

# Would You Be Young Again?

By GEORGE H. HEPWORTH.

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## CHAPTER I.

To each other they were simply Tom and Jack. In the courtroom, however, they were called "the learned counsel on the other side," a species of flattery in which lawyers delight to indulge. To the outside world they figured as Thomas Creighton and John Crandall, with a portentous "Esq." affixed.

Occupying adjoining offices in old Trinity building, they were ardently engaged in attracting clients, and when the sterner work of the day was over Jack generally sauntered into Tom's room for a half hour of badinage and a final smoke. They then joined in a somewhat plaintive duet, the burden of which was that while the clouds are raining litigation "let some droppings fall on me."

"I tell you, Jack," said Tom, with a sigh, as he rested his heels on his desk and tipped back at an angle of 45 degrees, "life in New York is about as encouraging to a fellow's peace of mind as a buzzsaw would be."

"Why, what's the matter, my boy? Been having an unusually hard time lately? I thought you won that case of Robinson versus Cobb. You have nothing to grumble about, I take it."

"Won it? Yes, of course I did. But I haven't had a good night's sleep since I went into the fight. I'm all fagged out. It strikes me that city fellows ought to be made of wrought steel. My nerves are getting rampant, my head feels as big as city hall and my legs wobble as though I had taken a dose of hashish."

"Brace up, Tom; brace up. You are in the race for fame and fortune, and you made a mighty sharp spurt in that last affair. Everybody down town is talking about it. You can soon put up your prices and take things more easily. Business is just like running—on first you get all out of breath and go puffing and blowing like an asthmatic locomotive, but after awhile you reach your second wind, and then—well, then you're all right, and devil take the hindmost."

"That's a very encouraging way of putting the matter, Jack, and I guess you're about half right, but no more. It's temperament, old fellow. Now, your wheels are all oiled, and you slip along without friction; but I, bless you, at 35—I'm like the deacon's 'one horse shay' just before it dropped into kindling wood. If I go on in this way, I shall be baldheaded at 49 and a refuge for rheumatism and gout and paralysis and a whole mob of aristocratic maladies. I find myself longing for the old college days when you and I were ruddy checked and laxy, or the days later on when we went into bachelor quarters and had such merry times that I just ache to live them all over again."

"Nonsense, Tom. Take a Turkish bath or a blue pill. It's not your fate that you should complain of, but—"

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Why, your liver, of course. You are trying to do too much in too short a time."

"Possibly."

"No, not possibly, but certainly. Climb on to the back of a horse and take a hard trot in the park every day for three months. That will make you liberal in religion, radical in politics and a better friend and father."

"H'm! Yes, good advice to a man in my circumstances. It would have to be an imaginary ride on an imaginary horse, I rather think. The last time I felt of my purse I was so sorry for myself that I went off and borrowed \$10."

"Well, try your legs, then, or go into a gymnasium and get up an appetite. Nine out of ten of the miseries of life come from poor digestion. Just feel that muscle in my arm. That's all I've got to make my way in the world with."

"By Jove, it's a stunner! You ought to go round lifting mortgages with an arm like that."

"I've just put up a tenement house instead."

"Put up a tenement house! You must be a howling athlete. Put it up as you would a dumbbell, I suppose. Why not engage in a dime museum? But, aside from all nonsense, my boy, I think I'm in a bad way. I'm so weak I couldn't draw a—"

"Get an artist to do it, then. It's his business, you know."

"My hand trembles when I try to sign a check even."

"So would mine, Tom, for I should know it wouldn't be paid. I'm glad to see you have some remnant of conscience left. Come, walk home and dine with me. It's only six miles and will do you good."

"Have you any ambulances up your way?"

"What for?"

"To bring my body home to a sorrowing family."

"Pshaw! What you need is to have your legs stretched."

"Perhaps, but my impression is they are quite long enough already. We'll drop all that for the moment, Jack. Those were gay old times, though, when we were young chaps, weren't they?"

"Yes, Tom, for boys' times they were well enough, but for man's times I think they would seem insipid. Now, tell me if some giftie were to give you the power to roll backward the spool on which your years are wound, would you do it? You say you would like to be a boy again, but aren't you joking, old fellow?"

