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Providence Independent

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THE MYSTERY OF A PIC-TURE.

Many years ago my brother and I made our first trip East, to join some artist friends who were spending the summer among the White Hills. Bethlehem was not the fashionable resort it has since become, as it was but a few years before Governor Howard, of Rhode Island, met with the carriage accident, and consequent detention, which resulted in calling attention to the advantages of this lovely spot, and making it famous. The old Howard House was still standing, and when our stage-coach rattled up to its door, on the night of our arrival, there sat one of our friends on the broad piazza making a study of a trout which he had that morning caught, on an improvised bank of grass and ferns in a chair before him. He hastened to give us a hearty welcome, and then returned to add a few more touches to his painting while daylight lasted. Blissful weeks followed. Four of us used to drive off in the early morning in a double buckboard with our "traps" and a light lunch, while the fifth cantered along on his great bay. We sketched all day, taking a short rest at noon, and then as the sun was setting drove home to a warm supper, a group of charming guests, and, if cool, a brisk fire of logs in the cosy parlor. H. H., afterward Mrs. Jackson occupied a sunny corner room, which was ever after regarded as a sort of shrine by those who had already learned to love her as a woman and an author.

One day, just after dinner, there was a knock at the door and some one reported that a man at the Howard was asking for "one of the artists." Frank went over to meet a sandy haired man of 40, who announced that he was a Canadian artist taking a tramp through the mountains, and had been overtaken by a thunder shower down in the Notch, far from dry raiment and surplus funds; he had lost his way and found himself quite exhausted. We supplied him with dry clothing, and admitted him to studio fellowship. He had managed to keep his portfolio and painting case unharmed, and we were soon interested in looking over his really fine water color sketches. Several guests of the house ordered pictures from him, and he spent some time in our company fulfilling their commissions. He proved to be a genial, pleasant fellow, a graduate from an English University, and made himself an agreeable addition to our party. Frank persuaded him to attempt oils on one of our expeditions, but after trying to point his brush in the familiar way, and thereby filling his mouth with oil paint two or three times, he threw aside the canvas and again returned to water-color.

One night there was a terrible storm. A waterspout burst up on the mountain and did much damage; the road to Littleton was washed out, leaving rents fifteen feet deep, and laying bare huge bowlders which, perhaps, had never before seen the sun. We were confined to the studio next day. Somers, the Canadian, employed the time in finishing some orders; Harry sat down to a portrait which had been turned face to the wall during the fair weather, and we all took turns in telling stories.

"Well," drawled Somers, holding his work at arm's length, and then getting it down for a fresh wash to dry, "Of all the strange true stories that I ever heard, the strangest was told me by my friend Norton, three years ago in London. We were looking at a collection of pictures put up for sale, when, as we passed before a large one, marked in the catalogue as 'Beholding of John the Baptist,' an old Spanish picture, artist unknown, Norton suddenly seized my arm and seemed about to faint."

"Don't be frightened, old fellow," he gasped at length, "it will soon pass; would you mind going home with me?" He leaned heavily on my arm as we went down into the street, where I called a cab and we were soon at his studio. After he had taken a little wine and was somewhat recovered, he said: "I must tell you the story of that painting, Somers, the story of my life. To begin with, Norton is not my real name, (and he told me the name of one of the proudest families in England, which I promised never to reveal). 'I was the youngest son of a large family,' he added, 'and my father never seemed to care particularly for me, while my mother was my dearest companion. She died when I was fifteen, and all the

brightness of my life went with her. I was passionately fond of pictures, and she had praised and taken pleasure in the drawings I was constantly making, and taught me how to appreciate the best works of art."

"After my mother's death, I was left to spend my days as I chose in the old country seat where I was born and where my mother died. Sometimes I think I should have been deranged had it not been for my drawing. Though there was now no one to praise or care what I did; the only pleasure I had was in working from nature either out of doors or in, and trying to make studies which I thought my mother would have liked. Once when my father was down from London, and had seemed kinder than usual, or rather less indifferent than usual, I ventured to ask him if I could not take painting lessons, as I had when my mother was alive. He seemed greatly annoyed and said that it was time I was sent to school and made a man of and that in any case no son of his should ever disgrace him by turning painter. According to I was sent to a large private school for two or three years, spending my vacation at home, where the love of the pencil proved too strong for my sense of filial duty, and I worked and sketched all summer, except during the rare occasions when my father or older brothers came down for a few weeks sojourn."

