

Something by Romeo

BY T. E. HOLLOWAY

Illustrated by Marshall Frantz

FREE of feminine restraint, very much the untrammelled male, he was almost forgetting why he had come to the show alone. His repulse still rankled, when he recalled it. "Some other time," she had said, scorning his invitation because "friends of the family" were coming to play cards.

"Friends of the family"—probably fat old Dr. Huggins and waddling Mrs. Huggins and their gawky son, Elmer. If Rose Gilmore had turned him down for Elmer Huggins, he was through with her for good and all, that was all there was to it. If she really had no more judgment of men than that—

Moodily he jingled the small change in his trousers pocket. Those nickels and dimes, saved from his allowance by scant lunches of sinkers for more than a week, represented the most poignant sacrifices of high-school youth. The theater, and ice-cream afterward—she wasn't worth it. No woman was worth it!

Gradually his lacerated feelings were soothed by the excitement of being in a "real theater," not just a movie, and by the thrill of occupying a box seat for some unaccountable reason, when he had merely asked for the best fifty-cent seat in the house. He still seemed to be weighed down with a cynical knowledge of the world, but underneath this pose he was enjoying himself immensely.

He hoped some one would recognize him sitting in the box—one of the front ones it was, and almost on the stage; but by concentrated will-power he kept himself from looking around at the audience, and fixed a moody gaze at the curtain. He had seen this curtain before, with its woodland scene surrounded by squares of local advertisements, and it held no interest for him; but he stared at it, nevertheless, for ten minutes. Then the orchestra assem-

bled, five musicians strong, and the curtain ascended slowly, to reveal the beach of a seaside resort with breakers dashing high on the back drop.

Man of the world though he was, he could not restrain a muttered "Golly, this is the life!" as the chorus, in Annette Kellermann bathing-suits of giddy stripes and spots, sidestepped from the wings. "Tabloid musical comedy," in the phrase of the *Morning Herald* critic, was on the bill for the evening. It was "small-town stuff," of course, but to Raymond Dorsey it represented the world, the flesh, and the devil, and he expanded in the resultant glow of sophistication.

His expression was blasé and world-weary as he stared boldly at the row of girls.

"Not half bad—that girl second from the right," he muttered to himself, and glowed inwardly at his ability to rise to the occasion in the choice of his phrase.

"Not half bad"—that sounded well. He had picked up the expression from his cousin just back from a freshman year at college. He repeated the phrase under his breath over and over as he watched the stage. It formed a sort of undertone of worldliness for his enjoyment.

The chorus-girl he had picked out in the fulness of his worldly wisdom as a seemly female—"some baby," in his ordinary diction—was also the choice of the manager, and a general favorite. She had the lead in the "song hits" that bolstered up the flimsy plot, and her performance was greeted with unfailing approval. In an interval when the leading actors had unaccountably deserted the stage, leaving the plot quite in abeyance, she danced on—the other girls a swaying, rhythmic background—and sang "Just You."

Clapping and whistling and the scraping of feet on the floor brought her back for an

encore. She blew kisses to the audience and bowed her thanks, but the noise kept up. Raymond had forgotten his world-weariness in the heat of his enthusiasm. He was whistling and clapping and stamping his feet like other schoolboys in the audience; but his individual racket stopped very suddenly. The girl was dancing across the stage toward him.

Her eyes had singled him out. She was singing to him!

Blushes rose in hot waves and seemed to pass up over his neck and his cheeks and into the roots of his hair. His eyes set in terror. Why had he taken that box seat?

The astute manager could have answered that question. Finding the boxes of the Cozy Theater hard to fill at prices above those of the rest of the house, he had reduced them to the general level, and had given instructions to the ticket-seller to fill them with boys like

Raymond, who might be counted on to add to the general entertainment and enthusiasm.

Such a cold business arrangement was beyond Raymond's conception, however. Fate had placed him there, and the girl had seen him and was singing to him — to

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AND ROARED IN UTTER
ABANDON. ROMEO RE-
CALLED HIS SPEECH
AND WENT ON

him alone. The spot-light followed her—and embraced him, too, as she swayed nearer the box. He longed to do something to show her that he understood, but he could only sit rigid, his jaw slightly dropped, under the amused gaze of the audience, his blushes rivaling the scarlet of his tie.

