

Coming Stories by  
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# THE OMAHA GUIDE

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ILLUSTRATED FEATURE SECTION—September 17, 1932

BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN  
THE FEATURE SECTION

## “TOBE” The Story of an Humble Janitor

**His Wife Needed an Operation and the Only Doctor in Town, a White Man, Hadn't Ever Operated on a Colored Patient. Tobe's Eyes were Wet as He Begged the Ofay for His Wife's Life. He Fished Out of His Pocket a Little Money, then He Produced Something Else that Made Old Dr. Norton Sit Up and Take Notice.**

By EDWARD WORTHY

Dr. Norton stumbled over a pail with a mop in it, and would have fallen had not a hand darted out to break his fall. It was a black hand, and the dignified surgeon thrust it aside.

"Nigger! What do you mean leaving that pail there for someone to break his neck!" he stormed.

"But, doctor, everybody is always gone this time of evening on this floor, an' my boss told me I could get through 'cause my wife is sick."

The doctor glared at the athleticly built black man standing before him. He hated niggers. Why should they let this nigger start his work before time in order to leave early; that was the trouble with so many of these uppity niggers, they were pampered too much. He snorted his disgust and went on to his office.

He'd come back to his office for an instrument that he would need on a case in the morning.

He turned on the light and sat at his desk. He fingered the poppy in the lapel of his coat. It was Memorial Day. He felt depressed this evening—he had something to remember. He walked to the mantel and moved a picture forward so as to get a better view.

It was a picture of his wife and child. It was his son. His son had been shot down in service overseas—his only child shot down while the grafters and profiteers—and niggers stayed behind and lived off the fat of the land.

He was bitter. Negroes had bought cars, ate pork chops every morning and wore fifteen dollar shirts, while his son had gone to war and gotten killed. Yes, he hated Negroes; that is why in all the years of his practice he had never served a Negro.

It had been fifteen years since his son had been listed on the casualty list. Those fifteen years had left their impression; he had planned such a brilliant future for his son; he had intended that his fame should exceed his own in surgery.

He opened a drawer in his desk and took out a letter; the years and much handling had faded and soiled it. He could not have told how many times he had taken that letter from the drawer and read and re-read it. It was the last letter that he had received from his son, when he had been in the hospital and realized that he could not get well. He had treasured that letter through the lonely years. His wife had died two years later.

He came to a portion of the letter that he had read so often:

"... He was known only as Tobe, dad, but had it not been for him, I would not be able to write you these last lines. He was so brave.

"I lay wounded in No-Man's Land. Five Huns stood over me. One, with fixed bayonet was about to do for me, when a shot came from somewhere and the man fell with a shot through his head, and then a figure was upon the remain-

ing four with a knife. He was out of bullets. One of them drew his automatic and drilled him through the shoulder, but he was a fighting maniac—he was too much for them. He wrenched the gun from the man's grasp and finished him and another; he had already done for two others with his knife.

"Then he lifted me to his shoulder and carried me as far as he could, but he had lost much blood, and he put me down and began to drag me as easily as he could, back to our lines.

"I gave him the watch you gave me for a birthday present, dad—I am sure you wouldn't mind—just as one pal to another. It was a wonderful gesture on his part, dad, but a futile one. He will live, but I . . ."

He couldn't go on—even after fifteen years, his eyes grew moist. Tobe—this man who had gone so gallantly to the rescue of his son; he had never heard from him in all these years; nor had he been able to locate him. He did not know whether he was dead or alive.

"Good night, doctuh," the janitor

had stuck his head in the partially opened door.

Dr. Robert Norton had the inclination to take one of the volumes from his desk and hurl it at the black face. He restrained himself instead and growled a "good-night."

Two days passed, then one evening as he read a treatise on surgery that a salesman had persuaded him to buy a few weeks previously, the janitor again thrust his head around the door.

"May I come in, doctuh?" he asked.

"What! You don't mean that you want to clean this time of day?" the doctor cried.

"No, sire, I wanta see you."

The doctor sighed and closed the book. He had found that the book was really a rehash of several books that he already had on surgery. But he wondered what the janitor wanted; a loan, he supposed. Well, he'd soon settle that—he wasn't lending a nigger his money.

"Come in," he growled.

"Doctor," he began, "I want to see you about your wife."

"What about your wife?"

"She's sick," the janitor replied. "Oh, yes," the doctor said sarcastically. "I remember. It was to go home to a sick wife when I came near breaking my neck over your scrub pail that evening. Well," he prompted.