"One day, when I was nineteen, I came in from a long walk, to find my father standing in the middle of the little den I had chosen myself in the tower, surrounded with, it seemed, to me, everything that I had ever drawn or painted. We had quite a scene, and the end of it was that I was ordered to 'clear out of the house, and never to darken the doors again.' In a storm of indignation and grief, I packed up a few things, and taking what little money I had, started for Dover, thinking that I would go to France, to the little town where I had once accompanied my mother, when she was ordered a change of climate. I had a little money which had come to me from my grandmother, and upon this I managed to live for some years, and pursue my art studies both in Paris and Rome. I took the name of Norton, from seeing it on some American baggage, the night that I crossed the channel."

"At length I began to long for a sight of my old home, and determined to go to London. I had had no communication with my family, though I had kept the run of them somewhat through the English papers, and knew that two of my brothers were married. I came to England and spent nearly a week in the neighborhood of my old home without being recognized by any of its inmates except an old hound, who used to be my companion. The family were in London, and some of the servants were new, so, in company with Leo, I revisited many of the scenes of my boyhood and one morning when there was a wedding at the village church, I slipped in and managed to reach the tower, where I waited until every one was gone, and then went down into the crypt where my mother had been buried, and as there was no evening service, spent the night lying on the cushions in our old pew, with my head upon the one on which she used to kneel. It was a moonlight night and the church seemed very quiet and holy, and I felt more at home than I had for years. Toward morning I let myself out at the tower door, and took an early train for London without bidding even old Leo good-by. I would have taken him along, poor fellow, had it been possible."

"I hired some unpretentious rooms in town, and was quite successful in selling my pictures. Then came a dull season, when for a long period I was unable to obtain a commission, until, at length, my funds were exhausted. One night, just at dark, when I had spent the day in trying to dispose of some work, and had come home discouraged, a carriage stopped beneath my window, and soon I heard footsteps coming up the long flight of stairs, and then a knock at my door. I opened it to see a tall man in dark livery who bowed gravely and asked whether I were Mr. Norton. An answering in the affirmative, he handed me a note written in a bold masculine hand upon heavy paper scented with some strange foreign perfume. It read:

bearer of this note? No signature was appended. "Who is the writer of this?" I asked. The footman bowed as he replied, "That my lady did not wish me to say, sir."

"That is very strange," I answered. I suppose to-morrow will be time enough for my answer?"

"She bade me bring you this evening if possible, sir; the carriage is at the door, and you can take any luggage you wish."

After a little hesitation, I decided to pack a few traps and my colors, and at least call upon my would-be patron, and learn a little more of her project. As I turned to accompany him the footman said respectfully:

"Big pardon, sir, but my orders were to bring you blindfolded," at the same time drawing a silk scarf from his pocket.

"I set down my valise and exclaimed, 'who and what is your mistress, and what can she suppose I am made of to impose such conditions upon me?'"

"As you please, sir; but my lady is anxious to have the painting done, and will pay a great price for it, if you please her, and she will not have you come in any other way."

"Indignant, I walked to the window and looked out into the fast darkening street, quickly reviewed my present condition. No one cared, I thought whether I lived or died, my affairs were in bad shape, and my curiosity was greatly aroused at this peculiar offer. Surely, if I did not like the looks of things upon my arrival I could refuse to execute the painting, and return home next day, none the worse for having humored 'my lady.' Turning back I picked up my valise, and signified my willingness to accompany the footman. After locking my door, I submitted to be blindfolded, and the footman taking my traps in one hand, offered me his other arm and aided me to the carriage. We rode, I know not how far or how long; all I am sure of was that it was eight o'clock when we left my rooms. At length the coach stopped and I was helped to alight and guided up a long flight of marble or stone steps, through a hall and up a slippery wooden staircase, through a softly carpeted passage, up some winding stairs into a room, when the footman respectfully removed the scarf, and hoped I was none the worse for my journey and that I would find everything comfortable now I had arrived. Then he left me, locked the door upon the outside."

