

The Carnival of Crime.

By FRANK HOWARD HOWE and LASCHELLES CHESTER MAXWELL.

Everybody knows Kitty Clyde. That is, all the fellows do. Her studio is on the top floor of the Wailes, where she does not mind your smoking an occasional cigarette if you are well acquainted. Kitty paints a very nice picture. Not great, you know, but just a pretty piece of genre work that hangs well in a drawing room, and is not a check to frivolous conversation. They say a better little woman in Gotham than Kitty herself. We all call her Kitty—the fellows do. She writes occasionally for the press about art, music and the higher education for women.

So much for Kitty. And myself? Well, hoping, like Paul Pry, I don't intrude, this is I. A man about town, with a weakness for Bohemian life—a weakness that may surprise you when I tell you that I'm a fellow of fashion, with some of the best cards of Gotham in my mirror. But I like cheerful company, and the jolly quill-drivers furnish it, without caring to follow me out of Bohemia into my own world. So I manage to let my associations there lie perdue, as it were. In truth, the beggars are not pushing. They have a dignity of their own. If they are at times a bit familiar they don't mean to compromise me by it. For instance, if I escort Mrs. Potphar Phillips to her carriage after the opera, Bob Jones, the dramatic man of the Orb, may favor me with a furtive wink from under his title—the ancient, the weather-worn—but he never presumes to bow.

The boys like me, or appear to. And so it has gradually come about that a good many of them make me the depository of their hopes and ca. s. When Jack Mills scores a failure with his play he comes to me—and curses the critics. And when Fred Raeburne has another story refused it is into my tender bosom that he pours his grief. Some say that this fable of the scribes is owing to the fact that I keep a brand of particularly fine cigars and a lot of good old brandy in my rooms; but then some people would say anything.

One day I had come up town rather early, and was just stepping into my elevator, when I felt a great thwack on my back, and a hearty voice exclaim: "Hello! How's his nibs?" I turned around and recognized Fred Raeburne. Now, I hate to be hit in the back and called "his nibs." It hurts both my spinal cord and my amour propre. So with some asperity I informed Fred that my health was as good as could be expected under present circumstances. But Fred has the skin of a rhinoceros.

"Going up to see Kitty Clyde?" he continued, oblivious of my irony. "Same here." And he beamed at the elevator boy. "She is a dear little woman. Eh? old man?"



I don't fancy taking the elevator boy into my confidence as a regular thing, so although I quite agreed with Fred about Miss Clyde's attractiveness I merely muttered something about "most estimable, I am sure." You cannot be too careful in a house with ladies; the elevator boy is their home journal. But notwithstanding my hints, both of manner and speech, Fred kept on importunately asking me all sorts of personal questions and commenting facetiously on my private affairs until the elevator stopped at the door of Miss Clyde's apartment.

We found it open, but Kitty was not in sight. The studio was a place with which we were both familiar; a long room, divided across the middle by a damasked screen about four feet high. At the end next the door was a carved oak mantel piece, having beneath it a deep fireplace in which burned a bright, soft coal fire. About the walls hung art studies—bits of china, curios, odd pieces of armor and bric-a-brac. Indeed it was a very pretty room, giving proof of Kitty's good taste, and that among other things she knew what a Japanese auction meant.

Finding no one in Raeburne suggested that we'd best wait for Kitty. "So we sat down and lit cigarettes. Still smarting under Fred's recent salutation, and being in an ugly frame of mind anyway, I began the conversation with:

"Well, and how does the coming novelist get on?"

"Novelist be damned!" quoth Fred, suddenly blazing into a fine fury. "Mark my words, old man, they'll be sorry one of these days for the way they've treated me. It hasn't mattered to me much until this year. But now things are different. Now I'm going to remember all those that gave me a stone when I ask for bread. I've got them on the list. When I am at the top of the ladder of fame and the publishers come to me, begging for stories, then it will be my turn. The public cannot go on imbibing milk and water forever. They will grow up some day, and then they'll howl for meat. Then they must come to me. It is a long fight, old man, but I'm bound to win in the end. They can't keep me down forever. See this parcel?" Fred had observed it bulging. "This is a real story—no Bismarck. There's real pathos, real comedy, real tragedy here," went on the enthusiastic author, violently pounding on the arm of my chair his manuscript. "My characters do not merely breathe and talk; they live and suffer. They are chastened in the fires of adversity, they lend the real commonplace life of this humdrum world; and yet I have thrown around them such a glamour of romance."

