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The Pedlar's Pack

(Concluded from last week.)

"Now, I have found out that it pays me better to sit down in my office here and write out a little order for what I want and send the letter through His Majesty's mail—and have the goods come up the lakes by the first convenient opportunity. Then the good-natured merchant added: 'Well, here's the Pedlar's Pack—you can have it for the ten days or even a month, free of charge or rent. At the end of that time you can return it, if you find the business of peddling an unprofitable profession. If you find there is money in the business, why you can give the wholesale house of Jackson & Co., a wholesale order in the lines of Ribbons and Laces.'

"And the yens?" asked the Sieur. "Well—for the fun of it—I will write down to one of the Banks below and find out the par value or the rate of discount of the 'yen,' as you call it, or whether they are negotiable in this country at all, and I will let you know what they say. In the meantime, you could leave one or two with my wife just to look at as a souvenir or memento, so to speak."

"Thanks ever so much, for your kindness," said the Sieur. "Indeed, we are ever so much obliged," said the Sessional Writer.

Then the Sieur put his hand in the bag and took out a handful of shining yens and put them on the counter before the merchant's fair wife, and said: "In case it should be that you should not see us pedlars again—please keep these as a little memento or souvenir of this very auspicious occasion. If we stay in the country of course we will often call and see you."

"Well, now, we'll be a-jogging along," said Mr. Williamson. "Good-bye, all."

The farmer and his wife and the two gentlemen-pedlars cordially shook hands with the merchant and his fair wife, and then the journey home again began.

The Sieur before leaving the store received from the merchant the little invoice mentioned.

Not very long afterwards the gentlemen-pedlars started for Summertrees, carrying between them their "Pedlar's Pack." The arrangement was that within as short a time as possible the good man and his fair wife were to follow the guests to Summertrees.

And thus it was that as recorded at the end of the first part of this romance, two sun-browned and wind-browned pedlars marched into the library at Summertrees, thus interrupting the grave and sad conversation in progress between the members of the Summertrees household, and acing in a deep basso-profundo-soprano, alto, contralto and mezzo-soprano tone of voice, as it were:

"We've ribbons and laces To set off the faces Of pretty young sweethearts and wives."

"Oh, Elfie, here are two gentlemen pedlars," cried Miss Retta to Miss Elfie. "Isn't it nice?"

"If we had known they were coming we need not have sent our little order with Mrs. Williamson," said Miss Elfie.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves at home," said the kindly laird, handing a chair to each of the visitors.

"You must be tired carrying that heavy pack. Have you travelled far this morning, gentlemen?"

"Not very far, sir," thank you," answered the Sieur.

"But it is a warm day, gentlemen, and you must be tired carrying that heavy pedlar's pack," said Miss Elfie, kindly.

"Come on, Retta, let us go and get a cup of tea for the gentlemen." "No, thank you, indeed," replied the Sieur. "It is not very long since we had breakfast, and we really have not travelled far this morning. You are all very kind."

so kind—and if it would not be too much trouble. But, oh, perhaps you had better not—I forgot we do not need anything in the way of ribbons and laces just now. You see, yesterday morning a good friend of yours and her husband were going to 'The Corners' and we asked the lady kindly to purchase a few ribbons for us at one of the stores there. It was probably late when they reached home—it is a long journey to 'The Sue'—as some folks call it, and the roads are rough, so I suppose our friend could not very well bring us the ribbons last night. But we expect them over to-day. They are really very nice people and very kind. So you see we would be putting you to a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"Every firm has a business motto, or should have one. We understand Mr. Jackson at 'The Sue,' or 'The Corners'—whichever it is—has two business mottoes. Ours will be, eh, pardner?" (looking at M. Machele—who was looking at Miss Retta), "No trouble to show Goods."

"I guess that'll be all right," answered the Sessional Writer, apparently waking up out of a reverie. "Well, then 'here goes,' said the Sieur, as he proceeded to undo the fastenings of the big leather portmanteau, whilst all the occupants of the library gathered round and watched the operation with curious eyes.

Having undone the fastenings, the Sieur opened wide the big valise. It contained two large compartments. In the one firstly opened was a small neatly folded little packet; in the other were two little slips of paper—one neatly folded and twisted as if by fair, feminine hands.

