

Half A Chance

BY FREDERICK S. ISHAM.

Author of "The Strollers," "Under the Rose," "The Lady of the Mount," Etc.

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The butler returned a subdued answer, and John Steele, after a moment's thought, stepped to a large safe in the corner and, applying a somewhat elaborate combination, swung open the door. Taking from a compartment a bundle of papers carefully rolled, he unfurled the tape, spread them on a table and examined them, one after the other. They made a voluminous heap. Here and there on the white pages in bold regular script appeared the name of a woman. Her life lay before him, the various stages of an odd and erratic career—at a cabaret at Montmartre, at a casino in the Paris bohemian quarter, in London—at a variety hall of amusement. And afterward—wastrel nomad! Throughout the writing in many of the documents another name, too, a titled name, a man's, often came and went, blotted elusively from leaf to leaf.

The reader looked at this name, wrote a page or two and inserted them. But his task seemed to afford him little satisfaction. His face wore an expression not remote from discouragement. None knew better than he the actual value, for his purpose, of the material before him—the chaff, froth, bubble of the case! Almost contemptuously he regarded it. Had he sought the unattainable?

He drew himself up suddenly as if to shake off momentary doubt or depression. Replacing his documents in the safe and locking it, he walked into a room adjoining. In a bare, square place on the wall hung foils and broadswords, and the only furnishings were the conventional appointments of a home gymnasium.

Here, having doffed his street clothes and assumed the scant costume of the athlete, for an hour or more he exercised vigorously, every muscle responding to its task with an untiring ease that told of a perfect system of training, which proved of service to him and his well being, for one night not long thereafter he was called upon to defend himself from a number of footpads who set upon him.

The episode occurred in his own street near a corner, where the shadows were black at an hour when the narrow way seemed silent and deserted. For a block or more footfalls had sounded behind him, now quickening, then becoming more deliberate, in unison with his own steps, as from time to time he purposely altered his pace. Once he had stopped, whereupon they, too, had paused.

John Steele seemed oblivious. He moved into a doorway and, drawing from his pocket a cigar, unconcernedly lighted a match. The fellows looked at him, at the tiny flame. It flickered and went out. They hesitated. He felt in his pocket, giving them time to move by. They did not do so. In a moment the others from the main highway would join them. As if disappointed in not finding what he sought, Steele, looking around, appeared to see for the first time the evil looking miscreants who had come from the direction of the Thames and, striding toward them, asked brusquely for a light. One of the fellows thus unceremoniously addressed had actually begun to feel in his shabby garments for the article required when his companion uttered a short derisive oath.

John Steele's heavy stick rang hard. The way before him cleared. But close behind now the others came fast. His door, however, was near. Now he reached it, fitted the heavy key. Had it turned as usual the episode would have been brought to a speedy conclusion, but as it was the key stuck. The foremost of those who had been trailing fell upon Steele, but soon drew back. One of them, unable to repress a groan, held his hand to a broken wrist, while from his helpless fingers a knife dropped to the ground.

A ponderous, hulking fellow about six feet three, with a shock of red hair and a thick hanging lip, cursed loudly. Obviously this one of his assailants possessed immense, unusual strength.

"Let me at him, ye!" he cried in foul and flash tongue, when John Steele suddenly called him by name, said something in that selfsame dialect of pick purse and their ilk. The ruffian paused, remained stock still.

"How the— Who"—the man began.

"Call off your fellows!" John Steele's voice seemed to thrill. "I want to talk with you. It'll be more worth your while than any priggish or bagging you've ever yet done."

"Well, I'm blowed!" Suspicion gleamed from the bloodshot eyes. "And you want to talk with me? Here's a gamey cove!"

"I tell you I must talk with you! I've got a lay better than hooking you for the dock. As for the others, they can go, for all of me."

"Oh, they can!" The big man's face expressed varying feelings—vague wonder. At the same time he began to edge cautiously away. "That would be a nice plant, wouldn't it? Let's out of this, blokes," suddenly. "This cove knows too much, and"—

"Wait!" Steele stepped forward. "I want you, Tom Rogers, and I'm going to have you. It'll be quids in your pocket and not Newgate."

"Slope for it, mates!" The big man's voice rang out. Around the corner in the direction of the Thames the burly figure of a policeman appeared in the dim light. "That's his little game!" and turned.

