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## Box 07, Folder 21 - "Cupid and the Scarecrow" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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CUPID AND THE SCARECROW

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BY

E. Mortimer Standing .

"Minella"  
Coleville Rd.  
CLONMEL  
Co. Tipperary  
IRELAND .

## CUPID AND THE SCARECROW

By E. Mortimer Standing

One day Colin, an only child aged eight, went hunting by himself with his toy bow and arrow in the fields behind his house. He was really looking for some Red Indians to fight with; but there did not seem to be any about that day. However, he found something almost as good. It was a scarecrow with an old coat and hat on, standing in the middle of a field. So he pretended it was an Indian chief, and crept up behind him until he got to within about twenty yards, and then opened fire.

Colin was in good shooting form that day; and two out of the first three arrows touched the scarecrow's coat ( which counted two points each). The next shot was a brilliant one, and knocked his hat right off. Colin was so excited that he shouted out "Hurrah! that counts six points!" and began to run forward to collect his arrows. Imagine his surprise, as he got nearer, to see the scarecrow stoop down and pick up its hat and quietly put it on its head again. Really it was not a scarecrow after all, but only a tramp who had been standing very still.

He was a rather special kind of tramp, though, because, besides doing the usual things that tramps do, he was a nature mystic -- a Pantheist if you like ( and even if you don't like, because that's just what he was) and the reason why he had been standing so still

and hadn't noticed the arrows, was because he had been watching the sunset in a sort of ecstasy.

"I'm awfully sorry, " said Colin, " I didn't know you were alive; I thought you were a scarecrow."

The tramp said nothing -- in fact he seemed hardly to hear him, for his eyes were still fixed with a far-away expression on the sun, which looked like a huge ball sitting on the edge of the world. Then as though speaking more to himself than to the newcomer, he murmured,

'The clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from the eye  
That has kept watch o'er man's mortality.'

At this Colin did not know quite what to say, so he just said "Quaite," -- a trick he had acquired from his mother.

Suddenly the sun disappeared behind the shoulder of the world; a shrill wind started blowing; and the boy realised he was very hungry.

"Have you had tea yet?" he enquired of the tramp.

"Well now you mention it, I don't think I have."

"Then will you come and have it with us?" said Colin, thinking it was the least he could do to make up for having shot at the man.

"That's very kind of you Cupid, " replied the tramp, "I could do with a cup o' tea, especially as somehow or other I missed my lunch to-day."

"Good! then that's settled!" said Colin who had by this time

collected all his arrows; "but my name is not Cupid, it's Colin. Why did you call me that?"

"Because Cupid also has a bow and arrow and goes around shooting at people -- like you", he added with a friendly smile.

"Did he ever hit you too?"

"I should say he did, and hurt me too -- much more than ever you could have done, even if you had had real arrows tipped with steel, but that was a long time ago."

"Tell me about him."

"Oh there's not much to tell about him; but if you like I'll tell you about a much more exciting fellow called Ulysses, who also had a bow and arrow, the best bow in the world."

So as they trudged along the way home the Tramp, who had had a classical education before he came down ( or up?) in the world related the deathless story of the Return of Ulysses.

It just happened that Colin's mother was crossing the hall when they entered the front door. She opened her eyes wide with astonishment -- not to say horror -- when she saw Colin's companion. "What on earth....? Who on earth ....." she stammered in amazement. "This is my new friend," broke in Colin, " I shot him by mistake, " he added comprehensively, "so I've brought him in to tea."

As she looked at the dilapidated specimen of humanity gazing at her with shrinking, questioning eyes, Mrs Woodford was assailed by a generous impulse, and was on the point of giving way to it. But then she hesitated. "I'm afraid you can't bring him into the

house, not to-day at any rate, because Sir John and Lady Walmesly and several other people are coming to tea; I expect them any minute".

It was at this <sup>h</sup>psychological moment that Martha intervened. Inspired with the Gift of Counsel she tactfully suggested that Colin's friend might take his tea in the kitchen. But here another difficulty arose, for Colin stoutly maintained that he would do without tea rather than not have it with his new friend. "It's very 'tahrsome' of you Colin, " said Mrs Woodford -- (everything was 'tahrsome' with her that did not fit into her scheme of things.)

At this Martha was again inspired and suggested that Master Colin should join them in the kitchen, to which suggestion Colin's mother rather grudgingly assented but "only for this once." She did not even invite the tramp to go through the house to the kitchen, so Colin led him round to the back door. As they were going, he heard the tramp saying, as it were to himself, "Great <sup>God</sup> snakes, I'd sooner be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn than <sup>such</sup> ~~as~~ as these!"

"Quaite", said Colin vaguely embarrassed; and then, feeling on firmer ground, he went on: "Martha made some treacle tarts this morning; they're supposed to be for to-morrow, but I am sure she will give us some; so we shall be better off than the people in the drawing room after all."

