

THE RADIO TIMES ^{2^d}



Stanley Robert

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thing just as she wants, and she won't have a wireless in the room. Says she's tired of music.

'Well, she needn't turn it on,' contributed Brock.

'Wants to forget it,' said Mrs. Meddip.

'I shall have to know all about her; she'll be news,' said Brock rather importantly, for he had not been a reporter very long.

'I know nothing about her yet,' said Mrs. Meddip, 'everything's been arranged by her manager. Hasn't even told me her name; so, likely, she's not using her own. Hard on you journalists.'

'Oh, never mind that, Mrs. Meddip,' said he. 'We can find out all right, and then it's all the bigger scoop when we do.'

And during this brief conversation he forgot his need of defence against her kindness, forgot indeed for the moment many a private trouble, as the thought of his public work thrilled suddenly in his mind. And when she asked him again if he'd like her wireless set in his room, he thanked her and said he would.

'She'll be here in half an hour.'

So they went out to get it, and Brock carried it in and heaved it up on to a table. For a little while she praised her possession, as people will, talking its technicalities; and then Brock pulled out the stop, and she stood waiting for him to confirm her praise, with a word of warning to him that it was yet morning, when no wireless set has come to its full value and must all the more be admired if it speaks at all. We are mostly rather inclined when someone exhibits some little treasure to another, to smile a hidden but superior smile, if we chance to overhear them; but we cannot do so here, for there is no portable in working order that could not take its place, without fear of abatement, among the seven wonders of which the world used to boast: the pyramids of Gizeh would not overawe it, the hanging gardens of Babylon would not turn their beauty away from it, the colossus of Rhodes looking down at it would never dare to sneer, Diana in her temple at Ephesus had no wonder greater than that, the solemnity of the tomb of Mausolus could not hush it, nor Proteus's lighthouse outstare it, nor the statue of Jupiter regard it with any scorn; these great things, gods or creatures, would recognise it as one of them, a fitting recipient forever of pious human wonder. Brock pulled the stop out and the thing was in good voice, although there was heard sunlight; it grunted and gurgled and broke into speech or song, as Brock turned the knobs. Far voices spoke strange tongues, an organ sounded, its voice more grand than ours; snatches of song went up; Mrs. Meddip had been right, it cheered the lonely journalist, and she stood there watching him smile. He turned and turned the knobs while the wonder of Mrs. Meddip's set was new to him, and every foreign station whose voice she heard was all the joy to her that is each word to a mother that her child of two speaks when there are visitors.

'It's a good little set,' she said.

'It's wonderful, Mrs. Meddip,' answered Brock. 'It really is. Definitely.'

And then Warsaw spoke. Both heard it clearly. 'Polski radio,' it said; and then 'Warsawa.' He turned past it, but when Mrs. Meddip explained to him what it was he turned back to Warsaw for the sheer wonder of hearing voices in that remote city. By the time he had got the right number again, with Mrs. Meddip's guidance, a woman was singing. And quite suddenly the smile went out of the young man's face, and all his eagerness to hear voices in Warsaw died, or any pretence to be sufficiently cheerful, and Mrs. Meddip saw that her mission had failed, even with the help of her wireless. It was an English song. 'It's set him thinking of something,' said Mrs. Meddip to herself. Brock put his ear close for a few moments, and then nodded and pushed in the stop. He sat down and one of those swift conflicts of which the mind is a battlefield must have come and instantly passed, a fight between his resolution not to be discovered wanting in cheerfulness, and some much simpler emotion, to which that resolution quickly surrendered. And somehow Mrs. Meddip saw the way it went, for she said 'What is it, Mr. Brock?' And something in her voice drew this story from Brock, and opened a long time ago, Mrs. Meddip,' he said.

'The child is twenty-two,' she said to herself.

