DOING NOTHING IN COMFORT

HAPPY DAYS FOR THE PEOPLE OF RAMBLERSVILLE.

A Village on Stilts on the Meadows of Jamaica Bay. Only Spot in Greater New York Quite Spanish in Its Ease—Its Many Boat Clubs Explained.

Houses perched precariously on short stilts, a muddy canal whose shallow waters are unmoving and the long, green, elbow sweep of miles of meadows to Jamaica Bay, that's the first comprehensive vision of Ramblersville. It is the only [illegible] along the inglorious creek [illegible] unmoringly over the [illegible] meadows. The town is [illegible] of Jamaica Bay [illegible] having been in [illegible] filled in.

That are the meadows and covered with [illegible] grass or coarser [illegible] in the mud. The houses are [illegible] conventions. Mostly [illegible] and while one door [illegible] a boardwalk the other gives [illegible] a veranda whose unstable stairs [illegible] water's edge.

[illegible] creek is bridged by a humpbacked [illegible] contour as arched as a bridge of Japan. It has an improvised air. The whole town has an improvised air, which accentuates its content with itself. You usually like your own compositions.

If you are weak minded you will of course refer to Venice and Holland, but here is neither. Ramblersville is not a show place. The people who live there are plain, everyday folks. The fathers work in the city and are blessed with neither large incomes nor a sequence of leisure days. They have little houses on the creek or near it. To the matter of fact structures they send wives and children for the summer. The men get down nights and of a Sunday. What does the family do?

It doesn't do anything. Why should it? It is there to have the outdoors and to endure the heat with decisive mitigations, such as a breeze. On many a baking day along the Manhattan pavements the little flags and pennants at Ramblersville are snapping in the breeze that draws as steadily over the meadows from Jamaica Bay as if it were a trade wind.

You may learn in Europe, say on Mediterranean shores, gracefully to do nothing; but in Ramblersville you acquire the art of doing nothing comfortably. The women sit and gossip or proceed to get a meal with an air of polite indulgence. The children promenade the ramshackle boardwalks, or fuss with boats. The youth mend boats, or chug loudly down the creek. People on facing verandas shout languidly to each other across the creek. An indefinite time can be spent making and refining upon plans, and every one takes a long siesta at noon.

Of course you may say the place might be beautiful, it might be simply ornate, it might be shaded with trees and be filled in, the creek dredged, lawns begun. Yes, they might even establish deer of cast iron on the front lawns and a rustic chair beneath a pergola. The answer is that all these things are done consciously. Some of them are artistic beyond all doubt; some are artistic to some minds. The point is, the moment Ramblersville enters upon art, whether in the form of Swinburne or landscape gardening, dissension starts. It becomes one of 3,671 blushing suburbs in the United States. The salvation of Ramblersville is its innate notion of the delights of loafing.

Nothing has ever been done there except under compulsion of necessity, of course when a stilt rotted you had to place it lest the house fall down. Also you had to scoop some mud [illegible] creek so that the boat [illegible] to shallow water. Also you had [illegible] a boardwalk because you could [illegible] wise traverse the meadow. [illegible] care was taken, however, [illegible] walk with the minimum of effort.

In the same way for the same [illegible] citous reason, a post office, a [illegible] station, one or two stores, a [illegible] like a deserted fort were all established. But the visitor is [illegible] lously warned that he must not [illegible] if he can go away without wrecking [illegible] life, and while in Ramblersville he [illegible] be careful to do nothing incompatible with the spirit of the place.

Each house would seem a boat club. There is the sign above each house, "Fortuna," "Happy Days," "Pastime B. C.," "Lone Star B. C." and so through all the simple appellations. None is far fetched. You might think that here at last you had found a sign of affectation in Ramblersville, but stop. Each family is literally a boat club. The boat club sign is significant only as is the name plate or number on a city house.

One of the new houses in Ramblersville has a number. It is an innovation and the Ramblers started to reproach the newcomer for going to unnecessary exertion in getting a number and affixing it to his door. Not until he had proved conclusively that all the boat club labels had been preempted and that getting the number was actually easier for him was he restored to standing.

