

Opera Hat



What has happened so far:

LONGFELLOW DEEDS'S only ambition was to be another Shakespeare, but when his uncle, Victor Semple, died and left him a huge fortune and the ownership of the Continental Opera Company, Longfellow suddenly found himself a patron of music. That was sort of tough, because Longfellow was a tuba player and could read only in the bass clef. Moreover, this opera company that he inherited was losing two hundred thousand a year and somebody had to make it up. It used to be Mr. Semple, and now they expected Longfellow to do it. His wool-hides-and-fertilizer career back in Mandrake Falls told him that this wasn't good business. So he was on the verge of selling the rights to broadcast opera to a soap manufacturer, Mr. Palk, whose wife aspired to make a name for herself in the world of art. Listening to an amateur night radio program gave Longfellow further ideas, and he threatened to throw all of the opera's traditions out the window at board meeting. Roger Bengold, his inherited secretary, and Mr. Cedar, of Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle, his lawyers, warned him against it.

But the opera's finances were not Longfellow's only troubles. Mr. Semple had had a weakness for the ladies, and a lawyer named Granzi claimed that the dancer, Nina Motti, was Semple's common-law wife and that there was

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also a child. To make the problem more complex, Motti was murdered when Longfellow and his bodyguard, Piazza—an unemployed gangster—were in the opera house. Thus they became suspects. Longfellow wasn't worried by suspicion being pointed at him, but when the police started to grill Simonetta Petersen, the lovely secretary of the opera star, Madame Pomponi, he became thoroughly angered. He sent a cable to Italy at once inquiring about all the Italian members of the opera

company. Longfellow believed that one of them must have killed Motti.

Simonetta was the only person he had met in New York whom he felt he could really talk to. He had already decided to commence an efficient courtship with her. And being a poet, and poetry being the very language of love, his campaign was to be waged in meters and rhymes. Mrs. Garrison, a society leader, was trying to marry her daughter Theresa to the very eligible Longfellow, but the plan wasn't working. It caused the two



Longfellow was used to Pomponi's interference—but Simonetta was in his arms. "Get out of here!" he said fiercely

"But why," asked a director, "are these people interested in a meeting of this board?"

"I interested them," said Longfellow. "I guess it is the first time an outsider has been interested in what this board did for a long time."

"Shall we proceed to business?" suggested Mr. Cedar.

"Mr. Palk manufactures soap," said Longfellow.

THE faces of the eminent directors mirrored their reactions to this announcement.

"He also," Longfellow continued, "runs a radio hour."

"And it is a very nice hour," said Mrs. Palk. "Papa and I often refer to it as the elite hour on the air."

Longfellow beamed upon her.

"So," he said, "I have made Mr. Palk a proposition. Mrs. Palk wants the hour to be even more elite than it is—"

"The papers will refer to Papa as a patron of the arts," Mrs. Palk said proudly.

"The proposition," said Longfellow, "is to broadcast Opera from the stage during the performance."

"Nobody has any better pearls than I have," said Mrs. Palk, "and if I could get a box right in the middle—"

"Do I understand," demanded a director, "that you consider violating every artistic tradition of the Opera by—by installing an electrical gadget upon the stage?"

"I do," said Longfellow firmly, "and I'm trying to sell the radio rights for the fourteen weeks of the regular season for

youngsters no end of trouble, though. Consequently, Longfellow heaved a sigh of relief when Mr. Dide, a would-be author, and Theresa arrived in the middle of the night to tell him they had eloped. Coinciding with their arrival came the answer to his cable to Italy. He threw the newlyweds out and read the cable. With a contented smile on his face he closed his eyes and dropped off to sleep.

Longfellow turns detective in this concluding installment. . . .



THE directors of the Opera were assembled about the table in the offices of Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle when Longfellow Deeds arrived in company with Mr. Bumpus, of the broadcasting company, and Mr. and Mrs. Palk. Longfellow took his seat and smiled a bit shyly about him.

