HALF A COAT

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — By Emily H. Calloway

To begin with, it was raining. Of course, it does have to rain, there's no denying that. And there really is nothing so very unique about the performance. Besides it is necessary for corn and grain and all sorts of uninteresting things.

But when you have only one pair of shiny shoes, when you've been going without lunches for days in order to buy a certain fluffy hat, and then, after months of waiting, you are to don the fluffy hat to see the biggest theatrical manager in New York, and all this happens and it rains you'll admit it's rather serious.

A taxi was as far from Elaine Hollister's thoughts as a trip to Europe would have been. So it was with a serious look in her big, brown eyes that she watched the downpour.

"Oh, I'll manage somehow, I suppose" she said, and turned to the contemplation of the small room she shared with Betty Buddell. "If only the maline on that hat hat doesn't slump before I get to the theatre."

"It's the limit, that's what it is today of all days when it means so much," and the small roommate scowled anxiously.

Elaine threw herself on the tumbled bed. She was a lovely picture, lovely with youth, and grace and red-gold hair, but the look in her great brown eyes was so troubled.

For life to her did not meant teas and adoration and petting and all that ought to go with youth and red-gold hair. It meant privation and disappointments and a struggle to exist. For she was a little, unknown actress from the West. And today was to be her day of days. She was to see the great Robertson, himself, the greatest manager in the country.

"Well, rain won't hurt the coat, anyway," went on Betty. "And it makes you look like a million dollars. Will you surely be back with it by four?" she added. "I hate to bother you" dearie, but I've got to have it by then. My dancing appointment is for four, and if I'm late—good night!"

"Oh, I'll know the worst long before that, I'm to see Mr. Robertson at two, you know."

Elaine got up and began brushing a fur coat, carefully hung from the gas-jet. "Do you suppose we'll ever own two fur coats between us and be able to go out at the same time?" she asked.

"Never, old dear," promptly answered the small roommate, proceeding to darn an exceedingly thin silk stocking. "Be thankful to have half a coat."

"Yes, we were wise to invest in this when we had the money," Elaine was loosening the thick waves of her hair until it fitted demurely under the new hat.

"I can't even buy a pair of rubbers now," she added. Then she threw back her head and laughed—a wonderful, tinkly, silvery laugh, with a hint of tears not very far away.

"Is it as bad as that?" Betty asked anxiously.

"As bad as that," answered Elaine.

Then she walked quickly to the window and gazed out at the driving rain. Down in the street below, a limousine was gliding quietly along. Elaine wondered vaguely if it held a girl with red-gold hair, a girl who didn't have to worry or pinch or work, a girl who had a father and a brother to adore her, a girl who could be just a—girl.

Elaine turned her back to the rain and the limousine.

"Oh, I hope I haven't been a fool," she burst out, trying to get in a New York production. Do you know what it's cost me? Four long months of horrible, nerve-racking waiting—and all my savings from three long years of stock. And all I've got to show for it is this one chance today to see Robertson."

Betty put a warm arm around the quivering girl. Well did she understand, with the deep understanding that comes from knowledge. Like all the generous children of the stage she was quick to share either tears or laughter.

"If any one deserves some luck," she whispered, "it's you, after the way you've supported your mother and slaved in stock all these years. And you're such a wonder! Why, Elaine, you can act all around some of these Broadway actresses. If you'd only get one chance to act before Robertson."

"Yes, just one chance!" Elaine's voice was tense.

"Now, don't get all worked up," was Betty's practical advice. "Here, powder your nose, while I hold the family comb."

"Do I really look all right?" asked Elaine finally. "You know the part is a rich society girl. It's the third part in the play, and the director told me to look particularly dressy to see Robertson. He didn't know I had on my very best things then."

"You look adorable, only be sure to keep the coat buttoned up. Of course the dress is pretty sad, so thank a kind Providence that it's a long coat and not three-quarter length," and Betty buttoned the last button for her.

"Do you think that patch on my shoe shows?" asked Elaine, anxiously examining the shiny shoes.

"Not a bit," but Betty was putting some powder on the offending patch. "I'll have my dancing dress all on so you won't have to get here till just before four. I can dash up to the hall in five minutes. But don't be any longer or I'll lose my job."