Photo by Vander Weyde.
AN OLD FISHERMAN PULLING UP THE BAIT TRAP.

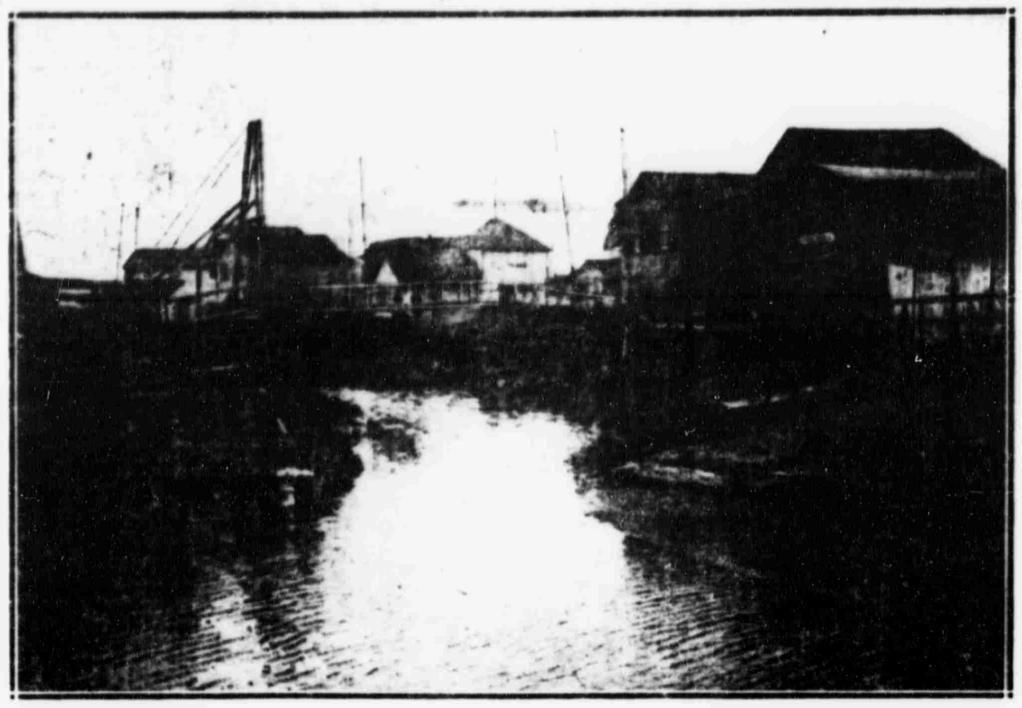

Photo by Vander Weyde.
THE WINDING CREEK AND THE BRIDGE WITH THE JAPANESE EFFECT AT RAMBLERSVILLE.

Photo by Vander Weyde
A FISHERWOMAN.

Photo by Vander Weyde
A CALM DAY ON JAMAICA BAY.

spot in Greater New York quite Spanish in its easygoing way of life. To reach it you take a B. R. T. train from Delancey street or a Long Island Railroad local train on the Rockaway Beach division. Once there you may indeed grasp how sweet it is to do nothing at all.

In Ramblersville the inhabitants putter through endless summer days. It is not a place to know the joys of the country. There are no cows. There are no horses. The farm, the suburban cottage, the warm weather palaces of the very rich are alike absent. There is no transit in Ramblersville except by boats.

SKYSCRAPER TALES

The Janitor's Inquest.

I.

Andrew Leggett, retired merchant, entered one morning his office in the Aerial Building, where he attended leisurely to his own comfortable affairs. Had it not been the 13th day of that particular month in that particular year he would not have come down town at all. The very passing of what was a most important date to a person dear to him, and all the dearer for his neglect, had given him a restless night. Again and again a dizzy feeling had come over him that made him feel as if he were losing his hold upon earth.

The pity of it, the pity of a weak, indulgent nature that had always postponed an evil day until it became a more evil day. "I did mean fairly by her, but," he kept murmuring in the very torture of his good intentions unfulfilled.

There was a neatness and brightness about the office which came not from the perfunctory care of the building. Everything was spick and span and set to his taste. The light just right, his favorite rose in a vase on his desk, and beside it his mail in an orderly pile.

