

The Free Press Short Story

SHADOWS ON THE CURTAIN

By EARL SILVERIS

THE rumor spread around the campus, as such things do, that Fred Livingstone's vote was all that had kept Hugh Barrick out of the Scarlet Club.

The next day he appeared on the campus minus a pledge button of any kind. He held his head high and gazed defiantly upon the college world; but there was a puzzled light in his eyes and the smile on his lips was not altogether a pleasant one.

Fred was surprised for a moment by the directness of the Freshman's attack; but he answered quickly enough, "Such things aren't talked about, Barrick. I'm sorry if you're disappointed."

"Not half so sorry as I am," said Barrick. "But you may be sorry before this incident is ended."

It was, of course, almost unheard of for a Freshman to speak to a Sophomore in that way; but Livingstone was an easy-going chap, so he simply nodded noncommittally and passed on.

A couple of nights later, when I was sitting on the steps of Willets Hall, he told me about it.

As most of you know, I have been the night watchman at Harlan College for over thirty years. The boys call me General Cobb, although I am not a military officer.

"Just by sight," I answered. "Do you know him, Fred?"

"Not especially well." The Sophomore rested his elbows on his knees and spoke evenly. "I was impressed with him when I first saw him; he is good looking, as you know; he has assurance and poise, and is just the type to make an excellent impression, I believe, wherever he goes."

"Nothing wrong so far," I suggested. "No. Some of the fellows over at the Scarlet Club considered him just the man we were looking for, and suggested that we rush him. So we had him to dinner, and he made a big hit."

"But for some reason he didn't altogether appeal to me. He told me that his mother was dead and his father was an actor, and he said that he was going out for dramatics here at college. He gave me some imitations of famous actors and everybody thought he was great."

"Still nothing wrong," I put in. "I suppose not," agreed Fred, "but I couldn't get it out of my head that he wasn't all that he pretended to be. About a week ago, when I was driving through Westville, where he lives, I stopped in at his high school and asked his principal about him."

"Anything happen, then?" "Well, the principal told me that Barrick was a real actor, and that he had all kinds of talent. Some of his teachers suspected that he cheated in his examinations, although they couldn't prove it. The principal seemed to think that he wasn't altogether to be trusted. Well, anyway, I decided that the Scarlet Club would be wise to hold off for a while."

"And so, you blackballed him?" "No, I just said I wasn't prepared to vote. Somehow, Barrick heard about it, and now I'm just a bit worried."

"Nonsense!" I said. "You're the president of the Sophomore class and a varsity football player in the bargain. He's only a Freshman, and he can't do any harm to you."

A few nights later, when I was standing at the entrance of the King's Building, Barrick joined me again. "Good evening, General!" he said. "Isn't there a ruling here at college that girls aren't allowed in the dormitory at night?"

"Yes," I answered. "Girls aren't allowed upstairs in the dorm at any time, except when accompanied by a chaperon. Why?"

"It's this way," he stated reluctantly. "Last night I was coming home from down town—it was about ten o'clock, I guess—when I saw a girl outlined on the shade of one of the windows in Willets Hall."

"Which room was it?" I asked. "The north corner room on the second floor," he said. "I don't know who lives there, but—well, at least I've done my duty."

He passed on down the campus path. When he had gone, I stood and wondered what it was all about. The north room on the second floor was occupied by Fred Livingstone, and I could not quite conceive of Fred having a girl up there at ten o'clock at night.

It was possible, of course, that Barrick may have been mistaken, but he could not have told me a story like that without some basis of fact. The only thing I could do was to keep my eye on the dormitory and await developments. About five years before we had had a rather unhappy experience in Willets Hall, and the dean had ruled that anyone breaking that particular regulation would be expelled from college.

So far as I know, Fred Livingstone was a fine, upstanding young man. Since the time of his entrance, no one had uttered a word of criticism against him, the more I thought about the matter the stronger became my conviction that Barrick had either imagined the shadow on the curtain or was attempting to arouse my suspicion without just reason.

I kept my eyes open, however, and about ten-thirty the next night, when I was returning from a tour of inspection of the college buildings, I glanced up at the end rooms on the second floor. There, outlined against one of the drawn shades was the unquestionable profile of a girl.

There was no denying this. She was hairless, apparently, for I could see her hair, which was curly. As I looked, she raised her arms and held them out in front of her, then she shook her head, stood up, and passed out of the circle of light.

For a moment, I was unable to believe my eyes; but the evidence was clearly before me. Deeply puzzled, I hastened across the campus and entered the dormitory. No one passed me on the stairs, but when I opened the door of Livingstone's room, the study was deserted. I glanced hastily into the bedroom. No one was there, but I found on the centre table a girl's compact. Unquestionably some one had been in the study and had left the compact. The air smelled vaguely of perfume.

