The White Satin Dress

BY MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN ANDREWS

A new Lincoln story by the author of "The Perfect Tribute."

"BARNEY, you've rather a problem coming up in that State Police question. Are you going to let the bill go through?"

There were sixteen people at the dinner-table—a table brilliant with crystal and flowers and silver, with tall candles and bright dresses of women. Into one of the spaces of table-talk the question, flung from the far end of the festive board, shot with a crack; everybody heard it, except quite brainless Esther Aspendale, and she buzzed on a moment and then hesitated, bewildered; no one was even pretending to listen to her.

"Oh, did I interrupt something interesting? Oh, I do beg your——"

But nobody listened to that, even. So she stopped; which seldom happened. Two rows of eyes were turned to his excellency, the Honorable Barnwell Gardiner; the papers had been full of the Massachusetts State Police bill, and of its stormy support and stormier opposition; what the Governor of Massachusetts had to say about it was of keen interest to every one, possibly excepting Esther Aspendale. The governor, an athletic, immaculate figure in the best-cut possible evening clothes, sleek of head, bulldog of jaw, alert—and yet oddly wistful—of eye, sat very erect and faced his querying host with a grin. He was entirely aware that the little audience of fifteen rather breathlessly awaited his answer; not his worst enemy or his warmest admirer would ever call the governor unsophisticated, politically or socially. No, not even considering that queer and appealing boyishness, which often and often metamorphosed the keenness of his very brown eyes. He was unaware of that trick of his eyes, uncovering for a second his soul, unaware that the friendliness which not seldom surprised him from old war-horses of politics was a response to that naïve glance. It was there now, the unfitting sweet look as of a kindly boy, as he sat grinning across at Tom Martin, his host. The dinner-party smiled, too, responsively, and waited to see what he would tell, and how much.

That last was easily measured. Nothing. As a fact, he had nothing to tell; in very truth he did not know, even now when the eleventh hour was striking, if or not he was going to sign the bill. It was a crisis in his career; that he recognized; but people in general were not to guess even so much. The governor laughed on top of the grin, a pleasant laugh, composed, assured, light-hearted; none of which he was.

"Tom, if you went into politics you'd be a genius, or else an awful ass, depending on whether you think I'll give up the secrets of my job. Guess again, old son. Am I going to let the Police bill through? It's one of those things no fellow can find out." With friendly malice, laughing more into Tom Martin's eyes, he volleyed a sentence like a

sudden tennis-ball into quite another court. "How did you say you won that big silver cup, Tom? Golf, was it? It makes a corking centrepiece for a dinner, Lily." He was turning now to the hostess, at his left. "Your table's lovely to-night," he said. "I haven't seen this ruby glass before, have I? Where on earth did you pick up such a lot?"

Then Esther Aspendale and the rest were off again on the ear-hammering trot and gallop of mass conversation.

The governor carried on with a bold hand, making gay talk with the beautiful woman on his right as with his best-loved cousin, the hostess, on his left; yet all the time the tactless question of good old Tom rankled in his mind. It was a conundrum pretty nearly filling his mind just now. Across the faces and glitter and movement it seemed to stare at him like the writing on the wall at Belshazzar. Was he going to sign the bill? Was he? The bill setting up a mounted State Police, bitterly needed, bitterly opposed by masses of the working people. His was the decision. What was he going to decide? Suddenly he was aware that lovely Mrs. Shannon had repeated a sentence and was laughing at him good-naturedly, as the lovely can afford to; he pulled himself together with a snap.

The dinner went on, a very gay dinner, which the high spirits and the capital stories of the guest of honor appeared to lead in the way it should go, and then, behold the successful evening was over; by ones and twos and threes the guests, and their bass and soprano cheerful last words, had evaporated from the big drawing-room; outside on the gravel the last motor-door had just slammed; a shower of merry talk inside the car was sliced off by the slam, and the busy noise of the engine going into second, into high gear, grew fainter; the party was over. It is a pleasant and civilized moment after a dinner when those of the house linger with the exhilaration of the evening, of good food and drink, of friendly laughter and kindly words still in the veins.

"The gayest party you've ever given, and that's saying a lot," Nina Windloss had said, and Jack backed her up.

