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LADY LARKSPUR

MEREDITH NICOLSON



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(Continued from Last Week.)

I hurried to the house, where I found Alice and Mrs. Farnsworth ministering to Elsie, who had been taken there by their order. Elsie, sharing with Dutch the honors of the night, lay on a day-bed, where she had received first aid. Alice rose from her knees as I entered, gathering up strips of bandages, and turned to me laughingly.

"Elsie's injuries are not serious; only disagreeable bruises in the face. There will be no scars, I'm sure. We'll keep her at the house for a few days until she's quite fit again. Surely any one who has questioned Elsie's loyalty ought to be satisfied now."

"You certainly managed it very cleverly, Elsie. We're all very grateful."

Elsie, her face covered with bandages, acknowledged my thanks by wiggling her foot.

Mrs. Farnsworth said she would put Elsie to bed. Now, I thought, Alice would make some sign if she knew anything that would explain Montani and the prisoner in the toolhouse. But the whole affair only moved her to laughter and she seemed less a grown woman than ever in her white robe. My efforts to impress her with the seriousness of the attempt to secure the fan only added to her delight.

"How droll! How very droll! You couldn't possibly have arranged anything that would please me more! It's delicious! As you say in America, it's perfectly killing!"

I suggested that the holding of a prisoner without process of law might present embarrassments.

"I know," she cried, clapping her hands festively. "You mean we are likely to bump into dear old habemus corpus! The sheriff will come and

read a solemn paper to you and you will have to lie you to court and produce the body of the prisoner. That will be splendid!"

"It won't be so funny if—"

"Constance and I so love the unusual—and it is so hard to find!" she continued. "And yet from the moment I reached the gates of these premises things have happened! Nothing is omitted! Strange visitors; fierce attacks upon our guards, and still the mystery depends in the wee sma' hours, with heroes and heroines at every turn! To think that that absurd little Dutch was asleep in the garden and really captured the spy or whatever he is! But you are a hero, too! You shall be decorated!"

She walked to a stand and pondered a moment before a vase of roses, chose a long-stemmed red one and struck me lightly across the shoulder with it.

"Arise, sir knight! You should have knelt, but to kneel in skirts requires practice; you could hardly have managed in that monk's robe."

I couldn't be sure whether she was mocking me or whether there was really liking under this nonsense. I was beyond the point of being impatient with her. I was helpless in her hands; she would do with me as she willed, and it was my business to laugh with her, to meet her as best I could in the realm of folly.

"You must go!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Constance will be calling down the stairs for me in a moment."

"Tomorrow—" I began. The wistful look she had at times came into her eyes as she stood in the center of the room, playing with the flower.

"Tomorrow," she repeated, "and then—tomorrow!"

"There must be endless tomorrows for you and me," I said, and took the flower from her hand. The revelry died in her eyes, and they were awake with reproach and dismissal. At the door I looked back. She hadn't moved and she said, very quietly, but smiling a little: "Nothing must happen to make me sorry I came. Please remember!"

CHAPTER IV.

Pursuing Knights.

I didn't sleep until near daybreak, and was aroused at nine o'clock by Flynn, who appeared at the door in his chauffeur's togs, carrying a tray. "The wife didn't come back, sorr, but I made coffee and toast. Sorry to waken you, but I'm takin' the new car

developments at Barton, and went out and walked. Inquiries at hotels large and small occupied me until seven o'clock. No one had heard of a Mrs. Bashford or a Mrs. Farnsworth. My inspection of the occupants of several thousand automobiles proved equally fruitless. I ate a lonely dinner at the club and resumed my search. Hanging about theater doors, staring at the crowd, is not a dignified occupation, and by nine o'clock, having seen the most belated theatergoers vanish, I was tired and footsore. The flaming sign of Searles' "Who Killed Cock Robin?" over the door of the "As You Like It" caught my eye. I sought a seat—the last in the rack—and squeezed into my place in the middle of the last row. As I had seen the piece at least a dozen times, its novelty was gone for me, but the laughter of the delighted audience was cheering. The first act was reaching its culmination, and I watched it with a glow of pride in Searles and his skillful craftsmanship.

