

House Bills of all kinds kept in stock or manufactured on short notice. We carry a stock of Dry Finish Lumber from which to make your selection. All kinds of mouldings; roofing paper; lath, windows, doors. No order too small or too large. Let us figure with you.

West Oregon Lumber Co., Clatskanie, Ore.

Reads New Confectionery
And
LUNCH ROOM
Cold Drinks, Ice Cream
Light Lunches at all times
In Seseman Bldg., West of Bank

The Holiday Spirit Caught
and Held Before Your Eyes

Beasley's Christmas Party

BY
BOOTH TARKINGTON



SYNOPSIS

PART I—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unaccountable actions of a man who, from the window of a fine house, apparently has converse with invisible personages, particularly mentioning one "Simpledoria." The youth goes to his boarding house, the home of Mrs. Apperthwaite, next door to the scene of the strange proceedings, bewildered.

PART II—Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. David Beasley, prominent politician, and universally respected. Telling of his last night's experience, he is markedly interrupted by a fellow boarder, a Mr. George Dowden. Later, with Miss Apperthwaite, he is an unseen witness of a purely imaginary jumping contest between Beasley and a "Bill Hammersley." Miss Apperthwaite appears deeply concerned, there apparently being no possible explanation of the strange proceedings.

PART III—The reporter learns that Beasley and Miss Apperthwaite had at one time been engaged, and that the young lady had broken the engagement because of Beasley's "lack of imagination."

PART IV—The "mystery" of "Simpledoria" and "Bill Hammersley" is explained by Mr. Dowden. Beasley is carrying for a small boy, Hamilton Swift, Junior, a helpless invalid bodily though more than ordinarily bright mentally, the son of dear friends who are dead and "Simpledoria" and "Bill Hammersley" are creatures of Beasley's and the small boy's imagination, Beasley humoring the little sufferer by the "play acting."

PART V—The reporter becomes acquainted with David Beasley and is invited to his home, where he meets Hamilton Swift, Junior, and his circle of "Invisibles," which Beasley and George Dowden have made very real to the child.

PART VI—Beasley is a strong candidate for his party's gubernatorial nomination, his chief enemy being one Simon Peck, a small-souled, mean-thinking individual. The reporter is sent by his city editor to see Peck, who declares he has "something on" Beasley. Peck and a number of his cronies, with two reporters, set out for Beasley's house, which Peck declares is the center of Christmas festivities to which Beasley has not deigned to invite his party's workers, to whom, however, he looks for support in his political aspirations. Assured of his coming triumph, Peck invites George Dowden, as Beasley's closest personal and political friend, to join the party, taunting him with the fact of his not being considered good enough socially to be entertained by Beasley. Watching from the outside, they see Beasley and his colored servant Bob, though apparently alone in a brightly illuminated room, with a magnificently decorated Christmas tree, seemingly entertaining a large number of guests. Miss Apperthwaite has joined Peck's party, and, considerably mystified, they await developments. The host, Beasley (Dowden declares, for the first time in his life) makes a speech, his only auditor apparently being Old Bob, though he talks as if addressing a large gathering. Following the speech, Beasley, by himself, dances a "quadrille" with amazing fidelity to detail, and a full complement of invisible partners. Peck is flabbergasted, insisting that Beasley is crazy and that he will have the news "all over town" tomorrow. Miss Apperthwaite is bewildered. The dance concluded, the watchers for the first time become aware of the presence of Hamilton Swift, Junior, and all realize that David Beasley—in Miss Apperthwaite's opinion a man of no imagination—has devised the whole scheme to give pleasure to his little crippled ward. The reporters promise Peck the story will be "all over town" tomorrow, and that individual realizes how greatly the human interest of the story will strengthen Beasley's position. He retreats crestfallen. Miss Apperthwaite, Dowden and the young reporter join Beasley's party, the young lady humbly begging the admission of "just one fool." It's Christmas time!

