



Restoration has its points, but there are some things you just can't restore

by Merwin Dembling

from the very beginning is definitely better."

I did agree. He seemed relieved. "You may put the car away, Perkins."

"Very good, sir," Perkins eased her into first, the joyous chuckle became a bit more pronounced, and the vehicle progressed majestically up Fifth Avenue, turning east into the next sidestreet. As we watched it reverently, the elegant young man chanted his mystic formula: "They just don't build things like that nowadays."

Nevertheless he was courteous about my Stutz, which looked crude and ill-bred alongside his Pierce. He even pretended to approve of all my restorations. "By the way," he said abruptly, "my name is Heseltine—Bradlaugh Heseltine."

I gave him my name.

"Happy to make your acquaintance. Can I invite you in for a drink? It's only just here." He indicated the ornate teak and wrought iron door of the mansion.

Once we were seated in a pair of comfortable leather chairs in his library, he pressed a mother-of-pearl electric button beside him, and as we waited for the butler to make his appearance, he treated me to a little more homespun archaeology. "Yes," he purred, "a fine, a venerable old cocktail, the martini. And very American, too. . . . The old drinks make the best refreshments. Old recipes make the most delicious dishes. I'm rather proud of my collection of early American cookbooks, by the way—all in their original bindings and in perfect condition. Tompion—that's our family butler—Tompion looks after them. He looks after this furniture, too. Been in the family over a hundred years, and polished twice a week from the beginning."

"Tompion?" I asked in genuine confusion.

"No," replied Heseltine wearily, "the furniture. They don't build stuff like this nowadays."

There was undoubtedly something in this maintenance business, but as a subject for endless conversation it left a bit to be desired. I decided to have my martini, spend a polite few minutes listening to my host's talk of pure beeswax and lemon oil, and beat it.

However, the martinis led to an invitation to an enormous and elaborate dinner; the dinner led to brandy afterward, and then to whiskey and soda by the fire-side in the library. As we talked—or rather as he talked—there was some fine music going on in the background; a funny mixture of grand opera and old, old-time New Orleans jazz. The combination sounded odd at first, but as the evening progressed it developed a haunting, out-of-this-worldly tang.

I sat back, and as he talked I tried to recall some of the Heseltine lore I had picked up merely by being born and raised in New York. Bradlaugh Heseltine, I knew,

was the last of his line. The family mansion, built during the Renaissance craze of the 1870's as an idealized French chateau, is one of the last—or possibly the last—of the great Fifth Avenue residences to be tenanted by its original family. The shack next door, a scale model of the Palace of Fontainebleau, is now an expensive secretarial school, and on the other side, in a replica of the Florentine Uffizi, one of those heavily-endowed boondoggles has its headquarters. This one calls itself "The Intercollegiate Posture Improvement Council."

Everyone has seen the Bradlaugh Heseltine collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "My great-grandfather's accretions," says Heseltine. Schoolchildren congregate about the lifelike group of eternally snarling stuffed tigers at the American Museum of Natural History. Few of them bother to read the card, which says: *Shot by Bradlaugh Heseltine, Esq. "My grandfather."* Presented to the Museum by Mrs. Bradlaugh Heseltine. "Poor grandmama—it was the only way she could get them out of the house!"

Heseltine's own father's philanthropies took up quite a bit of newspaper space a few years ago, when an expedition financed by the Heseltine Foundation, digging near the Red Sea coast for the remains of a biblical port, discovered oil, while a field crew of Heseltine and Co., prospecting for oil a hundred miles inland, came upon the remains of a biblical port.

I found it difficult keeping the various Bradlaugh Heseltine generations apart in my reverie, and came to the surface long enough to ask why they weren't numbered—Bradlaugh Heseltine II, Bradlaugh Heseltine IV, and so on.

"We aren't reigning monarchs, you know," he replied amiably—he would be IV—"and if you insist upon distinguishing numerically between us, there is always HESeltine-3 and HESeltine-7."

"Must seem odd, dialling your own name."

A slight coldness came into his tone. "One has no acquaintances in the—ah—Borough of Queens. And furthermore, I don't dial."

I didn't get the real significance of this until much later that night, when Bradlaugh drew aside a curtain and called to the stables to have my Stutz brought around. He used a shiny but ancient wall telephone, with a crank that made a whirring noise as he spun it.

He gave me the creeps right from the beginning, but I saw him often. He practically forced me to borrow the Pierce once or twice a week, and once when I mentioned that my Stutz took a lot of shoulder—mine, not the road's—in cornering, he had Perkins produce from the stables a perky little Amilcar two-seater *torpedo*. "My father brought this back from France with him after the war," he

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Maintenance

(Continued from page 25)

explained. "In 1919," he added, explaining his explanation. That was unnecessary, for by that time I spoke a fluent enough Heseltine to realize that as far as he was concerned they didn't have to print any calendars after about 1925.

