

Dolly's Sandwich-man

The Story of a Man Who Had His Revenge

By VIRNA SHEARD

IN the tide of life that continually sweeps by a certain corner of Twenty-third Street, New York, sooner or later nearly every human atom of the travelling public appears and passes, and this was the reason the sandwich-man had chosen that particular beat.

He was so familiar a figure to the frequenters of the street that they seldom noticed him, but took him for granted in all weathers, as they took the shop windows, electric light signs, the old woman who sold violets, and the half-witted boy who wound up the anatomy of tin rabbits and sent them hopping along the pavement.

By dint of long practice the sandwich-man had perfected a sinuous and unobtrusive method of locomotion whereby his clumsy wooden overcoat rarely rubbed shoulders with a conventional garment, and he kept moving in a mechanical sort of way that covered miles enough in a day to have aroused the envy of a professional pedestrian. His mind and his body worked independently of each other, apparently, and with him not to think of fatigue seemed to eliminate it.

On a certain May morning one side of the wooden overcoat in purple letters urged a long-suffering public to "chew Pole-axe," and the other side, in vivid scarlet, advised it to lose no time in hearing somebody's lecture on

The sandwich-man shuffled along with a gait all his own, the singularity of it being chiefly due to the fact that he had no toes on either foot, and on one especial foot a good deal less than no toes. The toes had been frozen off up in the Yukon fifteen years before, but he had never become quite used to doing without them.

The two boards bumped against his knees, and the leather straps binding the boards together cut down against his neck—sandwich signs being constructed with but slight consideration for the comfort of the wearer.

Although the sun was brilliant and the sky of an adorable azure, there was a high wind blowing—a wind, indeed, that might almost have been called a young cyclone at a certain point on the street where rose a high, wedge-shaped building. The boards now flapped sharply against the sandwich-man's ribs, that were none too well upholstered, and the wind harrowed him and forced him into a half-run.

He went up a couple of blocks and then down in seeming indifference to discomfort. One expression dominated his lined, weather-beaten face. It was the tense expression of a person who searches unceasingly, whole-hearted, and hungrily for one thing. His eyes were two steel-blue points of light that dwelt for an infinitesimal time on each face that passed; that is, each man's face, for he was looking the world over for a man.

The sandwich-man had long since discarded the superfluities of life, but when the mealtime hours came around he gave his whole, undivided attention to eating and drinking, that he might thereby lay up strength to search the longer, for none might say what years his quest would take. He had also given up what he called "work," for work took him into proscribed places and surrounded him with a limited number of people. The advertising boards brought him a living and the freedom of the streets, and on the streets, he had long since conceded, he would some day find the man he looked for.

Now and then a passer-by who seldom took that road, glanced back at the odd figure, not so much to read the aggressively insistent signs as because the worn face held him with its keen, cold eyes; and the close-set mouth, indomitable chin, and concentration of expression stirred his curiosity. It was the face of the hunter.

The throngs increased towards noon and jostled along the busy thoroughfare goodnaturedly, for, after all, it was a spring wind that was blowing,

with a scent of the sea in it, and a hint of far-off green-growing things—a warm wind that, with rough caress, brought the colour to faded cheeks, and set the old spring-feet and wanderlust astir in many a city-worn heart.

As the sandwich-man reached the end of his beat, the perfume from a tray full of violets held by the old woman at the corner was blown directly to him. He turned his eyes for a moment towards the purple clusters set in their cool green, and let the people pass unheeded; but it was only for a moment, then he shuffled on.

A child came towards him down the pavement skipping along lightly beside a woman who might have been either her nurse or governess, for she was an austere person, in the sad-hued garments of

Before the woman realized it, the little girl had left her side and was pursuing the aged Derby that careered madly along the edge of the asphalt pavement, and then took a flying leap into the street crowded with traffic.

Now it rolled on its brim like a small, unique black wheel, and again bounded grotesquely along on its dented crown just ahead of the little following figure. Horses were jerked suddenly aside, and automobiles skidded and swerved perilously to avoid touching the child, but what seemed the inevitable did not happen, though rough drivers turned white, breathed hard, and used language kept in reserve for just such occasions.

The sandwich-man had called sharply to the child not to trouble about his hat, as he hobbled after it himself; but she passed him and did not heed, even if she heard.

The nurse shrielled repeated commands to her charge and hastened forward, her cloak ballooning in the wind and combining with fear to lend her wings.

Careless of everything but the rolling hat, Dolly flew along, her yellow hair, crimson skirts, and black-stockinged legs making her look like a wind-blown poppy.

The battered headpiece brought up at last for half a minute beside the kerb, and she corralled it; then, rosy with triumph and breathless, came back to the sandwich-man, holding out the trophy of the chase.

"Here it is!" said Dolly, waving the Derby out towards its owner. "Here's your hat! I'm afraid it's rather dusty and dented. I'm so sorry."

The man glanced down at the little girl, noting the beauty of her face with the eager, unspoiled soul looking out from the clear eyes. Her garments, he saw, were the garments of the rich. He was trembling through all his limbs.

"You shouldn't have troubled fer to get my hat, miss," he said, a queer expression flitting across his mouth. "It was dangerous out on the street—mighty dangerous. But it was kind of you. I'm sure, I thank you most hearty."

"You are quite welcome," Dolly answered, smiling up at him as the nurse reached them.

"I'm astonished at you, Miss Dorothy!" called the woman, angrily. "You have frightened me half to death! The idea of you tearing off down Broadway after a man's hat, and"—dropping her voice—"a sandwich-man's hat into the bargain! I'm positively astonished at you—that's what I am!"

"But he could not have caught it himself, Johanna," the child explained. "He just simply could not with those boards around him. And you see"—with a glance at the crippled feet—"you see for yourself he could not go

very fast anyway, and the wind was blowing it farther every second, and you didn't go after it, nor the policeman, nor anybody else on the street, so I had to."

The nurse sniffed.

"I sure hope you won't find no fault with the little lady on my account, ma'am," put in the man, apologetically. "The old tile wasn't worth considerin', an' I wouldn't have had her go fer to get it on no account." He paused to glance keenly at the passing people, then brought his searching eyes back to the woman.

"I don't know jest why the little lady did go fer to get it, but I reckon she's got a different kind of nature from the general run of travellers on this road. I thank ye again, miss," he added, bowing awkwardly over the top of the boards.

Dolly nodded up at him, the dimples flicking in and out of her cheeks. The man twisted the old hat around a moment in his hands, then shuffled on apparently forgetting to replace it on his head.

The nurse caught the child firmly by one hand. "Come along at once, Miss Dorothy!" she said,



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some Order. On her sleekly braided hair was a flat, unlovely bonnet, and a skimpy blue cloak, whose evident duty it was to hang decorously, now coquetted with the breeze.

"This is no morning to go out walking, Miss Dorothy," said the woman, impatiently. "It blows a perfect gale, and tears one to pieces."

"Oh, it's a lovely morning, I think, Johanna!" returned the child, keeping beside her with dancing steps. "Such a fresh, sparkly, tingly morning! Besides, the last thing dad said before he went away was, 'Dolly, you must go out every single day! You remember, don't you?'"

"The wind would probably have abated by the afternoon," returned the woman. "Little girls have not the best of judgments. You should not have teased to go before noon."

"It's lovely! But, oh, Johanna! Just look at the sandwich-man! Those boards bang up dreadfully against him. They must hurt. Oh!" she gave a little cry. "Oh, dear! There goes his hat! I don't believe he can ever catch up to it, it's going so fast!"