

The Best Cellar

(Continued From Page Three.)

By Hanish McLaurin

What does old Mr. Barker know about the modern poets? He hasn't heard of anybody since Kipling."

"You appear to have given this matter a certain amount of consecutive thought," conceded Mr. Carver, "and it may be that there is a demand for Danish literature in this town that I hadn't been aware of, but why the cellar of the old Sadder house? Surely there must be places darker and damper than that, if you'd only look around a little."

"Isn't dark and it isn't damp. The floor is only three steps down from the sidewalk and the windows are plenty big enough for a nice display of selected books. The part I'd use was once a dining room or a billiard room or something; not a vegetable cellar. The woodwork is handsomer than most of what you see nowadays and with just a tiny bit of money I could fix it up the most artistic little shop you ever dreamed of."

"I see. And are you planning to station guides around town to pilot people to your threshold?"

"No, Mr. Wetblanket, I shan't need to. That house will be the art center of this town in no time. There's an interior decorator upstairs, and two painters, and a lady who dyes things, and an art jewelry maker, and a young Italian who carves furniture, and a couple of girls who bind books. They'd all be delighted to have me there, and I could display samples of their work in my shop and take orders for them. It would be kind of nice to help them out like that, I think, because they don't seem to have much money, any of them, but they're awfully nice just the same, and I like them a lot."

Dione's father was looking at her with genuine gravity, now, and a softness came into his eyes that she might have wondered at had she not been so preoccupied. This was the first time Mr. Carver ever had heard this pretty daughter of his talk of helping anyone less fortunately circumstanced than herself. By comparison with the vaster portion of young women, her life had been one of luxury, yet hitherto her interest had centered always upon those a few rungs higher up the financial ladder than she was. Bazaars for the benefit of the city's needy ones; charity balls; "tag days" of different sorts—yes, she had taken part in those, but always because the other girls were doing it and because the pictures of the participants invariably appeared in the society columns of the local papers.

This unwonted desire on her part to co-operate with some one who was earning a modest livelihood touched him more deeply than he thought wise to show her, but he was won over to her view of the proposed enterprise from that moment. When he did, at length, reach for his check book and inscribe the precious symbols which meant the establishing of "The Best Cellar," it was done with the ungrudging celerity of a man who feels that he is getting his money's worth.

"There you are, chickling," he remarked, as he tossed aside the blotter. "I'll gamble that much on your ability to advance the cause of culture in this community, and if the venture shows the least signs of life I might submit to another transfusion from the pocketbook in order to insure its survival."

The passing of that check permanently arrested the process which was turning the corners of Dione's mouth downwards. There were times, it is true, when lines of anxiety threatened to trench themselves forever upon her brow, but she was so happy in her work that there was no chance for discontent to set its mark upon the contour of her lips. The bothers of bookkeeping, the exasperation of having to deal with certain kinds of customers, the tremulous suspense of waiting to see whether the reading public would find a pathway to her cellar door—all these were more than offset by the fascination of the new world in which she found herself.

"It's amazing what a number of likable folks live hereabouts who never entered my life until I retreated into that cellar," she informed her father during one of their intimate conferences. "I'm beginning to think that the amount of time I have spent with some people—who used to seem terribly important to me was really worse than wasted."

Mr. Carver nodded his agreement. These little talks with Dione had come to be of almost nightly occurrence, and to him they constituted the most gratifying result of her venture into the world of affairs. No one would ever know how much he missed the comradeship which she always had given him as a child and of which her social activities had robbed him ever since her return from school.

"Yes," he said, "some of your

young friends—and a good many of their elders, if it comes to that—are several degrees too feverish for my taste. They're all right in their place, I suppose, but they're not to be taken too seriously, my dear. You still see them quite frequently, however, don't you?"

"O, yes, but they seem frightfully stupid to me now. They don't talk half so entertainingly as that funny old man who has charge of the composing room on the News. He seems to have been everywhere and read everything, but he works all night and sleeps half the day, and hardly anybody ever sees him except his family and the men in the office. He's just one that I happen to think of, but there are a number of others who drop in for a chat from time to time. There are several young reporters whose conversation is far more refreshing than anything I ever heard at a dinner dance, and there are half a dozen school teachers who have put in more summers abroad than any one else I know of and who have seen something over there besides the cafes and race tracks, and watering places, too."

