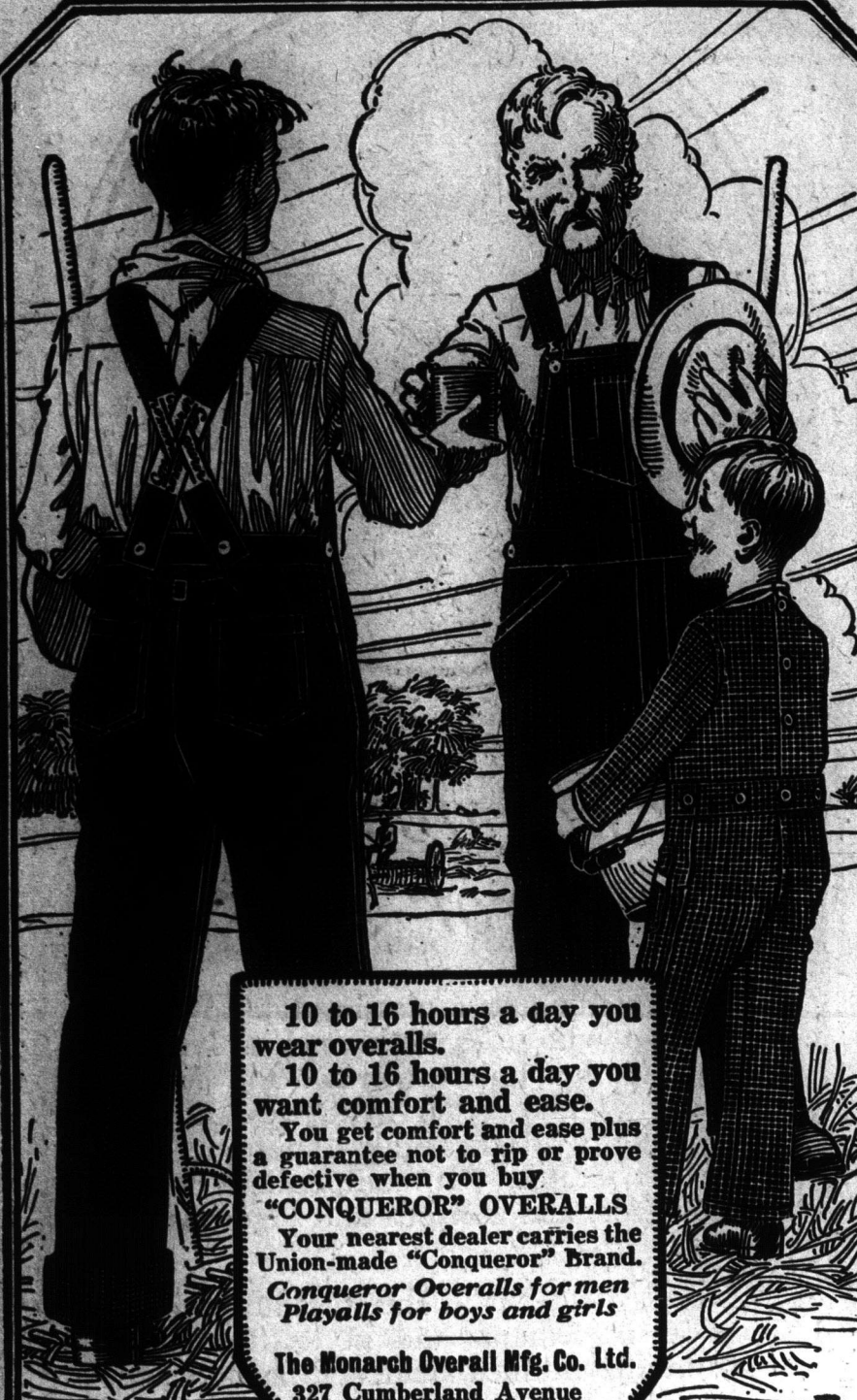
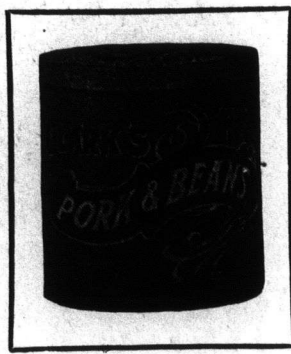




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to make sure that all that had happened was not a dream, and glanced at his arms and legs, and was really gratified to find that with her out of the room they did not seem any longer or more awkward than those of the average man of his height.

