

MEMORIES OF A DOCTOR By GEORGE KIBBE TURNER

Author of "The Last Christian."

FOR twenty years this man had to play to keep alive, or at least to keep sane. Those leaping head-aches at the base of the brain began the moment he stopped, and went indoors, and took up the ordinary working life of men.

So, being a bachelor and a rich man, he settled in a high-shoudered old brick house in one of the towns along the sound, and made a business of play. He was still not quite forty, so he had done practically nothing else. He was now a slight, wiry, sunburned man, with a lean face and rather precise manner.

Rameses, they called him, from the way his skull stood out under the brown skin. His real name was Saltinstall. The generation that the man had started with had, naturally, gone along about its business, and others had followed it. He was an exile, outside of any generation. He lived alone in his big house, with a couple of crocheted old servants; and very few men now, and no women at all, went inside. But all the town saw him playing religiously. He had ceased to be a person and had become an institution. And he had about as many friends as a county courthouse.

Women were practically barred from his private life. "I never saw a woman yet I hated enough to ask her to marry me," he said.

It was curious, under the circumstances, that the man should be thrown so much with women in his daily existence. The only time he really touched the world of men was Saturdays and Sundays—the week-end, when he could play golf or tennis with them at the country club. He gorged himself with exercise then, and got blissfully tired out. Then Monday came, the men went back to their work, and left him in the world of women.

It is a lonely and alien world for a man to be left in. But Saltinstall existed there as well as could be expected, until he finally interiered, this time I am speaking of, with the laws and customs of the country.

The man had a regular formula for living. He rode horseback in the morning and watched the work about his garden. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon he appeared at the country club. In the cafe sat Wicked Grandpa, the veteran club "lush," two bloated and dejected waiters stared out of the windows; Piffles-Whiffles, the rusticated prep school teacher, the caterer and "fuser" of girls, looked with one leg over a chair-arm. Occasionally, some other diletant from the world of men drifted in; occasionally some of the sporting set—Farquhar in his big green car, driving some young woman with a purple veil; occasionally a clergyman, or school teacher, or doctor, or some other male official of the world of women.

The women sat on the piazza on pleasant days, talking over their own affairs, in their own tongue, which men never hear, debating, adjudicating, and executing the laws of the women. The aged Supreme Court, with Caroline Ann Schuyler as chief justice, was at its bridge table; "S. O. S.," the most active social engineer—named for her habit of sending out a wild call for attention whenever a male hove in sight of the piazza—moved restlessly back and forth among tables. And at the edge of the piazza gathered the apprentices—the girls of from fourteen to twenty—studying and rehearsing and perfecting themselves in the customs and laws and business of women. Nearly every afternoon Saltinstall played golf or tennis with them, as he had with their long line of predecessors.

At 3 o'clock one afternoon in that summer I was spending there, Saltinstall came up toward the clubhouse, and "S. O. S.," who was Mrs. Emily Bisbee in private life—stood signaling to him from the piazza. When he went up, there was a new woman there, to whom he was introduced—a fair, red-haired woman, rather overdressed, whom he finally recognized as a girl he had once known. She had married and moved out of town; her husband had died, and she was back again—just coming out of mourning. At one side, curled up in a chair, was a little brown creature, mostly eyes and hair, who watched him steadily and dispassionately. She seemed to be about fifteen years old.

Her mother, his old acquaintance, called to her finally. She untucked her legs, and came over and shook hands—looking him squarely in the face. "Jack," her mother called her. The nickname was one of her father's queer notions. Her real name was Jessamine, chosen by the mother herself. But the husband had called her Jack, because of her childish preference for the career of Jack the Giant-Killer. He had tried his best to keep her a little girl.

The girl wanted until her inventory was complete, the eyes of the piazzaful of women upon her. It was evidently a somewhat exasperating experience. "What an odd nickname," remarked Mrs. Bisbee, pronouncing the agony.

"No older than you," said the girl abruptly. Mrs. Bisbee laughed sharply.

"Nor mine," said Saltinstall quickly. "No, nor yours," said the girl. "You all have funny nicknames here," she continued comprehensively.

"Jack, Jack," said her mother feverishly. "Why not?" asked the girl. "They spoke of my nickname; why shouldn't I of theirs?"

"I can beat you playing tennis," she said to Saltinstall—with the evident purpose of breaking an awkward situation.

"Jack," said her mother feebly, "you're old enough not to pounce on Mr. Saltinstall with that now. He does not want to play with you now."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Saltinstall—

which was true; anything for a little exercise.

They went away together. "She's sixteen," the mother was saying to her partner—"seventeen this fall. I can't do a thing with her."