"Mrs. Palk came along," he said, "because she is interested in her husband's business. Always, when he had a big deal on, my father used to take Mamma along."

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one hundred thousand dollars. Artistic tradition can stand a lot of violating for that much money."

The directors shuddered.

"Mr. Palk," said Longfellow, "has decided to accept my proposition."

"Which you had no authority to make, and which this board certainly will not confirm."

"You'll have to get used to confirming worse things than that," Longfellow said firmly. "As near as I can see, you haven't confirmed anything for years except to let Mr. Semple pay the deficit."

"The Opera is sacred."

"To whom?" asked Longfellow, and nobody seemed to be able to think of the right answer.

"It's the thirty-eight weeks the house stands idle that makes me mad," Longfellow said. "It's like putting a dollar out at interest for three months and then burying it in the cellar for the rest of the year."

"We find it difficult to maintain Opera even for a short season."

"Because the only way you've tried to maintain it is on charity," said Longfellow. "You got to be progressive. You got to advertise like Mr. Palk does. So I aim to keep the Opera open fifty-two weeks a year."

"HOW do you propose to bring this about?" asked a director, with a sneer.

"Well, the first thing I'm thinking about is to sweep out a barrel of cobwebs. And there's where Mr. Bumpus comes in. Mr. Bumpus is head of the broadcasting company, but he's 'way up in the motion picture business, too."

"We are acquainted with Mr. Bumpus's eminence."

"Did you know," asked Longfellow, "that an amateur night is about twice as popular over the air as an opera star?"

"Absurd."

"Anyhow," Longfellow said, "one of the things we are going to do at the Opera is have an amateur night."

"You're surely not serious. Such a thing would be sacrilege. Society would justly resent it."

"Then," said Longfellow, "we'll try to get along without society. There used to be four hundred folks in New York society and about a couple of



"Mr. Deeds," said the district attorney, "this cable is important, but it isn't proof"

million that weren't society. It stands to reason a couple of million can buy more tickets than four hundred."

"I am sure you will withdraw that suggestion, Mr. Deeds," said Mr. Cedar gravely.

Longfellow shook his head. "No, siree. I'm going to have an amateur night once a week, except during the regular season. It's going to be a nationwide contest. I'm sort of working up the details now. But the general idea is that the contest will run all the

year but the regular season—and at the start of the season we will announce the four winners, a bass and a tenor and a soprano and an alto. And the prize is that they get contracts to sing in the Opera."

"Unthinkable!"

"I suppose you think my poems are unthinkable," said Longfellow, "but I make more money than almost any other poet in the country. But anyhow we would have these amateur nights every week, and once a month we would have a contest between the winners of each week—see?"

THE directors sat in grim silence.

"And then, just before the season, we would have a grand contest between the monthly winners. Just look how it builds up. I'll bet you Mr. Palk will tell you it has got publicity value."

"It's got everything!" said Mr. Palk. "Listen; I want to make an offer—"

"So," said Longfellow, "you may take it as settled that there will be an Opera amateur night thirty-eight weeks a year."

"Not with the consent of this board."

"We'll come to that in a minute," said Longfellow. "Now, about motion pictures."

"What?"

"I went to one of these great big picture houses the other night. It was jammed. It was a beautiful place, all decorated up and everything, and so clean you could eat off of the floor. There was a show, too, and it was a pretty good show. And then the picture. They were turning people away."

"How does that affect us?"

"Like this," said Longfellow. "We are going to start in and just kick the stuffing out of the inside of the opera house and make it as swell and as clean as any movie theater in town."

"Where will the money come from?"

"Never you mind that. And then, if Mr. Bumpus and I come to an agreement, we will have a first-run picture every week except during the season—the swellest picture we can get."

"Sacrilege!"

"I don't know much about sacrilege," said Longfellow, "but I guess anything that is decent and respectable and entertaining, and maybe artistic besides, isn't as much sacrilege as a whole lot of

traditions and cobwebs are."

