

MUTUAL FLAMES.

By Tom Worth.

A coincidence that was accommodating to more than the chief person concerned.

"Isn't that curtain on fire?"

"It certainly looks so to me," I answered the little round personality who had thus accosted me.

Though we had never seen each other before, we were drawn together by the excitement of the moment.

From our position across the street from the house he had indicated, we could see that the blaze was making all-too-rapid headway.

Together and in the usual excitement of such moments, we rushed across, bent upon alarm. The house door stood open, for it was summer nightfall.

"This is surely luck!" my companion of the moment gloated.

I thought he referred to our timely discovery of fire. I modified this conclusion later.

Without ceremony we rushed into the house and he led the way up the short and easy flight of stairs to the room above where he had seen the blaze. We encountered nobody.

The short and corpulent fellow proved himself possessed of remarkable agility, for at a bound he cleared the breadth of the apartment, tore the offending drapery from its fastenings, and with a hasty reach for the water pitcher which stood handy, soon reduced the flaming fabric to a charred and water-soaked pulp.

My part was passive, and consisted of a review of the room and its appurtenances.

No question about it; we had stumbled upon "my lady's" boudoir. The atmosphere of feminine refinement

was most manifest, to say nothing of certain articles of apparel of which I will say nothing.

"Well it's out!" exclaimed the little fellow.

I don't know whether he referred to the fire or whether he meant to indicate his next move. Certain it is, however, he lost no time in getting out.

He brushed by me, thumped his way down-stairs with remarkable celerity, and I could even hear the trot he assumed as he made off into the stillness of the fast-closing night.

And then I caught the swish of a skirt. I trust that's the proper term. Anyway, I believe I've read it somewhere.

She appeared from an adjoining room the door to which had been latch-to.

I attempt no portraiture. Imagine your own ideal; transfer your viewpoint to mine. You have her.

Nor were her charms lessened by the flush as she caught sight of me, the charred curtain, all

I explained.

"It was those curling irons." She went to the cause of things with acumen.

Then she turned and thanked me. Truth compelled me to tell of the little fat man's share, and the next moment, I was mighty glad I had. For she had turned toward her dresser.

A little "oh!" of mingled surprise and alarm escaped her.

"May I ask the trouble?" I ventured.

"It's gone!"

"What, mademoiselle?" I'm not really French, but I look the part.

"The ring," she vouchsafed.

Then I thought I began to see a little clearer into the fat little gentleman's character.

Upon conference I was delighted to see that she agreed with me, for she could well have painted me with the same stick.

"I'm no exponent of deductive investigation, but I assure you I'll do my best. I'll certainly know him again. I'm your detective from this moment."

"Thank you, she said simply, and added with something akin to a stammer: "You see, it isn't the value of the stone; it's the peculiar circumstances; rather a personal matter, you know."

I thought I understood, though it certainly did dishearten me to do so. I don't care who knows it; I fell in love with her the minute she had glinted those heavy-fringed orbs my way.

And so I left her and started my search.

No, I did not count the number of nails in the heel of the footprint where the fellow had jumped the last four steps from the stoop, and had landed his left hind foot on an eight-day-old newspaper that had lain invitingly beside the mud-scraper, rendered pulp-like by the shower of yesterday.

I did not indulge in any science-of-deduction tactics.

No, I met him prosaically in the lobby of the hotel, where it appeared we were both stopping.

At first he tried to elude me. Finding this impossible, he blurted out:

"You see, I had spent two sleepless nights, for, after I had sent her that ring, more and more I began to see she wasn't just my style. In my letter I had given her until to-day to reply. Besides, I really can't afford to marry; fact is, I bought this sparkler on credit; and that worried me some, too."

He looked up to see how I took his revelation.

"Do you mean to tell me that that ring was sent by you to Miss——"

"Dorothy Machant" he prompted. "Yes."

"What will you take for it?" I asked.

"I owe seventy-five on it."

"Hundred and twenty do?"

"You bet!"

I counted out six yellowbacks, for I had just sold a piano. That's my line, you know.

On the sidewalk I beckoned a survey driver and gave the address.

She was in. I was discreet in explanation. Finally I exhibited the ring.

"Good!" she cried delightedly. "Now, I can send it back to him in time."

"No you can't," I answered.

At this new phase I overcame all discretion in my explanations.—Argosy.

DISCORD.

When I stahts a little chune,
Wif de banjo on my knee,
Boun' ter notice purty soon
Some one j'inin' in so free.
Satisfied wif how he sings;
Drownin' out de sweetest strings.
Voice is sure ter disagree;
Some one singin' off de key.
When de loafin's in yoh heart,
Dem as has ter oversee
Allus makes you git a start,
Allus spiles de jubilee.
Jes' when dreamin's full o' bliss,
Mammy says "git out er dis!"
Somehow seems dar's gotter be
Some one singin' off de key.
—All-Story Magazine.

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