"Would I be willing to take a leap backward, say, to 25, and the oyster suppers, the euchre parties, the bets on our favorite horses, the jolly evenings at the theater when we used to steal round to the stage door and get a smile from our adored after she had doffed her tinsel—and I can't think of the rest. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, precisely. If you could, would you? Be serious for a single brief moment and tell me the truth, the whole

truth and nothing but the truth. Hand me another cigar, please, and ponder the subject while I get a light."

"Well, on the whole, I think I would, Jack."

"And on the whole I think you wouldn't, Tom. I know you better than you know yourself. You are not that kind of a man at all. You are simply tired out, that's what's the matter. Your last ten years have been pretty tough, I admit, but they've been grand. Would you drop to the lowest rung in the ladder and begin all over again? Well, I guess not. You might not be able to duplicate your successes, and— and the chances are that you would double your failures."

"When did you take your degree in moral philosophy, Jack? You ought to have been a professor."

"Philosophy be hanged. A man's an idiot who wants to live his life over again. I'm looking just the other way. As for football and tennis and billiards



"You say you would like to be a boy again?"

"I've had my share and am satisfied, but I would like to have about 10 or 15 years added to my natural span of life. There'd be some fun in that."

"Yes? Well, I think we are both unreasonable, and perhaps the best thing to do is to go home. Goodby, my boy. You take your tramp and I'll take the elevator."

When Tom reached his well appointed little flat, consisting of six sunny rooms, all in a row, he found no one but the servant.

"All out, Bridget?" and he felt a pang of disappointment. There is one odd characteristic which can be predicted of every male human being in existence—when he reaches home after his day's work he always expects to find his wife close at hand to give him welcome. She may be just as busy as he is, but still he feels that he is being cruelly neglected if she is not there when he opens the front door. It is one of his inalienable rights to be greeted on his return from business, and if there is any failure in this respect he becomes at once disgruntled and offended.

"All out, Bridget?" and he looked round the deserted apartments as though his wife had eloped.

"The missis is to the dressmaker's, sorr, an she told me to say as how it was unexpected, sorr."

"I should hope so," remarked Tom in bad humor.

"An that she'll be back directly, sorr."

"Yes, tomorrow morning perhaps or the next day or next week," growled Tom.

"Ah, sure, sorr, she'll not be after kavin the child out in the night air!"

"All right, Bridget. Look after the dinner, and I'll look after myself."

He had a wash. Then he went into the snug little parlor and sank, with a sigh, into an easy chair. Everything was quiet in the darkened room. The rumbling teams of the street were beyond hearing distance, and after the clamor of the day this silence was peculiarly agreeable. On the wall hung some good pictures. Tom was something of a connoisseur in art, and he felt refreshed as he gazed on the painters' green fields and fleecy clouds and the cattle gathered at the stream as the sun was setting. Little by little the throbbing of his temples ceased, the blood ran less recklessly through his veins, life took on a tender hue, and in the course of ten minutes his head fell back against the soft cushion of the chair, and he was sound asleep.

## CHAPTER II.

From behind the olive green portieres stopped what seemed to be a fairy. This was in his dream. She was a beautiful creature, white winged and with a voice like distant music.

"Well," she said, "I am here."

"I beg pardon, but—"

"Ah, you forget that you called me!"

"Some mistake, I assure you. I am proud to make your acquaintance, but sorry to confess that you have been directed to the wrong apartment."

"Possibly, but isn't this No. 7?"

Tom nodded assent.

"And haven't I the honor of addressing Thomas Creighton, Esq.?"

"That is my name, miss, at your service."

"And didn't you express a wish in your office a couple of hours ago to be carried back ten years, I think you said?"

She took from a gossamer pocket a tiny tablet and turned the pages. "Yes, I thought I was right. Here is your name, and here is your wish. Well, I have been sent to conduct you on your journey. Your request is granted, and I have been appointed your guide."

She waved her wand over Tom's head, and the air was at once filled with the most delicious perfumes. His weary feeling disappeared, and his heart beat as beats the heart of a boy.

"Are you ready?" and there was an alluring mellowness in the tones of the magician's voice.

"More than ready," he answered. "I am in haste to begin the journey."

