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## The Mere Man and the Near-Maid

(Continued from page 9.)

baron with his legs bowed out like a

baron with his legs buildings bull-dog's.

"Halt," says I, "an' don't come nigh the tent 'til you git the word."

Then I put my mouth to the door an' yells, "Yer can come out of thar now, Miss Frank."

'Stead of Boots' mosse-horn sort of

Miss Frank."

'Stead of Boots' mosse-horn sort of bray rumblin' back at me, thar piped up a dear little treakle voice sayin', "Thank you, Ben. Kindly request his lordship to be seated."

At first I thought a gal had sneaked into the tent when I wasn't lookin', an' then I guessed maybe it were ony some more o' Frank's loonyness. Anyway I told the baron he was welcome to any squar yard of grass he took a fancy to, and accepted a convenient stump myself, where Joe quickly joined me.

No one said nothin' for five solid minutes, durin' which time I smoked, Joe spat an' the fat baron stared at the landscape through his window, standin' stiff an' pullin' at his swollen knickers with his fingers.

with his fingers.

The tent finally come unlaced an' out stepped Frank Boots. I had to rub my eyes good 'afore I'd 'low it were her though, for exceptin' the long nose an' blunt chin it had all got made over. From head to heel she was togged out in white canvas—hat, waist, skirt an' shoes. Her hat had a veil hangin' from it. The specs were gone an' one hand shoes. Her hat had a veil hangin from it. The specs were gone, an' one hand held onto a lacy umbrella the size of a handkerchief. I just let my pipe drop from my teeth an' stared 'til I were

dizzy. "What's the matter?" says Joe in my

ear.
"Blamed if I know," says I, gaspin'

"Blamed if I know," says I, gaspin' for breath.

But the baron weren't took aback a particle. He bows low an' smacks a kiss on the back of her free hand.

"My life-saver," he murmurs, "my fair life-saver."

Infe-saver."

And it were just erbout what she looked like, too—bein' hard an' round an' white an' covered with canvas.

Frank simpers in a way that keeps her front teeth well hid an' answers, "It were a great pleasure, I assure you, my lord—to be of any small service."

"It were a noble deed. You are a right brave lady, Miss Boots. I shall ever be in debt to you for my poor life."

Frank giggles at this. "These days a lord need never be in debt," says she so low I had ter bend over to catch it.

"You're referin' to bank debts," says he sadly. "Cash couldn't settle this kind."

"Don't mention that nasty word, my

"Don't mention that nasty word, my lord. I've more'n I know what to do with. I've come into the woods to forget money an' to hunt romance."

get money an' to hunt romance."

I've never heard moose called that name afore, but Nord seemed to catch onto what she meant. He caught her hand ag'in an' with a roll of his eyes cries, "You're a poet—a woman after my own heart!"

"It's not exactly your heart, my lord, it's your——" an' then she got red as a beet an' gazed at her toe.

Knowin' she'd put her foot in it somehow, I saunters up an' tells her the tea's bilin'.

"Thank you, Ben," says she in that same sticky voice she'd been usin' right along. "Kindly serve it."

I handed 'em each a mug, an' it was as black as your hat an' so bitter I had to chuck mine away. They didn't seem to notice anythin' woman thought.

to chuck mine away. They didn't seem to notice anythin' wrong though, an' sipped an' talked an' grinned so long that I got tired watchin' 'em, an' finally me an' Joe slipped down to the river to rest up rest up.

It was gittin' dusk when we returned, an' they was still at it. Ony now the baron was on his knees, an' she bendin' over him, the empty mug pressed tight

to her heart.

"It's erbout time to move," says I.

"Oh, Ben," she says, "you startled me," and the lord got up an' brushed

me," and the lold go.
his legs.

"I reckon it ain't no use goin' further,
Ben. We'll start home to-morrow."

"Home?" I gasps. "Why you ain't
found your head yet!"

"I couldn't bear to kill a poor, little



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