

Punctured

By ANDERSON HALEY

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P-z-z-z! B-s-s-sh! With the sickening swish of escaping air and the harsh grinding of brakes the gray roadster came to an abrupt stop. Jack Raynor sprang out and glanced sharply at his front tires. They were unmistakably flat.

"Well, of all the cursed luck!" he exclaimed in dismay. "Both of 'em and not an extra tube or casing. Nothing for it but to vulcanize the holes!"

Then unaware that a pair of startled brown eyes regarded him intently from behind the roadside tangle of bushes, he proceeded to say other things, uncomplimentary things about the road and the people who frequented it, things which it is unnecessary to repeat, but for which he will doubtless be pardoned by the veteran motorists.

For the mercury had already climbed to the "ninety-in-the-shade" mark. Presently, having exhausted his vocabulary, he flung off his coat, collar and tie, rolled back his sleeves and fell to work jacking up the front wheels.

Meanwhile the owner of the brown eyes, sensing the gravity of the situation, slipped unobserved from her hiding place and, berry pail in hand, sped across the adjacent cornfield to the small brown house beyond.

For a moment she lingered hesitatingly in the doorway. Then she disappeared within. When she came out again she was wearing a crisp brown linen dress with a deep white collar, in place of the faded blue calico, and she had on the bronze shoes and stockings ordinarily reserved for Sundays.

"I wonder if I dare," she whispered to herself in suppressed excitement. "But I'm going to, anyhow. It's the least I can do. He'll never guess how it happened. And it is dreadfully hot and dusty out there. Besides," irrelevantly, "he is splendid looking even when he's angry."

Ten minutes later, as Jack Raynor was ruefully contemplating two sharp tacks that explained the flat tires, his attention was attracted by a rustling in the bushes and, even as he looked, a slender girl of nineteen or twenty emerged, carrying a shining tin pail and a basket. His swift appraising glance noted that she was unusually pretty, with shy brown eyes, an abundance of soft brown hair becomingly arranged, and cheeks that glowed pink beneath their healthy tan.

"I thought you might like a fresh drink," she began timidly, extending the pail. "It—it's so warm this morning—and we do have good water—and on the way I picked these peaches—they're just ripe enough to eat," she concluded setting down the basket.

To Jack Raynor, tired and thirsty from his strenuous work, the sight of the sparkling water was indeed welcome. Smiling his thanks, he accepted the pail and drank eagerly.

"I don't know whether you are a wood nymph or just a sort of human angel," he said returning it to her, "but I was longing for a drink, and I more than appreciate your thoughtfulness. I always felt I should know a nymph if I saw her—that like you, she would be all in brown, with a hint of wild roses in her cheeks and sunlight in her hair. Won't you sit down, Wood Nymph?" he added politely, spreading out his coat by the roadside.

"I—I mustn't," she replied, in the same soft voice, "because you see I don't know you and—"

"Oh, if that's all I can soon set you right," he responded gayly. "I'm Jack Raynor of the state highway department. I'm looking up the route for the new state road, and I was getting on pretty well until the Grayhound," indicating the car with a nod of his head, "picked up a couple of tacks. I was just cursing my luck when you came along to prove the truth of the old adage about the 'silver lining.' And I'd much prefer to have company while I repair damages."

The girl seated herself gracefully and watched him with interest as he took out his vulcanizing outfit, affixed

a rubber patch, clamped it into place, and lighted the gasoline in the container. While he was waiting for it to burn out he sat down beside her. "Now—suppose you tell me about yourself. Of course I know you are a wood nymph, but even they must have names—otherwise there would be no end of confusion."

"There's nothing very interesting to tell," she replied quietly, her eyes fixed on the flame. "I'm Rose Carey, and father and I live in the brown house over there. He carries the mail, so I'm alone all day. He used to be a school principal, and then he developed tuberculosis and was ordered to stay out of doors, so we bought this little place and came here to live. With the mail route and the garden we get along. I had to give up high school, but he has taught me evenings. Mother died when I was a baby—there are just two of us—and I wouldn't for anything have him suspect I'm dissatisfied. In summer, with the flowers and berries and chickens, it's not so bad. But winters are lonesome—sometimes I just long to see the real world."

