

Silver Fox

As with a genie's gesture, fortune smiled on him and—in a way—on her

A Short Short Story

SHE was fascinated by the silver-fox scarf. It lay alone on a piece of rich black velvet—a thing to delight the heart of any woman.

The girl was oblivious to the wind which howled down Fifth Avenue. She had forgotten the biting air and the hurrying, shivering crowds. Tonight was as other nights: she had walked two blocks out of her way to come and stare through the gleaming plate glass at the gorgeous fur.

That particular scarf of silver fox had come to typify in the mind of Madge Garon all that was worth while in life: its wealth and luxury and softness.

It was not the scarf itself, but what must inevitably accompany it. The woman who would some day possess that scarf would be sheltered from hardship and protected against the bitter things of life. She would live in a mansion or a glorious apartment and be waited upon by obsequious servants. She would wear sheer silk underthings and chiffon hose and custom-made shoes and gowns from exclusive shops. That was what the silver-fox scarf unfolded before the eyes of the thinly clad girl with the big, eager eyes.

She did not see the luxurious limousine which rolled up to the curb and stopped, as though its owner had been expecting to meet her at precisely that spot.

She was not even conscious of the man's presence until he spoke in his smooth, soft voice and touched her on the elbow.

She smiled into his eyes and marveled that he had found her in the Fifth Avenue crowd.

"I could find you anywhere—by instinct," he said gently. "What were you doing?"

"Window-wishing," she confessed. "It's that silver-fox scarf yonder. Isn't it gorgeous?"

He smiled brightly. "Shall we go in and buy it, Madge?"

HER face flushed, and she bit her lip. "We've been over all that before, Hal. You know I can't accept such a gift from you."

He shrugged. "What has the fact that I'm a married man got to do with it?"

She did not evade the issue. "We both understand that, Hal. You know I can't take such a present."

"Foolish little girl! Well... at least you can go to dinner with me, can't you?"

She went cheerfully—with a last yearning backward glance at the silver-fox scarf.

She liked Hal—and understood him.

For an instant the girl's eyes lighted and then a cool voice suggested that he must have made a mistake

As a matter of fact, he had never tried to deceive her. He was fabulously wealthy—and securely married. He had told her that the first time they met. Her acceptance of the silver-fox scarf... yes, they both understood what that would mean.

And late that night, when he left her at the shabby boarding house where she existed with her dreams, she lay wide-eyed staring into the darkness, trying to probe through three thousand miles....

SOMEWHERE on the Pacific Coast was John: big, boyish, good-natured John, who had gallantly abandoned a meager clerkship to seek his fortune where the sunset is most golden. She hadn't heard from John for a long time. He had been gone now for three years. At first his letters had been filled with his love for her and his hopes for them both.

Things hadn't gone well at first, and he refused to handicap himself with the wrong sort of job. Some day, he told her, he would make his strike and then come back to claim her.

Three years is a long, long time—particularly for a pretty girl alone in New York; a girl who yearns for comfort—yes, and luxury—who hungers for love and companionship. John seemed so far away... he became a memory. True, it was a poignantly sweet memory. If only he'd write more often—or come to her with a confession of his failure. Then they could share a modest little home....

His letters became less passionate and more filled with details of his business schemes. There was something about oil, and a job in Mexico. Then he disappeared... and now for more than six months she had hungered vainly for a letter.

And he—fighting valiantly against hardship—had made his pilgrimage into Mexico.

There had been trouble, and physical danger and hardships unbelievable. There had been a siege of illness; then long periods of hope and bitterness, during which he postponed writing to her from day to day.

Then the sun rose, and it began to seem as though he were destined to

achieve his ambition. Again he deferred writing; this time because he didn't want to buoy her unduly, only to have her share the bitterness of possible disappointment. He did write a few lines occasionally, but they were cold and impersonal: merely letting her know that he was well and working hard.

Not a word of their future—not a line about the love which was greater than ever before... nothing to keep her courage strong against the ravages of loneliness and heartache and disappointment.

AND then—with the magic swiftness of a genie's gesture—fortune smiled upon him. As though to atone for the years during which prosperity had been withheld, wealth showered on him so prodigally that he could with difficulty adjust himself to the future. He did not write her the truth then—preferring, with pardonable pride, to withhold the story of his amazing success until he could tell her in person. Months dragged... while he tried to organize his new success so that his presence could be spared.

And then, alert and eager, he went East. He did not herald his coming. He was young enough to gloat over the surprise which was in store for her. His arms hungered for the girl, and his lips were eager.

He went to her boarding house and was amazed to learn that she was no longer there. At the shop where she had been an assistant cashier they told him that she had left three months before.

Bewildered and frightened, he hunted through New York. He tried to find girls who had been her friends—and was unsuccessful. Madge had been given to few intimacies.

Day after day and night after night he trudged the streets, hoping against hope to catch a glimpse of her in the hurrying throngs.

And then, late one evening when the first snow flurries of the year were feathering the avenue, he thought he saw her coming out of a tearoom. Exultantly he hurried forward and spoke.

For an instant the girl's eyes lighted. Then the delicate figure stiffened and a cool voice suggested that he must have made a mistake.

Embarrassed, he bowed and apologized.

Stung with disappointment, he stumbled down the street. It seemed impossible that any woman could bear so striking a resemblance to Madge.

And yet he felt he should have known that it was not she. The woman to whom he had spoken was richly dressed. Even he could appreciate the gorgeousness of the silver-fox scarf she wore.

Illustrated by
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The Whiskering

All these faces ought to be familiar to you although you can't be blamed if you don't recognize some of them under the shadows. Their own mothers wouldn't



The patronizing patriarch watching the Eskimo looks like that only when he's heading an expedition to somewhere or other which he generally always is. During brief pauses at home he's much more youthful looking, is
George Palmer Putnam

Both Wide World



Keystone View

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Those whiskers on the learned face of the former Secretary of State come under the head of permanent installations, although there was a time when Charles Evans Hughes was as beardless as a grapefruit and much handsomer. Why, just look at his earlier picture on the right



Wide World. Spots by Keystone

A couple of famous brothers whom you don't often have to coax out from behind whiskers. Col. Theodore Roosevelt (left) and his brother Kermit acquired the blackout effects while chasing the agile ovis poli over the Himalayas



Even their most enthusiastic fans couldn't have recognized H. P. Traynor, captain of the Pittsburgh Pirates (left), and Burleigh Grimes of the Brooklyn Robins when they returned from a razorless vacation in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas



P. & A. Spots by P. & A.