The Observer.

MORO, OREGON:

FRIDAY .... JUNE 26, 1908

Personal Talk With You.

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A QUESTION OF TIME.

By Clarissa Mackie.

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A night in India—humid, breathless, with great stars hanging in the dark blue sky and the dank odor of rotting vegetation from the nearby jungle.

From his seat in a bamboo reclining chair Welton stared unwinkingly at the blazing constellations. The punka boy had fallen into exhausted slumber on the mat, and the huge fan hung motionless overhead.

Welton could hear the low murmur of voices from the interior of the bungalow, and he knew that by slightly turning his head he could see the pink glow of light from the shaded lamp and the reflection of two faces in the large mirror in the corner.

The two forms leaned over the piano, the white fingers of Marion Lester drawing soft harmonies from the instrument, while Akerslie murmured tenderly in her pretty ear.

And it was because of these two at the piano that Welton was very miserable and stared at the stars. He knew that Mrs. Lester was nodding over her embroidery in some obscure corner of the room, and as for himself—well, he seemed not to be in it at all!

Colonel Lester was quartered at Lucknow, and when it was learned that Welton could not obtain the desired leave of absence to visit his sweetheart Mrs. Lester had good naturedly undertaken the journey to Welton's isolated station at Gola Chat.

The unexpected visit of the two women had thrown the little station into a blissful confusion of preparation. The depredations of a man eating tiger had furnished an inexhaustible source of conversation and had been the occasion for many tentative trips into the jungle for several weeks before the advent of the visitors, but now all was forgotten save the fact that there would be new faces to break the dead monotony of the days—the fresh faces and low toned voices of refined Englishwomen.

And then Akerslie had stepped in and spoiled it all. He had come up to see Welton and to try pot shots at the man eater, but he had met Marion Lester, and in spite of the fact that he was Welton's guest and that he knew the relatons existing between the two he paid assiduous court to the girl.

Thus far she had repelled his advances with a dignified coolness that seemed to inflame him to greater ardor. This evening, however, the gentleness of her manner toward him and her careless treatment of her lover had driven the latter to sulky solitude in the veranda.

When the blue smoke wreaths from

"WERE YOU REALLY ASLEEP, BILLY?"

his cigar had formed a dense cloud which obliterated the starry heavens from his gaze Welton dropped his eyes and stared at two points of yellow light that oscillated near the ground.

They were ten inches apart, and they moved in unison. Welton calculated that they must be just without the bamboo stockade which inclosed the compound.

There was a prickly feeling along the spine, and he could feel the hair raising slightly around his forehead as he realized that Chuni had neglected to close the great gate and that there was perhaps only a hundred feet intervening between the man eater and the open window of the little drawing room.

He thought rapidly, with his eyes fixed on the lambent points of flame in the velvet gloom of the gateway. If he made a dash for the window and the safety that lay beyond the beast would spring before he could close the shutters behind his retreating form. If he could make Akerslie hear, at least the women would be safe.

"Akerslie!" he called in a low, clear whisper.

"Yes!" came the other man's lazy tones.

"Close these shutters instantly! The man eater"— His words were lost in the quick manipulation of the iron rods from within, and the shutters fell with a clang, blotting out the glow of light and leaving Welton alone to face the tiger.

The momentary confusion roused the beast into action. Welton could see the slow approach of the yellow eyes, could hear the padding of the great paws on the sandy path, and now his long sinuous form was dimly outlined in the starlight.

Welton remembered that he had left his revolver on his dressing stand. It could not be much of a fight with all the odds on the other side. At any rate, when the tiger had borne him away to his lair Akerslie, the coward—

Suddenly there was a terrific roar, a stifling odor of fur. Welton's hand instinctively flew to his pocket, and to his surprise the revolver was there. There was a sharp crack at one of the yellow spots of light and a rush of air as the beast sprang toward him. He dropped to the floor, and with a tremendous thud the animal struck the closed shutters and bounded back with a bloodcurdling scream of baffled rage and pain.

Welton had leaped over the railing and slipped behind the protecting trunk of a giant teak. The animal snuffed about the veranda, and presently there was a cry of startled fright, and Welton remembered the sleeping punka boy. He saw the tiger stepping down the path, his jaws gripping a dark, moaning bundle.

He knew that, unmolested, the beast would now retire to the jungle with his victim and that the occupants of the bungalow as well as himself would be free from danger. He ground his teeth and aimed for the other eye. He put it out.

In the light of the stars he saw the beast shiver, drop the dark bundle, which sped affrightedly away, and then come toward him with bleeding, blinded eyes and snarling mouth.