“And I’ll tell you something that’s awfully true—There’s only one fellow I love—and that’s you!”

The spectators rocked with delicious amusement, but Raymond had forgotten them. Emotion had usurped the place of thought. The girl was singing to him alone!

II

BETWEEN stanzas she danced with a snappy vitality, her black satin bathing-suit not inimical to the display of a pair of comely legs. Her white shoulders swayed and shimmied at him. Her ingénue’s blue eyes gazed at him wistfully, even while her sprightly feet in black bathing-slippers kept up a ceaseless patter, but poorly seconded by the rest of the chorus dancing unobtrusively behind her.

Raymond watched her, fascinated at the romance of it all. Then his terror and his self-consciousness returned. She was dancing nearer. His rigor increased and his jaw fell again. Dancing unfalteringly, her eyes holding his, she swayed toward him, leaned a little closer—and chucked him under the chin! The audience howled. A masculine voice yelled, “Oh, Boy!”

The balloon of his romance was pricked. She had been laughing at him. The song ended, and the attention of the audience drifted from Raymond’s corner, following the girl.

She was recalled again by louder whistling, clapping, and catcalls from boys like Raymond, but this time he was silent. Divided between hope and fear, he wondered whether she would sing to him again.

But this time the spot-light avoided him. She danced and sang to another youth, who sat in the first row. Raymond, relieved and breathing freely once more, was conscious of a feeling, not quite of jealousy, but of slight.

When the song was over, he derived comfort from the thought that at any rate she hadn’t chucked the other boy under the chin. He was blissfully unconscious that the reason for the omission was that it was humanly impossible for her to reach so far.

The thread of the plot was taken up, only to be dropped again and again for other musical interpolations. No one, the girl least of all, was any longer thinking of Raymond, but he still blushed fitfully. When the curtain fell and the lights blinked out for the moving pictures, he felt as if a tight band had been unwound from his chest.

He could think now of all it had meant to him and the girl. Rose Gilmore and her “friends of the family” were forgotten. He was in love with a chorus-girl! The realization brought to him again that delicious feeling of sophistication which had been his before he had ever heard “Just You.”

Having thought in his limited way of Rose and no other, he was now so possessed by the fascination of the girl of the foot-lights that Rose was scarcely a memory, hardly more than a stranger he had passed in the street. It is only in extreme youth that such a transition from love to love passes unnoticed.

Through the course of a five-reel picture he thought only of the girl, and of different schemes of bringing himself again to her attention. The next time he saw her she must be made to realize what he really was—a man to be respected and feared.

Overflowing with novel though vague aspirations, he was about to leave the theater when an actor came upon the stage and halted him and many others with a request for a moment’s attention.

“One moment,” this person began. “I want to announce that, in response to many requests, we have decided to have an amateur night every Friday. This performance by the budding genius of your city will take the place of the motion-picture at the end of the regular performance; and to the most popular amateur, every Friday night, a valuable prize will be given. Every facility will be offered to make each speech or song a success. The orchestra will render any music requested. We will get out an American flag and wave it if there is any lack of applause, and any suspicious characters who endeavor to enter bearing cabbages, turnips, or eggs, will be disarmed at the door. The amateurs will have everything in their favor and nothing to fear. Take the message to your friends who are theatrically inclined. They will have no better opportunity than this—under the auspices of a company which has met with

such universal success. And remember that prizes, valuable prizes, will be given to the best performers. I thank you!"

A scattered clapping amid the bustle of departure, and Raymond found himself in the street. The actor's announcement had crystallized his vague longings. He would make a hit on amateur night and glorify himself in the eyes of his chorus-girl.

The fact that he had never been interested in dramatics, that the recitations at school had always filled him with loathing, counted nothing with him now. He was at that happy period of youth in which success in any particular field means nothing more than choosing the field.

