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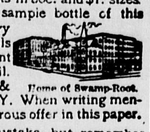

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A FLAT FAILURE

By Cecilia A. Loizeaux

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Bang went a window in the right hand third story flat. From the left hand flat in the same story directly across the hall there came a crash, followed by the shiver of broken glass. An old gentleman stepped out into the hall and waited. In a moment a second old gentleman appeared at the open door of his flat, evidently intending to slam it shut with all the power that lay in his strong right arm. But he, too, stopped as he saw his neighbor and then gave a shamefaced laugh.

"Broke a window pane trying to keep out the noise. That girl's dancing a polka on her piano and she's been at it four mortal hours. It's a shame, and I won't stand it any longer. There's going to be a change here!"

"If change is what you want, come over to my side. There you can hear singing. The young wretch down there aspires to be a tenor. He has been singing for so long that if he should stop now I'd be lonesome, I guess."

The piano player stopped long enough to get a new piece of music, and in the interval of comparative quiet there floated through the hallways the wails of a stringy tenor voice reiterating with long drawn out sadness:

"Oh-h-h I ha-ave sighed to re-est me!"

"Now, just listen to that, will you!" said one disgustedly.

Soon the strains of "My Old Kentucky Home," embellished with unheard of variations, drowned out the wails of the tenor.

"Yes, I'll listen. Don't see how I can help myself," said the other. "Come in here, Adams," and he led the way into his rooms and out to the piazza at the back. It was the least noisy place he could think of.

"Now, what are we going to do about this thing? We've signed leases for two years for these flats, and we'd only had four months before this chunk of Signor Squalli's conservatory of music came out here to stir up this peaceful neighborhood. I've questioned the parents of 'em, and they've signed for a year. Now, what'll we do?"

"I don't know," said Adams as he offered his neighbor a cigar and bit the tip from his own. "I went through more or less noise during the war, but this—I've got so I can't tell when they stop and when they begin now, the stuff rings in my ears so. My wife says I was urging 'em to run a race in my sleep the other night and putting all sorts of money on the tenor."

"If he'd use all that energy doing something he'd be rich some day!" growled Mr. Bolton, between puffs.

"Work? Oh, no!" blazed Mr. Adams suddenly.

There was a few moments' silence while they listened to the tenor, who was holding his own.

"Oh, I have si-ighed to re-est me-e
De-ep in the si-ilent grave!"

"Huh!" groaned Adams. "I'd like to dig it for him. I think it would be deep. I'm not so sure about the silent. But, see here, we're not getting on any. What are we going to do?"

"I thought of a plan last night," said Adams slowly, "if we could only put it through. You know the girl isn't much stuck on the tenor just now, and he doesn't seem to hanker much after her society. Musicians are such a jealous set! You see, that girl has only her mother, and he has only his—or these flats would be too small. Now"—and he brought his feet down from the railing and chewed his cigar fiercely in his excitement—"now, why shouldn't we fix things to get those two married? It would be a shame to spoil two families with 'em!"

"And as it is they're breaking up our happy homes," agreed the other.

"Why, Bolton," said Adams earnestly, "I haven't had a decent night's sleep or day's rest in months. I can't stand it. I went to see the rascally agent who turned 'em loose on us, and he was sympathetic enough, but he said they paid the rent, and he didn't feel to blame because he couldn't see it on 'em when they signed."

He chewed the end from another cigar. Bolton was chuckling. Adams went on:

"You see, there ain't any law about these things, though there ought to be, and all we can do is to fix up something ourselves and bear the consequences. My wife and I have done everything we could think of. We've been down to call, one on one side, the other on the other side, at the same time, thinking that while we were there they'd stop at any rate."

"I could have told you better than that," grinned Bolton. "Tried it myself. Both old women deaf too. Don't wonder either. They've stood this for some years now, they tell me. Stuck us out in that beastly middle room and pulled the curtains. No doors even. Went at it like Sam Hill and let us screech at the old women."

"Well, let's get 'em married," insisted Adams "Why not? Then they can fight it out in piece or in pieces. They'll have to move, because this place won't hold both of the old women and them too. Just so they get out of this neighborhood I don't care where they go."

They smoked a minute and then Bolton said:

"How do you propose to get 'em married?"

"I don't propose to do it alone. I can tell you that. You've got to help me. If you do it's easy enough." He waved his cigar in the air while he mapped out his campaign.

"It'll take some time, of course. First we get so neighborly we won't know ourselves. We go down and ask 'em to perform for our especial benefit—yes, we do, Bolton," he insisted as the other showed signs of mutiny.

"Well, go on."

"We invite 'em both up here and tell each of 'em the nice things the other is supposed to have said. We let the old women brag and no kicks coming Do you see?"

