

THE GREWSOME TALE OF A TEA JAR

BY MARY FENOLLOSA

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Between the hour of his appointment already secure, and that stupendous hour to come when he should take his seat among the mighty, the six dull, intermediate months stretched out before the minds of the Pegram family as some long, sandy road.

The time of the year was spring. "Couldn't we let a villa at Newport for the season?" suggested Miss Pegram. "The senator elect gave her a cautious smile."

"A heap better go to Europe," remarked Miss Una Pegram, with school-girl carelessness.

The smile turned on as a smile, losing its caution and acquiring approbation. From a quarter yet unheeded the slight sound of a cleaving through noise issued. All eyes veered instantly to the direction of Mrs. Pegram. That lady knew her power and was prone to hold the bliss of absolute decision a little while at bay. Her very appearance was a symbol of authority. Jet glittered on her bosom and in her glance. The family waited eagerly for her words. They came in due season, deliberate and calm.

"Newport can wait another year. We go to Europe. It is most appropriate. Perhaps we shall encircle the globe."

"A royal progress!" sighed Miss Pegram, in an ecstasy. Una began to jump straight up and down. "Now I'll find out for myself whether the earth is really round like an orange or a ball."

The senator's smile was like a photograph of the canals on Mars. "Trust mother to know what's the thing!" he cried, and placed a pudgy hand of approval upon the shoulder of his bridling spouse. A few weeks later, various hotel registers of the Old World gained this imposing array of entries:—Senator J. A. Pegram, Mrs. Pegram, Miss Una Pegram, Miss Pegram, Miss Una Pegram, two maids and a valet."

The success of their tour was instantaneous. For four wonderful months they revelled on the billboards of social preference. They were presented at more than a single court and knew royalty by sight and name. They began to regret, usually, that arrangements had been made for continued travel. Yet so it was. Their very itinerary had been published, and as Mrs. Pegram wisely observed, "people in their position couldn't afford to deceive the public."

Strengthened, if not cheered, by this high sense of martyrdom, they finally passed the eastern border of "dear, delightful, hospitable Europe" and plunged despairingly into darkest Asia.

It had been agreed before starting that they were to patronize the Trans-Siberian Railway. Mr. Pegram had always been interested in the shaggy empire, especially in the way of mortgages on mining stocks. This had been, indeed, the one personal element in their travels on which the Senator had insisted. "And," as his good lady was wont euphemistically to declare, "see what it did for us."

They found the Russian trains to be more rolling cabins of discomfort. The police espionage was enough to curdle the blood of any good American; fancy, then, the indignation of a new-fledged senator elect! At Lake Biwak, having been transferred three separate times to smaller steamers, their third craft stuck ignominiously in the mud. Here they remained for three days, their food supplies brought out from shore by means of long poles and consisting chiefly of sour black bread. Their drink was an inkly fluid called "tea," stewed in a corroding samovar.

It was a weakened and pallid party that arrived at last, through brightening social stages of Peking, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Kobe, to the irreproachable management of Yokohama's best foreign hotel. Here newspaper reporters, English and Japanese, flocked to interview them, an attention which Madame had begun to miss. Upon the gentry she beamed broad condescension, amazing them to her cause. In three more days Mrs. Pegram and her daughters pervaded Yokohama society like a tincture.

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Yet he alone of his family did not rally. Health and buoyancy seemed to have fallen from him into Lake Biwak. Perhaps the deadly samovar had done its work. But let us not dwell upon harrowing details. The bare fact is tragically enough. Senator J. A. Pegram, still a man in the prime of life, with his seat

among the mighty yet untaken, his passage on the home steamer paid for, and farewell banquets pledged up to the very hour of departing, with all these things accomplished and a glorious future rising like a dawn from America's distant shore, the Senator was actually inconsolable enough to die!