"I have always held that there is an aristocracy of the mind which takes little account of social distinctions," commented Mr. Carver. "I suspect that you are brazenly forcing your way into that aristocracy."

"I wish I'd started long ago," declared Dione. "You've no idea the interesting things I'm finding out. You know Mr. Gerry, the banker? We girls always used to laugh at him and think he was just an old fluff because he'd sit in a corner all evening at the country club dances while his wife cavorted with every male fledgling in the place. Do you know that man is an authority on rare bindings? He's written a book about it. He's been as nice as he could be about offering me suggestions, and, besides that, he has brought down several pattered old paperbound first editions that he wants the girls to bind in leather for him. Isn't that surprising?"

"Not to me, dear. I've spent many a pleasant evening in Joe Gerry's library. It's one of the finest in the country, I understand."

"Why, daddy, I never knew you were the least bit chummy with Mr. Gerry. I'd just adore to see that library. What was the reason you never told me about it?"

"I had no idea you'd be interested. In fact, until lately, Dione, I've been oppressed with a sneaking notion that in all probability you regarded me, too, as 'just an old fluff.'"

"Why Daddy Carver, how can you say such a thing? As if I could ever—"

"O, I don't think you feel that way now," Carver hastened to interject, "but after you came back from school, and especially since your mother died, it has seemed sometimes as if the people who in-

terested you the most were those in whom I never could get up any interest as long as I lived. So I decided just to sit back and let you enjoy yourself in the way that pleased you best—so far as I was able."

Dione toyed with the ring on her father's finger. "I know, I thought that was how it was. But I never thought you were an old fluff—never. I just thought you didn't care for dancing and bridge and dinner parties and all that."

"I don't. They are all right in themselves, but the superficial talk that goes with them is beyond my patience to endure. Every one seems afraid to discuss anything of the slightest real importance. Nobody bothers to say what he really thinks about anything, and, as a result, you never get to know anybody. How many people have you really become well acquainted with at a dance, a dinner, or a bridge party?"

"I think some of them are afraid to talk about anything worth while for fear the others will laugh at them," suggested Dione. "I'm sure there are a great many people in society who feel much the way you do about it, daddy. Jerry Bayliss, for example; I had a tremendous surprise in him."

"His private bug is child welfare, isn't it?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"We've talked about it any number of times, down at the office. I negotiated the purchase of a big farm for him, where he expects to establish a summer school for kids who need a better start than they're getting."

Dione was mildly indignant. "I declare if you two aren't the close mouthed old clams!" she exclaimed. "You never told me about that, and in all the years I've known Jerry Bayliss he never breathed a word of it to me until last week, when he came into the shop and wanted me to order him a book on vocational training. I had always looked upon him as just the country club clown; a young man with a heap of money and no higher ambition than to make us girls giggle at his foolishness."

"There's much more to Jerry than that."

"I know there is, but I'll wager I never would have found it out if I hadn't started 'The Best Cellar.' Do you know, daddy, I think I'm just beginning to find out how much I owe you for standing behind me like an old brick."

Her father cuddled her to him as he had when she was a baby. "Don't thank me," he said. "It was the best investment I ever made in my life."

In her letters to Hardy Irving, Dione told him how valuable she found her studies in character reading to be when it came to dealing with customers and with the various business men whom she encountered from day to day. What she didn't tell him was that she was

carrying on a systematic campaign to alter the expression of the offending feature upon which he had commented so caustically the night before he left for New York. That part of her studies in physiognomy she preferred to keep a secret until such time as he should return home. Then he would discover it for himself. That was her dream.

At first she had deliberately cultivated the habit of smiling at all times when it would not make her appear absurd. When anyone was around who might observe her, she made a practice of reading humorous books and magazines. She endeavored to smile constantly when she was by herself in her room. Upon the occasions when she went out with her former companions of the younger set, she tried always to attach herself to the group which promised to develop the most merriment.

Each customer who came into "The Best Cellar" received a smiling welcome. Whether he made a purchase or not, he got a smile when he departed, and the practical result of this was that he almost invariably revisited the shop, not once, but frequently. Business flourished in a way to challenge belief. Dione's circle of friends and acquaintances enlarged steadily, and when the holidays came around she received such a flood of Christmas cards and other modest remembrances that for once her smile gave way before a sudden freshet of tears.