He had often debated whether to be a great general, a captain of industry, or a world-famed inventor. Sometimes he preferred the position of commander-in-chief of the army; in other moods he was inclined to choose millions and a luxurious office in the Woolworth Building, in New York. The career of a second Thomas Edison had its attractions, too. It was simply a matter of selecting the army, business, or invention as a career.

Now it was the stage that was to be distinguished by his presence. He fancied himself the prominent actor of the century. His name should go down the ages, known to all, a household word for untold generations. The name of the actress who had inspired his choice should be remembered because of him.

The realization that he did not know her name woke him from his dreams; but that trifling lack of information did not stop the sweep of his fancy for long. As he turned into his own block, shadowy under the trees after he had passed the arc-lit corner, his fancy soared again to his probable salary—fifty thousand a year. He looked about him uneasily at the thought of so valuable a life exposed to the dangers of the night in so gloomy a spot.

At his gate he stopped to estimate the amount of the "valuable prize" to be awarded on amateur night. A probable dollar or two did not seem ridiculous to him in contrast to the goodly sums that had filled his mind a few minutes before. His fancy even condescended to picture a dollar's worth of ice-cream sodas.

III

THE first amateur night came and went undistinguished by the first appearance of

the greatest actor of the age, Raymond Dorsey. He was not quite ready, but he attended as a spectator and condescending critic, and laughed heartily at the boys and girls "who thought they could act and came out on the stage and made fools of themselves."

Prizes for that! Why, it wasn't acting at all—just squeaky recitations and songs in high, weak voices. As for the dancing, it was rotten. He would show them! In his glow of pleasant anticipation he even fancied that the audience might mistake him for one of the regular actors.

The sight of his chorus-girl again, dressed this time as a little maid in short skirts that suggested rather than revealed, put him in an amorous frame of mind which lasted until his return home. He was still in the arms of love, as it were, when he noticed a gift copy of "*Romeo and Juliet*" on the parlor table. He picked it up and began to run through it in the hope of finding something suited both to the Cozy Theater and to his feeling of affection for his lady of the stage—something more appropriate than anything he had found in his school edition of famous orations.

Ah, he had it—*Romeo's* soliloquy under *Juliet's* window!

Unmindful of his surroundings, he began walking about the room declaiming the lines in a voice which he unconsciously allowed to grow louder and louder. The family, consisting of his parents and a younger brother and sister, were drawn from various parts of the house by the unaccustomed uproar, and assembled in the front hall. They stared amazedly into the parlor, his father in his shirt-sleeves with the evening paper, his mother with her sewing, and the children with their playthings. They formed an attentive audience. He shouted on without noticing them:

"It is my lady—oh, it is my love!
Oh, that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing; what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business—"

Meeting at last the stares of the impromptu audience, he stammered and turned fiery red.

"Go on, go on," his father encouraged him.

"Don't mind us," his mother said kindly. "We only came to see what was happening."

But his brother and sister giggled, and he turned and fled through the open window to the porch, and then over the railing to the dark yard below. Even there his ears caught the laughter of the children, quickly silenced by his mother.

How he hated those children! He sat down fuming in the rope swing, hung in shadow from the limb of a large oak-tree. Still burning with mortification and resentment, he was thankful for the concealing darkness.

Determined, however, to go on with his undertaking, since he had found a selection fitted to the peculiar circumstances, he spent all of his spare time—and most of his time came under that heading—in memorizing the chosen passage and declaiming it, in places he deemed secure from family interruption.

Another amateur night came and passed without his being quite ready, so perfect had he planned his performance to be; but at last the fateful evening came. He betook himself to the Cozy Theater alone, his project unknown to any save himself. He was not accustomed to taking the family into his confidence; and as for Rose Gilmore next door, she had long since been relegated to the limbo of forgotten loves. If he had had more experience or less self-confidence, he might have tried to “salt” the audience—as they salt fake mines with nuggets—with friends who might be counted on to applaud his act; but such an expedient never occurred to him.

He applied at the box-office, according to instructions, and was sent around to the stage door. Trembling with his first attack of stage fright, he passed through the mysterious portal into a new region of dressing-rooms and scenery.