"Don't worry. I'll be here, and if I haven't landed—well, I'm down to my last three dollars."

Then Elaine, her eyes bright with hope, her lips smiling bravely, started out on her Great Adventure.

Luckily the Robertson theatre was only a few blocks away, for the rain was still coming down in torrents. Elaine clutched her umbrella and holding the precious coat tightly around her, proceeded to run. No need to pinch her cheeks today to get the color into them. Her head felt a little dizzy for her lunch had been painfully light, but she soon forgot it in the excitement of trying to dodge the downpour. The wet soon soaked through the thin soles of her shiny shoes, but the tops still looked all right, and the precious hat remained stiffly erect. She silently thanked Heaven that her hair curled in the rain, so she didn't have that to think about.

The great manager's offices were up above the theatre, four flights above, to be exact. Elaine stopped in the privacy of her first flight to adjust her hat and put on the carefully cleaned white gloves. Then, assuming an air of great prosperity and utter indifference, she proceeded to climb the remaining three flights. It was just 10 minutes to two.

At the head of the stairs was a small waiting room, most efficiently guarded by a small but mighty office boy. As Elaine entered the room she paused ,breathless. Her indifferent manner vanished. The room was crowder with girls, packed with girls—beautiful, radiant girls, stunning girls—all the prettiest ingenues in New York seemed to be collected in that one small room. And Elaine had thought she was the "only one."

For a moment she was dazed. Then a great weariness came over her. What was the use? What chance had she, with her $3.98 hat, among all these dreams? Even the fur coat looked shabby. And the assistant manager had told her to look her best.

All the chairs were occupied, more than half the girls were standing. Elaine found a foot or wall to lean against and waited. There wasn't anything else to do. She recognized several of the girls—well known actresses—waiting patiently to be admitted to the great presence, and Elaine had thought she had a chance. They had told her to come to let her down easy. They were always as kind as business would permit.

At that moment a tall girl entered the room. To be more exact, she made an entrance, pausing just long enough to register to the waiting roomful the red gold of her hair against the costly white furriness of her costume. It was Constance Raymond, a well-known leading woman.

"Come right in, Miss Raymond," shouted the office boy as he hastened to open the inner door for her. "Mr. Robertson's expecting you."

And Miss Raymond sailed in.

Gloom descended on the packed room. It meant a wait, a long and lengthy wait. Elaine thought of her breathless race to the theatre, trembling lest she be a moment late.

"I hear Constance Raymond's going to play the lead," remarked a dark-haired girl to the friend with her. "A wonderful part, they say—one of those poor, forlorn parts that walks away with the play. They sent for me for the society girl, because I'm such a good contrast to Constance. She'll make it hot if they try to put any light-haired girls in."

Elaine's heart dropped. Unconsciously she raised her hand to her own hair—even more red and more gold than Constance Raymond's own What chance had she—what chance Then she remembered that the day she had seen the director she'd worn a tam-o-shanter, and hardly any of the golden mass had shown. Well, she was going to wait. Besides, what else was there to do?

"You know I played with Constance before, when she was with Bill Grayson," the brunette was confiding to her friend. "If she gets this part, I'll bet Robertson won't put up with any of her airs."

"Oh, heavens," murmured a well-known ingenue, "here's where us 'poor working girls' wait one good hour."

"This is the life," came from another corner.

Then silence descended on the waitingroom.

At 2.45 the assistant manager opened the door. Every one turned expectantly.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, girls," he said cheerfully. "When Mr. Robertson does get to seeing you it won't take long." Then he went back and shut the door.

The tall brunette seemed to feel that she had been personally slighted. She walked over to the office boy.

"If you'll take my card in he won't keep me waiting, I know that," she announced.

But the office boy merely looked bored.

"Can't do it," he yawned. "Have ter wait till he's ready ter see the bunch."

And the brunette waited.

At quarter past three Miss Raymond came out. Her cheeks were very bright and she brushed through the crowd unseeing. The brunette, who had played with her, did not venture to speak.

At half past three the door opened again. Again the room turned expectantly.

