

RELICT OF JOSIAH BEGG—By Vincent Cornier

BETTY'S CHRISTMAS EVE

"Mother's coming Christmas" said Gertrude entering her circle her circle in the great department store. "Fine" said Mina replenishing spool cases. "I'm going out to Uncle Matt's—can taste turkey and mince pie right now." "Bill and I are invited to Charlie's. They're having a swell party," said Hattie sorting dress shields.

Betty ran the comb through the wavy hair of the dummy thoughtfully and applied a hair-curler. Resolutely she snapped the rubber band into place. Betty was a stranger. Her room was comfortable, her salary sufficient, but companionship she had not found. Holiday planning was entirely apart from her. She decided with the snap of that rubber band that there would be a place in the Christmas cheer—somewhere—for her.

Gertrude noticed the change in Betty. "She's getting human," she whispered, then "What's his name, Sunshine?" she teased, approaching that familiarity which appertains to those they like. "You'd be surprised," Betty laughed.

On the street car she found her inspiration. "Masquerade Ice Carnival," the handbill read, "North River at Beaver Bend, Benefit for Crippled Children, Christmas eve at 8 p. m." Betty's fingers were busy every night with her costume. While fur trimmed the bright red jersey. Golden-haired Betty knew what to wear.

Christmas eve found her radiant and happy, enjoying her favorite sport. Masked, she did not seem alone. Suddenly they began changing partners. Betty found herself skating first with one man, then another. They enjoyed her easy glide and graceful turns. A little- clad Scotchman seemed always ready to take her hand when another let it go. "Aren't you tired?" he asked, "let's have lunch." It had not occurred to her to be tired—her skates were Cinderella slippers. The Scotchman's request was like the midnight bell. This stranger must not know she was alone and to accept his invitation would be to invite discovery. "I must find my friends," she prevaricated, skating swiftly away. Having obtained her wrap from the checkroom she found a sign "for hire" instead of a pumpkin chariot and sped home over the crisp snow.

Betty chided and excused herself for her unfinished hair and the sudden dismissal of her delightful skating partner. "I didn't dare, I couldn't bear to have him know I came alone." Happy reflections filled her Christmas day.

Next morning in the store girls were relating experiences while putting their stock in order. "Well, Sunshine, did he come?" asked Gertrude folding the covercloth. "Of course he did," said Betty caressing the dummy's hair. Her happy face made her words ring true.

Across the aisle stood the department manager curiously studying the group. As he approached the counter each girl busily sought her own section. He chipped a flake of wax from the dummy's ear and said, "Miss Betty, I think there's a better head in the stockroom. Come, let us see."

Betty followed him down long aisles between rows and rows of boxes, silently. She trembled. On a table were heads—brown, blonde, red, black. Betty studied them critically.

"Why did you run away last night?" The voice sounded strange and uncanny as the dummies looked. Betty started, "Oh, I—what do you mean?" "Just that," he said: "I don't believe you knew I was the Scotchman."

"Why, I never dreamed it," she laughed.

"Then won't you go with me to the ice rink tonight? I love to skate with you, Betty. I do enjoy skating. Then perhaps you'll tell me why you ran away."

Betty laughed happily and promised.

Back to the main floor they went, forgetful of the badly needed head. "Where's the new doll, Sunshine?" said Hattie. "There wasn't any—that is—that would do," Betty was thinking more of skating than of marcelled dummies that day and soon another girl had the demonstration.

The girls in the circle did not know what became of Betty until one day she came down the aisle chatting gaily with her husband the department manager.

Little Anne received three dolls among her Christmas gifts. Her abundant supply caused her to become slightly careless. One day an arm fell off one doll, exposing the sawdust stuffing. "Well, you dear obedient dolly!" she exclaimed. "I knew I had to chew your food fine, but I didn't think you would chew it so fine as that."

Discreet behind its varied curtains the village was all one curious eye, and that, directed on the cottage garden, where the mighty red-berried holly trees grew, beyond the stumpy inn. The landlord of the Three Cranes whistled in his porch that Christmas Eve. It would be as well, thought he, to advise the relict of Josiah Begg that he in his grandeur was abroad. Not for him, with his immense prerogatives as gossip-monger in chief to Charlton Brough, the idling slinkiness of his inferiors. No—mine host was out in the open to do battle . . . for battle it assuredly was, that grim assault upon the newly made widow's privacy.