"Such food! How do you ever get such food?" demanded Jack.

"Tom's cocktails are too marvellous," Sammy Bailey put in.

Lily came smiling back to her husband and her cousin, the governor, when she had had a last word with the butler and sent word to the cook that the dinner was perfect. The human seven-eighths of Lily never forgot these people who worked faithfully in the background weaving her bright tapestry.

"Did you have a good time at your party, Barney?" She put her hand through the arm of the distinguished cousin, and slid slim fingers into his; she was very fond of this great man, very tender toward him; she knew more than one side of his much-envied career. The boyishness, the wistfulness behind the bulldog jaw were the qualities which registered most for her in his Excellency. "His Excellency, Barney," she murmured, smiling as he went on to say pleasant things. "You always were a blarney, Barney," she smiled at him. And then: "Now it's time for Wee Willie Winkie. We're all going to bed, though you two seem not to know it," she announced.

"Do let Barney have a quiet pipe and a drink with me, Lil." Tom never wanted to go to bed; not ever.

"No." Lily was firm. "Barney's tired. He's been making speeches and

making trains, by the skin of his teeth; he'll be here to-morrow; you're golfing with him at ten. Don't be a pig. You do want to go to bed, precious Barney?"

"I do that," the governor agreed with heartiness. "I've had a gorgeous time at my party, but I'm dog-tired from politicians and things. Bed sounds good, and golf to-morrow heavenly."

"Tom, sit still. *I'm* going to take Barney to his room. I've secrets to tell him—how I always was in love with him, and such."

Tom's eyes followed his woman as she led her cousin by the hand like a sleepy child, out into the hall and up the dark oak stairs. Amused, proud eyes. "My cat certainly has the longest tail," Tom Martin's eyes said; quite comfortably well he knew with whom his wife had always been in love.

Two or three lights glowed in the low-ceilinged place as the cousins came to the door of the room.

"It's a fascinating old house, Lily."

The governor halted to gaze in. The wide mahogany French bed had a sweep of rolled head and foot; the two priceless high-boys of carved mahogany gleamed with plum-colored shadows and silvery lights and intricate brass handles; chintzes flowered gaily; a wood-fire burned, orange and gold, behind a battered, polished old brass fender; embroidered linen sheets turned back invitingly; a row of books on the bed-table were multicolored like an oriental rug. A jade-shaded lamp lighted them.

"It's too peaceful to be true," the governor spoke dreamily. "They can't get at me till day after to-morrow. Blessed be thirty-six hours. You're a good piece of work, Lily." He bent to kiss her good night, but as he straightened she clung, her face at his ear.

"Barney, dear old Barney—it ought to bring you sweet dreams. This was Alice's room."

The governor seemed suddenly a frozen statue of a man; not a muscle of him stirred. Lily stood away from him, startled. "I haven't hurt you? You know I haven't seen you since—Alice died, but I thought——"

"It's all right," he spoke, and his face, if full of pain, was yet more full of gentleness. "Of course I'll love to be—in Alice's room. You mean——"

"I mean it was her room when you met her here, that house-party, twenty-one years ago. When you fell in love. It was up to this room she came nights to—dream about you. You made her so blissful, Barney; it ought to be joy to remember that."

"Nothing's joy without her," the governor spoke roughly. Then: "Sometimes it comes like a tidal wave—it seems as if I couldn't possibly stand it. Without her. Without hope of having her again."

"What?" The word was horrified. "You don't mean, Barney—you believe—there is no future life? That we never get our own back?"

He shook his head. "I can't get it across. If I could! I could bear living. I'd be—even happy. But there's nothing to prove it. If once—just once—I could see with my own eyes anybody from out beyond there—I'd believe. If anybody at all—were possible—then Alice might be."

"But people have seen—them," reasoned Lily.

The governor's head shook again in dissent; his cousin had a flash of thought of the stubbornness connoted by the bulldog jaw. "People," he repeated. "People—yes. What's evidence? If you were a lawyer you'd know the amazing

unreliability of it. And books. I never could believe—books. I had to see for myself. It's congenital; I can't be otherwise. I never wished to be otherwise, except—now. I'd lay down the rest of my life, now, if I could once see a proper spook—one I had to believe true. Then I might feel that perhaps—that likely—Alice—Alice and I might"—his voice rasped—"might have each other again." He finished with an effort.

