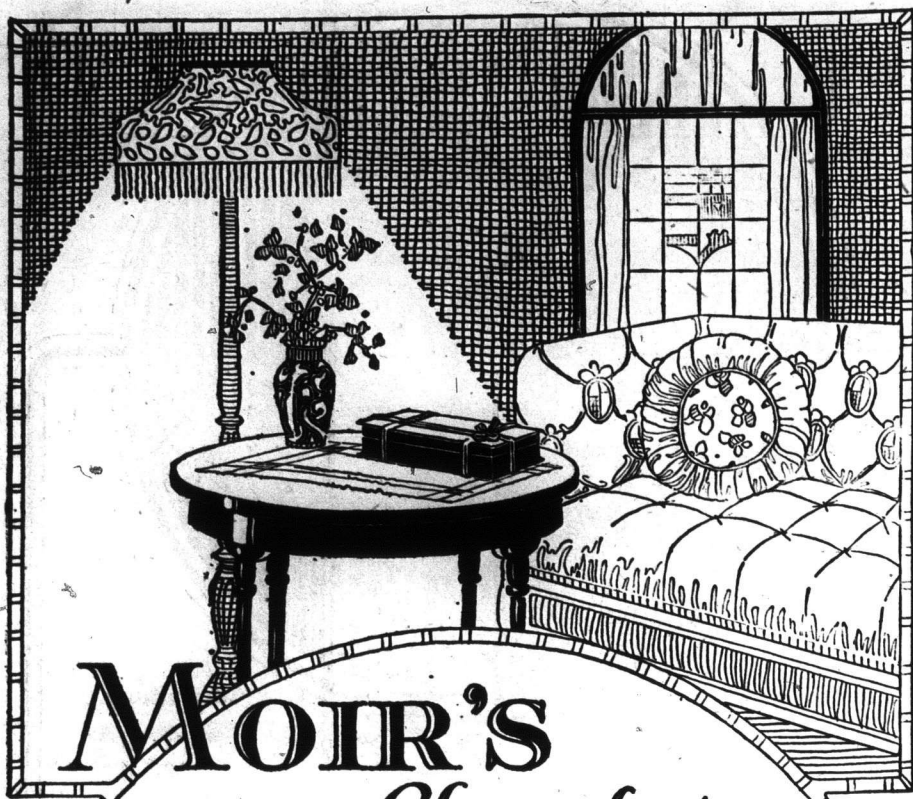


Light-Fingered

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Edith G. Bayne



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"My dear woman!" he exclaimed, in hushed tones. "Do you mean she—"

DR. JOHN SERVICE, rising young specialist in respiratory and nervous ailments, escorted his most prominent patient to the hall door. He always did this in the case of a lady, wealthy or otherwise, but to-day there was a very inefficient Swedish damsel doing duty in the ante-room and in addition to a lack of method in keeping her cap on straight, she had shown three patients out by way of the crowded waiting room—a heinous offence. Dr. Service was most meticulous about seeming trifles.

As he re-seated himself at his big, littered desk he turned over the cheque he had just received and swiftly endorsed it. The amount was two hundred dollars. The door leading to the waiting-room opened.

"Negst — Yas?" — came sing-songily from the aperture.

The doctor looked up in some surprise. "I'm through for to-day," he said, briefly, and turned frowningly to his papers again.

"But—dere is yet anodder," insisted the voice.

"No patients admitted after five-thirty, Thora. It is now almost seven."

"Yust one more—a lady," said the girl, entering.

"Had she an appointment?"

The girl shook her head and the cap found a jaunty but insecure resting-place over her left ear.

"I had to let her in. She awful bad I tink."

"What! Ill?"

"Worried. Afraid like. From de country, she said."

"Well — send her in. But stop a moment. Here's two dollars for your day here. I only took you on trial you know, and I'm very sorry but you won't do at all. Now you go down to the Imperial Steam Laundry like a good girl and tell them I sent you. I'll 'phone them. They'll give you a nice job at the mangle or something. No doubt you'll make a much better hit with them than you have with me. Don't slam the door going out, please."

The girl took her money and went out and the next moment she had ushered in the lady from rural parts.