"Have you tried it on the dog?" I queried, cutting in as Raeburne stopped for breath.

Fred chuckled himself suddenly in mid light and fell to earth. He looked at me

for a moment, while a comical grin overspread his rather good looking face. "I've tried it on all the dogs I can think of," he admitted, looking ruefully at the parcel. "Never mind; they'll have to accept something one of these days."

"Why the mischief don't you give it up for the present, Fred?" said I. "You have a little money; why not lie on your oars for a while and wait for the world to catch up with you?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Fred, assuming his confidential manner. "But mind, it's a secret. I spent last summer at the Isle of Wight, on the Long Island coast. There I met the loveliest girl!—Fred here threw his eyes and a kiss to the ceiling. "She was stopping with some people—the Rutledges—who had a cottage there. Well, Laura—her name is Laura—Laura Windom is an orphan. I don't know that that has anything to do with the story, but then she is. Well, I met her, and then I met her once or twice more, and then it seems to me some way as if I didn't meet anybody but her. We used to play lawn tennis and bath and drive together, and the result was that I got all you know."

"Never mind that; skip it," said I. "You proposed and were rejected, I suppose?"

"No; accepted," said Fred, growing red under the influence of some tender reminiscence.

"And yet people scoff at miracles," I murmured viciously.

"But when I came to talk to Mrs. Rutledge," continued Fred, "noticing my gibe, 'I got it hot, and no mistake. She asked me whether it was acting like a gentleman to engage a young girl's affections just because I knew she had a large fortune. By Jove, it just knocked me out. You know I have about three thousand a year. I saw this girl living with the Rutledges; I knew she was an orphan, and I thought, if I thought about it at all, that in marrying her I was doing a bit of the Cophetua business. I am blessed if the old woman did not row me for a fortune hunter. She said: 'Three thousand a year is nothing. I could not live on it myself. (That's a fact.) Then she went on to denounce fortune hunters in general and my indignation in particular. She told me, among other things in the course of her harangue, that I couldn't earn my salt. She's wrong there, though, old fellow," laughed Fred. "I think I could do that. I don't see a great deal."

"Of course I was very much out of about the whole thing," he went on. "Laura stuck to me like a brick, though (Fred has a knack of making his metaphors), and she didn't care what Mrs. Rutledge said. She's deviously fond of me, you know"—complacently casting his glance at me—"but I was not going to have that old cat saying that I had married Miss Windom for her money and couldn't support her. Would you?"

"Not if I could help myself," I admitted. "But I don't see quite how she could be bullied." Fred looked at me for a moment dubiously and went on:

"One day it occurred to Laura—I saw her sometimes—

"Oh! You saw her sometimes? I put in, 'Yes, of course. There was a lane back of the Cedarhurst track that she liked to drive through. I used to meet her there. As I was saying when you interrupted me, with a severe glance in my direction, it occurred to Laura that I might try and make some money just to show that I was good for something. She, of course, never doubted my ability, but she wanted me to convince other people of it. Funny! I had not thought of it myself, was it not?" queried Fred pensively.

"There seemed to me to be no reply to this. So I merely bowed my head in assent."

"Yes, exactly," continued Raeburne with a reproachful look on his face, as if he had rather hoped to be contradicted. "So then we talked over all the different sorts of business, Laura and I, and Laura concluded—she is very clever, you must know—that as I took eight or ten years to get a footing in any other business, and as we could not afford to wait that long, I must start out and be an author in earnest. That, she said, was the only trade whose fame and fortune were obtained at once. You know I have dabbled in verse more or less. I have written some really lovely stanzas about Laura, but of course she would not allow them to be published. So all this fall I have been trying all I know to get something of mine accepted. And that's the reason I've got to have something accepted," concluded Fred emphatically, adding anxiously, "Do you think I have a chance?"