IV

THE old negro doorkeeper, on learning Raymond's purpose, grinned without comment and led him to a corner of the wings where the amateurs would be less underfoot than any place else.

The other amateurs had already gathered—a boy in knee-trousers, two little girls, mere beribboned infants, and a wee boy costumed like a soldier in khaki. They were accompanied by fussy mothers and aunts. It was the youngest group of amateurs the Cozy Theater had ever featured.

The professionals, at first, took no notice of this group of children. The curtain was

about to go up. The orchestra was playing, and the chorus-girls stood ready to start madly on the opening song and dance. Raymond gazed soulfully at the girl of his choice. He looked so long and fixedly that her attention was snared. She tossed him an amused glance.

“Look what she's caught now!”

One of the other girls had seen him too, and twelve mocking chorus eyes, set in six painted and powdered faces, stared at him. Raymond wanted to sink down, down, down, or dissolve into the surrounding atmosphere. Why had he come? Even the girl of his dreams was laughing with the others.

“Robbin' the cradle, huh?” a frizzy-haired blonde commented. “She ketches 'em young!”

“Ketches 'em goin' and comin',” a scene-shifter chuckled.

Raymond shrank into himself at these thrusts. What he felt most was the realization that the girl of whom he had dreamed exclusively for three weeks had forgotten him—forgotten that her soft fingers had ever chucked him under the chin. The realization broadened and grew more devastating at the thought that probably she had never noticed him at all; that he had been no more to her than a masculine being seated in a convenient place, her advances only a trick for bringing forth a laugh.

An age of misery, and the curtain floated upward. He breathed more freely now that he was relieved from the concerted stares of the chorus, but his relief was short-lived. The thought of his own share in the evening's entertainment brought on a cold perspiration to succeed his hot blushing. He mopped his face miserably, yet, curiously, the thought of leaving the theater before his turn did not occur to him. To his mind the coming ordeal was something wholly inevitable.

But for the misery that consumed him, he would have enjoyed the novelty of seeing a performance from the wings. Even as it was, he thought the comedy even better than usual, and wished that he could enjoy it to the full. The bluish-black-haired Hawaiian picked strangely haunting sounds from a ukelele. The old comedian was never more brilliant in his witticisms. The thread of story in the tabloid drama was interesting; and he had never seen his girl of the chorus dance so alluringly, the

silver buckles on her slippers like winking points of light.

The full tide of his misery returned when he watched the one girl sing to yet another male who sat in the same box next the stage that he had occupied on the other great night. "Shamelessness," he called it, when he saw her chuck this other fellow under the chin.

The comedy came to an end. The actors took their curtain-calls, and then the comedian who played youthful parts, but who was really not so young himself, stepped forward and announced the amateurs. A rustle through the audience indicated that friends of those little boys and girls were getting ready to applaud.

"I will now introduce"—the professional had ushered a small beruffled girl to the center of the stage—"little Ireline Lang, who will give a song and dance."

Little Ireline sang in a squeaky voice and danced woodenly.

"How cute!" feminine voices exclaimed through the audience.

The small boy in khaki and the other little girl followed. Raymond watched their performance with disgust, which was more for himself than for them. The boy in knee-trousers, following with an extensive repertoire of popular songs, aroused enthusiasm in comparison. He was even showered with nickels and dimes by the relieved audience.

Raymond, now, was the only amateur left. In the wings, the old comedian asked him about the nature of his offering. Raymond licked his dry lips and muttered that he would recite "something by *Romeo*." The actor assumed a mien of grave import as he escorted Raymond to the front of the stage.

"It is now my unexpected privilege to present to this cultured audience the young Shakespearian actor, Raymond Dorsey, who will recite"—he turned to Raymond to bow ceremonially—"Something by *Romeo*."

V

THE audience sat up in joyous anticipation. Raymond stepped forward to begin, assuming the pose he had planned—one foot slightly in advance; but in the heat of the moment he had stepped out too far with his right foot, which gave to his left the appearance of dragging in the rear. A titter rose and spread over the house.