"You must have got nearly sold out, gentlemen, or else been robbed on the way," said the laird pleasantly.

"I thought by the way you 'uns carried that pack when you came in that it weighed most half a ton!" said old John.

Then everyone laughed. "Well," said the Sieur, "one thing is certain, we cannot show you what we have not got, can we? Now, let us see what is in this little packet."

Then the gallant Sieur opened the packet and displayed to the admiring eyes of everyone three pieces of silk ribbon, each a yard long and respectively of the colors blue, pink, and crimson, and each three-quarters of an inch wide.

"I am so sorry," said Miss Retta, to M. Machele, who could not help looking at her very often—in fact old John afterwards declared M. Machele looked at Miss Retta constantly and without intermission from the time the gentleman pedlars came into the room—but then old John always was a great fellow to joke—"that we sent away our order yesterday. You gentlemen seem to have got exactly the color and shade of ribbon we ordered yesterday—and exactly the length and exactly the width."

"It is apparently one of those peculiar circumstances which you might call a 'co-incidence,'" said her father, laughing.

"I don't understand it at all," said old John, a-gazing curiously into the cavernous depths of the big valise.

"It beats all," he added, a-rubbing his hands.

"Perhaps if we look in this other compartment or room, the mystery may be unraveled," said the Sieur.

Then he shut the first compartment and opened the second—the one on the left hand side.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," continued the Sieur, as if he were a showman addressing an audience, "I have in my hands two small pieces of paper. One reads as follows, that is to say in the manner and in the words and figures following—videlicet—

"1 yard blue ribbon 3/4 inches wide. 1 yard pink ribbon 3/4 inch wide. 1 yard crimson ribbon 3/4 inch wide."

"Why, that is exactly the order I gave yesterday, and I believe that is the very paper I wrote, too. Please let me see it, won't you?" asked Miss Elfie.

"Certainly, here it is, my liege," answered the gallant Sieur, handing the young lady the paper and bowing low.

"I wonder what he means by calling Miss Elfie 'my liege,'" said old John to the laird in a loud undertone.

"But he means well anyway—and he said it very politely. Perhaps they are furriers and it may be a furrin word."

"Why, this is exactly the same order which I wrote out yesterday morning and gave to old John. To hand to Mrs. Williamson! Didn't I, Old John?"

"Sartainly," answered that gentleman, a-rubbing his head hard and speaking in a very perplexed sort of way.

"Are you sure you gave my note to Mrs. Williamson, old John?" continued Miss Elfie.

"Sartainly," answered old John. "Sartainly." Then the old man bent down low and peered anxiously into the cavernous depths of the big leather valise; then he cautiously put his hand into one compartment and then into the other, and felt them.

"I was feeling to see whether it was a real valise or only an imaginary one," explained old John to the amused spectators. "You see, the bull thing seems to me like a fairy tale—like one of those fairy tales 'The Bonnie Leddies' tell us about sometimes. Here suddenly come two strange gentlemen pedlars—just as if they had come out of a book—they are apparently 'furriners' by their accent—then they bring with them a big pedlar's pack which seems so heavy when they come in that it appears to me to weigh at least half a ton—then they open it and what's in it? Nothing, as I can see, but this little wee packet of ribbons—the very ribbons which 'The Bonnie Leddies' ordered yesterday; that is on this side of the valise—and on the other side there is nothing but two little pieces of paper, and one of 'em is the very identical note Miss Elfie wrote with her own hand and gave me yesterday mornin' to give to Mrs. Williamson—and I did give it to her sure. It beats all—that it does—it beats the Dutch."

"Then, amidst the loud and repeated laughter of all present the old man carefully examined the interior of the valise again and exclaimed:

"I know what it is—it's magic. These gentlemen are conjurers—magicians. You folks had better 'look out.' Here the old man commenced to 'edge away' from the circle, saying: 'I've heard tell of conjurers and magicians afore. They do say they can do most anything. You'd

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better look out. They say there was a magician once came and gave a show at 'The Corners' and he could do most anything—make a fire in his stove-pipe hat and not burn it up—make all sorts of things come out of it—lots of things—dozens of handkerchiefs, and aprons, and all sorts of things—and even eggs—and they do say even a like chicken—he brought out of that hat and it burning like Sam Hill' all the time. I say the hull business is magic and these gentlemen are not pedlars at all—they are conjurers and magicians. You want to look out. You 'Bonnie Leddies' once read to me about such people in 'The Arabian Nights.'"

