TO HIM WHO WAITS—The Awakening of the Hermit on the Mountain Top Who Smiled in His Beard—BY O. HENRY

THE Hermit of the Hudson was bustling about his cave with unusual animation.

The cave was on or in the top of a little spur of the Catskills that had strayed down to the river's edge, and not having a ferry ticket had to stop there. The bijou mountains were densely wooded and were infested by ferocious squirrels and woodpeckers that forever menaced the summer transients.

Like a badly sewn strip of white braid, a macadamized road ran between the green skirt of the hills and the foamy lace of the river's edge. A dim path wound from the comfortable road up the rocky heights to the hermit's cave. One mile up stream was the Viewpoint Inn, to which summer folk from the city came, having cool, electric fanned apartments that they might be driven about in burning sunshine, shrieking in gasolene launches, by spindle legged Modreds bearing the blankest of shields.

Train your lorgnette upon the hermit and let your eye receive the personal touch that shall endear you to the hero.

A man of 40, judging him fairly, with long hair curling at the ends, dramatic eyes and a forked brown beard like those that were imposed upon the West some years ago by self-appointed "divine healers" who succeeded the grasshopper crop. His outward vesture appeared to be a kind of gunnysacking cut and made into a garment that would have made the fortune of a London tailor. His long, well shaped fingers, delicate nose and poise of manner raised him high above the class of hermits who fear water and bury money in oyster cans in their caves in spots indicated by rude crosses chipped in the stone wall above.

The hermit's home was not altogether a cave. The cave was an addition to the hermitage, which was a rude hut made of poles daubed with clay and covered with the best quality of rust-proof zinc roofing.

In the house proper there were stone slabs for seats, a rustic bookcase made of unplaned poplar planks, and a table formed of a wooden slab laid across two upright pieces of granite—something between the furniture of a Druid temple and that of a Broadway beefsteak dungeon. Hung against the walls were skins of wild animals purchased in the vicinity of Eighth street and University place New York.

The rear of the cabin merged into the cave. There the hermit cooked his meals on a rude stone hearth. With infinite patience and an old axe he had chopped natural shelves in the rocky walls. On them stood his stores of flour, bacon, lard, talcum powder, kerosene, baking powder, sodamint tablets, pepper, salt and Olivi-Cremo Emulsion for chaps and roughness of the hands and face.

The hermit had hermitted there for ten years. He was an asset of the Viewpoint Inn. To its guests he was second in interest only to the Mysterious Echo in the Haunted Glen. And the Lovers' Leap beat him only a few inches, flat-footed. He was known far (but not very wide, on account of the topography) as a scholar of brilliant intellect who had foresworn the world because he had been jilted in a love affair.

Every Saturday night the Viewpoint Inn sent to him surreptitiously a basket of provisions. He never left the immediate outskirts of his hermitage. Guests of the inn who visited him said his stores of knowledge, wit and scintillating philosophy were simply wonderful, you know. That summer the Viewpoint Inn was crowded with guests. So on Saturday nights there were extra cans of tomatoes and sirloin steak, instead of "rounds," in the hermit's basket.

Now you have the material allegations in the case. So make way for romance.

Evidently the hermit expected a visitor. He carefully combed his long hair and parted his apostolic beard. When the 98 cent alarm clock on a stone shelf announced the hour of 5 he picked up his gunnysacking skirts, brushed them carefully, gathered an oaken staff and strolled slowly into the thick woods that surrounded the hermitage.

He had not long to wait. Up the faint pathway, slippery with its carpet of pine needles, tolled Beatrix, youngest and fairest of the famous Trenholme sisters. She was all in blue from hat to canvas pumps, varying in tint from the shade of the tinkle of a bluebell at daybreak on a spring Saturday to the deep hue of a Monday morning at 9, when the washerwoman has failed to show up.

Beatrix dug her cerulean parasol deep into the pine needles and sighed. The hermit, on the q. t., removed a grass burr from the ankle of one sandalled foot with the big toe of his other one. She blued—and almost starched and ironed him—with her cobalt eyes.

"It must be so nice," she said in little tremulous gasps, "to be a hermit and have ladies climb mountains to talk to you."

The hermit folded his arms and leaned against a tree. Beatrix, with a sigh, settled down upon the mat of pine needles like a bluebird upon her nest. The hermit followed suit, drawing his feet rather awkwardly under his gunnysacking.

"It must be nice to be a mountain," said he, with ponderous lightness, "and have angels in blue climb up you instead of flying over you."

"Mamma had neuralgia," said Beatrix, "and went to bed, or I couldn't have come. It's dreadfully hot in that horrid old inn. But we hadn't the money to go anywhere else this summer."

