters began to arrive from everywhere to verify the sack and its history and write the whole thing up anew, and make dashing free-hand pictures of the sack, and of Richards's house, and the bank, and the Presbyterian church, and

the Baptist church, and the public square, and the town-hall where the test would be applied and the money delivered; and damnable portraits of the Richardses, and Pinkerton the banker, and Cox, and the foreman, and Reverend Burgess, and the postmaster—and even of Jack Halliday, who was the loafing, good-natured, no-account, irreverent fisherman, hunter, boys' friend, stray-dogs' friend, typical "Sam Lawson" of the town. The little mean, smirking, oily Pinkerton showed the sack to all comers, and rubbed his sleek palms together pleasantly, and enlarged upon the town's fine old reputation for honesty and upon this wonderful endorsement of it, and hoped and believed that the example would now spread far and wide over the American world, and be epoch-making in the matter of moral regeneration. And so on, and so on.

By the end of a week things had quieted down again; the wild intoxication of pride and joy had sobered to a soft, sweet, silent delight—a sort of deep, nameless, unutterable content. All faces bore a look of peaceful, holy happiness.

Then a change came. It was a gradual change; so gradual that its beginnings were hardly noticed; maybe were not noticed at all, except by Jack Halliday, who always noticed everything; and always made fun of it, too, no matter what it was. He began to throw out chaffing remarks about people not looking quite so happy as they did a day or two ago; and next he claimed that the new aspect was deepening to positive sadness; next, that it was taking on a sick look; and finally he said that everybody was become so moody, thoughtful, and absent-minded that he could rob the meanest man in town of a cent out of the bottom of his breeches pocket and not disturb his reverie.

At this stage—or at about this stage—a saying like this was dropped at bedtime—with a sigh, usually—by the head of each of the nineteen principal households:

"Ah, what *could* have been the remark that Goodson made?"

And straightway—with a shudder—came this, from the man's wife:

"Oh, *don't!* What horrible thing are you mulling in your mind? Put it away from you, for God's sake!"

But that question was wrung from those men again the next night—and got the same retort. But weaker.

And the third night the men uttered the question yet again—with anguish, and absently. This time—and the following night—the wives fidgeted feebly, and tried to say something. But didn't.

And the night after that they found their tongues and responded—longingly:

"Oh, if we *could* only guess!"

Halliday's comments grew daily more and more sparklingly disagreeable and disparaging. He went diligently about, laughing

at the town, individually and in mass. But his laugh was the only one left in the village: it fell upon a hollow and mournful vacancy and emptiness. Not even a smile was findable anywhere. Halliday carried a cigar-box around on a tripod, playing that it was a camera, and halted all passers and aimed the thing and said "Ready! — now look pleasant, please," but not even this capital joke could surprise the dreary faces into any softening.

So three weeks passed—one week was left. It was Saturday evening after supper. Instead of the aforetime Saturday-evening flutter and bustle and shopping and larking, the streets were empty and desolate. Richards and his old wife sat apart in their little parlour—miserable and thinking. This was become their evening habit now: the life-long habit which had preceded it, of reading, knitting, and contented chat, or receiving or paying neighbourly calls, was dead and gone and forgotten, ages ago—two or three weeks ago; nobody talked now, nobody read, nobody visited—the whole village sat at home, sighing, worrying, silent. Trying to guess out that remark.

The postman left a letter. Richards glanced listlessly at the superscription and the post-mark—unfamiliar, both—and tossed the letter on the table and resumed his might-have-beens and his hopeless dull miseries where he had left them off. Two or three hours later his wife got wearily up and was going away to bed without a good-night—custom now—but she stopped near the letter and eyed it awhile with a dead interest, then broke it open, and began to skim it over. Richards, sitting there with his chair tilted back against the wall and his chin between his knees, heard something fall. It was his wife. He sprang to her side, but she cried out:

"Leave me alone, I am too happy. Read the letter—read it!"

He did. He devoured it, his brain reeling. The letter was from a distant State, and it said:

"I am a stranger to you, but no matter: I have something to tell. I have just arrived home from Mexico, and learned about that episode. Of course you do not know who made that remark, but I know, and I am the only person living who does know. It was *Goodson*. I knew him well, many years ago. I passed through your village that very night, and was his guest till the midnight train came along. I overheard him make that remark to the stranger in the dark—it was in Hale Alley. He and I talked of it the rest of the way home, and while smoking in his house. He mentioned many of your villagers in the course of his talk—most of them in a very uncomplimentary way, but two or three favourably: among these latter yourself. I say 'favourably'—nothing stronger. I remember his saying he did not actually *like* any person in the

town—not one; but that you—*I think* he said you—am almost sure—had done him a very great service once, possibly without knowing the full value of it, and he wished he had a fortune, he would leave it to you when he died, and a curse apiece for the rest of the citizens. Now, then, if it was you that did him that service, you are his legitimate heir, and entitled to the sack of gold. I know that I can trust to your honour and honesty, for in a citizen of Hadleyburg these virtues are an unfailing inheritance, and so I am going to reveal to you the remark, well satisfied that if you are not the right man you will seek and find the right one and see that poor Goodson's debt of gratitude for the service referred to is paid. This is the remark: '*YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A BAD MAN: GO, AND REFORM.*'

*Howard L. Stephenson.*"

"Oh, Edward, the money is ours, and I am so grateful, *oh*, so grateful,—kiss me, dear, it's for ever since we kissed—and we needed it so—the money—and now you are free of Pinkerton and his bank, and nobody's slave any more; it seems to me I could fly for joy."

It was a happy half-hour that the couple spent there on the settee caressing each other; it was the old days come again—days that had begun with their courtship and lasted without a break till the stranger brought the deadly money. By-and-by the wife said:

"Oh, Edward, how lucky it was you did him that grand service, poor Goodson! I never liked him, but I love him now. And it was fine and beautiful of you never to mention it or brag about it." Then, with a touch of reproach, "But you ought to have told *me*, Edward, you ought to have told your wife, you know."

"Well, I—er—well, Mary, you see—"

"Now stop hemming and hawing, and tell me about it, Edward. I always loved you, and now I'm proud of you. Everybody believes there was only one good generous soul in this village, and now it turns out that you—Edward, why don't you tell me?"

"Well—er—er—Why, Mary, I can't!"

"You *can't? Why* can't you?"

"You see, he—well, he—he made me promise I wouldn't."

The wife looked him over, and said, very slowly:

"M a d e — y o u — promise? Edward, what do you tell me that for?"

"Mary, do you think I would lie?"

She was troubled and silent for a moment, then she laid her hand within his and said:

"No . . . no. We have wandered far enough from our bearings—God spare us that! In all your life you have never uttered a lie. But now—now that the foundations of things seem to be crumbling from under us, we—we—" She lost her voice for a moment, then said, brokenly, "Lead us not into temptation. . . I think you made the promise, Edward. Let it

rest so. Let us keep away from that ground. Now—that is all gone by; let us he happy again; it is no time for clouds."

Edward found it something of an effort to comply, for his mind kept wandering—trying to remember what the service was that he had done Goodson.

The couple lay awake the most of the night, Mary happy and busy, Edward busy, but not so happy. Mary was planning what she would do with the money. Edward was trying to recall that service. At first his conscience was sore on account of the lie he had told Mary—if it was a lie. After much reflection—suppose it *was* a lie? What then? Was it such a great matter? Aren't we always *acting* lies? Then why not tell them? Look at Mary—look what she had done. While he was hurrying off on his honest errand, what was she doing? Lamenting because the papers hadn't been destroyed and the money kept. Is theft better than lying?

*That* point lost its sting—the lie dropped into the background and left comfort behind it. The next point came to the front: *had* he rendered that service? Well, here was Goodson's own evidence as reported in Stephenson's letter; there could be no better evidence than that—it was even *proof* that he had rendered it. Of course. So that point was settled. . . No, not quite. He recalled with a wince that this unknown Mr. Stephenson was just a trifle unsure as to whether the performer of it was Richards or some other—and, oh dear, he had put Richards on his honour! He must himself decide whither that money must go—and Mr. Stephenson was not doubting that if he was the wrong man he would go honourably and find the right one. Oh, it was odious to put a man in such a situation—ah, why couldn't Stephenson have left out that doubt? What did he want to intrude that for?

Further reflection. How did it happen that *Richards's* name remained in Stephenson's mind as indicating the right man, and not some other man's name? That looked good. Yes, that looked very good. In fact it went on looking better and better, straight along—until by-and-by it grew into positive *proof*. And then Richards put the matter at once out of his mind, for he had a private instinct that a proof once established is better left so.

He was feeling reasonably comfortable now, but there was still one other detail that kept pushing itself on his notice: of course he had done that service—that was settled; but what *was* that service? He must recall it—he would not go to sleep till he had recalled it; it would make his peace of mind perfect. And so he thought and thought. He thought of a dozen things—possible services, even probable services—but none of them seemed adequate, none of them seemed large enough, none of them seemed worth the money—worth the fortune Goodson had

wished he could leave in his will. And besides, he couldn't remember having done them, anyway. Now, then—now, then—what *kind* of a service would it be that would make a man so inordinately grateful? Ah—the saving of his soul! That must be it. Yes, he could remember, now, how he once set himself the task of converting Goodson, and laboured at it as much as—he was going to say three months; but upon closer examination it shrunk to a month, then to a week, then to a day, then to nothing. Yes, he remembered now, and with unwelcome vividness, that Goodson had told him to go to thunder and mind his own business—*he* wasn't hankering to follow Hadleyburg to heaven!

So that solution was a failure—he hadn't saved Goodson's soul. Richards was discouraged. Then after a little came another idea: had he saved Goodson's property? No, that wouldn't do—he hadn't any. His life? That is it! Of course. Why, he might have thought of it before. This time he was on the right track, sure. His imagination-mill was hard at work in a minute, now.

Thereafter, during a stretch of two exhausting hours, he was busy saving Goodson's life. He saved it in all kinds of difficult and perilous ways. In every case he got it saved satisfactorily up to a certain point; then, just as he was beginning to get well persuaded that it had really happened, a troublesome detail would turn up which made the whole thing impossible. As in the matter of drowning, for instance. In that case he had swum out and tugged Goodson ashore in an unconscious state with a great crowd looking on and applauding, but when he had got it all thought out and was just beginning to remember all about it, a whole swarm of disqualifying details arrived on the ground: the town would have known of the circumstance, Mary would have known of it, it would glare like a limelight in his own memory instead of being an inconspicuous service which he had possibly rendered "without knowing its full value." And at this point he remembered that he couldn't swim anyway.

Ah—*there* was a point which he had been overlooking from the start: it had to be a service which he had rendered "possibly without knowing the full value of it." Why, really, that ought to be an easy hunt—much easier than those others. And sure enough, by-and- by he found it. Goodson, years and years ago, came near marrying a very sweet and pretty girl, named Nancy Hewitt, but in some way or other the match had been broken off; the girl died, Goodson remained a bachelor, and by-and-by became a soured one and a frank despiser of the human species. Soon after the girl's death the village found out, or thought it had found out, that she carried a spoonful of negro blood in her veins. Richards worked at these details a good while, and in the end

he thought he remembered things concerning them which must have gotten mislaid in his memory through long neglect. He seemed to dimly remember that it was *he* that found out about the negro blood; that it was he that told the village; that the village told Goodson where they got it; that he thus saved Goodson from marrying the tainted girl; that he had done him this great service "without knowing the full value of it," in fact without knowing that he *was* doing it; but that Goodson knew the value of it, and what a narrow escape he had had, and so went to his grave grateful to his benefactor and wishing he had a fortune to leave him. It was all clear and simple, now, and the more he went over it the more luminous and certain it grew; and at last, when he nestled to sleep, satisfied and happy, he remembered the whole thing just as if it had been yesterday. In fact, he dimly remembered Goodson's *telling* him his gratitude once. Meantime Mary had spent six thousand dollars on a new house for herself and a pair of slippers for her pastor, and then had fallen peacefully to rest.

That same Saturday evening the postman had delivered a letter to each of the other principal citizens—nineteen letters in all. No two of the envelopes were alike, and no two of the superscriptions were in the same hand, but the letters inside were just like each other in every detail but one. They were exact copies of the letter received by Richards—handwriting and all—and were all signed by Stephenson, but in place of Richards's name each receiver's own name appeared.

All night long eighteen principal citizens did what their caste-brother Richards was doing at the same time—they put in their energies trying to remember what notable service it was that they had unconsciously done Barclay Goodson. In no case was it a holiday job; still they succeeded.

And while they were at this work, which was difficult, their wives put in the night spending the money, which was easy. During that one night the nineteen wives spent an average of seven thousand dollars each out of the forty thousand in the sack—a hundred and thirty-three thousand altogether.

Next day there was a surprise for Jack Halliday. He noticed that the faces of the nineteen chief citizens and their wives bore that expression of peaceful and holy happiness again. He could not understand it, neither was he able to invent any remarks about it that could damage it or disturb it. And so it was his turn to be dissatisfied with life. His private guesses at the reasons for the happiness failed in all instances, upon examination. When he met Mrs. Wilcox and noticed the placid ecstasy in her face, he said to himself, "Her cat has had kittens"—and went and asked the cook; it was not so, the cook had detected the happiness, but did not know the cause. When Halliday

found the duplicate ecstasy in the face of "Shadbelly" Billson (village nickname), he was sure some neighbour of Billson's had broken his leg, but inquiry showed that this had not happened. The subdued ecstasy in Gregory Yates's face could mean but one thing—he was a mother-in-law short; it was another mistake. "And Pinkerton — Pinkerton—he has collected ten cents that he thought he was going to lose." And so on, and so on. In some cases the guesses had to remain in doubt, in the others they proved distinct errors. In the end Halliday said to himself, "Anyway it roots up that there's nineteen Hadleyburg families temporarily in heaven: I don't know how it happened; I only know Providence is off duty to-day."

An architect and builder from the next State had lately ventured to set up a small business in this unpromising village, and his sign had now been hanging out a week. Not a customer yet; he was a discouraged man, and sorry he had come. But his weather changed suddenly now. First one and then another chief citizen's wife said to him privately:

"Come to my house Monday week—but say nothing about it for the present. We think of building."

He got eleven invitations that day. That night he wrote his daughter and broke off her match with her student. He said she could marry a mile higher than that.

Pinkerton the banker and two or three other well-to-do men planned country-seats—but waited. That kind don't count their chickens until they are hatched.

The Wilsons devised a grand new thing—a fancy-dress ball. They made no actual promises, but told all their acquaintanceship in confidence that they were thinking the matter over and thought they should give it—"and if we do, you will be invited, of course." People were surprised, and said, one to another, "Why, they are crazy, those poor Wilsons, they can't afford it." Several among the nineteen said privately to their husbands, "It is a good idea, we will keep still till their cheap thing is over, then *we* will give one that will make it sick."

The days drifted along, and the bill of future squanderings rose higher and higher, wilder and wilder, more and more foolish and reckless. It began to look as if every member of the nineteen would not only spend his whole forty thousand dollars before receiving day, but be actually in debt by the time he got the money. In some cases light-headed people did not stop with planning to spend, they really spent—on credit. They bought land, mortgages, farms, speculative stocks, fine clothes, horses, and various other things, paid down the bonus, and made themselves liable for the rest—at ten days. Presently the sober second thought came, and Halliday noticed that a ghastly anxiety was begin-

ning to show up in a good many faces. Again he was puzzled, and didn't know what to make of it. "The Wilcox kittens aren't dead, for they weren't born; nobody's broken a leg; there's no shrinkage in mother-in-laws; *nothing* has happened—it is an insolvable mystery."

There was another puzzled man, too—the Rev. Mr. Burgess. For days, wherever he went, people seemed to follow him or to be watching out for him; and if he ever found himself in a retired spot, a member of the nineteen would be sure to appear, thrust an envelope privately into his hand, whisper "To be opened at the town-hall Friday evening," then vanish away like a guilty thing. He was expecting that there might be one claimant for the sack—doubtful, however, Goodson being dead—but it never occurred to him that all this crowd might be claimants. When the great Friday came at last, he found that he had nineteen envelopes.

## III

The town-hall had never looked finer. The platform at the end of it was backed by a showy draping of flags; at intervals along the walls were festoons of flags; the gallery fronts were clothed in flags; the supporting columns were swathed in flags; all this was to impress the stranger, for he would be there in considerable force, and in a large degree he would be connected with the press. The house was full. The 412 fixed seats were occupied; also the 68 extra chairs which had been packed into the aisles; the steps of the platform were occupied; some distinguished strangers were given seats on the platform; at the horseshoe of tables which fenced the front and sides of the platform sat a strong force of special correspondents who had come from everywhere. It was the best-dressed house the town had ever produced. There were some tolerably expensive toilets there, and in several cases the ladies who wore them had the look of being unfamiliar with that kind of clothes. At least the town thought they had that look, but the notion could have arisen from the town's knowledge of the fact that these ladies had never inhabited such clothes before.

The gold-sack stood on a little table at the front of the platform where all the house could see it. The bulk of the house gazed at it with a burning interest, a mouth-watering interest, a wistful and pathetic interest; a minority of nineteen couples gazed at it tenderly, lovingly, proprietarily, and the male half of this minority kept saying over to themselves the moving little impromptu speeches of thankfulness for the audience's applause and congratulations which they were presently going to get up and deliver. Every now and then one of these got a piece of paper out of his vest pocket and privately glanced at it to refresh his memory.

Of course there was a buzz of conversation going on—there always is; but at last, when the Rev. Mr. Burgess rose and laid his hand on the sack, he could hear his microbes gnaw, the place was so still. He related the curious history of the sack, then went on to speak in warm terms of Hadleyburg's old and well-earned reputation for spotless honesty, and of the town's just pride in this reputation. He said that this reputation was a treasure of priceless value; that under Providence its value had now become inestimably enhanced, for the recent episode had spread this fame far and wide, and thus had focussed the eyes of the American world upon this village, and made its name for all time, as he hoped and believed, a synonym for commercial incorruptibility. [Applause.] "And who is to be the guardian of this noble fame—the community as a whole? No! The responsibility is individual, not communal. From this day forth each and every one of you is in his own person its special guardian, and individually responsible that no harm shall come to it. Do you--does each of you—accept this great trust? [Tumultuous assent.] Then all is well. Transmit it to your children and to your children's children. To-day your purity is beyond reproach—see to it that it shall remain so. To-day there is not a person in your community who could be beguiled to touch a penny not his own—see to it that you abide in this grace. ["We will! we will!"] This is not the place to make comparisons between ourselves and other communities—some of them ungracious towards us; they have their ways, we have ours; let us be content. [Applause.] I am done. Under my hand, my friends, rests a stranger's eloquent recognition of what we are; through him the world will always henceforth know what we are. We do not know who he is, but in your name I utter your gratitude, and ask you to raise your voices in indorsement."

The house rose in a body and made the walls quake with the thunders of its thankfulness for the space of a long minute. Then it sat down, and Mr. Burgess took an envelope out of his pocket. The house held its breath while he slit the envelope open and took from it a slip of paper. He read its contents—slowly and impressively—the audience listening with tranced attention to this magic document, each of whose words stood for an ingot of gold: "'The remark which I made to the distressed stranger was this: "You are very far from being a bad man; go, and reform."'" Then he continued:- "We shall know in a moment now whether the remark here quoted corresponds with the one concealed in the sack; and if that shall prove to be so—and it undoubtedly will—this sack of gold belongs to a fellow-citizen who will henceforth stand before the nation as the symbol of the special virtue which has

made our town famous throughout the land—Mr. Billson!"