"The suite of rooms in which I found myself were most luxuriously furnished, with rich, foreign furniture, a delicate lunch stood on a side table covered with a fine linen cloth, and beyond opened an elegantly appointed bed-chamber. I felt as if I were in the midst of a scene from 'Morris's Earthly Paradise.' There were no windows in either apartment, but great skylights, with movable screens, as in a studio, while on an easel in the corner stood a huge white canvas, and nearly a table covered with paints, brushes and many kinds of oils and varnishes. When I looked at my watch it was long after midnight. I took a glass of wine and threw myself upon a lounge and tried to sleep, in spite of troubled dreams and visions."

"About 9 in the morning the taciturn footman appeared and silently cleared away the untasted lunch, replacing it with a dainty breakfast. As he turned to go he said, should you wish for anything, sir, there is the bell. My lady will come to you at ten." Promptly at that hour the door opened and I rose with some awe and much curiosity to greet a tall, large woman, with white wavy hair and piercing gray eyes, who carried in one hand my little picture of 'Judith and Holofernes.' She greeted me coldly and said, 'I took quite a fancy to that little thing, Mr. Norton, and wish you to paint a similar subject upon the canvas,' indicating the one on the easel. 'I prefer Salome with the head of John the Baptist, and have posed the model and made all the accessories myself. Some of the details of the head in your little picture are not quite correct, as you will shortly observe. I hope you will find colors and material provided, and that you are ready to do a little work this morning.'

a secret spring, for a panel slid back revealing an alcove where stood the most beautiful young girl I had ever seen, dressed in Eastern costume. She was deadly pale, her lips were slightly parted as she gazed with a look of fascinated horror at a huge silver salver, on the table before her, on which lay the head of the footman who had brought me to the place. Apparently the head had just been severed."

"The ghastly experience of Bellini had become mine. I fainted. When I awoke I found myself there was a soft rustle and tread as of some one leaving the room, and a strong, pungent, but refreshing odor. The panel was closed and the terrible old woman stood over me."

"Have you recovered?" she asked. 'I am sorry you are so weak. I suppose you had painted from cadavers enough at the schools not to mind a simple head. It is not always a young artist has such an offer as I am about to make you. Listen; I will pay you two thousand pounds if you will paint this picture to please me. See if you cannot bear the sight now like a man!' and again she touched the spring, and again the fearful tableau was presented. As I lifted my shuddering gaze upon it the young girl raised her lips and gave me one helpless, imploring look, which steadied me, with a sudden rush of sympathy for one who must be suffering more than I."

"Turning to the great canvass, I began with trembling hand to sketch the picture before me. Soon I almost forgot the horror of the thing as my love of art gained the ascendancy, and I strove with all my power to portray the beautiful face and figure of that girl. Every now and then the old lady rose and closed the panel, I suppose in order to give the model a rest, but as soon as it was opened there stood the living picture just as before. The pose and accessories were perfect, except that the model's face showed an innocence and sweetness which the daughter of Herodias could never have possessed. After two hours the old lady announced that Salome would pose no more that day, but that I might work meanwhile upon the head, and finish that as soon as possible. Once more raising her eyes to mine, the young girl, at a sign from her elder, turned and disappeared behind the drapery which formed the background, the old lady left the room after bidding me ring if I wished for anything, and saying that Salome would pose again at ten next morning."

"I was left alone with that head, but I drew the portiere, to conceal it. Lunch was brought by a grim old woman who said nothing as she placed it upon the table, and all afternoon I worked upon the head, spending the evening over a quiet pipe and some rare and interesting books, which I found in the chamber. Four days passed much in the same way, when the old lady declared the head to be finished quite to her liking, and on the fifth morning Salome posed beside the empty salver."

"She breathed more freely and so did I, but her face was still pale, and I doubt if it ever lost that look of terror. How beautiful she was! How I labored to portray her rare loveliness! The old lady was extremely critical, but not so critical as I, for my whole soul went out toward the mysterious girl. I painted as I never painted before. I lingered lovingly over every detail, and greatly as I longed for a breath of fresh air and the touch of the glad sun, I almost dreaded to finish the picture. I would not, if I could, have signed my name to the canvas, but wishing to place some infallible mark of recognition upon it, into the embroidered border of Salome's scarf, where it would escape any ordinary gaze, I wrought the crest of my mother's family. At length the old lady announced that in her opinion the picture was finished, and that there would be no more sittings. Salome gave no sign of hearing the remark, but I stooped to pick up a brush before I answered that I still felt the need of some further work upon it, and that it would require retouching and glazing here and there."

