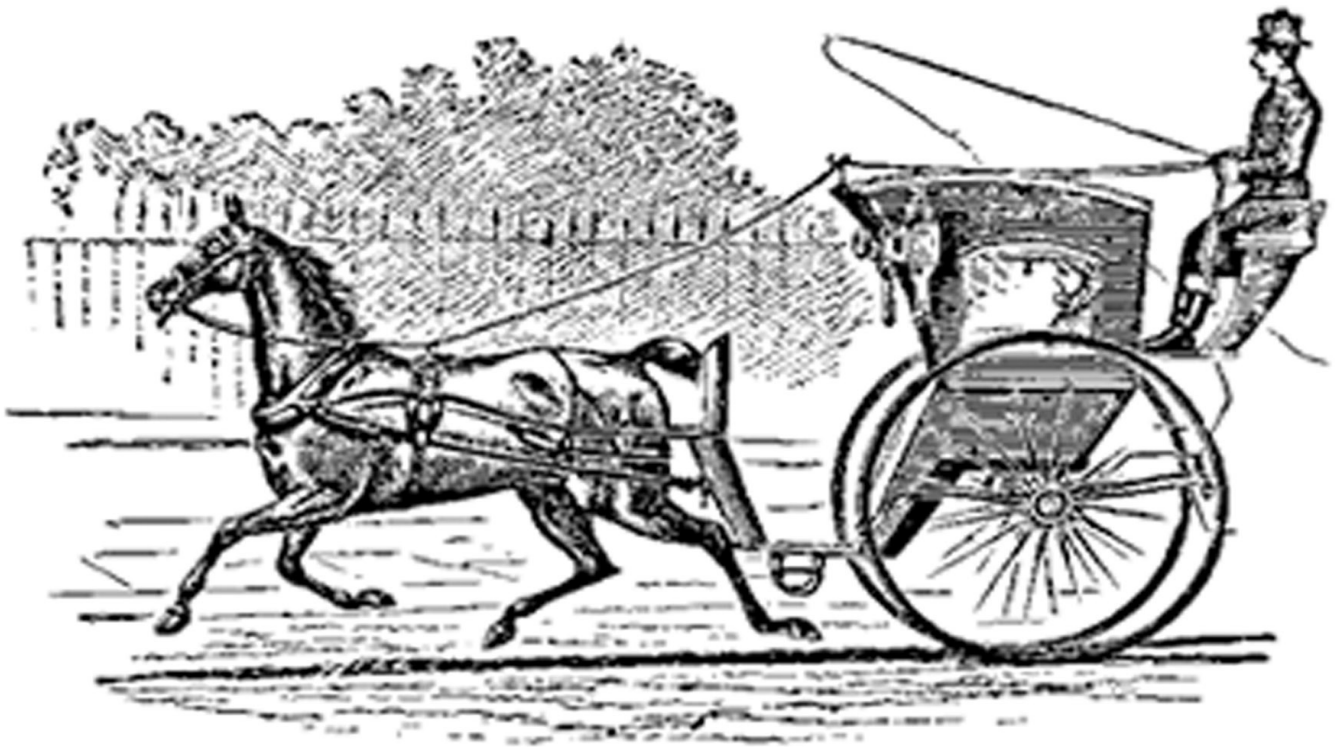


MAN ON THE BOX



Harold MacGrath



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About MacGrath:

