

Good Housekeeping

NOVEMBER
1933

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Beginning

Another Glamorous Story of the Theatre

By **BOOTH TARKINGTON**

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An Unforgettable Short Story

By **Gertrude Atherton**

THE FOGHORN

A Story That Will
Make You Exclaim,
"Have You Read



GERTRUDE ATHERTON'S Story in "Good Housekeeping?"

WHAT an absurd vanity to sleep on a hard pillow and forego that last luxurious burrowing into the very depths of a mass of baby pillows! Her back was already as straight as—a chimney. (Who was the Frenchman that said one must reject the worn-out simile?) But this morning she would have liked that sensuous burrowing, and the pillow had never seemed so hard, so flat. Yet how difficult it was to wake up! She had had the same experience once before when the doctor had prescribed a drug for insomnia. Could Ellen, good creature, have put a tablet in the cup of broth she took last thing at night: "as a wise precaution," the doctor had said genially. What a curse insomnia was! But she had a congenial fear of drugs and had told no one of this renewal of sleeplessness, knowing it would pass.

And, after all, she didn't mind lying awake in the dark; she could think, oh, pleasant lovely thoughts, despite this inner perturbation—so cleverly concealed.

How thankful she was to be tall enough to carry off this new fashion in sleeves! If trains would only come in again, she would dress her hair high some night (just for fun) and look—*not* like her beloved Mary Stuart, for Mary was always ugly if one analyzed her too critically, Charm? How much more charm counted than mere beauty—and she herself had it "full measure and running over," as that rather fresh admirer had announced when drinking her health at her coming-out party . . . what was his name? . . . six years ago. He was only a college boy . . . how could one remember? There had been so many since.

Ninon de l'Enclos? She was passable in her portraits, but famous mainly for keeping young . . . Diane de Poitiers? She must have needed charm double-distilled if she looked anything like an original portrait of

her hung at a loan exhibition in Paris: flaxen hair, thin and straight, drawn severely from a bulging brow above insufferably sensual eyes—far too obvious and easy for the fastidious male of today—a flaxen complexion, no high lights; not very intelligent. Interesting contrast in taste centuries apart, perhaps.

Madame Récamier? Better looking than most of the historic beauties: hair piled high—but then she wore a slip of an Empire gown . . . Well, never mind. . . .

She ranked as a beauty herself, although perhaps charm had something to do with it. Her mouth was rather wide, but her teeth were exquisite. Something rather obscure was the matter in that region of brilliant enamel this morning. A toothache? She had never had a toothache. Well, there was no pain—something wrong, though; she'd go to the dentist during the day. Her nose was a trifle tip-tilted, but very straight and thin, and anyhow the tilt suited the way she carried her head, "flung in the air" . . . Her complexion and hair and eyes were beyond all cavil . . . she was nothing so commonplace as a down-right blonde or brunette . . . How she should hate being catalogued! The warm, bright, waving masses of her hair had never been cut since her second birthday. They, too, were made for burrowing.

Her mother's wedding dress had a long train. But the delicate ivory of the satin had waxed with time to a sickly yellow. Her mother hadn't pressed the matter when she was engaged to John St. Rogers, but she had always expressed a wish that each of her daughters should wear the dress to the altar. Well, she had refused outright, but had consented to have her own gown trimmed with the lace: yards and yards of *point d'Alençon*—and a veil that reached halfway down the train. What a way to spend money! Who cared for lace now? Not the young, anyhow.

But mother was rather a dear, and she could afford to be quite unselfish for once, as it certainly would be becoming. When the engagement was broken, they told the poor old darling that she cried because she would have another long wait before watching all that lace move up the aisle on a long slender figure that made her think proudly of the graceful skeleton hidden within one hundred and seventy resented pounds.

Well, she would never wear that lace—or any wedding gown. If she were lucky enough to marry at all, the less publicity the better. A mere announcement (San Francisco papers please copy)—a quiet return from Europe—a year or two in one of those impersonal New York apartment houses where no one knew the name of his next-door neighbor . . . no effacement in a smaller city for her!