This catastrophe, will be thought, destroyed in one fell swoop all social hopes and ambitions of the ladies of the Pegram family. Not so! Mrs. Pegram did not turn her face to the wall. If death had snuffed out a shining career it was her part to see that the world realized its loss. Newspaper reporters were again summoned and the wireless telegraph station hummed. In a time, miraculously brief, the four corners of the earth had news of Mrs. Pegram's bereavement. In Yokohama the "executrix" was spoken of as a "marvel," a "wonder." And so she was.

The poor senator had breathed his reluctant last at six, one stormy evening in September. By nine of the next morning the widow and her two daughters were attired in full suits of mourning, with pins, belt buckles, handkerchiefs, note-paper and haircombs to match; while the maids and the valet bore wide hands of crepe upon the left arm, and the crimson bow of the new poodle, a gift from the Marchioness Katsudira, was changed to one of black.

Through that awful first day and the next Mrs. Pegram did indeed bear herself with amazing courage. If she wept no one perceived it. Only once was she seen to falter, and that was when the consul general—unhappy man—had to hint of cremation. The word stuck in his bulging throat and made him sick.

Yet in such cases it was the only way. Mrs. Pegram had risen and, with a less gallant tread than usual, crossed her sitting room to stand beside a window. For some moments, she had stood motionless. Apparently she was watching the splash and surge of billows as they charged against the sea-boulders and went writhing forty glittering feet into the air. Sea birds skimmed like giant swallows about a sea of tempestuous blue grain. Her eyes, indeed, were set, but keen and bright; but she had not been gazing on such things. It was a boy and girl upon a western farm—a little home, then Washington—and now this Far Eastern town with its dreadful something called a crematory. She closed her tired eyes for an instant and put out a groping hand to the cold glass.

"Very well—if it is necessary," she had told him. "I consent to what is necessary. Will you attend to it? Please be sure that you are a foreman in a factory, mumbled and got himself hastily from the room. Once in the street he thanked his Maker fervently and aloud that that particular "stunt" was over.

Will you attend to it? Please be sure that you are a foreman in a factory, mumbled and got himself hastily from the room. Once in the street he thanked his Maker fervently and aloud that that particular "stunt" was over. The usual designs of creases, wreaths, pil-lows, gates and broken columns—for the foreigners have imported their own flor-ists and their own bad taste in Japan. One might have fancied it a real funeral, except that, at the last, the stricken fam-ily returned, weeping, to the carriage and to the hotel, while the Consul General, the Rev. Mr. Potts and the unctuous un-der-taker only followed the sombre foreign hearse out over the hills to a valley cen-tered by a tall stone chimney, from which, at irregular intervals, might be seen to creep a sluggish yellow breath. Early the next day the ashes were to be gath-ered up into a bronze urn (already select-ed) and the precious relic given into the charge of Mr. Potts until the hour of sailing.

The third day after the church service was the one of departure. From literally the hour of dawn—the Japanese are early risers—more visitors, more hearse-men, more caskets and notes of con-dolence knocked at the door of the Pegram suite.

Within the room everything was going wrong. The cherished poodle made his escape, and after an hour of frantic search was identified only by his habes-bow. One of the maids had a fainting spell and needed a physician. Una locked her long crepe veil in the wrong trunk and had to go down in person to the hatoba to reclaim it. Maddening small

incidents and accidents multiplied, until even Mrs. Pegram's iron nerves began to feel like tinfoil.

The very last gift of all, brought in by Japanese dealer a few moments before starting and offered with many depre-cating bows and audible intakes of the breath, was a large tea jar, beautiful in shape and coloring but about as appro-priate an ornament for a steamer cabin as would be a totem pole. "Somebody bring it or leave it," said Mrs. Pegram desperately. "I don't care which!"

The Rev. Mr. Potts, nervous, excited, affable, was everywhere. He had come and gone many times already in the brief afternoon. Once Mrs. Pegram, catching him in transit, had whispered, "The niggard nod and smile, with the assurance, 'All right, dear lady.' As a matter of fact he had not understood, being deaf in that particular ear; but it was second nature to him to reassure."