"Miss Vinton," called the office boy.

A dark haired beauty in a Paris gown went in and the door shut.

Elaine, crowded against the wall, saw her go in—and she saw the Paris gown. Then she saw the hem of her old blue serge under the protecting coat. Oh, it wasn't fair, it wasn't just. Just because a girl had clothes didn't mean she could act. Bitterly she thought of the three long years of stock. What did it matter that she could act? This wasn't a contest in acting; it was a contest in clothes.

"Quarter of four," groaned somebody. "And it will be six before we get out of here."

"Quarter of four?" Elaine gasped. The coat—the family coat—that Betty must have at four. What must she do? What could she do? Four was the very latest, Betty had said, and she must have it; she couldn't possibly go out without it in her short dancing dress. It meant her "Job" too.

What she would look like, minus the precious coat. Elaine didn't stop to think. She mustn't think. There was no question, ther must be no question. She had promised to get the coat back in time. She stepped quickly over to the office boy.

"I'm Miss Hollister," she explained. "I'll be back in ten minutes, in case they want me.

Then she fled down the stairs. Suppose they should call her in this particular ten minutes and she should not be there. She would never be able to explain, she probably would never get a chance to explain. Of course, it was an awfully slim chance at best, she realized that. And minus the coat, it was hardly worth while going back for. Yet wild horses couldn't have kept her away.

She reached the little room at last. There sat Betty, waiting patiently. Elaine dashed in, struggling out of the coat as she ran. Before Betty realized she was there she had gone again. No time now for explanations or argument.

Out into the rain again went Elaine, and needless to say she ran most of the way back. For one thing, it was warmer. The shabby blue dress was possible as a street costume; a trifle chilly, to be sure, but at least no one stopped and looked at her. Think heaven, she still had her hat.

Up the four flights she raced. Then, as unobtrusively as possible, she slipped into the room.

She prayed that no one would recognize her. If no one observed the hat, she thought she might easily pass as another girl. Happily all the attention was focused on Miss Vinto, who was just coming out.

After that the director began calling names with great rapidity. Some of the girls would be sent back after only five minutes in the sacred inner office. Quietly they would come out and go down stairs. Apparently the great manager made up his mind very quickly.

"Many are called but darn few are chosen," murmered a girl in the corner.

Then a girl would be called, who would not come out for 20 minutes, and despair would descend on the room.

"She's got the part," some one would groan. "May as well toddle along home."

Gradually the room began to thin. At half past five there were only four girls left. Elaine sitting in the darkest corner, was trying to hide her dress. She had just discovered that one elbow had given way.

Long ago the color had faded from her cheeks. She found herself pinching them, mechanically. The long wait, together with her light lunch, were beginning to tell on her. She felt faint. Then she saw the door open. The assistant manager was looking around the room. Elaine could hardly believe her eyes when she saw him beckon to her.

Elaine rose. The room seemed to be swimming around, but somehow she got across and followed Mr. Reed inside. Her great moment had arrived.

"Let me see, the name is?" the assistant manager asked.

"Hollister," said Elaine faintly.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Reer pleasantly "Well, I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, but there really is nothing for you. You see, Mr. Robertson has just made up his mind about this third part. It is practically settled." And the assistant manager smiled benignly.

Then suddenly everything went black. Desperately Elaine pulled herself together. It was her last chance.

"But you promised me—I've been waiting hours. At least let me see him—just one minute." The tears were very close to her big brown eyes.

The assistant manager hesitated.

"Well, it won't do a bit of good, you know—just take up the governor's time. But as long as you've waited so long, you can see him a minute. Take off your hat and leave it out here."

"Take off my hat?" gasped Elaine.

"Yes, the governor likes to see people as they really are. Be quick as you can, please."

Off came the hat, her last glory, and Elaine found herself following the reluctant manager down the hall. Then a door was thrown open and Elaine was inside. Suddenly she remembered her hair. She had dressed it very loosely that morning to fit under theprecious hat, and the run in the rain and the long waiting had loosened it still more. But the assistant manager did not wait. He opened a door, and as Elaine stepped across the threshold the last hairpin came out, and her hair fell about her shoulders, a great, glittering gold, red mass.

