

McCLURE'S

Edited by Herbert Kaufman

SEPTEMBER
1928

25¢

Julian Street
Samuel Merwin
Frederick Palmer
Zane Grey
Vicente Blasco Ibañez
Henry Irving Dodge
James Branch Cabell
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The Hair of Melicent

THEY of Poicteame narrate that in the old days Count Manuel performed many notable exploits and wedded his true love and lived happily ever afterward. They tell also how he opened a window, at his fine home at Bellegarde on a fine summer morning, to confront an outlook more perturbing than his experienced eyes had yet lighted on.

So he regarded it for a while. Considerately Dom Manuel made experiments with three windows in this Room of Sesptra, and found how, in so far as his senses could be trusted, the matter stood. Thereafter, as became an intelligent person, he went back to his writing-table, and set about signing the requisitions and warrants and other papers which Ruric, the clerk, had left there.

"I will think no more of this prodigy," said Count Manuel. "What, after all, does it matter to me, who am not any longer a vagabond champion but a well-thought-of nobleman well settled in life?"

That was easy saying; yet all the while his gaze kept lifting to the windows. There were three of them, set side by side, each facing south. They were of thick clear glass, of a sort whose manufacture is a lost art, for these windows had been among the spoils brought back by Duke Asmund from ancient raidings of Philistia, in which country these windows had once been a part of the temple of Sesptra, an immemorial god of the Philistines. For this reason the room was called the Room of Sesptra.

Through these windows Count Manuel saw familiar fields, the long avenue of poplars and the rising hills beyond. All was as it had been yesterday, and as all had been since, two years ago, Count Manuel laid siege to Bellegarde, and took the castle, and severed Asmund's head from Asmund's body. All was as it had been, except that until yesterday Dom Manuel's table had stood by the farthest window. He could not remember that until to-day this window had ever been opened, because with the years' advance Count Manuel was becoming susceptible to draughts.

"It is certainly very curious," Dom Manuel said, when he had finished with his papers. He was again approaching the very curious window when his small daughter Melicent, long afterward a famous lady, but at this time a child of four, came noisily, and in an appalling soiled condition, to molest him. She had bright beauty later, but at four she was one of those children whom human powers cannot keep clean for longer than four minutes.

Dom Manuel kept for her especial delectation a small flat paddle upon his writing-table, and this he now caught up.

"Out of the room with you, little pest!" he blustered, "for I am busy."

So the child, as was her custom, ran back into the hallway, and stood there, no longer in the room, but with one small foot thrust beyond the door-sill, while she laughed up at her big father, and derisively stuck out a tiny red tongue at the famed overlord of Poicteame. Then Dom Manuel, as was his custom, got down upon the floor to slap with his paddle at the intruding foot, and Melicent squealed with delight, and pulled back her foot in time to dodge the paddle, and thrust out the other foot beyond the sill and tried to withdraw that, too, before it was spanked. So it was they gave over a quarter of an hour to rioting, and so it was that grave young Ruric found them. Count Manuel rather sheepishly arose from the floor, and dusted himself, and sent Melicent into the buttery for some sugar cakes. He told Ruric what were the most favorable terms he could offer the burgesses of Narenta, and he gave Ruric the signed requisitions.

Presently, when Ruric had gone, Dom Manuel went again to the farthest window, opened it, and looked out once more. He shook his head, as one who gives up a riddle.

All that week, too, the memory of it troubled Dom Manuel, in the back of his mind, while he was busied in the pursuit of Othmar and Othmar's brigands in the Taumenfels; and so soon as Dom Manuel had captured and hanged the last squad of knaves, Dom Manuel rode home and looked out of the window, to find matters unchanged.

He meditated, and sounded the gong for Ruric. Dom Manuel talked with the clerk about this and that.



by
James
Branch
Cabell

Illustration by Arthur E. Becher

Presently Dom Manuel said: "But one stifles here. Open that window."

The clerk obeyed. Manuel at the writing-table watched him. But in opening the window the clerk necessarily stood with his back toward Count Manuel, and when Ruric turned, the face of Ruric was impassive.

Dom Manuel, playing with the jeweled chain of office about his neck, considered Ruric's face. Then Manuel said: "That is all. You may go."

But Count Manuel's heart was troubled. "For it is likely," he reflected, "that I am out of my wits, and that what I seem to see from that window is a delusion. I must keep careful watch over myself, lest my wife be disturbed and the household upset and the neighbors started gossiping. Nevertheless, I shall also watch Ruric, my young clerk."

THIS Manuel did. He noted that in the afternoon Ruric went often into the Room of Sesptra when nobody else was there. "Now it must be he is peeping out of that window," Manuel reflected, "and is puzzling, as I puzzled, over what is to be seen from that window."

The next morning, in broad daylight, Manuel detected Ruric carrying into the Room of Sesptra, of all things, a lantern. The count waited a while, then went into the room. It was empty. Count Manuel sat down, and drummed with his fingers upon the top of his writing-table.