A silence crammed with vibration of emotion. Then Lily Martin bent, and held the man's hand to her mouth. He got control of himself first. "I haven't any business to tear you to pieces, Lily," he said, a trifle shakily. "I'm a hell of a guest—and you and Tom—so good to me—and that bully party. Dear of you to give me Alice's room, too. I love having it. You go to bed now, that's a good child."

Lily tried to twist to commonplace, but she whimpered. "You see, Barney, we're going to make over this part of the house; tear down partitions and change it a bit. It's rickety, so we have to. But I thought you'd like to sleep here—it's the same chintzes and furniture—everything. I thought you'd like to sleep here while it was the same."

Gardiner's voice was harsh. "I do like it. I love it. Go away, dear girl."

He kissed her quickly, as if a second might break thin self-command; then she was outside his closed door.

The governor turned the key and the bolt as if to assure himself of solitude. He wheeled and stood back, staring across at the bed as if he could see there slim lines of a woman, a gold head on the pillow. "Alice, Alice," he whispered, and any one who might have seen him gasping for breath would have known that the tidal wave of which he had spoken was on him. She had lain there, a tiny pillow cuddled into her neck the way he came afterward to know well, and, as Lily had said, she had dreamed there of him. He cried out in the torture of missing her. What sense was there, when two people adored each other, in some God far off who highway-robbed one of them from the other? "We weren't hurting anybody," he whispered. They had been perfect playmates, perfect comrades in all weathers, through bright days and dark—and there had been dark. Bob had died, sweet eight-year-old Bob, loving, quaint, manly little Bob, their first child. Blessed Bob; it had nearly killed both of them. But they had borne it together—had that infinite comfort of each other. Oh, yes, there had been troubles; money troubles and political troubles; strenuous times. But Alice's gold head had always been held high; she had fought his battles, and braced him to fight, laughed at him if he pitied himself, counselled him, in her direct, clear-headed way, loved him, sworn by him; it was like an army with banners just to look at her steadfast eyes. He remembered how he had always looked at them, the last thing, if she was there when he made a speech; the look was a stirrup-cup to set him on his journey.

> "The heart that, like a staff, was one
> For mine to rest and lean upon,
> The strongest on the longest day
> With hourly love, is taken away—
> And yet my days go on, go on."

The words sprang out of his memory; it was exactly that. And now—gone for good. What sense was there in letting his "days go on"?

A manner of numbness stole over him, dulling the terror of emotion which had drowned him. He flung across the room with an impatient half-

word and opened his bag. Thank Heaven Lily didn't let her servants unpack for him; he hated hunting his belongings through strange cupboards. On top of a masculine medley of shirts and golf clothes was a short Smith & Wesson .38-calibre pistol, a heavy wicked lump of steel; he usually carried that along. Some time a tidal wave might get too choking. Yet at the worst he had not yet been tempted to do that, for some unphrased reason. What reason? A reluctance not to play the game, maybe. The "unconquerable soul" maybe, objecting to own its conquest. And, maybe—maybe one did not entirely believe what one said—just now to Lily. Maybe one was not so sure that death ended everything; maybe one did have a hope that personality survived, that just possibly—some time—somewhere—he and Alice——

With a shake as of a huge dog shaking off water, he tried to rid himself, physically, of the creeping ecstasy of the thought; he would *not* let wild dreams swamp common sense. There was nothing to prove future life; hearsay, the age-long desire of humanity; a superstition of the ignorant; a weakness of the wise; he would not be fooled.

Yet Ned Rogers had said something—the bishop, his classmate at Yale—Ned had said human mentality was not the last word, that a quality called faith was built fundamentally into existence, without which most of the common mental progress, not to say spiritual idealism, of civilization would go blooey; with which one might in the ultimate end catch hold of possibilities ahead of any mere lumbering brainwork. Mental proof was beside the point of a whole world of reality—Ned Rogers said. The governor remembered what he had answered the bishop in that black hour:

"You're an old dear, Ned, but it doesn't mean a thing to me what you say; it's all indefinite and I'm in definite agony. I want Alice. The most hellish toothache would be sweet joy to the way I want her. And if I might be going to find her in some vague heaven, some vague time, which I don't believe, that wouldn't satisfy me. I want her *now*. Here. It's such foolishness to let Alice die—Alice. You know, Ned—it's *Alice*. The most vital, most alive creature ever. What kind of a God lets that happen, Ned?"