"That was really the gist of my last remark! said the tramp. Colin was just about to ask what a 'gist' was when suddenly round the corner like a baying tornado came Hamlet, the great Dane.

He looked terribly fierce and angry, and obviously did not seem to like the look of the tramp. The latter turned white under his stubbly beard and his knees felt all wobbly; but he manfully stood his ground. Colin darted quickly forward to intercept the infuriated creature, and when he had calmed him down, formally introduced him to his companion. Whereupon, Hamlet, after a few suspicious sniffs at the tramp's trousers, accepted him as one of the family -- which only shows that some dogs have better judgment, not to say better manners -- than some humans.

The tea was a great success. Not only was there treacle tart enough for two helpings each, but Martha gave each of her guests a boiled egg and bread and butter and jam, ad lib. Two rather curious incidents happened during the tea. The first was that as Martha handed the tramp his tea her hand trembled so much that she nearly upset it; and the second, that once she called the tramp George by accident. It must have been by accident, as the tramp hadn't told his name to anyone.

Tea was finished and the tramp was enjoying one of Martha's cigarettes when she said apropos of nothing at all. "Master Colin, did you feed your rabbits this morning?"

"Oh golly, I forgot! Thanks awfully for reminding me; I'll go now before it gets too dark. I won't be long." As soon as the door closed behind the departing Colin, The Tramp said in a quiet voice:

"Twelve years is a long time Martha!"

"It seems longer than that to me," replied Martha.

"You've come down in the world a bit too, I see," said the tramp.

"I suppose most people would say so," replied Martha, "but I believe if poverty levels down, love levels up."

There was a pause while the tramp relit his cigarette. Martha went on: "First, we lost all our money; and then one after the other my parents died. So I had to do something. I always liked cooking. And you? What happened to you?"

"When you never replied to any of my letters it seemed to me that it didn't matter what I did, or if I did anything; nothing mattered!" Martha felt a sudden stab in her heart, as though she had been struck with a stiletto.

"What letters?" she said anxiously.

"After that 'famous day', I wrote four, and <sup>as</sup> you never replied to any of them, so I gave up trying."

"I never got any letters -- not one. <sup>as</sup> My father must have intercepted them in the post -- God forgive him!"

Martha stroked the hand beside her at the table.

"My poor dear, how you must have suffered!"

"Cupid's shafts are barbed all right; they take a bit of getting out."

<sup>Poetical</sup>  
"~~Practical~~ as ever George!" she said with a smile.

"You can't live on poetry though," replied George grimly, "much less get married on it."

The drawing-room bell rang and Martha went out in answer to it,



returning with an empty hot water jug. "I'll be back in a minute," she said as she filled it from the kettle, "help yourself to another cigarette."

"It's strange," said George when she returned, "very strange, me happening to turn up at this house of all others. Seems like a miracle to me. Do you believe in miracles, Martha?"

"I believe in prayer," she replied in a quiet voice, "I have prayed for you George, every single day." The tramp gave a short and bitter laugh.

"You won't after to-day -- now that you have seen I'm past praying for."

"We're none of us that," said Martha quietly. "Do you know what date is to-day?"

"Don't even know what day of the week it is, let alone what day of the month. All days are the same for me."

"It's your birthday."

"Not a day that I should have felt inclined to celebrate -- even if I had remembered. It would have been better if it had never dawned."

"Every year -- to end on that date -- I've said the Thirty Days prayer to Our Lady! She never lets you down if only you have the faith."

At this the tramp tried to say something but his voice went all thick and husky, and before he had it under control again, the door flew open, and in rushed Colin all excitement.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "do you know what's happened? The

brown rabbit -- Mollie -- has had babies. Do come and look at them."

"You take this gentleman to see them, will you Master Colin; I've got to go upstairs for a few minutes."

Martha was back again in the kitchen when they returned from their inspection of Mollie's family.

"Mother and Quads doing fine," said the tramp with a smile.

"You'll have to watch out, Master Colin, lest she should eat her children," replied Martha.

"Like Saturn," commented the tramp.

At this Colin pricked up his quick little ears.

"Who's Saturn?" he enquired.

"Oh he lived a very long time ago -- even before Ulysses."

"Is there a story about him?"

"Yes, there is."

"Oh do tell me about him!"

"I'm afraid I can't -- not just now at any rate, because it is time I was going on my way again. Thank you very much for the lovely tea and also for letting me see your rabbits; and thank you too, Miss Martha."

"I'll go with you as far as the lodge," said Colin. "Wait half a mo' while I go and get my bow and arrow; I left them by the front door."

"They'll be wanting a new chauffeur next month," said Martha as soon as Colin was gone. "You know you're a good driver and know about cars -- so why not?"

"Not a hope! Look at me! Besides she has seen me."