"Once," he reflected, "I would not have lured any dark and prim-voiced young fellow into attempting this adventure, but would have essayed it myself post-haste. Well, but I have other duties now; and people would talk if they saw a well-thought-of nobleman well settled in life climbing out of his own windows, and there is simply no telling what my wife would think of it."

After a while the third window was opened. Ruric the clerk climbed over the sill.

"You are braver than I," Count Manuel said, "it may be. It is certain you are younger."

The clerk turned, startled. His hands went to his smooth chin, clutching it. His face was white as a leper's face, and his eyes now were wild and glittering, and his head was drawn low between his shoulders, so that he seemed a hunchback as he confronted his master. Another queer thing Manuel noticed, and it was that a great lock had been sheared from the left side of Ruric's black hair.

"Well, what is to be encountered yonder?" said Manuel.

"All freedom and all delight," young Ruric answered, "and all horror and all rebellion."

Then he talked for a while with Manuel. When Ruric had ended his speaking, Count Manuel laughed and spoke as became a well-thought-of nobleman. Ruric whipped out a knife and attacked his master. Count Manuel caught him by the throat, and with naked hands Dom Manuel strangled the young clerk.

"Now I have rid the world of much poison, I think," Dom Manuel said, when Ruric lay dead at Manuel's feet. "In any event, I cannot have such dangerous talk about my house. Yet I would that I had not trapped the boy into attempting this

adventure, which, by rights, was my adventure. I did not use to avoid adventures."

Manuel went to his bedroom, and was clothed by his lackeys in a tunic of purple silk, and a coronet was placed on his graying head, and the trumpets sounded as Count Manuel sat down to supper. Pages in ermine served him, bringing Manuel's food upon gold dishes, and pouring red wine and white from golden beakers into Manuel's gold cup. Skilled music men played upon viols and harps and flutes while the high Count of Poicteame ate richly-seasoned food and talked sedately with his wife, Dame Niafer. They had not fared thus when Manuel herded swine and Niafer was a slave girl, and when the two had endured strange adventures because of their love for each other. For these two had once loved marvelously, and even now Count Manuel was rather fond of Niafer.

But to-night Dame Niafer was mildly fretted, because the pastry cook was young Ruric's cousin, and was, she feared, as likely as not to fling off in a huff on account of Dom Manuel's having strangled the clerk.

"Well, then, do you raise his wages," said Count Manuel.

"That is easily said, and is exactly like a man. Why, Manuel, you surely know that then the meat cook and the butler, too, would be demanding more, and that there would be no end to it."

"But, my dear, the boy was talking mad blasphemy, and was for cutting my throat with a great horn-handled knife."

"Of course that was very wrong of him," said Dame Niafer, comfortably, "and not for an instant, Manuel, am I defending his conduct, as I trust you quite understand. But even so, if you had stopped for a moment to think how hard it is to replace a servant nowadays, and how unreliable is the best of them, I believe you would have seen how completely we are at their mercy."

Then she told him all about her second waiting woman, while Manuel said "Yes," and "I never heard the like," and "You were perfectly right, my dear," and so on, and all the while in the back of his mind continued to think about that very curious window.

Thereafter, Count Manuel could not long remain away from the window through which Ruric had climbed, and through which Ruric had returned insanely blaspheming. The outlook from this window was certainly curious. Through the other two windows of Sesptra, set side by side with this one, and in appearance similar to it in all respects, the view remained always unchanged, and just such as it was from the third window so long as you looked through the thick clear glass. But when the third window of Sesptra was opened, Count Manuel found, all the sunlit summer world that you had seen through the thick clear glass was gone quite away, and you looked out into a limbo of gray twilight wherein not anything was certainly discernible, and the air smelt of spring. It troubled Dom Manuel to regard his prospering domains through the clear glass, and then find them vanished as soon as the third window was opened. It made him dubious about things in which, he knew, it was wisdom's part to believe implicitly.

Now the second day after Ruric had died horribly, Count Manuel stood at the three windows, and saw in the avenue of poplars his wife, Dame Niafer, walking hand in hand with little Melicent. Niafer was still a fine figure of a woman, he reflected, with obscure surprise to find himself noticing Niafer's looks one way or the other: then Dom Manuel remembered that he was viewing Niafer through the third window of Sesptra.

He opened this window, to face gray sweetly-scented nothingness. But in the window glass, he saw the appearance of his flourishing gardens remained unchanged: and in the half of the window to his right hand were quivering poplars, and Niafer and little Melicent were smiling at him, and the child was kissing her hand to him. All about this swinging half of the window was nothingness; he, leaning out, and partly closing this half of the window, could see that behind it, too, was nothingness: it was only in the glass of Sesptra that his wife and child appeared to live and move. That tedious dear nagging woman and that priceless snub-nosed brat, then, might not be real. They might be merely happy and prosaic imaginings, hiding the night, which alone was real. To consider this possibility was troubling.

