

Mrs Sweeney's Tactics

By Charles R. Barnes

WHEN a lady has got to pawn her hair to pay her gas bill with," said Mrs. Sweeney, "it ain't no nice thing."

"No," agreed the Boarder sympathetically. "Specially," she continued, "when it makes you look sort of fell-away in the face."

The Boarder had never been able to divine the plot of his landlady's harangues from the opening paragraphs; so he settled back in his chair to await the great light which must presently break. He felt certain that something of moment was afoot with the race-track bookmaker's widow, and he listened attentively while she went on, contenting himself with the observation: "Women seem to be hair crazy, these days."

"Ain't they, though!" she cried. "They all wants to look like they was a haymow. But that same hair business is what— Say, mister, them windows oughta be washed, and washed good!"

She paused to pass her fingers over the degenerate panes, and to examine critically the resulting track of clearness.

"Yep," she resumed; "them oughta be made over some by a scrub-lady. Say,

broke than the Sunday closin' law— Mis' Boyle, she says: 'Belle Sweeny ain't in our set no more, bein' down and out; so I'll chop her from my gossipin' list,' she says. And so her and me ain't spoke much since, and I grew to love her like Danny loved my first cookin'. I alwus usta think I'd be happy enough to try to sing if I could bat her over the head with a social amenity stuffed with a brick and wrapped up in a pair of spiked shoes.

"So there was I, mister, with a fine grouch against a lady, and a way to get even. For, you see, Louise McCarty blows along and wants to sign me as trainer, so to speak.

"Belle," she says, 'I have went and got dippy over the loveliest man!'

"You ain't mentioned no names," I reminded her.

"Well," she says, 'my new gent'man fr'en' is Aloysius Boyle,' she says, 'and, Belle, I want you to plug my game— tout me good and hard, so's I'll get a invite to Mis' Boyle's house. A lady can't be too intimate,' she says, 'with her gent'man fr'en's family, if she makes good in nailin' him with one of them 'with there here ring I wed you, kid' things.'"

chirpful as I thought it would. Two or three times I got sort of wrinkly in my forehead over it. 'Belle Sweeny,' I says, 'if your Danny knowed this business, he'd hate you worse than carryin' a bundle home,' I says. And so, after a while I begun to loose my ambish, so to speak, mister." She paused, and put a finger to her lips, in a reflective manner.

"Some of them editorials you write in the paper is awful hard on gamblers, and I ain't sayin' some of them fellers at the track don't deserve all they gets. But I'll just say this for my Danny—he developed me, he did. There I was, a kid workin' in that West Baden, Indiana, store, sweepin' change out of the ca-drawer now and then—yes, I did, mister! I uster knock down worse'n a barkeep!— and along comes Danny, makin' me see how low-down was stealin' and tellin' lies and bein' a lady crook. He usta talk soft-like, and nice, about under-hand tricks and deceivin' your best fr'en's, till I couldn't of lied to him to save a new hat from bein' rained on. Honust, I couldn't, mister!"

"There's a good streak in everybody, even in gamblers," interrupted the Boarder.

"Well," announced Mrs. Sweeney. "I'm a mighty sight better lady than I was before he cops me out and sticks me in this flat in Central Park West, here. And it wasn't nothin' more than the decent streak he'd cultivated in me that called me off on that Aloysius business. After while it seemed like I just couldn't do it. Something said to me: 'Belle Sweeny, if you want to get even with Mis' Boyle for slightin' you, bat her in the jaw, all open and aboveboard. Don't do nothin' unladylike!'

"So that got me thinkin', mister, that it wasn't enough just to kick out of the game. I'd helped Aloysius to lose that thing he called a head, and I realized that there was matters that must be undid. And I kin tell you, mister, I never studied out such a puzzlin' dope sheet. Every entry, so to speak, was a dead one. The first didn't seem no good; the second had a crooked jockey up; the third never won a race; and, as for the rest, I couldn't see 'em at a hundred to one. I guess it was the Sweeny luck that butts in just when I was due for a 'Don't cry, little girl, don't cry' argument. It was this way:

"The villainness of the piece drops into my flat to get some help in dopin' out where she stood with the angel child, and she says: 'Belle, I seen him pipin' off my hair one day. Ain't it all to the come-on?' she says.

