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By The Law of Tooth and Talon

By MERLIN MOORE TAYLOR

CHAPTER II.

Vogel "Falls for a Skirt."

"Big Louie" Vogel took the back way out of "Silver Danny's" saloon, leaving a quarter on the table to pay for the drink he had not touched. He chose the back way for several reasons. Principal among them was the fact that one never could tell what bird of prey of his own world might be standing in the barroom to spot the well dressed stranger as he left and then lie in wait for whoever might follow him, with the hope of getting a "look in" on whatever rascality was brewing.

Not that "Big Louie" was in the habit of splitting with any one. He paid, and paid well, these to whom he saw fit to entrust small parts in his various enterprises, but the bulk of the work he did himself, and he kept the bulk of the proceeds. Less fortunate fellow crooks never had much difficulty in getting a few dollars from him when their pickings had been bad, but he always insisted rigidly on repayment when fortune smiled again.

From the back door Vogel surveyed the immediate surroundings before stepping down into the dark alley, but, once satisfied no one lurked in hiding, he followed it briskly for a couple of blocks, debouched upon a dimly lighted street and sought the shabby hotel where he had one of the two rooms he maintained in different parts of the city.

He passed through its doorway and went straight up the steps at the side of the narrow lobby, deserted now by its habitués who, as was their custom, prowled all night and slept all day. The surly-faced clerk mounting guard over the desk looked up at his entrance, then resumed his reading of the evening paper. The comings and goings of the hotel's guests interested him not in the least.

Down a long, dark hallway Vogel stepped with the assurance of one who knows his ground and knocked upon a door, whose grimy transom revealed a light within.

"Who is it?" demanded a woman's voice.

"Louie," he replied. There was sound of a rattling chain, the click of the key in the lock, the door was thrown open. In the dim rays of a gas light he faced a girl, scarcely beyond her teens, auburn haired and baby faced. She held a gaudy kimono wrapped about her figure and evidently she had been surprised in the act of dressing.

She did not invite him to enter, and "Big Louie," fumbling his hat in his hands, seemed at a loss for words. "I thought you might want to take in a pitcher show," he finally stammered.

"Well, I don't," she replied. "I've got another date for to-night."

"Big Louie" glared and his face flushed in anger.

"Who is he?" he asked. "I'll knock his—"

"Oh, no you won't," she replied; then laughed. "Aw, I won't kid you no more, Louie. It ain't he at all. I'm going to a meeting!"

"Again?" he muttered. "Seems to me you've got them d— meetings on the brain. What do they get you? Now if you'd look up with me—"

"And be left a widow some day when some cop bumps you off? Not much. I've told you that before. You'll get yours sure as shootin' one of these times. If you really want to marry me you'll have to cut out the rough stuff and get a job. I work every day, don't I? You can do the same and it won't make no difference to me whether you make ten dollars a week or fifty. Time's coming when us people what has to work will be gettin' ours, share and share alike, and we'll all be on the same footin' and no guy with money's goin' to sit back and get fat on what others make for him."

"And that's what you learn at them meetin'?" interrupted Vogel, roughly. "You listen to a lot of long-haired guys telling you what they are goin' to do for the country if you'll just do as they say and you give 'em your money to help spread 'the message' to all our downtrodden brothers," he mimicked a street orator he had once heard, "and you go out and help push their graft along. But if their dreams did come true and all that they promise you happened where do you suppose you'd get off? At the short end of the horn, as usual. You've listened to this spielin' so long you got so you believe

it, and you're always tryin' to work some other person into it. No wonder they're got so they call you 'Red Steel.' This red flag wavin' ain't goin' to get you nowhere."

"Now, Louie, we've been good friends and all that since you found me cryin' out there in the gutter one night because I was broke and hungry and no place to go and you been my friend right. We ain't goin' to quarrel now. So you run along and let me dress and I'll drift on down to the meetin' and along about 10 o'clock, say, you meet me in front of Massey's and we'll have a ice cream sody or somethin'. Some of these days, perhaps, we can see things alike. Meanwhile we ain't goin' to fuss."

She made as if to close the door but Vogel put out a restraining hand.

"There's one thing more, Stell," he said, awkwardly. "I picked up a piece of change to-night and I want you to keep it for me until I call for it. And if I don't call, why it's yours."

He pulled out the ten hundred dollar bills Lebrune had given him to bind their compact and pressed them upon her.

