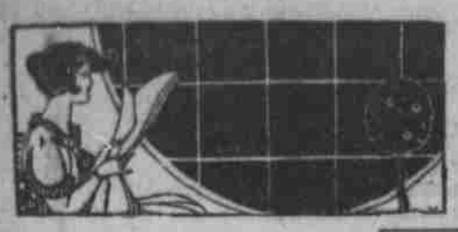

SHORT STORIES
OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE

The Wealthy, Poor Man

By Elsie Endicott

THE delicate flower of a white orchid trembled ever so slightly in its paper-thin crystal vase as the wealthiest man in the city tilted back his swivel chair and drummed the fingers of his thin hand on his mahogany desk.

The wealthiest man sighed. He felt very much alone. Old Scout, his thoroughbred airedale, had died that morning, and the world in consequence seemed very thin and much apart from an old wealthy man. True, he had many friends and was much beloved, but Old Scout was his family, and when one's family dies one's world is hollow.

He was aroused by the respectful knocking of his office boy, and the door opened reverently as the little fellow entered. The old man liked the boy and his bright freckled face was as welcome as ever this morning.

"Good morning, Tom," the wealthiest man greeted the boy.

"Top o' the mornin' to ye, yer honor."

The wealthiest man smiled. "Why do you call me that, Tom?"

"Call ye what, yer honor?"

"Your honor."

The boy blushed and twisted his fingers in his coat but his eyes never wavered. "Because, sir," he stressed the sir, "I forgot, sir."

"Forgot what, Tom?"

"Yer honor."

The old man pondered and shook his head. "I don't understand yet, my boy. Tell me again."

The boy grew redder under his freckles, but he stood staunch. "It's a game, sir."

"Oh, yes, I see." The man twisted the crystal vase between his thumb and forefinger. He watched the heavy blossom tilt back and forth while he questioned further. "And if I told you I liked games, Tom, would you let me play, too?"

The wealthiest man grasped the vase in his entire palm.

The slender crystal stem cracked and broke. A stream of water trickled over the papers on the desk and mingled with a drop of red blood from the wealthiest man's hand. The white orchid seemingly shuddered and writhed. Its delicate petals turned gray and crumpled. It faded into an ash and was gone.

The boy's face was white and awed. He looked apprehensively at the man. "Oh, sir . . . " he said, his voice weak.

"It's gone, Tom." The man spoke lightly.

"Yep, like death, sir."

"Yes, like death, Tom, or dreams."

"Oh, no, yer honor, oh, no, sir, I mean; dreams they ain't like that. If ye believe in 'em and put faith in 'em they're bound, sir, bound to come true."

"And why do you think so, Tom?"

"Me mother, she says so, yer—sir, I mean."

The wealthiest man felt a lump in his throat and fullness around his eyes that was even more forceful than earlier that morning, when Old Scout feebly tried to wag his tail just before —

"Could you get into college, Tom? It's awfully hard. There's exams and schooling—"

Tom's whole body was tense with eagerness. "Oh, sir, we're doin' that, Mary 'n me. I'm goin' to night school and Mary helps me, too. Mary's my sister."

"And ma?" asked the man.

"Oh, ma, well, there's her eyes, you know, sir."

"Ah, yes, her eyes," the old man repeated.

Tom edged nearer. "Oh, y—sir, I mean, theyre such beautiful eyes, ma's are. Big and soft and brown, but, sir," Tom touched the sleeve of the man's coat, "she can't see nothin'." He fingered the broadcloth. "But, yer honor, Mary 'n me 're goin' to fix that. There's doctors maybe what could help her, don't ye think, yer hon—sir, I mean."

The wealthiest man passed the back of his hand across his own eyes. "Tom," he said, "you saw that orchid there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know how much money it costs?"

Tom grinned and shook his head in denial.

"That flower, Tom, just that one, cost $25." The wealthiest man's voice was stern. Tom quivered a bit, he knew the boss could be very severe.

"Every day, Tom, I have such a one here in my office."

"Yes, sir."

"That's $25 a day, Tom." The man smiled somewhat grimly. "How much is that a week, boy?" Tom pondered.

The wealthiest man continued. "How much do you get a week, Tom?"

"Five, sir." He was at once alert. "I got a raise, sir, from $4.50, you know."

The wealthiest man cringed.

"Tom," he said, "what do you need most in the world?" Tom screwed his face in thought. He did not answer.

"What do you want most, Tom?"

Tom shut his eyelids tight in the intensity of his thought. His entire face puckered until wrinkles and freckles were apparently his only features.

