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The Woman Behind the Funnel.

By Frank Hurburt O'Hara.

The woman behind the steamship funnel started. She had been dozing, perhaps, but now she was quite awake. She thought she heard a voice very close at hand. It sounded familiar, and she lay back in her chair, listening.

"I first met Mason on the Bund at Shanghai," said the voice.

The woman trembled as she listened. The voice came from the other side of the funnel. Her back was to the huge stack, which prevented the possessor of the voice from seeing her. She did not move, only tucking the blankets more closely about her.

On the other side of the liner three men sat. He who was speaking was perhaps 40 years of age, or a trifle younger. His voice was low and clear. The others smoked and listened.

He was a handsome chap, this Mason, an athletic sort of fellow, and not over 25 when I knew him. But, as I was saying, it was for him that a very peculiar sacrifice was made—the only sacrifice that ever came exactly under my own observation.

"Tell us about it," ventured one. For a time the first speaker was silent, gazing out over the moonlit Caribbean.

"Well," he said, at last, "I was in Shanghai when Mason came out from the States. His sister was with him, or, perhaps, I should say he was with her, for she was the backbone of the two—and she was a dream. Oh, well, as I said, it was a long time ago, Miss Mason was as rich as any one might wish to be, and perhaps richer. They were orphans, and mighty fond of each other. Grace that was her name—"

Adopted her brother, and he certainly thought a lot of her. All the money, it seems, had been left to Grace, maybe because the father had known of his son's weakness for gambling.

"I didn't learn about this love of game until a long time after I met Mason, but, of course, it cropped out in time. Otherwise, he was an ideal man, I think, but once he got to gambling there was no stopping him. And yet, strange as it may seem, Grace never had discovered this. He had wasted a pile of money, I suppose, and hers, too. But she never knew, nor even accused him of being a spendthrift.

There was another American in Shanghai at this time whom I happened to know extremely well. Afterward he told me all that I am going to tell you.

The man relighted his cigar and for a long moment said no word.

"And he?" his companions prompted.

"Oh he fell in love with Grace, of course. There wouldn't be anything worth telling if somebody didn't. He wasn't a very wealthy fellow in fact, all he had was a little income. Beside the Mason fortune it was infinitesimal. But, mind, it was not the money he wanted. It was Grace.

Grace liked Shanghai and lingered there. So was just over in the Orient for pleasure—had come to see the 'cherry blossoms of Japan,' as she said, and then had come on down the coast. Perhaps it wasn't Shanghai alone that kept her. For after all, heresses are mortal and have hearts. In short, she fell in love with the man.

"Meanwhile Mason had become fond of the lover and had found him a good companion. But he never let the man know about his weak spot—oh, no! So things went on, until at last Grace had promised to become a wife. They told the brother and he was willing. But, alas! things fell. You see, the fellow felt he wasn't quite ready financially to do all that he would want to do for his wife. So they waited a bit—waited a bit too long."

He paused, tossing his cigar over the rail. The woman behind the funnel was listening intently. She shivered a trifle as the man resumed.

"One day Grace took her betrothed into her confidence and told him of a vast sum of money that was coming to her from a firm which was sending an agent to Shanghai to settle the matter. I won't tell you how much of a sum it was, because you might not believe me. At any rate, the sum was coming, and the woman told her fiance and the brother.

"There is no need to dwell upon the following events. What happened is obvious. The agent came and the brother somehow managed to step in ahead of the sister and got the money. Don't ask me how on earth he managed it, for I don't know. The gambling fever was upon him—and the money went.

"The next day—that is, the day after Mason had lost the money—he took his sister's fiance into his confidence and told him about the whole affair. What was said during the ensuing moments is best not dwell upon. The brother was called a fool, a coward, a cur and so on. He took it all without a word, except to admit it was true by nodding his head and now then murmuring that the family name would be disgraced for all time. But what seemed to hurt him most was the fact that now his sister must know everything.

"In the rooms they met Miss Mason. She was very pale, and her lips trembled as she murmured some greeting. Then she dived straight at the subject.

"George," she said to her brother, "I know all about it."

Mason turned ghastly white and staggered backward. It was fortunate the room was not lighter.

"The agent has told me that my brother received the money—has shown me the receipt—the papers, and—I had confided only in you and in you, dear." This last addressed to her lover.

Then the poor girl collapsed and shook with sobs.

"George! O George! How could you?" she cried.

"The lover shot one glance toward Mason, then, setting his teeth firmly, spoke in a low voice:

"Miss Mason, please—please don't blame your brother. It—it was I."

"Grace jumped to her feet with an inarticulate cry.

"You?"

"Yes—I impersonated your brother for the purpose."

They were quiet for a long moment. Grace staring fixedly into her lover's eyes, while the brother, very, very pale, kept glancing nervously from one to the other. At last the woman spoke, slowly.

