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of the moon lit up the cheerless, shabby room, revealing the threadbare carpet, the sticky chairs, and the shabby green marks upon Shannon's dusty clothes. Through a thin partition he could hear a child whining in its sleep.

"It seems mean, but I'll do it," he replied. "It's precious hard I can't get a decent berth, when one thinks of the idiots who scribble miles of stuff and are well paid."

And the next morning he sallied forth, armed with a good bundle of studies, sketches, "bits," and so forth, the gifts of grateful or hopeful artists. Johnny was quite ashamed of his task. The creators of these things had been so polite, so genial, it was like parting with old friends. But they were so valuable—of course they were! Three strokes of a brush by Sir Thomas Loft, Mr. Dawber, Mr. Sandanar, or Mr. Allbones were worth money. It was cruel to sell them, but he had no doubt of the result.

"Well, dear, have you sold them?" said Mrs. Shannon anxiously, when he regained his humble roof.

Her lord's step, I regret to say was unsteady and his voice was slightly husky. He extricated a parcel from the pocket of his overcoat with difficulty, and thrust it on the floor with an air of triumph.

"Sold them! No! They're not worth a mag. I showed them to Kleingeben, and he said that they would be dear at a fiver for the lot!"

"But, Johnny, dear, I thought they were worth hundreds!" she faltered.

"I didn't!" he cried, excitedly. "Talk's not much good; but what, in heaven's name, are we to do? I've a good mind to hang myself. You and the kids would get on better without me."

After that night Johnny was seen no more in his accustomed haunts. The Cherokees concluded that he had "gone on the booze" for an unusually longer period, his editors grumbled and swore, and, finally, handed over his work to other men. At the end of a week a pale, tearful woman applied to a police magistrate to give publicity to the fact that her husband, John Shannon, had mysteriously disappeared. The magistrate and the press kindly promised to assist her in finding him, and the disappearance of John Shannon, art critic and literary drudge, was speedily made public.

"Drunk and tumbled into the river," said one charitable friend; "Bolted to escape duns," said another; "Poor devil! wonder what has become of him?" queried a few—a very few.

In three weeks the mystery was solved, for a corpse was picked up in the Thames which was universally declared to be that of the missing journalist. And then suddenly his editors seemed to discover the loss they had sustained, or perhaps they did not care that their drudge should be buried in a pauper's grave; whatever were their motives, they subscribed a sovereign or so apiece for a funeral at Kensal-green. Having gone so far, it suddenly occurred to them that Johnny had left a widow and three children, who were in imminent danger of starvation.

"This is most unpleasant," mused he of the *Truthful*. "We shall have the woman round at the office wanting to borrow money."

"Something ought to be done," said the editor of the *Daily Driver*, in a burst of enthusiasm.

"Then perhaps you will do it," remarked the chief of the *Weekly Review*.

"Let's ask Blatherum!" was the universal decision. Now, Blatherum was the art critic of the *Parthenon*, which, as everybody knows, is a very influential and superior journal indeed. Blatherum wrote learnedly about "values," "tonality," "coloration," "infinity of aim," "opulence of line," "rhythmic cadence," "harmony of impasto." And as nobody understood what he meant, he was generally accepted as a very great authority.

"Well," said Mr. Blatherum, "if anything has to be done—and of course it is very unpleasant that Shannon's family commiserative unprofitable as it was, been abruptly cut short."

"What do you mean?" said the *Truthful*.

"Merely this, it would be a great thing to exhibit the devotion of editors to members of their staff; it would be a great thing to show that artists are fond of really honest straightforward criticism—such as our late friend's, of course! The dealers would be glad to help for the same reason."

"It's a great idea!" said the *Review*.

"Who's to work it?" queried the more practical *Truthful*.

"You leave it to me," said Mr. Blatherum. "I'll work it, the artist and the dealer; we'll get sketches from all sorts of swells, and press notices by the score. Oh, it will be a big thing!"

"Dessay you'll make it worth your while," growled the chief of the *Daily Driver*.

Mr. Blatherum was as good as his word. Of course his first task was to visit Mrs. Shannon. He found that lady melancholy, but apparently resigned.

