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# THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

By James Branch Cabell



"I NEVER DID KNOW HOW MUCH SEVEN TIMES EIGHT IS"

VIII

THAT evening, after proper deliberation, "Celestine," Miss Hugonin commanded, "get out that little yellow dress with the little red bandanna handkerchiefs on it, and, for Heaven's sake, stop pulling my hair out by the roots, unless you want a *raving* maniac on your hands, Celestine!"

Whereby she had landed me in a quandary. For how, pray, is it possible for me, a simple-minded male, fittingly to depict for you the clothes of Margaret—the innumerable vanities, the quaint devices, the pleasing conceits with which she delighted to enhance her comeliness? The thing is beyond me. Let us keep discreetly out of her wardrobe, you and I.

Otherwise, I should have to prattle of an infinity of mysteries—of her scarfs, feathers, laces, gloves, girdles, knots, hats, shoes, fans and slippers—of her embroideries, rings, pins, pendants, ribbons, spangles, bracelets and chains—in fine, there would be no end to the list of gewgaws that went to make Margaret Hugonin even more adorable than Nature had fashioned her. For when you come to think of it, it takes the craft and skill and lifework of a thousand men to dress one girl properly; and in Margaret's case, I protest that every one of them, could he have beheld the result of their united labors, would have so gloried in his own part therein that there would have been no putting up with any of the lot.

Yet when I think of the tiny shoes she affected—patent leather ones, mostly, with a seam running straight up the middle—and you may guess the exact date of our comedy by knowing in what year these shoes were modish; the string of fat pearls she so often wore about her round, full throat; the white frock, say, with arabesques of blue all over it that Felix Kennaston said reminded him of Ruskin's tombstone; or that other white-and-blue one—*décolleté*, that was—which I swear seraphic mantua-makers had woven out of mists and the skies of June; when I remember these things, I repeat, almost am I tempted to become a bootmaker, and a lapidary, and a milliner, and, in fine, an adept in all the other arts and trades and sciences that go to make a well-groomed American girl what she is—the incredible fruit of grafted centuries, the period after the list of Time's achievements—just that I might describe Margaret to you properly.

But the thing is beyond me. I leave such considerations, then, to Celestine, and resolve for the future rigorously to eschew all such gauds. Meanwhile, if an untutored masculine description will content you—

Margaret, I have on reliable feminine authority, was one of the very few blondes whose complexions can carry off reds and yellows. This particular gown—I remember it perfectly—was of a dim, dull yellow—flounciful—if I may coin a word—diaphanous, expansive. I have not the least notion what fabric composed it; but scattered about it, in unexpected places, were diamond-shaped red things that I am

credibly informed are called medallions. The general effect of it may be briefly characterized as grateful to the eye and dangerous to the heart, and to a rational train of thought quite fatal.

For it was cut low in the neck; and Margaret's neck and shoulders would have drawn madrigals from a bench of bishops.

And, in consequence, Billy Woods ate absolutely no dinner that evening.

IX

IT WAS an hour or two later when the moon, drifting tardily up from the south, found Miss Hugonin and Mr. Kennaston chatting amicably together in the court at Selwoode. They were discussing the tendencies of the modern drama.

The court at Selwoode lies in the angle of the building, the ground plan of which is L-shaped. Its two outer sides are formed by covered cloisters leading to the palm garden, and by moonlight—the night bland and sweet with the odor of growing things, vocal with plashing fountains, spangled with fireflies that flicker indolently among a glimmering concourse of nymphs and fauns eternally postured in flight or in pursuit—by moonlight, I say, the court at Selwoode is perhaps as satisfactory a spot for a tête-à-tête as this transitory world affords.

Mr. Kennaston was in vein to-night; he scintillated; he was also a little nervous. This was probably owing to the fact that Margaret, leaning against the back of the stone bench on which they both sat, her chin propped by her hand, was gazing at him in that peculiar, intent fashion of hers which—as I think I have mentioned—caused you fatuously to believe she had forgotten there were any other trousered beings extant.

Mr. Kennaston, however, stuck to apt phrases and nice distinctions. The moon found it edifying, but rather dull.

After a little Mr. Kennaston paused in his boyish, ebullient speech, and they sat in silence. The lisping of the fountains was very audible. In the heavens the moon climbed a little farther and registered a manifestly impossible hour on the sundial. It also brightened.

It was a companionable sort of a moon. It invited talk of a confidential nature.

"Bless my soul," it was signaling to any number of gentlemen at that moment, "there's only you and I and the girl here. Speak out, man! She'll have you now, if she ever will. You'll never have a chance like this again, I can tell you. Come now, my dear boy, I'm shining full in your face, and you've no idea how becoming it is. I'm not like that garish, blundering sun, who doesn't know any better than to let her see how red and fidgety you get when you're excited; I'm an old hand at such matters. I've presided over these little affairs since Babylon was a paltry village. I'll never tell. And—and if anything should happen I'm always ready to go behind a cloud, you know. So speak out, speak out, man, if you've the heart of a mouse!"

