

Lady Fairy Frock

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert

"AM I," demanded Sir Roger Annesly, "your godfather?"

"You are, sir."

"Have I ever done anything for you?"

"You gave me a silver mug, I believe," replied the young man.

"Well, I'm going to do something for you now—I'm going to send you to the seaside for two weeks. It'll cost you nothing, and save the expense of a nervous breakdown."

The boy, he was little more, lifted his tired white face, "You are very kind, most kind but—"

"Stuff!" blushed Sir Roger. "Stuff, I'm proud of my godson—I suppose I can be proud of you if I like! Heaven knows I am ashamed enough of my own son. I've heard lots of people talking about your articles in the 'Post'—They all say you'll make a great name for yourself. Your room is booked at the Grand Hotel."

"Is it—er—swell?"

"It's solid and comfortable, and the food is excellent—excellent!" said Sir Roger with emphasis. "I have engaged two rooms, I suppose your dress suit isn't in pawn?"

proud clear cut curve of mouth and chin—she was the acme of good taste, and she challenged instant attention.

"We call her Lady Fairy Frock here," volunteered a young man next to Roger. "Isn't she a scream?" "Very attractive," Roger answered nonchalantly.

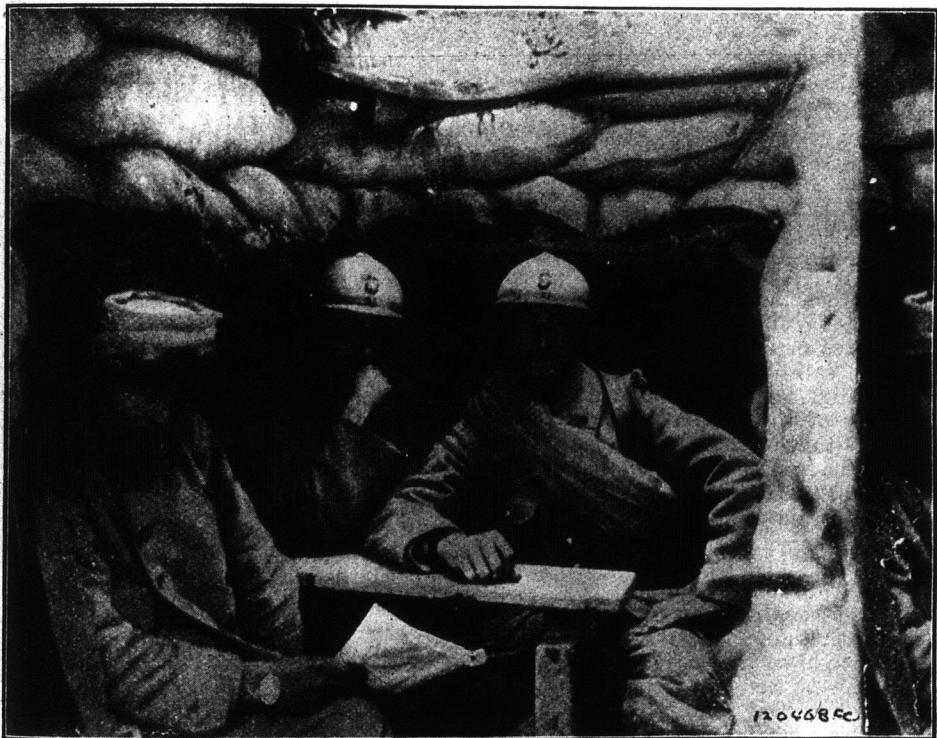
She belonged to a type, a class to which he was a stranger. She seemed to draw her charm from the sunny side of life, where one dreamed and—did no work.

He was on the shady side, the side where men jostled each other, filled with fierce endeavor, the lust of battle, where men had great visions, did great deeds, made hideous failures, and went under; their ways lay far apart.

Once or twice her eyes met Roger's—she made one or two attempts to draw him into general conversation but he refused to be drawn; their ways lay far apart.

After lunch she disappeared. He watched her go, out of the tail of his eye, and then he went and sat on the beach, revelling in the sea and the hot sun.

He told himself he was hungry, it was the sea air. He wasn't hungry a bit, he never bothered about afternoon tea, but



In the Trenches of the French in the Argonne.
A group of French soldiers wearing their new helmets, in one of the bullet-proof trenches in the Argonne.

"No," said the young man, eyes twinkling, "You see I've been doing jolly well lately."

"You've been overworking," sharply returned his godfather. "The doctor told me you had been doing the work of three men. What you want is proper food at proper hours, ozone and rest—and you'll get it at the Grand; it faces the sea—"

"You're awfully good, sir," said Roger Winch, and so the matter was settled.

So Roger Winch, pale, keen, tired, Roger Winch with his grave sedate face, and his brilliant masterful eyes, found himself a week later at lunch at the Grand; those keen, critical eyes "placing" the visitors one by one as they took their seats.

Miss Arford was first, a spinster known as "Vinegar," Colonel Mallot and family, the Rennet girls with their pretty aunt—artless silly little things, a fat widow who retained a good complexion and matrimonial hopes, two young men with dawning appreciation of the Rennet girls, and a pretty taste in socks—which they showed, and there were others.