How strange that she, of all girls, should have fallen in love with a married man—or, at all events, accepted the dire consequences. With a father that had taken to drugs and then run off with another woman—luckily before Mother had come in for Granddad's fortune—and . . . What was it Uncle Ben had once said? "Queer twists in this family since 'way back." It had made her more conventional than her natural instincts would have prompted; but, no, let her do herself justice: she had cultivated a high standard of character and planted her mind with flowers both sturdy and fair—that must have been the reason she had fallen in love at last, after so many futile attempts. No need for her to conceal from him the awful truth that she read the Greek and Latin classics in the original text, attended morning classes over at the University . . . Odd, how men didn't mind if you "adored" music and pictures, but if they suspected you of being intellectual, they either despised or feared you, and faded away almost at once. . . .

Fog on the bay. Since childhood she had loved to hear that long-drawn-out, almost-human moan of the foghorn as she lay warm and sheltered in bed. It was on a night of fog they had spoken for the first time, although they had nodded at three or four formal dinners given to the newcomers who had brought letters to the elect. Bostonians were always popular in San Francisco; they had good manners, and their formality was only skin-deep. The men were very smart; some of the women, too; but as a rule they lacked the meticu-



lous grooming and well-set-up appearance of their men. She had been impressed the first time she had met him: six feet (she herself was five feet six), somewhere in the thirties, very spare, said to be a first-rate tennis player; had ranked as an all-round athlete at Harvard; had inherited a piece of property in San Francisco which was involving him in litigation, but he was in no haste to leave, even before they met.

That had been at the Jeppers', and as the house commanded a fine view of the bay, and she was tired of being torn from some man every time they had circled the ballroom, she had managed to slip away and had hidden behind the curtains of the deep bow window at the end of the hall. In a moment she was aware that some one had followed her, and oddly enough she knew who it was, although she didn't turn her head; and they stood in silence and gazed together at the sharp dark outlines of the mountains on the far side of the bay; the gliding spheroids of golden light that were ferry boats, the islands with their firm, bold outlines, now almost visibly dropping in slumber . . . although there always seemed to her to be an atmosphere of unrest about Alcatraz, psychic emanation of imprisoned men under rigid military rule, and officials no doubt as resentful in that dull, monotonous existence on a barren rock . . . A light flickered along a line of barred upper windows; doubtless a guard on his rounds. . . .

The band of pulsing light on the eastern side of the bay: music made visible . . . stars as yellow and bright above, defying the thin silver of the hebetec moon . . . lights twinkling on Sausalito opposite, standing out boldly from the black mass of Tamalpais high-flung above. Her roving eyes moved to the Golden Gate, narrow entrance between two crouching forts, separating that harbor of arrogant beauty from the gray waste of the Pacific—ponderous, rather stupid old ocean. . . .

For the first time he spoke: "The fog! Chief of San Francisco's many beauties."

She had (Continued on page 129)



After dinner they had wandered up a long flight of steps on the side of a mountain . . . dim aisles of redwoods, born when the earth was young—unfriendly but protective, shutting out the world

Illustrated by F. R. Gruger

The Foghorn

(Continued from page 17)

nodded, making no other reply, watching that dense yet imponderable white mass push its way through the Golden Gate like a laboring ship—then riding the waters more lightly, rolling a little, writhing, whiffs breaking from the bulk of that ghostly ship to explore the hollows of the hills, resting there like puffs of white smoke. Then, over the cliffs and heights on the northern side of the bay, a swifter, more formless, but still lovely white visitant that swifled down and over the inland waters, embracing the islands, Sausalito, where so many Englishmen lived, the fulgent zone in the east, but a low fog. The moon and stars still visible . . . the foghorns, one after another, sending forth their long drawn-out moans of utter desolation. . . .

With nothing more to look at, they had seated themselves on a small sofa, placed there for reticent couples, and talked for an hour—a desultory exploring conversation. She recalled none of it. A few moments later they had met on the Berkeley ferryboat, accidentally no doubt, and he had gone on with her in the train and as far as the campus. . . .

Once again. . . . After that, when the lecture was over, in the Greek Theatre—wonderful hours . . . how easy to imagine themselves in Greece of the fifth century B.C., alone in that vast, gray amphitheatre, the slim, straight, tenebrous trees above quivering with the melody of birds!

Not a word of love—not for months. This novel and exciting companionship was enough . . . depths of personality to explore—by glimpses! Sometimes they roamed over the hills, gay and carefree. They never met any one they knew.

Winter. Weeks of pouring rain. They met in picture galleries, remote corners of the Public Library, obscure restaurants of Little Italy under the shadow of Telegraph Hill. Again they were unseen, undiscovered.