"I don't know," said I, keeping at her elbow, "whether it's more like 'Alice' or the interlocutor's conversation at a minstrel show."

"Hush!" she warned me, though we were already at a safe distance, and did not speak again until we had reached the front walk. There she paused, and I noted that she was trembling—and, no doubt correctly, judged her emotion to be that of consternation.

"There was no one there!" she exclaimed. "He was all by himself! It was just the same as what you saw last night!"

"Evidently."

"Did it sound to you"—there was a little awed tremor in her voice that I found very appealing—"did it sound to you like a person who'd lost his mind?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know at all what to make of it."

"He couldn't have been"—her eyes grew very wide—"intoxicated!"

"No, I'm sure it wasn't that."

"Then I don't know what to make of it, either. All that wild talk about 'Bill Hammersley' and 'Simpledoria' and spring-boards in Scotland and—"

"And an eleven-foot jump," I suggested.

"Why, there's no more a 'Bill Hammersley,'" she cried, with a gesture of excited emphasis, "than there is a 'Simpledoria!'"

"So it appears," I agreed.

"He's lived there all alone," she said, solemnly, "in that big house, so long, just sitting there evening after evening, all by himself, never going out, never reading anything, not even thinking; but just sitting and sitting and sitting—Well," she broke off, suddenly, shook the frown from her forehead, and made me the offer of a dazzling smile, "there's no use bothering one's own head about it."

"I'm glad to have a fellow-witness," I said. "It's so eerie I might have concluded there was something the matter with me."

"You're going to your work?" she asked, as I turned toward the gate. "I'm very glad I don't have to go to mine."

"Yours?" I inquired, rather blankly.

"I teach algebra and plane geometry at the High School," said this surprising young woman. "Thank Heaven, it's Saturday! I'm reading 'Les Miserables' for the seventh time, and I'm going to have a real ory over Gerwaise and the barricade this afternoon!"

III.

I do not know why it should have astonished me to find that Miss Apperthwaite was a teacher of mathematics except that (to my inexperienced eye) she didn't look it. She looked more like Charlotte Corday!

I had the pleasure of seeing her opposite me at lunch the next day (when Mr. Dowden kept me occupied with Spencerville politics, obviously from fear that I would break out again), but no stroll in the yard with her rewarded me afterward, as I dimly hoped, for she disappeared before I left the table, and I did not see her again for a fortnight. On week-days she did not return to the house for lunch, my only meal at Mrs. Apperthwaite's (I dined at a restaurant near the Despatch office), and she was out of town for a little visit, her mother informed us, over the following Saturday and Sunday. She was not altogether out of my thoughts, however—indeed, she almost divided them with the Honorable David Beasley.

A better view which I was afforded of this gentleman did not lessen my interest in him; increased it rather; it also served to make the extraordinary doings of which he had been the virtuoso and I the audience more than ever profoundly inexplicable. My glimpse of him in the lighted doorway had given me the vaguest impression of his appearance but one afternoon—a few days after my interview with Miss Apperthwaite—I was starting for the office and met him full-face-on as he was turning in at his gate. I took as careful notice of him as I could without conspicuously glaring.

There was something remarkably "taking," as we say about this man—something easy and genial and quizzical and careless. He was the kind of person you like to meet on the street; whose cheerful passing sends you on feeling indefinitely a little gayler than you did. He was tall, thin—even gaunt, perhaps—and his face was long, rather pale and broad and gentle; something in his oddity not unreminded of the late Mr. Smith Russell. His hat was tilted back a little, the slightest bit to reveal the sparse, brownish hair above his high forehead was going to be gray before long. He looked about forty.

The truth is, I had expected to see a cousin german to Don Quixote; I had thought to detect signs and gleams of madness, however slight—something a little "off." One glance of that kindly and humorous eye told me such expectation had been nonsense. Odd he might have been—Gad-sooks! he looked it—but "queer?" Never. The fact that Miss Apperthwaite could picture such a man as this "sitting and sitting and sitting" himself into any form of mania or madness whatever, spoke loudly of her own imagination, indeed! The key to "Simpledoria" was to be sought under some other name.