"Good morning, Miss Prine," he said to the dark, slight young woman awaiting his orders at the typewriter opposite, and there was gratefulness in his tones.

This stranger, whom he had engaged but the week before through a sudden interest in the cleverness and dignity of her address, had certainly proved a treasure; so competent, so alert, so altogether fit to serve his elderly indolence.

"I am sorry you were here ahead of me, Mr. Leggett," began Miss Prine, and then she stopped short on perceiving that her employer did not heed her. Indeed, he was too absorbed in his mail to answer, as he should have done, that he had not been there before that day.

Alice Prine resumed her routine duties, but this did not prevent her from watching her employer in the little glass over her desk. There was no wrong purpose in this scrutiny. It was simply an idle interest bred by his evident distraction. She liked this kindly old gentleman, who out of the goodness of his heart had taken her at her own word without a glance at the letters of recommendation. What concerned him concerned her for his sake.

There was an eager impotence about Mr. Leggett's movements that seemed characteristic to Miss Prine. Though obviously intent on the contents of the long legal letter bearing the superscription of "Righter Brothers, Attorneys at Law," he sniffed at the rose and held it between his teeth before he drew out and read the legal document it contained. Miss Prine could see that this was a deed of conveyance of some sort. She could even discern that it was already signed by witnesses and that its acknowledgment was complete. It made her smile to see how the lawyers had conformed to the procrastination and sloth of their client by having all the formalities of execution ready for his signature, as they would say, nunc pro tunc.

Vacillating ever in his reading and rereading, in his going back to go over again, Mr. Leggett finally reached the determination of signing his name. He tossed down the rose, he poised his pen. Then suddenly he fell back limp and lifeless in his chair. There was no mistaking it, he was dead before Miss Prine could bend over him.

Even in her distraction a name frequently repeated on the document's outspread pages caught Miss Prine's attention. It was her mother's name; and, yes, this conveyance, if it only were signed, as it another moment it would have been signed, gave to her mother a fortune.

As it would have been signed! As it should be signed, in legal parlance, nunc pro tunc. Though darker and slighter than ever there was no hesitation about Miss Prine. She snatched the pen from the dead man's hand. She wrote his name in characters too true for even him to dispute. Then she ran screaming out into the hall.

Joel Faxon, janitor of the Aerial Building, was just passing by. Jerked from the droop of his heavy eyelids and the deliberateness with which he moved, an observant onlooker might have deduced that he was passing by with intention. He followed the young woman into the office, closing the door. He took in the situation and more with a glance. "Whin did it happen?" he asked.

"Oh, it must be ten minutes ago," answered Miss Prine, now hysterical. "I was so frightened I could not stir."

"And yet, my dear," rejoined the janitor pityingly, "the ink on that signature is still wet."

II

Presently there was a tumult in the office as tenants who had also heard the scream kept crowding in. A portly young man with a profusion of light hair and lovely and watery blue eyes glimmering coldly through large spectacles pressed forward in a professional way. It was Dr. Adolph Klaar, examining physician with the Sempiternal Life Insurance Company on the floor above.

The good doctor gave a sharp glance at the stack of mail, apparently untouched, and there was a gratified gleam to his eyes like the touch of the sun on wintry waters as he then proceeded about his duties.

"Apoplexy? It might be. Heart failure? Hum. Of course it is always that in a sense," at length he answered to excited inquiries. "There are some strange convulsive features." He sniffed suspiciously at the rose. "Faxon, has the Coroner been summoned?" he asked.

"To waast," responded the janitor.

"And Judge Righter, whom I understand was the deceased's personal attorney?"

"Here, they're coomin' together, like the best part of a funeral, whin yoursiff's included."

The sharp faced lawyer and the dull faced official at once formed an autocratic triumvirate with the mild faced physician. Under their joint edict the office was cleared for joint consultation. But the lawyer, as if at a whispered hint from one of his associates, held back the janitor for the moment.

"Just keep an eye on that stenographer. What's her name? Oh, yes, Miss Prine," he said. "We may want her as a witness."

"I shud do that in anny case, sor," returned Faxon, "since I allus have an eye for a good gurl."

