

THAT CATACOMB STORY.

BY MARTHA FISHEL.

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Two of the three journalists were sharpening their pencils busily, while the tall one, she of the marvelous memory, looked on in pitying toleration as she adjusted a hairpin. She scorned notebooks, scorned pencils, satisfied in the thought that upon the tablet of her brain her impressions would be recorded unerringly.

The moist April breeze fluttered the curtains of our pretty salon in the Rue de Chaillot, No. 71, and an air of business excitement was upon us four damsels, who in trim tailor gowns and severe sailor hats awaited the coming of the Harvard man who had consented to be our pilot through the catacombs.

The serene peace of our little Parisian ménage had been rudely disturbed the day previous by the arrival of an American newspaper which announced a prize for the best article written on "The Catacombs of Paris." Upon inspecting the figure offered by the editor my three journalistic friends, the tall one, the colleen and the little chaperon, all decided to compete. The tall one laid aside her fashion article and bundled some translation into a drawer. The little chaperon put by her weekly letter on the "Facts, Fads and Follies of French Life" and placed upon her desk a dozen sheets of virginal paper, selecting at the same time a fresh, favorite pen for the fray, while the colleen shelved two

going to speak of the littleness, the absolute pettiness, of life, its aims and so forth, in the presence of the great ruler—you know—death. Veer the others off that if you hear they're going to use it. And—er—look here, don't fancy for one little instant that I have not been aware of your ideal platonic friendship with him," jerking her head in the direction of our male escort. "He's a nice boy, and I like him, in his place, but if you make your tender feeling any excuse for giving away my thought!"

"You're always so tactless, dear," I said viciously, turning away.

At this moment our Harvard man approached, his torch trembling with excitement.

"I've a fine idea," he breathed. "I hope the others aren't on its track. These kinds of things are so beastly alike anyhow. Come here." He drew me over to a secluded spot.

"My thought is on—on— But never mind that now. Do you know, I'm never able to see you a moment alone. You've a corporal's guard about you the whole time!"

"You forget our French lessons and walks," I stammered furiously, realizing I was blushing.

"Oh, they don't count! I mean really alone, like this, for instance, with out a soul about, though even here the others are only a few paces off."

The colleen, however, on her return from the catacombs had as a contrast to that visit dallied long amid the allurements of the milliners' shops on Rue de la Paix. On her arrival home she sadly inspected her letter of credit and followed it by a sum in subtraction. The result was disastrous, for the colleen fell by the wayside, and the prize article was untouched.

In our little dining room that night the cuckoo clock had piped out 11 calls before pens were thrown down and the tall one and the chaperon sought us to read their stories. Just then the Harvard man's ring at our door was also heard as he, too, entered, a dozen sheets fluttering in his hand.

"I tell you that catacomb story prize is mine, just as if I already had it," he whispered to me.

Meekly and in a subdued Christian spirit I sat there—yes, I sat and listened to every word.

When all had finished, there was a silence such as precedes a cyclone, and then I heard:

"You took"—began the chaperon.

"My thought"—continued the tall one.

"About life and death," finished the Harvard man.

But the colleen, whose article still reposed in her notebook impressions, cried out in husky tones:

"Since each of your three sneaky articles embodies every idea of mine—there!" And the meaty notebook was hurled to the floor.

The scribes were hardly on speaking terms after this. The Harvard man passed No. 71 every day with a girl who was known to make a cross for her name. "I'm very tired of female writers," he was heard to say.

In the pretty apartment in the Rue de Chaillot the frost, though slight, was none the less enduring, for, true to the inconsistency of the female mind, they all turned upon me and one morning addressed me thus:

"I could have forgiven you anything," all began in one breath,

"but—"

"But what?" I asked, outwardly calm.

"But giving away that great thought upon the littleness, the nothingness, of life," said the chaperon, bristling.

"That certainly!" began the tall one.

"Was mine!" they cried in chorus.

I no longer wore the Harvard man's fraternity pin, which in a tender moment he had loaned me. To and from my French lesson I walked alone, and in the pretty apartment, No. 71, the Harvard man's step and ring were heard no more.

It was one month later. I walked briskly along the brilliant avenue, watching the beautiful horses, with their silken coats, and the chic Frenchwomen, clad in gowns to make a nun covetous. The sound of familiar voices made me turn my eyes toward the footpath, and with a start I saw approaching me my three companions—and the Harvard man. They were enjoying some huge joke immensely, while the tall one was pointing to something in a newspaper. When they saw me, they hurried over, and I could see the soulful glance my erstwhile Harvard friend cast upon me as he approached.

