

Adrift in New York

By Ring Lardner



A humble beginning, but remember, my son, the man who conscientiously wields a broom can rise to almost anything

David Belasco just a few years later. If you photographed him now you'd have to allow room for at least ten limousines

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Gents:—

This seems to be the open season for biographies and as you was kind enough to ask me to write you a little something I said to myself, why not a little sketch of some prominent man like David Belasco who I have never met but at least have seen him numerable times which is more than most biographers can say of their victims, the last named having been dead sometimes hundreds of years before their vilifiers was born.

Mr. Belasco is approaching his 104th birthday anniversary and will reach it in a little over a quarter of a century if he is not mistaken for a cockatoo and shot down. He was born in California during the Quake and is a Quaker by religion like Herbie Hoover. The Quake, or fire, as it is pronounced in California, started the day before Davy's birth and was still raging in such a fearsome manner the day after that the infant Belasco's hair turned white over night. He was backward as a child and his collars have always continued to face the opposite way.

At the age of three, young David (named after the McCarthy Sisters) expressed a desire to become an architect and his parents entrusted him with the task of designing the new Home they were to build on recently purchased property atop the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. The house consisted of two bedrooms, a ladder and an apiary. The best bedroom was for David personally and he jokingly designated it the Master's Bedroom, since which he has frequently been referred to as the Master.

The apiary occupied most of his time during his youth and it is said that he still holds the world's record for the number of bees raised in one season on

No one, not even the Master, ever before saw these pictures. The family album came through Frisco's fire. Note the skillfully charred pages

No contemporary biographer is better qualified to tell you of the Men and Women Who Are Doing Things than is Mr. Lardner. He has studied them, analyzed them. He is privy to their foibles and their vanities, their personalities and their formulas. This first article of a penetrating, inspirational series deals with David Belasco. It is to a collar that Dr. Lardner attributes the successful career of this dominant figure in the American drama

the Fairmont roof. At length he tired of the bumbles and drones and went into the business of mowing lawns for strangers. Nearly all the strangers, of whom there were more than a number in San Francisco, enjoyed the way he mowed lawns, and glee clubs were organized to serenade him nights with an especially written song entitled "Davy, come mow my, Davy, come mow my, Davy, come mow my bonny, bonny lawn." It got quite tiresome to the guests at the Fairmont.

THEN occurred the shooting of the Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo. The Belascos moved to this country and little Davy got a position as assistant sweeper at the Hudson Theater. His assignment was to keep the aisles clear of peanut shells, just the shells, not the nuts themselves, which went out voluntarily when the play was over, and sometimes before. But the Master himself took advantage of his entrée to remain through all the performances and study the sets, the lighting, the acting and stagecraft in general.

"Othello gave me a double hunch," said Mr. Belasco, talking to himself the

other day. "It provided me with the idea for Lulu Belle and the name Lulu Belle furnished me the notion of having the front drop raised and lowered by bell signals instead of the old-fashioned foghorns."

He might have added that it also earned him the further nickname of La Belle Belasco.

Davy made enough money out of his sweepings to pay his way through college and he selected the Colorado School of Mines where he could study miner rôles to fit him for a personal career on the stage. He was halfback on the football team and scored many a touchdown through his trick of wearing his collars backward so that his opponents always thought he was running toward his own goal and let him go unchallenged.

After graduation he moved to the near-by village of East Hampton, Long Island, and applied himself for a while to the writing of poetry. It appears that the electric service in that town was kind of sensitive and his first verse, called Candle Lightin' Time, was dedicated to the East Hampton Lighting Company. It ran:

"Two small white clouds show in the sky;
'Tis dusk and vespers chime.
A breeze springs up, which means to us
It's candle lightin' time."

His next noteworthy work was Ode to a Buzzard and was written under the nom de plume of Percy Hammond Shelley. It read in part:

"'Hail to thee, blithe buzzard!' said
Giles-on-Parade,
'They tell me contract's much more fun,
but I have never played;
I can't afford to learn new games; I've
not the time to spare.'
And Casey stands a-watching it in
haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball
unheeded sped.
'Too high!' cried Casey, but 'Strike one!'
the color sergeant said.
The Tiger backs dash down the field
'mid shrieks of 'Hold 'em, Yale!
And the female of the species makes a
sucker of the male!"