HE NEVER came to the house. Since her mother's death and the early marriages of the girls, Uncle Ben had come to live with her in the old house on Russian Hill; the boys were east at school; she was free of all family restrictions, but her old servants were intimate with all the other servants on the Hill. She barely knew his wife. He never spoke of her.

Spring. A house party in the country, warm and dry after the last of the rains. After dinner they had sat about on the terraces, smoking, drinking, listening to a group singing within, admiring the "ruins" of a Roman temple at the foot of the lawn lit up by a blazing moon.

He and she had wandered off the terrace, and up a long, long flight of steps on the side of the mountain that rose behind the house . . . dim aisles of redwoods, born when the earth was young, whose long trunks never swayed, whose high beams her rays saw in never wind—unfriendly trees, but protective, sentinel-like, shutting out the modern world; reminiscent those closely planted aisles were of ancient races, forgotten races, god-like races, perhaps.

Well, they had felt like gods that night. How senseless to try to stave off a declaration of love. . . . To fear. . . . to wonder. . . . to worry. . . . How inevitable. . . . natural. . . . when it came. Hour of hours. . . .

They had met the next day in a corner of their favorite little restaurant, over a dish of spaghetti, which she refused to eat as it had liver in it, and talked the matter out. No, she would not enter upon a secret intrigue; meeting him in some shady quarter of the town, where no questions were asked, in some horrible room which had sheltered thousands of furtive "lovers" before them. . . . She would far rather never see him again. . . . He had smiled at the sight taken by an untrained intruder, but nodded. . . . No, but she knew the alternative. He had no intention of giving her up. No hope of a divorce. He had sounded his wife; tenta-

tively at first, then told her outright he loved another woman. She had replied that he could expect no legal release from her. It was her chance for revenge, and she would take it. . . . A week or two and his business in San Francisco would be settled. . . . he had an independent fortune. . . . would she run away with him? Elope in good old style? Could she stand the gulf? All Europe for a perpetual honeymoon—unless his wife were persuaded by her family later on to divorce him. Then he would return and work at something. He was not a lorn idler.

She had consented, of course, having made up her mind before they met. She had had six years of the world. She knew what she wanted. One might love many times, but not more than once find completion, that solidarity which makes two as one against the malignant forces of life. She had no one to consider but herself. Her mother was dead. Her sisters, protected by husbands, wealth, position, would mostly be fulfilled. The boys and Uncle Ben, of course, would be furious. Men were so hopelessly conservative.

For the rest of the world she cared exactly nothing.

THAT foghorn. What was it trying to tell her? A boat. . . . fog. . . . Why was it so hard to remember? So hard to awaken? Ellen must have given her an overdose. Fragmentary pictures: slipping down the dark hill to the wharf. . . . her low, delighted laugh echoed back to her as he helped her into the boat. . . . one more secret lark before they flung down the gauge. . . . how magnificently her owed. . . . long, sweeping, easy strokes as he smiled possessively into her eyes and talked of the future. . . . No moon, but millions of stars that shed a misty, golden light. . . . rows of light on the steep hillsides of the city. The houses dark and silent. . . . a burst of music from Fort Mason. . . .

Out through the Golden Gate, still daring. . . . riding that oily swell. . . . his chuckle as he had dared him to row straight across to China. . . . Her sharp, anxious cry as she half rose from her seat and pointed to a racing mountain of snow-white mist.

He had swept about at once and made for the beach below Suto Heights. Too late. Almost as he turned, they were engulfed. Even an old fisherman would have lost his sense of direction.

And then the foghorns began their warnings. The low, menacing roar from Point Benito. The wailing siren on Alcatraz. Sausalito's throaty bass. The deep-toned bell on Angel Island. She knew them all, but they seemed to come from new directions.

A second. . . . a moment. . . . an hour. . . . later. . . . a foreign but unmistakable note. Sibilant—two of them. . . . Blatant and counterblatant. . . . She could barely see his white, set face through the white mist as he thrust his head this way and that trying to locate those sounds. . . . Another abrupt swerve. . . . Crash. . . . Shoats. . . . Her own voice shrieking as she saw his head almost severed—the very fog turned red. . . .

She could hear herself screaming yet. It seemed to her that she had been screaming since the beginning of time.