"Have you seen it?" asked the chaperon.

"Seen what?"

"The catacomb prize has been awarded to an American, and—and—oh, you tell her!" to the tall one.

"Well, it's just this—it seems that—oh, read it yourself!" cried the colleen.

"I'm fairly ashamed to own up having been so silly."

They handed me the paper, and amid a dead silence I read every word of the article. As I did so many familiar friends greeted my eye—namely, "the nothingness, absolute pettiness, of life in the presence of the great ruler," and so forth, and so on. "Pluto's domain" was also touched upon, and mention was also made of some "grinning skulls," though to be honest the writer endowed these latter with teeth.

"To think we misjudged her so!" I heard them murmur as I read on intently, feeling a thrill of vindication sweep through me. But, alas, it was short lived, for when I read the name signed to the story—the name of the winner of that much desired prize—my satisfaction oozed from my soul and left me pallid and heartsick.

"All the waters in the five oceans won't wash me clean in their eyes when they discover," I muttered as I handed back the paper.

"We've all been very silly," said the chaperon cheerily, "but after this we'll say no more about it. This is only another instance of 'great minds running in the same direction.' Now for a brisk walk home."

For a moment I felt saved from exposure, but at the next query I again grew numb.

"Wonder who the winner is?" was the colleen's idle remark.

"Leonard Lane! Never heard of him!" said the Harvard man briskly, as if that settled the question of his renown, and at his tone a sudden defiant resolve shot through me. I determined to brave the worst.

"I've heard of him," I managed to say as quietly as I could. "He was in Paris two years ago and wrote the thing then. Leonard Lane is the nom de plume of my fiancé. We are to be married when I return home in June."

They murmured, "How lovely!" and whispered, "How sweet!" and the Harvard man muttered, "Lucky fellow!" But their eyes flared with suspicion as they looked at me, and to this day I am not sure but that they believe I used the mail service between France and America to betray their seething thoughts on death to my lover.

Consistent.

"Snagsby is the most devoted golf man I ever met. The only meat he eats is sausage."

"Ball?"

"No, links."—Exchange.

Silk Made of Gelatin.

A new artificial silk manufactured from gelatin, an invention of Professor J. J. Hummel of Yorkshire college, Leeds, England, has just been submitted to the Swiss silk manufacturers for their judgment. A reservoir containing gelatin in liquid form is kept at such a temperature that the gelatin will not harden. The top of the reservoir contains many small holes through which the gelatin passes in fine streams and is received on an endless band of linen. The gelatin hardens and presents threads of uniform thickness and brilliant surface ready to be wound upon spools.

The whole apparatus is said to require but little attention, the only thing to be looked after being the replacing of full spools with empty ones. One workman can oversee ten of the machines, which will produce about 470,000 yards of thread a day, an amount equal to the silk product of 24,000 cocoons. The threads are wound lightly on drums and submitted to the fumes of formaldehyde in a closed room for several hours, after which they resist water. Coloring matter, if required, is added to the liquid gelatin at the beginning.

A drawback to the usefulness of gelatin threads would be the low degree of firmness, but in combination with real silk or fine linen or cotton thread a durable silk tissue, it is declared, could be produced. The estimated cost of gelatin silk is about \$1.15 a pound. Colloid silk costs at present from \$2.25 to \$2.85 a pound, while natural silk reaches \$6.25.—Chicago Record.

The Great Gold Producers.

It will be several months yet before all the returns of the gold output of 1898 are received, but the five leading countries in gold production have been heard from, and their relative standing for the year has been ascertained. For the second time the Transvaal leads the world after having steadily been creeping up on the annual figures of the United States and Australasia. The Transvaal exceeded the United States output in 1897 by \$943,600 and in 1898 by \$9,176,600. Here are the figures of the five leading gold producing countries for 1898:

Transvaal.....	\$73,475,000
United States.....	61,300,000
Australia.....	61,300,000
Russia.....	35,126,000
Canada.....	14,190,000

The first three countries contribute about three-fourths of the entire gold production of the world. Our product last year was \$6,927,000 greater than that of the year before, but the Transvaal, advancing by leaps and bounds, as it has been doing since 1890, except in the year of demoralization due to the Jameson raid, has surpassed us by over \$9,000,000.—New York Sun.

