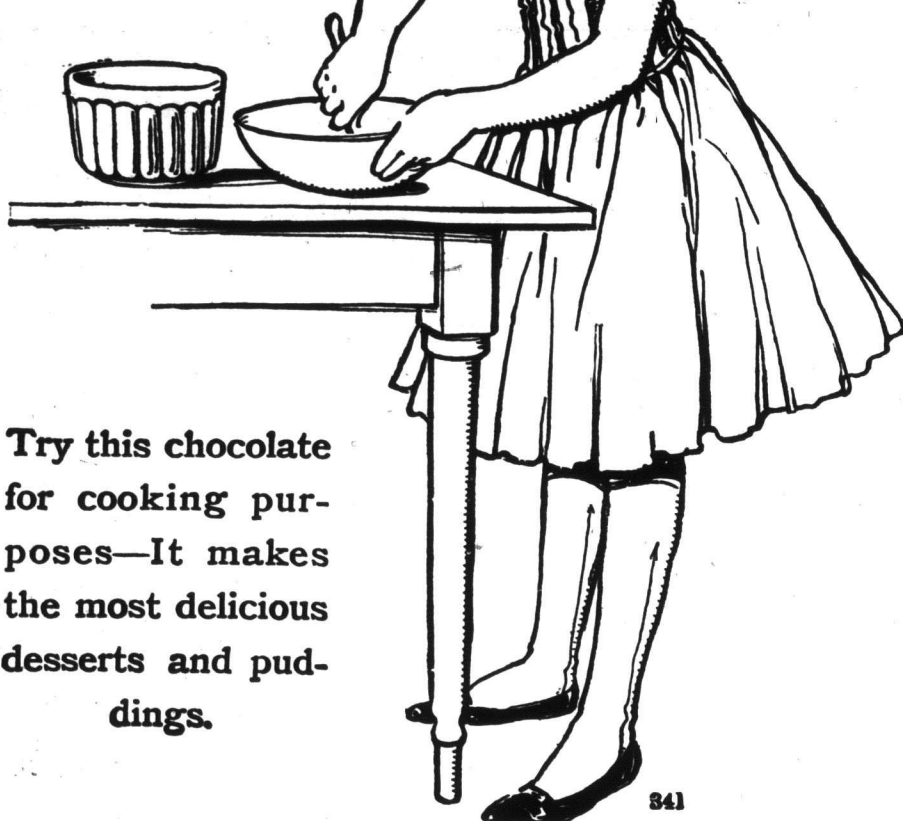


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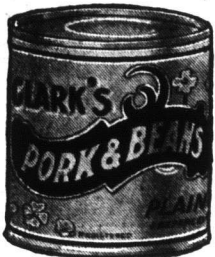
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341

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The Lucky Ring

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert.

The girl sat in front of what had once been a cheery fire, and ate the last of what had once been a quarter of a pound of biscuits, and realized that she was cold and still desperately, gnawingly hungry.

Dimly, at the very back of her tired mind, she realized other things—first that she was a failure, an orphan, practically friendless, and entirely moneyless. Moreover handicapped by a studio-bedroom with an unpaid rent, and the slowly dying belief that she had been born with an artistic temperament.

But for the pluck inherited from honest farming ancestors she might have cried. Instead she swallowed the last crumbs of the biscuits, gathered together three or four of her drawings, and determined to try and dispose of them.

The room swam round a little as she pinned on her hat.

It was lying almost at the door of the studio—a gold ring, curiously and exquisitely wrought, and jewelled with a fine gleaming emerald; it was that which caught her eye.

Of course it must belong to the unknown young man who had taken the studio, and, obviously she must return it to him. She raised her hand to the bell, and then stood staring at the trinket in her hand.

