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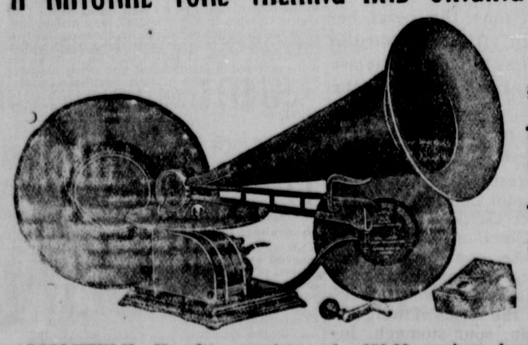

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JOHN BARTLEY, Chestertown, Md.


## BEWARE OF THE DOGS.

By Rita Kelley.

Copyright, 1906, by M. M. Cunningham.

"Hello! What are you doing here; here of all places? What's this? Tar, by Jove! And rents all over your frock!"

"You seem to be nothing but a big interrogation point," quoth the girl resentfully, refusing to look up at the athletic chap striding toward her. She was seated on a bowlder making sundry dabs with scraps of old newspaper at some black spots on her gray skirt, and at the sound of his voice the color had rushed furiously to her cheeks.

"Can't a girl get tar on herself if she wants to? And I'd like to know if I haven't as good a right to be here—alone, as you have?" she challenged.

The man laughed joyously and flung himself down at her feet.

"Delicious," he said. "Go on."

The girl bit her lip.

"You were always taking advantage," she flared out.

He laughed again, rolled over and touched one of the spots. She had forgotten them. "Will they come out?" he asked.

She flushed again, more painfully than before, at being thus off her guard when she wished of all times to be mistress of herself.

"I don't know," she exclaimed, "and I don't care, but I think you are mighty mean." She stood up suddenly, flinging away the blackened newspaper. "Didn't I tell you that I never would speak to you again and that I never wanted to see you? And here you are making me miserable and yourself obnoxious! Oh, I don't want you to touch me! I hate you!"

"Agatha!" He leaped to his feet, the boyishness gone from his manner, his face grown strangely tense. "If I thought you meant that!" he cried, clinching his hands till the knuckles showed white. "Oh, if I thought you meant it!"

She turned away, unable to meet the searching pain in his eyes, and gazed down at the river rolling its placid

BEGAN—OH, SO GENTLY!—TO RUB A SPOT OF THE PRECIOUS GRAY SKIRT.

length between the October hills. It was all peaceful out there in the woods. A squirrel chirped exultantly as he jumped for a falling beechnut, and a belated thrush warbled out a song of sweetness and light from the hawthorn hedge near by. Only man knew strife—and a girl.

The silence that is more deadly than a battle of words and more difficult to end grew appalling. Agatha felt driven to bay by a relentless pursuer, while she groped frantically for something to dismiss him utterly, to free herself of his oppressive nearness.

"Well, why don't you go?" she gasped finally, struck cold by the need for saying it.

"I can't go, Agatha—I can't go—till I know that you mean it."

The misery in his voice stung her. "Haven't I said it?" she cried in self defense.

"Yes, Agatha, but I have such a tiny hope that you don't always mean what you say"—

"Don't you think I meant it when I told you three months ago I never wanted to speak to you again? Don't you think I meant it when I released you from—our—engagement?" She hid her face convulsively in her hands.

"Agatha," he said slowly, his voice dropping to its lowest, most vibrant note. "Agatha, what did you mean when—without our engagement being known—except to ourselves—you went into seclusion and lived like a religieuse? Is it—is it," he insisted, "that you cared more than you wished to confess?"

She uttered a sharp little cry. "You were always like a surgeon's probe." And, with a beseeching flinging of her hand: "Please, please go! Don't you see you make me wretched?"

For a moment they stood measuring each other, her smoldering, pleading eyes vainly trying to wrest away from the intensity of his steadfast gaze. There was a crackling of underbrush, and a little, wizened old man, carrying a bunch of newspapers, shambled into the small open.

"Thought you might want some more, miss, to clear your skirt with," he said, ignoring the silence of the two and the presence of the young man. "How did the scraps do? I come back as soon as ever I could. Know'd you'd be a pretty sight goin' into town if I didn't.

"There," he said officiously, crumpling up a large page and thrusting it toward the young man, "you clean that side, and I'll go at this, and we'll soon have her in some sort of decent shape." He squatted beside the girl and began scrubbing the spots as though he were polishing harness.

The man looked at the girl, the girl looked at the river, and neither moved a muscle, though the man looked sheepish with his big wad of paper and a bit helpless and quite a good deal forlorn.

"Girls is strange critters," speculated the old man, beginning on another spot. "Allus doin' what they ain't got no call to do and jumpin' the traces when you least expect it. Funniest part of it is they don't allow as they ought to get their come-uppances neither. If you tell 'em not to do a thing they go straight and do it, and if they get into trouble they expect some one to yank 'em out. Here, you," he called suddenly to the young man, "set to and rub out them spots—near as you can."

