

# FATE OF THE SERPENT

## A ST. PATRICKS DAY STORY.

By JOHN FITZGERALD

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It will be admitted that a man who is to play the part of a serpent might select a better day than March 17 for such a performance. In the case of Harvey Miller, however, the decision was not made in advance, but upon the impulse of the moment. Circumstances, he would claim, and not deliberate choice put him into the role of tempter of his friend.

He was an Englishman in a national guard regiment whose roster shows a clear majority of good old Irish names. According to its custom, this regiment paraded on St. Patrick's day in an east wind which for penetrating chill was unparelleled in the memory of any soldier or civilian in the procession.

After the parade and the resumption of his ordinary attire Miller came out upon the steps of the armory, and the first gust that struck him made his teeth chatter. Immediately he was aware of a shivering, childish voice which said:

"A note for you, lieutenant. It came to the house after you'd left."

Miller beheld a blue visaged boy named Michael Healy, whose mother was landlady at the house where the generalman boarded.

Miller took the note from the boy's hand, ordered him to "report" to his mother and dismissed him with flat tiring formality. Then as he walked along the street the lieutenant opened and read the communication, which disclosed to him the fact that he would not have the pleasure of escorting Miss Florence Lantry to the masked ball to be given that evening. The young lady, who had been visiting her cousin, Miss Kate Mahan, had been called and sent home.

For certain reasons the reading of this note set up such a confusion of thought in Miller's brain that he forgot to continue walking, but the extraordinary chill of the afternoon struck to his vitals as soon as he stopped. At that moment a door opened opportunely just beside him, and he walked into the ornate cafe of a hotel.

The warmth of the place affected him with a childish sense of gratitude. The armory had been as cold as a barn—almost unendurable, in fact—after five hours out of doors on that raw day. He had thought that he should freeze while changing from his lieutenant's uniform to his civilian clothes, and his vitals still quivered with the chill. A temptation to have something to drink assailed him, and he moved toward the bar, but turned aside and stood irresolute in a corner.

Presently he was aware of voices just outside the window by which he was standing. Half a dozen members of his regiment had halted there, and one was saying:

"Come along, Larry. One drink on a day like this can't hurt a fellow."

Miller was alert in a moment. Previously more than half his mind had been concerned with the note from



DONOVAN WAS MARCHED INTO THE CAFE AT DOUBLE QUICK.

Miss Lantry, and only a small fraction of his attention had been given to his surroundings. Now he was recalled to complete self-consciousness and active, practical thinking. His face flushed. He thrust the note into a pocket of his overcoat and walked to the door.

"Come in, boys," he said. "Here's where we all save our lives after that march today. Larry, you're the color of a drowned corpse. You ought to see yourself in a looking glass."

He took a step or two forward and laid a hand on Larry Donovan's arm. Some one else immediately seized the other arm, and Donovan was marched into the cafe at double quick.

"Nothing strong for me," declared Donovan. "I've been on the water wagon for a year, and I'm going to stay there. I know when I'm safe."

One of the men on the other side of

the table looked across at Miller with a shake of his head. He was aware, as Miller was also, that Donovan had not always known when he was safe.

but, on the contrary, had put himself into very grave peril. That warning glance embarrassed Miller, who had been upon the point of ordering something hot and strong for all hands without regard to Donovan's refusal. While he hesitated some one else stepped in to the breach and gave the order.

"What time are you going to show up at the dance tonight?" asked one of the men.

Donovan turned to Miller.

"What hour did you mention to our coachman?" he inquired, with mock dignity.

"Aren't the trolleys running this evening?" inquired some one.

"Not for us," responded Donovan. "If I should get into a trolley car in the costume I'm going to wear tonight I'd be mistaken for the owner of the whole street railroad outfit."

"What's the costume?"

"A suit of red tights, two horns and a tail," answered Larry. "No, sir; I don't want to make the conductor nervous. Miller and I," he added in a more serious tone, "are going to escort Miss Mahan and her cousin from out of town, Miss Lantry. Did you see about the carriage, Harvey?"

