

A CLANDESTINE CORRESPONDENCE

Of course, it was a silly notion, and she didn't expect that anything would come of it, but Mrs. Bleeker had set her heart upon arranging some sort of a clandestine correspondence. She knew it was a rather vulgar form of diversion, but she meant to cover up her identity so thoroughly that she might drop the whole affair at any time without fear of discovery. She came out of her imaginative mind many reasons that seemed to condone, if they did not justify, the little scheme. Mrs. Bleeker, her husband, was a man of business, and she was still struggling to keep out of debt. She was suffering from ennui, amusements were expensive, and Curtis showed each night when he came home the evidences of busy, nerve-racking, business days. Sometimes he didn't come home till past midnight, and she was beginning to doubt his fidelity. She was sure of her fidelity under any conditions, and she was fascinated with the idea of getting up some sort of a letter to a man whose name she never expected or cared to see.

She confided the plan to Miss Annie Cuthbert, her best friend, who had a typewriter, and between them they fixed up an advertisement, which appeared in the next Sunday newspaper, as follows:

WANTED.—BY A YOUNG, HANDSOME, intelligent woman, the acquaintance of a sympathetic, educated and moral man; object, the exchange of instructive and helpful letters. Address, Q 33, this office.

Miss Cuthbert went for the answers and the clerk handed her many. That night Curtis didn't come home, and for dinner, and his wife, for the first time in her life, was glad of it. She went with her friend into the kitchen, locked the doors, and together they sat down to go over those answers to "Q 33." Most of them were idiotic, of course; a few were sane enough, but mercenary or commonplace or ill-spelled. Some contained photographs of love-lorn youths, with curls and foolish smiles. Some were the ridiculous complaints of old men who lived or neglected their opportunities to be loved. It was very funny, the whole business, and Mrs. Bleeker and Annie laughed over the reading and the photographs till the bell announced Mrs. Bleeker. Then Annie bundled the stuff into her satchel and said, "Come over in the morning, Chloe, and we'll answer them."

But when it came to formulating a letter to the most "likely" of the correspondents, and they saw what sort of what subtlety and what time it required, they determined to burn up all the letters but one and make the most of that. The lucky object of their attention signed, rather printed, his name as Roger Fortescue, and his address was "General Delivery." He had included no photograph, his type-written letter showed every evidence of education, good breeding, and even reverence for the unknown "Q 33," and forthwith he became a personage, something of a hero in the minds of both these good women, who never expected to see him, and would have laughed at his frank confession, his gentle hints, his dignified melancholy—if they could.

But they couldn't. Roger Fortescue's letters more than satisfied their first anticipation. His typewritten words in successive letters of increasing length were almost vocal of a gentleman, wise and kind, and Mrs. Bleeker and her friend began to endow him with every imaginable virtue. In the replies which the young wife wrote she strove to rise to his standard of rhetorical excellence, to his splendid imagery, to his vague but winsome messages of love. She no longer permitted her friend, Annie Cuthbert, to dictate even an occasional letter.

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al sentence, and at last she even failed to share with her friend one of the letters which, as usual, she had received at the general delivery window. Then Mrs. Bleeker, almost unconsciously, began to compare Curtis, her husband, with the unknown Fortescue. Why had the master of her destiny never written such letters to her? Why was he not elegant like Rodger? There she had begun to call him "Rodger," she became a bit scared then, for she was a true and dutiful wife, and she and Bleeker had exchanged very few letters in their courtship days. Perhaps he would have written just as well as Fortescue if he'd had the opportunity, she thought. And then, in a sudden realization of her folly and perhaps of some subtle and hateful sense of disloyalty, she went to Annie's house, and wrote a long letter to Fortescue, in which she begged his pardon for "disturbing" him into a correspondence that must appear deceitful, fruitless and even humiliating, when she, "Beatrice Landon," admitted, she was now married. She expected that this long and self-deprecating letter would put a final stop to his letters, but after a week, during which she did not inquire for any letters at the window, she asked Annie to "see if there was anything." There were five! "I, too," wrote Rodger Fortescue, "am married. My wife is the embodiment of all virtue, beauty and intelligence, but he didn't understand him, that he could not blame her, but that in seeking a correspondence with "Mrs. Landon" he had only tried after that impersonal, and he thought, unselfish gratification which comes of the spiritual and mental commerce of two kindred souls. It was very fine, said Annie and Chloe, and the latter almost shed tears as she declared, positively, that she would make no answer. And so the affair stopped.

It was about two weeks later that Mrs. Bleeker began to perceive a mighty change in the behavior of her husband. He had become so considerate, so confidential, so tender, so assiduous in his attentions to her that she felt like a girl again in the wooing days. But after tea, one night, he said, with sudden embarrassment, "Chloe, I know you'll laugh, but I did a very queer thing this summer. I answered an 'ad' of some woman who wanted to correspond with a moral and intelligent man of sympathy."