"Now, what should one say to a fellow like that?" said I, after considering a moment. "You have my best wishes, old fellow. But why don't you and the girl marry now and then go on to fame and fortune hand in hand? It sometimes takes a year or two for a writer in Gotham to make his mark."

"Sarcasm is simply thrown away on Fred."

"That is just what Laura says," he rejoined cheerfully, "so we have decided that whenever my first story is accepted we will get married at once."

"That is a very sensible determination," cried I. "Success to 'The Carnival of Crime!'"

I seized the package out of Fred's hand and waved it enthusiastically around my head, offering up a silent prayer that while that some editor might, in a moment of temporary mental eclipse, be induced to accept it.

"At this moment I saw Raeburne suddenly rise from his chair and stare open mouthed at the screen behind me with eyes that stuck out like hot peas. I turned in my chair and saw a sight that brought me to my feet instantly. Over

another head that I knew well. It was Kitty, wearing her most exasperating expression of contentment. When I am with the utmost fairness of reasoning and the utmost mildness of expression explaining to Kitty how such a man of our acquaintance has treated her, or how such another is a pretentious ass, and Kitty looks up at me from her painting, with a brush bit wide across her mouth and that expression on her noble features, I always shut up. I don't know why it is. I hate to be put down by anybody. But there's something in that look that shuts me up like a jackknife."

The brush was in Kitty's mouth now. She removed it to remark sweetly:

"I trust you shan't disturb you, gentlemen. Make yourselves quite at home. We do not intrude, do we?"

Raeburne commenced to stammer a reply, but there was evidently something in the situation that overcame him, for he stuck fast. I took advantage of his confusion to slide "The Carnival of Crime" under a neighboring sofa. Then I turned to Kitty and said bluntly:

"We didn't know you were at home. Why didn't you advise us?"

"My dear," said Kitty, turning to the blonde maiden, "without noticing my attention, 'let me introduce you to Mr. Malcolm, a gentleman who not-often deigns to guide my faltering steps in search of the beautiful and the true. Mr. Malcolm, let me present to you the upper section of my friend, Miss Windom.'"

While Kitty was speaking I was bowing in my most faultless manner to the beautiful head that rose above the screen like a Raphael's cherub. But when she came to the name of the fair unknown I straightened up so suddenly that I fancied I had heard my backbone click like an open clasp knife.

"Miss Windom?" I repeated. Then I looked at her and glanced at Fred. Both had turned a beautiful peony color. I transferred my gaze to Kitty's demure face. There was a twinkle in the corner of one of her eyes that was irresistible—I threw myself into an armchair and burst into a loud guffaw. Kitty's demureness went all to pieces in a moment and she bent off into fits of laughter. Fred and the other little fellow, meanwhile, going through these physiological processes familiarly known as "turning all colors of the rainbow" and "looking seven ways for Sunday." But Kitty's laugh was contagious, and presently they were forced to join us, he looking rather sheepish and she with a most charming blush on her cheeks and a flutter of the down cast eyelids that added considerable to my admiration of her pretty face.

"Well, it so happened that Miss Windom saw the article, and, being an amateur of painting and having sketched on the Jersey coast herself, she came up to see my pictures. What's more, she bought some of them," added Kitty, looking over to where Miss Windom was just then making a pretty picture of herself, bending over the easel with the winter sunlight falling on her blonde head, turning the masses of her hair into gold.

"What have you got on the easel over there?" I queried.

"It's a portrait of her—Laura," Kitty replied. "She liked my method so well that she insisted on my painting her portrait. You know she's very rich, and she pays me good handsomely for it. She is a dear, good girl, and I'm very fond of her," looking affectionately at the subject of her encomiums. "She comes up nearly every day for a sitting. We were at it when you came in. I was just finishing one of her eyes, and told her to keep quiet for a moment. Then the conversation out here became so personal that we couldn't announce ourselves." And Kitty relapsed into an amused giggle.