"None the less, I know that I am real, and certainly the grayness before me is real. Well, no matter what befell Ruric yonder, it must be that in this grayness there is some other being that is real and dissatisfied. I must go to seek this being, for here I become as a drugged person among sedate and comfortable dreams."

Then in the gray dusk he saw a face that was not human, and the round toothless mouth of it spoke feebly, saying, "I am Lubrican, and I come to guide you if you dare follow."

"I have always thought that 'dare' was a quaint word," said Manuel.

So he climbed out of the third window of Sesptra. When later he climbed back, a lock was sheared from the side of his graying head, and his face was grave, but it was younger looking.

NOW the tale tells that thereafter Dom Manuel was changed, and his attendants gossiped about it. His wife Dame Niafer also was moved to mild wonderment over the change in him, but did not think it very important, because there is never any accounting for what a husband will do. Besides, there were other matters to consider, for at this time the Northmen came up from the sea into the territories of King Theodoret, and besieged Megaris, and the harried king had sent messengers to Dom Manuel.

"But this is none of my affair," said Manuel, "and I begin to tire of warfare, and of catching cold by sleeping on hard-won battlefields."

"You would not take cold, as I have told you any number of times," declared Niafer, "if you did not insist on overheating yourself at the fighting. Still, you had better go."

"My dear, I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Yes, you had better go, for those Northmen are notorious pagans, and King Theodoret has at least the grace to call himself a Christian, and besides, it will give me a chance to get your rooms turned out and thoroughly cleaned."

So Manuel, as was his custom, did what Niafer thought best. Manuel summoned his vassals, and brought together his household, and without making any stir with horns and clarions came so swiftly and secretly, under cover of night, upon the heathen Northmen that never was seen such slaughter and sorrow and destruction as Dom Manuel wrought upon those tall pagans before he sat down to breakfast. The realm was thus rescued from dire peril, and Manuel was detained for a while in Megaris by the ensuing banquets and religious services and the executions of the prisoners and the nonsense of the king's sister. For this romantic and very pretty girl had set King Theodoret to pestering Manuel with magniloquent offers of what Theodoret would do and give if only the rescuer of Megaris would put aside his aging wife and marry the king's sister. Manuel laughed at him, and returned into Poictesme, with a cold in his head to be sure, but with fresh glory and much plunder and two new fiefs to his credit: and in Poictesme Dom Manuel found that his rooms had been thoroughly cleaned and set in such perfect order that he could lay hands upon none of his belongings, and that the pastry cook had left.

"It simply shows you!" said Dame Niafer, "and all I have to say is that now I hope you are satisfied."

Manuel laughed without merriment. "Everything is in a conspiracy to satisfy me in these sleek times, and it is that which chiefly plagues me."

He chucked Niafer under the chin, and told her she should be thinking of what a famous husband she had nowadays, instead of bothering about pastry cooks. Then he fell to asking little Melicent about how much she had missed Father while Father was



A crowned girl rose beside him, and clasped her lovely arms about him as she kissed him for the last time

away. And afterward he went alone into the Room of Sesptra.

Thereafter he was used to spend more and more hours in the Room of Sesptra, and the change in Count Manuel was more and more talked about. And time passed: and whether or no Count Manuel had, as some declared, contracted unholy alliances, there was no denying that all prospered with Count Manuel. But very certainly he was changed.

Now the tale tells that on the last day of September little Melicent, being in a quiet mood that time, sat with her doll in the tall chair by the third window of Sesptra while her father wrote at his big table. He was pausing between phrases to think and to bite at his thumb-nail, and he was so intent upon this letter to Pope Innocent

that he did not notice the slow opening of the third window:

and Melicent had been in conference with the queer small boy for some while before Dom Manuel saw them. Then Manuel seemed perturbed, and called Melicent to him, and she scrambled obediently into her father's lap.

There was silence in the Room of Sesptra. The queer small boy sat leaning back in the chair which little Melicent had just left. He sat with his legs crossed, and with his gloved hands clasping his right knee, as he looked appraisingly at Melicent. He displayed a beautiful sad face, with curled yellow hair hanging about his shoulders, and he was dressed in a vermillion silk coat: at his left side, worn like a sword, was a vast pair of shears. He wore (Continued on page 69)

George Keets's lips were drawn suddenly to a mere thin white line.

"One has no desire to intrude, Miss Wolter," he protested.

"It is no intrusion," said Ann Wolter.

For a single hesitating moment her sombre eyes swept the waiting group. Then she swept into her narrative.

"I am the May Girl's mother," she said. "I ran away from the May Girl's father. I ran away with another man. I don't pretend to explain it. All that I insist upon your understanding—is that I ran away from a legalized life of incessant fault-finding and criticism to an unlegalized life of absolute approval and love.

"I cannot even admit—after the first big wrench, of course—that I greatly regretted the little child I left behind. I was not perhaps a normal mother. I suffered—but it was a suffering that I could stand. I could not stand, it seems, the suffering of living with my child's father.

