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ALLEN GRAY;

— OR —

The Mystery of Turley's Point.

Being a Few Romantic Chapters From the Life of a Country Editor.

BY JOHN R. MURKIN.

AUTHOR OF "WALTER BROWNFIELD," "HELEN LAKEMAN," "BANKER OF BEDFORD," AND OTHER STORIES.

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"Not much," she answered; "they've been there some months, and no one knows their names. Some say that the man is a



"I WANT TO SUBSCRIBE FOR YOUR PAPER" brigand, some that he is a pirate, others that he is connected with a gang of counterfeiters of horse-bills."

"How man, have they in the family?" "I don't know. There was a white-faced woman once seen at the window but some one pulled her back. A few weeks ago a report went about that a pretty girl had been seen through a crack in the old garden wall, but the tall man with long black whiskers came out, and in a voice of thunder drove her to the house, and the young fellow who saw her ran away."

This gossip old maid furnished him much news and information. His poetic efforts were of no value, but she unconsciously gave him many items which he, unsober, noted on his memorandum book.

One evening Allen was working late in the office reading proof. All hands save Toby, who remained to sweep, had gone home. A tall man with long black whiskers and gray eyes entered the office. His manner was so singular as to strike the new editor with surprise. His bearing indicated that he belonged to a different sphere than Turley's Point.

"I want to subscribe for your paper," he said, in a deep, mysterious voice. "What is the subscription price for a year?"

"One dollar and fifty cents." The tall foreign-looking man threw the money on the table. "What is the name and address?" Allen asked, opening his subscription book.

"Send it to X. Y. Z., post-office box 141," answered the tall stranger, and then without another word, stalked away from the office.

"Who is that man, Toby?" the astounded editor asked, watching the receding form through the window.

"I don't know—nobody knows," Toby answered. "He's the mysterious man who lives in the big house on the hill."

CHAPTER III

SOME DIABOLICAL VERSE—POLITICAL AMBIGUITY.

Allen sprang to his feet and hastened to the door. Twilight shades were deepening into darkness, yet he could distinguish the outline of the tall man hurrying up the hillside road. There was something so fascinating in the mystery surrounding the stranger that Allen felt a strong inclination to follow and learn more of him.

"Toby, were you ever in that stone house on the hill?" he asked.

"No, sir," Toby answered.

"What do you know about it?"

"Nuthin' much," was the evasive response.

"Does he often come to the village?"

"No."

"Well, if you know any thing about those people tell it to me."

Toby shrugged his shoulders, cast an uneasy look about him, and said:

"Taint much I know, and taint much I want to know."

"Tell me just what you do know, and all that you've heard of it."

"I've been to the house two or three times," said Toby, in an awe-inspiring whisper. "But there's a great high wall all round it, so no one can see inside. Tommy Miles once peeped through the back-yard wall, and says he saw the prettiest girl he ever set eyes on in his life. People say they kill folks up at that big house."

"When was the house built?" asked Allen, hoping to bring the boy back from speculation, to answer facts.

"I don't know," Toby answered. "Twas long afore I was born."

"Do you know who built it?"

"No. I've heard ma say it was built by some rich people who lived there long ago, and then left."

"How long have these people lived here, Toby?"

"I've only been a few months since they come back the last time. They won't have nuthin' to do with us, an' we've don't hev nuthin' to do with 'em."

"Where did they come from?"

"No 'un knows. The house had been vacant, except two old people stayed there and kinder tuk keer o' it. The man was cross an' wouldn't talk nuthin' but French, an' the old woman was deaf an' dumb. The boys used to try to git in the orchard, but the old feller came out with a gun an' swore in furren language at 'em, an' sicored 'em so bad they wouldn't go nigh it. Then there's been some awful sights seen thar o' nights," concluded Toby, shuddering.

"What were they?"