"What was her name?" gasped Mrs. Bleeker, getting white and ready to faint. "Don't get angry, Chloe," he said quickly, mistaking her fright for rage. "I never signed my name, but, honest now, for a while I thought my correspondent must be—YOU, I—"

"Yes, yes, Curtis! You thought—!" she almost choked with terror. "I thought it might be you, and I was almost sure when she—her name was 'Beatrice Landon'—admitted that she was a married woman. I told her that I was a telegraph operator, and Chloe, I thought that would put an end to it, but what do you think?"

"What, Curtis?" "Well, I can't say right back, said she didn't believe me. Insisted that no married man ever praised his wife as I had done, and—inclosed her picture."

"Her picture?" "Yes, look!" He pulled out a photograph and showed the fair face of Annie Cuthbert. "And now Mrs. Bleeker doesn't know what to think of her friend, Miss Cuthbert, but they've kept the secret for three years. Curtis never let Annie know what he knew, and never 'let on' that she took up the Fortescue correspondence where Chloe let it drop, and Chloe has never told her husband that she was 'Beatrice Landon.' But she is fonder of him than ever, because he did praise her, and she, in those letters—Chicago Record Herald.

"What the blazes is it to you?" I asked him, sulkily enough for I confess I was feeling rather sore, "if you needn't bother your good ones yourself you needn't bother mine." "Oh, said he hastily: 'no offense meant. Only I thought I might be able to tell you a sure thing that was going to be pulled off tomorrow. I never hurts to do another fellow a favor, you know, but if you're upbush, by the way, I'm a telegraph operator. I felt rather taken aback by the answer he gave me rather abrupt interruption, to make assurance doubly sure, the time you are most certain to get tripped up."

"I acknowledge that there is a tinge of bitterness to my words, but the bitterness is defensible. If any man has a right to denounce the goddess of fortune, I have, for I have wooed her in season and out, and all ways in vain. And the latest blow is the hardest she ever dealt me. For a brief moment I had visions of a harvest of golden coins. I felt that my dreams were absolutely certain of realization; that it was morally impossible I could not become a rich man. But escape I did, and this is how it happened:

"For some months I had been dallying with the horses in a poolroom, and a hundred miles away from this flourishing borough, and had been having my customary siege of ill-luck. Every system that might be worth the bad eventually, no matter how promising it had been in the beginning. Even that 6 to 5, 4 to 5 game laid me low, after weeks of patiently watching the odds to catch those same figures, and I was about to give up the game in disgust and quit the turf forever, when I fell in with a man who inspired me with a new-born hope.

"He was a tall, raw-boned Yankee of the species that haunts from Maine, and he was shrewd to an extreme. He had only been in the poolroom once or twice when he accosted me.

"'Say,' he drawled, 'it bears to me as if you were down on your luck. What's the use of trying to press it when things are running against you? I haven't seen you cash a bet today, nor the last day I was here, either.'"

"'I've rented a room on the line of the wire that runs into this barn, tonight. I'm going to try the wire. Tomorrow if you're with me and will place the money for us we'll make the biggest killing this room ever knew.'"

"It was a bold proposition, and I seldom successful that I shook my head despairingly. But then the fellow flashed into my mind that perhaps this would be one of those positions of its succeeding. I plied him with questions, and we finally made a room in which he had his instrument and listened to all his arguments, pro and con. At last began the way of the king of wire tapping. Soon I was fully convinced that the scheme was feasible.

"We parted for the matter out before that the safest thing to do would be to doctor one race only, and that one race. Investigating, we found that this would be the seventh on the St. Louis card, and a careful consulta-

tion revealed that the rank outsider of the field in that event would be Over Street. Accordingly it was determined that I should get to the poolroom in plenty of time to place the money, and that he should hold back till the actual report of the race and send in a substitute in which Over Street would be declared the winner. By handling the race last he would accordingly lose the race, but the money would be secured, and then the police would be after us in jig time. Moreover, we calculated that by the time the race was over the money would have taken in enough money to make no trouble about the wager I was to place. This would total fully \$2,000, half of which was the money I was to take, and the other half, mainly borrowed from wealthy acquaintances and friends on whose trail I camped until long past midnight.

"We met again by appointment at noon the next day, and he informed me that everything was in apple-pie order and the wire was strung. As it was my custom to be at the poolroom early every afternoon, I decided it would not be wise to make this an exception to the rule. Accordingly we parted after having arrived at a complete understanding. I hastened to the barn, and was soon making my customary moderate wagers on both Eastern and Western tracks.

"Strange to say, I was lucky. Everything I picked out seemed to win, and in three hours I was five hundred to the good. A tall chap, with a monocle, whom I knew by sight, came over to me just as I was cashing in on the sixth St. Louis card, and congratulated me. He was one of those who had been cognizant of the ill-fortune I had hitherto been experiencing.

"I suppose," said he, with a smile, 'you're going to back Josie F. for the limit in the next, and then start for home with a satchelful of greenbacks.' "Josie F.," I replied. "Not by a jugful. She couldn't win that race if it was fixed for her."