"Don't you know, Tom?"

"No, yer hon—sir. It ain't time fer 'nother raise yet, 'n' Mary can't go to college cause she's got another year at high school."

"And your mother, Tom?"

"And ma's gonna git her eyes fixed as soon's I save enough money." Tom smiled confidently at the man. "Nope, I don' know. Unless . . ."

"Unless what Tom "

"A goose, sir."

"A goose?"

"Yep, like at the old place that ma tells about." The boy's face was all anticipation now. Clearly the momentous question was answered. Above all else he needed and wanted a goose.

"A goose, stuffed, sir."

The wealthiest man smiled kindly. "There shall be a stuffed goose, if—"

"Yep, yer honor." Tom in his anxiety forgot the "sir."

"If I can help eat it, I'm goose hungry, too."

"You hungry, sir?" Tom expressed unconditioned doubt.

"Oh, yes, and Tom, my family died this morning—all the family I had. Old Scout, I called him, and he was the finest dog a man ever had."

The boy nodded seriously.

"I haven't any Mary, nor any mother with big soft eyes, Tom."

"Ain't youse go nobody?"

"Nobody at all, Tom."

"Gee!" the boy looked at the man with feeling. "Gee!"

"Gee!" repeated the wealthiest man.

Tom laughed readily. "Say, I guess you do need somethin'." He moved closer to the man. "Say, if youse come home with me after work and see ma she'll help you, honest she will."

"How will she help me, Tom?"

"Well," he edged nearer and whispered confidentially: "Mary, you know, hadn't anybody, and so we jest took her in—we adopted her." The boy paused, thinking. "Maybe, yer—sir, I mean, if youse wanted to, and if you tell ma, we could just adopt you, too."

The old man turned his face away from the boy. "Could you afford to keep another, Tom?" His voice was husky.

Tom answered readily. "Yep, I think so. You see, I could work nights again like I used to, and—"

"And give up night school?"

"Yep, jest for now, you know, and youse could help with the goose money, we'd let that go fer now—fifty-fifty, you know."

"All right sir." The wealthiest man held a trembling hand to his freckled office boy—"fifty-fifty."

"Yep, yer hon—sir, I mean. Tom looked straight into the other's eyes with a frankness and honesty that thrilled the man.

"What'll you call me, Tom, after? I don't like 'sir' and 'your honor,' either one of them—they're too mighty sounding."

Tom's brows knit again in deep perplexity. The old man watched the mechanism of his thought and saw the pug nose wrinkle, the corners of the generous mouth twitch. Finally the eyelids fluttered open and the gray eyes sparkled with suppressed fun and daring.

"Let's go home and tell ma, Old Scout," he said.

Dresses For Dolls

By Phil Moore

LEONIA had reached her twenty-second year before she had seen a moving picture, been kissed by mere man, or enjoyed the luxurious smoothness of a silk-stockinged leg. The awakening to this third deprivation was what started Leonia on her flight towards independence.

Leonia was the daughter of an elderly country gentleman, who believed that the youths of today were headed on a speed train towards destruction, and that his daughter would not follow suit if he could help it. So she was brought up in a restricted environment, living a select, conservative life on the large estate, with scholarly tutors and maidenly attendants.

And then quite suddenly she awoke to the limitations of her existence and became possessed with the desire for silk stockings, plus the other joys of life. She arrived at the desire by a strange manner of reasoning. The clothes she wore were old fashioned and old maidish. The modern lads liked style and dash, and—to judge from the village girls—silk stockings.

Leonia was desperatey lonely. She wanted to be like the girl who went walking every Sunday with their beaux. Even Katie, the kitchen girl, was to be envied. How could she win the attentions of some estimable young man? Modern clothes, modern manners, Silk Stockings!

Blushing over the audacity of a thought she decided at the same time to procure them by hook or crook. But how? Father hadn't any money to spare; her allowance was limited to $1 a week, and she dared not ask for more. Other girls managed to earn money, but she had been brought up by a man who believed it unwomanly to seek occupation outside the home. What could she do?

One day as she was surreptitiously examining a mail order book and figuring that she needed at least $100 for a complete outfit of clothes, the bright idea came.

"Beautifully embroidered dresses of sheerest lawn for little tots, 2 to 6 years, $10," she read, and the idea hatched on the spot.

She had made dolls' clothes for years. Why not little children's clothes? There was no sewing machine in the house, but the seams would be short and easily hand sewed. Besides she embroidered with master fingers. And up in the attic was the wonderfully fine linen which had been packed away in the cedar chest since her mother's death years before.