Thus far the conscienceless spring moon.

Mr. Kennaston sighed. The moon took this as a promising sign, and brightened over it perceptibly, and thereby afforded him an excellent gambit.

"Yes?" said Margaret. "What is it, beautiful?"

That in privacy was her fantastic name for him.

The poet laughed a little. "Beautiful child," said he—and that, under similar circumstances, was his perfectly reasonable name for her—"I have been discourteous. To be frank, I have been sulking as irrationally as a baby who clamors for the moon yonder."

"You aren't really anything but a baby, you know." Indeed, Margaret almost thought of him as such. He was so delightfully naïve.

He bent toward her. A faint tremor woke in his speech. "And so," said he softly, "I cry for the moon—the exquisite, unattainable moon. It is very ridiculous, is it not?"

But he did not look at the moon. He looked toward Margaret—past Margaret, toward the gleaming windows of Selwoode, where the Eagle brooded.

"Oh, I really can't say, beautiful," Margaret cried in haste. "She was kind to Endymion, you know. We will hope for the best. I think we'd better go in now."

"You bid me hope?" said he.

"Beautiful, if you really want the moon I don't see the *least* objection to your continuing to hope. They make so many little airships and things nowadays, you know, and you'll probably find it only green cheese, after all. What is green cheese, I wonder? It sounds horribly indigestible and unattractive, doesn't it?" Miss Hugonin babbled in a tumult of fear and disappointment. He was about to spoil their friendship now; men were so utterly inconsiderate. "I'm a little cold," said she mendaciously; "I really must go in."

He detained her. "Surely," he breathed, "you must know what I have so long wanted to tell you—"

"I haven't the *least* idea," she protested promptly. "You can tell me all about it in the morning. I have some accounts to cast up to-night. Besides, I'm not a good person to tell secrets to. You—you'd much better not tell me. Oh, really, Mr. Kennaston," she cried earnestly, "you'd much better not tell me!"

"Ah, Margaret, Margaret," he pleaded, "I am not adamant; I am only a man, with a man's heart that hungers for you, cries for you, clamors for you day by day! I love you, beautiful child—love you with a poet's love that is alien to these sordid days, with a love that is half worship. I love you as Leander loved his Hero, as Pyramus loved Thisbe. Ah, child, child, how beautiful you are! You are fairest of created women, child—fair as those long-dead queens for whose smiles old cities burned and kingdoms were lightly lost. I am mad for love of you! ah, have pity upon me, Margaret, for I love you very tenderly!"

He delivered these observations with appropriate fervor.

"Mr. Kennaston," said she, "I am sorry. We got along so nicely before, and I was so proud of your friendship. We've had such good times together, you and I, and I've liked your verses so, and I've liked you—oh, please, *please*, let's keep on being just friends!" Margaret wailed piteously.

"Friends!" he cried, and gave a bitter laugh. "I was never friends with you, Margaret. Why, even as I read my verses to you—those pallid, ineffectual verses that praised you timorously under varied names—even then there pulsed in my veins the riotous pæan of love, the great mad song of love that shamed my paltry rhymes. I cannot be friends with you, child! Bid me hope or go!"

Miss Hugonin meditated for a moment, and did neither.

"Beautiful," she presently queried, "would you be very, very much shocked if I descended to slang?"

"I think," said he with an uncertain smile, "that I could endure it."

"Why, then—cut it, beautiful! Cut it out! I don't believe a word you've said, in the first place, and, anyhow, it annoys me to have you talk to me like that. I don't like it, and it simply makes me awfully, awfully tired."

With which characteristic speech Miss Hugonin leaned back and sat up very rigidly and smiled at him like a cherub. Kennaston groaned.

"It shall be as you will," he assured her with a little quaver in his speech that was decidedly effective. "And,



PREPARED TO ACCORD THE UNIVERSE  
HIS APPROVAL



in any event, I am not sorry that I have loved you, beautiful child. You have always been a power for good in my life. You have gladdened me with the vision of a beauty that is more than human, you have heartened me for this petty business of living, you have praised my verses, you have even accorded me certain pecuniary assistance as to their publication—though I must admit that to accept it of you was very distasteful to me. Ah!" Felix Kennaston cried with a quick lift of speech, "impractical child that I am, I had not thought of that! My love had caused me to forget the great barrier that stands between us."

He gasped and took a short turn about the court.

"Pardon me, Miss Hugonin," he entreated, when his emotions were under a little better control, "for having spoken as I did. I had forgotten. Think of me, if you will, as no better than the others—think of me as a mere fortune-hunter. My presumption will be justly punished."

