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Stumps and —Stumps

By ARCHIE CAMERON NEW

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Jean Ward, dragging two tired and
listless legs up the narrow iron stair-
case, passed down the tier of dress-
ing rooms; hot as a jail in the sultry
August air, and, with a sudden burst
of energy, flung herself into the last
room in the tier and slammed the door.
As she kicked two damp slippers from
her slender, tired feet, a noisy chorus
greeted her from the adjoining room.
"Thanks f'r th' breeze, kid," shrilled
one voice, whom Jean recognized as
Flo Darrett, of the Dancing Darretts,
a fellow act on the Olympia bill. "Be-
in's y've hogged th' only room with a
window, guess y' don't mind leaving
this door open, do y'?" Flo's head
appeared in the doorway between the
two rooms, and with it a cloud of
cigarette smoke. Jean shuddered
slightly, and shook her head. No use
being angry, she thought. After all,
perhaps it was hot in those inside
rooms. It was none too cool in her
own, opening as it did on the narrow
back alley, with a fifty-foot well be-
yond.

"Oh, no, I don't mind," she an-
swered listlessly, then drew a deep
breath of the thick, tobacco-laden air.
"Only—please—don't smoke. It's hot
enough already."

"Di mi!" came the mocking re-
sponse, as Jean turned to draw off
her moist costume, and to escape the
cloud of offensive smoke that came
with it she drew her chair near the
window and fell into a discontented
reverie.
What was the matter with Bart
Fendall, her dancing partner? she
mused. Why did he insist on her do-
ing this three-day summer season?
She remembered his promise, before
they left Salisbury, to start on their
road to fame—he had promised a va-
cation in July. It would be hot then,
he had told her, and they would need
a rest—back among the shady willows
—away from the white lights—with
fresh country vegetables, pure cool
milk, and—here they tarried, in a hot,
stuffy theater, with every woody
back-drop every line of "Down Home,"
the rural sketch that preceded them
on the bill, fairly shrieking to them
the call of the wild. And Bart had
been growing so different of late—so
silent, so unresponsive, so different
from the good old friend he had been
down home. Maybe, thought she, he
merely reflected her own mood. She
was feeling jaded, she was looking
sallow, in fact, so different from
Mabel Woods, the new comedienne on
the bill. Bart had been fawning
around her a lot lately, was the next
discomforting thought. How, won-
dered Jean, could she keep that fresh
appearance, that creamy white com-
plexion? Maybe that was why Bart
was hanging on—and keeping her
working, too, she angrily added to
herself.

She raised herself to her feet and
stared in the mirror. Her face was
red from the heat, her eyes a trifle
bleary—something fell on the dress-
ing table before her, and she picked
it up gingerly and stared at it wrath-
fully, then flung it out the window.
"Please," she called to the Darretts,
in the next room, "don't throw those
lighted stumps in here. Something
might catch fire."

"In that case," came the answer,
with Flo's cackling laugh, "here's
something to put it out with."

Close to Jean's head, with cattish
venom back of it, hurtled a small bot-
tle, landing on her pink hat, and
spilling a little of its amber fluid on
the pink perfumed brim. Jean took
the bottle of liquor and buried it re-
sentfully out of the window, then
turned and slammed shut the connect-
ing door and pushed her trunk against
it. She hurried into her stage cos-
tume and went downstairs, her face
red with anger.

Meanwhile, in the back alley, Andy
Scobell, the Olympia's property man,
sprang up from his chair with a cry
and flung a lighted cigarette stump
from his trousers.

"What th'—," he yelled upward
at the window above, and counted its
relative position so as to place its oc-
cupant. Why, it's J—."

"What's th' row, Andy?" chimed in
a bass voice and Andy turned and
faced Bart Fendall.

"She's smokin'," gurgled Andy, hot-
ly, gesticulating madly at the upper
window. "Y'r partner, and it's against
th' ru—"

A bottle fell between them, and
Bart, stooping, picked it up and sniffed
in horror at the contents.
"It's whisky," he muttered, dazedly,
and then turned a horrified glance
toward him. "Jean!" he called, but no

friend appeared at the window.
"She's havin' a party," growled
Andy. "Fine th' country kid y're
with."