"My husband followed us after a few months, not so much from outraged love, I think, as from vindictiveness. We met in a café—the three of us. My lover was a Quaker who had never yet lifted his hand against any man. The two men started arguing. I come of a hot-blooded family. I had never seen men arguing about a woman before. More than that I was vain. I was foolish. The biggest portrait-painter of the hour had chosen me for what he considered would be his masterpiece. I taunted my lover and my husband with the fact that neither of them loved me. John Stolter struck my husband. My husband made a furious attack on him. I tried to intervene. He struck me, instead, with such damage—as you note. Enraged beyond all sanity at the sight, John Stolter killed him.

"Even then—so overwrought I was, so bewildered, with my mouth all cut and bleeding—I looked into a mirror to gauge the extent of my ruin. John Stolter spoke to me—the only harsh words of his life.

"Your damage can be repaired in an hour," he said, "but his—mine—never!"

"It was at that moment they took him away. He did not have to pay the extreme penalty. There were extenuating circumstances, the judge thought. His time expires next month. I have been waiting for fifteen years. At least he will see that I have subjugated my vanity. I swore that I would never mend my damage until I could help him mend his."

With a little gesture of fatigue she turned to Rollins. "This is the story of the broken tooth," she finished quite abruptly.

"Wasn't Allan John even listening?" I thought. His eyes seemed focused far away. Instinctively I followed his gaze. At the top of the stairs, her arms holding tight to the bannisters for support, sat the May Girl!

In the almost breathless moment that ensued, Rollins swallowed twice.

"All the same—" insisted Rollins hesitatingly, "I really do think that—"

With a little cry that might have meant anything, the Bride jumped up and threw her arms around Ann Wolter's neck.

At twilight time everybody was still dis-

cussing the problem of the May Girl. Everybody had his or her own impractical or unsatisfactory solution to suggest. Everybody—that is—except Allan John. Allan John as usual had nothing to say.

Up-stairs, Ann Wolter and the May Girl were very evidently threshing out the problem for themselves.

Yet when they came down and joined us just before supper-time, it was only too evident from their tired faces that they had reached no happier conclusion than ours.

George Keets and my Husband brought the May Girl down. Claude Kennilworth superintended the operation.

"It's her being so beastly long," scolded Kennilworth, "that makes the job so hard!" In the depths of the big leather chair the May Girl didn't look very long to me, but she did look astonishingly frail.

With a gesture of despair, Ann Wolter turned to us as if she read our thoughts.

"There isn't any solution," she said.

WHY all of us turned just then to Allan John I don't know, but it became perfectly evident to everyone at that moment that Allan John was about to speak.

"It seems quite clear to me," said Allan John simply. "It seems quite natural to me, somehow," he added, "that you should all come home with me to my ranch in Montana. The little girl needs it—the big outdoors—the animals—the life she craves. You need it," he said, turning to Ann Wolter. "But most of all John Stolter will need it when it is time for him to come. Far from prying eyes, safe from intrusive questionings. There certainly will be the perfect chance for you all to plan out your new lives together. How much it would mean to me not to have to go back alone I need not say."

Startled at his insight—compelled by his sincerity, Ann Wolter saw order dawn suddenly out of the chaos of her emotions.

From her frankly quivering lips a single protest wavered.

"But Allan John," she cried, "you've only known us four days."

Across Allan John's haggard face flickered the faintest possible suggestion of a smile.

"I was a stranger—and you took me in."

With the weirdest possible sense of supernatural benediction, the dark room flooded suddenly with light. From the window I heard my Husband's astonished exclamation. "Look, Mary," he cried, "come quickly!"

In an instant I was at his side.

Across the murky western sky the tumultuous storm clouds had broken suddenly into silver and gold. In a blaze of glory the setting sun fairly streamed into our faces.