"Oh, no, no, it isn't that!" she cried; "it isn't that, is it? You—you would care just as much about me if I were poor, wouldn't you, beautiful? I don't want you to care for me, of course," Margaret added with haste. "I want to go on being friends. Oh, that money, that *nasty* money!" she cried in a sudden gust of petulance. "It makes me so distrustful, and I can't help it!"

He smiled at her wistfully. "My dear," said he, "are there no mirrors at Selwoode to remove your doubts?"

"I—yes, I do believe in you," she said at length. "But—I don't want to marry you. You see, I'm not a bit in love with you," Margaret explained candidly.

Ensued a silence. Mr. Kennaston bowed his head.

"You bid me go?" said he.

"No—not exactly," said she.

He indicated a movement toward her.

"Now, you needn't attempt to take any liberties with me," Miss Hugonin announced decisively, "because if you do I'll never speak to you again. You must let me go now. You—you must let me think."

Then Felix Kennaston acted very wisely. He rose and stood aside with a little bow.

"I can wait, child," he said sadly. "I have already waited a long time."

Miss Hugonin escaped into the house without further delay. It was very flattering, of course; he had spoken beautifully, she thought, and nobly and poetically and considerately, and, altogether, there was absolutely no excuse for her being in a temper. Still, she was.

The moon, however, considered the affair as arranged.

For she had been no whit more resolute in her refusal, you see, than becomes any self-respecting maid. In fact, she had not refused him; and the experienced moon had seen the hopes of many a wooer thrive, chameleon-like, on answers far less encouraging than that which Margaret had given Felix Kennaston.

Margaret was very fond of him. All women like a man who can do a picturesque thing without bothering to consider whether or not he is making himself ridiculous; and more than once, in thinking of him, she had wondered if—perhaps—possibly—some day—? And always these vague flights of fancy had ended at this precise point—incinerated, if you will grant me the simile, by the sudden flaming of her cheeks.

So Felix Kennaston had his hour. Now Margaret has gone into Selwoode, flame-faced and quite unconscious that she is humming under her breath the words of a certain inane old song:

Oh, she sat for me a chair;

She has ringlets in her hair;

She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother—

only she sang it "father." And afterward she suddenly frowned and stamped her foot, did Margaret.

"I *hate* him!" said she; but she looked very guilty.

X

IN THE living-hall of Selwoode Miss Hugonin paused. Undeniably there were the accounts of the Ladies' League for the Edification of the Impecunious to be put in order; her monthly report, as treasurer, was due in a few days, and Margaret was in such matters a careful, painstaking body, and not wholly dependent upon her secretary; but she was entirely too much out of temper to attend to that now.

It was really all Mr. Kennaston's fault, she assured a pricking conscience, as she went out on the terrace before Selwoode. He had bothered her dreadfully.

There she found Petheridge Jukesbury, smoking placidly in the effulgence of the moonlight; and the rotund, pasty countenance he turned toward her was ludicrously like the moon's counterfeit in muddy water. I am sorry to admit it, but Mr. Jukesbury had dined somewhat injudiciously. You

are not to stretch the phrase; he was merely prepared to accord the universe his approval, to pat Destiny upon the head, and his thoughts ran clear enough, but with Aprilian counterchanges of the jovial and the lachrymose.

"Ah, Miss Hugonin," he greeted her with a genial smile, "I am indeed fortunate. You find me deep in meditation, and also, I am sorry to say, in the practice of a most pernicious habit. You do not object? Ah, that is so like you. You are always kind, Miss Hugonin. Your kindness, which falls, if I may so express myself, as the gentle rain from Heaven upon all deserving charitable institutions, and daily comforts the destitute with good advice and consoles the sorrowing with blankets, would now induce you to tolerate an odor which I am sure is personally distasteful to you."



"I CAN WAIT, CHILD," HE SAID SADLY. "I HAVE ALREADY WAITED A LONG TIME"

"But *really* I don't mind," was Margaret's protest.

"I cannot permit it," Mr. Jukesbury insisted, and waved a pudgy hand in the moonlight. "No, really, I cannot permit it. We will throw it away, if you please, and say no more about it." And his glance followed the glowing flight of his cigar-end somewhat wistfully. "Your father's cigars are such as it is seldom my privilege to encounter; but, then, my personal habits are not luxurious, nor my private income precisely what my childish imaginings had pictured it at this comparatively advanced period of life. Ah, youth, youth! as the poet admirably says, Miss Hugonin, the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, but its visions of existence are rose-tinted and free from care, and its conception of the responsibilities of manhood—such as taxes and the water-rate—I may safely characterize as extremely sketchy. But pray be seated, Miss Hugonin."