The bishop had stared at him sorrowfully. "I think it'll get across to you some day, Barney. It's my fault I can't make you get it. I'd give a lot if I could. I can't; I'm limited. But some day something is going to happen that will be like going over a mountain top and seeing the ocean. It's been there all the time and you didn't stand high enough to get it; some day you'll get it."

The governor, wandering about the room, unconscious of his wandering, came to the line of books, titles up, standing between two bronze, heavy, miniature-ship book-ends on his bed-table. Light shone from the green lamp, and he bent, with the instinct of a man who cares about books, to read the names. And in a moment straightened, knowing that the letters that his eyes saw made no record in his brain. He had read six or so gold-printed titles, and could not have told one. He smiled grimly. "Queer thing, a brain," he murmured, and then: "I'd better sharpen mine. I have to use it to-night."

The signing or vetoing of the State Police bill was close on him; he had in fact bought these two days at his cousin's house in Loudonville with the resolve to make, during it, his decision. Free for thirty-six hours from politi-

cians and routine and state affairs; relaxed in country peace and surrounded by old affection, in that atmosphere of a woman's care and gentleness to which he was very susceptible and which he no more had—with this background he believed his problem would be simplified. Also there was an unphrased thought floating in the back of his brain: in this place where he had first known his wife, a place associated with her, where she had loved to be, might not Alice's direct vision come to him? She had been often a wise adviser in his public life; she looked so straight at a complicated argument that the complications, by her honest magic, divided, shifted to one side or the other, and shortly one might weigh a bundle of reasons in either hand and know which weighed most. She saw so straight; would not that gift of hers descend on him here, in the peaceful air which was soaked with her personality? He did not phrase it so far, but so the feeling existed in his mind. He would decide the State Police bill here, and Alice—who was gone into nothingness—Alice would help him. He dropped into a deep chair and, wrenching his brain from paralyzing thoughts, placed before him the question of the bill. It was simple enough in the reading:

"An act to amend the Executive Law in relation to creating the department of State Police and defining the powers and duties of its force and making an appropriation therefor: Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled and by the authority of the same, as follows:"

He read through all the formal wording, to put his mind in tune with the meaning which the formal wording set forth. It was a large meaning to him: it carried in all probability success or failure for his entire career in the big game of politics which was his affair. He had been Governor of Massachusetts for one year, the allotted term in that State. An election was due soon; he wanted to be elected again; wanted it more tremendously than he had wanted anything since his wife's death three years ago. The absorbing demands of the office; its vast responsibilities; the play of mind on mind; the tumult and the fighting; associations always important, always new, of worth-while people, all this filled his days with exhilaration to exhaustion, and all this dulled consciousness of his wrecked personal life. He wanted to be elected again very much indeed; it would be like snatching the blade from a skilled swordsman in the middle of a battle, if he should fail. The combat was in his blood now, and he felt that nothing would be left if he could not carry the election. It depended, likely, on the position he took as to the bill before him. He knew without doubt that a State Police was sorely needed to control increasing crime in country districts, to awe a secret, powerful criminal contingent; to keep traffic safe; only troopers, a mounted State Police, a body of men with high standards and without fear, could do this for the commonwealth, as such had done it for other commonwealths, and had done it *par excellence* in Canada. He was eager to give this organization to his State as a mile-stone marking his administration, but against the plan a hue and cry had been raised by practically all the working people of the population.

"You're plotting a bodyguard for the millionaires, you're planning to make us helpless; to control our strikes; to Cossack us out of our rights."

That was the cry of the opposition:

against that cry, so far, all friendly reasoned explanation had been useless. The "bug" of the disease known as scare had caught and spread among workers, a crowd psychology was pushing against the bill. "Sign that bill, governor," his campaign manager had said to him, "and before the ink's dry, you're a private citizen."