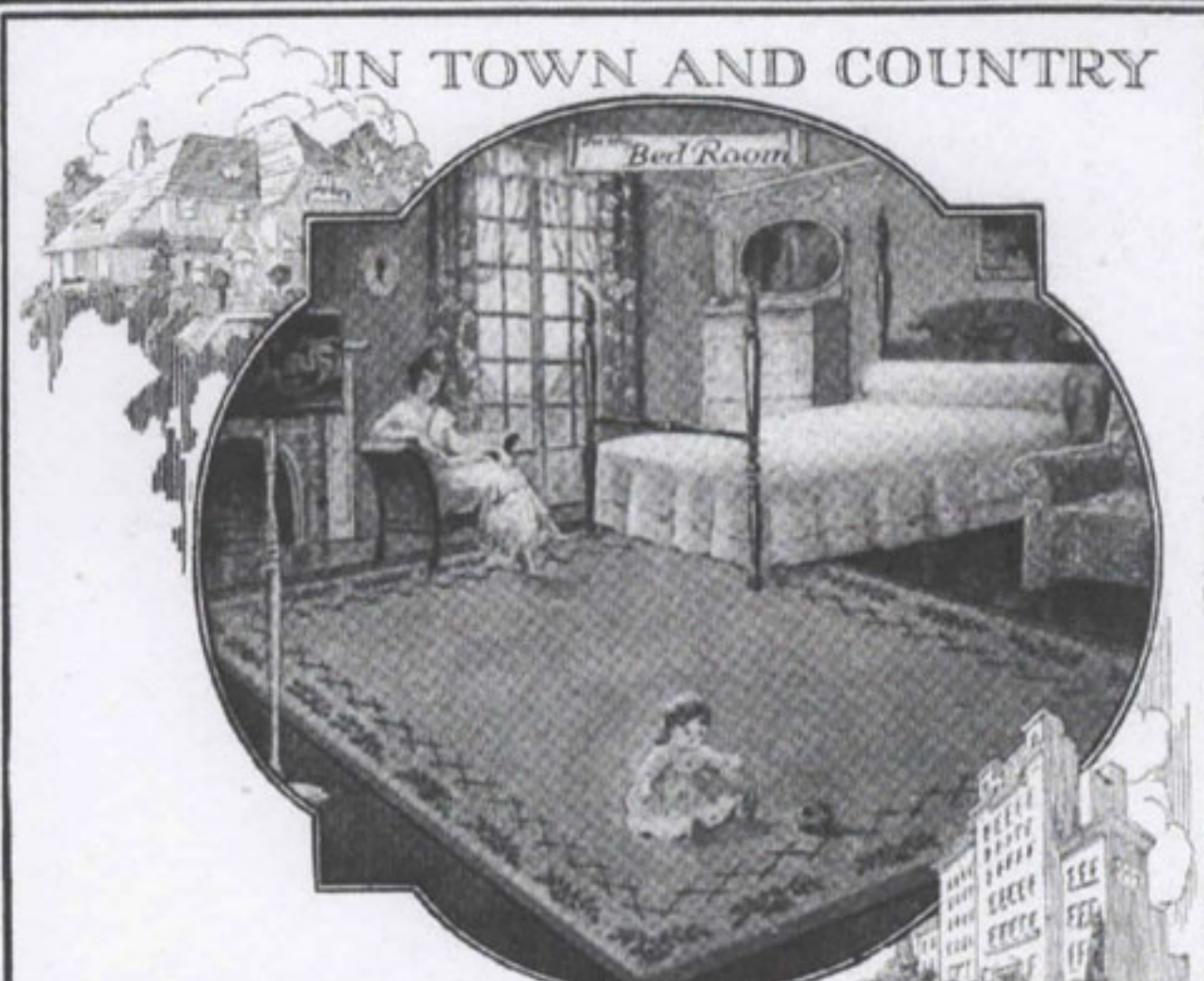
Struggling up from the depths of her chair—even the May Girl's pallid cheeks caught up their share of the radiance.

"Oh, Allan John," she laughed, "just see what you have done—you've shined up all the world."

With a curiously significant expression on his face my Husband leaned toward me.

"Ring down the curtain, quick," he whispered. "The play's done—*Rainy Week* is over."

THE END.



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The Hair of Melicent—[Continued from page 25]

also a pointed hat of four colors, and his leather gloves were figured with pearls.

"She will be a woman by and by," the strange boy said, with a soft and delicate voice, "and then she, too, will be coming to us, and we will provide fine sorrows for her."

"No, Hinzelmann," Count Manuel replied, as he stroked the round straw-colored head of little Melicent. "This is the child of Nifer. She comes of a race that has no time to be peering out of dubious windows."

"She is your child, too, Count Manuel. Therefore, she, too, in time will be wanting to be made free of my sister Suskind's kingdom as you have been made free of it, at a price. Oh, very certainly you have paid nothing as yet save the one lock of graying hair, but in time you will pay the other price which Suskind demands. I know, for it is I who collect my sister Suskind's revenues, and when the proper hour arrives, believe me, Count Manuel, I shall not be asking your leave, nor is there any price which you, I think, will not be paying willingly."

"That is probable. For Suskind is wise and strange, and the grave beauty of her youth is the fulfilment of an old hope. Life had become a tedious matter of much money

and much bloodshed, but she has restored to me the gold and crimson of dawn."

"So do you very greatly love my sister Suskind?" says Hinzelmann, smiling rather sadly.

"She is my heart's delight, and the desire of my desire, and it is she whom, unwittingly, I have been seeking away. I had seen my wishes fulfilled, and my dreams accomplished, and all the godlike discontents which ennobled my youth had died painlessly in cushioned places. And living had come to be a habit of doing what little persons expected of me, and youth was ebbing out of me, and I could not greatly care for anything. Now I am changed, for Suskind has made me free of the Country of the Young and of the ageless self-tormenting youth of the gray depths which maddened Ruric, but did not madden me."

"Look you, now, Count Manuel, but that penniless young nobody, Ruric the clerk, was not trapped as you are trapped. For from the faith of others there is no escape upon this side of the window. Count Manuel has in this place, even now, his luck and prosperity to maintain until the orderings of unimaginative gods have quite (Continued on page 72)

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The Hair of Melicent

(Continued from page 69)

destroyed the Manuel that was once a fiery champion. Here there is no escape for you from acquiring a little more wealth to-day, a little more meadowland to-morrow, with daily a little more applause and honor and envy from your fellows, along with always slowly-increasing wrinkles and dulling wits and an augmenting paunch and continuous success. That is the punishment of those persons who fulfill their desires, and whom you humorously call successful persons."