"Well, Tommy Miles said he hoped he might drop dead if 'twasn't so. He was comin' home through the woods one night, an' thought he'd risk comin' by the rock house. When he got nigh it, he heard a awful scream 'st like some one was bein' killed, an' every window in the house was a great blaze o' light. He said he'd swear he saw a woman standin' at a window with wings just ready to fly when some 'un pulled her back. Then old Dobbs went by there one night an' saw the blinds an' curtains all ablaze like, an' people flyin' around the collin'."

"Who is this man Dobbs?"

"He's an old feller who lives out in the country on a farm."

"Does he drink?"

"Like a fish."

"I guess he had been drinking that day, high accounts for his seeing the wonderful sights at the old house."

"He says 'twas spirits," said Toby.

"Doubtless it was; but the spirits he drank before leaving town."

"Thar's others who've seen strange sights up thar," Mr. Gray returned Toby, after a few moments' pause.

"There is some deep mystery about the house and people who live there, but when once understood you will find nothing supernatural about it. Why do people here object to talking about that old house on the hill?"

"Cos it's haunted," said Toby, with a shudder, "an' it drives people away from the Pint. Every body says if it hadn't a been fur that old house on the hill we'd a had a boom here long ago."

Allen dismissed Toby for the day, locked the office and went to his boarding-house, his mind full of the strange mystery of which he could learn so little.

Next day Toney Barnes entered with a smile on his face, and a bundle of manuscript under his arm. With an air of triumph, he said:

"Just let me read you what I've got here."

"I am pressed for time, Mr. Barnes," pleaded the editor. "I've it and let me read it at some other time."

"Oh, no, it will not take long," replied Toney, with a commanding smile.

"But you don't intend reading all that to me?"

"It won't take long."

"My time is very precious now. Every hour I lose this morning must be taken from my sleep to-night."

It was useless to expostulate. A country editor can not, like the city editor, send a clerk or other boy to talk with the ambitious author who is bold enough to invade his sanctum. He usually is so unfortunate as to be acquainted with the literary aspirant, and escape from a personal interview is impossible. Toney Barnes was certain the editor would not discover the beauty in his poetry unless the author read it himself, and gave it the proper eulogistic embellishments. It was no use to argue that he could not read it to every body, and that newspaper poetry is to be read and not heard; he was determined, and Allen was forced to listen.

"There are several pieces here," said the poet, with a cruel smile. "Let me see which I will read first."

Allen had no choice, and at last the author seemed to have found one that suited for a beginning, and, spreading it out on his knee, said:

"I will now read you something on spring."

A spring poem usually makes the experienced editor desperate. Country editors, especially, have a horror of spring poetry. But Toney, like all other poets, having no regard for other people's nerves, began:

"Those beauteous, sunny days have come,
The gladdest of the year,
When verdant nature strews the earth
With wild abundant cheer.
Remain, oh lovely days, remain
With all your pious peace,
And may your roses and cauliflower
And song-birds never cease."

"How do you like that?" asked Toney, with a triumphant smile.

Determined to assert his right as a critic, Allen rubbed his aching brow for a moment and answered:

"It seems to me, Mr. Barnes, that you might be charged with plagiarism in these lines."

"Where?"

"When you say
"Those beauteous sunny days have come,
The gladdest of the year,"
One can not help thinking of the familiar lines

"The melancholy days have come,
The saddest of the year,"

"What other place?" asked Toney, his face growing very red.

"Remain, oh lovely days, remain," might be thought by some to have been stolen from "Return, oh holy dove, return."

"But it's not, sir," interrupted Toney. "I am the author of those verses myself, and Watts said nobody else can claim 'em."

"Watts is not likely to trouble himself about it, but you know, Mr. Barnes, that poets must avoid any thing that savors of plagiarism."

"I guess you are right," said the poet, feeling that he was a persecuted man.

"There is another point where the critics might attack you," said Allen.

"Where?" asked Toney, beginning to squirm himself.

"In the next to the last line there is a

incongruous association of roses and cauliflower.

"It is a blending of the beautiful and practical."