Again the room went black. Nothing more in the world could possibly happen to her. Then she saw her shoes—rather she saw the patch on the shoes. It seemed to be rising off the leather. She wondered vaguely if there would be a hole in the stocking when the patch came off.

Afar off she saw a white-haired haired gentleman looking at her; saw three other men looking at her; she saw a stenographer taking notes. Still she didn't move, just leaned against the door. Vaguely she regretted all the luncheons she had gone without to buy the hat, the scorned, discarded hat. And then she began to laugh. She steadied herself by the doorknob and laughed; the tinkly, silvery laugh that somehow she couldn't stop.

She knew the men were staring at her, were looking apprehensively at each other. She saw Mr. Reed try to explain something to the white-haired man, but he pushed him aside impatiently. The white-haired man was staring at her.

Still she laughed. Then the tears somehow got in between the laughs, and she couldn't stop them either.

Afar off she heard the white-haired man speaking. She thought she must be going crazy. The great man was speaking.

"It's great, great! Even the dress is perfect, patch and all, the shabbiness, everything. And the hair, the wonderful red-gold hair. Reed, you have given me the surprise of my life. So this was what you had up your sleeve."

Elaine's tears stopped. She leaned weakly against the door. She saw Robertson patting his bewildered assistant on the back. Then he spoke to her.

"Give me that entrance right over again, and let me see if you can do it as well the second time."

Mechanically Elaine obeyed the voice. She opened the door and went out almost blindly. The assistant manager rushed after her.

"Do you understand?" he gasped. "You're to do it over again. Go in and laugh and cry just as you did before. You've stumbled into a part—a great part—dress and all."

Slowly Elaine's brain cleared. She was to do that entrance over again. She was to act for the great Robertson. She had gotten her chance.

For a moment she stood perfectly still, trying to grasp it. So they had thought that was good acting? That blind ,unknowing hysteria! All right, she would show them what she really could do!

The girl who entered the room this time was an artist in full possession of her faculties. Just as forlorn, just as appealing as before, she was, yet with her sixth sense of the actor at work; the subtle something that holds an audience spell-bound. Blind, unseeing, she leaned against the door. Then came the laughter, tinkly, silvery, with the hysteria slowly creeping in, and then the tears, the rackings, sobbing tears, until the little audience was breathless.

It was the great Robertson himself who broke the spell.

"You're a clever little girl, a very clever little girl," he said. "Now, come over here and pull yourself together."

The master had spoken. He had pronounced her good. It was enough. The secretary sprang to get her a chair, the stenographer brought her a glass of water, while the playwright himself fanned her with the manuscript. Meanwhile the assistant manager was carefully explaining to Robertson how he had "discovered" her.

"Have her read a little of the love scene for me," interrupted the manager. "We'll see how she reads."

The nervous young playwright hastened to explain the scene to Elaine. She took the part, inwardly blessing the stock training that made reading at sight an easy matter to her. Simply and naturally she read the lines, while the playwright gave her cues and the great manager paced the room. Back and forth he went. But Elaine was unconscious of him, completely lost in the joy of creating.

As she finished, there was a low murmur of approval. Mr. Robertson called the playwright aside. Then he turned to the waiting secretary.

"Call up Miss Raymond," he said. "Say we are unable to meet her requirements in regard to salary; that we will not need her services, as the part has been filled."

Smilingly he turned to Elaine.

"Well, Little Miss Goldylocks," he said. "If you care to consider the position of leading woman in my new production, the part is yours."

To this day Elaine has no idea what happened then. She has a vague notion that she threw her arms around the great man's neck or kissed the secretary or in some way disgraced herself for life. But the playwright says that what she really did was to crumple up in a pathetic little heap on the floor. But Elaine says that the hardest thing she did that day was to make Betty believe it.

Writes to Beethoven

A letter addressed to the composer Beethoven was received in Vienna the other day from a woman in the provinces. She wrote she had recently heard some of his music and was anxious to place her daughter under his tuition. The postal authorities delivered the letter at the house in which Beethoven lived and where he died 92 years ago. The concierge said no such man resided there, so the postman sent it to the dead letter office.