"H'm!" I says, gettin' a flash on somethin' I wanted a minute to study over. 'You haven't had no new hair for a long time, have you?'

"Well," she says, apologizin'-like, 'times ain't been no good with me lately—and hair costs so darn much, you know, Belle, dear.'

"You oughta have more," says I, and I wanted to giggle, 'cause it was the truth—oh, gee, how true it was, mister! Why, she ain't got enough hair to make a toupee for a lima bean, she ain't. But, honust, the way she pins on the store stuff would actually shock you, as the newspapers might put it. She carries around enough hair to make eight lawn-tennis nets, double-court size."

Mrs. Sweeney regarded the Boarder doubtfully before she resumed. Hers was the attitude of one who questions the ability of mere man to draw proper conclusions in a matter peculiarly feminine.

"I ain't sayin' that I'm above wearin' a short quart or so of hair, myself, mister. All ladies does, these days. It's like this, for instance: I seen Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen las' Sattidy wearin' a hundred-and-fifty-plunk blonde switch. Ladies was lookin' at her all up and down the avenue, and says I to myself: 'If my Danny was livin' now, I'd get him to blow me to one of those lovely bundles of hair.' All the other ladies was envious, too, just like me. Hair ain't no more, like it was when a young man was in her prime. Them days, ladies never wore nothin' but their own hair, except when it got awful thin. They'd get frizzes and bangs and bluffs and bluffs because they thought it was the next.

"I ain't sayin' nothin' like that now, mister. Einstein, she says to Mrs. Cohen, she says:



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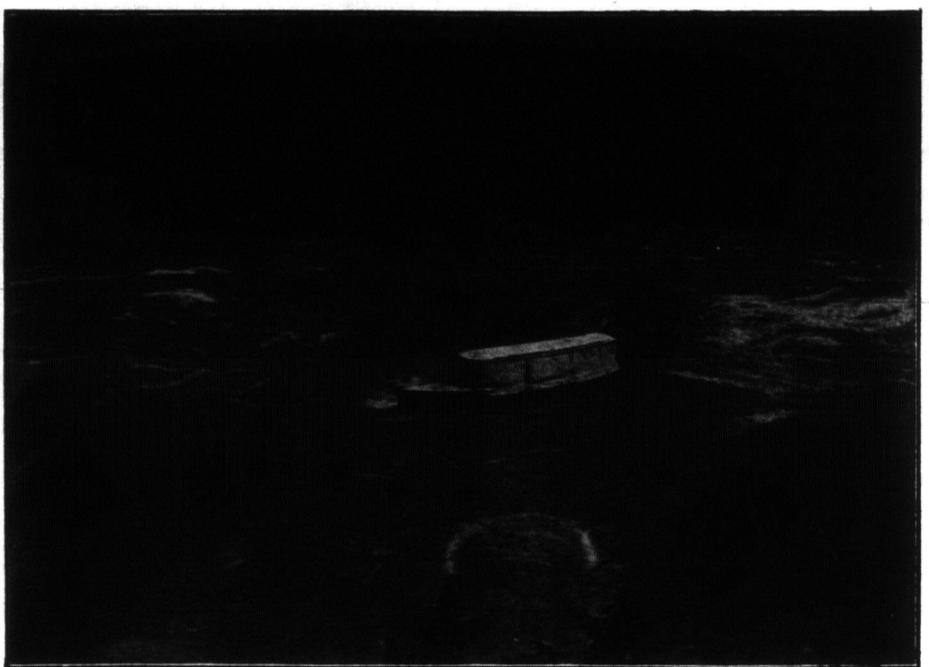
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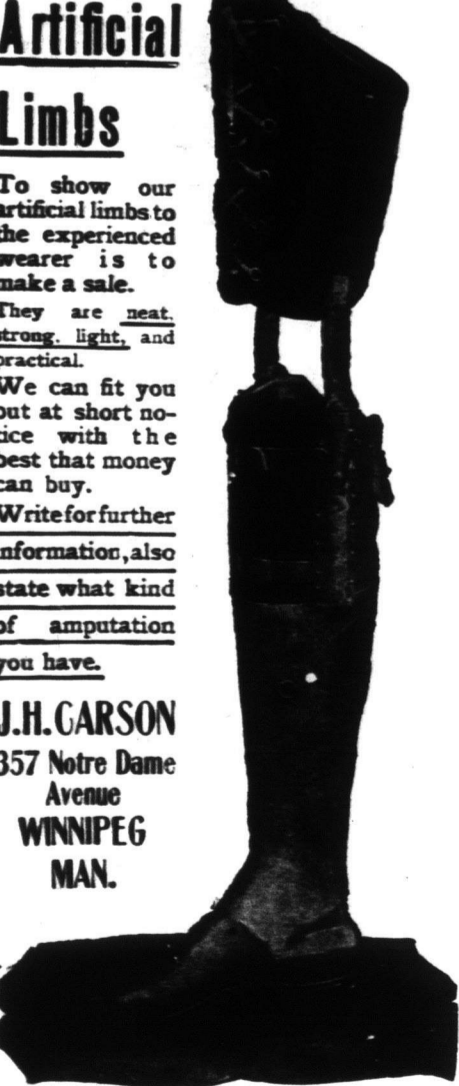