Dr. Service had pulled a little red-velvet covered book from one of the inner pigeon-holes of his desk and had turned the leaves till he came to the one bearing the date of the day just about concluded. Here in his small, firm calligraphy he entered the following item:

Received from Mrs. Clay Washburn on account two hundred dollars. One hundred credited to Fidus Achates."

Other items preceding this new entry were similar, not alone in form but in the fifty-fifty manner in which the creditor known as Fidus Achates always shared the great doctor's profits. Even when the fee was but five dollars, the

regulation and minimum amount, the creditor received his two-fifty.

Dr. Service blotted the entry carefully and returned the little book to its place. Then he wheeled his chair around.

"Good afternoon," he said, as cheerfully as though he were but beginning his usual day of listening to trouble and prescribing remedies instead of finishing the fag-end and being more than ordinarily tired, mentally and physically.

The lady who stood just within the threshold of the room was elderly. More, she appeared to be quite unduly agitated. He rose and pulled forward a comfortable arm-chair. Many women were nervous when admitted to the inner office of a specialist, but Dr. Service had the fine faculty, partly natural and partly acquired, of putting the most affrighted at their ease. Not by a brisk rubbing of his hands and breezy comments on the weather. Merely by his air of friendliness and imperturbable calm and a certain quiet sympathy that was a kind of reflection of the man's inherent nature and which was felt rather than seen by trembling creatures dreading an operation.

The woman sank into the chair. She was a slender, fragile little person, in decent, country-made clothes, and she played nervously with the handle of her worn handbag, as she regarded him timidly from behind her spectacles. She appeared to be between fifty and sixty.

"I—I came to you, doctor, because I felt that you were the only man for the—the case," she began in a tremulous voice.

He bowed. His mind busied itself with professional memories. He had seen her before, he was almost sure.

"I was here once, about three years ago," she went on, as though reading his thoughts. "My name is Mrs. Lister. My husband —"

"Oh, yes!" said Dr. Service, sitting up straight.

"It was when you first started up here," she resumed. "I came about Bobby's throat. He —"

"Yes, yes. Of course. Mrs. Lister of Vale?"

The woman seemed pleased. "To think you'd remember! A great doctor —"

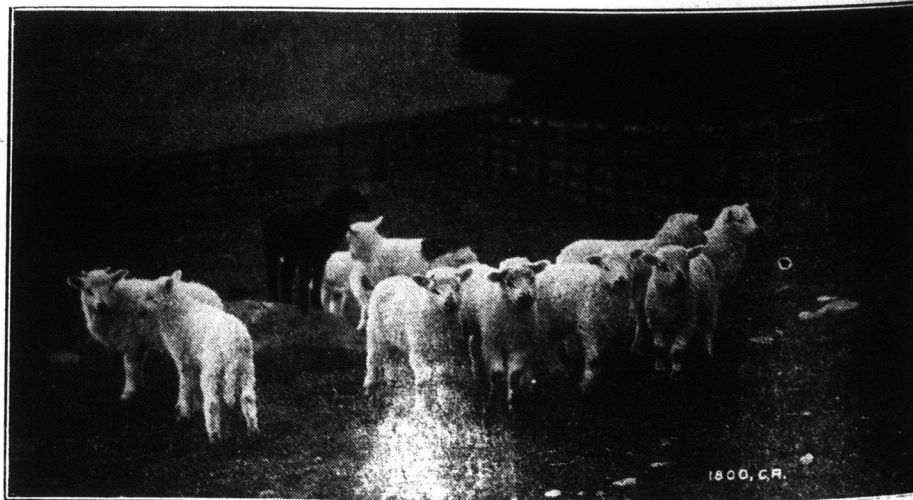
"And what can I do for you, Mrs. Lister?" he interrupted, with a sunny smile. "Why didn't you send in your name? Had I known —"

"I wasn't waiting long. I came in on the four-thirty train," explained Mrs. Lister losing a good deal of her tenseness. "I—it isn't myself. It's about my daughter, doctor."

"Oh."

"And I'm afraid it isn't in your regular line. When I was here, that time, we got chatting, you mind, while the nurse got Bobby ready. You were trying to keep me from being scared, I guess."

Continued on Page 9



Expectation