"There's a thousand dollars there, kid. Keep 'em as a favor for me and if— if anythin' happens, you keep 'em for yourself."

"I wouldn't touch it for myself, Louie," she replied. "But I'll keep them until you want it, as a favor for you. I've lived straight, so far, and I've lived honest, and I've never spent a penny that I didn't get fair and square."

"That's what I like about you, kid," he said and turned on his heel.

Stella Lathrop stood looking at his retreating back for a moment, then, shaking her head, closed the door and resumed her interrupted dressing. She was a startling and unusual exception to the class of people with whom she associated, almost as much to their own surprise and wonder as to that of the police, who had been vainly trying to discover just where she fitted in among the denizens of the underworld.

Stella Lathrop lived among crooks because among them she had found the only friends she had known since she had quit the mountain community where she had been born and reared, down among the foothills of the Ozarks. She had gone to The Cove's

little school and, because she had imagination and was a dreamer, she had foreseen that she could follow but two courses. One was to break away from The Cove altogether; the other to remain there and marry some mountain boy and raise his children and work from early morning until late at night to make his scanty earnings keep a roof over their heads, food in their stomachs and rough clothing on their backs. She had shuddered at visions of herself becoming a drudge like the other Cove women, her mother, for example, a slatternly, angular, discontented woman, whose frayed nerves kept her household of children in constant fear of her.

So Stella Lathrop, having broached the subject of seeking employment in town and receiving a box on the ears for her pains, had silently packed her pitifully few belongings in a handkerchief and set out one night to trudge the rocky roads to town. If she had feared pursuit and forcible return to her home, it was groundless. Her father had branded her an ungrateful little hussy, and her mother had been positive she would return as soon as she grew hungry.

The girl knew a storekeeper in town and he, sensing her ignorance, had readily given her a job in the kitchen of his home, at the munificent wages of four dollars a month and her keep. She had quickly seen that she had utterly failed in her purpose and she miserably had put by every cent of her wages until she had the price of a ticket to the big city. Then, her only possessions, the castoff garments of her mistress and two dollars in change, she had bravely set out to try her fortunes.

But the big city had been unkind, as is the habit of the big city. How she got past the policeman and welfare agents at the station where she was deposited by the train that had brought her, always was a mystery to her after she learned there were such persons on the lookout for unwise little girls. But she evaded them, probably because she was not trying to, and speedily found herself engulfed in the whirlpool. She had timidly ventured to ask a kind-faced old woman where she could get a job and had been answered so harshly that it was several hours before she had got up her nerve to ask any one else. Of course she never got the answer she was hoping for. One or two men, pausing to take in the beauty, which her ridiculous garb could not entirely hide, had been rude, and badly frightened her, and she had wandered on until she had come to a park and there she had fallen asleep, her couch a cold stone bench in a sheltered nook where she escaped the eye of the park policeman.

Thus two days had gone by and Stella had accomplished nothing beyond seeing a great deal of the city on foot. Naturally, with her mountain training, she had gravitated away from the better resident districts and towards the slums and there it had been that Louie Vogel had come upon her—a weeping, very tired, very hungry bit of femininity—and had taken her under his protecting wing.

Why he had done it the gunman himself could not have told. One of those streaks of goodness which are said to exist in even the worst of us, must have come to the surface just long enough to touch his heart at the sight of the forlorn little girl. At any rate he had taken charge of her and in his masculine way, unaccustomed as he was to dealing with women, he had seen that she had food and clothes and a room at the shabby hotel and then, when she refused to accept fur-

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ther bounty at his hands, had helped her to get a job in a factory at meagre wages that to her seemed a fortune.

Perhaps the same streak of goodness had compelled Vogel to treat her with respect and to see that others did the same. That had been several months before, and Stella, a ready pupil and apt at picking up new ways, had blossomed out from an awkward little country girl into a typical city girl of the factory type. She early discovered that Vogel and those she met through him lived by their wits and not the sweat of their brows, but they were the only friends she knew and they had treated her better than she had ever been treated before, so she had not chosen to desert them.