As I began to know some of my co-laborers on the Despatch, and to pick up acquaintances, here and there, about town, I sometimes made Mr. Beasley the subject of inquiry. Everybody knew him. "Oh, yes, I know Dave Beasley!" would come the reply, nearly always with a chuckling sort of laugh. I gathered that he had a name for "easy-going" which amounted to eccentricity. It was said that what the ward-beaters and camp-fol-

lowers got out of him in campaign times made the political managers cry. He was the first and readiest prey for every fraud and swindler that came to Walnwright, I heard, and yet, in spite of this and of his hatred of "speech-making" ("He's as silent as Grant!" said one informant), he had a large practice, and was one of the most successful lawyers in the state.

One story they told of him (or, as they were apt to put it, "on" him) was repeated so often that I saw it had become one of the town's traditions. One bitter evening in February, they related, he was approached upon the street by a ragged, whining and shiv-



As I Began to Know Some of My Co-Laborers on the Despatch, and to Pick Up Acquaintances Here and There About Town, I Sometimes Made Mr. Beasley the Subject of Inquiry.

ering old reprobate, notorious for the various ingenuities by which he had worn out the patience of the charity organizations. He asked Beasley for a dime. Beasley had no money in his pockets, but gave the man his overcoat, and spent six weeks in bed with a bad case of pneumonia as the direct result. His beneficiary sold the overcoat, and invested the proceeds in a five-days' spree. In the closing scenes of which a couple of brickbats were featured to high, spectacular effect. One he sent through a jeweler's show-window in an attempt to intimidate the other wholly imaginary pursuers, the other he projected at a perfectly actual policeman who was endeavoring to soothe him. The victim of Beasley's charity and the officer were then borne to the hospital in company.

It was due in part to recollections of this legend and others of a similar character that people laughed when they said, "Oh, yes, I know Dave Beasley."

Altogether, I should say, Beasley was about the most popular man in Walnwright. I could discover nowhere anything, however, to shed the faintest light upon the mystery of Bill Hammersley and Simpledoria. It was not until the Sunday of Miss Apperthwaite's absence that the revelation came.

That afternoon I went to call upon the widow of a second-cousin of mine; she lived in a cottage not far from Mrs. Apperthwaite's, upon the same street. I found her sitting on a pleasant veranda, with boxes of flowering plants along the railing, though Indian summer was now close upon departure. She was rocking meditatively, and held a finger in a morose volume, apparently of verse, though I suspected she had been better entertained in the observation of the people and vehicles decorously passing along the sunlit thoroughfare within her view.

We exchanged inevitable questions and news of mutual relatives; I had told her how I liked my work and what I thought of Walnwright, and she was congratulating me upon having found so pleasant a place to live as Mrs. Apperthwaite's, when she interrupted herself to smile and nod a cordial greeting to two gentlemen driving by. They waved their hats to her gayly, then leaned back comfortably against the cushions—and if ever two men were obviously and incontestably on the best of terms with each other, these two were. They were David Beasley and Mr. Dowden.

"I do wish," said my cousin, resuming her rocking—"I do wish dear David Beasley would get a new car of some kind; that old model of his is a disgrace! I suppose you haven't met him? Of course, living at Mrs. Apperthwaite's, you wouldn't be apt to."

"But what is he doing with Mr. Dowden?" I asked.

She lifted her eyebrows. "Why—taking him for a drive, I suppose."

"No, I mean—how do they happen to be together?"

"Why shouldn't they be? They're old friends—"

"They are!" And, in answer to her look of surprise, I explained that I had begun to speak of Beasley at Mrs. Apperthwaite's, and described the abruptness with which Dowden had changed the subject.

"I see," my cousin nodded, comprehendingly. "That's sippie enough. George Dowden didn't want you to

talk of Beasley there. I suppose it may have been a little embarrassing for everybody—especially if Ann Apperthwaite heard you."

