THE MAN ON THE BOX

By HAROLD MacGRATH

Author of "The Grey Cloak," "The Puppet Crown."

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"He does that, sir," replied the groom. "He has never taken less than a red ribbon. Only one horse beat him at the bars last winter in New York. It was Mr. Warburton's fault that he did not take first prize. He rode him in the park the day before the contest and the animal caught cold, sir."

And then it was that this hero of mine conceived his great (not to say young and salad) idea. It appealed to him as being so rich an idea that the stables rang with his laughter.

"Sir?" politely inquired the groom.

"I'm not laughing at your statement, my good fellow; rather at an idea which just occurred to me. In fact, I believe that I shall need your assistance."

"In what way, sir?"

"Come with me."

The groom followed Warburton into the yard. A conversation began in low tones.

"It's as much as my place is worth, sir. I couldn't do it, sir," declared the groom, shaking his head negatively.

"I'll guarantee that you will not suffer in the least. My brother will not discharge you. He likes a joke as well as I do. You are not handed $20 every day for a simple thing like this."

"Very well, sir. I dare say that no harm will come of it. But I am an inch or two shorter than you."

"We'll tide that over."

"I am at your orders, sir." But the groom returned to the stables, shaking his head dubiously. He was not thoroughly convinced.

During the morning ride down-town the two women were vastly puzzled over their brother's frequent and inexplicable peals of laughter.

"For mercy's sake, what do you see that is so funny!" asked Nancy.

"I'm thinking, my dears; only thinking."

"Tell us, that we may laugh too. I'll wager that you are up to some mischief, Master Robert. Please tell," Nancy urged.

"Later, later; at present you would fail to appreciate the joke. In fact, you might make it miscarry; and that wouldn't do at all. Have a little patience. It's a good joke, and you'll be in it when the time comes."

And nothing more could they worm out of him.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

At dinner that night I met my hero face to face for the first time in eight years and for all his calling me a duffer (I learned of this only recently), he was mighty glad to see me, slapped me on the back and threw his arm across my shoulder. And why shouldn't he have been glad? We had been boys together, played hooky many a school-time afternoon, gone over the same fishing grounds, plunged into the same swimming-holes, and smoked our first cigar in the rear of my father's barn; and it is the recollection of such things that cements all the more strongly friendship in man and man. We recalled a thousand episodes and escapades, the lickings we got, and the lickings the others got in our stead, the pretty school-teacher whom we swore to wed when we grew up. Nobody else had a chance to get a word in edgewise. But Nancy laughed aloud at times. She had been a witness to many of these long-ago pranks.

"What! you are not going to the ball?" I asked, observing that he wore only a dinner-coat and a pair of morocco slippers.

"No ball for me. Just as soon as you people hie forth, off comes this b'iled shirt, and I shall probably meander around the house in my new silk pajamas. I shall read a little from

"NO BALL FOR ME."

Homer—Jack, let me have the key to that locked case; I've an idea that there must be some robust old, merry old tales hidden there—and smoke a few pipes."

"But you are not going to leave Mrs. Warburton and your sister to come home without escort?" I expostulated.

"Where the deuce are you two men going?" Robert asked, surprised. Somehow, I seemed to catch a joyful rather than a sorrowful note in his tones.

"An important conference at midnight, and heaven only knows how long it may last," said Jack. "I wish you would go along, Bob."

"He can't go now, anyhow," said the pretty little wife. "He has got to stay now, whether he will or no. William will see to it that we women get home all right,"—and she busied herself with the salad dishes.

"Go to the ball, you beauties, dance and revel to your heart's content; your brother Robert will manage to pass away the evening. Don't forget the key to that private case, Jack,"—as the women left the table to put the finishing touches to their toilets.

"Here you are," said Jack. "But mind, you must put those books back just as you found them, and lock the case. They are rare editions."

"With the accent on the rare, no doubt."

"I am a student, pure and simple," said Jack, lowering his eyes.

"I wouldn't swear to those adjectives," returned the scalawag. "If I remember, you had the reputation of being a high-jinks man in your class at Princeton."

"Sh! Don't you dare to drag forth any of those fool corpses of college, or out you go, bag and baggage." Jack glanced nervously around the room and toward the hall.

"My dear fellow, your wife wouldn't believe me, no matter what I said against your character. Isn't that right, Chuck? Jack, you are a lucky dog, if there ever was one. A handsome wife who loves you, a kid, a fine home and plenty of horses. I wonder if you married her for her money?"

Jack's eyes narrowed. He seemed to muse. "Yes, I believe I can do it as easily as I did 15 years ago."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Wallop that kid brother of mine. Bob, I hope you'll fall desperately in love some day, and that you will have a devil of a time winning the girl. You need something to stir up your vitals. By George! and I hope she won't have a cent of money."

"Lovable brother, that!" Bob knocked the ashes from his cigar and essayed at laughter which wasn't particularly felicitous. "Supposing I was in love, now, and that the girl had heaps of money, and all that?"

