

# *Chicken-Hearted Tonkin*

**Leslie Gordon Barnard**

Illustrated by  
**Roy Fisher**

## **\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* Chicken-Hearted Tonkin

*Date of first publication:* 1926

*Author:* Leslie Gordon Barnard (1890-1961)

*Illustrator:* Roy Fisher (1890-1953)

*Date first posted:* December 25, 2024

*Date last updated:* December 25, 2024

Faded Page eBook #20241226

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh, & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Google Books

# Chicken-Hearted Tonkin

*By*

*Leslie Gordon Barnard*

*Illustrations by Roy Fisher*

N ight and morning I used to buy my newspaper from him. His stand was not the best in the world, for if there was wind it blew around this corner gustily, if there was rain or sleet no overhang of eaves afforded shelter; what was still more important to him, this being a one-way street the tide of people swept past him, waiting on the farther side for trams or 'buses, and making use of the moment to secure their news-sheets. This, I thought, was because an almost blind man—who refuses to capitalize his affliction—has small chance in the competitive struggle for existence, and must be content with the leavings from men with two good eyes, and a keen sense of business.

Some men would have hung a sign about them: "Blind Newsdealer," or "Almost Disabled by Blindness," but you knew at once, when you spoke to him and he replied, that this man was too much of a gentleman to resort to such expediciencies. Sometimes I wished that he might raise his voice more loudly, proclaiming his wares; there was an element of the pathetic in the very quiet, half-hopeful, half-apologetic way in which he would thrust out his carefully folded news-sheet, with a modest: "Evening paper, sir! Evening paper here!"

You would never have known he was almost blind unless you watched closely, for his eyes met yours bravely, and it took keenness of observation to detect the oddness about them, the disguised groping, as well as a pretty sharp glance to follow the clever way in which his hand aided his failing sight in distinguishing the value of coins. It was the bills that stumped him; but even then he would say, as almost anyone might do—crumpling the

thing up—"A one, sir?" and when you spoke—"Oh, sorry, sir—didn't notice it was a two!"

It took me quite a time to "get it." I offered him a five by mistake one day, and over this transaction I tumbled to the thing, and had a little enough sense to speak of it. He was courteous but reserved, and I fumbled on as one who has forgotten the decencies, asking him if he did not get it in the war. "During the war," he said, and I knew by the way he said it that the conversation must end there. I moved on, rather abashed, and for two days traded at the stand on the opposite corner. But on the third, feeling that this was childish, I returned to him. Disabled as he was, he knew me, and his "Evening paper, sir! Nice evening?" reassured me. After that we became fast friends, and often I have been glad of my impetuous speech for, but for that and another "near-east crisis," I should have missed one of the vital contacts of my somewhat quiet and uneventful life.

He had, for so I got the story from him at last, a little home in the suburbs. Not, I fancy, a pretentious place, for he made much—in retrospect—of a little "den" where his wife sewed, and where he read to her in the days of their married life before the war. He seemed to like to dwell on this room, as if, more than any other part of the house, it imprisoned the essence of his happiness. Sometimes it was of his bookcase he spoke—they had managed to start a sectional affair and were tremendously proud of it, and were saving up for another section to house the books that still remained homeless. But, more often, he would revert to some simpler thing . . . like coloured spools in the work-basket he had given her one Christmas . . . little touches like that, almost unrelated.

There was an old apple-tree, he told me, in the back area, and when they first went house-hunting, one day in late spring, there it was already touched with blossom. "It don't bear nothin'," the landlady told them. "It clutters up the back a deal. I've a notion to have it cut down!" He told me, a little unsteadily, that he fancied "his woman" took the place as much to save the tree as anything. And there was the time when, being troubled by a mouse, they set a trap, and in the morning the little dun beast was there, caught by the tail. They looked at it—"such a wee thing, sir!"—and then at each other, and presently—"I went, sir, like a sentimental fool, and lifted the spring, and we stood and laughed happily to watch the creature scuttering away to safety behind the cupboard, and when I said we were fools, sir, she quoted Burns to me!" The mouse, it seems, became almost a member of the family, quite tame, and indignant if crumbs were denied it.