"You would better go now. I am glad, after all, that it was not in the blood. Here her voice quivered a bit, but she steadied it and continued: "It would have broken my heart the other way. Now—now I do not know I loved you—but please go."

"The man had begun to tremble during her denunciation, and now he felt strangely ill.

"I will—pay you—some day," he muttered.

"You may settle," said she, very coldly, "with my brother."

Then she left the room. The self-accused man sank into a chair. The guilty one walked to the window and stood looking out, his fingers incessantly drumming the sill. It was not the brother who spoke first.

"You must go to-day. You must get her away from here."

Mason broke down. He wept like a baby.

"God, man!" he cried. "I can't do this. It's too much. I—I must tell her the truth. I can't let you do this for me."

"For you? It's for her—for the sake of the woman I love. For her to know would kill her. She will—forget me—perhaps."

"After a moment Mason spoke again.

"I'll never gamble after this," he said. "And I'll pay her, in your name when my money comes due. I'll never forget!"

The speaker broke off, and lighted a cigar. After a space of quiet one of the others asked:

"And the woman?"

The man smiled.

"The woman," he said, "went away with the brother. Afterward Mason paid the money and dropped the fellow in Shanghai a line to that effect. It seems he inherited some money at 30."

They three sat watching the blue expanse of water, smoking steadily. Atlas!

"And did they ever meet afterward?"

"Once," said the man, "years later. It was on a steamer. She looked him in the eyes when they came face to face, and he saw she did not know the truth."

It was very late. The decks were deserted, save for the three men and the woman behind the funnel. Two of the men went below, leaving the man who had spoken alone to his thoughts. Far ahead a dim light blinked, and he, seeing it, knew that the voyage was nearing its end. Suddenly there was a stir behind him and the woman came from the shelter of the funnel. The man jumped to his feet with a low cry.

"I have heard all," said she, smiling through a mist of tears.

The man turned his eyes away from her.

"I never meant you to know," he said, slowly.

"It would have made things so much happier—if you had," she answered.

"Grace!" he cried, turning to her. The ship steamed on in the tropic night.

Ostrich Feathers.

London leads all the other cities of the world in vulgarizing the ostrich feather. Its usage there is almost universal. Until 1870 France had a monopoly of this industry, but England controls the trade to-day. Cape Colony alone exports annually about 77,000,000 worth of feathers in their crude state, and these, when prepared for sale, represent at least \$30,000,000 in value.

The importations of France have fallen to about \$4,000,000, representing an industrial value of about \$20,000,000. In Paris alone over 4,000 men and women—mostly women—live from this industry.

A fashion which keeps alive such a prosperous industry and important foreign commerce, without speaking of the lucrative employment it furnishes to thousands of Europeans in Africa in the systematic raising of the birds, is likely to maintain its supremacy for yet a very long time to come, notwithstanding its respectable age of over 4,000 years.

The First Forks.

The Greeks and Romans, with all their luxury, ate with their fingers. They had large forks for hay and for taking meats from kettles, but they never dreamed of having small ones for table use. These are the only forms of forks known to have been in use before the fifteenth century. Sometimes during that epoch the Italians began to practice, now common to all civilized people among the Western nations, of eating with forks.—St. Nicholas.

WARINESS OF BLACK DUCK.

Habits of a Game Bird That Tests the Skill of a Hunter.

The black duck is infinitely wary and intelligent; he is a valuable prize, the hunt is thrilling and adds to your fund of wholesale memories, says the Connecticut Monthly Record. To outwit his vigilance and win the privilege of handling his firm set, well-scented plumage requires a thorough experience of his habits, an eager love for hunting and the practice of the Christian qualities of patience, watchfulness, long suffering and endurance. Withal, a quick eye is needed and such shooting judgment as enables one, partly by sight, partly by sound, to hit a whizzing streak of feathers traveling through the darkness at 40 miles an hour.

This cleancut water fowl is a night rover. By day he rests far out in the sound where his watchfulness protects him from large craft, and where it is perilous for a ducking boat—getting caught off shore by a northwest wind is very serious, and a cardinal calamity of the longshoreman—lany. Clams, muscles, snails and certain marine roots are his food, and he eats no fish, but feeds at the water's edge.

When dusk comes he sets out for his restaurant, selecting it as the tide, wind and weather promise best. Sometimes he flies toward the beach, sometimes he flies into the marshes.

Our black duck has compound lenses for eyes and travels by sight, not by instinct. In a fog he will not stir unless alarmed, dark nights he flies low, but keeps well up when the skies are moonlit. When he flies over a meadow he sees all that is going on there; he notices and remembers landmarks, and you will rarely shoot one from a newly-built blind. His ears are keen as an owl's.

