

In Dubious Garb

By RALPH HAMILTON

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"Dear, dear!" mourned and pitied Alvin Prince, and stood looking down at a human form lying prone upon the straw-littered floor of an abandoned shelter shed at a remote corner of his farm.

He was a genial old soul, this pleasant-faced, kind-hearted deacon, selectman and the prop and stay of sterling uprightness and dignity in the community. He had been passing the shed, when he fancied that a groan proceeded from within. He stepped across the threshold and, startled and puzzled, gazed down at the recumbent figure. It was that of a young man with a refined cast of features, his eyes closed in sleep. Two further discoveries of the farmer brought a serious expression to his face. One hand was abrased and bleeding, and a cut in the head showed a second recent injury.

"A convict—an escaped convict," soliloquized Prince. "Poor fellow! And he's badly hurt. What is my duty in the case? He looks likely, and perhaps a mother, a sister is worrying about him. There isn't anything of the criminal in that face. Shall I protect him?"

The decision was quickly made. Prince proceeded across the farm, got to the house, made up a bundle and, hitching up a horse to the old family carryall, started back the route he had come.

"Mother and Zelda away," he soliloquized, "and I don't see Zeph anywhere around. That just suits me."

Zeph Barnes was the handy man about the farm. At that moment he was making his way past the old shed. His coarse lips puckered as he discovered its inmate. He scented a mystery as he saw Prince returning. He wondered if there was any reward offered for the apprehension of convicts and, climbing to the shallow loft in the structure, waited for developments.

These materialized with the arrival of Prince. The latter proceeded to disrobe the stranger. He made a bundle of the incriminating convict garb and thrust it into an old manger, attired him in a suit of his own, lifted him into the wagon and drove to the house. He got his involuntary guest to bed, applied lotions to his wounds, and wondered what his story would be. When consciousness was restored, Alvin Prince gently inquired if the injuries were painful.

"I think only a stumbling fall," replied his guest. "Let me see, I was—Where was I? What was I doing? I'm all dazed. My name is Wilbur Thorne. I have a home, but I left it for wandering a long time ago. I've kept going with all kinds of jobs. You must be a pretty kind sort of a man to take in a stranger this way."

"Oh, that is all right," declared Prince lightly, and felt a certain delicacy about referring to his convict suspicions.

Mrs. Prince and her daughter Zelda came home two days later from a week's visit to a relative, to find the interesting-looking stranger insisting upon doing some light work about the farm. They were so used to the charitable impulses of the husband and father, that they did not question him when he told them that he was taking care of his visitor until he got on his feet again.

His frank, engaging ways won the favorable opinion of Zelda and her mother, and as the weeks drifted on Wilbur Thorne became so useful and so happy that Prince had not the heart to either question him or turn him away.

He had not noticed that a bond of mutual liking was being cemented between the two young people, but Zeph Barnes, himself secretly in love with Zelda, though the latter detested him, was witness to an interview between Thorne and herself when the latter confessed his deep affection for the farmer's daughter. Just before dusk that evening, just as the family were seated on the lawn, Mr. Prince reading, Mrs. Prince at her knitting and Zelda and Thorne looking over a pictorial magazine, there appeared Zeph Barnes and a man whom the farmer at once recognized as the town marshal.

"There's the man," spoke Zeph, pointing to Thorne. "He's an escaped convict, and here—" and he tore open a bundle under his arm, revealing the convict's garb in which Prince had first seen Thorne.

"Why! you give me a link in the past always a mystery to me," exclaimed Thorne abruptly, arising to his feet with an animated expression on his face. "I wore that suit the day I got hurt. Where did you ever get it, Zeph? You see, Mr. Prince, my last job was playing the convict for some movie people over beyond the village. I took a casual stroll in it while waiting for my part in the scenario, had a bad fall, and—and I guess you can tell how you found me."