The house had gotten itself all ready to burst into the proper tornado of applause; but instead of doing it, it seemed stricken with a paralysis; there was a deep hush for a moment or two, then a wave of whispered murmurs swept the place—of about this tenor: "*Billson!* oh, come, this is *too* thin! Twenty dollars to a stranger--or *anybody —Billson!* Tell it to the marines!" And now at this point the house caught its breath all of a sudden in a new access of astonishment, for it discovered that whereas in one part of the hall Deacon Billson was standing up with his head weekly bowed, in another part of it Lawyer Wilson was doing the same. There was a wondering silence now for a while. Everybody was puzzled, and nineteen couples were surprised and indignant.

Billson and Wilson turned and stared at each other. Billson asked, bitingly:

"Why do *you* rise, Mr. Wilson?"

"Because I have a right to. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain to the house why *you* rise."

"With great pleasure. Because I wrote that paper."

"It is an impudent falsity! I wrote it myself."

It was Burgess's turn to be paralysed. He stood looking vacantly at first one of the men and then the other, and did not seem to know what to do. The house was stupefied. Lawyer Wilson spoke up now, and said:

"I ask the Chair to read the name signed to that paper."

That brought the Chair to itself, and it read out the name:

"John Wharton *Billson.*"

"There!" shouted Billson, "what have you got to say for yourself now? And what kind of apology are you going to make to me and to this insulted house for the imposture which you have attempted to play here?"

"No apologies are due, sir; and as for the rest of it, I publicly charge you with pilfering my note from Mr. Burgess and substituting a copy of it signed with your own name. There is no other way by which you could have gotten hold of the test-remark; I alone, of living men, possessed the secret of its wording."

There was likely to be a scandalous state of things if this went on; everybody noticed with distress that the shorthand scribes were scribbling like mad; many people were crying "Chair, chair! Order! order!" Burgess rapped with his gavel, and said:

"Let us not forget the proprieties due. There has evidently been a mistake somewhere, but surely that is all. If Mr. Wilson gave me an envelope—and I remember now that he did—I still have it."

He took one out of his pocket, opened it, glanced at it, looked surprised and worried, and stood silent a few moments. Then he waved his hand in a wandering and mechanical

way, and made an effort or two to say something, then gave it up, despondently. Several voices cried out:

"Read it! read it! What is it?"

So he began, in a dazed and sleep-walker fashion:

"'The remark which I made to the unhappy stranger was this: "You are far from being a bad man. [The house gazed at him marvelling.] Go, and reform."' [Murmurs: "Amazing! what can this mean?"] This one," said the Chair, "is signed Thurlow G. Wilson."

"There!" cried Wilson, "I reckon that settles it! I knew perfectly well my note was purloined."

"Purloined!" retorted Billson. "I'll let you know that neither you nor any man of your kidney must venture to—"

The Chair: "Order, gentlemen, order! Take your seats, both of you, please."

They obeyed, shaking their heads and grumbling angrily. The house was profoundly puzzled; it did not know what to do with this curious emergency. Presently Thompson got up. Thompson was the hatter. He would have liked to be a Nineteener; but such was not for him; his stock of hats was not considerable enough for the position. He said:

"Mr. Chairman, if I may be permitted to make a suggestion, can both of these gentlemen be right? I put it to you, sir, can both have happened to say the very same words to the stranger? It seems to me--"

The tanner got up and interrupted him. The tanner was a disgruntled man; he believed himself entitled to be a Nineteener, but he couldn't get recognition. It made him a little unpleasant in his ways and speech. Said he:

"Sho, *that's* not the point! *That* could happen—twice in a hundred years—but not the other thing. *Niether* of them gave the twenty dollars!" [A ripple of applause.]

Billson. "I did!"

Wilson. "I did!"

Then each accused the other of pilfering.

The Chair. "Order! Sit down, if you please—both of you. Neither of the notes has been out of my possession at any moment."

A Voice. "Good—that settles *that!*"

The Tanner. "Mr. Chairman, one thing is now plain: one of these men has been eavesdropping under the other one's bed, and filching family secrets. If it is not unparliamentary to suggest it, I will remark that both are equal to it. [The Chair. "Order! order!"] I withdraw the remark, sir, and will confine myself to suggesting that *if* one of them has overheard the other reveal the test-remark to his wife, we shall catch him now."

A Voice. "How?"

The Tanner. "Easily. The two have not quoted the remark in exactly the same words. You would have noticed that, if there hadn't been a considerable stretch of time and an exciting quarrel inserted between the two readings."

A Voice. "Name the difference."

The Tanner. "The word

*very* is in Billson's note, and not in the other."

Many Voices. "That's so—he's right!"

The Tanner. "And so, if the Chair will examine the test-remark in the sack, we shall know which of these two frauds—[The Chair. "Order!"]—which of these two adventurers—[The Chair. "Order! order!"]—which of these two gentlemen—[laughter and applause]—is entitled to wear the belt as being the first dishonest blatherskite ever bred in this town—which he has dishonoured, and which will be a sultry place for him from now out!" [Vigorous applause.]

Many Voices. "Open it!—open the sack!"

Mr. Burgess made a slit in the sack, slid his hand in, and brought out an envelope. In it were a couple of folded notes. He said:

"One of these is marked,'Not to be examined until all written communications which have been addressed to the Chair—if any—shall have been read.' The other is marked '*The Test*' Allow me. It is worded—to wit:

"'I do not require that the first half of the remark which was made to me by my benefactor shall be quoted with exactness, for it was not striking, and could be forgotten; but its closing fifteen words are quite striking, and I think easily rememberable; unless *these* shall be accurately reproduced, let the applicant be regarded as an impostor. My benefactor began by saying he seldom gave advice to anyone, but that it always bore the hallmark of high value when he did give it. Then he said this—and it has never faded from my memory: 'YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A BAD MAN- '"

Fifty Voices. "That settles it—the money's Wilson's! Wilson! Wilson! Speech! Speech!"

People jumped up and crowded around Wilson, wringing his hand and congratulating fervently—meantime the Chair was hammering with the gavel and shouting:

"Order, gentlemen! Order! Order! Let me finish reading, please." When quiet was restored, the reading was resumed—as follows:

"'GO, AND REFORM—OR, MARK MY WORDS—SOME DAY, FOR YOUR SINS YOU WILL DIE AND GO TO HELL OR HADLEYBURG—TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER.'"

A ghastly silence followed. First an angry cloud began to settle darkly upon the faces of the citizenship; after a pause the cloud began to rise, and a tickled expression tried to take its place; tried so hard that it was only kept under with great and painful difficulty; the reporters, the Brixtonites, and other strangers bent their heads down and shielded their faces with their hands, and managed to hold in by main strength and heroic courtesy. At this most inopportune time burst upon the stillness the roar of a solitary voice—Jack Halliday's:

"*That's* got the hallmark on it!"

Then the house let go, strangers and all. Even Mr. Burgess's gravity broke down presently, then the audience considered itself officially absolved from all restraint, and it made the most of its privilege. It was a good long laugh, and a tempestuously whole-hearted one, but it ceased at last—long enough for Mr. Burgess to try to resume, and for the people to get their eyes partially wiped; then it broke out again, and afterward yet again; then at
last Burgess was able to get out these serious words:

"It is useless to try to disguise the fact—we find ourselves in the presence of a matter of grave import. It involves the honour of your town—it strikes at the town's good name. The difference of a single word between the test-remarks offered by Mr. Wilson and Mr. Billson was itself a serious thing, since it indicated that one or the other of these gentlemen had committed a theft—"

The two men were sitting limp, nerveless, crushed; but at these words both were electrified into movement, and started to get up.

"Sit down!" said the Chair, sharply, and they obeyed. "That, as I have said, was a serious thing. And it was—but for only one of them. But the matter has become graver; for the honour of *both* is now in formidable peril. Shall I go even further, and say in inextricable peril? *Both* left out the crucial fifteen words." He paused. During several moments he allowed the pervading stillness to gather and deepen its impressive effects, then added: "There
would seem to be but one way whereby this could happen. I ask these gentlemen—Was there *collusion — agreement*??"

A low murmur sifted through the house; its import was, "He's got them both."

Billson was not used to emergencies; he sat in a helpless collapse. But Wilson was a lawyer. He struggled to his feet, pale and worried, and said:

"I ask the indulgence of the house while I explain this most painful matter. I am sorry to say what I am about to say, since it must inflict irreparable injury upon Mr. Billson, whom I have always esteemed and respected until now, and in whose invulnerability to temptation I entirely believed—as did you all. But for the preservation of my own honour I must speak—and with frankness. I confess with shame—and I now beseech your pardon for it—that I said to the ruined stranger all of the words contained in the test- remark, including the disparaging fifteen. [Sensation.] When the late publication was made I recalled them, and I resolved to claim the sack of coin, for by every right I was entitled to it. Now I will ask you to consider this point, and weigh it well; that stranger's gratitude to me that night knew no bounds; he said himself that he could find no words for it that were adequate,

and that if he should ever be able he would repay me a thousandfold. Now, then, I ask you this; could I expect—could I believe—could I even remotely imagine—that, feeling as he did, he would do so ungrateful a thing as to add those quite unnecessary fifteen words to his test?—set a trap for me?—expose me as a slanderer of my own town before my own people assembled in a public hall? It was preposterous; it was impossible. His test would contain only the kindly opening clause of my remark. Of that I had no shadow of doubt. You would have thought as I did. You would not have expected a base betrayal from one whom you had befriended and against whom you had committed no offence. And so with perfect confidence, perfect trust, I wrote on a piece of paper the opening words—ending with "Go, and reform," —and signed it. When I was about to put it in an envelope I was called into my back office, and without thinking I left the paper lying open on my desk." He stopped, turned his head slowly toward Billson, waited a moment, then added: "I ask you to note this; when I returned, a little latter, Mr. Billson was retiring by my street door." [Sensation.]

In a moment Billson was on his feet and shouting:

"It's a lie! It's an infamous lie!"

The Chair. "Be seated, sir! Mr. Wilson has the floor."

Billson's friends pulled him into his seat and quieted him, and Wilson went on:

"Those are the simple facts. My note was now lying in a different place on the table from where I had left it. I noticed that, but attached no importance to it, thinking a draught had blown it there. That Mr. Billson would read a private paper was a thing which could not occur to me; he was an honourable man, and he would be above that. If you will allow me to say it, I think his extra word '*very*' stands explained: it is attributable to a defect of memory. I was the only man in the world who could furnish here any detail of the test-mark — by *honorable* means. I have finished."

There is nothing in the world like a persuasive speech to fuddle the mental apparatus and upset the convictions and debauch the emotions of an audience not practised in the tricks and delusions of oratory. Wilson sat down victorious. The house submerged him in tides of approving applause; friends swarmed to him and shook him by the hand and congratulated him, and Billson was shouted down and not allowed to say a word. The Chair hammered and hammered with its gavel, and kept shouting:

"But let us proceed, gentlemen, let us proceed!"

At last there was a measurable degree of quiet, and the hatter said:

"But what is there to proceed with, sir, but to deliver the money?"

Voices. "That's it!

That's it! Come forward, Wilson!"

The Hatter. "I move three cheers for Mr. Wilson, Symbol of the special virtue which—"

The cheers burst forth before he could finish; and in the midst of them—and in the midst of the clamour of the gavel also—some enthusiasts mounted Wilson on a big friend's shoulder and were going to fetch him in triumph to the platform. The Chair's voice now rose above the noise:

"Order! To your places! You forget that there is still a document to be read." When quiet had been restored he took up the document, and was going to read it, but laid it down again saying "I forgot; this is not to be read until all written communications received by me have first been read." He took an envelope out of his pocket, removed its enclosure, glanced at it—seemed astonished—held it out and gazed at it—stared at it.

Twenty or thirty voices cried out

"What is it? Read it! read it!"

And he did—slowly, and wondering:

"'The remark which I made to the stranger—[Voices. "Hello! how's this?"]—was this: 'You are far from being a bad man. [Voices. "Great Scott!"] Go, and reform.'" [Voice. "Oh, saw my leg off!"] Signed by Mr. Pinkerton the banker."

The pandemonium of delight which turned itself loose now was of a sort to make the judicious weep. Those whose withers were unwrung laughed till the tears ran down; the reporters, in throes of laughter, set down disordered pot-hooks which would never in the world be decipherable; and a sleeping dog jumped up scared out of its wits, and barked itself crazy at the turmoil. All manner of cries were scattered through the din: "We're getting rich —*two* Symbols of Incorruptibility!—without counting Billson!" "*Three*— count Shadbelly in—we can't have too many!" "All right—Billson's elected!" "Alas, poor Wilson! victim of *two* thieves!"

A Powerful Voice. "Silence! The Chair's fished up something more out of its pocket."

Voices. "Hurrah! Is it something fresh? Read it! read! read!"

The Chair [reading]. "'The remark which I made,' etc. 'You are far from being a bad man. Go,' etc. Signed, 'Gregory Yates.'"

Tornado of Voices. "Four Symbols!" "'Rah for Yates!" "Fish again!"

The house was in a roaring humour now, and ready to get all the fun out of the occasion that might be in it. Several Nineteeners, looking pale and distressed, got up and began to work their way towards the aisles, but a score of shouts went up:

"The doors, the doors—close the doors; no Incorruptible shall leave this place! Sit down, everybody!" The mandate was obeyed.

"Fish again! Read! read!"

The Chair fished again, and once more the familiar words began to fall from its lips—"'You are far from being a bad man—'"

"Name! name! What's his name?"

"'L. Ingoldsby Sargent.'"

"Five elected! Pile up the Symbols! Go on, go on!"

"'You are far from being a bad—'"

"Name! name!"

"'Nicholas Whitworth.'"

"Hooray! hooray! it's a symbolical day!"

Somebody wailed in, and began to sing this rhyme (leaving out "it's") to the lovely "Mikado" tune of "When a man's afraid of a beautiful maid;" the audience joined in, with joy; then, just in time, somebody contributed another line -

"And don't you this forget—"

The house roared it out. A third line was at once furnished -

"Corruptibles far from Hadleyburg are—"

The house roared that one too. As the last note died, Jack Halliday's voice rose high and clear, freighted with a final line -

"But the Symbols are here, you bet!"

That was sung, with booming enthusiasm. Then the happy house started in at the beginning and sang the four lines through twice, with immense swing and dash, and finished up with a crashing three- times-three and a tiger for "Hadleyburg the Incorruptible and all Symbols of it which we shall find worthy to receive the hall-mark to-night."

Then the shoutings at the Chair began again, all over the place:

"Go on! go on! Read! read some more! Read all you've got!"

"That's it—go on! We are winning eternal celebrity!"

A dozen men got up now and began to protest. They said that this farce was the work of some abandoned joker, and was an insult to the whole community. Without a doubt these signatures were all forgeries -

"Sit down! sit down! Shut up! You are confessing. We'll find your names in the lot."

"Mr. Chairman, how many of those envelopes have you got?"

The Chair counted.

"Together with those that have been already examined, there are nineteen."

A storm of derisive applause broke out.

"Perhaps they all contain the secret. I move that you open them all and read every signature that is attached to a note of that sort—and read also the first eight words of the note."

"Second the motion!"

It was put and carried—uproariously. Then poor old Richards got up, and his wife rose and stood at his side. Her head was bent down, so that none might see that she was crying. Her husband gave her his arm, and so supporting her, he began to speak in a quavering voice:

"My friends, you have known us two—Mary and me—all our lives, and I

think you have liked us and respected us—"

The Chair interrupted him:

"Allow me. It is quite true—that which you are saying, Mr. Richards; this town *does* know you two; it *does* like you; it *does* respect you; more—it honours you and *loves* you—"

Halliday's voice rang out:

"That's the hall-marked truth, too! If the Chair is right, let the house speak up and say it. Rise! Now, then—hip! hip! hip!—all together!"

The house rose in mass, faced toward the old couple eagerly, filled the air with a snow-storm of waving handkerchiefs, and delivered the cheers with all its affectionate heart.

The Chair then continued:

"What I was going to say is this: We know your good heart, Mr. Richards, but this is not a time for the exercise of charity toward offenders. [Shouts of "Right! right!"] I see your generous purpose in your face, but I cannot allow you to plead for these men—"

"But I was going to—"

"Please take your seat, Mr. Richards. We must examine the rest of these notes—simple fairness to the men who have already been exposed requires this. As soon as that has been done—I give you my word for this—you shall he heard."

Many voices. "Right!—the Chair is right—no interruption can be permitted at this stage! Go on!—the names! the names!—according to the terms of the motion!"

The old couple sat reluctantly down, and the husband whispered to the wife, "It is pitifully hard to have to wait; the shame will be greater than ever when they find we were only going to plead for *outrselves*."

Straightway the jollity broke loose again with the reading of the names.

"'You are far from being a bad man—' Signature, 'Robert J. Titmarsh.'"

'"You are far from being a bad man—' Signature, 'Eliphalet Weeks.'"

"'You are far from being a bad man—' Signature, 'Oscar B. Wilder.'"

At this point the house lit upon the idea of taking the eight words out of the Chairman's hands. He was not unthankful for that. Thenceforward he held up each note in its turn and waited. The house droned out the eight words in a massed and measured and musical deep volume of sound (with a daringly close resemblance to a well-known church chant) —"You are f-a-r from being a b-a-a-a-d man." Then the Chair said, "Signature, 'Archibald Wilcox.'" And so on, and so on, name after name, and everybody had an increasingly and gloriously good time except the wretched Nineteen. Now and then, when a particularly shining name was called, the house made the Chair wait while it chanted the whole of the test-remark from the beginning to the closing words, "And

go to hell or Hadleyburg—try and make it the for-or-m-e-r!" and in these special cases they added a grand and agonised and imposing "A-a-a-a-*MEN!*"

The list dwindled, dwindled, dwindled, poor old Richards keeping tally of the count, wincing when a name resembling his own was pronounced, and waiting in miserable suspense for the time to come when it would be his humiliating privilege to rise with Mary and finish his plea, which he was intending to word thus: ". . . for until now we have never done any wrong thing, but have gone our humble way unreproached. We are very poor, we are old, and, have no chick nor child to help us; we were sorely tempted, and we fell. It was my purpose when I got up before to make confession and beg that my name might not be read out in this public place, for it seemed to us that we could not bear it; but I was prevented. It was just; it was our place to suffer with the rest. It has been hard for us. It is the first time we have ever heard our name fall from any one's lips—sullied. Be merciful—for the sake or the better days; make our shame as light to bear as in your charity you can." At this point in his reverie Mary nudged him, perceiving that his mind was absent. The house was chanting, "You are f-a-r," etc.

"Be ready," Mary whispered. "Your name comes now; he has read eighteen."

The chant ended.

"Next! next! next!" came volleying from all over the house.

Burgess put his hand into his pocket. The old couple, trembling, began to rise. Burgess fumbled a moment, then said:

"I find I have read them all."

Faint with joy and surprise, the couple sank into their seats, and Mary whispered:

"Oh, bless God, we are saved!—he has lost ours—I wouldn't give this for a hundred of those sacks!"

The house burst out with its "Mikado" travesty, and sang it three times with ever-increasing enthusiasm, rising to its feet when it reached for the third time the closing line -

"But the Symbols are here, you bet!"

and finishing up with cheers and a tiger for "Hadleyburg purity and our eighteen immortal representatives of it."

Then Wingate, the saddler, got up and proposed cheers "for the cleanest man in town, the one solitary important citizen in it who didn't try to steal that m o n e y — E d w a r d Richards."

They were given with great and moving heartiness; then somebody proposed that "Richards be elected sole Guardian and Symbol of the now Sacred Hadleyburg Tradition, with power and right to stand up and look the whole sarcastic world in the face."

Passed, by acclamation; then they sang the "Mikado" again, and ended it with -

"And there's *one* Symbol left, you bet!"