"Ann? That's Miss Apperthwaite? Yes; I was speaking directly to her. Why shouldn't she have heard me? She talked of him herself a little later—and at some length, too."

"She did!" My cousin stopped rocking, and fixed me with her glittering eye. "Well, of all!"

"Is it so surprising?"

The lady gave her boat to the waves again. "Ann Apperthwaite thinks about him still!" she said, with something like vindictiveness. "I've always suspected it. She thought you were new to the place and didn't know anything about it all, or anybody to mention it to. That's it!"

"I'm still new to the place," I urged, "and still don't know anything about it all."

"They used to be engaged," was her succinct and emphatic answer. "I found it but too illuminating. 'Oh, oh!' I cried. 'I was an innocent, wasn't I?'"

"I'm glad she does think of him," said my cousin. "It serves her right. I only hope he won't find it out, because he's a poor, faithful creature; he'd lump at the chance to take her back—and she doesn't deserve him."

"How long has it been," I asked, "since they used to be engaged?"

"Oh, a good while—five or six years ago, I think—maybe more; time skips along. Ann Apperthwaite's no chicken, you know." (Such was the lady's expression.) "They got engaged just after she came home from college, and of all the idiotically romantic girls—"

"But she's a teacher," I interrupted, "of mathematics."

"Yes." She nodded wisely. "I always thought that explained it; the romance is a reaction from the algebra. I never knew a person connected with mathematics or astronomy or statistics, or any of those exact things, who didn't have a crazy streak in 'em somewhere. They've got to blow off steam and be foolish to make up for putting in so much of their time at hard sense. But don't you think that I dislike Ann Apperthwaite. She's always been one of my best friends; that's why I feel at liberty to abuse her—and I always will abuse her when I think how she treated poor David Beasley."

"How did she treat him?"

"Threw him over out of a clear sky one night, that's all. Just sent him home and broke his heart; that is, it would have been broken if he'd had any kind of disposition except the one the Lord blessed him with—just all optimism and cheerfulness and making-the-best-of-it-ness! He's never cared for anybody else, and I guess he never will."

"What did she do it for?"

"Nothing!" My cousin shot the indignant word from her lips. "Nothing in the wide world!"

"But there must have been—"

"Listen to me," she interrupted, "and tell me if you ever heard anything queerer in your life. They'd been engaged—Heaven knows how long—over two years; probably nearer three—and always she kept putting it off; wouldn't begin to get ready, wouldn't set a day for the wedding. Then Mr. Apperthwaite died, and left her and her mother stranded high and dry with nothing to live on. David had everything in the world to give her—and still she wouldn't! And then, one day, she came up here and told me she'd broken it off. Said she couldn't stand it to be engaged to David Beasley another minute!"

"But why?"

"Because"—my cousin's tone was shrill with her despair of expressing the satire she would have put into it—"because, she said he was a man of no imagination!"

"She still says so," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Then it's time she got a little imagination herself!" snapped my companion. "David Beasley's the queerest man God has made, but everybody knows what he is! There are some rare people in this world that aren't all talk; there are some still rarer ones that scarcely ever talk at all; and David Beasley's one of them. I don't know whether it's because he can't talk, or if he can and hates to; I only thank the Lord he's put a few like that into this talky world! David Beasley's smile is better than acres of other people's talk. My Providence! Wouldn't anybody, just to look at him, know that he does better than talk? He thinks! The trouble with Ann Apperthwaite was that she was so young to see it. She was so full of novels and poetry and Geminus and highfalutin nonsense she couldn't see anything as it really was. She'd study her mirror, and see such a heroine of romance there that she just couldn't bear to have a fiance who hadn't the chance of turning out to be the crown prince of Kenosha in August! At the very least, to suit her he'd have had to wear a 'well-trimmed Vandyke' and sonnets in the gloaming, or sit on a balcony to her by a red lamp."