"I get terribly tired of being disciplined," said the girl to Saltinstall, with a sigh. "I always wished I was a boy. For one thing, you'd be left alone."

They went down to the tennis courts, were challenged by Piffles-Whiffles and the girl child he was at that time "rushing," and beat them disastrously. The newcomer played like a little savage—with ferocious energy and determination.

Saltinstall introduced the newcomer all around, and went back with her to the piazza. She apparently was not impressed, and on her way back gave him her views of all kinds—especially after he had praised her playing—a mimic, quite a natural actress, wild and full of life as a young fox.

"Oh, wouldn't you hate to be a woman!" she burst out.

He encouraged her expression of opinion.

"Aren't they funny—honestly, aren't they funny? Look at them up there, sitting on the piazza, like like educated ducks, just sitting there exclaiming. And the longer they sit, the dicker they get. Don't they, now?" she inquired earnestly—"don't they? Oh, I'll never be like that—never, never! You see if I do."

The two came up on the piazza, arm in arm, the girl talking.

"Your daughter plays very well," said Saltinstall, in his stiff way, to the mother.

The women's council looked her over. "I've been wondering, coming up," said Saltinstall. "I have several riding horses that need exercise. Do you suppose you could let her ride one of them with me?"

The girl, standing at one side, had precipitated herself between him and her mother.

"Oh, do you mean it?" she cried. Her face was actually pale with excitement. And so that riding of theirs together began.

"How old did you say she was?" asked Mrs. Bisbee, looking up at the mother—when Saltinstall moved away. Mrs. Bisbee lived opposite the Saltinstall house, and had the run of his grounds—flowers, vegetables, horses even. She made herself very much at home with them.

Saltinstall grinned to himself several times that night as he sat in his living-room. His eyes would not let him read indifferently, and his evenings were pretty long.

The next morning the resentful-eyed factory workers, drifting to their work, saw another figure riding beside the familiar grim-faced man on the black horse—a small brown-haired girl, looking smaller on her big mount than she really was.

They rode sedately at first—he was not sure of the girl's horsemanship. It was a wonderful morning—green and yellow; crows calling on the edges of the woods, and crimson-breasted robins listening, and valiantly dragging their reluctant prey to their green lawns. Life boiled up in the child; she patted her horse's neck, moved in her saddle, gave great sighs of contentment.

"Oh, isn't it great!" she said—"mornings like this. It makes you feel so—adventurous. Come on, let's gallop. Come on! Oh, I can stay on all right." They clattered half a mile down the road.

"Morning has always seemed to me the best time for adventure," she announced, when they walked their horses. "Doesn't it to you? You see, my father and I, every morning, used to have an adventure—when I was a kid. We walked of course; we couldn't afford horses. And every morning we went together—somewhere, on an adventure. We planned them in advance. He made me a rope ladder, I remember, and I climbed out of the window to meet him—one time. I've got it now—the ladder!"

"Oh, don't you hate to get old!" she said suddenly, and as suddenly—looking at his face—repented.

"I'm always young," said Saltinstall. "That's my business."

She laughed, without understanding; and went on chattering—giving a general confession of faith.

"Had he read 'Treasure Island'?" Did he like travel? Wasn't it splendid to go on and on—always to see something new? She thought so. She had always had one idea. She would rather be a discoverer—no, an archaeologist, really; a noted archaeologist. She always had, ever since she was a child. And she still intended to be one. She generally did what she made up her mind to.

From that time on, there was a curious change. The man who was exiled to youth, who played grimly alone, now touched the laughter and enthusiasm of a real youth again. Morning after morning the incongruous pair came riding by again, as the world of men went out to work—the girl crowding ahead, the man slightly behind, watching her with a half smile on his face. Afternoons they played together at the country club—quite usually. It never occurred to him that the thing couldn't last forever. Or, if it did, he quickly forced himself to forget it.

But there were those who never forgot—who must not forget. It was the apprentices—speculating, wondering over the approach of the chief venture of a woman's life—who moved first. Whatever Saltinstall might think, or rather not think, about the freezing of the clock upon the hour of childhood, their instinct taught them better.

So the apprentices watched, half friendly and half hostile. The veteran bachelor, the rich man of the town, was taken at last—by one of their own age! There was a certain sporting pride in this fact, and a general agitated interest.

"How does she do it?" the apprentices asked their closest friend. "I don't consider her really pretty, do you?"

The newcomer took an unexpected attitude. All advances, hostile or friendly, were savagely repulsed—the friendlier, in fact, the more savage the reception.

