

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BLUE GHOST

By DON MARK LEMON

THIS is a message from the Beyond, sketching my brief experience as a blue ghost, and nowhere have I dyed any of the plain sober gray stuff of actual events in the bright hues of my own vivid imagination, for I hold that those things which are set down exactly as they took place are the most valuable of human transcriptions. They leave the mind free to judge for itself, without prejudice or bias, except its own prejudice and bias, which is the highest freedom and truth.

Names, dates, events, herein are all genuine, and my tombstone in Greenwood Cemetery is a silent yet sure witness that I died. A bill of seventeen dollars and eighty cents still standing against the stone testifies that, though dead, my credit yet lives. And that I am alive as a ghost can not be disputed by any reasonable mind, since there are things set down here too ghostly to have been set down by any hand but that of a ghost. I leave it to an unprejudiced jury of six men and six ghosts.

Enter at the main gate of Greenwood Cemetery, pace off fifty-four steps to the north, turn west seven steps, vault the fence here and pace twenty steps north, and read on my tombstone

**"Sacred to the memory of
Robert Jay Tuffey
Born April first, 1880
Died April first, 1919
Rest in peace."**

But I didn't rest in peace very long, for the ghost of a man named Edwin X. Benjamin came along shortly after my funeral, and almost on the heels of my last mourner, a little tailor from lower Fifth Street, and kicking with his ghostly feet on my brand-new tombstone shouted for me to "come out of it" and pay him the ten dollars that I had honestly forgotten I owed him.

Besides, he didn't need the money, while several others to whom I honestly owed more than ten dollars did need their money. I called back for him to fetch me out of it, for it was the first

time I had died in quite a while and I couldn't recall just how to resurrect myself from the papier mache coffin in which my loving friends had buried me, and I was afraid unless I was very careful that I might resurrect myself wrong and there would be the devil to pay.

He shouted down some directions, which I followed, and soon my ghost was standing beside Benjamin's ghost. He was a blue ghost too, only bluer than myself, and looked kind of fuzzy around the edges, like a raveled ghost, but more like a hazy transparent silhouette of his former self. I could look right through him and see several tombstones beyond.

I stared about the quiet graveyard, then exclaimed: "Why, I'm not dead! This isn't hell!"

The ghost of Benjamin, that I will call Ben for brevity's sake, gave a short nasty laugh, as he replied: "No, not yet; you haven't been here long enough."

I felt quite weak, being only just born as a ghost, and taking a few steps I sat down on a stone and stared at a tombstone. Suddenly I gave a gasp, for on the tombstone were the words:

**"Ohing Lung Hi
Born January ninth, 1882
Died July seventh, 1918"**

"It's a Chinaman's grave!" I yelled. "And my grave next door to it!"

Ben yawned. "Sure! This is the Chinese addition to Greenwood."

"There's going to be a lawsuit over burying me in a chink graveyard," I scowled.

"There was a lawsuit," said Ben. "The Chinese company who owns this section of the cemetery got a judgment of two hundred dollars and costs against your undertaker for burying you here."

I looked hard at Ben and saw he meant it, so I decided to drop my lawsuit and start something else rolling to bring me in a few dollars.

"How did you get here?" I asked Ben, looking about and seeing no Ford, and wishing for something on wheels

that would spare me the trouble of traveling afoot, for I did not propose to spend the balance of my ghostly existence in a Chinese graveyard.

Ben brought a hazy-looking bicycle from behind a tombstone. "On my bike, of course."

"Can a ghost ride a bike?" I asked. "Ghost bikes," replied Ben. "This is the mechanical ghost of my old bike, and it's all right except its make and action and a puncture in the back tire. I was coming across the path there when I punctured it on the tooth of a dead Chinaman that had worked out of the ground. Just my blame blue luck!"

For twenty years, while alive as boy and man, Ben had ridden the same bike, with a racing saddle about the size of a parcel post stamp, and now his ghost was riding the ghost of that bike. This is what I would call habit wedded to economy, but flirting with parsimony.

"Any room for me on the handle bars?" I asked.

Ben looked hurt and, getting on the bike, started off. I ran after him and begged him to give me a few tips about ghostland, to put me wise to the tricks that are ghostly and the wiles that are beyond the grave.