"Poor David! Outside of his law-books, I don't believe he's ever read anything but 'Robinson Crusoe' and the Bible and Mark Twain. Oh, you should have heard her talk about it! 'I couldn't bear it another day,' she said, 'I couldn't stand it!' In all the time I've known him I don't believe he's ever asked me a single question—except when he asked me if I'd marry him. He never says anything—never speaks at all!" she said. "You don't know a blessing when you see it. I told her, 'Blessing!' she said. 'There's nothing in the man! He has no depths! He hasn't any more imagination than the chair he sits and sits and sits in! Half the time he answers what I say to him by nodding and saying 'um-hum' with that same old

foolish, contented smile of his. I'd have gone mad if it had lasted any longer!' I asked her if she thought married life consisted very largely of conversations between husband and wife; and she answered that even married life ought to have some poetry in it. 'Some romance,' she said, 'some soul! And he just comes and sits and sits! And I can't bear it any longer, and I've told him so.'"

"Poor Mr. Beasley," I said.

"I think, 'Poor Ann Apperthwaite!' retorted my cousin. 'I'd like to know if there's anything nicer than just to



"I Think, 'Poor Ann Apperthwaite!' Retorted My Cousin.

st and sit and sit and sit with as lovely a man as that—a man who understands things, and thinks and listens and smiles—instead of everlastingly talking!"

"As it happens," I remarked, "I've heard Mr. Beasley talk."

"Why, of course he talks," she returned, "when there's any real use in it. And he talks to children; he's that kind of a man."

"I meant a particular instance," I began; meaning to see if she could give me any clue to Bill Hammersley and Simpledoria, but at that moment the gate clicked under the hand of another caller. My cousin rose to greet him, and presently I took my leave without having been able to get back upon the subject of Beasley.

Thus, once more baffled, I returned to Mrs. Apperthwaite's—and within the hour came into full possession of the very heart of that dark and subtle mystery which overhung the house next door and so perplexed my soul.

IV.

Finding that I had still some leisure before me, I got a book from my room and repaired to the bench in the garden. But I did not read; I had but opened the book when my attention was arrested by sounds from the other side of the high fence—low and tremulous croonings of distinctly African derivation.

"Ah, met mah sistun in a-mawwin', the 'ut a-wassin' up de hill, so slow! 'Sistun, you must get a rastle in doo time, B'fo de hevumy do's close—!"

It was the voice of an aged negro; and the simultaneous slight creaking of a small hub and axle seemed to indicate that he was pushing or pulling a child's wagon or perambulator up and down the walk from the kitchen door to the stable. Whistles he preferred soothing music; over and over he repeated the chant, though with variations; encountering in turn his brother, his daughter, each of his parents, his uncle, his cousin, and his second-cousin, one after the other ascending the same slope with the same perilous leisure.

"Lay still, honey." He interrupted his injunctions to the second-cousin. "Des keep on a-nappin' an' a-breavin' de fesh air. Dass wha's go mek you good an' well agin."

Then there spoke the strangest voice that ever fell upon my ear; it was not like a child's, neither was it like a very old person's voice; it might have been a grasshopper's, it was so thin and little, and made of such tiny wavers and quavers and creakings.

"I—want—" said this elfin voice, "I—want—Bill—Hammersley!"

The shabby car which had passed my cousin's house was drawing up to the curb near Beasley's gate. Evidently the old negro saw it.

"Hi dar!" he exclaimed. "Look at dat! Hain' Bill a comin' yonnah des eadry on de dot an' to de vey spot an' instink when you 'quah fo' 'im, honey? Dar come Mist' Dave, right on de minute, an' you kin bet yo' las hundud dollahs he got dat Bill Hammersley wif 'im! Come along, honey-chile! Ah's go to null you 'roun in de side yod fo' to meet 'em."

The small wagon creaked away, the chant resuming as it went.

Mr. Dowden jumped out of the car with a wave of his hand to the driver, Beasley himself, who drove through his open carriage-gates and down the drive on the other side of the house, where he was lost to my view.

