

The "Zulu" Shop

Written for The Western Home Monthly By Charles Dorian

WHY, you're a regular shinplaster fiend!" laughed the girl within the cashier's grille.

The young man addressed looked at her reprovingly, and then glancing behind to make sure that no one else waited, he confided:

"Your shinplasters have a quality all their own. I hope you'll continue to save them for me."

He was far from being the talkative sort—inclined rather to reticence, but this sunshiny girl with the candid brown eyes and glistening bronze hair made him talk.

It was only the third time he had asked her if she would exchange any shinplasters she might have for silver. Her predecessor knew his crotchet and saved the miniature bank notes for him as a matter of course. He did not invite familiarity, and she was indifferent to one of his shy manners and odd habits. He was a regular patron of the Elite Cafe, and had seen many types of cashiers in his time.

Shirley Rodgers showed interest as well as amusement, which seemed to rub off some of the hesitancy in the regular customer's manner, for he stayed at her desk long enough to explain his predilection for tiny bank notes. As a boy he saved postage stamps, cancelled and current; now it was shinplasters. They are quite valid exchange in the country in which he was born and in the city in which he idled with his hobby and his books.

Shirley Rodgers was born in Canada, too, but she had worked long enough in New York to acquire a flippancy of tongue and an alertness born of facing people who needs must talk to live.

"It's a nice fad," she admitted to him, and this so touched his vanity, much though it seemed that he was devoid of any, that he grinned broadly. "But poor business," she added, to his intense amusement.

He was loath to leave this little minx who showed so much shrewdness beyond her years. He was not so sullen as to accept the quip with glum silence and depart; rather would he have jumped behind the grille and shaken, or hugged her. Never playful from childhood, the spirit of sport awakened in him as he listened to the bantering of this bell-voiced sybil.

"I don't pretend to know a thing about business," he said. "Why should I? I've always been too lazy to work, have access to a lot of interesting books, and am saving shinplasters for a rainy day. What better business could a man like I am wish?" he challenged.

"Make the shinplasters work," she retorted. He was at that moment forced to make way for another: no man has a monopoly at a cashier's desk.

Morley Brandon did not find it easy to concentrate his studious mind upon the columns of his cyclopedia. It was not that the species of thrift promulgated by the pretty cashier demanded his serious thought. He had been told by broad-minded men of business without batting an eye that he was a fool not to turn over his money.

It was the fluffy hair with the copper glare to it, the fresh cheeks that bespoke a clear, clean mind and good blood, the teeth that did not owe their whiteness to the scouring properties of chewing gum, the trim figure, the dainty feet and hands—the whole exquisite personality of the girl that troubled him with delicious delight and put deep thinking to hazardous flight.

Had his apartment in the "Jungfrau," marble-lined, modern pension, faced the street at right angles to it, he would have been compelled to draw the curtains to see if she were still there. It would have betrayed the first inclination to influence of any kind not occasioned by the reading of books or the filing of shinplasters.

He spent the evening in luxurious dreaming until sleep came and, paradoxically, chased the dreams away. He had learned nothing new that evening, as in the evenings preceding; what he learned was older than books, older than coinage. The glory that spells life, the drop of water to the parched throat, slumber to a tired body were nothing to the singing that soothed, yet stirred, his soul.

She greeted him with a cheery "Good morning!" as he passed in. Two others

had preceded him; three more followed. He timed his breakfast tactfully to leave his table as those in ahead of him passed out, so as to allow a reasonable interval before the later arrivals could finish.

There was a small foyer between the desk and the first row of tables which gave to the cashier's corner near the window a privacy agreeable to her, and which enabled her to handle a crowd with the least discomfort to them.