"It's too beautiful, daddy," she sobbed, surveying the heaped up evidence of the affection in which she was held. "It's just too sweet of them all! Imagine them remembering me like this, when all I've ever done for half of them was just to be decently pleasant to them when they came into the shop."

"That's a great deal, these days, loverkin," replied Mr. Carver. "It's so unusual that people can't forget it. I'm glad to see that you appreciate how they feel toward you, but, to my way of thinking, sweetheart, it's only what you deserve. Nobody gains the good will of others earning it."

As the happy months danced onward this atmosphere of good will with which the mistress of "The Best Cellar" had surrounded herself rendered quite unnecessary any deliberate and conscious efforts at smiling. Opportunities for curling up the corners of her mouth came so frequently that the possibility of their ever sagging in the other direction ceased to exist. The muscles which controlled them would stretch so far as to indicate firmness if called upon, but as for petulance, discontent, and bitterness—it took a special effort of the will before they would consent to register such unpleasant emotions as that.

Then gradually, by some psychophysical miracle, the whole process began to compound upon itself. Dione's happy state of mind resulted in a livelier way of going

about things; this increased activity produced a brisker circulation; the improvement in the blood supply inevitably made for better health; better health begot a certain pleasing degree of plumpness; and before their possessor was aware of it, two palpable dimples had ensconced themselves at precisely the most strategic points of vantage. It was the final touch of magic. Dione's smile was now a ravishing, irresistible, perfect thing.

It was Jerry Bayliss who discovered to Dione this subtle enhancement of her beauty. He had been away for many weeks, looking after the welfare of the youngsters on his farm, and when he returned to town he made straight for "The Best Cellar." Its fair owner greeted him with her customary graciousness and made him be seated and tell her "all about everything," but Jerry remained standing, his eyes taking in the vision before him with the privileged frankness of an old friend.

"By Jupiter, Dione," he exclaimed at last "what a downright dimpled darling you are getting to be!"

"Save it for the flappers, Jerry," admonished Dione, the dimples deepening provokingly as she spoke. "You don't have to talk that way to me."

"No, but look here—I mean it!" insisted Jerry. "I never say you look so beautiful before in your life."

Dione laughed his protestations to scorn, but the dimples had done their deadly work, and from that moment Jerry began laying out his memorable campaign for the capture of her heart. It was heavy sledding for many weeks. There was somebody else, Dione told him, but she wouldn't tell him who the somebody else might be. She and Hardy Irving still corresponded regularly, and he had thrilled her to ecstatic and anxious anticipation by a recent announcement that he was coming home for the Christmas holidays. He had been unusually successful of late, he told her, and could come and go as he pleased. Therefore, Dione held her new admirer at friendly arm's length, awaiting the day when Hardy would arrive and recognize the marvel which had been wrought during his absence.

But when Hardy did arrive, a curious thing happened. Dione found to her dismay that he wasn't at all the person for whose approval she had been working. Success had made him far too conceited to suit her, and as for the sort of life he led in New York—that existence in which she had once burned to have a part—she discovered that the place she had made for herself in her own town offered all the attractive features which she had dreamed of sharing with him in the metropolis.

Hardy was impressed by the improvement in her appearance; he made that fact unmistakably plain. Dione could have had her dream, had she still wished it, but now, to her somewhat exasperated amazement, she discovered that she was not dreaming of New York's Latin quarters at all, but of a wondrous place in the country where life was a simple affair, and where flourishing little folks from the tenements were placed on the pathway to health and happiness.

The next time Jerry Bayliss stormed the citadel of her affections the defending garrison capitulated ignominiously, and the engraved invitations which went out shortly thereafter caused much ranking speculation among certain debutantes who, for the life of them, could not understand why such a prize as the bridegroom named thereon had wriggled out of their nets.

During one of the many sweet and crowded hours of self-revelation which marked their honeymoon, Dione told Jerry how she had overheard him talking to Hardy Irving about the expression of her mouth, and of the heroic measures she had taken in consequence. She was sharply piqued for severer moments thereafter while her husband devoted himself to a most uproarious spasm of laughter, and the dimples were still indignantly hiding themselves when at last he gathered her tenderly into his arms.

"Bless your plucky little heart," he said, soothingly. "To think you went to all that trouble for nothing. Why, what wasn't your mouth we were discussing that night, baby child; we were talking about Ethel Colburn."

Dione started at him blankly for a space. Then the dimples flickered, retreated, and finally emerged in triumph.

