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LETTIE

SYNOPSIS.-Living in a barn, converted into a dwelling. Mrs. Penfield is manager of an apartment building known as "The Custard Cup," originally "Cluster Court." Her income is derived from laundry work, her chief patron being a Mrs. Horatius Weatherstone, whom she has never seen. Living with her are "Crink" and Thed," homelass small boys whom she has adopted. They call her "Pensie." Thad tells Pensie a strange man was inquiring for her under her maiden name.

CHAPTER II .--- Continued. ---2---

Above these rooms was a loft, once used for hay but now entirely cut off from the ground floor. It could, bowever, be approached by a ladder on the outside—and was so approached by Crink during winter rains, when it was the last resort for drying clothes.

It was September. The California summer was in its glory; the days were warm and bright, not yet edged with the crispness of fall. Crink being in school, Mrs. Penfield was managing alone.

i She had taken up her basket of clothes and started for the yard, when the bell rang. This was strictly in accordance with the usual routine, because Mrs. Penfield rarely finished anything without interruption. She put down her basket and went to the door.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bosley, Come right in."

A young woman stood outside. She was carefully groomed, smartly dressed, striking in appearance without being exactly pretty. She and her husband lived in The Custard Cup, but no one could understand wity. They were apparently free of responsibilities and devoted themI figger a child ought to be dis'ppointed at least once a week, in order to get used to life." She discarded a broken clothespin and reached into her pocket for another.

"I guess likely you aimed to have folks think he was your own kid," insinuated Mr. Wopple, testing the strength of his old pruning-shears.

"Land, no. I never claimed he was. He's mine 'cause I adopted him and love him, and 'cause he loves me. That's all there is to it."

Mr. Wopple thought otherwise. "It's easy said, Mis' Penfield, but I'll bet there's a lot more to it. Where'd you get Thad, Mis' Penfield?" With a quick movement she lifted

the sheet and pinned it into place. "The records are for Thad when he grows up."

"You got some records, then?" "Mebbe," she returned, on guard. "I don't see what diff"runce it makes."

"Well, I should say it made a lot. 'Course you'd want to know what kind o' folks he had. Might be things that'd crop out. You'd be the one to be dis-'ppointed if he was to turn out a robber or murderer or somep'n." Mrs. Penfield shook out a white skirt and smiled. "All you got to do, Mr. Wopple, is to look at Thad once and you won't talk that way. He's as sweet a baby as ever was, and there ain't nothing in his face that ain't good and dear. If he ever turns out bad, it won't be his fault; it'll

be 'cause I failed him." "'Shaw! More like it'd be somep'n in his birth."

Mrs. Penfield jammed down a clothespin with a violence that snapped it in two, but her voice was still pleasant. "Thad's got past his birth by 'most four years, and he



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to do than to tear little children to pleces, you'd better sleep twenty-four hours a day steady."

Mr. Wopple dropped his shears and assumed a reproachful occitude. "I jest thought you'd want to know what's bein' said-"

"Well, I don't," she interrapied. And if you've got a grain of sense, you'll put your mind on other things. Ev'rybody lives in his own generation; he ain't just reflectin' what's been lived before him. I know where Thad came from, and it's all right. Do you think you can remember that, Mr. Wopple?"

Mr. Wopple, with some hesitation, admitted that perhaps he could. Mrs. Penfield having hitherto been a satisfactory neighbor; and she acknowledged his courtesy by a smile, half girl appeared suddenly around the conciliatory, half abstracted. But when she had taken up the empty lothes basket and gone back into the house, she sat for several minutes looking into space, her busy hands idle, a mist of compassion in her dark eyes. Once her lips moved.

"Why, why can't I wipe out the handicaps entirely?" she breathed. "Don't seem right for any child-"

She was still sitting there , when Thad came in. Mrs. Penfield gathered the boy into her arms and kissed him. "Penzie," he gasped, "squeeze me

softer, please. I 'most can't breathe. What you do it so hard for?"

She laughed. "Bless your baby heart! I expect I was keeping av'rything away."

"Why, Penzle, ain't anything herejust you and me." "Sure enough," she said, more

lightly. "And we mustn't sit here. doing nothing. I've got to get to work, and you trot along and play." A few minutes later he came run-

ning to her in great glee. 🐡 "See, Penzie, I found somep'n." He held up a small package. It was flat, oblong, tied with cord?

"Where did you get that, Thad?" "In your room-all done up in paper."

"You shouldn't have touched it-" She took the package, to carry it back to her room; then paused in astonishment. The cords were fastened with wax; the seals had not been broken. She turned it over. It was soft to the fouch. On one side was simply the name "Bosley."

she thought, as she went into the bedroom. "Next time I'll let her keep It to home. I'll bet it ain't nothing I want in this house."

The Invasion of Lettie. Having delivered the final order of groceries for the day, Crink Penfield, row afternoon?" route home, and was rewarded by a you. I'm so stupid." and catch his breath with joy. In a could you?"

ALL'S FAIR By CORONA REMINGTON

(by McClars Newspaper Syndicate.)