"Last night," said the hermit, "I climbed to the top of that big rock above us. I could see the lights of the inn and hear a strain or two of the music when the wind was right. I imagined you moving gracefully in the arms of others to the dreamy music of the waltz amid the fragrance of flowers. Think how lonely I must have been!"

The youngest, handsomest and poorest of the famous Trenholme sisters sighed.

"You haven't quite hit it," she said plaintively. "I was moving gracefully at the arms of another. Mamma had one of her periodical attacks of rheumatism in both elbows and shoulders and I had to rub them for an hour with that horrid old liniment. I hope you didn't think that smelled like flowers.

"You know there were some West Point boys and a yachtload of young men from the city at last evening's weekly dance. I've known mamma to sit by an open window for three hours with one-half of her registering 85 degrees and the other half frostbitten, and never sneeze once. But just let a bunch of ineligibles come around where I am and she'll begin to swell at the knuckles and shriek with pain. And I have to take her to her room and rub her arms.

"To see mamma dressed you'd be surprised to know the number of square inches of surface there are to her arms.

"I think it must be delightful to be a hermit. That—cassock—or gabardine, isn't it?—that you wear is so becoming. Do you make it—or them—of course you must have changes—yourself? And what a blessed relief it must be to wear sandals instead of shoes! Think how we must suffer—no matter how small I buy my shoes, they always pinch my toes. Oh, why can't there be lady hermits too!"

The most beautiful and most adolescent Trenholme sister extended two slender blue ankles that ended in two enormous blue silk bows that almost concealed two fairy Oxfords, also of one of the forty-seven shades of blue. The hermit, as if impelled by a kind of reflex telepathic action, drew his bare toes further beneath his gunnysacking.

"I have heard about the romance of your life," said Miss Trenholme softly. "They have it printed on the back of the menu card at the inn. Was she very beautiful and charming?"

"On the bills of fare!" muttered the hermit; "but what do I care for the world's babble? Yes, she was of the highest and grandest type. Then," he continued, "then I thought the world could never contain another equal to her. So I forsook it and repaired to this mountain fastness to spend the remainder of my life alone—to devote and dedicate my remaining years to her memory."

"It's grand," said Miss Trenholme, "absolutely grand. I think a hermit's life is the ideal one. No bill collectors calling, no dressing for dinner—how I'd like to be one! But there's no such luck for me. If I don't marry this season I honestly believe mamma will force me into settlement work or trimming hats. It isn't because I'm getting old or ugly, but we haven't enough money left to butt in at any of the swell places any more. And I don't want to marry—unless it's somebody I like. That's why I'd like to be a hermit. Hermits don't ever marry, do they?"

"Hundreds of 'em," said the hermit, "when they've found the right one."

"But they're hermits," said the youngest and beautifulest, "because they've lost the right one, aren't they?"

"Because they think they have," answered the recluse, fatuously. "Wisdom comes to one in a mountain cave as well as to one in the world of 'swells,' as I believe they are called in the argot."

"When one of the 'swells' brings it to them," said Miss Trenholme. "And my folks are swells. That's the trouble. But there are so many swells at the seashore in the summer time that we hardly amount to more than ripples. So we've had to put all our money into river and harbor appropriations.

"We were all girls, you know. There were four of us. I'm the only surviving one. The others have been married off. All to money. Mamma is so proud of my sisters. They send her the loveliest penwipers and art calendars every Christmas. I'm the only one on the market now. I'm forbidden to look at any one who hasn't money."

"But——" began the hermit.

"But, oh," said the beautifulest, "of course hermits have great pots of gold and doubloons buried somewhere near three great oak trees. They all have."

"I have not," said the hermit, regretfully.

"I'm so sorry," said Miss Trenholme. "I always thought they had. I think I must go now."

Oh, beyond question, she was the beautifulest.

"Fair lady——" began the hermit.

"I am Beatrix Trenholme—some call me Trix," she said. "You must come to the inn to see me."

"I haven't been a stone's throw from my cave in ten years," said the hermit.

"You must come to see me there," she repeated. "Any evening except Thursday." The hermit smiled weakly.

"Good-by," she said, gathering the folds of her pale blue skirt. "I shall expect you. But not on Thursday evening, remember."

What an interest it would give to the future menu cards of the Viewpoint Inn to have these printed lines added to them: "Only once during the more than ten years of his lonely existence did the mountain hermit leave his famous cave. That was when he was irresistibly drawn to the inn by the fascinations of Miss Beatrix Trenholme, youngest and most beautiful of the celebrated Trenholme sisters, whose brilliant marriage to——"

"It's grand," said Miss Trenholme, "absolutely grand. I think a hermit's life is the ideal one."

Aye, to whom?

The hermit walked back to the hermitage. At the door stood Bob Binkley, his old friend and companion of the days before he had renounced the world—Bob, himself arrayed like the orchids of the greenhouse in the summer man's polychromatic garb—Bob, the millionaire, with his fat, firm, smooth, shrewd face, his diamond rings, sparkling fob chain and pleated bosom. He was two years older than the hermit, and looked five years younger.

