

MAGIC

BY EDMUND L. PEARSON

YOU took rose leaves—fresh rose leaves—and mixed them with brown sugar. Then you wrapped them in a leaf from a grape-vine, and buried the whole business in the ground. You let them stay for three days. At the end of that time you dug them up and ate them; ate them with rapture known only to those who have eaten this particular delicacy. For to the natural fragrance of the rose leaves and the nourishing and delicious properties of brown sugar, that interval of three days in the warm earth had added a new quality. A mysterious alchemy had been at work and transformed the mixture into something exquisite—a dish to be envied by great kings and sultans. It had about it odors of the East; savors of Araby the blest.

So said Ed Mason's older brother, Billy. And he was nearly thirteen. He did not use all the words which I have used to describe the taste of the rose-leaf compound. He merely said it was "bully." That was enough for us—that, and the charm of the operation itself. He had tried it many times in the far-off days of his youth; and now we set out to make some for ourselves.

The rose leaves were easy to get. We had only to climb over the fence and we were in Auntie Merrill's garden. Auntie Merrill was old and she seldom came into the garden. She had no one with whom to share it; and the roses budded, bloomed, and dropped their petals unheeded to the path. From this path we gathered some; but it is likely that others were induced, with little effort, to leave the full-blown flowers a day or two in advance of their natural fall.

Roses are beautiful things even to boys of eight or nine, but æsthetic considerations must give way before the stern, practical demands of life. We debated whether red or yellow roses were most likely to give good results. At last we decided to combine the two colors, and a tempting mixture they made. We put the leaves in my hat, and climbed the fence again into the Masons' back yard.

The next ingredient was brown sugar. Here, again, the matter was simple. A barrel of the pleasing substance lived in a certain dim passage leading from Ed Mason's mother's pantry. It was dark, moist, and a joy forever. It had the crawly habit peculiar to brown sugar, and it came away (when questing hands were plunged into the barrel) in lumps that filled the mouth and turned the cares of life to vanity and unimportance. With it, during the hard days of vacation, we frequently restored our wasted tissues.

The rose leaves were left to themselves while we made a reconnaissance in force toward the place of the sugar barrel. The enemy (one Nora Sullivan, a desperate character) was reported as engaged in washing dishes in the kitchen. She neglected to station any outposts, so her carelessness was our advantage. We made the customary investigation for a large gray rat—supposed, since a time to which the mind of man runneth not back, to dwell behind the barrel. As usual, he was found missing. We seized the sugar and retired in discretion and stickiness to the yard. There we mixed the rose leaves and the sugar. From the vine that grew on the side of the woodshed we picked a large leaf. This was the vine that furnished leaves to be worn inside our hats to prevent sunstroke on hot days. No one knows how many sunstrokes we escaped by means of those grape leaves. We wrapped the red and yellow petals, well covered with sugar, in the grape leaf, and secured it with straws and blades of grass. No creeping worm nor brisk beetle was to partake of this food of the gods.

Next came the rite of burial. There was no doubt that the leaf and its contents must be buried in Auntie Merrill's garden. That was the scene of all mysteries, and the only place where our cache would be reasonably secure from Ed Mason's sister Louise and her friend Jessie Plummer. These were high matters, too great for the feminine intellect. Also, of course, we had Auntie Merrill to consider. A place must

be found where she would not come poking around.

Ed spoke of the little patch of ground back of the lily-of-the-valley bed. I thought the earth too damp at that spot. But he argued that the brown sugar belonged to his mother (which was certainly true), and that the recipe had been furnished by his brother Billy. From these facts he reasoned that his choice of a spot ought to prevail. I succumbed to the force of this argument, and we began to excavate back of the lily bed. With shingles (procured from men who were shingling Dr. Macey's barn) we dug the pit and covered the grape leaf with earth. Then, after driving away a prowling cat (who probably recollected funeral services performed over deceased robins in that very garden), we climbed the fence once more and set out to endure the weary interval of three days. It was then Monday morning, and ten o'clock. Not until Thursday at the same hour could we unearth the treasure. Billy had said so. Three days were required, no more and no less. At the end of that time, to the minute, the magic forces that dwelt in the earth would have effected the change, and what we buried as simple brown sugar and the petals of roses would come forth in a new form—a form to make epicures sigh with content.

We walked up the yard, by the woodshed, past the apple tree and the clothes-jack, and out to the street. But something had happened. A thick black cloud had descended and covered us. A few minutes before the sun was shining gloriously, and we stood on the mountain peak of action and expectancy. Now it had all come to an end; the rose leaves were buried, and before us in all their hideous length and tediousness stretched those three days. Three days! Three years rather! The face of the heavens was darkened and we wandered in gloom. We made an effort of cheerfulness and started for the pond with a view to catching lucky-bugs. But we abandoned this almost immediately, and decided to hunt up Jimmy Toppans, who lived next door. Then we remembered that Jimmy had gone to his grandmother's farm in the country for the whole day. By this time the pall that overhung us had become deeper and more insufferable.