"Ah," said he, mysteriously, 'get wise. The race is fixed for her. See those men in the corner? They've got Josie F. down for a killing. I know them. When they bet on a thing it's ripe.' "He spoke with such an air of conviction that if I had not remembered my friend in the room doing the same, I would have followed his advice. But I only thanked him, and, out of a desire to reciprocate favors, told him that I was as certain of Over Street winning as he was of Josie F.

"Cut it out," said he, 'get out of your trance. Why, man, those fellows are going to slice this room wide open. You know the man behind the counter here. He'll take any old bet on any old thing with the sky for a limit, and that's about the limit of Josie F. Josie wants. Fall into line, for heaven's sake!'"

"While he was still speaking the card for the race came out. The price was short, as there were only four starters, but Over Street was at the comfortable odds of 10 to 1. I saw the coterie from the corner, and I told them that I was going to place my money on Josie F., and I fell back second. Second betting would surely give Over Street's price away, and I was right. When the card was displayed again the room had Josie F. a hot favorite over Linden Ella and a long shot over Josie F. I mingled with the crowd in front of the wicket.

"Do you want twenty-five hundred of this?" I asked in an unconcerned way. "The cashier looked at me out of the corner of his eye. "Josie F. is it?" he inquired. "No," said I, "Over Street." "Sure, you're on. But when did you get at the pipe? You've been cleaning things up this afternoon, and it'd be a pity to—"

"Carve away," said I, 'carve away. You can pay me out of that Josie F. money.' "He smiled at me with an air of profound sympathy, but I only strove over to the other window, as I knew I would have to collect my money in a hurry and vanish. There was the delay at the start that I had expected, but it was even longer than I had counted on, and I began to get nervous. The scheme had miscarried somehow. But presently the tick-tick-tick of the instrument behind the partition began its merry music.

"According to the story told by the wire Linden Ella got off in front, with Menace second, Josie F. third. They kept this order right up to the end, where Josie F. forged in front, with Linden Ella second and Menace next, five lengths away.

"Great Scott!" I groaned. I suppose the fool thinks it will be a pleasing joke on the crowd to make Over Street sweep in front at the finish with a fall wise to such a game I'm not fit to try to pick another winner." "Then came the final call: 'Josie F. wins by a head, Menace second, Linden Ella third, a length away.'"

"What! Over Street nowhere? In less than a minute I was out of the room and dashing down the stairs. I found the telegrapher, with a pleased smile on his features, calmly packing up his instrument for a few moments. "Hello!" said he, 'you cashed in quickly.' "Cashed in the devil!" I yelled. "What kind of a game have you been springing on me?"

"Game? What do you mean?" said he. "Didn't you place your coin?" "I placed it, I cursed well," said I, 'on Over Street.' "Well, Over Street was right. That's what I sent in."

"You sent in Josie F., you liar!" "If he hadn't been a great, big, self-controlled man there would have been murder then, but as it was he merely took me by the collar and shook me. 'Come out of here,' said he, 'and we'll go back to the poolroom. I tell you again I sent in Over Street.' "I was almost weeping with rage when we got out of the house. He was as excited as I was, but kept cool. I knew he suspected me of what I suspected him of, and we were both deceived.

"As we ran toward the poolroom we met the tall chap, running in the opposite direction. After three days I took two boxes of Dodd's Kidney Pills and am a perfect well."

TRICKS IN ALL TRADES

How a Street Fakir Draw a Crowd and Got Money From It.

A small, active and enterprising vendor of the itinerant variety was standing near the corner of School and Washington streets, and the other evening loudly expounding the contents of a sealed envelope which he held in one hand, while with the other he shook a small, gaudily-colored pamphlet in the faces of the "rubbering" crowd.

"Get together, gentlemen, get together," he exclaimed with a cheery dialect, and an expressive sweep of the hand toward the goodly crowd that hovered near.

"Is that all we get?" inquired a tall, lanky chap with a sleepy face and a moist moustache. The vendor pretended unconsciousness, and the crowd snickered. "Now gentlemen, I'm selling you this envelope for a nickel, a half dime, 5 cents, and I'm giving you this book at the same time. The book is advertising, but to place it in your hand I must sell you this envelope."

"What's the matter with selling the book and giving the envelope away?" queried the lanky chap, clearing his throat noisily. The answer was a scornful glance. "What's in the envelope?" asked an interesting spectator.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the man of the sleepy face, and the crowd echoed him. The vendor looked fierce for a moment and then said: "For the benefit of those who have just arrived I will open it, and he opened the ordinary manila envelope and took out five plain white cards. 'Hold them up to the light gentlemen, that's all. That's all.' "And I guess it'll be enough," vouchsafed the lanky chap, with a queer grin.

A smile ran through the crowd while a number loudly laughed at the suppressed anger of the little man in the plaid suit. "Gentlemen, these cards are transparent. One is called 'The