"It's very sad to break up our home," she said, "but there must be a sale. The sketches, all of them presents, which poor Johnny valued so highly, must be sold at Christie's."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear madam!" ejaculated Blatherum; "they must be sent to the Dunct Art Exhibition for sale there. And he represented to her in such a convincing manner the commercial aspects of the enterprise, that she gladly fell in with his plan. Blatherum had but little difficulty with the artists.

"Look here, my boy," he said to Sir Thomas Loft, "you remember that sketch you gave to poor old Shannon?"

"Believe I gave him something—I'm, think it was rather a promising study made by one of my pupils—Miss Arabella Skumble—daughter of old Skumble—most charming girl."

would scarcely like that; fact is we were getting up a little exhibition for the benefit of Mrs. S. and the kids. If you will contribute a sketch the other thing can go in; otherwise it will be sold at Christie's. People may say it isn't yours. See?"

In private life, Mr. Blatherum talked quite like an ordinary human being, and Sir Thomas understood the situation in a surprisingly short space of time.

"Ah, yes! Benefit for a deceased artist—pictures contributed by eminent R. A.'s—great attraction."

"Quite so," said Mr. Blatherum. "I think you have a sketch handy which you might give away for such a noble object."

Sir Thomas had, and so had a good many other artists whom the astute art-critic visited. "Nothing like establishing a precedent," he said to himself, after a dozen or more interviews. "Now if I get laid up you'll have to arrange a benefit show for me. If they don't, begad, won't I let them have it when I get well! Really, Shannon did quite the right thing when he fell into the Thames."

As for the dealers, there was even less difficulty with them. The generosity of dealers is proverbial, and all the big men gave valuable pictures—which had been left on their hands unsaleable for years.

So the Shannon Benefit Fund was organized. The cash subscriptions were few, and they were not large in amount, for they came from men who were almost as hard up as poor Johnny himself had been. But the number of pictures the committee received was quite surprising, and when Mrs. Shannon's small collection was thrown in it became necessary to hire a large gallery wherein to exhibit and sell them. The gallery proprietor let his rooms for a nominal sum—which was truly liberal, as at that period of the year there was absolutely no demand for it, and, of course his generosity was duly chronicled in the catalogue and in the newspapers. The Benefit Exhibition was a great success; there were pictures by R. A.'s which they would have been ashamed to hang up in their own kitchens; there were works by outsiders, which would have been rejected even at the Academy; there were pieces of sculpture too terrible for words. But the works of art were gits, so their purely disinterested donors were lauded to the skies by wily critics who thought that some day their own turn might come, and the good-natured public bought the rubbish at twenty times its value, just as people pay at a bazaar half a guinea for a pair of mittens which would be dear at sixpence.

The committee were soon enabled to hand over to Mrs. Shannon £800 on account. She was sent to Margate with the two younger children, while the eldest boy was dispatched to a boarding-school.

Six months had passed since Shannon's disappearance; the grass was green on his grave, and the exhibition was on the point of closing, nearly everything having been sold, for such pictures as the public could not be induced to purchase were brought in by the judicious artists themselves. Mr. Blatherum, the indefatigable secretary, was seated at a table in the gallery, writing an article for the *Parthenon*, for business was slack. There was no one else in the room but a tall man in a grey overcoat, with a big muffer round his throat, of whom Mr. Blatherum took no notice, for he did not look like a purchaser. It was getting dusk, close upon seven o'clock—closing time—and the art critic began to put his papers together with a view of going home.

Meanwhile, the man with the muffer was walking round the gallery examining the pictures with much interest, and, at last, then giving vent to a subdued chuckle. The first time that the sound broke the stillness, Mr. Blatherum paid no attention to it, but when it had been repeated three or four times he began to get annoyed.

"Confound that fellow's impudence!" he thought; "what the deuce does he find to laugh at?" And then he uttered a loud "Hem!" with a view of recalling the stranger to a sense of propriety. But the man with the muffer paid no heed; he was engrossed with his task. He paused before one of Sir Thomas Loft's contributions, and, after gazing at it for some time, he passed on to a great work by Dawber, R. A., and laughed in open derision.

"Good Lord!" murmured Mr. Blatherum, "perhaps he's an escaped lunatic! I'd better call the commissioner. What on earth is he going to do now?"