"Anyway, tell me, am I here to stay?" I asked.

"Did you bring your nerve along?" he demanded.

"Sure," I replied.

"Then, we'll never shake you." With this, he rode away and left my young ghost standing in the center of that Chinese graveyard.

I was a blue ghost, and I felt it. I looked myself over and found I was blame poor stuff. I stuck a finger through myself sideways and pulled it out, and nothing came out of myself but my finger. It didn't hurt either, except for a brief pain in my finger. All there was to me was a kind of hazy blue outline and the consciousness of my identity as Robert Jay Tuffey. I seemed to be just identity—just Bob

Tuffey, and that hazy blue outline, which didn't much matter.

I considered: "Well, identity is all we are, anyway, unless one has personality, and that is just a little more of the same stuff as identity, only more troublesome so. As long as I have my identity what's the difference about my shape. It would be unpleasant to have just shape and no identity, like a stout, unconscious lady, or a balloon."

I sat down on a gravestone to grow a bit, for I was but a few minutes old.

"Confound Ben!" I meditated. "Why couldn't he have waited and introduced me in decent ghostly society? Perhaps he didn't know of any and was ashamed to introduce me to his ghost friends. He never reformed while alive as a man, why should he have reformed after he was dead and a ghost?"

"Chong ching! chong lo!"

"Chuck! Muck a chuck!"

"Hi!"

I looked about me in some alarm, then my blue outline began to creep with a ghostly fear. For seven yellow ghosts came up from the grave where I was seated and squatted about me in a circle. These were not mere outline ghosts, either, like myself, but must have been older ghosts that had taken on substance and solidity with the ghostly years. But what substance! A kind of thick flaccid, yellow quivering gelatine that made me want to yell every time they moved and shook themselves, like soft custards or semi-liquefied frogs.

"What do want with me?" I asked.

"All same we wash your laundry when we were live Chinamen," replied the fattest ghost.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "So you are some of my old Chinese laundrymen who did up my shirts. Well, boys, I'm glad to see you. I was just coming around to pay you, when I dropped dead."

"Hi! we glad to see you too," said the same fat custard. "Now we cut your blame ghost throat!"

"How did you get that way!" I gasped. "I never harmed you!"

"All same you kill all of us," replied the leanest ghost. "You make us seven blame stiffs!"

"Oh, come on boys," I protested. "You've got the wrong Tuffey. I'm Bob Tuffey—Bob J. You remember me now! How's your copperparity segagitating?" I assumed a cheerfulness that I scarcely felt, for I could see that they proposed to do me out of my young, innocent ghostly life.

"All same we know you," nodded the fattest Chinaman. "All same we wash your blame shirts, and every time one

of us wash one of your blame shirts one of us die and go damned!"

"What you die from, boys?" I asked.

"All same your shirts!" they cried.

"And now you dead! Did you wash one of your blame shirts, too!"

"No, I never washed one of my shirts," I replied.

"But you wear them," said the leanest ghost.

"Sure!"

"Then that's why you dead and damned too," nodded the spook-spook.

This seemed to settle in their minds that the washing of my shirts had caused their deaths, and they held an argument as to which one should cut my innocent young throat.

"If it's too difficult for you to decide which one must be the unfortunate party to do the deed, I'll do it myself," I suggested. I had concluded, since I could stick my finger through myself with little unpleasant effect, that I could cut my own throat and not greatly mind.

"We no need help," said one of the yellow custards. "Each of us just crazy to cut your blame throat."

"Say, what was the matter with those shirts of mine that you washed?" I demanded.

"We don't know," they replied unambiguously. "We just die in convulsions few minutes after we wash them."

At last a ghost was selected to cut my throat, and he did the job neatly and with dispatch, with a ghostly hatchet that he drew from his ghostly sleeve. But the act scarcely disturbed my bluish outline, and that only for a moment, then the severed parts closed a little fuzzily but securely. My identity was as good as ever, for nothing seemed to trouble my identity.

I was just as sure of myself as I had always been, boy, man or ghost. Without boating, I may say that I have the most fixed, concentrated identity that I have ever met. Positively rigid.

I now seemed properly initiated into the world of ghosts, for the seven yellow gelatine Chinese ghosts sank back into their grave. I immediately rose and hurried from the cemetery, as a locality unsuited for a young ghost with all ghostland before him, and with an ambition to be a whale of a ghost, with no ghost Jonah inside of him.