"It is my lady," he began unexpectedly in a sort of bleat. "Oh, it is my love!"

Here, realizing that his position was awkward, and even a little unsafe as regards balance, he brought his left foot up to his right, and then took a short step forward with his right to get into his pose again. The titter became ripples of infectious laughter. He was a most entertaining *Romeo* as he stood there—long-legged, one trouser-leg hitched up, arms dangling, sandy hair damply matted on his forehead. He mopped his face with a handkerchief, slightly soiled, and began again with a gasp:

"It is my lady—oh, it is my love!
Oh, that she knew she were!"

The tide of laughter rose again, and he realized that he was going too fast. He began to mouth his words and give full value to all the final consonants, the result being a series of snappy explosions.

"She speaks, yet she says nothing; what of that? Her eye discourses; I will answer it—it—it—"

The audience rocked and roared in utter abandon. *Romeo* recalled his speech and went on.

"I am too bold—'tis not to me she speaks.
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return."

He had relapsed into a sort of chant. The merriment, which had subsided a trifle, now began on the crescendo again. The chorus-girl, who had guessed that she was more or less the subject of this effusion, had appeared at one side of the stage. With one finger in her mouth, she stood in an attitude of youthful shyness that convulsed the audience. Raymond, knowing nothing of all this, went on bravely:

"What if her eyes were there, they in her head?"

Here the girl roguishly winked an eye in his direction, and the audience stood up and howled. Raymond, realizing at last that his performance was being embellished, turned toward her. She extended her arms to him yearningly. Vanished from his memory were the remaining lines "by *Romeo*." He knew only that the whole world, and the girl included, were united in mocking him.

He fled. Never did he know how he got out of the theater, past the laughing groups of professionals in the wings, past the old negro doorkeeper now doubled up in mirth, through the stage door and out into the street.

VI

At first he rushed on wildly, pounding up one street and down another, heedless



"HERE'S YOUR PRIZE. YES, TAKE IT. THAT WAS THE BIGGEST HIT THE COZY EVER HAD"

of his surroundings, the hot blood surging through his body in succeeding waves of embarrassment. He dwelt on one miserable incident after another; but at last, cooled by the night air, he slowed down, and, wandering aimlessly, he reviewed the whole experience more calmly.

Gradually he began to wonder a little about the "valuable prize." It had probably gone to the boy in knee-trousers.

Raymond felt another pang of disappointment. Nothing ever came his way! He felt this monetary loss as keenly as if it had been the fifty-thousand-dollar salary of his dreams. As for the whole wretched affair, he only hoped that no one he knew had been at the Cozy Theater.

He avoided every one next day, but late in the afternoon, as he was nearing home, he saw Rose Gilmore at her front gate.

"Hello, Raymond! Where have you been all day?"

"Oh, nowhere," he answered, attempting to pass on indifferently.

"Because a man has just been to your house looking for you."

"He has?"

Raymond's curiosity was aroused, and he waited to hear the rest.

"Yes, and I heard him tell your mother he was from the Cozy Theater."

Raymond wondered if he had understood aright.

"It's a nice little theater, isn't it? I've been there several times, but I've always missed amateur night. They say they're good, too."

"Oh, I don't know," Raymond remarked loftily, gaining confidence with the knowledge that she knew nothing of his terrible failure. "Nice for those that like 'em, maybe."

"Why, here the man is, now."

It was the old comedian. He had seen Raymond, and was coming toward them.

"Hello, young man!" the actor said kindly. "You ran away last night. If you hadn't been so well known, we never could have found out where you lived. Here's your prize. Yes, take it. That was the biggest hit the Cozy ever had."

Raymond stared dumbly at the new five-dollar bill in his hand.

"Th-thanks," he stammered.

"Come and try again another time. Always glad to see you. So-long!"

The old comedian swung up the street, whistling.

"Why, Raymond, I didn't know that you had acted on amateur night!"

"Oh, I—I did my bit. I just happened to be there, you know, an' I just thought I might have a try, so I went up on the stage—"

"And gave a recitation?"

"Wasn't much."