Now, at length, the sable group ap-peared, moving slowly down the hall, out through an awed and sympathetic throng to the waiting carriage. The American launch, its crease colored flaglet properly swathed in crepe, conveyed them to the great ship, half a mile distant from the land.

The captain on his quivering, pendant stairway came to meet them. He assisted the widow as tenderly as though she had been a lighted bomb. The family ascended in order of preference, and last of all the two maids, one carrying the poodle and one staggering under the multi-tinted tea jar.

The Pegram ladies went immediately to the upper deck, where they might least see the railing for a last waving of hands. Below them, on the launch, the upturned faces of friends were already shrunken to meaningless oval dots. Pyg-my, answering hands, and now the more pronounced note of a waving handker-chief, continued the messages of good-will. Even at such a distance the portly, authoritative figure of the Rev. Mr. Potts dominated the group.

All at once Mrs. Pegram gave a gasp, then a sound like a cry strangled in a nightmare. She caught at the railing, covering down upon it, then drew herself full height. "Mr. Potts! Mr. Potts!" she screamed. Her words were torn in frag-ments by the rough sea winds. Not even the gulls paused to listen.

"Why, mother!" cried the girls in a breath, each grasping a gesticulating arm. "What could have happened right here on deck?" questioned the elderly, looking fearfully about. Even her commonplace mind felt the touch of a new tragedy.

But Una realized it from her mother's twitching face. There was something like scorn in the girlish voice as she said, deliberately:—"It's only that, after all the hullabaloo, we've come away without poor papa!"

"Hush!" commanded Mrs. Pegram fiercely. "Don't dare to say it. Don't think it! Get me to our cabin, quick. Send the maids off. Don't let any one come in!"

The officers and fellow-passengers gazed sorrowfully after the three black, stag-

gering figures. Heads were shaken and some of the sympathetic ones began to feel like tinfoil.

"Now look the door. This far we are safe, thank Heaven!" Mrs. Pegram glar-ed for a moment, wild eyed, about the tiny space. Her elder daughter, succumb-ing to the moment, sank sobbing to the first convenient heap.

"Stop that noise. We've got no time to smivel. We've got to think!" com-manded the mother. She took deliberate seat upon the narrow bed lounge under the port holes and leaned her head, still swathed in crepe, against the white paint of the wall. "Will Potts have sense enough to keep his mouth shut until I can send him a wireless?" she asked aloud, as if to herself, but her hunted eyes went to Una.

"Sure," said Una promptly. "He'll be feeling like three cents himself!"

"I believe you're right. Now I'll com-pose the message while you girls find an urn."

"An urn," echoed the elder. "What on earth can you want with an urn—now—when—"

Her non-comprehension gazed the al-ready frantic parrot to madness. "Yes, nunny, an urn! What am I to hand out to the delegation when they meet us at Frisco—a hairpin—or a smelling bottle?"

Una was again inspired. "The tea-jar! She's sitting on it. The very thing!" In-continentally she thrust her sister over, disclosing the tea jar in all its glory—in the dignity of its ample size.

"I've something yet to live for," mur-mured Mrs. Pegram. "He taking off the top, Una, while I write this awful mes-sage."

A few minutes later the following in-structions flew Japanward through the air:—"Rev. R. Merriweather Potts, D. D. Gratitude for your kindness suggests that I make through you a donation of \$2,000 for your work. I find I have left a val-uable curio of bronze in your charge. Say nothing. Keep in personal and private charge until you get letter of instructions from San Francisco. Mrs. Pegram."

When Una returned saying that one important step, at least, had been suc-cessfully taken, Mrs. Pegram, for one pas-sionate instant, longed for the relief of tears. But no—they were to come later! There was still work to do.

By this time the purple silk cloth lying down the cover of the jar had been re-moved. A delicate, yet pungent, frag-rance filled the room.

"What are we to do with it?" asked Miss Pegram, helplessly.

"Lift the jar, Una. I presume that the tea—alone—would be too-light?"