For a moment Jack Raynor was silent. Then, to hide the depth of his sympathy, he sprang up quickly and busied himself with the vulcanizer. "Wood Nymph," he inquired presently, "could you be persuaded to have lunch with me? I brought a substantial one along, and it's only fair to share it with you, since you've supplied the drinks and dessert."

Then, taking her acceptance for granted, he fished out a large box from the rear of the car and deposited it beside her with the comment:

"If you like you may set the table while I finish pumping up these tires."

To them both the wayside meal was a delightful adventure, entered into wholeheartedly and in the spirit of comradeship. Jack Raynor found himself more and more impressed by the charm of his companion and she herself under his approving gaze grew momentarily more radiant. Her face lost its wistfulness and her brown eyes sparkled with fun. He was sorry when, the lunch hour over, she rose to go.

"It's been a wonderful party, Wood Nymph," he said smiling down at her. "I have you to thank for turning my bad luck into fortune—now that I know where you live perhaps you'll permit me to stop without the excuse of repairs. Meanwhile here are the fateful tacks to remember me by."

But even as he laughingly extended them a change came over the girl. She drew back with a little shudder and turned her head away. But the gesture was not quick enough to hide the tears in her brown eyes.

"Why, Wood Nymph," he cried in genuine concern, "what's the matter? Have I offended you? Surely you know that I didn't mean to—I—"

"It—it's not you, it's—oh, you'll never want to see me again when I tell you—I put those tacks in the road myself."

"You put them there?" he repeated wonderingly. "Yes, because I—I wanted something to happen, because I was tired of seeing just the dust of the cars and never any of the people—I put the tacks there this morning when I came out after berries—then behind the bushes I waited—when your car came along I heard what you said and realized the damage I'd caused. I was frightened. First I thought I'd run away, but I wanted to make up a little for what I'd done—so I brought the water and the peaches. When you treated me so like a real friend—I—I couldn't bear to explain and spoil it all, but now," she added, miserably, "I can't let you go without confessing. I'm sorry about the tires, and, fumbling in her pocket, "I'd like to pay for them with my berry money, then I wouldn't feel quite so—so like a—handit," she finished, helplessly.

"You poor little girl," he said gently. "Don't you realize I'm grateful to those very tacks for helping me to find you—and of course I can't accept your berry money. But I'll tell you what, you can take it up to the Grayhound, if you like, with your own society, say twenty miles per tack."

With relief he observed that the brown eyes were smiling again.

"You see," he went on, "there's a prospect of running the road through your father's land—naturally that would considerably increase its value. I'll be over to talk to him about it some evening soon, and we can arrange about the ride then. Is it a bargain?" Brief as it was, the handclasp sent a thrill through his veins. With reluctance he released her slim brown fingers.

"Except that it wouldn't be playing fair, I'm mightily tempted to turn bandit myself and carry you off; but I warn you it will take more than tacks to keep me off this road in the future, and just by way of farewell," he said, "slipping into the car—he knew he should kiss her in another moment if he didn't—let me say that you've achieved your wish, Wood Nymph, something has happened, sure enough, but I'm afraid this time it's a puncture that can't be vulcanized."

Rose Carey watched the gray car until it was lost in the white dust of the road. Then, womanlike, because in her heart she knew the answer perfectly well, she said aloud: "I wonder what he meant by a 'puncture that can't be vulcanized?'"

Get the Drop. A certain stingy son of Erin, upon seeing another Irishman just going to drink a glass of whiskey, exclaimed: "Hould on Pat; let an odd friend have a drop, the last taste in the wurrld."

His friend passed the glass, and the stingy one emptied it. Pat was naturally annoyed, and said: "Bedad, I thought you said you only wanted a drop?"

"We may guess his feelings when he received the reply: 'The drop I wanted was at the bottom.'"

In the first six months this year mines in Western Texas yielded silver at the rate of 530,000 ounces a year.