I had scarcely left the cemetery when I came on Ben's ghost seated on a rock, swearing at his bicycle. The rear tire had received another puncture.

"Just my blame blue luck!" growled Ben. "It it was raining roof tacks I'd be out on my bike with new racing tires, and the other fellow would be out on a steam roller."

I laughed. "Come, chuck the bike and let's go somewhere that's more exciting."

"Go to hell!"

"Is it exciting?" I asked.

"No, it's deadly tiresome. That's why it's hell."

"Not for me, then! I want something as different from the tedious as rheumatism is from 'rithmetic. What do you say we go to a world where their present is our future, then we'll see what's coming to us."

"I don't want to see what's coming to me," growled Ben. "I've trouble enough now."

"Maybe there's good coming to you," I suggested.

"Then somebody will change the address on the way to me," retorted Ben's ghost. "Or somebody's goat will eat the tag off. But if it's trouble, it's got my address blown in it, and I'll have to pay the freight besides."

"What's that!" I exclaimed, as I heard a voice singing *Annie Laurie* not a rod away, yet could not see so much as a ghost.

"That's Calloway's ghost," Ben informed me. "Calloway lived so pure a life that there was nothing of him to resurrect but song."

"Why is he hanging so closely around the cemetery?" I asked.

"He doesn't seem quite satisfied with being so pure," replied Ben. "He thinks that perhaps he can resurrect a little more of himself than song. Just enough for the lady ghosts to see, for he's very fond of lady ghosts, particularly the athletic; but they want something more definite than song in a gent ghost."

I looked myself over and saw little to take out a patent, copyright, or trade mark on. "What's the difference between a male and female ghost?" I demanded. "I'm nothing but outline and identity anyway."

"Just identity," replied Ben. "That is, with blue ghosts. With green or pink ghosts, or any other color of ghosts than blue, there is a greater distinction than mere outline and identity between the feminine and masculine, but with blue ghosts the distinction lies wholly in the identity. Blue ghosts are the lowest form of ghosts, and it's just my blame blue luck to be compelled to be a blame blue ghost, and have no distinction between myself and an old woman ghost but just my blame blue identity."

"How big is ghostland?" I inquired.

"To hell and back," replied Ben. "There's no limit to the ghost worlds, but there's a limit of a million miles an hour to blue ghosts."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "If I can go a million miles an hour, I will soon have been everywhere and back again."

"I said there's a limit of a million miles an hour, not that you could make a million miles an hour," explained Ben. "You'll need to grow a few days before you can make half that."

"Will I be traveling a half million miles an hour in a few days?" I demanded.

"Perhaps," nodded Ben. "If some ghost sting-ray doesn't meet you and lay her eggs in your neck to hatch out."

I laughed. "That must be a ghost-bait! But I'd believe more of that if I knew less of you."

I angered Ben to be called a prevaricator to his face. "Have it your own fool way," he said. "You'll be lucky if the sting-ray doesn't bore a hole in your identity and lay her eggs there. Only I'd be sorry for the little sting-rays that had to be hatched in your identity."

"What's the most fun a blue ghost can have for nothing?" I asked, for I had just that much in my pocket, but no pocket as yet.

"Roll on the grass and get the ghost hives," replied Ben.

"What are the ghost hives good for?"

"To scratch."

"Is it a pleasure to scratch the ghost hives?"

"The only fun a blue ghost can have is to scratch his hives," replied Ben. "Now, aren't you sorry you died?"

"I couldn't help it," I said. "I was shot."

"But you shouldn't have taken that cow," said Ben.

"Hello! what have we here!" I cried. In another moment I started to run, and not ask any more questions, for I had recognized the thing before me as just a big ghostly human head, seven feet high, and it was reaching for me. If it should close on my poor ghost it would squeeze the very identity out of it.

"Help!" I cried, for the big hand had got me and was squeezing my outline into the shape of a disappointed orruler. But it seemed that nothing could squeeze my identity into any other shape that it was, for it was too rigid.