Leonia's castle rapidly assumed enormous proportions. She couldn't quite figure out just where she would sell the finished gowns, but as the pastor had so often advised she had but to follow the candle light and as she progressed new paths would open up for her. Filled with the money idea she hastened to the village store to buy a pattern, and there she halted, struck dumb by a new idea.

Standing near the counter was a young traveling man whom she had noticed several times before. He was a stranger to her, but she had heard him spoken of as a "coming young man." Swaying between hope and fear, she approached him.

"Are you a salesman?" she asked timidly.

The man turned towards her. He had a nice, clean-cut face.

"Yes, can I do anything for you?"

"You might give me some advice if you will. I want to sell some children's dresses. Do you sell such things on commission?"

"No, I don't," returned the man regretfully. "My line is shoes."

"Oh!" Leonia suddenly realized her boldness and blushed furiously. "I'm sorry to have bothered you."

Her disappointment and embarrassment were so evident that the man was suddenly interested in her.

"I say, don't go," he exclaimed. "There's no reason why I can't look into the matter. I'm on my way to a large department store in the next town. They deal in dresses as well as shoes. Tell me more about your stock."

He was so encouraging, so matter-of-fact, that Leonia soon found herself telling him her whole story, and she was thrilled with a new-born sense of joy, as the light of sympathy rose in his eyes.

"I'll send you word of the prices as soon as I have investigated, and we'll try to land a small order first. To whom shall I write?"

"I'm Leonia Snow; just address the letter to Hillsdale, General Delivery, Mr. ——?"

"Jack Elliot, at your service."

Then they shook hands, and Leonia turned homeward, walking as though fairy wings had sprouted on her ankles.

Three dresses were completed the first week. Jack had sent word that the best offer he could get was $5.50 apiece, in dozen lots. Leonia wrote back, "Accepted," and feverishly attacked the other nine, which she actually completed during the second week.

The gowns proved more than satisfactory, and orders for more came in rapidly. Leonia was obliged to call in the assistance of some of the village girls who were eager to make an extra dollar.

There came a time when the attic supply of linen was exhausted and Leonia had to go into the open market for material. But she had plenty of money now, and when her father, aghast at first at his daughter's mixing in the trade, objected, she had already tasted the sweets of success, and laughed him into silence.

And still Leonia had no silk stockings. She had, in fact, forgotten all about silk stockings, for she had fallen in love and spent each day, as her fingers flew over the dainty garments, longing for a letter, which, fortunately for her happiness, always came. At first they were filled with business detail, but after awhile the business receded, the friendliness increased.

On Jack's next visit, he wended his way excitedly up the broad walk to the Snow estate instead of leaning over the store counter dickering over shoes.

"I've been promoted to head salesman," he said. "No more touring over the state for orders. But I'm not kicking at what has been, for if I hadn't drummed the country towns I wouldn't have met you. And life's been worth living since then! Leonia, won't you accept these? Won't you say 'Yes'?"

Leonia blushed as she received the gifts; there were two boxes. She opened the smaller one first. A solitaire! She blushed again as Jack pushed it on her left third finger, and kissed her.

Then she opened the second box—a pair of white silk stockings.

"I'll wear these on our wedding day," she whispered. "My first silk stockings!"

Camouflage.

He picked it up at a small garage,
And thought himself in clover
To buy a car so cheap—and found
'Twas his old one, painted over!

He picked her up at the facny ball,
And proved a charming lover—
Then found, instead of a brand new girl
'Twas his old one painted over!

Domestic Triangle

By Parke Whitney

"FOR pity's sake, girls, aren't you dressed yet?" called Mrs. Weston from the stairway. "I am all ready and your grandpa is hitching up and you mustn't keep him waiting in the cold."

"I'm ready, too, mother," answered Agnes, the younger daughter. "It's Isabel that is dawdling. She won't be ready till Summer."

Isabel, sweet seventeen and pretty as a picture, sat down, and, taking off her everyday shoes, gave them a vicious little toss into the corner of the room. "Mother is scared to death for fear Breck Montieth will get to the dance five minutes before I do. I hate him and all the other grinning idiots that will be there tonight. I'd a thousand times rather stay home than go."

"Oh, Isabel! Breck is the nicest man in Colorado, and I do wish you would quit being so grouchy—and just because Will McCall is gone," she added under her breath.

Mrs. Weston now came bustling into the room, and by the aid of her mother and sister Isabel was ready when her grandfather drove to the door and called, "All aboard!"