I mentioned that the Amilcar, which handled like a dream, was beautiful, and that I'd sure like to have it. His face took on a look of great sadness. "It was my father's!" he whispered.

"Holy smoke, I wasn't asking you to give it to me!"

"Ah—but I wish I could!" he cried, grabbing my lapel. "It's wrong to be possessive, or jealous. It's wrong to keep things for yourself when you could spread happiness by giving them to other people. It's just wrong."

I unraveled his frantic fingers from my jacket, but not before he had made an unfortunate impression on the bargain cashmere.

"Sure," I said, "the best way to spread happiness is to give all your friends one-of-a-kind automobiles." Then by some mysterious process of association, something I had been wondering about for months found its way into words: "Listen, Bradlaugh, have you got any other friends? I mean, am I the only person you know?"

"Not at all," he replied, his voice normal again, and his manner unconcerned. "But I do find you one of my most congenial friends. You understand about the old things, about maintenance, about loving care." He scowled, and his voice took on a sudden bitterness. "Often some of my other so-called friends treat my convictions with the crudest derision!"

I well understood how they felt. I often found Heseltine a pain in the neck — so much so that after a session with him I could hardly face my Stutz, and pined for a Corvette, a Thunderbird, or almost anything else, just so long as it was born in 1957. Well, in a pinch, 1947. The Heseltine mansion gave me the willies, and the Heseltine way of living as though this were still the McKinley administration sometimes made my vertebrae want to slither up and huddle under my scalp. Yet — the Napoleon brandy was good, each meal was memorable, the library was comfortable, and in the summer there were delightful excursions in the steam yacht. It was a piquant escape to be with Heseltine, and creepy as he was, he was good-hearted. A bit of an idiot in many ways, and a spook in practically every way, he was still the most generous spook or idiot I'd ever be likely to meet.

Although he claimed to have other friends, I never saw any of them, and although I assumed he had some sort of sex life, I never saw any evidence of that either. Curiosity soon got the better of me, and I set off to look for Tompion, who would know if there were anything to know.

The butler was either somewhere about the house molesting the housemaids, or in his little office, making kickback deals with

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Maintenance

(Continued from page 64)

the grocer, the butcher, and the liquor store that cost Heseltine about twice my gross annual income. Heseltine just smiled at this; it was traditional with butlers, and anything traditional was OK with him.

I came upon Tompion in the corridor between the gun room and a divan-lined chamber known as the back drawing room. He had one of the maids—indeed, one I had noticed myself—backed against the wall, and about eight inches off the carpet. I cleared my throat, and he dropped the slavey with a thud. Oblivious to her look of outrage, he bowed gravely to me and murmured "I beg your pardon, sir." The girl scurried away.

"Not at all, Tompion. I want to ask you a rather unusual question."

The butler nodded.

"Has Mr. Heseltine many friends?"

"An adequate number, sir."

"I mean has he any lady friends, Tompion?"

"As I say, sir, an adequate number."

"Only adequate?"

I think I detected a flicker of the butler's eyelid as he brushed me off. "An adequate number is a sufficiency, sir. More than that may become inconvenient."

Heseltine himself satisfied my curiosity about six weeks later, when he invited me to dinner, the opera, and supper afterward.

"By the way," he added just before ringing off, "it's to be full-fig—white tie, you know. There'll be a lady with us."

"Hurrah!" I cried, grabbing for the Classified book and turning to DRESS SUIT RENTAL.

Heseltine must have surrounded plenty of nondescript food before his researches turned up the place where we met for dinner. It was a dreary, brownish hotel in the east twenties, not a block from Fifth Avenue. I had passed it maybe a few thousand times and never thought it might harbor anything but the same kind of electric fixture buyers and agents for small Japanese vase factories who snored, padded their swindle-sheets, and rinsed out their socks in the other hotels of that neighborhood.

Once through the frosted-glass doors, though, I realized how wrong I was. I had passed from the noisy, gritty, New York of today to the still, Spotless Town of 1900. A thick-piled carpet muffled my footsteps. The lighting was subdued; in fact the brightest highlights in the lobby came from the glistening brass spittoons at the base of every dark oak column.

An ancient flunkey shuffled forward. "Mr. Heseltine's guest, sir?" When I nodded, he took my coat and led me through a fern-lined corridor, pointing out a cream enamelled door. Behind it I heard laughter: Heseltine's silly-ass giggle, and a girl's low, voluptuous chuckle.

Heseltine insisted upon the best of everything, but I was not prepared for his girl friend. The word "stunning" is slightly out of fashion nowadays, but it is the only one for Dolly. I was stunned when I saw her. Of course, his ideas being what they were, she was not all legs, bones, and bosom in the style popular today. She was

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SAN FRANCISCO 10, CALIF.**Maintenance***(Continued from page 65)*

in the style beloved in the 'eighties: round, full-bosomed, with curves where they should be, and straight lines—well, there shouldn't be any straight lines, and there weren't.