V. EXILED TO YOUTH

The apprentices were now quite generally hostile. They pronounced her sentence freely to their elders, with appropriate explosions of emotion. "She's impossible perfectly impossible. You ought to see her with him. She's utterly shameless, the way she runs after him."

The girl was direct; there was no question about that. She called Saltinstall Mr. Rameses now—to the astonishment of all hearers. In a very short time she was inside the gambrel-roofed house where women never came, by the simple process of asking, "What's your house like inside?"

After that she established herself there regularly mornings—perched on the window-seat of the living-room, reading through the contents of his library. She was strong for the wars of the roses, and Mary Stuart, and Scottish border warfare; adventure after the wilder the better.

She sat in that corner of the precise room, cross-legged, head down, reading; and, when he came in and interrupted, she looked up at him abstractedly and

"A forward girl," said Caroline Ann Schuyler.

The matter began to reach even to the men. Wicked Grandpa passed his verdict from the cafe, as was his custom.

"No, can you?" said the girl impatiently.

Mrs. Bisbee was naturally nettled. "You're getting old enough to know it isn't quite the thing to do," she said.

"You were old enough years and years ago," the girl replied cruelly. "Nothing could check her; she was bound on self-destruction."

"Forward," said Caroline Ann Schuyler to an associate of the Supreme Court.

"Very precocious," pronounced the other.

"You too, you fat old thing!" said the girl furiously, turning on the whisperers. "All of you dressing up like foolish old dolls, dangling yourselves before the men, talking about scandal and marriage!"

There was a very short silence. "No one will talk marriage to you, my dear," said Caroline Ann Schuyler quite calmly, "if you keep on as you



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distantly—a traveler over two centuries, called suddenly back.

This second development was doubly unfortunate. It cemented and hardened a relation that was perfectly impossible. And it advertised itself loudly to the whole community—this young girl sitting in the window of that house, Mrs. Bisbee saw it first, of course, from across the road. She had heard at length the views of the girl's contemporaries. She showed the whole thing plainly to the girl's mother.

"Why, she's only sixteen—less than that, really," said the mother.

"Do you really think that girl is backward in such things?" asked Mrs. Bisbee, smiling indulgently.

"Why, yes; don't you?" said the mother.

"I certainly do not!"

"Don't say that," said the mother.

"S'teen," said S. O. S. "Do you remember how you were when you were sixteen?"

"What shall I do?" rejoined the mother faintly. She remembered. It was the opinion of Mrs. Bisbee—and of those she spoke to—that the only thing to do was to send the child to Miss Chilson's—that ancient fitting-school for womanhood, in a neighboring village, where most of the local women who could afford it had been prepared for life. The discipline of the place was proverbial; it turned out women finished in the prevailing mode, as reliably and evenly as a Grand Rapids furniture plant brings forth period furniture.

old impatience that she wasn't a boy was with her often—her old hostility to the "silliness" of women. And there was no limit to her spirit of adventure. She would have ridden to the end of the earth—suggested impossible excursions.

"Why not?" she teased. "Why not?" The question had become a formula for her.

And all the time she became, unfortunately, more and more a part of his daily existence. He was not very well for a few days; she read to him. She was coming to give color to his whole life. And he let the thing go on, without analysis or thought. Everybody saw it but himself.

In the cafe, Wicked Grandpa, though he had pronounced against the girl, laid the principal blame on Saltinstall, where it belonged.

"Damn cradle-rober," he called him. He had made a regular daily pass-word of the thing. "Well, what's the cradle-rober doing with his victim today?" he asked the bloated waiters every afternoon.

But the burden of the affair fell upon the girl. Day after day the machinery of justice of the women went grinding, grinding, grinding at her, changing her in spite of herself.

It was the opinion of the younger set that, forward as she was, the thing would end in marriage. But Mrs. Bisbee knew the situation and the man. There was no possibility of his marrying—any one. She explained that to everybody—to the mother. "If you flatter yourself he will, you are mistaken," she told her bluntly.

The situation could not go indefinitely. Sooner or later an explosion was due, and when it came it was a disaster.

S. O. S. at last persevered too long in her grim humor on his "little playmate."

"Can't you stop following him for a minute?" she asked.

"No, can you?" said the girl impatiently.

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her to some extent to do what her mother continually urged upon her—to lessen a little the time she spent with Saltinstall.

All that time, the growth of the thing was lost on Saltinstall—though he did see a change in the girl—an added restlessness.

"Do you ever feel smothered—sometimes—kind of smothered?" she asked him, one day.