"You're Hamp Ellison, in spite of those whiskers and that going away bathrobe," he shouted. "I read about you on the bill of fare at the inn. They've run your biography in between the cheese' and 'Not Responsible for Coats and Umbrellas.' What'd you do it for, Hamp? And ten years too—geewhilikins!"

"You're just the same," said the hermit. "Come in and sit down. Sit on that limestone rock over there; it's softer than the granite."

"I can't understand it, old man," said Binkley. "I can see how you could give up a woman for ten years, but not ten years for a woman. Of course I know why you did it. Everybody does. Edith Carr. She jilted four or five besides you. But you were the only one who took to a hole in the ground. The others had recourse to whiskey, the Klondike, politics and that similia similibus cure.

"But, say—Hamp; Edith Carr was just about the finest woman in the world—hightoned and proud and noble, and playing her ideals to win at all kinds of odds. She certainly was a crackerjack."

"After I renounced the world," said the hermit, "I never heard of her again."

"She married me," said Binkley.

The hermit leaned against the wooden walls of his ante-cave, and wriggled his toes.

"I know how you feel about it," said Binkley. "What else could she do? There were four sisters and her mother and old man Carr—you remember how he put all the money he had into dirigible balloons? Well, everything was coming down and nothing going up with 'em, as you might say.

"Well, I know Edith as well as you do—although I married her. I was worth a million then, but I've run it up since to between five and six. It wasn't me she wanted as much as—well, it was about like this. She had that bunch on her hands, and they had to be taken care of. Edith married me two months after you did the ground squirrel act. I thought she liked me, too, at the time."

"And now?" inquired the recluse.

"We're better friends than ever now. She got a divorce from me two years ago. Just incompatibility. I didn't put in any defence. Well, well, well, Hamp, this is certainly a funny dugout you've built here. But you were always a hero of fiction. Seems like you'd have been the very one to strike Edith's fancy. Maybe you did—but it's the bank roll that catches 'em, my boy—your caves and whiskers won't do it. Honestly, Hamp, don't you think you've been a darned fool?"

The hermit smiled behind his tangled beard. He was and always had been so superior to the crude and mercenary Binkley that even his vulgarities could not anger him. Moreover, his studies and meditations in his retreat had raised him far above the little vanities of the world. His little mountainside had been almost an Olympus, over the edge of which he saw, smiling, the bolts hurled in the valleys of man below.

Had his ten years of renunciation, of thought, of devotion to an ideal, of living scorn of a sordid world, been in vain? Up from the world had come to him the youngest and beautifulest—fairer than Edith—one and three-seventh times lovelier than the seven years served Rachel. So, the hermit smiled in his beard.

When Binkley had relieved the hermitage from the blot of his presence and the first faint star showed above the pines the hermit got the can of baking powder from his cupboard. He still smiled behind his beard.

There was a light rustle in the doorway. There stood Edith Carr, with all the added beauty and stateliness and noble bearing that ten years had brought her.

She was never one to chatter. She looked at the hermit with her large, thinking dark eyes. The hermit stood still, surprised into a pose as motionless as her own. Only his subconscious sense of the fitness of things caused him to turn the baking powder can slowly in his hands until its red label was hidden against his bosom.

"I am stopping at the inn," said Edith in low but clear tones. "I heard of you there. I told myself that I must see you. I want to ask your forgiveness. I sold my happiness for money. There were others to be provided for—but that does not excuse me. I just wanted to see you and ask your forgiveness.

"You have lived here ten years, they tell me, cherishing my memory! I was blind, Hampton. I could not see then that all the money in the world cannot weigh in the scales against a faithful heart. If—but it is too late now of course."

Her assertion was a question clothed as best it could be in a loving woman's pride. But through the thin disguise the hermit saw easily that his lady had come back to him—if he chose. He had won a golden crown—if it pleased him to take it. The reward of his decade of faithfulness was ready for his hand—if he desired to stretch it forth.

For the space of one minute the old enchantment shone upon him with a reflected radiance. And then by turns he felt the manly sensations of indignation at having been discarded and of repugnance at having been, as it were, sought again. And last of all—how strange that it should have come at last!—the pale blue vision of the beautifulest of the Trenholme sisters illuminated his mind's eye and left him without a waver.

"It is too late," he said, in deep tones, pressing the baking powder can against his heart.

Once she turned after she had gone slowly twenty yards down the path. The hermit had begun to twist the lid off his can, but he hid it again under his sacking robe. He could see her great eyes shining sadly through the twilight; but he stood inflexible in the doorway of his shack and made no sign.

Just as the moon rose on Thursday evening the hermit was seized by the world madness.