Gardiner sat motionless in the silent room, and the fire on the hearth burned and fell apart and blazed up and burned on, an hour, two hours, till it burned out, and only red coals lay among ashes and charred ends. The room grew chilly, and he did not notice; his eyes were wide and bright and his teeth bit at his lower lip as he considered, recapitulated, weighed. Was it right to veto the bill now, to let it go till he might better prepare the minds of the people, make them see right values, let them come to it willingly? That way lay re-election, his heart's desire. Was it not the wiser way? The bill was Fairfield Harrison's bill, his young brother-in-law, in the State senate; that point would be against him. Fairfield was of the millionaire class; it would be said all the more that the governor was playing their game. Good politics, ambition, common sense itself seemed to demand a veto of this firebrand bill. On the other hand:

"The State needs it; it's a good bill; it's the best gift I could make to my people," the man spoke into silence.

There was almost anarchy in wilder, mountain parts of the State; there was banded outlawry rivalling old Kentucky; innocent people were being shot down by thugs; troopers without fear, armed by the law with authority and force, were the only answer. Should he dare postpone the answer, and waste yet more innocent lives?

Over and over, in the night silence, he reviewed such facts, such arguments. And suddenly was aware that his tired brain was refusing to function further, that words were repeating themselves without connoting ideas; he was desperately sleepy.

"I'm doing no good," he considered. "I've got to have sleep. The night brings counsel," and set about getting ready for bed.

But when the lights of the low-ceilinged room were snapped off, a sea of white gold all at once possessed the place, and the governor stood a moment between the bed and a broad window and stared out at the moonlight and orchard tops and the dark valley below. A single belated car of two flaming eyes ran howling along the metal road a half-mile away, and the man thought how from this old house, when it stood here new, a hundred and fifty years gone, some late watcher had stared, likely, of a midnight out of this same window, at the distant rough highway, and would have believed himself raving even to dream such a sight as those racing headlights, such a sound as that squealing horn. With a pang he thought too: "Even when Alice was here—twenty-one years ago—few motors then." He laid his head on the pillow with her name crowding out the difficult debating of the last hours. Then, to his own surprise, he spoke aloud, almost from sleep:

"If I could see once, only once, a proper indubitable ghost—anybody, anybody at all—so it's a true ghost, I'd believe—the out-beyond—Alice and I —" His half-articulate words trailed into sleep.

It was about half past one of the autumn morning when the governor went to sleep. Two hours later, as he knew afterward, he was suddenly alertly

awake. There was a vital reason that he should be awake. Before his eyes opened he knew this, but he did not know or ask the reason. His eyes opened. The sheet of moonlight had travelled across his bed and stood, a panel of brilliance on the side away from the window. Framed in this brightness, as Gardiner's lids slowly lifted, he saw a figure. A man; a man's trousers defined bony, long legs— The sleepy eyes opened more; the governor caught a sharp breath; what was a huge raw-boned man doing at his bedside, in the night? His look travelled up. His chin lifted as his head pushed back into the pillow to allow his vision to range higher—to the face of the gigantic intruder. He saw the face. An intake of breath whistled from his mouth. A second he lay and stared; then with a spring was sitting up in the bed, supporting his body on the palms of his hands, staring yet upward, at that unmistakable face, sculptured on moonlight.

"My God! Abraham Lincoln!"