"Kitty," I said severely, "that joke is getting to be a habit."

At this moment the other two joined us, and we drew up together around the cozy fireplace and prepared to spend a pleasant afternoon together.

Kitty made tea. I ordinarily hate tea, but as Kitty makes it (Russian fashion, she says), and served with a slice of lemon, it is far from bad. By and by she got down her banjo and played us two or three soft, plaintive melodies, which had the effect of steeping us in a sort of tender melancholy. Raeburne, indeed, became so morbid that nothing would do him but that Miss Windom should sing. That is always the way. Whenever I see a lovely face which quite satisfies me, some idiot insists on the statue opening its mouth to disenchante me. I settled back in my chair and prepared to hear "White Wings," or "The Lost Chord," with what fortitude I might. Miss Windom took the banjo, struck a few soft notes, and then in a low, sweet voice, full of expression, sang the verses which follow. I got a copy of them afterward from Raeburne. It seems he wrote them one moonlight night during an especially desperate crisis of the tender passion. Miss Windom composed the air. I was surprised on reading them to find so little of the dreamy pathos that seemed to pervade them, when Miss Windom sang them.

Sweetheart of mine, lapped in the gloom I lie
Mid bitter thoughts. Yet, dear, I will rejoice,
If it be so, that I must make the choice,
To take my love and let the world go by.

Sweetheart of mine, far through the silent night,
My heart turns toward my darling where she lies,
To breathe a kiss upon her fast shut eyes,
And bid her sleep with happy dreams and bright.

Sweetheart of mine, whatever may befall,
Come woe, come weep, come pleasure or come pain,
Sorrow's heat shall burn upon my heart in vain;
Your perfect love is recompense for all—
Sweetheart of mine.

When the last notes had died away there was an awkward silence. I mentally followed Raeburne's example and handed the young lady my hat. But the irrepressible Raeburne could not long be muzzled.

"Thanks awfully, Laura," he said. "I could sit here forever to listen to you. Could not you, Miss Clyde?"

"Hardly forever, unless I was deucedly fond of her," replied Kitty, merrily.

I joined Kitty's laugh this time, though in truth the joke was getting shop worn. But it was as well to have Fred squelched once in a while. If not he's apt to become so dreadfully universal.

Miss Windom, with a little sigh, put down the banjo, and, rising, said with an expressive glance at Raeburne: "I really must go. Thank you very much for my pleasant afternoon, Miss Clyde. May I—may I see Kitty?"

"You may," responded our little hostess heartily. "I shall be only too pleased to have you."

Miss Windom strolled over to the window and began drawing on her gloves.

"How strangely a few simple notes can affect one," said I, assuming my favorite colloquy of Rhododendron attitude before the fire. "I remember in Paris once, being awakened by a hand organ playing 'Home, Sweet Home' beneath my window, and do you know—"

"There is something going to play 'Home Sweet Home' beneath this window," cried Miss Windom, starting back from the easel out of which she had been peevishly gazing as she buttoned her gloves.

"What's the matter?" queried Kitty, hastening toward the easel, disturbed by the noise.

"Mrs. Rutledge's carriage is at the door," explained the latter. "She promised to call for me. Oh, dear, what shall I do? She will be simply furious if she finds Fred here."

"Oh, never mind her," said Kitty reassuringly. "She won't come up. She'll send the footman."

"Oh, yes, she will," said Miss Windom. "See, she's exclaimed, peeping cautiously from the window. 'Here she is getting out—and yes—she's coming right into the house.'"

"There was no doubt about it. In a moment we heard the elevator boy outside.

"That door, ma'am, No. 6."

"Thank you. Yes," a harsh voice responded. "I see the name on the door."

And then there came a loud, authoritative knock. Luckily the door was not open, as it had been when we came up. There was a moment for deliberation. I looked around.

"The screen!" I whispered to Kitty. "The very thing," she murmured back. "But, no, Mrs. Rutledge is a regular mouser. Whenever she comes here with Laura she invariably prowls over the whole place and pokes into everything."

"Rat-tat-tat!" came from the door insistently.