They had lived there a year when the war came along. Like most people, it first touched them only as most mass movements affect folk. An earthquake wipes out a whole community, and you are too stunned to fully realize or visualize it; a single man is imprisoned in a cave, and the world is agog about his rescue. Like others, my friend Tonkin and his wife went about their business, made patriotic economies in their provisions, shook their heads a bit over the newspapers, watched the parade of khaki in the streets, listened to the roll of drums and the gay music of the bands. But, for the time, it passed by their door, and did not touch them. And if there was uneasiness within them, they kept it to themselves. I imagine, from what he said, it was the first real reserve that had come between them.

And then the neighbor's boy, next door, joined up, and used to swank around a bit outside, as a boy would in his first uniform. So war came and sat on their doorstep, and they held their breath, and their silences became longer, and sometimes, as he sat in the "den" and read books from the sectional case, he would let the book lie open, and sit staring into space; and sometimes, as she sewed, a little coloured spool would fall from her fingers, and go trailing its silken length along the floor, and frightening the mouse behind the baseboard.

## II

There was a man in the establishment where my friend Tonkin worked named Glauss. You may perhaps have seen his name mentioned—always with a discreet reserve—in connection with more recent gatherings to denounce the bourgeoisie. I believe he makes pretty fiery speeches, evenings, denouncing all brands of imperialism, and preaching a Utopian sort of internationalism. In the daytime he puts in a grudging eight-hour day, and on Saturdays eagerly collects his pay-envelope from the capitalistic press.

However, this phase had not come to pass at the time of which I speak. At that time, with the war just properly launched, no one gloated more over the three-inch headlines whose setting-up he had to supervise, than Glauss. At that time, too, my friend Tonkin read proof upstairs, his sensitive spirit daily harassed by the war stuff that came in unfailing, and increasing, volume before him.

Glauss was a bull-necked, quick-tempered man of average height, crowned by a shock of reddish hair; unmarried, and probably quite undeserving the whispers of clandestine affairs to enliven his bachelor existence, for I imagine him to be, in his own way, an intensely moral man,

and with a native caution to facilitate control. Many of these qualities, of course, he still has, but he has added a sprouting of reddish hair on his upper lip which bristles impressively when he utters violence in the cause of Peace. He had attained at the time war broke out—so his own word put it—an age that set him just beyond the limit for active service, enabling him, as he went about berating the young men who were not in khaki, to add with unction: “Ah, if only I were a few years younger myself!” I have heard it said since that he made a good thing on the side out of his recruiting at so much a head, in league with some overzealous sergeant, but this is merely rumor. Well, there he was, growing daily more impressed with himself and his role—and meeting frequently in their work of helping to get out a newspaper, my friend Tonkin upstairs.

One can imagine those meetings: the great, beefy fellow, shirt sleeves rolled up to display a pair of muscular arms, the very hair above the shaven portion of his neck aggressively bristling—and the sensitive-featured, spectacled Tonkin, who only kept himself from being round-shouldered and hollow-chested by a regular course with dumbbells and Indian clubs and whose wife could never forget that he had not been over-strong as a child, and worried if he had the least touch of cold.

Perhaps it was this very fact of his physical disparity that sheltered him from earlier persecution. And then, one day, Glauss, meeting Tonkin in the hall by the elevator, made some remark, anent an air-raid, about “giving the enemy women and children back twice the hell their men sent!” Tonkin, it seems, looked at him with those pale, rather deep-set eyes of his, and said slowly: “I’m not so sure of that, Glauss!”

Then Glauss’ aggressive red bristles began to move on his scalp, and his eyes to regard Tonkin as might the eyes of a bloated red spider perceiving for the first time another fly at the edge of his web.

“Comes to that,” sneered Glauss, loud enough for some passersby to hear, “why ain’t you in khaki?”

### III

I realize, of course, that it isn’t the thing to talk much about the war that concerned us all so considerably a few years ago. We used to say then, in our silly way, that by what one did or did not do in the day of crisis—by that one would be judged for a lifetime, and by posterity. Now, if you would save

embarrassment all round, it is better to keep the thing quiet, as if the least said of a shady business the better.