Some one kept slipping a muff back and forth across the plans of the new wing to his factory over which he was working, making a spell of phantasmal stage mystery. Who was the maestro? Why should it make him happy forever to have Toinette beat a railroad train? There was more to the story than a whim that she should appear in Philadelphia and New York the same evening.

The three engagements which had stared at him from the calendar pad were brought under one head at the dinner hour. The Falcon, which rose above the gleaming city on that crisp winter's night, was a different looking aeroplane from the Falcon in her summer rig. The boxlike structure over the seats gave the effect of the body of a Brobdingnagian interplanetary bird. As warm as toast when he descended to the roof of the Aragon in Philadelphia, Rodd looked down on skurrying men in the streets with their hands to their ears, and on chauffeurs in rough furs resembling so many clumsy bears with heads drawn shiveringly between the shoulders.

When he entered the theater he heard a sound like the distant beating of surf, and he saw that Toinette had just gone on the stage. When she came off, with thunders of applause following her, she ran to Rodd and gave his fingers an earnest press, while the audience continued to call.

"I love it! I love to dance!" she cried. "But only one encore to-night!"

The instant she returned, all the theater was silent, as if, indeed, the people were listening to the singing of her feet. A third time she went back, but only to kiss her toe in adieu. Then her maid threw a heavy fur coat about her and thrust the two precious feet in satin slippers into big fur boots.

"And the make-up box? Mon Dieu! That is everything! I must not forget that!" said Toinette, which struck Rodd as odd, considering that she was not made-up at all.

"Here!" said the maid, taking a box off a chair. Toinette slipped it under her arm.

"All right, Meestaire Rodd—queeck!" But as they passed out she paused long enough to pull the long knotted forelock in the center of the comedian's bald wig, and that comedian's round face through its grease paint, flashed with happiness like the moon coming out from under a cloud.

They ran across the street into the doorway of the hotel and were shot up in the back elevator to the roof, where the Falcon's engines were softly humming in readiness.

"It's cozy!" she said, when she was seated inside the silken hous-

ing. "And why these woolly little wires like a cobweb over the walls?"

"They keep us warm," answered Rodd. "Otherwise, we'd be frozen by the terrific speed."

"Then I could not dance at the opera to-night," she said, "not until they stood me up beside the radiator and thawed me out—and then it would be too late, too late!"

The motors started; the runners creaked on the frosty track; they were already ascending.

"Oh—oh—oh!" she trilled. The lights of Philadelphia were trailing in confusion like thousands of comet tails. "That is your audience, Meestaire Rodd," she cried, with a gesture earthward, "and you wait not for the encore!"

"Those toes—those very valuable toes, are they tucked in snugly?" he said, bending over to see for himself that they were.

"Yes, those very valuable toes! Nevaire do I go on the stage but I have a little stage fright for them," she said. "What if they should not—not do as I bid them! They are what you call my capital, my kingdom, my all, is it not? Every morning when I wake up I look across the sheet at them so far away and say, 'Toes, are you there?' And they wiggle back, 'All right!'"

"Yes, I know how you feel. All the rods and planes and the ingines, they dance for me," said Rodd.

"And do you have the stage fright, too?"

"Yes," he confessed. "I never throw in the gear without a feeling that perhaps the Falcon will not respond. I never rise without fresh wonder to find myself flying. But if I break a toe I can get a new one, and you can't!"

"Non—nevaire!" She shuddered. "And I will grow old and can't dance any more. No! no!" She shook her head obstinately, defiantly, as if shaking off this shadow. "Non! I will keep young! Oh, that was the river—and it is gone like a needle shot through the cloth, n'est-ce-pas?" Then she looked about her inquiringly and exclaimed: "Voilà! I can save the time!" and took a mirror out of the box, hung it in a crotch of the asbestos-covered wires, and began making-up.

"It is a part of the trick for the maestro. Ah, but I have not told you about the maestro!" she added, turning to Rodd in surprise at the discovery, with one eyebrow darkened. "I ask you to do everything and explain nothing. Where shall I begin this bonne histoire? With what was the beginning, of course! I was a little girl this tall!"—she indicated the height by holding out the rouge brush and measuring carefully from the footrest—"a waif! I ran the errands for Madame of the bake-shop. 'The bread you ordered!' 'The cake you ordered, my lady!' And I dance—always I dance. The music, it touched the little springs in my toes! I danced for the love of the dance, just like I breathe the air for to live."