Here everyone laughed heartily, and the laird said: "I fancy it is only a co-incidence and not magic."

"I don't know anything 'bout any co-incidence or any magic," said the good wife, who had stolen on tip-toe into the room, followed by her good man—also on tip-toe—and who had been interested spectators of the more recent proceedings, and interested auditors of old John's eloquence, "but my good man and me knows these furriners well; they are real friends of ours, and they are stopping at our house. They only left there about a couple of hours ago—or so—and they very bouquets they wear are from your 'pansy beds.' Then the good lady, more particularly addressing the 'Bonnie Leddies,' continued: "You know we always calls 'on your pansy beds,—that is, yourn as well as ourn—because they are really more yourn than ourn."

"Then the good wife continued: "Them's your own ribbons, bonnie ledlies; the fact is that these gentlemen-pedlars rode in with my good man and me to the 'Pur,' yesterday. They had bin intendin' to lay in quite a stock of ribbons, an' laces fur to start with in their perfession—but when it came to the butin' of 'em it turned out that tho' they had lots of money—a hull bag full to fact—it was no use; their money was not the right kind, and so they had to wait a while afore they could lay in what you might call a wholesale stock. On our way down I handed 'em your little order, thinking they might like to fill it, sayin' they was goin' into the ribbon business. I know you would not mind."

"Certainly not," said the 'Bonnie Leddies.' "So the only ribbons they bought were these ribbons which I paid for out of your own money—and here's the change, my dear."

Here the good wife handed to Miss Elfie the change—and my good man has the tobacco which was ordered."

Here that gentleman produced the article mentioned—and the gentlemen pedlars has the bill—or the 'invoice,' as I think Bro. Jackson called it—of the ribbons."

"Here, my liege, certainly, is the 'invoice' or 'statement current,' or whatever the merchant called it," said the Sieur, handing to Miss Elfie the other little paper which was on the left hand compartment of the pedlar's pack.

"Well, old John," said the laird with a gay laugh, "you see I was right for once and you were wrong for once; it was not magic—only a peculiar co-incidence."

"I guess you were right and I was wrong, 'as you generally are,' as the old saying is, laird," replied Old John, also laughing.

Then the Sieur and the Sessional Writer took a little walk to the house of the neighbor—the next house on 'the Sue road' from Summertrees. They carried with them the pedlar's pack; they had borrowed from Mr. Jackson at 'The Corners,' and giving the pack to the kind neighbors, they asked them "would you mind, next time you are going to 'The Sue,' handing this valise to Mr. Jackson, the general merchant? He kindly lent it to us two or three days ago."

And on being told by the kind people that they would be glad to return the valise the very next Saturday, as they were going in themselves that day, the envoys said "thanks ever so much," and returned to Summertrees.

When old man Jackson opened the valise on Saturday afternoon he found inside a small piece of paper, bearing these strange words:

"Thanks ever so much for the use of this 'pedlar's pack.' (Signed) D'ULRIC SIEUR, MACHELLE.

Ministers Plenipotentiary and Ambassadors Extraordinary from The Land of the Grimalkins."

Old Brer Jackson was alone in the store at the time the valise was returned. His fair wife was busy in the house behind the store, baking a pie for dinner—a deep apple pie—one of those pies Old Brer Jackson particularly liked.

So he went back into the house and said, "Susan! Susan Mary, my dear! Just see the 'funny words' them two furriners have writ in the valise we lent 'em t'other day!"

The fair Mrs. Jackson had her fair arms in the baking tin up to her elbows—and the dimples in her fair arms looked pretty in the flour, and in fact altogether she made a charming picture; as people used to say, "Sis Jackson always does look well."