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"Now, now!" objected the Boarder. "Won't you please talk in something besides race track?"

"Sure! I mean I was a matchmaker, only I didn't live up to the advertisin'. That there Louise McCarty, her that every jockey lovingly hollers 'Hello, grandmaw Mac!' to, because she's ninety years old, or oughta be if she ain't, and is about as desirable a proposition as a place bet on a doped horse that—"

The Boarder's puzzled look caused the speaker to pause until apparently her listener had assimilated the information, before purveying more.

"Louise ain't no good," came the explanatory note. "She was follerin' the ponies, makin' piker bets and hopin' for a big winnin', when Sheridan was twenty miles away—she was! Alwus lookin' to grab off a rich husband, too; and so, when she is introduced to that pet of the foolish house, Aloysius Boyle, that's twenty-two years old but don't dare claim more'n six, she's on the job to onset, mister, as I seen plain from where I sits.

"Aloysius' ma is the widow lady of Yellow Money Pat—you've heard of him, mister; for there wasn't nobody here in New York made more money at the book than him, not even my poor Danny. And the kid's come over with a wad of a hundred thousand since he was two years old. It was easy as findin' kiks against a monitor to pry checks out of him, mister, and me usta be friendlier than a dog and his landlord, we did; but when Danny died and I was left alone, I was against it, worse-

"You weren't really going to help along a match like that, were you?" asked the Boarder, incredulous.

"I sure was," Mrs. Sweeney declared, "and you don't know women, or you wouldn't of ast that. When one lady gets it in for another lady, she won't stop at nothin', not even lettin' the other lady go out with too much make-up on. No, sir! And there I was, hatin' Mis' Boyle somethin' fierce, and holdin' the cards that would sick a designin' grand-ma on to her only son. Honust, mister, I could almost hear that uppish, snippy lady comin' around to me and cryin' on her knees: 'Oh, Mis' Sweeny, Mis' Sweeny, gimme back my che-ild!' Oh, gee!"

"I got real excited over it, I did; and the very next thing I done was to have 'em meet in my house for dinner. That there dinner burned up so much gas that when the bill come I jest gasped—uh—uh—like that, real hard. Then I goes out and pawns three pints of my hair, not countin' some swell puffs. I got the bill paid; but I've looked dented in, ever since.

"Well, honust, I never seen nobody fall for a lady like Aloysius fell for that Old Ladies' Home sign. Anybody could see that she was the one best bet with him. He'd set and hold her hand, which was the same as grabbin' a fistful of toastin' wires, and look into her eyes like he was seein' the loveliest biograph pitchers ever in 'em. Land, that woman was a sure of him that she promised to pay me next six months in advance, the minute she comes across with the question. I'll say for her that she was liberal and independent.

"Some, mister, though, mister, all this here thing wasn't makin' me as happy and