Feeble Minded Persons.

According to Commissioner Wright's latest report, 15 states of the Union are supporting institutions for the care and instruction of feeble minded persons of all ages. The outlay for grounds and buildings for their use is \$4,640,000. The annual expenditure for their support is \$1,363,000.

As caretakers and teachers 823 persons are employed, and the number of pupils or inmates is 8,177, of whom about 55 per cent are men.

It is not quite safe to assume that all the feeble minded persons in our cities and towns are gathered into public institutions. Years ago, when a similar establishment was proposed in Amsterdam, the objection was raised that it would be a difficult and delicate question to determine who was eligible to admission, but a vaggish Dutchman suggested that "by roofing the whole city they would be sure to cover them all."

McCumber a Hustler.

"Senator Elect Porter J. McCumber," says a North Dakota man, "is a hustler, for he struck Dakota in 1889 without a dollar to his name, but chock full of law and determination. He had an office in a shack that hadn't more than \$10 worth of lumber in it all told. McCumber, however, buckled down to work in that shanty and gave the fellows with \$5 cases just as good and just as much law as the \$50 fellows, and it didn't take long for his reputation as a worker to spread from Wahpeton all over the state. He was just the sort of man the Dakotans wanted, for he worked for them day and night just as hard as he worked later when he was after the 'blind pig' proprietors."

Are We Quinophagists?

A new word applied to Americans, says the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, is "quinophagists," indicating that they consume more quinine than any other people in the world. The total imports exceed 1,500,000,000 grains a year, an average consumption of 20 grains to each inhabitant. Its price to importers within 25 years has fallen from \$2 an ounce to 16 cents. Two-thirds of the quinine comes from the cinchona trees of Java, planted by the intelligent Dutch governors since 1852.

Keeping Tab on the "Cabbies."

The "cabbies" of St. Petersburg have recently been supplied with a book of tickets by the municipal council for the purpose of providing every "fare" with the means of making a note of any complaint he may desire to make against the "cabby." The latter, at the request of the "fare," is obliged to tear off one of the tickets for him. The tickets bear the number of the cab and the tariff of charges.—Journal de St. Petersburg.

Pneumatic Tires on Cabs.

The tires on the New York electric cabs are quite formidable affairs. They are nearly three-quarters of an inch thick and are five inches in diameter. They are tested up to a pressure exceeding that used in an ordinary locomotive boiler. In practice 60 pounds to the square inch "floats," as it is termed, the cab. The tire of each wheel costs \$80.

SOME

SPECIAL BARGAINS

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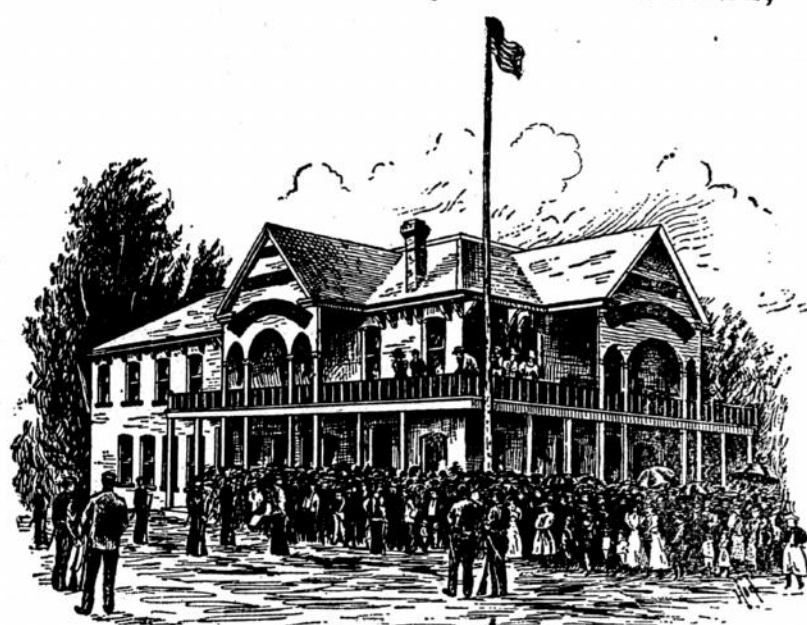
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SEE ME.

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Opposite Starch Factory.