Just the Thing

George Leffler, the A. H. Woods booking manager, is telling a story worth repeating. A stock actor, who was to appear in a costume play, according to George, went to a pawn shop kept by Abraham Levinsky and his wife to buy a sword.

"Sure, I got one," said the old man. However he indicated by his actions that he didn't know what a sword is. Finally he called his wife, who told him she didn't think they had one. Noticing his evident confusion, the actor made several stabbing motions and said:

"You know what a sword is. I want to kill a man." The old pawnbroker's face lighted in a smile.

"Oh," he said. "So you vant to kill a man, eh? Vell then I sell you a pistol."

Daysman Arbitrator

A daysman is an arbitrator, umpire or judge. The term of the Anglo-Saxon origin and is still used in the northern part of England to describe an unofficial judge or arbitrator to whom a matter in dispute is referred. The origin of the term is obscure.

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The Eternal Feminine

Lawyer—You say the prisoner stole your watch. What distinguishing feature was there about the watch?

Witness—I had my sweetheart's portrait in it.

Lawyer—Ah, I see. A woman in the case.

Courtesy Pays

A man may fight fiercely to hold his own in business; but he does not need to fight to get ahead of someone in the elevator, or up the car steps, or at the postoffice window. And no matter how strong competition is, business and personal courtesy make it easier and pleasanter for every body.

Crown Prince's Income

Decision has been reached by the Holland government that the former crown prince of Germany must pay taxes upon the basis of an annual income of 800,000 florins (normally $320,000.) This action was taken despite protest from the crown prince.

One of the wonders of the British Dairy Association was a Danish appliance for keeping milk fresh for two years or more. No preservatives are used.

"The average lawyer fills me with admiration."

"In what way?"

"On account of the confident way he examines a man on a subject he has barely heard of, when the man has made it a life study."

Beauty is only skin deep. A girl's freckles are not as pretty as her blushes, but they are more genuine.

The Juvenile Band

The Juvenile Band of Mansfield, Wash., is an organization of which any city might be proud. It consists of about 20 boys and girls ranging from 8 to 15 years of age. The small performers play in an artistic manner concert repertoire. The band gives monthly programs in the city theatre and is frequently assisted by local singers and instrumentalists.

Equality

"Morning stranger," began the talkative party as he settled himself in the only vacant half-seat in the smoker. "And what State might you be from?"

"Oh," replied the stranger, wearily, "it doesn't matter now. One's as dry as another."

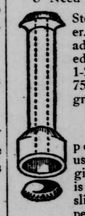
The Fourth Trial

"I admit," said the district attorney in summing up, "that a man is held to be innocent until proved guilty. However, when he has been found guilty three times it kind of puts a crimp in his amateur standing. Gentleman of the jury, I thank you."

Heads and Hearts

Some people carry their hearts to their heads; very many carry their head to their hearts. The difficulty is to keep them part, yet both actively working together.

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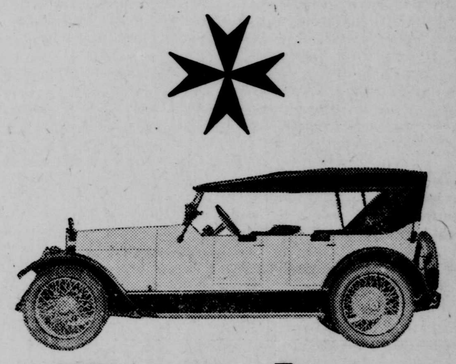


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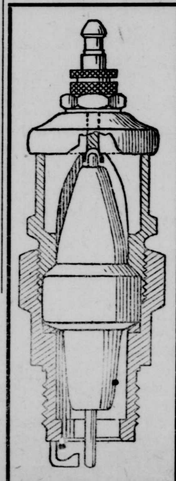
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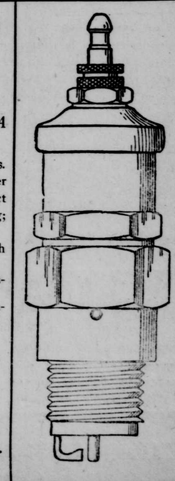
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