The loud words exploded, shocking to his own ears the deep quiet. The great rugged face gazed down, the deep eyes met his eyes; there was power, protection, warming in that look, and Gardiner no more doubted the actual presence than he had doubted Lily Martin's the night before. It was impossible, but it was so; Abraham Lincoln stood by his bed, and somehow counselled him. The time was too short to know what was the counsel—it was a huge throb of certainty, but not of definition. With that the door of moonlight was empty. Gardiner was sitting in his bed, holding himself yet on his hands, and he knew without a shadow of turning that a spirit had come from over the line, and subconsciously he was sure that the message he was due to have would come also. With a manner of caveman cry, the fashion of expression which happens to us, from back of civilization, when primitive depths are stirred, he threw his legs to the floor and reached for the electric button, and, reaching, knocked over the row of books on the bed-table. Down they crashed in a cascade; then the light was on; the man stared about, searching to see, somewhere in the room—Lincoln. He had been there three minutes ago; he did not question that, he knew it. But the room was empty; the fire was gray ashes; the air was cold. The governor looked at his watch; ten minutes after three; early morning. He found slippers and a dressing-gown; then saw the tumbled books on the floor and stooped to pick them up. The "Oxford Book of English Verse"; Edna St. Vincent Millay's last volume—Lily knew he liked poetry; the latest "Book of the Month," rather dull but painstakingly modern; Beveridge's "John Marshall"; and, look!—Lily had chosen the books, for Lily knew his hero-worship of Lincoln—a collection of Lincoln's speeches. He held the sprawling leaves in his hands, staring at the title, and glanced up as if the person who had made these sentences, who had stood close just now—as if he really must yet be about. His heart pumping as if climbing steep hills, he smoothed the page and examined. The signature at the bottom, "A. Lincoln"; not far above it a sentence which separated itself; it might have been printed in red type, it so hit his eyes, this sentence:

"Hew honestly to the line; let the Lord take care of the chips."

Gardiner closed the book and placed it on the table and sat down. He had got his message. A sense of leisure pervaded him; the load was lifted; his decision

ıbout the State Police bill was made. Why, surely. Lincoln, the statesman, he incorruptible, the American, had ourneyed across the border in the dawn –how sent the Lord only knew, but ıe had come—to tell another perplexed ımerican statesman what to do. This ıne would do it. Hewing to the line ıeant one thing, to decide by one's onscience. All at once there was no diemma. He saw the question as Alice vould have seen it, as Abraham Lincoln would, in terms of honesty on one ıde, of policy on the other. Both Houses f the Legislature had passed this good ·ill; he would not veto it; he would sign :. That was that. Election, popularity vith the working people, his future caeer—"Let the Lord take care of the hips." Those things were chips, the ord's affair, not his; his affair was to eep his hands clean. The State Police ill would be signed.

Smiling, he put "de noses er de hunks togedder" in the dark fireplace; lames sprang cheerily; sitting by them ıe thought over the event of the night, ts thrill yet in his veins. Now he knew vhat Ned Rogers, the bishop, had ıeant when he tried to describe faith. t could not be described any more than ir, but it was as real and as important. Never could he prove to any one that Lincoln had come in the night and set-ed a political question for him; but he ad. He knew it; human mentality, as Rogers had said, was not the last word; roof was not all of belief; there was an ocean made of intangible stuff called aith, and he stood high enough now, y some mysterious lifting, to look over he iron mountains of reason and glimpse that sea. It sounded like foolishess; yesterday it would have been foolshness to him; to-day he knew.

Yet it was a thing easy to explain away. He remembered how he had bent over the row of books and read the titles; it was easy to explain that one at least of those names which he believed had not registered in his brain had caught there—"Speeches by Abraham Lincoln." Easy to explain that the tired brain, twisting still in sleep at its tangled problem, had constructed out of that subconscious registry a theatrical answer to the problem. That was what everybody on earth would say, what Gardiner himself would have said yesterday. Perfectly natural to say it, except when, as in his case, one knew otherwise.

Pale gray of morning drifted like dreams into the room; birds began to chirp sleepily; leaves rustled in a chilly wind; the man sat by the fire and went over and over the short minute of drama just past. Why, *par example,* should Abraham Lincoln travel from eternity to boost him, one governor of one State out of forty-eight, over a bad jump? At that, why Lincoln? Why not Washington or King Alfred or Moses? What had Lincoln to do in this galère, in Lily's quiet old house? If Alice had come— And at that a shock of joy caught him like a blow in the face; he had not realized the largest significance of that visit of the night. He had said that if he could see one, only one, soul from the unknown land, he would believe in the thing unbelievable, a future life. Lincoln had come, was alive, was an identity; why not Alice? God! Why not? His face turned dark red as the blood jumped violently. It was Lincoln —it all turned on that—and he knew beyond need of proof, he *knew* it was Lincoln. He could never tell any one; not even Lily, for not even Lily would understand. But he did not need to tell any one; this thing was his own, and a

fact. Being so, life and eternity shifted. He would have Alice again; he did not now doubt it. Doubled up in his dressing-gown over the fire, the first sunshine of a bright morning touching him, dancing around him, the governor adjusted himself to a titanic experience and a new radiant outlook. After a while he went back to bed, for it was too early yet to dress, and lay awake, smiling. Then he spoke aloud:

"But, Alice darling, why should you stay away and pick Abraham Lincoln out of the mass of the departed to be your messenger?"

