

THE MASONIC EMBLEM.

The long passenger train drawn by two puffing, panting iron horses rolled up and down and over and around the mountain grades through the silent land of the west.

Fenton Blake, leaning his head back against the plush of the Pullman, absolutely ignored the wild scenery with-out, he preferred the contemplation of the beautiful woman who occupied the section opposite him. He knew she must be as beautiful in heart as in face and form, for she was sweet and gracious to porter, to conductor, and even to that most obnoxious personage, the news agent. There was about her and her belongings those little outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace which are indefinable yet unmistakable.

For two days Blake had watched for an opportunity to render her some aid that would not appear like an intrusion, but fate had denied him such a pleasure.

Suddenly he assumed an upright position. They were going at an unusual rate of speed. There came a terrible jolt and a rocking motion, followed by a dead halt. He went forward and learned that the train had broken in two on a heavy grade, and the runaway portion, consisting of the four sleepers and the growing-room coach, had overtaken the day coaches, smashing them into kindling wood.

Blake joined those hurrying to the aid of the victims, climbing over the wreckage, and, hearing the helpless, hopeless cries of those buried beneath the mass of timbers. The inevitable accompanying fire lent its horror to the occasion. He stopped on his merciful way at the sound of a faint, little voice saying:

"Cancher git me out?"

A glow of running red fire lit up the scene and showed to him the terrified appealing eyes of a little lad who was tightly wedged in between heavy beams.

With set teeth, stern eyes and panting breath Blake lifted and pulled and tugged and strained, making but a slight opening in the piled-up wreckage. The menacing flames darted forward from all sides, when he held their little victim. Then he made one grand, final, superhuman and successful effort. Catching the child up in his arms he strode away with him to his coach.

The beautiful woman had come out on the forward platform and was looking anxiously about. Blake swung him self up on the steps beside her.

"Will you come in and look after this little chap?" he asked as he hurried him up in his section. "I must go back and help."

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried, following him.

"Is the child hurt?"

"No, I think not, only weak and frightened. He's cold, too. Lay him on the seat."

"Give him to me," she said, seating herself and drawing a traveling rug across her lap.

Blake laid the boy gently in her arms and she wrapped the rug snugly about him. The child looked up at her with bewildered eyes, and then, seemingly content, dropped his head on her shoulder.

Blake returned to action. In an hour he came back to his coach, tired and triumphant.

"It wasn't so bad after all," he declared. "We are right on the edge of a station. Plenty of helpers came. They put out the fire almost immediately. Only three killed and about twenty injured."

The beautiful woman shuddered and pressed the little form closer in her arms.

"Have you held him all the time?"

"Yes, I liked to," she replied. "He has made you quite a hero. He says you 'fit the flames and everything' that you hadn't gotten him outen the lumber he would have all burned up. Didn't you, Bud?"

"So his name is Bud. What is your other name?" he asked, addressing the boy, who now sat bolt upright and shook off the rug.

"Bud Lukes."

"Were your parents with you in the car?"

"Nope, I was makin' the trip alone."

"Where were you going?"

"Want goin' nowhara; jest gittin' a ride."

"Where do your folks live?"

"Ain't got no folks. I'll wrap 'em up."

"No relations—no friends?"

"Nope! My relations is all dead, and I ain't got no friends."

"Who did you come from?"

"Got in at the last stop and thought I'd see how far I could ride before they put me off, but they thought I was ad to a woman what set in front of me with a lot of kids, and they didn't ask me fur no ticket nor nothing."

"But with whom now you live?"

"Lived with dad till he got killed. Bin livin' alone sense."

"How long has your mother been dead?"

"Dunno. Don't remember her."

"How old are you?" asked Blake.

"Seven, gonn' on eight."

"You don't look that old."

"I'll be bigger, all right. Say, hain't you got a chaw of tobak about yer?"

"Little Breches," laughed Blake, to the beautiful woman, who touched her lips to the boy's brow and exclaimed in expository tones:

"Oh, Bud, Bud!"

Then Blake recalled the last verse of the poem and thought that the beautiful woman was a fair illustration of the angel who guarded Little Breches.

"I am afraid he is feverish," she said looking up anxiously.

"I'll see if I can get hold of a doctor in a moment," exclaimed Blake, leaving the coach.

He soon returned with a local doctor who had come with the others from the little station. He took Bud's temperature and examined him carefully.

"What have you had to eat today?" he then asked.

"Peanuts and codfish before I started. Hain't had nothing since."