"And all that," mimicked the elder brother. "What does 'and all that' mean?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, I hope you are in love. It serves you right. You've made more than one girl's heart ache, you good-looking ruffian!"

Then he switched over to politics, and Robert became an interested listener. Quarter of an hour later the women returned, and certainly they made a picture which was most satisfactory to the masculine eye. Bob jumped to his feet and kissed them both, a thing I lacked the courage to do. How pleased they looked! How a woman loves flattery from those she loves!

Well, William is in front with the carriage; the women are putting on their cloaks, and I am admiring the luxurious crimson fur-lined garment which brother Robert had sent to Nancy from Paris. You will see by this that he was not altogether a thoughtless lad. Good-by, Mr. Robert. I leave you and your guiding-star to bolt the established orbit; for, after this night the world will never be the same careless, happy-go-lucky world. The farce has its tragedy, and what tragedy is free of the ludificatory? Youth must run its courses, even as the gay, wild brook must riot on its way to join the sober river.

I dare say that we hadn't gone 20 minutes before Robert stole out to the stables, only to return immediately with a bundle under his arm and a white felt hat perched rakishly on his head. He was chuckling audibly to himself.

"It will frighten the girls half to death. A gray horse and a bay; oh, I won't make any mistake. Let me see: I'll start about 12 o'clock. That'll get me to the spot just as the boys leave. This is the richest yet. I'll wager that there will be some tall screaming." He continued chuckling as he helped himself to his brother's perfectos and fine old Scotch. I don't know what book he found in the private case; some old rascal's merry tales, no doubt; for my hero's face was never in repose.

We had left Mrs. Secretary-of-the-Interior's and were entering the red brick mansion on Connecticut avenue. Carriages lined both sides of the street, and mounted police patrolled up and down.

"Poor boy!' sighed Nancy. "I wonder if he'll be lonely. It's a shame to leave him home the very first night."

"Why didn't he come, then?" Mrs. W. shrugged her polished shoulders.

"Oh, my cigars and Scotch are fairly comforting," put in Jack, complacently. "Besides, Jane isn't at all bad looking,"—winking at me. "What do you say, Charlie?"

But Charlie had not time to answer. The gray-haired, gray-whiskered ambassador was bowing pleasantly to us. A dozen notable military and naval attaches nodded; and we passed on to the ball-room, where the orchestra was playing "A Summer Night in Munich." In a moment Jack and his wife were lost in the maze of gleaming shoulders and white linen. It was a picture such as few men, once having witnessed it, can forget. Here were the great men in the great world: this man was an old rear-admiral, destined to become the nation's hero soon; there, a famous general, of long and splendid service; celebrated statesmen, diplomats, financiers; a noted English duke; a scion of the Hapsburg family; an intimate of the German kaiser; a swart Jap; a Chinaman with his peacock feather; tens of men whose lightest word was listened to by the four ends of the world; representatives of all the great kingdoms and states. The president and his handsome wife had just left as we came, so we missed that formality, which detracts from the pleasures of the ball-room.

"Who is that handsome young fellow over there, standing at the side of the Russian ambassador's wife?" asked Nancy, pressing my arm.

"Where? Oh, he's Count Karloff (or something that sounds like it), a wealthy Russian, in some way connected with the Russian government; a diplomat and a capital fellow, they say. I have never met him. . . . Hello! there's a stunning girl right next to him that I haven't seen before. . . . Where are you going?"

Nancy had dropped my arm and was gliding, kitty-corner fashion, across the floor. Presently she and the stunning girl had saluted each other after the impulsive fashion of American girls, and were playing cat-in-the-cradle, to the amusment of those foreigners nearest. A nod, and I was threading my way to Nancy's side.

"Isn't it glorious?" she began. "This is Miss Annesley, Charlie; Betty, Mr. Henderson." Miss Annesley looked mildly curious at Nan, who suddenly flushed. "We are to be married in the spring," she exclaimed shyly; and I dare say that there was a diffident expression on my own face.

Miss Anneslay gave me her hand, smiling. "You are a fortunate man, Mr. Henderson."

"Not the shadow of a doubt!" Miss Annesley, I frankly admitted on the spot, was, next to Nancy, the handsomest girl I ever saw; and as I thought of Mr. Robert in his den at home. I sincerely pitied him. I was willing to advance the statement that had he known, a pair of crutches would not have kept him away from No. 1300 Connecticut avenue.

I found three chairs, and we sat down. There was, for me, very little opportunity to talk. Women always have so much to say to each other, even when they haven't seen each other within 24 hours. From time to time Miss Annesley glanced at me, and I am positive that Nancy was extolling my charms. It was rather embarrassing, and I was balling my gloves up in a most dreadful fashion. As they seldom addressed a word to me, I soon became absorbed in the passing scene. I was presently aroused, however.

