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FLAT TO LET

By Germaine Beaumont
(Translated by Ralph Cooks)

Every Saturday Marcel Gevandan and his wife set out from their disagreeable little hotel on an expedition of discovery which had lasted since they were married. They were trying to find a suitable flat. They set out on foot, in order to miss nothing; and they returned in the evening unsuccessful and exhausted ,but never discouraged, for hope sustained by romance is long-suffering. They had invented a system by which they chose their direction each time according to the weather. A blue and cloudless sky took them to Passy, a dark grey one to Grenelle, a windy day stood for an excursion to Vincennes, and so on; so until Saturday arrived they never knew which particular district was to be the object of their attentions.

In this manner they pursued their search, house by house, street by street, district by district. They rapidly became skilled flat-hunters, able to answer with complete assurance the objections of caretakers and the conditions imposed by landlords; and at an early stage of their experience they acquired a vocabulary of statements with which they found it useful to introduce themselves, such as: "We have no children; "We do not like loud-speakers or dogs"; "We always go to bed at 10 o'clock," etc.

On this particular Saturday, the sky being a gentle and consistent grey verging upon mother-of-pearl, their chart told them that they should set out for Vanguard. As they went they began, with their usual optimism, an animated discussion on the advantages of the district they were approaching; for whatever locality they happened to be exploring at the time was always, for them, the least expensive, the healthiest, and the most convenient from every point of view.

"You know," said Annette, "vegetables in Vanguard cost practically nothing!"

"The buses from there take me all the way to the office!" announced Marcel.

But on this day, as on many others before it, the gods who presided over the disposal of flats at Vanguard were apparently not attending to their business. As evening fell Annette and Marcel prepared to take their leave of the district, empty-handed. They were, as usual, tired but not discouraged. Through a labyrinth of little streets they walked slowly towards the bus route.

Suddenly they stopped, transfixed. Above the doorway of a neat, quiet-looking little building they saw a placard inscribed "Flat to Let."

"I expect it's furnished, though," said Marcel.

"No, no!" said Annete. "Look: it says 'Unfurnished'."

"Then there will be a premium," objected Marcel.

"Let's go and see," Annette answered.

They hurried across the street, entered, and on being confronted in the hall with a notice which said "Housekeeper in Basement," descended. A half-open door at the foot of the basement stairs revealed the housekeeper to be a fat old woman sitting peeling potatoes with the detachment of a goddess to whom all things are destined and inevitable.

"You have a flat to let," began Marcel. "We have no children or dogs—"

"Oh, that doesn't matter," said the goddess. "Once the rent is paid the landlord doesn't mind anything like that."

"And what is the rent?" asked Marcel, nervously.

The goddess indifferently mentioned a surprisingly low figure.

Annette pinched Marcel from behind.

"Er—is there a premium?" ventured Marcel, in response to a pinch.

"No. No premium."

"How many rooms are there?"

"Three, with bathroom, scullery, and kitchen."

"May we see it now?"

The goddess handed him a key festooned with a potato-peeling.

"On the third floor. There's no need for me to come with you, I suppose? If there's not enough light you can open the shutters." And she resumed her work.

"It's unheard of!" said Marcel, as they went up the stairs. 'Absolutely unheard of! It's exactly what we've been looking for!"

"Keep calm," advised Annette. "It's all right as far as the rent and the premium are concerned, but wait till we see the rooms. They may be impossible."

The rooms were far from impossible however. The front ones gave on to the street; and another, with the bathroom and scullery opening off it, overlooked a courtyard and gardens at the back of the house. They were all pervaded by the rather sad atmosphere peculiar to rooms in disuse.

"Well, I don't see anything the matter with this," said Marcel. "It's very convenient, and it's certainly very pleasant. It seems to me to be exactly what we want."

"Yes, it does," said Annette without enthusiasm. "It's very nice indeed. Only——"

"Only what?"

"Well, it strikes me as a little extraordinary that no one has taken it."

"That depends upon how long it's been to let."

"Look," said Annette. She drew her finger along the marble mantelshelf and showed it to him black with dust. "It's taken a long time for all that to collect."

They examined the rooms again minutely, sniffing the air, ferreting into corners, opening cupboards.

"Well?" said Marcel at last.

"Well," said Annette, "before we decide let's go and see the housekeeper again. Let me talk to her this time."

In the basement the goddess had finished peeling potatoes and was washing refractory lettuce-leaves before putting them to bed in a salad.

"We like the flat very much," said Annette, approaching the subject with decision. "But there's one question I'd like to ask you about it. How long has it been to let?"

"Two years," said the housekeeper.

"Oh. And who lived in it last?"

"An old lady. The landlord's mother."

