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was this?—yours or my father's?"

The naivete of the question took Lambaire off his guard.

"Your father discovered it," he said, unthinkingly, and as he stopped, Whitey came to his rescue.

"But we floated it," he said, in a tone that suggested that on the score of ownership no more need be said.

### CHAPTER IX.

CYNTHIA SUTTON was twenty-three, and, by all standards, beautiful. Her hair was a rich chestnut, her eyes were big, and of that shade which is either blue or grey, according to the light in which they were seen. Her nose was straight, her upper lip short; her lips full and red, her skin soft and unblemished. "She has the figure of a woman, and the eyes of a child," said Amber describing her, "and she asked me to come to tea."

"And you didn't go," said Peter, nodding his head approvingly. "You realized that your presence might compromise this innermost flower. 'No,' you sez to yourself, 'no, I will go away, carrying a fragrant memory, an'—'"

"To be exact, my Peter," said Amber, "I forgot all about the appointment in the hurry and bustle of keeping out of Lambaire's way."

"They were sitting in the little room under the roof of 19, Redcow Court, and the sweet song of the caged birds filled the apartment with liquid melody."

"No," continued Amber thoughtfully, "I must confess to you, my Peter, that I had none other of those interesting conversations with myself that your romantic soul suggests."

He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock in the forenoon, and he stared through the open window, his mind intent upon a problem.

"I ought to see her," he said, half to himself; he was grouping for excuses. This business of young Sutton's . . . compass and chart . . . hidden treasures and all that sort of thing, eh, my Peter?"

Peter's eyes were gleaming from behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and his hand shook with excitement, as he rose and made his way to the cretonne curtained shelves.

"I've got a yarn here," he said, fumbling eagerly amongst his literary treasures, "that will give you some ideas: money and pieces of eight—what is a piece of eight?" He turned abruptly with the question.

"A sovereign," said Amber promptly, "eight half-crowns." He was in the mood when he said just the first thing that came into his head.

"Um!" Peter resumed his search, and Amber watched him with the gentle amusement that one reserves for the enthusiasm of children at play.

"Here it is," said Peter.

He drew forth from a pile of books one, gaudy of colour and reckless of design. "This is the thing,"—he dusted the paper cover tenderly—"Black Eyed Nick, or the Desperado's Dream of Ducats; how's that?"

Amber took the book from the old man and inspected it, letting the pages run through his fingers rapidly.

"Fine," he said, with conviction. "Put it with my pyjamas, I'll read myself to sleep with it"—he spoke a little absently, for his mind was elsewhere.

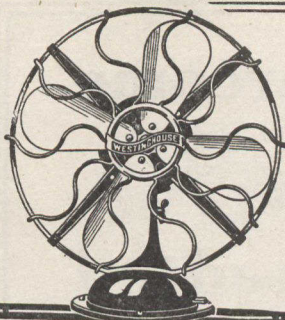
It was a relief to him when Peter left him to "shop." Shopping was the one joy of Peter's life, and usually entailed a very careful rehearsal.

"A penn'oth of canary seed, a quarter of tea, two of sugar, four bundles of wood, a pint of paraffin, tell the greengrocer to send me half a hundred of coal, eggs, bit of bacon—you didn't like the bacon this morning, did you, Amber?—some kippers, a chop—how will a chop suit you?—and a pound of new potatoes; I think that's all."

Leaning out of the window, Amber saw him disappearing up the court, his big rush bag gripped tightly in his hand, his aged top-hat tilted to the back of his head.

Amber waited until he was out of sight, then made his way to his bedroom and commenced to change his clothes.

A quarter of an hour later he was



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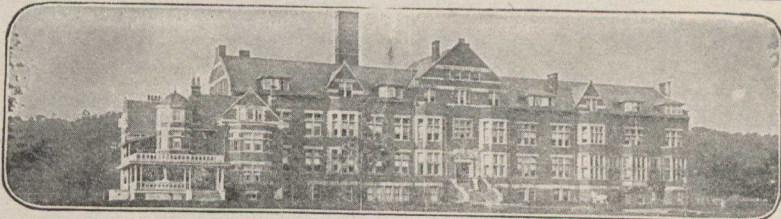
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