Another wave of the wand, and the apartment faded, faded, slowly faded, and was soon lost to sight altogether. His present life, with its ambitions and

its drudgery, became mere reminiscence. The ten years flew from him, as it were, on strong pinions and sped on their way beyond the hills, beyond the plains, beyond the clouds and out of sight. It was as though they had never been.

When he recovered from his astonishment, he found that he and his companion were traveling at a marvelous rate, though without any apparent effort. His guide was inclined to silence, which gave him an opportunity to look about at his leisure. The stars were out, a glorious multitude, and the landscape was in deep shadow, its outlines only being well defined. He felt a sense of buoyancy, a consciousness of returning youth, a gaiety of spirits, a freedom from all responsibility and a lightness of heart which increased as they sped on. At last, when this ecstatic state of mind and body had reached its climax, he cried out with an unexpressed joyousness which verged on hilarity, "Ah, good fairy, I am no longer a man, but a boy once more!"

"Then we have reached the end of our journey," replied the spirit, and he thought he detected a certain sadness in her tone. "Your wish is granted. We have arrived."

With that she waved her wand over his head three times, saying: "A re-voire. I shall leave you here for awhile. By and by I will return."

Behold him, then, seated in an old leather lined chair in a dingy room, a student's den.

"I must have been dreaming," he said, with a start. "I thought I was married, and married to—ah, I fear that will never be my good fortune—and that we had a happy home, and a little one. Bless me, but that was a very agreeable dream! If I could only hope for so much as that, I think I should never ask for anything more."

On the desk lay an open letter. He had just written it. The ink was hardly dry. "I suppose," he said to himself, "that writing this letter must have suggested the dream."

He then read it over carefully, line by line, word by word. "By Jove, I don't believe I have courage to send it! She has been very kind, sometimes more than kind, but what right have I to imagine that she would consent to become the wife of a poor man? Why should she? She is more than beautiful and can command the best man that treads shoe leather. She ought to have wealth and can have it for the asking. Fool, fool, to think for a moment that such a creature as Mildred Hewson would—come, Tom Creighton, be a man! Get down to your level. You may deserve a good woman, but you want an angel and can't get her."

In wild despair he tore the letter to bits and threw it into the wastebasket.

"There! I propose to banish that vision and attend to business—if I can."

He walked up and down his little room like a caged lion, then took a chair by the fire and stirred the coals until the rebellious sparks flew over the carpet and threatened a conflagration.

"I wonder why we have hearts anyway. A pound or two of cast iron would serve a better purpose. We are always falling in love with the wrong woman—I know a dozen cases myself—and the result is we go all to pieces. What's the good of life? It's a farce, a comedy, a tragedy, a mistake. I wish to heaven I'd never been born."

"I ran across that girl two years ago and have not been able to get rid of her face. It has haunted me ever since. She has been my torment, and it will end by her being my destruction. I can't have her, and I can't live without her. What a fix for a decent fellow to be in! Confound the whole thing! I've a great mind to emigrate to Australia or buy a ranch in central Africa and raise ostriches! Stay here in this gloomy hole I can't! I try to read—impossible. Her face is in front of me all the time. I take a long walk—no good. There she is looking into my eyes. I believe if I were in the moon I should meet her round the corner. Why can't I be strong enough to banish such stupid vagaries? Poor, wretched weakling, nothing but a slave, a miserable, pitiable, driveling idiot!"

"By the way, what tiny feet she has. Cinderella's slipper! Pshaw! It would be too big for her. And those delicate



"Why, Tom, you dear boy, you must have been tired."

white hands, the pink finger nails, and that golden hair! There was never anything like it. And those eyes! Why, they put the color of the sky to shame."

Just then Jack, his fellow student, burst into the room. He came like a stiff northwest breeze, stimulating and cutting.

"Well, old fellow, have you got through with that treatise on bond and mortgages?"

Tom did not deign to reply.

"Oh, I see. In the dumps, eh?"

"Stop your fooling, Jack. I'm going to Australia."

"Good idea. Fine country, can't get a title to your land, eternal litigation and eternal fees. I'll go with you, old boy. The firm shall be 'Creighton & Crandall.' In ten years we'll come back with a fortune."

"No coming back for me, Jack."

"Forsake your country, boy? Ye gods! What next?"

"The country is nothing to me. It can take care of itself."