It was only a question of time now. Around the tree he dodged, and then farther away from the house toward the stockade. He would lure the beast from the vicinity of the bungalow and fight it out with him in the open space before the jungle, which rose dark and forbidding in the background. One would win out, and the other—

Again he heard the crack of his revolver, and yet again, and still the beast did not fall. Still he tracked the man blindly, remorselessly. There were two cartridges left in the chamber, and then—again Welton fired, once, twice. With a shudder, he felt something soft on his cheek.

"By Jove! Billy seems a bit sleepy! Wake up and hear the news, old man!"

Welton recognized the facetious tone of Akerslie, his faithless friend. He opened his eyes slowly, wonderfully. Overhead the great stars were hanging in the dark blue sky, and there was a rank odor of rotting vegetation from the nearby jungle.

He was reclining in the bamboo chair, and Marion stood behind him with her soft hand upon his rumpled hair. There was a glow of lamplight from the open window of the drawing room, and in the opposite direction he could see that the gate of the compound was closed.

"The—man eater?" he asked dazedly, moving his cramped limbs.

"What made you think of that?" asked Akerslie ruefully. "I was just going to spring it on you! Chuni—the brave, the incomparable Chuni—has slain the man eater just without the stockade! Look!"

Welton rose stiffly to his feet and looked sheepishly at the flaming torches and the crowd of brown skinned natives who were triumphantly dragging the huge carcass through the gateway. Chuni, proud and victorious, salaamed before his master. "For the honorable sahib," he said solemnly.

A little later Marion bade her lover good night. "What do you think, Billy?" she murmured softly, with a side glance at the stalwart form of Akerslie. "Major Akerslie has been telling me about his engagement to Marjorie Booth—a dear schoolmate of mine—and I'm afraid we were so much interested in talking about her that we forgot you! Were you really asleep, Billy?"

"I hope so," said Billy impressively.

Cures Woman's Weaknesses.

We refer to that boon to weak, nervous, suffering women known as Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription.

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Playbills and Sentiment.

By Carl Williams.

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The janitor's little girl murmured a word of thanks for the penny bestowed upon her and scampered back downstairs, while Elizabeth returned to the parlor with the mail which the child had just brought.

It was a comfortable little city apartment, and only the typewriter table in one corner betrayed the fact that it was a work as well as a play room. Through an arch an absurdly small dining room with the table laid for one proclaimed it to be the home of a bachelor girl, though Elizabeth Belknap's dainty femininity gave no suggestion of spinsterhood either from choice or circumstance.

The coffee percolator steamed on the table unheeded while she ran through her letters—a check for a story, two manuscripts, a paper and a thin, flat package bearing a foreign stamp.

Elizabeth frowned over one letter, smiled over another, patted the check lovingly as she thrust it into the drawer of her tiny desk and ripped the covering from the package. Out fell a playbill, a glaring thing of red and blue letters on yellow paper, bearing the list of artists appearing at a Roman music hall.

One of the names was marked with an inky cross, and in defiance of postal regulations Nell Stanwood had written on the margin: "Do you remember we saw her at the theater the night before I sailed? It's a small world, after all."

Elizabeth smiled at the remembrance. Four other girls and herself had given Nell a going away party the night before the latter sailed to study in Italy. They had wound up the evening at a vaudeville theater, where the little dancer of the glaring programme had appeared. Now, Nell in Rome had seen the same act and had remembered their last night together. Was she homesick?

It was several moments before Elizabeth opened the newspaper, the old home paper and "as good as a letter," so Jack Hardy had often declared. Not an item of news worth the telling escaped publication in the Blairsville Beacon, for even with detailed information as to newly painted fences the editor found it difficult to fill his yawning columns.

The Beacon was Hardy's compromise with his conscience, for he had declared when Elizabeth had determined to leave Blairsville for the greater opportunities of the city that he would not write. He had not written, but after the first week the Beacon came regularly, addressed in his strong, masculine handwriting, and Elizabeth always smiled a softly triumphant smile whenever the copy arrived.

There had been an "understanding" with Jack Hardy until the stories she loved to write had so frequently found publication as to awaken in Elizabeth an ambition to get in personal touch with the editors.

Hardy had frowned upon the suggestion of removal to New York. He could not leave Blairsville because his own and his mother's incomes were derived from the lumber business which his father had left, and Hardy knew that to go to the city meant beginning all over again the fight for a competence.

There had been heated words over Elizabeth's determination to leave, and she had been given her choice of a career or marriage. She had elected in favor of the career. She had prospered in the great city. She had told herself over and over again that she had done the only sensible thing, and yet—

Today there was an inclosure with the Beacon, a playbill announcing in flamboyant language a week's engagement at the opera house of the Rice & Bennett Empire stock company.

Elizabeth smiled as she read the familiar repertoire. The Rice & Bennett company was almost an institution in Blairsville. Twice a year they played for a week in the town hall, and every one who could afford it attended all their performances. It was the one real dramatic treat of the season, for the few other attractions that made Blairsville were traveling magicians, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" companies and an occasional "medicine show." The Rice & Bennett company was to Blairsville what grand opera is to the cities.

Last year she and Jack had attended the spring performances together, but in the fall she was gone. How time had flown! The Rice & Bennett company would open their spring engagement the following week, and Jack had sent her a hanger. An odd lump came in her throat as she returned to the table and her neglected coffee.

When she started to tidy up after the meal she thumb tacked the Italian poster to the wall of her tiny private hall. The wall was bare, and the yellow poster with its foreign lettering gave a smart touch to the hall, like hotel labels on a steamer trunk or suit case.

Elizabeth sat down to the typewriter, but presently there came an insistent ring at the hall door. Tony, the rosy faced Italian, who supplied the tenants of the house with ice, displayed two rows of gleaming teeth as he explosively announced "Ice!" Elizabeth held open the door for him while he lifted the cake from the dumb waiter and placed it in her refrigerator.

But the smile faded from Tony's face as he turned to leave. With an

"IT IS FROM THE HOME," HE EXPLAINED.

inarticulate cry he sprang at the poster, fingering it lovingly and scanning every word of the beloved Italian.

"It is from the home," he explained, blushing, when the first shock of surprise had passed. "It is to there that I take—a what you call—sweetheart? Ah, to the Salone Margherita, me an' my Marie. Marie she cannot leav-a da pop—da fard'. I come-a to America to make-a mon. It is ver' lonely, signora. Scus-a mi."

He shuffled haltingly from the apartment, his jovial face drawn with homesickness and thoughts of the distant Marie.

Elizabeth went back to her work. On the floor the Rice & Bennett playbill still lay neglected, but now it caught her attention, and she picked it up to read, even as Tony had done with the other, every word of the familiar announcement.

She wondered if Jack would be going. If so, who would be in her place? Mrs. Hardy did not care for the theater, and it was not fair to expect Jack to go alone. She smiled at her jealous thoughts and sat down resolutely before her typewriter, but she found that the thread of the story which had started so well was lost. She could not force her mind to concentrate upon the adventures of an imaginary heroine. Her attention persistently wandered to the playbill on the floor.

She could see the opera house without even shutting her eyes. The roller skating craze had somewhat revived its original glories. The common wooden chairs were in place now only when some theatrical performance was given. Probably there were "Rules and Regulations" tacked up on the walls with "Beacon Job Print" in large type beneath the phrase, "By order of the management." She could hear the ragged strains of the three piece orchestra, and she knew that Will Taber and Ren Blake would bustle importantly through the stage entrance. They were always the "and others" on the programme, the army in "Under Two Flags" and "A Celebrated Case," the miners in "The Danites," etc. It was all so vivid that she seemed really to be there. With a choking laugh at her new emotions she ripped the story from her typewriter and slipped in a fresh sheet.

John Hardy, Blairsville:
Please get seats for all next week. I am coming home tomorrow.
ELIZABETH.

Then she gazed about the cozy little flat. It would be very different in Blairsville, and she knew that in sending that message she had virtually announced her surrender, but she hummed a blithe little song as she put on her hat and prepared to take the telegram to the office. When she came to the narrow hall she stopped and took down the Italian poster and, with the one from home, placed it in the drawer of her desk.

"You've carried your messages," she whispered to them as she smoothed the folds, "but I want to keep you—for remembrance and warning. To Tony and me you meant home. I'm more fortunate than Tony, for I'm going home—to Jack."

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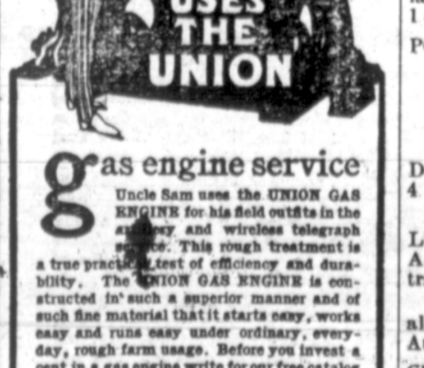

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