The riding kept along; but the girl stayed less in Saltinstall's house and was less with him afterwards. He appeared several times at the tennis courts—waiting, apparently. And, in the meanwhile, the girl was in far worse company. They were succeeding in driving her away from him—in the wrong direction. The sporting set were coming into the situation. She was an interesting child, and not bad-looking when she was excited. It looked as if Wicked Grandpa said—as if Farquhar were "on the trail again." Once or twice he had been out driving in that big green car of his.

The girl didn't care one way or the other about Farquhar—further than that she seemed a quiet, obliging man, and a good sort of fellow. It was that green car. She would drive to the end of the earth and back for the excitement of the sixty miles an hour; and she would do it, it seemed, to forget. But the trouble with the green car was, as everybody knew but her, that it was likely to get to the end of the earth some day—and break down. It had done it.

If anybody would try to tell her anything on such subjects—and her mother did try to tell—she wouldn't believe it was all hypocrisy and villainy. And the more they talked, the more she disbelieved.

So it happened, curiously enough, that Saltinstall, although he had started the thing, was the only real influence for good that touched her. And he didn't know anything.

But about that time Saltinstall was taken with one of his headaches—a real one, such as he hadn't had since he had met the girl. The girl didn't know it until that evening, when she saw the doctor's carriage—my rig—at the door. She insisted upon going over to see him—if necessary, to take care of him. Her mother set her foot down and said she should not go.

"I'm going," said the girl. "He's my friend. He's all alone in that house, and I'm going."

Her mother called over Mrs. Bisbee, and they shut her up in her room—upstairs. Then the crazy child raked up that old rope ladder her father had made her—which she still kept in her room—and climbed out of the second-story window, went over there, and walked in about 9 o'clock at night.

Saltinstall was not in bed. He was lying in a reclining chair. She fussed over him, laughed with him, and saw that he was as comfortable as possible. His headache did not last him much sleep power for thought, but he finally started her home by 11 o'clock. She went back, and climbed in at her window. And there, waiting for her, were her mother and Mrs. Bisbee.

That settled it. There was nothing left but Miss Chilson's school. It was a final resort, but it should be tried.

The trouble was that the girl would not leave it. The best they could do was to get her consent to see Miss Chilson. And it was practically certain she wouldn't go. The whole thing was at a deadlock.

So it was only natural that, finally, Mrs. Bisbee should be sent out as an ambassador to the recalcitrant Saltinstall. She didn't mind it much. She called to him one morning, in that confidential "come-here-Mr-Man-I've-got-something-to-tell-you" manner of hers; and they talked it out on her piazza.

It seemed inconceivable that a man could be so oblivious of what he had been doing.

"That sort of thing can't go on," said S. O. S. "You know that. Be sensible. Unless," she said, raising her eyes, "you are going to marry the girl."

"Marry!" said the man. "That child!"

"Well, I didn't know," said Mrs. Bisbee.

"Marry!" said Saltinstall. "I wouldn't ask a dog to live my life with me."

He had turned cold at the first impact of the thing. He saw at once that the end of that impossible relation had come. The girl must go along her natural path in life; and he must stay behind, as usual, going through his mechanical motions of youth. But the real situation had not struck him yet.

"What are you trying to do, then?" continued Mrs. Bisbee. "Spoil her for marrying anybody else?"

"She's nothing but a child," he said hoarsely—"sixteen."

Mrs. Bisbee spread her hands. "After all," she said, "there are some conventions, even for sixteen."

"I'm old enough," began Saltinstall. "All the worse—all the less natural," cut in Mrs. Bisbee briskly.

"Yes; I suppose," said the man slowly. "It looks—rather—unnatural."

His face was rigid; the skull showed through the brown skin more plainly than ever. He stood up suddenly.

"My God!" he said. "Isn't there anything I can touch without ruining it?"

Then he sat down again, and Mrs. Bisbee showed him the real problem—the twist in the mind of the girl; the fact that there was no one who could do a thing with her; the absolute necessity of her going to Miss Chilson's school, and her refusal.

"What if she doesn't go?"

"She'll stay at home. And more than likely go over to see you at midnight, or some such thing."

"I can keep out of her way," said Saltinstall coldly.

"It's got past that now," said S. O. S. "You don't think you're the only one who smashes the conventions with, do you? Well, you aren't. There's that other crowd. Suppose you dropped her?"

"What crowd?"

"Farquhar and young Van Vleet." "Not those—nor Farquhar!" "Exactly. Not very far, but still—"

And, when they do, it will be a mighty had one."

"If her mother—" began Saltinstall. "Poor, fool!" said Mrs. Bisbee.