There are some, of course, who unhappily can't conceal their part. Nature, with all the good-will in the world, hasn't been able to give them back legs, and arms, and lungs, and eyes—and minds!

With my friend Tonkin, you see, it was the eyes—and even though his trouble came not “in the war,” but “during the war,” as he carefully expressed it, I shall have to plunge ahead with the incident and get it over with, lest I be considered not quite decent in my sense of the fitness of things.

Singularly enough, it was on the very day when he definitely made up his mind as to his own course that the thing happened. Tonkin admits frankly that he had the makings of a very good conscientious objector. He used to prowl around the little house in those days, wandering from room to room, picking up unrelated articles, as if he had lost something, and couldn't remember what or where. But everybody knows that you can't find the answer to moral issues under the clock Uncle Matthew gave you for a wedding gift, even if the thing is itself a standing witness of faith versus works; nor yet in the tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece, even if it is consecrated more to household savings than to the smokers' weed. At other times he would sit so quietly, smoking his way through the mental haze, that I shouldn't be surprised if the mouse came out and sat up on its hams, twiddling its whiskers and considering him; then going back behind the baseboard shaking her head sadly to her children, who were already beginning to fancy they had a joint ownership in the house because their mother had been given the freedom of it in her day and generation. If you will read back or think back to those almost forgotten days, you will be surprised and pained at the attitude of this mother of a family, who of course should have either withdrawn her society from him in contempt, or, better still, have gone up and bitten his heel from behind to demonstrate that love of country meant action with her. . . .

But I started out to say that it was singular the thing should happen on this very day, for at breakfast Tonkin told his wife that he had got the matter straight at last.

“I can't just get the rights and wrongs of it,” he confessed. “Sometimes it seems the only way, and then again . . . but there's always the medical corps. A chap can't go far wrong on that. It's service to humanity whatever way you look at it! And I could manage no end of a load on a stretcher and things. And it's dangerous enough in its way!”

He shouldn't have said that, of course, before her; but you can understand how pathetically anxious he was not to play the shirker when it came to risks. He hadn't done his "daily dozen" yet that morning, and I have it from his wife that he stood there mid-floor in the kitchen, working like a Trojan, until she had to laugh through her threatening tears. And then it came to him what it would mean to her, and he dropped the dumbbells with a bang on the kitchen floor, and ran over to reassure her that he'd come through right as anything, and she could get a friend to stay with her here for the few—er—months he'd be away, and the paper, of course, would pay half-salary, and with his army pay they'd manage splendidly. . .

#### IV

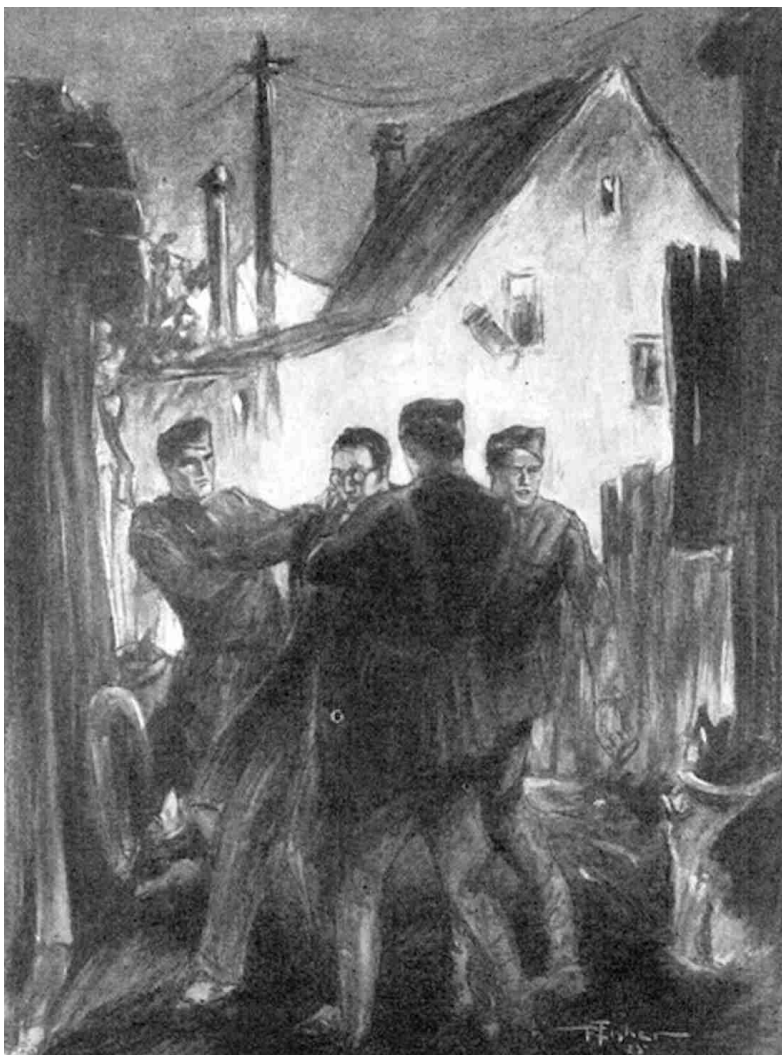
There are three things Tonkin has never told me. Just where the thing took place; just who the actors were; and the full details of the outrage. The first two he was under promise to them not to divulge. They threatened, if he did, to break up his home and harass his wife, and Tonkin was in no state to think clearly, or to figure on his rights to police protection, or to philosophize on the general emptiness of threats. He saw only his little home, and his wife, and the colored spools that now were in use for tiny garments, and he gave his word. The details he has withheld, I fancy, out of a sense of horror and shame. I do know that there were some uniformed men in it, and I have a strong suspicion that Glauss and the overzealous sergeant were not unaware of it.