He placed them all, and then came two, last of all, to enter the big dining room, and these he could not place—one was middle-aged and fat and the other was young and most undeniably distinguished. The eyes of every man in the room rested on her with pleasure—even the four stolid waiters—and those of every woman with envy.

She wore a dress of plain white serge, most exquisitely cut and on her red-brown hair rested, at a chic angle a white Dolly Varden hat; below this came her creamy face, wide, velvety honest brown eyes, the

he told himself the doctor had told him to feed up; but in his heart he knew that he came back for the pleasure of seeing Lady Fairy Frock.

Tea was served in the cool green lounge and she was there, and he could see the red glory of her hair. She wore a simple white muslin frock—was it simple?—or was it the most subtle thing he had ever seen a woman in?

As he entered she was saying: "Then you will try my Gearing and Gloom? I will give you a personal recommendation to their mercy. Yes, I get all my clothes there—and my hats!"

And the widow was saying: "Do you really think they can turn me out as they do you?"

And the soft gay voice said, "I am sure they could."

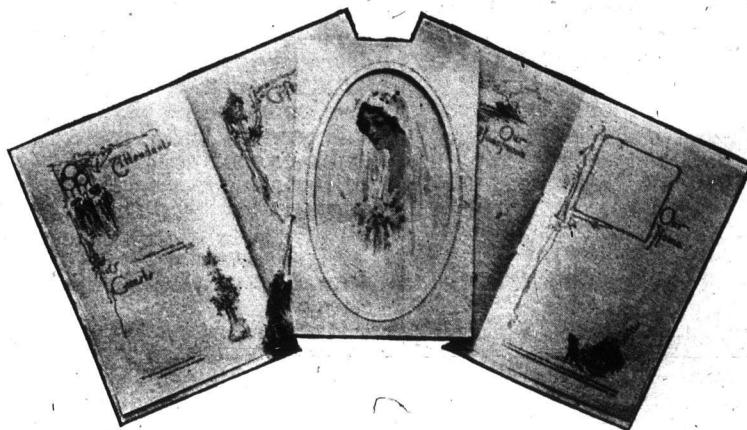
She looked up sharply as Roger entered, and he saw something flash into her eyes and away again, something that had nothing to do with the bright and careless side of life.

That evening the old Colonel took her with his meek little wife to a military reception. She wore a cloud-blue gown, and out of it rose the mystic sweetness of her arms and neck. A little buzz of admiration surged round her as she waited in the hall for her escort's car.

"You look too ducky for anything," said one of the little Rennet girls, in a burst of spontaneous worship.

"There's a letter for you, sir," whispered one of the waiters at Roger's elbow.

He took it from the salver. It was the acceptance of his first novel by a well-known publisher, who made him a flattering offer



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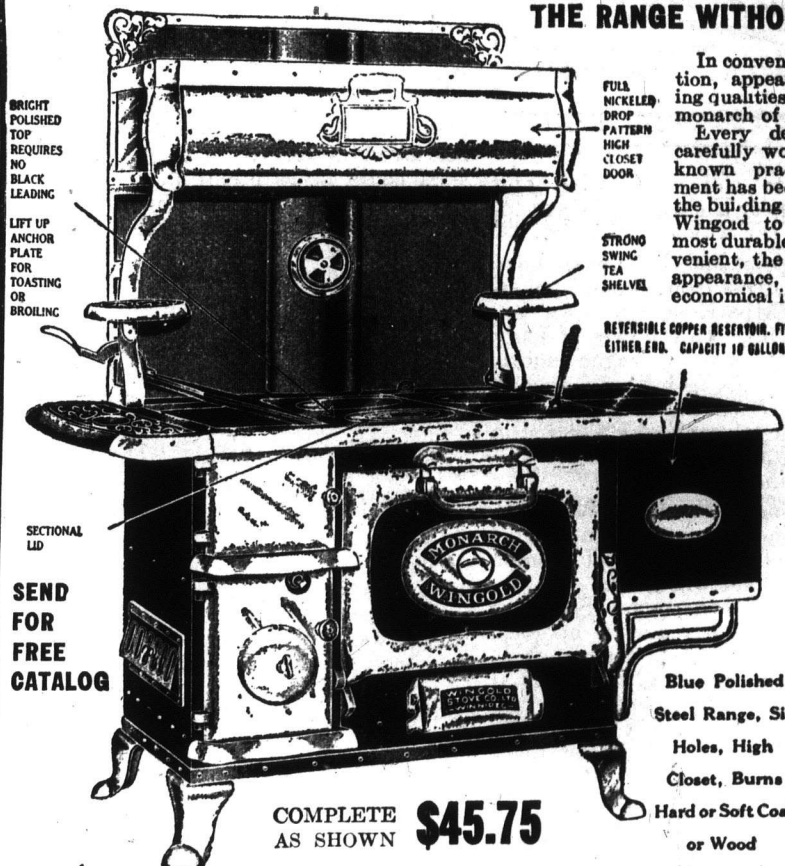
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