

The Shoestring Boy

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one of themselves, he was so small, and treated him as a brother accordingly.

The burly policeman on the beat knew him; so did the Greek peanut-vendor, and the girl from sunny Italy with the street-piano.

Came the balmy days of spring, and in their midst, race-week. Mornings and evenings the street in front of the big store and the bigger hotel near-by was gay with groups of handsomely-gowned and bejewelled women, and flashily-attired and prosperous-looking race men.

The shivers had disappeared from my little friend, but he was still clad in the same old winter rags, and he greeted me with his wonted grin whenever I pressed a coin into his black little paw.

As I passed him on the first day of the races I said to him: "How's trade?"

"Gee, dem race-fellers is fine," piped he. "One big guy t'rew me up in de air t'-day, an' said I'd be his Mascot fer de races, an' 'e gi' me a dollar."

A couple of sporty "fellers" with diamond headlights passed by and threw the youngster some change, with a laugh and a joke.

The kid said, looking up at me, "Gee, Mister, me throat is sore t'-day. Me fer home. S'long."

The next day I looked in vain in his accustomed place for the little lad. He was not there. After searching diligently without result, I opined that he had withstood the chills of winter only to be saved for Death's spring harvest. So I promised myself to take another route home in future.

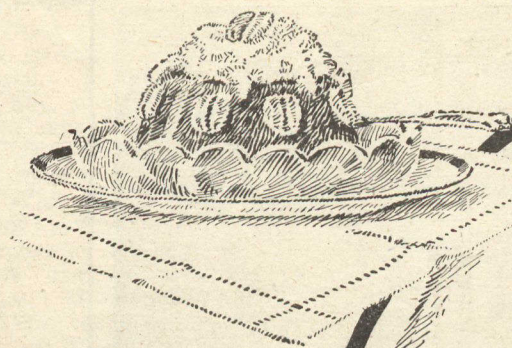
However, on the last race-day I was obliged to pass that way once more, and again I saw nothing of my little friend. As I quickened my pace to get by the spot where he was wont to be, I heard a familiar voice huskily call: "Mister,—say, Mister!" Turning, I saw a sight that held me suspended between laughter and tears. There was the kid right enough. But what a transformation! Gone was the scrimpy coat, gone the shabby cap, the worn-out shoes, the threadbare hose. In their place were velvet and patent leather and silk. He was a vision of crimson plush from head to foot—Little Lord Fauntleroy reincarnated, save for the flaxen curls.

"I t'ought you wuz gone away or sumpin'," he cried. "I wuz lookin' fer y' t' show y' me clocs."

"You look like a Christmas tree," I said. "Where did you get all the finery?"

"Dese is me Mascot clocs. Y' know de guy wot I'm his Mascot. Well, he gi' me dem. Say, he's a prince. He's a bookmaker, an' he says ever sence he gi' me de dollar an' made me his Mascot, all de horses wot he bet on wins. So de oder day he tooked me in de big store an' buyed me dese togs, an' made me wear dem. Gee, dey felt funny at first. But people wot used to growl at me like I wuz a dog, says now, 'No, me little man, I don't want any laces t'-day. Now run away home.' An' me own customers buys jus' a same, an' brings people to look at me. De man wot I'm his Mascot tooked me fer a ride in his car, an' he's goin' to gi' me Mudder a lot o' money to keep fer me wen de races is over. Gee, I hope I grows up quick so's I kin be a bookmaker at de races. Dere's some class to dem guys—gee, dere he is now. S'long, Mister."

And the little red figure pattered across the walk to the curb, where a big, fat, jolly-looking man with a sparkler the size of a walnut in his scarf, was sitting in an automobile.



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