After the hand had squeezed my outline from all ghostly semblance to a man, it threw me aside and moved on, walking on its fingers, toward the cemetery. I watched it till it was hidden by the tombstones, then I arose on one end of my damaged outline and soon had worked myself back into my former shape, and felt no worse for my amazing experience. My identity seemed even more rigid than ever.

"Was that the ghost of a glad hand?" I asked.

"No, that was the ghost of a milkman," replied Ben. "He milked twenty cows before breakfast for seventeen years, and died suddenly one morning from water on the brain, and now he goes about milking every blue ghost he comes across, and we blame blue ghosts have to stand for it, for blue ghosts have to stand for everything."

"Where was the rest of him?" I asked.

"There isn't any rest of him. He is all hand. Ghostland is full of ghosts that now are all that they were most of while alive as men and women. There are ghosts that are all ears, or nose, or necktie, or haircut. You want to look out for the ghost that's all gall. If he ever spreads himself over you, even your identity will be slightly fused."

Just then a pair of large, bare, very clean, very pink feet hurried by, each about a yard high, and I watched them until they had hurried over the hill, then I sat down and whistled.

"Great Scott!" I laughed. "That must have been the ghost of H. Hurry Scott. He always was in a hurry about something."

"That's Scott's ghost," nodded Ben. "He died in a hurricane."

"From hurry to hurry he hurried himself to hurry out of debt. And but he hurried into a hurricane. He had been hurrying yet."

"I must be half an hour old," I considered. "I guess my crust should be hard enough by now for me to roll onward. Believe me, Ben, I had some crust before I became a ghost."

"I'll go along with you a little ways," Ben offered, pushing his bike along beside me. "There's a ghost dog down the road that always rushes out and bites me in my outline, and he may want a change of outline."

"If he comes after me, I'll change his outline," I laughed. "Say, Ben, do you know of any rich young ghost girl—I mean wealthy, for all girls are rich—who might be willing to marry a handsome blue ghost an hour old?"

"There's a wealthy ghost girl down the road a ways, but she's not very young," replied Ben.

"How old is she—a month?"

"She became a ghost girl the year that Helen was carried off to Troy by Paris. But you'd never guess her age from her looks."

"Now for her looks," I said, holding my ghostly breath.

"She's a triangle, with one blind eye in the center of the triangle."

I waved the temptation to sudden riches aside. "I'd rather work and change jobs so often that it wouldn't seem like real work. But I say, Ben, what makes your bike rattle so?"

"That's the dead Chinaman's tooth, that punctured the tire and got inside. If there was only one dead Chinaman in all the world, and he had only one tooth, that tooth would have worked up out of his coffin and punctured my tire. That's just my blame blue luck."

"But I say, Ben, I thought ghostland was a dim, haunted place, inhabited with ghostly specters and grisly shapes, and your hair stood on end and without any vaseline, and a clammy sweat froze your B. V. D's, to your funked back bone, and your middle name was fear! Then Horror blew out the last candle and you were alone with—"

"With what?" asked Ben.

I sunk my ghostly voice to a ghostly whisper. "The seven dead Chinamen whose throats you had out to rob them."

"How much did you get?"

"Only a pint of little black collar buttons and a lady's back comb with thirteen paste shiners in it," I replied.

"Well, that's something," said Ben.

"I wouldn't have got that much."

Then a faint, phosphorous light came from somewhere in the darkness. I continued. "And I saw a little tree coming up from the ground with something swinging to it, and one of the dead Chinamen arose and watered the tree with blood from his throat that I had cut, and the tree grew higher and higher till it was a large oak, and swinging to it, hanged by the neck until dead, was—"

"What?" asked Ben.

"A human figure—a man with a black hood over his face—and something compelled me, step by step, to approach the tree and remove the hood from over the face of the dead and hanged man, and it was—"

"Yourself," yawned Ben.

"Sure," I nodded. "That's what hurt! There I was, cutting myself down, hanged dead, and only got out of the job a pint of little black collar buttons and a lady's back comb with thirteen paste shiners in it. It was very disappointing."

"Ghostland isn't what it used to be," Ben sighed. "We ghosts used to pull off some pretty shabby stunts. When I was alive as a man and in the yam and bicycle business in Florida, the ghost of a big murdered lunk negro used always to follow me into my bedroom at nights and lock the door behind me, and throw

the key under the bed, and then cut his throat in the mirror. And there I was, locked in with this ghost, and couldn't get the key, and it gave me a worried look that I have never quite got over. I didn't murder that particular negro either, but it was just my blame blue luck that I looked like the fellow who did, and so this negro ghost haunted me."