"There will be no more sittings," said my patron, curtly, 'but you may remain as long as it seems necessary for your retouching.'

"Several intolerable dull days followed, during which I did what was necessary to the picture, and saw no one beside the old servant, who served my meals, and cared for my rooms, and who seldom spoke. The long confinement and nervous tensions was telling

upon me, and I determined to go away on Friday, feeling that I could do no more to my picture, but I longed to see Salome. Friday morning saw me with my valise packed, and I bade the servant tell her mistress that my work was done and that I should like to leave during the day. She bowed silently and withdrew, while I paced up and down the long room, wondering how I could send some word of farewell to the beautiful girl who had so taken possession of me. Just then with a slight sound the panel opened and there stood the object of my thoughts, no longer clad in Eastern dress, but in some white woaden robe, her hair hanging over her shoulders and her eyes full of tears, appealing to me as if seeking deliverance from some strange spell."

"I sprang toward her, and instinctively she stretched out her beautiful arms and threw them about my neck."

"My darling! My darling! I whispered; come with me; show me how we can leave this dreadful place."

"She shook her head sadly, and pointed to her lips and ears. Then I knew she was deaf and dumb."

"I kissed her lovely forehead once and taking her in my arms determined to find some way to escape, but just then she fell back a dead weight upon my shoulder, and I turned to face the malignant sneer and angry eyes of the old lady, and just behind her stood the same footman who had brought me to the house, and whose head I had painted as that of John the Baptist. I fainted again, and knew no more until I found myself on my own bed at home with the footman bending over me."

"Are you better, sir?" he asked, and then in answer to my start of recognition, added, sadly: 'It was not I but my twin brother, whom you painted, sir. Good day, sir; you will soon be all right now,' and I found myself alone, with a strange lethargic sensation upon me, as of some opiate, while on my pillow lay an envelope containing a check for two thousand pounds, the sole witness of my strange experience. Even when I cashed the check I could find no clue to the person who paid it, nor to this day have I ever been able to learn anything of the old lady, the house where I spent that memorable time, nor of my beautiful Salome. I do not even know what was her real name, to me she will always be Salome. I have been through nearly all the principal streets of London and visited its many suburbs in vain, as I have never seen any house in one of them which seemed like the one I seek. I inquired at the gallery as to who purchased the Judith, but my only answer was that a liveried servant came and paid for it and carried the picture away."

"Next morning," continued Somers, "we went again to the gallery, and there sure enough on the border of Salome's scarf was the tiny crest. The picture had been badly smoked as though exposed to some great fire, and looked much older on that account. We could learn nothing about it except that it came in a roll with several other paintings (many of which were nearly ruined from mildew) from an old church in Madrid. Norton was too agitated and excited to do anything, so, at his request, I bought the picture and had it removed to his rooms. He seemed overjoyed to possess it, and spent much time in cleansing and restoring it, 'poor girl,' he would say, as he worked almost reverently upon her face and drapery, 'I hope you are dead, for I shall never find you in this world, and I know your life was terrible with that woman, I shall meet you somewhere Norton himself was drowned about a year after.'

"Strangest thing," added Somers after the long silence which followed his story, "that picture was totally unlike anything he ever did before or afterward, quite in the best Spanish style. He was a fine painter, too, but his talent was at its best, as he said, in that picture."

The Origin of Tea.

The tea-plant grew for endless centuries in Central Asia, and the guileless Celestials blandly assert that the drink was invented by Chin Nong some five thousand years ago. A poetic version makes it sixteen hundred years ago, and gives the following account of its earliest appearance: "In the reign of Yuen Ty in the dynasty of Tsin, an old woman was accustomed to proceed every morning at daybreak to the market-place, carrying a cup of tea in her hand. The people bought it eagerly, and yet from the break of day to the close of evening the cup was never exhausted. The money received was distributed among orphans and beggars. The people seized and confined her in prison. At night she flew through the prison windows with her little vase in her hand." If you care to do so you can read this story and enjoy it in the original Chinese of the "Cha Pu," or "Ancient History of Tea," and will no doubt find the translation exact.

