

The Red Fisher by Owen Cliver

THE RED FISHER knows the bait for every one. He took me with Robert Carr.

You'll think that's only a figure of speech, but it isn't. There is a full bottle of strong sleeping-draught in my bedroom, marked off into 16 tiny portions by lines of glass. I would take the whole bottle if I could escape a picture of the Red Fisher waiting to pull me out of the river of sleep. The devil may be only a superstition that ages haven't quite wiped off the slate of heredity; but the picture is a fact. You can see it on the walls of Nugent's gallery:

It shows up best if you stand just beside the left hand seat of the settee. You get the full malignity of the grin then. I stood just there when my duel with conscience began. I suppose I am not ultra-modern. I have a conscience.

It was on a rainy Friday afternoon, three years ago, and I had a dull hour to kill. I passed the gallery. "I may as well be bored by myself as bored by pictures," I reflected. "I can't be more bored by pictures than I am by myself." I thought 50 yards down the road. I turned back and went in.

I saw my own thoughts rather than the pictures, until I found myself staring at a very proper Mephistopheles, long, lean, sardonic, and habited in hard red. He sat upon an overhanging branch, dangling his pointed shoes above a glassy stream that came from nowhere into a green wood and ran out to nowhere again. A network bag lay upon the grass behind him, with his varied bait peeping through the meshes; a miniature of a pretty, enticing woman, and a cardinal's hat; a diploma, a seal of office and a fat packet bound in a necklace of diamonds and a president's chair. A pale young monk lay dead upon the bank, caught by a saint's aureole; and a red-faced woman captured by a wicker flask. The wine was dribbling out and staining a little white daisy purple. The Red Fisher was angling now with a pretty mannikin. A wistful, elfish girl was swimming away from temptation; but she looked back over her round shoulder, and her pouting mouth opened a little as if she wanted to come back and snare. I wondered foolishly whether she was going to be caught; moralized tritely upon the vanities that catch women and men; and then suddenly—

"I wonder," I thought, "what bait he'd use for me?" I turned over temptations hopefully in my mind, but could find none strong enough to haul me to the devil's bank. I was a dull bachelor woman, I told myself impatiently, half-past temptation, and groaning into an old maid with a hundred weaknesses and no grand vice; not warm enough to nourish a sin.

"Isn't there anything you'd risk the hook for, Nina?" I asked myself. "Surely you aren't a fool, are you?" I looked into my secret mind, as if it were a picture book, and the burly form of Robert Carr grew slowly out of the mist within; dear old Robert, many, and clever, and courteous, and kind! I felt my eyes widen and my mouth open and close with a snap. I am telling the truth. I did not know before how much I liked him, though I would have said any day and anywhere that he was the nicest fellow in the world. Well, I did like him, in a perfectly proper way; liked him very much. What of it?

"My dear Devil!" I said contemptuously. "You've chosen the wrong fly! I don't nibble at the husband of my friend. . . . And besides he doesn't want me." I gasped again at the self-betrayal of the last words; reddened and then turned very pale. I could see my face in a little mirror. I have a conscience, as I have said. There were many virtues that I had no great care for, but I cherished an idea of myself as loyal to my friends. Margaret was a cat of a woman, and I was another, but we were pals; had been all our lives, from the cradle. I said, even in the dark depths of my mind; but the heart is deeper. That said I was lost if the fisherman won over Robert Carr, to help him angle for me. I must fly from temptation or risk the consequences.

"Well," I decided deliberately, "I take the risk; it's there in one. There isn't. Robert loves his wife, if she doesn't care much for him. She is ten times better looking than I. He likes pink, smiling young prettiness. He'd never want this pale, old snaphan thing, except perhaps as a friend. . . . Poor boy! He needs some one to comfort him. Fish away, my dear Devil! I'll risk all I have and am to be a little help to dear old Bob."

I went to their house on the Saturday afternoon. I generally did. Margaret was animated. Robert was gloomy. She was going to drag him away to the seaside on Monday; and his roots are in his business and his study.

"It's all very well for you," he grumbled. "You'll have drives and excursions and dances and whist-drives, and two or three admirers hanging around. I shall have nothing to do but potter along the beach. I hate pottering. I'd rather stay and work in town."

"Don't potter," I advised. "Take to golf or something. Get an admirer yourself, if Maggie doesn't behave."

"What introduces a subject for me?" Margaret cried gaily. "Come with us, Neen, and take him off my hands for a fortnight. You can teach him golf, if you like; or sailing. He'd love that! Nag him and wake him up! Wanted an experienced lady with a stimulating tongue, to take entire charge of a dull infant! You just fit!"