Harold MacGrath (September 4, 1871 - October 30, 1932) was a bestselling American novelist, short story writer, and screenwriter. Also known occasionally as Harold McGrath, he was born in Syracuse, New York. As a young man, he worked as a reporter and columnist on the Syracuse Herald newspaper until the late 1890s when he published his first novel, a romance titled *Arms and the Woman*. According to the *New York Times*, his next book, *The Puppet Crown*, was the No.7 bestselling book in the United States for all of 1901. From that point on, MacGrath never looked back, writing novels for the mass market about love, adventure, mystery, spies, and the like at an average rate of more than one a year. He would have three more of his books that were among the top ten bestselling books of the year. At the same time, he penned a number of short stories for major American magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Red Book* magazine. Several of MacGrath's novels were serialized in these magazines and contributing to them was something he would continue to do until his death in 1932. In 1912, Harold MacGrath became one of the first nationally-known authors to write directly for the movies when he was hired by the American Film Company to do the screenplay for a short film in the Western genre titled *The Vengeance That Failed*. MacGrath had eighteen of his forty novels and three of his short stories made into films plus he wrote the story for another four motion pictures. And, three of his books were also made into Broadway plays. One of the many films made from MacGrath's writings was the 1913 serial *The Adventures of Kathlyn* starring Kathlyn Williams. While writing the thirteen episodes he simultaneously wrote the book that was published immediately after the December 29, 1913, premiere of the first episode of the serial so as to be in book stores during the screening of the entire thirteen episodes. Among MacGrath's short stories made into film was the 1920 Douglas Fairbanks Production Company's feature-length adventure film *The Mollycoddle* based on MacGrath's short story with the same title that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1913. Directed by Victor Fleming, it starred Fairbanks, Ruth Renick, and Wallace Beery and was distributed through the newly created United Artists. It is said that during this same time, a young Boris Karloff, who previously had a few uncredited film roles, chose his stage name for his first screen credit in 1920 from the MacGrath novel *The Drums of Jeopardy*, which had also been published by *The Saturday Evening Post* in January of that year and which featured a Russian mad scientist character named Boris Karlov. The name Boris Karlov was used from MacGrath's book for the 1922 Broadway play, but by 1923 with actor Boris Karloff using the similar sounding variation, the film version renamed the character Gregor Karlov. Harold MacGrath's success made him a wealthy man and, although he traveled the world extensively, Syracuse, New York, was his home, and it was there in 1912 that he built an English country-style mansion renowned for its landscaped gardens. In an article in the April 23, 1932, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* written under the title "The Short Autobiography of a Deaf Man", MacGrath told the public how he had struggled early in life as a result of a hearing impairment. At a time in history when deaf people were almost automatically considered as lacking intellectual acuity, he had hid this from his employer and others. Harold MacGrath died at his home in Syracuse a few months after the article was published.

Also available on Feedbooks MacGrath:

- *The Voice in the Fog* (1915)
- *A Splendid Hazard* (1910)
- *Arms and the Woman* (1899)
- *The Grey Cloak* (1903)
- *The Lure of the Mask* (1908)
- *The Puppet Crown* (1901)
- *The Ragged Edge* (1922)
- *The Drums of Jeopardy* (1920)

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To Miss Louise Everts

*He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.*

Dramatis Personae

Colonel George Annesley A retired Army Officer
Miss Betty Annesley His daughter
Lieutenant Robert Warburton Lately resigned
Mr. John Warburton His elder brother, of the War Department
Mrs. John Warburton The elder brother's wife
Miss Nancy Warburton The lieutenant's sister
Mr. Charles Henderson Her fiance
Count Karloff An unattached diplomat
Colonel Frank Raleigh The Lieutenant's Regimental Colonel
Mrs. Chadwick A product of Washington life
Monsieur Pierre A chef
Mademoiselle Celeste A lady's maid
Jane Mrs. Warburton's maid
The Hopeful A baby
William A stable-boy
Fashionable People Necessary for a dinner party
Celebrities Also necessary for a dinner party
Unfashionables Police, cabbies, grooms, clerks, etc.

TIME—Within the past ten years.

SCENE—**Washington, D.C., and its environs.**

Chapter 1

INTRODUCES MY HERO

If you will carefully observe any map of the world that is divided into inches at so many miles to the inch, you will be surprised as you calculate the distance between that enchanting Paris of France and the third-precinct police-station of Washington, D. C, which is not enchanting. It is several thousand miles. Again, if you will take the pains to run your glance, no doubt discerning, over the police- blotter at the court (and frankly, I refuse to tell you the exact date of this whimsical adventure), you will note with even greater surprise that all this hubbub was caused by no crime against the commonwealth of the Republic or against the person of any of its conglomerate people. The blotter reads, in heavy simple fist, "disorderly conduct," a phrase which is almost as embracing as the word diplomacy, or society, or respectability.