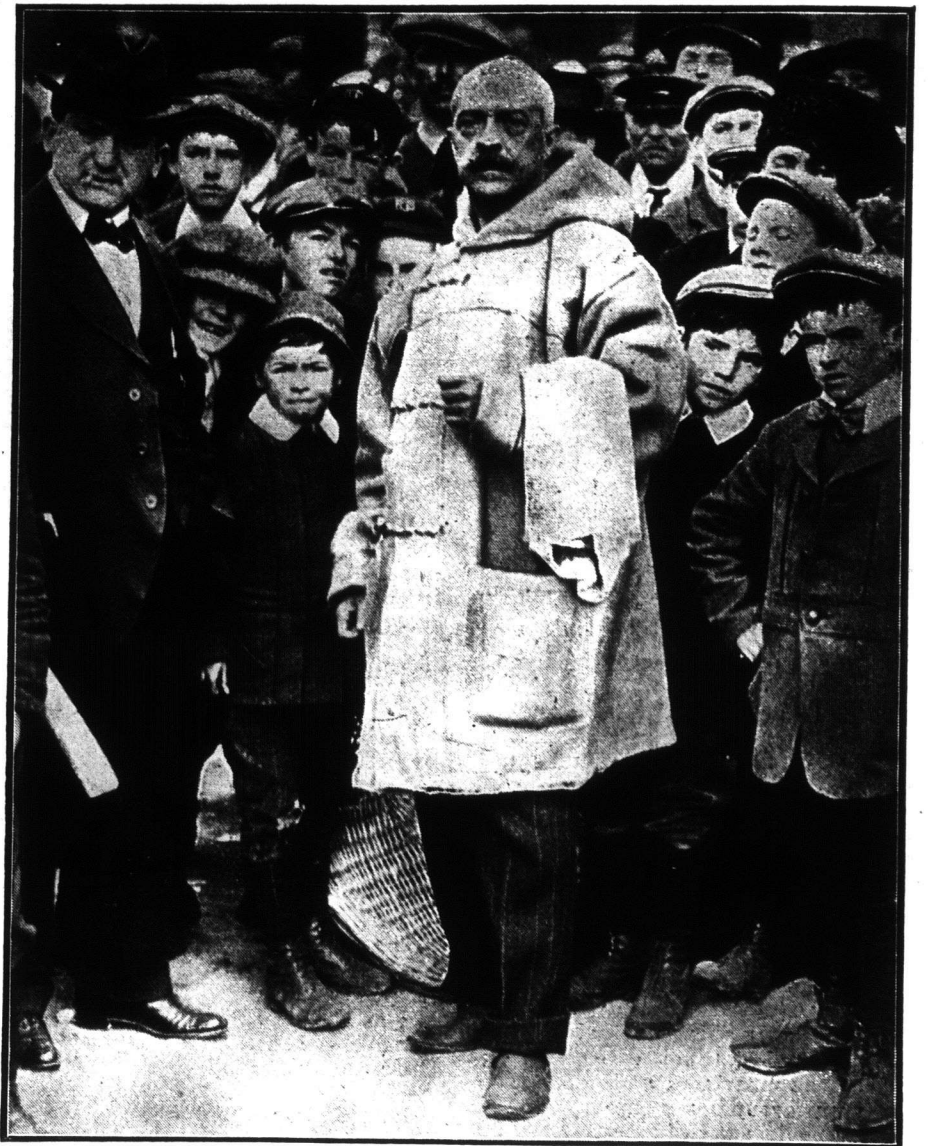
It represented food—much food—warmth, decent clothes, the rent she owed and—she was cold and absolutely hungry.

Very quietly her cold fingers closed over the ring. The owner was rich!

She flushed crimson, and pushed the bell—and again, but there was no answer.

Then she looked again at the ring, and shivered.

She had pawned everything she had,



Cuban Consul General who was rescued from the "Lusitania"
Julian de Avala, in a bath robe which he had to use. He was rescued almost naked.

A year ago things had seemed so different! How they had discussed life at the Art School. How they had sneered at the commonplace public! What fun they had made of its ideals and ambitions!

She, Ivy Latimer, had made fun with them, added her sneers to theirs. But with her father's death, the careless life of the Art School came to an end, and Ivy dazed for the moment, but quite confident of her own powers, had chosen Art as her career.

Her talent was small, her pluck indomitable, but in spite of it she had come to this.

What wouldn't she give for a good square meal? She opened the studio door and stood on the landing till the stairs should have ceased to bow to her, then slowly, she descended.

On the second landing she paused feeling faint from want of food.

Her tired eyes fell on the studio door facing her. She wondered who had taken it—it had been to let for so long.

She knew that the new comer was a young man and that he was rich, but she had never seen him and his name was quite unknown to her. Conscious of faint curiosity she bent forward to read it on the brass plate, "Julius A. Cowan."

She turned away listlessly to continue her descent, and saw — It.

worth pawning; all her little personal effects had gone for coal and food. She had no delusions now; she knew she would never be a great artist. She was just a shivering ordinary young woman, without friends.

The door of the caretaker's room downstairs opened, and there floated up a smell of meat cooking.

With a little sob, Ivy Latimer raised her hand and pressed again, and again there was no response.

For a second she hesitated. All her instincts, all her training, all that she had inherited from her pretty, gentle mother, and her upright practical father, had taught her to abhor this thing she contemplated.

"I—I am not stealing it," she muttered, and it was as if she silenced those generations of fine ancestors. "I—I shall pawn it, and then when things go all right, I will redeem it, and return it to him."

She did not dare to reason as she hurried down the stairs past the scent of roasting meat which had been her undoing.

The city, only a year ago, had seemed to her all that was beautiful, but now dingy to her eyes as she hurried through it to the pawnshop. She remembered it, for she had often stopped to admire the exquisite old things displayed in the windows—rare jewellery, brass and copper