"She wouldn't recognise you if you were shaved and in a new suit,"

"Asking for the moon!"

"No it isn't! Look in your pocket."

The tramp felt in his coat pocket and produced an envelope which Martha had deftly slipped into it unobserved. It contained <sup>L40</sup>~~200~~ in notes -- Martha's savings.

"I couldn't take it," said the tramp, holding it back.

"But you must. It would be tempting Providence not to do so, after what has happened. Besides you can pay it back to me later, if you like. There's a cottage goes with it," she added significantly.

Just then Colin returned looking rather crestfallen.

"Mummy won't let me go; she says it's getting too dark."

"Never mind, and thanks all the same. I'm used to finding my way in the dark," said the tramp standing by the open door.

"Where are you going to now?" queried Colin.

"I'm going to find the nearest church where I shall burn twelve big candles in honour of Her <sup>who</sup> ~~who~~ - as my favourite poet says -- is 'Our tainted nature's solitary boast!'"

Colin was nearly going to say "quite" but changed his mind and said "Why twelve?"

"One for each of the past twelve years"

"Oh" said Colin, "I thought it might be for the twelve apostles."

"That too," said the tramp. "I think we ought to include them too -- don't you think so, Martha, especially St. Jude?"

At this they all laughed, though Martha's eyes were moist and she had to swallow a lump in her throat.

The tramp held out his hand. "Good-bye Cupid, " he said, "Goodbye Ulysses," retorted Colin.

The tramp laughed. "Why do you call me that?"

"Well you call me Cupid because I had a bow and arrow, and so I call you Ulysses because you are dressed like a tramp."

"But I am a tramp, aren't I?"

"I don't think so really; at least you're not like an ordinary tramp, because Martha always tells me to keep away from them -- and she didn't with you. Besides, she called you "this gentleman" just now, and anyhow I vote we pretend that you are not a real tramp but that you are Ulysses dressed up and coming back after all those years to find your P-P-Pen....?"

"Penelope."

"Yes, that's it! It's an awfully difficult word to say."

"It is a bit of a mouthful."

"I like the name Martha better -- don't you?"

"Much better."

"I know what," exclaimed Colin in a sudden burst of inspiration "Let's pretend that Martha is your P-P-Penny--what's her name?...."

"Penelope."

"..... and that you've found her at last -- after wandering all over the world."

"Master Colin," interposed Martha - blushing violently, "what will you think of next?"

There was an embarrassing pause, broken in the end by Colin exclaiming impatiently, "Oh come on, let's begin. You start Ulysses; you must come up to Martha, put your arms round her, kiss her and say: 'At last my dear Penelope' ".

"But supposing Penelope doesn't recognise me and still thinks I'm only a tramp?"

"Oh but she'll have to; that's part of the game." Still, the invincible Ulysses, hero of a hundred fights, continued to hesitate and Colin grew more and more impatient.

"Grown up people are no good<sup>d</sup> at pret<sup>e</sup>nding," he said, half to himself; "they always make a mess of it." He felt as exasperated as a producer at a bad rehearsal.

*dramatic* It was at this moment that Martha saved the situation and the reputation of "the grown-up people" at the same time. She stepped forward, put both her arms round the tramp and gave him two resounding kisses, one on each stubbly cheek.

"That's better!" exclaimed Colin clapping his hands. The tramp was covered with pleasant confusion, and when he had pulled himself together again he picked up his bundle and made towards the door.

"Well now that's over, and Penelope has been found, and the play finished, I really must be going."

"But you will come back again won't you?" Colin's voice was edged with anxiety.

"Of course! I shall have to fetch my Penelope. In the meantime you won't let anyone else into the secret will you, not even

your daddy and mummy, because I am still in disguise you know. Promise?"

"I promise on my honour," replied Colin.

Every minute the tramp seemed to be getting less and less like a tramp in spite of his clothes. His manner was more quick and confident, and he held himself up like a soldier, almost as if he <sup>actually turning</sup> really ~~was~~ <sup>turning</sup> into Ulysses. As he said good-bye to Martha he gave her a kiss -- which was right and proper -- but when he turned to say good-bye to Colin he did not shake hands. Instead he drew himself up to his full height in the doorway ( and he seemed to have suddenly grown much taller) and gave Colin a military salute -- just as Ulysses would have done. Colin returned the salute with great solemnity, whereupon the tramp swung round quickly on his heel and marched out into the night.

As soon as he was gone Martha began behaving in a most extraordinary manner. First of all she got very sniffy, and then actually began to cry, dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief.

"It's silly to carry on like that" said Colin, "for after all it's only pretend." At which remark Martha began to laugh and cry at the same time. And then, to crown all, she suddenly stooped down and gave Colin a tremendous hug and a kiss. Which was the silliest thing of all because it wasn't bedtime for at least another hour.