Miller nodded, while two or three of the other men secretly exchanged glances. It was more than suspected among their inmates that both Miller and Donovan were seriously smitten with sweet Kitty Mahan and that Miller had been the less successful rival for her gracious notice. There had been gossip that he had not taken his defeat with a good grace, and as he had the heavy tenacity of purpose characteristic of many men of English blood it was regarded as surprising that he should be found playing the part of servicable friend and escort to the country cousin.

Now, the truth is that this was more surprising to Miller than it could possibly be to anybody else. His pride gnawed his vitals whenever he realized the position into which he had been drifting during the last few months and especially since Miss Lantry had come to the city. He cared nothing at all for that estimable young lady. Her presence gave him an opportunity for seeing more of Kitty Mahan, particularly for seeing her and Lawrence Donovan together, for spying upon them in order to discover whether there existed between them anything that could be called an understanding. This observation had filled his heart with bitterness, for it had revealed to him the very many ways in which Donovan excelled him as a cavalier, and yet it had satisfied him that Kitty was still heart free, so far as she herself knew.

If Donovan could be removed from the scene for awhile, if he should suffer some reverse in this sentimental battle, if he should cease to be so amusing to Kitty, with his songs and stories and unfailing light heartedness, there might be a chance for Harvey Miller.

"I'm told that Florence has a stunning costume," said Donovan aside to Miller. "I suppose she wouldn't tell you what it was."

"No," he replied, "but we shall soon see. Here's her health with all my heart. She is a very charming girl."

He touched his glass to Larry's, and the trick was done. Larry had not quite the strength to decline the toast, and so he raised the glass to his lips. Five minutes later every glass was empty and others were on the way.

When Miller was upon the street again it was half past 3 o'clock. He had been in the cafe less than an hour and had not drunk very much, and yet the clock on the railroad station opposite seemed to have acquired three or four extra faces, which lurched and gyrated and melted into one another so mystically that it was amazingly difficult to tell the time. He realized his condition and knew that all the other men were as bad, except Larry Donovan, who was worse.

Miller observed with satisfaction that two of the most reckless of the men had attached themselves to Larry and that they were leading him in a direction which would never bring him to his home or to the Irish societies' masked ball unless continued all the way around the world. Considering what Larry's tendencies had been for a couple of years before he became an abstainer, there was no reason to doubt the issue. One of two things must happen—Kitty Mahan would not see him at all that evening or she would see him at his very worst.

With Larry out of the way he could present himself at Kitty Mahan's house in the handsome costume which he had provided for this festive occasion. He would be informed that Miss Lantry had gone, and he would exhibit surprise, an appropriate sympathy, too, because of the bad news about her mother. Her note to him must have been mislaid at the boarding house.

And what has become of Larry? Not here? How surprising! He was not at his home. It was natural to suppose that he had gone on to the Mahans alone. Let us wait for him. Half an

hour's waiting perhaps and no sign of Larry. Miss Mahan is offended. Mr. Miller escorts her to the ball; he makes himself extremely agreeable; he obliterates the memory of Larry from the young lady's mind. It is the beginning of victory.

Thus he forecast the evening's events. They would make a sensation and exalt him in the estimation of his friends who now believed him beaten in the game of love. Would he be blamed for Donovan's downfall in case his comrade should really go on a protracted spree and seriously injure his prospects? Perhaps by a few, but he would manage to crawl out of it somehow. The word gave him a momentary sensation of being a crawling creature, a brother to those that St. Patrick drove out of the Emerald Isle, but he shook off such fancies and defied the saint.

There was another consideration, however, which demanded attention. It was the matter of finances. He had spent an extravagant sum on his costume and had not reserved enough to carry him through the holiday with perfect security. Donovan, who was to have been his companion, had agreed to lend him whatever he might need, but Miller himself had cut off that source of supply and must now look for another.

He counted his cash and was amazed to learn how much he had spent in the barroom. He was aware, however, that this is the common penalty of such foolishness, and he wasted no time in regret. Instead he acted upon a genuine inspiration and called up on the telephone a certain friend of his whom he knew to be well supplied with ready cash. The response was cordial.

"Be at my house between 6 o'clock and half past 8," said this obliging gentleman.

There was a long silence. The cabman gathered up his reins and urged his tired horse forward.

"Hold on!" called Miller. "Drive back—back where you took me from."

Mike Healy was upon the steps of the boarding house as Miller, scowling and muttering, crossed the sidewalk. "I was afraid I'd make a mistake," said the boy proudly. "Guess I laid awake pretty near all night."

