



THE GATES OF MEMORY

The Story of an Interrupted Proposal

By HERMAN SCHEFFAUER



THE morning air and the fresh scent of the fields worked like wine in their veins. The wheat shook its millions of bristling spears in the sunlight. They had just heard a lark trilling sunward, and the Sabbath was still young. It was summer in the world, but spring in their hearts.

So John Ogilvie, with Bessy Marvin beside him, flitted his whip sportively above the glistening flanks of his jaunty mare, and the little dog-cart bowled merrily along the road out of Orthridge. The young man turned his head toward the fair girl beside him. Blue-eyed and tawny-haired was she, her round cheeks flushed with an inward joy—some rare exuberance of the spirit. She sat on the tufted seat of the dog-cart, clad in white, the incarnation of happiness, a young queen upon her throne of youth—the predestined mate, as it seemed, chosen by Nature and Destiny for the lithe and comely young farmer at her side.

"But the day, dearest! You know it's as terrible for a lover not to know the day of his happiness as for a criminal not to know the hour of his execution," said John.

"Well, that is a pretty comparison, I must say!" replied the young woman, pouting her red lips.

"Dear Bess, do tell me the day when—"

A rabbit flashed across the road; the horse swerved, and the next instant there was the roar of a gun and a cloud of sulphurous smoke in whose centre loomed the figure of a man. The mettlesome mare reared and plunged, and backed toward the edge of the road. The girl screamed, and Ogilvie sprang to his feet, one hand upon the reins, the other upholding the whip. But ere it fell upon the startled horse the left wheel of the dog-cart had passed backward over the dusty margin of dry grass which bordered the embankment; and, the next instant, cart, horse, man and woman lay, a confused heap, amidst the briers and brambles of the field below.

The man with the gun ran hastily forward; the rabbit lay quivering in death some yards away. For a moment a strange, sinister light blazed in the eyes of the new-comer, like some flash of fire from the underworld. It was Henry Barton, and in the heart of him a fierce desire, a mad, secret hope suddenly burned like a red-hot thing.

Ogilvie was lying huddled up under the cart, his head against a stone which protruded from the ground. He was bleeding from a deep gash in his forehead close to his brown hair. His hand still grasped the reins. Bessy, who had fallen free of the vehicle, was seeking to stanch the blood with her handkerchief. Barton swiftly unharnessed the restive, struggling animal, and with one wrench of his powerful arms righted the little cart. He then lifted Ogilvie, still unconscious, and placed him on the seat of the cart, where the girl supported him, his head upon her breast. Then, reharnessing the mare, he led her back to Orthridge, to Ogilvie's home. No word was spoken, only the horse whinnied as if concerned for her master's life.

John Ogilvie died—or rather the personality, the human entity, the memories of the individual being known by that name suddenly ceased to exist. His body lived and recovered from its wound, and was vigorous as before; but from the brain of that body all retrospection, all mental links with the past, all traces of association with his former life and friends were suddenly wiped away and expunged like writings on sea-sands.

When John Ogilvie, in the afternoon of that fateful Sunday, opened his eyes once more upon the world about him he was, but for the gift of language, like unto a new-born babe. He gazed blankly around as if suddenly awakened from some stupefying dream, looked curiously and strangely into the faces of his relations, and felt the bandage encircling his head. Then, staring vacantly at the young woman who sat close to his bed, he spoke.

At the first words that fell from his lips some deep terror seized upon Bessy Marvin, and, trembling from head to foot, she sprang from her chair and looked down upon the prostrate man. For the voice that came from the lips of John Ogilvie was not his own, but that of some other being! And some other soul was peering out of the unresponsive eyes he bent first on this face, then on that.

"Where am I? What has happened?" were the words that were struggling through the laboring lips. Then came the astounding query: "Who am I? Tell me who I am."

Again he raised his hand to his head and felt the bandages. Then he seemed to lose himself in some measureless vastness of time and space far removed from the pleasant room into which the

warm sunshine burst, and where his astonished sweetheart, his father and mother, and his sister Esther were standing silent as if under some iron spell. Then the girl cried, as she clasped his arm:

"Why, you're my John, dearest. Don't you remember, we met with an accident this morning? Molly backed off the road. Don't you know your Bess, dear?"

But John Ogilvie that was merely shook his head and wearily closed his eyes. Then, for an instant, as if by some miracle, his features relaxed from their strange expression, the tension of the facial muscles was smoothed away, and he appeared again as of old.

"He will come to himself to-morrow," said the doctor, who had been summoned. "His faculties of recognition are temporarily suspended, due to shock to certain brain centres. That is often the way with cases of concussion."

But neither the next day nor the day thereafter, nor the week following, nor in the months nor the years that succeeded, did John Ogilvie ever come back to John Ogilvie. His past life was cut off as if by the shears of Fate, and nothing remained of the twenty-five years of his life save his native speech. He now spoke slowly, in a voice entirely



"The years seemed to fall from him."

strange, and with an accent that was slightly foreign.

Thenceforth the fact that his name was John Ogilvie, that he was the owner of a splendid farm with unfailing acres of golden wheat, and with superb prize cattle, that he had lived all his life in the beautiful region of Orthridge, remained as darkly unknown to him as a book he had never read. And he who had been the happiest of all living men until the morning of that fateful drive, because of his having won the heart and hand of beautiful Bessy Marvin, retained not the faintest memory of the tender ties and sweet communion of hearts that had bound him to his betrothed. For hours Bessy would sit by his bedside incessantly searching his eyes for the slightest sign of recognition. But the eyes remained dull and lustreless, and no longer held the old familiar light of love she had always found there. The fond heart, the warm impulsive soul of John Ogilvie no longer shone through them. His demeanor and remarks were truly those of one who had no past knowledge of things nor events—one whose prior life was a dark baffling blank. To all her questions and remarks the man upon the bed would reply, as if in great mental distress and confusion:

"I'm sorry, but I do not know you. I am sure

I never saw you before. I do not even know myself! I cannot tell how I came to be here!"

And when for the thousandth time the girl in her passionate, broken voice had cried to him:

"Why, you are my John—John Ogilvie—oh, can't you remember me—can't you remember your Bessy?—who loves you! Here is the ring you gave me down by the river-side that afternoon. And the very moment before the accident you were asking me to set the day of our wedding!" John Ogilvie stared fixedly in front of him as if into endless depths of space.

The distress of those about him was beginning to work upon him. He appeared and acted as might a child which had been lost in some huge, thunderous city. Having knowledge of nothing, save the immediate present and the few days since the mishap, his soul and mind were adrift as on some misty, uncharted ocean, or wandered, as it were, through some wild, sand-tossed desert.

Soon he was about once more, somewhat dazed, acquainting himself with places and persons. Outwardly, at least, he was again almost the living image of John Ogilvie, but the personality of Ogilvie had vanished like a trace of dew in the sun. In time he came to know, though

he could not understand, that the venerable, lace-capped woman was his mother; the white-bearded, hale, blue-eyed man, his father; the smooth-haired girl, with the sweet placid face his sister; and Bessy, his beloved. Although his mind accepted the knowledge of these relationships, his heart was unable wholly to respond to them. Bessy was affected to the profounds of her nature. His voice was no longer the same, his mannerisms were those of an utter stranger, his stride was different from that of the man she had loved; his very expression was charged with something entirely alien.

The thing that now lived in the brain and dominated the man and his thought soon brought into play a different set of facial muscles. These so altered his features that his mother at times remarked that she no longer knew her son. The spirit of John Ogilvie had been joyous, free, even boisterous; but the spirit that now dwelt in his body was silent, grave, and haunted by brooding dreams. Ogilvie's pet setter bristled and snarled whenever the transfigured man passed by.

Yet easily and naturally enough the new John Ogilvie began to adapt himself to the life about him. Something apart from intellect or memory seemed to help him to acquire his former skill in the management of the farm. Material conditions were altered little more than if there had merely been a change of overseers. His demeanor toward all was pleasant and kindly, and he accepted the devotion of his parents and sister with heartfelt appreciation. But ever there rested a shadow upon his relations with the folk about him—some remnant of the darkness that had blotted out his memory of all he had been to these persons and they to him.

Slowly the fervent affection of Bessy Marvin began to wither under the estranging shyness of the man who had once been her lover. In the new individuality even time and renewed association seemed unable to arouse a response to the love that was still cherished in the heart of the bewitching girl.

The girl realized that she was the chief victim of the extraordinary fate which had overtaken her loved one. Like the man who had lost his past, she seemed to change into another being. Two years dragged slowly and heavily along.

Finally, Bessy left Orthridge to spend a few months with her aunt in London. When she returned she was again the same lovely and cheerful creature as before. She now came but seldom to the home of the Ogilvies, and then only to visit John's sister. A new pair of lovers soon began to engage the tongues and attention of the people of Orthridge. It was observed that Henry Barton, an old suitor of Bessy's before John Ogilvie had won her hand, was again paying court to her. It was also observed that Matthew Olcott, who had for many years wooed Esther Ogilvie, seemed strangely disconsolate.

One summer evening, when Barton and the girl were strolling along the road and the new-mown sheaves lay pallidly under the glowing moon, they came to the spot where the mare Molly had shied at Barton's shot. Thoughtfully, Bessy pointed out the rooted rock against which Ogilvie had struck his head when the dog-cart was overturned three years before.

"That one stone, Henry," said the girl, mournfully, "has changed two lives—John's and mine!"

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