"What did you have yesterday?"

"Nuthin. Yes, he's belong to coffee."

"Just as I thought," exclaimed the doctor. "He wasn't hurt in the accident, but he's nearly starved."

Blake turned to the beautiful woman and said: "Where's the porter?"

"He's gone to get more coffee," she replied. "Bud shall have a ten-course dinner."

The physician laid a restraining hand on his arm and the beautiful woman smiled gently.

"A little warm milk," she asked of the doctor.

"Yes, that will be good. He has a fever, and I am afraid it will increase. He ought to be put to bed, and I will leave some medicine for him. Do you take to him any more. He is excited."

"The stationer isn't occupied," said the beautiful woman, turning to Blake, "Engage it for me, please, and I'll put Bud to bed."

"But it is too much," said Blake, "to ask you to take care of him."

The eyes of the beautiful woman were sad and watery as she replied in a sad, low voice:

"I lost a little boy 3 years old—I can

take good care of him."

A pang of keen disappointment pierced the heart of Bud's rescuer. She was married, then!

He hunted up the conductor and engaged the stateroom. When he returned Bud was sleeping quietly in the arms of the beautiful woman.

Blake regarded him whimsically. "He is a comical-looking little chap," he said. Then suddenly an interested, excited expression came over his features.

The child's ragged coat had fallen away and pinned to the coarse, common shirt Blake beheld a Masonic pin.

Now Fenton Blake was a prominent member in the Masonic order, and Masonry was one of the few things in life that still held his interest. He eagerly took the pin from the child's shirt.

"Bud thought he had no friends. He will find he has a wonderful," he exclaimed as he rose and hastened into the other coach.

Presently he came back jubilant, his arms full of boys' clothing.

"There were plenty of Masons on board," he said. "I told them of Bud. He showed them this little pin. They shelled out liberally and the mother of four small boys donated this toger."

"How providential!" exclaimed the beautiful woman. "If you will carry Bud into the stateroom I will put him to bed."

The Masonic emblem had aroused Blake's sympathy and interest, and as he felt the soft weight of the sleeping child against his shoulder, a sudden impulse came to him. He laid the child down in the berth and returned to his section, where he remained buried in thought until the beautiful woman rejoined him.

"Bud did not awaken until I undressed him," she said slowly. "The porter is staying with him now."

"Do you know what I am going to do?" exclaimed Blake impetuously. "I am going to adopt him. I am like him in some respects. 'My relations is all dead, and I ain't got no friends,' that is, no near ones."

"What a surprise there were evidences of visible disappointment in the countenance of the beautiful woman."

"Do you know," she said slowly, "I have made up my mind to adopt him. Since my little boy died three years ago, it has given me pain even to look at a child, but tonight when I held their little victim, I felt that feeling, of course, you have the first right—you saved his life."

"That isn't why I am going to adopt him," he hastily interrupted, "but because of that little pin, the emblem of that great brotherhood."

Your home is in Denver, isn't it?" she asked after a pause.

"Yes," he said in surprise. "As the guardian of our mutual little friend, may I introduce myself? My name is Fenton Blake."

"Yes, I know," she said quietly. "My husband once pointed you out to me—on the opera, I think."

He showed the evidences of another pang at the mention of those two words.

"You live in Denver, also?" he asked.

"Yes, she replied."

Opening her hand she handed him a card with name and address engraved thereon.

The name revived hope: "Mrs. Marion Vernon." "She must be a widow," he thought.

"I am sure," she said anxiously. "I will say that it is best I should take her to my home and care for him until he is convalescent."

"I will be so grateful to you if you will. My bachelor apartments are not arranged comfortably for a sick child."

Blake was quick to perceive the advantages derived from this arrangement, which was continuing and strengthening the friendship so charmingly and informally opened.

When they had reached Denver Bud's temperature had risen alarmingly. Mrs. Vernon's home with her, carrying the child in his arms, and the arrival of the family physician of the Vernon household called. He didn't prophesy a long or severe illness for the lad, but Blake's mind was filled with a blisful frame of mind.

To his lawyer on the following day he confided his plan of adopting the little boy.

"He is at present at the home of Mrs. Vernon. She was on the same train with us."

"Where does she live?"

Blake told him the street and number.

"Yes, Max Vernon's widow."

"Blake's heart gave a leap of joy at this confirmation of his hopes."

"He was her guardian," continued here as soon as she was out of school. He was a negative, uninteresting sort of man—hardly a friend of the family."

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