Dowden, entering our own gate, nodded in a friendly fashion to me and I advanced to meet him.

"Some day I want to take you over next door," he said cordially, as I

came up. "You ought to know Beasley, especially as I hear you're doing some political reporting. Dave Beasley's going to be the next governor of this state, you know." He laughed, offered me a cigar, and we sat down together on the front steps.

"From all I hear," I rejoined, "you ought to know who'll get it." (It was said in town that Dowden would "come pretty near having the nomination in his pocket.")

"I expect you thought I shifted the subject pretty briskly the other day!" He glanced at me quizzically from under the brim of his black felt hat. "I meant to tell you about that, but the opportunity didn't occur. You see—"

"I understand," I interrupted. "I've heard the story. You thought it might be embarrassing to Miss Apperthwaite."

"I expect I was pretty clumsy about it," said Dowden, cheerfully. "Well, well—" he flicked his cigar with a smothered ejaculation that was half a sigh and half a laugh; "it's a mighty strange case. Here they keep on living next door to each other, year after year, each going on alone when they might just as well—" He left the sentence unfinished, save for a vocal cleft of compassion. "They bow when they happen to meet, but they haven't exchanged a word since the night she sent him away, long ago." He shook his head, then his countenance cleared and he chuckled. "Well, sir, Dave's got something at home to keep him busy enough, these days, I expect!"

"Do you mind telling me?" I inquired. "Is his name 'Simpledoria'?"

Mr. Dowden threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Lord, no! What on earth made you think that?"

I told him, it was my second success with this narrative; however, there was a difference: my former auditor listened with flushed and breathless excitement, whereas the present one laughed congenially throughout. Especially he laughed with a great laughter at the picture of Beasley's coming down at four in the morning to open the door for nothing on sea or land or in the waters under the earth. I gave account, also, of the miraculous jumping contest (though I did not mention Miss Apperthwaite's having been with me), and of the elfin voice I had just now overheard demanding "Bill Hammersley."

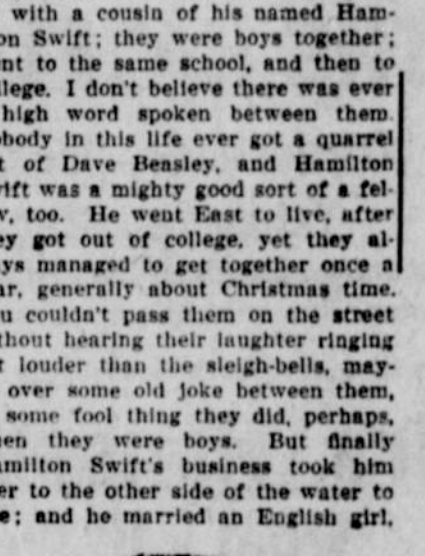
"So I expect you must have decided," he chuckled, when I concluded, "that David Beasley has gone just plain insane."

"Not a bit of it. Nobody could look at him and not know better than that."

"You're right there!" said Dowden, heartily. "And now I'll tell you all there is to it. You see, Dave grew up with a cousin of his named Hamilton Swift; they were boys together; went to the same school, and then to college. I don't believe there was ever a high word spoken between them. Nobody in this life ever got a quarrel out of Dave Beasley, and Hamilton Swift was a mighty good sort of a fellow, too. He went East to live, after they got out of college, yet they always managed to get together once a year, generally about Christmas time. You couldn't pass them on the street without hearing their laughter ringing out louder than the sleigh-bells, maybe over some old joke between them, or some fool thing they did, perhaps, when they were boys. But finally Hamilton Swift's business took him over to the other side of the water to live; and he married an English girl,

Continued Next Week

"Simpledoria is Supposed to Be Hamilton Swift, Jr.'s, St. Bernard Dog."



"Simpledoria is Supposed to Be Hamilton Swift, Jr.'s, St. Bernard Dog."