Accordingly, and as it was now the noon hour, the janitor asked Miss Prine to his house on the roof for a bite and a sup. The girl accompanied him in a silent and stolid submission, which showed she had not failed to put her own construction on Judge Righter's intervention; but there was a melting influence to Faxon's cordiality which it was hard to withstand. In a trice he had prepared a hot cup of tea and produced the thin sliced chicken and rolls from the locker, pressing them upon her with such adroit kindness that as she looked up in thankfulness her eyes filled with tears.

"Good," cried Faxon. "Come tears, go fears. Eat and get strengt', my dear, and thin the doves above will grow wiser than the suppints below; and let me tell you for a sauce that I'm your frind and will stand by you through thick and thin ag'inst all the begoggled Dutch doctors in the univarse."

"But I did it," declared Alice Prine after a brave attempt at eating.

"I know. Av coorse you did; but it's the why that goes with me, miss."

Then she told him the sordid tragedy that had blighted her mother's life and had set her battling without a name for existence.

"Why shouldn't I do it," she argued fiercely, "when I knew, when I knew it was but the sorriest recompense for his cruel and cowardly desertion? He was about to do it for himself willingly, gladly; let him have that poor credit. The pen was in his hand ready to sign. The deed was all fixed for execution, signed by witnesses, certified by a notary. Who had a better right to do for him what he couldn't do for himself?"

"Nobody, my dear; and let me tell you that same hankypanky business of putting the legal cart before the harse is going to prove a help over the present hard place. Don't you see? Lawyer Righter for his own protection will never dispute the correctness of the paper, and the doctor whin he finds no trace of it in the mail, as no doubt he has done by this sneaking time, will conclude that he tunned the trick just in time."

"Wait, wait," panted the girl. "You must speak plainer, so much mystery sets me wild. I can understand that Mr. Righter will stand by the execution of the deed rather than admit his own professional conduct, but why should the doctor be searching for it, he relieved not to find it? How would he know anything about it, and why should he care even if he did know?"

"The noes have it, my dear; I don't know that mesiff. What I do know, though, is that I saw the doctor sneaking into your office early the marn with the rid, rid rose such as Mr. Leggett used to sport, and out of my high disregard for him I thought it prudint to carry off the wan he left and put its mate, which was as innocent as it looked, in its place. The rose he brought I have put away safe with somethin' ilse."

"You mean the . . . Oh, here he is at last, at last!"

The girl darted out of the little house on the roof, her face transformed into beauty by a heartfelt emotion as a young man came up briskly through the hatchway.

III

A manly and personable young chap this, with something of an official air, despite his civilian dress. In a word, a plain clothes man from Headquarters and a man who tried to be straight and square.

"Oh, at last I have found you, at last I can thank you as I do, as I do, for saving my life on that dreadful night, for saving me from myself."

"It's yoforself that saved you, miss," replied Ruthven, "as I knew it would as soon as you pulled yourself together and looked for the light out of the dark . . ."

"Ah, it was so black dark, that despair! I could not have believed there was hope and help for me, but for your kind, kind words. And yet the very next day I found work where I least expected it with Mr. Leggett——"

"What? Is your name Alice Prine, and are you the girl they sent me after? Then I'm damned if I do it; no, not if I get broke!"

"Oh, yis you will," interposed Faxon, coming up with an innocent air which said louder than words that he had been listening with intent. "That and this is jest what you're goin' to do. You will telephone Dr. Klaar that you have Miss Prine right and tight and all alone in my little house on the roof, where I had left her, and thin when he comes sneaking up for his own perliminary examination you will leave him to me. In which evint, it's me private judgment that the bot', the bot' of youse, mind, will be made, not broke, for life."

"But he warned the Coroner," hesitated Ruthven, "that it looked as if Leggett had died from the effects of some such poison as brucine and that while he was not quite ready to testify the inquest won't be held for an hour yet. He already had reason to believe that it had been administered by means of the red rose on Mr. Leggett's desk. He said that Mr. Leggett had the habit of holding a rose he favored in his teeth and that Miss Prine knew of this habit and had the best opportunity to take advantage of it."

"It's a straight steer. I'm giving you, all the same," persisted the janitor, "and if you love me you'll do as I say."