"Yes," said Una, grimly, "and too green."

"Then throw it all out of the window. A Boston tea party in Yokohama Bay! We'll fill it up with something heavier."

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be closed. Mrs. Pegram, always a poor sailor, went over bodily to the starboard mattress of the bench, but even then her spirit prevailed. Like a wounded general beneath a tent she lay, issuing strategic orders.

"It's empty now, thank heaven! Begin to fill up with anything—anything—just so you get it heavy. It's supposed to be bronze, you know. Put cloth and paper in the bottom, so things can't be heard rattling. Chuck the flowers out of the window and put in the tooth brush mug. It weighs a pound. Yes, put in all the overshoes; they're a nuisance kicking about the cabin. Hand me the salts, Una—and some chewing gum. Somebody said it helped nausea. Dump in all that sticky looking Japanese candy; it may melt and help hold things together. Let's give and tea exclaiming portholes must it heavy yet? Here, then, take this brass

screw they use on the porthole. Wrap it in something—a ship's towel. Never mind what the cabin boy may think. Put in those Japanese coins of yours, Una."

"I tell you it must be made heavy. This is a desperate game. Anna, unscrew the dressbooks. We can get more. Will the handle of the door come off? Good! Put in these cheap black felt buckles; we can pin our belts on. Thank heaven it is getting full at last. It looks heavy. Let me try. Oh, oh! If only this wretched ship would stand still till I finish. I believe that is heavy enough! Now cram in things on top. It must not rattle. Use anything of mine in sight; stockings, garters, my hair rat, soap, talcum powder—anything, anything—so it all for him!"

For an instant she wrestled with a very genuine anguish, and then regained her moral if not her physical prowess. "Finished at last! Now, girls—before we all die of seasickness—thread, needles, black petticoats and shawls! Yes, all of them and the first that may come handy. I want the horror sewed round and round with so many layers of black cloth that an army worm wouldn't dare go into it, much less a bunch of sorrowful politicians."

A half hour later, in the very instant of dissolution (as it seemed), Mrs. Pegram roused herself to the ultimate heroism of demanding the captain's presence and of delivering into his hands with her own object resembling an enormous swart coot. With the honor at last re-moved, Mrs. Pegram calmly though with increasing vehemence, gave herself up to a fit of hysterics.

It was a week before a Pegram showed a face. With the landing at San Francisco Mrs. Pegram once more girded up her diplomatic loins. As at Yokohama, she received in person all delegations and private visitors. An imposing array of leading citizens from their own town awaited them. To the chairman of this organization she offered with a stony face and in sight of all the passengers the black, swathed object, which she touched, said, represented all that was left to them of a devoted husband and an adoring father.

Nothing could have been more affecting. The onlookers were just at the moment of coagulation into one great, sticky gum-drop of sympathy when suddenly the younger Miss Pegram went off into shrieks of wild laughter. "Poor, old dad! Sacred urn! Garters, mugs and chewing gum!" were a few of the unrel-iable and disjointed phrases she was heard to emit. Fortunately the stewards were still near, and Una allowed her min-istrations to prevail. But the sentiment of the occasion had received a shock.

A private car, heavily draped in black, conveyed the party onward. During the trip the urn occupied a stateroom to itself, resting on an ebony pedestal, with the fringe of Mrs. Pegram's best black shawl vibrating with the motion of the train. Arrived at its destination, it was taken to a chapel where, heaped about with fresh flowers, it became an object of reverent curiosity.

Finally, the committees and sub-com- mittees having come to an agreement, a day for the great funeral was announced. Business was at a standstill. Banks hung their doors in ink. Excursion trains brought in thousands of country visitors. The whole town took on the air (to quote from a somewhat flippant young reporter) of a "country fair at half past."

Mrs. Pegram, shaking hands always with the right people, weeping always at the proper moment, held herself vice-regent of the departed hero.