I went across the hall to the quarters of a Junior named William Denman. He was lying half asleep on the window seat, but he sat up and greeted me pleasantly enough. "Hello, General! What's on your mind?"

"I'm looking for Fred Livingstone," I explained. "Have you seen him?" "Not since this afternoon," answered Denman, and grinned. "I think he has a girl friend down town and is probably there. Anything wrong?"

"No," I answered. "I just wanted to ask him about something."

"Returning to the porch, I waited for Fred to return, but at eleven-thirty he had not come back and I was forced to leave for my round of inspection. When I reached the porch again, his room was dark and I judged that he had gone to bed."

I was frankly puzzled as to what to do. Somehow, the affair was inconsistent with all that I had known of Fred, and so I decided to wait for another few days before reporting to the dean.

The next afternoon I dropped in at his quarters, and found Fred studying chemistry. "Fred," I asked, taking the compact from my pocket, "did you ever see this before?"

He was suddenly embarrassed, and his face grew red. "Yes," he answered, sheepishly, "it belongs to a friend of mine. How did you get hold of it?"

"I was wandering around the dorm last night," I explained, "and I found it on your table."

"Oh," he smiled relievedly, "it was left in my pocket a couple of days ago, and I put it there on the table to take back, but forgot all about it. Thanks, General!"

I handed it over. "Sure your girl friend would up here, Fred?"

He looked at me doubtfully. "Of course not! What makes you think that, General?"

"I've heard, indirectly, that there's been a girl in the dorm," I said, "but it's just rumor, of course."

"None around here," he announced positively.

I left him to his studies and wandered up to the athletic field, figuring that if he had broken the rules, my words would warn him. The problem I had seen on the shade was still a mystery for which I could find no solution. It occurred to me that possibly Hugh Barrick might have mixed up in it some way. He might have induced a girl acquaintance of his to come to Fred's room and stand in the light, although that seemed hardly possible.

Nevertheless, I kept a strict watch upon the corner room as soon as it became dark. Early in the evening I saw Fred pull down the shades; then I was called to another part of the campus and it was after nine o'clock when I returned to Willets Hall. Struck by an impulse, I mounted the stairs quietly and opened the door of William Denman's room. William had gone out, so I sat down on his cot and decided to wait.

The dormitory was quiet. Far down the hall some one strolled for a time on a mandolin and then desisted. Finally the clock on the mantel struck ten, and I had just about decided to go out to the campus when I heard soft footsteps approaching. Some one came down the corridor, opened the door of Livingstone's room, and closed it.

I crossed the corridor and pushed open the door of the corner room. Sealed on the window seat, in direct line with the light, I discovered a girl; and I am forced to admit that my heart misbed a beat. Her face was turned toward me, a pretty face with red lips and a pert nose.

"Well," I said sharply, "what are you doing here?"

Unexpectedly, she turned away from me and covered her face with her hands. "Please let me go," she begged.

"I had no intention of letting her go, however, and I crossed the room and stood over her. "Have you been here before?" I demanded.

"Yes," she said, still not looking at me; "but Fred said it would be all right."

I stood glaring at her and finally my eyes rested on her shoes. Suddenly I saw a great light—for they were the shoes of a man. "Oh!" I snapped. Reaching down, I snatched the wig from the girl's head. The person was not a girl, of course. It was Hugh Barrick. Knowing that the deception was up, he rose to his feet and confronted me. His face was pale and his hands were trembling. "What are you going to do with me?" he demanded.

"I told you I was interested in dramatics. All through high school I took the part of girls, and people said that I could easily be mistaken for one. I had brought my costumes and make-up to college, but no one knew it. So when I read about that dormitory ruling, I thought I might come here a couple of times and stand in front of the shade. If you saw the shadow, Fred would be in wrong even if he denied it. And I figured that if you caught me here, you wouldn't recognize me."

"I mightn't have," I said, "if it hadn't been for your shoes."

He looked down ruefully. "I hardly expected you to-night, and so I didn't bother to change. But if I had, you would have been deceived." His voice assumed a note of pride. "I'm a character actor," he finished.

"An actor, perhaps," I corrected him, "but without character."

He nodded unhappily. "What are you going to do with me, General?" he asked.

"Hugh," I said, and there was something in my voice which caused him to look up hopefully. "If I say nothing about this, will you promise me something?"

"Yes," he replied, tensely. "What is it?"

"That from now on you will let up on the acting and bear down on the character."

He drew back his shoulders, and his eyes met mine without wavering. "So help me, General, I will," he said.