An old Maine guide—a close observer—once told me that "black ducks can smell like a fox," but John R. Roughs, the dean of the American feathered college, says their power of scent is small. In storms I have had them fly up the wind, almost into my face, I have often laid on the beach and watched them drift within short range, with a sculling boat, masked by rushes, they are very easy of approach.

The black duck never dives unless wounded, and then he develops all the submarine agility of the loon. I do not believe he will go down, hold on to the bottom and drown rather than be caught, although they often disappear, hiding in muskrat holes or sticking an unseen half inch bill out of water when compelled to come to the surface for air. I have dropped a black duck in a narrow shallow creek and watched him swim under water with wings and feet, trying to find a hole in the bank.

You are hunting a bird whose ears and eyes are far sharper than yours, who is automatically alert and suspicious, who has no curiosity and takes no chances—anything unusual, and he is gone. He pays little attention to a low lying motionless object, but will detect, when a mile away, the muzzle of a gun stirring against the sky line.

How the World Laughs.

High mentality is shown in a laugh, according to answers. There are savages in Africa who never laugh, they grin, that is all; and this lack of the quality of laughter is a symptom of their low mentality.

The Chinaman has no hearty bursts of laughter. He utters cynically—tit-ters over the misfortunes of an enemy or the elopement of a daughter of a friend. He cannot laugh. When he is delighted, or amused, or happy, he just looks calm.

The Frenchman has a reserved laugh, one which he holds well in hand. Being a great stickler for dignity, he is afraid that a loud and honest laugh would injure his deportment, would demean him in the eyes of the world. You will not hear much more laughter in Paris, though it is true that the women have a cultivated musical "ha-ha-ha," that they use in cafes when they wish to attract somebody's attention.

The German's laugh is cavernous. It comes from far down somewhere in his stomach. The laugh of the Irishman is, upon the contrary, rather soprano, not a stomach laugh, nor even a chest laugh, but a head one.

The English and the Americans laugh the best. Their mirth is so naturally and heartily and musically expressed that you cannot but rejoice on hearing it.

Shipbuilding a Fine Art.

"There is," says the Glasgow Herald, "a general tendency to reduce shipbuilding more and more to a fine art; to appreciate more and more the value of technical training given naval architects, and of the thorough knowledge of the trade of the world. The movement in favor of a chair of naval architecture at Liverpool and another at Newcastle is gaining ground. Even with these and the one at Glasgow, Great Britain will be far behind Germany and the United States in facilities for technical training. The countries named were the first to realize the value of technical education, and they produced early a large number of students capable of becoming leaders in their different walks of life." Concluding the Herald says: "In its lack of scientific training Great Britain lost ground in shipbuilding for nearly a century prior to 1860, and to maintain the supremacy of the sea she must see that a race of naval architects is trained to take over the profession as the present generation retires from the field we are occupying so creditably."

THE SENSITIVE KOREAN.

Perhaps Feels More Keenly Things That Others Wouldn't Notice.

"There are brass men, and wooden men, and cowhide men, in all lands and among all nations, so also in Korea; but taken one by one, and as a whole, there is no race where there exists a more sensitive nature or a keener appreciation of the feelings of others," says a writer in the Seoul Press Weekly. "As for theaters, there are none, and Korea has no pit or dress circle, but yet every man plays to the galleries for all that he is worth and the manner in which he succeeds in his part is to him everything. We, from the west, are rude and careless in comparison. We move about without ceremony and think even to hold our heads up when our trousers are puffed at the knees and our shoes lack luster, but not so the Korean. He falls frequently into a state of dilapidation, and the burden of it is full of misery and bears heavily down upon him. If a sudden downfall comes his way he blossoms out immediately.

"His is a life of ceremony, and his words are full of all delicate shades of compliment and good opinion. By a turn of the verb or choice of the noun he can lift his hearer up among the gods and crown him with no end of distinction. Again by the same power of the tongue and same words used he can put you down into the depths and leave you weeping. Through the medium of this language of his he can tell you to go about your business and never come back again in a way that will leave you highly elated. Korean life and language are based on the understanding that this human frame of ours is capable of appreciating all the slightest degrees of frown and favor.

"At this time when their land has publicly passed under the protectorate, how keenly they feel it. It is no mere show of tears these days, but real sorrow that wells forth from the broken fountain of the soul. The wisest have seen that it must come and that their own misrule would end (thus ultimately, but that makes it none the less hard to bear."

How Cossacks Came to America.