"That also is true. I am being reshaped into a complacent idol for fools to honor, and their eternal approval is converting the heart and wits of me into the stony heart and wits of an idol."

They kept silence for a while. Count Manuel stroked the round straw-colored head of little Melicent. Hinzelmann played with the small cross which hung at Hinzelmann's neck. This cross appeared to be woven of plaited strings, but when Hinzelmann shook the cross it jingled like a little bell.

"Yet, none the less," says Hinzelmann, by and by, "here you remain, although you know that you will never become old and tired and fat-wittedly hopeful if you once yield entire allegiance to my sister. No, certainly, I cannot understand you, Count Manuel. As a drunkard goes back to his bottle, you continue to return to your fine home at Bellegarde, for all that you have but to remain in Suskind's low red-pillared palace to be forever rid of this dreary satiating of human desires."

"I shall, of course, make my permanent quarters there by and by," Count Manuel said, "but not just yet. It would not be quite fair to my wife for me to be leaving Bellegarde just now, when we are getting in the crops, and when everything is more or less upset already."

Hinzelmann still smiled rather sadly. "Last month you could not come to us because your wife was just then outworn with standing in the hot kitchen and stewing jams and marmalades. Dom Manuel, will you come when all the crops are in?"

"Well, but, Hinzelmann, within a week or two we will be brewing this year's ale, and I have always more or less seen to that—"

Still Hinzelmann smiled sadly. He pointed with his gloved hand toward little Melicent. "And what about your other enslavement, to this child here?"

"Why, certainly, Hinzelmann, the brat does need a father to look out for her, so long as she is the merest baby. And naturally I have been thinking about that of late, rather seriously."

Hinzelmann spoke with deliberation. "She is very nearly the most stupid and the most unattractive child I have ever seen. And I, you must remember, am blood brother to Cain and Seth."

But Dom Manuel was not provoked. "As if I did not know the child is in no way remarkable! No, my good Hinzelmann, you that serve Suskind have shown me strange things, but nothing more strange and dear than this thing which I discovered for myself. I am Manuel of Poictesme, and my deeds will be the themes of harpers whose grandparents are not yet born. I have known love and war and all manner of adventure; but all the sighings and hushed laughter of yesterday, and all the good that in my day I may have done, and all the evil that I have certainly destroyed, seems trivial as set against the begetting of this tousled brat. No, to be sure, she is not, as you say, a remarkable child; though very often, I can assure you, she does things that would astonish you— Well! I, who have harried pagandom, and capped jests with kings, and am now setting terms for the Holy Father, have come to regard the doings of this ill-bred selfish ugly little imp as more important than my doings. — And I cannot resolve to leave her just yet. So, Hinzelmann, my friend, I think I will not thoroughly commit myself just yet. But after Christmas we will see about it."

"And I will tell you the two reasons for this shilly-shallying. Count Manuel. One reason is that you are human, and the other reason is that in your head there are gray hairs."

"What, can it be," said the big warrior, forlornly, "that I am beyond my prime, and that already life is going out of me?"

"Oho, you are not yet so old, Count Manuel, but that Suskind's power is greater than the power of the child, and, besides, there is a way to break the power of the child. Death has merely scratched small wrinkles, very lightly, with one talon, to mark you as his by and by. That is all as yet; and so the power of my high sister Suskind endures over you, and though you deny her to-day, you will be entreating her to-morrow, and then it may be she will punish you. Either way, I must be going now, for it is at this time I run about the September world collecting my sister's revenues, and her debtors are very numerous."

And with that the boy, still smiling gravely, slipped out of the third window into the gray sweet-smelling dusk, and little Melicent said, "But, Father, why did that queer sad boy want me to be climbing out of the window with him?"

"So that he might be kind to you, my dear, as he estimates kindness."

"But why did the sad boy want a piece of my hair?" asked Melicent; "and why did he cut it off with his big shiny shears, while you were writing, and he was playing with me?"

"It was to pay a price," said Manuel. He knew now that the Alf Charm was laid on his loved child, and that this was the price of his

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junketings. He knew also that Suskind would never remit this price.

Then Melicent demanded, "And what makes your face so white?"

"It must be pale with hunger, child: so I think that you and I had better be getting to our dinner."

But after dinner Dom Manuel came alone into the Room of Sesphra, and equipped himself very strangely, and he climbed out of the charmed window for the last time. His last visit to the depths was horrible, they say, and they relate that of all the deeds of Dom Manuel's crowded lifetime the thing that he did on this day was the most grim. But he won through all, by virtue of his equipment and his fixed heart. So when Dom Manuel returned he clasped in his left hand a lock of fine straw-colored hair, and on both his hands was blood let from no human veins.