It was scarcely sundown, though bitter cold, but the sled was piled high with warm comforts and plenty of hay. A nest was made for a small tub filled with doughnuts and several varieties of pie, and when all was arranged they went skimming over the snow to a ranch some miles away.

Breck Montieth was near the door awaiting the Westons when they arrived. He was a large man, with hair beginning to gray a little about the temples, but with heart and spirit as young as a boy. He asked Mrs. Weston for the first dance, but the second one he begged of Isabel. She was about to excuse herself on the plea that she was tired and must rest; but she looked up and encountered such a pleading look from her mother that she had not the heart to refuse. When their dance was finished he led her to a quiet corner and seated himself by her side.

"Isabel," he said, "I was in Denver last week, and I know what great readers you girls are—all three of you"—he laughed as he thus included the mother—"so I bought some books for you. I'll bring them over next Sunday."

"Thank you," she replied frigidly.

"Isabel," he said, "I do so much wish that I could change your feelings toward me. Is there nothing, little girl, that I can do to make you like me—the least bit in the world?"

"There is nothing that can change me, Breck. And I might as well tell you now that there is not a bit of hope for you—never—for there is another man."

"What!" he cried, with ashen face. "You don't mean that, Isabel!"

"But I do," she averred.

"Who is he, Isabel?" and his voice shook. "Is it some one you knew back East?"

"I'll not tell you any more—it's just another man. That's enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's enough;" and Breck slipped away. He was seen no more that night. People wondered about him, and many inquiries were made, but no one could tell why or where he had gone. Breck did not go to any more dances that Winter. Mrs. Weston often looked at Isabel with sad questioning eyes, and with a reproach in her manner that was keenly felt by the girl. Isabel's heart was in Wyoming with Will McCall, who had gone away without so much as a goodby; and this, with the sense of her mother's displeasure, weighed heavily upon her.

Agnes, too, suffered from the gloom that prevailed. One day she declared: "This family is getting on my nerves. You are about as hilarious as tombstones. I must get away to get a breath of free air, and I'll go and gather sarvise berries—I'll get every one within forty miles—just to work off my feeling. And seizing a big pail she started up the gulch. When she had gone but a short distance she heard footsteps, and looking back she saw Breck Montieth. She walked slowly, and when he joined her she said: "Breck, everything is wrong. Mother is in the dumps—so is Isabel, and so are you. I am disgusted with the whole bunch."

"Why, what's wrong with your mother, Agnes? She ought to be happy—that man back East—he broke off, his voice trembling and tense.

"Man back East. Whatever do you mean, Breck Montieth?"

"Why, that man that loves your mother—that—"

Agnes broke in: "There is no man in the East, North, South or West that loves my mother, that I know anything about. She has never had a beau since my father died. What do you mean?"

"Why—why, Isabel said there was—that there was another man."

Agnes whistled. "This is the first lie that I ever knew Isabel to tell, but she certainly started with a whopper. Come on back to the house and let's have it out," and, seizing him by the arm, she led him straight into the room where sat her mother and Isabel and, though Agnes was too excited to see him at first, Will McCall. "Mother," she cried, "there's Breck Montieth. He says Isabel told him you had a beau. Now, you folks fight it out."

Isabel sprang to her feet. "Why, Breck, I never told you that!" she said.

"Why, why, Isabel," he began, when she burst into a laugh. "Breck, tell me, whom have you been trying to court—mother or me?"

"Why, Isabel," he said, "I have loved your mother ever since you came to this gulch."

The young people slipped out to the porch, where Agnes executed the Highland fling to express her joy. Then she ran away to tell her grandmother the good news.

"I thought you cared for Breck," Will said to Isabel one day after he returned from Wyoming, "and that your mother wanted you to marry him. He had his big ranch and all his cattle, and I hadn't a blame thing to offer you, so I ran away, but I couldn't stay, so—"

"But," interposed Isabel, softly, "you had yourself to offer, hadn't you, Will?"

A Strange Old Man

By Joella Johnson

WASN'T Dorine glorious tonight? Oh! She made me feel as if I wanted to cry and cry for hours on end. Do you suppose I'll ever sing like that?"

The speaker dropped her chin into her cupped hands and stared across the shabby little cafe with a gaze of almost tragic wistfulness.

A few blocks away the great opera house was once more a silent, darkened cavern. In her dressing room the prima donna whose "Butterfly" had moved eager hundreds to envy, sadness, or admiration—as the case might be—was fretfully removing her make-up and thinking of the check in her hand bag and the delayed dinner which would be ready in her apartment.

"Un bel di," hummed the girl in the little cafe. "Oh! do you think it will ever come to me?"