"I have it," came all at once from Kitty in an exaggerated stage whisper. "It's Laura! Take your hat and come. So now, then, Mr. Raeburne, stand here. Hurry, Malcolm, help me to roll the screen around him. On your knees, Mr. Raeburne. You can pray a little in the meanwhile, if you want to, for our escape. You might do something to assist the general effort."

With this, and having Raeburne fairly imprisoned, she proceeded to throw over the screen a heavy portiere, which was one of the properties, so to speak, of her atelier.

"You see, you dare even to breathe," was her parting injunction to poor Fred.

"I'm not likely to," came in another tones from under the picture. "A—clew! Whew! How dusty that curtain is!"

Rat-tat-tat-bang! came from the door. And then a hand rattled the knob impatiently.

"What shall I do with you, Malcolm?"

gaped Kitty. "Oh, I know. Here, hurry. Take this cloak," producing an immense, dingy, red affair. "Now, the hat," examining a big, flapping Mexican arrangement over both eyes and ears. "Now, this dagger. There, stand in this dark corner, with your face to the wall, and try to look wooden—no, don't try; just look natural and all!"

Having got me thus thoroughly disguised as a lay figure the little woman turned with an elaborate courtesy in the direction of the door.

"Now, madam," she said, "I am at your service."

She stuck a paint brush across her mouth in business like fashion, hung her palette on her thumb and opened the door.

"Oh, Mrs. Rutledge—you're so sorry to have kept you waiting." Unfeigned surprise was in every tone of Kitty's short speech.

Mrs. Rutledge bowed without saying anything in reply, and walked majestically into the room, amid a prodigious rustling of silks. She surveyed the apartment for moment (I could see her in a small mirror that hung on the wall directly in front of me), sniffed once or twice and then asked abruptly:

"Is there any one else here?"

"Only Miss Windom, as you see, madam," responded Kitty, innocently.

"Who's been smoking?" demanded Mrs. Rutledge, with another sniff.

"Er—only me," Kitty was evidently taken aback by this question, which 'was in the nature of a power, but seeing there was but one way out of the dilemma she walked into it like the little heroine she is.

"You smoke?" queried the elder lady, severely.

"Yes," said Kitty. "You know we Bohemians will have our little dissipation. By the way, if you don't mind I'll have a cigarette now."

Suiting the action to the word, Kitty picked up my case where I had chanced to lay it on the mantel, selected a cigarette with the air of a connoisseur, lit it and began to puff. I could see a quail pass over the poor little woman's face as she expelled the first mouthful of smoke, but with the resolution of a martyr she stuck to her cigarette to the no small astonishment and disgust of her caller.

"I owe you an apology for keeping you waiting, Mrs. Rutledge," explained Kitty. "But the fact is, I was at work on a very delicate part of the portrait when you knocked—one of your ward's beautiful eyes, and not dreaming that it could be you, I thought it best to finish before going to the door."

"Oh, Kitty, your little pocket edition of Sapphira, how glibly you did it that winter afternoon!"

Mrs. Rutledge turned to her ward, Laura, she asked.

"Not quite, Mrs. Rutledge. But you needn't wait. I can walk quite as well. It will be tiresome for you up here with nothing to do."

"I shall wait," intoned the matron abruptly. Then going to the girl, she looked at her closely. "Laura," she said, "what is the matter with you? You are flushed and trembling. Laura (diapason), have you been seeking that man again?"

"What man?" murmured poor Laura. "But here a suppressed sneeze from underneath the portiere interrupted her. Mrs. Rutledge turned hastily around.

"What was that?" she demanded, looking suspiciously at the screen.

"But they seem to be so fond of each other," I went on. "I don't see why they should keep apart. He has some money and she has plenty of it. It's all foolishness, this waiting until he has done something in a literary way. They'll die a bachelor and a maid if they wait for that. It's a great pity. Don't you think so?"

Being thus directly appealed to, Kitty came out of her dark corner, and leaning forward so that the firelight fell upon her pleasant face, said, laughing:

"You mean old Aeneas, why don't you bind your love with a rose, get yourself an ornamental shepherd's crook and take something like the Happy Valley?"

