

WEEKEND FICION



LEOPARD MAN.

A Romance of Jealousy

THE LEOPARDIAN'S STORY.

He had a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes, and his sad, insistent voice, gentle spoken as a maid's, and the placid embodiment of some

dejectedly melancholy. He was the Leopard Man, but he did not look it. His business in life, whereby he lived, was to appear in a cage of performing leopards before vast audiences, and to thrill those audiences by certain exhibitions of nerve for which his employers rewarded him on a scale commensurate with the thrills he produced.

As I sat, he did not look at me. He was unsmiling, narrow-shouldered and anemic, while he seemed not so much oppressed by gloom as by a sweet and gentle sadness, the weight of which was as sweetly and gently borne. For an hour I had been trying to get a story out of him, but he appeared to lack imagination. To him there was no romance in his gorgeous cage, no deeds of daring, no thrills—nothing but a gray sameness and infinite boredom.

"Lions? Oh, yes! he had fought with them. It was nothing. All you had to do was to stay sober. Anybody could whip a lion to a standstill with an ordinary stick. He had fought one for half an hour once. Just hit him on the nose every time he rushed, and when he got artful and rushed with his head down, why, the thing to do was to stick out your leg. When he grabbed at the leg you drew it back and hit him on the nose again. That was all."

"I suppose you've heard of the lion-tamer who was hated by another man?"

He paused and looked pensively at a slice of lemon in the cage opposite. "Got the toothache," he explained. "Well, the lion-tamer's big play to the audience was putting his head in a lion's mouth. The man who hated him attended every performance in the hope of some time of seeing that lion crunch down. He followed the show about all over the country. The years went by, and he grew old, and the lion-tamer grew old, and the lion grew old. And at last one day, sitting in a front seat, he saw what he had waited for. The lion crunched down, and there wasn't any need to call a doctor."

The Leopard Man glanced casually over his finger nails in a manner which would have been critical had it not been so sad.

"Now, that's what I call patience," he continued, "and it's my style. But it was not the style of a fellow I knew. He was a little, thin, sawed-off, sword-swallowing and juggling Frenchman. De Ville he called himself, and he had a nice wife. She did trapeze work and used to dive from under the roof into a net, turning over once on the way as nice as you please."

"De Ville had a quick temper, as quick as his hand, and his hand was as quick as the paw of a tiger. One day, because the ringmaster called him a frog-eater, or something like that, and maybe a little worse, he shoved him against the soft pine background he used in his knife-throwing act so quick the ringmaster didn't have time to think, and there before the audience De Ville kept the air on fire with his knives, sinking them into the wood all around the ringmaster so close that most of them bit into his skin."

"Well, then I shant marry him," she declared, giving me her hand as she spoke, and darting a quick glance at me that might have meant anything.

However, I know Marian, and her glances, and I greatly fear that before the year is out she will have become Mrs. Vincent Farrington. The question which troubles me is whether I shall be able to keep my resolve.

"When is it to be announced, Will?" "There isn't any engagement"—her glance leaped to mine, and in the way dimples became manifest—"yet."

Marian changed the subject abruptly. "I'm tired, Will. I think you work too hard."

I glanced away from her wide-opened eyes. "Unfortunately, I can't help that. I am not a millionaire."

"I wish you were."

"Why? So I could drive a car like Farrington's?"

"I don't see why you always come back to him," she said petulantly. "Well, I have made my confession. Suppose you follow my example. Is what every one is saying true?"

"I suppose you have heard that I am engaged to him," she said, with a sudden frankness that made me wary. "People will talk."

"Well, you see, there are drawbacks in owning a particularly high and conspicuous car. Every one knows that how often Farrington comes to see you and how long he stays."

"I never thought of that!" she exclaimed. "Is it so?"

"Do you think it would be a good thing?" she asked. "I hesitated. With all her fascination Mariap is made rather to be loved than to love. Good-natured, clumsy Farrington would in all probability be as little in the way as any husband she might choose. To borrow her own words, she might have her apron in the closet and shut the door upon it, with him still tied contentedly to the strings. As for myself, I have long since abandoned any hopes I may have cherished. Marian put up one hand to touch the most tempting of the little curls that clustered about her face. "Well," said she.

"Yes," I answered slowly. "I think Farrington is the best man for you."

She frowned openly, and then smiled as she asked, "When I am married, will you come and drink tea with me in just the same way?"

"No," I said gravely. "Why not?" she inquired in amazement. "Surely you are not so old-fashioned as to think that married women shouldn't receive calls?"

"No, that's their own affair. Personally, they don't attract me."

"Oh, that depends on the married woman," Marian said, elevating her chin scornfully.

"On the contrary, it depends on the unmarried man," I answered, smiling back at her as I spoke.

"But you forget that you are to be married," she eyed.

