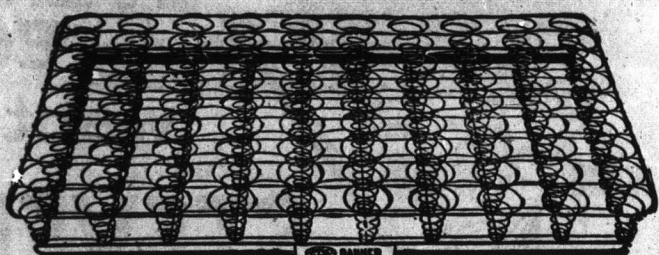


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The Conversion of Van.

By Elliott Flower.



IT CERTAINLY was an extraordinary thing that a young girl should be left to the guardianship of Van. Not that Van would not be faithful to the trust, as he understood it, but any one should have known that he would not understand the girl. For Van was a confirmed bachelor. I almost said an old bachelor, but he would resent that. Still, he was on the far side of forty, and a man who has lived that long without feminine companionship is not likely to understand feminine needs, or to give very much time to trying to understand them; he has evolved his own method of life, which he does not like to have disturbed.

be saddled on a confirmed bachelor living at a club. It was an entirely new order of things; it meant that he, who never had had to think of any one but himself, would now have to give first thought to another, and that other of a sex that he never had understood.

Van did not minimize the revolutionary and distressing effect of this new condition of affairs, but neither did he hesitate. In the morning he received a telegram announcing the death of his former friend and informing him that the girl had been left to his care, and by afternoon he was on his way to take charge of his ward. He found her a quiet, unsophisticated child of twelve. She had lived alone with her father since her mother's death some years before, and her father had been a mining expert whose business necessitated frequent changes of residence. So she had formed none of those friendships that are so much to a girl of that age; she was alone, absolutely alone. Perhaps her plight had something to do with it, arousing his sympathy, but Van had become really fond of her by the time they reached home.

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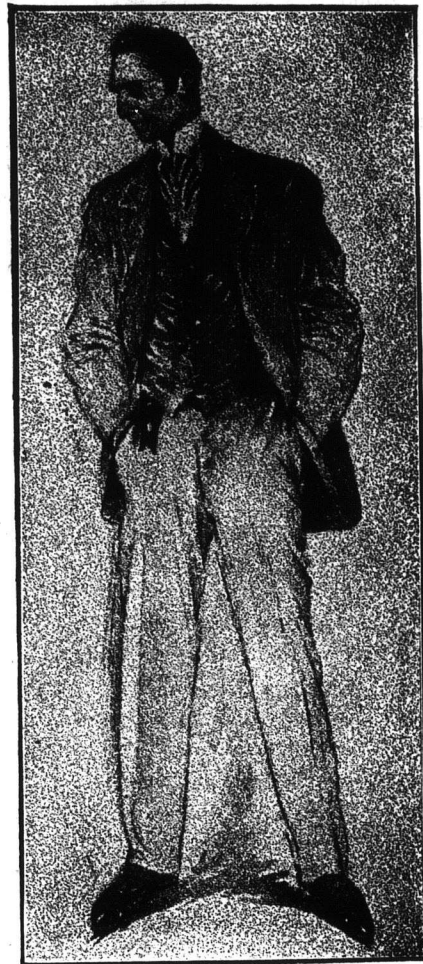
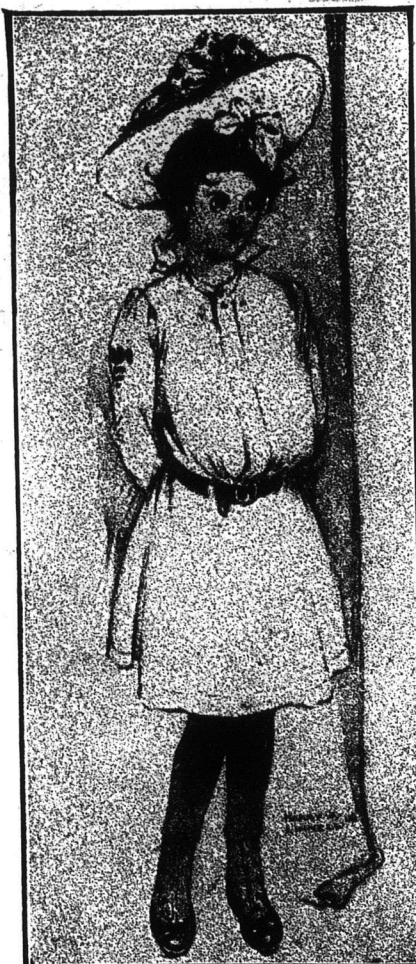
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your hobbies are many; you get in a rut, and anything that jars you out of that rut interferes with your enjoyment of life. Imagine yourself, being in this rut, suddenly confronted with the duty of acting as guardian for a young girl! Then you will have some conception of Van's predicament.

The girl's father had been Van's friend in the earlier days, but they had seen little or nothing of each other for many years. Possibly the father did not understand the situation; possibly Van was the only person to whom he could entrust the girl, she being left absolutely alone in the world when he died. At any rate, he left her what little property he had and named Van as sole executor, trustee, guardian—everything. And he also left a pathetic note asking him to accept the trust for the sake of old times.

It never occurred to Van to attempt to shirk the responsibility. Whatever of error there may have been in the execution of the trust was of judgment and never of heart. He did not even touch the girl's little inheritance, but defrayed all her expenses out of his own pocket, intending that she should have all that her father had left her when she married. But the guardianship was a strange and exacting responsibility to

"She's a mighty nice little girl," he said, "but what in thunder am I going to do with her?"

There are many things which we like of which we do not care to have personal charge.

Van's first move was to change his residence from the club to a hotel, where he could provide suitable accommodations for her. But a hotel was no place for a young girl; neither did a boarding-house appeal to him as just the thing, and a house was quite out of the question. In this emergency, it being summer, he decided to take a vacation, just to give him time to think the matter over, and he and the girl went to the seashore. Neither enjoyed the trip. Van was burdened by his responsibility, and the girl found him unusually strict. He was generous, but he seemed to think that a girl could not do anything without being guilty of an impropriety, and she found herself more dreary and lonely than ever before. He meant well, but he was like a man, unaccustomed to responsibility, who suddenly finds himself in charge of a vast treasure; the precautions he took to guard her made her little more than a prisoner. For himself, he said frankly that she was "more trouble than a prize setter pup," and he meant no disrespect