DAVY'S writings were soon brought to the attention of Jerome D. Kern, the composer, and Jerry (as I call him) began to collaborate with the Master on musical shows. They turned out Oh, Boy! and Very Good, Eddie!—Mr. Belasco using the names Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse—and Show Boat! in which he employs the pseudonym of Oscar Hammerstein I, II, III and IV.

La Belle Belasco decided that musicals were a little beneath his dignity and went into the business of serious play-writing. His first hit was A Doll's House, a play about a couple of ski jumpers, the heroine of which got mad at her husband, Sambo, for getting mad at her for forging a check.

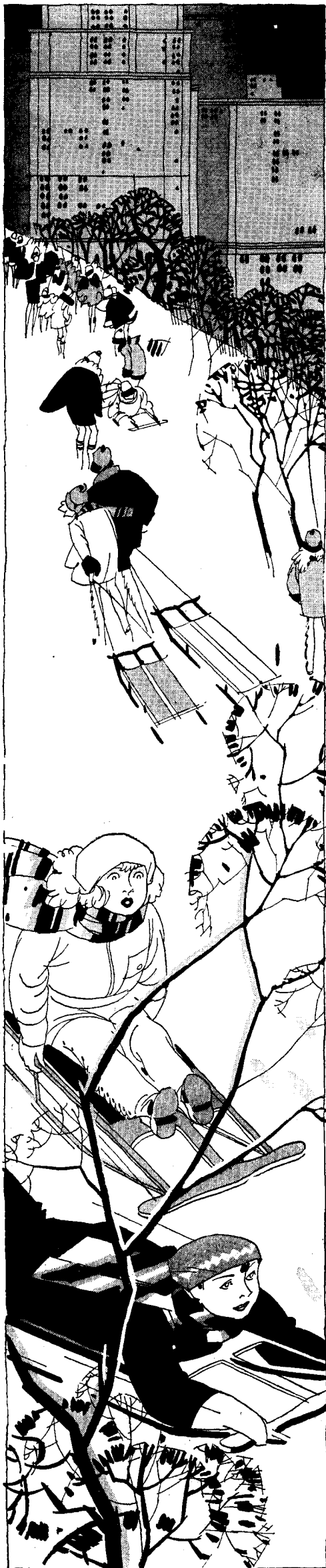
The next was Mary O'Deal, an Irish farce about a clerk in Macy's and three traffic policemen.

In spite of (Continued on page

Third Accident

By Dana Burnet

*An irresistible young woman meets an immovable young man again and again
—with magnificent consequences*



NATALIE WEBSTER met Elliott Crane the winter that she was eight years old. Elliott was nine. The place of their introduction was a snow-covered slope in Central Park, near the East Seventy-second Street entrance, and the manner of it was most informal.

The month was February, the day Friday. Natalie, demurely mounted on her childish little sled, came scooting downhill—and met Elliott at the bottom of the slope. It was not a propitious meeting. When frightened governesses untangled the resulting snarl, Natalie was found to be unharmed. Elliott spent the next six weeks in bed with a broken leg.

The Sunday following the accident Natalie came to see him. Mrs. Webster came with her. They were ushered into the room where Elliott lay gloomily pursuing the Funnies. Elliott's mother stood by and signaled him to be gracious.

"I'm thorry, Ellyet," lisped Natalie, gazing with interest at her handiwork. "I didn't mean to do it. I'm very thorry."

"It doesn't hurt," said Elliott, embarrassed.

"I'm thorry."

"It's all right. I don't care."

"I'm very thorry."

The reiteration of this apologetic formula annoyed Elliott. He said coldly: "You can't steer a sled like that one you got sitting up straight. You got to go belly-buster."

"Shall we leave the children alone?" suggested Natalie's mother, anticipating a sentimental juvenile *rapprochement*. Elliott's mother was dubious, but she couldn't object without seeming rude. Both the Websters and the Cranes inhabited a world in which rudeness was unthinkable.

THE two children were left alone. Natalie, freed from parental supervision, walked up to the bed.

"Can I thee where it's broken?" she asked eagerly.

"No," said Elliott.

"Wath it broken right in two?"

"Sure. I guess so."

"Why can't I thee it?"

"'Cause it's all bandaged up," said Elliott. "And I don't like you."

"I don't like boyth," said Natalie. "And anyway, my Nanny thayth it wath your fault cauth you wath in the way."

All the smoldering resentment induced by the prospect of six weeks in bed leaped to Elliott's lips.

"I was not in the way! Like heck! Girls don't know how to slide downhill. Where'd you get the sled? It's just a baby sled. Why don't you get a sled like mine? Why don't you stay home and play with your dolls or something? You make me sick. I got something to do. I got to read the Funnies."