Her companion, a big, dark-eyed girl, set down a cup of viciously strong black coffee and gripped her fists tensely on the edge of the table. "Don't ever give it up. I never will. It's worth any struggle—any sacrifice."

A little old man sat opposite the two girls. He was sipping tea, munching a ham sandwich, and around the side of his newspaper regarded them with kindly quizzical eyes.

"I take it you're music students?" he advanced, courteously.

For the first time the girls became aware of his presence.

"Yes, we are."

The old man's face grew genial and encouraging. The girls responded: "Did you hear Dorine tonight? Wasn't she superb?"

"Madame Dorine is a very great artist. I know her. I have known her for a great many years. I have a fancy she would like you to hear her story. You particularly." He indicated the dark-eyed girl who had last spoken.

They bent forward glowing and expectant. Coffee and ices were forgotten.

"She was born in a small town out West. Sally Gerrish her name was—'Lucky Sally'—that's what they called her. It began when my brother sent her East to study singing. You see my niece and she were chums, almost inseparable, and there was money in our family while the Gerrishes were poor, at least too poor for that sort of thing.

"Well, they came on here, found a good teacher and settled down to hard work. They were as different as any two girls you ever saw. My niece was a quiet little thing. Took everything pretty sober and thought a long while before she made up her mind. The Lord gave her a better voice to begin with than Sally, but she had the ambition and the get there and was willing to make sacrifices.

"At the end of a year they were both getting ahead fine, but my niece had taken up with a beau, and she was doing a lot of thinking about more things than music. I never saw him, but I guess he was pretty handsome looking, and he was rich and sort of a swell. Well, about this time someone heard my niece taking her lesson, and he was crazy about her voice. He was looking for a soprano for his church, and he hunted her up and offered her the position.

"Sally and she talked it over and her young man was consulted. That's when he met Sally. In the end my niece decided she didn't want the position. You see she didn't have to care about the money side of it, and she thought it would interfere with her practice. Sally for some reason didn't agree with her. She took on at a great rate. Called her a fool and wished she'd had the chance, and at last she said if Crystal—that's my niece—wouldn't take it she was going to have it.

"I don't know to this day the whole thing, but Crystal's young man had something to do with Sally's getting the church. She did get it, and the folks back home said again, 'Sally's luck, and did anyone ever see anything like it?'

"There's a lot of things you can't see right from a distance. My niece was the lucky one that time, though no one knew it. Her fine beau kinder drifted away from her, and the next thing we knew he and Sally sailed for Europe on the same steamer. My niece never talked much about it. She went home and she never came back to study. She kept on with her singing, and we all think in our town that there never was a voice quite so beautiful. She's married now to a tip-top man, and she's got a nice home and three children—splendid youngsters. The boy's named for me.

"Sally never went back home till last Spring. She stayed over in Europe most of the time and the newspapers became her letters. We never heard much any other way. She kept her own counsel. The world knows her as a great singer. She's rich and she's generous to her people and back home they still call her 'Lucky Sally.' The man who led the two girls to the turning point of their lives lives in New York. He's married, too.

"Last Spring when Madam Dorine went home she stayed three days, and most of the time she spent at my niece's playing with the children. She was there when the telegram came with an offer that took her post haste to Paris. My niece laughed when she read it. 'You'll always be Lucky Sally' she said to her.

"Sally turned on her like a tigress she says. 'Don't let those words ever cross your lips again. Lucky Sally! Oh! the mockery of it!' Those were just her words, and for some time she paced back and forth without speaking. Finally she got quiet and bade my niece good-by. At the door she turned and said: 'Crystal, you've got two things I'd give all I have in the world to own.' Then she pointed to the plain ring on my niece's left hand and to the baby in his cradle.

"I guess perhaps that isn't just the kind of story you expected, but maybe some time it'll help you if you're ever at a cross roads. Good night."

The old man sipped his chilled tea, folded his paper, and bowed himself from the cafe.

Correct.

At a school examination the examiner asked one child:

"What are the products of the Indian Empire?"

The unhappy infant began nervously to reel off the list she had got by heart:

"Please sir, India produces curries and pepper and rice and citron and chillies and chutney, and—and—and—and—"

"Yes, yes," said the examiner, impatiently. "What comes after all that?"

Another infant's hand was raised.

"Well, you tell her what comes after that."

"Please, sir, India-gestion."

"Is he what you would call a first-class newspaper man?"

"I should say so. When the 'end of the world' scare was at its height he had two editorials written—one to publish if it did come off and the other if it didn't!"