Zeph drew back crestfallen. The marshal, however, insisted on some close questioning, and Wilbur Thorne was forced to tell that he was the son of a wealthy man with whom he had quarreled to become a wanderer. A repentant truant, now that he had won Zelda's love, he was willing to ask parental forgiveness, and a week later Alvin Prince was glad to accept Wilbur Thorne as his son-in-law.

TAKING IT ALL

"Before I agree to undertake your defense," said the eminent criminal lawyer, "you will have to tell me the whole truth. Did you embezzle the \$100,000 you are accused of having taken?"

"Yes, sir," replied the accused man. "I'll not attempt to conceal the fact from you. I stole every cent of it."

"How much of it have you still?" "It's all gone but about a couple of dollars."

"Young man," said the eminent lawyer, buttoning his coat about him and putting on his gloves, "you'd better plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court."

"I'll do it if you say so, sir. What are you going to charge me for the advice?"

"Two dollars?"

THE ETERNAL FEMINE

"How old are you, little girl?" said the streetcar conductor genially. "Now see here," said the little girl. "I'm paying full fare, so it isn't necessary for you to ask any impertinent questions."

Pat and Mike were passing a butcher's shop where there was a pair of chickens for sale.

"I'll buy them if you'll lend me your coupons," said Mike, "and who ever has the best dream tonight can cook them for himself tomorrow."

When they awoke in the morning Pat related his dream.

"I dreamt that angels carried me up to heaven."

"You're right," said Mike, "I saw you going up, and thought you would never come back, so I got up, cooked the chickens and ate them."

SAVED THE ADMISSION MONEY

Ruth came home from her first visit to Sunday school, carrying a small sack of candy.

"Why, Ruth, where did you get the candy?" asked the family, who had gathered to hear her experiences. Ruth looked up in surprise.

"I bought it with the nickel you gave me," she said; "the minister met me at the door and got me in for nothing."



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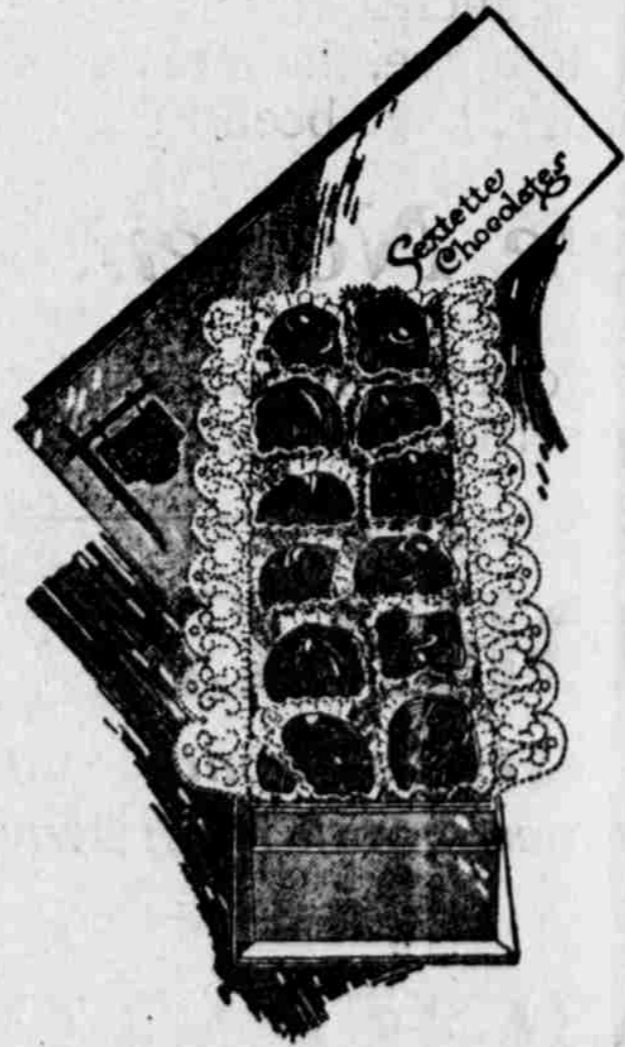
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