

He somehow backed himself, buggy on the bridge, turned and hit up a rattling clip towards Tilbury. Madder and sadder than I had ever been all at one time I let him have his head. He seemed to have an occult idea that we might overtake the guilty pair on the road and give 'em a whirl of our dust to swallow. Which kept him in a state of high-mettled ferment mile after mile—till by nine o'clock we got into the thick of the dust and the rigs heading in all directions on to the gravel road that slid off into the main street of Tilbury, passing rig after rig in a cloud of dust, but never a sign of Maggie Malone.

Here, opposite the fair ground, was the circus city; all tents up and flags flying, procession about to begin.

Yonder on the railroad tracks was the circus train. In a wild sort of way I enjoyed it all. But the part of the joy I should have got from seeing it along with Mag—

(I guess I'll have another cigar; this one seems to be frazzled.)

The Corkery House stables, opposite the market, were crammed with horses and the street both sides lined with rigs. Corkery was a big, wooden rookery, and its one negro ostler made it feel like a fabulous hostelry in some place that clever people write novels about. Sambo managed to find a cranny in the corner of the yard for Bob, and vowed not to water him till he was cooled off. The smell of those stables alone was almost uplifting enough for a circus.

But when I got sight of the Becket top buggy, backed up in the barricade, I forgot all romances to pause and grate my teeth a bit. Oh, it was a lovely rig. The image of my old shoebox out on the street line made me feel ill.

But the circus parade came along past the market square and the firehall. It was all very glorious. That trailed away again and the crowd swung to the little peninsula park and the two bridges over the Idlewild to see the regatta.

Towards noon I was on one of the two bridges—regretting, as I remember now, that for one day I was neither big enough to see over the shoulders of a mob or little enough to look between their legs at the white-flanneled oarsmen struggling in such a strange craft on the muddy and shipmasted river. Tilbury had a lot of river giants, of whom I had read. Here they were—with a score of others from surrounding towns. The Idlewild was only an overgrown creek. But that Dominion Day of 1881 it seemed as famous as the Thames. The bridge was as hot as a steam box in one of Tilbury's stave mills. The sun beat up from the river. I saw nothing; heard cheerings, puffings of little tugs, blowing of whistles, shouts below—a splash or two under the bridge—people up at the rail, those on the other bridge going wild, as I could see.

And suddenly I knew that the marvel thrilling those thousands of people on the bridge and the banks as far as the eye could see, was the great and only Ned Hanlan, the most wonderful oarsman in the world. I saw that gleaming dot in the long shell with the slide seat shoot over the course between the bridges like a devil's darning-needle full hickory. I heard the cheers. Our bridge struck up as he passed under. The crowd veered across till I thought the old thing would go over like a load of hay into a ditch. Somebody tramped on my shiny boots. Strangling a lump of national pride in my throat, I looked up—

It was Dave Becket, the loose-hung, daredevil, slim Jim who had stolen my girl in the dawn of the morning. But just at that moment he was only a circumstance. The girl t'other side of him, Maggie Malone, was nothing but a dream. I was full to the eyes of Ned Hanlan, wishing to be a man like him, with no girls to bother me. I wanted to be able to do something somewhere some Dominion Day to give people a thrill and make 'em proud of a country that could produce the likes of me.

I met old Ned years afterwards, in 1903. One summer evening I was in his house on Beverley St., Toronto, I remember, and he was showing me two rooms crammed of trophies and illuminated addresses; chattering about them like a garrulous old grandmother—when I had to make myself believe he was the identical man that thrilled me in 1881.

But I suppose there are heroes operating nowadays that thrill the present generation quite as much. In 1881 we had no "fans." We were all that way. I was a whole grandstand myself.