Miller pushed by him roughly and entered the house. His temper was not improved even by a good breakfast, and he was the sourest rascal in town when he arrived at his place of employment at half past 8. One of the first persons upon whom his eyes rested was his fellow employee, Larry Donovan, who seemed to be in even better spirits than usual.

"Pity about Miss Lantry," he said sympathetically. "But why didn't you come along anyhow? We had the time of our lives. Narrow escape for me, though. If I hadn't got away from that blasted barroom just as I did—However, it's all right now. Never again—not a drop. I've given my solemn word to Kitty Mahan, and you know what a pledge like that will mean to me."

lighter head. Upon the stairway he met his youthful admirer.

"Mike," said he, sitting down without intending to do so, "can you tell time by a clock?"

"Sure," responded the boy. "I'm feeling a little under the weather, and I'm going to turn in. Understand?"

"That means go to bed," said Mike. The lieutenant struggled to his feet. "Knock on my door at half past 5," said he. "Don't you dare to forget it. That's orders."

He went on to his room, put on about half of his masquerading costume and then dropped upon the bed, asleep before he had fairly struck it.

Faithful to his orders, little Mike Healy rapped upon the lieutenant's door at precisely half past 5. Miller sprang up, dazed, groped for his watch and after a glance at it dismissed the boy with thanks. Five minutes later he was upon the street, shivering and confused and presenting a figure sufficiently grotesque in his courtier's costume of two centuries ago under an overcoat of today's pattern.

An empty cab was passing, and Miller was reminded that he had given no notification to the cabby whom he had engaged that he had made a change in the hour of his departure. He hailed the driver of the chance vehicle, gave him the address of the kind friend who was to lend the money and climbed aboard. He sank shivering into a corner and tried to make plans for the evening.

The ride seemed very long, and the passenger's wits were gradually restored. Suddenly he put up his hand to his forehead and became rigid from top to toe.

What was the matter with the street? It should have been thronged at this hour, but, on the contrary, was almost deserted. Moreover, by some strange miracle it was growing lighter. The gas lamps were pale. A peculiar quality was perceptible in the chill and murky air.

A shiver that was not of cold passed over Miller's body. He thrust his head out of the window and shouted to the driver hoarsely. "What time is it?"

Cabby pulled up his horse and looked around sleepily.

"About 6 o' the mornin'," said he. "There's a clock forinst ye."

"Morning!"

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### SHOPPING RUMORS.

By H. J. Birkenmayer.

I always mean to have my sense of humor with me," said a shopper the other day, "and it is wonderful how it

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drives grim cate away. Last week I had three such absurd experiences that I've hardly stopped chucking over them yet.

"In the first place I was looking for a copy of 'Tales from Shakespeare' by Charles and Mary Lamb. This book as everyone knows is commonly called 'Lamb's Tales.' I was in a hurry and rushed up to the book counter in one of our large department stores and asked the much-pompadoored clerk if she had a copy of 'Lamb's Tales.' Evidently only the last two words reached her ears, for she replied promptly and decisively: 'Lamb's tails? Fur department, second floor.'

"My next experience was in buying a set of furs. The clerk showed me a handsome set of lynx, but I hesitated on the ground that lynx did not wear well. This objection was at once set aside by the clerk, who said in a most superior manner: 'Oh, that may be true of some sets, but this particular set was made from the very part of the link.'

"For a moment I must confess I was nonplussed at the word 'link.' Then I argued it out satisfactorily to myself. Surely, if the plural is lynx, the singularly should be link. Why not?

"My third experience was in hunting for a plain brass seal, on which to have cut my husband's monogram. I went

to the counter having brass furnishings for desks and asked for a brass seal. The answer came back: 'Brass alligators, brass elephants; no brass seals.'

"This has since reminded me of the old story of the Boston woman who asked for a copy of Browning at a country store which also contained a small circulating library. The storekeeper-librarian made answer somewhat on this wise:

"'No'm, We hain't browning. We've blacking for your shoes and bluing for your wash. We've got a whiting for your silver. Sometimes we do a little pinking. In winter we've as good greenin's as you ever set your teeth into; but I must say we ain't ever had a call for brownin' till now!'"

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