

A Table of Contents

MY LAST FLAPPERS

THE JELLY-BEAN

This is a Southern story, with the scene laid in the small Lily of Tarleton, Georgia. I have a profound affection for Tarleton, but somehow whenever I write a story about it I receive letters from all over the South denouncing me in no uncertain terms. "The Jelly-Bean," published in "The Metropolitan," drew its full share of these admonitory notes.

It was written under strange circumstances shortly after my first novel was published, and, moreover, it was the first story in which I had a collaborator. For, finding that I was unable to manage the crap-shooting episode, I turned it over to my wife, who, as a Southern girl, was presumably an expert on the technique and terminology of that great sectional pastime.

THE CAMEL'S BACK

I suppose that of all the stories I have ever written this one cost me the least travail and perhaps gave me the most amusement. As to the labor involved, it was written during one day in the city of New Orleans, with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars. I began it at seven in the

morning and finished it at two o'clock the same night. It was published in the "Saturday Evening Post" in 1920, and later included in the O. Henry Memorial Collection for the same year. I like it least of all the stories in this volume.

My amusement was derived from the fact that the camel part of the story is literally true; in fact, I have a standing engagement with the gentleman involved to attend the next fancy-dress party to which we are mutually invited, attired as the latter part of the camel—this as a sort of atonement for being his historian.

MAY DAY

This somewhat unpleasant tale, published as a novelette in the "Smart Set" in July, 1920, relates a series of events which took place in the spring of the previous year. Each of the three events made a great impression upon me. In life they were unrelated, except by the general hysteria of that spring which inaugurated the Age of Jazz, but in my story I have tried, unsuccessfully I fear, to weave them into a pattern—a pattern which would give the effect of those months in New York as they appeared to at least one member of what was then the younger generation.

PORCELAIN AND PINK

"And do you write for any other magazines?" inquired the young lady.

"Oh, yes," I assured her. "I've had some stories and plays in the 'Smart Set,' for instance—"

The young lady shivered.

"The 'Smart Set'!" she exclaimed. "How can you? Why, they publish stuff about girls in blue bathtubs, and silly things like that."

And I had the magnificent joy of telling her that she was referring to "Porcelain and Pink," which had appeared there several months before.

FANTASIES

THE DIAMOND AS BIG AS THE RITZ

These next stories are written in what, were I of imposing stature, I should call my "second manner." "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," which appeared last summer in the "Smart Set," was designed utterly for my own amusement. I was in that familiar mood characterized by a perfect craving for luxury, and the story began as an attempt to feed that craving on imaginary foods.

One well-known critic has been pleased to like this extravaganza better than anything I have written. Personally I prefer "The Offshore Pirate." But, to tamper slightly with Lincoln: If you like this sort of thing, this, possibly, is the sort of thing you'll like.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON

This story was inspired by a remark of Mark Twain's to the effect that it was a pity that the best part of life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end. By trying the experiment upon only one man in a perfectly normal world I have scarcely given his idea a fair trial. Several weeks after completing it, I discovered an almost identical plot in Samuel Butler's "Note-books."

The story was published in "Collier's" last summer and provoked this startling letter from an anonymous admirer in Cincinnati:

"Sir—

I have read the story Benjamin Button in Colliers and I wish to say that as a short story writer you would make a good lunatic I have seen many peices of cheese in my life but of all the peices of cheese I have ever seen you are the biggest peice. I hate to waste a peice of stationary on you but I will."

TARQUIN OF CHEAPSIDE

Written almost six years ago, this story is a product of undergraduate days at Princeton. Considerably revised, it was published in the "Smart Set" in 1921. At the time of its conception I had but one idea—to be a poet—and the fact that I was interested in the ring of every phrase, that I dreaded the obvious in prose if not in plot, shows throughout. Probably the peculiar affection I feel for it depends more upon its age than upon any intrinsic merit.

"O RUSSET WITCH!"

When this was written I had just completed the first draft of my second novel, and a natural reaction made me revel in a story wherein none of the characters need be taken seriously. And I'm afraid that I was somewhat carried away by the feeling that there was no ordered scheme to which I must conform. After due consideration, however, I have decided to let it stand as it is, although the reader may find himself somewhat puzzled at the time element. I had best say that however the years may have dealt with Merlin Grainger, I myself was thinking always in the present. It was published in the "Metropolitan."

UNCLASSIFIED MASTERPIECES

THE LEES OF HAPPINESS

Of this story I can say that it came to me in an irresistible form, crying to be written. It will be accused perhaps of being a mere piece of sentimentality, but, as I saw it, it was a great deal more. If, therefore, it lacks the ring of sincerity, or even, of tragedy, the fault rests not with the theme but with my handling of it.

It appeared in the "Chicago Tribune," and later obtained, I believe, the quadruple gold laurel leaf or some such encomium from one of the anthologists who at present