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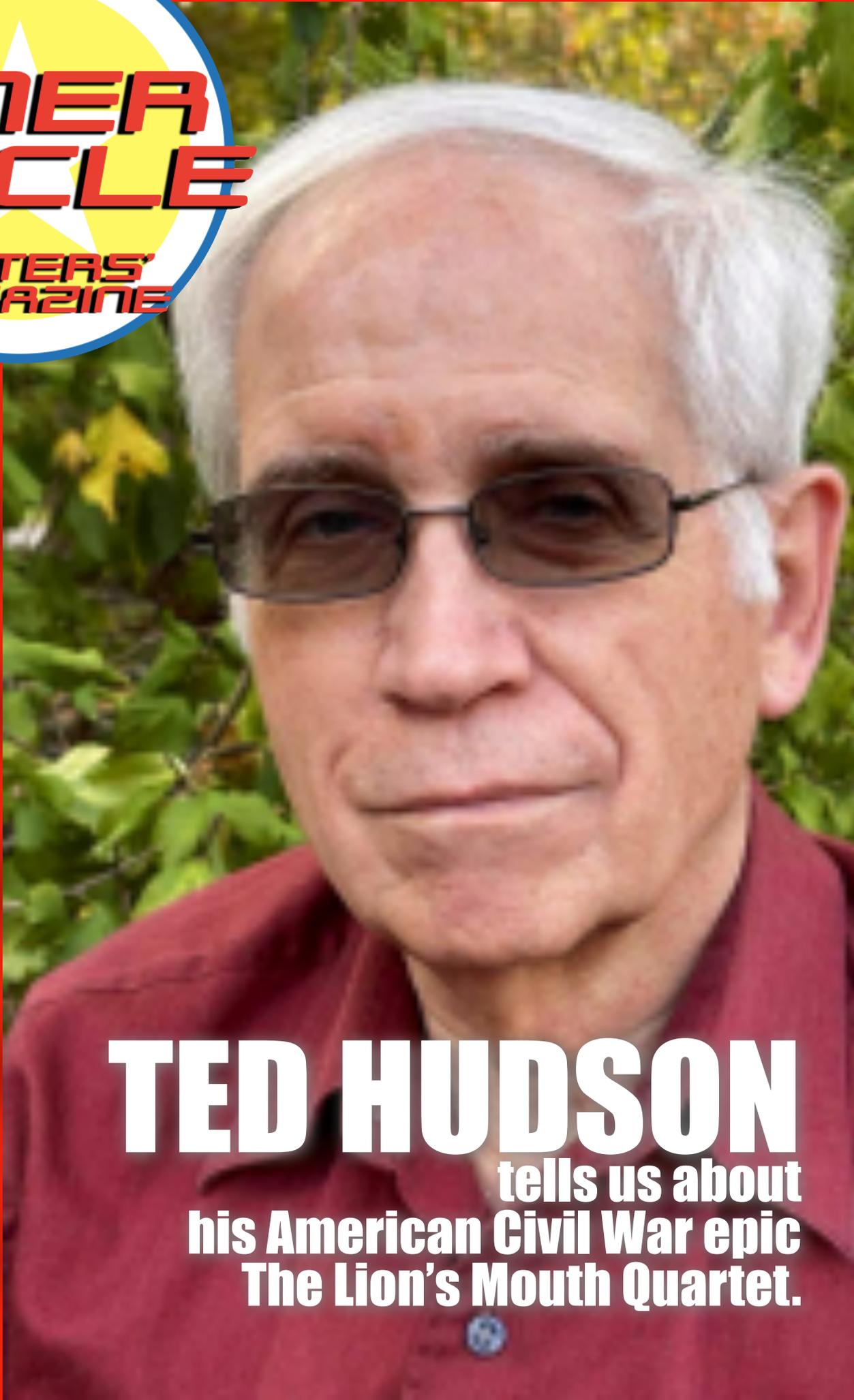
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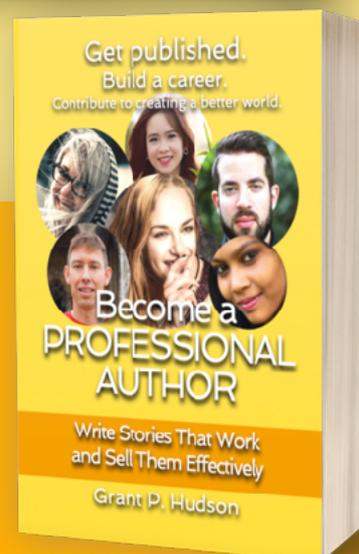
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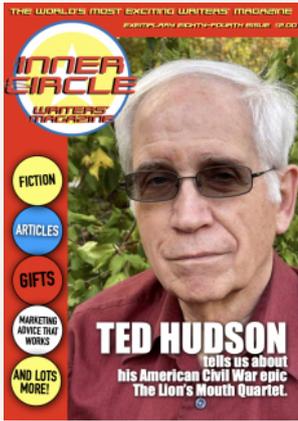
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Dear Reader,

2026 begins with a bang -from an American Civil War cannon, no less, as we hear from **Ted Hudson** about his multi-volume Civil War epic, *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*!

Plus we have the concluding part of the eerie fantasy story 'The Tale of the Blue Beast' by **Alexander Marshall** and **Tobias Green**, as well as the next chapter in the much-beloved classic *The Railway Children* by **E. E. Nesbit**.

In addition, we continue to go deep into what lies behind the telling of stories in the **Fictivity** series, and explore the principles behind successful marketing in the '**Laws**' of **Spamming** series.

You'll also find the usual literary quiz, submission opportunities, and a charming tale in **Master Author Showcase** from American novelist **Kathleen Norris**!

Enjoy!

Grant P. Hudson

CONTRIBUTORS



with Tobias Green, Alexander Marshall and others.

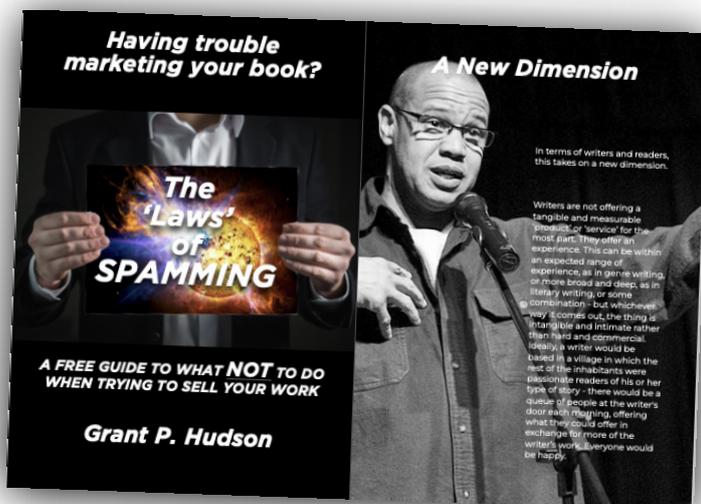
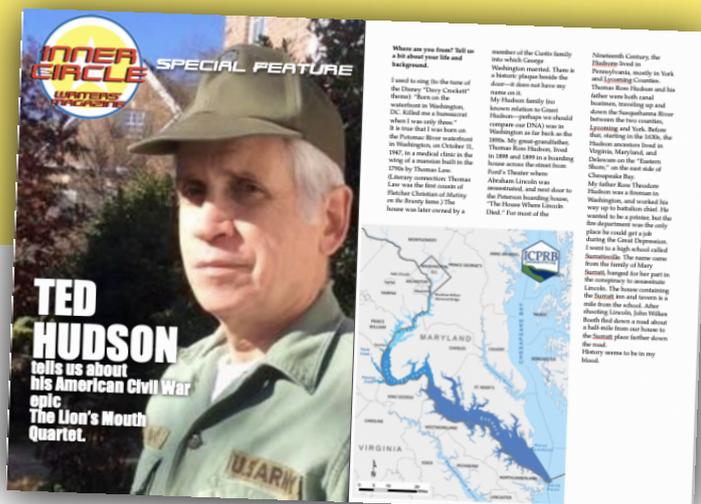
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IN THIS ISSUE



FICTION
12 THE TALE OF THE BLUE BEAST PART TWO by Alexander Marshall
56 CLASSIC MASTERPIECES: Continuing a serialisation of **E. E. Nesbit's** famous story *The Railway Children*
114 MASTER AUTHOR SHOWCASE: 'Poor, Dear Margaret Kirby' by **Kathleen Norris**

INTERVIEWS AND SNAPSHOTS
84 TED HUDSON tells us all about his American Civil War epic *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*.



EXPERT ADVICE
36 FICTIVITY Explore the key concepts behind effective storytelling
114 THE LAWS OF SPAMMING Find out how **NOT** to market your book in this series!

CLASSIC MASTERPIECES

The Railway Children

Chapter 4: The Engine Burglar

What was left of the second sheet and the Beowulf book came in very slowly to make a banner bearing the legend

SHE IS NEARLY WELL THANK YOU

and this was displayed to the Green Dragon about a fortnight after the arrival of the wonderful banner. The old gentleman was, it had second-hand impressions from the letter. And when this had been done the children were that were the first time they went to Mother when they had done when she was ill. And it did not seem nearly so angry as they had thought it would be. This was horrible. But it was much worse when she suddenly began to cry. Crying to catch, I believe, like a mother and whirling round, at any one moment of your hand itself taking part in a crying party.

Mother stopped first. She closed her eyes and then she said—

"I'm sorry I was so angry darling, because I know you didn't understand."

"The didn't mean to be naughty, Mamma," sobbed Robin, and Peter and Phyllis wept.

"Now, listen," said Mother. "It's quite true that we're poor but we have enough to live on. You mustn't go telling anyone about our affairs—it's not right. And you must never, never, never ask anyone to give you things. Now always remember that word 'yes'."

They all hugged her and rubbed their damp cheeks against her and promised that they would.

"And if I write a letter to your old gentleman, and I shall tell him that I don't approve of it, of course I shall think him, too, for his kindness. It's not right, I don't approve of, my darling, but the old gentleman. He was so kind to me when I was a child. And you can give the letter to the Station Master to give him and so on, so you may see that it's not."

Edith Nesbit (married name Edith Nesbit, 1858–1924) was an English writer and poet, who wrote or collaborated on more than 60 books as E. Nesbit. She was a political activist and Co-Founder of the Fabian Society. *The Railway Children* is a children's book written during 1905 and published in book form in the same year. It has been adapted for the screen several times, of which the 1972 film version is the best known.

The first book for any would be successful writer in imagination. This is an essential for states but to discover those principles upon which the writer's own life has been built. It's a prophetic insight into the heart of the individual's own 'truth' what has the process given to believe to be true from their very earliest times up until the present day? It's an adventure into the Unfamiliar.

What is usually found in one of our beloved positions.

'To be happy in a happy world' = Fate

'To be happy in a neutral world' = Comedy

'To be sad in a neutral world' = Tragedy

'To be sad in a sad world' = Irony

At first glance it might seem that it would be very difficult for the individual writer to understand the journey alone. There are unspoken principles which will be found at the heart of the myth, but it is the conscious about it. It's not meant well hidden — by the writer himself or herself. Indeed, with those psychological aspects of the heart on the mind — but it can be kept mysterious and mythical moments by speaking which of the four basic problems above an individual has assumed.

A SERIES TO ENLIGHTEN AND DELIGHT ALL WRITERS

FICTIVITY

Key Concepts Behind Effective Storytelling

Particular kinds of tropes, metaphors, idioms and other conventional ideas function effectively against the individual without intention. Thus, every writer would wish to become successful as a writer and without being aware of the reasons why.

Further understandings are the many of art and writers.

Grant P. Hudson
author of *How Stories Really Work and Become a Professional Author*

INNER CIRCLE PRESENTS MASTER AUTHOR SHOWCASE

Poor, Dear Margaret Kirby

by Kathleen Norris

Kathleen Thompson Norris, an American novelist and journalist, was born in 1903 in San Francisco, California. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, she worked as a journalist for *Northwest* magazine. Her first novel, *The Virgin*, was published in 1937. She went on to write over 70 novels, many of which were bestsellers. She was known for her sensitive depiction of the struggles and joys of everyday life. Norris was a prolific and prolific writer, and her books were translated into several languages. She was the highest paid female writer of her time. Many of her novels are set in the San Francisco area and detail the lives of the upper-class.

her husband and herself was no secret from their world. A certain ambivalence was never far from her mind. She was not a woman who would be a lonely figure in the world. She was a woman who would be a lonely figure in the world. She was a woman who would be a lonely figure in the world.

"You and I have been married nearly seven years," Margaret Kirby informed her husband, "and I suppose you are as much having with other as some civilized people over you?"

"He did not say that." The Kirby had long ago given up any discussion of their attitude to each other. But as she thought once more her mind she eyed her husband—looking steadily in her eyes—as if they ought have through the winter twilight with hope, passion, and devotion.

What was the matter, she wondered, with John and Margaret Kirby—strong, handsome, rich, and popular? What had been wrong with their marriage, that hitherto happy and widely advertised one? Why had it as it was they could not see the unbroken and unbroken could not seem to live out their lives together in happiness and dignified companionship, as generations of their forebears had done?

"Hush!—my dear, my dear, my dear," she said, "Margaret never married. Perhaps there is no such thing as a happy marriage."

Almost all the women she had known admitted the happiness of one and another, and she had discovered that domestic trouble itself. Margaret had never seen to it, it would not seem to have been a matter to a man as well as a woman and as old as her. But she knew she had had that her marriage for an obscure and distant had and only that she knew she had been happy by the letter to that the state of affairs between.

NEWS AND FEATURES

6 OBTAIN YOUR GUIDE TO GIFTS FROM CLARENDON HOUSE and much more in the Clarendon House Catalogue!
8 LOADS OF FREE E-BOOKS, WRITING RESOURCES AND OTHER ITEMS! No email address required!

50 A LITERALLY LITERARY QUIZ
80 SUBMISSION OPPORTUNITIES with Clarendon House Publications

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Here's to many more publications and many more years helping you achieve your dreams!

Grant P. Hudson

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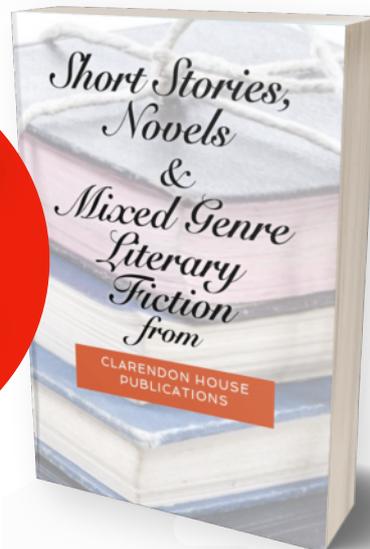
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CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

'The world is better with all this beautiful work seen at last.' - A. Delf, author

**This week from
Clarendon House**



Your Biggest Challenge As A Writer- and What To Do About It
NOW FULLY ILLUSTRATED
and COMPLETELY FREE



*High Fantasy & Science Fiction
Magazine Issue # 3*
also COMPLETELY FREE



Welcome!
Welcome to the Clarendon House Newsletter for week ending 28th November 2025!
It's been a big week! The new, fully illustrated e-book *Your Biggest Challenge As A Writer- and What To Do About It* was released and is available for FREE [here!](#)
PLUS Issue # 3 of the *High Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine* came out - also completely FREE!
On top of that, Clarendon House's *Grand Christmas Catalogue 2025*, packed with links to almost 300 books, magazines and other items, can be downloaded [here](#).
Feedback is welcome. Drop me a line at grant@clarendonhousebooks.com
Below is a popular blog item.

Clarendon House Publications 1

The Clarendon House Weekly Newsletter

Simply click on the image to
go to the Free Items
webpage, where you can also
sign up for regular briefings.

CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHORS

ANDREW and HELEN BIRCH



Space Truckers 6

Marvis City Blues



Jack Booth turned into the shadows, and away from the blinking neon that permeated the mask covering his face. Avoiding the puddles of the alley, he stepped into a doorway, and opened the door. Looking around, he sighed. The sign that read 'Booth, Private Investigations', was faded and peeling...

Outside, Marvis City was alive. Vendors with street stalls hawked their wares among the neon signs, to the throng of night owls, with tastes and smells from across the galaxy. Con-artists and tricksters walked up and down the strip looking for the unsuspecting tourists, and the easy mark. Cabs lifted off and set down, taking drunken revellers from across the galaxy, to night spots and flesh pots, where a week's wages could be spent in a moment. Whatever you could imagine, it could be bought in Marvis City. Whatever kink or fantasy your heart desired, as long as you had the green, it was here for the taking...

Come to Marvis City in the universe of the Spacetruckers and enter the dark world of the detective - especially that of Jack Booth, scarred ex-soldier from the Celeron Wars, who now battles against injustice and corruption as a detective in one of the wildest cities in the galaxy...

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-David Bowmore, author of *The Magic of Deben Market*

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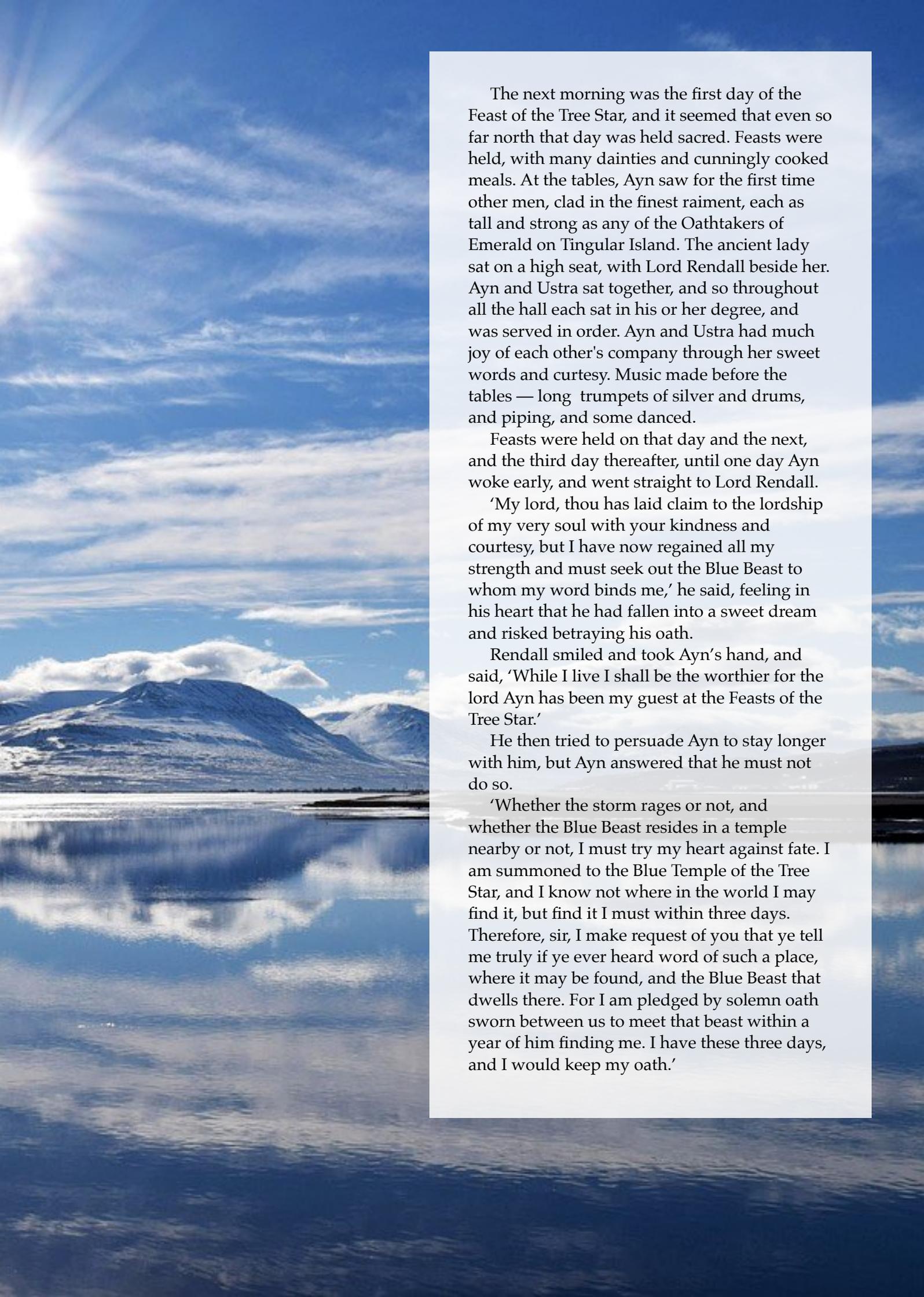
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FICTION by ALEXANDER MARSHALL
and TOBIAS GREEN

THE TALE OF THE
BLUE BEAST

PART TWO



The next morning was the first day of the Feast of the Tree Star, and it seemed that even so far north that day was held sacred. Feasts were held, with many dainties and cunningly cooked meals. At the tables, Ayn saw for the first time other men, clad in the finest raiment, each as tall and strong as any of the Oathtakers of Emerald on Tingular Island. The ancient lady sat on a high seat, with Lord Rendall beside her. Ayn and Ustra sat together, and so throughout all the hall each sat in his or her degree, and was served in order. Ayn and Ustra had much joy of each other's company through her sweet words and curtesy. Music made before the tables — long trumpets of silver and drums, and piping, and some danced.

Feasts were held on that day and the next, and the third day thereafter, until one day Ayn woke early, and went straight to Lord Rendall.

'My lord, thou has laid claim to the lordship of my very soul with your kindness and courtesy, but I have now regained all my strength and must seek out the Blue Beast to whom my word binds me,' he said, feeling in his heart that he had fallen into a sweet dream and risked betraying his oath.

Rendall smiled and took Ayn's hand, and said, 'While I live I shall be the worthier for the lord Ayn has been my guest at the Feasts of the Tree Star.'

He then tried to persuade Ayn to stay longer with him, but Ayn answered that he must not do so.

'Whether the storm rages or not, and whether the Blue Beast resides in a temple nearby or not, I must try my heart against fate. I am summoned to the Blue Temple of the Tree Star, and I know not where in the world I may find it, but find it I must within three days. Therefore, sir, I make request of you that ye tell me truly if ye ever heard word of such a place, where it may be found, and the Blue Beast that dwells there. For I am pledged by solemn oath sworn between us to meet that beast within a year of him finding me. I have these three days, and I would keep my oath.'

Lord Rendall laughed, and said, 'I will show you your goal, the Blue Temple of the Tree Star, have no fear! Take your ease, friend, in your bed, till the fourth day, and go forth on the first of the year, storm willing, and you will come to that place in the morning, there to do as you must. It is not two miles from here.'

Ayn was greatly relieved, and he laughed. 'I thank you for this above all else.'

Then Rendall sat beside him, and said, 'You have promised to play the game I suggested?'

'Indeed,' said Ayn, 'for while I abide in your chimney I am bound by your will.'

And they bound each other again to play the game whereby anything the lord hunted and caught he would exchange with whatever Ayn had garnered during his day of rest.

*





Before daylight broke in the world outside the great chimney, folk rose up; those who would hunt with Lord Rendall called their grooms and summoned their steeds, and Ayn witnessed a great wonder: for the hunters brought forth mighty white thalars, great beasts which had been bridled and girthed and seemed tame to Ayn's eyes. These they made ready, saddling them, tightened up their girths, and then, all arrayed for riding, up they leapt upon the thalars' backs and took their bridles, and each rode away, down a wide white tunnel leading to the chambers Ayn had seen before.

Rendall and his fellow hunters rode through a wide arch into the sprawling great caverns just as the light of the Tree Star glimmered upon Emerald outside. A dozen hunters there were, and the cavern rang with their silver trumpets and the snuffling roars of the eight beasts upon which they rode.

In the cavern dwelt many creatures of which Ayn had never seen the like: large white deer, and winter foxes and flightless birds that dwelt among the dim lakes deep under the earth. The caverns were lit by an ice-like light, which refracted from the surface above; it illuminated all the floor of the cavern with blue radiance, so that it seemed to Ayn's eyes as he watched the riders ride out, that he was looking deep within a moving painting.

While Lord Rendall roamed the caverns, seeking prey, Ayn returned to his curtained bed, lit by firelight upon the gleaming white walls. There he pondered what would happen when he finally re-encountered the Blue Beast.

A photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, shirtless, sleeping peacefully in a bed. He is lying on his side, facing right, with his head resting on a white pillow. The bed is covered with white linens, and the background shows a wooden headboard. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a serene atmosphere.

As he lay half slumbering, he heard a sound at the door of the chamber. He raised his head, and pulled back a corner of the curtain, and saw that it was Ustra-al-adale, the lord's companion. She shut the door softly behind her, and turned towards the bed; and Ayn laid him down softly and pretended to sleep. Ustra came lightly to the bedside, lifting the curtain; she sat herself down beside him. Ayn lay there awhile, wondering what was happening, until he finally said to himself, 'I should ask her why she has come.' He pretended to wake up, and turned towards her, and opened his eyes as one astonished. Ustra laughed, and her face blossomed like a pale flower, with small smiling lips.

'Hail the morning, sweet lord Ayn,' she said. 'You are careless, since anyone could have entered thus. You might have been taken unawares, and bound in your bed.'

'Hail the morning to thee, fair lady,' Ayn replied. 'I yield to you, for you have the advantage of me. Instruct me what I must do.' He laughed. 'But grant your prisoner that he might rise. I would get up from bed, and array me better, then could I talk in more comfort.'

'Certainly not, my lord,' she answered him, 'you shall not rise; I shall keep you here, since you can do no other, and talk with you whom I have captured. For I know well that you are Ayn, whom those in the South deem worthy of great respect, wheresoever you may go. Your honour and your courtesy are praised, I am sure, by all who live in those warm southern lands. Now you are here and we are alone; my lord and his men are afield; all the servants are in their beds, and my maidens also, and the door shut upon us. And since in this hour I have him that all folk love, I shall use my time well, while it lasts. You are welcome to my company, for I choose to be your servant.'

Ustra spoke musically, and with great precision, and Ayn felt that a web of words weighed as heavily upon him as his thick blankets.



'In good faith,' Ayn said, 'I think I am unworthy of such service as you offer.'

'In truth, my lord Ayn,' replied Ustra, 'there are ladies enough who would prefer to be in my position than to possess all the treasures of Emerald. And now, through the grace of the Tree Star, I have wholly in my power that which they all might desire!'

Ayn replied with modest words, 'My lady, you speak frankly. One such as yourself must know only goodness of heart.'

'Of goodness I know little,' Ustra said. 'All I perceive is desire.'

'I would that you might have chosen someone better than a poor wanderer from the South,' Ayn replied.

The lady Ustra talked on in this way, and ever did Ayn turn her words aside, for though she was the most beautiful woman he had here seen, yet his mind bore before it always the oath that he had made and the contest that was yet to come.

After much beautiful speech, Ustra said, 'My lord, wilt thou not kiss me in all graciousness, as thine hostess?'

Ayn blushed, but knew that he was at her mercy and must behave according to the constraints of manners, yet keenly and with due regard for all proprieties.

'My lady,' he said after a moment, 'as custom demands, I shall indeed render thee a kiss as my goodly hostess.'

And they kissed with all delicacy, before the lady Ustra took her leave.

*

That evening the lord Rendall returned with many deer, and gave them all in gift to Ayn, his guest.

'And now I would have that which ye have gained, while I have laboured,' he laughed, and Ayn kissed him.

'Such is my bounty,' said Ayn, 'yet humble it may seem placed against the rewards of your hunting.'

Rendall laughed again. 'I see that my guest is bounteous indeed! Let us renew our promises for the morrow: that which I acquire is thine, and likewise thou yield up what thou gain within.'

And so their bargain was renewed.

*





The next day, the lord Rendall hunted a wild white boar, which curved and dived and swept all about the strange white forests deep in the chambers beneath the snow and ice of Emerald. White snow-wolves pursued it into the frozen thickets, but at the last it burst out and gored them. No arrow from the huntsmen's bows would pierce the thick flank of the boar and it galloped off down the bed of a half-frozen stream into thick woodland, lit from above by a fiery pink sky.

At last, the mighty thalars could proceed no further into the thickets and Lord Rendall dismounted and pursued the huge beast on foot, crashing through the thorn bushes and clambering over the twisted roots of the low trees, until, in a narrow clearing, he confronted the boar. The beast charged him, but he stepped aside and grappled with it, gripping its bloodied tusks with his hands. It trampled him, and opened its maw to bite at his throat, but, at the last moment, he let go of one of its tusks and swept a broad-bladed kuru deep across its neck, severing its massive head in one blow.

*

Back in the chambers of the Chimney, Lady Ustra visited Ayn again as he lay abed, and told him in her sweet voice that he was strong enough to take from her whatever he wanted.

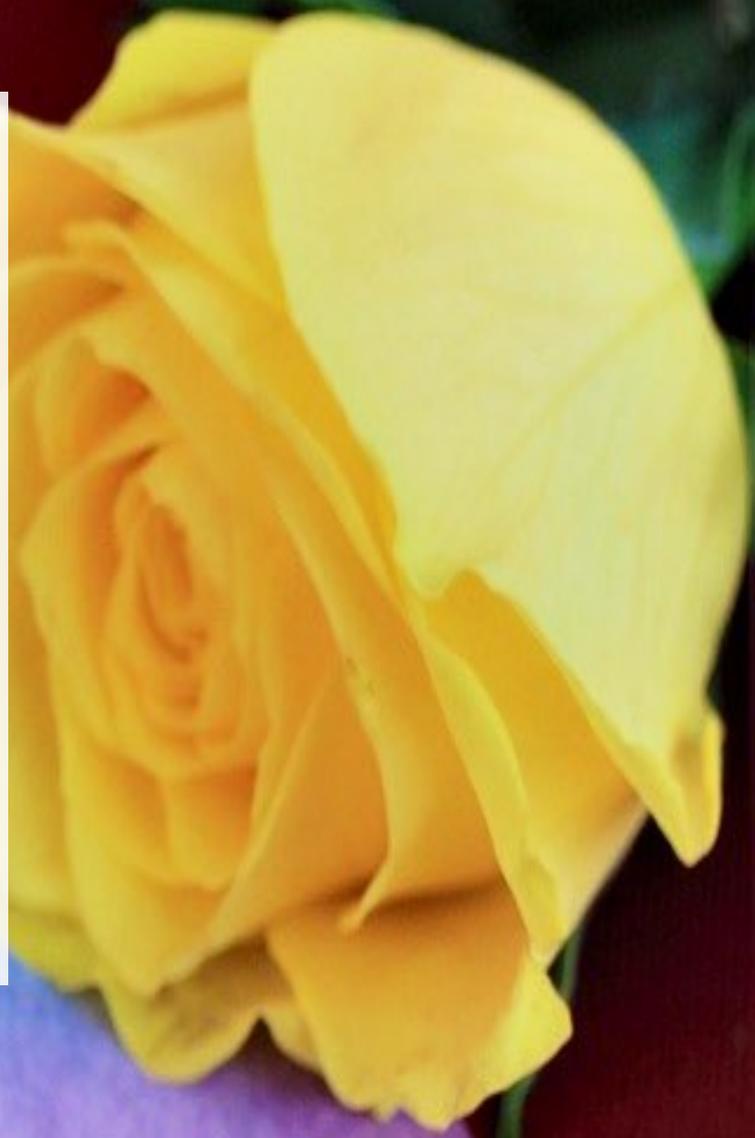
She did not permit him to rise from his blankets, beneath which he lay naked, but leaned over him in the firelight and kissed him on the lips.

'I demand to know from thee tales of love such as they tell in the South,' she whispered to him, 'for in all my travels there I saw many mighty men but never heard any of their poetry of love and words of beauty they use to charm their womenfolk.'

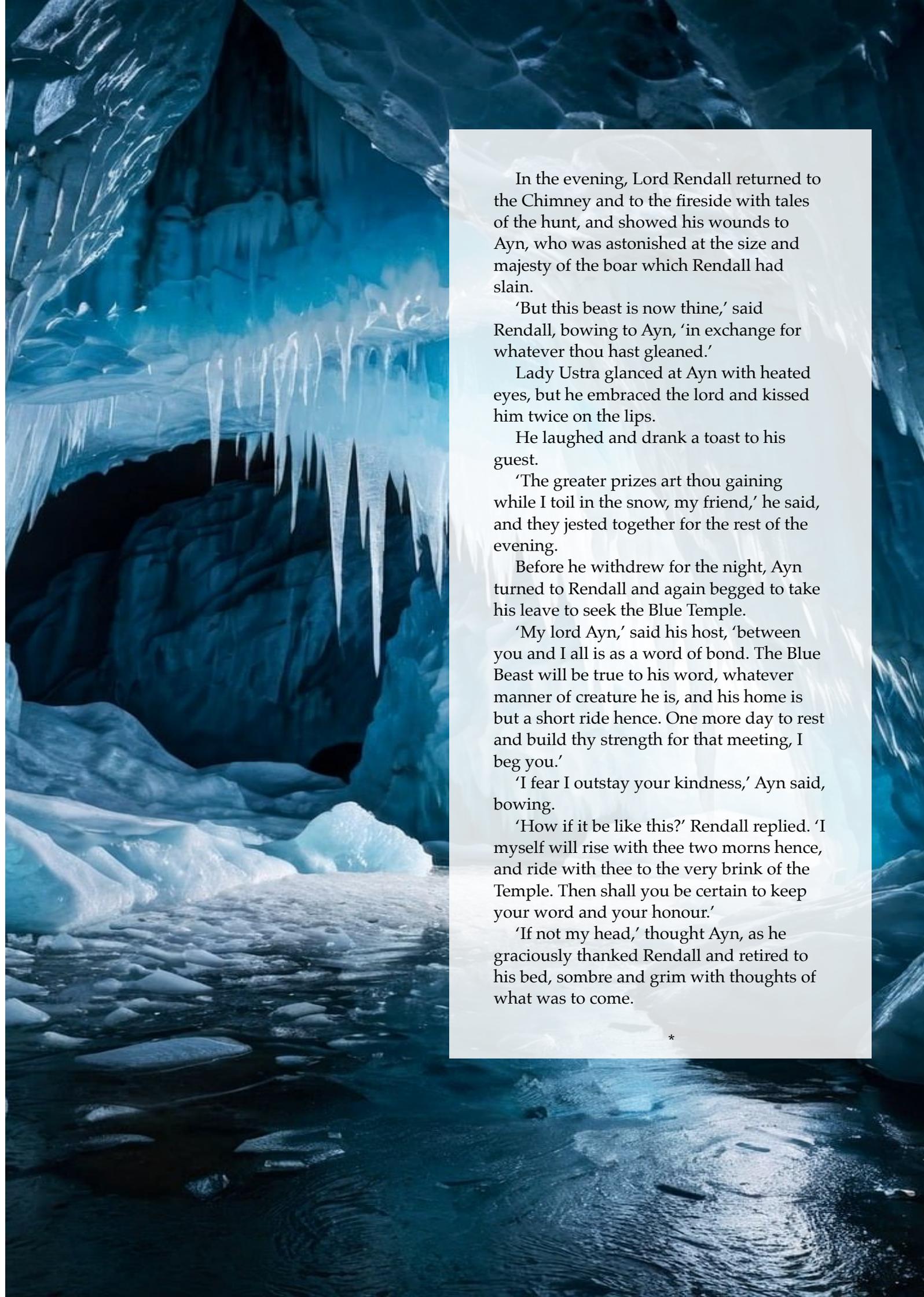
Ayn replied, 'I fear thou must know more of love than I. I am an Oathtaker of Emerald, and am too young yet to have spoken such words.'

She laughed then, and kissed him again, and then departed from him for the rest of the day.

*



minne joy -
ein so glänzend
und so schön,
Anwesenheit, so schön



In the evening, Lord Rendall returned to the Chimney and to the fireside with tales of the hunt, and showed his wounds to Ayn, who was astonished at the size and majesty of the boar which Rendall had slain.

‘But this beast is now thine,’ said Rendall, bowing to Ayn, ‘in exchange for whatever thou hast gleaned.’

Lady Ustra glanced at Ayn with heated eyes, but he embraced the lord and kissed him twice on the lips.

He laughed and drank a toast to his guest.

‘The greater prizes art thou gaining while I toil in the snow, my friend,’ he said, and they jested together for the rest of the evening.

Before he withdrew for the night, Ayn turned to Rendall and again begged to take his leave to seek the Blue Temple.

‘My lord Ayn,’ said his host, ‘between you and I all is as a word of bond. The Blue Beast will be true to his word, whatever manner of creature he is, and his home is but a short ride hence. One more day to rest and build thy strength for that meeting, I beg you.’

‘I fear I outstay your kindness,’ Ayn said, bowing.

‘How if it be like this?’ Rendall replied. ‘I myself will rise with thee two morns hence, and ride with thee to the very brink of the Temple. Then shall you be certain to keep your word and your honour.’

‘If not my head,’ thought Ayn, as he graciously thanked Rendall and retired to his bed, sombre and grim with thoughts of what was to come.

Deep in the snow forests the next day the lord Rendall hunted a wily fox. In its winter fur, the sleek creature was able to slither into narrow crevasses where snow-wolves could not follow, and dash across low hillsides faster than the fastest hunting hound. Though he had set out early in the Emerald day, it was late evening before, exhausted, thirsty and hungry, the hunting party finally cornered the beast. It was Lord Rendall himself, who, wearying of the chase, and bringing out his slender bow, fired a long arrow high into the air which pierced the fell of the fox and brought it down.

Back in the chambers of the Chimneyhearth of Rendall, Lord of the North, the fair lady rose betimes, cladding herself in a rich mantle that reached even to the ground but left her throat and her fair neck bare. The long gown was bordered and lined with rich furs. On her head she wore a network of precious snowstones, that gleamed and shone through her firelit tresses in clusters like the constellations of the sky. She came thus into Ayn's chamber, closing the door after her, and called to him, 'My lord Ayn, art thou rested enow? Be you ready for your greatest challenge?'

Ayn had not slept well, but had restlessly turned in his bed, troubled by the contest which he knew was fast approaching. He turned to see the lady Ustra adorned in her gown. She bent over him in his bed and kissed him.

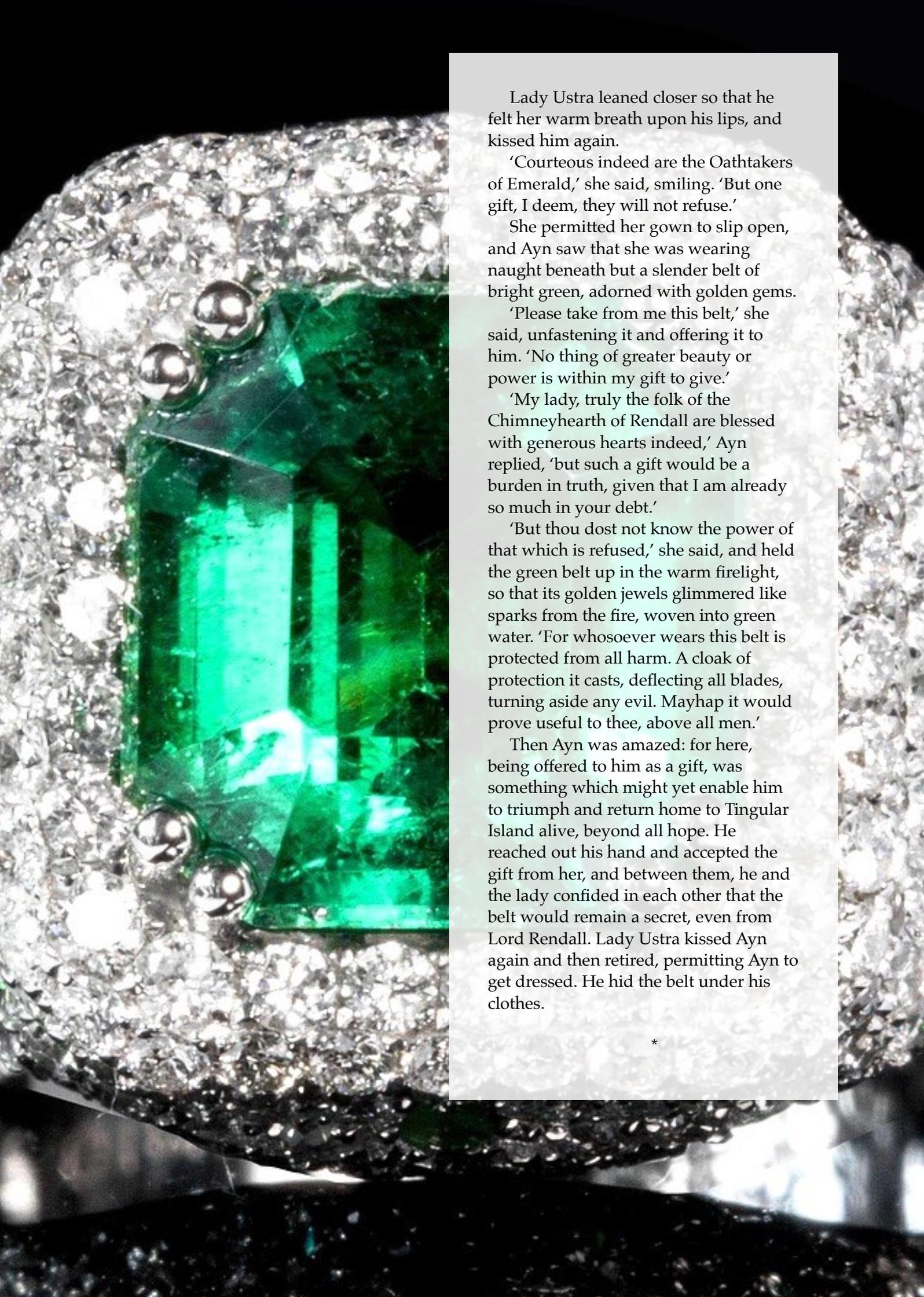
'My lord, is there someone in the South who owns thy heart? A lover, perhaps?' she asked him in her soft, musical voice, sitting beside him.