It had gone around the village of Charlton that Mrs. Begg was leaving its bounds. Not to hide her grief in decency in the village was in itself a heinous crime against their vaunted ordinances. But, to leave the village—to go abroad: to go to foreign shores—if Charlton Brough could be one eye it ached to be one hoot.

The villagers seethed. Old Josiah Begg hardly in his grave, and she not ordered his head-stone even; nor had she dropped one flower on his mound. . . . and going abroad! Mine host, well learned man, had but the night before talked wisely, and propoundly in cynicism, of modern woman. He had also mentioned where the ducking stool used to stand beside the pond. His customers and cronies had shaken their heads and repeated all this delicate allusion to their spouses, but starkly. For women's tongues want sharpening, even though for agreement. A truce was in the village. No household quarrelled; time passed along the enormous ways of speculation and contempt that the relict of Josiah Begg had opened.

A dozen gawkish men had shamed each day from the time when old Begg's illness began. Two had been loudly acclaimed to have adjuired drink for ever. Three had affected collars for their every evening wear and one had bought a bicycle; two gave great attention to their hands and nails. For was it not accepted that old Josiah Begg had wealth untold. Despite the fact that he had lived in the old "bottom-street" cottage and followed desultorily the craft of dry-stone wall builder, upon the moorland pastures no man had heard him complain of poverty nor had any woman's searching eye detected one trace of it upon the well kept household goods of these two, man and wife. . . . Now she was a widow she was a prize. Joyce Hayward, as she had been, was for too comely and gently nurtured to have endured marriage with old Josiah Begg, had he not money. And now, a dozen men softly cursed themselves for disappointed fools, the attractive widow was to go her ways, despising their causes, as she despised their unwritten laws of conduct.

Josiah Begg, the woman sneered now, had been old enough to be her father. Then, having sneered their fill, they thought. Had anyone ever noticed between the Beggs any outward signs of conjugal life? They canvassed this point, avidly. . . . No—no one had! Where had anyone noticed a true husbandly or wifely affection between them? Nowhere. . . .

Were they man and wife, the shrews all asked. And that a question left unasked for nine long years! Since first Josiah Begg brought his grave young wife to the village no one had thought on that phase. Now he had gone his eternal way and had left her, their only hope of efficient contumacy against her lay by way of this sudden suggestion. They had sneered, they had thought—now was the finality in action of such narrow thought processes made manifest. Each unit in that great village eye saw with a bitterer light, in one hour they had convinced themselves of her infamy. She had not, said they, been old Begg's wife.

So—pooh—a drab; why not hoot? Or, falling such why not probe in on her life as a lance upon living bone? They had hurt in their souls, lain there by her unheeding touch. Terribly they longed to hurt her in return. . . .

Ah, the Vicar stout and childishly rosy, had nodded to mine host and had stopped at her door! Now we shall see, they crowded.

But the Vicar was not admitted. A slim tall form in black drew back the olden door. The Vicar swept off his hat and took a step forward, smiling as befitted the mood and graced the state.

But . . . the village almost howled in angry wonder. . . . the relict of Josiah Begg did not offer her hand in welcome, but, raised it in half-

weary protest. Upon her lips they saw an icy smile that not one of them could have achieved; it was the smile of them who once had smiled on crowds from hurrying tumbrils. The village saw her shake her graceful head before an exostulation of the priest; saw her hand, suddenly a-tremble, touch at her throat; saw her face whiten and her eyes go large. . . . She had recovered herself and the door was closing—closing!

The harridan; the shameless har-

lady of undertaking such a momentous thing! All on her own had she made decision. . . . Again swiftly acrid outbursts and a hissing accompaniment of ejaculations; a portentous, amazing and sidling shaking of heads.

Ten-thirty. . . . The Three Cranes opened its doors. The auctioneer left Mrs. Begg and walked straight to the inn, all decked out with its rude Christmas decorations. And there was not a man at home in the village but who was furnished feverishly—if



The village eyes saw her hands outstretched.

ridant! . . . The Vicar replaced his hat and blankly gazed at the windows. Then he studied his stick on the path and walked away. His face was purple for he knew the village eye, and dreaded all it saw.