"Do you mean to the girl I was walking with?"

"Of course."

"Well, the trouble is that she is chosen already."

Marian's eyes sparkled as her gravity vanished. "Who was she?" she asked, and her use of the past tense was significant.

"My sister-in-law from New York."

"I am so glad," Marian said frankly. "You would not make a bit nice married man?"

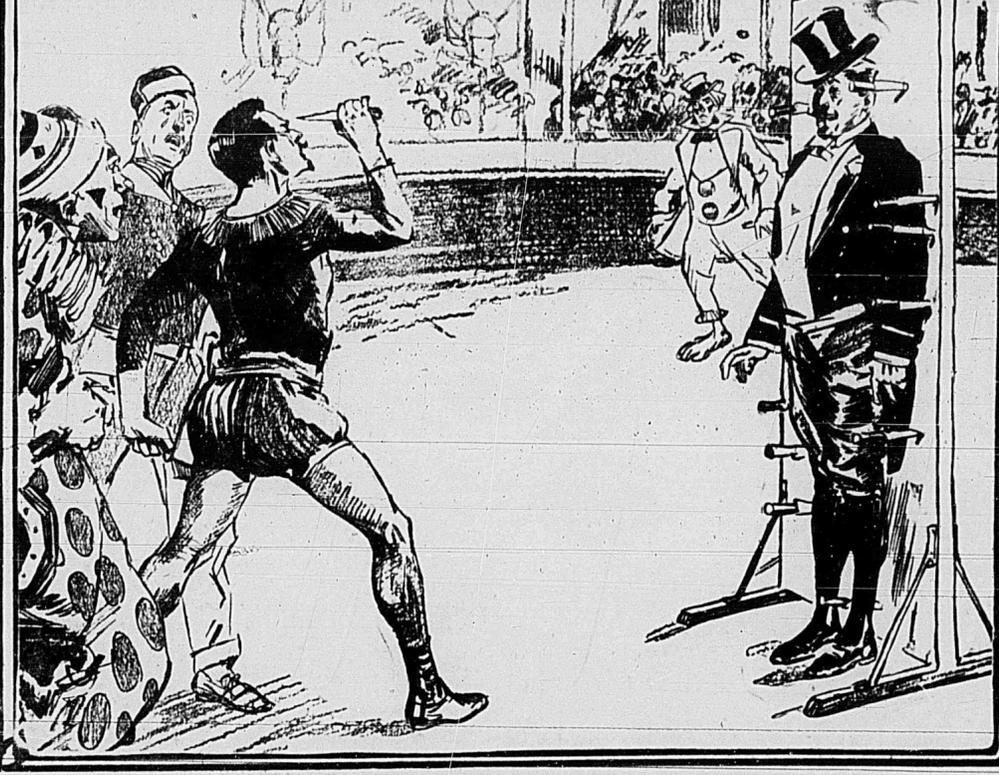
"Is that from your standpoint, or my wife's?"

"Why should there be a difference in standpoints?"

"You know best," I returned, and Marian had the grace to blush.

"Did you really mean it when you said you would not come to see me if I married Mr. Farrington?" she asked, as I rose to go.

"Yes."



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"The clowns had to pull the knives out to get him loose, for he was pinned fast. So the word went around to watch out for De Ville, and no one dared be more than barely civil to his wife. And she was a sly bit of baggage, too, only all hands were afraid of De Ville."

"But there was one man, Wallace, who was afraid of nothing. He was the lion-tamer, and he had the self-same trick of putting his head into the lion's mouth. He'd put it into the mouths of any of them, though he preferred Augustus, a big, good-natured beast who could always be depended upon."

"As I was saying, Wallace—'King' Wallace we called him—was afraid of nothing alive or dead. He was a king and no mistake. I've seen him drunk, and on a wager so into the care of a lion that he'd turned hasty and without a stick beat him to a finish. Just did it with his flat on the nose."

"Madame De Ville—"

At an uproar behind us the Leopard Man turned quietly around. It was a divided cage, and a monkey, poking through the bars and around the partition, had had his paw seized by a big gray wolf, who was trying to pull it off

those in the magazine, done up in real scientific style, too. I can't talk of anything but what I've observed in a long and useful life."

"Yes, but we'd rather hear a story that's never been printed than read one that's been read a hundred times."

The young women were both pretty, and Uncle Eli, although a little beyond the Palmist's limit, was not proof against admiration. It pleased him that his stories were well received by the boarders. The chores were all done and he had nothing to do but talk until bedtime.

Mr. Butler, a boarder, who was in the habit of writing stories himself, winked generally at Uncle Eli, and, ending a split log, made himself a seat and the trio prepared to listen.