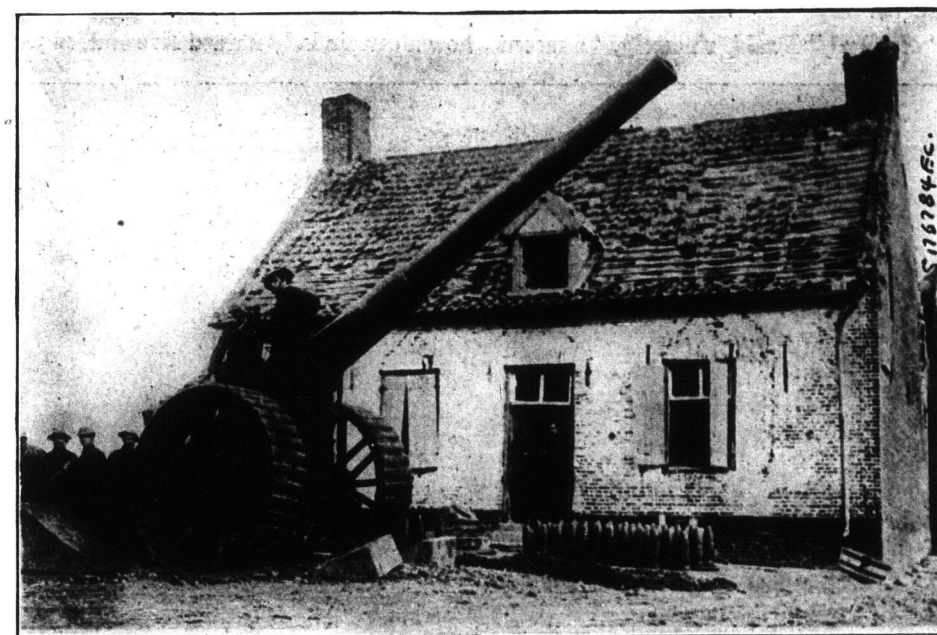
She was looking out of the window idly when Brandon came along. He did not have to cough or rattle a coin to attract her: no matter how apparently preoccupied Shirley Rodgers was she was ever ready to attend to the Elite's patrons. She looked up quickly as he reached the grille's embrasure and started to thumb over shinplasters, remarking as she made change:

"I was just noticing how extravagant they are in this city."

"Extravagant!" he repeated. "It has often occurred to me, on the contrary, how modestly conservative they are."

"Well, if you want an example, just look across the street," she nodded.

He looked. "I don't see anything unusual," he admitted. "The big apartment house is put up in good taste, and the bank next to it is a model of simple architecture; the street is well paved and clean, the sidewalks, too. The people are plainly dressed—why, where is the extravagance?"



One of the British giant guns that have been instrumental in checking the German offensive on the western front. A gun of this type is used only for long range work, and can be fired about fifteen miles. They are placed far in the rear of the infantry, and the only danger of its being destroyed lies in enemy aircraft or should the enemy long range guns locate its base. The shells, presumably eight-inch, are also in the picture.

"Why, that vacant lot between the apartment house and the bank," she pointed out.

"Vacant lot!" he laughed. "That gap is only ten feet wide."

"And ten feet in the heart of this city is some money," she replied. "If I had it I'd open up a shop right there. All it wants is a glass front, a roof, and a wall at the back, then interior fixings. The rest of it is already built."

He smiled at her acumen.

"You have a gift of picking out values, I must confess," he praised. "I wonder what business you would start over there—a candy shop, I'll wager!"

"You've guessed it," she said, her eyes snapping delightedly. "I'd sell nothing but high-grade chocolates of entirely one brand. I've the best recipe ever—but I'm only dreaming. Wake me up—I'm cashier at the Elite, with as much prospect of opening a candy shop on Yonge street as buying in the next British war loan."

Morley suddenly became a man of action. He made his way to the architect who had designed the "Jungfrau." He told him a little story of a vacant lot. The architect smiled.

"You've listened to some hard-headed business man at last," Brandon heard Judson, the peer of architects, say. He nodded cryptically.

"It's not a matter of business. I want to have a one-storey shop and candy kitchen combined squeezed into that gap you have so often quizzed me about. I want to make a present of it to some one who wants that particular kind of shop on that particular site."

"Well, well, Brandon; that's in line with your character, I'll admit. I was hoping you had come to an arrangement to make that lot pay its taxes."