Perhaps we are far enough from the event, and calm enough now to reflect that to put a uniform on a man, and give him license to kill the country's enemies, is not to apotheosize him. I say this with due appreciation of wastrels who became heroes, and men in ordinary life, plain citizens, comrades of mine, who gave themselves in a way that brings tears to the eyes, of whom the world—this post-war world—is not worthy. But I repeat that a uniform and a rifle do not make a man a saint. And these, with whom my friend Tonkin had dealings that evening, were devils.

The ironic touch is that Tonkin, leaving the office that day, was on his way to join up with the medical corps, if they would have him, when he was waylaid in a lonely spot by this devil's crew.

"Why aren't you in khaki?" they demanded of him.

Now Tonkin might have told them the nature of his present mission, but he had a high pride of his own, and he held right on his course.



*“Why aren’t you in khaki?” they demanded of him.*

I shan’t go into details concerning which Tonkin has such reserve. There was a dark alleyway nearby, and some kind of an unused garage, I gather. They took him there, beat him up, and heaped outrages upon him not fit to describe. If you do not believe me, just make inquiry if this was a solitary case of the kind. Even then Tonkin’s pride held, and he refused to say a word about joining up. I know of few more utter ironies than that they should have taunted him mostly with being a coward! They took fright themselves at last, and left him, for he had gone mercifully unconscious.

It was typical of Tonkin that, in the hospital later, he stuck to his promise, even though it was one extorted from him. All he kept saying, when he was able to speak and identify himself, was: “Don’t tell Mary! Don’t tell Mary!”

But, naturally, sooner or later she had to know the truth of it. It was not until some time later that they discovered that in some indirect way—though his eyes had never been strong—his sight was badly impaired.

## V

Well, that was the end of the war for Tonkin. With him, though he had got to the front only in the travail of his own spirit, it ended in night and darkness. Mary was wonderful through it all. She, of course, disclaims this, but Tonkin cannot yet speak of her part with equanimity. She approached the newspaper office about his salary, but Glauss—whose bitterness toward Tonkin seemed to be intensified rather than relaxed—was there before her. It was pretty well understood that Tonkin was one of those “wretched cowardly C.O.’s,” and had got into a scrap over the thing. “Hard luck about his eyes,” Glauss would state glibly, “but after all don’t it serve him pretty damn well right?” He had also the blasphemous audacity to quote scripture in support of this, about a man seeking to save his life, and losing it. . . . The powers-that-be were genuinely sorry for Mary, but in the distant way of men immersed in greater sorrows and driven by more pressing and legitimate calls; they did arrange to pay a month’s wages and let it go at that.