"Mr. Henderson, Count Karloff," Miss Annesley was saying. (Karloff is a name of my own choosing. I haven't the remotest idea if it means anything in the Russian language. I hope not.)

"Charmed!" The count's r's were very pleasantly rolled. I could see by the way his gaze roved from Miss Annesley to Nancy that he was puzzled to decide which came the nearer to his idea of womanhood.

I found him a most engaging fellow, surprisingly well-informed on American topics. I credit myself with being a fairly good reader of faces, and, reading his as he bent it in Miss Annesley's direction, I began to worry about Mr. Robert's course of true love. Here was a man who possessed a title, was handsome, rich, and of assured social position: it would take an extraordinary American girl to look coldly upon his attentions. By and by the two left us, Miss Annesley promising to call on Nancy.

"And where are you staying, Betty?"

"Father and I have taken Senator Blank's house in Chevy Chase for the winter. My horses are already in the stables. Do you ride?"

"I do."

"Then we shall have some great times together."

"Be sure to call. I want you to meet my brother."

"I believe I have," replied Miss Annesley.

"I mean my younger brother, a lieutenant in the army."

"Oh, then you have two brothers?"

"Yes," said Nancy.

"The dance is dying, Mademoiselle," said the count in French.

"Your arm, Monsieur. Au revoir, Nancy."

"Poor Bobby!" Nancy folded her hands and sighed mournfully. "It appears to me that his love affair is not going to run very smooth. But isn't she just beautiful, Charlie? What color, what style!"

"She's a stunner, I'm forced to admit. Bob'll never stand a ghost of a show against that Russian. He's a great social catch, and is backed by many kopecks."

"How unfortunate we did not know that she would be here! Bobby would have met her at his best, and his best is more to my liking than the count's. He has a way about him that the women like. He's no laggard. But money ought not to count with Betty. She is worth at least $250,000. Her mother left all her property to her, and her father acts only as trustee. Senator Blank's house rents for $8,000 the season. It's ready furnished, you know, and one of the handsomest homes in Washington. Besides, I do not trust those foreigners,"—taking a remarkably abrupt curve, as it were.

"There's two B's in your bonnet, Nancy," I laughed.

"Never mind the B's; let us have the last of this waltz."

This is not my own true story; so I shall bow off and permit my hero to follow the course of true love, which is about as rough-going a thoroughfare as the many roads of life have to offer.

(To Be Continued.)

Mr. Newlywed—"Did you say this was pound cake, my dear?"

Mrs. Newlywed—"Yes, precious, and I made it myself."

Mr. Newlywed—"Are you quite sure you—er—pounded it enough?"

HOSE BURSTS

FIRE DEPARTMENT IS CRIPPLED BY LACK OF EQUIPMENT.

Work On Fire Station, No. 2, Nearly Is Completed and Engine Will Be Installed.

Bids for 3,000 feet of new fire hose will be asked for by the fire committee of the general council, as soon as it is authorized by the board of aldermen Thursday night. The city is in need of some new hose, several sections bursting at a recent fire.

The work on the addition to fire station, No. 2, is nearly completed and will be finished probably this week. The installation of the fire engine in this station will follow on the heels of completion, the manufacturer desiring to have all the fire protection possible at once.

Harry Rudolph, stationman at the station, No. 4, is reported better today. He is suffering from blood poisoning, the result of running a nail in his hand two weeks ago.

RENT PAYS FOR LAND.

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ESTATE IN ITALY

Found to Have Been Left By Father of L. A. Lagomarsino.

Mr. L. A. Lagomarsino, of the city, is in Sheffield, Ala., investigating the title of property and securing data which may lead to his claiming a portion of a big estate in Italy. The heirs of Mr. Lagomarsino's father lately discovered that he left an estate in the old country and are setting about to recover it. Some of the necessary preliminaries take the heirs to Alabama. John Lagomarsino, another heir, has gone to Italy to investigate the matter from that end.

LIGHTNING KILLS HORSE.

Dick Allen Feels Shock At Distance of 300 Yards.

Yesterday a mare belonging to A. L. Joynes, manager of the Cumberland Telephone company, was struck by lightning on Dick Allen's farm, three miles from the city, and instantly killed. Several other horses standing near were stunned by the shock and Mr. Allen, who was in a barn 300 yards away, was partly stunned by the shock.

Cures Old Sores.

Westmoreland, Kan., May 5, 1902: Ballard Snow Liniment Co. Your Snow Liniment cured an old sore on the side of my chin that was supposed to be a cancer. The sore was stubborn and would not yield to treatment, until I tried Snow Liniment, which did the work in short order. My sister, Mrs. Sophia J. Carson, Allensville, Miffin Co., Pa., has a sore and mistrusts that it is a cancer. Please send her a 50c bottle. Sold by Alvey & List.

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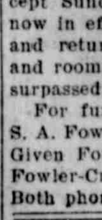

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"How should I know?"—Baltimore American.

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