"Yes," said Bolton, "I see. I suppose I must sacrifice myself to the cause. So be it."

They set themselves to work, together with their wives. The two men became so engrossed in their efforts with the young people that they hardly paid any attention to the noise that still went on. They noticed, though, that after a time there were intervals of total silence. The two young people occasionally left the house together. On rare occasions the young man carried a box of flowers into the house, and the girl was heard to play over and over with much feeling the love song of Paderewski. At such times the two old gentlemen adjourned to the back piazza and regarded each other with a deep and solemn joy. They felt that their plans were succeeding, but how well neither of them guessed until the climax was suddenly upon them—the culmination of all their dreams.

One evening one of the old women tapped at the doors of both flats and invited the two families downstairs rather mysteriously. The girl was dressed in white and was blushing, and the tenor, visibly nervous, seemed to be waiting for the bell to ring.

When it did ring, in a few moments, he ushered in the minister of a nearby church, where he sang on Sundays. Then he and the girl stood up, and before the old gentlemen knew what was happening the two were one, a musical unity. The joy of the two old men was deep—very deep. They shook hands with every one and then with each other. And then—

"Where are you going to live?" inquired Mr. Adams. "You must let us make a little contribution toward your housekeeping."

"Oh, that's the best part of it!" cried bride, groom and both old women at once. "The agent is going to get the landlord to take out the partition between our flats and make one big one, and we are all going to live here, and we can have the same rooms for studios, so we can go right on with our work. Aren't you glad? It was you who brought us together, and now we can stay right here with you."

Somehow the two old gentlemen got up their own flight of stairs when the awful evening was done. Silently they stood in the hall and looked at each other while their wives laughed heartlessly. Then without one word they opened the doors and disappeared within their own apartments.

A Good Luck Stone.

All through the ages the ruby has been called the stone of good luck. According to the old stories, whoever owned a ruby would never fail in anything he undertook, for that beautiful jewel held in its glowing red heart a magic power which always brought success. No matter how dangerous the task, the ruby was sure to give courage and victory. In the days of ancient Greece when the rich man wished to express to a friend good wishes for wealth or honor he sent to him a ruby engraved with the figures of an orator. Today the ruby is considered the luckiest of stones, though the good fortune, as we see it, lies in the owning of anything so precious, for even the diamond is not so valuable a gem. The ruby is the stone of July, and the fire which abides in its red heart is truly typical of that burning month of summer. According to legend, however, this fire varied with the fortune of the owner. A popular superstition in regard to the ruby was the belief in its power to foretell danger or disaster by the changing of its color. It was a favorite talisman and love token in the time of the crusaders.—St. Nicholas.

Easy Come, Easy Go.

A Michigan man tells a grimly humorous story of a lumberman who, after a hard winter in the lumber camps, appeared in the streets of one of the larger towns ready and anxious "to have a good time." This lumberman had with him the sum of $500, the proceeds of his season's labor—a sum for which he had toiled and slaved and risked his life in the lumber jams, enduring the while all the discomforts and tribulations of the rigorous winter. With the $500 thus painfully amassed the lumberman sought the comparative civilization of a lumber town. He first purchased himself a big drink and an expensive cigar; then hied him to a faro joint, where he staked his entire fortune on a single play. In another moment he was penniless. Shifting the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, the lumberman cheerfully observed, "Oh, well; easy come, easy go!"

A Secret Standard.

A small boy and his smaller sister of a West Philadelphia family were being interviewed by an admiring visitor. She asked the boy how old he was, but he had an attack of shyness and could not tell. His sister, however, did better and announced that he was six years old. "Six years old!" exclaimed the visitor. "What a big boy! And how tall are you?" This stumped both the children. The visitor expressed surprise that a six-year-old boy could not tell his height, and even the little sister hung her head in shame. Then the visitor gave it up and talked of other things, but soon the little girl edged around to her and whispered, "You mustn't tell mamma," she said, "but Rob is just tall enough to reach the jam on the pantry shelf."—Philadelphia Record.

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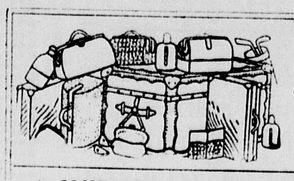

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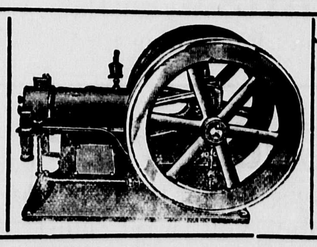

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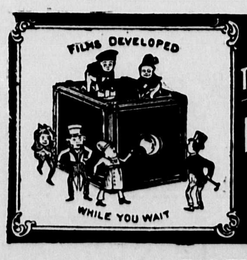

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