There was a pause; then-

A Voice. "Now, then, who's to get the sack?"

The Tanner (with bitter sarcasm). "That's easy. The money has to be divided among the eighteen Incorruptibles. They gave the suffering stranger twenty dollars apiece—and that remark—each in his turn—it took twenty-two minutes for the procession to move past. Staked the stranger—total contribution, $360. All they want is just the loan back—and interest—forty thousand dollars altogether."

Many Voices [derisively.] "That's it! Divvy! divvy! Be kind to the poor—don't keep them waiting!"

The Chair. "Order! I now offer the stranger's remaining document. It says: 'If no claimant shall appear [grand chorus of groans], I desire that you open the sack and count out the money to the principal citizens of your town, they to take it in trust [Cries of "Oh! Oh! Oh!"], and use it in such ways as to them shall seem best for the propagation and preservation of your community's noble reputation for incorruptible honesty [more cries]—a reputation to which their names and their efforts will add a new and far-reaching lustre." [Enthusiastic outburst of sarcastic applause.] That seems to be all. No—here is a postscript:

"'P.S.—CITIZENS OF HADLEYBURG: There *is* no test-remark—nobody made one. [Great sensation.] There wasn't any pauper stranger, nor any twenty-dollar contribution, nor any accompanying benediction and compliment—these are all inventions. [General buzz and hum of astonishment and delight.] Allow me to tell my story—it will take but a word or two. I passed through your town at a certain time, and received a deep offence which I had not earned. Any other man would have been content to kill one or two of you and call it square, but to me that would have been a trivial revenge, and inadequate; for the dead do not *suffer*. Besides I could not kill you all—and, anyway, made as I am, even that would not have satisfied me. I wanted to damage every man in the place, and every woman—and not in their bodies or in their estate, but in their vanity—the place where feeble and foolish people are most vulnerable. So I disguised myself and came back and studied you. You were easy game. You had an old and lofty reputation for honesty, and naturally you were proud of it—it was your treasure of treasures, the very apple of your eye. As soon as I found out that you carefully and vigilantly kept yourselves and your children *out of temptation*, I knew how to proceed. Why, you simple creatures, the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire. I laid a plan, and gathered a list of names. My project was to corrupt Hadleyburg the Incorruptible. My idea was to make liars and thieves of nearly half a hundred smirchless men and women who had never in their lives uttered a lie or

stolen a penny. I was afraid of Goodson. He was neither born nor reared in Hadleyburg. I was afraid that if I started to operate my scheme by getting my letter laid before you, you would say to yourselves, 'Goodson is the only man among us who would give away twenty dollars to a poor devil'— and then you might not bite at my bait. But heaven took Goodson; then I knew I was safe, and I set my trap and baited it. It may be that I shall not catch all the men to whom I mailed the pretended test-secret, but I shall catch the most of them, if I know Hadleyburg nature. [Voices. "Right—he got every last one of them."] I believe they will even steal ostensible *gamblr*-money, rather than miss, poor, tempted, and mistrained fellows. I am hoping to eternally and everlastingly squelch your vanity and give Hadleyburg a new renown—one that will *stick*—and spread far. If I have succeeded, open the sack and summon the Committee on Propagation and Preservation of the Hadleyburg Reputation.'"

A Cyclone of Voices. "Open it! Open it! The Eighteen to the front! Committee on Propagation of the Tradition! Forward — the Incorruptibles!"

The Chair ripped the sack wide, and gathered up a handful of bright, broad, yellow coins, shook them together, then examined them.

"Friends, they are only gilded disks of lead!"

There was a crashing outbreak of delight over this news, and when the noise had subsided, the tanner called out:

"By right of apparent seniority in this business, Mr. Wilson is Chairman of the Committee on Propagation of the Tradition. I suggest that he step forward on behalf of his pals, and receive in trust the money."

A Hundred Voices. "Wilson! Wilson! Wilson! Speech! Speech!"

Wilson [in a voice trembling with anger]. "You will allow me to say, and without apologies for my language, *Damn* the money!"

A Voice. "Oh, and him a Baptist!"

A Voice. "Seventeen Symbols left! Step up, gentlemen, and assume your trust!"

There was a pause—no response.

The Saddler. "Mr. Chairman, we've got *one* clean man left, anyway, out of the late aristocracy; and he needs money, and deserves it. I move that you appoint Jack Halliday to get up there and auction off that sack of gilt twenty-dollar pieces, and give the result to the right man—the man whom Hadleyburg delights to honour—Edward Richards."

This was received with great enthusiasm, the dog taking a hand again; the saddler started the bids at a dollar, the Brixton folk and Barnum's representative fought hard for it, the people cheered every jump that the bids made, the excitement climbed moment by moment higher and higher, the bidders got on their mettle and grew

steadily more and more daring, more and more determined, the jumps went from a dollar up to five, then to ten, then to twenty, then fifty, then to a hundred, then -

At the beginning of the auction Richards whispered in distress to his wife: "Oh, Mary, can we allow it? It—it —you see, it is an honour—reward, a testimonial to purity of character, and—and—can we allow it? Hadn't I better get up and—Oh, Mary, what ought we to do?—what do you think we—" [Halliday's voice. "Fifteen I'm bid!— fifteen for the sack!—twenty!—ah, thanks!—thirty—thanks again! Thirty, thirty, thirty!—do I hear forty?—forty it is! Keep the ball rolling, gentlemen, keep it rolling!—fifty! —thanks, noble Roman!—going at fifty, fifty, fifty!—seventy! —ninety!— splendid!—a hundred!—pile it up, pile it up!—hundred and twenty—forty!—just in time!—hundred and fifty!—Two hundred!—superb! Do I hear two h—thanks! —two hundred and fifty!—"]

"It is another temptation, Edward—I'm all in a tremble —but, oh, we've escaped one temptation, and that ought to warn us, to—["Six did I hear?—thanks!—six fifty, six f—*seven* hundred!"] And yet, Edward, when you think—nobody susp—["Eight hundred dollars!— hurrah!—make it nine!—Mr. Parsons, did I hear you say—thanks!— nine!—this noble sack of virgin lead going at only nine hundred dollars, gilding and all— come! do I hear—a thousand!—gratefully yours!—did some one say eleven?—a sack which is going to be the most celebrated in the whole Uni—"] "Oh, Edward" (beginning to sob), "we are so poor!—but—but—do as you think best—do as you think best."

Edward fell—that is, he sat still; sat with a conscience which was not satisfied, but which was overpowered by circumstances.

Meantime a stranger, who looked like an amateur detective gotten up as an impossible English earl, had been watching the evening's proceedings with manifest interest, and with a contented expression in his face; and he had been privately commenting to himself. He was now soliloquising somewhat like this: 'None of the Eighteen are bidding; that is not satisfactory; I must change that—the dramatic unities require it; they must buy the sack they tried to steal; they must pay a heavy price, too—some of them are rich. And another thing, when I make a mistake in Hadleyburg nature the man that puts that error upon me is entitled to a high honorarium, and some one must pay. This poor old Richards has brought my judgment to shame; he is an honest man:—I don't understand it, but I acknowledge it. Yes, he saw my deuces—*and* with a straight flush, and by rights the pot is his. And it shall be a jack-pot, too, if I can manage it. He disappointed me, but let that pass."

He was watching the bidding. At a thousand, the market broke: the prices tumbled swiftly. He waited—and still watched. One competitor dropped out; then another, and another. He put in a bid or two now. When the bids had sunk to ten dollars, he added a five; some one raised him a three; he waited a moment, then flung in a fifty-dollar jump, and the sack was his—at $1,282. The house broke out in cheers—then stopped; for he was on his feet, and had lifted his hand. He began to speak.

"I desire to say a word, and ask a favour. I am a speculator in rarities, and I have dealings with persons interested in numismatics all over the world. I can make a profit on this purchase, just as it stands; but there is a way, if I can get your approval, whereby I can make every one of these leaden twenty-dollar pieces worth its face in gold, and perhaps more. Grant me that approval, and I will give part of my gains to your Mr. Richards, whose invulnerable probity you have so justly and so cordially recognised tonight; his share shall be ten thousand dollars, and I will hand him the money to-morrow. [Great applause from the house. But the "invulnerable probity" made the Richardses blush prettily; however, it went for modesty, and did no harm.] If you will pass my proposition by a good majority—I would like a two-thirds vote—I will regard that as the town's consent, and that is all I ask. Rarities are always helped by any device which will rouse curiosity and compel remark. Now if I may have your permission to stamp upon the faces of each of these ostensible coins the names of the eighteen gentlemen who—"

Nine-tenths of the audience were on their feet in a moment—dog and all—and the proposition was carried with a whirlwind of approving applause and laughter.

They sat down, and all the Symbols except "Dr." Clay Harkness got up, violently protesting against the proposed outrage, and threatening to -

"I beg you not to threaten me," said the stranger calmly. "I know my legal rights, and am not accustomed to being frightened at bluster." [Applause.] He sat down. "Dr." Harkness saw an opportunity here. He was one of the two very rich men of the place, and Pinkerton was the other. Harkness was proprietor of a mint; that is to say, a popular patent medicine. He was running for the Legislature on one ticket, and Pinkerton on the other. It was a close race and a hot one, and getting hotter every day. Both had strong appetites for money; each had bought a great tract of land, with a purpose; there was going to be a new railway, and each wanted to be in the Legislature and help locate the route to his own advantage; a single vote might make the decision, and with it two or three fortunes. The stake was large, and Harkness was a daring speculator. He was sitting

close to the stranger. He leaned over while one or another of the other Symbols was entertaining the house with protests and appeals, and asked, in a whisper,

"What is your price for the sack?"

"Forty thousand dollars."

"I'll give you twenty."

"No."

"Twenty-five."

"No."

"Say thirty."

"The price is forty thousand dollars; not a penny less."

"All right, I'll give it. I will come to the hotel at ten in the morning. I don't want it known; will see you privately."

"Very good." Then the stranger got up and said to the house:

"I find it late. The speeches of these gentlemen are not without merit, not without interest, not without grace; yet if I may he excused I will take my leave. I thank you for the great favour which you have shown me in granting my petition. I ask the Chair to keep the sack for me until to-morrow, and to hand these three five- hundred-dollar notes to Mr. Richards." They were passed up to the Chair.

"At nine I will call for the sack, and at eleven will deliver the rest of the ten thousand to Mr. Richards in person at his home. Good-night."

Then he slipped out, and left the audience making a vast noise, which was composed of a mixture of cheers, the "Mikado" song, dog-disapproval, and the chant, "You are f-a-r from being a b-a-a-d man--a-a-a a-men!"

## IV

At home the Richardses had to endure congratulations and compliments until midnight. Then they were left to themselves. They looked a little sad, and they sat silent and thinking. Finally Mary sighed and said:

"Do you think we are to blame, Edward—*much* to blame?" and her eyes wandered to the accusing triplet of big bank-notes lying on the table, where the congratulators had been gloating over them and reverently fingering them. Edward did not answer at once; then he brought out a sigh and said, hesitatingly:

"We—we couldn't help it, Mary. It—well it was ordered. *All* things are."

Mary glanced up and looked at him steadily, but he didn't return the look. Presently she said:

"I thought congratulations and praises always tasted good. But—it seems to me, now— Edward?"

"Well?"

"Are you going to stay in the bank?"

"N—no."

"Resign?"

"In the morning—by note."

"It does seem best."

Richards bowed his head in his hands and muttered:

"Before I was not afraid to let oceans of people's money pour through my hands, but— Mary, I am so tired, so tired—"

"We will go to bed."

At nine in the morning the stranger called for the sack and took it to the hotel in a cab. At ten Harkness had a talk with him privately. The stranger asked for and got five cheques on a metropolitan bank—drawn to "Bearer,"—four for $1,500 each, and one for $34,000. He put one of the former in his pocket-book, and the remainder, representing $38,500, he put in an envelope, and with these he added a note which he wrote after Harkness was gone. At eleven he called at the Richards' house and knocked. Mrs. Richards peeped through the shutters, then went and received the envelope, and the stranger disappeared without a word. She came back flushed and a little unsteady on her legs, and gasped out:

"I am sure I recognised him! Last night it seemed to me that maybe I had seen him somewhere before."

"He is the man that brought the sack here?"

"I am almost sure of it."

"Then he is the ostensible Stephenson too, and sold every important citizen in this town with his bogus secret. Now if he has sent cheques instead of money, we are sold too, after we thought we had escaped. I was beginning to feel fairly comfortable once more, after my night's rest, but the look of that envelope makes me sick. It isn't fat enough; $8,500 in even the largest bank-notes makes more bulk than that."

"Edward, why do you object to cheques?"

"Cheques signed by Stephenson! I am resigned to take the $8,500 if it could come in bank-notes—for it does seem that it was so ordered, Mary—but I have never had much courage, and I have not the pluck to try to market a cheque signed with that disastrous name.It would be a trap. That man tried to catch me; we escaped somehow or other; and now he is trying a new way. If it is cheques—"

"Oh, Edward, it is *too* bad!" And she held up the cheques and began to cry.

"Put them in the fire! quick! we mustn't be tempted. It is a trick to make the world laugh at *us*, along with the rest, and— Give them to *me*, since you can't do it!" He snatched them and tried to hold his grip till he could get to the stove; but he was human, he was a cashier, and he stopped a moment to make sure of the signature. Then he came near to fainting.

"Fan me, Mary, fan me! They are the same as gold!"

"Oh, how lovely, Edward! Why?"

"Signed by Harkness. What can the mystery of that be, Mary?"

"Edward, do you think—"

"Look here—look at this! Fifteen—fifteen—fifteen—thirty-four. Thirty-eight thousand five hundred! Mary, the sack isn't worth twelve dollars, and Harkness—apparently—has paid about par for it."

"And does it all come to

us, do you think—instead of the ten thousand?"

"Why, it looks like it. And the cheques are made to 'Bearer,' too."

"Is that good, Edward? What is it for?"

"A hint to collect them at some distant bank, I reckon. Perhaps Harkness doesn't want the matter known. What is that—a note?"

"Yes. It was with the cheques."

It was in the "Stephenson" handwriting, but there was no signature. It said:

"I am a disappointed man. Your honesty is beyond the reach of temptation. I had a different idea about it, but I wronged you in that, and I beg pardon, and do it sincerely. I honour you—and that is sincere too. This town is not worthy to kiss the hem of your garment. Dear sir, I made a square bet with myself that there were nineteen debauchable men in your self-righteous community. I have lost. Take the whole pot, you are entitled to it."

Richards drew a deep sigh, and said:

"It seems written with fire—it burns so. Mary—I am miserable again."

"I, too. Ah, dear, I wish—"

"To think, Mary—he *believes* in me."

"Oh, don't, Edward—I can't bear it."

"If those beautiful words were deserved, Mary—and God knows I believed I deserved them once—I think I could give the forty thousand dollars for them. And I would put that paper away, as representing more than gold and jewels, and keep it always. But now— We could not live in the shadow of its accusing presence, Mary."

He put it in the fire.

A messenger arrived and delivered an envelope. Richards took from it a note and read it; it was from Burgess:

"You saved me, in a difficult time. I saved you last night. It was at cost of a lie, but I made the sacrifice freely, and out of a grateful heart. None in this village knows so well as I know how brave and good and noble you are. At bottom you cannot respect me, knowing as you do of that matter of which I am accused, and by the general voice condemned; but I beg that you will at least believe that I am a grateful man; it will help me to bear my burden.

[Signed] *Burgess.*'"

"Saved, once more. And on such terms!" He put the note in the lire. "I—I wish I were dead, Mary, I wish I were out of it all!"

"Oh, these are bitter, bitter days, Edward. The stabs, through their very generosity, are so deep—and they come so fast!"

Three days before the election each of two thousand voters suddenly found himself in possession of a prized memento—one of the renowned bogus double-eagles. Around one of its faces was stamped these words: "*The remark I made to the poor stranger was*—" Around the other face was stamped these: "*Go, and reform... [signed] Pinkerton.*" Thus the entire remaining refuse of

the renowned joke was emptied upon a single head, and with calamitous effect. It revived the recent vast laugh and concentrated it upon Pinkerton; and Harkness's election was a walk-over.

Within twenty-four hours after the Richardses had received their cheques their consciences were quieting down, discouraged; the old couple were learning to reconcile themselves to the sin which they had committed. But they were to learn, now, that a sin takes on new and real terrors when there seems a chance that it is going to be found out. This gives it a fresh and most substantial and important aspect. At church the morning sermon was of the usual pattern; it
was the same old things said in the same old way; they had heard them a thousand times and found them innocuous, next to meaningless, and easy to sleep under; but now it was different: the sermon seemed to bristle with accusations; it seemed aimed straight and specially at people who were concealing deadly sins. After church they got away from the mob of congratulators as soon as they could, and hurried homeward, chilled to the bone at they did not know what--vague, shadowy, indefinite fears. And by chance they caught a glimpse of Mr. Burgess as he turned a corner. He paid no attention to their nod of recognition! He hadn't seen it; but they did not know that. What could his conduct mean? It might mean—it might—mean—oh, a dozen dreadful things. Was it possible that he knew that Richards could have cleared him of guilt in that bygone time, and had been silently waiting for a chance to even up accounts? At home, in their distress they got to imagining that their servant
might have been in the next room listening when Richards revealed the secret to his wife that he knew of Burgess's innocence; next Richards began to imagine that he had heard the swish of a gown in there at that time; next, he was sure he *had* heard it. They would call Sarah in, on a pretext, and watch her face; if she had been betraying them to Mr. Burgess, it would show in her manner. They asked her some questions—questions which were so random and incoherent and seemingly purposeless that the girl felt sure that the old people's minds had been affected by their sudden good fortune; the sharp and watchful gaze which they bent upon her frightened her, and that completed the business. She blushed, she became nervous and confused, and to the old people these were plain signs of guilt—guilt of some fearful sort or other—without doubt she was a spy and a traitor. When they were alone again they began to piece many unrelated things together and get horrible results out of the combination. When things had got about to the worst Richards was delivered of a sudden gasp and his wife asked:

"Oh, what is it?—what

is it?"

"The note—Burgess's note! Its language was sarcastic, I see it now." He quoted: "'At bottom you cannot respect me, *knowing*, as you do, of *that matter of* which I am accused'—oh, it is perfectly plain, now, God help me! He knows that I know! You see the ingenuity of the phrasing. It was a trap—and like a fool, I walked into it. And Mary—!"

"Oh, it is dreadful—I know what you are going to say —he didn't return your transcript of the pretended test-remark."

"No—kept it to destroy us with. Mary, he has exposed us to some already. I know it—I know it well. I saw it in a dozen faces after church. Ah, he wouldn't answer our nod of recognition—he knew what he had been doing!"

In the night the doctor was called. The news went around in the morning that the old couple were rather seriously ill—prostrated by the exhausting excitement growing out of their great windfall, the congratulations, and the late hours, the doctor said. The town was sincerely distressed; for these old people were about all it had left to be proud of, now.

Two days later the news was worse. The old couple were delirious, and were doing strange things. By witness of the nurses, Richards had exhibited cheques—for $8,500? No—for an amazing sum—$38,500! What could be the explanation of this gigantic piece of luck?

The following day the nurses had more news—and wonderful. They had concluded to hide the cheques, lest harm come to them; but when they searched they were gone from under the patient's pillow—vanished away. The patient said:

"Let the pillow alone; what do you want?"

"We thought it best that the cheques—"

"You will never see them again—they are destroyed. They came from Satan. I saw the hell-brand on them, and I knew they were sent to betray me to sin." Then he fell to gabbling strange and dreadful things which were not clearly understandable, and which the doctor admonished them to keep to themselves.

Richards was right; the cheques were never seen again.