She was wearing a lush, full-skirted, topless evening gown, that revealed powdered, dimpled shoulders, and snowy white arms. Her hair, luxuriant and coppery, was caught in a fetching, womanly bun at the nape of her neck. Her eyes were brown, sparkling, and so skilfully shadowed that at first I thought it was natural.

I don't remember much of the dinner except that we drank a good deal of champagne. The box at the opera was intimate and exciting; at the *entr'acte* a waiter from Sherry's appeared with a refreshing champagne cup that had a lot of fruit in it. Occasionally I got a breath of Dolly's patchouli-laden perfume, and at one enchanted moment she put her hand on my sleeve and asked to borrow the opera glasses.

Afterward Perkins picked us up in an exquisite steel-grey Daimler limousine and drove us back to Heseltine's, where Tompion had set out the traditional after-theatre supper; a light meal built around oysters and more champagne. I noticed that Heseltine was looking rather flushed, but Dolly was chattering merrily; about strawberries, as I remember.

A few moments later I noticed that Heseltine was looking pale. Dolly had exhausted the subject of strawberries, and passed on to horses. "Have you seen the carriages?" she asked. "They're very elegant."

I turned to query Heseltine about them, and was just in time to see him take another sip of champagne, sneeze once, and pass out on the table, his head resting in a delicately painted Havilland dessert plate.

Dolly looked at me and I at her, and we laughed. As I stretched out my hand she drew away, and with a *frou-frou* of petticoats, whisked through a door in the panelled wall. Behind it was a dark, sparsely carpeted passage, lit only by the green glow of a gas mantle. She had disappeared, but I heard her going up some steps.

Two floors up she opened a white door, and we were in a quaint, feminine bedroom. A shaded lamp next to the bed gave the only light. Here she finally turned, smiled, and held out her arms to me. Her kiss was soft, full, and insistent.

She broke away, unhooked the back of her dress, disappeared momentarily in its folds as she swept it over her head and let it flutter lightly over a screen. Another deft motion and the strategic hairpin loosed the luxuriant mass of her hair. She turned her back to me. "You may unlace me—please."

I undid the silk ribbon, freeing untold riches from the embrace of—according to the tiny label—The Tampico Patent Corset. "Now," she said, blowing out the lamp.

As the morning sun glowed behind the damask drapery, I stirred. Her calm, slow breathing quickened, and she opened her eyes to smile at me.

"You are superb," I whispered.

Again that low, throaty chuckle. She kissed me gently, and I collected my rented evening clothes and prepared to steal out of the Heseltine mansion—and out of the life of Bradlaugh Heseltine—forever.

Tompion was waiting for me at the foot of the grand staircase. "Don't go, sir," he said. "Mr. Heseltine is in the breakfast room."

"Thank you, Tompion, but I think I'd better."

"Mr. Heseltine will be most disappointed, sir. He ordered breakfast for two."

"Yes, I dare say he did."

But Tompion was skilful, and without my being aware of it, had guided me to the breakfast room. Heseltine sat over a steaming cup of his family's traditional blend of coffee.

"Good morning," I managed to say. "Feeling better?"

"Oh, fine," he replied, pouring me a cup. "And you?"

"Great." I sat down.

"Extraordinary, isn't she?" asked Heseltine sweetly.

A dollop of the Heseltine family brew hit the tablecloth.

"How—how do you mean?"

"Well, after all—you don't see a creature as beautiful as that every day in the week, do you?"

"You certainly don't," I replied fervently. Another heartwarming sip of coffee relaxed me.

"She's said to have been an exquisite child. I suppose she was. Of course, I never saw her as a child."

"No, of course not," I agreed.

"It was long before my time, I'm afraid."

I felt strong enough to kid him. "It's maintenance that does it."

"You understand!" he cried triumphantly, the maniacal light in his eyes. "It was maintenance! And what painstaking, arduous maintenance! But we've done it!"

I began to get the creeps. "Done what?" I asked.

"Succeeded! Succeeded in stopping time!" he whispered. "My family's been maintaining Dolly since 1889. She's—she's sixty-eight this year!"

I got the hell out of there, but took a jumbo case of the heebie-jeebies with me.

The bow-tied Connecticut patent lawyer who was on the receiving end of a bargain Stutz couldn't believe his good fortune.

"Rest assured," he said, "I'll maintain this Stutz as beautifully as you have."

"Don't do that," I begged him. "Above all, don't do that. Let nature take its course!"

"Y-yes . . . sure, you bet," he answered hurriedly, jumping into the Stutz and starting her up. What a beautiful exhaust note she had. A low, throaty, chuckle. Glad to be alive.

I suddenly remembered what it reminded me of, and broke out in goose pimples. By the time my scalp considered it safe to return to my head, the lawyer, the Stutz, and the vintage passion were out of my life forever.