'I have no lover,' said Ayn, sitting up.

'Then might I give thee a gift? This precious ring contains a tiny burning ember stolen from the heart of a snow-worm,' she said, and showed him a red ring upon her finger. Deep in its crimson heart burned a tiny glede of gold, flickering hypnotically as he watched it in the firelight.

'Nay, my lady,' he said, looking up into her eyes, 'I can take no gift from thee, to whom I am already well beholden.'





Lady Ustra leaned closer so that he felt her warm breath upon his lips, and kissed him again.

'Courteous indeed are the Oathtakers of Emerald,' she said, smiling. 'But one gift, I deem, they will not refuse.'

She permitted her gown to slip open, and Ayn saw that she was wearing naught beneath but a slender belt of bright green, adorned with golden gems.

'Please take from me this belt,' she said, unfastening it and offering it to him. 'No thing of greater beauty or power is within my gift to give.'

'My lady, truly the folk of the Chimneyhearth of Rendall are blessed with generous hearts indeed,' Ayn replied, 'but such a gift would be a burden in truth, given that I am already so much in your debt.'

'But thou dost not know the power of that which is refused,' she said, and held the green belt up in the warm firelight, so that its golden jewels glimmered like sparks from the fire, woven into green water. 'For whosoever wears this belt is protected from all harm. A cloak of protection it casts, deflecting all blades, turning aside any evil. Mayhap it would prove useful to thee, above all men.'

Then Ayn was amazed: for here, being offered to him as a gift, was something which might yet enable him to triumph and return home to Tingular Island alive, beyond all hope. He reached out his hand and accepted the gift from her, and between them, he and the lady confided in each other that the belt would remain a secret, even from Lord Rendall. Lady Ustra kissed Ayn again and then retired, permitting Ayn to get dressed. He hid the belt under his clothes.

*

That evening, Ayn came down to the evening meal in the central chamber of the Citadel, and he was full of good cheer. Lord Rendall showed him the fox which he had caught and described in great detail the chase the creature had led him on over hill and through cavern, and he made a gift of its carcass to Ayn.

Ayn laughed, and kissed the lord three times, and then, in high spirits, they retired to the feast and made merry until late that night.

Then Ayn bowed before all the courtiers, and bowed to Lord Rendall, thanking him for his bounteous kindness and declaring that on the morrow he would leave for the Blue Temple of the Tree Star. And Rendall repeated his promise that he himself would lead Ayn to its threshold.

*





That night, the storm outside was wilder than ever, and snow swept across the Great Ice in raging blizzards, but Ayn slept soundly and when he awoke, the whole landscape was in an eerie peace.

Ayn quietly dressed, first with the green belt glittering with its golden stones next to his skin, then his linen under-shirt and under-garments and fur stockings; then his arming coat, followed by his sabatons and greaves and poleyns, cuisses, besagues, rerebraces, vambraces and all the rest.

Then he went down to the tunnel which led to the outer world, where Lord Rendall waited for him. Here they mounted a simple snowsled, pulled by two snow-wolves almost as large as thalars, and Ayn thanked the lord again and then donned his snowhelmet with its dark crystal visor. He attached his kuru and kajar to his outer belt, and carried his heraldic shield.

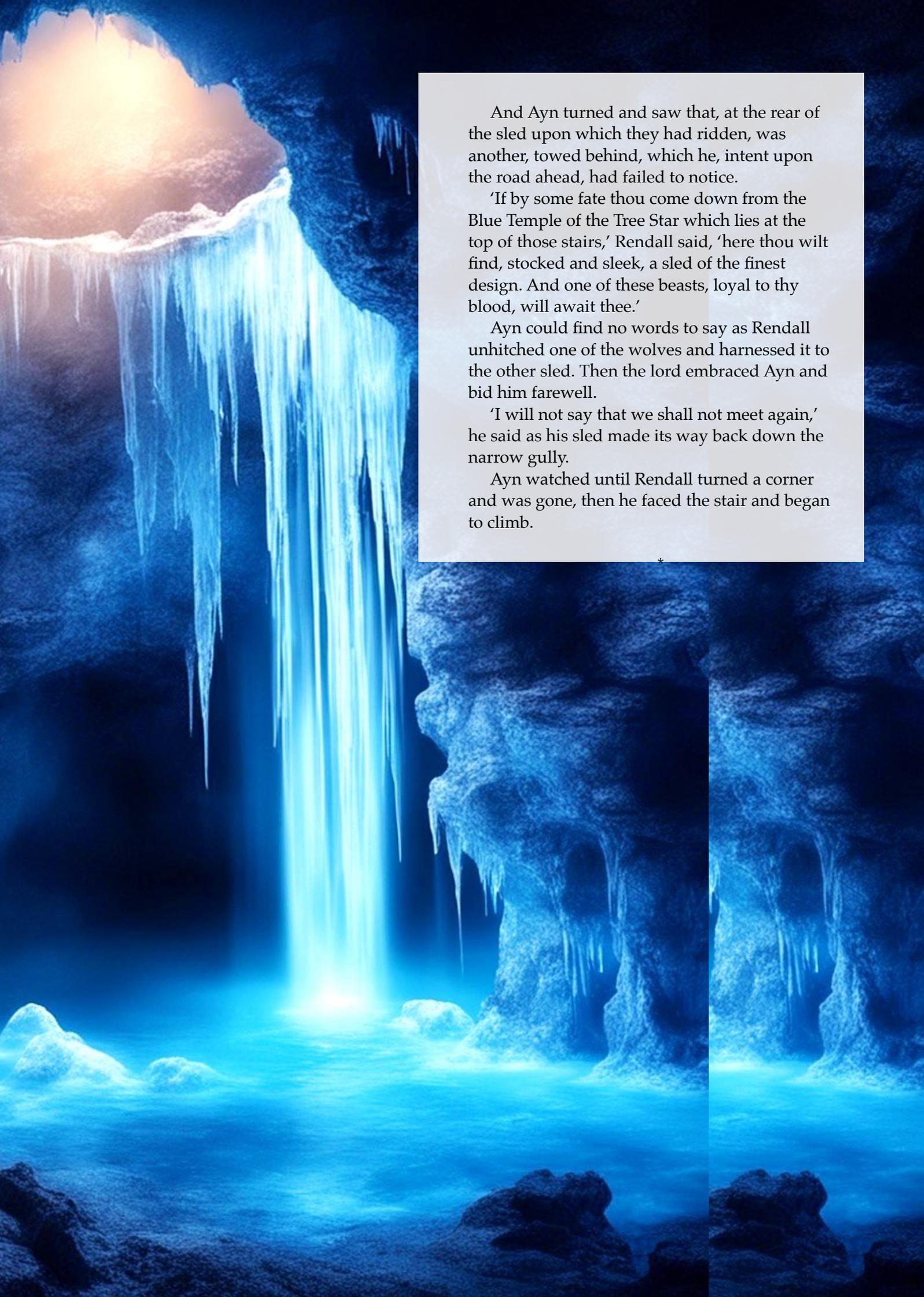
The lord Rendall was dressed only in a surcoat of rich thalar fur. He climbed aboard the sled and with kind words bid Ayn do the same, and they set off. The lady Ustra was nowhere to be seen, and all was quiet except for the sound of the sled as they slid up the narrow tunnel to the surface.

As they emerged into the wider world at last, Ayn turned to see that the Citadel was housed within a massive mountain whose crest glimmered with distant flame. And he saw that they were sledding along the bottom of a narrow valley between peaks. It was the night of Winter upon Emerald, and the sky was black and strewn with a hoard of glittering stars of all colours.

In less than an hour, through which they had travelled silently, the lord turned the sled into a narrower valley and drew to a halt. Ahead, Ayn could make out in bright starlight the end of that valley, and, climbing up into the topmost peaks was a white staircase, hewn from the rock and laden with snow upon every step.

'Here thou and I must take our partings,' said Rendall, gripping Ayn's gloved hand in his mighty fist. 'But though thou hast given no thought for life and the future, behold, I have done so!'





And Ayn turned and saw that, at the rear of the sled upon which they had ridden, was another, towed behind, which he, intent upon the road ahead, had failed to notice.

'If by some fate thou come down from the Blue Temple of the Tree Star which lies at the top of those stairs,' Rendall said, 'here thou wilt find, stocked and sleek, a sled of the finest design. And one of these beasts, loyal to thy blood, will await thee.'

Ayn could find no words to say as Rendall unhitched one of the wolves and harnessed it to the other sled. Then the lord embraced Ayn and bid him farewell.

'I will not say that we shall not meet again,' he said as his sled made its way back down the narrow gully.

Ayn watched until Rendall turned a corner and was gone, then he faced the stair and began to climb.

*

It took many hours to climb the slippery, snowy staircase of stone, though each stair was broad and there was little danger of him falling. As he came out onto a wide plateau, the firemoon of Emerald rose in the south east, and it was as though the sun itself had risen; all about him, the Great Ice glimmered and shimmered like a silver gown, and it seemed as though he could see the whole world laid out at his feet.

There was nothing at all upon the plateau, but Ayn could hear the sound, near at hand, of a blade being sharpened. He drew his kuru from his belt and gripped his kajar, and sweated beneath his armour, though the air around him glistened with frost.

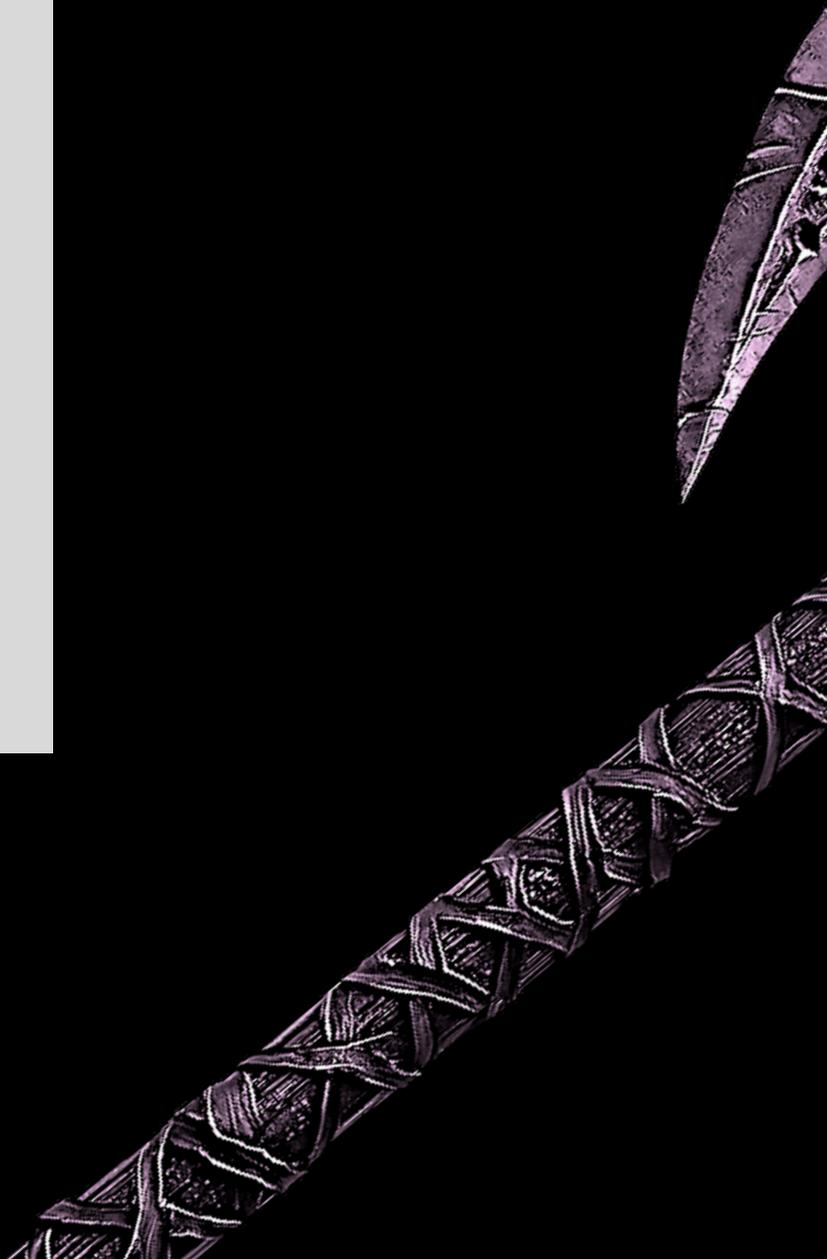
Then, over the curvature of the plateau to his right, an immense shadow appeared, casting darkness ahead of itself, and he saw the form of the Blue Beast approaching through the thin snow.

'Hail, Oathtaker of Emerald,' said the beast, though the sound seemed to come from the frosty air. 'Pleased am I to see that the Children of the Stars keep their word upon my world.'

'I come not to banter words with thee, however courteous they may sound, but to fulfil my oath,' replied Ayn, trembling as he saw the beast's mighty axe shining under the moon.

The Blue Beast made a sound which might have been laughter, and came a few steps nearer.

'Yield thyself as I did, then,' it said, and Ayn put aside his weapons and knelt in the snow. He removed his snowhelmet and said a prayer to The Book.





'May my example serve to strengthen the ways of The Book upon Emerald,' he said, and bowed his head, putting aside the skirt of mail, the aventail, designed to protect his neck.

The Blue Beast then swung his huge axe about, scything the air back and forth.

'Be at your task, O beast!' said Ayn, and finally the axe blade swung high above him. As it whistled down, though, Ayn flinched.

'Art thou so afeared, young Oathtaker?' laughed the beast, holding back the blade — but Ayn leapt up in fury.

'Speak no word against mortal men, inhuman creature!' he cried. 'Well it is for those born in some other, fell way who need not bend their lives to the blade — but I am only a mortal man! See now whether I will balk beneath thy blade!'

So saying, he knelt again in the snow, determined to face death without flinching.

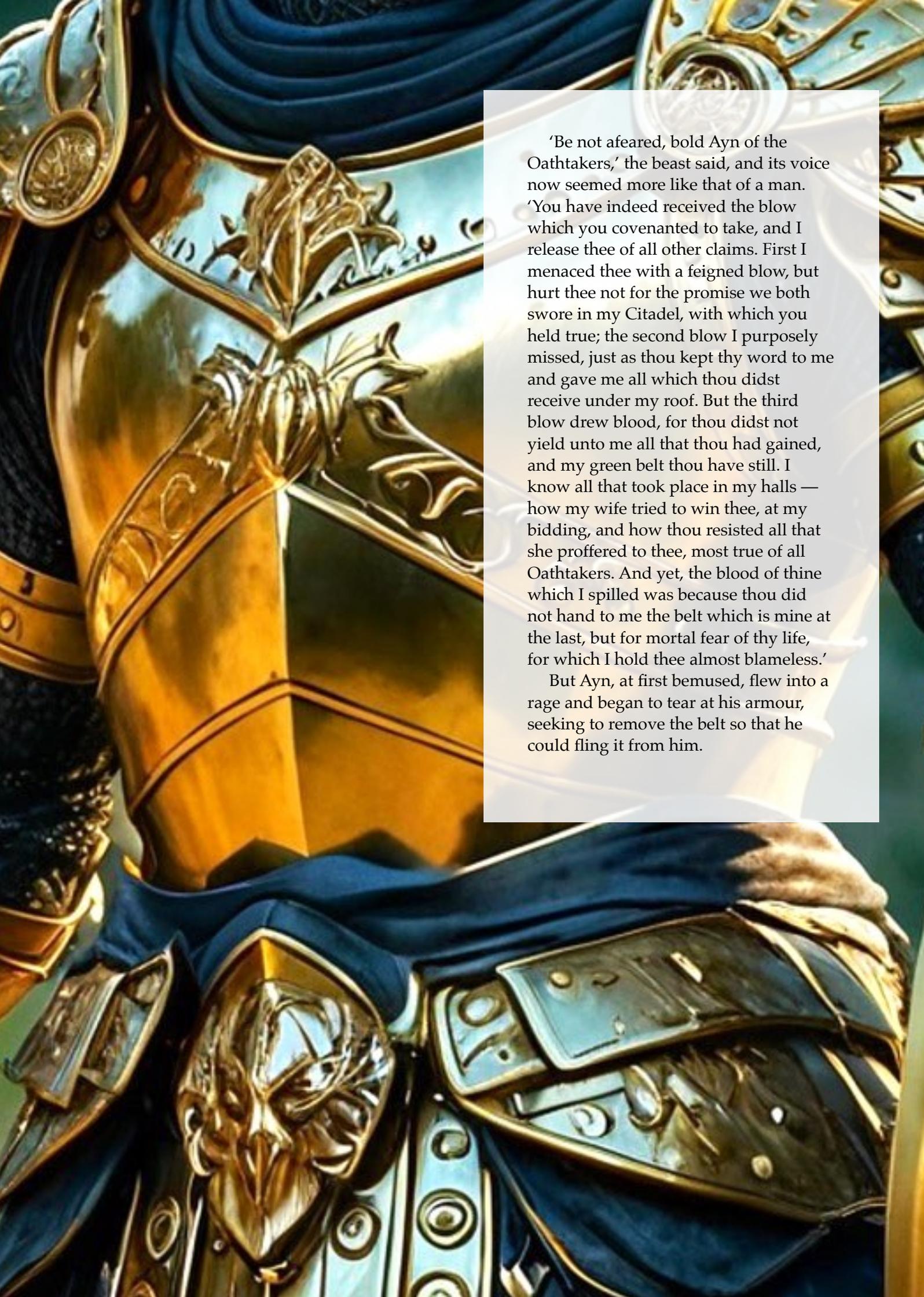
The Blue Beast swung his axe high again, but this time plunged it into the snow near Ayn's head. Ayn had not moved, however, and this time simply looked up into the white eyes of the monster.

'I am no longer afraid, beast,' he said in a low voice. 'Do what thou wilt, or desist.'

Then the axe swung high for a third time — and this time, as it came down, it nicked Ayn's neck in the slightest of wounds. Seeing his bright red blood drip onto the snow, but feeling nevertheless very much alive, he leapt aside and brought up his kuru and kajar to face the beast.

But what he saw astonished him. For the Blue Beast was leaning upon his axe, its shaft in the ground, looking upon Ayn as he stood all armed and faced him fearlessly — and it seemed as though the creature's face smiled.





‘Be not afeared, bold Ayn of the Oathtakers,’ the beast said, and its voice now seemed more like that of a man. ‘You have indeed received the blow which you covenanted to take, and I release thee of all other claims. First I menaced thee with a feigned blow, but hurt thee not for the promise we both swore in my Citadel, with which you held true; the second blow I purposely missed, just as thou kept thy word to me and gave me all which thou didst receive under my roof. But the third blow drew blood, for thou didst not yield unto me all that thou had gained, and my green belt thou have still. I know all that took place in my halls — how my wife tried to win thee, at my bidding, and how thou resisted all that she proffered to thee, most true of all Oathtakers. And yet, the blood of thine which I spilled was because thou did not hand to me the belt which is mine at the last, but for mortal fear of thy life, for which I hold thee almost blameless.’

But Ayn, at first bemused, flew into a rage and began to tear at his armour, seeking to remove the belt so that he could fling it from him.

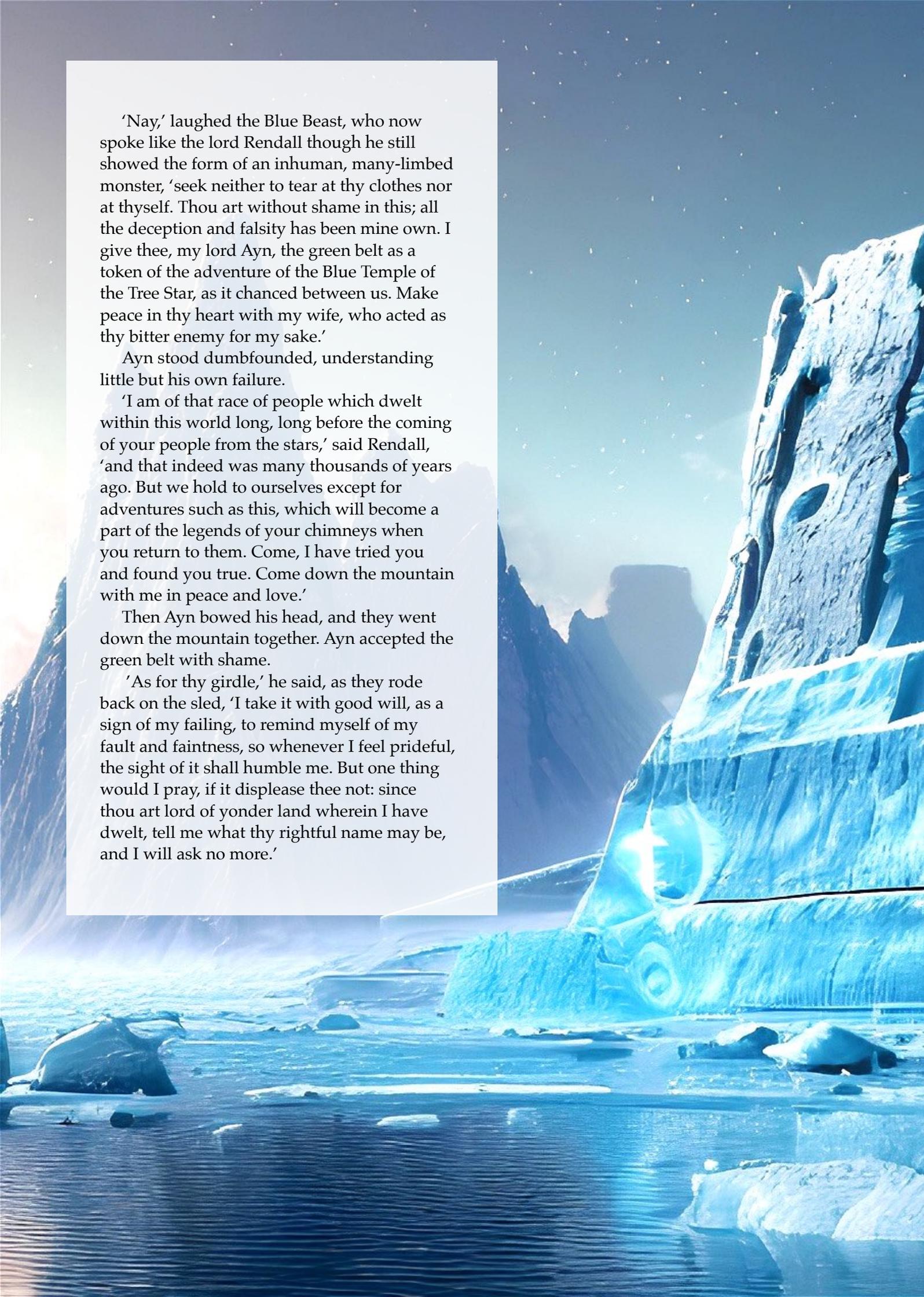
'Nay,' laughed the Blue Beast, who now spoke like the lord Rendall though he still showed the form of an inhuman, many-limbed monster, 'seek neither to tear at thy clothes nor at thyself. Thou art without shame in this; all the deception and falsity has been mine own. I give thee, my lord Ayn, the green belt as a token of the adventure of the Blue Temple of the Tree Star, as it chanced between us. Make peace in thy heart with my wife, who acted as thy bitter enemy for my sake.'

Ayn stood dumbfounded, understanding little but his own failure.

'I am of that race of people which dwelt within this world long, long before the coming of your people from the stars,' said Rendall, 'and that indeed was many thousands of years ago. But we hold to ourselves except for adventures such as this, which will become a part of the legends of your chimneys when you return to them. Come, I have tried you and found you true. Come down the mountain with me in peace and love.'

Then Ayn bowed his head, and they went down the mountain together. Ayn accepted the green belt with shame.

'As for thy girdle,' he said, as they rode back on the sled, 'I take it with good will, as a sign of my failing, to remind myself of my fault and faintness, so whenever I feel prideful, the sight of it shall humble me. But one thing would I pray, if it displease thee not: since thou art lord of yonder land wherein I have dwelt, tell me what thy rightful name may be, and I will ask no more.'





‘My true name is Rendall,’ said the beast, ‘and I am gifted in ancient ways which empower me to appear before you as I am now, but also in another form, more suited to mortal eyes. These and many other mysteries are held sacrosanct here in the North.’

So Ayn bade farewell to the Blue Beast, and that creature turned down the valley and disappeared whithersoever he would. But Ayn found that the hurt that he had in his neck was healed, and he climbed aboard the sled which had been left for him, and set off south, and so came at long last back to the sea and eventually to Tingular Island and the algooth of Hur at Asdalashan.

Joy abounded there when Hur knew that the good Ayn had returned beyond all hope. He asked Ayn how he had fared, and Ayn told them all that had chanced to him —the adventure of the Blue Temple of the Tree Star, the fashion of the creature, the love of the lady Ustra — and at last of the belt which he had accepted. He showed them the wound in his neck and blushed for shame as he told the tale.

But Hur comforted him, and all those at the algooth were of good cheer, welcoming back their hero, who became a legend in the annals of Emerald.

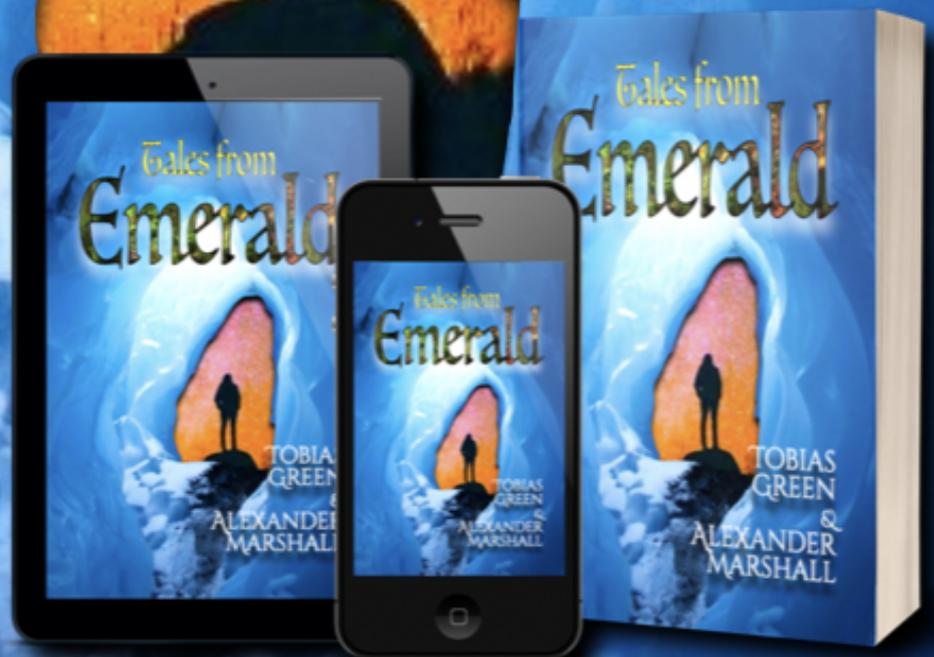


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Tales from Emerald

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FICTIVITY

***Key Concepts
Behind Effective
Storytelling***



Grant P. Hudson

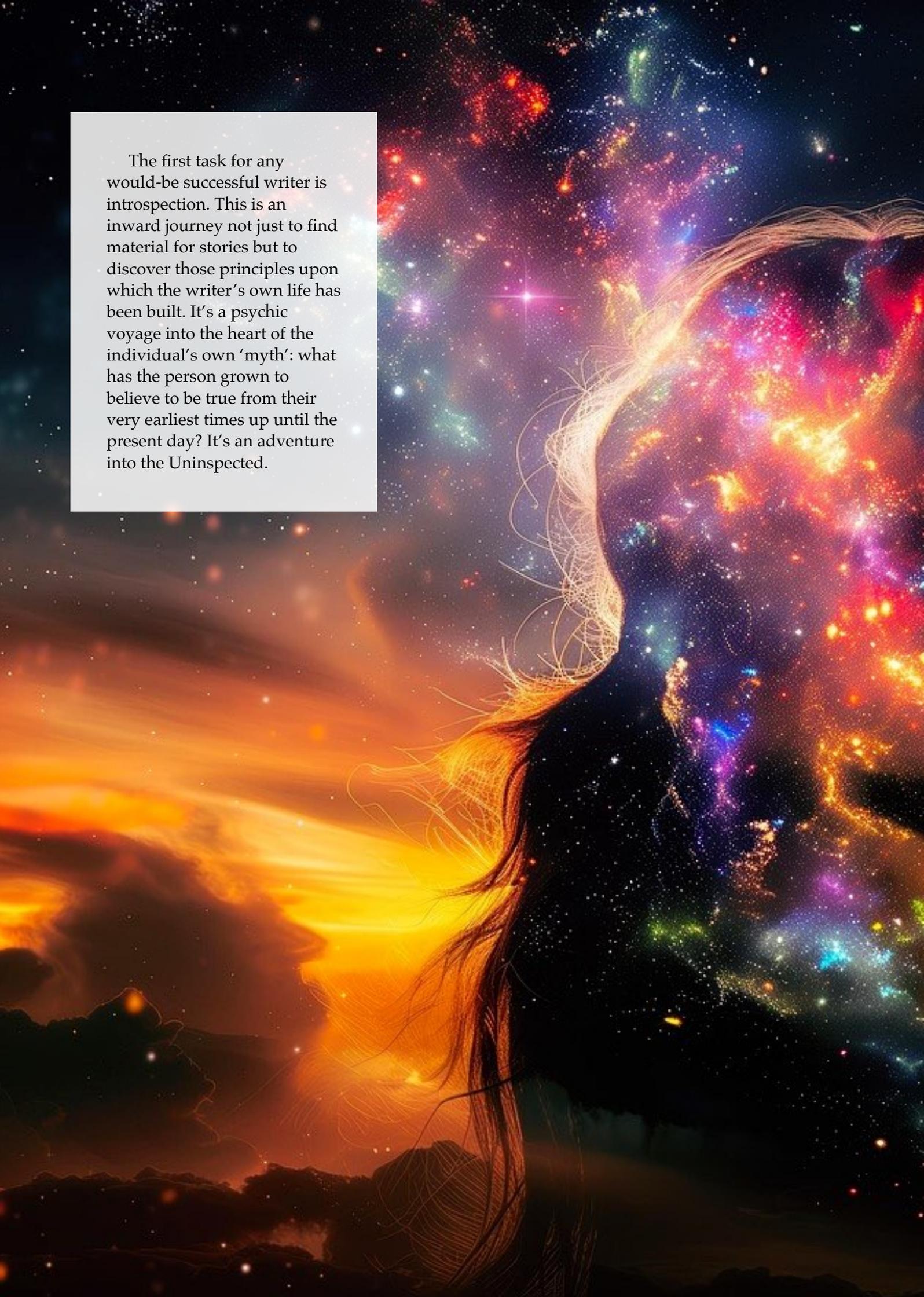
***author of
How Stories Really Work
and
Become a Professional Author***

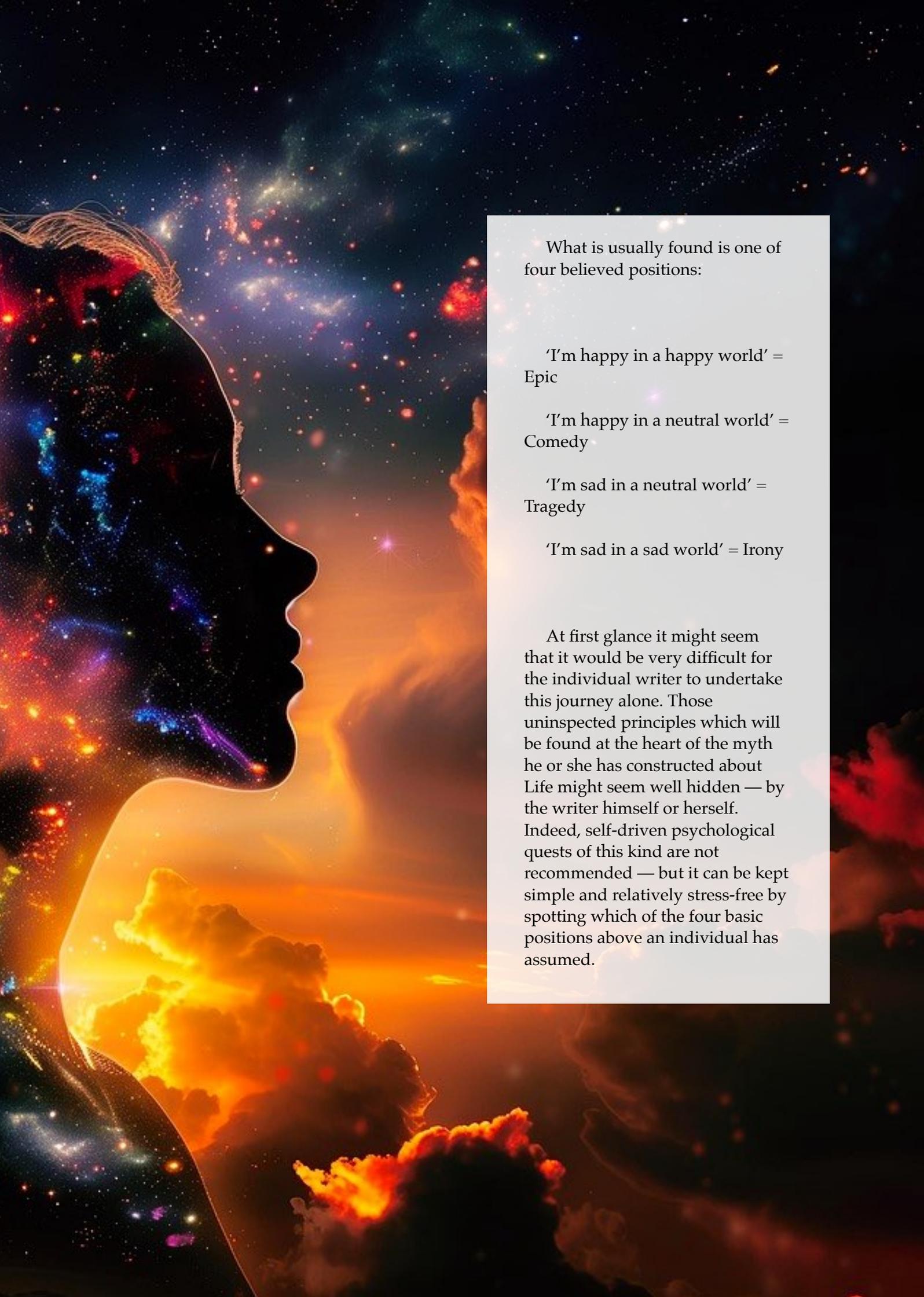


False understandings are the enemy of artists and writers.

Particular kinds of impulses, obsessions, delusions and other unwanted ideas manifest themselves against the individual without necessarily prompting any inspection. Thus, many who would wish to become successful as writers are isolated from their goals without being aware of the reasons why.

The first task for any would-be successful writer is introspection. This is an inward journey not just to find material for stories but to discover those principles upon which the writer's own life has been built. It's a psychic voyage into the heart of the individual's own 'myth': what has the person grown to believe to be true from their very earliest times up until the present day? It's an adventure into the Uninspected.





What is usually found is one of four believed positions:

'I'm happy in a happy world' = Epic

'I'm happy in a neutral world' = Comedy

'I'm sad in a neutral world' = Tragedy

'I'm sad in a sad world' = Irony

At first glance it might seem that it would be very difficult for the individual writer to undertake this journey alone. Those uninspected principles which will be found at the heart of the myth he or she has constructed about Life might seem well hidden — by the writer himself or herself. Indeed, self-driven psychological quests of this kind are not recommended — but it can be kept simple and relatively stress-free by spotting which of the four basic positions above an individual has assumed.

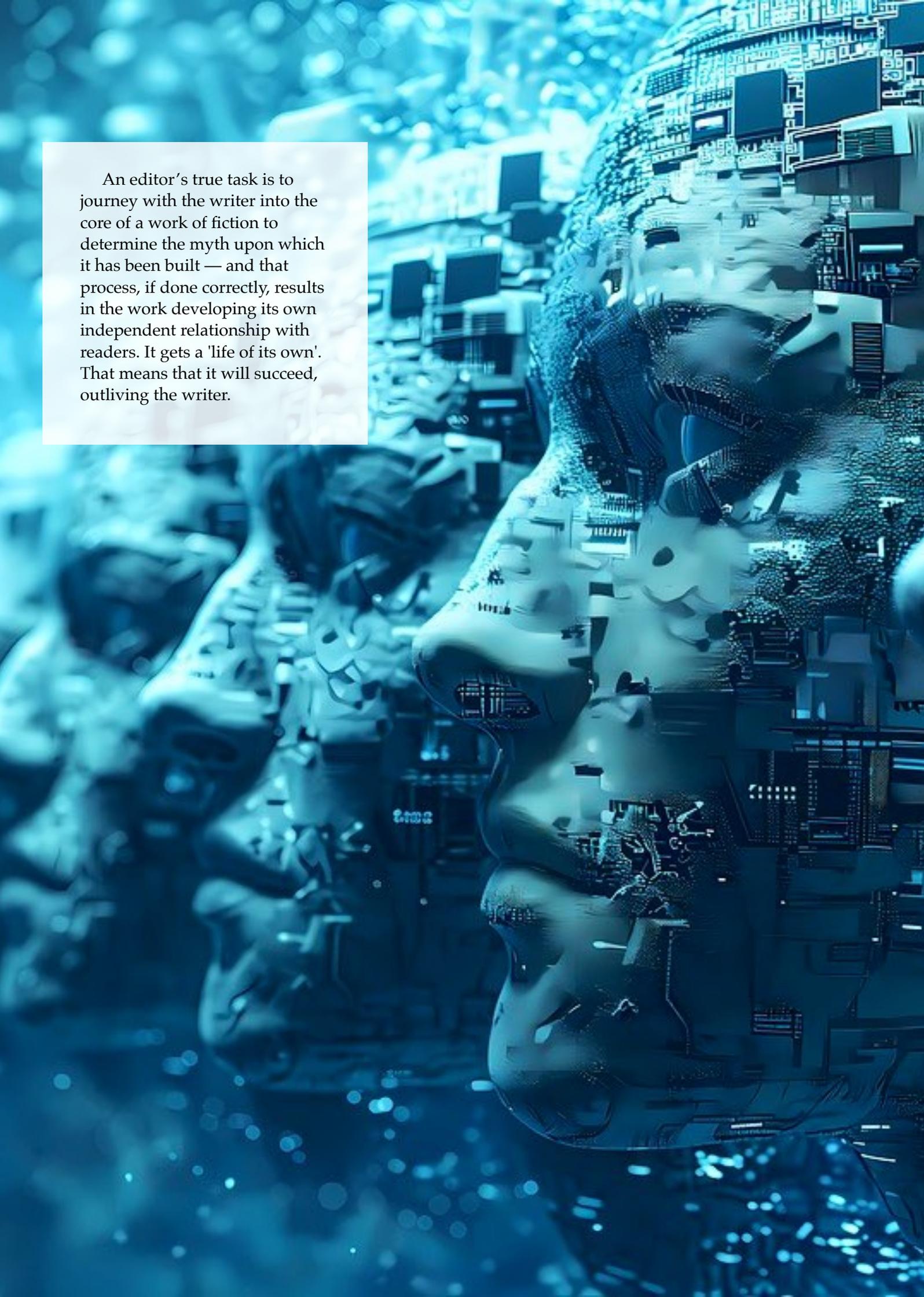
A story written by a writer — any writer, experienced or not — yields a kind of guide to the ways in which that writer's mind and heart operates. A tale can be orderly, restrained, wild, dark, shallow, deep, full of metaphors or coldly stark; it can be many things. But under expert eyes, these things are all clues as to the psychic foundations upon which they have been constructed. And generally speaking, most fiction falls into one of the four categories above.