About the time the old apple-tree in the back area was putting forth its buds again, the Tonkins moved out—being unable to cope with the rent in their reduced circumstances—and drifted into indifferent lodgings in a cheap and crowded district, leaving the family of mice in full charge during the period of untenantry. Mary Tonkin, it seems, picked a spray of the dim blossoms and kept it till they fell. And I myself, when I came to visit their cramped quarters, saw the dried branch hanging on a nail. They apologized for it when I had little enough sense to remark on it.

There is one more word I must append to close the war history of this story of Tonkin’s, and bring the thing up to these latter days and the near-east crisis.

When the draft came along, and men were being conscripted, Glauss was one day missing from his accustomed place in the bowels of the newspaper office. It seems he had been “faking” his age right along. Some

question of a life-insurance policy betrayed him. They hustled him into uniform, and he was soon learning the meaning of war.

I understand that, from the day he was taken away, still protesting, he became a radical of sorts, and began to be violent and abusive in the cause of Peace. . . .

## VI

Glauss was undoubtedly a pretty efficient man in his own line. The day after he got his discharge from the army (in the summer of 1919, for they gave him, I believe, with others of his ilk, the task of cleaning up the battlefield somewhere around Courcelette—where I myself have seen the scattered crosses thick as daisies in a held) he was at work in his old place, with the heavy presses rumbling and tumbling out their newsprint about him. Confirmation of his efficiency is given by the course he pursued without loss of his job. By day he toiled for what was to him—though it was then inclined towards liberal views—the hated “capitalistic press” . . . by night he fulminated to a noisy, fanatical, eager, pathetic crowd of what the average man would call “cranks and worse,” his views of class and nationality. I gather they used to bait him quite a bit down at the office, asking him why he continued to subsist on capitalistic dollars. And he would reply, invariably, that the paper was not the worst of its kind, that it rose above some others in its international and humanitarian conscience, and that one must subsist on an imperfect system until the perfect supplanted it.

Happening one day to pass through the room where delivery of papers was made to waiting newsdealers, he met Tonkin. Ordinarily my friend Tonkin did not himself visit the source of supply, but there was some matter he had come to straighten—and one can imagine the sense of humiliation he would feel in coming by this back way to the basement of a building in which once he had held office above.

Tonkin tells me that he knew, even before he heard Glauss’ voice booming out some order, that it was he; and that he felt suddenly limp and uncertain. Out of this uncertainty emerged one irresistible thought: he would speak to Glauss, he would not evade him, nor show humiliation before him. So as he felt Glauss pushing his way through the crowd, he put an arm across the heads of small boys and caught his shoulder. “Hullo, Glauss,” he said. “I see you’ve got the old job back!” Glauss stopped dead in his tracks. Tonkin, of course, could not see well, and I have no eyewitnesses for the fact that Glauss’ strong color failed him; I can only surmise it. “Tonkin!” he

breathed, and then, quickly moving towards his former antagonist, and laying a hand on his shoulder: “Sorry to see you’ve come to this, Tonkin!”

One has to stop a moment before putting an interpretation on this. As a sentence it was unexceptional, friendly. Considering everything, as a word from Glauss it was sheer impertinent audacity. But there was something more subtle still, and Tonkin was quick to sense it. Behind the apparent friendliness, and behind the obvious impertinence was the old antagonism, repressed but ready to leap. And is there any greater hatred than that of the one who has been in the wrong, who has injured, against the injured one?

“Look here,” said Glauss suddenly, “I want you to come and see me. You may have heard I’m rather your way of thinking now—war and things!”

If he had deliberately slapped Tonkin on the face, he could have occasioned no greater surprise. Tonkin was stunned. But he found himself desiring to probe further into this anomalous affair, and answering, quite calmly:

“Any time you say, Glauss!”

Post-war politics have made strange bedfellows, but I can think of few more peculiar incidents than this one, narrowed down to two individuals as opposite and antagonistic as Glauss and Tonkin. I have often tried to picture them there, in Glauss’ bachelor apartment—a room rather overdone with cheaply framed portraits of irreconcilables, and strewn with ultra-radical papers, as one would expect from a man with such a bristling red moustache!—Glauss with his fierce little eyes upon his visitor, and his quick fiery speech; and Tonkin, sitting there with the rather pathetic tilt of face of the nearly blind, his words groping a little too, as if they worked out from the deep recesses of his mind with an odd, impressive patience.