The man with the muffer had discovered a bust of the late John Shannon, Esq., by a rising young sculptor, Mr. Thomas Trowel, to wit. It seemed to fascinate him; he looked at it from every point of view, chuckling all the while, and finally, as if to enjoy his mysterious joke the better, he put down his hands on his knees, and rocked himself to and fro in an ecstasy of merriment. Mr. Blatherum's curiosity overcame his fears.

"He's talking to himself. I must hear what he's saying." And he rose, and stealthily approached the stranger on tip-toe.

"Oh, this is too much!" gasped that profane person. "Tommy Trowel as a sculptor! I owed him ten pounds; blessed if I ever pay him now. Some flats has bought this thing for fifty—and he never sold a bust before in his life! Ha! ha! ha!"

And he fairly roared. There was something in the tone of his voice which made Mr. Blatherum start violently. The stranger turned at at the voice, met Mr. Blatherum's eye, and at once exclaimed:

"Why, Blatherum, old chap, how are you?"

But the art critic's jaw fell, his face grew pale, and with a howl of terror he turned to fly for his life. The deceased Mr. Shannon grasped him firmly by the coat-tails.

"Don't be a fool! I'm not a ghost! I'm alive! Very much alive! Better than I've been for years!" And he dealt his former friend a sounding slap on the back.

"You're not dead?" gasped that gentleman, "then what the devil have you been doing?"

"I had an accident," said Mr. Shannon, "mighty bad accident. I've been in hospital for months with some infernal fever. Just out."

"But why didn't you write or do something? It's really most inopportune your turning up like this, you know!"

"Couldn't, my dear boy; was off my head, raving; never even saw a newspaper till yesterday. Didn't know anything about this show till today, when I went home and found that they'd sent away the miums and the kids. Came on here at once, and my stars, isn't it a treat!"

"Precious lucky treat for you!" said Mr. Blatherum, by no means mollified.

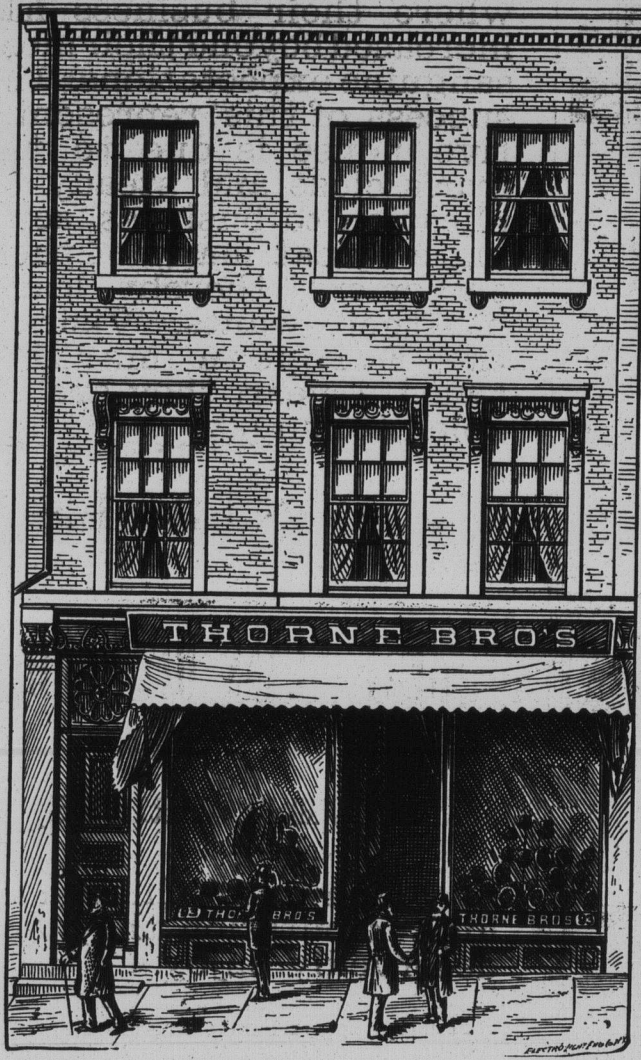
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DEAD AND ALIVE.