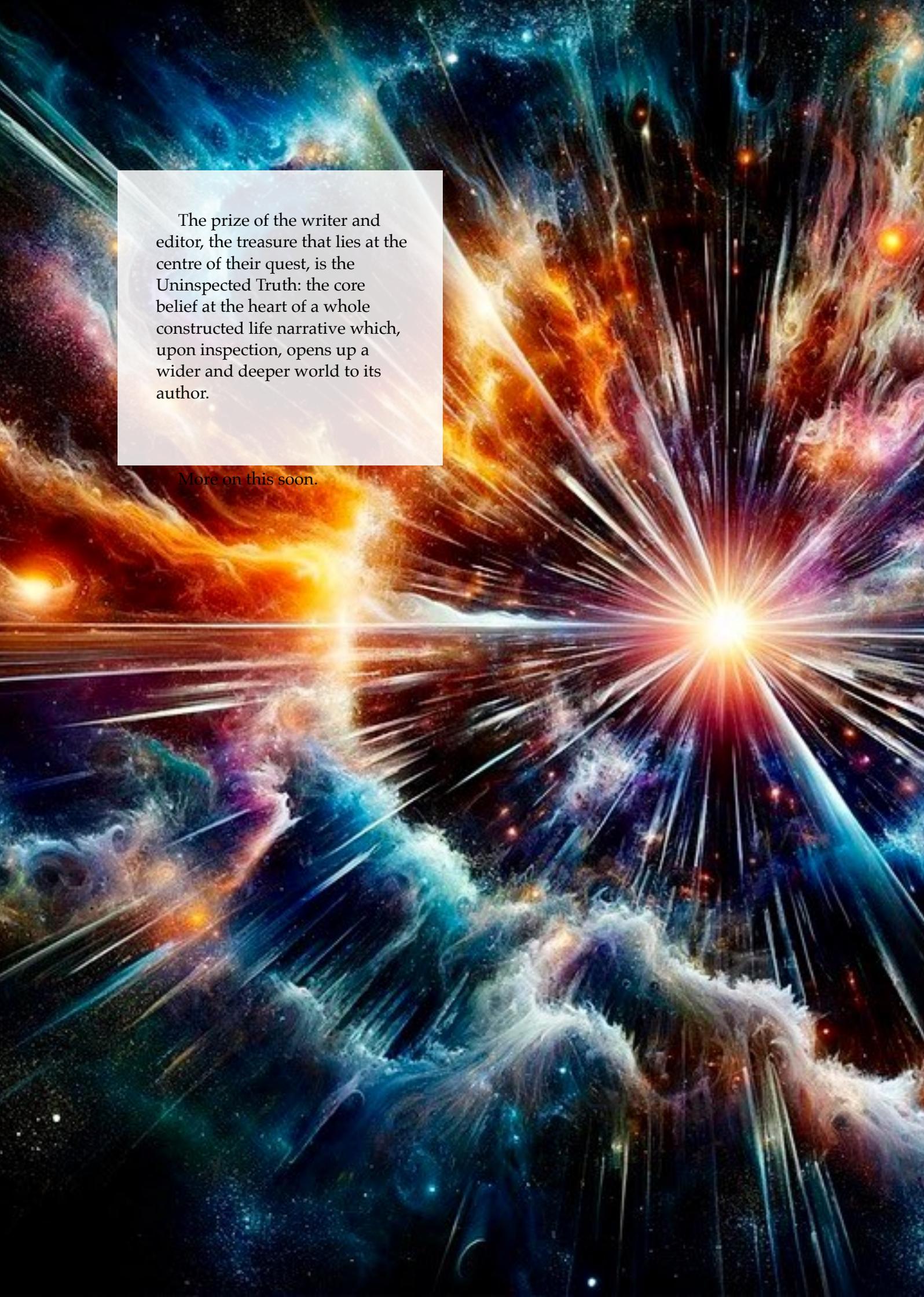
A knowledgeable editor, trained in the principles of Fictivity, can take the writer on a voyage into that writer's understanding of himself or herself. It can be a tricky business, as you might imagine, but it can be done. Editors are normally seen as coming along later in the picture to tweak and twist a work into a shape which will appeal to a targeted readership; they are seen as mechanics, and sometimes seen as enemies. But a true editor is the opposite of these things.

An editor's true task is to journey with the writer into the core of a work of fiction to determine the myth upon which it has been built — and that process, if done correctly, results in the work developing its own independent relationship with readers. It gets a 'life of its own'. That means that it will succeed, outliving the writer.





It doesn't matter what the writer's personal 'position' is: it may be Epic, Tragic, Comic or Ironic. What matters is that the understanding of that personal position can create life where before there might have been only dull cliché or derivative superficiality.



The prize of the writer and editor, the treasure that lies at the centre of their quest, is the Uninspected Truth: the core belief at the heart of a whole constructed life narrative which, upon inspection, opens up a wider and deeper world to its author.

More on this soon.



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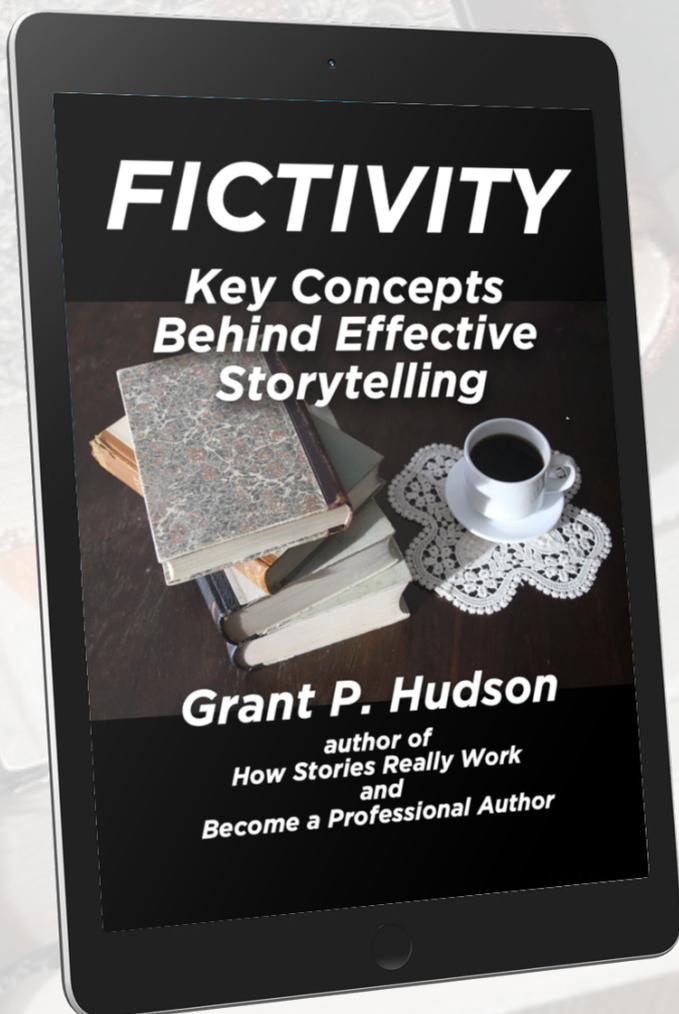
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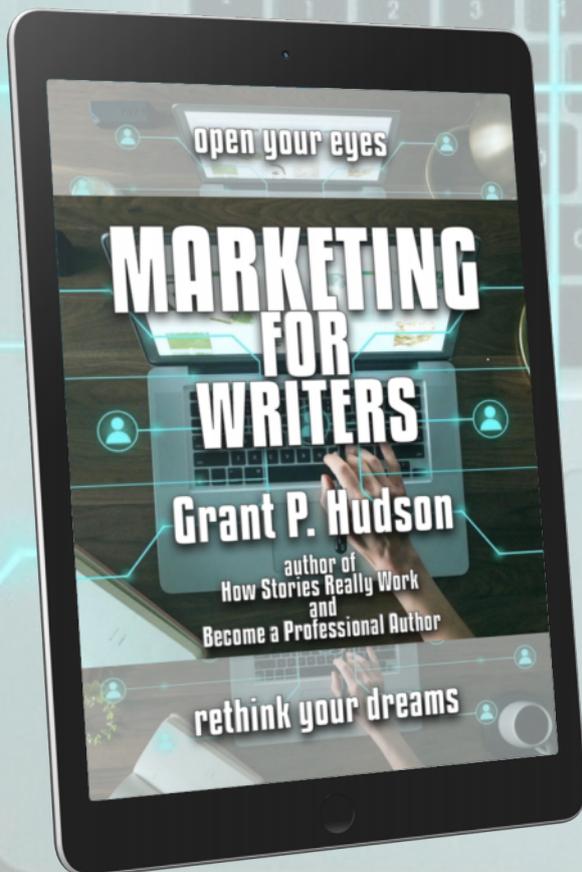
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THE PHANTOM SWORD OF RONDAR

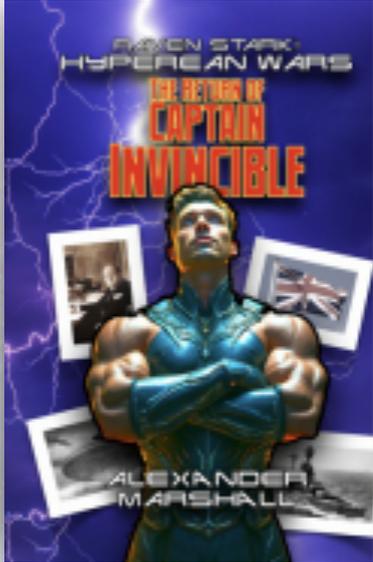
Annua Larkswing once studied to be a Herald of Raendu in the Hall of Ramsgarden high in the hills of Rondar - but she abandoned the ways of peace and went to fight in the War of the Sword, becoming one of the fabled Crimson Company...

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**RAVEN STARK:
HYPEREAN WARS**



THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN INVINCIBLE

1940: Britain and Nazi Germany are at war.

HMS Eagle, under the command of Captain John Strange, is sent to investigate a huge craft of extra-terrestrial origin which has plunged into the ocean west of Spitsbergen. He finds that the Germans have been there first - and that the secrets of the ship threaten to alter not only his life, but the entire destiny of humanity...

In this novella launching the Raven Stark series, sorcery and spectral evil meet super-science and space wars - and the world will never be the same again...

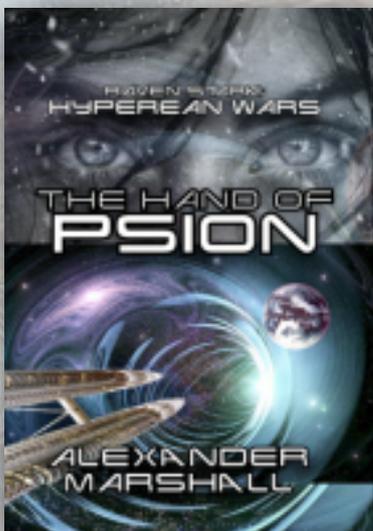
SPECTREBROOD

1940: Britain stands alone on the threshold of an invasion...

But from an alien craft in the Arctic Sea comes an evil even greater than the Nazi threat...

Raven Stark, a gifted but physically challenged orphan with a talent for tackling bullies, stumbles upon a secret initiative to save humanity hidden under an ordinary London shop...

When her best friend disappears while seeking her sinister father, Raven is driven to make decisions that will change life on Earth in ways no one could have imagined - and to find out who, or what, she really is...



THE HAND OF PSION

1940: the Nazi regime stands poised to invade Britain...

But the nascent British Space Fleet has its hands full with a menace far more powerful, one that threatens all life on Earth...

With her best friend taken by the enemy for purposes too dark to contemplate, and Captain Invincible shorn of his powers, the newly emancipated Raven Stark finds herself confronting the ultimate challenge alone, on the frozen edge of the world...

A LITERALLY LITERARY QUIZ

1. In Charles Dickens' novel *Bleak House*, what is the name of the legal case in the Court of Chancery?
2. When was *I Capture The Castle* by Dodie Smith published?
3. What is the name of Rochester's home in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*?
4. Who wrote the 1992 novel *The Secret History*?
5. What is the name of the dog in *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London?
6. In *Persuasion* by Jane Austen, Anne Elliot's feelings for which handsome captain are re-ignited when he returns from the sea?
7. In which time period does *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo take place?
8. When was *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville published?
9. What is the name of the narrative technique used in *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf?
10. Which novella by Alexander Marshall features the first appearance of Captain Invincible?



A Christmas Literary Quiz

Answers to last month's questions

1. In Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*, what is Scrooge's partner's name?

Marley

2. When was Truman Capote's short story 'A Christmas Memory' published? **1956**

3. When was *It's a Wonderful Life* released? **1946**

4. Who wrote the novel *The Pickwick Papers*? **Charles Dickens**

5. Who co-starred with James Stewart in the Christmas classic *The Shop Around The Corner*? **Margaret Sullavan**

6. In which 1990 Christmas movie does McCauley Culkin play a boy left behind on a family holiday at Christmas? **Home Alone**

7. In the famous Christmas carol 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', what does the recipient get on Day 4? **Four golly birds or calling birds**

8. In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, what gifts does Father Christmas give to Susan? **A bow and a quiver of arrows along with a little ivory horn**

9. Who plays Scrooge in *The Muppet's Christmas Carol*? **Michael Caine**

10. In which children's book by Bernard Crispin and Alexander Marshall and does a special necklace get returned to Lady Phyliss Beckenwith at Christmas? **Winter's Door by Bernard Crispin and Alexander Marshall**

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Dive into these macabre horror stories, but be careful not to close your eyes. Evil lurks unseen. Supernatural beings keep watch and monsters lie in wait. Some plot vengeance, while others crave human flesh.

**Crystal idolizes rock stars and longs to be one. What would she do to make her dream come true? Lie? Steal? Would she go as far as to kill?*

**Elayne goes to extremes to be like Sonora. But Elayne isn't the only one wanting to be someone else.*

**Bettie struggles to breathe after Rodney blows smoke in her face. Soon he does worse. But The Watchers have something special in mind for him.*

**Wahasi stalks through the swamp in cocodrie — crocodile — form, infuriated at her lack of food. However, she has a plan involving the sorcerer, Kula, and the townspeople better watch out.*

**A brat, Brad tries to hurt his sister and defies his parents, but he's not the only bully around.*

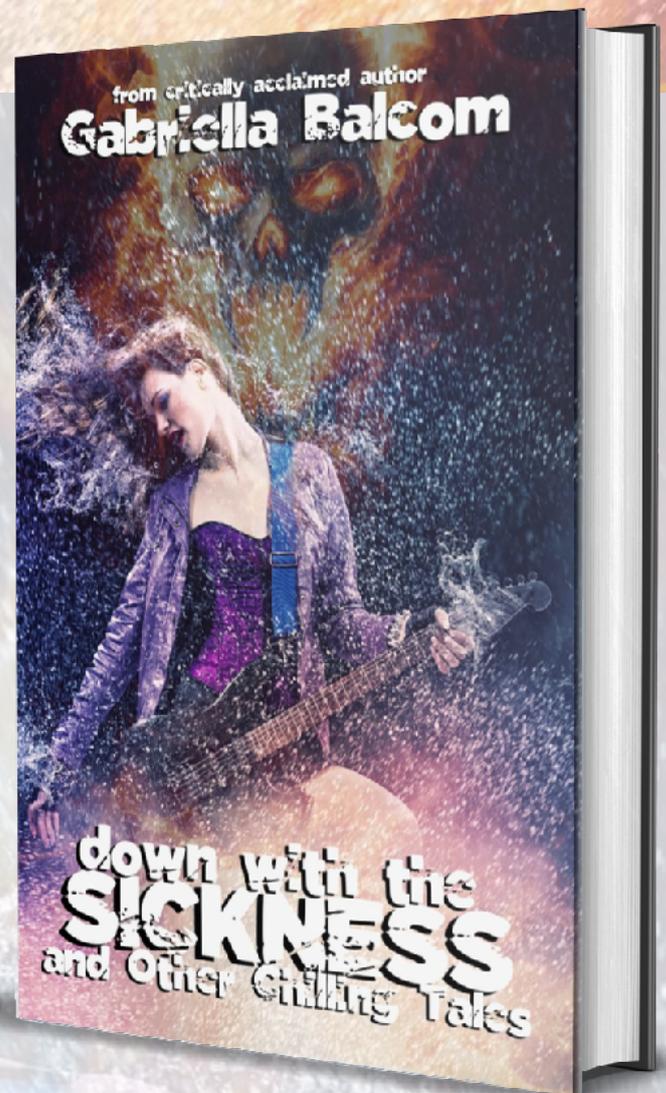
**Abner is delighted to visit Aokigahara Forest, which is rumored to be haunted. Sharyn isn't.*

**Shane dares Angeline to spend the night in The Devil's Hand, which is supposedly cursed...*

**Tricia is prideful about her looks, loves bullying, and makes a younger girl feel worthless. But she has a surprise visitor.*

**Life post-COVID included increasing deaths and nuclear bombs. Cole, Vera, and Marianne survived, but have little left to eat. Rovers are out and about, and must be avoided at all costs.*

**Dean likes pushing people around. When he damages his grandfather, Charlie's, Venus Fly Traps, Charlie isn't the only one who's upset.*



What readers say:

“... this is a thrilling ride ...”

“Best plot twist ...”

“... great job putting unique twists ... highly recommended ...”

“Wow, just freaking wow!”

“I was deeply disturbed ... loved every minute ...! Bravo!”

“Heartbreaking and devastating.”

“Holy shit ... that was so creepy. I loved it!”

“I want more, more, more, more, dang it!”

“I got chills reading this story.”

“Exciting and horrific.”

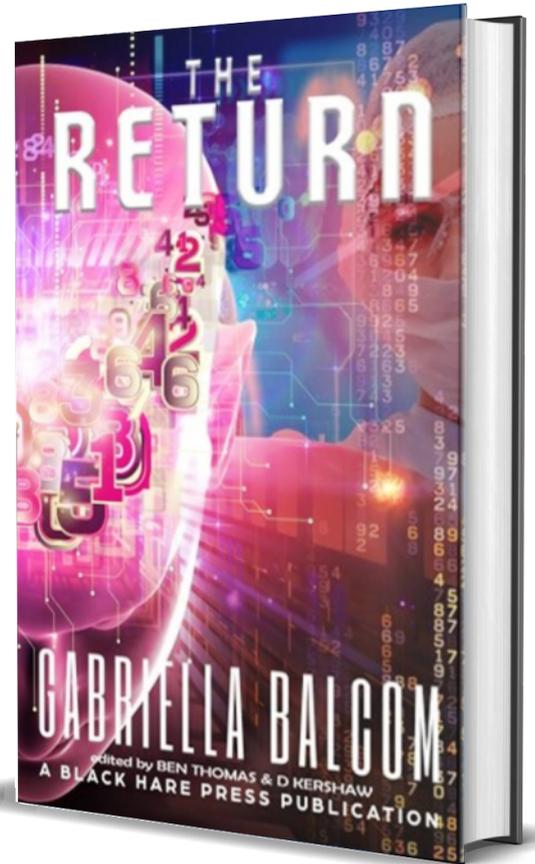
“Multifacetedly disturbing...”

Grab your print copy [here](#) or your Amazon e-book [here](#).

The world doesn't know about the compound hidden underground, and the wealthy investors funding it want things to stay that way...

It's 2027 with numerous scientific advances having been made, but most of the facility's research is illegal. If animal rights' activists had an inkling of what went on, they'd clamor for justice. Human rights' activists would scream from the rooftops.

By the time 2030 arrives, researchers have worked for awhile with feline service units and Human Replicas — HRs—virtual prisoners with no rights. More and more of them are dying, and they long for freedom. One of the top scientists isn't happy with the status quo either. Tensions are mounting, and things are not as they appear...



Wilfred has always been a loner, though less of one with his late wife, Beth. She's been gone over thirty years, but he still misses her...

Cancer took her while he served in the Army overseas, devastating him and their five young children. He left the military to care for them, days stretching into months and years. By the time they left home, his routines were set in stone—work, hobbies, work... Coworkers had tried to set him up on dates, but he'd resisted. He'd stayed busy, found life rewarding, and being alone was normal. Comfortable.

Eventually, Wilfred moves to a different place, and a sweet lady named Sadie welcomes him to the neighborhood. He has no idea he's lonely, or that his life's about to change...



Gabriella Balcom writes fantasy, horror, romance, sci-fi, literary fiction, and more, and was nominated for the 2020 Washington Science Fiction Association's Small Press Award. She won second place in JayZoMon/Dark Myth Company's Open Contract Challenge, and her novelette, *Worth Waiting For*, was published. Her book, *On the Wings of Ideas*, came out recently, while another is pending publication. Her author's page: <https://m.facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

CLASSIC MASTERPIECES

The Railway Children

Chapter 4: The Engine Burglar



Edith Nesbit (married name Edith Bland; 1858 – 1924) was an English writer and poet, who wrote or collaborated on more than 60 books as E. Nesbit. She was a political activist and co-founder of the Fabian Society. ***The Railway Children*** is a children's book originally serialised in *The London Magazine* during 1906 and published in book form in the same year. It has been adapted for the screen several times, of which the 1970 film version is the best known.

What was left of the second sheet and the Brunswick black came in very nicely to make a banner bearing the legend

SHE IS NEARLY WELL THANK YOU

and this was displayed to the Green Dragon about a fortnight after the arrival of the wonderful hamper. The old gentleman saw it, and waved a cheerful response from the train. And when this had been done the children saw that now was the time when they must tell Mother what they had done when she was ill. And it did not seem nearly so easy as they had thought it would be. But it had to be done. And it was done. Mother was extremely angry. She was seldom angry, and now she was angrier than they had ever known her. This was horrible. But it was much worse when she suddenly began to cry. Crying is catching, I believe, like measles and whooping-cough. At any rate, everyone at once found itself taking part in a crying-party.

Mother stopped first. She dried her eyes and then she said:--

"I'm sorry I was so angry, darlings, because I know you didn't understand."

"We didn't mean to be naughty, Mammy," sobbed Bobbie, and Peter and Phyllis sniffed.

"Now, listen," said Mother; "it's quite true that we're poor, but we have enough to live on. You mustn't go telling everyone about our affairs--it's not right. And you must never, never, never ask strangers to give you things. Now always remember that--won't you?"

They all hugged her and rubbed their damp cheeks against hers and promised that they would.

"And I'll write a letter to your old gentleman, and I shall tell him that I didn't approve--oh, of course I shall thank him, too, for his kindness. It's YOU I don't approve of, my darlings, not the old gentleman. He was as kind as ever he could be. And you can give the letter to the Station Master to give him--and we won't say any more about it."

Afterwards, when the children were alone, Bobbie said:--

"Isn't Mother splendid? You catch any other grown-up saying they were sorry they had been angry."

"Yes," said Peter, "she IS splendid; but it's rather awful when she's angry."

"She's like Avenging and Bright in the song," said Phyllis. "I should like to look at her if it wasn't so awful. She looks so beautiful when she's really downright furious."

They took the letter down to the Station Master.

"I thought you said you hadn't got any friends except in London," said he.

"We've made him since," said Peter.

"But he doesn't live hereabouts?"

"No--we just know him on the railway."

Then the Station Master retired to that sacred inner temple behind the little window where the tickets are sold, and the children went down to the Porters' room and talked to the Porter. They learned several interesting things from him--among others that his name was Perks, that he was married and had three children, that the lamps in front of engines are called head-lights and the ones at the back tail-lights.

"And that just shows," whispered Phyllis, "that trains really ARE dragons in disguise, with proper heads and tails."



A black steam locomotive is positioned on railway tracks in the foreground. In the background, there is a white building with a tiled roof and several windows, surrounded by lush green trees under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

It was on this day that the children first noticed that all engines are not alike.

“Alike?” said the Porter, whose name was Perks, “lor, love you, no, Miss. No more alike nor what you an' me are. That little 'un without a tender as went by just now all on her own, that was a tank, that was--she's off to do some shunting t'other side o' Maidbridge. That's as it might be you, Miss. Then there's goods engines, great, strong things with three wheels each side--joined with rods to strengthen 'em--as it might be me. Then there's main-line engines as it might be this 'ere young gentleman when he grows up and wins all the races at 'is school--so he will. The main-line engine she's built for speed as well as power. That's one to the 9.15 up.”

“The Green Dragon,” said Phyllis.

“We calls her the Snail, Miss, among ourselves,” said the Porter. “She's oftener be'ind'and nor any train on the line.”

“But the engine's green,” said Phyllis.

“Yes, Miss,” said Perks, “so's a snail some seasons o' the year.”

The children agreed as they went home to dinner that the Porter was most delightful company.

Next day was Roberta's birthday. In the afternoon she was politely but firmly requested to get out of the way and keep there till tea-time.

“You aren't to see what we're going to do till it's done; it's a glorious surprise,” said Phyllis.

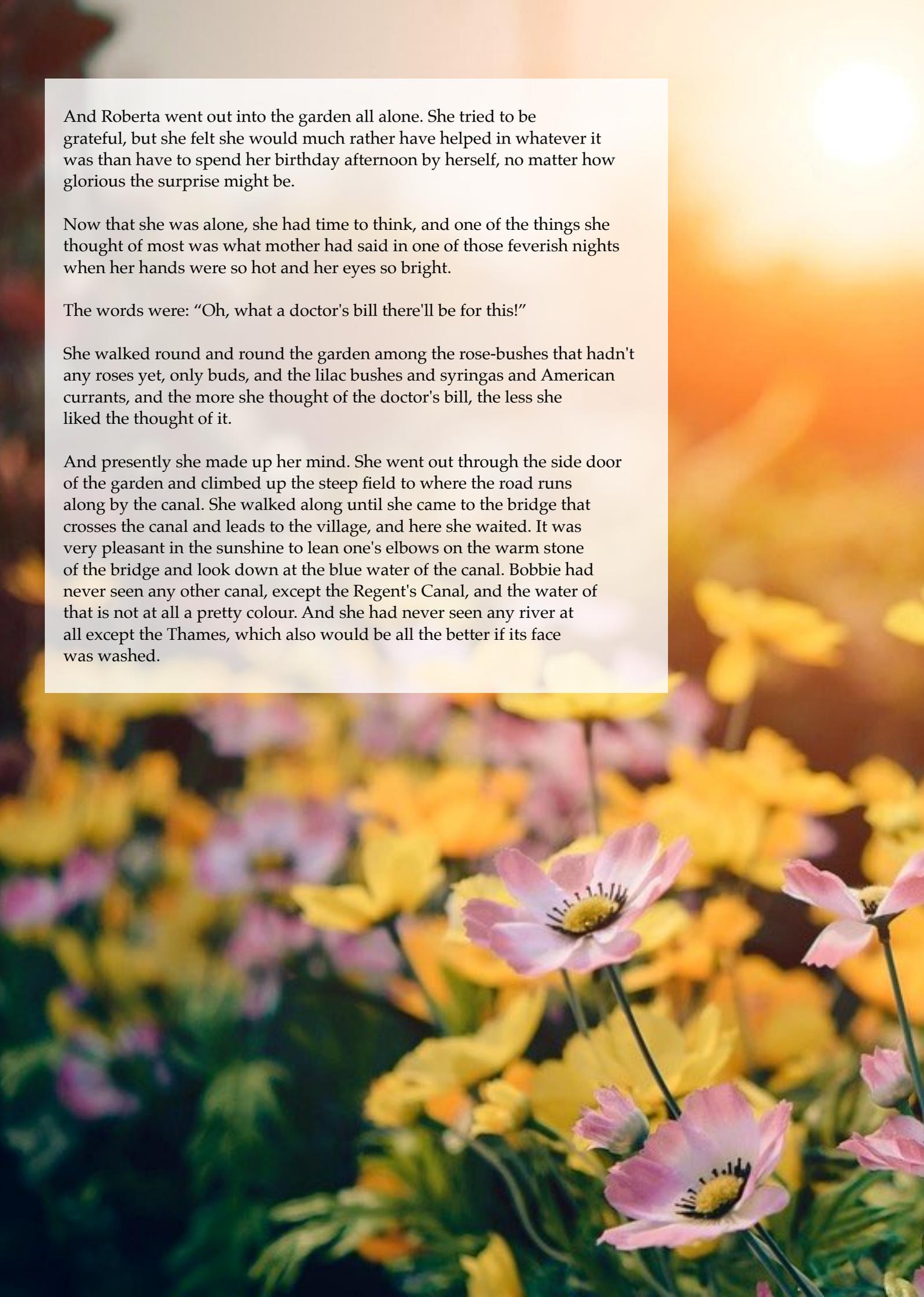
And Roberta went out into the garden all alone. She tried to be grateful, but she felt she would much rather have helped in whatever it was than have to spend her birthday afternoon by herself, no matter how glorious the surprise might be.

Now that she was alone, she had time to think, and one of the things she thought of most was what mother had said in one of those feverish nights when her hands were so hot and her eyes so bright.

The words were: "Oh, what a doctor's bill there'll be for this!"

She walked round and round the garden among the rose-bushes that hadn't any roses yet, only buds, and the lilac bushes and syringas and American currants, and the more she thought of the doctor's bill, the less she liked the thought of it.

And presently she made up her mind. She went out through the side door of the garden and climbed up the steep field to where the road runs along by the canal. She walked along until she came to the bridge that crosses the canal and leads to the village, and here she waited. It was very pleasant in the sunshine to lean one's elbows on the warm stone of the bridge and look down at the blue water of the canal. Bobbie had never seen any other canal, except the Regent's Canal, and the water of that is not at all a pretty colour. And she had never seen any river at all except the Thames, which also would be all the better if its face was washed.



Perhaps the children would have loved the canal as much as the railway, but for two things. One was that they had found the railway FIRST--on that first, wonderful morning when the house and the country and the moors and rocks and great hills were all new to them. They had not found the canal till some days later. The other reason was that everyone on the railway had been kind to them--the Station Master, the Porter, and the old gentleman who waved. And the people on the canal were anything but kind.

The people on the canal were, of course, the bargees, who steered the slow barges up and down, or walked beside the old horses that trampled up the mud of the towing-path, and strained at the long tow-ropes.

Peter had once asked one of the bargees the time, and had been told to "get out of that," in a tone so fierce that he did not stop to say anything about his having just as much right on the towing-path as the man himself. Indeed, he did not even think of saying it till some time later.



Then another day when the children thought they would like to fish in the canal, a boy in a barge threw lumps of coal at them, and one of these hit Phyllis on the back of the neck. She was just stooping down to tie up her bootlace--and though the coal hardly hurt at all it made her not care very much about going on fishing.

On the bridge, however, Roberta felt quite safe, because she could look down on the canal, and if any boy showed signs of meaning to throw coal, she could duck behind the parapet.

Presently there was a sound of wheels, which was just what she expected.

The wheels were the wheels of the Doctor's dogcart, and in the cart, of course, was the Doctor.

He pulled up, and called out:--

"Hullo, head nurse! Want a lift?"

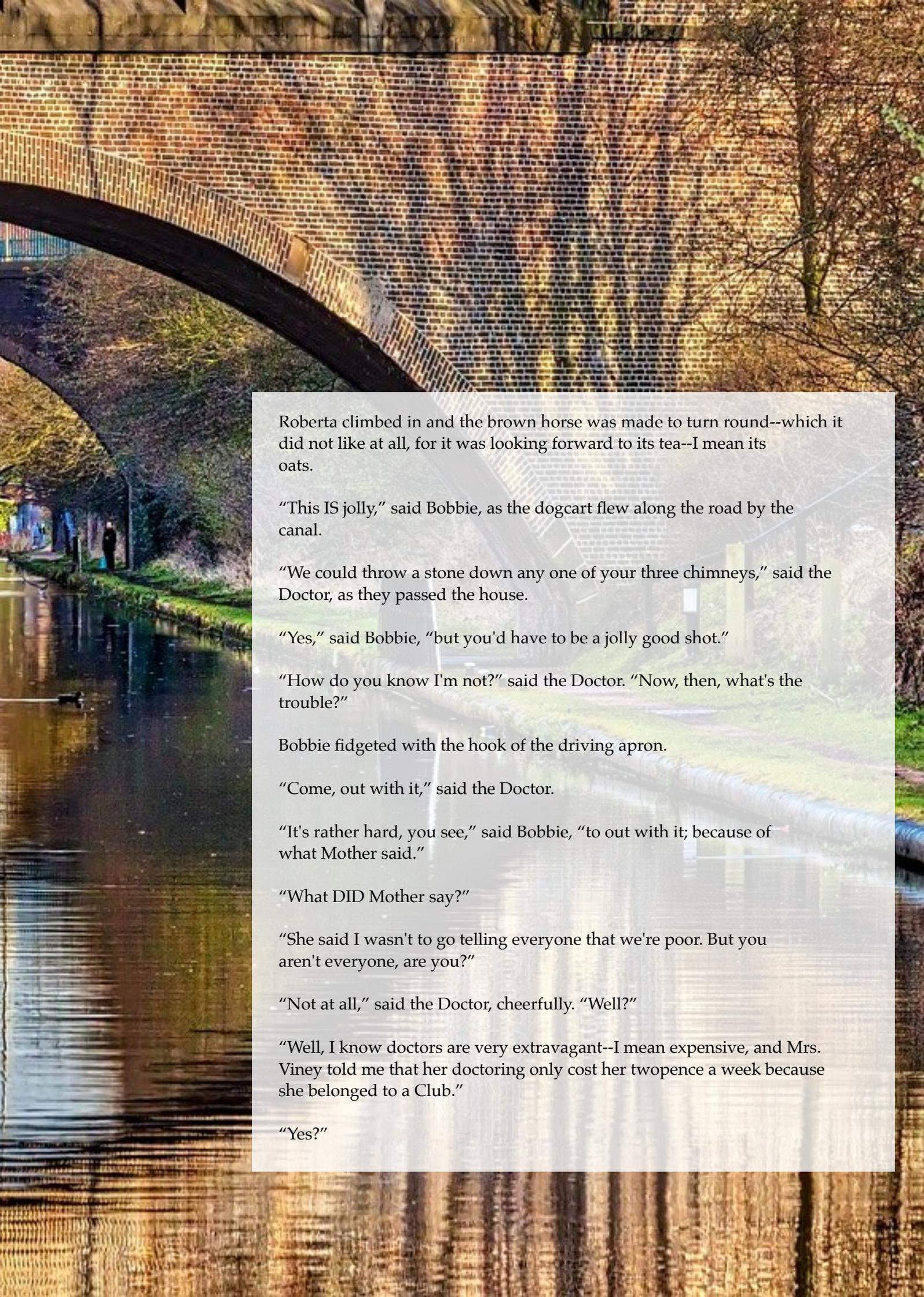
"I wanted to see you," said Bobbie.

"Your mother's not worse, I hope?" said the Doctor.

"No--but--"

"Well, skip in, then, and we'll go for a drive."





Roberta climbed in and the brown horse was made to turn round--which it did not like at all, for it was looking forward to its tea--I mean its oats.

"This IS jolly," said Bobbie, as the dogcart flew along the road by the canal.

"We could throw a stone down any one of your three chimneys," said the Doctor, as they passed the house.

"Yes," said Bobbie, "but you'd have to be a jolly good shot."

"How do you know I'm not?" said the Doctor. "Now, then, what's the trouble?"

Bobbie fidgeted with the hook of the driving apron.

"Come, out with it," said the Doctor.

"It's rather hard, you see," said Bobbie, "to out with it; because of what Mother said."

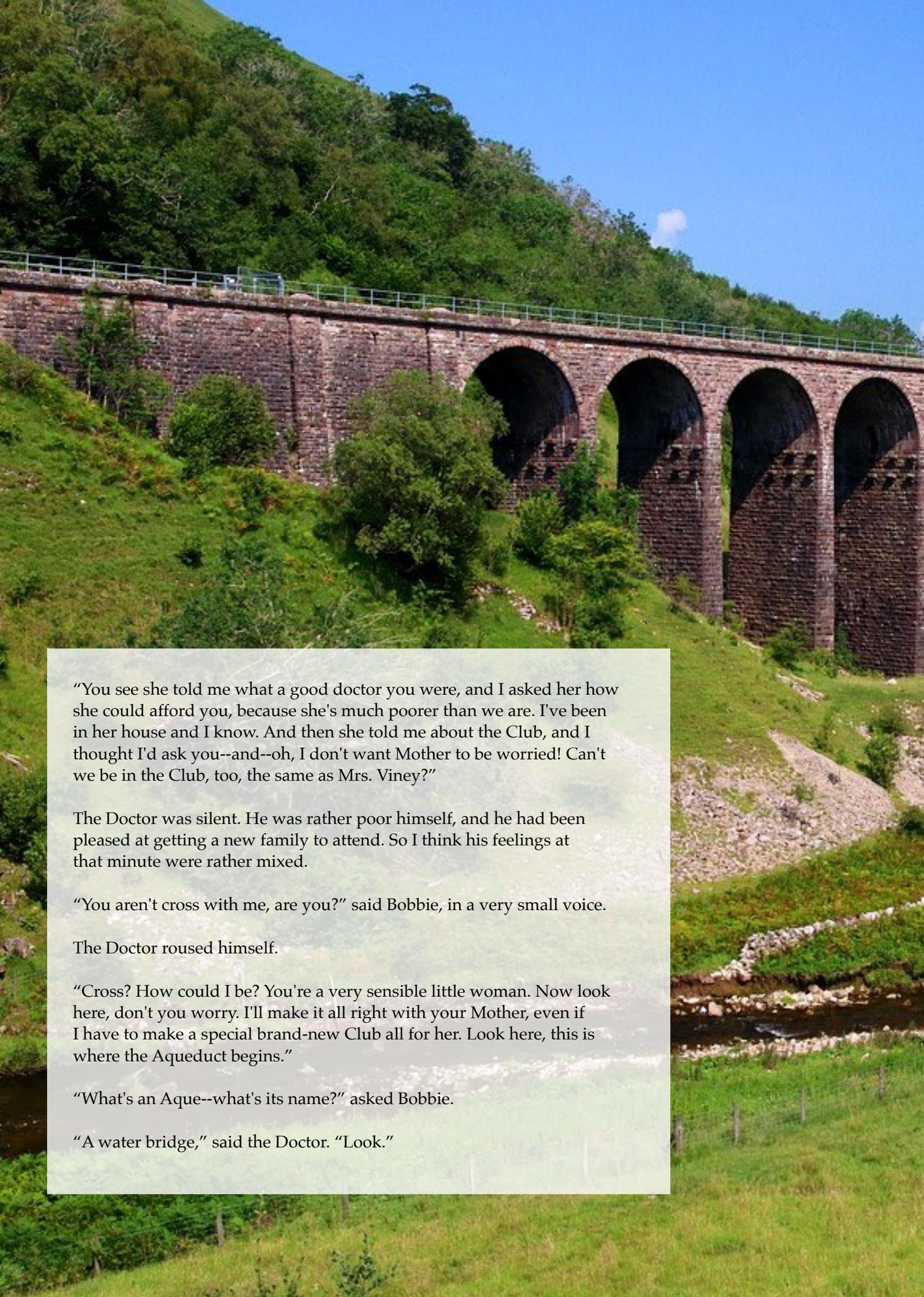
"What DID Mother say?"

"She said I wasn't to go telling everyone that we're poor. But you aren't everyone, are you?"

"Not at all," said the Doctor, cheerfully. "Well?"

"Well, I know doctors are very extravagant--I mean expensive, and Mrs. Viney told me that her doctoring only cost her twopence a week because she belonged to a Club."

"Yes?"



“You see she told me what a good doctor you were, and I asked her how she could afford you, because she's much poorer than we are. I've been in her house and I know. And then she told me about the Club, and I thought I'd ask you--and--oh, I don't want Mother to be worried! Can't we be in the Club, too, the same as Mrs. Viney?”