So far as my knowledge goes, there is no such a person as James Osborne. If, by any unhappy chance, he *does* exist, I trust that he will pardon the civil law of Washington, my own measure of familiarity, and the questionable taste on the part of my hero—hero, because, from the rise to the fall of the curtain, he occupies the center of the stage in this little comedy-drama, and because authors have yet to find a happy synonym for the word. The name James Osborne was given for the simple reason that it was the first that occurred to the culprit's mind, so desperate an effort did he make to hide his identity. Supposing, for the sake of an argument in his favor, supposing he had said John Smith or William Jones or John Brown? To this very day he would have been hiring lawyers to extricate him from libel and false-representation suits. Besides, had he given any of these names, would not that hound-like scent of the ever suspicious police have been aroused?

To move round and round in the circle of commonplace, and then to pop out of it like a tailed comet! Such is the history of many a man's life. I have a near friend who went away from town one fall, happy and contented with his lot. And what do you suppose he found when he returned home? He had been nominated for alderman. It is too early to predict the fate of this unhappy man. And what tools Fate uses with which to carve out her devious peculiar patterns! An Apache Indian, besmeared with brilliant greases and smelling of the water that never freezes, an understudy to Cupid? Fudge! you will say, or Pshaw! or whatever slang phrase is handy and, prevalent at the moment you read and run.

I personally warn you that this is a really-truly story, though I do not undertake to force you to believe it; neither do I purvey many grains of salt. If Truth went about her affairs laughing, how many more persons would turn and listen! For my part, I believe it all nonsense the way artists have pictured Truth. The idea is pretty enough, but so far as hitting things, it recalls the woman, the stone, and the hen. I am convinced that Truth goes about dressed in the dowdiest of clothes, with black-lisle gloves worn at the

fingers, and shoes run down in the heels, an exact portrait of one of Phil May's lydies. Thus it is that we pass her by, for the artistic sense in every being is repelled at the sight of a dowdy with weeping eyes and a nose that has been rubbed till it is as red as a winter apple. Anyhow, if she *does* go about in beautiful nudity, she ought at least to clothe herself with smiles and laughter. There are sorry enough things in the world as it is, without a lachrymal, hypochondriacal Truth poking her face in everywhere.

Not many months ago, while seated on the stone veranda in the rear of the Metropolitan Club in Washington (I believe we were discussing the merits of some very old product), I recounted some of the lighter chapters of this adventure.

"*Eempossible!*" murmured the Russian attache, just as if the matter had not come under his notice semi-officially.

I presume that this exclamation disclosed another side to diplomacy, which, stripped of its fine clothes, means dexterity in hiding secrets and in negotiating lies. When one diplomat believes what another says, it is time for the former's government to send him packing. However, the Englishman at my right gazed smiling into his partly emptied glass and gently stirred the ice. I admire the English diplomat; he never wastes a lie. He is frugal and saving.

"But the newspapers!" cried the journalist. "They never ran a line; and an exploit like this would scarce have escaped them."

"If I remember rightly, it was reported in the regular police items of the day," said I.

"Strange that the boys didn't look behind the scenes."

"Oh, I don't know," remarked the congressman; "lots of things happen of which you are all ignorant. The public mustn't know everything."

"But what's the hero's name?" asked the journalist.

"That's a secret," I answered. "Besides, when it comes to the bottom of the matter, I had something to do with the suppressing of the police news. In a case like this, suppression becomes a law not excelled by that which governs self-preservation. My friend has a brother in the War Department; and together we worked wonders."

"It's a jolly droll story, however you look at it," the Englishman admitted.

"Nevertheless, it had its tragic side; but that is even more than ever a secret."

The Englishman looked at me sharply, even gravely; but the veranda is only dimly illuminated at night, and his scrutiny went unrewarded.