For upwards of an hour the villagers talked this episode over. By this they were boldly whipping aprons over arms and entering one another's houses. That their sole topic of discussion was the relict of Josiah Begg that lady was left in no doubt. She smiled again that feely imperial smile as she glanced from her window, to see groups of children standing awkwardly and gap-mouthed at their mothers' doors gazing all on the Begg's cottage. So would they gaze so long as their elders talked behind them, not realizing how their secret convales were thus, innocently, betrayed.

Ten o'clock. . . . and there arrived the auctioneer from the nearby markettown. So there—would you believe it!—that woman was going to 'sell-up' her household! . . . Not so much as a question had she asked of village pundits on the advisability—by his womenfolk with

money. Away to the Three Cranes went them all.

And Mrs. Begg, noticing the auctioneer's movements and the almost unprovoked rush of custom that followed his wake, smiled yet again—this time half-wearily, half-pityingly, as one smiles down on a tiresomely lovable child.

She spoke to the old clock that had ticked away the last nine years of her life.

"Poor, poor fools," she said. Into a black steel chest case she packed what remained of a pile of papers. This she locked, and secured the key within her bosom; it dangled, daintily cold upon its thin chain on her heart.

The thought of something, felt the keys chill and laughed, in a sound that set a hollow echo shimmering through the half dismantled house. . . . The key of the chest box had warmed; she could not feel it. She braced her shoulders, looked at the clock once more, and held her head high as she made her way upstairs. One room had been hers.

She looked around it and closed the door. Her eyes grew red and wet about their rims. . . . The other room had been hers. By the side of its trim little bed she knelt and prayed—prayed and called and moaned as if her very heart was torn; cried and shuddered and brought her God . . . for happiness.

And there must have come within the tiny house a whispering of peace for, at twelve o'clock, serene and beautiful of eye, the relict of Josiah Begg, lips parted prettily and bosom all aflame, sat at her window, hidden, waiting. . . . waiting.

The village had learned that the cottage and its contents were to be sold and the money so obtained given to charity. This point they debated with a wonder that in some way dulled their previous sullen anger.

Now they recalled—not to Mrs. Begg—a thousand thoughtful moods of he who had died. Why, with his almost cultured voice, had he had such horny hands? Why, with his certain intellect and undoubted education, had he chosen of all things to work his days through in chipping shaping and setting stones, out on the desolate moors? Why had he always gripped his hands and looked like death the moment after he had shown any form of anger? . . . Why?

Then, where did he come from to Charlton Brough? And where had she come from, this graceful quiet young wife of his? In all these years they had never thought to question on these subjects—then, with recurrent gusts of affrontedly angry pride, recalled that never had opportunity been given them for such discussion. A close couple, if ever there was one,

THE OLD TOY-MAKER.

AMONG the many interesting habit characters that until quite recently were to be found around the Bonsecours Market in Montreal, was Jean de Laroche, the old toy-maker. He occupied a small shop in the market for many years, where his quaint, bright-colored, hand-made toys attracted considerable attention. They were in steady demand, more particularly during the Christmas season. They also found a ready sale, during the summer, among tourists in search of "local color," who were, no doubt, attracted by the character and originality of the products, especially the quaint little horse-and-cart toy, which has been used by Paul Caron, artist, of Montreal, as the cover motif of this issue of "CanadaLink."

The old toy-maker is now in his eighties and the business is being carried on at present by one of his sons, "Bonhomme" Laroche has carved toys and religious subjects for many years, as did his father, his grandfather, and his great grandfather for the generations that have gone.

They sagely told each other. An well—nothing more remained, but to watch. When was the woman going? . . . There was one thing to her credit, she had been dressed decently in black, when the Vicar called.

At one o'clock a superb limousine ran into the village, curved gracefully and pointed its bonnet in the direction whence it had come, and stopped before the cottage that held a woman; relict of Josiah Begg. The chauffeur got down and swept open the door. A tall iron-grey haired man, whose face appeared radiantly youthful, despite its lines and its grave cool eyes, stepped into the street. . . . moved to the door.

It swung open. . . . the relict of Josiah Begg, no longer in black, stood there. White was she—all white and soft of every line as a bride. . . . the village eye saw her hands outstretched; the village heart stood still before the glory of her face.

"Darling—my darling! Thank God it is all over," said he.

"And you still want me John? Still want me?"

"As always, and for ever, my woman."

His arms were with hers as they kissed.