Common courtesy forced her to comply. So Margaret seated herself on a little red rustic bench. In the moonlight—but I think I have mentioned how Margaret looked in the moonlight; and above her golden head the Eagle, sculptured over the doorway, stretched his wings to the uttermost, half-protectingly, half-threateningly, and seemed to view Mr. Jukesbury with a certain air of expectation.

"A beautiful evening," Petheridge Jukesbury suggested, after a little cogitation.

She conceded that this was undeniable.

"Where Nature smiles, and only the conduct of men is vile and altogether what it ought not to be," he continued with unction, "ah, how true that is and how consoling! It is a good thing to meditate upon our own vileness, Miss Hugonin—to reflect that we are but worms with naturally the most vicious inclinations. It is most salutary. Even I

am but a worm, Miss Hugonin, though the press has been pleased to speak most kindly of me. Even you—ah, no!" cried Mr. Jukesbury, kissing his fingertips with gallantry; "let us say a worm who has burst its cocoon and become a butterfly—a butterfly with a charming face and a most charitable disposition and considerable property!"

Mr. Jukesbury sighed.

"A naughty world," said he with pathos, "a very naughty world, which really does not deserve the honor of including you in its census reports. Yet I dare say it has the effrontery even to put you down in the tax-lists; it even puts me down—me, an humble worker in the vineyard with both hands set to the plough. And if I don't pay up it sells me out. A very naughty world, indeed! I dare say," Mr. Jukesbury

observed, raising his eyes—not toward Heaven but toward the Eagle—"that its conduct, as the poet says, creates considerable distress among the angels. I don't know. I am not acquainted with many angels. My wife was an angel, but she is now a lifeless form. She has been for five years. I erected a tomb to her at considerable personal expense, but I don't begrudge it—no, I don't begrudge it, Miss Hugonin. She was very hard to live with. But she was an angel, and angels are rare. Miss Hugonin," said Petheridge Jukesbury with emphasis, "you are an angel."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Margaret to herself. "I do wish I'd gone to bed directly after dinner!"

Above them the Eagle brooded.

"Surely," he breathed, "you must know what I have so long wanted to tell you—"

"No," said Margaret, "and I don't want to know, please. You make me awfully tired, and I don't care for you in the *least*. Now, you let go my hand—let go at *once*!"

He detained her. "You are an angel," he insisted—"an angel with a large property. I love you, Margaret! Be mine! Be my blushing bride, I entreat you! Your property is far too large for an angel to look after. You need a man of affairs. I am a man of affairs. I am forty-five and have no bad habits. My press-notices are, as a rule, favorable, my eloquence is accounted considerable, and my dearest aspiration is that you will comfort my declining years. I might add that I adore you, but I think I mentioned that before. Margaret, will you be my blushing bride?"

"No!" said Miss Hugonin emphatically. "No, you tippy old beast—*no*!"

There was a rustle of skirts. The door slammed, and the philanthropist was left alone on the terrace.

XI

IN THE living-hall Margaret came upon Hugh Van Orden, who was searching in one of the alcoves for a piece of music that Adèle Haggage wanted and had misplaced.

The boy greeted her miserably.

"Miss Hugonin," he lamented, "you're awfully hard on me."

"I am sorry," said Margaret, "that you consider me discourteous to a guest in my own house." Oh, I grant you, Margaret was in a temper now.

"It isn't that," he protested; "but I never see you alone. And I've had something to tell you."

"Yes?" said she coldly.

He drew near to her. "Surely," he breathed, "you must know what I have so long wanted to tell you—"

"Yes, I should think I *did*!" said Margaret, "and if you dare tell me a word of it I'll never speak to you again. It's getting a little monotonous. Good-night, Mr. Van Orden."

Half-way up the stairs she paused and ran lightly back.

"Oh, Hugh, Hugh!" she said contritely, "I was unpar-donably rude. I'm sorry, dear, but it's quite impossible. You are a dear, cute little boy, and I love you—but not that way. So let's shake hands, Hugh, and be friends! And then you can go and play with Adèle."

He raised her hand to his lips. He really was a nice boy.

"But, oh, dear, dear!" said Margaret when he had gone, "what horrid creatures men are, and what a temper I'm in, and what a vexatious place the world is! I wish I were a pauper! I wish I had never been born! And I wish—and I wish I had those League papers fixed!" She swept down upon the papers of the Ladies' League for the Edification of the Impecunious with very much the look of a diminutive Valkyrie.

Subsequently, "Oh, dear, dear!" said she amid a feverish rustling of papers; "the whole world is out of sorts to-night! I never *did* know how much seven times eight is, and I hate everybody, and I've left that list of unpaid dues in Uncle Fred's room, and I've got to go after it, and I don't want to!"

Miss Hugonin rose, and went out from her own rooms, carrying a bunch of keys, across the hallway to the room in which Frederick R. Woods had died. It was his study, you may remember. And there she found Billy Woods.

(TO BE CONTINUED)