We let it go at that; and when the corridor was clear, he hurried back to his room, three doors away, and changed into a man's costume. He has worn it ever since, for he is a member of the Junior class now, and report has it that he will be on the honor roll at the end of the semester.

Gambling in Law Suits In sixteenth century France, gambling in law suits was not uncommon, writes C. C. Lawrence, Wall Street, Mass., in Collier's Magazine. One man would bring a civil action against another, usually without justification, for the purpose of selling the case, when he had the advantage, to a professional plaintiff who would gamble on winning it through the inevitable lying of his own staff of witnesses."

Rapids Run Upstream It is true that the rapids in the St. John River in Canada run upstream twice every 24 hours. The St. John river empties into the Bay of Fundy, which is noted for its remarkable tides. When the tide is coming in, the rapids are running upstream. In some years, in the spring, the tide has been known to have a daily variation in some parts of the bay of nearly 60 feet.

First Azaleas in New World It is said that Pilgrimage Langlois, who arrived with the French Colonists in 1711, returned to his home in Toulon on a visit and saw azaleas blooming in his parents' garden. On his return to Mobile he brought seeds and planted them. By the end of the French period azaleas had spread over the town. These are believed to be the first azaleas planted in the New world.

THE REASON One morning Rastus didn't show up for work until quite late. His boss asked why.

"Well, you see, boss, I was taken into the lodge last night."

"What reason is that that you should be late this morning?" "Well, you see, boss, I was elected to an office and I've busy this morning."

"Elected to an office the night you were taken into the lodge?" "Yes, sir. I was appointed the Grand Exalted Ruler of de Universe."

"That's a pretty high office for a new man, isn't it?" "No sir, Grand Exalted Ruler of de Universe is de very lowest office what dey is in de lodge."

HIS ADVICE "What would you say, Jackie if I married your mother and became your daddy?" "Don't do it, Mr. Smith."

CANADA'S HOMES

A study of Canadian homes based on the last Dominion census reveals that the great majority of Canadian rural families live in owned homes, but in urban areas paying tenants are somewhat more numerous than owners. In rural areas 78.53 per cent. of all homes were owned as compared with 45.55 per cent. in urban communities. All households in the Dominion numbered 2,252,729.

In Canada the six-room house is more common than any other size, but it is not typical in all parts of the country. Nearly 66 per cent. of the Canadian households occupy from four to seven rooms and almost 20 per cent. live in three rooms or fewer. Only 3 1/2 per cent. live in homes of more than ten rooms.

In the Maritime Provinces, urban homes, such as in Halifax and Saint John centre around six rooms, while the rural homes are larger on the average than in any other part of Canada. Five-room homes are the most numerous in urban Quebec but in rural Quebec there is no definite favor for any special size. Both rural and urban Ontario homes characteristically include six rooms, the outstanding exception being Ottawa, where seven-room houses are most numerous. Over 60 per cent. of prairie rural homes contain four rooms or fewer, while the number of such homes in Ontario is less than 23 per cent. Four-room homes dominate in both rural and urban areas of British Columbia.

Many mothers have reason to bless Mother Graves' Worm Exterminator, because it has relieved the little ones of suffering and made them healthy.

Customer—"I want to buy some rouge and face powder." Clerk—"For your wife, girl, or to match your coat label?"

DUTY

The Rev. Rowland Hill was a famous English eccentric. One day he overheard two servants disputing as to which should wash the hall, each insisting that it was not part of her duties. The clergyman called them in and sent each away on an improvised errand. When they returned they found the reverend gentleman diligently mopping the hall. Both servants protested against his performing so menial a task.

"Poh! Poh!" he said, "It's not your duty Peggy; nor yours, Jane; so it must be mine, I suppose."

Thereafter the hall was cleaned regularly, without dispute.

MEXICAN RABBITS

A Mexican and an American worked together in a mine in Kansas. On several occasions the Mexican had rabbit for dinner, and shared it with his workmate.

One day the American asked: "Where do you get rabbits, Jose? I can't find any."

"My wife she get 'um," Jose replied. "Every night they come 'round the house and make noise. She shoot 'um."

"Noise? Rabbits don't make a noise." "Sure," asserted Jose, positively. "Go, Meow, meow."

JUST WHO?

Customer—"I want to buy some rouge and face powder." Clerk—"For your wife, girl, or to match your coat label?"

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CANADIANS AND THEIR INDUSTRIES—AND THEIR BANK

GRAIN GROWING HENRY: "James, I can remember Dad telling us that, in his day, they used to thresh their grain with a flail. We couldn't get along that way nowadays; there's too much." JAMES: "You're right, Henry. We must have mechanical help to produce grain at a profit in these days. But I'm in favour of employing as many men as we can."

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