At this point Marcel interposed himself, unobtrusively proffering a ten-franc-note.

"Look here," he said: "tell us the truth about it. Why should this unusually nice flat remain to let for two years at a time when flats of this size are hardly to be had for love or for money? There's some reason for it, surely: isn't there?"

"What reason would there be?" asked the housekeeper.

"But there must be something," said Annette.

"What is it you want me to say?" demanded the old woman. "There it is: you must make up your own minds about it. Either you take it or you don't take it."

"May be think about it until to-morrow?" said Marcel. "Here is my card. If you will give me the first refusal of it until then I will send you a telegram."

"Take your time," said the housekeeper.

Out in the street the wind had risen and was making the board inscribed "Flat to Let" swing gently to and fro. With a common impulse they paused to look up at the windows on the third floor. The closed shutters, like dropped eyelids in a person's face, revealed nothing. Annette took Marcel's arm and they set off in silence.

After dinner, back once more amidst the ugly furniture of their room at the hotel, she murmured:—

"All the same, it's a pity."

"Yes," said Marcel: "It's a great pity."

The next day he sent the promised telegram to the housekeeper. He was very sorry, he informed her, but they were unable to overcome the feeling that there was some serious disadvantage connected with the flat, and he did not wish to undertake something which involved that risk.

The old woman read the telegram and elevated her shoulders to their utmost.

"What on earth's the matter with them all?" she ejaculated. "They look at it; and then they all say the same thing! There's nothing wrong with the flat that I know of!"—John O'London's Weekly.

"There is something about the modern woman that gets her anything she wants," says a writer. We think it must be her husband.

FINDS TURTLE IN SWIMMING POOL

Sucked in by the hose pipe used to fill the deck pool on the Cunarder Mauretania during week-end cruises, the baby turtle in the picture was found swimming in the sea water by Miss Edith McNutt, a voyager. She decided to make a pet of it and evidently seems satisfied with her success.

Solitude

Not all of us have the opportunity or time to view the sun rise over the sea in complete solitude, but Archibald Rutledge, in "Peace in the Heart," vividly imparts to his readers a complete picture of such a scene. We read:

One night I slept among the sand dunes of a wild southern sea island. I happened to be the only human being in that solitary beautiful wilderness. Deer roamed those tropical woods by hundreds; long lines of wild ducks sped veeringly into its streams; wild turkeys raked the pine straw under the huge yellow pines and fed ravenously upon the acorns of the live oaks.

The place was as perfectly wild as it had been before the days of Columbus. In such a place a man is likely to be keenly aware of all that is about him; yet I had expected to be impressed chiefly by the wild life. It was not so. A sunrise over the lonely ocean stirred me far more than the sight of huge stags, shockingly tame; monstrous pines literally draped with wild turkeys gone to roost; and incredibly placid ponds swarming with wild fowl.

The deep woods of the island marched down to the rolling dunes; beyond the dunes was a fine stretch of beach, tirelessly trampled by the Atlantic. In a hollow between the dunes I slept, rolled in a blanket. Over me blazed the stars tremulous with beauty. What woke me was the morning flight of the mallards and the black ducks and the teal; with glad cries they left the lagoons of the island for a sunny day among the sea marshes. I lay looking at them in the pearly morning heavens; like them, what was I but a child of nature rejoicing in the return of the day? Then I turned to face the sea and the sunrise.

The tide was flooding; and as the shoals before me extended for more than a mile, the playing of the white horses was spectral and spectacular. Tossed and snowy beauty, dimly illumined now, made the sea a visionary loveliness. The deep rose of the eastern sky turned scarlet, while long blushes of crimson stole softly to the heavens' high arch; a misty amethyst tinge came over the waters.

Now came the sun, its gorgeous shafts of fire reddening the rolling foam of ten thousand waves. Was there ever so gorgeous an arrival? The whole ocean was burning unconsumed before me, and upon the glossy shore there was not a shell that did not gleam and blossom with radiance. The sea and the sun! I gazed spellbound at these majestic forces, formed I know not now by what amazing process of evolution; now harnessed, obedient—the sea keeping his bounds and the sun his destined course. The sea at sunrise! I searched my heart for words to express my feelings at sight of it. The words of the Shepherd King came to me, and they seemed adequate: "The sea is His, and He made it."

Man at Right—"I'm a self-made man."

Man at Left—"Don't brag, the job ain't completed yet."

Source of Light

He in whom "there is no darkness at all," is the only Source of light—of light for earth and for heaven—of light for nature and for reason.—Dr. Davies.