"But just think, getting five dollars like that!"

"Oh, that's nothing," grandly. "Come on, Rose, let's get an ice-cream soda!"

APRIL

I COME—behold me, love-child of the sun.
From out the brown earth's womb I leap,
A sportive nymph with slender limbs,
And eyes that flash and gleam,
And wind-blown hair.

The fairies fashion me o'ernight
A wonder robe of tender green
Bejeweled thick with yellow stars.
I dance, I sing,
I mime the sunbeams,
And the skies are blue—deep blue!

Cold, ghostly, gray-cowled monks
Look on my sport askance and turn away.
I touch the naked branches of the trees—
A myriad trembling blossoms burst their buds
To kiss my teasing finger-tips,
To live their little day and die of love
And beat their wings upon the greening sod.

I dance, I sing,
I laugh—and lo, a mystic urge
Constrains the heart of every living thing
To love!

I dance, I sing,
And then, all suddenly—I know not why—
I weep!

Lachlan Campbell

The Roof Tree^{*}

AN EPIC OF THE FEUD COUNTRY

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Battle Cry," "When Bear Cat Went Dry," etc.

XXXIII

ONE might have counted ten while the picture held, with no other sound than the breathing of the two men and the strident clamor of a blue jay in the woods near by.

Rowlett had not been ordered to raise his hands, but he held them ostentatiously still and wide of his body. The revolver in its holster under his armpit might as well have been at home, for even had both started with an equal chance in the legerdemain of drawing and firing, he knew his master. Now, moreover, he faced an adversary no longer fettered by any pledge of private forbearance.

This, then, was the end—and it arrived just a damnable shade too soon, when with the falling of dusk he might have witnessed the closing scenes of his enemy's doom. To-morrow there would be no Kenneth Thornton to dread, but it looked as if to-morrow there would be no Bas Rowlett to enjoy immunity from fear.

"Hit war jest erbout one y'ar ago, Bas," came the even and implacable inflection of the other, "thet us two stud up hyar ter-gither. A heap hes done come ter pass since then. Don't ye want yore envellup, Bas?"

Silently and with a heavily moving hand Rowlett reached out and took the proffered paper, which bore his incriminating admissions and his signature, but he made no answer.

"Thet other time," went on Thornton with maddening deliberation, "hit war in the moonlight thet us two stud hyar, an' when ye told me ye war befriending me I war fool enough ter b'lieve ye. Don't ye recollect how we turned and looked down,

an' ye p'inted out thet big tree in front of the house?"

The intriguer ground his teeth, but from the victor's privilege of verbose taunting he had no redress. After all, it would be a short-lived victory. Kenneth might exult in it now, but in a few hours he would be dangling at a rope's end.

"Ye showed hit ter me standin' thar high an' wide-spread in the moonlight, an' I seems ter recall thet ye 'lowed ye'd cut hit down ef ye hed yore way. Ye hain't hed yore way, though, Bas, despite Satan's unflaggin' aid. The old tree still stands thar a castin' hits shade over a place thet's come ter be my home—a place ye've done vainly sought ter defile."

Still Rowlett did not speak. There was a grim vestige of comfort left in the thought that when the moon shone again, Kenneth Thornton would have less reason to love that tree.

"Ye don't seem no master degree talkative ter-day, Bas," suggested the man with the pistol, which was no longer held leveled, though ready to leap upward. Then, almost musingly, he added: "An' thet's kinderly a pity, too, seein' ye hain't niver goin' ter hev no other chanst!"

"Why don't ye shoot an' git done?" said Rowlett, with a leer of desperation. "Pull yore trigger, an' be damned ter ye! We'll meet in hell afore long, anyhow."

When Thornton spoke again, the wrath that had smoldered for a year like a banked furnace at last leaped into untrammelled blazing.

"I don't strike down even a man like you out o' sheer hate an' vengeance," he declared with an electrical vibrancy of pitch. "Hit's a bigger thing then thet. Ye've got ter know in full what ye dies fer,

^{*} Copyright, 1920, by Charles Neville Buck—This story began in the August (1920) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE