

THE PREDICAMENT OF SILAS SINGER

A Short Story

BY ELLIOTT FLOWER.

Silas Singer was ailing. It would not be correct to say that he was sick, for there was nothing serious the matter with him, but he himself insisted that he was ailing, and surely he ought to know. He needed some sort of treatment, but he was not sure what it ought to be. While he was debating this question in his mind some one suggested a vapor-bath cabinet.

"It is evident," said this authority, "that your circulation is not what it should be. You need something that will open the pores, give tone to the skin and freshen you up generally. Some feature of your interior mechanism is loading on its job and needs to be stirred up."

Silas was not sure that the home-made vapor bath would do the work, but it would certainly do no harm. It was worth trying, at any rate. Some men are so constituted mentally that they have to do a little doctoring now and then in order to preserve their peace of mind, and Silas was one of them. When he was very busy he was all right, but when business was dull and his mind reverted to his physical condition he always found that something was wrong with him. Then he would take digestive tablets or some new tonic with great regularity until business became brisk again, whereupon he would forget all about his ailments and his remedies. If he had taken exercise, it would have been better, but he did that only occasionally for perhaps two days in succession. The vapor-bath idea, however, impressed him favorably, and he straightway purchased an outfit.

Now, it stands to reason that a man ought not to fool with one of these things in the absence of his wife, for she alone knows where it ought to be set up, and she alone can attend to the preliminaries satisfactorily. But Silas Singer was an enthusiast in all that he undertook, and an enthusiast is always in a hurry to secure results. The day the vapor-bath was delivered he returned home early and found that it had been despoiled in his study.

"Well," he remarked to himself, "this is as good a place as any. This is my den, and I will not be disturbed here."

It was a good two hours before dinner, and his wife, he learned from the maid, had gone out to make some calls. Being in a fairly resourceful man, and having a book of instructions, it did not take him long to get the vapor-bath cabinet in working order. But he was cautious. Before either disrobing or starting the blaze that was to create the vapor he experimented "to see," as he expressed it, "what kind of a fit it was." Seating himself on the chair within, he closed it round him like a dry goods box, his head alone sticking out through a hole in the top. It proved to be rather a tight squeeze, but he was able to shut himself in, and he smiled with cheerful anticipation of the immediate flight of all bodily ailments.

"It certainly ought to do me a lot of good," he soliloquized. "What 'What we mortals need is something that will make our pores attend strictly to business. I'll bet Martha will find me fresher and brighter tonight than I have been for a year."

Then he lighted it up, disrobed, fastened himself in the cabinet and waited. It was rather slower in setting about the work to be done than he had anticipated, but the sensations were pleasurable; and he only

regretted that he had not been thoughtful enough to lay a paper on the top of the cabinet so that he could pass the time by reading. But that was a minor matter. The main thing was that he was being brought back to a condition of perfect health. He could actually feel the change, but it came in spots. Some parts of his anatomy were being rejuvenated more rapidly than others. This set him to wondering whether the thing was working right and he began to worry. It was annoying to have a blaze that he could not see in such close proximity to him; it might set something afire and scorch him before he could release himself.

"This is bound to make a man perspire one way or another," he muttered, "if the steam doesn't do it, the anxiety will. My head, which is outside, is perspiring worse than the rest of me that's inside."

Then a fly settled on the top of his nose. He shook it off, and it settled on his forehead. He shook it off again, and it went back to his nose, after which it tried to locate on one ear.

"I'd give a million dollars," he exclaimed, "for just one swat at that fly."

But the fly was forgotten when he heard a step in the hall.

"Great Scott! I wonder if I locked that door?" he muttered anxiously.

The answer came almost immediately, for the door slowly opened and a strange man looked in. He hastily dodged back when he saw the room was occupied, but almost instantly looked in again and surveyed with some curiosity what was visible of the astonished occupant. The latter's first impulse was to jump up, but he realized his utter helplessness and also the danger of any sudden move with a blaze immediately beneath him.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"Me!" answered the stranger, slowly, entering. "Oh, my name's Bill or Tom or Reddy or 'most any old thing, an' I come in 'cause somebody left the front door open."

"A sneak-thief!" ejaculated Silas. "Don't you git to callin' no names," retorted the stranger, "cause a man wot calls names has got to back it up, an' you ain't in no shape to back up nothin'. I could paste you one easy."

The perspiration was coming faster than Silas desired. The mental strain of trying to decide what he could do was of great assistance to the vapor in producing results.

"Have you taken anything yet?" he asked.

"Nix, not," replied the stranger with cheerful friendliness. "I got into this room first, 'cause it was close to the door."

"Well, if you will go out without touching anything I'll let you go and say nothing about it."

"Thanks," said the stranger, without giving any indications of an intention to depart.

"If you don't," persisted Silas. "I'll call for help."

The stranger coolly closed the door and set down on a chair in front of the bath-cabinet.

"I didn't know you was in," he explained, easily. "I thought the two girls was all, an' that wouldn't worry me, an' it don't worry me now. No sure-thing gent would want the female servants to see his cavortin' 'round in a short-skirt drygoods box, like you'd be if you stood up. They'd be worse scared of you than they would of me an' besides, if you make a whimper, I'll paste you one alongside the ear an' put you in a tangle that'll be nothin' short of disgraceful. No, sir, nix, not; you ain't in the shape to make no holler—not unless you're lookin' for somethin' soundious."

Silas realized that the man spoke the truth; and that did not make his predicament any the more pleasant. Irrespective of the presence of the thief, the vapor-bath had continued as long as he desired. He felt that he was melting away, and he wanted relief.

"For heaven's sake, get out and let me get out of this, anyway!" he pleaded. "I can't stand it."

"Nix, not," replied the stranger, that apparently being his peculiar form of emphatic negative. "It's doin' you good. Them things is fine for a man wot lives too high. If you move, I'll knock you wrong side up. Jest be comfortable w'ile I'm pickin' up a few things, an' I'll let the rest of the house go."

"Be comfortable," groaned Silas, "with a temperature of over 200 and still rising."

"Let 'er rise," returned the stranger. "If you could only see yourself, you'd thing it was funny enough to be worth all it hurts. But I ain't goin' to be long."

With that he got and made a quick survey of the room.

"Books!" he said scornfully. "Don't want 'em. Don't bring no sort of price, an' they're hard to carry. Pipes!" he added, as his eyes rested on the desk. "Now, that's more like. I've been lookin' for a good pipe." Here he put a fine meerschaum in his pocket, and then took possession of some solid silver ornaments. "Don't seem to be much else but the clothes," he went on.

"There's a little money in the vest pocket," Silas suggested plaintively. Freedom at the cost of the cash to be found in his pockets would be cheaply bought, for he was sure that he was losing an ounce a minute.

"Sure," answered the stranger, as he proceeded to roll the clothes up and tie them with a string, "an' a watch, too; but I can go through the clothes w'en I gets away."

Silas nearly upset the cabinet in his excitement.

"You're not going to take the clothes!" he cried.

"W'y not?" retorted the thief. "I need 'em."

"But think of me!" he pleaded. "I'll have to go upstairs like this to get any more."

"Stand up!" commanded the thief. Silas dared not disobey. With great caution he stood up, and the thief put out the blaze beneath the chair. Then he stood off and looked at his victim critically.

"Them there box coats ain't wot they're cracked up to be," he said. "This one you're a-wearin' ought to be longer so's to look real well, an' I tell you honest, if the servants sees you a-sneakin' up stairs with your legs an' feet stickin' out below like they are now, it'll be up to you to explain to the coppers an' the firemen wot's been happenin'. But don't say I never done nothin' for you; I put out the fire that was sweatin' you all up."

The thief picked up the bundle of clothes and opened the study door.

"Don't holler," he cautioned. "You'd scare them girls to death if they come on you sudden. You ain't a bit pretty in that rig."

This was quite true. There is nothing attractive about a box standing on two human legs and surmounted by a human head, and Silas was uncertain as to what move he ought to make. He unfastened the cabinet sufficiently to get rid of the chair the moment the thief had disappeared, and then fastened it up again. It was the only covering he had, and would have to serve him until he could get upstairs to his room. He was just preparing to make a run for it, cabinet and all, when the outer door opened, and his wife entered, accompanied by two ladies.

"I believe that man was a thief," she was saying excitedly. "Did you notice how he scurried away? I must see if anything is missing."

Silas has just time to turn the key in the study door when she tried it.

"Locked!" she exclaimed. "Who's in there?"

"It's I—Silas," he answered.

"Let me in!" she cried. "I'm sure there's been a thief in the house."

"Correct!" replied Silas. "He just left."

"Well, why don't you come out and chase him?" she demanded.

"Chase him!" moaned Silas, as he looked at himself and mentally pictured the furor he would create rushing down the street. "I—I am too busy, dear."

"Too busy to catch a thief!" ejaculated Mrs. Singer. "Why, the man's crazy—something must have happened to him. Silas Singer, why don't you open that door?"

Silas fairly danced about the room in impotent rage. If only those other women weren't there!

"Go away! go away!" he cried at last. "I can't be disturbed just now."

"I won't go away," retorted Mrs. Singer. "That man must have frightened you into insanity. If you don't come right out and go after him, I'll get an axe and break the door down."

"Oh, please go away," pleaded Silas. "Think of the scandal if—"

Here he paused abruptly, and Mrs. Singer looked blankly at her two friends.

"I think I'll have to be going," suggested one of them nervously. "I'll telephone to the police for you, if you wish."

"Do," said Mrs. Singer. "That man certainly has done some harm here, regardless of what he may have taken. Silas is certainly out of his head."

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"Perhaps I'd better get a doctor," suggested the other.

"By all means," said Mrs. Singer thankfully.

"Doctor! Doctor!" cried Silas, who had caught this last suggestion. "Hang the doctor! I don't want a doctor; I want a tailor!"

The two ladies looked at Mrs. Singer with sorrowful sympathy, murmured something to the effect that it was "too bad," and quickly retired.

"Have they gone?" asked Silas, as he heard the door close.

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Singer soothingly. "Will you let me in now?"

"Is the coast clear?" persisted Silas, ignoring her question.

"Yes, dear."

"All the way to my room?"

"All the way."

"Ellen, the maid on the stairs anywhere?"

"No. I'm quite alone."

He unlocked the door, but hesitated a moment before opening it.

"I'm coming out," he said, "but I want you to understand that if you laugh at me there will be a murder committed in this house. I've had all the humor I can stand today."

"Poor man!" she sighed. "I wonder what that thief did to him. I must be very gentle with him until the doctor comes."

Then the door opened and he marched out. He didn't scurry for the stairs; on the contrary, he moved with deliberation and a painful attempt at dignity. In his efforts to avoid making any more of a spectacle of himself than was absolutely necessary he actually added to the humor of the situation.

"Good Heaven!" cried Mrs. Singer, uncertain whether she ought to laugh or cry. "What have you been doing?"

"I have been taking a vapor-bath," he answered coldly and calmly.

"Oh! a vapor bath," she repeated, bewildered; "but I—I didn't know it was customary to carry the cabinet about in that way."

He was part way up the stairs, but he turned and addressed her deliberately and impressively.

"Mrs. Singer," he said, "if you

laugh, I'll wreck this house. A sneak-thief got my clothes."

She didn't laugh; oh, no! She just went up to the sewing room where she would be out of the way, and shut the door and lay down on a lounge and went into paroxysms of something that sounded like laughter, in all probability. But, being a wise woman, she never mentioned the subject again, even showing sufficient self-control to refrain from asking what became of the bath-cabinet.

Brooklyn Yachtmen of Cruise.

Norwalk, Conn., Aug. 10.—The squadron of the Brooklyn Yacht club, now on its annual cruise, reached Sheffield island yesterday and today started on its cruise to Black Rock, where the Brooklyn yachtmen will be the guests of the New Haven Yacht club. The distance is only 23 miles. Tomorrow the squadron will remain at Black Rock to take part in the races of the Bridgeport Yacht club. On Sunday the squadron will sail to New Haven, a short trip of 21 miles. On Monday the cruise will be continued to Duck Island roads, thence to New London and back to Black Island; thence to Shelter Island and finally to Thimble Island.

Southern Pacific Time Card, Effective July 3d.

Toward Portland. Train Arrives.

No. 16—5:23 a. m., Oregon express.

No. 14—8:23 a. m., Cottage Grove express.

No. 12—3:29 p. m., Oregon express.

No. 22—11:08 a. m., through fast freight.

No. 226—11:53 a. m., local way freight. Departs 12:45 p. m.

Toward San Francisco.

No. 15—10:56 p. m., California express.

No. 13—6:32 p. m., Cottage Grove express.

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