Gardenias Lend Color to Camp

Girl Socuts in Porto Rico Have Alligator Pears Supper

A camp which provides alligator pears for supper and gardenias for every camper's coat does not sound as if it were run in the regular Girl Scout manner. Yet there is a camp where these luxuries go hand in hand with pioneering: in Porto Rico, where the pears and gardenias grow. The camper's life on El Junque, highest mountain of Porto Rico, was described by Miss Dorothy Sullivan, director of girl scouting on the island, who recently arrived in New York on her vacation.

To live as the "jibaros," or mountain people do, is the aim of the Porto Rican Girl Scouts. They wash their clothes by pounding them between rocks on the riverbank. The jibaro method of broadcasting warning signals often sends them scuttling from that same river, which has a nasty trick of rising seven feet in about fifteen minutes.

"When it begins to rise," Miss Sullivan explained, "the native whose grass hut is nearest the source sounds a warning by blowing on a conch shell. This is taken up from hut to hut and we get it at camp at least ten minutes ahead of trouble."

Until four years ago camping was an unknown amusement for Porto Rican girls. Now the taste for it is spreading rapidly. There were two Girl Scout camps this summer, and for the first time the girls did their cooking on the trail. Strange cooking it seems to an American. They bake and boil big green bananas. Their favorite drink is cocoanut milk drawn through a hole in the green fruit. They also like one made from the guanabana, a fruit about the size of a melon, the pulpy white flesh of which they squeeze. Their favorite dish is rice with chicken, cooked slowly in an earthenware pot with pimentos, raisins and olives.

"We had fifteen girls in the camp on El Junque," Miss Sullivan said. "They love it, but their parents are nervous about them. So we have one counselor to every three girls. At home the proportion is one to every eight."

Earth Shaken 43 Times in Four Months

Forty-three earthquakes in four months, six of them major disasters to life and property in widely scattered parts of the world, is the appalling seismic record of 1931 to the end of April, says Science Service's Daily Scence News Bulletin.

"These earthquakes count only the ones important enough to figure in the day's news or to trace their autographs on the ever-vigilant instruments in seismological observato ies.

"The lesser quakes that happen every day, the mere local shocks, were not counted.

"The data have been gathered for the use of scientists of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey by Science Service, from the stations of the Jesuit Seismological Association, from official observatories of the United States and Canadian Governments, and from numerous universities."

No Farm Poor

Victoria Colonist (Cons.): A newspaper man has been investigating the causes of distress among the farmers o fthe Prairie Provinces. The conclusions he reaches are that some are stock market poor, some land poor, some poor through extravagance, but he heard of relatively few broke through farming operations. In other words, most of these farmers who stuck to farming through thick and thin and who built up reserve funds with their profits in the fat years are able to weather the present low price of wheat.

1,444 Whales in One Catch

On a recent whaling cruise of eight months one vessel brought back a catch of 1,444 whales, the lot yielding oil with an estimated value of $1,250,000.

after PLAYTIME

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RED ROSE TEA
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Radium Deposits In the Dominion

The richest deposits yet found in the Dominion are reported by H. S. Spence and R. X. Carnochan, of the Canadian Geological Survey in the Wilberforce range. Uraninite, from which radium is derived, is scattered in large crystals through pockets of calcite and fluorite. The area surveyed is 500 feet long and from five to twelve feet wide. One gram of radium can be obtained from approximately 3,422 tons of the rock. The age of the deposit is approximately 1,200,000,000 years.

Pitchblende deposits, in which radium is found, have been located at Echo Bay on Great Bear Lake, 700 miles by river from the railhead at Waterways, Alberta. While it is probable that the deposits could not be successfully mined at present, because of the radium supply from the Belgian Congo, they remain a source of great potential wealth.

Female Birds Go First On Migrations South

The strange impulse to travel which sends birds on their long migrations north and south with the seasons, affects the females first, according to the British naturalist, Noble Rollin, in a communication to The Naturalist, London.

He shot at random last fall birds arrivin gto winter in the British Isles. Those killed fell into eleven families, six common land birds and six sea birds and waders. During October and November the victims were predominantly female. During December and January they were predominantly male.

He concludes that as a general rule females form the vanguard in migrations, while the males show a tendency to lag behind, starting south only when conditions in the summer home become unendurable.

Japan Imports Asbestos

Ottawa.—The market in Japan for asbestos in lump, powder and fibre, as well as in packing and other forms, is increasing year by year owing to the expansion of industrial plants using this material, and to the great variety of uses to which asbestos products are being put in every-day life, writes James A. Langley, Commercial Secretary in Tokyo, in the "Commercial Intelligence Journal." About 80 per cent. of the domestic imports of asbestos fibre come indirectly from Canada.

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Stowaways are becoming increasingly numerous on board vessels leaving Australia, a dozen or so being the usual number found in one ship.

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—Mrs. G. P.

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