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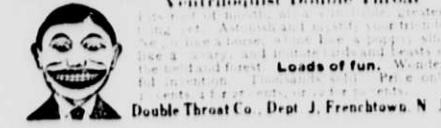
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**LOTS OF FUN FOR A DIME**



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roborated by so good a judge of character as yourself, Ponderby."

They went together to Ponderby's cabin, and there sat the woman, her dark head bowed upon arms outstretched along the table, her shoulders heaving with her sobs. She was plainly on the verge of hysterics, if, indeed, she had not already crossed the boundary line.

"Madam, here is Mr. Trevelyan," said Ponderby. "You wished to speak with him."

**THE** girl raised her head, dabbed her wet eyes nervously with her handkerchief, and made an effort to pull herself together. When she spoke, it was with rapid utterance, reciting off what she had to say as if it were a task learned by rote.

"I have come at last to the end of my tether, and tonight, if there is no prospect of freedom, I shall destroy myself. I have often thought of suicide before this, but I am cowardly, and cling to life. Five years ago, my father went out to America on a motor tour; he took me with him. Among other servants he engaged Charles Branksome, an expert chauffeur. He was English, and came to us well recommended. He intimated that he was of good family, but had his living to earn. He was handsome then, and had a most ingratiating manner. The person who called on you tonight bears little resemblance to the Branksome of five years ago. I had often gone motoring with him in America. I was young, flighty, and a foolish person altogether. Perhaps you saw about it in the papers. I cannot dwell on the appalling mistake I made. He professed to have fallen in love with me, and I believed him.

"We were secretly married in America, and I was not long in doubt as to the disaster that had befallen me. His sole desire was money; my father, however, was a stubborn man, and after his first shock—the episode being made much of in the American papers—he refused to pay Branksome a penny, and returned to England. I never saw him again, nor could I communicate with him. Two years after my mad act, he died, and never even mentioned me in his will.

"My husband is a liar; a thief; a forger; a gambler and a brute. He has maltreated me so that I have been left once or twice for dead, but finally he broke me to his will. He is known as a cheat in every gambling resort in Europe, and on the Atlantic liners. Lately I have been used as a decoy in the way you have experienced. Somehow he learned—indeed, that is his business—who were the rich travellers on this boat. He thought as this was the newest and largest steamship on the ocean, its staff would not, at first, be thoroughly organized, and that he might escape detection. He pointed you out to me as you came on board, and said you were Lord Stranleigh, travelling as Mr. Trevelyan. The rest you know. He forced me to hand to him the notes you had given me. His plan was to demand a moderate sum at first, which was to be a mere beginning, and each exaction would be but a prelude for the next. He is old at the game, and is wanted now by the authorities in New York for blackmailing a very well-known millionaire."

"Do you know the name of the millionaire?"

She gave him the information.

"Very well, Madam. In the first place you must do nothing rash or foolish. I shall see that this man is detained at New York—on some pretext or other; in fact, I shall arrange for this by wireless. You must journey to one of the states where divorces may be obtained."

Stranleigh added, after a cool, scrutinizing look at the grief-stricken woman:

"If you will permit, I shall be your banker. Should Branksome go free in New York, it will cost him dear, and as his supplies are precarious, you

should have no difficulty in evading him. Do you agree?"

"Oh, yes, yes. You are only too kind," she said, as she sobbed again. "Then it's settled. Ponderby, look into the corridor, and see that the way of escape is clear."

"I am sorry," the girl said, rising—she seemed very young. Stranleigh thought—"to cause you such trouble and inconvenience."

"No inconvenience at all," said Stranleigh, with his usual nonchalance, "and I never allow myself to be troubled."

Ponderby reported the way clear, and the lady disappeared silently along the passage. Stranleigh betook himself to Hazel's cabin, and had a long talk with the Honourable John, who, for the first time during the voyage, seemed to be enjoying himself.

**N**EXT morning, the Honourable John paced one deck after another, as if in search of someone. On one of the almost deserted lower decks he met the person he sought.

"I beg your pardon," said Hazel, in his suavest manner, "but I am trying to find three men as tired of this journey as I am. I have never crossed the Atlantic before, and I miss London, and the convenience of its clubs. A quiet little game of poker in the smoking room might help to while away the time."

The keen eyes of Mr. Branksome Poole narrowed, as was a custom of theirs, and he took in the points of the man who addressed him.

"I am not much at poker," he said, hesitatingly and untruthfully.

The Honourable John laughed.

"Doesn't matter in the least," he said. "The requirement for this game is cash. I have approached several men, who object to playing for money. I confess I don't care a rap for a card table unless there's something on."

"I'm with you there," agreed the stout man, his eyes glistening at the thought of handling a pack of cards once more. His momentary hesitation had been merely because he feared recognition, for he knew himself able to cope with anyone when it came to the shuffle and deal.

They were a strangely contrasted pair as they stood there, the plebe and the patrician; the plebe grim and serious, the patrician carrying off the situation with a light laugh. Yet it was hard to say which was the more expert rascal when it came to cards.

A little later four men sat down to a table. Hazel ordered a new pack of cards from the steward, broke the seal, and pulled off the wrapper.

At first Poole played cautiously, watching from the tail of his eye for any officer who might spot him as one who had been ordered off the green. The consequence of this divided attention was soon apparent. He lost heavily, and finally drew a couple of fifty-pound notes from his pocket book. He fingered them for a moment, as if loath to part with paper so valuable.

"Where's the steward?" he asked.

"What do you want?" demanded Hazel, as though impatient for the game to go on.

"Change for a fifty."

"I'll change it for you," and the Honourable John drew from his pocket a handful of gold, and five-pound bank notes, counted out fifty pounds, and shoved them across the table to Poole, who, still hesitating, was forced reluctantly to give up the big bank note.

Poole now began to play in earnest, but still luck was against him, and soon the second fifty-pound note was changed, for they played high. Hazel, after glancing at the number on the note, thrust it carelessly into his waistcoat pocket, alongside its brother, as if it were of no more account than a cigarette paper.

Hazel now possessed the two banknotes that might have been used as evidence against Stranleigh, and he drew a sigh of satisfaction. Poole saw only that here was a man evidently

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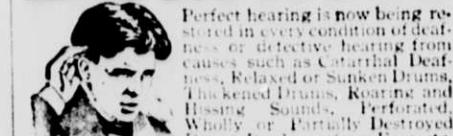
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