A nurse must have talked in her sleep, for within two days the forbidden gabblings were the property of the town; and they were of a surprising sort. They seemed to indicate that Richards had been a claimant for the sack himself, and that Burgess had concealed that fact and then maliciously betrayed it.

Burgess was taxed with this and stoutly denied it. And he said it was not fair to attach weight to the chatter of a sick old man who was out of his mind. Still, suspicion was in the air, and there was much talk.

After a day or two it was reported that Mrs. Richards's delirious deliveries were getting to be

duplicates of her husband's. Suspicion flamed up into conviction, now, and the town's pride in the purity of its one undiscredited important citizen began to dim down and flicker toward extinction.

Six days passed, then came more news. The old couple were dying. Richards's mind cleared in his latest hour, and he sent for Burgess. Burgess said:

"Let the room be cleared. I think he wishes to say something in privacy."

"No!" said Richards; "I want witnesses. I want you all to hear my confession, so that I may die a man, and not a dog. I was clean— artificially—like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came. I signed a lie, and claimed the miserable sack. Mr. Burgess remembered that I had done him a service, and in gratitude (and ignorance) he suppressed my claim and saved me. You know the thing that was charged against Burgess years ago. My testimony, and mine alone, could have cleared him, and I was a coward and left him to suffer disgrace—"

"No—no—Mr. Richards, you—"

"My servant betrayed my secret to him—"

"No one has betrayed anything to me—"

- "And then he did a natural and justifiable thing; he repented of the saving kindness which he had done me, and he *exposed* me—as I deserved—"

"Never!—I make oath—"

"Out of my heart I forgive him."

Burgess's impassioned protestations fell upon deaf ears; the dying man passed away without knowing that once more he had done poor Burgess a wrong. The old wife died that night.

The last of the sacred Nineteen had fallen a prey to the fiendish sack; the town was stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory. Its mourning was not showy, but it was deep.

By act of the Legislature—upon prayer and petition—Hadleyburg was allowed to change its name to (never mind what—I will not give it away), and leave one word out of the motto that for many generations had graced the town's official seal.

It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again.

fiction

# ten

by douglas thornsjo

"Clear it out," she said to herself. "All of it. Everything."

It was a new year and soon it would be a new life in a new place: there would be no call for the past. The past only choked life out of the living. It was the future that mattered.

And so to prepare for her move into the future she set about jettisoning anything that extended too far back into her mind. She threw out all her check stubs and financial records that were more than a year old — "Trouble if I'm audited," she thought. "But I'll risk it." She threw out books that her ex-boyfriend had given her: *The Enchanted April, Mulliner Nights, Persephone's Torch, Black Money, The Eyewitness Guide to London*. She tore her Flower Power poster off the wall and threw it away. She threw away a cactus plant that her mother had given her: she'd never liked it, anyway.

She had six months worth of Architectural Digest magazines piled on a stand at the end of the sofa. Not that she had ever dreamed of living that way: but looking at the magazines had once rested her eyes and relaxed her mind, providing her with perfect rooms and hallways that no one else could inhabit. Now she believed that that kind of escape was as foolish as worrying

about the past. She tied the magazines neatly with twine and dumped them into the recycling bin. There would be no place for escape in her future life.

Among the chotchkas piled on top of the television set was a porcelain gnome no more than two inches high. It had been willed to her by her grandfather, and she never had understood that. She hated gnomes, and her grandfather had died a drunk. She threw it away.

She opened her closet door and was astonished by the memories she would have to be rid of: dresses she had worn so seldom that she could still recall the occasion, suits with interesting stains pointing back to moments of embarrassment or passion, or both. She folded them away neatly into boxes for the Salvation Army, thinking "Sippy's party. The Museum of Time, where I met Frederick. The interview for the job at Global. Twenty-seventh birthday. Oh my god. Trip to Mexico with Mom & Dad. Ugh, was my taste in clothes that bad? The night Carl proposed. Wuf, slinky! What a color! I'll miss this, but... out it must go!"

*She opened her closet door and was astonished by the memories she would have to be rid of...*

Of the two rows of shoes extending from wall to wall there was only one pair (made from canvas and molded rubber) that was still comfortable to both her feet and her memory. The rest were boxed or bagged and carried down to the battered pick-up in the yard ("Have to get rid of that, too," she thought).

In her dresser drawer she found black underwear that she didn't want to think about, and a wad of love letters from Paul. They were good love letters, not too sickeningly smarmy, full of marginal illustrations and wishes. She looked at them briefly, and knew that looking was a mistake. She crumpled them up as best she could, carried them to the bathroom sink and burned them.

The worst was still to

come. There was a store room off the kitchen, and of course the attic. She could have left the contents of these for the future occupants of the house, whoever they might be, but that would have been doing the thing halfway: the boxes with their objects and subjects would have haunted her if they remained behind, intact, waiting for her possible failure, her potential return. It all had to go.

The first thing she found was a carton of her brother's old comic books. Her brother was dead. Of what use were these? She found a broken lamp and a clothes bag full of dresses belonging to her mother. Forties stuff: eye-burning reds and sweeping collars. Stylish in its time — but now? Who would ever wear them again? Not her — and they no longer fit anyone she knew. Get rid of them.

*She thought oh my god oh my god I can't go back that far, it's useless, it's worse than lugging around a corpse...*

In the attic there were trolls and coloring books starring Ricochet Rabbit and King Linus the Lion-Hearted. There was a hot potato game called Time Bomb and a Shari Lewis Draw 'n' Play set. There were her Barbies and Kens and the corvette and the wardrobe full of tiny clothes. She thought oh my god oh my god I can't go back that far, it's useless, it's worse than lugging around a corpse. It's over. And one by one she carried the boxes of things down to the pick-up. Take it to the dump this afternoon, she thought. Don't wait until morning. Her only wish was that she owned a trash compactor big enough to crush it all.

At last the only thing left was a smallish trunk containing charcoal drawings signed by her father. He had been a pharmacy clerk all of his life and as far as she knew had never owned any ambition for anything else. Yet here were pictures bearing his name: bowls of fruit and nature scenes and a nude woman, not her mother. None were any good: certainly she wouldn't have wanted any of them

hanging on her walls. Her father had made the right choice.

There were too many to burn. She took the trunk outside and buried it, with all of its contents, in the back yard. There they would slowly rot, until nothing remained, as it was with all things of the past.

By the time she had finished she was covered in dust and dried sweat, and had cobwebs sticking in her hair. She took off her clothes, bagged them and threw them away, then stepped into the shower to wash everything off. “Perhaps I should cut my hair,” she thought. It had never been short or tidy. To change that would be a fine first step into the future.

When she stepped out of the shower she saw that the bathroom mirror was empty. Steam from the shower had fogged the glass, but when she wiped it clear with a towel and stood naked in front of it she saw only the empty shower dripping with moisture, and the dull star-patterned shower curtain pulled back against the wall, and the towel in her hand floating ghostlike in empty space. She had completely gone.

This pleased her. She went out into her new life and became nobody.

fiction

# seven

by douglas thornsjo

It was not known during her lifetime that Madeleine L'Engle had been a maker of quilts.

It was her biographer, Maura Collins, then a graduate student at ESU, who made the discovery.

It was August.

Maura made her final pilgrimage to the seaside cottage where the author of *A Wrinkle In Time* had ended her days. The afternoon was sharp and cool. Maura drove a yellow second-generation VW bug along the narrow coastal road that ran straight out to the point. At times there was water on both sides. A fine mesh of cloud hovered at the farthest edges of the sky. At the end where the road vanished into a thick cluster of pine trees she found the little house looking just as it always had.

Maura climbed the gray unpainted stairs and used her key. It felt odd to enter without calling the author's name, to pass uninvited in to the empty kitchen, where she had once sat with Madeleine, reading the mail aloud to her over a cup of scented tea. She entered the room that overlooked the ocean. Here was the author's writing desk, the ancient manual typewriter, the neat stack of paper and the blue-patterned vase filled with dried flowers.

Maura thought that she had come to say goodbye. We know this because that is what she wrote in her journal. The house certainly seemed to lack the author's presence. But then Maura

ventured upstairs, where she had never been before. And that is where, she said, it felt as if she had met Madeleine for the first time.

This was due to a shuttered room that she found at the front of the house. It was locked, but Maura discovered that she already held a key.

The room's only furnishings were a high-backed chair facing the window, a one-legged stand beside it with a black leather sewing kit perched on top, and four dressers, one against each wall. A basket of cloth scraps rested on floor near the arm of the chair.

Maura sat in the high-backed chair and considered the discovery. There were issues of intent that Maura felt underqualified to adjudicate. As of its own volition, her right hand slipped over the arm of the chair and found the scraps of cloth within easy reach. Maura selected one blindly, and brought it up into the dim light. It was blue, with white polka dots.

Feeling much like an archeologist, Maura started methodically around the room. Each dresser had four drawers. Each drawer contained five neatly folded quilts. Each quilt was unique, and each bore a name. One of the names was hers.

There were flying geese and house and starburst patterns, and there were patterns that Maura had never seen the like of before, double helixes and spiral chains and mist and television snow. The quilt that bore her name was all nested triangles framed by a fire pattern and bordered in deep blue. Maura had never felt so flattered in all her life.

Knowing that she would not find the answers that she felt she needed in a single afternoon, she refolded the Maura quilt, set it aside and returned everything else to the state in which she had found it. With the Maura quilt tucked under one arm, she locked the room, and the house, and drove quietly back out along the point.

Her apartment in Cambridge was one not-too-small room on the top floor above the Wursthaus. She liked it because in the morning the sun flooded her, and in the afternoon the square flooded with people. There was room for a double bed and a wardrobe and a sink and hotplate and the overstuffed chair she'd inherited from her grandfather, and a floor lamp that gave her enough light to read by. Two or three nights a week Michael came by to share dinner and the bed. She loved Michael because he was by turns considerate and vigor-

ous, but she was always glad when he left.

This turned out to be a Michael night. When he saw the Maura quilt spread out across her bed he said that it was beautiful, but it hurt his brain. The pattern, he said, was quite busy. Maura, who had spent much of the afternoon studying the quilt from the chair across the room, now stretched out across it, rested her chin on her folded arms, and decided, quite happily, that she agreed.

Michael had brought a roasted bird and cheese and crackers and wine. They sat on the bed and ate and drank, and then crawled under the quilt together. She half expected to feel its design impressing itself upon her flesh, and was disappointed when she felt nothing of the kind.

All in all it was an ordinary night. Maura found, as usual, that she could not sleep when Michael shared the bed. She was just nodding off in the hour before dawn when he crawled out of the sheets, and kissed her lightly on the cheek. She smiled for his benefit, but was so tired that she dropped off the moment she had stretched out to take advantage of the warm extra space. She didn't hear him leave.

*It occurred to her sudden;y that the quilt's pattern was a specific code carrying a message intended particularly for her...*

It was after ten before she woke. The room was bright and warm. Somehow she had twisted around in the sheets so that she found herself lying on top of the quilt instead of under it. The first thing that she saw when she opened her eyes was a small corner of the fire pattern against black quilted sky.

She was still half asleep. Her complete relaxation of mind was such that she imagined the quilt was trying to tell her something: and it occurred to her suddenly that the quilt's pattern was a specific CODE carrying a MESSAGE intended particularly for her.

Maura wrenched herself up on all fours and looked down into the pattern. It was true: she could not yet make out the code but it was there — it was visual and

mathematical and it seemed to be reaching a part of her mind even though both the basics of the code and its message still escaped her.

This act of recognition triggered a chemical change in Maura's brain: and that afternoon she began seeing things.

She had been reading at Wordsworth's bookstore for more than hour when an eight foot ghost rose up on the other side of the literature aisle and peered at her over the rack. Whether man or woman, she could not say, but the thing had curious eyes. It was wrapped in a shroud, and was entirely the color of old newspapers.

When she ignored it the thing grew annoyed and changed into a black lizard that reared overhead and vomited fire. Maura realized that she was late for lunch with her friends.

Outside it had turned into a gray day. The street had entirely crumbled away so that the sidewalks bordered a rocky canyon that ended miles down in darkness. A group of gothic youths passed her from the opposite direction, dressed all in black, with spikey red hair and black lipstick and kohl smeared round their eyes. They were real.

At the Wursthaus nothing was out of the ordinary. Frank and Julie and Sarai stood up in the booth and Maura hugged each one of them in turn. They were drinking dark beer. Maura waved her glass aside and ordered coffee instead.

Their opening conversation was about movies. Maura could barely make them out over the screaming of the food. As Maura had long since come to terms with the nature of consumption the cries of the fruits and vegetables did not bother her nearly so much as not being able to hear her friends. At last Sarai asked Maura what she had been up to. Leaving out certain details, Maura told them of the day and a half just past.

The next morning all four of them drove out to the house on the point in Frank's van. Maura was bemused by the grandfather clock standing out beside the porch and by the brontosaurus peeking at her from over the roof, but as she knew the others could not see these things she said nothing. She had not herself seen these things two days before: still she knew that the house had not changed.

Frank and Julie were almost as excited by the quilts as she had been. Even Sarai said that the patterns were like nothing she had ever seen before. One by one the quilts were lifted from their drawers, wrapped in cotton and packed neatly away into a series

of glass-topped cases that Maura had brought from the college library.

This was her first mistake.

As they were leaving, the shade of Madeleine L'Engle appeared at the foot of the stairs and gestured at Maura in a way that she did not understand. Her reception was still imperfect, and anyway, the others were watching her. Maura did not want them to know that she had jumped sideways out of the loop.

By five o'clock they had safely delivered all one hundred and fifteen quilts to the college library and were ready for dinner. Maura wanted to beg off, but felt that she owed them something for their efforts and offered to buy instead. They went back to the Wursthaus. This time their conversation was about quantum physics and time and death: topics that had never interested them before. Maura made a note of that, and of the group's unconscious avoidance of fruits and vegetables in favor of meat dishes, which were already dead.

When they had parted for the evening, hugging again, breathing out smoke into the unseasonably cold night, Maura waited until she had seen them all safely across one of the ladders that bridged the yawning chasm where the streets used to run. From where she stood, her apartment above the Wursthaus now had the appearance of a crumbling turret held up by ancient brown beams embedded in the masonry. It towered over the rest of the town, with the moon posed dramatically at its back.

*She possessed an almost magical power to alter the dream and her circumstances within it in any way that she wished...*

She climbed up to the room, brewed some tea, crawled under the Maura quilt and fell deeply into sleep, where she dreamed an intensely embarrassing dream. The contents of this are not important: what matters is that she suddenly wakened within the dream, and realized that she possessed an almost magical power to alter that dream and her circumstances within it in

any way that she wished. Before she could use these powers to turn the dream in her favor, she woke up. That raised several questions in her still-half-slumbering mind: while conventionally dreaming she had been blinded to the controls that she, as dreamer, had possessed all along. Could life be the same way? Was a higher state of human development so much a given that we took it for granted, and, taking it for granted, forgot about it? Would the simple act of remembering our own powers propel us into wakefulness? To what degree were these "powers" a metaphor, and to what degree should they be taken literally?

Maura was not prepared to answer the last question, and laid aside the evidence of her own eyes and senses. *It could be as simple as this:* she thought. *I could be going mad. Others would say that I am. The possibility, uhm, probability, should not be discounted.*

Nonetheless when she chanced across Michael that morning she asked him to organize a news conference. Michael asked what it was about. Maura told him about the discovery of the quilts, which would be enough to warrant a small conference, but not about the deeper avenues that the quilts were guiding her along. It would take a few days to get the word out. Maura believed that was all she would need.

Maura went on to the ESU library and spent the rest of the day cataloguing her discovery. Among the collection of quilts there were twenty-five that did not bear any names. Maura believed these twenty-five to be the heart of the message, with the named quilts designed as specific keys that would unlock the minds of the people they addressed: people whose names meant nothing to her. She noted that the named quilts did not seem to hold any particular resonance for her, though their patterns were often strikingly similar.

With the tedious work of cataloguing done, Maura turned her attention to the twenty five that she now referred to as "the master key." These were so different in design and color that Maura despaired of ever finding an overall pattern or sequence. There were picture quilts (one of these depicted a nighttime scene of animals resting on the banks of the Nile River, with a pyramid far in the distance and a sky of the darkest blue dotted with six, seven and eight-pointed stars) and abstracts, traditional and semi-traditional styles, two that showed a far-eastern influence and

two that were unlike anything Maura had ever seen before. Lacking any clue of where to begin, Maura chose a quilt at random and began a stitch-by-stitch examination.

When Michael found her just after nine that evening, she was still crawling over the surface of the Egyptian quilt, soft pads strapped to her knees and elbows, a lighted magnifying glass in her left hand and a notepad close by her right. "You weren't at home," he said. "I had a feeling I'd find you here."

As he came into the room, he'd had the fleeting impression of something large and felty standing close by Maura's side. Now, for no reason that he could understand, he said: "Did you watch *Captain Kangaroo* when you were a little girl?"

Maura looked up. "You saw him," she said.

*As he came into the room, he'd had the fleeting impression of something large and felty standing close by Maura's side...*

She was referring to Dancing Bear, who had waltzed in some time before and asked for her card. Maura had tried to take advantage of the opportunity by attempting to "morph" Dancing Bear into Antonio Banderas, but she could not remember the controlling thoughts, could not even remember if such thoughts truly existed. Then Michael had come in. Dancing Bear had turned sideways and vanished.

"I don't know what I saw," Michael said. "But I remembered *Captain Kangaroo*. He was in black and white when I watched him, and his mustache was bushier. There was one quite remarkable episode that I still remember. Everything was black and white, the Captain, The Treasure House and everything in it, Grandfather Clock, everything. Then the captain went through a door in the wall, and when he came out the other side everything was in color."

Maura said, "Michael I love you." She gave him a wet kiss on the mouth. It was her first assurance that he was not an hallucination.

The press conference was held on the follow-

ing Thursday. Ten of the named quilts and all twenty five comprising the master key were brought on in their glass cases and laid open for the reporters to inspect. Maura studied their faces. The reporters were men and women, mostly in their thirties. If the quilts had any effect on their minds, they made no sign of it.

"As you know," Maura started, "Madeleine L'Engle was a writer, sometimes dismissed, in her time, as a writer of children's books. Readers who knew and loved her work understood that it carried an imaginative power. The discovery of these quilts, the existence of which was kept secret even from her closest relatives, brings home the point that this power had a breadth and design that most of her readers never consciously suspected.

"It's my belief," she said, "that these quilts made by Ms. L'Engle are nothing less than blueprints: an evolutionary key to the next step in human development. Study of the quilts has already brought about a partial change in me."

Three reporters walked out of the room.

"The effect can only be described by metaphor: it's the difference between watching life on a black and white television, and then suddenly seeing things in high-definition color. A key quilt bearing my name brought about this change in me. These twenty-five, the master key, carry the code which allows us to take the next step."

Of the five reporters remaining, two more left at this point. One asked Maura about her intake of mind-altering chemicals. Another asked about little green men. Only one reporter carried on with any degree of seriousness: he turned out to work for the *National Inquirer*.

It was over within five minutes. Maura and Michael, alone in the room, looked at each other and said nothing. Michael helped her pack and load the quilts, then left. Maura took them back down to the college library.

For months after, nothing more changed. Maura continued to be haunted by the yellow ghost and continued to see strange alterations in the landscape, but these grew less and less spectacular with time. Michael stopped coming around. Maura's nights were spent alone in the library.

Then came a cold night in January.