MUST THE SMALL HATS REALLY GO

There are some women who never feel smartly dressed for the street unless they are wearing a small hat. This does not mean that the small hat is any smarter—simply that some women feel smarter when wearing it, and there is no denying the fact that when autumn winds begin to blow it is vastly easier to keep one's locks trim and in place under a small hat than a large one.

Undoubtedly it would be very hard for a good many women ever to give up the small hat. Yet there are times when small hats are quite out of fashion. A couple of decades ago no one but old women or widows in their weeds wore small hats, and those small hats were bonnets. When the so-called toque came in it was a real novelty. So you see, the small hat may go out of style.

And there are those who say that with the dress silhouette tending whither it now is the small hat will simply have to go. If we are to wear skirts that give the effect of broadness through the hips we will look absurd in our small hats. The only way to finish the picture as it should be finished will be to wear wide-brimmed hats or very tall hats. The very high headdress of the period of Louis XV in France was worn to counteract

the dwarfing effect of the wide-hipped pannier frock and when full skirts were in vogue some twelve or fifteen years ago hats that were extremely wide—so wide that you could not have worn one into a telephone booth without holding your head sideways—came into vogue. However, for the present there seems to be little chance that the wide-hipped silhouette will have anything to do with our tailored costumes. For street the straight up and down silhouette will persist and there are those who say that the distended hip could never succeed for transit, elevators and subways. Even if you go about in your own sedan or limousine you would find it incon-

venient for day wear to have on a suit that would make it impossible for you to occupy your little corner in a crowded elevator or to squeeze into some of those close passages that every one does have to encounter in going about by rail.

A tobacco can that carries a roll of paper inside its lid, against which any amount can be torn off to roll a cigarette has been patented by a Texas inventor.

An electric motor controlled by a lever on the steering post has been invented for operating the brakes on an automobile.

A polish machine for jewelers is featured by a suction fan to gather and save particles of precious metals.

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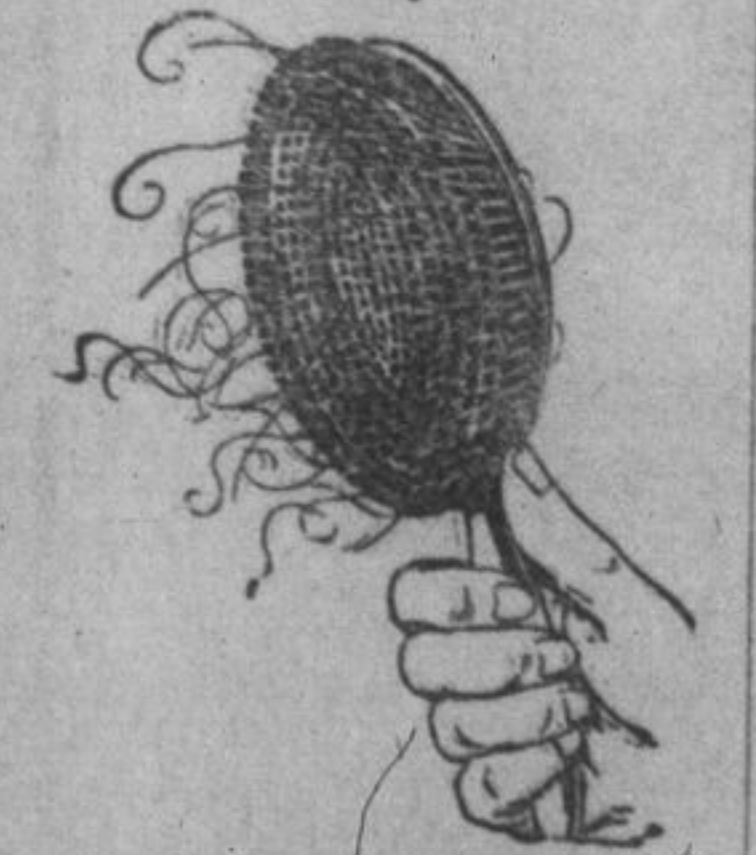
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