

THE BRONZE BUG

By Justine Neltner

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"Good-by to my dream of dreams!"
sighed Vance Edison, sadly.

He stood at the window of the plain house he called home. Its bewildering attachment was the radiant garden. There the captivating scene fascinated his vision.

A lovely girl of 19 sat on a rustic bench between a golden-haired little maid of four and a rosy-cheeked lad two years her senior. The little ones were adjusting a wreath made up of pansies and forgetmenots across her flaxen hair—a happy, laughing trio, and yet it made Vance Edison's heart ache, for in the combination lay his distraction.

The young lady was Nella Burt, the daughter of a widow, his next-door neighbor. Both she and her invalid mother found a true friend in the young college professor. His life was very simple and humble, yet bright and merry were the hours they spent in the garden that was the pride and glory of the place.

Then the father of the two children came along. He was an uncle of Edison, a sea-faring man. He had been compelled to give up his ship on account of failing health. He had taken his motherless children from an asylum where they had been put. He had come to Edison's home, carried on a litter.

"Dear boy," he said, bluff and hearty, but his voice woefully thin and piping, "I've brought my chests, the children and myself to the only relative I can claim in the world. I'm a dying man—three months more the doctor gives me. I've a little saved. Tomorrow I shall give it to you. I want you to adopt the little ones, educate them, be a father to them when I am gone, and take it a little more easy yourself."

Alas! Before another sunrise a seizure attacked the old salt. The little

ones were left orphaned. Vance Edison cared for them tenderly.

He said nothing to anybody concerning a disappointment he sustained during the week after the funeral. Anxiety for the children caused it. As for himself, Vance Edison was too soulfully unselfish to covet riches. Aside from a few curiosities that he had gathered up in his travels, the chest his uncle had brought him contained nothing of interest or value.

The old salt's wealth must have been a phantasy, Edison decided.



"Where on Earth Did You Get a Malacca Finder?"

Then he set himself to work to block out the future. He found that the added expense of the two children would take all the surplus he could earn, unless his college salary was increased.

This particular afternoon, as he watched his lovely neighbor with the two little ones his spirits sank low, indeed. He loved her with a fervor he dared rarely contemplate. Before his uncle had come he had more than once decided to tell Nella of his af-