Herald Tribune MAGAZINE

Section XII

Mrs. William Brown Meloney, Editor Sunday, January 24, 1932

Twenty-eight Pages



She Said: "That Was Overbrave. Now Your Lips Can Not Ever Lie to Me, True Thomas"

Drawn for the Herald Tribune by Ninon

The Happy Ending

By Branch Cabell

Author of "Jurgen," "The Silver Stallion," Etc., and the Forthcoming "These Restless Heads"

Learmont encountered, in a place where three roads met, a thin, dark girl who rode upon a stallion that gleamed like silver. Her mantle was of green velvet, and her silken gown also displayed the gray-green color of fern leaves; about the neck of the stallion hung fifty-and-nine small silver bells. She spoke: and Thomas Learmont very ardently kissed her laughing lips into silence.

She said: "That was overbrave. Now your lips can not ever lie to me, True Thomas."

He replied: "My doom is at one with my desire." They rode together upon the back of the gleaming stallion along a road which was bordered by ferns everywhere, and they forded a sullen river of which the waters were colored like human blood, coming thus into a garden, and in the midst of this garden they found a tree. They rested in its wavering shadows amicably. She who was the Queen of Faëry had smiled upon mortal lovers before this time, but never at any time had her light body nestled within the strong arms of a human lad who had Thomas

Learmont's fancifulness in his talking or such earnestness in all his amicable doings.

It is known that after seven years Thomas Learmont returned into the world wherein mortal beings rule and order matters. He brought with him his memories of a kingdom wherein all were young, and the control of many little half-magics, which he embellished with a poet's innate inventiveness and some legerdemain. He prospered as a reliable and sober soothsayer, with a fair grounding in the nine geomancies. He became well to do, and he lived at

wite in the serene afternoon of his lifetime. now that all the neighbors who took any thought for the future rode toward Ercildoune with one fee or another fee for True Thomas: the earls, the barons and the dukes talked privately with him about what was to befall them: the King of Scots also sent for True Thomas, and it was in this way the high King learned that because of the passing of the fatal stone Lia-Fail from out of his kingdom his race must perish, and the detested Bruce would beget new rulers over Scotland.

There had been no sense whatever in telling old Sandy that, and to be doing it was exactly like Thomas Learmont, when you knew it would only upset his majesty and be of no earthly good to anybody, said the wife of Thomas Learmont.

Thomas Learmont mildly agreed to all this, and then said mildly, "Nevertheless"——

"- With," she continued, "the soothsaying business what it always is at this time of year, and you know that as well as I do!"

Nodding gravely, Thomas Learmont replied that the seer must speak the truth as it is revealed to him. His wife referred to stuff and nonsense in the while she went on patching the breeches of their third son, and, besides that, she added, you make up more than half of it.

"But not all of it, my dear," said Thomas Learmont. "A fair half of my trade is pure magic, and it is that which puzzles me. I am become at times an impostor, in a world wherein that foible is more or less common to every professional man. But at other times my magic is a true magic, and my looking runs very lightly over all the days which are to come before my client has quite done with earth's daylight; and at these times I must tell, will I or will I not, the truth about my foreseeings, because my lips once touched the lips of the Queen of Faëry."

At that his large and light-colored wife looked at him over the top of her spectacles during the chilled instant that she said reflectively:

"Lips! And the things I have heard about that woman!"

Thomas Learmont fidgeted, "Well, but, my dear," he remarked, "a wife always does hear these things, somehow or another. And more often than not, I can give my clients something far more acceptable than the truth about their future. So these passing seizures of veracity do not really injure my soothsaying."

The matters thus far recorded are known. To many persons it is not known that in the spring of the year, upon the last night in April, gray Thomas Learmont went by moonlight to a place where three roads met. The one road passed among briars, and lilies grew thickly about the second road, but the third road was bordered by the dim green of many ferns. It was in this place that Thomas Learmont thought about his severance from the thin, dark girl and about the noble times when he had thrived as a king in Faëry.