Up from the inn, fainter than the horns of elfland, came now and then a few bars of music played by the casino band. The Hudson was broadened by the night into an illimitable sea—those lights, dimly seen on its opposite shore, were not beacons for prosaic trolley lines, but low set stars millions of miles away. The waters in front of the inn were gay with fireflies—or were they motor boats, smelling of gasolene and oil? Once the hermit had known these things and had sported with Amaryllis in the shade of the red and white striped awnings. But for ten years he had turned a heedless ear to these far off echoes of a frivolous world. But tonight there was something wrong.

The casino band was playing a waltz—a waltz. What a fool he had been to tear deliberately ten years of his life from the calendar of existence for one who had given him up for the false joys that wealth—"tum ti tum tum ti"—how did that waltz go? But those years had not been sacrificed—had they not brought him the star and pearl of all the world, the youngest and beautifulest of——

"But do not come on Thursday evening," she had insisted. Perhaps now she would be moving slowly and gracefully to the strains of that waltz held closely by West Pointers or city commuters, while he, who had read in her eyes things that had recompensed him for ten years of life, moped like some wild animal in its mountain den. Why should——

"Damn it," said the hermit suddenly, "I'll do it."

He threw down his Marcus Aurelius and threw off his gunnysack toga. He dragged a dust covered trunk from a corner of the cave and with difficulty wrenched open its lid.

Candles he had in plenty and the cave was soon aglow. Clothes—ten years old in cut—scissors, razors, hats, shoes, all his discarded attire and belongings, were dragged ruthlessly from their renunciatory rest and strewn about in painful disorder.

A pair of scissors soon reduced his beard sufficiently for the dulled razors to perform approximately their office. Cutting his own hair was beyond the hermit's skill. So he only combed and brushed it backward as smoothly as he could. Charity forbids us to consider the heartburnings and exertions of one so long removed from haberdashery and society.

At the last the hermit went to an inner corner of his cave and began to dig in the soft earth with a long iron spoon. Out of the cavity he thus made he drew a tin can, and out of the can $3,000 in bills tightly rolled and wrapped in oiled silk. He was a real hermit, as this may assure you.

You may take a brief look at him as he hastens down the little mountainside. A long, wrinkled black frock coat reached to his calves. White duck trousers, unacquainted with the tailor's goose, a pink shirt, white standing collar with brilliant blue butterfly tie and buttoned congress gaiters. But think, sir and madam—ten years! From beneath a narrow brimmed straw hat with a striped band flowed his hair.

Seeing him, with all your shrewdness you could not have guessed him. You would have said that he played Hamlet—or the tuba—or pinochle—you would never have laid your hand on your heart and said: "He is a hermit who lived ten years in a cave for love of one lady—to win another."

The dancing pavilion extended above the waters of the river. Gay lanterns and frosted electric globes shed a soft glamour within it. A hundred ladies and gentlemen from the inn and summer cottages flitted in and about it. To the left of the dusty roadway down which the hermit had tramped was the inn and grillroom. Something seemed to be on there, too. The windows were brilliantly lighted, and music was playing—music different from the two-steps and waltzes of the casino band.

A negro man wearing a white jacket came through the inn gate with its immense granite posts and wrought iron lamp holders.

"What is going on here to-night?" asked the hermit.

"Well, sah," said the servitor, "dey is havin' de regular Thursday evenin' dance in de casino. And in de grillroom dere's a beefsteak dinner, sah."

The hermit glanced up at the inn on the hillside, whence burst suddenly a triumphant strain of splendid harmony.

"And up there," said he, "they are playing Mendelssohn—what is going on up there?"

"Up in de inn," said the dusky one, "dey is a weddin' goin' on. Mr. Binkley, a mighty rich man, am marryin' Miss Trenholme, sah—de young lady who am quite de belle of de place, suh."

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"I can see how you could give up a woman for ten years, but not ten years for a woman."

Office Hours

TWO men with offices in the Wall Street district, each employing a clerical force of a dozen persons, were talking shop at luncheon the other day and one said he was an early riser and usually was at the office before any of the clerks.

"I'm an early riser too, and get up because I like to," said the other, "but I never get to my office before 9 o'clock, a half hour after the office opens for business. I do this because after considerable experience and observation I found that it is more effective with the employees.

"They are shrewd folks, they are, and have their own methods of sizing up the boss, and I find that they conclude that the employer who gets to his office early either needs the extra time to do his work in or he wants to see that his employees are not beating time on him. Either of these conditions is, in my opinion, not to the interest of the employer.

"Therefore I let them see that I trust them to be on hand promptly and also that I can do my part of the work in less time than they can. I can't always, but when I can't I do it at home, where they can't see me or know anything about it. I respect my people and they respect me and I don't have to get to the office early to do it, either."