"She needs an operation."

The doctor smiled derisively. "And you want me to perform the operation—is that it?"

"Yes, sir," he replied. "You see, there ain't a colored doctuh in town that can do er operation like she needs, that's why I come to you, because I know you is the best of the white doctors, and my Susie is so good—she deserves the best—please doctuh."

Doctor Norton noted that there were tears in the man's eyes, and in spite of himself he was touched, and they stayed the sharp retort that he had intended flinging from him. "No," he said "I can't do it." In all the years of his practice he had never performed an operation on a Negro and he didn't intend starting now.

"I know your fee is high, doctor, but I have a little money, and I have something else." He fished in his vest pocket and brought out an article and thrust it into the doctor's hand. "I hate to part with it, but it is for Susie, and she deserves the best."

The doctor looked at the object in his hand; it was a watch, and the next second he was around his desk, grasping the janitor's shoulders.

"Where did you get this watch?" he cried.

"It was given to me by a pal—overseas—" he said bewilderedly, "whom I tried to save."

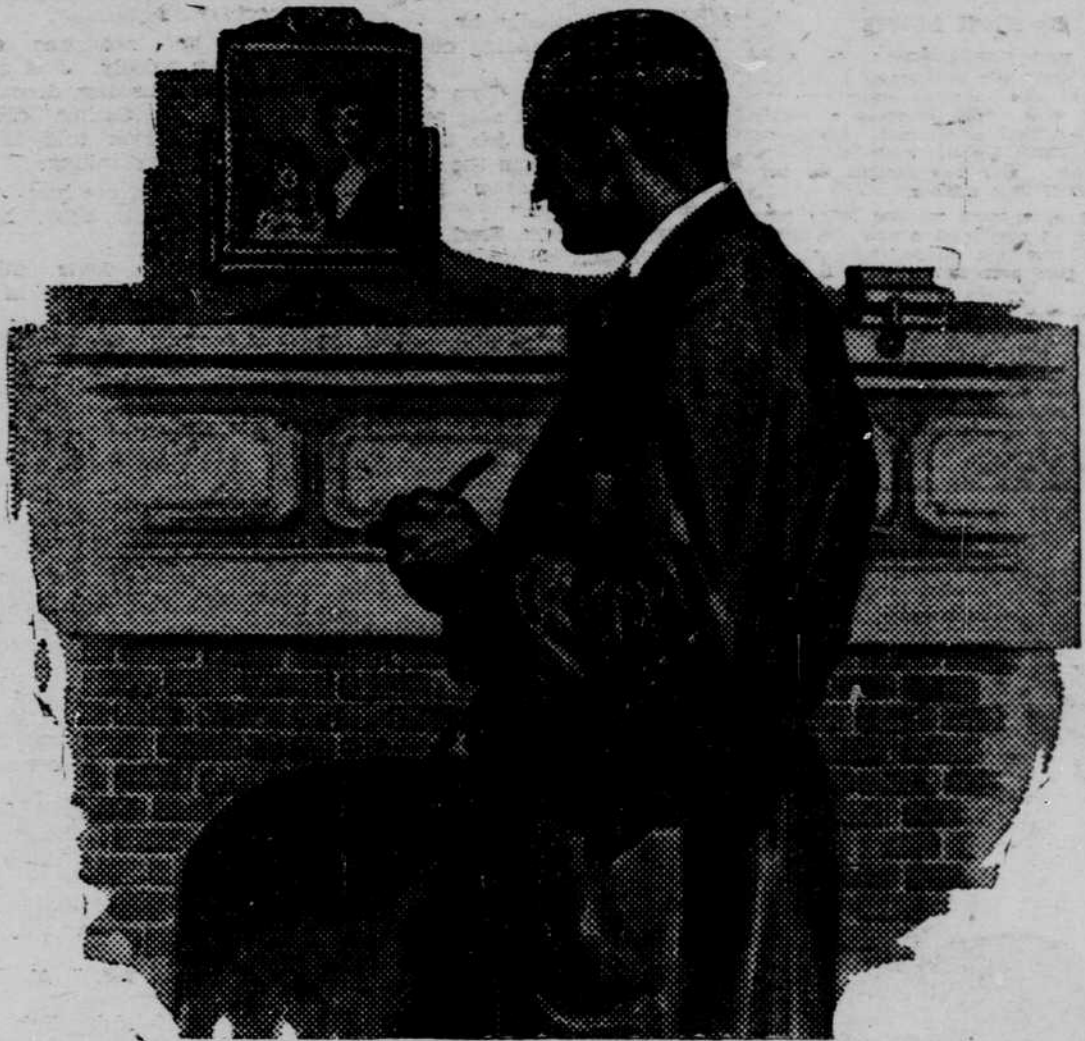
"What is your name, man?" he demanded, shaking him.