"There, Tom, you are suffering from a fatal malady, and—stop poking that fire; coal is dear—and I know the nature of it. I've been there myself. You've got all the symptoms frightfully developed."

"Well, what is it?"

"You are in love. That's what's the matter with you. You've aimed high, Tom, but my blessing goes with you. Hitch your wagon to a star, tra la la."

"You seem to know all about me," and Tom grew surly.

"Yes, when a fellow mopes all day instead of studying law, and when I find scraps of poetry on his desk instead of the last opinion of the court of appeals, and when—"

"That will do, Jack. You're hitting me under the belt."

That evening Tom went to a small social gathering. Mildred was there. She was robed in white, and the poor fellow felt convinced that she must have wings concealed under her dress. She had just dropped down from the heavenly choir for a few minutes' conversation and might take flight at any moment. He was all eyes, and his heart fluttered. He chatted with her, but was so beside himself that he couldn't do justice to his own powers and thought she regarded him with something like disdain. That stung him to the quick.

At half past 11 her father was to have called for her, but he hadn't arrived. She was a good deal troubled at the mishap, but Jack instantly offered himself as her escort, and to his great surprise she gladly assented.

"I'll be ready in five minutes, Mr. Creighton," and then she disappeared.

On the way home he had an irresistible impulse to declare himself. The moon shone bright and clear, and the occasion seemed favorable to his suit. In trembling tones he made the fatal confession, and when it was all over there was a long silence.

At length she said in a low, pathetic voice:

"I am so sorry!"

"And you can give me no hope?"

"How can the lips speak when the heart is dumb?" she answered, but by no means coldly. On the contrary, her accents were very tender.

"You are already"—he began rather bitterly.

"That question, Mr. Creighton, you have no right to ask." This time she spoke in a distant, even a haughty, tone.

They had reached her door. He lifted his hat. She extended her hand cordially and said: "I hope always to be your friend. Good night."

The poor boy staggered back to his room, and, thank heaven, Jack was not there. He sat in front of the fire thinking, thinking, chafing at his ill luck and cursing himself, and at last dropped into a troubled doze and dreamed.

The rustling of magic raiment made him turn his head. There stood a fairy, with a strange smile on her lips.

"Have you come to gloat over my misery?" he cried. "Can't I even be wretched without your interference? Leave me to myself."

A silvery laugh was the only answer. It rang through the room like a strain of music.

"I am here," she said, "to do your bidding. Shall we go?"

"Go? Yes, go anywhere; to the end of the world if you like—anywhere, so I get away from here."

She waved her wand, and that dingy student's den gradually disappeared. They were in the open air. Fields and hills and valleys flew past them. Tom became exhilarated. Yesterday was fading from his memory. He only dimly recalled the walk with Mildred, and there was a strange unreality about that poignant experience. With another wave of the wand he fell into entire unconsciousness. And while in that state the magician led him to his apartment and seated him in a chair.

A harsh grating sound broke on his ears, and he awoke.

"The missis is here, sorr, an is askin' for yez."

Tom rubbed his eyes. In front of him stood—could it be true?—Mildred Hewson.

"Why, Tom, you dear boy, you must have been very tired. You didn't hear me open the door, did you? I looked in, saw that you were asleep and thought it too bad to wake you."

Then he roused himself and took the dear woman in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"You must have been dreaming, Tom."

"I was, Mildred."

"What did you dream, dear? Tell me all about it."

"Not now, Mildred. It was an awful dream, and the less said about it the better."

In the morning Jack and Tom met as usual.

"I was pretty tired yesterday, wasn't I, Jack?"

"Yes, you were, and I advise you to take care of yourself. Good fellows are scarce nowadays."

"Didn't we say something about being young again, Jack?"

"Certainly—that is to say, you did, not I. Why, have you thought the matter over?"

"Yes."

"And you conclude—"

"That I'm satisfied with things as they are."

## THE END.

### Toasting the Queen.

Every night, in every ship in her majesty's navy, the queen's health is drunk by the officers of the vessel, but it is a curious fact that it is always drunk sitting, the officers never rising as is usual on land. The origin of this custom has never been thoroughly elucidated.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

### Two Points of View.

"You, sir," said the poet, "are a bad judge of poetry."

"I, sir," retorted the editor, "am a judge of bad poetry."—Cincinnati Enquirer.

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