CHARLOTTE BRONSON sat in the sum on the porch of the Country club and beneath half-closed lids eagerly scanned her surroundings. A man passing by glanced at the girl in the chair and softened his step.lest he rouse her. He was undoubtedly nice, she decided, but not very interesting. She assumed her old position and wondered idly who would pass next. A corner of the veranda accompanied by a man. Charlotte held her breath when she saw him. in a second she knew, she absolutely knew, that he was magnificent.

He was her dream man in the flesh. There were the tall figure and the dark eyes that could smile. Who could he be? For the first time she looked at the girl at his side. Yes, it was Florence Nelson. Would she bring him over and introduce him? Florence saw her, waved a friendly greeting and came toward her.

"Miss Bronson, this is Mr. Fleming," she smiled.

"Oh. I wonder whether you are any relation to Arthur Fleming, a lawyer I know in Chicago?" said Charlotte, putting out her hand warmly.

"He's my first cousin. Arthur and grew up together." "Now, you two have something to

talk about. I'm going to find Dot," said Florence, starting off. "Feels good to meet some one who knows old Arthur," laughed Fleming. "How long since you've seen him?" They talked and laughed together

for half an hour or more. Then Fleming rose. "Sorry I must go, but I only have

two hours before dinner and I'd like to exercise. No chance that you'd like to play a little tennis with me or learn tennis or something?" he asked hopefully.

"Oh, would you teach me?" asked Charlotte, eagerly jumping up.

"Certainly. I'd love to. Tennis is my hobby, you know."

They, walked off toward the courts together, chatting happily about nothing. At first Charlotte seemed clumsy, but soon she improved and by the end of the afternoon she played amazingly well for a beginner.

"You're going to make a crackerlack player." he told her enthusiastically as they returned to the club. "May we have another lesson tomor-

"I'd love to, but I'm afraid I'd bore

sight that made him stop suddenly "Bore me!" he laughed. "How



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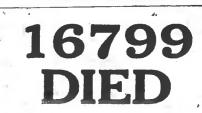


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CHAPTER III

varied monotony by taking a new

"That's never the family jewels,"

elves to good times; in short, they were everything that the other members of the community were not.

"I can't stop, Mrs. Penfield. I'm going downtown, and I wondered if you't let me leave this package with you. ' It's got a few trinkets in it. and I'd feel safer."

Mrs. Penfield hesitated. "I hain't got any safe place," she said slowly, "and I'm in and out-"

Gussie Bosley broke in eagerly. "You needn't feel any care about it. Nobody'd take it, but Tve got a feeling-I'd rather leave it here. I put a newspaper round it, so 'twouldn't look of any value whatever." She passed over a small package.

Mrs. Penfield took it with some refuctance and queried it into her bedroom. She was accustomed to all sorts of strange requests, but it was the first time she had been asked to guard valuables.

"I expect she thinks nobody'd look here," Mrs. Penfield reflected; and with that she dismissed the matter altogether and went on out to the yard with her basket. As she wiped the lines, she sang under ber breath in sheer blitheness of spirit. This was the happlest part of her work; she loved the air, the sunshine.

"Mornin'," called a rasping voice. "Why, Mr. Wopple, good morning!" she returned briskly. "Ain't it a grand day?"

"Well, pretty fair," conceded Mr. Wopple grudgingly. He never so far encouraged anything, even the weather, as to give it unqualified approval.

Mr. Wopple was a night watchman in some vague building near the water front; and no one in The Custard Cup questioned his being eminently adapted to exactly that work. Watchfulness was the keynote of his personality; he sacrificed many hours of possible daytime sleep by bringing his professional activities into the home field.

"Yes, it's a grand day," repeated Mrs. Penfield, quite as if she had received more encouragement. "How are you feeling, Mr. Wopple?"

"Jest middlin'," he replied, in a dieaway voice. His small, beady eyes were filmed for a moment, out of defartace to this sentiment. He gazed at Mrs. Penfield with a new shrewdnon which she would have sensed at ence If she had been less occupied.

"I see Thad's got a new rig," contisued Mr. Wopple, in the manner of. one who delivers a preamble.

"Yes, bless the baby !" laughed Mrs. Penfield. "I finished that up last sight! I'm sorry it's pink, 'cause it don't go with his hair the best ever, but that nice gingham couldn't go to THE REAL PROPERTY OF

"I expect Thad's lucky to get as muches that." Mr. Wopple now be-gan on the main argument. "Bine. He was a little dis podinted

in pist but that's good for him. And if you can't find nothing better

Her Dark Eyes Blazed.

won't never get mixed up with it again. He didn't inherit nothing that I'm afraid of, and one of the main reasons I'm living is to see that he develops just the way he's started. It's a good way; I like it; and if the Lord spares me, he'll be ready to meet the world face to face when he's growed up."

Her neighbor's thin lips twisted. "All is," he said slowly, digging his broken shears into a post, "I thought mebbe you'd like to know there's talk started. You see, Ben Simmons come in t'other day and he saw Thad. He said he couldn't get over it-Thad looks so much like a kid he knew about, a year ago. Perfect image, Ben says!"

