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The ORIOLE
by Booth Tarkington
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partner had taken secure measures to prevent Florence from ever again setting foot within the newspaper building. In addition, he was quite showered with definitions; and these, though so variant, all sought to phrase but the one subject; his conduct in seeking to drug Florence through the mire, when she was absent and could not defend herself. Poor Florence would answer later in the evening, he was told, severely; and though her cause was thus championed against the slander it is true that some of them felt stirrings of curiosity in regard to Florence. In fact, there was getting to be something like a cloud upon her reputation. There were several important things for her

to explain; among them, her taking it upon herself to see that Noble received a copy of the Oriole, and also her sudden departure from home and rather odd protraction of absence therefrom. It was not thought she was in good company. Uncle Joseph had telephoned from a suburb that they were dining at a farmhouse and would thence descend to the general region of the movies.

(To be continued.)

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(Continued from Last Week.)

Herbert's father joined them, a few minutes later, but it had already become clear to the son that the North End Daily Oriole was in one sense a



"Oh, if Boys Could Only Be Girls!" Herbert Just Looked at Her.

thing of the past, though in another sense this former owner and proprietor was certain that he would never near the last of it. However, on account of the life of blackmail and slavery now led by the members of the old regime, the Oriole's extinction

was far less painful to Herbert than his father supposed; and the latter wasted a great deal of severity, insisting that the printing press should be returned that very night to Uncle Joseph. Herbert's heartiest retrospective wish was that the old printing press had been returned to Uncle Joseph long ago.

"If you can find him to give it to!" Aunt Harriet suggested. "Nobody knows where he goes when he gets the way he did this afternoon when we were discussing it all with him. I only hope he'll be back tonight!"

"He can't stay away forever," Aunt Fanny remarked. "That garage is charging him five dollars an hour for the automobile he's in, and surely even Joseph will decide there's a limit to wildness some time!"

"I don't care when he comes back," Herbert's father declared grimly. "Whenever he does he's got to take that printing press back—and Herbert will be let out of the house long enough to carry it over. His mother or I will go with him."

Herbert bore much more than this; he had seated himself on the third step of the stairway in the hall, and maintained as much dogged silence as he could. Once, however, they got a yelp of anguish out of him. It was when Cousin Virginia said:

"Oh, Herbert, Herbert! How could you make up that terrible falsehood about Mr. Crum? And, think of it; right on the same page with your cousin Florence's pure little poem!"

Herbert uttered some sounds, totally incoherent but loud, and expressive of a supreme revulsion. The shocked audience readily understood that he liked neither Cousin Virginia's chiding nor Cousin Florence's poem.

"Shame!" said his father. Herbert controlled himself. It could be seen that his spirit was not broken, even when Aunt Fanny mourned, shaking her head at him, smiling ruefully:

"Oh, if boys could only be girls!" Herbert just looked at her. "The worst thing," said his father—"that is, if there's any part of it that's worse than another—the worst thing about it is this about Noble Dill."

"What about that poor thing?" Aunt Harriet asked. "We haven't heard."

"Why, I walked up from downtown with old man Dill," said Mr. Atwater, "and the Dill family are all very much worried. It seems that Noble started

downtown after lunch, as usual, and pretty soon he came back to the house and he had a copy of this awful paper that little Florence had given him—"

"Who gave it to him?" Aunt Fanny asked. "Who?"

"Little Florence."

"Why, that's curious," Cousin Virginia murmured. "I must telephone and ask her mother about that."

The brooding Herbert looked up, and there was a gleam in his dogged eye; but he said nothing.

"Go on," Aunt Harriet urged. "What did Noble do?"

"Why, his mother said he just went up to his room and changed his shoes and tie—"

"I thought so," Aunt Fanny whispered, hurriedly, but solemnly. "Crazy."

"And then," Mr. Atwater continued, "he left the house, and she supposed he'd gone down to the office; but she was uneasy, and telephoned his father. Noble hadn't come. He didn't come, all afternoon, and he didn't go back to the house; and they telephoned around to every place he could go, that they know of—and they couldn't find him or hear anything about him," Mr. Atwater coughed, and paused.

"But what," Aunt Harriet cried, "what do they think's become of him?"

"Old man Dill said they were all pretty anxious," said Mr. Atwater. "They're afraid Noble has—disappeared."

Aunt Fanny screamed. Then, in perfect accord, they all turned to look at Herbert, who rose and would have retired upstairs had he been able.

As that perturbing evening wore on, word gradually reached the most outlying members of the Atwater family connection that Noble Dill was missing. Ordinarily, this bit of news would have caused them no severe anxiety. Noble's person and intellect were so commonplace—"insignificant" was the term usually preferred in his own circle—that he was considered to be as nearly negligible as it is charitable to consider a fellow being. True, there was one thing that set him apart; he was found worthy of a superlative when he fell in love with Julia Atwater. Of all the large and ardent group in like condition, he obtained conspicuousness as "The Worst." Of course, this distinction caused him to become better known and more talked about than in his earlier youth.

However, the eccentricities of a person in such an extremity of love are seldom valued except as comedy; and even then with no warmth of heart for the comedian, but rather with an incredulous disdain; so it is safe to say that under other circumstances Noble might have been missing, indeed, and few of the Atwaters would have missed him. But as matters were, they worried a great deal about him, fearing that a rash act on his part might reflect notoriety on themselves through their beautiful relative—and through the North End Daily Oriole. And when nine o'clock came and Mrs. Dill reported to Herbert's father, over the telephone, that nothing had yet been heard from her son, the pressure of those who were blaming the Oriole more than Julia became so wearing

that Herbert decided he would rather spend the remaining days of his life running away from Wallie Torbin than put in any more of such a dog's evening as he was putting in—thus he defined it.

He made a confession; that is to say, it was a proclamation. He proclaimed his innocence. He began the history of it with a description of events distinctly subsequent to the little game with Patty Fairchild, and explained how he and Henry had felt that their parents would not always be with them, and as their parents wished them to be polite, they had resolved to be polite to Florence. Proceeding, he related in detail her journalistic exploit.

Of the matter in hand he told the perfect and absolute truth—and was immediately refuted, confuted and demonstrated to be a false witness by Aunt Fanny, Aunt Carrie, and Cousin Virginia, who had all heard him vehemently declare, no longer ago than the preceding Sunday, that he and his

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