In the afternoon there was a land tournament in the park that was between the river Idlewild and Rat Creek. I wish to mention just one thing about that—because at this distance that's about all there is to remember. I'll admit there was a good programme of variegated sports rather more top-lifting and professional than most of the things put

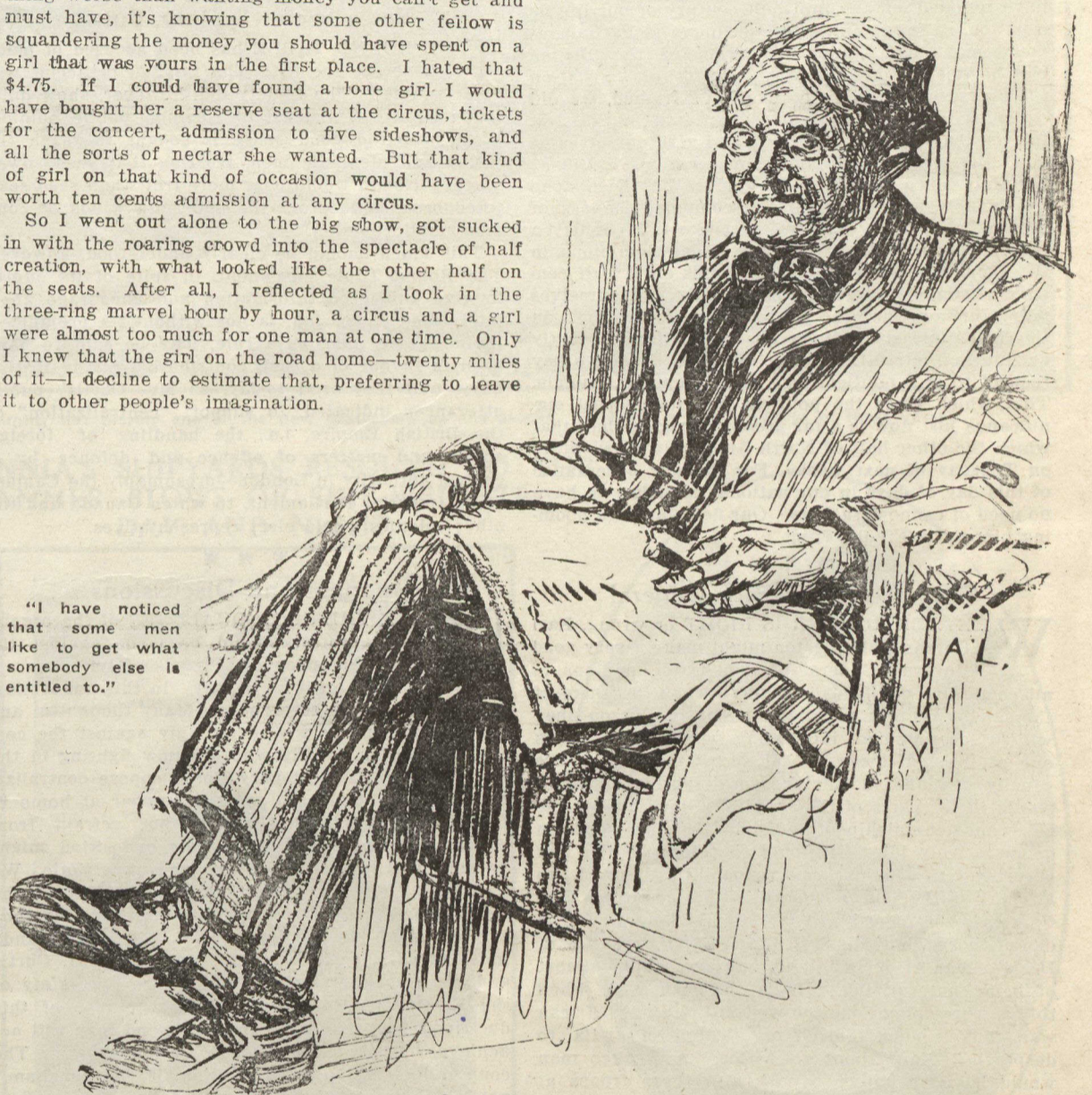
on by the sawdust squad out at the Corners. But the nerve-tingling thing of the afternoon was the lacrosse match between the county town and Picketon. It was a marvelous, skull-endangering struggle. I was powerfully excited. Picketon won. The score was close. After that was over nobody seemed to take much interest in the rest of the programme—which included, as I remember, a game of baseball, a form of amusement just beginning to come into vogue in those parts.