'Well perhaps only a year ago really,' he went on, 'but it began a long time before that.' As though every year of his life had been millions of years ago. 'I was quite young when I first met her. I mean, compared to what I am now.' And some sympathy invisible as wireless, from Mrs. Meddip, cheered him, so that his tale came past those halting sentences, and he told of the cherry blooming, when winter is gone, through Kent, and the orchards whitening and blushing, and the primroses stealing out, and the little haunts of the anemones appearing in ways of wood, and then the blue-bell flowering till the blue in the dawns and the wood was as bright as the sky. He told of his home on the hills where those orchards were and all those woods of hazel; till Mrs. Meddip wondered when it was coming, the point he held back through shyness or deliberate mystification, and which, curiously enough, she could have told him herself, though she knew almost nothing about him. It began, he explained to Mrs. Meddip, with spring. In spring a roving feeling would always come on him, and every note of a bird would mysteriously call him, and every waving leaf when a light wind lifted the branches would beckon him on his way. And the world was beautiful then, as Mrs. Meddip might have noticed; yet behind every screen of birch-leaves, shining like brass, and over every horizon, something stranger and lovelier seemed hiding. He had discovered spring as Cortez discovered once the Pacific, along whose shores there must have been millions dwelling, but it was all next to Cortez. It was the same way to discover spring. And the actual moment at which he must have really discovered it was when after one of his walks, with this roving feeling of his, that had taken most of the day, and twilight it was coming on, he came out to a wood and into an orchard sheltering under the side of it, a long way from home and in land that he did not know, and saw a girl who was coming the other way. And either she was as

THE thump of the sea on the shore, like a slow monumental pulse, was the only sound: the scene a room in a lodging house, and a young man sitting lonely. His thoughts were far from the sea, some forty miles inland, inland among the hills of the North downs; the pear-blossom and the orchards; orchards that had grown empty to him, hills that had lost their glamour, and only a year ago. So he had left his father's farm and the great hills, as they seemed to him, whose curves surrounded the only fields that he knew, and had gone forth to make his fortune; in an actual prosaic fact, to be a reporter working for a paper that circulated over a few square miles on the South coast. And then, above the sound of that steady pulse of Eternity, came the quicker sounds of ephemeral purpose: it was his landlady knocking on his door. The beating of the sea had lulled him, and he turned a little regretfully back to a world of smaller, less loudly things, as he said 'Come in' to his landlady. She entered, Mrs. Meddip, and said: 'I thought you might like to have my wireless, Mr. Brock. Thought it might cheer you up.'

'Your wireless, Mrs. Meddip?' he replied. 'I should hardly have the time. I have to be going over to the office shortly.'

He had missed the kindness of the offer, only seeing the need for defence; she had seen his want of cheerfulness, and at once his instincts became like the sentries of a little lonely camp when they see an enemy peering at their small and weak palisades. And she only made things worse by repeating: 'It will cheer you up, you know.'

'It was only too true; he wanted cheering up.' So he said: 'I'm really quite cheerful, thank you, Mrs. Meddip. I don't know why you think I'm not.'

'No?' said Mrs. Meddip.

'No, I really don't,' answered Brock.

'Just as you like,' she said. 'Only I have to put it somewhere. There's someone takes my best room, and she's coming this morning; one of those ladies that must have everything just as they want it.'

'What? Royalty, or something?' bubbled Brock.

'No; temperance,' she replied.

'Coming to the theatre here?' he suggested.

'Don't know,' said Mrs. Meddip. 'Know nothing about her. But she must have every-