He sighed as he waited there in the moonlight of April. He saw the little white shapes which scuttered and flickered along the briery road, and he saw the little yellow shapes which capered like pale flames in the road that went among lilies, as one by one these shapes fared out of the world . wherein mortal beings rule and order matters. In the road which was bordered by ferns the moonlight lay unbroken by anything except the wavering shadows of one tree; not any soul traveled upon this road: and that seemed a large pity to the aging charlatan, now that he remembered the wavering shadows of another tree, and his wisdom was clouded by the betraying magic of April.

This is a magic which has had many analysts, along with its victims, and its. effects upon the young in heart have been duly recorded. It is a luxuriant and a very various magic, which, if it flowers now and then with red murder and with long despair and with ill-considered marriages, yet blossoms also with fine poems and with heart-shaking Joys. But it blossoms, too, with a regretting, by-and-by: and a regretting now overshadowed the wisdom and the contentment of Thomas Learmont. A regretting made his snug cottage, and the two acres that he held in fee, and his Wrife's thrifty housekeeping, and his three sturdy boys, and his two fat cows, and his

James Branch Cabell Cuts His Name

The accompanying article is the first ever to be published under the signature of Branch Cabell, and marks the return to American letters of James Branch Cabell, who announced his retirement in 1929. A second article from the pen of this famous author will appear next Sunday.

decent riding horse, and the respect paid to his half-magics by persons who hoped to profit by them, and all the other comforts of a prospering soothsayer, seem to be not quite enough to breed any complacency. All these were plain and solid goods: and the shadow which had come into his thinking made shadows seem more lovely and more dear to him. .

So he dispatched a little magic of his own shaping, with a lamb's skin, and with mint and marjoram and rosemary, and with three nails from the coffin of a young child. He duly invoked the spirits of Malkuth and the bright lords of Netsah and Hod, to protect and cleanse and enlighten his desire; and the power of this little magic did not fail him. Then Thomas Learmont laughed, now that the Queen of Faëry had returned to him who in the remote days of his youthfulness had been her lover.

He said: "The years have been long and without any savor"- He said then: "Since you went away"- He cried with a tinge of wildness: "Men have made for me no words to serve my last need! Men have not any words for the passion and the thought which are troubling me!"

She did not answer: but the dark eyes of her eternal youth regarded the old fellow fondly; her young lips smiled with an unforgotten tenderness; and her light young hands lay at this time upon his long years of their separation had never

Then Thomas Learmont said: "You -alone mattered. All that has mattered in my life is that I once had your love. Now that I become old I do not any longer try to evade this knowledge. The gray who have only death before them do not marvel to observe that behind them also there is only ruin. Yet I marvel, oh, my dearest, to hear men acclaiming the deeds performed in that part of my life which did not matter, and to see the respectfulness in these dull men's eyes. I am skilled in this magic or in the other magic, they report of me, and I have performed small

wonders competently such as no other man has happened to perform before me. I think that perhaps this is true: it may be that I have pre-eminence in my halfmagics, and that idle persons may recall my name affably and some one or two of the not very important things which I did in the days of my loneliness"----

She replied: "It is strange that in the new spring, that even now, True Thomas, I should be thinking about the bleak shining and about the restlessness of a wintry sea and about a fallen king in sober broadcloth. He is walking upon the long marge of this sea for the while that his aging stomach needs to digest his wholesome dinner; he belches comfortably now and then toward the sea's large restlessness; and he regards, half idly, not any firm and ponderable thing, but only the far away sea mists as they rise lightly in the form of castles which he ruled in once."

He said: "But we were talking about my loneliness. All my life has been a loneliness excepting only that part I shared with you. When I left you I left the half of myself in Faëry. I came thence maimed and bedrugged and overdoubtful. My fate has been the fate of all who have returned out of Faëry. I have loved nor hated nothing; I have believed nothing with any assured faith; and I have laughed without any lustiness. There has been no strength and no depth in my shrunk and knotted hands, as though the human living. The fervors of other men, and of the pawing women, too, were a trouble to me; and I went among them warily, as must do all those who have returned from Faëry. Inside me there was only a softness and a frivolousness and a doubting in the while that I went among these resolute and loud talking people, whose frankness I could not understand, and whose blundering wits I must ward off from ever understanding me"----

> The Queen said, "What may it avail any man to drowse in a troubled sleeping when the half of his memories live more gloriously than he lives?"