That settled it. Ruthven telephoned Presently Dr. Klaar slipped cautiously out on the roof from the hatchway.

"I want to speak a word in private with your prisoner for her own good," he whispered. "You keep guard outside, my man."

"You just bet I will," murmured Ruthven, taking his post as the doctor in his noiseless way went inside. "No one will get away, you least of all."

It was dark within the little house, for the shades were drawn, but the doctor could make out Miss Prine sitting at the table, her face in her hands.

"I don't blame you for feeling frightened, my girl," he began in his patronizing way. "To be suspected of murder, however unjustly, means ruin in these days of publicity. Who would want as an employee a person whose face had been blazoned in the papers as that of a poisoner? Then the suspense, consequent upon conviction, the never ending, ever ending wait in the death house, ugh; the march to the chair, the exposure—it is maddening! I as a physician who knows the sensitive nature of women would save you from such torture, and I will."

"How? Oh, how?" entreated Miss Prine.

"In the simplest way in the world. The rose suspected to be saturated with poison is now in my office for analysis. If I say that this suspected condition does not exist, that the flower is in its natural, innocent state, why, then the other alternative, that Mr. Leggett died of an apoplexy, must be accepted. It rests absolutely with me, or rather with yourself."

"With myself? What can I do except to thank you?"

"Yes, but in pregnant, practical words, not in idle words. Listen, I saved Mr. Leggett's life a few years ago, as is well known, by my skill and care, attending him not only as a physician but as a nurse through a terrible illness. He was profuse in his promises and boasts of all he was going to do for me; but he did nothing, less than nothing. This was perhaps inevitable from his selfish, indulgent nature, for his expenses always exceeded his income, but lately, yesterday, in fact, he became vested with the residuary interest in a large estate. This he should have devised to me, out of simple justice; this he did deed to me, as you will testify, verifying his signature and acknowledgment and your own signature as witness or——"

The words died in the doctor's throat, at the throttle of giant hands, which also choked away breath and strength. Bent back over the press of a great knee, he was in the telling of it a frightened, bewildered bundle, all bound and trussed on the settle.

Surveying his work with an instant's satisfaction, Faxon stepped to the door with whispered instructions, upon which Ruthven hastened away. Then he returned, after bolts were drawn and shades run up, to jerk his captive into a sitting position.

"Silence in coort," he said. "We will perceed with the Janitor's Inquest!"

IV

"Fustly, doctor," began Faxon with a judicial air, though there was a menace for silence in the way he kept waving a stout blackthorn stick, "you are not as keen as you think you be, for otherwise you wudn't have planned to do a sneaky thing out of your usual order. Eternal vigilance is the price of a janitor's job, and whin I seen you kem in the marn through the side intrance and climb up nine pair of stairs instid of riding luxurisly a full two hour ahead of your custom I knew somethin' rotten was doin'. You didn't reason on that little winder across the coort from Leggett's office, knowing that it only let into a storeroom, but I was behind the flapping shade. I seen you put the rose on Mr. Leggett's desk, and all the rest of it, do you understand? And what is more, before you sneaked back along the ridge like to break your neck, Jake, the elevator man, and Watts, the electrician, and Mrs. Mooney, the head cleaner, whose wuds anny jury wud take for the Gospel trut', seen you too.

"Wait a bit until the d'rect is t'roo," continued Faxon impressively, as the doctor wriggled either in resistance or submission, "and thin you shall have your innings fair. Be this time Ruthven has taken the rose from your office and delivered it to the Coroner with the message from you that it is most important to hold it secret and safe for the prisint. Do you twig? There'll be no getting away with the carpus delicty in this coort; and now go ahead with your defince, though if you're prudint you'll make tarms, and this avoide the river indint, ever indint wait in the deat' huss, the march to the cheer, the exposur' so maddening to your sensitive natur'."

There wasn't a fight left in the doctor. Even as Faxon whipped off the gag and bonds he was grovelling on the floor, praying, beseeching, promising to do anything, everything, if only he might have a living chance to flee and hide, never to return.