"My dear, my dear!" cried their sweetly chastened mistress. "What a horribly egotistical little idiot I must have been. But—" and here she took Jerry's face between her hands and gave him a look worth treasuring — "don't ever pity me for my trouble, man of mine; it was worth it, ten million times over."

The Wicked Flee

By Merlin Moore Taylor

"Some of these days, Slippery," said Inspector Eagan as he signed an order for the release from custody of Earl Sims, alias Slippery, "some of these days you are not going to play in your usual luck and I'm going to nail you. When I do it is going to mean a long stretch for you. You've never been over the road, have you?" The shifty-eyed youth before him stirred uneasily.

"You know I've never been up, inspector," he replied. "I'm not doing anything, but the bulls won't leave me alone. You fellows have given me a bad name without any cause. I'm as innocent—"

"O, forget it," the inspector broke in wearily as he reached for a blotter. "That's the tale they all tell and you're wasting your breath handing it out to me. A man doesn't get pinched 27 times in a year unless there is pretty good evidence against him. We've never made a charge against you stick, but that isn't saying we never will. Better take my tip, Slippery, and go straight. If you don't you'll fall sure as shooting, for I'm out to get you now."

The other bowed ironically. "That's square of you inspector," he said with mock gratitude. "As if you hadn't been after me all along. Well, slip me the paper and I'll be on my way."

"Don't forget, Slippery, I'm going to get you," Eagan called out after him. But a mocking laugh was the only reply.

The night, shortly after that, that Slippery dropped from the library window of the Vanlandingham mansion with the famous Vanlandingham jewels stowed away in his pockets, he discovered that Solly Magruder did not answer the discreet whistle or two by which Slippery sought to apprise him that all

was well. That in itself was strange, for it was Solly who had given him the tip that the jewels were to be kept in the library safe overnight, following a dress affair at the opera. By all the rules of crookdom, Solly should have been on hand to meet Slippery and keep a jealous eye on him until they had split the proceeds of their trick.

Solly had been left on guard outside while Slippery undertook the more hazardous job of forcing the safe and removing the jewels. Yet, if appearances were to be believed, Solly had quit his post cold without even the hint of warning to his comrade inside. That, in the circles to which both belonged, was equivalent to desertion in the face of the enemy and the penalty usually was the same.

Slippery did not waste any time trying to find out what had become of his erstwhile lookout. There would be time enough for that after he had rid himself of his loot and the kit of expensive, burglar tools. But Solly was not to be found in his usual haunts. In one of them, however, Slippery received startling news. Solly had been found shot to death only an hour before in one of the high-toned residence districts of the north shore, within two blocks of the Vanlandingham home.

Murder! It had a nasty sound and in Illinois they made a specialty of hanging men for murder, particularly if both slayer and victim were of the underworld. Slippery had once attended one of those trials and heard "Necktie" O'Reilly, the hanging prosecutor, as the newspapers called him, make an impassioned plea that the jury assess the ancient penalty of life for a life. Before his mind arose the vision of himself in the prisoner's dock, accused of Solly's murder. He quit

the neighborhood of the Vanlandingham home with as much speed as was consistent with safety in case the suspicious eye of some guardian of the law should fall on him, and sought one of the two rooms in different parts of the city which were alternately home for him, according to whether the police were after him or not. In a neatly concealed compartment back of the baseboard he hid the jewels and his kit and prepared to set out in search of Solly. On second thought he returned to the room and got a revolver from his secret cache.

With the thought of Eagan came a new suspicion, full born in an instant. What if Eagan had framed this thing? Eagan had told Slippery he was going to get him. Suppose he had adopted this method. Suppose it all had been a frameup from the beginning, when Solly had approached him with a proposition that they go to the Vanlandingham robbery together. What did he know about Solly, anyhow? He recalled vague rumors that once upon a time Solly had been suspected of being a stool pigeon for the police, a suspicion that he never had quite lived down. That would explain Solly's desertion of the post outside the Vanlandingham home.

If there had been a frameup what would be easier than for Eagan to reveal it on the witness stand and then accuse Slippery of killing Solly? What alibi would he, Slippery, have? None!

Terror was fast seizing upon Slippery as he hurried to his room. As he traversed the several blocks on foot, keeping as much as possible to the shadows, his mind was mulling over the consequences of flight. Would he be able to get out

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