To that, no answer; so he dropped into a child's deep sleep for two hours more.

When a dinner at the Somerset Club in Boston was to be arranged for the newly re-elected Governor of Massachusetts, three months later, the president of the club made oration to the guest of honor as follows:

"You're fed up, governor, with politicians and Captains of Industry. If you'll let us have an evening, we will give you, instead of important affiliations, a perfectly good time. I'll seat you between the two most attractive dinner men in America; of course you'll be at my right."

The governor chuckled. "It's settled; I'll come. And I don't care who's your running mate."

"He's yet to be picked, but I'll use judgment," stated the president, who, in fact, did rank as best company in high circles of good company. "It won't be, likely, anything useful in public life; merely the most charming fellow alive; I have my eye on him, I believe. You know I'll first have to hold forth about you and the miracle you've put across, throwing away your election by signing an unpopular bill and then finding that the honesty of the State had risen to meet your honesty, and that you were elected after all. I'll have to talk about that a bit. Most unheard-of political performance."

"Tommy-rot," said the governor. "Just one of the queer things that happen. But you couldn't keep me away from this dinner with an axe." He grinned with his boyish friendliness.

As, three weeks later, fifty or sixty men sat down at a vast round table the new governor glanced about at the faces fitting—as chairs scraped and men found their allotted seats—into the great circle; he listened with a satisfied ear to trained, well-bred voices. A picked lot; the cream of brains and breeding of the country. It flashed to him what the president of the club had said about the man on his other hand "merely the most charming fellow alive"; he turned to see a lean, dark face carved with thought, brilliant with life, experience, mind. "Not overstated I'm guessing," he commented to himself on the president's promise. One must like this chap, just to look at him one did; everybody did. There is no use trying to describe charm. It has many side qualities, to any of which it is often ascribed, but it is independent of qualities; it is charm. One may be ugly, illiterate, and common, and have it; it happens. This man had stunning good looks and intellect and breeding, and the charm of him made one forget all of that. Nothing mattered except that something about him which made it a delight to be with him.

"You're from Albany?" the governor asked. "You know, of course, the Loudonville people. I've a cousin there

Mrs. Tom Martin. I was stopping at her house not long ago."

"Surely," said the other. "I know them well, Tom and Lily. I was asked to meet you that night. I was not in town. I felt defrauded to miss you. By the way, have you heard from them since they made over the old house lately, six weeks or so ago?"

"Why, no," answered the governor. "Lily is a bad correspondent."

The other man settled deeper into his chair and laughed delightedly, a contagious manner of laughter which was part of his hold on everybody, anybody.

"There's a treat coming to me," he stated. "I'm about to have the satisfaction of telling you as good a ghost-story as any old house ever produced."

"Ghost-story." inquired the governor quickly.

"No," said the other. "Not exactly, for the ghost's lacking; but the stage is marvellously set. I'll tell you about it. Do you remember the large bedroom at Tory Trees' which is above Tom's library?"

"I slept there."

"You did? And you didn't see a ghost?"

The governor said nothing; he listened.

"Well, you see, six or seven weeks ago they took that room to pieces; plaster was falling, woodwork cracking; they had to do radical things to save it. When the east wall was being stripped of paper a workman called Lily.

" 'There's a double partition in here, Mrs. Martin,' the man said. 'There's a sort of closet between, and I found a dress hanging up in it. It looks old. I thought you'd better see about it.'

"Lily was surprised. 'A dress?' she asked. 'I don't know anything about a dress in that place. We have lived here thirty years. Mr. Martin's father lived here twenty-six before us; I never heard of a dress in there. Or a closet.'

"She hurried to the room. Sure enough, there was a shallow space near where the bed had stood. A charming old room—you remember?"

The governor nodded.