But Bart, entering the stage door in
a sort of stupor, missed Scobell's
mocking leer. Was this Jean, the
little, happy-hearted, pretty creature
he had promised to look out for? He
walked toward the wings and came
upon her by surprise.

"Why, Jean, I thought—" he began,
and then as his head bent over her
hat he smelled whisky.

"You thought—what?" she glanced
up at him apathetically, and caught
his puzzled frown, for he expected to
smell tobacco in her breath, but met
the odor of violets. Worse and worse,
thought he, she was trying to hide
her infamy from him.

"Oh, nothing," he growled in a whis-
per, and then they tripped on the
stage.

But the strain and the heat had
taken their toll of her slender
strength, and several times she nearly
tripped him as they whirled around
the stage. He was horror-struck! She
must be intoxicated. And then, as
they bowed themselves off the jeers
of several in the audience smote on
his ears. He hurried toward his
dressing room.

"Bart," she cried after him, "aren't
you going to take an encore!"

"With you?" he growled over his
shoulder as he hastened on. "Never!
I'm through!"

As he disappeared in the back of
the stage she gave a little cry and
ran after him. Timidly she opened
the door of dressing room B and then
started back, for a woman's hat and
clothes met her eyes and struck her
with horror.

"So that's why?" she gasped to her-
self, "I—I'm going—home."

An hour later, as Bart Fendall dis-
consolately passed the parlor in the
Garden boarding-house, he heard two
loud voices, and then at what he
heard he stood transfixed.

"Th' poor simp," one was saying,
and he recognized the voice as Flo
Darrett's. "Th' idea of a country
Jane comin' up here an' grabbin' all
th' favors. An' then cryin' about it
in th' bargain. She's talkin' about
quittin'—goin' home tonight."

"I can't please some people," came
the indignant answer. "Th' lucky stiff's
crabbed jes' 'cause you shot your
cigarette stump in her room, an' now
she's yellin' 'cause she got some
liquor on her hat. Why, I seen th'
time when I'd 'a' been tickled stiff t'
get a whiff o' th' joy-water."

"Guess she's a prohibition pill,"
agreed the other, matter-of-factly.
"How'd she grab Bart Fendall, I won-
der? It gets me how these guys 'll
fall for a baby-doll milkmaid."

Bart had heard enough. With four
bounds he cleared the steps to the sec-
ond floor and flung himself into a
room at the end of the hall. A tired,
disheveled little girl with moist eyes
and drooping figure turned in surprise
to meet him.

"Jean, I'm so sorry," he gasped,
brokenly. "I didn't know, I—"

She drew back stiffly, but her eyes
had a hurt look.

"Don't apologize—Bart," she an-
swered in a low tone. "I—I suppose
you like her. I—I don't blame you.
I—I'm such a—frump."

"Like her?" echoed Bart, puzzled.
"A frump—you? Never! You're the
sweetest, darlinest girl in North
America, Europe, Asia, Af—"

"Don't—Bart," she protested, as he
leaned toward her eagerly. "I know
all. I—I can't blame you. Mabel's an
awfully pretty girl—"

"What's all this?" he queried, daz-
edly. "Mabel? Mabel who?"

"I saw—for myself," she asserted
quietly. "I—I was looking for you in
B, and I saw her things. Then I de-
cided to go home—back to Salisbury."

Bart stared at her dumbly, then his
vision cleared and, leaping toward her,
he drew her into his arms, despite her
weak resistance, and laughed aloud.

"You saw her in B?" he guffawed,
shaking with laughter. "Oh—oh."
Then he grew serious. "Why, you lit-
tle dear, they changed dressing rooms
on me tonight. I gave mine up will-
ingly, as I'm going to take a vaca-
tion. I—I thought I'd work a couple
of weeks later—to get a little honey-
moon fund—for you and me. Er—I
got fooled on a stump and you got
stumped on a fool. Why, Mabel can't
hold a candle to you—you little
darling. So let's both quit being fools
and take to th' stumps—th' old moss-
grown stumps down by th' cool Chop-
tank—just you and I—come on—will
yuh?"

And the answer she dreamily whis-
pered partially accounts for the Dan-
cing Darretts' present occupancy of the
room over the alley, with a window
through which to shoot their stumps.

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