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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac Crane
Stockton Vatsyayana Verne
Burroughs Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Curtis Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Potter Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Hesse Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Cooke
Poe Aristotle Wells Shakespeare Irving
Hale James Hastings Richter Chambers Alcott
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Sally Bishop A Romance

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GERALD DU MAURIER

MY DEAR GERALD,

Amongst the many things which I anticipate in the reception of this book, is the shrug-shoulder smile of critics at my sub-title – a Romance. There are canons and rubrics to be observed, it would seem, in the slightest action that a man attempts in this Great World's Fair of Conventionality, whose every sideshow is hedged around with the red-tape of the Law. Witness even that delusive proverb – there is honour amongst thieves. So is there an unwritten canon in literature and the making of books, that a Romance must end with a phrase to convey another illusion – namely, the happiness that is ever after.

And so, in this respect, I throw canons to the winds – it sounds a herculean feat – wash out the printed red of the rubric, and call, perhaps the saddest story I shall write, a Romance.

Yet I profess to have a reason beyond mere contrariness. The world of Romance must be at all times an elusive star – never capable of being put in the exact same place on any one's calendar. And to me it conveys no fixed beginning, no fixed end, so long as it possesses that quality of dreaming imagination in the mind of the character with whom the circumstances are first concerned. All that we know certainly of life is reality, and of all those myriad things which combine to make up the one great scheme, of which we know nothing, there is the quality of Romance – free to any one who cares to let his mind drift upon the sea of conjecture.

In that this was the case with Sally; in that she made her dream out of Reality itself – I have called it a Romance. The Romance that remains a Romance until the end, is not as yet within the reach of my pen. If it ever should be – then I promise you that book as well.

On all my other anticipations – the attitude of the critical mind towards Chapter IV. in Book I., the sensitiveness of the delicate mind when it closes its eyes on Chapter VI. of Book II. – I will keep silent. As I have said, I anticipate many things, but I only hope for your approval.

*Yours always,*E. TEMPLE THURSTON.

LONDON, January 31st, 1908.

CONTENTS

BOOK I. THE CONSCRIPT

BOOK II. THE DESERTER

BOOK III. DERELICT

BOOK IV. THE EMPTY HORIZON

SALLY BISHOP

BOOK I

THE CONSCRIPT

CHAPTER I

It was an evening late in November. The fog that during the afternoon had been lying like a crouching beast between the closely built houses had now risen. It was as though it had waited till night-fall for its prey, and then departed, leaving a sense of sulkiness in the atmosphere that weighed persistently on the spirits. A slight drizzling rain was wetting the pavements. It clung in a mist to the glass panes of the street lamps, dimming the glow of the light within.

In the windows of all the houses the electric lights were burning. You could see clerks, male and female, bent up over their desks beneath them. Some worked steadily, never looking up from their occupations; others gazed with expressionless faces out into the street. Occasionally the figure of a man would move out of the apparent darkness of the room beyond. The light would fan in patches on his face. You could see his lips moving as he spoke to the occupant of the desk; you might even trace the faint animation as it crept into the face of the person thus addressed. But it would only last for a few moments. The man would move away and the look of tired apathy settle itself once more upon the clerk's features as soon as he or she were left alone.

As it grew later, there might be seen men with hats on their heads, moving about—in the light one moment, lost in the darkness the next. Some of them were pulling gloves on to their hands, or lighting cigarettes, others would be pinning a bunch of violets into their button-holes, or brushing the shoulders of their coats. These were the ones who had finished for the day. It could always be

known when they had taken their departure. The heads of the clerks would twist towards the interior of the room. You could almost imagine the wistful expression on their faces from the bare outlines of their attitudes as they turned in their chairs. Then, a minute later, the main door of the house would open, the figure of a man emerge; for a moment he would turn his face up to the sky, then the umbrella would go up and he would walk away into the darkness of the street, for one brief moment an individual with an identity; the next, a mere unit in the great herd of human beings.

There were many departures such as these before, at last, the clerks rose from their chairs. When finally they did move, it was with a lethargy that almost concealed the relief which the cessation of work had brought them. One might have expected to see the slamming of books and the rushing for hats like children released from school. But there was no such energy of delight as that. Ledgers were closed wearily, as though they were weighted with leaden covers; papers were put in tiny heaps as if they were a pile of death-warrants. Typewriters were covered with such slowness and such care that one might think they were delicate instruments of music with silver strings, instead of treadmills for tired hands.

Some reason must explain why these young men and girls, when their superiors took their departure, showed so plainly the envy that they felt and now are apparently unmoved by the prospect of their own freedom. It is simply this. Vitality is an exhaustible quality. It may last up to a certain moment, then it burns out like the hungry wick of a candle that has no more grease to feed it. You can incarcerate a man for such a length of time that when at last you do give him his liberty he has no love left for it. It is much the same with these creatures who are imprisoned in the barred cells of London offices. By the time their day's work is ended their vitality for enjoyment has been exhausted. They take their liberty much as a man takes the sentence of penal servitude when he had expected to be hanged.

Stand for a moment in this street that runs out from the Covent Garden Market and watch the office windows before the lights are extinguished. Is there one attitude, one movement, one gesture that betrays the joy of freedom now that the day's work is over? Scarcely

one. That boy with the long dark hair drooping on his forehead, contrasting so vividly against his sallow skin—you might imagine from the listlessness of his actions that the day's work was just beginning. At lunch time, when the vitality was yet in store, he might have been seen, running out from the building in the gleeful anticipation of an hour's rest. But now, when all the hours of the night are before him, his nervous energy has been sapped away. You get no spirit in a tired horse. It shies at nothing, but drags one foot wearily after another until the stable door is reached.

This is the actual condition of things that the young men and women find when they have burnt their boats, have left the country for the illusory joys of the town. There may be greater possibilities of enjoyment; but this huge, carnivorous plant—this gigantic city of London—has only displayed its attractions in order to gain its prey. They are drawn by the colours of the petals, they come to the honeyed perfume of its scent; but once caught in the prison of its embrace, there is only the slow poison of forced labour that eats its deadly way into the very heart of their vitality.

In one of these offices off Covent Garden, under a green-shaded lamp that cast its metallic rays on to the typewriting machine before her, sat one of the young lady clerks in the establishment of Bonsfield & Co., a firm of book-buyers. They carried on a promiscuous trade with America and the Colonies, and managed, by the straining of ends, to meet their expenses and show a small margin of profit. You undertake the labour of a slave in Egypt, and run the risk of a forlorn hope when you try to make a living wage in London as your own master. The price of freedom in a free country is beyond the reach of most pockets.

The hour of six had rung out from the neighbouring clocks, yet this girl showed no signs of finishing her work. From down in the street you could see her bent over the machine, her fingers pounding the keys—human hammers monotonously striving to beat out a pattern upon metal, a pattern that would never come. The light from the green-shaded lamp above her, fell obliquely on her head. It lit up her pale, golden hair like a sun-ray; it drew out the round, gentle curve of her face and threw it up against the darkness of the room beyond. So well as it could, with its harsh methods, it made a

picture. One instinctively paused to look at it. A man coming out of the shadows of the Covent Garden Market stopped as he passed down King Street and gazed up at the window.

For five minutes he stood and watched her, assuming, by looking up and down the street when anybody passed him by, the attitude of a person who is waiting for some one.

It is impossible to say whether it is really the woman herself, or a combination of the woman and the moment, which seizes and drags a man's attention towards her. In this case it may have been the combined result of the two. The girl was pretty. In the ray of that electric light, the soft, childish outline of her face and the pale, sensuous strands of her hair were probably lent a glamour such as that given by the footlights. The man, too, was on his way back to companionless chambers. The lower end of Regent Street may be a far from lonely spot in which to take up one's abode; but there is nothing so empty as an empty room, no matter on to what crowded thoroughfare it may look. Say, then, it was a combination of impulses, the woman and the moment—the girl pretty and the man oppressed by a sense of loneliness. Whatever it was, he stood there, without any apparent intention of moving, and watched her.

She was the last, amongst all those workers who could be seen within the lighted apertures of the windows, to leave her post. One by one they performed their weary play of actions, the shutting up of ledgers, the putting away of papers—out went the lights, and a moment later dim figures stole out of the darkened doorways into the drizzling rain, and hurried away into the shadows of the streets. But she still remained, and the man, with a certain amount of dogged persistence, continued to watch her movements. Once he took out his watch, as his impatience became more insistent. Then, with the continual watching of her, the continual sight of her hands dancing laboriously on those keys, the noise of the typewriter at last reached the ears of his imagination. He could hear, above the sounds of the street, that everlasting metallic tapping.

"God! What a life!" he exclaimed to himself.

If there is anything in telepathy; if thoughts, by reason of their concentration, can be borne from one mind to another utterly unconscious of them, then what followed his exclamation might well

have been an example of it. For a moment the girl buried her face in her hands. He could see her pressing her fingers into the sockets of her eyes. Then, sitting upright, she stretched her arms above her head. Every action was expressive of her exhaustion. The glancing at her watch, the critical inspection of the bundle of papers, yet untyped, that lay beside her on the desk; all these various movements were like the gestures of a dumb show. Was she going to give in? From the size of the bundle of papers which she had looked at, there was apparently still a great deal of work left for her to do.

The thought passed across his mind that he would give her until he had counted twenty; if she showed no signs of moving by that time, he decided to wait no longer.

One—two—three—four—she stood up from the desk. He still watched her until he had seen her place the wooden cover over the machine; then he crossed to the other side of the road and began walking up and down the pavement, passing the door of Bonsfield & Co. About every twenty yards or so, he turned and passed it again.

Five minutes elapsed. At last he heard the door of the premises close—the noise of it rattled in the street; then he turned and faced her as she came towards him.

Her head was down; her feet were moving quickly, tapping on the pavement. He prepared himself to speak to her, his hand getting ready to lift his hat. If she had given him half the encouragement that he imagined he required, he would have found courage; but without lifting her head, as though she were utterly unconscious of his presence, she hurried by in the direction of Bedford Street and the West.

Was that to be the end of it? Had he waited that full quarter of an hour in the drizzling rain for nothing? The man of fixed intent is hardly beaten so easily as that. There was no definite evil purpose in his mind. He was caught in that mood when a man must talk to some one, and a woman for preference. The waiting of fifteen minutes in that sluggish atmosphere had only intensified it. The fact that in the first moment of opportunity his courage had failed had had no power to move him from his purpose, or to change the prompting of his mood.

As soon as she had passed him on the pavement, he turned resolutely and followed her.

CHAPTER II

All life is an adventure, even the most monotonous moments of it. It is impossible to walk the streets of London without being conscious of that spirit of the possibility of happenings which makes life tolerable. It was not to feast their eyes upon unknown worlds, or drench their hands in a stream of gold, that the old marauders of England set forth upon the high seas. Assuredly it must have been, in the hearts of them, that love of adventure, that desire for the happenings of strange things which spurred them on to face God in the wind, to dare Him in the tempest, to brave Him even into the unknown.

Some of that instinct, but in its various and lesser degrees, is left in us now. For one moment it rose in the mind of Sally Bishop, as she turned into Bedford Street and directed her course towards Piccadilly Circus. It had crossed her mind in suspicion—the uprush of an idea, as a bubble struggles to the surface—that the man whom she had found waiting outside the premises of Bonsfield & Co. had had the intention in his mind to speak to her as she passed. Now, as she looked sideways when she turned the corner, and found that he had altered his direction—was following her—the suspicion became a conviction. She knew.

In the first realization, the thought of adventure thrilled her. A life, quiet and uneventful such as hers, looks of necessity for its happiness to the little thrills, the little emotions that combine to make one day less monotonous than another. But when, having reached Garrick Street and, looking hurriedly over her shoulder, she found that not only was he still following, but that he had perceptibly lessened the distance between them, the spirit of interest sank—

died out, like a candle snuffed in a gale. In that moment she became afraid.

It is nameless, that terror in the mind of a woman pursued. Yet without it one of the first of her abstract attractions would be gone. Undoubtedly it is the joy of the pursuer that the quarry should take to flight. Would there be any chase without? But long years of study amongst the more advanced of us have made the fact of rather common knowledge. The woman has learnt that to be caught there must be flight, and, in assuming it, she has acquired for herself the instincts of the pursuer. So an army, resorting to the strategy of retreat, is still the pursuer in the more subtle sense of the word. It is this strategy that is cunningly taught in the modern, genteel education of the sex. The virtue of chastity it is called, but over the length of time it has come to be a forced growth; it has altered intrinsically in its composition. Education has learnt to make use of chastity, rather than to acquire it for itself. And, after all, what is it in itself, when the gilt of its glamour is stripped, like tinsel, from the fairy's pantomimic wand?

There is, when everything has been said, only one value in chastity in its ideal sense, so long as we are tied to these conditions of human instinct, and that is in the value that it brings to women. Without it, a woman may be the essence of fascination; she may be the completeness of attraction, but for the need of the race she is undesirable. Without chastity, a woman may be most things to a man, but she cannot be a mother to his child.

Amongst those girls, then, whose desire in life it is to marry, conforming in all ways to the authority of convention, chastity has been taught from the cradle—taught as a means to an end. It is mostly, if not altogether, in the lower middle classes that you will find chastity to be an end in itself. The destructive philosophy of education has not swept out the gentler virtues from them. As yet they have not come under the keen edge of its influence. For their chastity, then, they are interesting; whereas the manufactured virtue of the upper middle class is like the hothouse strawberry—forced in May—a tempting fruit to lay upon a dish, but tasteless, as is wool, between the teeth.

It is this virtue—this real quality, breeding self-respect—that you will find in the mind of Sally Bishop. Here is no strategy of movement, no well-considered campaign. She quickens her steps, and her heart thumps within her, because that virtue, which is her priceless possession, is in danger of being assailed. In the very soul of her is the desire to escape. There are thousands of women whom education has nursed who set the pace as well, whenever a man starts in pursuit; but the course of their flight leads straight to the altar and they run neither too fast, nor too slow, lest by any chance the hunter should weary of the chase. But here you have none of this. The woman is obeying instincts that Nature gave her with her soul. Sally Bishop is pure—the chaste woman. Where men most look for her, she is hard to find.

This journey from King Street to Piccadilly Circus was performed every evening. In Piccadilly she found the 'bus that took her to Hammersmith. It was a pleasurable little journey; she looked forward to it. It amused her to dally on the way, stopping to look in the shop windows. The bright lights lifted her spirits. After a time she had become acquainted with the prints that hung in the print-seller's windows in Garrick Street; they always stayed there long enough to grow familiar. There was also a jeweller's shop in Coventry Street; it sold second-hand silver—old Sheffield-plated candlesticks, cream ewers and sugar bowls; George III. silver tea-services, and quaint-shaped wine strainers—they stood there in the window in profusion. In themselves, for the daintiness of their design, or the value of their antiquity, they did not interest her. She liked the look of them glittering there; they conveyed a sense of the embarrassment of riches which touched her ideas of romance. It was the tray of old-fashioned ornaments, brooches in the design of flimsy baskets of flowers, each flower represented by a different coloured stone—old signet rings, old seals, quaint little figures of men and beasts in silver, sometimes in gold; these were the things that caught her fancy; she pored over them, choosing, every time she passed, some fresh trinket that she would like to possess.

But on this evening in November she did not stop. At the print-seller's in Garrick Street, she hesitated, but one glance over her shoulder sped her onwards. The apprehension most prominent in her mind was that if she continually looked behind her, the man

might fancy she was encouraging him. Once having consciously decided that, she turned no more until she had reached the protection of the fountain in the middle of the Circus. There she stopped and glanced back. He was gone. In all the hundreds of human beings who mingled and churned like a swarm of ants upon an ant-hill, he was nowhere to be seen. With a genuine sigh of relief, she crossed over to the Piccadilly side and walked beside a Hammersmith 'bus, as if slowed gradually down to the regulated place where the conditions of traffic permit vehicles to collect their passengers.

A little crowd of people, like flies upon fallen fruit, clung about the steps of the 'bus as it moved towards its resting-place. She joined in with them, jostled along the pavement by their efforts to secure an advantageous position by the steps. When finally it did come to a standstill and she had reached the conductor's platform, the announcement, "Outside only," met her attempt to force a passage within.

It was still raining—persistent mist of rain that steals a way through any clothing. Should she wait? She had no umbrella. But she had known what it was to wait on such occasions before. The next 'bus would probably be full up inside, and the next, and the next. Twenty minutes might well be wasted before she could start on her way home, and you have little energy left within you to care about a wetting, when from nine o'clock in the morning until six, when it is dark, you have been beating the keys of a typewriter. Your mind demands but little then, so long as you can secure a peaceful oblivion.

So, in the face of others who turned back, she mounted the stairway on to the roof of the 'bus. There she was alone, and, pulling the tarpaulin covering around her, she seated herself on the little bench farthest from the driver. The little bell tinkled twice, viciously—all drivers and conductors are made vicious by a steady rain—and they moved out into the swim of the traffic, as a steamer puts out from its pier.

On bright evenings it was the most enjoyable part of the journey home, this ride from Piccadilly Circus to Hammersmith. From there onwards in the tram to Kew Bridge, it became uninteresting. The

shops were not so bright; the people not so well dressed. It always gave her a certain amount of quaint amusement to envy the ladies in their carriages and motor-cars. The envy was not malicious. You would have found no socialistic tendencies in her. In her mind, utterly untutored in the sense of logic, she found birth to be a full and sufficient reason for possession. But there was always alive in her consciousness the orderly desire to also be a possessor herself. It never led her actually into a definite discontent with her own conditions of life, irksome, wearying, exhausting though she found them to be. But subconsciously within her was the feeling that she was not really meant to be denied the joy of luxuries. That instinct showed itself in many little ways. She was sometimes extravagant—bought a silk petticoat when a cotton one would have done just as well, but, oh heavens! it was cheap! You would scarcely have thought it possible to buy silk petticoats at the price. And no doubt the appearance of the silk was only superficial. But it gave her a great deal of pleasure. When any lady stepped down from her carriage to go into one of those West End shops, Sally always noticed the petticoat that she wore. Women will—men too, perhaps.

But on this dismal evening, when whenever she lifted her head the fine rain sprayed upon her face, there was no pleasure to be found in watching the people in the streets below. Carriages were huddled up in line upon the stands and the coachmen shivered miserably on their seats, the rain dripping in steady drops from the brims of their hats into the laps of their mackintoshes. So she kept her head down, and when she heard footsteps mounting the stairway, approaching her, she held out the three coppers for her fare without looking up. When her mind, anticipating the answering ring of the conductor's ticket-puncher, realized the mistake, she raised her head, then twisted back, electrically, as though some current had been passed through her body. Seated on the bench at the other side of the passage-way, was the man whom she had found in King Street outside the premises of Bonsfield & Co.

Her first thought was to get off the 'bus. She made a preparatory movement, leaning forward with her hand upon the back of the seat in front of her. Possibly the man saw it and had no desire to be foiled a second time. Whatever may have been his purpose, he