

Our Complete Short Story What Are You Laughing At?

GROMLEY'S SCOOP

By E. A. Walcot

"GROMLEY!"

The voice of the city editor rang sharp and decided from the inner sanctum, where an explosive suddenness which started the shivering in the afternoon sunlight that streamed into the local room.

The figure started up, with the drowsy air of the close, warm room pictured in every movement, and sleepily replied, "Here."

"What are you working on?" asked the city editor.

"Half a column on the danger of snailpox from over-ripe sewers."

"Well, let that go. The sewers will keep. Just step into the news-room. Mr. Peters wants you."

Gormley bundled together the scattered sheets of his "sanctum," put them where he would be sure to forget them, and stepped briskly into the news-room.

The news editor was waiting for him.

"I want you to start for the Legislature on the next train. You can just catch it. There is a big sensation, expose, or something of the kind on hand, and Thompson has wired for help. He'll tell you all about it when you get there. Have you got money enough for expenses? No? Well, here's an order on the business office. It's too late to get a pass. There'll be enough to see you through."

"I'll catch the five o'clock," said Gormley.

"Don't be late," he said, "I thought to myself as he closed the door. 'I wish it was Patagonia instead.' Gormley hadn't done the Legislature" at the previous session, and knew the detail for what it was.

But Patagonia or the Legislature, an order was enough. Gormley was a reasonable loyal member of a profession that calls for the same prompt obedience that must be given by the soldier and the commercial "drummer." He cashed the order and caught the train.

II.

It lapsed twenty minutes to nine and the office was again almost deserted. Upstairs the printers were busy, and the click of metal as the afternoon copy was being put into type suggested some curious machine. But down in the editor's rooms there was hardly a sound to be heard but the whirr of a dynamo in the basement and the passing sounds of traffic on the street.

The city editor had just come in and was looking over the detail-book, wondering if that Dobson scandal was a "scoop." The copy reader was savagely slashing the last pages of the afternoon's copy. The local room held but two men writing up their belated work.

Suddenly a messenger-boy thrust the door open, hurried through the local room with a scared, hunted glance behind him, and flung a packet on the city editor's desk.

The city editor glanced up and over the boy's shoulder, noted that a figure passed the door, silently and softly, and walked on to Gormley's desk. The back was toward him. But the back was indubitably the back of George Gormley, who had left the office four hours ago.

The packet was the long office envelope with the office address printed across its face. Under the address was written, "rush," the mark of important news.

"I found it," stammered the boy. "That's—I mean—I dunno—I mean I find it in my hand, and a gent—or boy—I thought it was a gent—or a something—says ter run with it here. He was a regular queer—un-mighty queer, and a boy looked over his shoulder in a half scared way."

"He must have been a queer one to set you to running in here the way you did." The city editor concurred to make the statutory joke on the messenger-boy as he tore open the envelope.

The manuscript was in Gormley's hand.

The city editor read a few lines and then drew a long whistle.

"Gormley!" he called.

There was no response.

The city editor got up and looked out into the local room.

Gormley's chair was vacant.

"Jones," he asked sharply, "where did Mr. Gormley go?"

Jones looked up from his writing in surprise.

"Gormley hasn't been here since five o'clock, sir," he said. "I met him then. Said he was going to catch a train."

"Well, he's back. I saw him come in here not two minutes ago. Jones looked astonished.

"Nobody's been through here but the boy," he said.

It was beneath the city editor's dignity to dispute over a simple matter of fact with a reporter.

Gormley had come, for he had seen him. He must have gone to the news editor's room. At all

the probabilities and accept the story.

"Well," said the news editor, drawing a surprised whistle.

"What do you think of this item?"

"And he held up the last sheet, and pointed to the final paragraph. It read:

"Among the killed was George Gormley, a newspaper correspondent, on his way to X—". His body was frightfully mangled, and his death was instantaneous."

"I never knew a man that was killed to write copy like that," said the news editor, grimly. "And if Gormley came to the office less than an hour ago, he didn't go on the train, for that was getting into X— in about half an hour. If he didn't go he couldn't have been in the accident, if it was killed. If he had gone and taken place, if he had gone and written anything at all. If he had been through an accident, he could not have written this copy under three or four hours, and if he had had it already written, his mind is possible have got from Greendale, two hours yet, even if it had come on a special."

"Dear case of fake, then," said the city editor, "Dump it into the waste-basket."

"It's a bang-up story," said the news editor, regretfully. "I wish I could use it."