Tonkin has related to me much of that conversation, but most of it I have forgotten, and you can get the gist of it almost anywhere nowadays, for neither of the men were profound thinkers and their speech would naturally suffer from the catch-phrases of the day. But the closing incident remains in my mind. It is one thing to discuss systems of government and international movements, and the rights of the individual and of small nations, and to agree on the main issues as they affect mankind. It is another thing to work out the personal element.



*“And it struck me suddenly what confounded fools we were, sitting there prating about brotherhood and all the rest of it, with the hatred of hell itself in our hearts!”*

“You see,” said Tonkin, telling me of it, “all the time he was talking of these things, I could feel the other thing. He despised me, he hated me. He had me there partly, I think, to ease his own conscience a bit, and more to parade the thing he had become—as against my—my poor estate. And when I thought of him sitting there smugly, talking of human rights and liberties, and thought of the part he’d played in breaking up my home—my God, I wanted to kill him! I’m not excusing myself, sir, I’m only stating plain facts. And it struck me suddenly what confounded fools we were, sitting there prating about brotherhood and all the rest of it, with the hatred of hell itself in our hearts! So I got up, sir.”

“‘Glauss,’ I said, ‘God forgive us for trying to regulate other men’s lives! We’ve got to start with ourselves. It’s easy enough for us to talk here,

and for you to go making speeches abusing everybody else—but where do we come in? What would all our ideas amount to if it came down to touching our pockets or our hearts?’

“Well, sir, he stared at me, and I could feel, even though his face was just a pale mist before me, that the corners were curling. ‘So you’re the same old chicken-heart, Tonkin!’ he sneered. ‘I tell you’—and here he banged the table, sir—‘there’s not one of us who hold these views strongly enough to get up in public and boldly proclaim them, but would throw over anything, everything for them!’

“Well, he said it as if he really meant it, so I said nothing and came away, for I wasn’t so sure of myself, and saw it was no company for me to be in. And I thought, as I went, of all he’d done to break and blast our little home, and of how my Mary has had to work to eke out my bit, and of the years of scraping and scrimping to try and get back to a place of our own again. . . .”

He stopped when he had got that far, and sat there, and once again his mind seemed to be groping, like his eyes. . . .

## VII

A fortnight or so later I was called in to help celebrate with the Tonkins. Our friendship had grown from a street-corner one to the intimacies of their home—if home you could call it. Just why I merited this friendship I do not know, except that I was careful never to overstep the bounds by suggesting aid to them. There are those, perhaps, who will criticize the fierce pride that kept Tonkin from demanding more of the world than he did. In their time of utter need—and how urgent it was, what with his partial blindness and the baby coming, one can only imagine—they retreated from contact, like dumb animals nursing their own hurt and determined to fight it through somehow by themselves. I believe that to me, first, were the barriers let down; that I became a link between their present state and some of the things they had cherished in pre-war days.

Tonkin’s invitations to me were typical: so casual that there was no real demand on me, and yet neither apologetic nor subservient—the invitation of one gentleman to another. I was glad to go, and especially upon this occasion of which I speak, for I was anxious to see more of their life. I liked, too, the fact that he offered no apologies for the meagreness of their dwelling place—two rooms and kitchen privileges in a fourth-rate house—beyond the mild statement that the landlady had an unfortunate predilection

for onions and cabbage, an unhappy union, whose aftermath he trusted I would overlook in the domestic atmosphere.

As soon as I entered I saw that, indeed, a celebration was in promise, if not already in progress. The best linen—a few pieces preserved from the wreck; china that she had clung to because it was a wedding gift; and, in the center of the table, rising proudly from a majolica pitcher, a great spray of apple-blossoms, for it was May again! “Bobby and I got them this afternoon,” Mrs. Tonkin announced proudly.