Strangely enough, she had kept herself aloof from any of their nefarious enterprises and, stranger still, she had "gone straight." But her own bitter experiences during her first days in the city, magnified perhaps by the strangeness of all about her, had implanted in her heart a rebellious feeling against the order of things which permitted so few people to have a great many things, and so many people to have nothing at all. Thus she had been an easy convert to the street corner harangues of soap-box Socialistic, I. W. W. and Bolshevist orators and, deluded by their false doctrines, she had become a rampant radical herself. She attended all the meetings of this kind she could, eagerly drinking in the lying promises of the spellbinders and failing utterly to see the real motives behind their words. Bit by bit, they had taken notice of her, sensed approval

of all their utterances and gradually admitted her to the inner circle.

In the world in which she lived, she aired her views and preached the doctrines of the red flag. Because they liked her, these people of the underworld, to which she belonged in one sense and still did not belong, tolerated her, jokingly nicknamed her "Red Stell," and let it go at that. As for Vogel, he was in love with her and would have married her, but she would have none of him, nor would she even consider the matter unless he gave up his dangerous pursuits, and this he would not do. He had done nothing else for so long that the game itself, if nothing else, would have held him.

(Continued in next issue.)

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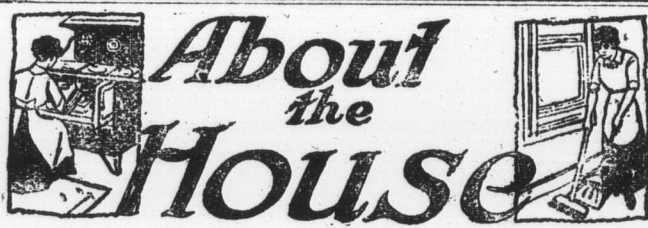
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About the House

When To Send for the Doctor.

In innumerable instances the summoning of a physician is a necessity; but oftentimes a physician is called from force of habit, and hypochondriacs seek a doctor for no apparent reason whatever. Many small ailments can be overcome by means of diet, rest or simple home remedies; but the practical and sensible person realizes the inability of a novice to cope with many of the ills common to mankind.

"We haven't consulted a doctor for nearly ten years," was the proud boast of a man in whose home we found ourselves recently. Meanwhile, his near-sighted wife rocked a peevish, fretful baby.

"What is the matter with the little fellow?" we inquired.

"I don't know," answered the mother. "He has never been very well, sometimes I think one thing is the matter, and sometimes another. I suppose he will outgrow the trouble after a while."

A small girl ran into the room and climbed upon her father's knee. Her breathing was difficult and seemed restricted. Her general appearance bespoke the presence of adenoids. We said nothing. What was the use? What was there to say to a man who boasted that he consulted no doctor, while the condition of his little daughter pleaded for attention, to say nothing of the assistance an oculist could have rendered his near-sighted wife. Any one with even average intelligence would realize that, for this particular family, medical aid was imperative.

Although the habit of summoning a physician for trivial excuses is unpardonable, to postpone the securing of necessary medical aid is dangerous. Offensive breath, persistent eruptions of the skin, loss of appetite, insomnia, or constant drowsiness are symptoms which may or may not betoken serious disorders, and when they are present, it is advisable to consult the

family doctor before serious complications set in. Nor should enlarged tonsils, carbuncles, suspicious growths and other abnormal conditions be overlooked.

The general health requires the teeth to be kept in order. The almost unendurable suffering caused by toothache is often followed by serious conditions, which might be avoided if the teeth were kept in good condition.

Inconvenience and pain are often experienced by those who neglect the eyes. When it is understood that the difficulty is due to overwork, poor light, or a natural weakness, the individual can sometimes remedy the defect by observing customary precautions and if possible rectifying the cause. But generally speaking, whenever there is optical trouble of any sort, even of the slightest degree, it is wiser to consult a competent oculist.

Surgical cases demand competent aid. A broken bone, a bad sprain, a severe wound, wounds from firearms, severe burns and hernia are but a few of many serious troubles that require the services of a physician.

If any one has taken poison—either accidentally or with suicidal intent—it is imperative to summon a physician while "first aid" is being administered. The same is true in cases of apparent drowning, asphyxiation, electric shock and sunstroke, and of contagious diseases, fevers, extreme vertigo and other alarming symptoms.

Whether or not medical aid should be summoned for a person who has fainted depends altogether upon the patient and the attending circumstances. If the person is in the habit of fainting, from any trivial or particular cause, the members of the family should learn to be equal to the occasion. But in exceptional cases, or where a patient faints under peculiar conditions, the wisest course would be to place the case in the hands of a capable physician.

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