He hesitated, glanced over his shoulder as though he expected to see someone behind him, and put the copy back on his desk. He looked a bit as he did so. Before he could explain his motive, if he wished to do it, the telegraph editor burst into the room in much excitement.

"Here's your wreck," he said; "got a despatch from X— just this minute. There's been a big smash-up on the road. The five o'clock express went through the bridge at Greendale about an hour ago. Wreck caught fire. Hundreds of people killed and injured. Wreck not particulars."

The double perplexity cleared from the news editor's face. Here was something on which to act.

"Wire Thompson to let his story go over. Tell him to turn the Legislature over to Wilkins, take Curtis, get over to the office. Give me two men from here, and I'll send them to help or relieve Thompson. Get the local story from the railroad men. Keep everything else under bedrock."

The city editor stopped at the door. There was a curious look on his face, as he pointed with his thumb to the despatch packet on the desk and asked:

"Where did that come from?"

But the news editor did not seem to hear him, and he went out.

III.

Midnight had come and the news editor was gloomily taking account of stock.

"It's a bad wreck," the city editor reported. "The railroad men cannot be got to talk, and that's a sure sign. They won't even give out the name of a passenger. We've got about fifty names, but they're Greendale, photos of about a dozen of the big passengers, and about a column of keep everything else under bedrock."

Railroad is getting acres of despatches, but not a word is to be squeezed out of them."

The telegraph editor had hardly a more satisfied expression. "Thompson, being a specialist in the train and had smuggled himself to Greendale as a surgeon. The wreck was a bad one. Forty or fifty killed, and hundreds wounded. With this much information Thompson's despatches had been cut off to or from him."

"Been writing him for an hour and can't get a line," concluded the telegraph editor.

"Just as I expected," said the news editor. "The railroad has got the wires. The operator at Greendale is the railroad agent, too, and help it. If they could shut out the newspapers their bill for damages wouldn't be very heavy."

"Pretty situation," grumbled the telegraph editor. "Biggest sensation of the year, and only one column of double-headed padding, and a column of local go with it. I've built up half a column of scare heads. That's a fine kind of a show for a live paper printed within a hundred miles of the scene."

The news editor glanced at the city editor, and picked up the manuscript in Gormley's hand.

"I'm going to use it," he said, hesitatingly. "I've compared the names of the killed and wounded with the passenger list we get from the railroad, and it's correct, so far as the local list goes. It's a full account, and—well, I'll send it up, double-headed."

Send it up, double-headed, grumbled the telegraph editor, who ran over it hastily.

"Good—good. This is prime. Who did you get it? Is it a 'Levi' story. Get it in and we'll tell the news later."

IV.

The news editor still sat at his desk, though it was long after his usual hour to leave. The upper floors of the building were deserted

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The left hand grasped a mass of charred brown paper, on which the writing was illegible.

"What was it?" said the city editor, looking rather uncomfortable.

The news editor had no reply to make, as he had none.

Gormley was buried at the expense of the office.

But they never speak of his "scoop." There were few who knew of it, and these have an unpleasant feeling when they think of it. It was an impossible thing, and no good can come from probing into certain mysteries in this world of ours.

COBBS ENTHUSIASM DAMPED A LITTLE.

DETROIT, Feb. 28.—Ty Cobb, world's champion batsman, was seen in a new role yesterday, when, as a newly recruited hand on the iceboat "Detroit," he essayed to skid over the frozen surface of the Detroit river. As a preliminary to the novel experience he tested his ability as a broad jumper by trying to leap over a crack in the ice. He fell short and fell in, getting thoroughly soaked.

Feeling that he could do no worse on runners, Cobb boarded the ice craft, for a trial spin. As like the proverbial member of the crew,

Ty was a success, although his ability to understand a sudden order of Captain Mitchell, having bit of rigging known as the "sheet," Cobb said he saw a sail but no sheet, caused the craft to capsize while going at the rate of about sixty miles an hour. A fifty foot sled along the ice, which was covered with an inch or two of slush resulted. But as Cobb had opined at the start, he could not get any wetter, so there was no harm done.

"This is almost as fast as my time around the bases," the Georgian remarked after the boat was righted.

STAND BEHIND—THE TOWN.

Did you ever think of this? Suppose every business man in Truro took as much interest in the upbuilding of "our town" as the newspaper men.

We work and agitate for railroads, manufactures, better roads, churches, and a hundred and one other things for the general good. If all the merchants did half as much.

Truro would prosper and flourish like the proverbial green Bay tree.