But John Steele sprang savagely forward. "You fool! You'll not get away so easily!" he exclaimed when one of the others put out a foot. It tripped him. John Steele's head struck the curb violently.

For some moments he lay still; then he made out the face of a policeman bending over him.

"That was a nasty fall you got, sir." "Fall!" John Steele arose, stood swaying. "That man must not escape. Do you hear—must not?" As he spoke he made as if to rush forward. The other laid steady fingers on his arm.

"Hold hard a bit, sir," he said. "Not quite yourself. Besides, they're well out of sight now. No use running after."

Steele moved, grasped the railing leading up the front step. His brow throbbed; a thousand darting pains shot through his brain. But for the moment these physical pangs were as nothing. Disappointment, self reproach, moved him. To have allowed himself to go down like that—to have been caught by such a simple trick! Clumsy clod! And at a moment when—

"Pardon me, sir," the officer said in a brisker tone, "but hadn't we better go in? This, I take it, is your house. You can look after yourself somewhat and afterward describe your assailants; then we'll start out to find and arrest them, if possible."

Steele loosened his hold on the railing. He appeared now to have recovered his strength. "That's just what I don't want you to do. My name is John Steele. You know of me?" And as the other returned a respectful affirmative, "It is my desire to escape any notoriety in this little matter, you understand?" Something passed from his hand to the policeman's.

Walking quickly up the steps, John Steele opened the door, murmured a perfunctory "Good night" and let himself in. But as he mounted to his chambers some of the moment's exultation that had seized him at sight of the man revived.

"He has come back. He is here—in London. I surely can lay hands on him. I must! I will!"

(To Be Continued.)

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"There's a real sport for you," said Rickard in commenting on the telegram from Schwab.

FORMER MEDFORD RESIDENT
PASSES AWAY IN SAN JOSE
(San Jose Mercury.)

William G. Cooper, a prominent Civil War veteran, janitor of San Jose high school for the last eleven years and a member of the G. A. R., died at his home, 720 South Seventh street, Tuesday morning from pneumonia after an illness of one week. Mr. Cooper, until last Wednesday morning, had been in good health when he was taken with a chill. From that time until his death at 10:30 o'clock Tuesday morning he sank rapidly.

Mr. Cooper was born in Knox county, Illinois, February 20, 1842. He was the son of Samuel Cooper. In 1862 he enlisted in the army and participated in a number of important engagements. He served his country three years, at the end of which time he was honorably discharged.

Since 1885 he had lived on this coast, his first home being in Medford, Or. From Medford he came to San Jose in 1889 and had resided here since.

The deceased leaves seven children, who are: Theodore Cooper of Elmhurst, Cal.; Mrs. James Deas of San Jose; Mrs. O. Daugherty, of Portland, Or.; Mrs. Clarence Kellogg of Portland, Or.; Edward Cooper of Stockton; Mrs. Thomas Taggart and Miss Neva Cooper of San Jose.

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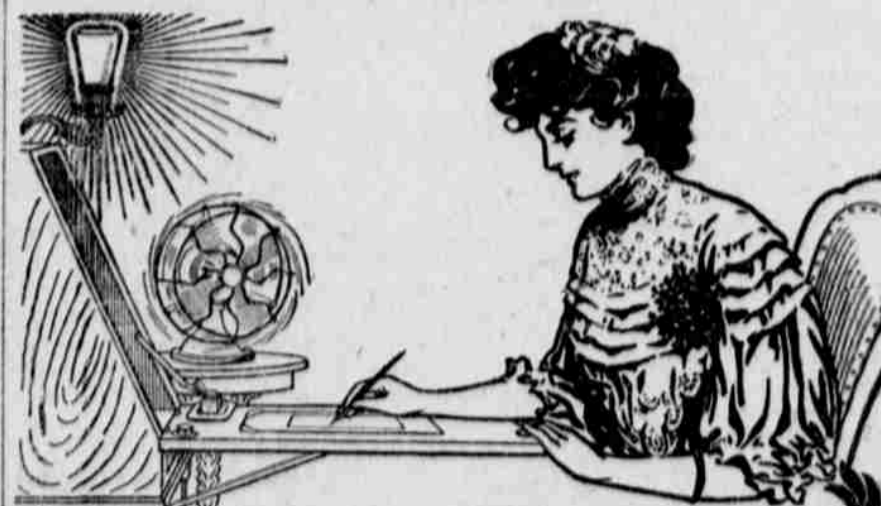
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