But it is ill work interrupting a poet who is about the familiar task of talking about himself. Thomas Learmont replied instantly:

"No, there are not any words. My heart understands this matter, and my heart knows very well what I am trying to tell you. But it is my mind which picks out the battered-about words that I must say to you; and since my mind does not understand this matter, it gives me the wrong words. I have not been unhappy in my human living, and I have done well enough with it, by all the measurings which are known to me. But there was something not ever found. All that has mattered in my life is that I once had your love."

So did he at last make an end of his groping speech in the while that she listened with a fond and secret smiling. Then the Queen said:

"Let us turn homeward, speaking no vain words and thinking upon no ponderable thing. Let us follow after shadows in our returning to the two we know of, in search of our ancient home. Restraint lives here, and a shrewd laborious talking makes faint my music. You nod at your frowsy hearth while the two we know of pass furtively toward the fern road that fares between heaven and hell to our ancient home. Let us be leaving this place. Here the ways of wisdom are at struggle against no ponderable thing, like shadows which war in an autumn fog, or like dead leaves scuttling and bustling aflutter to rustle in dusty gutters. So does the sound of their scuffling muffle my music. Let us be leaving this place, for its ways are dreary, and yonder lies the road to our ancient home."

Then Thomas Learmont made wide eves at this romantic-minded and eternally young female, who was offering (in her roundabout florid fashion) to restore his own youth and the lost happiness which they had shared in Faëry. That the girl's intentions were kindly, he knew; but he knew also that she, who was immortal, could as a consequence not understand the most simple and common sense facts.

"I am astonished," he said, and he cleared his throat—. "I am grieved, madame, that you should be suggesting any such evasion to a married man of my known principles. I most certainly could not leave the esteemed wife and the three growing sons and the other matters to which I am accustomed. I do not desire to exchange these things for more glorious things. I like to grieve over my undeservedly sad lot in life now and then, madame, because I have a poetic turn of mind: but not even in my self-pity is there much profoundness nowadays," said Thomas Learmont, with very honest regret that his lips could not lie to this eternally young person.

The Queen answered, without any smiling, as a child speaks when a puzzling world has proved inexplicably unkind: "I have met in this place a corpse that is moving cumbrously; and it is hunting down a boy that thrived in the gear of all Faëry's king. Now those light sea mists which arose like castle turrets are descending in the shape of long grave mounds seen beyond the rim of a wintry sea; and I who am immortal turn homeward toward my own fellowship, speaking no vain words and thinking upon no ponderable thing."

Then two that had the appearance of a white hind and of a white hart came tripping down the fern road, and no sign remained anywhere of the Queen of Faëry.

Gray Thomas Learmont sighed. She was a quite charming girl, and she had meant well, and his heart was suitably ravaged with renewed anguish now that upon yet a second occasion she had passed out of his ruined life forever.

The trouble was (he reflected) that these rather flighty divine beings did not comprehend the best-thought-of human standards; and they had, too, a remarkably roundabout and archaic way of talking. It fitted in well enough with moonlight; still, you could not always talk in figurative style with any imaginable woman whatever, day in and day out, and even over your porridge at breakfast, with any real comfort.

It is known that after this night Thomas Learmont went on with the course of his living. Day in and day out he adhered to the levelness of his life and to the