"Poor Robert!" I said. "My sailings all right; and my tongue! But I don't know golf. Don't be afraid, my dear chap. I won't add to your troubles."

She danced all the evenings. Robert and I sailed away the days in a 20-foot half-decked boat. My father taught me sailing when I was a child, and now I taught Robert. In the evenings we went to concerts and entertainments or walked—generally walked. Oh! those walks. I never knew before that the sky was so full of stars!

It did not occur to Robert to make love to me, and I did not try—I swear—to put the notion in his mind. I just wanted him to be happier, and I made him. I was a fine pal, he told me, as we scudded back before the wind on the last afternoon. I remember the salt spray on my lips, and my hair blowing loose, and the adoration in my heart when I looked at him.

"I'm glad," I said. "I like to be your pal, Bob."

"Thank you," he acknowledged, "dear old girl! Long knows, I need a pal. I just wanted him to be happier, and I made him. I was a fine pal, he told me, as we scudded back before the wind on the last afternoon. I remember the salt spray on my lips, and my hair blowing loose, and the adoration in my heart when I looked at him."

"It's just that," I consoled him. "Margaret is all right in her way. I am fond of her, you know. That was fairly true. 'There's nothing in her little flirtations, Bob.' That had a large element of truth. She ekated on thin ice, but she did not go in. 'She's fond of you, really. That was quite true. I think, Bob, if you spoke to her frankly, if you said 'I'd like you to get on better, Margie. I much prefer you to anyone else, ard—'

"That was my supreme effort. God knows what it cost me. The little would have gone through with it and tried to reconcile them if he had not interrupted me, but he held up his hand."

"I don't, Nina," he said, very, very quietly. "I haven't for several years. . . . Don't ask me questions."

"No," I promised faintly. "I won't." I opened my mouth a little to catch the salt wind. It seemed to me that there was not air enough in the whole world and that my heart was too small to hold my hot blood. I loved him as a mother loves her little child just then; this big, strong man. Our love should be silent and pure. I vowed, and everything else in my life should be set aside to do little things to brighten him.

"We won't talk about troubles," I said cheerfully. "Let's make the best of the comfort we have. A good pal to sail a good boat! I'll put her nose into the waves and make her splash; and we'll get drenched and laugh like kids. Kids who are out with their pal!"

"That's flat!" he echoed. "Let's shake hands on that!"

That was a red letter afternoon. We went back to town that evening. "Come in often, Nina," he begged when we parted at the station. "Good luck, old girl!"

He smiled at me then. He had such a nice smile; and such a nice voice; so rich and round. I used to seem to hear it when I woke up at nights. I cried for him then.

Things went badly between him and Margaret during the next year. He was too civil to her, and she was not civil enough to him. They had a bad quarrel, cold on his side and hot on hers, and decided to occupy separate rooms. Margaret told me herself. Her pink face was very red, and she gritted her splendid teeth.

"As he does not want me," she said, "the inference is obvious."

"That he thinks you want another man," I answered sharply. "No one in particular," she rejoined pettishly. "He likes dozens. That's my safety! He likes very few women. That's his danger. If you only like one you like too much."

"If," I cried scornfully. "It's like you to try and put the blame on him. He's worth a dozen of either of us. You're a silly, suspicious woman. Are you working round to object to me being friends with the poor, neglected boy?"

I never had a greater insult than her look of amazement then. "You," she cried with her big blue eyes wide open. She had lovely soft eyes and mine are hard, beady things. "You!" She laughed. "I'd have liked to take her full throat in my hands and strangle the snorer. 'No, I'm not so absurd as that. You just take the place of a sister to him. . . . You and I have been rather like sisters, Neen. . . . Don't look hurt, dear old thing. I didn't mean that a man couldn't like you very much, only—you are far too good a pal to me to let him flirt with you."