Long before Peter the Great had sent Vitus Bering to America, in 1741, Russian voyagers had launched out east and north with a dare-devil recklessness that would have done honor to prehistoric man, says Harper's Magazine. That part of their adventures is a record that exceeds the wildest darlings of fiction. Their boats were called kotches. They were some sixty feet long, flat-bottomed, planked with green timber. Not a nail was used. Where were nails to come from 6,000 miles across the frozen tundras? Indeed, iron was so scarce that at a later day, when ships with sails ventured on these seas, natives were detected diving below to pull the nails from the timbers with their teeth. Instead of nails, the Cossacks used reindeer thongs to bind the planking together. Instead of tar, moss and clay and the tallow of sea animals calked the seams. Needless to say, there was neither canvas nor rope. Reindeer thongs supplied the cordage, reindeer hides the sails. On such rickety craft, "with the help of God and a little powder," the Russian voyagers hoisted sail and put to sea. On just such vessels did Dezhnev and Staduchin attempt to reach Asia from the Arctic into Bering Sea (1647-50).

To be sure, the first bang of the ice-floes against the prow of the rickety boats knocked them into kindling wood. Two-thirds of the Cossack voyagers were lost every year, and often all news that came of the crew was a mastpole washed in by the tide with a dead man lashed to the crosspiece. Small stores of fresh water could be carried. Pine needles were the only antidote for scurvy; and many a time the boat came tumbling back to the home port, not a man well enough to stand before the mast.

The Only Born King.

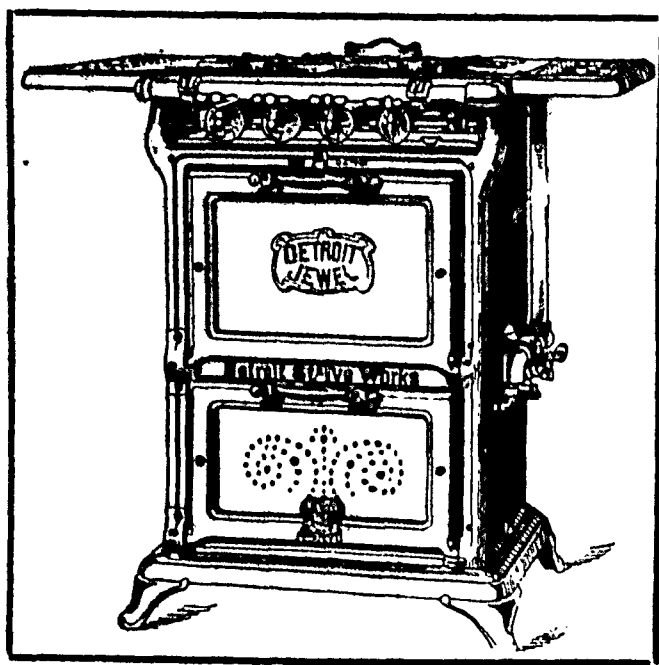
There is a fact about King Alfonso well worth knowing. Of all the Kings who have ever lived, with the sole exception of Jean I of France, who reigned but a few hours, he is the only one to be a King from the moment of his first breath—a veritable "born King." And since he is much spoken of these days it is not amiss to know his name, which is, His Most Catholic Majesty Don Alfonso XIII, King of Spain, of Castile, of Leon, of Aragon, of the two Sicilies, of Jerusalem, of Navarre, of Gibraltar, of the Western and Eastern Indies, of the Oceanic Continent, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Brabant and Milan, Count of Hapsburg, of Flanders, of the Tyrol, and Grand Master of the Golden Fleece. This is not really all, but it is a good deal to live up to, even for a King.—Boston Herald.

The Last Versailles Bourbon.

There is at Versailles an orange tree close upon 500 years old. This tree, which was taken from Fontainebleau to Versailles on the completion of the Orangery, was already famous under the title of the Great Bourbon. According to tradition, the tree had been planted in 1421, by a Princess of Navarre, and, after several changes of owners, came into the possession of Francis I, by whom it was placed at Fontainebleau. When it reached Versailles the King came to visit it, and two Grand Bourbons were then face to face. The man passed, and even his bones, torn from their tomb at St. Denis and tossed into a trench, have perished; not a pinch of his dust remains. But the tree lives and blooms and bears fruit—the only Bourbon at Versailles—serene, inviolable, enthroned.

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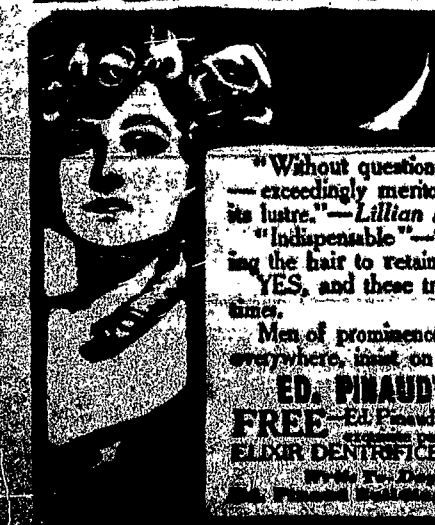
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