beautiful as he said, or else the magic of twilight shining on face and hair; or twilight, sunset and full moon gleaming together; had so enchanted her face and kindled her eyes that some unearthly splendour had come to her out of the air. That was his story, the meeting with this girl. What she was like Mrs. Meddip scarcely gathered, for he seemed not to find words to describe her, and spoke so often of spring coming over the downs, from the days of the cherry blossom to the fall scent of the may, and later of thyme on the hills, and the summer grass gold in the sun, that he somehow seemed to confuse her with elemental things, and to credit a girl of sixteen or seventeen with some close kinship with the very ages. It was clear that his love of the great shapes of the downs, and the flowers that lived on them, and the light in which they gleamed, was intricately mixed with his love of this girl. And so at one moment he was speaking of that late light, that haunted the apple-blossom, gleaming upon her face, and at another of all the stars whirling up over Kentish horizons, and seemed to think he was all the while telling his love-story. Mrs. Meddip heard a great deal about spring and summer shining on southern hills, long slopes of chalk with clay on the tops of the highest, and the hush and the loneliness of evening when those two used to meet, by paths that went over fields untroubled by cities. And yet, had she gone there with his story fresh in her mind she would never have found her way, for the glamour that shone for the young man on those fields, made a tale sincere enough, but a tale of hills and valleys that never quite stood in our world, or certainly not in the world in which one walks at the age of Mrs. Meddip. And so she heard the story of many meetings, at evening when his work on the farm was over, with the girl who would wait for him in some wood or ash, or out on the slope of some down going golden with the late sunlight; and had Mrs. Meddip been thirty years younger, it would all have been news to her. To the disconcerted man as he told it, sitting bowed on his chair, it all seemed strangely new, no such chance meeting as that on the edge of the orchard being likely to have taken place before. She was the daughter of another farmer, he said, living a few miles away, and her name was Rose Tibbets. She had a voice so clear that if he called to her from as far as he could be heard, shouting his loudest, her answer came floating with no more sign of effort than one can discern with birds passing high on a journey, that throws a note or two to the fields or a village, and pass on their unknown way. And sometimes in the warm summer, sitting amongst the thyme, she used to sing to him. She never sang to anyone else. She sang simple English songs.

'Ah, like one of those we just heard' said Mrs. Meddip.

'Like one of those,' he said.

'Of course,' she said. 'It would set you thinking of her.'

'Yes,' he said, and continued his story of

those two, a story that might have been told of two butterflies, so much did they haunt the slopes where the flowers grew; or rather, for it was always evening when they met, a story of two moths, two humming-bird hawk-moths such as make their journeys before the sun is set, and hover before large flowers. Mrs. Meddip learned a lot of the North downs from his story, for always he told of the place where he went with Rose as though she had somehow enchanted it, and as though the tall splendour of the foxglove in June, the solemn darkness of yew, the sound of far sheep-bells, the bracken high on the hill-tops and hop-gardens in the valleys, were all part of her magic. He told of her as he saw her coming to meet him, past pear-trees when at their loveliest; he told with vivid distinctness how his eyes roving from her face saw the sun's rays shining on the pink breast of a penguin flying over them after the sun had set, while they rested among some heather, rare in Kent, high on a brow of the downs. 'To a

LORD DUNSANY

is the distinguished Irish author and dramatist whose plays, *If, The Use of Man*, and *Barras de Change* (the last two written specially for broadcasting) will be remembered with pleasure by many listeners. Another play by Lord Dunsany will be broadcast during the summer

portrait-painter the background is often little more than a further expression of the character of his sitter, and nobody laughs at him; with Brock, too, any beauty he saw in his wide view where they walked, looking over the folded valleys, was evidently to him a flowing on of the beauty of the dark-haired girl with the sweet voice, out into distance and as far as the stars. And if they noticed together the delicate fairness of the tendrils of the convolvulus, and the gorgeous outspreading of its beautiful flower, then it became to them as a little possession of theirs, as though nobody else had known it, as though whatever herbivorous animals had ever roamed those hills had not browsed on the flower for ages. Had Mrs. Meddip been frivolous she might have chafed him; had she been a philosopher she might have seen that he had had two glimpses of the unity that would explain the stars and their courses, if we knew it, one glimpse seen through the long horizons of downland clothed with the gloaming, and another glimpse in the face of Rose Tibbets; in finding some dim connection between the two she would have seen some reason in him had she been a philosopher. But she was neither philosophic nor frivolous, and taking the midway course she sympathised with him, without understanding more than is necessary for that.

if anything more is ever necessary. And then, as he told a tale that should have been all happiness, an idyll of an evening in June among the wild-roses, in whose thickets the nightingales were practising for the night, in little bursts of song like falling fountains, and the may was still in flower, and the hills with their heads in clear gloaming were whitening below with the mists, like old men drawing rugs over their knees, he suddenly fell silent, as though the nightingales had reminded him of something; and he sat disconcerted in his chair, and the only voice was the old voice of the sea, beating upon the shore like the pulse of eternity.