"I said steadily, 'and, since you mention the matter to me, I don't blame him nearly so much as I blame you.' 'I don't either,' she agreed, 'but still—I'm a cat, of course, but I only wanted just to have a little amusement. If he'd pulled me up as he ought to have done I'd have been pulled up after a kick or two, and I suppose you know that I like him.' 'I suppose so,' I answered, 'but you've had a funny way of showing it.' 'Well, you see, it may be only my fancy, but three or four years ago I thought that he cooled to me. It had been just angry or nasty and we'd quarreled I'd have made it up very nicely, but he didn't seem to want to make it up, and I thought—you'll laugh, but I did think that there must be someone else. I thought so the other day when we met—someone. I watched him talking to her. I am sure she likes him, anyhow.' 'Who?' I demanded. My voice was more anxious than I liked. 'Joyce Reed,' Margaret told me. 'Joyce!' My laugh was very genuine. 'You donkey! Why, she's about 24, and he's getting on to 40. He always likes kids, but he's quite fraternal to them. He doesn't even see her more than once in six months.' 'Doesn't he? You know more of his doings than I do.' 'More shame to you,' I said vigorously. 'Well, I don't think his doings concern Baby Joyce. Robert's tastes are mature. I don't suppose his doings concern any woman, but he has not broached the subject to me.' 'He might if you led him on a little,' she suggested, with one of the pretty sideways looks that trap a man and warn a woman. I rose to go. 'Margaret,' I said sternly. 'You



A very proper Mephistopheles, long, lean, sardonic . . . He sat upon an overhanging branch, dangling his pointed shoes above a glassy stream.

disgust me. Robert is my friend. His friendship is a precious thing to me. I don't mind saying that to you, or on the housetop! He is absolutely the best man I know. If you dream that I would win his confidence and betray him to you, you are greatly mistaken. Look here! If I found him out I shouldn't tell you. That's flat!"

"No," I promised faintly. "I won't." I opened my mouth a little to catch the salt wind. It seemed to me that there was not air enough in the whole world and that my heart was too small to hold my hot blood. I loved him as a mother loves her little child just then; this big, strong man. Our love should be silent and pure. I vowed, and everything else in my life should be set aside to do little things to brighten him.

"I know. . . . I don't want to sink in your estimation, friend. I will tell you how I looked at it. There is no wrong to Margaret, I said. For years she has not scrupled to flirt with others. I do not say that she has been untrue to her marriage vow, as the world estimates it. I do not know."

PROF. GOES UP IN BALLOON TO BE ALONE JUST TO THINK

Hanging by One Toe, and With His Right Palm Pressed to His Eyes, He Says: "Now I Am Alone, Let Me Think"; and He Does.



HE SWUNG BY HIS KNEES AND WAVED ADIEU.

BY GEORGE ADE. NOW it happens that in America a man who goes up hanging on a Trapeze below a Balloon is a Professor. One day a Professor, preparing to make a Grand Ascension was sorely pestered by Spectators of the Yellow-Hammer Variety, who fell over the Stay-Ropes or crowded up close to the Balloon to ask Fool Questions.

charged me; "but you're wrong. I don't want him to plague. I'd be good to him—now. Try, Neen. If you could put the idea of making it up into his head? It's natural to him to do the kind thing if he thinks of it. You could say it's a pity we squabble, because I can be nice, and—you could say you know I like him. . . . Will you, Neen? We never had sisters, you and I; only each other."

"I'll try," I answered. "That was a die. I did not try to lead him back to her. I tried to alienate him; warned him against being fooled by her."

Margaret's affectionate mood soon passed. I knew it would! Their disension became sharper and more in evidence. They never went out together; and whenever one dined at home the other dined with friends, or "in town." It was generally she who was out; but Robert was "at the club" more than he used to be. He was abstracted and silent very often when I

talked to him. I had always been able to rally him into interest before. I spoke to him frankly one evening when Margaret had gone out and I had dropped in.

"Bob," I said, "you look upon me as a pretty trusty friend, I think."

"Indeed," he assured me, "I do! I'd trust you blind, Nina."

"There's something on your mind, I know. Would it help you to tell a pal?"

Baking Enhances Natural Flavor of Foods.

Oven-Cooking Also Insures Retention of Valuable Substances.

NOT everyone realizes what temperature means in cooking, yet the intelligent use of graded heat largely determines the palatability of a dish. The higher the temperature used the more pronounced is the flavor of the food, especially when dry heat is employed.

Take, for example, the characteristic taste of roast beef and the savor of broiled oysters. If the beef were boiled and the oysters stewed, each would lose much of its flavor.

The rule applies to vegetables as well, for although turnips, tomatoes and a few others have their flavor increased to an unusual degree by high temperature, by far the greater number are better baked than boiled. Carrots, parsnips and beets can be baked on the rack of the oven as potatoes are.

But baking does more than to enhance the natural flavor of foods; it creates new flavors by making new substances through high temperature. The fresh crust of bread, muffins and toast, the well-browned top of a rice pudding and the crisp surfaces of boiled or baked meats, poultry and fish all have a new and delicious flavor, due to actual change in the food material.