"Roses are beautiful and cabbage useful, it is true, but there seems to be an incongruity in their association that might subject you to criticism. Besides, one blooms in the spring, and the other usually matures in autumn."

"Well, if you think that piece won't do, I'll read you one on the brooklet," said the author.

"There was no escape, and Allen told him to proceed."

"Laughing, bubbling, bright and clear,
Gushing, dimpling little brook,
Gurgling, murmuring, sad to hear,
How you tempt me from my book;
Dashing, sparkling ever on,
Skipping, jumping, as if you go,
Laughing, bubbling, rushing, dimpling,
Flashing, whispering, roaring, sipping,
Gurgling, murmuring, as if you go."

"How do you like that?" the poet asked, giving the editor a precarious look.

"That's better."

"D'you really think so?"

"Yes—decidedly."

"Well, suppose you use that?"

"Very well," and, without further reading,



"HOLD ON, TONEY!"

ing, the *Brooklet* was laid aside as accepted.

"Well, now, I'll read another."

"What is the title?"

"The *June Apple Tree*."

"I don't like it."

"We can change it, if you wish. This is an elegant bit of blur, that, which I looked at."

Re-read:

"High up 'mid the branches
Gazing at the far-off moon,
In gorgeous splendor
And wisdom solemn mood,
Sits the undisturbed owl."

"Hold on, Toney," cried the editor, "never allow any thing so sublime as that to appear in a newspaper. Send it to the best publisher in the land, have it copyrighted, or it may be stolen from you."

The author glanced at the editor as if he half doubted his sincerity. If Allen had not had excellent control over his feelings he could not have refrained from laughing. Toney's excellent opinion of his own talents as a poet blinded him. He laid the gem aside, determined to send it to *the press*, and drew another which he thought more common place, and read:

"Oh, speak not of splendors, of sorrow and pain,
Of happiness ethereal, of England or Spain;
Oh, tell not of anguish, your hopes or your fears,
Come to me in gladness, with laughter or tears."

"That poem is too deep; our readers would never be able to fathom it," said the editor. Not having been able to fathom it himself, Allen supposed that few at least of the *Western Republic* readers could.

Toney then recited two small verses of doggerel, meaningless stuff, which he called sonnets, gave them to the editor, and called freezing the blood in his veins by the announcement that he would soon have a serial story ready for the *Western Republic*, and left the office.

Allen suspected that the story was already written, and had been rejected by every publisher in the land. Of course Toney would insist that it was an excellent story, and that as soon as it appeared in print would take the world by storm.

Having got rid of the poet, the publisher went to assist in making up the form, when Tom Simmons entered.

"I say, Mr. Gray, I don't think there need be any more delay in my announcing myself as a candidate," he said, throwing his hat on the folding-table and seating himself in a chair.

"It seems early," returned the editor.

"But delays are dangerous. Some one may get ahead of me."

"Of whom are you afraid?"

"Thar's George Strong—"

"But he belongs to a different political party."

"It makes no difference," said Simmons, impatiently. "He's in my way and I intend to rise in spite of him. If I go to the Legislature, it'll give me the inside track; for Congress, don't you see, and if I get in Congress it's only a step to President of the United States. You know when a feller gets to goin' up there's no taintin' howfar he'll go."

To sensible nature this man's opinion was simply disgusting. In order to change the subject Allen asked him the price he asked for the corner building near the printing office.

"D'you want to buy it?" asked Simmons.

"I might."

"A thousand dollars."

"I will see about it."

A few moments later Simmons left the office.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STROLL—A MYSTIC BEAUTY.

To Allen Gray it seemed as if Strong and Simmons were constantly watching each other, to thwart one another's plans. However, it may only have been by accident that Mr. Strong came into an office just an hour after his political opponent's visit. Having scouted himself, Strong said:

"There isn't any doubt, Mr. Gray, that Simmons is onto my racket. He knows I'm gwine to run for sheriff, an' he'll beat me if he kin."

"I don't think he knows any thing about it, Mr. Strong," said the editor.

