

Astro received by a messenger a hurriedly penciled note. It read:

"Something awful has happened! Chester broke his leg last night, and was taken to the hospital; but when it was set (the leg), he insisted on being brought home to the studio. He's almost crazy, and has a fever, and I'm sure the elopement was planned for to-night. I'll get it out of him somehow, and you must tell me what to do. Here's the text he got last night. I can't make it out: so please tell me immediately. V."

The text indicated was from the 59th Psalm, verse 14.

"And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city."

As soon as Astro had looked it up, he put on his hat and coat, and jumping into his private hansom drove to Washington Square.

It was half-past eight when Ruth Lorsson raised the shade of her window and threw up the sash. At the curb opposite her house a cab was waiting. She looked at it eagerly.

There came a sudden noise like the barking of a dog, repeated three times. Ruth smiled, let down the sash, and drew the shade. Then, stuffing a package wrapped in a towel inside her full blouse, she ran down stairs.

"Ruth, child! what are you doing?" Mrs. Lorsson's voice came in a petulant way.

Ruth hovered a moment by the doorway, to say, in a voice that trembled a little, "Oh, I only want to get the Smiths' address from one of their cards on the hall table."

She walked swiftly to the front door, opened it noiselessly, slipped out, and shut it carefully behind her. She fairly flew down the steps now, and ran across the street straight for the cab. The door in its side swung open, and she popped inside. The cab instantly drove off at a furious pace.

There was a dark figure inside. She snuggled up to it deliciously. "Oh, Harry!" she breathed. "At last! Oh, I thought this time never would come!" Then with a little scream she jumped away from him. "Who are you!" she demanded. Her voice showed terror.

"My dear," said Astro, "don't be frightened, Mr. Chester couldn't come. He has had a slight accident; but not bad enough to prevent his being married to-night."

"Why, how do you know?" she demanded, staring at him. Then, as an electric light suddenly illuminated the interior of the cab, she recognized the fine, picturesque features of the Master of Mysteries, and gave a little sigh of relief. "Oh, it's Astro!" she exclaimed. "You know everything, don't you? Did you see it in your crystal ball?"

"Oh, I was so frightened! But tell me about Harry! It must be a bad accident to keep him away—to-night."

He reassured her and they drove on. They reached Washington Square, and hurried to the studio. Valeska met them at the door with a smile. For a moment Ruth eyed her suspiciously.

"Your bridesmaid," said Astro.

Ruth, relieved but anxious for a sight of her lover, darted by with hardly a glance, and ran to the bed where Harry Chester lay, weak, but impatiently awaiting her.

"Oh, Harry!"

"Oh, Ruth!"

Astro and Valeska walked into the hall. "Well," said Astro, "I hope she's satisfied now. She has lost four millions and three magnificent houses."

"For which she'd have to pay all her life," said Valeska. "If you ask me, I'd say she's got a bargain. Come, let's call in the minister!"

The next Master of Mysteries story, "The Count's Comedy," will appear October 10.

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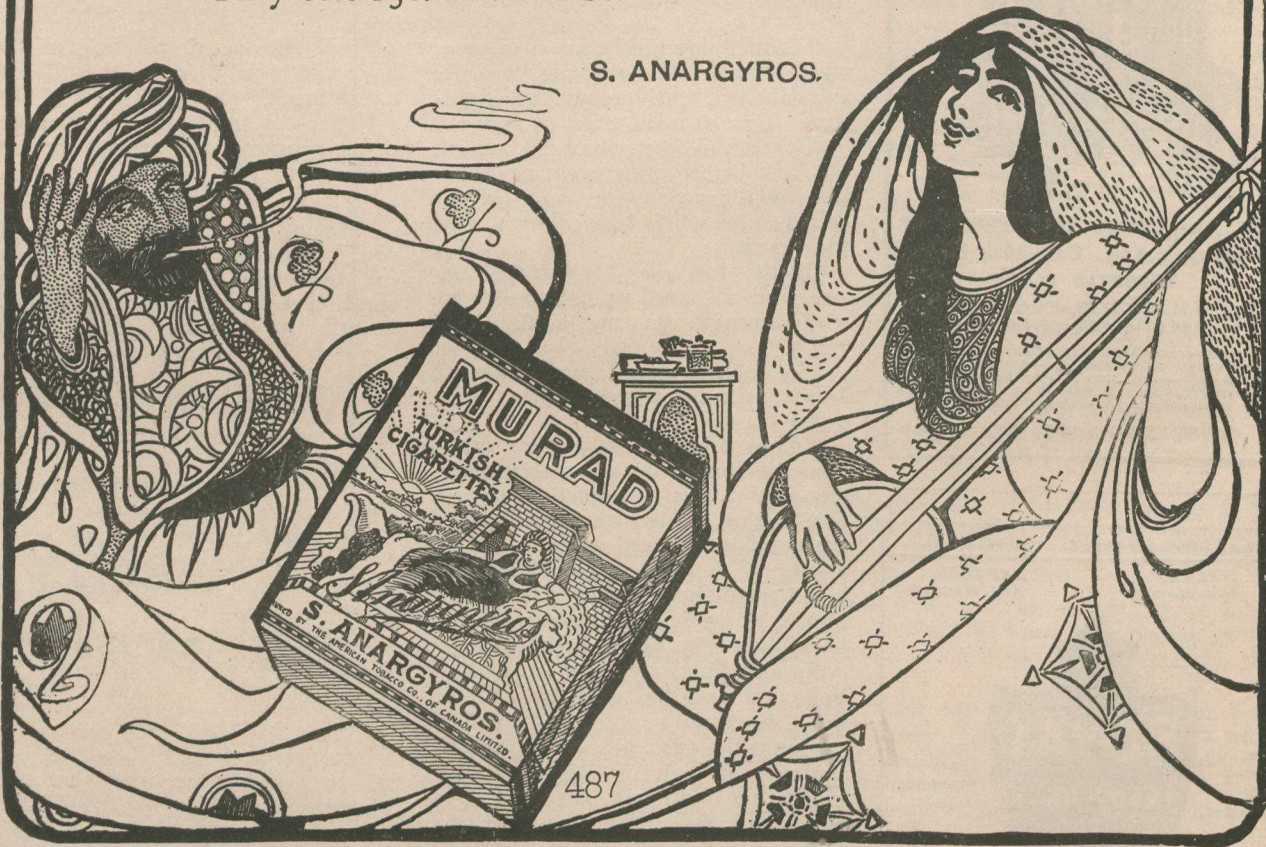
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