Moreover, baking insures the retention of minerals and other valuable substances that are dissolved in boiling and lost when the water is poured into the sink. The constant use of foods impoverished in that way causes malnutrition as surely as does a diet lacking in some one of the important foodstuffs.

Some foods, however, should not be subjected to intense heat during the whole of the cooking process. For example, if an egg is boiled steadily for three or four minutes the white will be hard and the yolk soft, whereas if it is put into a pan of boiling water and the pan is withdrawn to a warm place where the water does not boil, both the white and the yolk will be cooked evenly.

about; things that concern other people."

"Talk about a man you know," I nodded. "and leave out people's names; and I'll advise you in the abstract."

He shook his head. "I'm no good at acting, Neen. I'm talking about myself. . . . Eight years ago I married Margaret. Nobody blamed us. We appeared to be just suited. We didn't really suit, Neen; not even on the honeymoon. I remember—bah! I'm gossiping like an old lady. Well, wherever the fault lay, we drifted away from each other. Possibly he didn't mean much harm by her flirtations; but they are sufficiently in evidence to humiliate her husband. I was too proud to own my hurt. I just gritted it out till I didn't care a hang. Well, no much. . . . Anyhow, I was very lonely for a long time, and then I found . . . a very wonderful woman. . . . Oh! a very wonderful woman!"

"You thought her so," I said. I sighed. "She was, and is. There has never been a word of love between me and her, Neen; but we know."

"You're right," I asked, unsteadily. I caught sight of my face in the beveled mirror of a wall bracket just then; and it wavered. Pale, and with the young bloom gone, and never beautiful; but it looked loving, I thought. "Ah! loving!"

"Both of us," he said, unhesitatingly. "Yes. Sometimes we have been near to the word; but we have paused in time. It is not my strength that keeps us as we are, but the strength that I get from my reverence for her goodness and daintiness. She is above all women. She—"

"Hush!" I said. "We are not talking of her, but of you. This is your story, which you are telling to your friend. . . . So truly your friend, Bob, you know."

"I know. . . . I don't want to sink in your estimation, friend. I will tell you how I looked at it. There is no wrong to Margaret, I said. For years she has not scrupled to flirt with others. I do not say that she has been untrue to her marriage vow, as the world estimates it. I do not know."

"I do not know," I said in a falset whisper. "If I did a shameful, damnable thing from first to last it was when I said that Margaret was an honest woman then. I had not the slightest doubt of it."

"There can be no wrong to myself. For lover of her—her whom I love—I am a better man; and our love is innocent and pure. . . . The question was about the girl. I kept out of her way for some years, for fear that her love for me—I knew it—would spoil her life. Then I saw that she meant to die a maid for love of me. Why should not she as well as I have the comfort of friendship? I have the comfort of friendship? I think life is just the hours that we spend together. . . . Is it very wrong, Neen?"

"Only unwise," I said, still very faintly. "Is that all?"

"No," he put his cigar to his lips, but I saw that it had gone out. "I'll light it," I offered.

"It was growing dusk, and when the match flared up I seemed to see the Red Fisher in it, laughing triumphantly in the flare."

"Hook me, then," my mind told him fiercely. I expected Robert's arm to go round me as I stood beside his chair, offering him the light. I held his wrist with one hand to steady the cigar. . . . The touch that I hungered for did not come.

"Thank you, Neen. You spoil me. The devil of it is that Margaret has taken one of her turns up. . . . Neen, I don't want her. I should not want her if the other woman weren't in the world. Don't tell me that duty is to make it up!"

"That's what I have on my mind; what I wanted to ask you, my good friend."

There was a long, long silence. I called at Robert's office the next morning and saw him alone.

"Bob," I said, "I've got to be disloyal to one friend or another. You have to come first. . . . You are all right, but I've got to go. I can't see your life spoiled by a tie that you honor and she—if I were you I should have Margaret watched. . . . Not a word. It doesn't bear discussion."

