

## THE GUILTY PARTY

By O. HENRY.

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A RED haired, unshaven, untidy man sat in a rocking chair by a window. He had just lighted a pipe and was puffing blue clouds with great satisfaction. He had removed his shoes and donned a pair of blue, faded carpet slippers. With the morbid thirst of the confirmed daily news drinker, he awkwardly folded back the pages of an evening paper, eagerly gulping down the strong, black headlines, to be followed as a chaser by the milder details of the smaller type.

In an adjoining room a woman was cooking supper. Odors from sizzling bacon and boiling coffee contended against the cut plug fumes from the vespertine pipe.

Outside was one of those crowded streets of the east side in which all twilight falls Satan sets up his recruiting office. A mighty host of children danced and ran and played in the street. Above the playground forever hovered a great bird. The bird was known to humorists as the stork. But the people of Chrystie street were better ornithologists. They called it a culture.

A little girl of twelve came up timidly to the man reading and resting by the window and said:

"Papa, won't you play a game of checkers with me if you aren't too tired?"

The red haired, unshaven, untidy man sitting shoeless by the window answered, with a frown:

"Checkers! No; I won't. Can't a man who works hard all day have a little rest when he comes home? Why don't you go out and play with the other kids on the sidewalk?"

The woman who was cooking came to the door.

"John," she said, "I don't like for Lizzie to play in the street. They learn too much there that ain't good for 'em. She's been in the house all day long. It seems that you might give up a little of your time to amuse her when you come home."

"Let her go out and play like the rest of 'em if she wants to be amused," said the red haired, unshaven, untidy man, "and don't bother me."

"You're on," said Kid Mullaly. "Fifty dollars to \$25 I take Annie to the dance. Put up."

The Kid's black eyes were snapping with the fire of the baited and challenged. He drew out his "roll" and snipped five tens upon the bar. The three or four young fellows who were thus "taken" more slowly produced their stake.

"And, oh, what'll be done to you'll be a plenty," said a better, with anticipatory glee.

"That's my lookout," said the Kid sternly. "I'll 'em up all around, Mike."

After the round Burke, the Kid's sponge, sponge holder, pal, mentor and grand vizier, drew him out to the boot-black stand at the saloon corner, where all the official and important matters of the Small Hours Social club were settled.

"Cut that blond out, Kid," was his advice, "or there'll be trouble. What do you want to throw down that girl of yours for? You'll never find one that'll freeze to you like Liz has. She's worth a hall full of Annes."

"I'm no Anne admirer!" said the Kid, dropping a cigarette ash on his polished toe and wiping it off on Tony's shoulder. "But I want to teach Liz a lesson. She thinks I belong to her. She's been bragging that I don't speak to another girl. Liz is all right in some ways. She's drinking a little too much lately. And she uses language that a lady shouldn't."

"You're engaged, ain't you?" asked Burke.

"Sure. We'll get married next year, maybe."

"I saw you make her drink her first glass of beer," said Burke. "That was two years ago, when she used to come down to the corner of Chrystie bare-headed to meet you after supper. She was a quiet sort of a kid then and couldn't speak without blushing."

"She's a little spitfire sometimes now," said the Kid. "I hate jealousy. That's why I'm going to the dance with Annie. I'll teach her some sense."

"Well, you better look a little out," were Burke's last words. "If Liz was my girl and I was to sneak out to a dance, coupled up with an Anne I'd want a suit of chain armor or under my gladstone rags, all right."

Through the land of the stork-vulture wandered Liz. Her black eyes searched the passing crowds feverishly, but vaguely. Now and then she hummed bars of foolish little songs.

Liz's skirt was green silk. Her waist was a large brown and pink plaid, well fitting and not without style. She wore a cluster of rings of huge imitation rubies and a locket that banged her knees at the bottom of a silver chain. Her shoes were run down over twisted high heels and were strangers to polish. Her hat would scarcely have passed into a flour barrel.

The "family entrance" of the Blue Jay cafe received her.

"Whisky, Tommy," she said as her sisters farther uptown murmur.

"Champagne, James."

"Sure, Miss Lizzie! What'll the chaser be?"

"Seltzer. And, say, Tommy, has the Kid been around today?"

"Why, no, Miss Lizzie. I haven't saw him today."

"I'm lookin' for 'm," said Liz after

the chaser had sputtered under her nose. "It's got to me that he says he'll take Annie Karlson to the dance. Let him. The pink eyed white rat! I'm lookin' for 'm. You know me, Tommy. Two years ago and the Kid is lookin' engaged. Look at that ring. Five hundred he said it cost. Let him take her to the dance. What'll I do? I'll 'em his heart out. Another whisky, Tommy."

"I wouldn't listen to no such reports, Miss Lizzie," said the waiter smoothly from the narrow opening above his chin. "Kid Mullaly's not the guy to throw a lady like you down. Seltzer on the side?"

"Two years," repeated Liz, softening a little to sentiment under the magic of the waiter's art. "I always used to 'play out' on the street of events 'cause there was nothin' doin' for me at home. For a long time I just sat on their steps and looked at the lights and the people goin' by. And then the Kid came along one evening and shined me up, and I was 'mashed on the spot for fair. The first drink he made me take I cried all night at home and got a 'm for makin' a noise. And now, say, Tommy, you ever see this Anne Karlson? If it wasn't for peroxide the chloroform fume would have put her out long ago. Oh, I'm lookin' for 'm. You tell the Kid if he comes in. Me! I'll out his heart out. Another whisky, Tommy."

A little unsteadily, but with watchful and brilliant eyes, Liz walked up the avenue toward the Small Hours Social club.

At 9 o'clock the president, Kid Mullaly, paced upon the floor with a lady on his arm. As the Loretta's was her hair golden, Her "yes" was softened to a "yah," but its quality of assent was patent to the most Milesian ears. She stepped upon her own train and blushed, and—she smiled into the eyes of Kid Mullaly.

And then as the two stood in the middle of the waxed floor the thing happened to prevent which many lamps are burning nightly in many studies and libraries.

Out from the circle of spectators in the hall leaped Fate in a green silk skirt under the nom de guerre of Liz. Her eyes were hard and blacker than jet. She did not scream or waver. Most unwomanly she cried out one oath, the Kid's own favorite oath and in his own deep voice, and then while the Small Hours Social club went frantically to pieces she made good her boast to Tommy, the waiter—made good as far as the length of her knife.

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