The Doctor was silent. He was rather poor himself, and he had been pleased at getting a new family to attend. So I think his feelings at that minute were rather mixed.

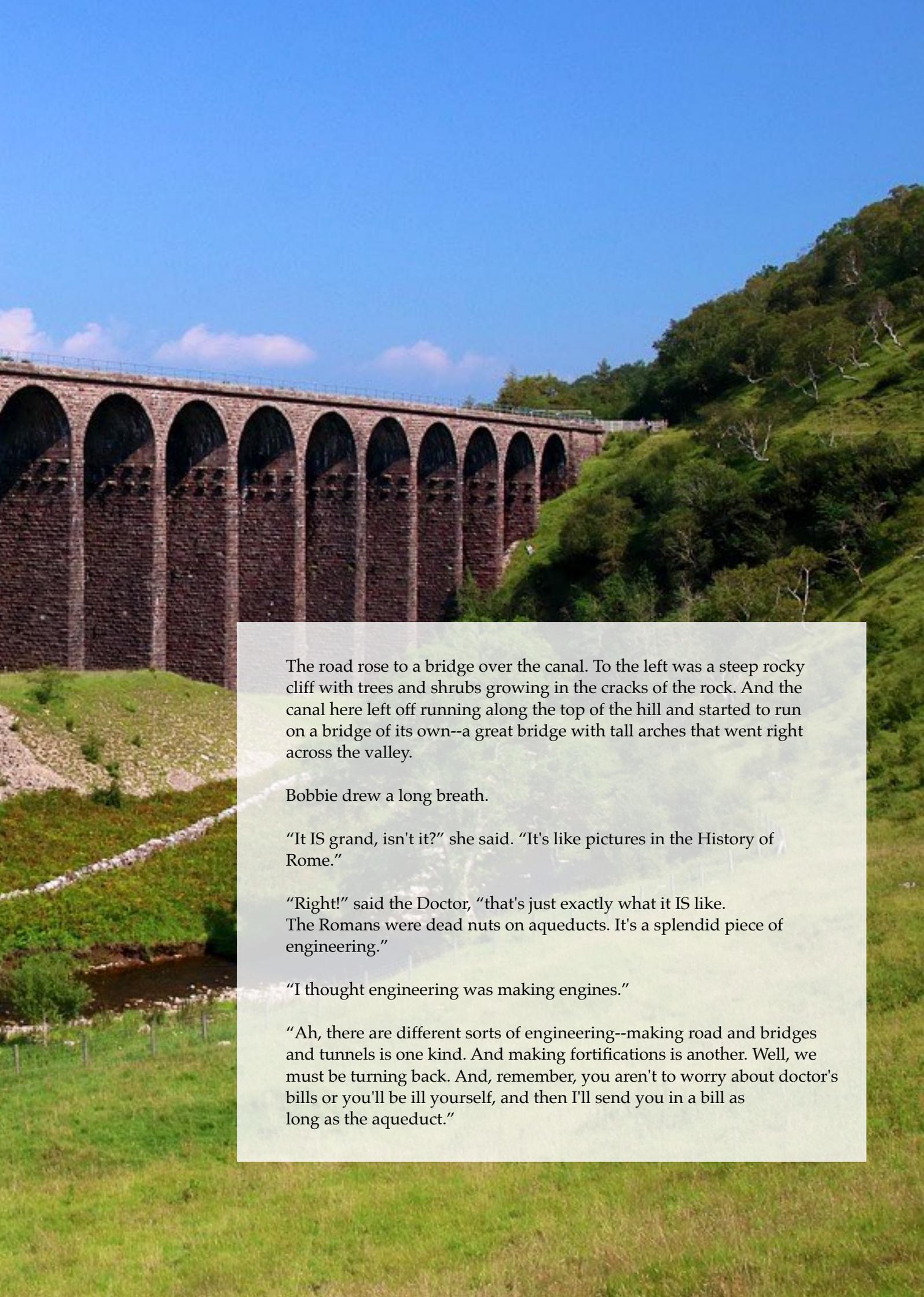
“You aren't cross with me, are you?” said Bobbie, in a very small voice.

The Doctor roused himself.

“Cross? How could I be? You're a very sensible little woman. Now look here, don't you worry. I'll make it all right with your Mother, even if I have to make a special brand-new Club all for her. Look here, this is where the Aqueduct begins.”

“What's an Aque--what's its name?” asked Bobbie.

“A water bridge,” said the Doctor. “Look.”



The road rose to a bridge over the canal. To the left was a steep rocky cliff with trees and shrubs growing in the cracks of the rock. And the canal here left off running along the top of the hill and started to run on a bridge of its own--a great bridge with tall arches that went right across the valley.

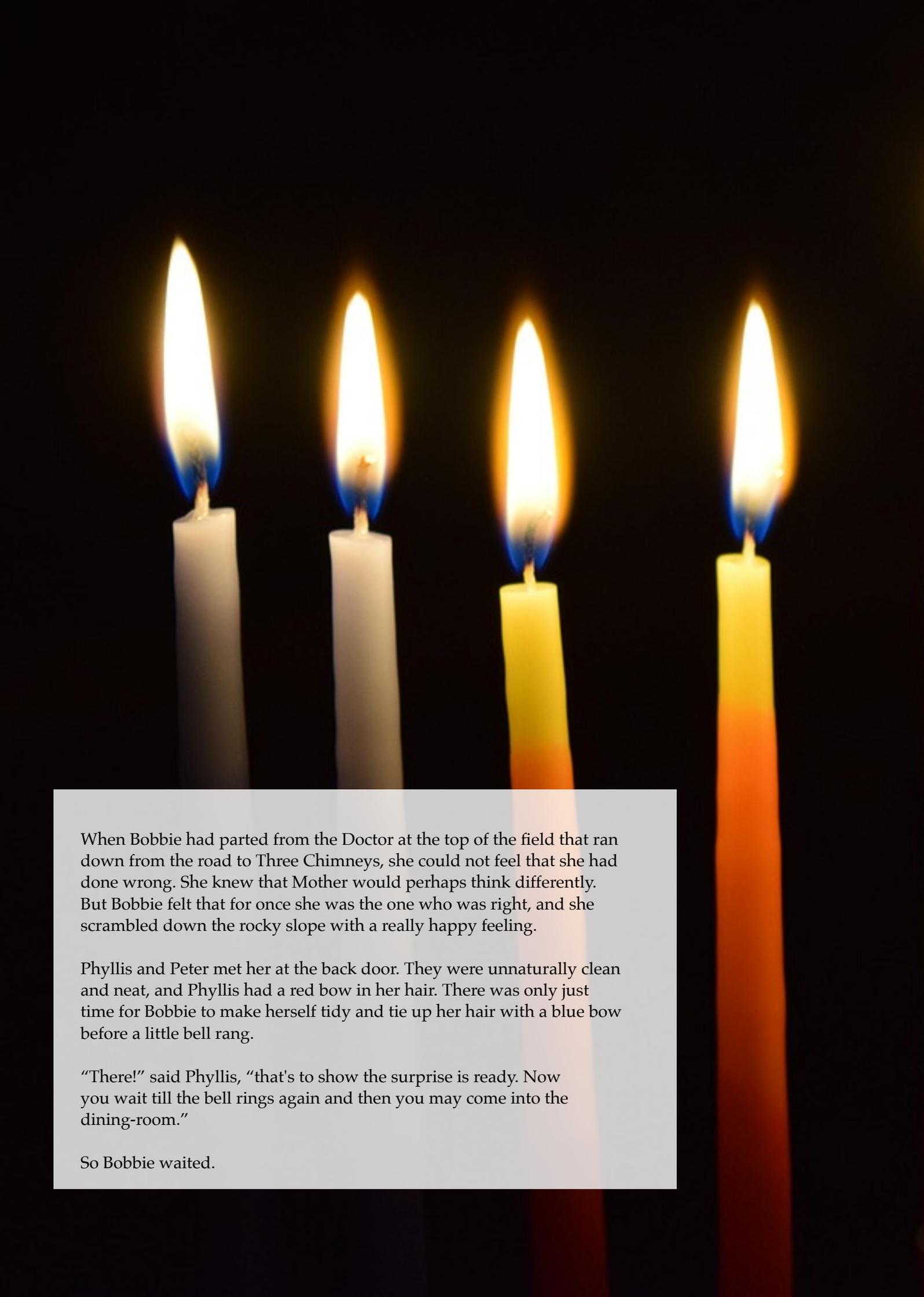
Bobbie drew a long breath.

"It IS grand, isn't it?" she said. "It's like pictures in the History of Rome."

"Right!" said the Doctor, "that's just exactly what it IS like. The Romans were dead nuts on aqueducts. It's a splendid piece of engineering."

"I thought engineering was making engines."

"Ah, there are different sorts of engineering--making road and bridges and tunnels is one kind. And making fortifications is another. Well, we must be turning back. And, remember, you aren't to worry about doctor's bills or you'll be ill yourself, and then I'll send you in a bill as long as the aqueduct."

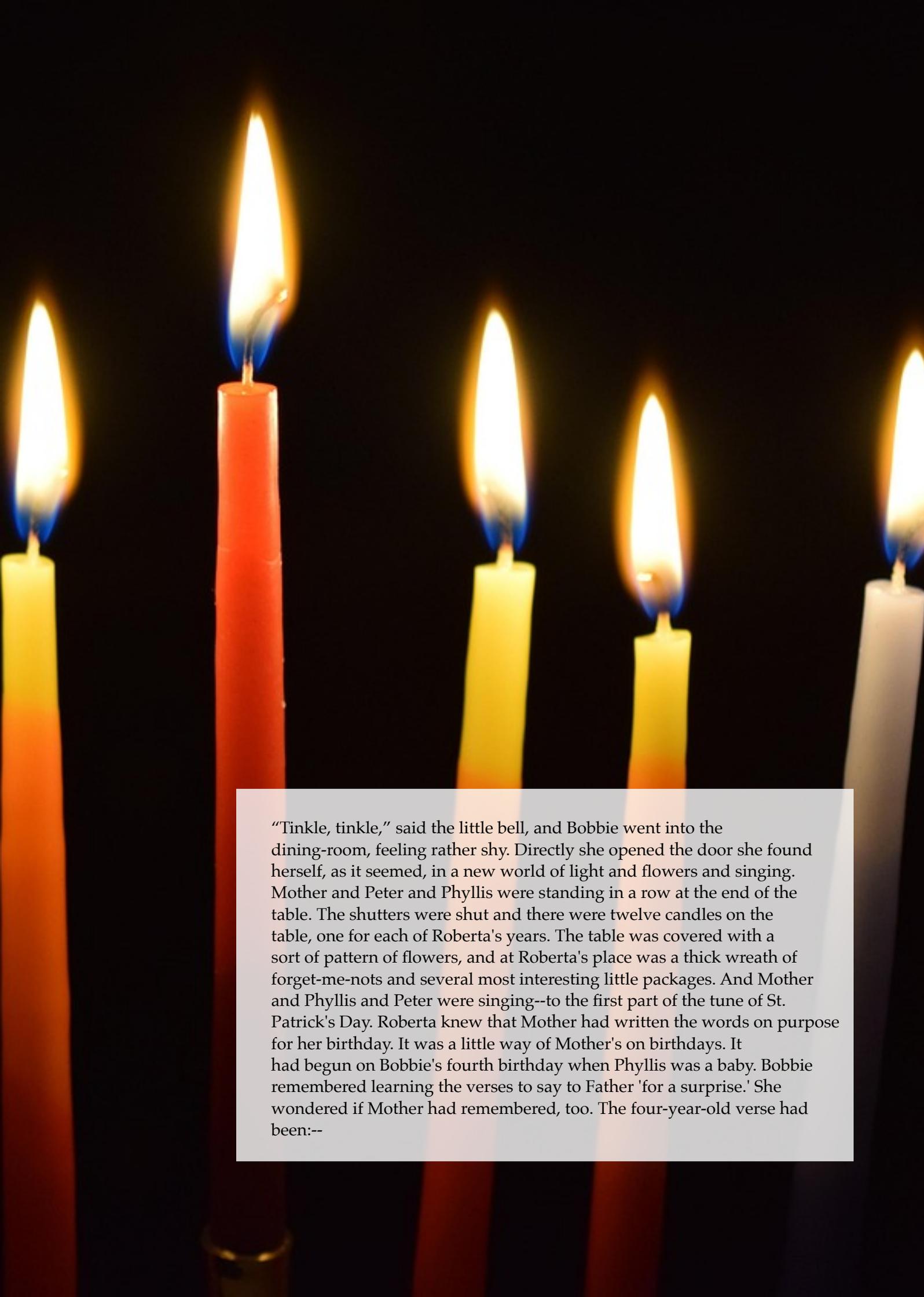


When Bobbie had parted from the Doctor at the top of the field that ran down from the road to Three Chimneys, she could not feel that she had done wrong. She knew that Mother would perhaps think differently. But Bobbie felt that for once she was the one who was right, and she scrambled down the rocky slope with a really happy feeling.

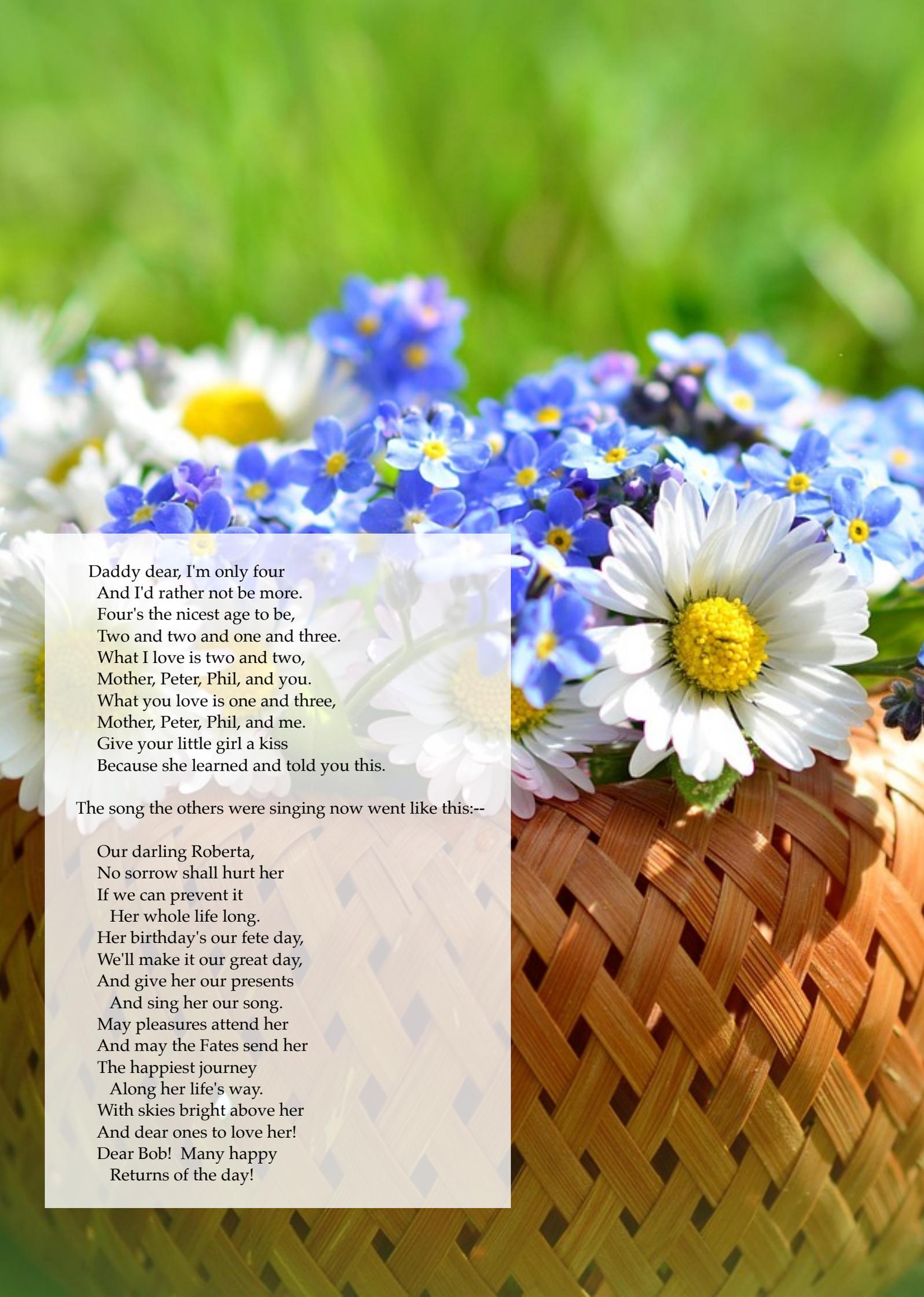
Phyllis and Peter met her at the back door. They were unnaturally clean and neat, and Phyllis had a red bow in her hair. There was only just time for Bobbie to make herself tidy and tie up her hair with a blue bow before a little bell rang.

“There!” said Phyllis, “that’s to show the surprise is ready. Now you wait till the bell rings again and then you may come into the dining-room.”

So Bobbie waited.



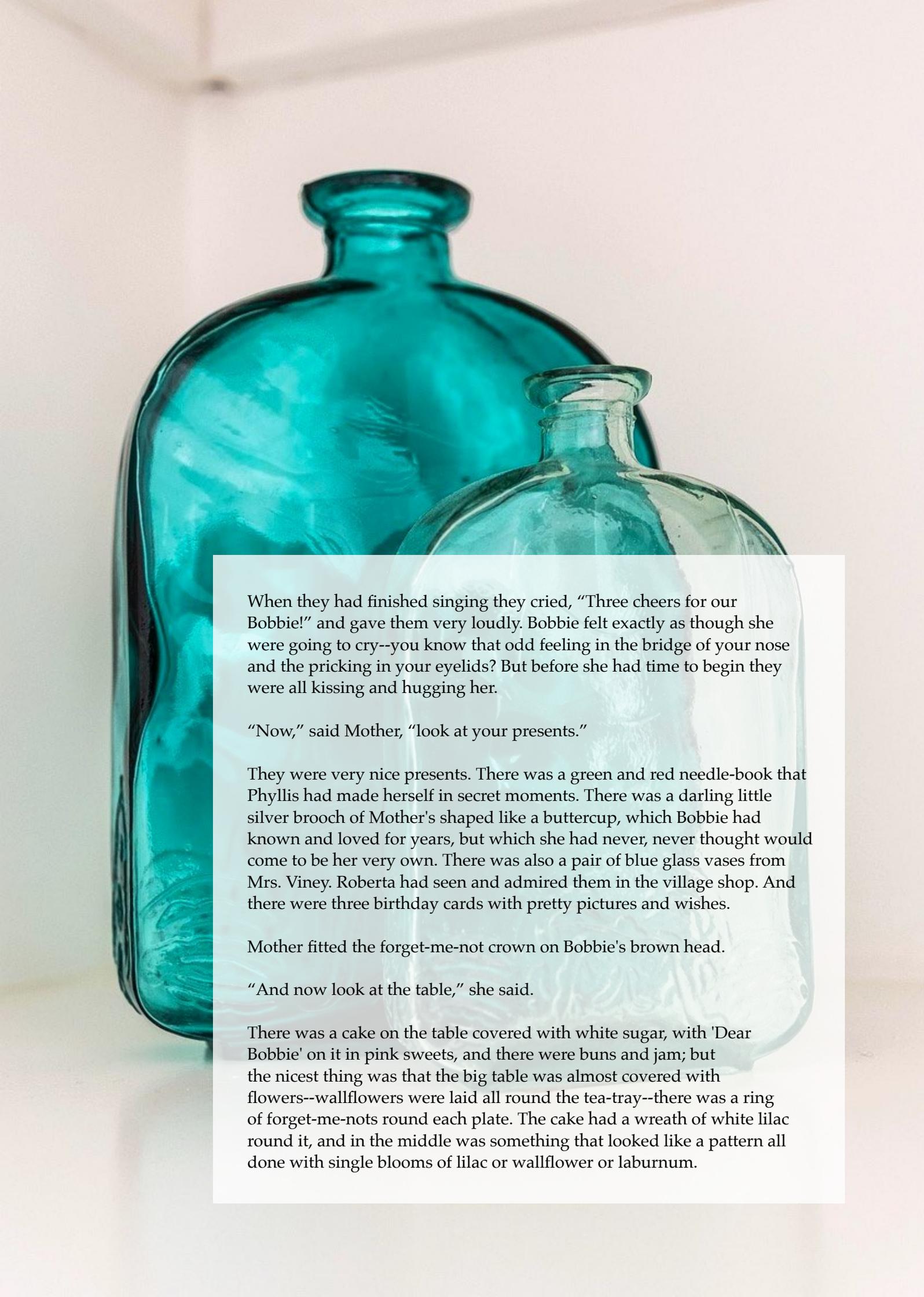
"Tinkle, tinkle," said the little bell, and Bobbie went into the dining-room, feeling rather shy. Directly she opened the door she found herself, as it seemed, in a new world of light and flowers and singing. Mother and Peter and Phyllis were standing in a row at the end of the table. The shutters were shut and there were twelve candles on the table, one for each of Roberta's years. The table was covered with a sort of pattern of flowers, and at Roberta's place was a thick wreath of forget-me-nots and several most interesting little packages. And Mother and Phyllis and Peter were singing--to the first part of the tune of St. Patrick's Day. Roberta knew that Mother had written the words on purpose for her birthday. It was a little way of Mother's on birthdays. It had begun on Bobbie's fourth birthday when Phyllis was a baby. Bobbie remembered learning the verses to say to Father 'for a surprise.' She wondered if Mother had remembered, too. The four-year-old verse had been:--

A close-up photograph of a woven basket filled with flowers. In the foreground, a large white daisy with a bright yellow center is in sharp focus. Behind it, a dense cluster of small blue forget-me-not flowers is visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a grassy field. The basket's woven texture is clearly visible at the bottom of the frame.

Daddy dear, I'm only four
And I'd rather not be more.
Four's the nicest age to be,
Two and two and one and three.
What I love is two and two,
Mother, Peter, Phil, and you.
What you love is one and three,
Mother, Peter, Phil, and me.
Give your little girl a kiss
Because she learned and told you this.

The song the others were singing now went like this:--

Our darling Roberta,
No sorrow shall hurt her
If we can prevent it
Her whole life long.
Her birthday's our fete day,
We'll make it our great day,
And give her our presents
And sing her our song.
May pleasures attend her
And may the Fates send her
The happiest journey
Along her life's way.
With skies bright above her
And dear ones to love her!
Dear Bob! Many happy
Returns of the day!



When they had finished singing they cried, "Three cheers for our Bobbie!" and gave them very loudly. Bobbie felt exactly as though she were going to cry--you know that odd feeling in the bridge of your nose and the pricking in your eyelids? But before she had time to begin they were all kissing and hugging her.

"Now," said Mother, "look at your presents."

They were very nice presents. There was a green and red needle-book that Phyllis had made herself in secret moments. There was a darling little silver brooch of Mother's shaped like a buttercup, which Bobbie had known and loved for years, but which she had never, never thought would come to be her very own. There was also a pair of blue glass vases from Mrs. Viney. Roberta had seen and admired them in the village shop. And there were three birthday cards with pretty pictures and wishes.

Mother fitted the forget-me-not crown on Bobbie's brown head.

"And now look at the table," she said.

There was a cake on the table covered with white sugar, with 'Dear Bobbie' on it in pink sweets, and there were buns and jam; but the nicest thing was that the big table was almost covered with flowers--wallflowers were laid all round the tea-tray--there was a ring of forget-me-nots round each plate. The cake had a wreath of white lilac round it, and in the middle was something that looked like a pattern all done with single blooms of lilac or wallflower or laburnum.

"It's a map--a map of the railway!" cried Peter. "Look--those lilac lines are the metals--and there's the station done in brown wallflowers. The laburnum is the train, and there are the signal-boxes, and the road up to here--and those fat red daisies are us three waving to the old gentleman--that's him, the pansy in the laburnum train."

"And there's 'Three Chimneys' done in the purple primroses," said Phyllis. "And that little tiny rose-bud is Mother looking out for us when we're late for tea. Peter invented it all, and we got all the flowers from the station. We thought you'd like it better."

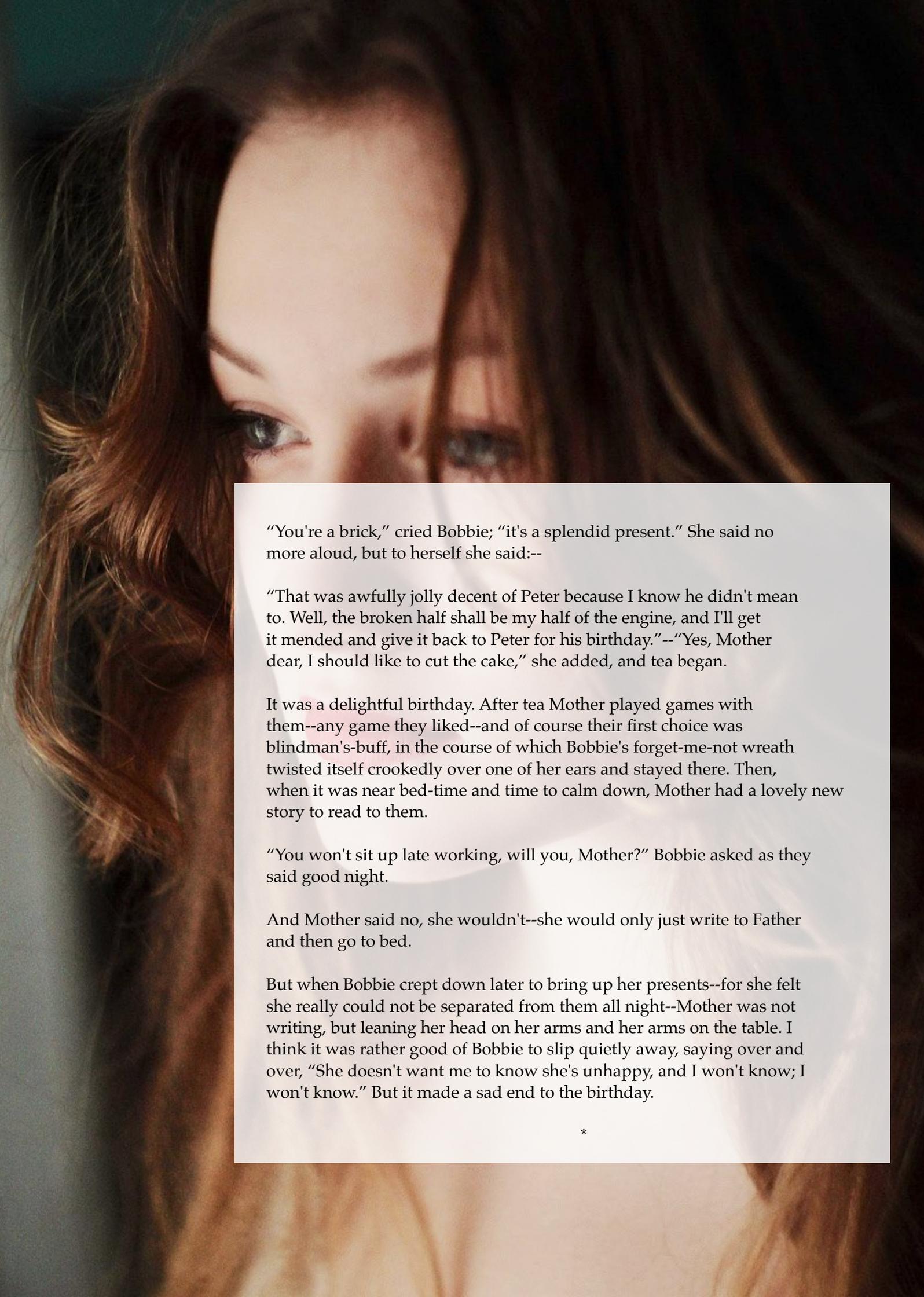
"That's my present," said Peter, suddenly dumping down his adored steam-engine on the table in front of her. Its tender had been lined with fresh white paper, and was full of sweets.

"Oh, Peter!" cried Bobbie, quite overcome by this munificence, "not your own dear little engine that you're so fond of?"

"Oh, no," said Peter, very promptly, "not the engine. Only the sweets."

Bobbie couldn't help her face changing a little--not so much because she was disappointed at not getting the engine, as because she had thought it so very noble of Peter, and now she felt she had been silly to think it. Also she felt she must have seemed greedy to expect the engine as well as the sweets. So her face changed. Peter saw it. He hesitated a minute; then his face changed, too, and he said: "I mean not ALL the engine. I'll let you go halves if you like."





"You're a brick," cried Bobbie; "it's a splendid present." She said no more aloud, but to herself she said:--

"That was awfully jolly decent of Peter because I know he didn't mean to. Well, the broken half shall be my half of the engine, and I'll get it mended and give it back to Peter for his birthday."--"Yes, Mother dear, I should like to cut the cake," she added, and tea began.

It was a delightful birthday. After tea Mother played games with them--any game they liked--and of course their first choice was blindman's-buff, in the course of which Bobbie's forget-me-not wreath twisted itself crookedly over one of her ears and stayed there. Then, when it was near bed-time and time to calm down, Mother had a lovely new story to read to them.

"You won't sit up late working, will you, Mother?" Bobbie asked as they said good night.

And Mother said no, she wouldn't--she would only just write to Father and then go to bed.

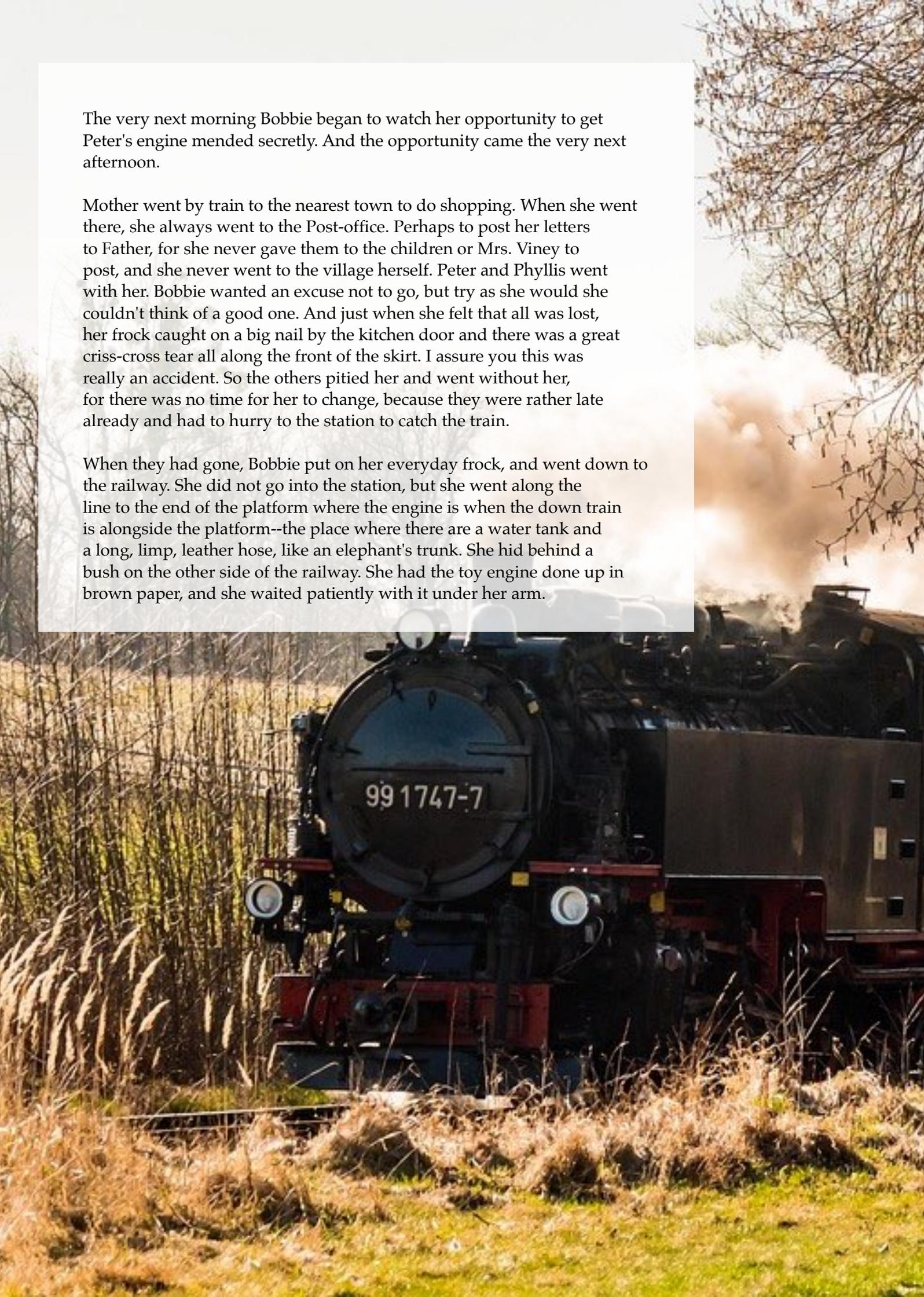
But when Bobbie crept down later to bring up her presents--for she felt she really could not be separated from them all night--Mother was not writing, but leaning her head on her arms and her arms on the table. I think it was rather good of Bobbie to slip quietly away, saying over and over, "She doesn't want me to know she's unhappy, and I won't know; I won't know." But it made a sad end to the birthday.

*

The very next morning Bobbie began to watch her opportunity to get Peter's engine mended secretly. And the opportunity came the very next afternoon.

Mother went by train to the nearest town to do shopping. When she went there, she always went to the Post-office. Perhaps to post her letters to Father, for she never gave them to the children or Mrs. Viney to post, and she never went to the village herself. Peter and Phyllis went with her. Bobbie wanted an excuse not to go, but try as she would she couldn't think of a good one. And just when she felt that all was lost, her frock caught on a big nail by the kitchen door and there was a great criss-cross tear all along the front of the skirt. I assure you this was really an accident. So the others pitied her and went without her, for there was no time for her to change, because they were rather late already and had to hurry to the station to catch the train.

When they had gone, Bobbie put on her everyday frock, and went down to the railway. She did not go into the station, but she went along the line to the end of the platform where the engine is when the down train is alongside the platform--the place where there are a water tank and a long, limp, leather hose, like an elephant's trunk. She hid behind a bush on the other side of the railway. She had the toy engine done up in brown paper, and she waited patiently with it under her arm.



A steam locomotive is pulling a train through a wooded area. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The foreground is a grassy field. The locomotive is emitting a large plume of white steam. The train consists of several dark-colored passenger cars.

Then when the next train came in and stopped, Bobbie went across the metals of the up-line and stood beside the engine. She had never been so close to an engine before. It looked much larger and harder than she had expected, and it made her feel very small indeed, and, somehow, very soft--as if she could very, very easily be hurt rather badly.

"I know what silk-worms feel like now," said Bobbie to herself.

The engine-driver and fireman did not see her. They were leaning out on the other side, telling the Porter a tale about a dog and a leg of mutton.

"If you please," said Roberta--but the engine was blowing off steam and no one heard her.

"If you please, Mr. Engineer," she spoke a little louder, but the Engine happened to speak at the same moment, and of course Roberta's soft little voice hadn't a chance.

It seemed to her that the only way would be to climb on to the engine and pull at their coats. The step was high, but she got her knee on it, and clambered into the cab; she stumbled and fell on hands and knees on the base of the great heap of coals that led up to the square opening in the tender. The engine was not above the weaknesses of its fellows; it was making a great deal more noise than there was the slightest need for. And just as Roberta fell on the coals, the engine-driver, who had turned without seeing her, started the engine, and when Bobbie had picked herself up, the train was moving--not fast, but much too fast for her to get off.

All sorts of dreadful thoughts came to her all together in one horrible flash. There were such things as express trains that went on, she supposed, for hundreds of miles without stopping. Suppose this should be one of them? How would she get home again? She had no money to pay for the return journey.

“And I've no business here. I'm an engine-burglar--that's what I am,” she thought. “I shouldn't wonder if they could lock me up for this.” And the train was going faster and faster.

There was something in her throat that made it impossible for her to speak. She tried twice. The men had their backs to her. They were doing something to things that looked like taps.

Suddenly she put out her hand and caught hold of the nearest sleeve. The man turned with a start, and he and Roberta stood for a minute looking at each other in silence. Then the silence was broken by them both.

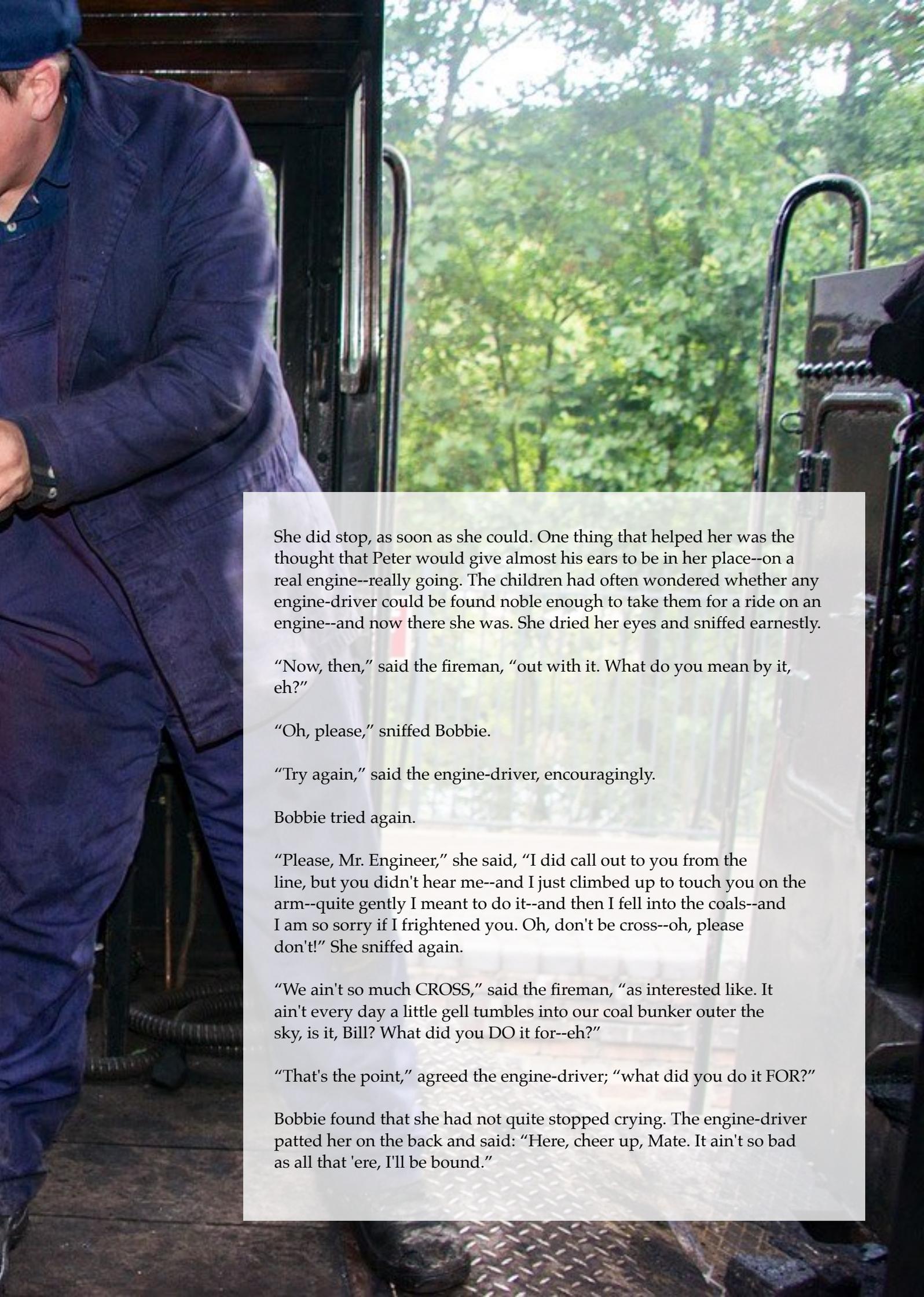
The man said, “Here's a bloomin' go!” and Roberta burst into tears.

The other man said he was blooming well blest--or something like it--but though naturally surprised they were not exactly unkind.

“You're a naughty little gell, that's what you are,” said the fireman, and the engine-driver said:--

“Daring little piece, I call her,” but they made her sit down on an iron seat in the cab and told her to stop crying and tell them what she meant by it.



