

# Fifty Thousand and Found

By DUFFIELD OSBORNE

PEOPLE of good judgment have admitted that there were more than merely social possibilities in Marion Brett, and this notwithstanding that she had had most unpromising heredity and bringing up. John Brett began life as an ignorant laborer, and one might fairly say he ended it as one, despite the fact that everything he had touched turned to money—from a hole in the ground in Colorado where he blundered on the largest gold vein in the State, down to a few acres inherited from a shiftless uncle in Pennsylvania who developed a colossal oil strike. Before the discovery of the gold vein, Bridget Brett (née McCarthy) had been a fairly competent washerwoman. Then they both migrated to New York, and butted with such stubborn energy and such profuse expenditure that, after ten years of ridicule and scorn, the walls of society crumbled to a practicable breach, which they stormed forthwith. They were still ridiculed and disliked, and they never lost their inherent vulgarity, but they were accepted to the extent of finding a market for their hospitality.

Marion Brett was about twenty years old when the survivor of this interesting couple departed from the scene of their Pyrrhic triumph. They had sent her to a fashionable boarding-school because that was what other fashionable people did with their daughters, and she had a bright mind and had made the best of it. Then they tried to marry her to a doubtful Russian prince, an impecunious Italian count, and a disreputable English earl, all of whom she escaped through a measure of cleverness and common-sense and several streaks of signal good luck. Later, as I have said, they died and left her, an only child, with a list of excellent securities whose aggregate values ran close to eight million.

I have mentioned two of Marion Brett's qualities—a bright mind and a strain of common-sense. The rest was yet to develop, and under some disadvantages. Naturally she was in the way of being pretty well spoiled, and she was spoiled more or less. The line of suitors lengthened out, after the death of the ex-laborer and the ex-washerwoman, and numbered, in addition to the ever-constant foreign contingent, an average representative string of native talent and push.

Perhaps there might have been several fairly decent men in the collection; for Marion was not without attractions. She had *la beauté de Diable*, a graceful figure, and a certain picturesque quaintness; but her vein of common-sense made her realize the big chances of being wooed on merely sordid grounds, and was even pronounced enough (the rarest of all things) to inspire her with a distrust of her own ability to discriminate between a white man and a fortune-hunter.

As a matter of course, it carried her too far. She assumed every man, or at least all of her men, to be fortune hunters, and she deliberately trained her affections on horses and dogs, which might be said to be purchasable without discredit. The result was that at twenty-six Marion Brett, while still maintaining a measure of her social duties, had become pronouncedly bossy and doggy. She could doctor a Great Dane pup with the distemper as well as the average veterinary, and she toiled her four-in-hand with all the skill and self-reliance of the most popular whip. Perhaps these were not especially lofty accomplishments; but, perhaps again, they were higher ambitions than inspired her lamented parents, or, for that matter, the majority of their social sponsors and detractors. As I have said, however, she did not entirely drop the hard-woodence.

Marion Brett was in her twenty-seventh year when she met Guyon Trevor for the second time. The other time she did not like to remember. It was eight years before. During that particular winter society had developed a highly humorous literary fad. It had suddenly become the fashion—Heaven knows why—to seek out the lions of poetry and fiction and drag them from their lairs and jungles to grace the boards and floors of a set of social Hagenbecks. As there were not many full-grown lions that could be dragged, and as the demand was pressing, even the cubs, promising and unpromising, found themselves rushed with engagements; while



"Pardon Me, Sir: Will You Let Me Have Your Hypodermic?"

a considerable proportion of personages who might be classed as asses in lions' clothing seized upon the auspicious season, did the rushing themselves, and dined well and often at a circle of boards that at times applauded their banalities and again marveled at its own condescension. Oh! it was a famous winter, a most glorious winter; but it passed, and the next devoted itself to just plain slum charity, as the preceding had run to bridge.

Of course, the Bretts pushed the fashion to the limit, and it had happened, on one particular occasion, that Guyon Trevor had been compelled from the byways and hedges. Guyon Trevor reported for "The Argus"; but he had got into somebody's magazine with a story that marked him for the slaughter. Guyon never knew how he had found himself at the Bretts's table. The invitation came through Billy Slayden, whom I rather imagine old Brett had chartered to do the inviting. Slayden told Trevor a lot about how the Bretts admired the "Somebody's" story, and, partly for joy in his first-born, partly from adventurousness, and altogether thoughtlessly, Trevor accepted. He regretted the acceptance almost at once, but it seemed too late then. He did not want to lie out of it, so he went.

