

STOLEN—A HOUSE

By HELEN BALL.

Drawings by Emily Hand.

Resume: Larry Staunton has informed his eccentric employer, Mr. Patrick Lawless, whom he has never met and who has a preference for married employees, that there is a Mrs. Larry Staunton, while, as a matter of fact, the young man is unmarried and very much in love with Doris Hamilton. Mr. Lawless is coming to the city and wishes to call, and Mr. Staunton is consequently in a scrape. There is a cottage owned by Mr. Pinkerton who is abroad and whose house is in the hands of an agent named Hudson. Mr. Staunton forms the daring plan of borrowing the house for an afternoon and evening, secures the key and the co-operation of Miss Hamilton, his friend Tom Bryan, and Sylvia, wife of the latter. Doris and Sylvia proceed to the cottage the following afternoon, as the former has promised to pretend to be Mrs. Staunton. They see a policeman approaching the house, whereupon they rush to the cellar.

"OH," with a subdued gulp from Sylvia, after ten minutes of agonised silence, "what was that? I know I heard someone. Oh!" and she flew to a cupboard, pulling the door tight after her.

Undoubtedly there was a sound of footsteps above stairs. Seeing no other refuge, Doris leaped into an empty coal-bin, and crouched down regardless of her dainty summer frock.

The steps grew more pronounced, and she was fully

prepared to see an officer of the law appear at the cellar door, when, above the clamour of her heart, she managed to distinguish the voice of Larry calling in vain for her. "H-here I am," came in a weak voice from the coal-bin, just as Larry reached the cellar door, and finding it open, rushed down stairs.

"Oh, L-Larry!" and she wildly flung her arms about his neck.

"Dor," exclaimed Larry, too upset to appreciate his blessings, "for the love of Jupiter what are you doing? You're not backing out, Dor? He's upstairs now, waiting to meet you. Seems an awfully decent chap. I like him immensely. Oh, Dor, do come quickly. Here, I'll help you out," and he lifted her over the low partition. "Now don't forget you are Mrs. Larry Staunton."

As they ascended the stairs hand in hand, Doris felt her courage returning, for Larry certainly did give one a feeling of confidence. Sylvia, peeping from her cupboard, stepped out as they vanished and quietly seated herself on the top-most step.

Giving her the moral support of his arm, Larry led the reluctant Doris to the drawing-room and successfully introduced his "wife" to Mr. Patrick Lawless.

Mr. Lawless was easily approached. His twinkling grey eyes under the shaggy brows held a world of humour, and his mouth smiled pleasantly, almost laughed thought Doris in surprise. Larry leaned back in his chair and, finding matters adjusting themselves pleasantly, glanced with pride at Doris, when suddenly with an explosive laugh he interrupted the conversation which was satisfactorily dealing with the weather, past, present and future. Doris looked at him in amazement.

"Great guns, Dor," he gasped; "your face is all smut. You've been in the coal-bin; for goodness sake go and wash it."

The hot blood dyed Doris' face while she hastily left the room, vowing wrathful vengeance on Larry for not even looking at her face before.

"What must Mr. Lawless think? That was what he was laughing at. Oh, the mean—" and here, Sylvia appearing on the scene, managed to subdue the righteous indignation.

"I simply won't go back. It's all his fault," raged Doris.

But Sylvia unexpectedly acquired a hot and even abusive determination.

"You will. Doris Hamilton, if you are not a horrid little sneak. Whose fault was it you were in the coal-bin, and how could Larry see your face when you probably had to be dragged into the room? If I agreed to do a thing I wouldn't be a coward at the last moment."

The scathing words had the desired effect, and Doris once more approached the dragon. Mr. Lawless proved so entertaining that a delightful hour slipped away in no time.

The sound of the door-bell sent temporarily-forgotten thrills shooting through Larry and Doris. Larry, leaving the room to answer the summons, was stunned to find a maid in spotless cap and apron on duty.

"Who the—why Sylvia," in a stage whisper; "it's not—good heavens, what next?"

And the circumspect little Mrs. Bryan, decked out as a dapper maid, calmly opened the door, and with a low courtesy admitted Tom who stared in amazement as he endeavoured to grasp the situation.

Doubtful of the course of proceeding, Tom had left his office early, and happened in to see how the land lay. Larry, thankful for a companion-at-arms, drew him into the drawing-room to take a leading part in the comedy. Everyone was duly pleased to make the acquaintance of everyone else, and things once more moved along happily. Larry was beginning to wonder if his friend Mr. Patrick would soon make his adieus, when the bell rang a second time. Everyone in the room with the exception of Mr. Lawless gave a perceptible start, while Larry, hurriedly explaining that he expected a plumber, left the room, carefully closing the door behind him, for with true instinct he scented trouble.

Once again the dapper maid had answered the summons, and she turned to Larry with a frightened face, and incoherently pointed at a man fuming on the doorstep. Larry strode to the door and politely asked his visitor's business.

"What do I want? Well, I like that!" in an angry, excited tone. "I want to know what in the devil you are doing in this house? I've arranged to take it for



"Oh, what was that?"