"There had evidently been a closet: there were rows of hooks, and nothing on them but this one dress. Lily lifted it carefully, for it was evidently very old, and carried it into her own room and laid it on the bed; gone yellow, of course, but it had been a handsome white satin ball-dress, with a wreath of artificial roses and lilacs across the front; the roses were not very rosy, and the lilacs dusty with years, poor things. But what struck Lily at once and most was a lot of dark stains, some big and some a mere spatter on the skirt. They seemed creepy to her, she said, those stains; she beat her brains to think what they were and why the old dress should have been hung long ago in that secret place. The wall was papered over, door and all; fit to conceal it till doomsday. She couldn't find a theory; so she put the haberdashery into a guest-room and showed it to a few people, but no one could drum up an explanation. One day I went out to 'Tory Trees' for lunch and, as I like old things, Lily took me up to see her ghost-dress. And somehow I hit on an answer. I got very much of a thrill out of that answer."

The dark, brilliant, visionary eyes of the "most charming fellow alive" met the governor's eyes. Then the voice went on:

"Do you remember the details about Lincoln's assassination?" the vibrating voice inquired.

"Lincoln?" Gardiner started. And then: "I do, yes."

"The theatre-party, at Ford's Theatre. The President and Mrs. Lincoln first invited General and Mrs. Grant to go in the box with them, you remember?"

"Yes," said Gardiner.

"The Grants failed. They were going out of town. So the Lincolns cast about for two attractive people and hit on a young officer, well known in Washington, and his half-sister. These were asked, and came, and were in the Executive box when Wilkes Booth fired his shot, and—you see? The stains on the old dress were—Lincoln's blood."

"But"—the governor shot the word at him—"but, why the dress—in Loudonville—walled up? Where does it connect?"

"The old house—Lily's house—belonged to the girl's family. No secret about that; everybody in Loudonville knows that; Lily and Tom, of course, know it. Tom's father bought the house from the family. The girl was probably distracted as to what to do with that dress, with those terrible, almost sacred stains. She should have burned it up, but she didn't. Instead she brought it home— All this is just my theory, but I know it's so. Likely she agonized over it and its dreadful memories, and somehow, some time, she got it walled up."

The raconteur stopped with a dramatic gesture and stared at the governor. A wonderful audience, the governor; his eyes burned like lamps, listening; one had heard that he was temperamental; part of his strength and of his weakness.

"Of course there's no proving my explanation," went on the story-teller. "It's only my theory, but I'd risk my life it's the right one. What else, possibly? The dress was there, hidden; the stains were there; and the girl who lived in that house had been through that historic scene."

"You're right. There's no question," pronounced the governor, and his voice was harsh and dominant. "Your theory is right."

The other looked up quickly at the inflection of assurance. "You know? How do you know that, governor? Did a ghost tell you?"

The governor was silent a moment. Then he spoke: "Considering the hole I was in over our State Police bill at that moment"—he spoke with a laugh that shook a little—"it really was up to any ghost of Abraham Lincoln within hail to answer the S. O. S. of a hard-put American. Don't you think so?"

Temperamental himself to the nth power, quick-visioned, almost a sensitive, the club president's best guest thrilled suddenly at the vibration of some experience which he might never know in words, which he did not need words to apprehend. A little he glimpsed through the ether which divides unlike and unites kindred spirits; his brain sang, answered like a wind-harp, to the gusts of the governor's brain reconstructing a dim room, a panel of moonlight, a face intimate to Americans. He could not know, this guest, this flower of Americanism, the message which had come from the open book on the floor which was not less a message for its delivery through modern print: "Hew to the line; let the Lord take care of the chips." But the governor was reliving the experience, and his neighbor, high strung, psychic, got the atmosphere and well-nigh the fact as if many words had told him.

"Wasn't it—a duty—if a ghost of

Abraham Lincoln—maybe—was hovering about that place—where his mortal blood still existed—to help an American—a leader of the people—who was fighting through—to— Don't you think so?" shot the governor, ending his incoherent sentence explosively. His face was aflame and his boyish, honest eyes, bared, with that lifelong, unsuspected trick of them, his whole soul.

The two men stared into each other's faces. And understood.