It was close on two AM. Maura had been studying the Nile quilt for nearly eight hours. Her eyes were bleary. She put aside the magnifying glass, closed her

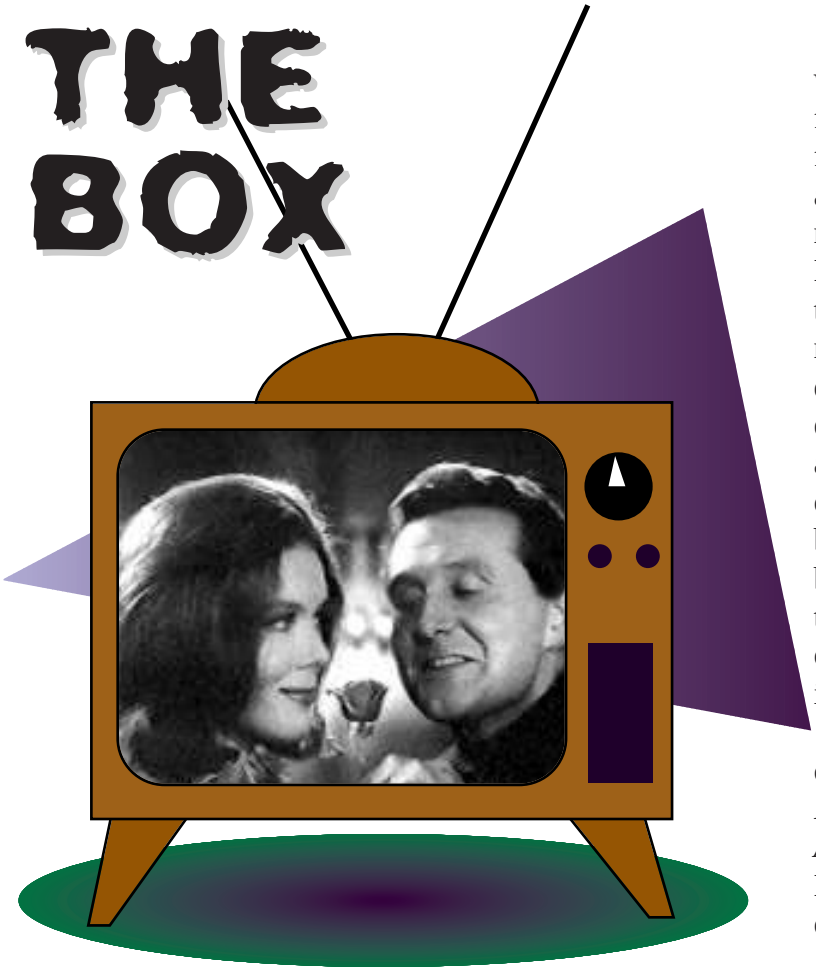
eyes, and rested her head on folded arms.

Suddenly the key turned in the lock, and the lock opened in her mind.

“Oh my god,” Maura said.

She was never seen again. The quilts were stored away in a back room of the ESU library, where they were promptly forgotten. Twenty years later they were destroyed by fire. No one ever missed them.

The house on the point where Madeleine L’Engle ended her days still stands.




# We're happy

whenever one of our favorite television shows from the 1960s is made into a godawful big-budget summer "spectacular" Major Motion Picture. Inevitably, this "blockbuster" is dismissed or forgotten, as it deserves to be, the producers lose buckets of money, as they deserve, and the original television series benefits from all the hype by re-emerging in syndication or on home video, often remastered and looking better than ever.

This is particularly the case with *The Avengers*. Any attempt at filming *The Avengers* without Pactrick Macnee in the pivotal role of John Steed is misguided

"Mrs. Peel -- we're needed ...now more than ever!"

from the get-go, and last year's version featuring Ralph Fiennes as Steed and ever-diminishing Uma Thurman as Mrs. Emma Peel was a miscalculation of jaw-dropping proportions, proving the arrogance of '90s film producers, who seem to believe only in what's synthetic; or at the very least to believe that nothing lives or breathes which cannot be replicated artificially in a studio laboratory.

To look at the original and the replicant side by side is to look at difference between life and anti-life — yet in this case the living thing owes its continued existence (on video) thanks to the construct. In the thirty years since its original run, *The Avengers* has aired in North America only twice, usually with five minutes or more hacked out of the running time of each episode. Video releases have been spotty and of low quality. Thanks to A&E, and to Hollywood's belief that nothing is sacred, a restored, uncut *Avengers* is available to us again — for the first time.

We doubt that this effect will alter the world of so-called entertainment — but it should. *The Avengers* was radical in the '60s — by rights it should seem tired and dated when compared to television programming in the '90s. It does not, which should frighten you down to the soles of your feet. As radical as *The Avengers* was thirty years ago, today it's at least three times as radical, three times as fresh, three times as daring. In part, this has to do with the producer's arrogance mentioned above, the belief that creative people are no longer needed in the production of film or television. But it also has much to do with the broader effect of that arrogance, which has been to create a culture that has taken two technological steps forward and three spiritual Giant Leaps backward.

*The Avengers* is everything '90s cultch is not: colorful, intelligent, charming, playful, dignified, exciting, stately, witty, powerful and just a little bit impudent. Try getting *that* from a cola nut — or from any Hollywood company actively producing new material for television, all of which seems hyper-serious, weighted by muddy, muted colors, a relentless pursuit of the relentless, dull pseudo-documentary style, posturing doctors, lawyers, bare-assed cops, all sweaty protagonists snarling at the camera as they draw arbitrary lines in the sand. *The*

*Avengers* proves that we are not only dumbing ourselves down but losing our sense of humor and our flair for style.

In this *The Avengers* owes not a little of its success to blind luck: the sort of blind luck that can only occur when creative people are given the power to make their own decisions. It is next to impossible for this kind of Happy Alchemy to occur at any level in the culture that has evolved over the past two decades (and especially during the twelve years that Ronald Reagan and George Bush occupied the White House). Why? Because all the components that could bring it about are missing. Principally, these are:

• *Producers who are creative people first, business people second — if at all.* There have always been money men: people with no creative inclinations or ability who run the business end of things and reap the lion's share of the rewards. We can't kick about this, it's more than a simple fact of life: it's a darn good arrangement so long as the suits know their place. But the Reagan-Bush years were so kind to suits that vast numbers of them began to get uppity and think that they could handle creative work without the participation of creative people — nearly everyone notices the danger flags, but the balance of power has shifted so far to the right that "creatives" can't do much more than lick their wounds. *The Avengers* profited from something almost unheard-of today: a couple of *writers* were more or less given complete control to produce the show their own way. When the suits stepped in and tried to take the reigns from *Avengers* producers Brian Clemens and Albert Fennell, as they did at the end of show's fifth season, the show's quality nose-dived so dramatically that Fennell and Clemens were finally brought back on board: too late to save the series from the corruptive cookie-cutter Suit Influence that had already set in. Let's put this as simply as possible: people should stay away from things that they don't understand. By definition, suits try to reduce everything to numbers: but drama doesn't work that way. Even when the numbers are in place, suits lack the ability to make them add up to anything.

• *Production designers who aren't afraid to dazzle the eye — in the service of the story.* Visually, '90s tele-

vision isn't *completely* dull — only the *programming* falls into that category. In the days when color was new to television, it wasn't just the sitcoms that were bright and visually exciting. Designers for shows like *The Avengers, The Prisoner, Star Trek* and *The Wild, Wild West* went out of their way to provide us with colors and images that were not merely exciting, but focused the eye and the brain delightfully on the story at hand. Especially in the case of *The Avengers*, the playfulness of the production designers actually enhanced the playfulness of the stars and the producers: this is a far cry from design for its own sake. In the early eighties, so-called "reality" shows like *Hill Street Blues* began to mute the color scale and provide us with faux noir imagery that would have had more dramatic impact if the shows had simply been filmed in black and white. Today, muted colors and dull images are the industry standard for dramatic programming — meanwhile, commercial designers have reacted to this mudslide by dazzling us on a scale beyond the wildest hallucinations of the hippie-culture '60s. But when all of our most interesting work is being done in the service of Madison Avenue, the value of creative design is flipped on its back — and culture begins to die a long, lingering death as it flails about helplessly trying to find the ground.

• *Directors more interested in storytelling than dazzling the viewer.* We believe that good storytelling is dazzling in itself, and that eye-catching visuals are the province of the designer. Thirty years ago, most television directors learned their craft working as assistants to Hollywood's greatest storytellers: they knew how characters and the elements of plot worked because it was in their blood. Today, most directors have their training on MTV with high-gloss music videos whose object is in direct opposition to character, conflict, sustained tension or mood. This has damaged our culture in ways that are probably irreparable. Drama requires thought and development, whereas scenes in a music video are measured in the fractions of a second and images are forgotten in an eye-blink. By definition, a character can only work on one level in this kind of structure — sometimes these characters are literally flat, removed from any con-

text of background and turned sideways until they vanish. At the surface level these short films are often very effective, which is why they have successfully weaned us away from things like depth, purpose, layers and commitment. But a music video lasts only a few minutes: feature film and hour-long TV drama require more, and modern directors are emotionally and intellectually unable to provide the necessary substance.

• *Actors more interested in acting than in becoming a "personality."* Being British was a distinct advantage for *The Avengers* — that advantage reached the pure definition of Happy Alchemy when Diana Rigg was cast opposite Macnee as the swash-buckling amateur, Mrs. Emma Peel. That's M-Appeal, for Man Appeal. Rigg had that in spades, but she had something better: classical training, instinctive talent, and an affinity for working hand in glove with her co-star that we think is unmatched anywhere in the history of series television. Rigg was as interested in success as anyone — her stint as a Bond Girl in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* proves that — but she wasn't about to let ambition keep her from doing the job at hand. It's pleasing to note that Macnee and Rigg put themselves forward by not putting themselves forward — by refusing to pose and pretend. There seems to have been a remarkable quality of genuineness and generosity on the sets of *The Avengers*. None of actors can be said to be sleep-walking through their work: indeed they seem to be challenging each other to be real within the context of the series unreality, and having a jolly good time in the process.

• *Above all, a sense of drama — and especially melodrama — that does not take itself too seriously. The Avengers*'s lightness of touch meant that an accelerated sense of fun could be applied to straight-forward, nearly realistic stories, while an aura of calculated dread and menace could be brought to bear on tales that would otherwise be too ridiculous for words. Here again the British way of thinking comes to the rescue: because humor has been an essential element of British drama since the days of Shakespeare and Marlowe. There must be cycles of tension and relief, a sense that human drama is actually comedy underneath it all and that the gods —


often represented by the audience — are having a good laugh at the expense of mere mortals. In High Art, the worst of Eugene O'Neil and Arthur Miller often collapses under its own weight because it offers us nothing to laugh at. This principle reaches its deadliest point when art is not a factor, in the biceps-flexing movies of Stallone and Willis, where smash-cut is piled on smash-cut and the audience is expected to swallow it all with nary a flicker of a smile. Danger and an onrushing sense of hyper-catastrophe — a sort of mandated super-seriousness that isn't seriousness at all but mere straightfaced posing — is the tone of '90s drama... the empty embodiment of runaway self-importance, a culture that clings too tenaciously to the wrong things. The two faces of John Steed are the perfect example of this. In the original series MacNee's Steed was always smiling: and it was a genuine smile, full of humor, even when he was about to punch some villain's lights out. As Steed in the new big-screen *Avengers*, Ralph Fiennes can barely manage a pained wince. "Dignity," he seems to be declaring. "Dignity for its own sake." Macnee never had to ask for dignity. He didn't give a rat's ass for the stuff. He had plenty of it in store, which was why he could afford to be charming.

In that sense, *The Avengers* was a more realistic show than many more serious programmes then or now. It's a living example that television is, or once was, capable of offering so much better when creative people are allowed to do their work without a Suit looking over their shoulder.

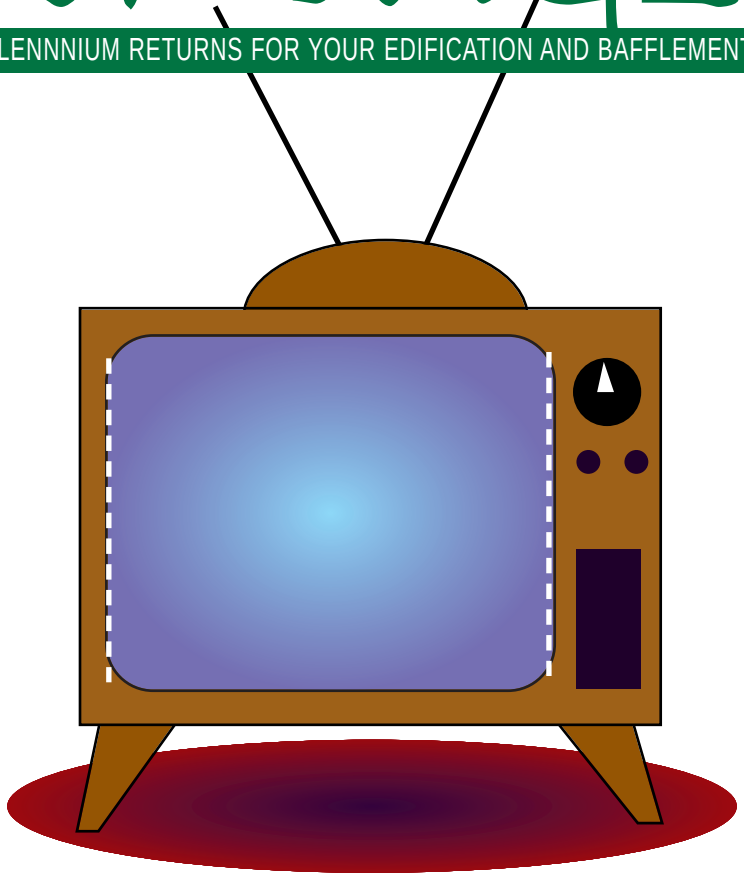
Why does T*he Avengers* matter? Because people create culture and culture creates people. We become what we watch. Steed and Mrs. Peel, with their commitment to set things right while still taking the time to enjoy everything that life has to offer, are the best models that anyone could have.

# THE FUN PAGE

A REGULAR FEATURE FROM THE PRINT VERSION OF MILLENNNIUM RETURNS FOR YOUR EDIFICATION AND BAFFLEMENT!

## Make Your Own Cultch!

We're so convinced that ANYBODY could make better TV than what TV people can, that we're giving you the opportunity to try it yourself! On a strip of paper approximately 1.5" tall and as long as you care to make it, draw storyboards for your ideal television show. Make it a kid's show, a spy show, a comedy, a western. News magazines not acceptable. Then print out this page, cut slits along the dotted lines on the TV screen, and run your show intstead of something like PROVIDENCE or 20/20. If you make a good one, send it to us! We'll print the best new TV shows in a future issue!




# let's get video

## It's frightening

to note that the film industry offers us so little to write about that we're reduced to writing about the lack rather than anything positive. We had to wrack our brains to remember the last movies we saw — and once we remembered it became obvious why we'd forgotten them in the first place. A BUG'S LIFE is well-designed and competent in every way, but like all Hollywood fare it is constructed according to the current numbers, and the current numbers are low and common indeed. Its most memorable scenes are nothing more or less than an in-joke enjoyed by the filmmakers, missed by most audiences who get up and leave the moment the credits begin to roll.

We used to be annoyed at these early-leavers who seemed more interested in rushing for their cars than in giving filmmakers their due... but these days, who can blame them? We live in a rubber-stamp culture where even the independents are forced to play by Hollywood's rules. As movies and books grow more synthetic,

people are bound to notice the difference on a subconscious level if no other. Would the people who made MOUSE HUNT a hit think well of that movie if they knew of any comedic alternatives? We doubt it very much — and we doubt that MOUSE HUNT will be remembered in the long term — even by the people who claimed to enjoy it. The only virtue of disposable culture is that it *will* be gone tomorrow.

That's why video continues to be our movie theater of choice. A quick look at the pleasures video has offered us in the last year includes:

The Saint series: we owe Val Kilmer and the makers of his godawful Saint movie a debt of gratitude, for causing video distrubutors to fall all over themselves getting better Saints into the video stores. There is, of course, the Roger Moore version, which has its merits (principally Moore himself) but looks clunky next to better spy shows like *The Avengers*. *The Fiction Makers*, a sort-of-movie cobbled together from two episodes of the show, does make for a very pleasing afternoon's entertainment, and what it lacks in action setpieces it more than makes up for in wit, color, a rich '60s atmosphere and the sort of updating that remains scrupulously faithful to the intent of Leslie Charteris's original stories.

But the greatest of the Saints was George Sanders, who took the role in a series of B-thrillers made by RKO between 1938 and 1941. The entire RKO series (which includes features starring Louis Hayward and Hugh Sinclair in the title role) has been made available from Turner Home Video, in a terrific package that includes two uncut, remastered features on each tape. *The Saint in New York*, featuring Louis Hayward in the title role, has a sort of rough and tumble insouciance that plows over Hayward's lack of magnetism: it is a pleasant hour, little more. The sequels featuring Sanders as Simon Templar are much more refined, to match Sanders's absolute authority and mastery of the role. Brisk and pleasing, these Saints carry just the right amount of noir, thrills and urbane attitude, and are a delight to watch. Subsequent features starring Hugh Sinclair as Simon Templar have much to recommend them — they were filmed in Britain and carry an authentic mystique that

the American films didn't try to emulate — but one misses the arrogant charm of Sanders. All told, this is a great value and a pleasure that you won't have to feel guilty about.

For those who desire something more contemporary, *The City of Lost Children* came to video in 1998: this French SF-thriller embraces all the conventions of that genre and demonstrates that originality and emotional complexity can exist comfortably and even thrive in a commercial venture. Where Hollywood continues to give us beast after Vaseline-drooling beast and dismemberments galore, the makers of *City* have given us a world where childhood and adulthood cross currents and threaten to destroy each other by the simple act of longing for their own opposites. A exceptionally talented cast (including Ron Perlman as a naive circus strongman whose adoptive little brother is kidnapped — to literally have his childhood tapped and drained out of him) and special effects that actually serve the higher purpose of a plot are two of the joys *City* has to offer. This is the sort of movie that gets better as you think about it; we think it represents the best that filmed fantasy has to offer.


Thanks to video we were able to see Ridley Scott's *The Duellists* again; made in 1978, this action drama was Scott's first film — and few directors have offered a more dazzling debut. With Harvey Keitel on the one hand as a crazed army officer bent on dueling to gain satisfaction for every slight, be it real or imagined, and Kieth Carradine on the other as a duty-bound officer who becomes entangled in Keitel's web of hatred, *The Duellists* blazes through a twenty-year grudge match with the combatants falling on each other with increasing ferocity and decreasing sense of purpose. Though it's marked by some wildly exhilarating action and is in many ways beautiful

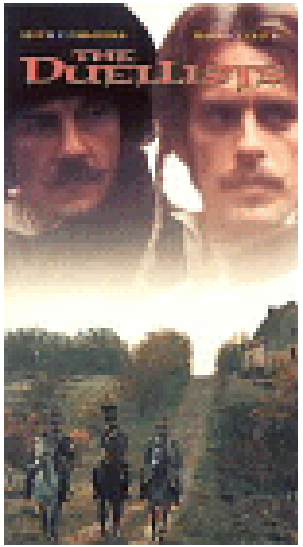
to look at, the film hinges on emotion and intellect, with intellect finally winning the day. We wish that all action films had as much fire and smarts as this one.

*The Mark of Zorro* proves beyond any reasonable doubt that heroes require and deserve less cynical times. After the gratuitous deconstrction (almost a disembowlment) that the character suffered in *The Mask of Zorro* last year, it is more a pleasure than ever to retreat into this, the best and most sophisticated of all screen Zorros, filmed by Rueben Mammoulian in 1940. One of the great commercial stylists of his period, Mammoulian delivers a Zorro filled with light and shadow, in which cleverness and confusion are far more important weapons than the sword — which is not to say that action doesn't have its place in this intensely exciting adventure. Basil Rathbone does his bit as the chief baddie, and his climactic swordfight with Power is one of the longest and most satisfying ever filmed. Forget deconstruction: building requires much more talent and skill than disassembing, and this is the movie that built one of the greatest screen legends of all time.