"Yer mistaken; I tell yer mistaken. That man is just watching me all the time. He's allers tryin' to spile my plans. I believe the devil owes me a spite an' is payin' me off with bad neighbors. Wasn't he in here to-day?"

"Yes, but we were talking on a business matter," said Allen, with some hesitation, "I wanted to buy that corner lot of his."

"Ye did. What did he ax yer?"

"One thousand dollars."

Mr. Strong gave a prolonged whistle.

"That's more'n twice what it's worth. I wouldn't give him three hundred dollars fur it; for the house is no account at all."

Three or four days later, when Mr. Strong had almost induced Allen to purchase some of his property, Tom Simmons, having heard of it, determined to "spoil the trade," if he had to injure all the property in Turley's Point to do so. A large number of the citizens of Turley's Point seemed to be watching each other, trying to prevent their neighbors' success, even to their own detriment. As nearly every body seemed pulling against every body else, the business outlook of the village was not bright.

On Sunday afternoon Allen Gray determined to set all warnings and umors of danger aside and take a stroll to see all on which the mysterious stone house stood. It was a delightful day, and he found the woods pleasant. The trees were clothed in their richest green, and wild flowers nodded their saucy heads in the gentle breeze which stole through the forest. The nimble squirrels ran before him, frisked about among the branches or chattered from some leafy retreat. He followed an old disused cart-rig road, once macadamized and an excellent thoroughfare, but now in a dilapidated state, and partially overgrown with grass. The grim old forest on either side of him seemed dark and gloomy.

The distance was much greater than Allen had supposed. Though the top of the old stone house could be seen from the village, he lost sight of it the moment he entered the wood. Having paused to rest at the foot of a long hill, he discovered a narrow, but well-worn path leading up the right angles through the trees, and decided to follow it.

Through a forest of grand old moss-covered oaks, winding about among huge masses of rock which in centuries past had tumbled from the bluff above, the path took its course until he found himself at a delightful spring of clear, cold water at the foot of the hill. Here Allen paused and gazed about him.

On his right beneath a wide-spreading beech was an old rustic seat. It had evidently been there a great many years. Lovers may have sat there and breathed vows with only the gray old forest to hear them, long before he was born.

At one time the whole forest seemed to have been a grand park, but allowed to run wild, it had become a labyrinth of tangled undergrowth and vines. Throwing himself on the rustic seat Allen gazed into the spring, which, gushing out from the side of the hill, formed a sparkling rivulet that glistened over a bed of many colored pebbles. This cool retreat was a haven of rest to the tired editor, and he nestled himself that here he might frequently find security from the persecutions and annoyances of poets and politicians.

But the afternoon was wearing away, and as he had determined to visit that mysterious old stone house, he could waste no more time at the spring.

As he rose to return to the main road, something bright on the side of the path caught his eye. He stooped to see what it was, and discovered a golden chain partly covered with leaves and dirt. He drew it out and found buried beneath the leaves, but attached to the chain, a golden locket.

It was a lady's locket, and Allen knew at a glance that it did not belong to any one at Turley's Point.

"What shall I do with it?" he asked himself.

"Keep it and advertise it! That is the best I can do; but suppose I open it and take a peep within."

He pressed his thumb on the spring and the lid flew open, revealing only a short tress of soft, golden hair, which had evidently been clipped from the head of a child.

"That reveals nothing," said Allen, closing the locket, putting it in his pocket and starting back to the road, tapping the leaves with his slender cane.

Reaching the main road he ascended the hill toward the great house. The road between the spring and top of the hill bore some evidences of recent travel. He had nearly reached the top of the hill when he found a lady's kid glove lying at the side of the road.

The glove was too small and of a quality too fine to belong to any of the women whom he had met in the village.

"Of two things I am certain," soliloquized Allen. "There is a lady at the stone house on the hill, and she takes strolls."

Allen began to wonder what kind of a person she was. Was she young or old, beautiful or ugly?