A man in a blue uniform and cap stands on the side of a steam locomotive, looking out at a forest. The locomotive is dark, and the background is a lush green forest. The man is wearing a blue jacket and pants, and a blue cap. He is looking out of the open door of the locomotive.

She did stop, as soon as she could. One thing that helped her was the thought that Peter would give almost his ears to be in her place--on a real engine--really going. The children had often wondered whether any engine-driver could be found noble enough to take them for a ride on an engine--and now there she was. She dried her eyes and sniffed earnestly.

"Now, then," said the fireman, "out with it. What do you mean by it, eh?"

"Oh, please," sniffed Bobbie.

"Try again," said the engine-driver, encouragingly.

Bobbie tried again.

"Please, Mr. Engineer," she said, "I did call out to you from the line, but you didn't hear me--and I just climbed up to touch you on the arm--quite gently I meant to do it--and then I fell into the coals--and I am so sorry if I frightened you. Oh, don't be cross--oh, please don't!" She sniffed again.

"We ain't so much CROSS," said the fireman, "as interested like. It ain't every day a little gell tumbles into our coal bunker outer the sky, is it, Bill? What did you DO it for--eh?"

"That's the point," agreed the engine-driver; "what did you do it FOR?"

Bobbie found that she had not quite stopped crying. The engine-driver patted her on the back and said: "Here, cheer up, Mate. It ain't so bad as all that 'ere, I'll be bound."

"I wanted," said Bobbie, much cheered to find herself addressed as 'Mate'--"I only wanted to ask you if you'd be so kind as to mend this." She picked up the brown-paper parcel from among the coals and undid the string with hot, red fingers that trembled.

Her feet and legs felt the scorch of the engine fire, but her shoulders felt the wild chill rush of the air. The engine lurched and shook and rattled, and as they shot under a bridge the engine seemed to shout in her ears.

The fireman shovelled on coals.

Bobbie unrolled the brown paper and disclosed the toy engine.

"I thought," she said wistfully, "that perhaps you'd mend this for me--because you're an engineer, you know."

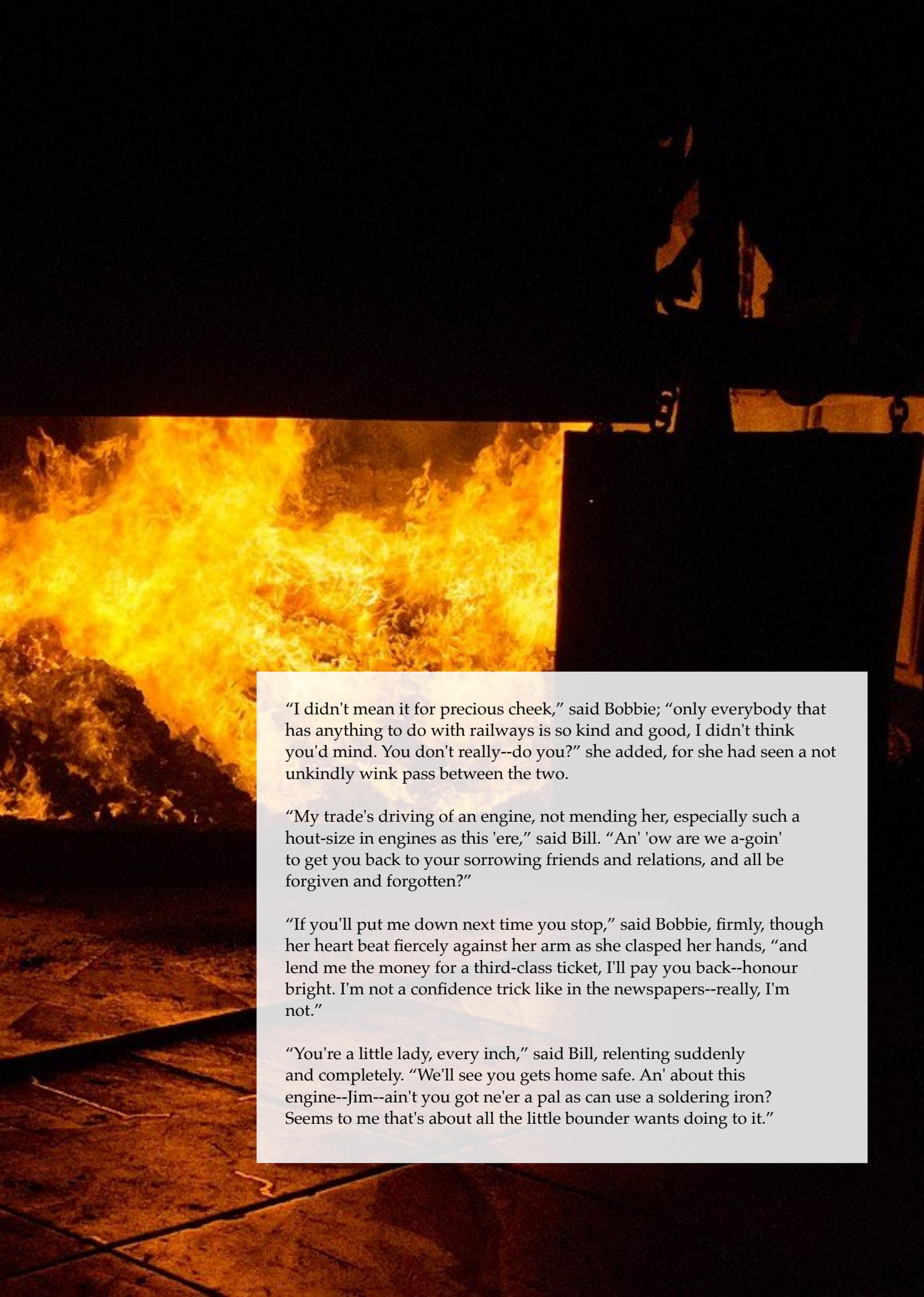
The engine-driver said he was blowed if he wasn't blest.

"I'm blest if I ain't blowed," remarked the fireman.

But the engine-driver took the little engine and looked at it--and the fireman ceased for an instant to shovel coal, and looked, too.

"It's like your precious cheek," said the engine-driver--"whatever made you think we'd be bothered tinkering penny toys?"



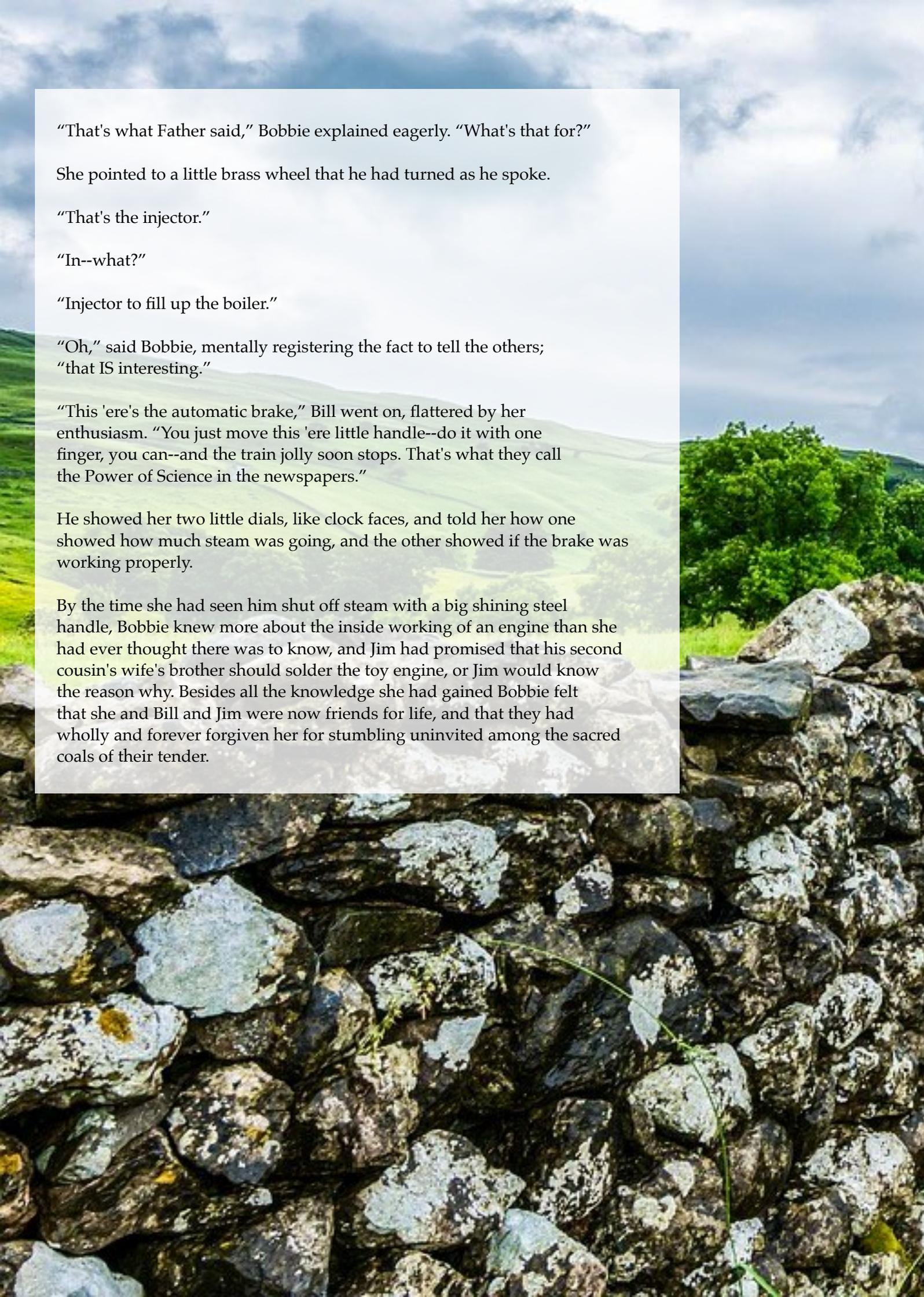


"I didn't mean it for precious cheek," said Bobbie; "only everybody that has anything to do with railways is so kind and good, I didn't think you'd mind. You don't really--do you?" she added, for she had seen a not unkindly wink pass between the two.

"My trade's driving of an engine, not mending her, especially such a hout-size in engines as this 'ere," said Bill. "An' 'ow are we a-goin' to get you back to your sorrowing friends and relations, and all be forgiven and forgotten?"

"If you'll put me down next time you stop," said Bobbie, firmly, though her heart beat fiercely against her arm as she clasped her hands, "and lend me the money for a third-class ticket, I'll pay you back--honour bright. I'm not a confidence trick like in the newspapers--really, I'm not."

"You're a little lady, every inch," said Bill, relenting suddenly and completely. "We'll see you gets home safe. An' about this engine--Jim--ain't you got ne'er a pal as can use a soldering iron? Seems to me that's about all the little bounder wants doing to it."



"That's what Father said," Bobbie explained eagerly. "What's that for?"

She pointed to a little brass wheel that he had turned as he spoke.

"That's the injector."

"In--what?"

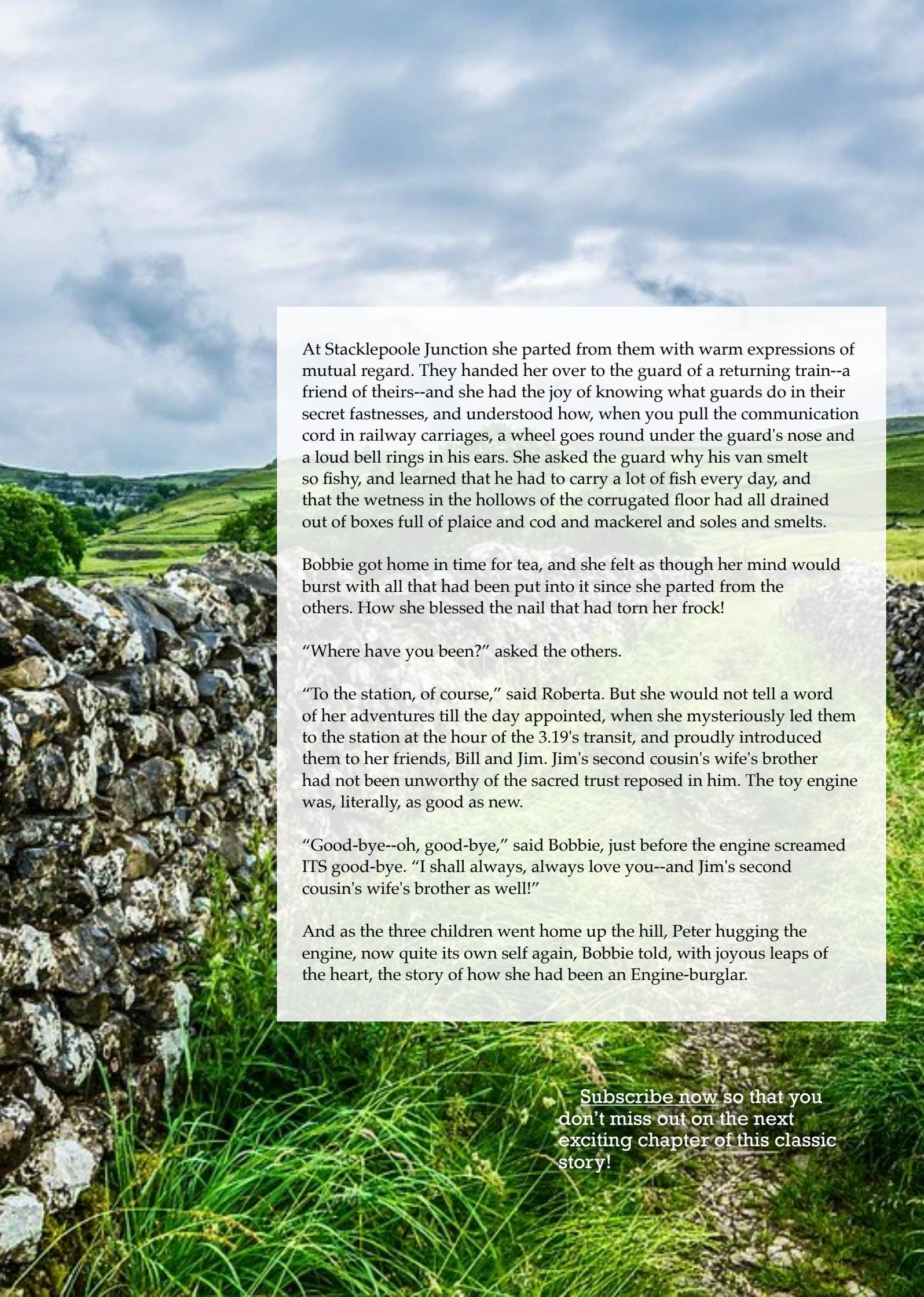
"Injector to fill up the boiler."

"Oh," said Bobbie, mentally registering the fact to tell the others;
"that IS interesting."

"This 'ere's the automatic brake," Bill went on, flattered by her enthusiasm. "You just move this 'ere little handle--do it with one finger, you can--and the train jolly soon stops. That's what they call the Power of Science in the newspapers."

He showed her two little dials, like clock faces, and told her how one showed how much steam was going, and the other showed if the brake was working properly.

By the time she had seen him shut off steam with a big shining steel handle, Bobbie knew more about the inside working of an engine than she had ever thought there was to know, and Jim had promised that his second cousin's wife's brother should solder the toy engine, or Jim would know the reason why. Besides all the knowledge she had gained Bobbie felt that she and Bill and Jim were now friends for life, and that they had wholly and forever forgiven her for stumbling uninvited among the sacred coals of their tender.



At Stacklepoole Junction she parted from them with warm expressions of mutual regard. They handed her over to the guard of a returning train--a friend of theirs--and she had the joy of knowing what guards do in their secret fastnesses, and understood how, when you pull the communication cord in railway carriages, a wheel goes round under the guard's nose and a loud bell rings in his ears. She asked the guard why his van smelt so fishy, and learned that he had to carry a lot of fish every day, and that the wetness in the hollows of the corrugated floor had all drained out of boxes full of plaice and cod and mackerel and soles and smelts.

Bobbie got home in time for tea, and she felt as though her mind would burst with all that had been put into it since she parted from the others. How she blessed the nail that had torn her frock!

"Where have you been?" asked the others.

"To the station, of course," said Roberta. But she would not tell a word of her adventures till the day appointed, when she mysteriously led them to the station at the hour of the 3.19's transit, and proudly introduced them to her friends, Bill and Jim. Jim's second cousin's wife's brother had not been unworthy of the sacred trust reposed in him. The toy engine was, literally, as good as new.

"Good-bye--oh, good-bye," said Bobbie, just before the engine screamed ITS good-bye. "I shall always, always love you--and Jim's second cousin's wife's brother as well!"

And as the three children went home up the hill, Peter hugging the engine, now quite its own self again, Bobbie told, with joyous leaps of the heart, the story of how she had been an Engine-burglar.

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-A. P. (Author)



SPECIAL FEATURE

**TED
HUDSON**
tells us about
his American Civil War
epic
The Lion's Mouth
Quartet.



Where are you from? Tell us a bit about your life and background.

I used to sing (to the tune of the Disney “Davy Crockett” theme): “Born on the waterfront in Washington, DC. Killed me a bureaucrat when I was only three.”

It is true that I was born on the Potomac River waterfront in Washington, on October 11, 1947, in a medical clinic in the wing of a mansion built in the 1790s by Thomas Law.

(Literary connection: Thomas Law was the first cousin of Fletcher Christian of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame.) The house was later owned by a

member of the Custis family into which George Washington married. There is a historic plaque beside the door—it does not have my name on it.

My Hudson family (no known relation to Grant Hudson—perhaps we should compare our DNA) was in Washington as far back as the 1890s. My great-grandfather, Thomas Ross Hudson, lived in 1898 and 1899 in a boarding house across the street from Ford’s Theater where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and next door to the Peterson boarding house, “The House Where Lincoln Died.” For most of the

Nineteenth Century, the Hudsons lived in Pennsylvania, mostly in York and Lycoming Counties. Thomas Ross Hudson and his father were both canal boatmen, traveling up and down the Susquehanna River between the two counties, Lycoming and York. Before that, starting in the 1630s, the Hudson ancestors lived in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware on the “Eastern Shore,” on the east side of Chesapeake Bay.

My father Ross Theodore Hudson was a fireman in Washington, and worked his way up to battalion chief. He wanted to be a printer, but the fire department was the only place he could get a job during the Great Depression. I went to a high school called Surrattsville. The name came from the family of Mary Surratt, hanged for her part in the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln. The house containing the Surratt inn and tavern is a mile from the school. After shooting Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth fled down a road about a half-mile from our house to the Surratt place farther down the road.

History seems to be in my blood.



I had good grades at Surrattsville, which got me into Cornell University. There I studied mostly political science and history, went to hockey games, learned to skate by playing hockey on the pond of some church friends, and became a bench-warmer on the varsity 150-pound football team. Then I went to law school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore.

My working life began at age ten, delivering newspapers on my bicycle, which I continued until I was ready for college. I became aware of current events, looking at the front page of the *Washington Star* that I delivered.

Summers 1967, '68, and '69 I worked at Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA, helping procure component parts for unmanned satellites: weather, communications, geo-mapping, astronomical observation, and so forth. I had a card in my wallet saying I was at Goddard when man first walked on the Moon.

Between college and law school, I joined the US Army Reserve, substitute taught in public schools, and went to California for basic training at Fort Ord. I moved across Monterey Bay to study Russian at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey. From there, some friends and I spent a few weekends backpacking in the Sierra Nevada, where we climbed several 12- and 13,000-foot mountains. This sparked my interest in working to protect wild lands. For more than a decade, my usual vacation was a backpacking trip with the Sierra Club, mostly in the mountain and desert West.

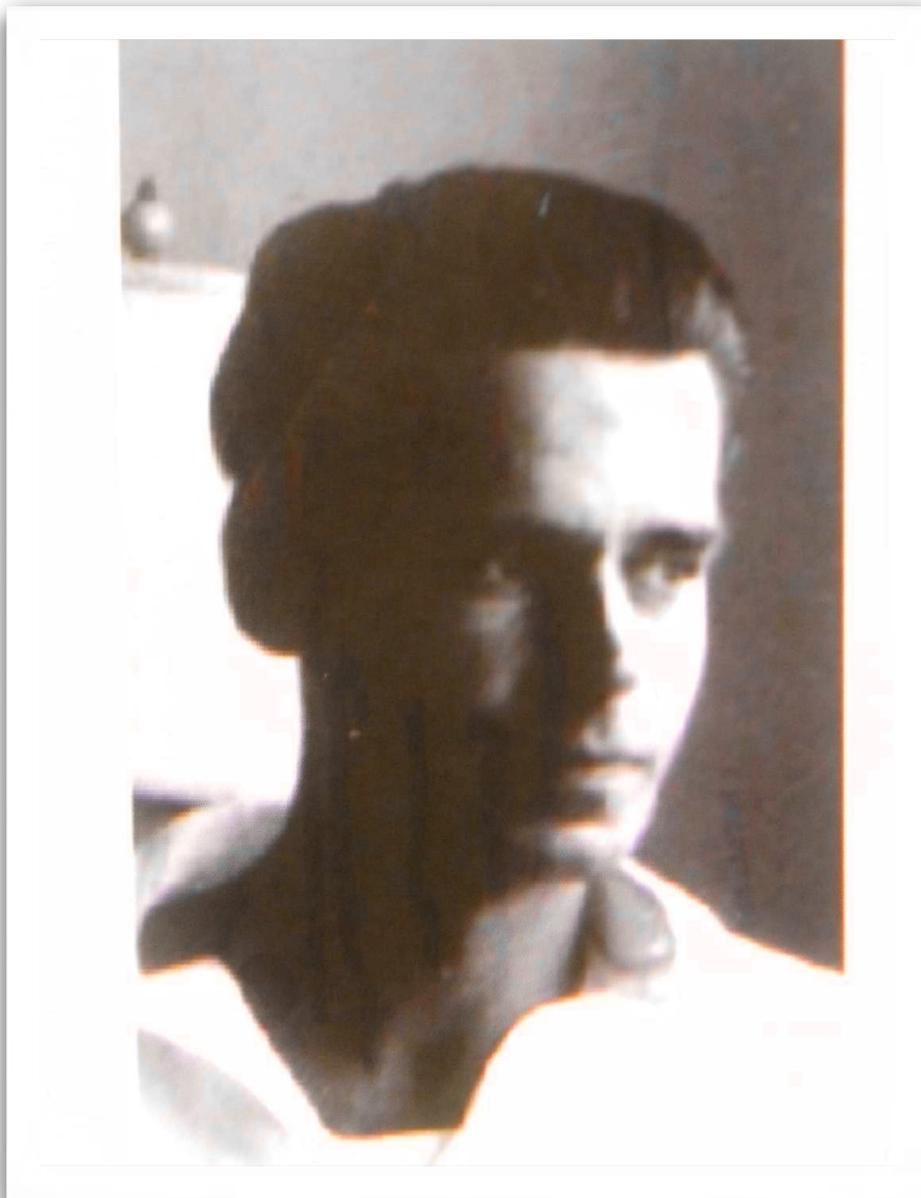
For a time I worked with a lawyer in Frederick, Maryland, about a mile from the house of Barbara Fritchie, immortalized in a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier: "Shoot if you must, this old gray head, but spare your country's flag, she said," waving a flag from her window at Stonewall Jackson as he marched through town in 1862.



Ted's mother, Leona Caroline Junghans



Father and grandfather, Ross T. Hudson and Theodore Frelinghuysen Hudson, in the mid-nineteen-teens, in Washington, DC. Old Thede died 16 years before Ted was born--1868-1931



Ross T. Hudson probably in the 1940s soon after he and Mom were married, and before all his hair went away.

After that, I began to work at the US Department of the Interior with the goal of pursuing my environmentalist inclinations. Unfortunately, for the better part of my career I served under Republican presidents, Reagan and the Bushes, whose policies were mostly environmentally destructive. For much of that career, I co-wrote regulations for the management of the public lands in the American West. At least I could hone my writing skills.

Living near Washington, I went to museums like the National Gallery of Art. I became a fan of the Hudson River School of landscape artists (if you are English, think Constable, only with more mountains). In the autumn of 1990, I conceived the idea of going on a landscape trip. I took along my camera and a coffee table book about the Hudson River School and New England landscape artists, and drove up the Hudson River as far as Frederic Edwin Church's home Olana overlooking the Hudson River south of Albany, then across New England and up the coast of Maine to the Penobscot Bay region where Church and others painted. I was looking for scenes painted by Cole, Bierstadt, Church, Kensett, FitzHugh Lane, and other Hudson River School and Luminist artists so I could compare the paintings with photos of the actual landscape subjects. I paid my respects at Church's grave in Hartford, Connecticut.

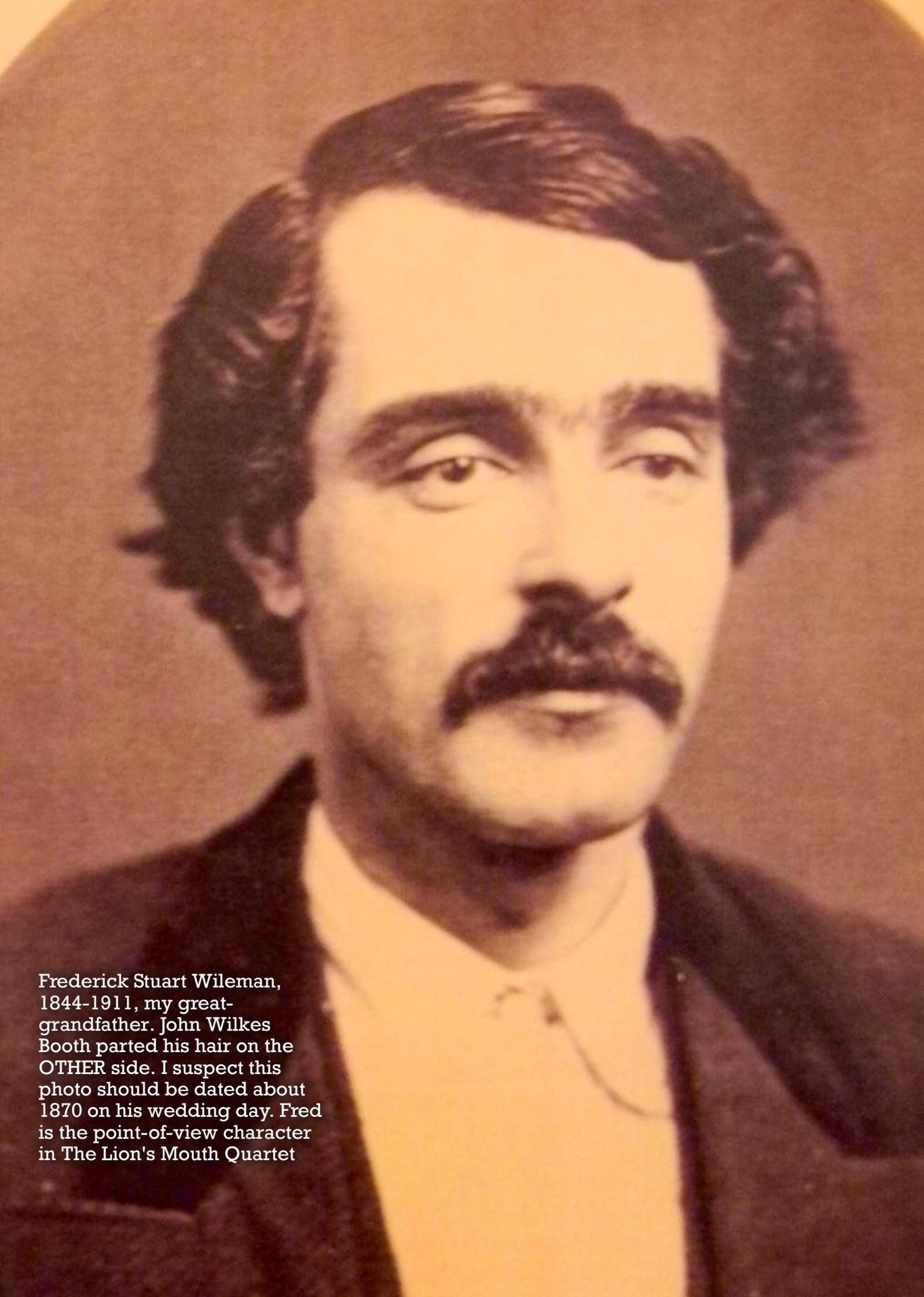
Mostly in the late '80s and early '90s I traveled abroad. I went with the Sierra Club in 1985 to spend a month in Scotland, hiking the Highlands and islands. (I even bought a Ross kilt in Edinburgh, which turned out to be the wrong tartan—I'm really a Royal Stewart by descent.) I went with some environmentalist friends to Peru in 1986 to see Halley's Comet, and to visit Lake Titicaca, Cusco, and Machu Picchu, taking the train from

Lake Titicaca through the Altiplano to Cusco. I went to New Zealand in 1988, where I saw more rainbows in a handful of days than I see in as many years here. We hiked the famous Milford Track to beautiful but foggy Milford Sound, and then the lesser-known Rees-Dart Track where Peter Jackson filmed many scenes for *The Lord of the Rings*. With a group of environmentalists, I went to Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea as the Soviet Union was

collapsing in 1991. (Some of us went to Red Square the night of July 4 to see the cathedral onion domes lit up, but they were dark. I asked a young Kremlin guard in Russian why they were not illuminated. He replied, only on holidays. I said, "But it's the Fourth of July!" He laughed.) Later, when we married, my wife and I traveled to Taiwan to meet her family and honeymooned on Bali, Indonesia, in 1995.

Ancestral village of Latsch in the Canton of Graubünden, southwest of Davos, Switzerland, in 2010





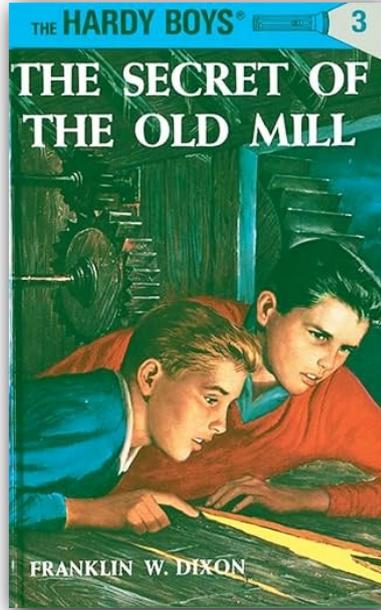
Frederick Stuart Wileman,
1844-1911, my great-
grandfather. John Wilkes
Booth parted his hair on the
OTHER side. I suspect this
photo should be dated about
1870 on his wedding day. Fred
is the point-of-view character
in *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*

In other years, we made several trips to China (climbed the Great Wall in a thick fog, so I only know what it looks like from pictures), and one to Switzerland and Austria. We've gone on a few cruises: to the Bahamas, to Southeast Alaska, and across the ocean this summer by way of Nova Scotia, Labrador, Greenland, and Iceland, to Norway, Holland, Ireland, and Scotland, and back. (Cruising is

fine, if you only want to get a hint of what a place is like.) My wife, LiPing, and I have two children, Miranda (named for Prospero's daughter in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*), and Lachlan. Miranda has two young daughters, Alanna who will be three in February, and Eliza who will be one in April.

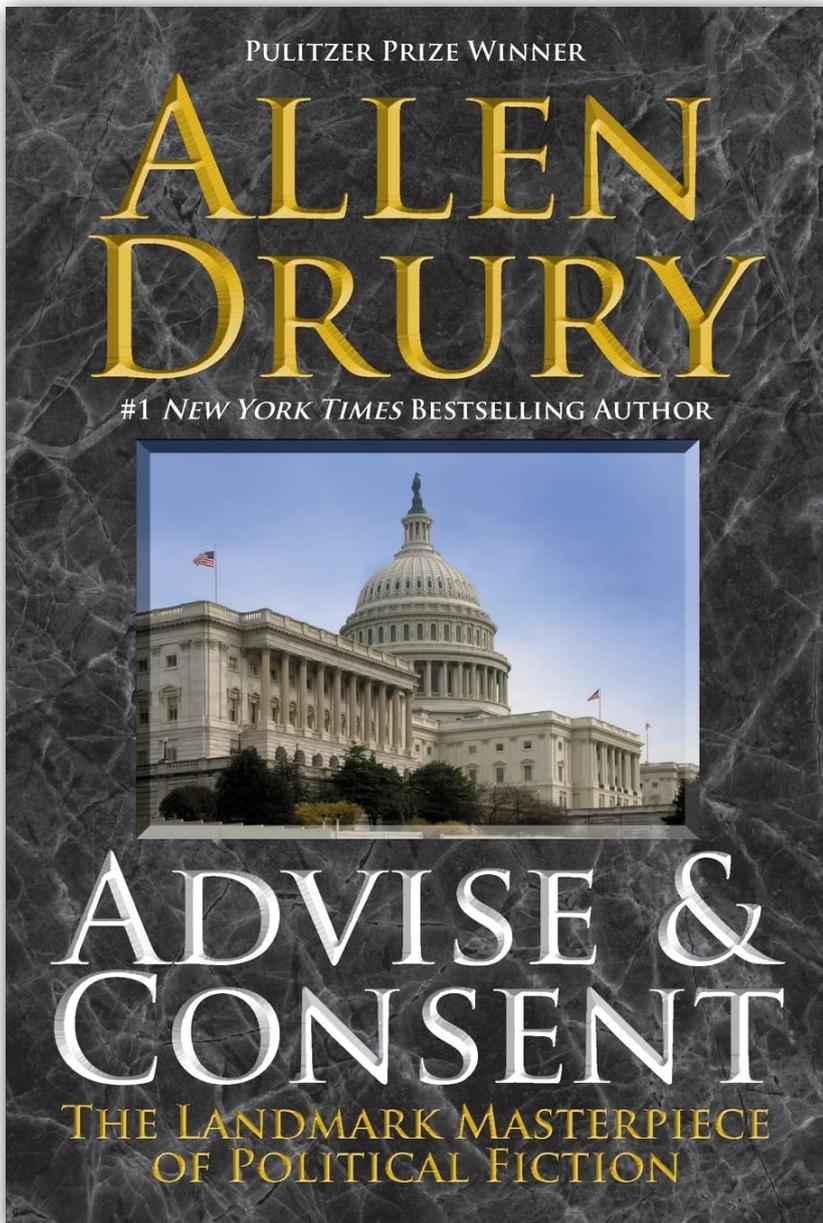
Miranda and Lachlan





What's your earliest memory of fiction?

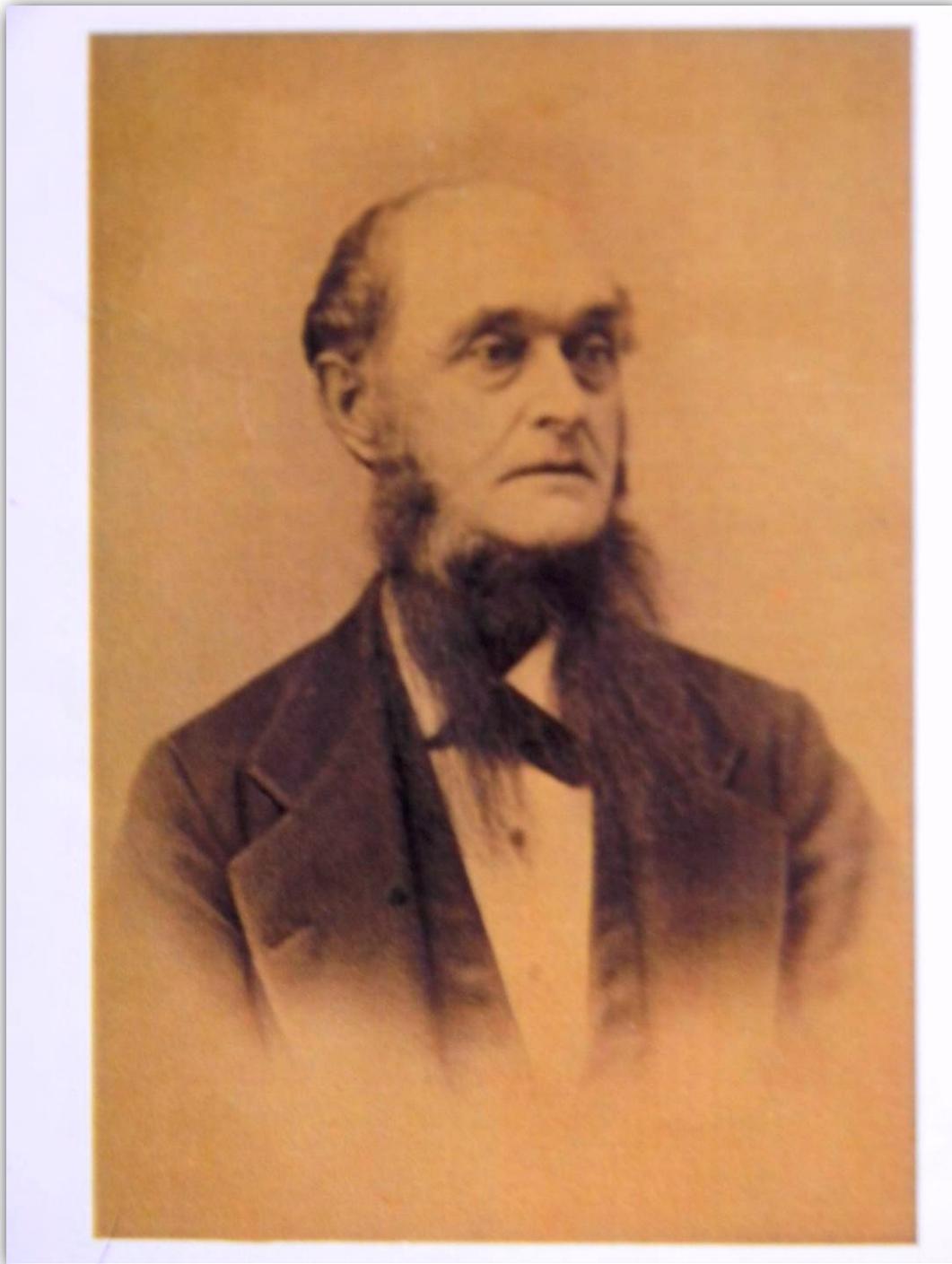
As a young child, I read Disney Golden Books like *Peter Pan* and *Snow White*, and moved on to a couple of early Hardy Boys stories in about third grade. (Side note: the boy who took over my paper route, David Bischoff, went on to be a writer and wrote some Hardy Boys books himself, as “Franklin W. Dixon,” of course). In 1958, my parents gave me a “We Were There” history novel about D-Day, my first historical fiction. A year later, I found in the library the Civil War juvenile novels by Joseph A. Altsheler (1862-1919) and devoured them. In high school, I read Allen Drury’s political novels, *Advise and Consent* and its sequels. This began my interest in political science. I read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which helped make me a liberal despite also reading *Gone with the Wind*. I read *Treasure Island*, *Ivanhoe*, some Dickens, and *Ben-Hur*.



Did you want to be a writer from an early age? Tell us about your first attempts.

Yes. I wanted to become like Altsheler, writing historical fiction about the Civil War. I wrote a few pages in longhand while still in elementary school, thankfully long lost. But life and needing to earn a living got in the way. Now I have written that Civil War series, begun when I retired.

Miles Herman Wileman, 1821-1894, my great-great-grandfather, and the father of Frederick Stuart Wileman in *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*.