At this point there was a path leading off from the road, and a sign on the path reading: "No blue ghosts allowed on this path."

"What's this!" I exclaimed. "Have-n't blue ghosts as much right in ghost-land as green or pink ghosts!"

"They've got as much right of another sort," replied Ben. "But not this sort." "Watch me amble down the path," I said.

"Watch me watch you ambling down the path." Ben gave a nasty, economical laugh.

"I'll be too busy ambling to watch you watch me ambling," I retorted, giving a nastier and more economical laugh, for I laughed through my nose, or rather the consciousness of a nose. "Well, good bye, old ghost!"

I took Ben's hand to wish him good-bye and good luck, when something happened that seemed more like light than sound, and it was good-bye to Ben's ghost, for there I stood holding Ben's right hand, and his right hand was all that remained of Ben's late ghost.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "Something unlucky must have happened to poor old Ben."

Then I thought to let go of Ben's right hand, intending to place it on the fence nearby. If he should come back that way he would find his hand hanging there like a lost glove; but the blame blue ghostly hand wouldn't let go of mine!

For a while I ranted around like a young mustang attempting to throw a green monkey clinging to his back, but it was of no use. I had always suspected Ben as having more up his sleeve than his arm, and now I was positive he was that famous character who, as man or ghost, if he once got hold of you would never let go. The rest of him had jumped on that ghost bike and ridden away like a blue streak, but his right hand had remained, clutching my own right hand, like a rusty gopher trap.

This wouldn't do: they might find Ben's hand on me, clinging to me like a terrible retribution, and claim that I had killed him, suspecting that he had some ghostly dollars on his ghostly person, though no human eye, and I am as certain no ghostly eye, had ever discern-

ed his person and twenty-five cents proximate or semi-proximate.

"It will have to wear off like a wart," I said, thrusting my right hand behind me with Ben's right hand still grasping it fast. Then I turned into the path reserved for most anything but blue ghosts.

I didn't see anything peculiar about that path, nor smell anything peculiar, nor hear any peculiar sound, nor even anticipate anything peculiar, but soon I began to feel peculiar. It began in my identity and stayed there, but that was enough. While boy and man I had always been very particular about my identity. My identity had been the only thing I had ever possessed beside a motorcycle and a wrist watch, which between them would run almost an hour, and believe me it was some identity, shading into actual personality at the extreme edge. I was now seized with a kind of uncertain, wobbly sensation in my identity, like a top must feel when it is about come to the end of its spin. This sensation soon became quite unbearable, for I felt as if I were not myself but Ben, while Ben was somewhere back in the distance; and was not himself but me.

It was bad enough to be a blue ghost not two hours old, with the dismembered hand of another blue ghost clinging to one's own hand like a rusty gopher trap, but this was crowding the limit—to be a blue ghost and some other dead man's blue ghost at that! And of all blue ghosts to be Edwin X. Benjamin's unlucky blue ghost!

I gave myself a nasty look and said, "Just my blame blue luck!"

Then I yelled, for I was positive I was Ben's ghost hurrying down that path, while Bob Tuffey's hand was clinging to my hand like a murdered thing.

I quickly decided that path was no place for me, as the sign had said, and I sought to turn back. *But I found I could not turn back!* I had got upon a path where no blue ghost could turn back, and I must continue to go on as another's ghost and not as myself. Continue to go on and leave myself with every step one step further behind.

Did you ever leave yourself behind, compelled to go on as some other man? Leave all your pride of youth and masculine beauty and a dash of everything big, if not holy, and sneak on as a miserable old yam eating, screw-necked sting-ray?

I did! I, the young ghost of Robert Jay Tuffey was that unhappy young ghost! But pity me not, for I'll be hanged if I care for your pity. I still remembered what I had been, though I felt all too keenly what I had become. I

held my head high with pride of my old state, though my heart dragged with shame at my new condition. I looked like young Apollo but I felt like old Lucifer. I flamed without, but I was ashes within.