"I suppose it's no use to tell you that rabbits are about as timid as any animal, without it's sheer. Now I've always felt that the reason they're timid is because all they ever hear preached in the home circle is timidity. There's 'quakers' every one of 'em, and believe in the virtue of non-resistance. No young rabbit ever hears another rabbit declaimin' Friday afternoons 'Strike for the sake of your sinner,' and they grow up like their fathers and mothers,—perfect cowards."

"But if rabbits were put out to nurse with wildcats they'd soon get more pugnacious ideas on their heads, if the wildcat didn't yield to its instincts and eat 'em up at once."

"In other words, it ain't what your parents was, but who you're thrown among that makes you what you are."

"So much for a starter. One day, a couple of years ago, in the fall, I was out huntin' for squirrels to make a potpie out of, for neutral people, just Hokin' good. I went down in the little patch of woods just off the Edgewood triangle and I had got one fine gray squirrel and a couple of reds, when I heard a patter in the grass and who should come toward me but a young rabbit."

"It wasn't comin' in a panic, but in confidence, and although my first impulse was to raise my gun, I lowered it again, because a man who shoots an animal that is claimin' protection has a mighty inferior set of feelin's."

"I laid my gun down and I made a V of my hands, and master rabbit ran plump into them. He was about two weeks old, and really not old enough to be away from his mother."

"Now our Sarah, the bulldog that died last year, had a litter of bull pups, and as soon as I had the rabbit in my hands I decided what I'd do. So I took the rabbit home, and when it was dark I went out to the kennel, and taking one of the pups from the dog, I substituted the rabbit, and had the satisfaction of seeing it begin its supper at once. Bein' dark, the mother didn't notice but what they was all pups. That's a rule she applies to her substitutes in the animal line. Wait until it's dark, and if the mother's mother 'em all night she won't reproduce 'em in the morning. Only with cats, you have to put blinders on the mother cat because they see so well in the dark."

"I gave the bull pup to a neighbor who was willing to buy it up to by hand, because that breed of bulls are fine watch dogs and are just death for hang-in-on dogs they get a grip. And yet they're good-natured with children."

"Well, it was most amusin' to the boarders we had then to see the way that mother dog acted with the rabbit, and the way the rabbit acted with the

by main strength. The arm seemed stretching out longer and longer like a thick elastic, and the unfortunate monkey's mate was raising a terrible din. No kites was at hand, so the Leopard Man stepped over a couple of paces, dealt the wolf a sharp blow on the nose with the light cane he carried, and returned with a sadly apologetic smile to take up his unfinished sentence, as though there had been no interruption.

"I looked at King Wallace and King Wallace looked at her, while De Ville looked black. We warned Wallace, but it was no use. He laughed at us, as he laughed at De Ville one day when he shoved De Ville's head into a bucket of paste because he wanted to fight."

"De Ville was in a pretty mess—I helped to scrape him off; but he was cool as an cucumber and made no threats at all. But I saw a glimmer in his eyes which I had seen often in the eyes of wild beasts, and I went out of my way to give Wallace a final warning. He laughed, but he did not look so much in Madame De Ville's direction after that."

"Several months passed by. Nothing had happened, and I was beginning to think it all a scare over nothing. We were West by that time, showing in 'Frisco. It was during the afternoon performance, and the big tent was filled with women and children when I went looking for Red Denny, the head canvas-man, who had walked off with my pocket-knife."

"Passing by one of the dressing tents I glanced in through a hole in the canvas to see if I could locate him. He wasn't there, but directly in front of me was King Wallace, in tight, waiting for his turn to go on with his cage of performing lions. He was watching with much amusement a quarrel between a couple of trapeze artists. All the rest of the people in the dressing tent were watching the same thing, with the exception of De Ville, whom I noticed standing at Wallace with undignified head. Wallace and the rest were all too busy following the quarrel to notice this or what followed."

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JACK LONDON.

A Romance of Revenge

The look troubled me at the time, for not only did I see hatred in it, but I saw triumph as well.

"De Ville will bear watching," I said to myself, and I really breathed easier when I saw him go out the entrance to the circus grounds and board an electric car for downtown. A few minutes later I was in the big tent, where I had known King Wallace, and King Wallace was doing his front of me and holding the audience spellbound. He was in a particularly vicious mood, and kept the lions stirred up till they were all snarling and growling around him; that is, all of them except little Augustus, and he was just too fat and lazy and old to get stirred up over anything."

"Finally Wallace cracked the old lion's knees with his whip and got him into position. Old Augustus, blinking good-naturedly, opened his mouth and he popped Wallace's head. Then the jaws came together, crunch, just like this."

"The Leopard Man scudded in a sweetly beautiful fashion and the far-away look came into his eyes."

"And that was the end of King Wallace," he went on in his sad, low voice. "After the excitement cooled down I watched my chance and bent over and smelled Wallace's head. Then I sneezed."

"I sneezed."

Love

Tea and Confession, By Jane Kellogg.