After her husband had read the paper to her slowly three times, the lady remarked "Wa'al, that here paper shows three thi,gs anyway: "The first, that them gentlemen were

Won by a Head

"To-night, Tansy—to-night! Take it straight to him at Holly Lodge. Tell no one; watch your chance. It's as vital to me as—Lochnivar and b's Cesarewitch are to you. You know what that means. I trust you alone. I have heard my uncle's own lips say that you are immaculate. Immaculate!"

A queer little flush crept into Tansy's lether-like face. Only faintly he understood that last imposing word, but the white and delicate little hand had gripped his own iron paw with a caressing supplication more than thrilling. Turned forty, he still carried the name of trainer's "head boy"; perhaps, being a woman, she accepted the word "boy" in its literal sense. What did she know of stable dietion? She had come 'titting across here like a spirit, struggling to be calm, her beautiful brown eyes searched the zone of twilight as if she feared every deeper ebreak of shadow might move. She had crushed the letter into his inner pocket, and now stood looking back at the big, dim mansion, as if dreading the return journey.

Tansy, starting too, could make nothing of it. Of course he had heard the rumors from the house, but what were they when Lochnivar was within four days of winning the Cesarewitch and putting up a record in time and stakes for the stable? That—that must happen; Tansy stood there as certain as he was that the moon lay over the woods like a hatless scimitar.

"I'll do it," he said. "Don't you go worrying Miss Greta!" he said, huskily. It was excusable; he had been living in a sort of tentative ecstasy lately. "Listen! Put every penny-piece you've got, every bangle you wear, on Lochnivar!"

"Hush—don't!" She twisted only her face, that looked of a sudden like white marble in the moonlight. Her throat seemed struggling against an explicable suffocation. "I loathe the name—never wish to hear it spoken again—never!" And then, as Tansy stood appalled, waiting for the rush of sob to crown all, she faced round—a smile dancing in the dilated eyes.

"No, no! You'll think me mad. My uncle's own grand, wonderful horse, whose name is to be on all the world's lips!" she said, with quick breath-catches. "Is he all right, Tansy? Might I have just one more, pamp at him before the day? Is he safe to win?"

"Safe?" Tansy turned at the door of the zinc-protected stable, his tone a study, all else forgotten. "Ask his lordship! He'll win, turning round and winking at his field. Haven't they told you what he beat the other day, and the time? Haven't you heard—"

"But this other great horse—Valhalla—that they say—" Her voice trailed off expectantly, breathlessly. "Valhalla! Look here, Miss Greta!" He glanced all round, as with an instinctive idea of listening touts even there. "Don't go by the market. It's a coup—a bigger thing than we ever dreamed of till that trial was run. He stood at sixes yesterday; you wait! Step softly! There he is, the beauty! Tight as a gun, all silk and whipcord; no 'coughing' at the last hour with Lochnivar!"

He had sunk to a whisper, as if the atmosphere were sacred. And the awe seemed to steal into Lord Poolminster's neck and ward. She craned forward with shining eyes and parted lips, watching as though the great horse standing almost motionless there, its glossy skin iridescent as satin, were to-night something more than human.

"Bound to win!" Tansy caught that semiunconscious, quivering whisper from her lips as she turned. Greatly it puzzled him.

"What's to beat him?" he asked, as the door closed. "You can't go against the clock, Miss Greta. I've heard of many 'dead certs' in my time; I've known only one—Lochnivar for the Cesarewitch. Can you see your way, missie?"

She had paused, a hand pressed to her eyes. He thought once again how fragile and sweet she looked, as that glint of moonlight caught upon and haloed the fleecy wrapper flung about her dark head. Tansy worshipped her herself, but no one ever knew that. In his pocket at this moment lay the letter for Mr. Noel Braddon, the gentleman for whom fate destined her—unless, indeed, the vague rumor was true of some tragic hitch only spoken of in whispers.

"You'll take it—your won't fail me?" she breathed, as with a sudden shaft of misgiving.

"Tansy's word on it!" She was moving away. Hardly knowing, he tip-toed just behind. And, all of a sudden, the queer thrill ran through him, and through Miss Greta too. She trembled to a standstill; she had gripped his arm with a tightness that was to leave its mark.