"Thank you for the suggestion," I responded. "I'll think of it. Will you please tell me what has caused this outburst of irony? Don't you think Fred is good enough for your friend? Well, I do think."

"I really didn't think anything at all about it. But I know the best way to bring Kitty out is to oppose her views, and I thought to do so now by taking up the subject for Fred."

"Oh, you do, you do," murmured Kitty sarcastically.

"Yes, I do," said I a little nettled by her malicious spite. "I myself. If you think that's too good for him because she happens to have a fortune, I don't agree with you, that's all."

"Oh, you don't?" queried Kitty. "I thought you set up for a cynic, but you go on with an amateur's smile. You don't know my friend, and you think you can suggest things to him. He's a man who will have to wait for his money. Also, people who push their own private affairs are apt to be generally pinched."

"But, think," said I. "Why don't you tell them you don't intend to marry the girl?"

"I have a mind to do so, but I don't want to do so until I have a good reason for it. I don't want to do so until I have a good reason for it. I don't want to do so until I have a good reason for it."

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dragged the portiere away from the screen. The latter tumbled over at the same time, disclosing Fred, disheveled and dusty, kneeling on the floor, and looking for all the world like some pious chimney sweep.

"The situation was too much for Kitty. She went off into peals of laughter, in which, I must confess, I joined, having by this time recovered from my own discomfort. Fred got up off the ground and sheepishly dusted his clothes with his handkerchief. Miss Windom glanced timidly at the matron. The latter was a statue of wrath.

"Put on your things at once, Laura, and come with me," she commanded, when she had recovered her speech.

Laura meekly obeyed. The statue of wrath marched out of the room, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with the air of a tragedy queen on her way to execution. R. E. Miss Windom followed her silently, but at the door she turned and threw a keen look at us, which we immediately proceeded to avert for.

III.

We all resumed our seats after we had heard Miss Windom and her aunt bestow themselves in the elevator.

Kitty and I were disposed to be jocular over the adventure. But nothing that we were able to say could cheer up Fred. He was sure now that he had put an end once and forever to all his hopes of Laura. He made two or three sickly attempts to join our laughter, but his mirth was too evidently assumed. Finally he muttered something about "not feeling quite up to himself," and took his leave. I stayed behind to have a little chat with Kitty.

We sat together for a while in silence after Fred had gone, watching the evening shadows lengthen across the polished floor, until they encountered the flickerings from the pleasant fire that burned in the hearth. Outside, as the night drew on, the wind rose, and presently a few stray flakes of snow drifted past the pane. The contrast between the comfort within and the cheerlessness without soothed me into a pleasant reverie, which was suddenly broken by Kitty's earnest crying out, "Who's a Muggump?" from his perch in the dark corner by the easel.

"Confound the bird!" I exclaimed. "It had sent a cold shiver up my spine, bringing me out of my comfortable day dream with a jounce. I sat bolt upright and softly swore at the bird. The first seemed to read my thoughts, for he burst into shrieks of hendiadys laughter that set my teeth on edge. I threw myself back in my chair and covered my ears with my hands."

"Kitty," said I, when the bird had finally relapsed into silence, "what do you think of it all?"

"All what?" asked Kitty.

"Why—you know—Fred and the girl. They'll make a nice couple, don't you think?"

"Very," said Kitty, shortly. Her face was hidden in the shadow as she leaned back in her big arm chair in one corner of the fireplace, where the flickering gleams from the flames could not reach her face.

"I fear there is but little chance of their finally coming together," I suggested sympathetically.

Kitty made no answer to this. I resumed:

"You know he cannot write any more than that ancestor of Pheidias, who signed Magnus Charta with his sword blunt."

"Still no response from Kitty's dark corner."

"But they seem to be so fond of each other," I went on. "I don't see why they should keep apart. He has some money and she has plenty of it. It's all foolishness, this waiting until he has done something in a literary way. They'll die a bachelor and a maid if they wait for that. It's a great pity. Don't you think so?"

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