"But I don't have to, Judson, not yet. You know my policy, if anybody does. It costs me just a certain amount to live, and enjoy life my own way. When my old dad sold the bank site and the 'Jungfrau' site, he purposely left that gap as a legacy to me. He lived comfortably and has left me enough to live comfortably for a long time, too. I've no one to enrich when I die, so I'm not worrying about making what I have earn more. I want to spend it all. Then, when it's all gone, there's the 'gap.' My poor old dad sold the whole block for what that little gap would bring to-day. It pays its own taxes in the increased increment year by year. I never before thought of putting a shop on it, but if you say it can be done, it shall be."

Judson shook his head. "You're incorrigible! But what do you say if I make it a two-storey building, so that some day if you cared to do so, you could take up your apartments there."

"Just as you like, Judson, just as you like. But start it quick. I want to see a load of brick or something on the ground by noon. And, by the way, have you any shinplasters?"

Judson grinned as he handed over a smallwad of them, taking full-sized currency for them.

Shirley ill-concealed her surprise when she noted activity on the vacant lot before that day was done. She remarked about

yours but the business, and you will let me buy it from you out of what I earn over and above expenses?"

"Right," he confirmed. "Now, you may start any time to buy sugar!"

But her first purchase was a number of neatly printed cards announcing the opening of the "Zulu Shop." These she handed to the patrons of the Elite during the last week of her stay there.

She taught one of her friends, Rita Simpson, the secret of making the fattest chocolate drops with the whitest centers and the blackest bitter-sweet chocolate coating. These "Zulus" were delicious beyond praise. The specialty was well designed and people were attracted by the white gloss-paper boxes, with deep brown lettering, tied with deep brown ribbon, and though the weight was but twelve ounces net and the price a dollar a box, she sold all she could make. By midsummer she had increased sales so that she had to employ two helpers in the kitchen.

The attractive window brought customers; the confections themselves held them, but there were dull times in every business which had to be bridged by special advertising. Shirley's genius had kept the business going as if there were no dull times—until an accident happened.

She had put on the third helper, who proved to be a girl of more comeliness than wit. This was proved by her glancing into a mirror as she passed carrying a kettle of hot fondant to a table for cooling. Shirley had gone to the kitchen for a few minutes' supervision, and the girl ran blindly into her, the scalding fondant dripping onto her hand and instep, causing her immediate removal to the hospital.

Morley Brandon did not hear of it until he saw her pretty understudy behind the counter and inquired for Shirley.

"She's at the General Hospital—burnt," said Rita, succinctly.

Morley was off to the hospital as fast as he could secure a box of "Zulus" and an armful of flowers.

The matron did not wish to admit anyone. As an argument she gave Morley his best excuse for insisting upon seeing her:

"She thinks she can manage to look after the store and we wish to influence her against it. Her hand and instep are severely burned, and while she might get around she would risk having scars. If she stays here a few weeks that will be avoided."

"She'll stay—I'll arrange that nicely," promised Morley.

He found her sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, her right hand and right foot swathed in bandages. He drew a chair close to hers.

"Oh, I'm glad you came," she greeted him. "You'll be able to get me out of here. I don't know why they brought me here; a doctor could have done all that was necessary in a few minutes, and left me where I was. I'm perfectly able to work."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it, but it will be better to stay here for awhile. That Miss Simpson whom you left in charge can do very nicely. I'm sorry to see you laid up," he went on, picking up her bandaged hand, gently. "There is one consolation: that burn could not possibly have been a big one."

Her face, all too pale from pain, became faintly suffused with rose. She smiled.

"It's worth being 'wounded' to hear you say nice things," she said. He bowed his head and touched her fingers with his lips.

"Shirley," he said, his voice pregnant with emotion, "you are the sweetest girl in the world. I would rather have you than all I have deemed worth while. I want to marry you. Can you accept a prosaic man like me?"

For answer her head dropped against his arm. He kissed her silky hair, her half-closed eyes, and her parted lips with an ecstasy that surprised himself.

"Morley, dear," she breathed in his sleeve, "how can I get clothes for the wedding if I am to stay here?"

"Clothes!" he exclaimed, as if nothing had been farther from his thoughts. "Why, get the nurse to telephone all the stores with which you want to deal, and they'll send up salespeople, I'm sure," he offered as the most plausible answer.

"And I'd like to see Niagara again and show you to the folks on the old homestead in the fruit district," she babbled.