As the curtain fell and the lights went up amid murmurs of pleasure and expectancy, I glanced across the rows of heads. The half-turned face of a man three rows in front of me suddenly caught my attention. There was something curiously familiar in his outlines and the gesture with which, at the moment, he was drawing his handkerchief across his forehead. It was Montani—beyond any question Montani—and I instinctively shrank in my seat and lifted my program as he turned round and swiftly surveyed the rows behind him.

I watched his black head intently until I remembered the superstition that by staring at a person in a public place you can make him look at you. Montani knew a great many things I wanted to know, but I must have time to adjust myself to the shock of his propinquity.

The house now took note of a stirring in the boxes. There was an excited buzz as the tall form and unmistakable features of Cecil Arrow-smith, the English actor, were recognized. I had read that day of his arrival in New York. With him were two women. My breath came hard and I clutched the iron frame of the seat in front of me so violently that its occupant turned and glared.

(Continued on page two, this section.)

Fast in Acoustics.
To test the acoustic properties of a hall, the lecturer proposed counting the number of seconds the clapping of the hands could be heard; if five or six seconds, the hall is unfit for public speaking, for which it must be reduced to two or three seconds, but for musical purposes a little longer may be allowed. Draping the hall is the best way to reduce the reverberation, belief in the efficacy of stretched wires being a mere relic of superstition.

**A HURRICANE OF DRAMA!
A GALE OF PASSION!**
See
"OUT OF THE STORM"

into the city."
I sat up and rubbed my eyes.
"Who's going to the city?" I demanded.
"The ladies is goin' at once, sorr. They sent orders an hour ago to be ready with the new machine. I'm late and you'll have to excuse me, sorr."
I sprang out of bed and piled him with questions, most of which he was



"I'm Late and You'll Have to Excuse Me, Sorr."

unable to answer. I did, however, extract from him the information that nothing had occurred after I retired for the night that could have alarmed the women at the residence and prompted this abrupt departure. There was no reason why Alice shouldn't run to town if it pleased her to do so, and yet it was odd that she hadn't mentioned the matter. Flynn hurried away, and from the window I followed the car's course to the house, and a moment later caught a glimpse of it on its way to the gates.