"I—I'm afraid it won't do much good," he said, dubiously eying the girl rather than the tar smears.

The old man's eyes gleamed mischievously. "Haven't you been introduced yet? Well, now, that's an oversight! Young man, this is a girl that read that there sign about no trespassin' on these premises and decided right off to come in and make me a call. That there barb wire fence is enough to keep ordinary trash out, but you can't never reckon on a girl. Girls mostly needs a keg o' tar, too, and she got both."

The old man backed off and squinted his eyes. "Mighty fine skirt to get scratched up. But, then, girls is skittish. I'd sooner break sixteen colts one winter than try bringin' one girl to time." And he grinned illuminatingly up at the young man from the safety of the back breadths of the gray skirt.

The girl shook herself impatiently.

"That will do, thank you," she said, moving quickly forward. "It is growing late. I must be going."

But the old man had a firm hold on the skirt, and she stopped short. He continued to rub away—he had never stopped.

"Had a little experience o' that myself," he said reminiscently, "when I was courtin' Mandy. Swore she wouldn't ever have a gol durned thing to do with me—just cause I held Tabitha Juniper's hand one sleighin' party to see if Mandy cared. Tickled plum crazy"— For the first time the old man ceased to rub, and, half crouched, the dirty paper crunched in his hand, he gazed out across the river. "Queer how kind a-durned happy a fellow can be just cause a skittish girl shows him she cares," he muttered.

"Who-oo-oo! Who-oo-oo!" A shrill, beckoning call floated across the wood lot.

The old man let the tarry paper fall from his big hand.

"It's Mandy," he said, springing up. "I guess you'll have to manage now for yourselves. Supper's waitin'." With a quick sidelong movement he was off through the low hawthorn.

Both the man and the girl stood and looked at the place where he had disappeared until the last leaf ceased to flutter, then slowly she turned to the man before her. Their eyes met and lingered for a long moment fraught with questioning. What they answered could not be told in words, so the man fell on his knees and began—oh, so gently!—to rub a spot of the precious gray skirt. She stood looking down on his broad shoulders, his big blond head touched gold by the setting sun. Then her eyes wavered to the crude sign, "No Trespassing," directly in front. With a quick movement she reached down and ran her slender fingers through his hair, stooped and touched his face caressingly with hers. "Beware of the dogs," she said in a voice that choked, but ended in a laugh.

### The Snow Flower.

A traveler in Siberia tells us about a wonderful plant found in the northern part of that country, where the ground is perpetually covered with a coating of frost and snow. It is called the snow flower, and the description of its birth and its short life reads like a fairy tale. He says it shoots out of the frozen soil on the first day of the year and attains a height of three feet. On the third day it blooms, remaining open for only twenty-four hours. Then the stem, the leaves and the flower are converted into snow—in other words, the plant goes back into its original elements. The leaves are three in number, and the flower is star shaped. On the third day, the day the bloom appears, little specks appear on the extremities of the leaves. They are about the size of the head of a pin and are the seeds of the flower. It is said that some of these seeds were gathered once and taken to St. Petersburg, where they were buried in a bed of snow. The first of the following year the plant burst forth and bloomed just as it does in Siberia.

### Painfully Frank.

Merchant (to applicant who has called in response to an advertisement for a business partner)—Now let us get to business at once. To begin with, what I want to assist me in this enterprise is a man of brains.

Applicant (with alarming frankness)—Oh, you needn't have told me that. I could see it for myself.

### Taking It Internally.

As he crept softly upstairs the clock struck 2.

"Where have you been, Alfred?" she asked quietly.

"At the office, taking stock," came the glib reply.

"I thought I smelt it," said his wife.—New York Press.


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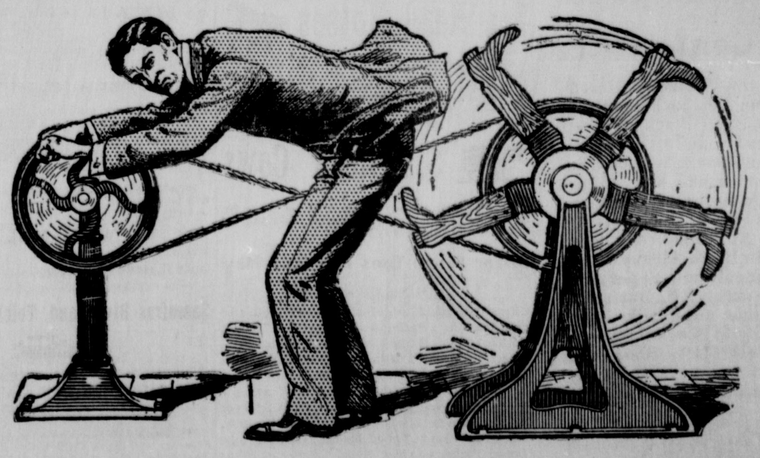

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