Tea was not heard of in China again for three centuries and a half, when a "Fo hi" priest is said to have advised its use as a medicine. In the ninth century, an old beggar from Japan took some of the seeds and plants back with him to his native land. The Japanese relished the new drink, and built at Osaka a temple to the memory of those who introduced it. This temple is still standing, though now almost seven hundred years old. Gradually the people of Tartary and Persia also learned to love the drink, and serve it at all hours of the day.

The honor of introducing the herb into Europe may be considered due equally to the Dutch and Portuguese. Early in the seventeenth century tea became known among "persons of quality" in Europe, and in 1602 some Dutch traders carried a quantity of sage (which was then used to make a drink popular in Europe) to China, and by some ingenious device succeeded in making the almond-eyed tea-drinkers think it a fair exchange for an equal quantity of very good tea, which was brought home in safety and without the loss of a single Dutchman.

Chatting over their cigars, a few gentlemen passed a pleasant hour at the St. James hotel exchanging personal experiences of the chase. Mr. M. N. Bryan, of Madison county, Fla., told with much interest to his listeners, stories of the hunting of wild cat. He said:

"The Florida wildcat, when fully grown, weighs about fifty pounds, and is as large as a good sized fox hound, and when in full chase of a pack of fox hounds is an object to startle and bewilder a northern hunter. With fur thrown back, claws extended, leaping with great springs through forest or swamp, the ordinary sportsman, at the first sight of the animal, turns pale and wants to leave instantly. The cat will attack sheep, lambs, young hogs and poultry, but, the human family, except young and unprotected children, need have no fear of him. I know of no sport so exciting and demanding efforts so hard and long continued as a cat drive. The hunting party having been agreed upon, they meet an hour and a half before daylight, mounted on their best horses and attended by hounds, often to the number of forty. The wildcat is generally found foraging at this hour, and being surprised, runs quickly to the cover of the nearest swamp or climbs a tree. If he seeks a tree he is not shot, but the tree is cut down, or he is otherwise dislodged.

"The hounds are held in leash until he gets a good start, when the leader blows his horn and the pursuit is resumed. If the cat enters a swamp the hounds follow him there, and ultimately drive him out, and the hunting party guided by the noise of the dogs, is ready to take up the chase near the point where the game emerges. And so we go! Over the hills, through the farms, jumping fences, leaping ditches! No English fox hunt can compare with the Florida 'cat drive.' And few are the farmers who can resist leaving team a-field and running to the house for a saddle when the baying of hounds and the blowing of horns tell that a 'cat drive' is on. The hounds of every farmer hearing the din leave their kennels, and are found loudest mouthed in the pursuing pack. At last comes the end, as all sports must end."

"After an all day's chase the wildcat at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, or at 5 o'clock at the latest, can go little further. The snapping jaws of the hound come closer and closer. He turns his glaring eyes a moment behind him and stagers on. The pack of dogs that had been in full cry in the morning is now broken. Only the hardy ones have kept up with the long chase. Horses and riders are worn and jaded. The cat can run no more. He prepares to battle for his life. He turns on his back, rises his feet, and strikes his long claws viciously at any hound that dare attack him. The battle is long and bloody, and before it ends hounds are frightfully scarred, and often lose an eye. Many a time after a cat chase I sewed up the ears of my dogs. The cat drives the Florida man's favorite sport. It is not pursued with the purpose of exterminating the animal. Indeed, by a state law, a hunter who will shoot a cat in front of his dogs is fined \$25, and by a rule of the Hunters' association he is fined again for the same offense. You see if a cat is killed by a bullet the hounds that have followed it are forever spoiled for a chase. Their proper discipline and future usefulness require that they should kill the cat. On this account shotguns and rifles are usually left behind.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Charles King, son of Prof. J. P. King, of Hartford, Conn., has made a sensation at the Conservatory of Music, Sanderhausen, Germany, by his "almost miraculous talent for clarinet playing." Nothing like it has ever been known in that part of Germany.

A San Diego (Cal.) paper says a line of porpoises was seen in the ocean from the Colorado Hotel a few days ago, which was over half a mile in length. They were estimated to number 10,000.

Willing to Shoulder It.

Office boy (to editor)—Here's a man with red hair outside the door, sir, who wants to know who writes that editorial about him dis morning'. He says his name is Blood.

Editor (in alarm)—Eh, James, tell him the gentleman has gone to the seashore for the summer.

Office boy (expectant on his digits)—I say, Boss, let me say I write it.—Epoch.

