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OCTOBER 8, 1914

Our Serial Story. PETER.

A Novel of Which He is Not the Hero
By F. HOPKINSON SMITH.

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Chapter XIII.

The Scribe is quite positive that had you only heard about it as he had, even with the details elaborated, not only by Peter, who was conversation itself in his every statement, but by Miss Felicia as well—who certainly ought to have known—you would not have believed it possible until you had seen it. Even then you would have had to drop into one of Miss Felicia's cretonne-upholstered chairs—big easy-chairs that fitted into every hollow and bone in your back—looked the length of the uneven porch, run your astonished eye down the damp, water-soaked wooden steps to the moist brick pavement below, and so on to the beds of crocuses blooming beneath the clustering palms and orange trees, before you could realize (in spite of the drifting snow heaped up on the door-steps of her house outside—some of it still on your shoes) that you were in Miss Felicia's tropical garden attached to Miss Felicia's Genesee house, and not in the back yard of some old home in the far-off sunny South.

It was an old story, of course, to Peter, who had the easy-chair beside me, and so it was to Morris, who had helped Miss Felicia carry out so Utopian a scheme, but it had come to me a complete surprise, and I was still wide-eyed and incredulous.

"And what keeps out the cold?" I asked Morris, who was lying back blowing rings into the summer night, the glow of an overhead lantern lighting up his handsome face.

"Glass," he laughed.

"Where?"

"There, just above the vines, my dear Major," interrupted Miss Felicia, pointing upward. "Come and let me show you my frog pond—" and away we went along the brick paths, bordered with pots of flowers, to a tiny lake covered with lily-pads and circled by water-plants.

"I did not want a green-house—I wanted a back yard," she continued, "and I just would have it. Holker sent his men up, and on three sides we built a wall that looked a hundred years old—but it is not five—and roofed it over with glass, and just where you see the little flight of stairs is the heat. That old arbor in the corner had been here ever since I was a child, and so have the syringa bushes and the green box next the wall. I wanted them all the year round—not just for three or four months in the year—and that witch Holker said he could do it, and he has. Half the weddings in town have been begun right on that bench, and when the lanterns are lighted and the fountain turned on outside, no gentleman ever escapes. You and Peter are immune, so I sha'n't waste any of my precious ammunition on you. And now what will you wear in your button-hole—a gardenia, or some violets? Ruth will be down in a minute, and you must look your prettiest."

But if the frog pond, damp porch and old-fashioned garden had come as a surprise, what shall I say of the rest of Miss Felicia's house which I am now about to inspect under Peter's guidance.

"Here, come along," he cried, slipping his arm through mine. "You have had enough of the garden, for between you and me, my dear Major"—here he looked askance at Miss Felicia—"I think it an admirable place in which to take cold, and that's why—" and he passed his hand over his scalp—"I always insist on wearing my hat when I walk here. Mere question of imagination, perhaps, but old fellows like you and me should take no chances—" and he laughed heartily.

"This room was my father's," continued Peter. "The bookcases have still

some of the volumes he loved; he liked the low ceiling and the big fireplace, and always wrote here—it was his library, really. There opens the old drawing-room and next to it is Felicia's den, where she concocts most of her deviltry, and the dining-room beyond—and that's all there is on this floor, except the kitchen, which you'll hear from later."

And as Peter rattled on, telling me the history of this and that piece of old furniture, or portrait, or queer clock, my eyes were absorbing the air of cosy comfort that permeated every corner of the several rooms. Everything had the air of being used. In the library the chairs were of leather, stretched into saggy folds by many tired backs; the wide, high fender fronting the hearth, though polished so that you could see your face in it, showed the marks of many a drying shoe, while on the bricks framing the fireplace could still be seen the scratchings of countless matches.

The drawing-room, too—although, as in all houses of its class and period, a thing of gilt frames, high mirrors and stiff furniture—was softened by heaps of cushions, low stools and soothing arm-chairs, while Miss Felicia's own particular room was so veritable a symphony in chintz, white paint and old mahogany, with cubby-holes crammed with knickknacks, its walls hung with rare etchings; pots of flowers everywhere and the shelves and mantels crowded with photographs of princes, ambassadors, grand dukes, grand ladies, flossy-headed children, chubby-cheeked babies (all souvenirs of her varied and busy life), that it was some minutes before I could throw myself into one of her heavenly arm-chairs, there to be rested as I had never been before, and never expect to be again.

It being Peter's winter holiday, he and Morris had stopped over on their way down from Buffalo, where Holker had spoken at a public dinner. The other present and expected guests were Ruth MacFarlane, who was already upstairs; her father, Henry MacFarlane, who was to arrive by the next train, and last and by no means least, his confidential clerk, Mr. John Breen, now two years older and, it is to be hoped, with considerable more common-sense than when he chucked himself neck and heels out into the cold world. Whether the expected arrival of this young gentleman had anything to do with the length of time it took Ruth to dress, the Scribe knoweth not. There is no counting upon the whims and vagaries of even the average young woman of the day, and as Ruth was a long way above that medium grade, and with positive ideas of her own as to whom she liked and whom she did not like, and was, besides, a most discreet and close-mouthed young person, it will be just as well for us to watch the game of battledoor and shuttlecock still being played between Jack and herself, before we arrive at any fixed conclusions.

Any known and admitted facts connected with either one of the contestants are, however, in order, and so while we are waiting for old Moggins, who drives the village 'bus, and who has been charged by Miss Felicia on no account to omit bringing in his next load a certain straight, bronzed-cheeked, well-set-up young man with a springy step, accompanied by a middle-aged gentleman who looked like a soldier, and deliver them both with their attendant baggage at her snow-banked door, any data regarding this same young man's movements since the night Peter wanted to hug him for leaving his uncle's service, cannot fail to be of interest.

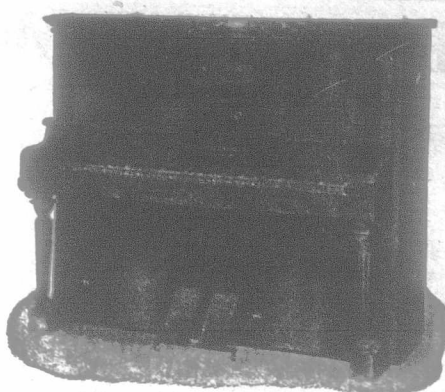
To begin then with the day on which Jack, with Frederick, the second man's assistance, packed his belongings and accepted Garry's invitation to make a bed of his lounge.

The kind-hearted Frederick knew what it was to lose a place, and so his sympathies had been all the more keen. Parkins's nose, on the contrary, had risen a full degree and stood at an angle of 45 degrees, for he had not only heard the ultimatum of his employer, but was rather pleased with the result. As for the others, no one ever believed the boy really meant it, and everybody—even the maids and the high-priced chef—fully expected Jack would turn prodigal as soon as his diet of husks

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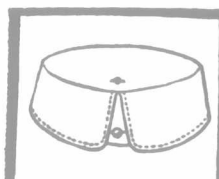
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