They kept the good news from me until we sat down to the feast. For the first time I saw his reserve quite broken. Between them, one catching up the story in turn from the other, I learned the facts. I had heard, of course, that his old newspaper was changing ownership. Now it seemed that the new owners were very much alive to opportunities.

“They’ve even got control of all the best newsstands,” Mrs. Tonkin enlightened me. “The very best—and they’re fixing them up almost as good as store fronts, with lights and shelves—and of course we’ll be able to sell all the magazines too!”

Tonkin interrupted smilingly.

“You’ve overlooked the main point, dear. For some reason they’ve picked me as one of the favored ones, and offered me a stand.” His glow of enthusiasm died away a little; he added: “There’s just one point I don’t quite like—I must contract not to sell the”—he mentioned our rival evening paper, for we have just the two in town. “It doesn’t seem just fair, does it?—but I suppose beggars can’t be choosers!”

“You won’t lose much not handling it!” I told him, for it was too broad for many minds, and too unyielding in its convictions to have more than a minor circulation.

Tonkin nodded in a worried way; this uneasiness he shook from him with a quick: “It means, you see—it means everything to us. Do you know, sir—our old house we had before the war, apple-tree and all, is vacant, and we can get it on quite decent terms. If things go well from the first—” He caught his breath.

Mrs. Tonkin broke in, to cover an emotional pause: “You must come and see our stand as soon as we open up.”

I did. Three days later the place was ready, and I dropped around. The stand was not far from his old corner, a strategic spot on the right side of the street for his business. Mrs. Tonkin was busy laying out long, attractive lines

of magazines. The place was all freshly-dried varnish and paint, and generously lighted, and both Tonkin and his wife were as proud as if they had just opened a departmental store! In a corner, on a pile of papers, the boy was happily reducing the nearest gaily covered magazine to fragments.

I felt like cheering myself. Instead I stocked up unnecessarily with magazines and papers, and went my way, delighted. I remember that it was only vaguely I took in the headlines that night, or realized that a new near-eastern affair was approaching a crisis. . . .

## VIII

**Y**ou remember, perhaps, the flurry it produced: the near-east again, diplomacies, bluffs, counter-bluffs, much talk of national and international issues involved, and most of the Great Powers scrambling, in a “diplomatic” sense, to keep their hands on the oil-wells and similar interests, and at the same time to propitiate a war-weary world straining its eyes through mists of suspicion towards that better day that seems, at long last, to be dawning! But you will recall, too, how all the extremists of either side came tumbling out of their retreats—the jingoist press of all nations to beat the drums and flourish the trumpets of public opinion, with a shrill scream for “Preparedness!”—the extreme radical to mount his tub and urge his panacea for all such ills!

Quite ridiculously, of course, when I think back to that time, I seem to see opinion like turgid water swirling in a great basin, and my friend Tonkin caught in the vortex and like to be sucked down the drain!

**I**t was on a Saturday, if I remember, and I saw as I drew near the stand that Tonkin was doing a “land-office business.” I walked up in turn, purchased paper and magazines . . . and Tonkin, who was always quick to know me, no matter how busy, treated me as if I were just one of many. His quick, “Thank you, sir!” came with a dull mechanical note to me as to the others. Mrs. Tonkin saw my look of surprise, and signaled to me.

“You mustn’t mind him!” she confided to me. Her own eyes were fighting some fierce distress. She hesitated, then went on: “You know, sir, he’s been uneasy about the paper, under the new management. I’ve read him the editorials each night—and there he’ll sit, smoking and shaking his head, and saying: ‘Reactionary! Reactionary!’ . . . you know how he feels, sir, about war and things? . . . we’ve been trying to pretend . . . but you can’t, can you, when every night you’d think to read it there’d never been a war,

with millions killed, and millions crushed. And now, with this new scare—"She seemed anxious I should not misunderstand. "You see, having this newsstand, and being tied to the one paper, it makes him feel as if he was part of it all, just as if he was working for them straight—as if, you see, he stood for what they stand for!"

I knew better what she meant—though I could pretty well guess it from my knowledge of the two papers—when I bought the other and opened both at their editorial pages. Tonkin's paper was a screaming jingo, the old pre-war mentality unchanged, calling for preparedness of navy, of army, of air-force, now that "the need was so apparent, the dangers of another world explosion unmasked" . . . the other dealt quietly with the pros and cons, deprecating all war talk, urging the need of peace, not war, of men, not oil-wells . . . .