"Wha-wha—" he began mystified, "name's Tobias Marshall."

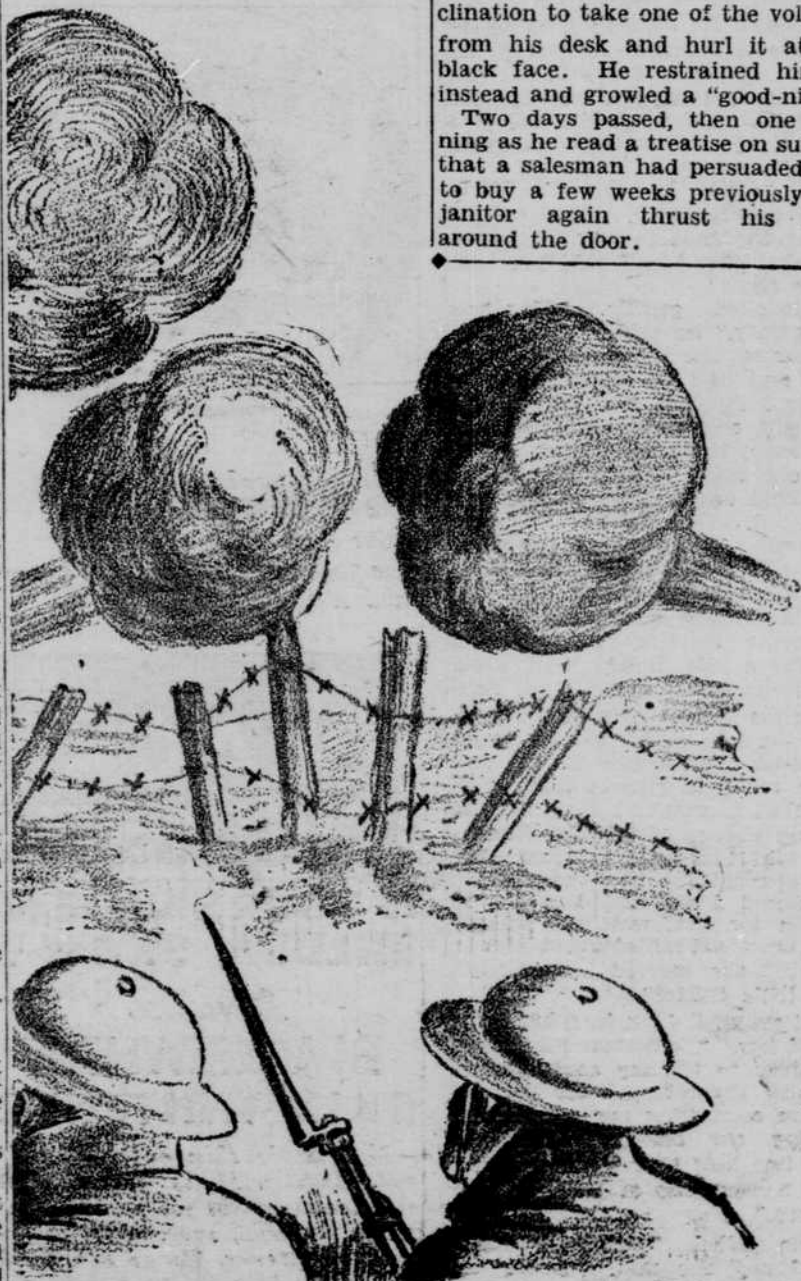
"Tobe," said the doctor, "a colored man—I didn't know—I didn't know."

He went around the desk and sat wearily down in his chair and looked up at the stalwart black man—the prejudice and hate of a lifetime seemed to fall from him. "Tobe," he said, "I'll do the operation."

THE END.



His boy had gone to war and been killed while Negroes stayed behind, ate pork chops every morning, wore \$15 silk shirts and rode in fine autos. He hated Negroes.



In No-Man's Land. Negroes stayed behind.

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WEEK

ANOTHER  
EDWARD WORTHY  
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Clue

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