THE COMMERCIAL HOTEL,



H. NEWBERT, Proprietor.

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Here is one of those who are either so prejudiced against all advertised remedies, or have become discouraged at the failure of other medicines to help them, and who will succumb to the grim destroyer without knowing of the wonderful value of Foley's Honey and Tar for all Throat and Lung troubles.

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It would be useless to tell you that we can sell you goods cheaper than any of the other merchants, but we do say that we sell goods as cheap as the cheapest—competition open to the world.

Just see these prices:

Apples, per can, 10c.
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Corn, "Rinoh," the best that money can buy, 10 per can, or 3 cans for 25c.
1 lb can Baking Powder only 10c.
White Fish, per pound, 7c.
Trout, per pound, 8c.
Salmon, per pound, 9c.
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1 lb Package Soda, 4c.
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Package Parlor Matches, 5c.
Rio Coffee, per pound, only 10c.

Men's Furnishings, an elegant line, direct from the manufacturers.

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"I'M NEVER ABLE TO SEE YOU A MOMENT ALONE!"

"penny dreadfuls" which she was writing at the same time and pigeonholed a great work also to join in the battle for red gold. Even the Harvard man, who lived at the pension over the way, deserted his realistic novel, which he fancied would give him the title of "The American Maupassant," and turned with covetous eyes toward that catacomb story.

I alone went merely as an onlooker—yes, a lotus eater, for I was going to write—nothing.

It was the chaperon, a charming mixture of thrift and spendthrift, who said to me: "My, but you're silly to spend 5 francs if you don't make copy of it and at least try to get your money back!"

Still I went. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness, and, although I am reluctant to intrude my private griefs on the public, it was the moral lesson following this visit that has made me regard the spending of that 5 francs as the greatest extravagance of my life.

The Harvard man arrived serene and smiling. Having counted us, he made a swift, clever mathematical deduction that two cabs would be necessary, and so we started.

Of what we saw in the catacombs that day there shall fall from my poor pen a silence so weighty that it could be cut, but of my dear, busy scribes—ah, that is another matter!

We descended the interminable winding steps leading to that underground charnel house, and the tall girl, she of the marvelous memory and no notebook, dropped behind with me in that gloomy winding path and said in a sepulchral whisper (she is always consistent):

"I'm going to refer to these lines of grinning skulls. You might drop a hint of this to the others lest they think of using it. Will you?"

"But," I ventured meekly, not being a scribe myself, "have you reflected that none of these skulls has teeth? It is only those with teeth who grin." She looked at me pityingly. "They shall grin," she said firmly, clinching her own molars vindictively. "A little thing like that doesn't bother me. And," she continued airily, "I'm also

"Tell me your thought," I broke in, finding the conversation too personal.

"The thought?" he repeated dazedly.

"Oh, yes. It's on life's absolute littleness, its subjugation—and—and—"

But just then his torch caught my flimsy veil, and it went up in a gauzy whirl of smoke, while I sputtered and choked with fear. I fled from the Harvard man minus the thought and one veil and was met by the little chaperon, her cheeks very red and her eyes very bright.

"She's had a thought, too," I said to myself and tried to dodge her behind a column of bones, but in vain.

"My dear, I want to tell you something. Now, you know the others will treat this subject in the ordinary journalistic way, but I will not. I am going to treat it seriously. I am going to speak of this as Pluto's domain and say Poe's 'Raven' was inspired by a visit here. Switch the others off this, won't you, love? The colleen has just asked me how to spell Plutonian, and I'm a little suspicious of her. It would be a delicate matter for me, but a little finesse on your part will do it." And she bustled away.

A nudge at my elbow, and I turned to find the colleen's pale face close to mine. "Listen!" she said. "They won't treat this subject as I shall. Why, I have this notebook just closely written in shorthand with impressions! I've thought of two fine similes too. One is how similar the transit from life to death is to this visit. Just as we had to come down here, each one alone, so we must die. Now, what was that other—what was it? Wait until I look."

"Was it on the littleness, the pettiness, of life—its nothingness?" I asked in a still, small voice.

"Yes! How did you guess it? So you thought of that too! Well, in that case it must be poor. Do you believe in thought currents? I do. No doubt you got that from me. So it's mine anyway. I suppose it is foolish to even whisper these pearls aloud, but I tell you them so you'll keep the rest from poaching."

That night two pens raced over paper as the tall one and the chaperon put their seething thoughts into words.