And I am free to admit that it would have taken some imagination in 1881 to see in a game of baseball—even if one of the teams had been the celebrated Maple Leafs—any excitement compared to a good game of lacrosse. There again we have other heroes in 1916, and most of them don't grow up in Canada.

Supper at the Corkery House was a real goal scrimmage between hunger and plenty—with the circus pulling everybody. So far I had spent only 75 cents of my \$5.50. If there's any financial one thing worse than wanting money you can't get and must have, it's knowing that some other fellow is squandering the money you should have spent on a girl that was yours in the first place. I hated that \$4.75. If I could have found a lone girl I would have bought her a reserve seat at the circus, tickets for the concert, admission to five sideshows, and all the sorts of nectar she wanted. But that kind of girl on that kind of occasion would have been worth ten cents admission at any circus.

So I went out alone to the big show, got sucked in with the roaring crowd into the spectacle of half creation, with what looked like the other half on the seats. After all, I reflected as I took in the three-ring marvel hour by hour, a circus and a girl were almost too much for one man at one time. Only I knew that the girl on the road home—twenty miles of it—I decline to estimate that, preferring to leave it to other people's imagination.

"I have noticed that some men like to get what somebody else is entitled to."



Out among the sideshows after the big circus was over and the concert about to begin, I began to speculate again on the chance of seeing Maggie Malone. In such a cram it seemed impossible. In some of the sideshows there was an off chance. I went to three. The fourth I was considering whether or not—the snake-charmer this time, a really good-looking girl—when I became aware of two people arguing about it. The one went in; the other waited for him outside.

That was Maggie, trim as a young hen in a garden, just a bit frayed at the edges, but jaunty as ever; and when she saw me she spoke first—which was not at all the way I had intended.

"Jacob, ain't you lonesome?"

Maggie always seemed to be sincere. But of course I was too much of an amateur in the lingo of coquetry to know when she wasn't.

"Yes," I said, bluntly, "but I like it."

To which she replied:

"Yes you do—like ducks."

"I'm used to it. I been alone all day."

"Poor little orphan."

"And you know why," was my next hot-headed break into repartee. It was no use trying to be haughty with Maggie Malone.

"Early bird gets the worm," she said.

"Not before daylight, Maggie. Besides—you ain't any kind of a worm. You're a —"

She knew I was in a fizzle between criticism and compliment, and she interrupted me.

"You didn't see the animals unload, did you?"

She knew I hadn't. This was her way of jogging my memory on what a timid adventurer I had been. And as the conviction dawned upon me I suppose a scarlet poppy would have looked pale beside my face. I asked her,

"Why the Sam Hill didn't you stump me to be on hand at two a.m., then?"

To this her obvious and inevitable rejoinder was, "Well, why in the dickens didn't you have gumption enough to propose it?"

There was no regret in her voice; more like defiance. So I said,

"Maggie, you know very well that I hadn't the least idea I had any right to expect—"

"Fiddle-diddle-dee!" she interpolated.

"All right, then. If you don't believe that—let me tell you I think the top buggy seemed to you like a fine business and the old shoebox—"

That choked me. She knew she was caught; and when Maggie gave in that much she was too beautiful for language—at least such as I had in those days.

Then a sudden, impetuous desire seized me and I said,

"Maggie—come on with me now to the Corkery House—and go home with me in the old shoebox—just to be a —"

No use. Words weren't invented to explain just why I was fool enough to make such a proposal. She poohpoohed it. I knew she would. Besides, Dave would be out in a jiffy. It took a powerful snake-charmer to offset Maggie Malone, even if he had been with her all day and I hadn't a word with her till now.

"All right," I said, with a brave show of temper. "I'll make both of you sorry—that you didn't do it."

So saying, as they tell us in novels, I turned upon my heel and walked swiftly away from that glittering, thumping, torturing circus; back up town to the Corkery House where I ferreted out Sambo, bribing him with a quarter to give Bob just enough water and no more, telling him that I had a scheme on foot—and I had.

By the time I got my feet planted against the old dashboard the town was swarming with home-bound rigs. I trotted Bob leisurely out of town on to the gravel road, past the circus just beginning to

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