So the village eye saw a man and a woman sweep away from their ken for ever in that car. The man carried a big black chest box and trod like a god. The woman trembled and was as coral flushed as a girl before the altar.

So swept from the village's life one who had given all, and the chest box could have told how great that all had been.

For in it lay the private papers of one of Josiah Treverne and his children-of-leave. He, who had murdered thirty years before, had served twenty years of his life sentence and the woman who had denied her life its love for nine long years and more went out again into the world to enjoy both. . . . Treverne's eldest daughter.

THE RABBIT DREAMS

(Continued from Page 7)

Roger Betteridge stirred and spoke in his sleep.

For the first time he saw her face. It was laughter laden and very kind. The face of beauty yet very old—old not with years so much as grave wisdom. Behind the kindness and the laughter lay a light that caused the sleeping prince of gold to recall his

Wood carving has been carried on in Quebec for nearly 250 years, for a trade and arts school was established by Bishop Laval at St. Joachim in 1838. This painstaking attempt to found a school of art in Canada in thirty days was a wonderful achievement, especially when we consider that almost entirely the northern part of America was a savage wilderness.

St. Joachim is a small village located a few miles down the St. Lawrence River below Ste. Anne de Baupre, where the famous shrine of Ste. Anne is located, and which is visited yearly by thousands of pilgrims from all over Canada and the United States. Here, until a few years ago lived old Louis Jobin, with the gentle face and flowing beard of biblical saint, who carved Virgins, Ste. Annes and Josephs from logs of wood for the parish churches. In many places in rural Quebec are still to be found sacred figures from the hands of long dead craftsmen that reflect their inspired genius.

A curlew went awailing over the moorland and a grouse cocked and chucked in the lings. . . . And now the sleeping brain of Betteridge heard grave music. Gone was the pool and the trees were pillars reared to a roof that was lavied by light from hidden lamps. There danced upon the floor where the waters of the pool had been as beautiful, she of the dart of black hair. . . . in a palace, of a king, when earth was young.

The king stirred on the magic hill and smiled. Now went the palace all a-sailing, and green fields were near. And she in a gown of flowered dimity, moved shyly past a water which walked at her side heard her name—and it was . . . mystery. . . . she was gone.

The sun was dying and the winds grew cold. Roger Betteridge awoke on the hill and got to his feet. As a man whose ways are well appointed, he turned to the higher ranges and walked towards them certainly.

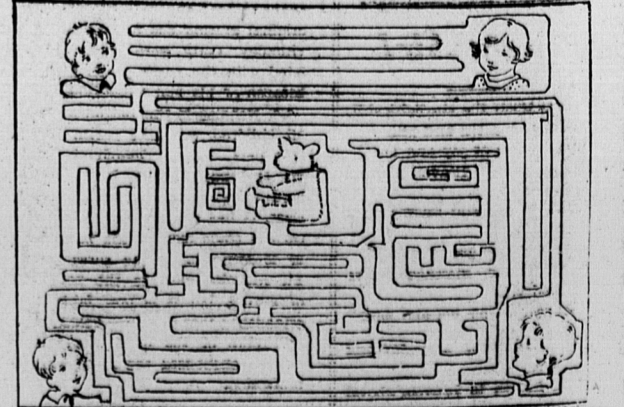
So in the golden hush of a December eve when the moon glowed wildly he came upon a little tarn where stood straight trees and where the air was all a sweetness with wet earth and dead broken. And from a distance he saw, without fear and without surprise, a tall white column rise out from the water, turn and pass . . . and it was she of his dreams, with her dark hair and her music— and shortly she was not.

He did not move nor call. He sat and waited until the night grew old and the wilderness of the moon had gone into serene light. The waters did not stir again nor did the bird cry. . . . And high to midnight he heard her summings.

He arose and stretched his arms and laughed to the surging loves of the world about him, cried to them and wished them all the joys he knew. . . . sang. . . . and her name, which was mystery, hung in his singing.

Then he walked forward. Lady Moira Hennaton's fingers trembled as she lay down the newspaper. Her face was pinched and grey. He looked across at Young Maxwell. . . . She could not speak. "Seems strange, Moira, doesn't it—that you should have sort of prophesied. . . . ?"

"THE MAZE PUZZLE"



Teddy Bear is tied by a string to his owner. Follow the line from him to see where you can, but do not cross lines. See if you can enter his owner's.