'And what happened then?' asked Mrs. Meddip.

And something in her voice led him back to his story.

'She used to have singing lessons,' he continued. 'Used to go up to London for it every now and then. I knew she had singing lessons, but I never set much store by it. I never fancied her in London, never thought anything could come out of anything she did there; didn't think London could teach anything to a girl like that, so I set no store by it.'

So deeply was he assured that she was of the downs and the evening, which were fragments of that unity of which of course he knew nothing, that he probably no more thought that London could have any effect on her future than it could after the way of a star. Whether London has its place in that unity too, or whether it pulls against it, is no discussion for this light tale. Certainly he ignored his adversary, the City of London, a boy too confident in his allies, the great hills, the spring, summer, wild woods, and the splendour of youth. And in the end London took her. The great market that draws in so much from ten thousand farms found Rose Tibbets' voice, and trained it and shaped it. So that one day, where the speedwell shone round their feet like the sky, when birds were home and the first of the bats was abroad, she suddenly told him that she was going to sing in London, and afterwards on the continent. So incompatible was this with the dreams they had dreamed of their future, together on a farm on these hills of chalk; so hostile seemed London and towns of the continent to the meadow air and the quiet of the fields around them, through which the rare sounds that came were all familiar and friendly, that her plan had seemed to him a treachery against the lovely world in which they had walked together, if it really was

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ROSE TIBBETS: The rest of Lord Dunsany's Story

as Brock had described it, or to the world of their dreams. Certainly great cities and the large concert-halls are very different from the downland, and the contrast loomed for the first time in his mind, had evidently appalled him. He had asked for no explanations; all he had asked, and this again and again, was if it was really true; and when he had found it was he had reproached her, no doubt with all the bitterness of his sudden loss, as it seemed to him. She had not thrown him over; he seemed to have assumed that she had done that; and those few bitter words were the last they had spoken together.

'And did she get on with her singing?' asked Mrs. Meddip. For much seemed to hinge on that. If she made a lush of it, thought Mrs. Meddip, she would come back to the young man quick enough, and he glad to. And Mrs. Meddip didn't think that a girl from forty miles away would make a great name as a singer; it was too near to where she lived herself; great names were remote.

'She's singing now,' said Brock.
'Singing now?' said Mrs. Meddip.
'Singing in Warsaw,' he said.
'You don't mean,' she exclaimed, 'you can't mean Rosa Tibetskoi?' For she had caught the name of the singer on the wireless.
'That's what she calls herself,' he said sadly.

'And, and, you heard her just now?'

He nodded.
Yes, that, thought Mrs. Meddip, would account for everything; suddenly to hear that his girl was a thousand miles away, and singing merrily too; it would be enough to upset any young man. And she understood his story and his mood. As for Rosa Tibetskoi, she knew that name well enough, dimly, as we know the names of Julius Caesar and Woodrow Wilson yet unmistakably as a name; a name that during all the last year the wireless had frequently brought to her doors, with songs that she loved to hear, as the sea brought wonderful shells to her on its tides.

And then Brock pulled out the stop of the wireless set again, the dial pointing still at Warsaw; and this time just as he pulled it out they heard her name again clearly, Rosa Tibetskoi, and she was singing again; not that Brock needed to hear her name, so far as it was her name, to tell him who was singing; he knew every note of her voice. And, to a young man who had never travelled, the hundreds of miles between him and the voice that sounded so near seemed all the more a bleak gulf of separation and loneliness. She was singing 'Home Sweet Home,' the old song and the English voice ringing across Europe, a favourite enough song with Mrs. Meddip, yet she wished it would stop, for the sake of poor Mr. Brock; wished she had never brought the set from her room to please the woman who was tired of music. Some effort she made to persuade him to push in the knob and stop it. 'Doesn't it bring the past back to you too much?' she said.