He rose slowly; staggered; rested his hand on the table. "Nina!" he said, hoarsely. "You know that she—"

ant with my chin on my hand staring into the fire, made a picture to drowse with the black and gold and amber and the gray smoke. . . . The Red Fisher dangled his feet merrily in the flames; set his teeth and forgot to smile as he played me at the end of the line; wondered—so did I!—if I was finally hooked. I swam round and round, I thought, till the water ran in fast ripples that I could hear. Hiss—ss—ss. . . . That was only the sound of the flames. . . . Flap—flap—flap. . . . Only the puffs of the jets. She laughed as catching fire. . . . I put my hands on the arms of the chair. One more tightening of my nerves and I should go to Robert. I paused only for the right words. Just the right words. I would say "Bob, dear!" I drew a breath; half rose. . . . And heard Margaret's voice in the hall. She had come home. . . . What a magnificent woman she looked when she switched on the light at the door! "I had a fancy to be domestic to-night," she said, laughing; "but I suppose you're going out, Bob?"

"I am going out," he told her, and rose. They looked hard at each other. Several times I thought they were going to speak, but they did not. She gasped when he had gone; clinched her hands. Presently she clutched my arm.

"He's going to her!" she hissed. "Don't be a fool!"

"He wants to get rid of me," she said in my ear. "He thinks—Neen, he's having me watched!"

"He would, if I were he," I told her—that was not true. I had no suspicion of her—"but he isn't. I should think it's your conscience; if you have one."

"Until tonight I had," she told me furiously, "now it's gone. I came home to try and put things right. I was ready to humble myself to him. She laughed wildly. "You side with him, of course. I dare say you'd try to marry him, if I were gone!"

"Margaret!"

"I didn't mean it, Neen. Don't you turn on me. You're the only pal I have. Women don't like me. . . . Well, men do. Can't you help me, Neen? I tell you I'm desperate. Do you understand?"

"What do you mean?" I clutched her arm. "Why should I stay with a man who despises me when another adores me? I've had a good time till now, but . . . You don't know what temptation is—"

"Who is it?"

"I didn't say it was any one. . . . Don't start at me like that! You look as—a devil. . . . If I did, he'd have driven me to it; he's a cold brute. He—"

"I won't listen to abuse of him," I said.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "I want help. . . . Closed the door upon her. I called at Robert's office the next morning and saw him alone."

"Bob," I said, "I've got to be disloyal to one friend or another. You have to come first. . . . You are all right, but I've got to go. I can't see your life spoiled by a tie that you honor and she—if I were you I should have Margaret watched. . . . Not a word. It doesn't bear discussion."

He rose slowly; staggered; rested his hand on the table. "Nina!" he said, hoarsely. "You know that she—"

"Have her watched!" I said, sharply. Then I turned and walked out. I went away for a month. When I came back he had taken proceedings for his divorce.

I don't know what kink in my character took me to the court. He had kept me out of it, of course, and I needn't have gone. Margaret was foolish enough to fight the case. I don't think she expected to save herself, only wanted to say what she said in the box.

I have done things that lay me open to suspicion, she said, looking like a beautiful, pale statue, "things that I should not have done. I deserved to lose my husband's affection! But I tried to win it back. He did not want me back. That made me desperate, and I—"

"You have not answered my plain question, madame," Robert's counsel interrupted. He repeated the question—I need not name it—and she fainted in the box. The judge suggested to her counsel that it was a matter for his discretion whether "this painful cross-examination" should proceed when his client recovered. She did not reappear and her counsel accepted judgment against her. I sometimes wonder whether she merely fainted, or by default to give Robert his freedom. The man protested her innocence, but he married her afterwards. I do not trouble very much about Margaret even now. I did not trouble about her at all then.

My brain was in a mad whirl thinking of the time when Robert would come as a free man to me. I went away to the sea, which we loved, to wait for him. He did not come.

It was his idea of my "goodness" and "delicacy" that delayed him, I suppose. He thought that I should not wish him to speak yet. I meant him to keep that idea all our lives. I decided to go back to town and wait patiently till we met in the usual course of friendship. He was away in the country, I found. His mother told me.

"You were a friend of Margaret's," she said, "but I think you wish for Robert's happiness."

"Indeed," I said, "I do, Mrs. Carr. Believe me, I do, and am a friend of Robert's, too. . . . He deserves happiness, and if it depended on my wish—"

I drew a deep breath; wondered whether the foolish fellow feared that I would renege him for some scruple, because he had been Margaret's friend. . . .

"Then," she said, "you will like to know that he has it. . . . He is engaging yet, but he and Joyce—"

I do not remember the rest. I found myself wiping my face with my handkerchief and feeling as if I had just "come to" at the dentist's from laughing gas.

"It is very hot," I said; "very hot. . . . I feel as if something is sticking in my throat!"

The Red Fisher knew what it was. (Copyright, 1921, by the Chicago Tribune.)