Yes, my poor ghost had turned into the wrong path and that path was the downward way to hell. I, formerly Robert Jay Tuffey, was now on my way to hell as the miserable ghost of Edwin X. Benjamin, retired Florida yam and bicycle merchant. There was the taste of some sour peanut butter in my mouth, the last dish of which Edwin X. Benjamin had partaken before his hasty demise to escape an advance of three cents the pound on cow's butter.

As I advanced the path grew wider, and after a time its borders began to bloom with primroses, just as the old poet Shakespeare tells of, and who himself often wore one of those primroses in his buttonhole. I plucked a primrose and placed it in my own buttonhole, for with the primroses a buttonhole had been provided me.

I had decided I would give Ben's ghost one hell of a good time. He had always looked as if he had been to hell, but he must have been hurried there through some dark underground passage, for he had none of the wide-glad-way and-primrose-air about him. He had been cheated somewhere along the crowded line of life, but now I would give his ghost a wide swing of the rosy way.

But I had forgotten the cue of destiny, and now destiny rang down the curtain on this glad act and began to shift the scenery to gloom for Ben's appearance on the stage. Yes, I had become Edwin X. Benjamin's ghost and it was just Ben's blame blue luck to miss all this rosy swing that I had promised his poor ghost.

The path suddenly narrowed, the primroses withered, and no longer had I that feeling of being Ben's ghost but was Bob Tuffey again, with a rigid identity carrying a rip-saw personality capable of cutting the knottiest logic into kindling wood. Poor Ben's ghost had smelt but a few rods of primroses, then the bouquet of delight had been dashed from his nostrils, and for him all but the bill was over.

It was now that I ran into the tide of adventure that swept me out on the wide sea of the mysterious and ghostly, but where my rigid identity preserved me from losing my head, and my rip-saw personality prevented any malignant spirit from taking advantage of any youth and innocence as a ghost.

I met a young lady ghost. She was just a creation of pink and outline, without any real substance whatever. I had no idea that mere color and outline could be so appealing.

"A mere colored silhouette." I checked my beating heart. "Pooh, bah!" But I looked again, and there were two of them, and they were not pooh-baba. They showed pink and faultlessly outlined beneath her pink outlined dress. Two faultless pink ankles, and for a moment I was sorry for Ben's ghost, for I was no longer Ben's ghost, but not for a moment was I sorry for the ghost of Bob Tuffley.

I introduced myself as Robert Jay Tuffley, which meant something, and she introduced herself as Genevieve Actum. I told her I didn't like her last name and offered to change it at the first flag station. It pained me very much to make this offer, for that blame blue ghostly hand of Ben's, still clinging to my hand like a rusty gopher trap, nearly squeezed my fingers off as I made the offer. It was as jealous as a clam that had lost its only pearl, and I had found that pearl.

"Believe me, little sport-ghost Genevieve," I said, saluting her chaste lips, "this is the ghostly life!"

"You have come at last!" she sighed. "Oh, I have waited, waited so long for you!"

"Where have you been waiting?" I asked, for being so young I could not tell her of much waiting on my part. As she smiled, I felt a manly crust come over my young ghost like that on the ghost of Julius Caesar himself.

"By the Nile," she replied. "The eternal Nile."

As she said this Ben's hand released mine and I looked and saw it was gone. Ben had funked at mention of the eternal Nile, and all that remained of him had sneaked off.

"If you were as old as Mary Ann, how old would Mary Ann be?" I asked her.

"Dear, bold, blunt boy," she smiled, "look not at a maiden through time, but look at time through a maiden, and time will be no more."

"You didn't happen to know of a skirt named Cleopatra on the Nile?" I inquired.

"I was her favorite manicurist," she replied. "Oh, history, history what were you without Egypt, and what were Egypt without Queen Cleopatra!"

"How did you get this far out of ancient history?" I asked.

"I am neither strayed nor lost," she said. "This is the ghostland of the ancients, and no ghost may leave here but

by the consent of the seven sacred crocodiles of the Nile, who never consent."

Great Scott! here I was, a ghost just born, running after the girls of old Egypt, and I must get the consent of the seven sacred crocodiles of the Nile, who never consented, to get back into a ghostland even as recent as the times of Pocaontas. I certainly had backed up on time somewhere without noticing it. It must have been along that primrose path. Had I gone the full length of eternity and back again up to ancient history, as Ben's blame blue ghost, and not know it? I must have been stupid not to have noticed all eternity passing, but then, I recalled, I had been Ben's ghost, and that may have been the why of my wherefore.