She sat up in bed, clasping her head between her hands, and rocked to and fro. This bare, small room, just visible in the gray dawn. . . . She was in a hospital, of course. Was it last night or the night before, they had brought her here? She wondered vaguely that she felt no inclination to scream any more, now that she had struggled to full consciousness. . . . Too tired, perhaps. . . . the indifference of exhaustion. . . . Even her eyes felt singularly dry, as if they had been baked in a hot oven. She recalled a line, the only memorable line in Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia": "Eyes'it red with rust of ancient tears". . . . Did her eyes look like that? But she did not remember crying. . . . only screaming. . . .

The Foghorn

Odd that she should be left alone like this. Uncle Ben and the girls must have been summoned. If they had gone home, tired out, they should have left a nurse in constant attendance . . . and surely they might have found her a better room . . . Or had she been carried into some emergency hospital? . . . Well, she could go home today.

Her hands were still clasping her head when another leaf of awareness turned over, rattling like parchment. Hair. Her lovely, abundant hair . . . She held her breath as her hands moved exploringly over her head. Harsh, short bristles almost scratched them.

She had had brain fever, then. Ill a long time . . . weeks . . . months, perhaps . . . No wonder she felt weak and spent and indifferent! But she must be out of danger, or they would not leave her like this . . . Would she suffer later, with renewed mocking strength? Or could love be burnt out, devoured by fever germs? A short time before, while not yet fully conscious, she had revived all the old hopes, fears, dreams, ecstasies; reached out triumphantly to a wondrous future, arrogantly sure of herself and the man, contemptuous of the world and its make-shift conventions . . . And now she felt nothing . . .

But when she was well again? Twenty-four? Forty, fifty years more; they were a long-lived family. Her mother had been killed at a railroad crossing . . . Well, she had always peided herself on her strength. She would worry through the years somehow.

Had the town rung with the scandal when the newspapers flared forth next morning? No girl goes rowing at night with a married man unless there is something between them. Had his wife habbled? Were the self-righteous getting off the orthodoxies of their kind? Punished for their sin. Retributive justice meted out to a girl who would break up a home and take a married man for her lover.

Retributive justice! As if there were any such thing in life as justice. All helpless victims of the law of cause and effect. Futile, aspiring, stupidly confident links in the inevitable chain of Circumstance . . . Commonplace minds croaking, "Like father, like daughter" . . . How she hated, hated, *hated* self-righteousness, smug hypocrisy, illogical minds—one sheep bleating like another sheep—not one of them with the imagination to guess that she never would have stooped to a low, secret intrigue. . . .

SHE had been pounding her knee with her fist in a sudden access of energy. As it spattered out and she felt on the verge of collapse, her hand unfolded and lay palm down on the quilt . . . She felt her eyes bulging . . . She uttered her first sound: a low almost inarticulate cry.

Her hand? That large-veined, skinny thing? She had beautiful, long, white hands, with skin as smooth as the breast of a dove. Of no one of her beauty's many parts had she been prouder, not even when she stood bow and then before the cheval glass and looked critically, and admiringly, at the smooth, white, rounded perfection of her body. She had given them a golden manicure set on one of their birthdays, a just tribute; and they were exquisitely kept, although she hated conspicuous nails. . . .

A delusion? A nightmare? She spread the other hand beside it . . . side by side the two on the dingy counterpane . . . old hands . . . Shorn hair will grow again . . . but hands. . . .

She was mumbling. Why mumbling? She raised one of those withered yellow hands to her mouth. It was empty.

Brain fever! The sun had risen. She looked up at the high, barred window. She understood.

Voices at the door. She dropped back on the pillow and closed her eyes and lay still.

The door was unlocked, and a man and woman entered: doctor and nurse, as was immediately evident. The doctor's voice was brisk and business-like and deeply mature; the woman's, young and deferential.

The Fog Horn

"Do you think she'll wake again, Doctor?"

"Probably not. I thought she would be gone by now, but she is still breathing." He clasped the emaciated wrist with his strong fingers.

"Very feeble. It won't be long now."

"Is it true, Doctor, that sometimes, just before death, reason is restored, and they remember and talk quite rationally?"

"Sometimes. But not for this case. Too many years. Look in every hour, and when it is over, ring me up. There are relatives to be notified. Quite important people, I believe."

"What are they like?"

"Never seen them. The law firm in charge of her estate pays the bills. Why should they come here? Couldn't do her any good, and nothing is so depressing as these melancholia cases. It's a long time now since she was stark raving. That was before my time. Come along. Six wards after this one. Don't forget to look in. Good little girl. I know you never forget."

They went out and locked the door.