"I'll do better than thot," agreed the janitor, "if you perduce at waast and without a wud the exhibits in the case I demand. Fust, the deed you wanted Miss Prine to swear to. Very good; I'll put this with the small but select collection of forgeries I hev alriddy started. Second, that folded blue paper I seen you steak out of Mr. Leggett's desk. What? You hold back on thot? Shall I tilephone for the perlice? Ah, this is it, is it? Well, I guess yis, be the fathers, I know it is! Scoot thin and good riddance, as if the divvle was alriddy arter you!"

"My dear," said the janitor gently, when the doctor had shown his aptitude for sneaking the last time, "do you mind teling me your mother's name?"

"Her maiden name was Ethel Luttin," replied Miss Prine. "She was an actress when Mr. Leggett married her, as she solemnly declares he did. But what could she do? She was young and giddy at the time, it was in England when they were travelling about, she does not even know the parish. When he deserted her he took the certificate with him, no doubt to destroy——"

"No, here it is," returned the janitor, showing the folded blue paper. "The fact that the doctor stole it is good proof of its authinticity, don't you see? It wud gev your mother her dower rights, it wud gev you full title as the heir. Av coorse he didn't want anny such claim popping up aginst his fraudulent wan. Now we'll go down and tell the facts as much as mobile nicissary to Judge Righter and the Coroner and hint to thot fine young fellow Ruthven of the good luck that is surely coming to you bot'; but fust we'll burn the two exhibits I hev in my small but sklect collection of forgeries—and niver do thot agin, my dear."

Patted the Czarina on the Back.

From the Gentlewoman.

Lord Tennyson used to relate a story showing the thoughtfulness of Queen Alexandra. It was on the occasion of a voyage with Mr. Gladstone and many distinguished people were on board. Tennyson read "The Grandmother" on board because the Princess of Wales asked for it.

"I read it," said Tennyson, "in a cabin on deck. The Princess sat close to me on one side and a young lady, whom I didn't know, on the other. The wind came through an open window and the Princess whispered, 'Put on your hat,' but I said I ought, if possible, to make myself balder than ever before so many royalties.

"She said again, 'Oh, put it on!' so I did, and I heard afterward that the King of Denmark's court fool, who was in the background, they really kept a court fool, remarked, 'He may be laureate, but he has not learned court manners.'

"When I was done the ladies praised me, and I patted the unknown one on the back by way of reply, and presently I found out she was the Empress of Russia."

"Had you any talk with the Czar?"

"Hardly any. He said he couldn't speak English. Perhaps he was disgusted at my patting his wife on the back. His head was up in the cabin ceiling as he walked about below."

THE GREAT DRY WAY.

Experiences of a Traveller in Land of Dantean Desolation.

"The country I was now approaching," said the traveller, "was desolate and dreary in the extreme.

"I was proceeding down a great rocky cañon, from which at irregular intervals ravines led to the right and left. Great mountains of stone rose before and behind me, apparently blocking my path, but far ahead I could see a faint streak of daylight which showed me there was an outlet to the deep defile.

"Although there were evidences of human habitations I could not see a soul. Occasionally, far off, I could hear sounds which resembled somewhat the toot of a steamboat whistle, and this made me think I was near the sea or some great river.

"Once in a while I heard what to my imagination sounded like the clanging of bells, but though I looked carefully it to several of the ravines I could see nothing that resembled human life. At other times I seemed to hear shrill, hoarse cries of great distress.

"I was parched and thirsty from my long walk and the stones were rough and my feet were weary, but still there seemed no end to the length of that interminable deserted cañon. I panted for water, but the rocks yielded none. I longed for a drink of whiskey, but my flask was empty and there was no place to replenish it.

"Still I stumbled blindly on, knowing that to pause there and tamely submit to the desolate surroundings would be folly. So on and on through the terrible wilderness I plodded and trudged, hoping against hope I would soon see some sign of that human life which had left its footprints and handiwork all around me."

"Great heavens!" cried the listener. "Where was this terrible, desolate country—in Alaskan mountains or in the wilds of Arizona?"

"Neither," replied the traveller with a smile, "I was walking down lower Broadway in New York at 7 o'clock at night when every one had gone to the other end of the island to get dinner."

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