"I'm going back," I told her. "I've a friend waiting back a ways and I'll send him along to talk it over with you. He knows ancient history like a personal diary."

"You can not go back," she smiled. "You must go on and on till you come to the ghostland of old King Chaos, and the time that was before time, and the maidens of that time."

"The girls of chaos!" I exclaimed. "They must be a little mixed in their dates and shapes."

"Dear, blunt boy," she smiled again, "their shapes are as the shapes of shapes before shapes. You will do well to linger with my shape, ancient as it is."

"Youth is the time to flit," I said. "I will fitter on and see these maidens of chaos. Little sport-ghost, farewell!"

"Dear boy ghost, farewell!" she wept. "Remember my shape when you behold the shapes of the maidens of chaos, whose shapes are as the shapes of shapes before shapes."

I almost lingered at her shapely speech, and turned back more than once to admire her shapely outline, but whilst alive as a man I had ever been a horizon chaser, and the old passion of flesh was still strong on my young ghost, and so I hurried after the horizon and left behind me this sweet maidenly ghost of two thousand Egyptian summers.

Soon I left the horizon itself behind me and came to the ghost-land of straight lines, where there was no horizon because there were no curves. This was the land of checkerboard maidens, square-mouthed and square-hipped, square-legged and square-eyed. I soon had the holy squares and my ghost suffered every torment of mal-adjustment to the ladies of the country and the blame square country itself. Everything in it was square, from Priscilla to possibility.

I kicked my young ghost through this land as fast as it could be squarely kicked, and after traveling for two square moons, came into the ghostland of the Smell-that-would-be-all. And it was all! I have met with several young and elderly smells in my time, as man and ghost, that were possessed of great ambition and marvelous genius in their line of endeavor, and extreme originality, and a promise only exceeded by their daring; but this Smell promised nothing, gave no hope for further achievement, held back nothing to spring later, for it was fulfillment itself.

There was nothing lacking, neither in body nor persistence, neither in achievement nor possibility. It was done, perfect, geometric, unquestionable, absolute! It arose with me, it lay down with me, it went before me and followed behind me. I lingered and it lingered with me, I hastened on and it had preceded me. I furnished but the nose and it did all the rest, willingly, freely, wholly. Nothing wearied it, nothing delayed it, nothing obscured it. It had length, breadth, thickness, and, like imagination, the mystic, mysterious fourth dimension was in it also.

"This is the third morning of the Great Smell!" I said on the third morning, for I kept the days by it, and that night was the third night of the Great Smell. Then the stars came out and shone above it and smelt to me as the Great Smell smelt, and the moon was drawn like a scimitar from the scabbard of night and hung in thrilling splendor above, and smelt as the Great Smell smelt. The next morning was the fourth morning of the Great Smell, and the following night the fourth night.

Once or twice I suspected that Ben's blue ghost was following me, then I concluded that I must be getting close on to chaos, and this was the smell of chaos itself. But one faith sustained my young ghost through this land of the Smell-that-would-be-all, and that was the faith that I was the smellier and not the smell.

On the sixth day I came out of the country of the Great Smell into a small country, which seemed to serve for no purpose but as a buffer to keep the smell back from the countries beyond. It must have been a very difficult job for this little country, requiring great talent, if not actual genius, by its anti-odor administration, but that administration did its work well and I was no longer accompanied by the Smell-that-was-all.

For a few days I rested in this buffer country, while my young ghost recovered sufficient strength, verve, and hope to

go on, then I proceeded advancing at great speed, as the clear, odorless air offered little resistance to my blue outline. I was so etheralized that, had it not been for my rigid identity, I might have doubted my own existence.

Then I came all of a sudden into the country of unassembled girls. At first I could scarcely believe my own ghostly eyes. All about me, on the green lawns, among the pleasant trees, were faultless ankles and busts, and girlish heads, and hands, and arms, and feet, and shoulders, and all that goes to make beautiful girls, except the assembly. All these girlish installments were alive, attired in exquisite silks and laces, and all were smiling, or dancing, or swaying, or moving about or faintly stirring. All young and glowing, and fresh and sweet. All maddening dear.