He looked back for the last time into the gray depths. A crowned girl rose beside him noiselessly, all white and red, and clasped her lovely arms about him as she kissed him for the last time. Then her arms were loosed from about Dom Manuel, and she fell away from him, and was swallowed by the gray sweet-scented depths.

"And so farewell to you, Queen Suskind," said Count Manuel. "You who were not human, but knew only the truth of things, could never understand our foolish human emotions. Otherwise you would never have demanded the one price I may not pay."

"Weep, weep for Suskind!" then said Lubrican, wailing feebly in the gray and April-scented dusk; "for it was she alone who knew the secret of preserving that dissatisfaction which is divine where all else falls away with age into the acquiescence of beasts."

"Why, yes, but unhappiness is not the true desire of man," says Manuel. "I know, for I have had both happiness and unhappiness, and neither contented me."

"Weep, weep for Suskind!" then cried the soft and delicate voice of Hinzelmann; "for it was she that would have loved you, Manuel, with that love of which youth dreams,

and which exists nowhere upon your side of the window."

"Oh, it is very true," said Manuel, "that all my life henceforward will be a wearing business because of long desires for Suskind's love and Suskind's lips and the grave beauty of her youth, and for all the high-hearted dissatisfactions of youth. But the Alf Charm is lifted from the head of my child, and Melicent will live as Niafer lives, and it will be better for all of us, and I am content."

And from below came many voices wailing confusedly. "We weep for Suskind. Suskind is slain with the one weapon that might slay her: and all we weep for Suskind, who was the fairest and the wisest and the most unreasonable of queens. Let all the hidden children weep for Suskind, whose heart and life was April, and who plotted courageously against the orderings of unimaginative gods, and who has been butchered to preserve the hair of a quite ordinary child."

"And that young Manuel who was in his day a fiery champion who fretted under ordered wrongs, and strove to right them—why, that young fellow also is dead," said Dom Manuel, with a wry smile. "For the well-thought-of Count of Poictesme must be as the will and faith and as the need of others may dictate; and there is no help for it, and no escape. I must henceforward be reasonable in all things, and I shall never be quite discontented any more; and I must feed and sleep as the beasts do, and it may be that I shall even fall to thinking complacently about my death and glorious resurrection. Meanwhile, no hair of the child's head has been injured, and I am content."

Then little Melicent came to molest him, and she was unusually dirty and disheveled for she had been rolling on the terrace pavement, and had broken half the fastenings from her clothing; and Dom Manuel wiped her nose rather forlornly. Of a sudden he laughed and kissed her. And Count Manuel sent for masons to wall up the third window of Sesphra, nor was it ever opened any more in Count Manuel's day for him to breathe through it the dim sweet-scented air of spring.

The Ladies and Joe O'Brien

[Continued from page 23]

dock-rats, they used to call them—used to go down to the waterfront, surreptitiously strip to the buff, and plunge overboard, right under the tail of some ocean liner, while the remote cop turned an indulgent back. O'Neill let Joe ramble on for some time. Presently he said: "What kind of social life does a young feller like you have, O'Brien?"

"You mean women? Not very much," said Joe. "I go in mostly for athletics. I scull on the Hudson and I bowl. We're the banner club of the Old Sixteenth."

"You're no tango lizard then?"

"Are you lookin' for information, Mr. O'Neill? If you are, I'll turn you over to my friend Hazard. He knows where all those joints are."

"I don't mean that, O'Brien. What I mean is that a feller like you naturally would have a lot of young women runnin' after him."

"Never in my life," said Joe quickly. "I've run after one or two myself—and failed. But I never had one run after me—not that I know of."

"You're a darned liar, if I'm any judge," thought O'Neill. But Joe's answer pleased him, for a certain purpose was working out in O'Neill's mind. He puffed his cigar in silence and covertly observed Joe, who was taking in the gorgeous surroundings. Presently he said: "Ever hear of a personality expert, O'Brien?"

At the words Joe quickly transferred his gaze from the chandelier to O'Neill's face. "Never, Mr. O'Neill. I've heard of those fellers that tell you how to run your business and your family and how to treat your children, before and after you have 'em, but I never heard of the kind you were speaking about, Mr. O'Neill."

O'Neill raised his eyebrows. "He's the biggest of the lot, because he tells you what you're good for."

"But don't you know what you're good for yourself, Mr. O'Neill? How can any man know better? No expert or anybody else that lives outside of my brain knows me as well as I know myself."

O'Neill was indulgent. "You think you do, but you don't, O'Brien."

Joe hitched a bit uneasily in his chair. Was this man a nut?—he wondered. "If you don't know in your own head what you're good for, how can any one else know? And if you do know, what's the use of payin' some long-haired guy for tellin' you? Besides, what's personality anyhow? Does it mean a man's looks and the way he dresses and the way he talks?"

O'Neill nodded. "But you can't let it go at that alone. That wouldn't get you anywhere."

"Wouldn't, eh?" O'Neill chuckled. "A man without any brains in particular may radiate health and happiness and sunshine and everybody wants to be near him."