Continued on page twenty-seven

In This Issue

The Happy Ending Drawing by Ninon Why Aliens Are Deported Drawing by Stockton Mulford "We Come to Bury Peace" Drawing by Joseph Simont Blind in the City A Poem by Charles Hanson Towne American Money in Chile By Henry Kittredge Norton Photographs History—While You Wait Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
Why Aliens Are Deported Drawing by Stockton Mulford "We Come to Bury Peace" By Lorine Pruette Drawing by Joseph Simont Blind in the City A Poem by Charles Hanson Towne American Money in Chile By Henry Kittredge Norton Photographs History—While You Wait By Weare Holbrook Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
"We Come to Bury Peace" By Lorine Pruette Drawing by Joseph Simont Blind in the City A Poem by Charles Hanson Towne American Money in Chile By Henry Kittredge Norton Photographs History—While You Wait By Weare Holbrook Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
Blind in the City A Poem by Charles Hanson Towne American Money in Chile By Henry Kittredge Norton Photographs History—While You Wait By Weare Holbrook Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay 10 Illustration by F. Strothmann
Blind in the City A Poem by Charles Hanson Towne By Henry Kittredge Norton Photographs History—While You Wait Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
American Money in Chile Photographs History—While You Wait Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
History—While You Wait By Weare Holbrook Illustrations by Stuart Hay The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson 8 Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay 10 Illustration by F. Strothmann
The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson 8 Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay 10 Illustration by F. Strothmann
The Real Alice of "Wonderland" By C. Patrick Thompson 8 Photographs The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay 10 Illustration by F. Strothmann
The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay Illustration by F. Strothmann
The Bridge Forum By Shepard Barclay 10 Illustration by F. Strothmann
Illustration by F. Strothmann
TT D 1 TTT: 1 (T) 11:1
He Broke With Tradition By Gove Hambidge 11
Portrait by Leonebel Jacobs
Taxes By Bruce Barton 12
Cats of Every Station By Sydney Thompson 14
Etchings and Drawings
School Directory 24
Meeting Place of the Puzzle Makers
INSTITUTE
With the Albanian as Host By Beth Roberts 17
Photographs
Molding a Child's Habits By Blanche C. Weill, Ph. D. 18 Photograph
Protection for Busy Hands By Dorothy Stacey Brown 19
Photographs
That Schoolgirl Gathering By Rachel Dunaway Cox 20



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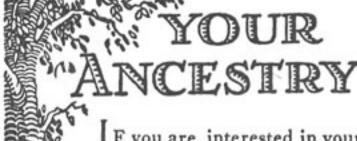


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The Happy Ending

Continued from page two

practice of his half-magics, and he | some local eminence and the respecttook soberly the quite acceptable rewards which these magics earned toward the discharge of his increasing household expenses, now that two of the boys were at school. He prospered, in so far as reached any meashim, in a world wherein mortal beings rule and order matters, and wherein he lived as neither the foremost nor the least of his neighbors. He therefore did not complain, since a responsible householder could perceive nothing to complain about in the logica' daytime.

But it is known also that the infirm poet went by moonlight to a place where three roads met and that he made there a lament for his severance from the Queen of Faëry.

Said Thomas Learmont: "I shall not see you any more, passing among the youthful people of your kingdom -that unforgotten twilit kingdom wherein all were youthful and were more merry-hearted than are the wrangling burghers and the broadshouldered earls, or than are the shining kings that prance past me upon shining war-horses, here in earth's sunlight. It is a very troubling sunlight. My life is a fire that dies in this sunlight. The moments smoulder, and their warmth dwindles in gray spirals, O Queen, in whose fine realm there is not any gray thing nor any sunlight."

Then Thomas Learmont said: "I shall not see you any more, passing among the youthful people of your kingdom. In the village street I regard the comely and dear women, but not you—not you who were once more dear to me than my lean heart remembers, not you whom I found more comely than a gray brain may quite believe. It is a thin sorrow to me that I do not sorrow any longer when the thought of you returns like a faded music, and awakens in me no anguish, O Queen of our young twilit late residence at Ercildoune, near the realm-for it is not anguish, a little Brook of Goblins, then wound up his pensively to be hearing that music's earthly affairs without any further

ful esteem of my fellow creatures."

And Thomas Learmont said also: 'Once every dream was a sword. My dreams are not bright and keen any longer. They waver in thin spirals; and that thin thought of you, which urings which were ever revealed to is like an old thin music, wavers half unregarded through the ordered ways of my living. Yet at dawn it conquers me, O Queen, in the sharp gray panic of dawn. Then an aging woman sleeps on, very sturdily, at my lean side, but I may not sleep because of those little memories which nibble too closely to my lean heart. Then the dawn-wind whispers, over and over again, to the lilt of this faded music, that I shall not see you any more. passing among the youthful people of your kingdom."