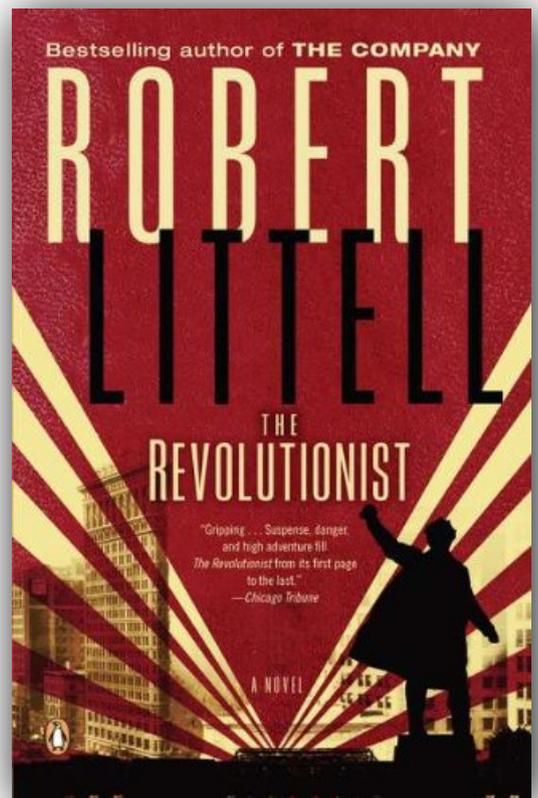
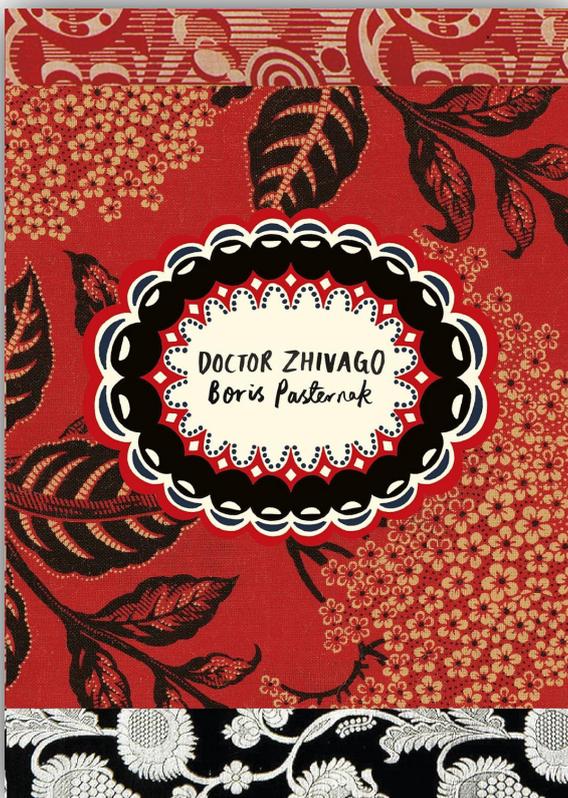
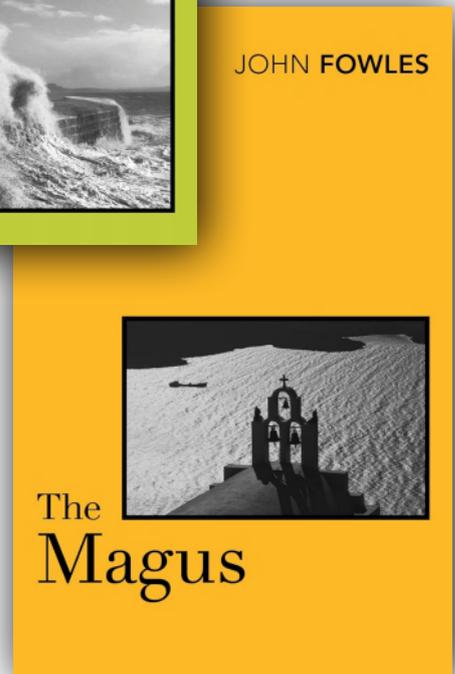
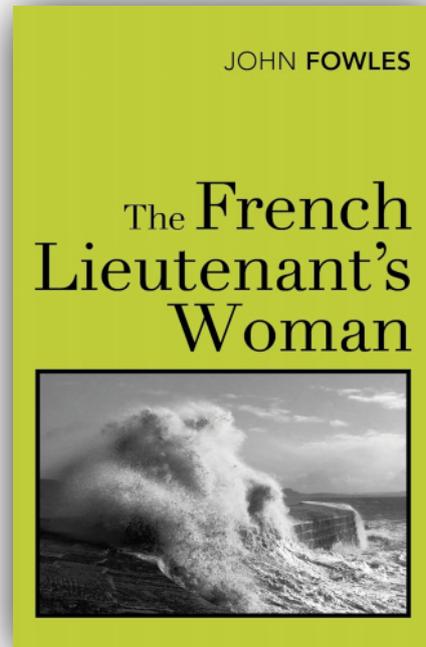


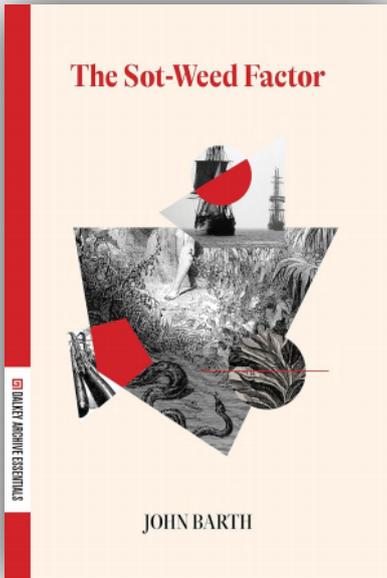


Margarethe Fredericka Wilson, the future wife of Fred Wileman, and my great-grandmother. "Those Eyes" is the title of the final chapter of *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*.

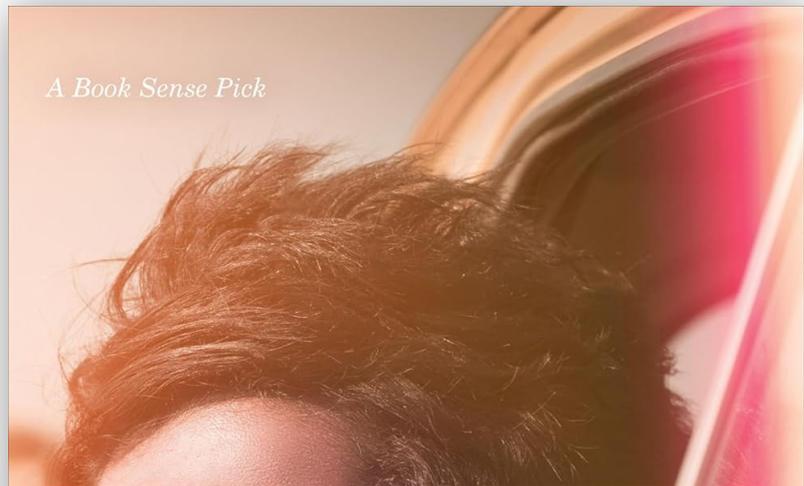
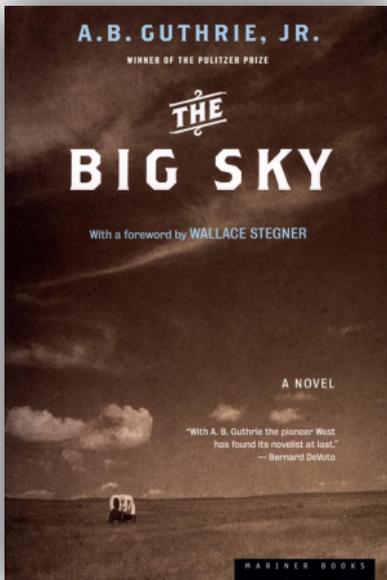
What kept you hooked on fiction as you grew older?

I discovered more and more writers that I came to love. I read a few of the mysteries of Agatha Christie in high school. I saw the movie *The Collector* in college, which led me to John Fowles. His *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *The Magus* remain two of my favorite novels. In the 1970s I turned to P.G. Wodehouse, reading I think just about everything he wrote, which is a lot, and in the '80s to George MacDonald Fraser, from whose Flashman novels I learned you can inject humor into historical fiction. His *The Pyrates* is still the funniest book I have ever read. About 1970 I read *Dr. Zhivago* and in the '80s Robert Littell's *The Revolutionist*, both about the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Russian history is so tragic. As the Robert Massie biography of Peter the Great says at the end of chapter one: "Russia is a stern land with a harsh climate, but few travelers can forget its deep appeal, and no Russian ever finds peace in his soul anywhere else on earth." I learned the truth of this after a failed relationship with a young Crimean woman I met on my Russia trip.





I discovered novels about the American West by the likes of Thomas Berger (*Little Big Man*) and Larry McMurtry, and became particularly devoted to the novels of Montana writers A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (*The Big Sky*, *The Way West*), and Ivan Doig (*English Creek*, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*). And about my own backyard: the Chesapeake Bay region, books like *The Sot-Weed Factor* by John Barth, a historical fiction that might make you think of Henry Fielding, and the Civil War at sea novels by Eastern Shore writer David Poyer. It is disturbing to think of my youth as fodder for historical fiction, but the excellent *Freshwater Road* by actress Denise Nicholas is just that, historical fiction about the Civil Rights movement.

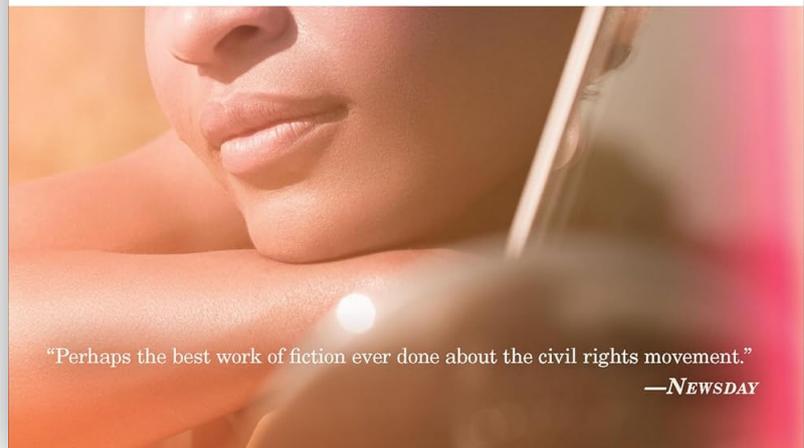
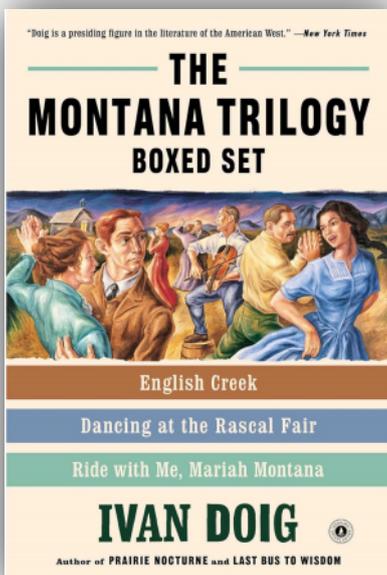


A Book Sense Pick

Freshwater Road

A Novel

DENISE NICHOLAS

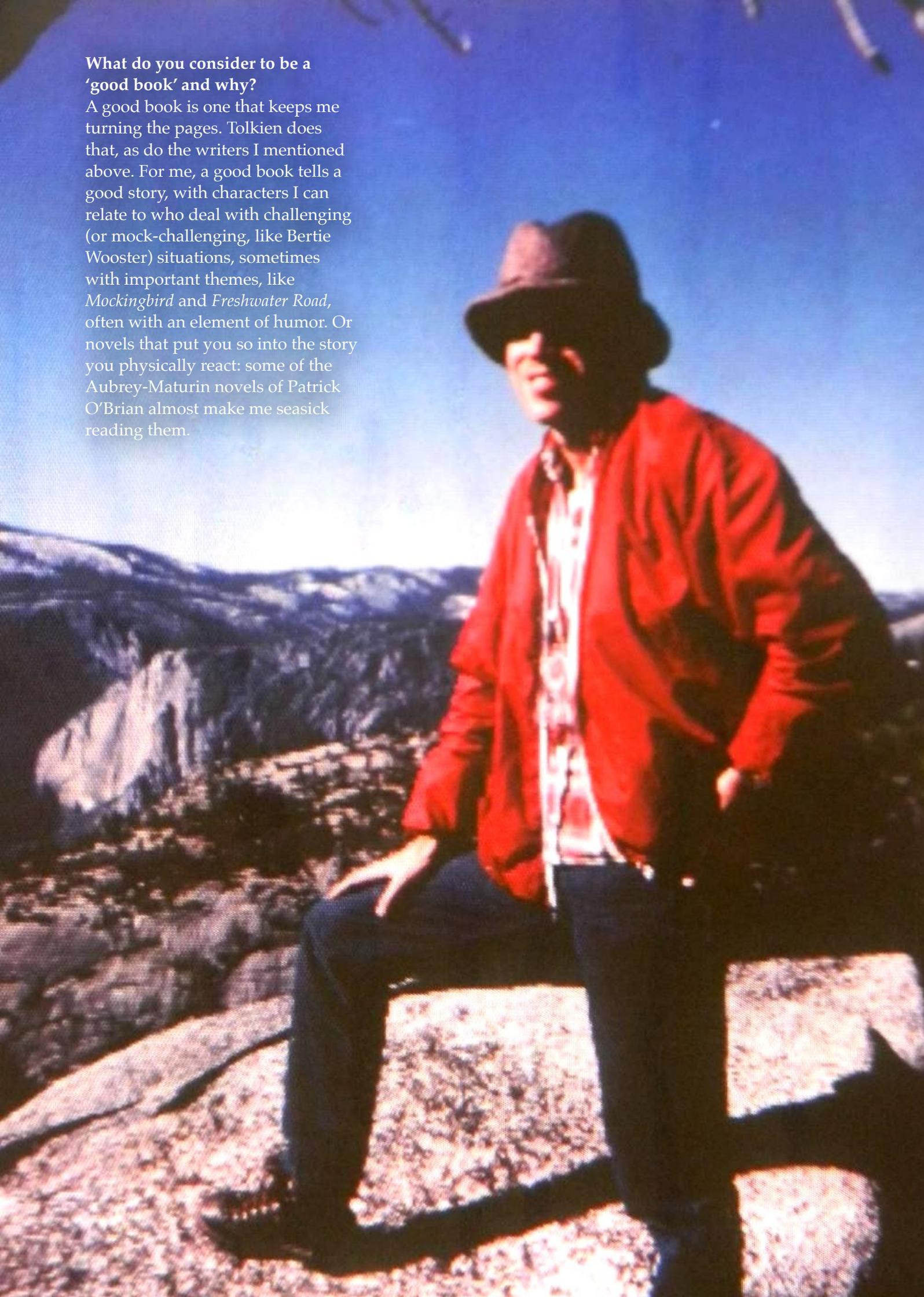


"Perhaps the best work of fiction ever done about the civil rights movement."

—*NEWSDAY*

**What do you consider to be a
'good book' and why?**

A good book is one that keeps me turning the pages. Tolkien does that, as do the writers I mentioned above. For me, a good book tells a good story, with characters I can relate to who deal with challenging (or mock-challenging, like Bertie Wooster) situations, sometimes with important themes, like *Mockingbird* and *Freshwater Road*, often with an element of humor. Or novels that put you so into the story you physically react: some of the Aubrey-Maturin novels of Patrick O'Brian almost make me seasick reading them.





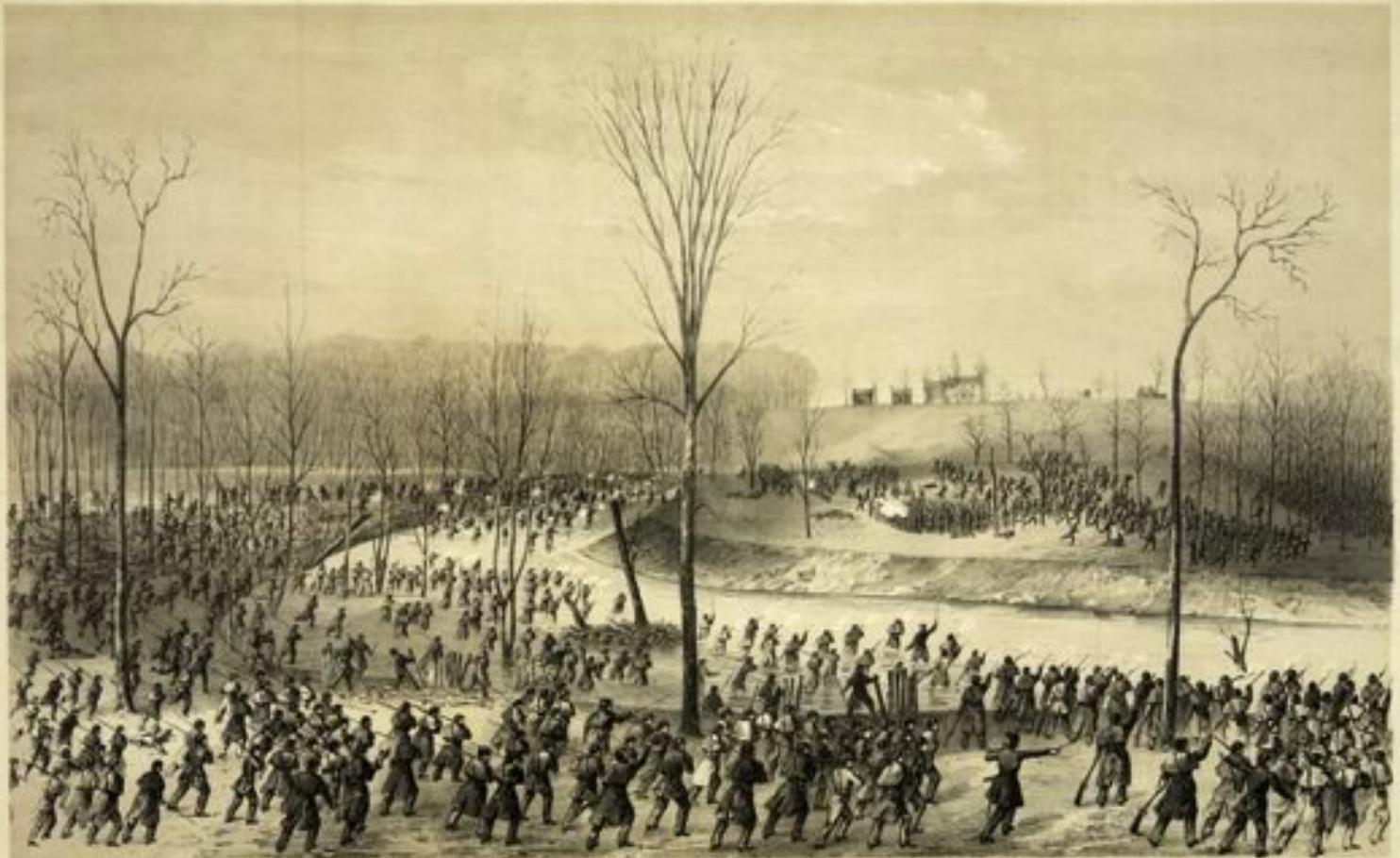
Peterson boarding house, The House Where Lincoln Died

Was there ever a point where you said to yourself 'I'm a writer'? Tell us about that.

While I was still working, I received from a genealogist cousin copies of two letters my great-grandfather Frederick Stuart Wileman wrote during the Civil War. (I was researching family history myself at that time.) One of them, written July 1, 1863, had a postscript: "...I

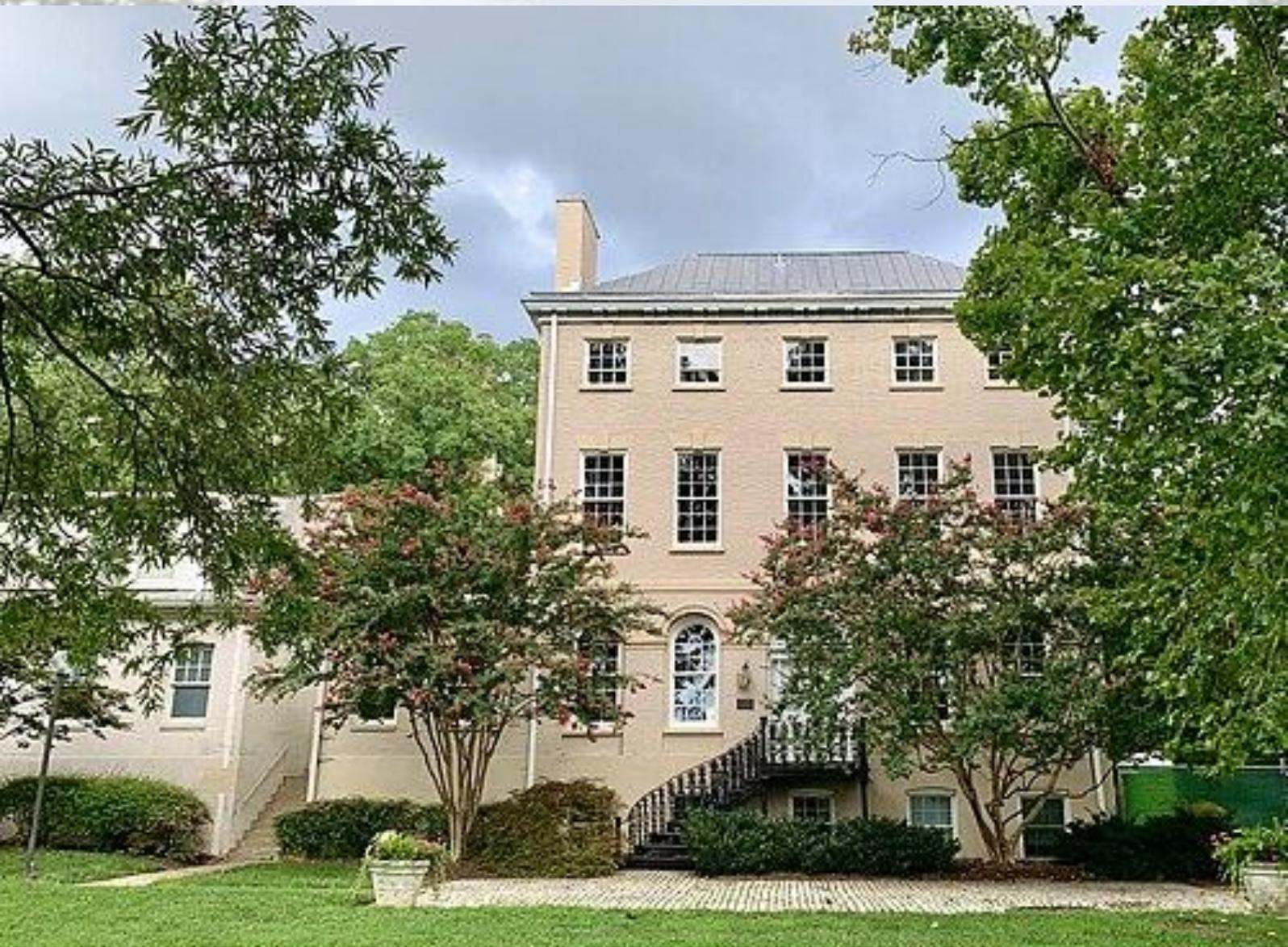
hope you will enjoy the 4th of July. I do not care a snap for it. I had my fourth of July at the Battle of Murphreesboro. I think it was equal to Van Amberg's manœuvres." When I learned that Isaac Van Amburgh (1808-1865) was a lion-tamer whose 'maneuver' was to put his head in the lion's mouth, I thought maybe I could write about Fred and his experience in the Civil War as historical

fiction. As the words mounted up, I thought, "Maybe I *am* a writer." My first adult publication was long before that, though. The Sierra Club paid me \$200 in 1979 for a humorous article about a near-disastrous 1978 backpacking trip in the Sierra Nevada for their magazine.



THE BATTLE OF STONE RIVER OR MURFREESBORO'.
Charge of Gen. Negley's Division across Stone River, on Friday, January 3rd, 1862.

GEN. NEGLEY'S DIVISION.



The Thomas Law House, just off the waterfront in SW Washington, built in the 1790s. I was born in the wing to the left, which was Dr. Hadley's clinic at the time. Law was first cousin of Fletcher Christian of the Mutiny on the Bounty.

Tell us about your adventures on your way to being published, and what it was like seeing your name in a proper print book.

My series of historical fiction novels about Fred Wileman in the Civil War has been accepted for publication, but won't appear in print until about a year from now. But if

it is anything like seeing my name on that *Sierra* magazine article all those years ago, I imagine it will be pretty cool. An acquaintance of mine works for the publisher, and commented favorably on excerpts from time to time. I submitted my manuscripts to that publisher, which accepted them.

I did not submit anywhere else, figuring a bird in the hand... So, nothing really adventurous happened (yet) on the way to publication.



Assateague National Wildlife Refuge on Virginia's Eastern Shore, just offshore from Chincoteague



Cole plantation that Fred and his comrades had to charge across at the Battle of Bentonville on March 19, 1865

Has being accepted for publication changed what you do as a writer? i.e. habits, types of things you write, expectations etc.

No. Finishing the half-million-word series left me for a time in a state of post-partum, as it

were, depression. I wondered what to do next.

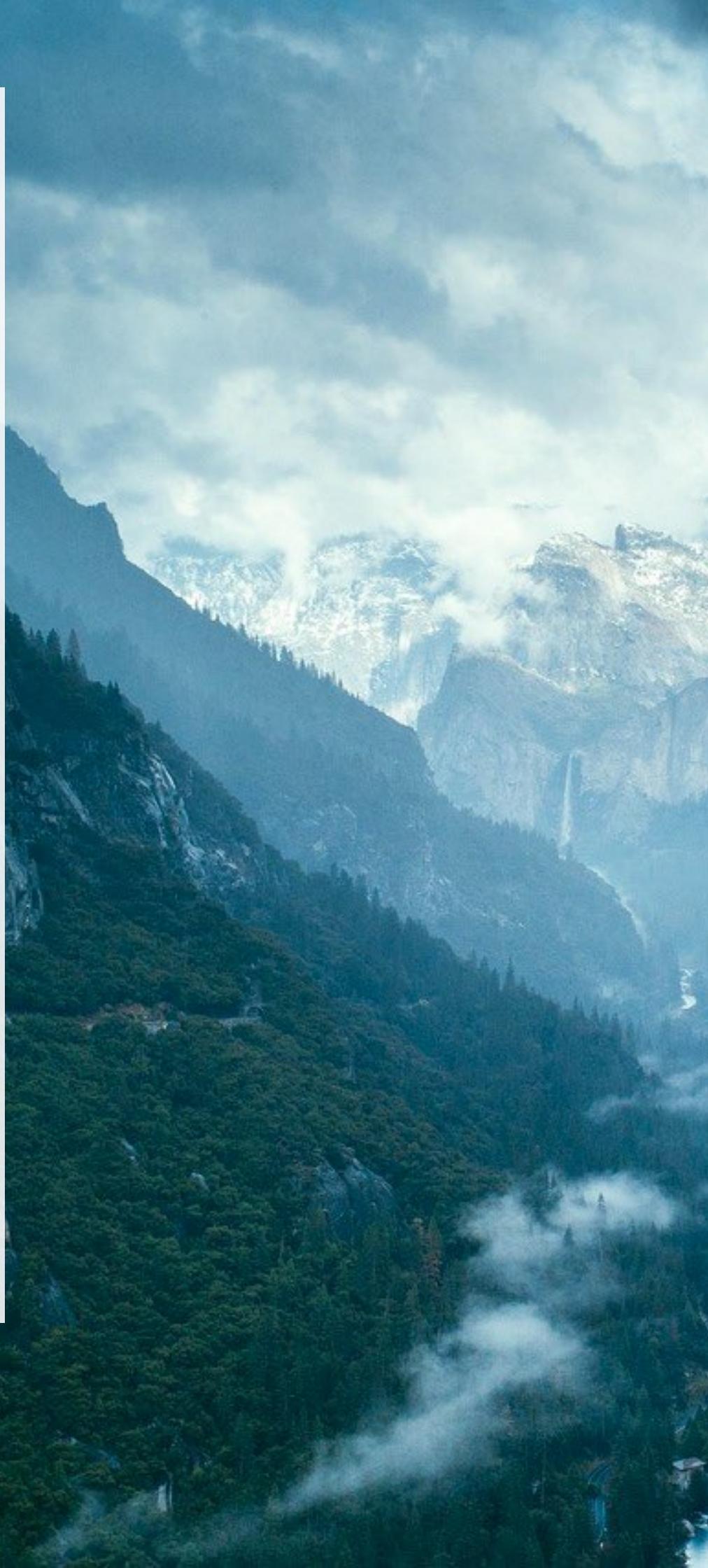
Then I remembered I had another Civil War great-grandfather...

What's a really profound thing that has happened to you (related to writing or not)?

In July 1971, my army language school classmate John Tallmadge recruited me to drive several of us to Yosemite National Park for a weekend of backpacking. We hiked from Tuolumne Meadows north to upper Young Lake, swatting mosquitoes all the way. I thought the experience was highly overrated.

We made camp beside the lake and watched a glorious sunset over the lake. As the air cooled, the mosquitoes subsided, and I thought this wasn't so bad after all. Next morning, we continued north and climbed Mount Conness (12,590 feet), a beautiful mountain to look at and down from. I decided I loved this experience.

The next weekend John and I and a couple of others, including my Minnesota friend, Terry Paradeis, drove back to Tuolumne Meadows and backpacked up Lyell Canyon. At its upper end, we climbed up a glacier to the summit of Mount Lyell (13,144 feet), the highest in the park. The following weekend I led my own expedition to Evolution Valley in Kings Canyon National Park, farther south in the Sierra Nevada, surrounded by peaks bearing names like Darwin, Mendel, and Huxley.





This began several decades of mountain and desert backpacking, including a ten-day Sierra Club trek in the highest section of the Sierra Nevada in Kings Canyon NP, during which we climbed a half-dozen “fourteeners,” mountains higher than 14,000 feet, including Mount Whitney, the highest in the lower 48 states. That one was just a stiff walk, not really a climb. We *backpacked* over the top of 13,990-foot Mount Barnard, the highest I ever carried a pack. More fun than Whitney was the scramble to the top of Mount Williamson (14,379 feet) from which we peered down over the verge of its vertical eastern face. I was 27 that year, and felt immortal.

(Nb. My friend Tallmadge has published a beautiful memoir, *Meeting the Tree of Life: A Teacher's Path*, and a book of essays, *The Cincinnati Arch: Learning from Nature in the City*. Highly recommended.)

I took several canoe trips on the Shenandoah River in Virginia, reveling in the exciting white-water passages. (It is curious to think that on the ocean, waves move but the water stands still, but on the river, the waves stand still but the water moves.) And raft trips on the New River in Virginia and West Virginia (much too big a river for an open canoe), and on the Youghiogheny (pronounced Yockagainy) River in southwestern Pennsylvania.

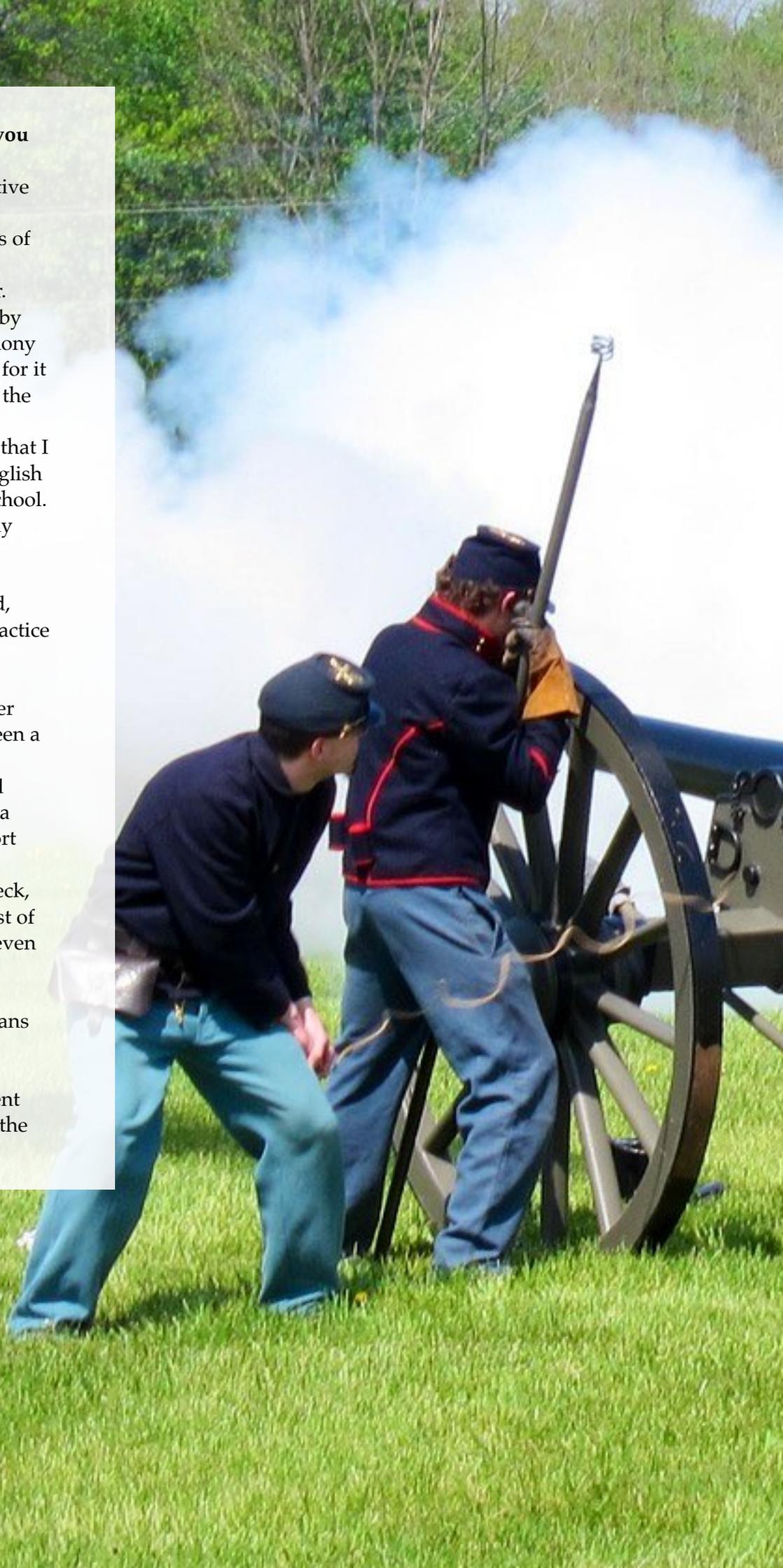
Another profound experience, familiar to most parents, was holding daughter Miranda in my arms a few minutes after watching her be born. We played classical music during the delivery. She emerged to the tune of Bizet's *L'Arlesienne*. I was an old hand at this when Lachlan came along three years later, with a Mozart piano concerto playing on the radio.

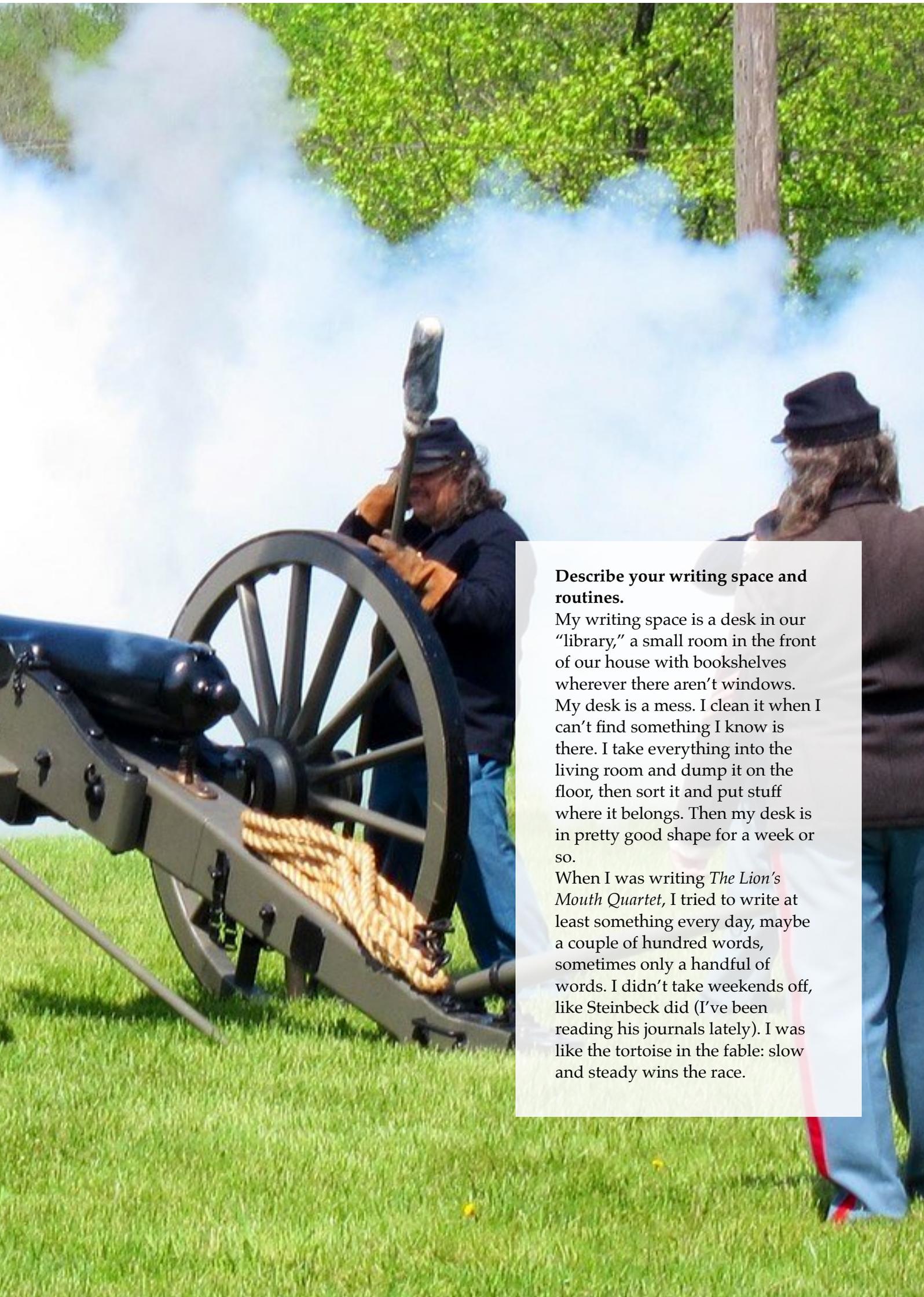
Who or what has helped you the most as a writer?

I had one semester of creative writing freshman year of college. And two semesters of English literature and composition the same year. (Years later, I read a novel by the second professor, Anthony Caputi—didn't care much for it—and a book of poems by the creative writing professor, Archie Ammons.) Beyond that I have had no writing or English instruction beyond high school. My mother insisted that my high school essays be grammatically correct. My grammar is still quite good, especially after years of practice writing government regulations.

Having a desktop computer and word processor has been a godsend. Writing on a typewriter as I did that old *Sierra* magazine story and a couple of unpublished short stories fifty years ago, or longhand like John Steinbeck, Charles Dickens, and a host of others, did—gosh, I can't even contemplate.

Of great help to me were librarians and local historians and historical societies in Michigan, Connecticut, Virginia, and, for my current project, Pennsylvania and the Eastern Shore.





Describe your writing space and routines.

My writing space is a desk in our “library,” a small room in the front of our house with bookshelves wherever there aren’t windows. My desk is a mess. I clean it when I can’t find something I know is there. I take everything into the living room and dump it on the floor, then sort it and put stuff where it belongs. Then my desk is in pretty good shape for a week or so.

When I was writing *The Lion’s Mouth Quartet*, I tried to write at least something every day, maybe a couple of hundred words, sometimes only a handful of words. I didn’t take weekends off, like Steinbeck did (I’ve been reading his journals lately). I was like the tortoise in the fable: slow and steady wins the race.

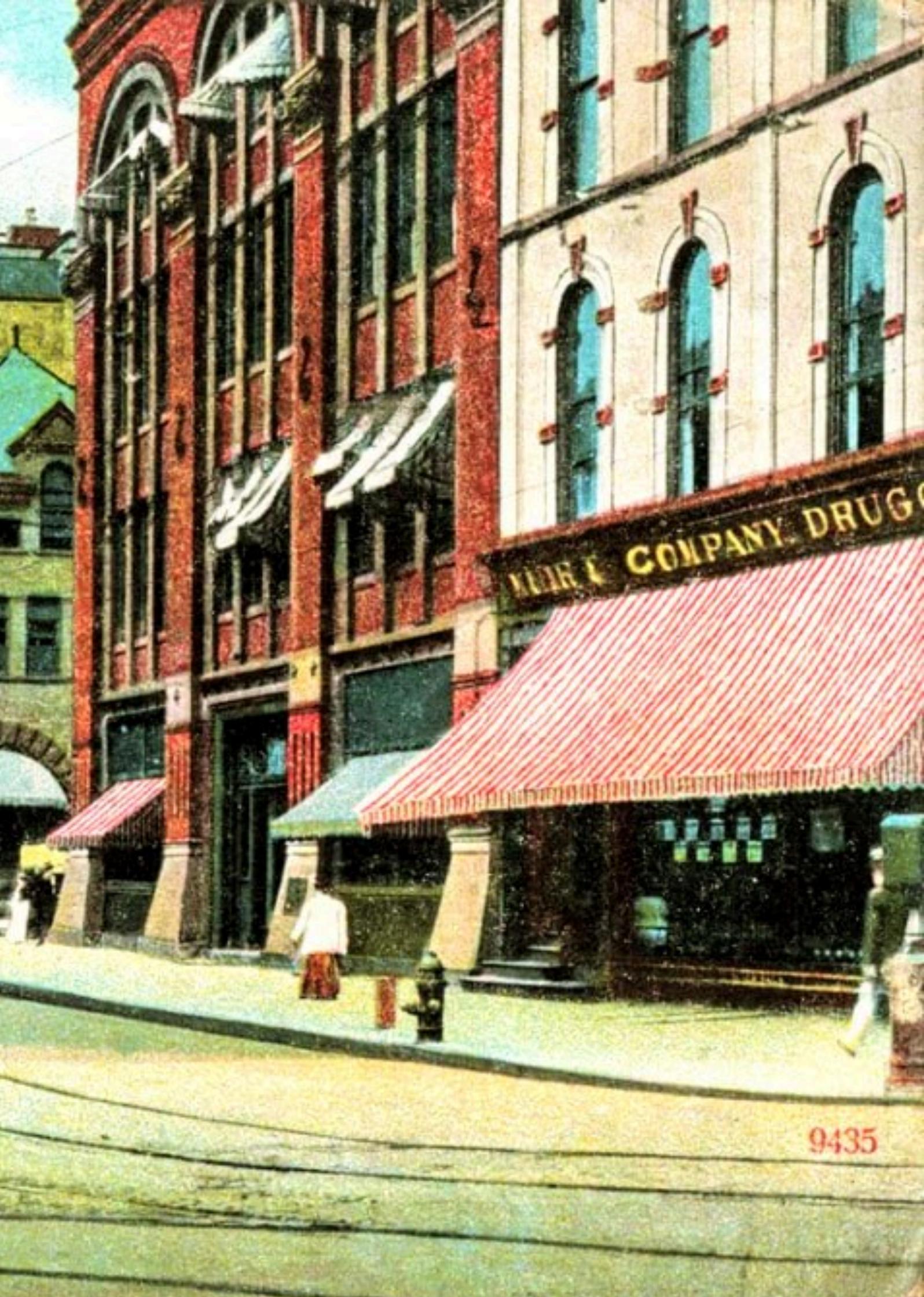
OTTAWA STREET, GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

Tell us about the books you've written so far. How did they evolve, what did you enjoy/not enjoy, etc?

The only books I have written to this point are the four that comprise *The Lion's Mouth Quartet*. The title of the series was inspired by the postscript to that letter I mentioned earlier, in which Fred elliptically compared being in the battle of Murfreesboro (Stones River) to putting his head in the lion's mouth. The titles of the four volumes are *To Know What War Is*, *The Lion's Mouth*, *To Hold Their Heads High*, and *To Get Home Honorable*. The titles are all derived from Fred's letters. The letters inspired a theme for my stories: the duty to act honorably.

I spent a lot of time doing research, reading regimental histories, memoirs, military personnel records at the National Archives, modern histories, diaries, and studying maps and pictures. I also visited battlefields, followed as best I could Sherman's March to the Sea, and spent a week in Fred's hometown, Grand Rapids, Michigan, peering into microfilms at the library there. I also did a lot of online research into the families that Fred and his companions encountered while foraging in Georgia and the Carolinas. The research was fun, and the writing, while hard, was a labor of love.





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The first book, *To Know What War Is*, takes Fred Wileman and his friends from a boyhood adventure at the circus with the lion tamer Van Amburgh through the pre-war years as tensions mount over slavery, abolition, and politics, to enlisting and undergoing the first campaign. It concludes with the battle of Perryville in Kentucky.

Book Two, *The Lion's Mouth*, begins with the sanguinary aftermath of the Perryville battle and takes our heroes farther south, into Tennessee where they fight the bloody battle of Stones River, and into the squalid Confederate prison in the Libby warehouses in Richmond, Virginia.

Book Three, *To Hold Their Heads High*, begins with Fred and his comrades waiting to be exchanged, at Camp Chase in Ohio, continues with their return to their regiment via a hike through the mountains of East Tennessee in time to build a pontoon bridge over the Tennessee River before the battles of Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, after which they build a high bridge over the river. The volume concludes with a long section about Sherman's March to the Sea. (I may want to put Sherman's March into a separate book—this one is much longer than the other three in the series.)

Book Four, *To Get Home Honorable*, begins with the siege of Savannah, Georgia, and continues with the winter campaign across South Carolina and into North Carolina. The climax comes with a bloody battle that most Americans know nothing about—Bentonville. The novel winds down after the Confederate surrender with the forced march to Washington City, the Grand Review of the army in that city, and the return home to Michigan for a romantic denouement.



What are you working on? What are your plans?

I am preparing to write another historical fiction, this one about Thomas Ross Hudson, my father's paternal grandfather. He was a seventeen-year-old recruit in the winter of 1864, and served in a Pennsylvania light artillery battery in Ulysses S Grant's Overland Campaign of that spring and early summer in Virginia. I am learning all I can about the other soldiers in Battery B, and about the role the battery played in Grant's campaign. This novel (working title *Overland*) will be much shorter than the *Quartet* — Thomas Ross Hudson was only in the war for a little over a year.

Do you have favourite characters of your own? A favourite story that you've written? Anything you'd love to see made into a movie/Netflix series?

My publishing contract allows the publisher to seek film opportunities. I'm not holding my breath waiting for that to happen, though. Would I like to see *The Lion's Mouth Quartet* filmed? Sure. The named characters were all real people, characterized fictionally. Fred Wileman has several messmates who are main characters of the story. Fred is the observer—the story is seen entirely through his eyes. He is also the only one

whose thoughts we know (except for thoughts spoken by other characters, of course); there is no head-hopping in the *Quartet*. Dan Alcumbrack is the stoic among the companions, taking things as they come pretty much without complaint. Jim Finney is the one who always has a clever, offbeat remark—Jim may be my favorite character. George Taylor is always complaining, cursing (PG-13) a lot. Henry Tracy is the happy, friendly guy whom everybody loves. John M. "Jack" Knapp is Fred's cousin and is characterized as a singer, the Alan-a-Dale of the story.





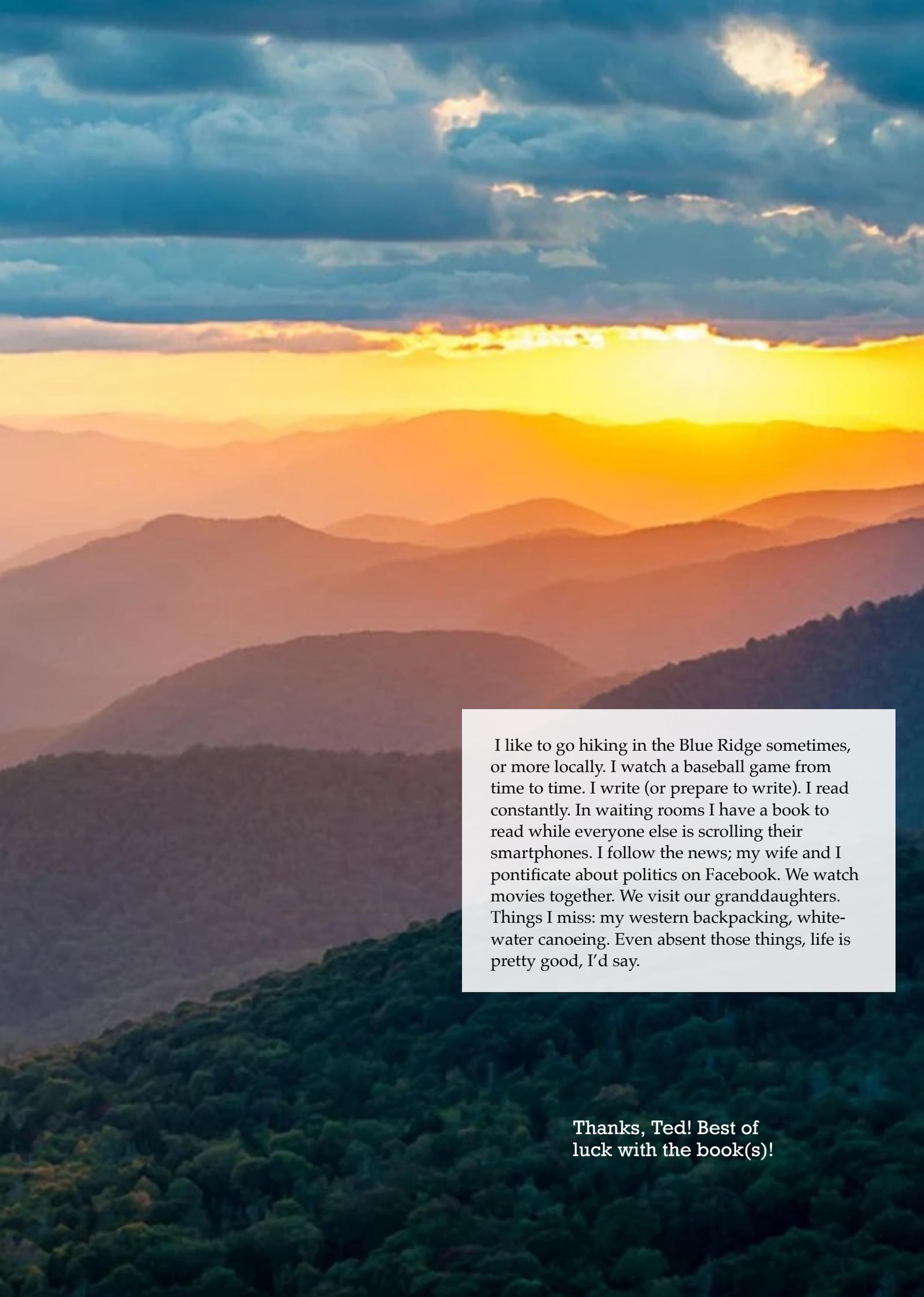
Gus Moransky is the Dutch immigrant, the enthusiastic campaigner, eager for battle. Henry Church is the villain in the early part of the war, a burly blacksmith who tries to bully Fred and has no use for the people they are fighting to liberate. Josiah B. Conklin is my principal villain beginning in 1864 when he enlisted. There is historical justification for the characterization of these two: Church deserted early in 1863, and Conklin was court-martialed in 1864 for insubordination and is

mentioned in diaries as a thief within the regiment. Fred has two possible love interests in the story: the girl who lives over the back fence back in Michigan, his "Dulcinea," and the younger girl. "the kid," who lives a couple of blocks north of his house in Grand Rapids. Will one of them be his true love? There is also a real-life madwoman in Part One who gives Fred warnings, not unlike in *Macbeth*.

Describe your ideal life from your point of view.

Unless I could live the life of, say, Cary Grant (as depicted in some of my favorite '60s movies), I'm pretty content with the life I have. Recently for my birthday we went to the Fairfax Symphony for a concert of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, one of my favorite composers.

Blue Ridge Mountains



I like to go hiking in the Blue Ridge sometimes, or more locally. I watch a baseball game from time to time. I write (or prepare to write). I read constantly. In waiting rooms I have a book to read while everyone else is scrolling their smartphones. I follow the news; my wife and I pontificate about politics on Facebook. We watch movies together. We visit our granddaughters. Things I miss: my western backpacking, white-water canoeing. Even absent those things, life is pretty good, I'd say.

Thanks, Ted! Best of luck with the book(s)!

***Having trouble
marketing your book?***

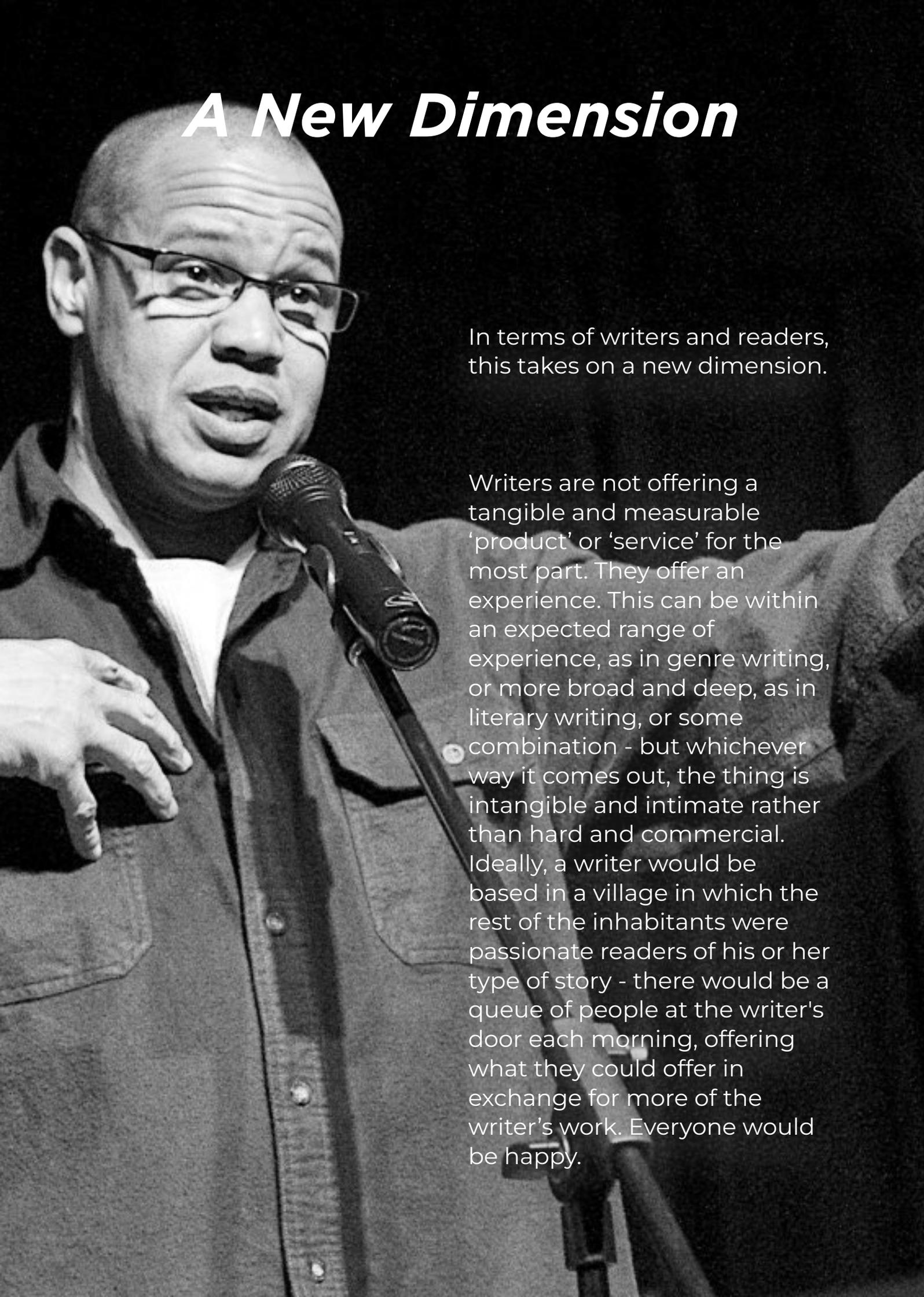
A person in a dark suit and white shirt is holding a rectangular sign with both hands. The sign features a vibrant, cosmic background with a glowing yellow and orange sphere in the center, surrounded by swirling blue and purple energy. The text on the sign is white and reads:

***The
'Laws'
of
SPAMMING***

***A FREE GUIDE TO WHAT NOT TO DO
WHEN TRYING TO SELL YOUR WORK***

Grant P. Hudson

A New Dimension

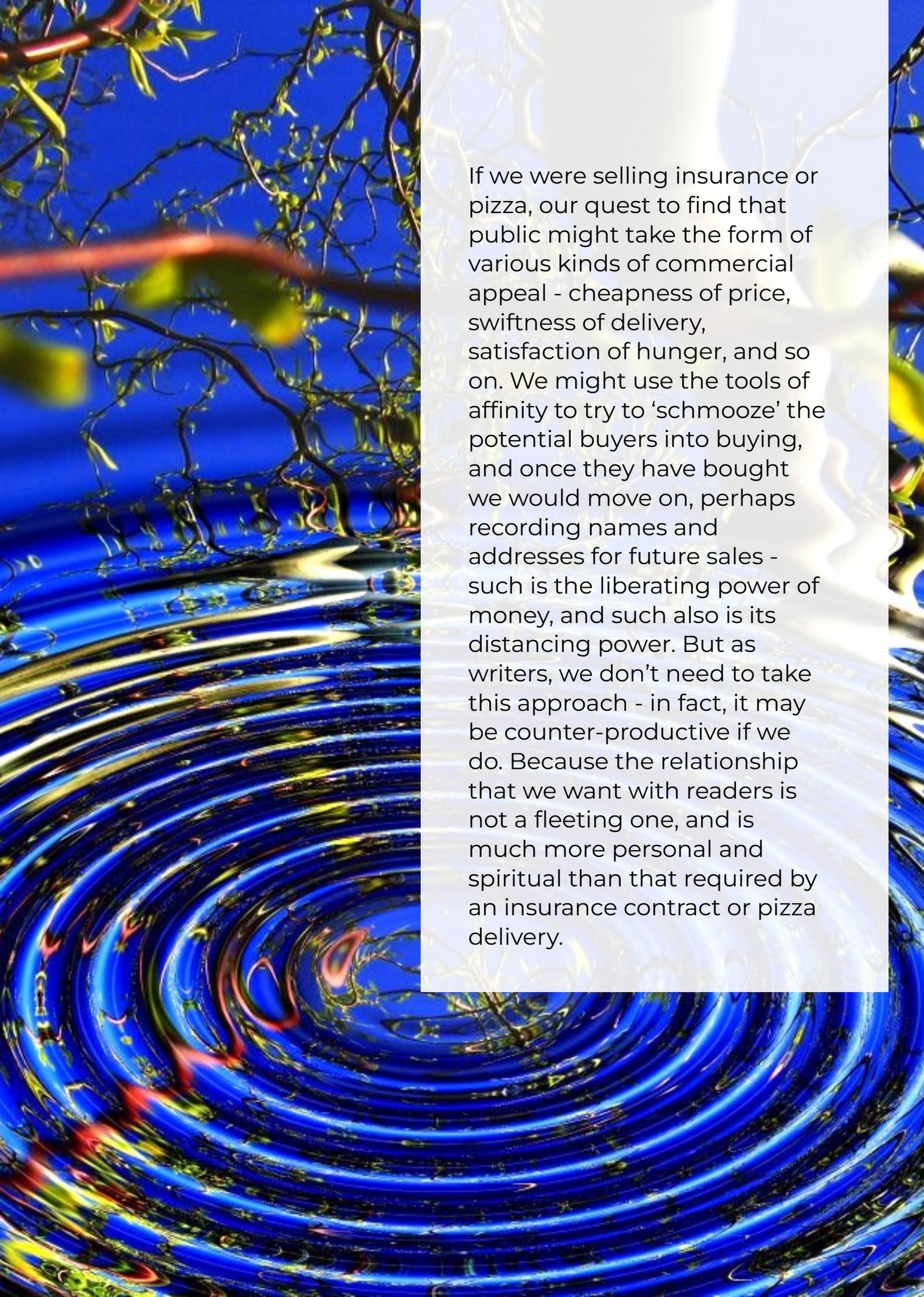


In terms of writers and readers, this takes on a new dimension.

Writers are not offering a tangible and measurable 'product' or 'service' for the most part. They offer an experience. This can be within an expected range of experience, as in genre writing, or more broad and deep, as in literary writing, or some combination - but whichever way it comes out, the thing is intangible and intimate rather than hard and commercial. Ideally, a writer would be based in a village in which the rest of the inhabitants were passionate readers of his or her type of story - there would be a queue of people at the writer's door each morning, offering what they could offer in exchange for more of the writer's work. Everyone would be happy.

But the coming of money has scattered the writer's village far and wide. Not only are the writer's 'people' not living locally, they have disappeared off the map. They are busy doing their own thing, and probably don't even realise that they have a need for the writer's work or that the writer even exists.





If we were selling insurance or pizza, our quest to find that public might take the form of various kinds of commercial appeal - cheapness of price, swiftness of delivery, satisfaction of hunger, and so on. We might use the tools of affinity to try to 'schmooze' the potential buyers into buying, and once they have bought we would move on, perhaps recording names and addresses for future sales - such is the liberating power of money, and such also is its distancing power. But as writers, we don't need to take this approach - in fact, it may be counter-productive if we do. Because the relationship that we want with readers is not a fleeting one, and is much more personal and spiritual than that required by an insurance contract or pizza delivery.



So how do we contact our own 'global village'? And how do we frame our approach in terms other than purely commercial ones?

Price has not usually been a determining factor in the booksales industry - books are generally priced around the same range, and offering a book for a lower price or for free is a recent initiative with limited application. Readers don't normally look for the kinds of experiences that they need from books by price.

They look for triggers - edges of that experience, symbols, suggestions, images.





They see key words, core elements of cover design, positioning, and a mysterious blend of similarity and difference: they want books which contain samenesses with books that they have already loved, but differences enough to provide new sensations and experiences. Blurbs, cover design, correct and clever placements are the writer's 'schmooze tools' if you like.



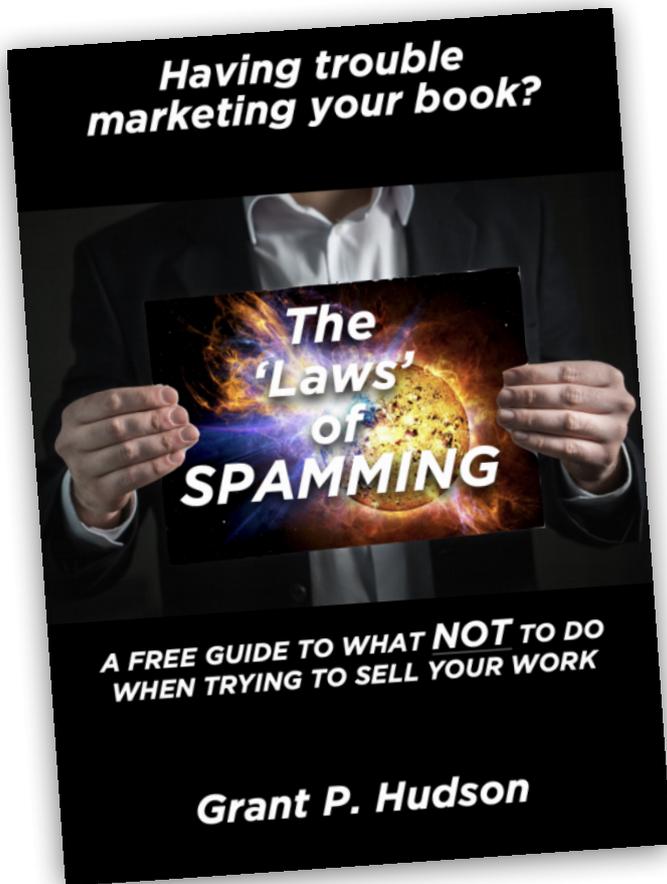
But the writer isn't trying to 'trick' the reader, or to use inappropriate aspects of relationship building to sell a piece of work and then move on: the writer is attempting to develop a deeper bond, a lasting connection or association, possibly even a life-changing fellowship with the reader. A writer - along with other artists - is trying to forge a 'pre-commercial communion' with a reader or audience.

The core of commercial success for a writer is another kind of success: a success based on the building up of an affinity. One kind of relationship, the kind the writer might benefit from in money terms, is dependent upon the other - the closeness, intimacy and trust of the friend.

So how exactly does a writer build up an affinity?

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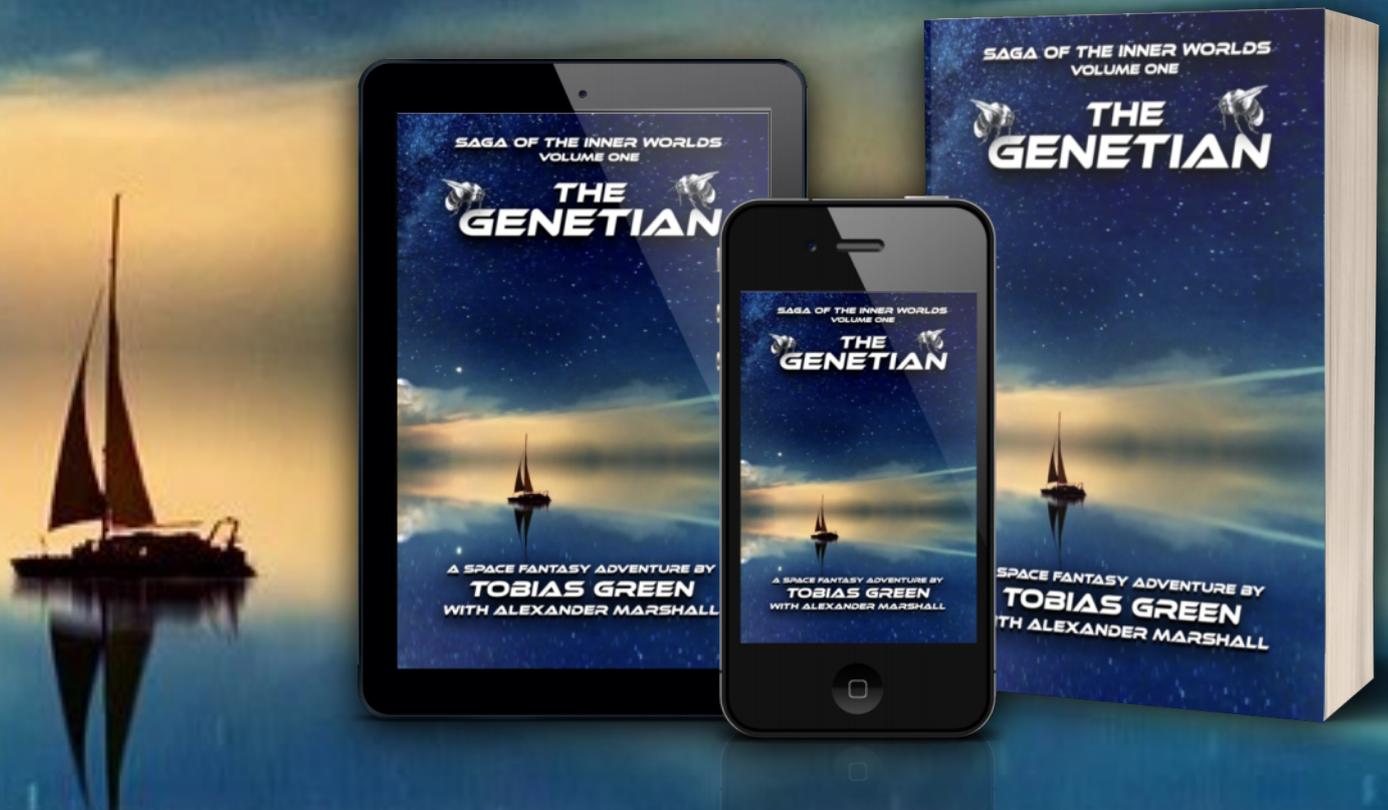
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A sepia-toned photograph of a woman in a dark Victorian dress and hat, standing on a train platform. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background shows a building and train tracks.

**Poor, Dear
Margaret Kirby**
by Kathleen Norris

Kathleen Thompson Norris, an American novelist and journalist, was born in 1880 in San Francisco, California. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, she worked as a journalist for various newspapers and magazines, and began writing fiction in her spare time. Her first novel, *The Foolish Virgin*, was published in 1907. She went on to write over 70 novels, many of which were bestsellers. She was known for her romance novels, as well as her social commentary and her depiction of the struggles and joys of everyday life. Norris was a prolific and popular writer, and her books were translated into several languages. She was the highest paid female writer of her time. Many of her novels are set in the San Francisco area and detail the lifestyle of the upper-class



I

"You and I have been married nearly seven years," Margaret Kirby reflected bitterly, "and I suppose we are as near hating each other as two civilized people ever were!"

She did not say it aloud. The Kirbys had long ago given up any discussion of their attitude to each other. But as the thought came into her mind she eyed her husband--lounging moodily in her motor-car, as they swept home through the winter twilight--with hopeless, mutinous irritation.

What was the matter, she wondered, with John and Margaret Kirby--young, handsome, rich, and popular? What had been wrong with their marriage, that brilliantly heralded and widely advertised event? Whose fault was it that they two could not seem to understand each other, could not seem to live out their lives together in honorable and dignified companionship, as generations of their forebears had done?

"Perhaps everyone's marriage is more or less like ours," Margaret mused miserably. "Perhaps there's no such thing as a happy marriage."

Almost all the women that she knew admitted unhappiness of one sort or another, and discussed their domestic troubles freely. Margaret had never sunk to that; it would not even have been a relief to a nature as self-sufficient and as cold as hers. But for years she had felt that her marriage tie was an irksome and distasteful bond, and only that afternoon she had been stung by the bitter fact that the state of affairs between

her husband and herself was no secret from their world. A certain audacious newspaper had boldly hinted that there would soon be a sensational separation in the Kirby household, whose beautiful mistress would undoubtedly follow her first unhappy marital experience with another--and, it was to be hoped, a more fortunate--marriage.

Margaret had laughed when the article was shown her, with the easy flippancy that is the stock in trade of her type of society woman; but the arrow had reached her very soul, nevertheless.

So it had come to that, had it? She and John had failed! They were to be dragged through the publicity, the humiliations, that precede the sundering of what God has joined together. They had drifted, as so many hundreds and thousands of men and women drift, from the warm, glorious companionship of the honeymoon, to quarrels, to truces, to discussion, to a recognition of their utter difference in point of view, and to this final independent, cool adjustment, that left their lives as utterly separated as if they had never met.

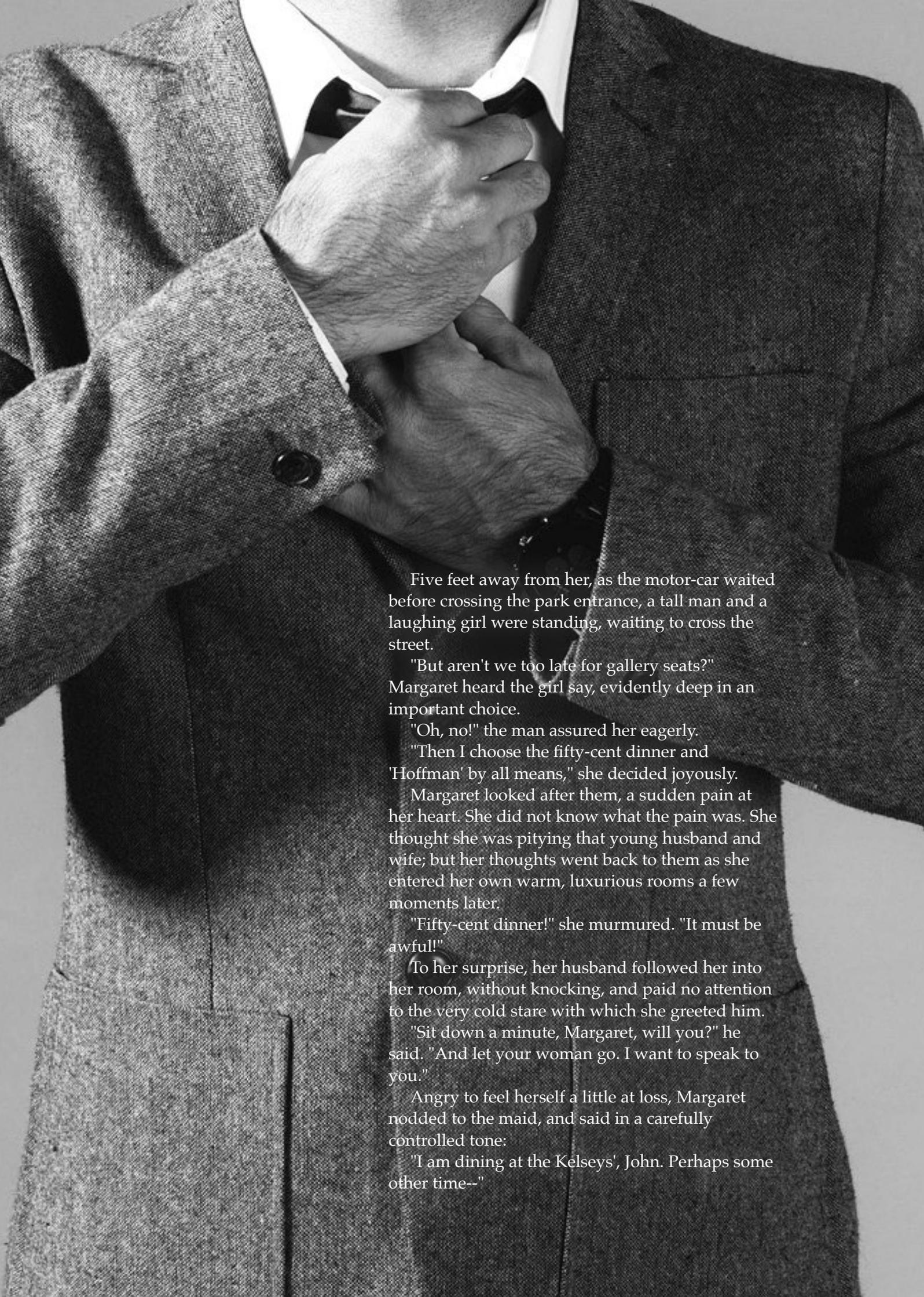
Yet she had done only what all the women she knew had done, Margaret reminded herself in self-justification. She had done it a little more brilliantly, perhaps; she had spent more money, worn handsomer jewels and gowns; she had succeeded in idling away her life in that utter leisure that was the ideal of them all, whether they were quite able to achieve it or not.

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her mouth and nose. She is wearing bright red lipstick. Below her chin, a thick, light-colored fur collar is visible. Her hand is partially visible, wearing a large, ornate ring with a white oval stone, red and green gemstones, and a gold band. The background is dark and out of focus.

Some women had to order their dinners, had occasionally to go about in hired vehicles, had to consider the cost of hats and gowns; but Margaret, the envied, had her own carriage and motor-car, her capable housekeeper, her yearly trip to Paris for uncounted frocks and hats.

All the women she knew were useless, boasting rather of what they did not have to do than of what they did, and Margaret was more successfully useless than the others. But wasn't that the lot of a woman who is rich, and marries a richer man? Wasn't it what married life should be?

"I don't know what makes me nervous to-night," Margaret said to herself finally, settling back comfortably in her furs. "Perhaps I only imagine John is going to make one of his favorite scenes when we get home. Probably he hasn't seen the article at all. I don't care, anyway! If it should come to a divorce, why, we know plenty of people who are happier that way. Thank Heaven, there isn't a child to complicate things!"



Five feet away from her, as the motor-car waited before crossing the park entrance, a tall man and a laughing girl were standing, waiting to cross the street.

"But aren't we too late for gallery seats?" Margaret heard the girl say, evidently deep in an important choice.

"Oh, no!" the man assured her eagerly.

"Then I choose the fifty-cent dinner and 'Hoffman' by all means," she decided joyously.

Margaret looked after them, a sudden pain at her heart. She did not know what the pain was. She thought she was pitying that young husband and wife; but her thoughts went back to them as she entered her own warm, luxurious rooms a few moments later.

"Fifty-cent dinner!" she murmured. "It must be awful!"

To her surprise, her husband followed her into her room, without knocking, and paid no attention to the very cold stare with which she greeted him.

"Sit down a minute, Margaret, will you?" he said. "And let your woman go. I want to speak to you."

Angry to feel herself a little at loss, Margaret nodded to the maid, and said in a carefully controlled tone:

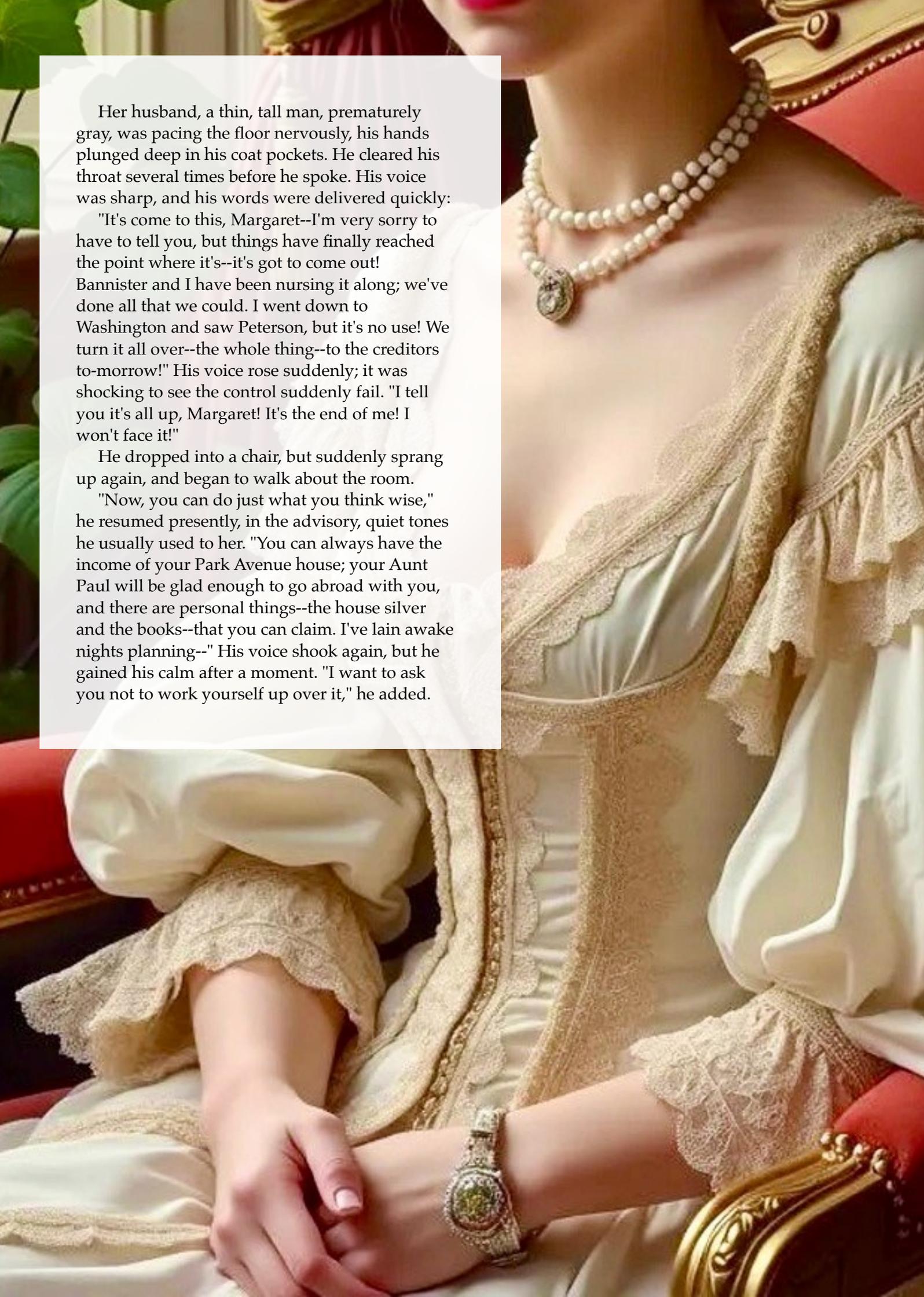
"I am dining at the Kelseys', John. Perhaps some other time--"

Her husband, a thin, tall man, prematurely gray, was pacing the floor nervously, his hands plunged deep in his coat pockets. He cleared his throat several times before he spoke. His voice was sharp, and his words were delivered quickly:

"It's come to this, Margaret--I'm very sorry to have to tell you, but things have finally reached the point where it's--it's got to come out! Bannister and I have been nursing it along; we've done all that we could. I went down to Washington and saw Peterson, but it's no use! We turn it all over--the whole thing--to the creditors to-morrow!" His voice rose suddenly; it was shocking to see the control suddenly fail. "I tell you it's all up, Margaret! It's the end of me! I won't face it!"

He dropped into a chair, but suddenly sprang up again, and began to walk about the room.

"Now, you can do just what you think wise," he resumed presently, in the advisory, quiet tones he usually used to her. "You can always have the income of your Park Avenue house; your Aunt Paul will be glad enough to go abroad with you, and there are personal things--the house silver and the books--that you can claim. I've lain awake nights planning--" His voice shook again, but he gained his calm after a moment. "I want to ask you not to work yourself up over it," he added.





There was a silence. Margaret regarded him in stony fury. She was deadly white.

"Do you mean that Throckmorton, Kirby, & Son have--has failed?" she asked. "Do you mean that my money--the money that my father left me--is gone? Does Mr. Bannister say so? Why--why has it never occurred to you to warn me?"

"I did warn you. I did try to tell you, in July--why, all the world knew how things were going!"

If, on the last word, there crept into his voice the plea that even a strong man makes to his women for sympathy, for solace, Margaret's eyes killed it. John, turning to go, gave her what consolation he could.

"Margaret, I can only say I'm sorry. I tried--Bannister knows how I tried to hold my own. But I was pretty young when your father died, and there was no one to help me learn. I'm glad it doesn't mean actual suffering for you. Some day, perhaps, we'll get some of it back. God knows I hope so. I've not meant much to you. Your marriage has cost you pretty dear. But I'm going to do the only thing I can for you."

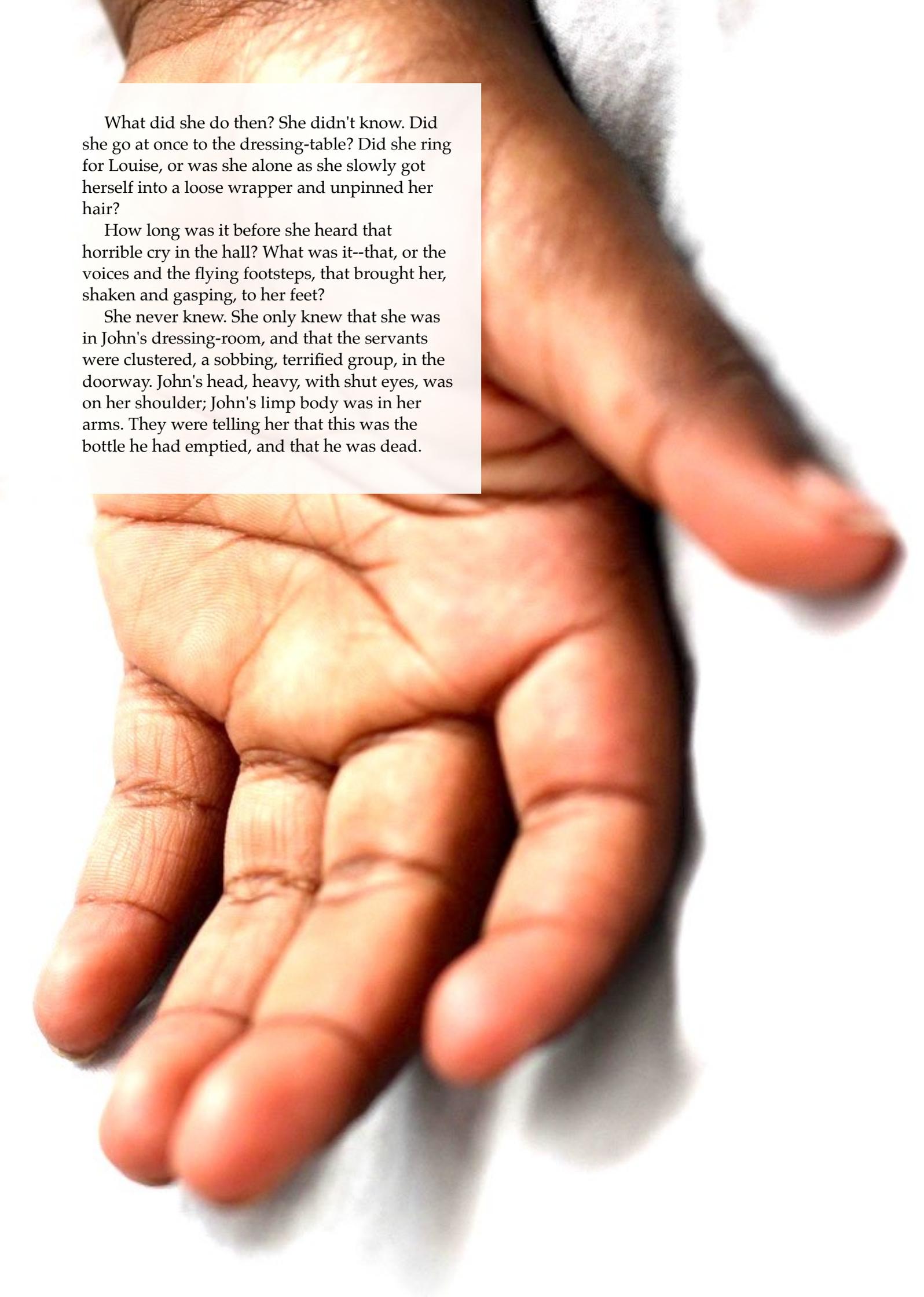
Silence followed. Margaret presently roused herself.

"I suppose this can be kept from the papers? We needn't be discussed and pointed at in the streets?" she asked heavily, her face a mask of distaste.

"That's impossible," said John, briefly.

"To some people nothing is impossible," Margaret said.

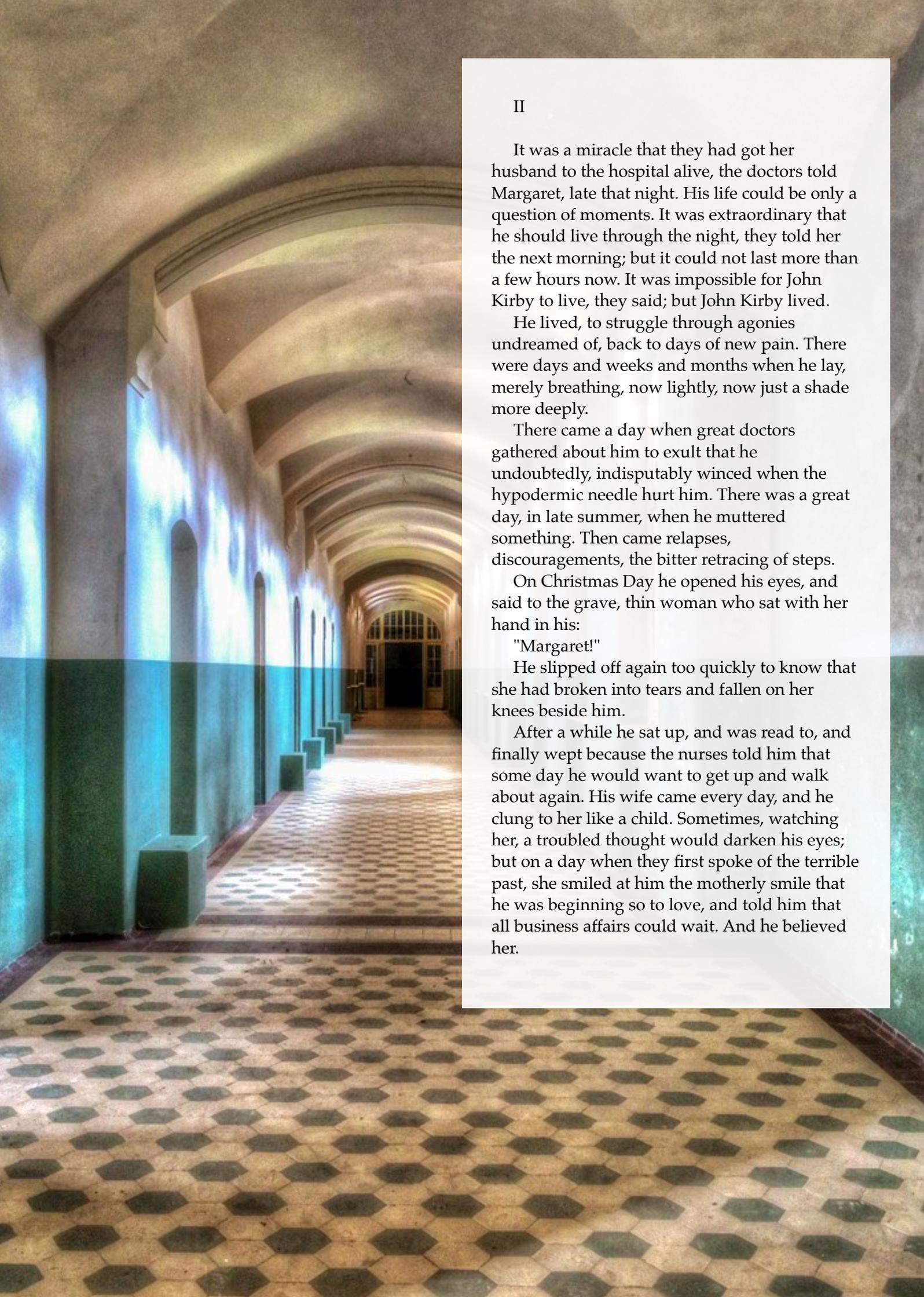
Her husband turned again without a word, and left her. Afterward she remembered the sick misery in his eyes, the whiteness of his face.



What did she do then? She didn't know. Did she go at once to the dressing-table? Did she ring for Louise, or was she alone as she slowly got herself into a loose wrapper and unpinned her hair?

How long was it before she heard that horrible cry in the hall? What was it--that, or the voices and the flying footsteps, that brought her, shaken and gasping, to her feet?

She never knew. She only knew that she was in John's dressing-room, and that the servants were clustered, a sobbing, terrified group, in the doorway. John's head, heavy, with shut eyes, was on her shoulder; John's limp body was in her arms. They were telling her that this was the bottle he had emptied, and that he was dead.

A long, arched hallway with a checkered floor and a row of arches on the left side. The floor is made of light-colored tiles with dark-colored diamond-shaped tiles in a repeating pattern. The walls are light-colored with a row of arches on the left side. The ceiling is also arched. The hallway leads to a doorway at the end.

II

It was a miracle that they had got her husband to the hospital alive, the doctors told Margaret, late that night. His life could be only a question of moments. It was extraordinary that he should live through the night, they told her the next morning; but it could not last more than a few hours now. It was impossible for John Kirby to live, they said; but John Kirby lived.

He lived, to struggle through agonies undreamed of, back to days of new pain. There were days and weeks and months when he lay, merely breathing, now lightly, now just a shade more deeply.

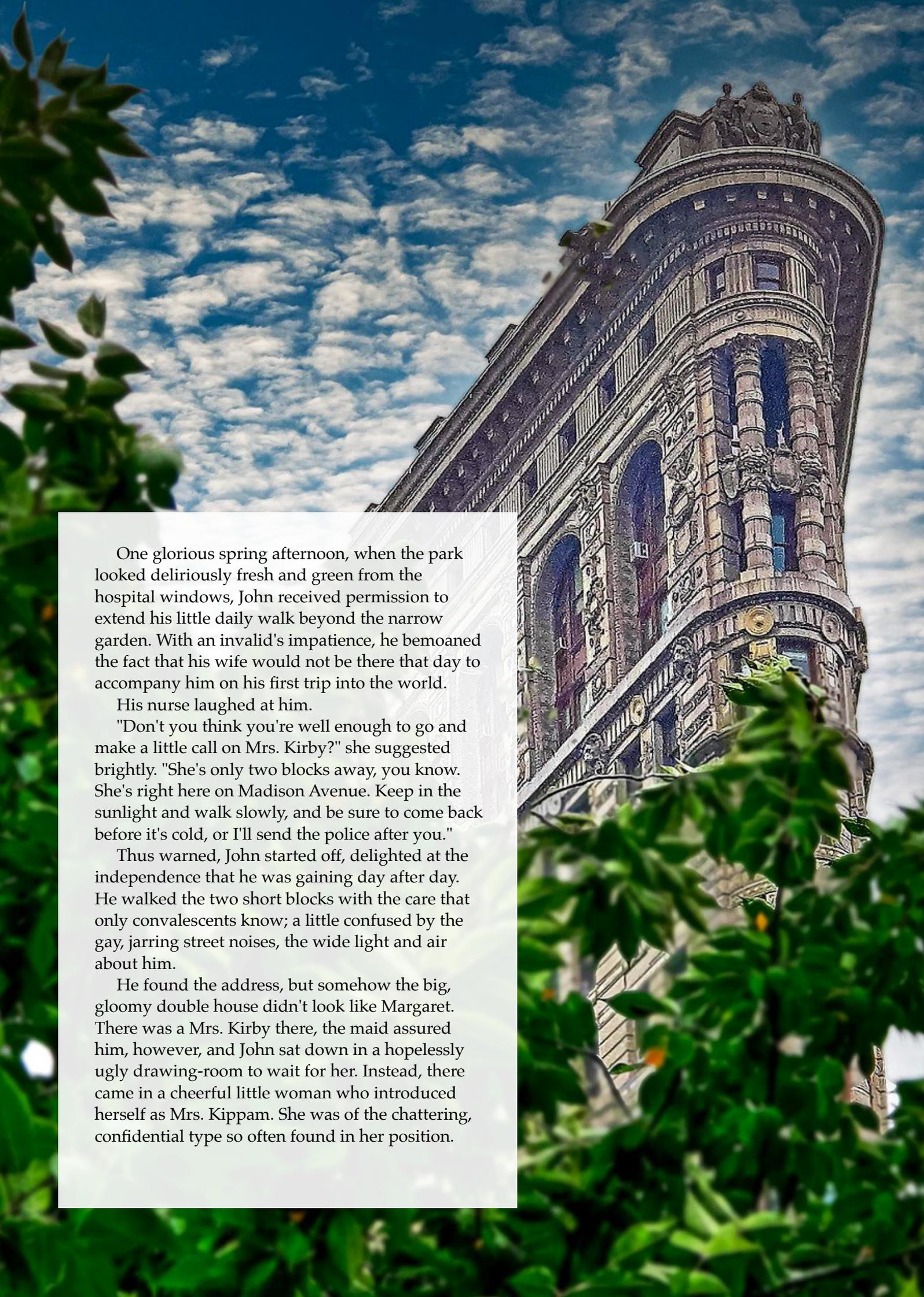
There came a day when great doctors gathered about him to exult that he undoubtedly, indisputably winced when the hypodermic needle hurt him. There was a great day, in late summer, when he muttered something. Then came relapses, discouragements, the bitter retracing of steps.

On Christmas Day he opened his eyes, and said to the grave, thin woman who sat with her hand in his:

"Margaret!"

He slipped off again too quickly to know that she had broken into tears and fallen on her knees beside him.

After a while he sat up, and was read to, and finally wept because the nurses told him that some day he would want to get up and walk about again. His wife came every day, and he clung to her like a child. Sometimes, watching her, a troubled thought would darken his eyes; but on a day when they first spoke of the terrible past, she smiled at him the motherly smile that he was beginning so to love, and told him that all business affairs could wait. And he believed her.



One glorious spring afternoon, when the park looked deliriously fresh and green from the hospital windows, John received permission to extend his little daily walk beyond the narrow garden. With an invalid's impatience, he bemoaned the fact that his wife would not be there that day to accompany him on his first trip into the world.

His nurse laughed at him.

"Don't you think you're well enough to go and make a little call on Mrs. Kirby?" she suggested brightly. "She's only two blocks away, you know. She's right here on Madison Avenue. Keep in the sunlight and walk slowly, and be sure to come back before it's cold, or I'll send the police after you."

Thus warned, John started off, delighted at the independence that he was gaining day after day. He walked the two short blocks with the care that only convalescents know; a little confused by the gay, jarring street noises, the wide light and air about him.

He found the address, but somehow the big, gloomy double house didn't look like Margaret. There was a Mrs. Kirby there, the maid assured him, however, and John sat down in a hopelessly ugly drawing-room to wait for her. Instead, there came in a cheerful little woman who introduced herself as Mrs. Kippam. She was of the chattering, confidential type so often found in her position.



"Now, you wanted Mrs. Kirby, didn't you?" she said regretfully. "She's out. I'm the housekeeper here, and I thought if it was just a question of rooms, maybe I'd do as well?"

"There's some mistake," said John; and he was still weak enough to feel himself choke at the disappointment. "I want Mrs. John Kirby--a very beautiful Mrs. Kirby, who is quite prominent in--"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" said Mrs. Kippam, lowering her voice and growing confidential. "That's the same one. Her husband failed, and all but killed himself, you know--you've read about it in the papers? She sold everything she had, you know, to help out the firm, and then she came here--"

"Bought out an interest in this?" said John, very quietly, in his winning voice.

"Well, she just came here as a regular guest at first," said Mrs. Kippam, with a cautious glance at the door. "I was running it then; but I'd got into awful debt, and my little boy was sick, and I got to telling her my worries. Well, she was looking for something to do--a companion or private secretary position--but she didn't find it, and she had so many good ideas about this house, and helped me out so, just talking things over, that finally I asked her if she wouldn't be my partner. And she was glad to; she was just about worried to death by that time."

"I thought Mrs. Kirby had property--investments in her own name?" John said.

"Oh, she did, but she put everything right back into the firm," said Mrs. Kippam. "Lots of her old friends went back on her for doing it," the little woman went on, in a burst of loyal anger. "However," she added, very much enjoying her listener's close attention, "I declare my luck seemed to change the day she took hold! First thing was that her friends, and a lot that weren't her friends, came here out of curiosity, and that advertised the place. Then she slaves day and night, goes right into the kitchen herself and watches things; and she has such a way with the help--she knows how to manage them. And the result is that we've got the house packed for next winter, and we'll have as many as thirty people here all summer long. I feel like another person," the tears suddenly brimmed her weak, kind eyes, and she fumbled with her handkerchief. "You'll think I'm crazy running on this way!" said little Mrs. Kippam, "but everything has gone so good. My Lesty is much better, and as things are now I can get him into the country next year; and I feel like I owed it all to Margaret Kirby!"

John tried to speak, but the room was wheeling about him. As he raised his trembling hand to his eyes, a shadow fell across the doorway, and Margaret came in. Tired, shabby, laden with bundles, she stood blinking at him a moment; and then, with a sudden cry of tenderness and pity, she was on her knees by his side.

"Margaret! Margaret!" he whispered. "What have you done?"

She did not answer, but gathered him close in her strong arms, and they kissed each other with wet eyes.





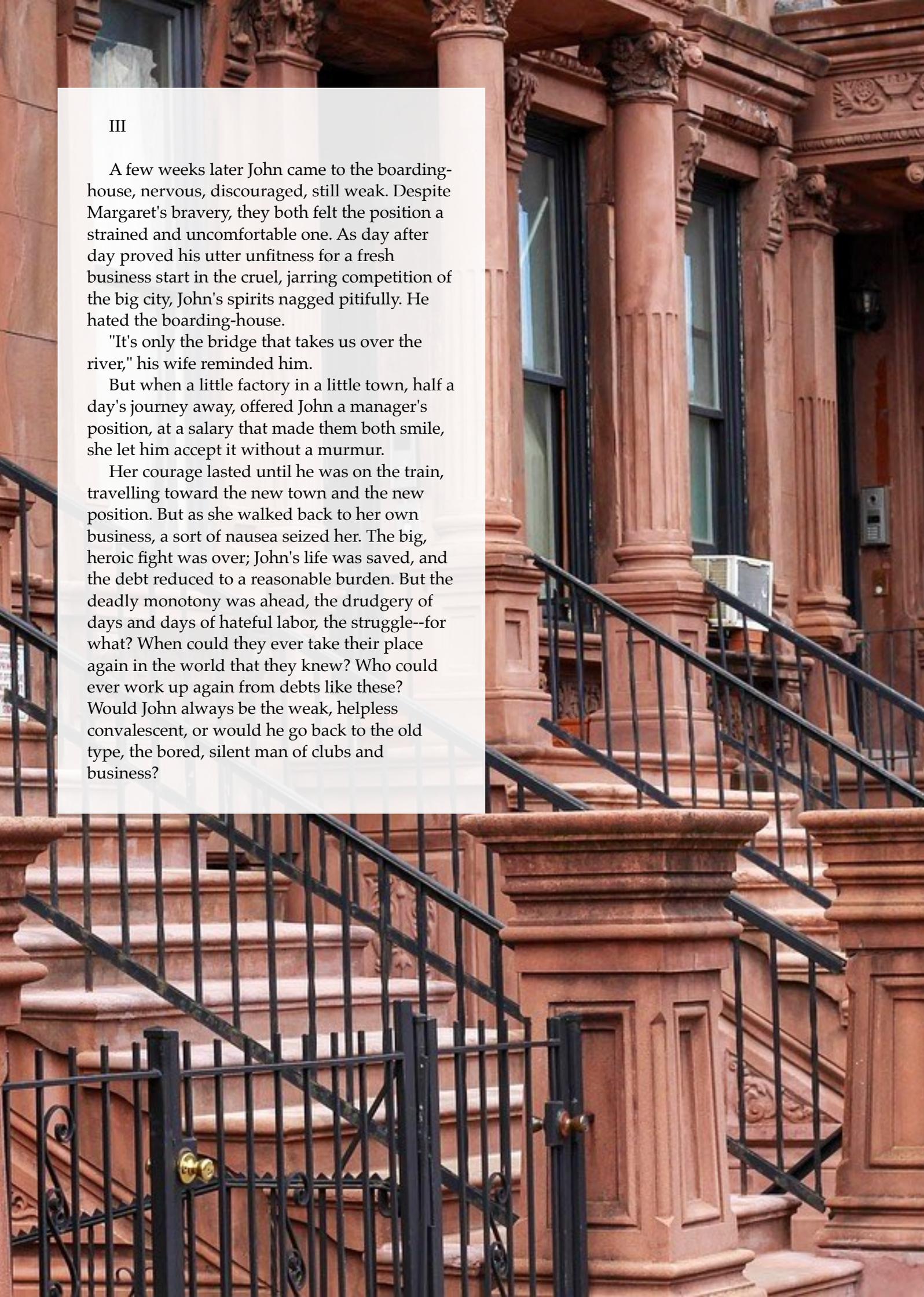
III

A few weeks later John came to the boarding-house, nervous, discouraged, still weak. Despite Margaret's bravery, they both felt the position a strained and uncomfortable one. As day after day proved his utter unfitness for a fresh business start in the cruel, jarring competition of the big city, John's spirits nagged pitifully. He hated the boarding-house.

"It's only the bridge that takes us over the river," his wife reminded him.

But when a little factory in a little town, half a day's journey away, offered John a manager's position, at a salary that made them both smile, she let him accept it without a murmur.

Her courage lasted until he was on the train, travelling toward the new town and the new position. But as she walked back to her own business, a sort of nausea seized her. The big, heroic fight was over; John's life was saved, and the debt reduced to a reasonable burden. But the deadly monotony was ahead, the drudgery of days and days of hateful labor, the struggle--for what? When could they ever take their place again in the world that they knew? Who could ever work up again from debts like these? Would John always be the weak, helpless convalescent, or would he go back to the old type, the bored, silent man of clubs and business?





Margaret turned a grimy corner, and was joined by one of her boarders, a cheerful little army wife.

"Well, we'll miss Mr. Kirby, I'm sure," said little Mrs. Camp, as they mounted the steps. "And by the way, Mrs. Kirby, you won't mind if I ask if we mayn't just now and then have some of the new towels on our floor--will you? We never get anything but the old, thin towels. Of course, it's Alma's fault; but I think every one ought to take a turn at the new towels as well as the old, don't you?"

"I'll speak to Alma," said Margaret, turning her key.

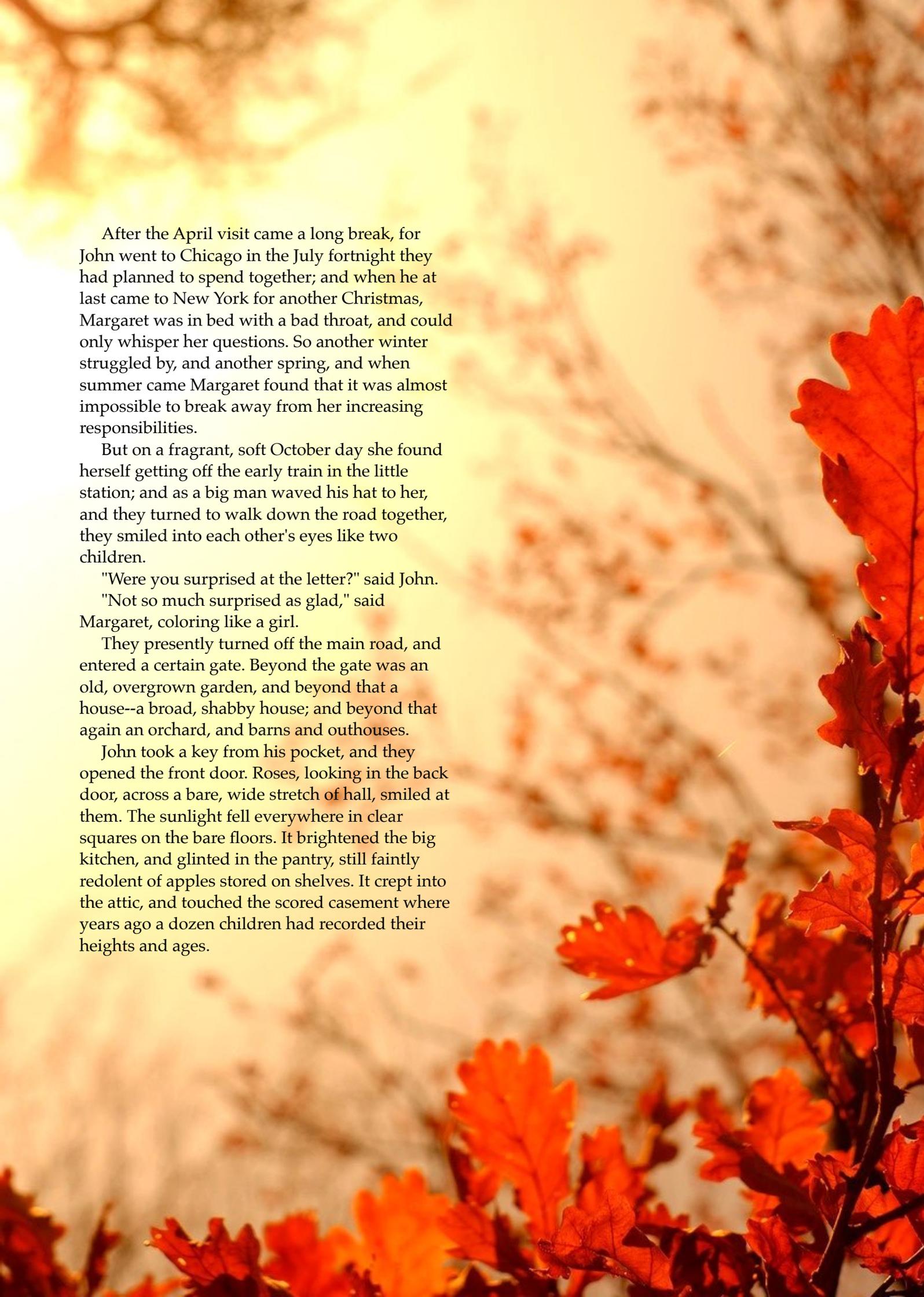
A lonely, busy autumn followed, and a winter of hard and thankless work.

"I feel like a plumber's wife," smiled Margaret to Mrs. Kippam, when in November John wrote her of a "raise."

But when he came down for two days at Christmastime, she noticed that he was brown, cheerful, and amazingly strong. They were as shy as lovers on this little holiday, Margaret finding that her old maternal, half-patronizing attitude toward her husband did not fit the case at all, and John almost as much at a loss.

In April she went up to Applebridge, and they spent a whole day roaming about in the fresh spring fields together.

"It's really a delicious little place," she confided to Mrs. Kippam when she returned. "The sort of place where kiddies carry their lunches to school, and their mothers put up preserves, and everybody has a surrey and an old horse. John's quite a big man up there."



After the April visit came a long break, for John went to Chicago in the July fortnight they had planned to spend together; and when he at last came to New York for another Christmas, Margaret was in bed with a bad throat, and could only whisper her questions. So another winter struggled by, and another spring, and when summer came Margaret found that it was almost impossible to break away from her increasing responsibilities.

But on a fragrant, soft October day she found herself getting off the early train in the little station; and as a big man waved his hat to her, and they turned to walk down the road together, they smiled into each other's eyes like two children.

"Were you surprised at the letter?" said John.

"Not so much surprised as glad," said Margaret, coloring like a girl.

They presently turned off the main road, and entered a certain gate. Beyond the gate was an old, overgrown garden, and beyond that a house--a broad, shabby house; and beyond that again an orchard, and barns and outhouses.

John took a key from his pocket, and they opened the front door. Roses, looking in the back door, across a bare, wide stretch of hall, smiled at them. The sunlight fell everywhere in clear squares on the bare floors. It brightened the big kitchen, and glinted in the pantry, still faintly redolent of apples stored on shelves. It crept into the attic, and touched the scored casement where years ago a dozen children had recorded their heights and ages.



Margaret and John came out on the porch again, and she turned to him with brimming eyes. It suddenly swept over her, with a thankfulness too deep for realization, that this would be her world. She would sit on this wide porch, waiting for him in the summer afternoons; she would go about from room to room on the happy, commonplace journeys of house-keeping; would keep the fire blazing against John's return. And in the years to come perhaps there would be other voices about the old house; there would be little shining heads to keep the sunlight always there.

"Well, Margaret, do you like it?" said John, his arm about her, his face radiant with pride and happiness.

"Like it, I..." said Margaret. "Why, it's home!"

IV

So the Kirbys disappeared from the world. Sometimes a newcomer at Margaret's club would ask about the great portrait that hung over the library fireplace--the portrait of a cold-eyed woman with beautiful pearls about her beautiful throat. Then the history of poor, dear Margaret Kirby would be reviewed--its triumphs, its glories, Margaret's brilliant marriage, her beauty, her wit. These only led to the final tragic scenes that had ended it all.

"And now she is grubbing away dear knows where!" her biographer would say carelessly. "Absolutely, they might as well be buried!"

But about seven years after the Kirbys' disappearance, it happened that four of Margaret's old intimates--the T. Illington Frarys and the Josiah Dunnings--were taking a little motor trip in the Dunnings' big car, through the northern part of the State. Just outside the little village of Applebridge, something mysterious and annoying happened to the car, which stopped short, and after some discussion it was decided that the ladies should wait therein, while the men walked back in search of help.

Mrs. Dunning and Mrs. Frary, settling themselves comfortably in the tonneau for a long wait, puzzled themselves a little over the name of Applebridge.

"I can just remember hearing of it," said Mrs. Dunning, sleepily, "but when or where or how I don't know."



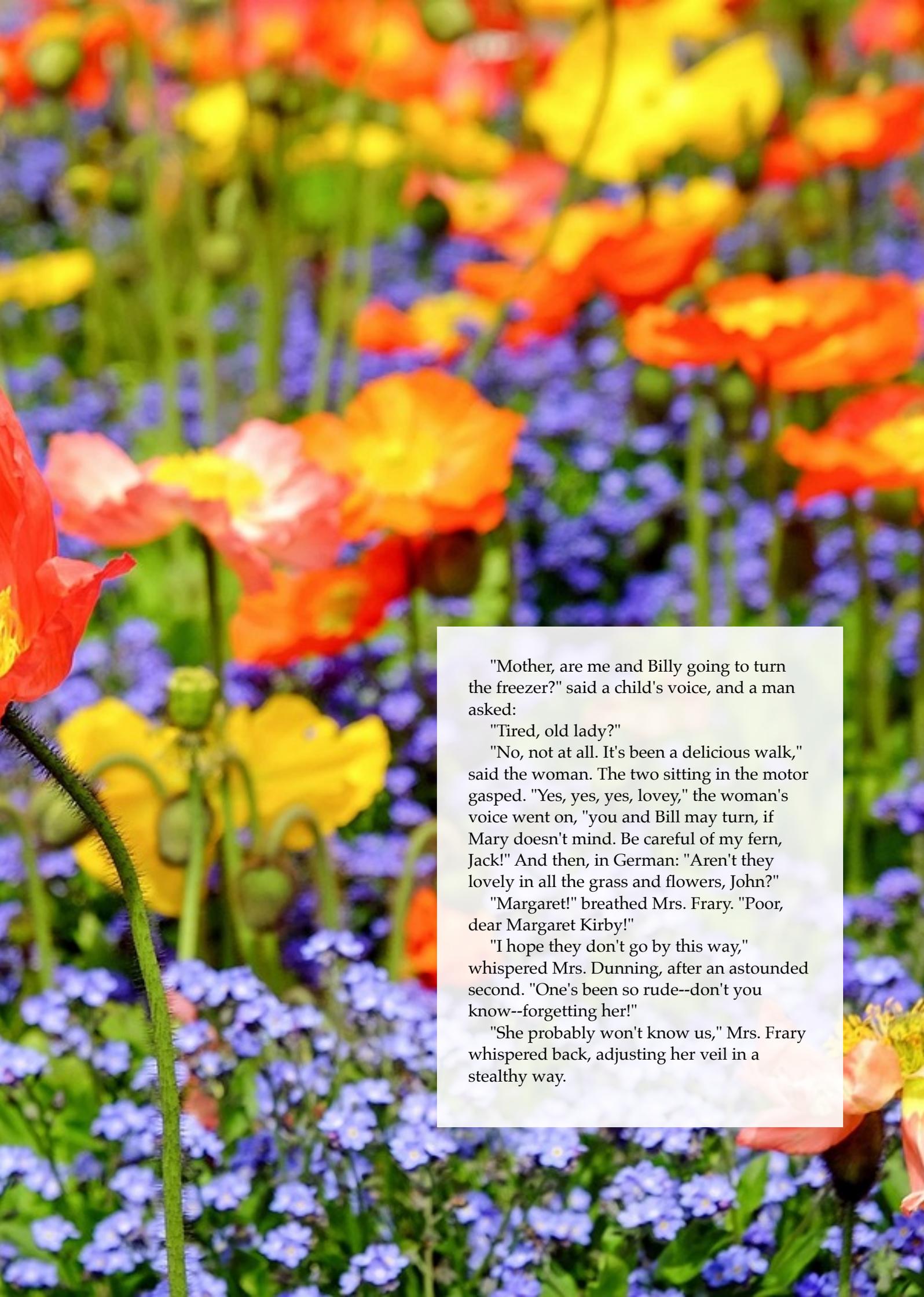


They opened their books. A brilliant May afternoon throbbed, hummed, sparkled all about them. The big wheels of the motor were deep in grass and blossoms. On either side of the road, fields were gay with bees and butterflies. Larks looped the blackberry-vines with quick flights; mustard-tops showed their pale gold under the apple-blossoms.

Here and there a white cloud drifted in the deep, clear blue of the sky. There had been rains a day or two before, and in the fragrant air still hung a little chill, a haunting suggestion of wet earth and refreshed blossoms. Somewhere near, but out of sight, a flooded creek was tumbling noisily over its shallows.

Suddenly the Sunday stillness was broken by voices. The two women in the motor looked at each other, listening. They heard a woman's voice, singing; then a small boyish voice, then a man's voice. The speakers, whoever they were, apparently settled down in the meadow, not more than a dozen yards away, for a breathing space. A tangle of vines and bushes screened them from the motor-car.





"Mother, are me and Billy going to turn the freezer?" said a child's voice, and a man asked:

"Tired, old lady?"

"No, not at all. It's been a delicious walk," said the woman. The two sitting in the motor gasped. "Yes, yes, yes, lovey," the woman's voice went on, "you and Bill may turn, if Mary doesn't mind. Be careful of my fern, Jack!" And then, in German: "Aren't they lovely in all the grass and flowers, John?"

"Margaret!" breathed Mrs. Frary. "Poor, dear Margaret Kirby!"

"I hope they don't go by this way," whispered Mrs. Dunning, after an astounded second. "One's been so rude--don't you know--forgetting her!"

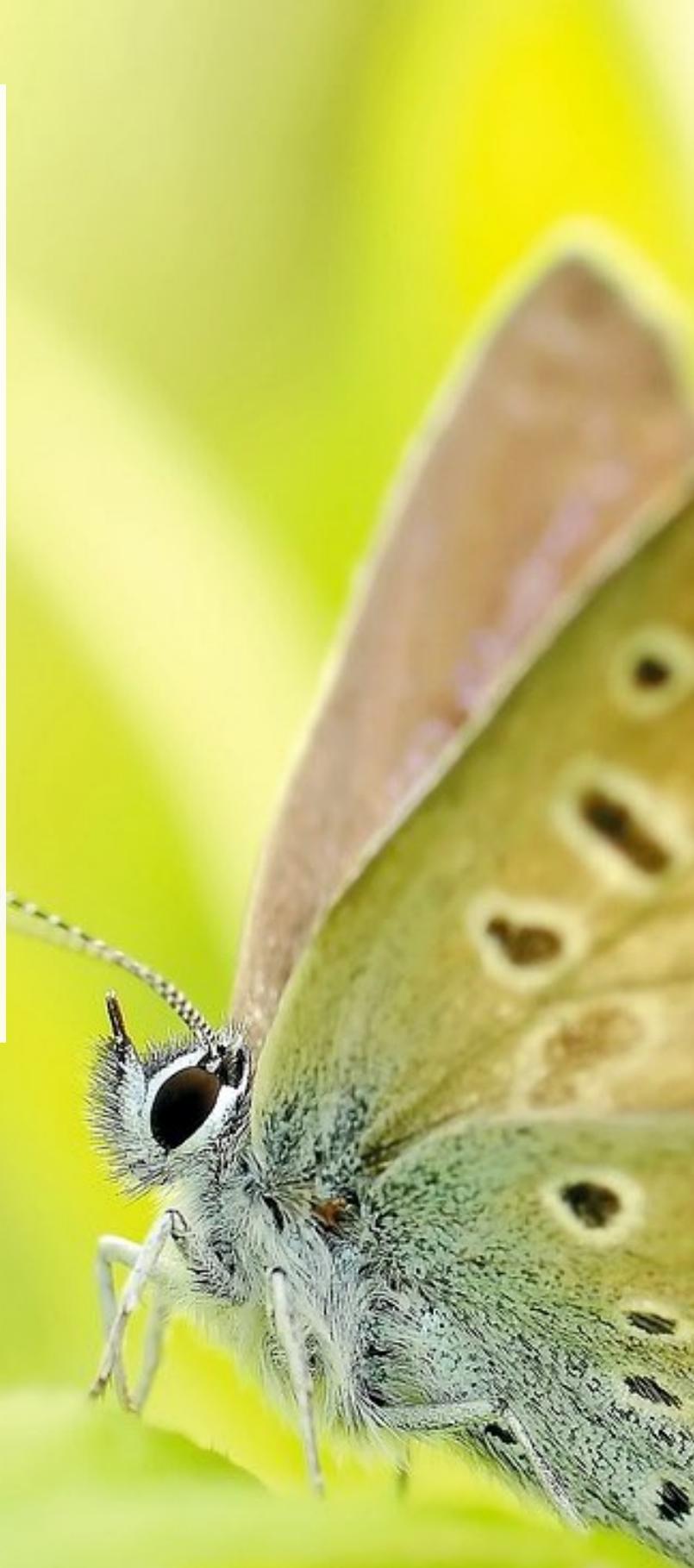
"She probably won't know us," Mrs. Frary whispered back, adjusting her veil in a stealthy way.

Mrs. Frary was right. The Kirbys presently passed with only a cursory glance at the swathed occupants of the motor-car. They were laughing like a lot of children as they scrambled through the hedge. John--a big, broad John, as strong and brisk as a boy--carried a tiny barefoot girl on his shoulder. Margaret, her beauty more startling than ever under the sweep of a gypsy hat; her splendid figure a little broader, but still magnificent under the cotton gown; her arms full of flowers and ferns, was escorted by two more children, sturdy little boys, who doubled and redoubled on their tracks like puppies. The tiny barefoot girl, in her father's arms, was only a tangle of blue gingham and drifting strands of silky hair; but the boys were splendidly alert little lads, and their high voices loitered in the air after the radiant, chattering little caravan had quite disappeared.

"Well!" said Mrs. Dunning, then.

"Poor, dear Margaret Kirby!" was on Mrs. Frary's lips; but she didn't say it.

She and Mrs. Dunning stared at each other a long minute, utterly at a loss. Then they reopened their books.



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