The site chosen for the burial of the urn (I had nearly said tea jar) was the summit of a low hill. Here, into a tiled vault, lined with fragrant bloom, the sym-bol was lowered. The throng of onlook-ers, mounting the hillside in tiers, like a circus audience reversed, moved its myriad feet, rustled and gave out a forest-sigh of sym-pathy. Una alone was unmoved, though this time she was calm.

This all took place at noon one bright October day.

On the other side of the world, in Ja-pan, the hour was midnight. That morn-ing the Rev. Mr. Potts had received an un-expected and most unusual communi-cation. Because of this letter he remained

now alone in his study, while all the rest of his household slept.

Almost on the stroke of twelve he rose and drew from a certain niche a squat, bronze urn. Bearing this he went cau-tiously to the door and summoned his trusty jirikisha coolie, Taro. A few mo-ments later he was whirling away on noiseless rubber tires, the urn between his knees. A small spade, too, lay on the jirikisha floor.

"The haka-wara, Taro," was the low direction given.

The white tombs of the hillside foreign cemetery gleamed with an uncanny dis-tinctness under the thronging stars. Mr. Potts' teeth chattered, but that might have been with the autumn chill. He and the servant bore their burden to a far corner of the consecrated plot and silent!

The minister re-rended his vehicle. The weight seemed disproportionately less. He threw his head far back that he might see the stars. They were all there—Orion, the Pleiades, the morning stars that sang together all the dear constella-tions that his English boyhood had in-duced to know and love. Oh, watching these same stars, had drawn strength from their serenity. The old Chinese sage knew them well. Mahomet, the Buddha, Christ—all these had come and gone! Ar-

a thousand years hence, when his little handful of dead exiles sleeping under the surface of an Asiatic field would be less than grains of sand in the shadow of a Sphinx, the self-same stars would still bend bright faces down to earth.

After all, what did it matter? The jirikisha man's bare feet made a dull tattoo on the road. The figure in the vehicle drew in a long, long breath, then sent it forth in a tremulous sigh. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man?"

"Hai, Dan-na!" answered Taro and stopped so suddenly that Mr. Potts very nearly went over on his ecclesiastical nose.

"What back already?" said Mr. Potts. "Very good, Taro and here is a yen. We have been nowhere tonight, Taro San."

Taro grinned and acquiesced, and put the coin into his cheek as might a large brown squirrel.

The Fatal American Banquet

(New Haven Register.)

Massachusetts, there seems ground to hope just now, may receive its governor back from the jaws of the grave, and if it does, Massachusetts, and all other states which observe, may learn a plain lesson. For the thing which came so near to ending the useful career of Governor Gould so near the beginning of his third term in office platonically and primarily is the unsuccessful effort to keep up the pace.

In a sense, the governor belongs to the people. He is elected to administer the public affairs, and that should be his first consideration. That in itself is enough for any ordinary man. But in addition to that the people make other demands upon him. He must attend their conventions, he must appear in all their large assemblies, and make speeches on special occasions, and of all he must spirit like a hungry dog in the direction of whomsoever offers him a banquet. He could stand the rest; it is this last which kills. He might in his sense of duty find an excuse for all the other demands; there is no excuse, whatever for the killing strain which this last imposes upon him.

Oh, this fatal American banquet habit! It is the peril of all our public men. He who can sit for two or three nights a week through a two-hour meal, composed of all things rich and indigestible, in quantities of quantity and variety beyond the compass of the normal stomach and digestion, even if he eats sparingly and omits all drink, who can endure the mixture of tobacco smoke which some persons with fevered fates will insist on mingling from the first, has more than an iron constitution. There is a limit, even with the greatest of care. It's all a mistake, based on the false concept, which has especially run riot in this country, that one can't get together unless they cause their gathering by eating or drinking.

Let those who haven't the sense to stop keep up the game if they will; may we not at least show our appreciation of our public men by saving their acquiescence, and come and talk to us, in so far as their time will allow, when we ask them, but spare them the agony of being obliged to eat.

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