"Eh, well!" said the Russian; "your philosopher has observed that all mankind loves a lover."

"As all womankind loves a love-story," the Englishman added. "You ought to be very successful with the ladies,"—turning to me.

"Not inordinately; but I shall not fail to repeat your epigram,"—and I rose.

My watch told me that it was half after eight; and one does not receive every day an invitation to a dinner-dance at the Chevy Chase Club.

I dislike exceedingly to intrude my own personality into this narrative, but as I was passively concerned, I do not see how I can avoid it. Besides, being a public man, I am not wholly averse to publicity; first person, singular, perpendicular, as Thackeray had it, in type looks rather agreeable to the eye. And I rather believe that I have a moral to point out and a parable to expound.

My appointment in Washington at that time was extraordinary; that is to say, I was a member of one of those committees that are born frequently and suddenly in

Washington, and which almost immediately after registration in the vital statistics of national politics. I had been sent to Congress, a dazzling halo over my head, the pride and hope of my little country town; I had been defeated for second term; had been recommended to serve on the committee aforesaid; served with honor, got my name in the great newspapers, and was sent back to Congress, where I am still to-day, waiting patiently for a discerning president and a vacancy in the legal department of the cabinet. That's about all I am willing to say about myself.

As for this hero of mine, he was the handsomest, liveliest rascal you would expect to meet in a day's ride. By handsome I do not mean perfect features, red cheeks, Byronic eyes, and so forth. That style of beauty belongs to the department of lady novelists. I mean that peculiar manly beauty which attracts men almost as powerfully as it does women. For the sake of a name I shall call him Warburton. His given name in actual life is Robert. But I am afraid that nobody but his mother and one other woman ever called him Robert. The world at large dubbed him Bob, and such he will remain up to that day (and may it be many years hence!) when recourse will be had to Robert, because "Bob" would certainly look very silly on a marble shaft.

What a friendly sign is a nickname! It is always a good fellow who is called Bob or Bill, Jack or Jim, Tom, Dick or Harry. Even out of Theodore there comes a Teddy. I know in my own case the boys used to call me Chuck, simply because I was named Charles. (I haven't the slightest doubt that I was named Charles because my good mother thought I looked something like Vandyke's *Charles I*, though at the time of my baptism I wore no beard whatever.) And how I hated a boy with a high-sounding, unnicknamable given name!—with his round white collar and his long glossy curls! I dare say he hated the name, the collar, and the curls even more than I did. Whenever you run across a name carded in this stilted fashion, "A. Thingummy Soandso", you may make up your mind at once that the owner is ashamed of his first name and is trying manfully to live it down and eventually forgive his parents.

Warburton was graduated from West Point, ticketed to a desolate frontier post, and would have worn out his existence there but for his guiding star, which was always making frantic efforts to bolt its established orbit. One day he was doing scout duty, perhaps half a mile in advance of the pay-train, as they called the picturesque caravan which, consisting of a canopied wagon and a small troop of cavalry in dingy blue, made progress across the desert-like plains of Arizona. The troop was some ten miles from the post, and as there had been no sign of Red Eagle all that day, they concluded that the rumor of his being on a drunken rampage with half a dozen braves was only a rumor. Warburton had just passed over a roll of earth, and for a moment the pay-train had dropped out of sight. It was twilight; opalescent waves of heat rolled above the blistered sands. A pale yellow sky, like an inverted bowl rimmed with delicate blue and crimson hues, encompassed the world. The bliss of solitude fell on him, and, being something of a poet, he rose to the stars. The smoke of his corn-cob pipe trailed lazily behind him. The horse under him was loping along easily. Suddenly the animal lifted his head, and his brown ears went forward.

At Warburton's left, some hundred yards distant, was a clump of osage brush. Even as he looked, there came a puff of smoke, followed by the evil song of a bullet. My hero's hat was carried away. He wheeled, dug his heels into his horse, and cut back over the trail. There came a second flash, a shock, and then a terrible pain in the calf of