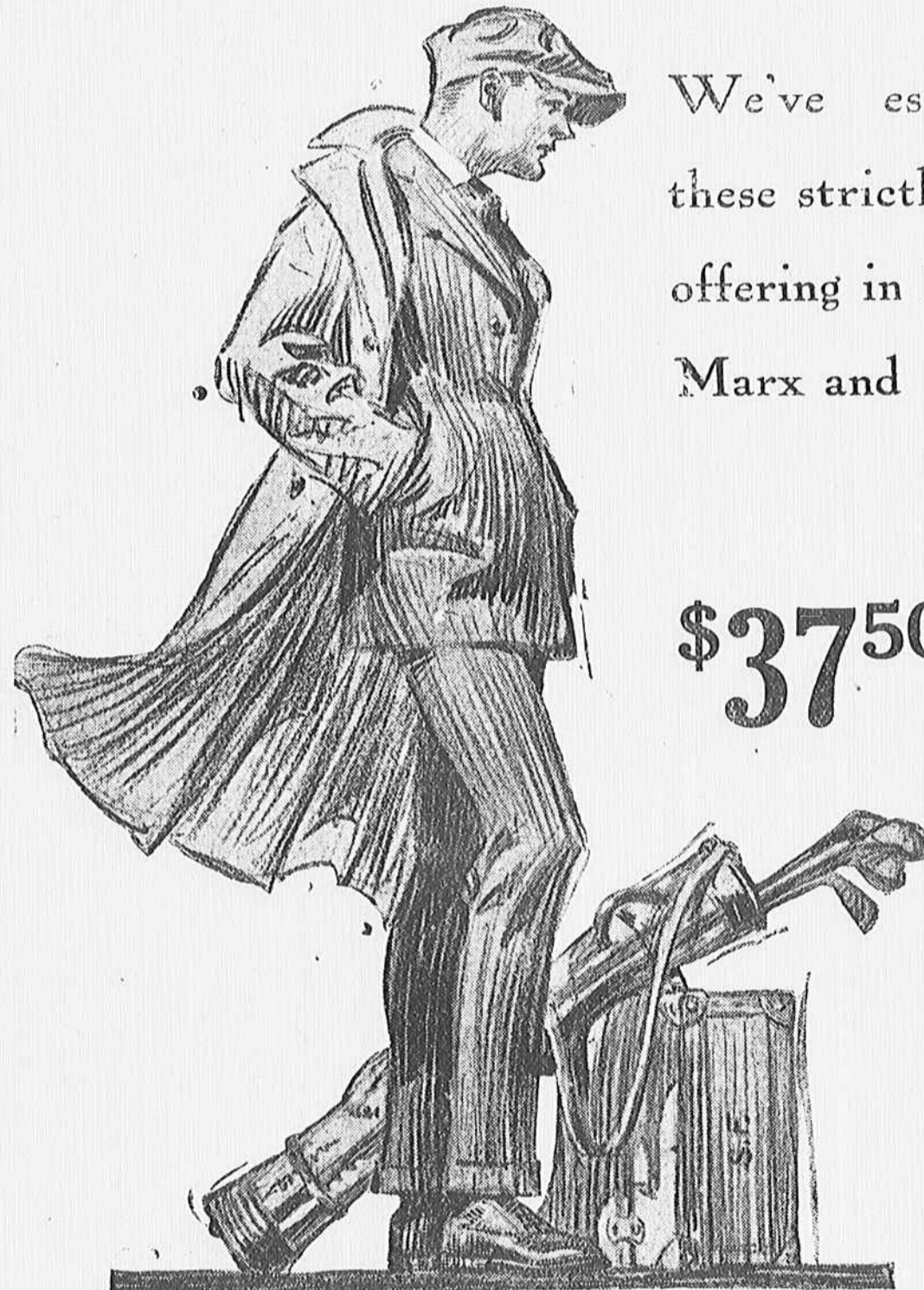
I called from the window to one of the gardeners who knew how to manage a machine and told him to be ready to drive me to the village in half an hour. There was an express at ten-forty, and by taking it I would at least have the satisfaction of being somewhere in New York when the runaways arrived. Antoine packed my suitcase; I am not sure that he didn't shed tears on my belongings. The old fellow was awed into silence by the rapidity with which history had been made in the past twenty-four hours, and clearly was not pleased by my desertion.

We drove past the toolhouse, where I found the prisoner seated on a wheelchair smoking a cigarette. He was no more communicative than when I had questioned him after his capture. He smiled in a bored fashion when I asked if he wanted anything, and said he would be obliged for cigarettes and reading matter. He volunteered nothing as to his identity, and the guards said that a thorough search of the captive's clothing had disclosed nothing incriminating. He had three hundred dollars in currency

(this was to cover Elsie's bribe money, I conjectured), a handkerchief, a cigarette case, and a box of matches. I directed that he be well fed and given all the reading matter he wanted, and hurried on to catch my train.

I took a room at the Thackeray club and pondered carefully whether, in spite of my misgivings, I hadn't better see Torrence and tell him all that had happened since his call on Mrs. Bashford. If there was any chance of doing the wrong thing in any matter not prescribed in the laws governing the administration of estates, he would be sure to do it; but I was far from satisfied with the results of my own management of affairs at Barton. I finally called up the trust company and learned that Torrence was in Albany attending the trial of a will case and might not be in town for a couple of days. His secretary said he had instructions to wire my daily report to Albany. I told him there had been no

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