And while I read, I remembered my last question, put as the crowd, clamouring for their news-sheets, swept me along.

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Tonkin?"

And her quiet reply: "I'm sure I don't know, sir. I'm sure I don't know. Jim says we'll have to talk it over to-night and to-morrow, and decide by Monday what's right for us."

Now that the bubble of excitement has been pricked this long while, and almost forgotten, you will say, perhaps, that it was much ado about nothing, that it was not a very vital issue after all. I can only say that this is not a setting forth of the rights and wrongs of the matter, nor the history of its outcome. It is merely Tonkin's story I am telling. And there come to me two mental pictures that somehow make the issue important.

Some curious spirit led me that night to enter a meeting of the most radical element in the city. You may imagine how big a night it was with them. Some of their speeches were quite balanced and excellent. More were not. But the hit of the evening was a man, red-haired, bristly-moustached, who poured out bitter invective against all who made and fostered war. Right madly was he cheered when he called upon all present to renounce everything, to sacrifice human desires, ambitions, possessions, for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood. When I left, the room was still rocking with "bravos," and buzzing like a hive with approval.

I went out into the sweet evening air, and walked home under the stars. And I seemed to see only a two-roomed dwelling in a fourth-rate house, flavored with the stale aftermath of perpetual onions and cabbage . . . and

some dried branches from an apple-blossom spray, and a woman with great grey eyes facing a man whose head was tilted slightly back after the manner of the almost blind. These two I could not shake from mind, sitting there, groping their way towards a decision, and trying not to think of the house with the apple-tree at the back, vacant again now, save perhaps for the scamperings of mice . . . .

## IX

I quite lost them for a time. I think they picked up and carried their belongings to still cheaper lodgings. And I think, too, it was wise for him to change the scene of his activity for a while, even if his original stand was better. And then, one blowy night, turning the corner, I found him at his familiar post, where the wind was gusty and there was no overhang to catch the rain and enable him to set out any worth-while stock of magazines. As I approached, in his old half-hopeful, half-apologetic way, he thrust out his carefully folded news-sheet—the rival paper of broad view, tolerant earnings and small sale!—with a modest:

“Evening paper here! Evening paper, sir?”

A man, pushing in just ahead of me, took the paper, glanced at it, and handed it back with an impatient: “No, no, I want the other—”

“Sorry! Don’t sell it, sir!” said Tonkin, and the prospective customer moved almost angrily away.

I took his place, and bought the paper. That time, though I felt sure he recognized me, he gave no sign; I think he was afraid of my pity, or my commendation, and, possibly, of my charity. So I passed on into the gusty drizzle of the night, and left it for another and a better time. And, as I went, his voice, in modest cheerfulness, followed me through the storm: “Evening paper, sir? Evening paper here!”

In the morning I succumbed to a temptation. I went down to Tonkin’s old newspaper office, and, inquiring for one Glauss, was led at once into the bowels of the plant, where I discovered him giving brisk orders for the issuing of the latest edition of a militaristic press.

“Mr. Glauss,” I said boldly, “you will forgive my coming on such an errand, but I happened to be one of the audience when you spoke a while back on renouncing all in the cause of Peace and Brotherhood. May I ask what you are doing here?”

He stared at me, but he got the point quickly enough, for he turned evasively away. Some words came presently from that corner of his mouth nearest to me, and I gathered that one must subsist on an imperfect system until the perfect one supplanted it.

I left him, for after all it was no business of mine. But as I went out, it seemed to me as if the personality of my friend Tonkin grew until it filled this whole establishment where once he had worked; then it narrowed down into focus, into something braver still—a man upon a street-corner in the gusty wind, refusing to capitalize his affliction, but folding a tolerant, little-wanted news-sheet carefully, and thrusting it forward hopefully with the modest cry:

“Evening paper, sir? Evening paper here!”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Section headings have been renumbered beginning with Roman numeral II.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Chicken-Hearted Tonkin* by Leslie Gordon Barnard]