"I bet you can't read," chanted Natalie. "I bet you can only look at the picturth."

"If you wasn't a girl I'd slap you."

"Go ahead and thlap me," said Natalie, holding out her hand.

Elliott burrowed deeper into the bedclothes.

"Aw, go on and leave me alone," he muttered.

Suddenly, surprisingly, Natalie's eyes filled with tears. That was one of the troubles with girls. They cried if you looked at them.

"I think you're a horrid, nathty boy!"

"Aw!" said Elliott helplessly.

"You think you're tho thmart, cauth you got a broken leg. I know a boy 'ath got the mumphth."

"Mumps!" said Elliott contemptuously. "What's that? I had mumps. It isn't a darn thing."

"My Nanny thayth darn ith a bad word. Do you know any more bad wordth?"

"Sure."

"Leth hear them."

Natalie was eight. Elliott was nine. The place of their introduction was a snow-covered slope in Central Park, the manner decidedly informal

"Aw, say, leave me alone, can't you?" begged Elliott.

This time his earnest plea was successful. Natalie turned and stalked out of the room, pausing in the doorway just long enough to stick out her tongue at her unhappy victim. Then the door banged behind her.

Elliott didn't see her again till he was seventeen years old.

He had planned to spend his entire vacation, that summer, touring the country with a school friend in a rattle-trap stripped roadster for which he had paid fifty dollars. But the school friend had got the shingles; so early in August Elliott drove north to visit his parents, who had taken a cottage at Lord's Harbor, Maine. Mrs. Webster, now a widow, had owned a house in Lord's Harbor for years. Natalie and Elliott met again, and the consequences of that meeting were, to Elliott, even more serious than before.

He arrived at the harbor on a Thursday. The next morning, appearing on the beach in a brand-new, blue-and-white striped bathing suit, he was hailed by a boy he knew, Jack Prescott, and presented to the Younger Set, who lay sprawled in a wide circle on the sand. The Younger Set looked at Elliott, saw that he was tall and smiling and blue-eyed and husky, and said: "Hello!"

Elliott murmured a comprehensive "Hello!" in return and sat down between Jack Prescott and a girl in a flowered bathing suit, who lay full length on the sand. The girl had curly blond hair and a beautiful tan.

"You don't remember me," she said. "But I remember you. I ran into you once, on my sled, and broke your leg."

"Gee whiz!" said Elliott. He looked in astonishment at the pretty face pillowed on the slim brown arms. Recognition stirred in him, and with it a confused sense of painful memories turned suddenly delightful. "Gee whiz, was that you?"

"It certainly was," said the girl.

"Well, gee! What do you know about that?" said Elliott.

"It does seem sort of funny, doesn't it?"

"Gosh! Doesn't it? To think of me sitting down here beside you like this, without knowing who you were or anything—!"

"I knew you right away," said the girl.

"Natalie Webster!" exclaimed Elliott, triumphantly producing her name from the dim, dead past. "Why, sure, I remember you now! Gee, it certainly is funny. I mean, the way you meet people you haven't seen for years, and—I mean—"

"I suppose life is full of the unexpected, isn't it? But I mean I think it's wonderful."

"I know what you mean," said Natalie.

"I think sometimes there must be something like Fate, or something, that sort of brings two people together," said Elliott gravely. "But I don't know, maybe it's just an accident."

IT WAS the first time we met," said Natalie, and they both laughed, lightly.

"Seems a long time ago, doesn't it?"

"Perfect ages!" agreed the girl.

There was a silence, during which they studied each other with increasing interest.

"I guess maybe I better look out for you," finally observed Elliott, smiling boldly into the blue eyes turned toward him. "I guess maybe you're sort of a dangerous person."

"Why, I'm not either. I don't think that's nice."

"I mean, a beautiful woman is always dangerous," exclaimed Elliott, hoping that his air of sophistication would prove convincing.

"Oh," said Natalie. "I don't think I'm beautiful."

"You've got the bluest eyes I've ever seen. And the best tan. You've got a peach of a tan!" said Elliott.

"Do you think so? But I'm really quite discouraged about my looks, and I'm quite sincere when I say so."

"Listen," said seventeen to sixteen. "You're the prettiest girl I've almost ever met." (The slight reservation in this compliment would contribute, Elliott felt, to his standing as a man-of-the-world and a connoisseur of pretty women.) "But it isn't only looks