They were silent for quite a while. "We have talked—everything we knew how," explained S. O. S. "In my opinion, there's only one thing that could turn her. A shock—a real shock; nothing else."

Saltinstall got up to go. "If possible," said Mrs. Bisbee.

At home, he went indoors and went all over it again—back and forth. He saw it all well enough now—the touch of youth and its buoyancy, which had drawn him out of common sense. He must leave it, and go on alone again. But it was more than that now.

The thing kept sounding in his ears: "She's bound to have her lesson, anyway."

It was no longer simply youth in the girl; it was youth run wild—through his own criminal carelessness. He himself had set it loose. Supposing he simply dropped it now, his handiwork, and let others take it up—Farquhar, or young Van Vleet.

His head jumped and gushed with pain. Another headache was upon him, but he plugged along, and he saw plainly, in spite of it, it was up to him now—not merely to lose the youth of the girl. It was his business to murder it.

Fortunately, matters moved fast. It happened, that very day, that the girl had her session with Miss Chilson. That night she went over again to Saltinstall's house. He was sitting alone, when some one rapped furiously upon the window of the living-room.

"It's I—my father," the girl's voice whispered. "Let me in."

He opened the front door with a cold hand. He knew exactly what he had to do.

"I've come to—" the girl stammered. "Oh, how nice!" interrupted Saltinstall—and laughed.

The girl went in, and seated herself on the window-seat—where he had watched her dozens of times, buried in her adventures.

She sat stiffly now. Her face was flushed; she looked tired and excited. But her eyes were as frank and direct as the first day he saw her. She began with some embarrassment—apparently a sort of little formal set speech.

"I've come to—" the girl stammered.

"Wait," he said. He went out to the dining-room, brought in a decanter, and ostentatiously poured himself a drink of whiskey. She had never seen him drink. In fact, he never did drink.

"Have some?" he asked.

"Why—no," she replied, shrinking back.

"I didn't know," he said—drinking. "Well, go ahead."

Then he poured out another glass.

"You see Mr. Rameses," she began the third time I've run away again and come over to see you."

"I see," said Saltinstall facetiously. "Glad of it. You can't come too often to suit me."

"Don't Mr. Rameses," she said. "You confuse me. I want you to help me out. Can't you?"

"Certainly I can, my dear," he said, and stood up, leaning. He had never called her "dear" before.

"We've been such friends," she said, hesitating at his manner—"such friends."

"Certainly," he said, moving toward her. "I'm always friends with young ladies who come to see me evenings."

"She sprang to her feet, staring. His tone was too obvious now.

"What!" she said, sitting away.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," he said. "The servants are all out tonight."

It was like kicking a child in the face. "What, you Mr. Rameses!" she said. "You!" Her voice was not much more than a whisper.

He steadied himself the best way he could, and went on, under the guise of liquor.

"Why not?" he said, in hazy justification. "Why not, as well as Farquhar?"

"Farquhar?" repeated the girl.

"Oh, come, said Saltinstall. "Every one knows Farquhar—and those that Farquhar runs with."

Suddenly the girl threw herself face down on the window-seat.

"How dull I was," said Saltinstall. "All your coming here! I never dreamed—"

She lay with her face in the pillows, breaking with sobs. He was murdering her youth with a vengeance.

"Oh, come, come," said Saltinstall again.

The girl sprang up. "You beast!" she said, striking him in the face with both hands. "You beast! All you beasts! Oh God, is the whole world like this?"—and staggered limply toward the door.

"Going?" asked Saltinstall, with drunken surprise. "Do you really want to? Oh, all right. Go. I'm not Farquhar. I wouldn't keep any girl who didn't want to stay."

She went out. He watched her. She turned the only way she could—home.

The Man Who Played sat down again at his table, reached out a third time for the whisky, drank, and sat staring at the table.

"Poor kid," he muttered. "Poor kid!" when he thought, got up suddenly, and went to the telephone and called Mrs. Bisbee.

"The person we were talking of—you know, she would do exactly what I wanted—if you follow my advice."

"What?"

"Don't try to drive her—either of you. And you keep out of it—out of sight entirely. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Telephone her mother—at once. Tell her to leave her alone—absolutely—till she comes to her. Understand? Of her own accord. And when she does come, to be affectionate to her—not demonstrative, affectionate. No scolding, not a word. Affection—understand?"

"Yes."

"Hurry—there's no time to waste!"

She did exactly as he said. Mrs. Bisbee is no fool; not a bad woman, either—at heart.

The next morning the girl and her mother were crying together. The girl is at Miss Chilson's now. So far as I know, she is doing very well.