Mrs. Penfield made no reply. A flush rose in her cheeks, but she placed her pins carefully in the last garment.

"Well, Ben says this kid didn't have no family he could be proud of Seems his mother run off somewhere and died of it, and his father was 'rrested for somep'n and-"

Mr. Wopple was gazing at the post, and therefore did not see Mrs. Penfield's reception of his speech.

"Stop !" she cried. He looked up in injured bewilder-

ment. Mrs. Penfield was standing in front of him. The color was high in her cheeks; her dark eyes blazed dangerously.

"You stop!" she repeated in a low voice. "You look so small to me that I can't scarcely see you 't all. But if you're still there, you'd better lay hold of one thing; you let Thad alone. Ain't nobody's business where best the solor, 'cause he ain't struck he came from, nor who his folks were.

large lot, where he distinctly remembered a tenement house, there only an enormous heap of debris. that a grand fire? Here's where I get busy."

He hid his basket behind a mass of shattered masonry and plunged into exploration of the highest mound of ashes. Crink lived the life of salvage. A bit of human wreckage him, self, he had an unfailing attraction for all the material wreckage that came within range. Young as he was, the boy was an expert with a bent piece of iron, flicking scrap heaps for those fragments which have been thrown out, not because their usefulness is exhausted but because their owners have been lacking in ingenuity. Even as Mrs. Penfield had rescued him, so had he in turn rescued countless bits of wood and cloth, iron and tin, and pulled them back into the field of service.

Squirming to the top of the mass, Crink discovered an incredible piece of luck, the wheel of a dismembered sewing machine. He grabbed it, but at the same moment another hand also grabbed-a small, thin hand. A pair of bright black eyes confronted Crink, the eyes of a girl about his own age who had been conducting a series of investigations of her own from the rear of the lot.

"Hey, leggo there," cried Crink. "Leggo yourself," retorted the girl. "Shan't. I got here first."

"You didn't neither. If you had, you'd ha' taken it, wouldn't you?" For a moment the boy was stag-

gered. He had been prepared for action, but not for reasoning, and the latter had driven him into a corner where speech would merely weaken hls cause.

By a quick movement Crink lifted the wheel, but the girl's counter-pull flopped it back again with a smart whack that sent a cloud of ashes into the air. The contestants gulped, coughed, ignominiously sneezed. glared at each other with reddened eyes but with no diminution of will. "Now look here," began Crink, in

voice intended to be terrible, "you ain't gaining nothing. This here wheel's mine."

"Prove It, why don't you? Rummydummy !" "Goshi" he writhed. "Quit calling

names, you little fighting devil." "Now you got my number," she returned. "Just you make me one bit

madder, and I'll show you." "How'll you show me?" "I'll punch you into purgatory So !"

"Huh! You couldn't." "Could, too."

"Couldn't, neither."

"Would you like to stay and live with us, Lettie?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

And so it was arranged. They played the next afternoon and the next, and after a while it became a "Cracky !" murmured Crink. "Wa'n't settled thing that they should do it each day. And after a month of hard practice she had really become an ezpert player.

> "Charlotte, I want you to stay over and enter the contest we're 'going to have next week," he begged. "Oh, but, Tom, I'd get so scanda-

> iously licked," she gasped. "No: I believe you'd win, and if

you did I'd be so tarnation proud of you I'd chuck the law business and become a tennis professor, with you as assistant teacher."

"I-I'll think a ut it," she prom-ised, "and let you know tomorrow." Of course, she staved. She had intended doing so from the first second. And the contest that next week was close. Charlotte fought like a tiger to the very end and showed a skill that was amazing in a beginner.

""I'm too happy for anything," she told him when they were alone at last, after she had been presented with the silver loving cup.

"And I'm mighty proud of my pupil, I can tell you, and, somehow, Charlotte, teaching you to play tennis has been the biggest thing in my life. I wonder whether you feel that way too, dear."

He put a caressing hand over hers. "I-I've been very happy," she admitted.

"Then don't go. Charlotte; stay with me forever-" he begged. When Miss Bronson's visit was over

and she returned home her mother greeted her with a look of utter bewilderment on her face.

"Charlotte, I just received a letter from a Mr. Tom Fleming. He says something about proposing to you and goes on to say a whole lot more about teaching you to play tennis. Teaching you and you already a champion !"" "Sh-h-, mother, you mustn't tell

that. I didn't think it was a very big sin and it isn't always wise to shine too much before a man. When he offered to help me-why, it was simply irresistible."

"You absolutely amazing child!" laughed Mrs. Bronson. "But it's none of my business, dear. By the way, there's a letter from him for you, too." "Dearest," it ran.

"Just after our second lesson Arthur wrote me you were a crackerlack player, but whatever the reason I asked nothing better of fate, so helped carry on the little deception, but 'fess up now, didn't you ask me to teach you to play tennis because you wanted to be with me? I'm coming over tomorrow. Can't stand it another second alone. Love." "The conceit of the man," laughed

Charlotte jamming the letter back into its envelope.

"What's the matter, daughter?" "Nothing, only men are so deceivlag, but I adore him. Dinner ready. muddy? I'm starving."

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