I must have lost my head for a time, for when I came to a more coherent mind I found I had gathered together a considerable quantity of the unassembled girl parts without any definite object in view. I presume my first glowing idea had been to get plenty of parts together, then assemble of the fairest segments ten or twelve complete and perfect maidens.

On examination I found that I had more than sufficient parts for such an undertaking, and selecting the two fairest ankles I proceeded to assemble them with two dainty feet, but alas! there was no coherency between them, and they would not assemble and remain assembled. Again and again I tried, each time failing lamentably. It was the saddest moment of my young ghost life when I realized that while I had every girlish segment in the greatest superfluity and perfection, I yet could not assemble even a single maiden, and keep her assembled till she should take one step, or as much as stand alone.

I would but get a luscious girl assembled on the grass, and then as I sought to wise her to her feet, she would tumble apart like a girl of sand, or cards, or quicksilver, and the parts would move away from one another. If this was the

work of old King Chaos, I asked just one whack at old King Chaos.

I worked all that day and night, and well into the next day, trying to get just one girl together for just five minutes, but unsuccessfully. I had all the materials a husky young ghost could desire, and every charming variety of that dear material, but the precious magnetism to bind the lovely parts together was wholly lacking.

I all but wept as I kissed a rosy mouth, then gently lay the girlish head down on the green grass. I couldn't use that girlish petal without the whole blossom. It smiled at me and I turned away and, putting one sad foot before another, passed out of that land of unassembled and unassemblable girls.

I had gone an hour's journey when I came to a large rock, and hearing someone conversing behind it I peered around and saw Ben's ghost seated near his ghost bicycle.

"Just my blame blue luck," he was conversing with himself. "After getting her this far, to find I have lost one of her ankles on the way! And the sweetest little ankle this side of poetry! Now I'll have to ride back and hunt for it, and I suppose somebody else will have found it and gone off with it, and I'll have to take an ankle that doesn't match, or do without entirely!"

I saw that there was a nice clean plump sack lying by Ben's bicycle and I judged that the unassembled girl was in this sack, perhaps with a number of duplicate parts.

I came from behind the rock and offered to help Ben hunt for the missing ankle, yet I questioned the wisdom of the whole affair, for should he find the ankle he would still be unable to assemble the girl.

"Go to grass!" he growled. "What are you doing, anyway, this far from your last unpaid bill?"

I told him of my journey and spoke of the country of the Great Smell, but he had never heard of it.

"Must have been all in your own mind," he said. "But I never discuss smells in the hearing of a bad odor."

I looked and saw that neither of his hands was missing.

"How about it?" I asked. "I thought you lost your hand, and it hung on to me. Your right hand."

"I was with you all the time," he replied, "till you met Genevieve Actum, and then I walked away. I wasn't blown up or melted down, but I merely sublimated all of my ghost person, except my right hand, till it was so fine you couldn't see it. You're young yet: when you're as old as I am you'll know half as many ghostly tricks as I do, and I'll be older and know twice as many more."

I saw that he desired to be left alone with his bike and the unassembled girl, and wishing him good luck, I went on my way. My young ghost had fully recovered from the depressing effects of the country of the Great Smell, and as I proceeded I began to feel more fit and sound than a new drum. I soon commenced to shout and sing and beat a great tattoo on my well-stretched spirit, in pure excess of energy. I had a sudden expansion of power and largeness, like a stick of dynamite at the instant of concussion. I wanted to go back and bite a large piece out of the rock that had concealed Ben, and then wipe his blue ghost off the ghostly map.

I was fairly bursting with the pride of my own remarkable identity. Was I not the astonishing Robert Jay Tuffley, of whom there was no duplicate or even imitation in the whole ghostly universe! I was beyond duplication, I was beyond imitation, I was beyond description itself! There was none like me, there had never been another like me, there could never be another like me! I was the first, last, intermediate, and only Robert Jay Tuffley, unique, unapproachable, with a perfectly rigid identity supporting a rip-saw personality! I had been some man, and now I was *some* blue ghost! I would no longer be a blue ghost! I would aspire higher in the spectrum of ghostliness! I would be a green ghost!

I expanded with pride, I dilated with ambition; I whooped; I burst into vivid green!



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