'It's all I've got, Mrs. Meddip,' he answered, leaning towards that song. And then he went on sadly gathering memories that that voice brought him from Warsaw, memories of sheepfolds with their wattle hurdles, memories of swills with indescribable grace going through the evening shadows the roofs of old villages, memories of mulleins lifting their lovely blooms high above tallest grasses, memories of all the things that he felt that voice had deserted, and without which all his splendours seemed to have gone, like the camp of magic people seen in the distance and strictly gone next day. And that is the way with magic, that comes and goes as it will; he had

seen the hills and the hay-fields through some magic; there was with Rose; now she was gone and the hills and the fields were all deserted. But still there was an enchantment in the voice, which still held him, still calling up memories as with a sorcerer's wand. And there sat Mrs. Meddip wondering how to help him. For she also had once been young, and had seen spring coming over all downs, and summer approaching, almost violet by violet; no poem can quite be translated into any other language, no story of one person can quite be the story of another; yet, with allowance for different idioms and strange phrases, poems pass from country to country; and, allowing for many little differences, Brock's story was not so unlike an idyll that Mrs. Meddip had known. And so she sympathised with him more than he knew, and for reasons beyond his guessing. And the song rang on from Warsaw, bringing back with it lost summers. As the last word floated away the door-bell rang through the house, and Mrs. Meddip leaped up. All the sympathy that she had to spare she would have given to this young man, but business claimed her now; here was the lodger on whose behalf, as she had not told young Brock, a larger rent than she had ever asked before, merely as a basis for bargaining, had been accepted immediately. She leaped up and went from the room, while the Polish announcer began to speak in Warsaw, of whose words Brock, listening still, understood no more than two, Rosa Tibetskoi. Now and then hints crossed his mind that his last words to Rose had been spoken lightly, hints like the flash of sudden sparks in the dark; but he had not been able to see by them. His grievance really was against Farnie, not against Rose; but he could not see this. Farnie had suddenly seized her and carried her off to Warsaw, and to who knows where beyond that. The announcer ceased talking in Polish and he heard her voice again, and knew it from the first note that came through over all those miles of ether. Then he heard voices in the house, and suddenly stopped the song from Warsaw to listen to what was being said, prompted by some swift impulse that he never could understand. But the voices had sunk again as though their news were over, and he only heard the sea. It lulled him for a while, as the downs used to do, that voice so far from our cares and our curiosities; till he was brought back again to things that pass and that change, by Mrs. Meddip's voice in the passage, saying as though rather conclusively: 'Then I think there's something about this young idyll to see.'

And, before he had time to wonder, Mrs. Meddip opened the door, with all the air of a landlady who has at last secured the lodger that will make her the envy not only of all her profession, but even of the hotel-keepers, and with an air of something more than that in her smirks; and in walked Rose.
'Hallo, Bill,' she said.
'But you're singing in Warsaw,' gasped Brock.
'I'm tired of it all,' said Rose, 'and I've come back.'
'But you're singing there now,' persisted the young man.
'Now?' strolled Rose.
'And Mrs. Meddip she stood there quietly watching, with a kind of smile round her eyes.
'Well, listen,' said he; and he pulled out the stop again; and there was that fluting voice, full of the wonder there is, for whomsoever hears it, in the first blackbird that wakes the chorus in April, in England, just before dawn.
'Oh, that,' said Rose. 'That's grammo.'
'What?' said Brock, for she pronounced the

'A' long, as she had learned to in foreign concert-halls, and the word was strange to him.

'Gramophone, you know,' said Rose. 'But I'm tired of all those things.'

'And you've come back?' asked Brock.

'Well, haven't I?' asked Rose.
And Mrs. Meddip withdrew, not beyond hearing, that would have been too much to expect, but discreetly out of sight.