W.C. Fields has always been a favorite, for having a bad attitude and backing it up with talent and skill. Four of his movies found their way onto video for the first time last year, including *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (with rather too much Charlie McCarthy and rather too little Fields, though both deliver top-notch material in this Circus World knockabout) and *Million Dollar Legs* (a calculatedly zany, almost surreal film stolen and ultimately sold by the comparative reality of Fields). *It's A Gift*, with Fields as the owner of a general store who gambles everything on an orange farm, is probably best of breed — but *You're Telling Me* has more than its share

of moments (including a long version of his famous golf sketch) and another plot that allows Fields to have it both ways as sympathetic hero and scalawag. It's no exaggeration to say that no ten comedians working today have the talent or the audacity of the wonderful Fields.

In a different vein, but nearly as pleasing, is the comic crooner Eddie Cantor. Cantor was no genius, just a working Hollywood stiff with a pleasing demeanor and big eyes that he knew how to use. He was exceptionally fortunate in the talent that he worked with, including Busby Berkeley, Nat Perrin, Eddie Sutherland, Leo McCary and Norman Taurog. In his best movie, *Kid Millions* (1934) Eddie plays an over-aged Poor Naive Kid living with an adoptive family of thugs, who inherits a wealth of fabulous jewels from his explorer-father. The catch is that Eddie has to claim the inheritance from its faux-Egyptian guardians, which isn't such an easy task, especially with the gold-digging Ethel Merman and her paramour along for the ride. The dialogue is especially funny, the comedy setpieces are never less than charming, and it's all punctuated by some of Cantor's best musical sequences (directed by Berkeley). A Technicolor fantasy finale literally puts the frosting on a delightful confection, the sort of screen candy that's forever lost to us, except, now, on video.




It's far from being his most cachet movie, but to our minds *The Magician* (1959) is hands down Ingmar Bergman's best. Here, the psychological elements pervasive in his work are given their only true and proper clothing to wear, as a fake mystic (Max Von Sydow in his finest role, yes including Jesus Christ) arrives in a provincial village with his entourage of colorful gypsies and scoundrels — none of whom are exactly what they seem. When a priggish town doctor exposes the magi-

cian for what he is, Sydow turns the tables and proves that fake can real — his retaliation is subtle, spectacular and merciless: though in the end he seems to lose as much as he gains. Moody, erotic and horrifying, this is true magic pressed onto celluloid.

Most notably, this year I had the chance to see George Roy Hill's movie version of *Slaughter-House Five* for the first time. Not only is it a better adaptation of Vonnegut's spectacularly un-adaptable novel than anyone could reasonably expect, it's probably one of the truest adaptations any novel or play is likely to get. Notorious in its time for Valerie Perrine's nudity and for daring to assert that war is hell (it appeared in a decade when John Wayne was still sweating and machoing his way through the kind of heroic war movie that was just then beginning to turn sour in our mouths), *Slaughter-House Five* today seems sweet and innocent, with its man-child hero tumbling through time and its happy ending among the stars of Tralfamadore. Still, it remains radical in other ways: for its intelligence (George Roy Hill, where are you today?), its fearlessness and bravura style, and its ability to deliver a message of kindness in a way that isn't the least bit sentimental.

Let the multiplexes breed as they may; let them fill their screens with computer effects and sweat and cynicism, with explosions and glittering packages that hold nothing inside. Let it snow: because I've got video, and there's more than enough joy there to keep me through Tommorowland.

MILLENNIUM
A JOURNAL FOR TOMORROWLAND
PAGES

# the road ahead

*This article was originally written as part of an ongoing **"Writers on Writing"** column at another magazine, but was refused as "inappropriate" by that magazine's editors. We believe the piece is a model of appropriateness, and present it here in its entirety.*

For the first time since the invention of the printing press, the publishing industry — at least in America — doesn't reflect the existing base of would-be working, professional writers.

I personally know better than half a dozen writers whose work is *at least* of professional caliber who cannot get their books into print. At any other time in history, these working writers would have been the voice of their generation. But in a very real sense, our generation (the forty and under crowd) has been deprived of its voice.

This is because the publishing business is now controlled by short-timers who are incapable of taking the long view. Large retail chains and

other Keepers of The Bottom Line — NOT creative people — are deciding what will be available for YOU to read. As recently as the late '60s, publishers would take on a first novelist as an investment towards the future, knowing that they would suffer short-term losses but betting that talent would sell and make a profit in the long term. Usually they were right. It's the old Catch-22 game: lots of readers are willing to buy books by established professionals, but how do you become an established professional if you can't get your early work into print?

M.J. Rose, a three-time unpublished novelist and ad-agency writer whose clients have included McDonald's and Harlequin Books, was told by her publisher that "We're not in a position to take a chance on a book that doesn't come with a built-in readership." Her book, an erotic thriller called LIP SERVICE, was then summarily dumped: the publisher had suddenly realized that she was a "first-timer."

*Large retail chains and other Keepers of The Bottom Line — NOT creative people — are deciding what will be available for YOU to read.*

If it doesn't have an existing, clearly defined and easily pigeon-holed "market" it won't get into print. That's why celebrities and Star Trek hacks are the top-selling "authors" of our time. As Ms. Rose goes on to report, "My novel is commercial but — and this is the scariest part — the people at the big publishing company who loved the book said they were sure they could sell 5000 copies, but they no longer were using 5000 as a measure, if they weren't sure they could sell 25,000 they weren't buying. So I lost out."

It's all so terrifying because it isn't just damaging writers as a group — it's damaging the entire culture by ensuring that only the lowest common denominator makes it into print.

Ms. Rose is one of a growing number of frustrated writers who have taken their work to the infobahn. LIP SERVICE (ISBN 0966433203) is available for download right now at http://www.readlipservice.com, with a self-published paper version available from amazon.com. Hers is just one of many similar attempts to tame the web to the needs of writers — and thereby hangs a tale.

Any search of writers, literature and web-based publications on the internet will turn up hundreds, maybe thousands of hits. Authors as big as Madison Smartt Bell and as unknown as myself have their own websites, while e-zines like CORTLAND REVIEW and CRANIA appear and disappear by the second. At least one web host, the remarkable etext.org, is the home of an innumerable stock of on-line magazines.

Founded in 1992 by Paul Southworth, the totally volunteer-operated etext.org started as an archival project for political-based usenet groups and has since expanded to the point where it now offers free storage and web-hosting services for electronic magazines of all kinds.

The catch is that most of these on-line books, magazines and writer's sites are free, which in a very real way means that they cannot replace paper magazines sold at bookstores and magazine stands. By not selling advertising or charging admittance, web magazines can't afford to pay their contributors: and, increasingly, publication-starved professionals are willing to take the loss in the vain hope that the exposure might increase their salability in other areas.

*If it doesn't have an existing, clearly defined and easily pigeon-holed "market" it won't get into print. That's why celebrities and Star Trek hacks are the top-selling "authors" of our time.*

Writing is a trade like any other. We need to find a way for writers to derive income from web-published work. Then and only then will the internet become a true alternative to paper publication.

But there are other concerns. How much exposure does the Internet *really* afford us? Of course the potential is huge but with millions of sites to chose from and so little time, how many browsers will actually light on any one page? (Don't rely on counter applications to give you the answer: they don't work.)

Democracy, more often than not, means the freedom to fall through the cracks.

The web may indeed be the only answer for writers in future years, but I'm beginning to feel that if all of us continue to go our separate ways, each promoting our own efforts, each slicing the pie that much thinner, we're doomed to failure — or at least to only limited success. It will take a collective, or a company — say, the internet equivalent of Random House, publishing dozens of books each

quarter to an established retail network (Amazon and the like) — to finally establish web-based publishing as an alternative to print.

So I'm making this column a call to action. It's time to circle the wagons. I see lots of good ideas and templates for internet publishing out there, with, at most, three people behind them. We need a hundred people. We need to meld those templates together into a kind of Internet Publishing Collective: a business run by its employees with the goal of establishing a viable, profitable publishing company on the internet. We need established authors and talented beginners alike to commit their work to one outlet. Then we need all of us to make a big damn noise about it so that someone will take notice.

We need writers with a good head for business (not me) and others (like me) who can wield a mouse, type a press release, design pages and assemble product (and, as my friend and co-author of this column Bruce Canwell adds, we also need "writers with technical backgrounds who can help figure out a way to make fiction-on-computer less bothersome to read. In the long term, reading PC-based stuff has to become as easy as reading paper editions in order to compete."). It should be easy to organize a storefront for our collective on the internet — what's more difficult is the marketing and publicity, not just to let people know where we are, but to create a product that our customers, the daily readers of the web, will find an attractive alternative to paper. My own model for that product is PDF, but we should look at the pros and cons of every format and perhaps try different things, with a goal towards producing sales.

*…it isn't just damaging writers as a group — it's damaging the entire culture by ensuring that only the lowest common denominator makes it into print.*

Does anyone else think this is a good idea? Does anyone have any other ideas?

By making this call to action I feel a bit like Mickey Rooney cocking his fist in the air and saying to Judy Garland, "Hey! Let's put on a show!"

But, you know what? "It just might work!" And anyway, what are the alternatives?

My address is thornsjo@uninets.net

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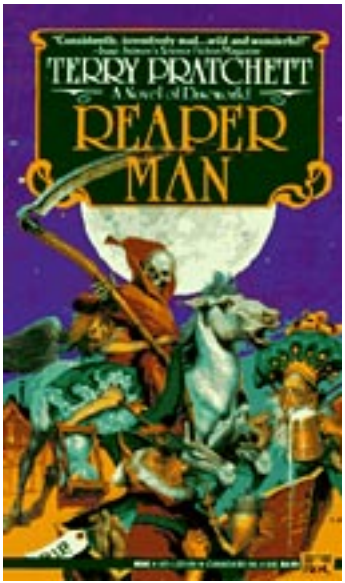
# a few reviews




*Reaper Man* and *Equal Rites*, two novels by Terry Pratchett (Signet, $4.99 each, 0-451-45168-6 and 0-451-45092-2)

Any so-called "comedy fantasy" that opens in a sort of cosmic boardroom with a circle of cosmic executives discussing the need to sack a high-profile employee because he's "developing a personality" is comic fantasy of a high level indeed; when that discussion is made to sound real without losing any of its humor, we begin to smell greatness. Just listen:

*One said, He has worked inefficiently?*

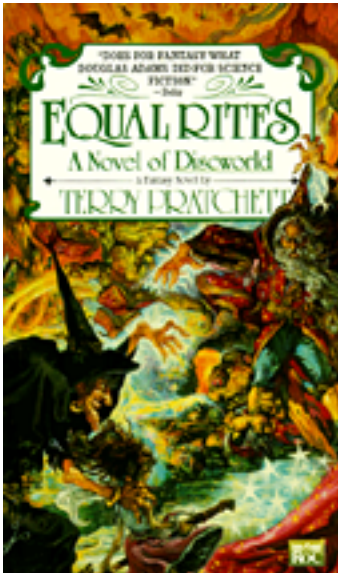
*One said, No. We can't get him there.*

*One said, That is the point. The word is* him. *Becoming a personality* is *inefficient. We don't want it to spread. Supposing gravity developed a personality? Supposing it decided to* like *people?*

*One said, Got a crush on them, that sort of thing?*

*One said, in a voice that would have been even chillier if it was not already at absolute zero, No.*

*One said, Sorry. Just my little joke.*



*One said, Besides, he sometimes wonders about his job. Such speculation is dangerous.*

*One said, No argument there.*

*One said, Then we are agreed?*

*One, who seemed to have been thinking about something, said, Just one moment. Did you not just use the singular pronoun "my"? Not developing a personality, are you?*

*One said, guiltily, Who? Us?*

*One said, Where there is personality, there is discord.*

*One said, Yes. Yes. Very true.*

*One said, All right. But watch it in the future.*

The employee in question is Death, and when Death is sacked without a replacement Death to take on the job, all hell breaks loose on Discworld, the setting of Terry Pratchett's delightful series of — we must add the disclaimer — so-called comic fantasies.

The story, as you've no doubt guessed, is merely "Death Takes a Holiday" in a swords-and-sorcery setting. What sets this version above the rest is the deftness of Pratchett's touch, and the vaguest of suspicions (which we liken to the work of Tom Sharpe) that this confection may actually be good for us. Also like Tom Sharpe in his prime, Pratchett seems to be able to crank his Discworld novels out at an alarming rate without any serious lessening of quality.

Many critics compare Terry Pratchett to Douglas Adams and stress the yuks and hahas that Pratchett's stories are marketed as sure to generate. We prefer to compare him — against all appearances — to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald, all of whom said: here we have a genre — there is no reason why the elements of great fiction cannot apply.

The fantasy is no less fantastic and the comedy is no less funny for his taking this approach: quite the opposite. Comic fantasy is not a genre we would bother with in the hands of any lesser writer. To put it another way, it's not how many laughs Pratchett generates, it's what he gets us to laugh at.

In *Equal Rites*, a dying wizard bequeaths his power to the "eighth son of an eighth son," not knowing that the infant "son" is actually a girl, who grows into a living conundrum, a female wizard in a strictly male-dominated field of endeavor. But the protagonist of the novel is actually the girl's

Granny Weatherwax, who first tries to mold her into a more socially acceptable witch, only to learn that magic cannot and will not be denied, and that to do so would destroy the child. It's Granny's evolution — from a small-town stick-in-the-mud who believes that everything has its proper place into a witch of infinitely broader sensibilities who realizes that the world is a mass of wonders that can only be enjoyed and appreciated — that gives the novel its foot on the ground and makes it worth reading.

Pratchett is serious because he's humane and funny for the same reason. Late in the novel, Granny and an old wizard are comparing notes about the world that's gone, the world of their youth:

*"It didn't rain so much in the summertime."*

*"The sunsets were redder."*

*"There were more old people. The world was full of them," said the wizard.*

*"Yes, I know. And now it's full of young people. Funny, really. I mean, you'd expect it to be the other way round."*

We don't know of any other comic fantasist, Douglas Adams included, capable of writing dialogue that well. More than that, we don't know of any other comic fantasist who would even *think* to include a passage like that in their stories. The highest praise that we can give to Mr. Pratchett is that his stories are real.

## *Books Briefly Noted:*

*The Return of Count Electric and Other Stories* by William Browning Spencer (White Wolf, $5.99)

The polite way to say it is that William Browning Spencer is at his best as a novelist, not as a short story writer. We still admire *Zod Wallop* and *Résumé With Monsters* and recommend them as two of the best novels to appear in recent years, but this collection offers little of interest either to Spencer's fans or casual readers. The title story concerns a serial killer who returns to his old habits after a few years off; it has some good ideas behind it but the "surprise" ending is telegraphed much too far in advance, and like most of the stories in this book "The Return of Count Electric" neither goes anywhere nor accomplishes anything. Spencer seems to hit his target only when writing about failed authors

whose girlfriends have left them, and that gets old real fast, especially to failed authors whose girlfriends have left them. We're glad that Spencer got this collection into print, but we hope that he finds a new subject sometime soon.

*Diary of an Amateur Photographer, A Mystery*. Written and Designed by Graham Rawle (Penguin Studio, ISBN 0-670-87775-1, $19,95)

This is a rare thing: a designer's book that tells a clear story with the sensibility of a writer. The plot is just about straightforward: a socially backward man whose new hobby leads to uncomfortable revelations of his family's past. The design aspect of the book (the shutterbug's story is told in collage form, with bits and pieces of typed scraps, photos and pages torn from magazines combining into a diary volume) is probably what sold it to the publishers, but after a few dozen pages it's the design that becomes tiresome, failing as it does to play any functional part in the story. In a unified piece, all the elements should combine for dramatic impact, and in a tale like this Rawle the writer presents Rawle the designer with the perfect opportunity to dramatize a troubled mind coming completely unraveled. Instead, Rawle's design, while striking, hits only one note and hits it again and again: by its end the book is no more bizarre to look at than it is at the beginning. The clever text keeps things moving along and the book delivers a pleasing mix of oddity and a kind of side-show barker-veiled perversity, but this is a case of a good book that could have been something more.

*Essential Fantastic Four, Essential Spider-Man* (3 Vols.), *Essential Avengers*, by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, John Romita and Don Heck. (Marvel Comics, $12.95-$14.95)

For comic book fans of a certain age these collections represent a Golden Age unmatched by anything before or since. The Marvel conceit was to set super-hero adventures into something that resembled the real world, and to give their protagonists the same sort of problems that ordinary folks have to face, including troubled relationships, bad hair days and clothes that won't fit. Combining influences from a wide variety of sources with an absolutely contemporary atmosphere, Marvel succeeded in building a

unified mythos that had a unique flavor and weight. The stories frequently offer more of value to their readers than many far more straightfaced and high-minded works of art and literature — we enthusiastically recommend the best of their output to readers of all levels, from all walks of life.

That said, even the panting-est of Marvel's fans is likely to find the Avengers volume slow going: Kirby turns in his least interesting work for Marvel and the team is too ill-assorted and poorly defined to hold our interest for long. But The Fantastic Four and Spider-Man represent Marvel's finest moment, and here we have the formative years of both in four volumes. The lack of color notwithstanding, you are not likely to find these stories anywhere else at such a reasonable price.

*High Spirits* by Robertson Davies. Penguin.

We're not certain that this one is still in print — a collection of the Christmas ghost stories that Davies read every year at Christmas High Table during his tenure as Master of Massey College. It's not our favorite Davies, but any Davies is better than none. He is never less than enlivening and entertaining: here for the first time he allows the former to get rather in the way of the latter. Under the circumstances he can be forgiven for that, but it's more than likely that the result is a book for the already-converted: those unfamiliar with Davies should begin with his novels, especially his masterpiece, *What's Bred In The Bone*. For the rest of us, there's joy to be had anytime we read Davies. Our favorite scene involves a group of Scottish ghosts arguing over the most Important Event to occur on a particular date. At the first deviation from Historical Birthdates, one of the vapory figures cries, "You've had to take refuge in deaths. Deaths will avail you nothing."


*Nightmare Cafe*, a Pop-Up book by Alex Henry and Antje V. Stemm

(Envision, 1-890633-06-2, $15.95)

Not only the best Pop-Up book of the year but one of the very best creepy Halloween books ever, this is a sequel (and companion volume) to Henry and Stemm's even more delightful *Nightmare Hotel* from 1997. Henry's text is serviceable, concentrating on gross-out puns more than character, and it's clearly the artist who is the star of these books. Stemm, who does her own paper engineering, has a style both childlike and refined, and she makes fresh and effective use of all the standard pop-up devices while adding a few new wrinkles of her own. Readers look through windows and onto stages where pleasantly nightmarish acts take place, open wallets stuffed full of cash and other goodies, view the cafe's kitchen from inside its flaming oven — meanwhile, bugs crawl across the pages and clumsy gremlin waiters spill drinks out of the book into your lap. Both the Cafe and Hotel would please Charles Addams and his ooky extended family; if you share a fondness for good-natured macabre, the Nightmare Hotel and Cafe will surely become your favorite local haunt.