We turned the corner of the street and gazed drearily at Dr. Macey's barn and the men at work on its roof. The old shingles were coming down with a clatter, and the pungent odor of the new ones filled the air. Perhaps there was hope in shingles! We remembered that it takes but few strokes of a jackknife, a little cutting and boring, to convert a shingle into a boat. It only needs pointing at the bows and rounding at the stern, the insertion of a mast and the fitting of a paper sail—half an old envelope will do. The boats thus fashioned would sail half across the pond—until stuck in the lily-pads.

We chose two shingles and began to whittle. But there was no salt in it. Our minds wandered, and after a few moments Ed dropped his shingle, closed his knife, and put it in his pocket. He said he was going in the barn to look for mice. About the chutes which let grain into the stalls mice were known to linger. Once I had caught one in my hand, a feat which I instantly regretted, for the mouse bit my finger and made his escape in short order. Since that time the pursuit of the common drab mouse had been considered a pastime not without the charm of danger and the risk of bloodshed. But now the mention of mice only brought my thoughts back—as if they needed bringing!—to the subject that possessed us both.

"Do you think you drove that old cat away?" I asked abruptly.

Ed understood immediately; I did not need to specify the cat. "I dunno," he said; "she may be foolin' round now. P'r'aps we ought to go and see."

"Let's," I replied quickly.

We crossed the street, cut across the Toppans' back yard, and then, by a certain fence route, well understood and prescribed for all important occasions, entered Auntie Merrill's garden. A cat slunk off between the box hedges and a robin flew hurriedly from the fence to the apple tree where he had his nest of mud and dried grass. He uttered three or four excited notes as he flew. The sunlight of a morning in late June fell in patches on the paths, the hedges, and the flowerbeds. The rose-bushes dropped their petals, and the syringa moved in the breeze. That was a garden! It had

old-fashioned flowers—snapdragons, portulacas (now in full blaze in the sun), and hollyhocks—in the days before old-fashioned flowers became new-fashioned again. Orioles hunted their food in the fruit trees to carry it back to their hanging nests in the elms that shaded the street near by. It was firefly-haunted at night, and we used to run up and down the paths and try to catch the fireflies in our hats. It was full of long, mysterious vistas, overgrown shrubs breaking in on the paths, and valuable hiding-places. Plums grew there, and pears and cherries and peaches. When, on rare occasions, Auntie Merrill walked slowly down the path, she appeared to be totally unaware that Indians, highway robbers, pirates, cowboys, spies, scouts, and other ruffians were dogging her footsteps from bush to bush. We always thought it best to keep an eye on her.

It is a perfectly safe place to-day. Auntie Merrill is dead; the shrubs are trimmed, the hedges cut down, the paths covered with asphalt, and the whole garden a dismal spectacle of precision, order, and expensive simplicity.

But on the morning when we returned to look after our buried rose leaves no one had dreamed of these miserable improvements. Keeping well down below

the hedge, we reached the lilies-of-the-valley without encountering any opposition. The place of burial was inspected and the earth searched for tracks. None appeared. Then we stood over the spot and meditated. A lilac bush sheltered us from inquisitive persons in the house.

Finally Ed Mason spoke. "I wonder how they're getting on," he said.

"I wonder!" said I.

Then there was another pause. I poked my foot among the lilies where we had concealed the shingles we had used as trowels. They were waiting for Thursday morning.

Ed spoke again. "Let's dig 'em up and look at 'em!"

Already I was fishing for the shingles.

In half a minute we had brought the grape leaf once more to the light of day. We unfastened it and gazed upon its contents. It was a quarter past ten. Fifteen minutes had passed since we buried the mixture.

"Don't you suppose they're done?" I queried.

Ed's only reply was to take a pinch between his fingers and convey it to his mouth. I did the same. Then we ate the whole lot. It tasted—and on this point I will pledge my word—it tasted exactly like rose leaves and brown sugar!

MEXICO AND CHINA

BY ELBERT F. BALDWIN

OUR diplomacy has recently been concentrated on two regions, Latin America and the Far East. Particularly interesting, therefore, is the American whose relations with both regions have been intimate—John Watson Foster, lawyer, soldier, editor, diplomatist. In the last-named capacity he spent several years as Minister to Mexico, a year as Minister to Russia, and two years as Minister to Spain. He was Special Plenipotentiary in the negotiation of treaties with Brazil, Spain, Germany, and the British West Indies. He succeeded James G. Blaine as Secretary of State

(1892–1893), and then was United States Agent in the Bering Sea Arbitration Tribunal at Paris. Invited by the Emperor of China at the close of the Chino-Japanese War, he participated as American adviser in the peace negotiations with Japan; later he was our Special Ambassador to Great Britain and Russia, later still he became a member of the Anglo-Canadian Commission, and in 1903 was United States Agent at the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal in London. Long a trusted adviser of the Chinese Government, he represented that Government at The Hague as one of its delegates to the