Everybody called him Johnny. He was the sort of man whom his friends slapped violently on the back or dug playfully in the ribs at inopportune moments. Practical jokers used to hide his hat and coat at the club—they were so greasy and ancient that it was impossible to get a mistake—and leave him to wander home to Camden Town, bareheaded and scantily clad, at three or four o'clock in the morning; when he fell asleep in an armchair after dinner, and snored in the repose of the weary or the inebriate—more frequently the latter. I guess to say his boon companions would blacken his face with a cork, or draw white figures on his clothes with a piece of chalk flicked from the billiard-room. Johnny Shannon was a literary hack, an out-at-elbows Fleet street scribbler, who wrote well when he was sober, and respectfully even when he was drunk. Had he lived in the days of Captain Shannon, he would have written most of his articles, like that worthy gentleman, in a debtor's prison, for poor Johnny was always hard up, always tormented by duns, always in dread of bailiffs, writers, and committals to Holloway jail for what is euphemistically termed contempt of court. He could turn his hand to pretty nearly everything in the literary line; he could write sporting articles, city articles, art criticisms, political manifestoes, paragraphs by the score; he frequently wrote sermons, which he sold to stupid country parsons at five shillings apiece. He reviewed books on all manner of subjects, from Roman Pavements to Savories and Sweets; he could knock off "vers de société," and was by no means a novice at rhymed acrostics. And still Johnny did not prosper; what he earned one day he spent the next, and being blessed with a wife and three children, he found existence a very hard struggle. For as fast as he got a good berth he lost it. Editors fought shy of him, except as an "occasional contributor;" they said that he could not be relied on; often he had missed a sub-editorship through his deplorable weakness. He might even have attained to the dignity of an editorial chair; but no sensible proprietor would entrust his paper to the charge of a man who on press night might be lying half-drunk, half-asleep, in the smoking-room of the Cherokee Club, with his face blackened and his clothes adorned with hieroglyphics in which chalk. The one post, however, Johnny contrived to hold for a good number of years was that of art critic to the *Truthful*. The *Truthful* was not a

lively journal; it had a very limited circulation, and the amount of cash which Johnny received for his articles was small. But it was eminently respectable, and his articles signed "Morbidezza" had appeared for so many years that the signature acquired a certain weight in the artistic world. Mr. Shannon would have been grievously hurt had his connection with the *Truthful*, commiserative unprofitable as it was, been abruptly cut short.

Now, although the *Truthful* had but a small following among the public, artists, for some reason or another, valued its good opinion. So, in artist circles, Johnny was a welcome guest. At studio-views, when the host employed his wife and daughters—or somebody else's wife and daughters, if his own were not sufficiently attractive—to flirt with the art critics, and ply them with tea and muffins, he generally gave Johnny Shannon a stiff brandy and soda in his own sanctum, and not seldom pressed upon him at parting a small souvenir in the shape of a drawing or study which he could not induce his dealer to purchase. It was a mere act of civility, of course, and to do Johnny justice he valued the drink more well than the sketch. Still, he could not very well abuse the man as an artist, whose hospitality had been so acceptable, and thus it came to pass that Mr. Shannon's notices were generally favorable. It also happened that he had quite a collection of drawings, studies and sketches presented to him at various times by genial artists who possessed the right of appending to their names the magic letters R. B. A., R. W. S., R. I., A. R. A., or even R. A.

Things were very bad in the Camden Town household. The bills waxed larger and larger, as Johnny's credit waned. Mrs. Shannon wanted sea air, Johnny junior was down with measles, and the baby threatened whooping-cough. Mr. Shannon himself was doing badly; he had lost the countenance of several editors lately. The *Truthful*, it is true, remained faithful; but the *Truthful* paid little, and that at irregular intervals. It was a black look-out.

"What the deuce is to be done?" said Johnny, hopelessly, to the wife of his bosom.

"Sell those absurd drawings of yours," she suggested, in a querulous tone. "Mrs. Shannon had been a pretty woman, but care had made her thin and angular, and had turned her voice shrill and her hair prematurely grey."

"Hang it all, Hester! I can't sell presents!"

"Why not? You sold my watch."

There was silence, and a sudden ray



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