*Faithfull*, by Marianne Faithfull, with David Dalton. (Penguin, £7.99 ISBN# 0-14-024653-3)

We don't usually recommend, or even notice, ghost-written autobiographies of celebrities, but this one, and especially its section devoted to Faithfull's years as a friend and sometimes lover of the various Rolling Stones, is strangely interesting. Dalton's writing is literate and stylish and the picture he paints is a fascinating one, of kids — wildly famous kids, wildly rich kids, but naive and strangely innocent nonetheless — given carte blanche to party and hang out as


they wish. After reading it we feel a better understanding of what the '60s were all about: not just rebellion, but relief and fear, a certain amount of innocent exploration, and the sort of childlike acceptance and curiosity that asks: what shall we do next?

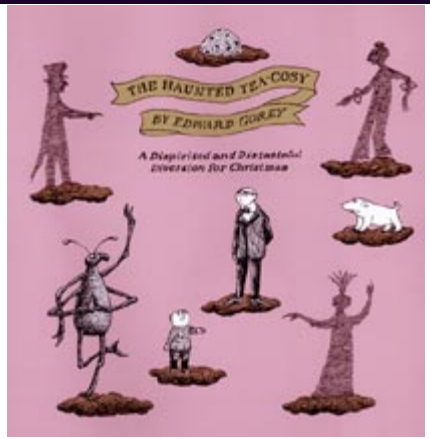
*A Time of Gifts*, by Patrick Leigh Fermor (Penguin, £7.99, ISBN# 0-14-004947-9)

In 1933 Fermor walked from the coast of Holland to Constantinople, through countries primed for war. There is beauty on a grand scale, but also local color (about to squashed under bomb-blasts and the tread of tanks) and human stories, as when Fermor spends Christmas with an unfamiliar family in a frozen little German town. This is a travel book thrice blessed: for recounting an interesting journey made at an interesting period in language that is lyrical and evocative.

*Backcloth*, by Dirk Bogarde (Penguin, £5.99, ISBN# 0-14-008967-5)

Only Britain produces actors who can also write, and if Bogarde is not the greatest stylist ever to bang a typewriter still he knows how to achieve dramatic impact. At four volumes his biography would seem on the long side: but War and the arts have granted Bogarde a great many stories to tell, and he tells them well in a brisk detached style that keeps the pages turning.

*The Haunted Tea-Cosy*, by Edward Gorey




(Harcourt, Brace, $15.00, ISBN# 0-15-100415-3)

Edward Gorey's latest is a typically perverse reworking of *A Christmas Carol*, originally drawn for The New York Times. The art seems sketchier than what we're used to seeing from Gorey and the price of the volume seems more than a little bit steep, but Gorey's prose is as charming and as dryly funny as ever, and fans of his work will definetly want to add this "dispirited and distasteful diversion" to their shelves. All others need not apply.


# slave nation

Who says we live in a free society? To survive we're forced to sell ourselves into indentured servitude, doing work that we hate for people that we hate in the name of a cause that we don't believe in, at wages that reinforce a feeling of personal worthlessness: squandering our lives at a rate of ten dollars an hour or less and then using the free time that remains to drug ourselves, one way or another, into senselessness, praying to a god that doesn't exist to give us a sign, any sign, that our lives amount to something more.

We live surrounded by angry zealots determined to inflict their will on the rest of us, to strip us of the few remaining rights that we have left. We live in an atmosphere of consumerism so corrupt that even our language has begun to lose its meaning.

We believe that the dumbing down of America is a deliberate campaign being conducted against us by the same people who employ us and produce the goods that we buy. Why? Because a populace that cannot communicate cannot complain.

*In response to our comments about the end of television as a subject for socialization, frequent MILLENNIUM contributor Bruce Canwell writes:*

"…The Balkanization of all entertainment has diminished people's ability to share thoughts and opinions about *any* media: movies, TV, comics, fiction, you name it. Not just because there's so *much* of everything that no one has a common base from which to discuss (though that alone was enough to drive a stake through the heart of the MCC), but also because the choices create whole differing *camps of thought* about what is or is not "quality" stuff. I'm sure there is a camp out there believing that, say, John Woo is the greatest filmmaker ever — and since their world doesn't contain, say, Keaton or John Ford, Kurosawa or Orson Welles, how can they be convinced they're wrong? They can't — they just look at you like you're talking Urdu when you throw such names at them.…"

# Because We're Nutty

During his high school years (in another decade) a friend of ours was part of a circle of chums known affectionately to its own members as The Insanity Club. This conjured up images of gibbering maniacs bearing knives, of schizoids and depressives in their coats with the arms that tie at the end, talking to themselves, rocking themselves gently in the common room.

So we were disappointed when we met them and discovered that they were all more or less ordinary people, a bit on the shy side perhaps; last we heard, shyness didn't qualify as a mental illness, though as chronic sufferers of it we wish there was a medical cure.

In larger and smaller ways, we see faux-loopy poseurs at every strata of our culture: actors foaming at the mouth for either "dramatic" or comedic effect, advertising agencies pushing weird, web pages by young artists who present or perceive themselves as somehow "warped," bearing admonish-

ing words such as "Welcome to my hell," when the designers are really nothing more or less than talented design hacks...

It's crazy. Why do so many of us want to be seen as goofy, nutty, warped, crazy or psycho when we are nothing of the kind?

In Jim Carrey's case we understand. As a perfectly creditable and talented actor Carrey climbed to exactly nowhere: it wasn't until he began puffing up his cheeks and yodeling out of his asshole that he began to make real money. But what is it about obnoxious behavior — more to the point, what is it about pretending to be goofy (which Carrey emphatically is not) that should have brought him so much fame?

Of course we all desire to be different: it's this very desire that makes us all the same. What's most disturbing about this is that a sense of fun, a sense of difference, of interest in something other than football and the insurance business, should be considered insane. What kind of a truly warped culture do we live in where artists must think of themselves as weird?

Some of the attraction in assumed weirdness must lie in the feeling — how strange, sad, and misguided — of specialness that it generates. Look at me: I'm just CaRAZY! But it's an easy out: putting a rubber glove over your head and blowing it up like a balloon makes a colorful and high-profile substitute for talent. Anyway, how special can a strange person be in a world where absolutely everyone is strange?

Having a sense of fun isn't insane. Wanting to bring something of value into the world isn't insane. An appreciation of what's considered to be odd and unusual isn't insane. What's insane is the notion that difference equates with degeneracy, that ordinary lightness of being equates with mental illness. So, stop thinking of yourself as crazy. You're so damned normal it's pathetic.

# NÉCROLOGIE

A SORT OF ANTI-OBITUARY COLUMN

We are sometimes accused of morbidity; but we believe that the world is diminished, not increased, by time, that immortality is attainable only in the memory of the living, and that people sometimes need to be reminded that life is short.

## Blue Notes

A decade ago I listened to music every day. Coming home from work, the first thing on the agenda would be to run for the stereo and get it going as loud as possible. It didn't matter what: I listened to all sorts of things, classical

and Kansas, Cab Calloway and the Beatles, little-known independent bands, *Pianosaurus* and *Orchestra Luna*, Springsteen and Broadway.

At some point over the past few years that has stopped. Thanks to some friends who have kept me musically informed I enjoyed the wave of 10,000 Maniacs and The Cranberries, but I seldom listen to them or to anything anymore. Older music sometimes seems to come out of too distant a time: still speaking of wonders but doing so in a voice that has passed off the face of the earth, while new music seems to be uniformly bleak, riddled with angst, depressing. Some of it is very well made, but I have angst enough to spare. Where has cheerfulness gone?

The other day I popped Edith Piaf into my computer's CD-ROM drive. I was always and I remain in awe of her talent, and there are songs that she sings that seem the purest expression of all human faith, hope, desire. This hasn't changed: yet as I listened I had the oddest, most awful feeling that I was, almost literally, listening to the singing of a ghost. A particular kind of string accompaniment came up out of my computer, and I realized that this music belonged to a world that was dead — had been dead for at least thirty years.

It's a blessing, unique to our generation, to be able to travel so far back in time and listen to, or watch on film, a performance that could have been made as much as ninety or one hundred years ago. But such a time traveler must be well-armed against regret and melancholy for the people who are gone and the dreams that they represent. Their art is no less valid: but it begins to remind us painfully of mortality because of the way it was made or the style in which it is presented, a style recognizable to everyone of a certain age, because not so long ago it was everywhere, and because that style isn't anymore, not anywhere.

It becomes possible to greet with warm nostalgia music that used to make us want to run screaming out of elevators. When I was still very young, my grandmother presented me with a record called "One Stormy Night." That this and Perry Como were the best examples of her musical taste should tell you that her musical taste was not very sophisticated. This album was orchestral

music of a lugubriousness, not without a certain quality of evocation, particular to the late fifties and sixties, timed to the rhythm of a prerecorded storm. The fact that the style of music can be nailed down so precisely to a period that lasted not more than fifteen years makes me wish more than ever that I could hear that music again, for no other reason than that it used to be common, that it is no longer common, and that my grandmother enjoyed it.

Similarly, a favorite band of mine during the seventies was The Moody Blues. I won't go into the reasons why I liked them which seem painfully teenaged and naive to me now. But I liked them enough that when my sister moved out of the house and took all her records with her, The Moody Blues were the only band I replaced. I still own those records — but had not listened to them in half a decade or more until late last night. Wondering what had happened to my music habit, I was thumbing through the row of vinyl that sits more or less untouched next to my turntable (yes, I still own a turntable. It still seems to me the best way to package music), when I came upon the Moody Blues.

It had been long enough that the music sounded both fresh and familiar. Some of it was rather more naive than I remembered — and all of it, though not terribly old in the scheme of things, belonged to a world that doesn't exist anymore, except in my head, except when I put the vinyl on the turntable, a world of Nehru jackets which for all of its painful innocence was a good deal more romantic than the one we live in today.

It reminded me that's it's good to lose something once in a while, so that we can have the experience — however fleeting — of getting it back.

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# Me and My SHADOW

*by Walter Gibson*

Some thirty-five years ago I wrote the first of the adventures of The Shadow, a weird crime fighter who invariably emerged from the blackness of the night to pluck helpless victims of black-hearted villains from the brink of doom. As a character The Shadow was as nebulous as the swirling fog (a favorite habitat of his). But as the story progressed, he took on substance. It was formula writing.

In those days, more than a generation ago, The Shadow stories were read as exciting adventure. Today's new generation of readers may call these stories high camp, or low; and enjoy them just as much. Still, from his first appearance The Shadow captured the imagination of hundreds of thousands of readers, and of millions of radio listeners. How The Shadow managed to do this I don't know. Not even now. But he did. And I am grateful. For it happened in the days of the depression, of unemployment, of breadlines, And I was then a hungry young writer, even as writers have always been.

That first novel contained 75,000 words and appeared in the first issue of The Shadow Magazine. Originally the publisher, Street & Smith, intended it as a quarterly magazine. Enthusiastic reader response induced him to publish the magazine as a monthly after only two issues.

My contract called for four novels a year, a not especially difficult task for a pulp story writer. But when the magazine became a monthly, the editor asked me for twelve novels a year, each running to about 60,000 words. A novel a month was a nice prospect, and I hoped the demand would last for two, three, or four years. It didn't. Instead, it became a bi-monthly and I was asked to deliver two novels a month, twenty-four a year. That came to 1,440,000 words a year.

"I'll have a few other stories for you to write to fill up any slack time you might have," the editor told me casually.

I still remember his words, and they sound funny now.

That first year I wrote twenty-eight novels, and for the next six or seven years I turned out twenty-four adventures a year, one novel every two weeks. Then the pace slowed to one

novel a month, and finally it was all over — fifteen years after it began.

Through those years I had come to know The Shadow quite well, or perhaps he had come to know me. It was hard to tell which was the true case. New plots for stories popped up as fast as the books were finished.

One factor helped spark the stories. By keeping a dozen ahead I became so involved in new plots and situations, day and night, that when an issue came out I even enjoyed reading it, and often found myself wrapped up in a story I had already forgotten. I found fault with it and griped — and that kept me on my toes.

Even today when all this is far behind me I wince when I reread my prose. My villains "chortle," "leer," "sneer." Or this: "a rare smile seldom seen on the face of Lamont Cranston." There's not a story lacking in such priceless expressions. But it was all in good fun, or so it seems now. At the time life was somewhat hectic.

When I went to Florida in the winter, I wrote Shadow stories going and coming. When I decided to live in Maine, I arrived there so early in the season that I had to finish a Shadow story in a cabin that was literally being built around me. Picture me sitting at a desk, put together out of leftover lumber, in the middle of an empty room, largish and not quite finished, with carpenters banging and nailing all around me, or carrying two-by-fours in and out and through the room. That old desk I still have, and use, and it remains as sturdy as the Maine pine from which it was hewn.

In winter I often worked late into the night and often my Shadow themes were interrupted by unexpected visitors. One night it was a man who had gotten off a bus and found the town asleep with no phone available to call his home a dozen miles away. He was hiking it when he saw my light and stopped, hoping to find a phone, which he did. Another early morning visitor was an Indian, a lineal descendant of the famous King Philip (or so I was told). He was selling arrowheads, so I took a 2 A.M. coffee break to chat with him. And there was a kindly old lady who used to wake up in the middle of the night and couldn't go back to sleep. Somehow she found out that I was also awake and so developed a regular schedule of calling me up for a bit of friendly talk.

I had gone on the theory that 2,000 to 3,000 words a day was a writer's proper stint, perhaps the maximum one is capable of; certainly a good day's work. But to meet The Shadow schedule I had to hit 5,000 words or more per day. I geared for that pace and found that instead of being worn out by 5,000 words I was just reaching my peak. I made 10,000 words my goal and found I could reach it. Some stories I wrote in four days each, starting early Monday morning and finishing late Thursday night. On these occasions I averaged 15,000 words a day, or nearly 60 typewritten pages, a pace of four to five pages an hour for 12 to 15 hours.

By living, thinking, even dreaming the story in one continued process, ideas came faster and faster. Sometimes the typewriter keys would fly so fast that I wondered if my fingers could keep up with them. And at the finish of the story I often had to take a few days off as my fingertips were too sore to begin work on the next book.

So I wrote a few of the novels in four days, a few more in five days, and more in six days (which I thought then was a more sensible pace). But eight to ten days per novel proved best, sometimes with a break of a half-day or a day between novels. In terms of pages I set twenty pages as a day's minimum, thirty pages as a good average, and forty pages as something special.

The fifteen years I spent writing The Shadow were hard and hectic. But looking back now, I remember mostly the fun and excitement of those hectic years.

New York
1966
WALTER GIBSON
(alias Maxwell Grant)

For your key to some great Shadow sites on the web, visit the links page at Duck Soup Productions

# THE COMICS PAGES


You can check out more cool adventures of Quirk and his pals on the web at:
http://www.etext.org/Zines/Millennium/milquirk.html

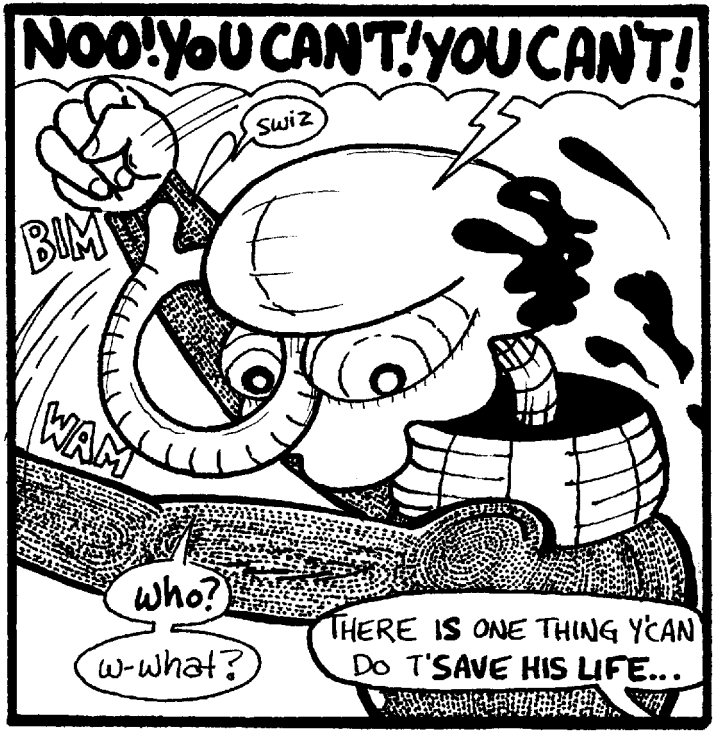
FEATURING:

# QUIRK
## SPACE REJECT

## THE STORY SO FAR:

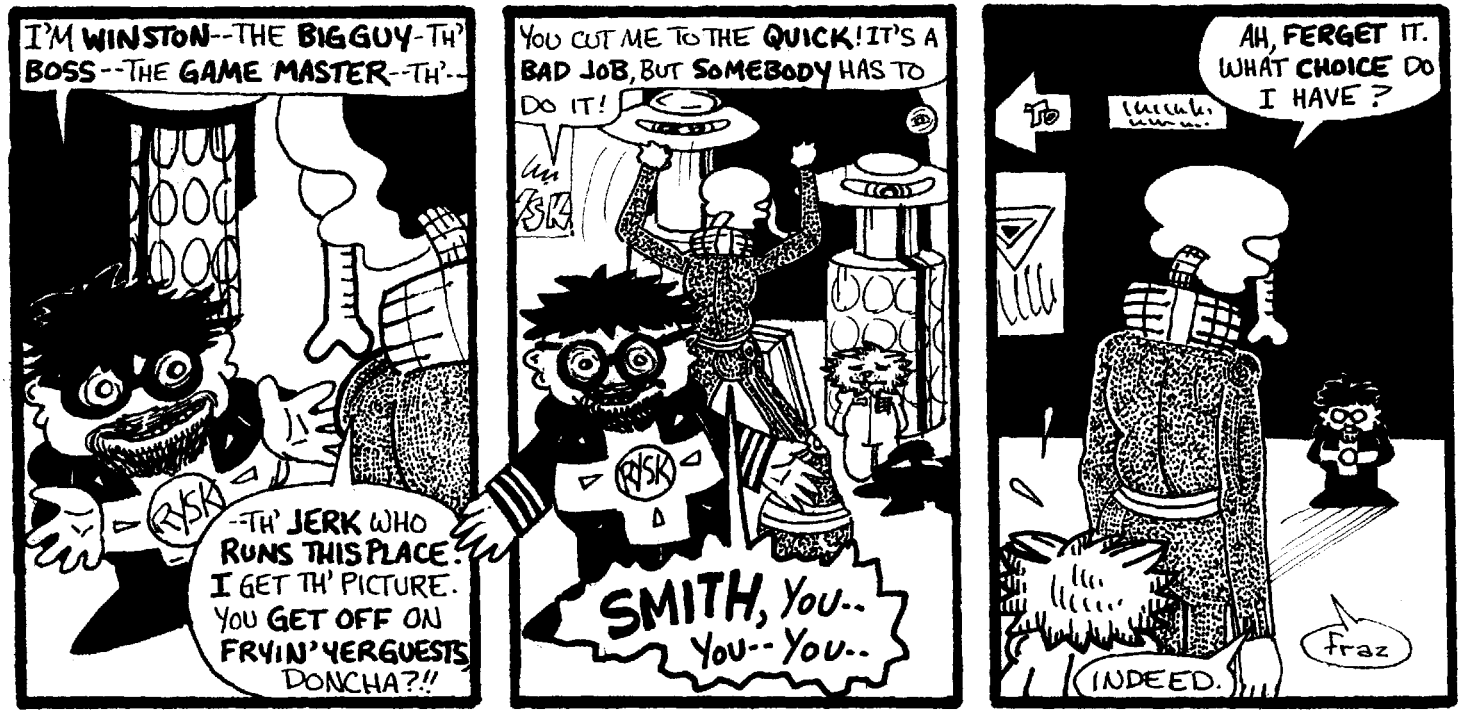
FOR QUIRK AND THE CREW OF THE FRIGID, SOME PLANNED R&R AT THE NOTORIOUS GAMING SATELITE CALLED RYSK HAS DEGENERATED INTO A NIGHTMARE WITH THE REALISATION THAT THIS SO-CALLED HOT SPOT IS A DEATH CAMP IN DISGUISE! WHILE A SHADOWY FIGURE IN A CLOWN COSTUME ISSUES A SECRET CHALLENGE, QUIRK WRESTLES WITH A PAIR OF SERVO-DROIDS DETERMINED TO CARRY HIS PAL SMITH OFF -- TO THE INCINERATORS!