> He spoke thus with deep emotion, but he despatched no more magics in this place, since the first small magic he tried there had been successful a thought beyond his wishes. It had left him with a fret-waking suspicion that perhaps even now the unobstructed fern road before him led back to Faëry and to all which he desired.

> He did not attempt to follow that road. He made his lament instead: and the dignified yet so delightfully simple phrasing of it drew tears from his old eyes, and it warmed his childish nature with a fine welling of selfpity, so that the pathos of his circumstances proved a large comfort to the infirm poet whenever his rheumatism permitted him such jaunts in the night air.

These matters are known. Yet the upshot of these matters is not known quite so certainly. Romantics declare that a hind and a hart came out of Faëry to bid Thomas Learmont cease from his play at being a well-thoughtof citizen. But the conservative report that in due time he entered into eternal rest, under the proper medical attention, and that a funeral from his lament over my tinseled downfall into nonsense or any unbecoming scandal.

History-While You Wait

Continued from page seven

her husband concluded. "Our talk is nally dinner was finished. "I think too trivial. We need more epoch- I'll go down to the club," he said. making statements."

Mrs. Oddleigh nodded. "Those good old epochs, like mother used to make," she muttered. And when her husband came home from the office that evening, she was standing in the doorway with arms outstretched. "Hail, spouse!" she cried. "We who are ab. to dine salute you and bid you welcome. 'A man's house is his castle, et domus sua cuique tutissimum refugium' (Coke)."

"Huh?" Mr. Oddleigh stared at her. | winter." "Enter," said Mrs. Oddleigh, with a commanding gesture. "It must be now or never, for while you stand leigh staggered upstairs. He had hung with reluctant feet upon you threshold, old Boreas clutches with frosty fingers at the ankles of your partner in joy and sorrow. Shut the door, He literally fell into bed. and the devil take the hindmost!"

Dazedly, Mr. Oddleigh followed her in "How about dinner?" he inquired, hanging up his coat and hat.

"O rash importunity!" she replied. "'At the beginning of the cask and at the raveled sleave of care, the death the end, take your fill; but be saving in the middle, for at the bottom saving comes too late' (Hesiod)."

"But I'm hungry," explained her life's feast!' (Shakespeare)." husband.

They sat down at the table. "Well," Mr. Oddleigh began chattily, "I met Pete Blurp on the street today and invited him over to the club for a little game tomorrow night, but he said his wife wouldn't let him go. Can you beat it?"

Mrs. Oddleigh nodded sagely. "'He that has wife and children has given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief' (Bacon)."

"Where?" he inquired, glancing about the table.

"That's a quotation from Bacon," she explained.

Mr. Oddleigh ate in silence. Fi-

"You'll stay right here," she replied

"A little exercise will do me good," argued Mr. Oddleigh. "My constitution needs it."

"There is a higher law than the constitution' (Seward)," she informed him. "If you want exercise, you can help me hang curtains in the parlor. We must hang together or we shall hang separately, and I intend to fight it out on this line if it takes all

"Oh, very well," he grumbled.

At ten o'clock that night Mr. Oddsix curtains, fallen off the step ladder twice and smashed seven out of a possible ten fingers with the hammer.

Just as he was dropping off to sleep, he heard his wife's voice again. Its ringing, oratorical tones echoed through the bedroom. "Sleep," she apostrophized, "sleep that knits up of each day's life, sore labor's bath, balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, chief nourisher in

Mr. Oddleigh opened one eye. "'Aw, nerts!' (Oddleigh)," he groaned.

And that, to date, is Mr. Oddleigh's only contribution to Significant Statements of the Twentieth Century. Like most of his contemporaries, heads inarticulate in comparison with the figures of the past

In fact, the only upholders of the old tradition that illustrious persons should use illustrious language are a few of our Congressmen from the South. They have never discoveredbless their hearts! — that actions speak louder than words, and they deserve a place in the archives of the hour. What modern history needs is a little old-fashioned elocution.

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