"But a man's got to radiate more than that to get the coin, Mr. O'Neill."

O'Neill talked right through the interruption. "No man can define personality, O'Brien. It's something in a man that draws you to him. For instance, I knew two brothers once—they were twins—they were as near alike as two peas in a pod—same eyes, same hair, same build, good-natured, affable. But the one drew you to him and the other didn't. Just why you couldn't tell. Personality seems to be inside of a man, not on the surface. It's a force that's always operating, like magnetism. The actor's got it—the movie star's got it so strong that he sends it out through the screen even. Personality is the stock in trade of the politician, my boy. I'm a politician and I know. I've sent many a man to Congress that hadn't the wits of a chicken because he had a way that got the votes, and he could do what the fellow with brains told him to do."

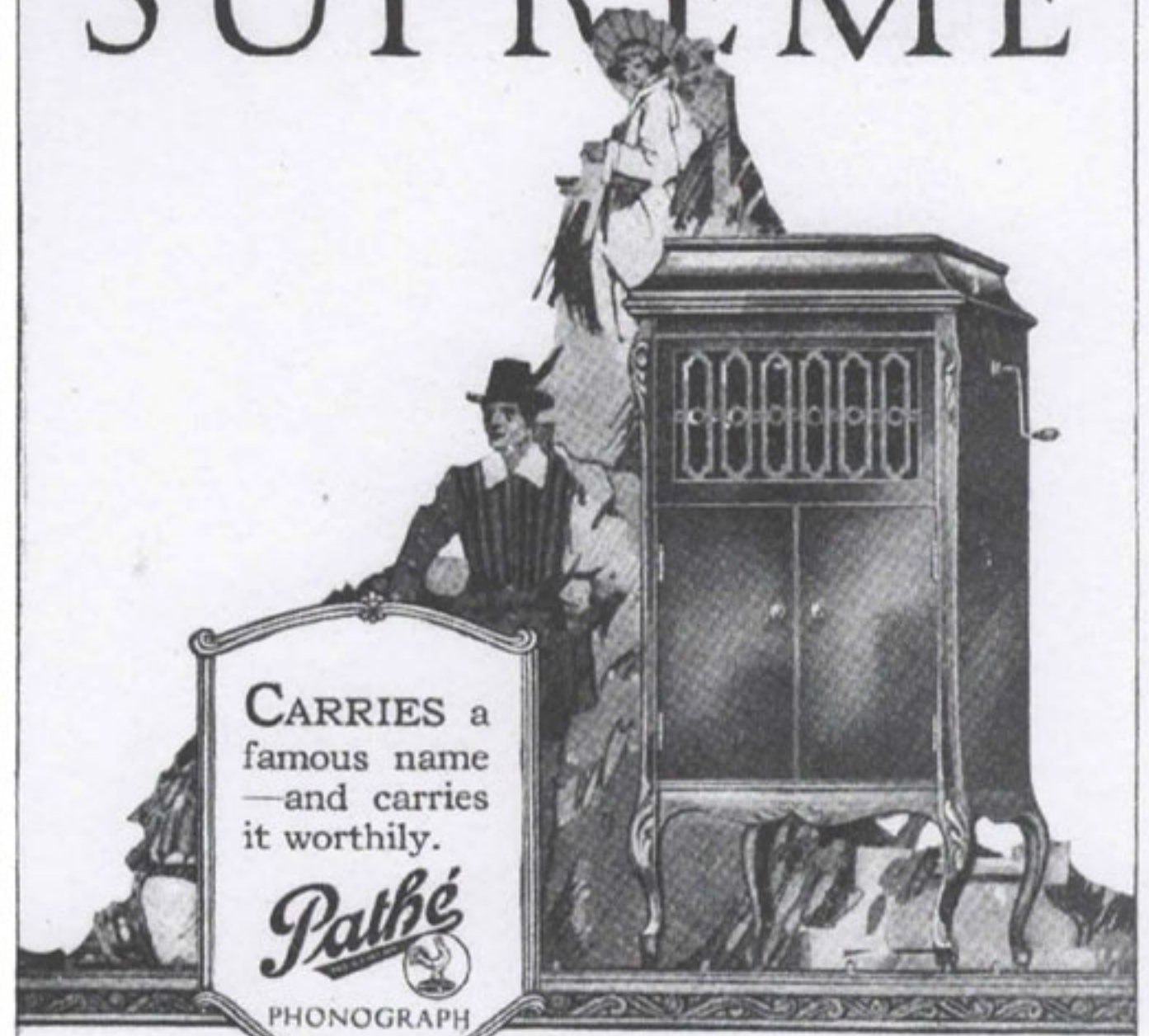
"Quite so," said Joe, still wondering what O'Neill was driving at.

O'Neill eyed Joe shrewdly. "Did anybody ever tell you that you had personality, O'Brien?"

"He did not, Mr. O'Neill."

"Well, you've got it, all right. I know. I'm a personality expert myself."

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