"Tansy!" They were close to the house—so near that that sword of amber light from a swiftly-opened door on the terrace there ran almost to their feet. His slow brain failing for the moment to take in what he saw, Tansy stared.

Two figures were silhouetted against the light. One was Lord Poolminster's. He had waved his hand and turned away; there was a challenging scornful significance in his stiff attitude that framed all the rumors in a flash. And the other tall man, who stood there so seemingly unmoved, cigar smoke wreathing from his lips—

"Why—no!" Tansy's mechanical gasp was cut short. Lord Poolminster's voice, deep and booming, carried across with a never-forgotten finality.

"Will you go? I have said all I wish to say to you. Take any steps furriners; it says 'from the land of the Grimalkins.'"

"Second, it shows that them gentlemen were distinguished furriners, having all them 'er' titles and names which you read over."

"In fact, they're probably some kind of noblemen."

"Thirdly, it shows they were thankful—grateful; it says 'thanks ever so much.'"

Then Brer Jackson thanked her for the interpretation, kissed her and returned to the store, and she returned to the making of that deep-apple pie.

It is needless to say that for many years that mysterious note was safely preserved as a precious relic and keepsake among the archives of the Jackson family at "The Sue."

you please, but while she remains my ward—you understand!" "Why, it's Mr. Noel Braddon himself—here—now!"

His hand clutching the letter in his pocket, Tansy turned to look into the face beside him. It was rigid, almost death-like; that picture of the two men seemed to hold the dilated eyes in a spell. What was it? What sword hung, waiting to fall?

"Quite still!" her lips moved. "He is here, but—but I was not to know or to see him. It is private—man to man; my uncle dared me—made me promise not to stir from my room. Tansy!" She was shrinking back from the sword of light, her figure in one tremble. That last moan seemed for herself alone. "Oh, if I dared—but no, it's life or death to him; he said so. Put yourself in my place to-night—the place of a woman who loves so well, and yet knows—"

It trailed away; she seemed to master herself by a supreme effort for that love's sake. No word would take shape in Tansy's throat. To him it seemed as if the air were slowly thickening—as if he stood upon the threshold of some curtained, mysterious room. Even the tentative glory of Lochnivar's great day faded into a dim background. Staring back from the balcony into those filmed, wide eyes, he grasped but the one incredible truth. The tender little heart beating so close to him was to be broken. She must stand mute and see the man she loved practically ordered off the premises and out of her life. Lord Poolminster was suddenly shattering their happy dream—his friendship for Mr. Noel Braddon, a neighbor and sportsman, had swung round into an icy hostility as sinister as unattractive.

"He—he sha'n't!" Braddon's figure had stroffed away down the gravel path and Lord Poolminster had shut out that light with a bang, when Tansy found his thick arm hugged tightly around the slight little figure.

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"The note!" To-night—you promised!" She seemed to come to herself with that muffled little sob, and then she had vanished somewhere in the shadow. Tansy half realized, sprinted along by the shrubbery, and stepped out as if nothing had happened.

"Sorry, sir. Anything wrong, sir?" "Wrong? No. Come here!" The trainer drew him forward by the sleeve impressively. "Turned that key on Lochnivar? Very well; keep it. For the next four nights his lordship 'll want you to look that door on the inside, and keep a good look-out in there till morning. You'll get your sleep in the daytime. It's just on nine o'clock. Start straight away!"

"Now." The word died instinctively in Tansy's throat. A mechanical jerk to his forelock as they turned away;

ure. "He sha'n't! He couldn't—he don't mean it—all the world knows what he thinks of Greta! There'll be a judgment on him. Don't you fear it! I'll see Mr. Braddon before midnight; I'll make him know you ain't weepin' or worrin'. It'll all come right for them weddin' bells. You jest go in quiet, and wait till his lordship's all alone after supper, and then put this little arms round his neck, and jest—"

Tansy had never spoken such words before in his life, such lumps had never yet swelled in his throat. All else forgotten, that sweet little figure held so preciously close, he was sweeping along on the tide of suppressed indignation, when that sharp, incisive voice rang across from the paddock buildings behind.

"Tansy!" "It's me!" He broke off, to stare. "It's the trainer—and his lordship with him. Here they come. Shall I—"

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