Most of the other cubs whom Slayden had gathered in enjoyed it hugely. They dined well, and, however their imaginations ran riot among the titles of books they were to write in some distant future, their host and hostess proved as familiar with these masterpieces that were to be as the most exacting clairvoyant could demand. It was the almost unanimous verdict that old Brett got his money's worth, and Trevor was the only dissenter.

He felt thoroughly uncomfortable and out of place through the whole affair. He had not realized what a roaring farce it was to be until the game began, and then there was literally no escape. To make fun of any man whose salt he ate was beyond the limit of his breeding; but he was too young and too inexperienced to carry off the situation—if, indeed, it was carryable. Therefore, he just sat and looked grim and unhappy—"sulked," as Slayden described it—and even refused to gratify the unanimous demand to know how he came to produce that stunning but unwritten novel, "The Cherub at the Window and the Wolf at the Door," which old Brett had "read with so much pleasure."

It was when floundering red-faced in this refusal that he caught Marion Brett's eyes looking up from the other end of the table, and he remembered thinking that they were nice eyes, set far apart and having in their depths a sense of shamed understanding of the whole business. They had divined his feeling, too, and were trying to thank him; but, being a man and young, he could not read so much as that. Afterward he had debated with himself whether, under the circumstances, he would call, and had compromised by leaving his card when he knew the Bretts were out.

And this was how the second meeting took place. Marion was driving in the park one day, and had almost passed a small circle of people standing by the driveway. The next instant her groom had the reins and she was in the midst of it. A little mongrel had been run over, and a man with his brows drawn

together was on his knees by the poor beast trying to do what he could for it. Evidently that was little enough.

Marion was down beside them on the grass, and her diagnosis was prompt and accurate. "Poor little tike!" she said. "If you could only put him out of his pain."

The man swept a keen glance around the circle of loungers. Then he stepped up to a carelessly dressed man with a pasty complexion. "Pardon me, sir," he said; "but will you let me have your hypodermic? I'll send you another to-night."

It was all so sudden that the shifty eyes of the man addressed had no time to look surprised. Evidently without thinking, and as a matter of course, he drew the little case from his pocket. The other took it, and in a moment there was enough morphine in the veins of the victim to end its sufferings forever. Then the owner of the syringe held out his hand awkwardly.

"Never mind," he stammered. "It will be just as good when I've washed it."

"Thanks; but I've used all your stuff."

"I don't care. Perhaps I'm glad you have."

He took the case and shambled off, and Marion Brett and Guyon Trevor looked at each other with sudden mutual recognition. She flushed crimson. Then she put out her hand impulsively.

"I like you," she said. "I liked you when I first met you at that—dinner."

The loungers had drifted away, except two or three who still looked at the dead dog with a sort of stupid fascination.

Trevor felt the old embarrassment coming over him.

"How did you know that man had a hypodermic?" she went on.

"Why—well, you see, a newspaper man learns sometimes to size people up. He struck me as a pretty far-gone case. It was worth the try."

"Yes," she said, looking away. "It was worth the try," and then, turning to him again: "I wish you would come and see me. I'm at home Wednesdays." She took a card from her case and held it out to him.

"I'll be glad to."

She was in her trap again before he had gathered himself enough to go through the form of helping her, but he raised his hat as she drove off.

"I'm afraid I had a bad case of rattles," he mused; but her thoughts dwelt only upon his handling of the emergency and his incisiveness with the morphine fiend.

It never occurred to Trevor not to accept Marion Brett's invitation. Somehow their two meetings seemed to have placed them on a ground of intimacy that long acquaintance might have failed to accomplish, and he knew now, too, that she had understood and appreciated his attitude six years before. Therefore, as a matter of course, he found himself on Wednesday, at half after three, before the steps of the Brett palace on Central Park East, and with a full realization that he had come early for the sake of the absence of other callers. He told himself that this was because he would be sure to have nothing in common with nine-tenths of Marion Brett's friends.

It seemed hardly a minute when she came forward with her hand extended—not a small hand, but well shaped and with a firm, warm clasp.

"How nice of you to come so soon!" she said. "Now you must tell me what you have been doing all these years. We are old friends, you know."

Trevor laughed. "I am afraid my exploits would make rather tame telling. You see, my business is to tell what other people are doing."

"Real people, or those you invent?"

"Oh, real people, generally."

"And you have given up fiction? I read that story of yours afterward, and I hoped you would write more."

"I have hoped so myself, off and on; but somehow I haven't found the demand for my fiction pressing; that is, outside of newspapers. It's sometimes more pressing there than I care to supply."

"I like that, too," she said. "It's what I would have expected of you."

Trevor found himself taking kindly to her good opinion. He did not admit that it was altogether justified, but he was glad she thought so. It stimu-