The top of the hill was reached, and he found himself on a broad plateau with a large, magnificent mansion before him. A high wall on the top of which were sharp iron pickets, surrounded house and grounds as far as he could see. The gate was tall, surmounted by a high arch supported by pillars of stone. All the nursery stories of enchanted castles which he had ever heard or read came with wonderful freshness to his memory. There was something so

grand and yet so weird in that imposing pile, reared as it seemed in the very heart of the wilderness, that Allen was inspired with a feeling of awe, if not fear. For some time he stood gazing at the vast building. Then he went a little noarer, and from a slight eminence could see fountains playing on the lawn, while the gentle breeze came to him laden with the fragrance of sweetest flowers. Notwithstanding the grandeur and beauty of the house and grounds, there was something so weird and strange about them that he felt strongly inclined to retreat.

"Oh, pah! I am getting almost as silly and superstitious as the villagers," said Allen to himself.

After examining the front as well as he could, he decided to walk completely round it. Those people must have good reasons for living here if not for coming, and he would not question their plans. That they were people of refinement, and into the pretentious residence and airy-like grounds were all plainness, they might as well better have represented. The people of the village had countless mansions and had conducted and given their neighbors in the bad worse games than they enjoyed.

With these thoughts in his mind Allen wandered around to the rear of the great mansion and called. The great wall enclosed about ten acres, and from what little Allen could see of the grounds they seemed in excellent order. The wall in the rear was so high and thick and eight feet high, and through the cracks the editor had a very good view of the garden.

A well-worn path, leading from the garden gate to the river bluff a fourth of a mile away attracted Allen's attention, and, wearied with razing at the house, he thought to go to the bluff and watch the sunset.

He had almost reached the great cliff when he came to a sudden halt and stood

transfixed with amazement. There, standing on a grass plot, gazing across the dark river beneath, was a beautiful girl about eighteen years of age. She was very pretty, with large blue eyes, a wealth of golden hair and a form which might have been the envy of a sculptor.

Her eyes were fixed upon the river, and she was not yet aware of his presence. As the rays of the setting sun fell upon this angelic being, Allen thought he had never seen one so lovely. That she was an inmate of this wonderful house seemed to give an additional charm to her beauty, and he found his heart beating with a hitherto unknown emotion.

At last the sun tipped behind the turrets across the river, and, wearing a deep sigh of regret, the young man turned to retreat her steps homeward, when she discovered a handsome young stranger standing in her path.

"CHAPTER V.
ARRIVING FOR THE CONFLICT.

It was difficult to tell who was the most confused, Allen Gray or the beautiful girl before him.

Her dress and manner indicated culture and refinement, and he felt that he must apologize for his presence.

"I—I beg pardon," he stammered, after an awkward silence of a few moments. "I came for a stroll to the bluff, not aware of your presence. I hope I have not annoyed you?"

There was an honest frankness in his voice and manner, more reassuring than his words. A change from surprise and terror to pleasure, as instantaneous as it was remarkable, came over her face.

"Oh, don't blame yourself, sir," she said, in tones the sweetest that ever fell on mortal ears. What a delicious voice, how like the chiming of a silver bell. Then, as if not altogether recovered from her surprise, she stammered: "I—I was watching the sunset."

"It is a delightful view from here," said Allen, recovering at once his self-possession. "I do not wonder that you came here to witness it; I came for the same purpose, but seeing you, and not wishing to disturb you, remained in the background."

"You have lost much," answered the beautiful girl, her angelic face wreathed with smiles. "I frequently come to this bluff to view the sunset, and the scene never grows old."

"No doubt, were I near enough, I would do the same."

"You are the new editor at the village, are you not?" she asked, with charming childlike simplicity.

"I am; my name is Allen Gray, and I am editor and proprietor of the *Western Republic*. You live in the stone house on the hill, do you not?"

She started, a death-like pallor swept over her face, and in a confused manner she answered:

"Yes, sir."

It was painfully evident that the stone

Continued next week