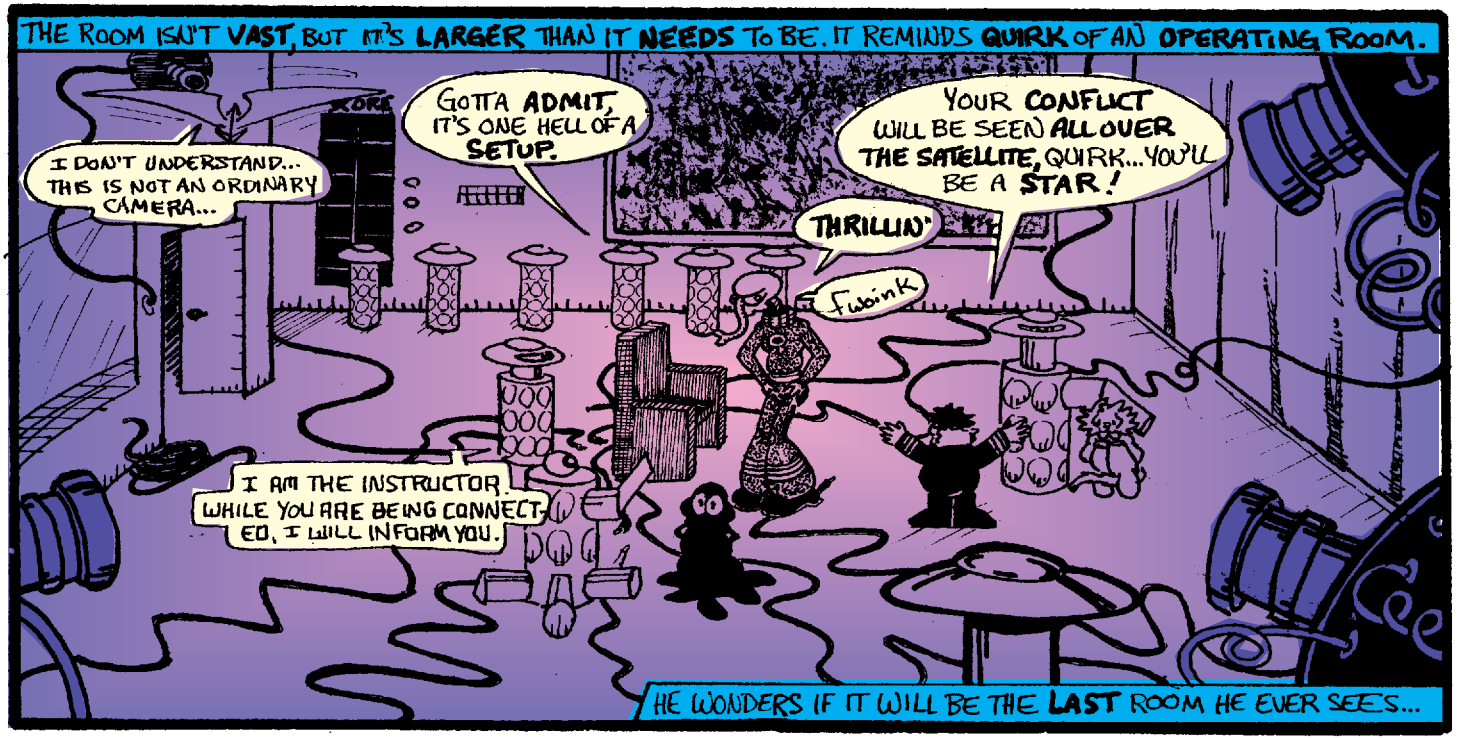

LOSER APPREHENDED. RENDEZVOUS AT INCINERATOR
STOP! LET 'IM GO! HE'S DONE NOTHIN'!
THUMPA!
WHAM!
BAM!
snort snuffle
HELP!
IT IS THE LAW. WINNERS LIVE. LOSERS MUST BE DESTROYED.
NO!

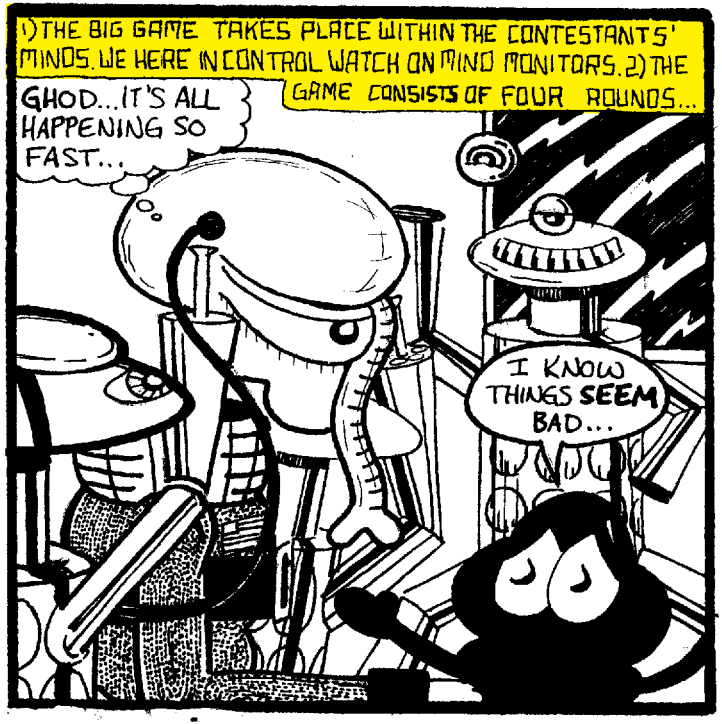

NOO! YOU CAN'T! YOU CAN'T!
SWIZ
BIM
WAM
who?
w-what?
THERE IS ONE THING Y'CAN DO T'SAVE HIS LIFE...


URF.
ALL EYES DRIFT DOWN... DOWN TO A LEERING LITTLE LEACH OF A CREATURE... WHO HAS (THEY JUST NOW REALIZE) BEEN HOVERING AROUND BELOW KNEE LEVEL.
PYSK
YOU CAN PLAY THE BIG GAME!
WHAT? ARE YOO KIDDEN?

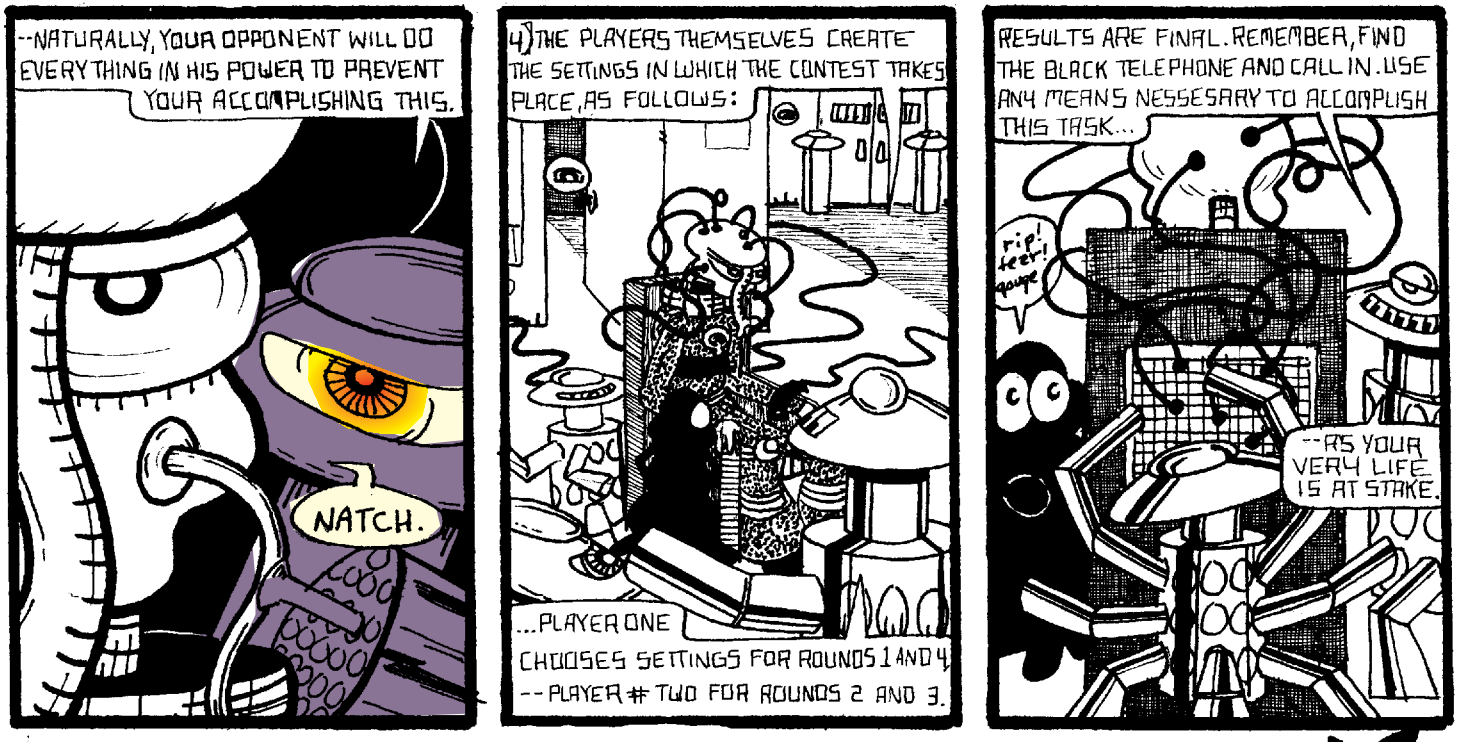

JUST PLAY IT, AN' YOUR FRIEND'LL LIVE. REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENS T' YOU. Y'GOT MY PERSONAL GUARENTEE.
fraz
CAREFULL, QUIRK...
OH, YAH? AN' HOO ARE YOO?

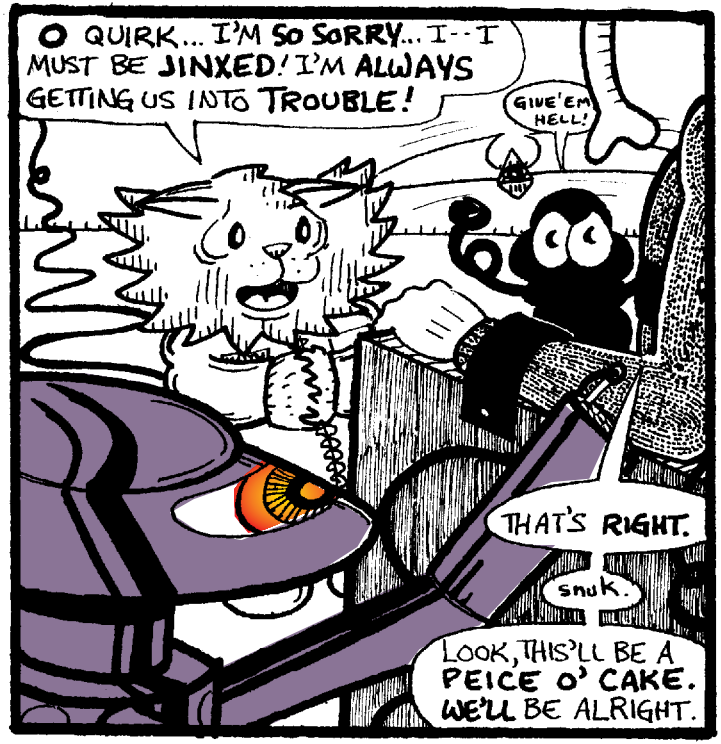

I'M WINSTON--THE BIGGUY-TH' BOSS--THE GAME MASTER--TH'--
--TH' JERK WHO RUNS THIS PLACE. I GET TH' PICTURE. YOU GET OFF ON FRYIN' YERGUESTS, DONCHA?!!
YOU CUT ME TO THE QUICK! IT'S A BAD JOB, BUT SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT!
SMITH, YOU.. YOU-- YOU..
AH, FERGET IT. WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?
To
INDEED.
fraz


THE ROOM ISN'T VAST, BUT IT'S LARGER THAN IT NEEDS TO BE. IT REMINDS QUIRK OF AN OPERATING ROOM.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... THIS IS NOT AN ORDINARY CAMERA...
XORK
GOTTA ADMIT, IT'S ONE HELL OF A SETUP.
YOUR CONFLICT WILL BE SEEN ALL OVER THE SATELLITE, QUIRK... YOU'LL BE A STAR!
THRILLIN'
FWOINK
I AM THE INSTRUCTOR. WHILE YOU ARE BEING CONNECTED, I WILL INFORM YOU.
HE WONDERS IF IT WILL BE THE LAST ROOM HE EVER SEES...


1) THE BIG GAME TAKES PLACE WITHIN THE CONTESTANTS' MINDS. WE HERE IN CONTROL WATCH ON MIND MONITORS. 2) THE GAME CONSISTS OF FOUR ROUNDS...
GHOD... IT'S ALL HAPPENING SO FAST...
I KNOW THINGS SEEM BAD...

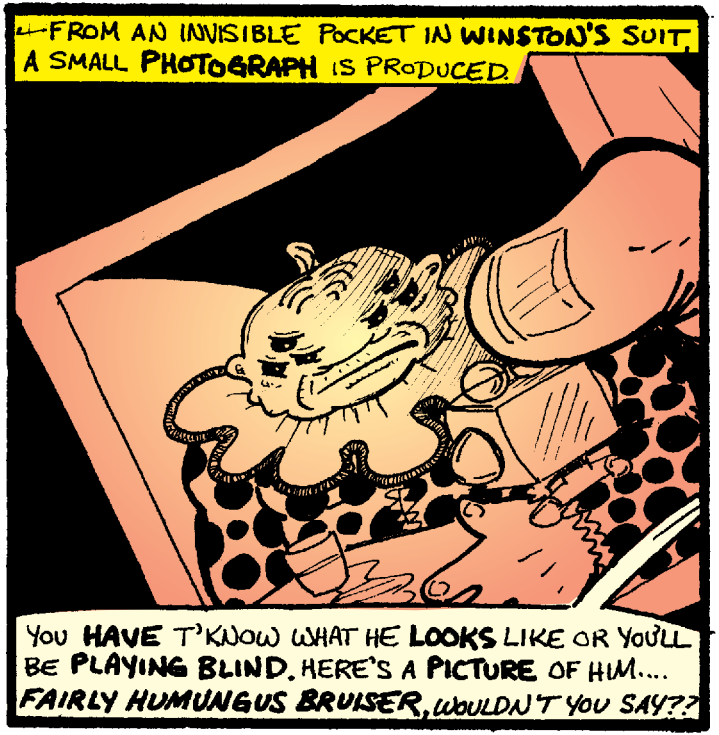

...REGARDLESS OF HOW PREVIOUS ROUNDS RESULT, THE PLAYER WHO SURVIVES ROUND 4 WILL BE DECLARED THE WINNER. 3) THE ONLY OBJECT IS TO REACH THE BLACK TELEPHONE AND CALL IN.
...BUT YOU CAN LICK 'EM!
I THINK DAT JUST A FEW PAGES AGO, WE WUZ BACK ON TH' SHIP...

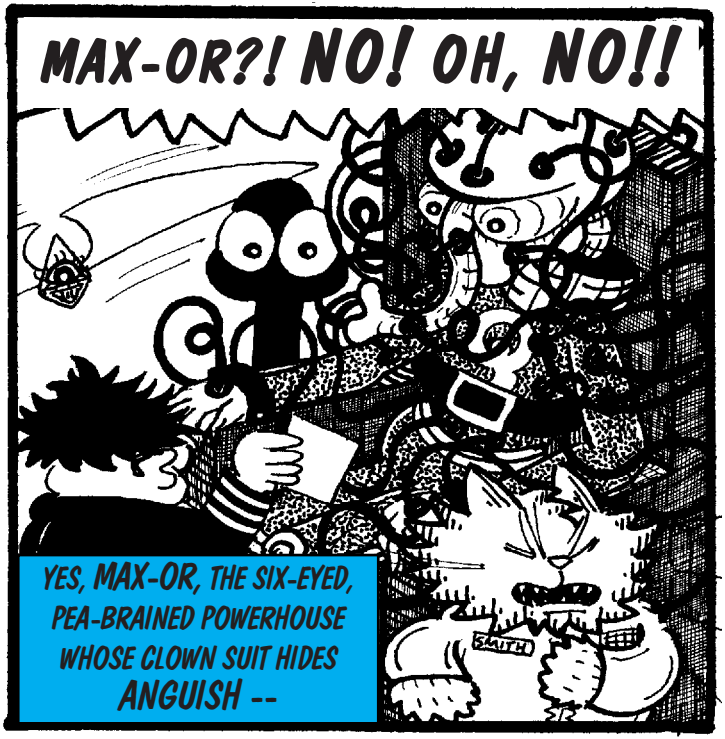

--NATURALLY, YOUR OPPONENT WILL DO EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO PREVENT YOUR ACCOMPLISHING THIS.
NATCH.
4) THE PLAYERS THEMSELVES CREATE THE SETTINGS IN WHICH THE CONTEST TAKES PLACE, AS FOLLOWS:
...PLAYER ONE CHOOSES SETTINGS FOR ROUNDS 1 AND 4.
--PLAYER # TWO FOR ROUNDS 2 AND 3.
RESULTS ARE FINAL. REMEMBER, FIND THE BLACK TELEPHONE AND CALL IN. USE ANY MEANS NESSESARY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK...
rip! teer! gouge
--AS YOUR VERY LIFE IS AT STAKE.


O QUIRK... I'M SO SORRY... I--I MUST BE JINXED! I'M ALWAYS GETTING US INTO TROUBLE!
GIVE 'EM HELL!
THAT'S RIGHT.
snuk.
LOOK, THIS'LL BE A PEICE O' CAKE. WE'LL BE ALRIGHT.


wuf.
ENOUGH CHIT-CHAT!
RYSK
WE'VE GOT T'GET ROLLING... COMFORTABLE, QUIRK?
WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS GUY... HE SEEMS LIKE SUCH A WIMP-BUT THAT'S JUST PART OF IT...


DO I LOOK COMFORTABLE, CAMEL-BREATH?
fraz
FOR BEIN "TH' BIG MAN" AROUN' HERE, YOU GOT A DISTINK-LY SHRUNK WIT. NO DOUBT IT MATCHES YER SIZE!
THERE'S A LAW AGAINST SHORT JOKES HERE, QUIRK!
BESIDES, I MERELY WANTED TO ASK IF YOU WISHED TO MEET YOUR OPPONENT... HE'S BEHIND THE SCREEN IN FRONT OF YOU...
grrrr-rrrr-rrrr...
FERGET IT. I AIN'T MEETIN' NOBODY JUST SO'S YOU AN' YER CUSTOMERS CAN HAVE A "PRE-FIGHT SHOW".
snuk.
SUIT YOURSELF.
--STILL--




-- AND A MISDIRECTED HATRED FOR QUIRK AND HIS PALS!*

*DATING BACK TO "THE HUMOR AGENCY" -- QUIRK #2

...TO BE CONTINUED...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