"I suppose that is all?" asked a director.

"It isn't even a start," said Longfellow. "We got to have a show in addition to the picture. Well, we already have a chorus. We got opera stars. I've been to a lot of operas since I got this job, and the trouble with them is, it's too long between tunes."

"Eh?"

"Just that. So, what I'm going to do for a show is to take all the operas and have somebody cut them down to fit."

"What?"

"Yes, sir; so you can sing the whole opera in half an hour. Just keep in the good parts. You know—tabloid. Then anybody can go and hear *Aida* and not get bored most of the time, because the good parts will be crowded together and the—the rubbish will be out altogether."

"Intolerable."

"WHO to?" asked Longfellow, without regard to his parts of speech. "Not to me. It's what's going to happen. For thirty-eight weeks, in a theater as well as any, we're going to have tabloid opera—with the regular stars and all, and first-run pictures, and an amateur night every week. Then for fourteen weeks we'll go back among the cobwebs, and see if it will work that way."

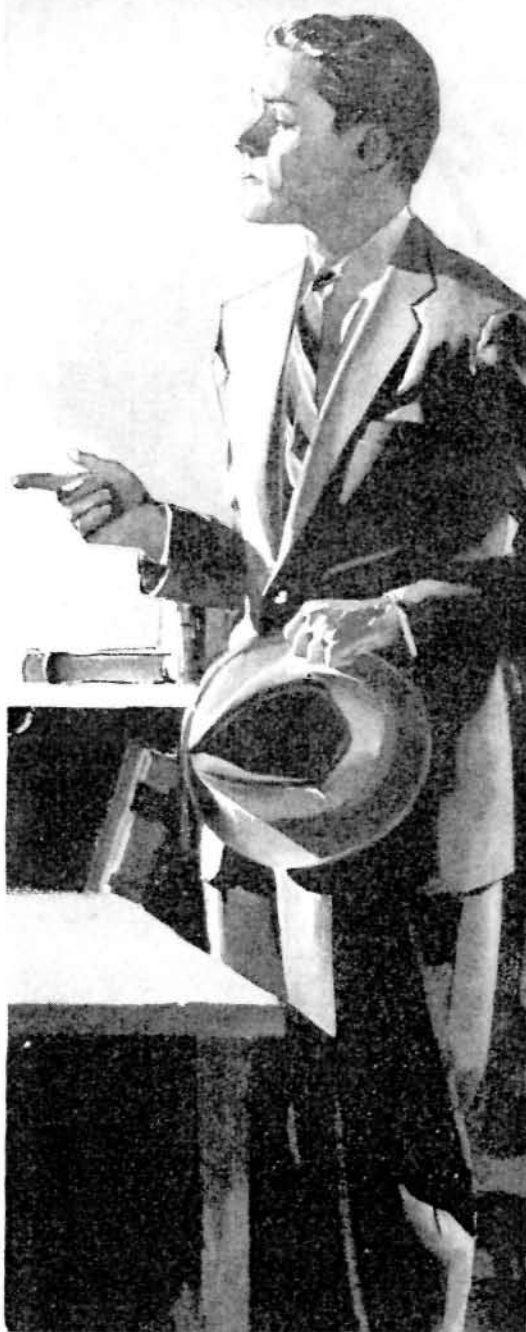
"I, for one, will never permit it," bellowed a director. "Vandalism!"

"I am going to put up the money to fix up the theater," said Longfellow, "but just as a loan. I get it back out of profits before there are any dividends to the stockholders. And, if our plans go through, there will be a new corporation, and it will be a kind of subsidiary of the broadcasting company, with them owning, maybe, a majority of the stock."

"We will serve on no such boards."

"I had an idea you wouldn't," said Longfellow. "It kind of gives the broadcasting company a corner on opera talent. Mr. Palk pays a hundred thousand for fourteen weeks. We can sell the amateur night for that much more. I bet you there are a lot of sponsors who will buy a half-hour of tabloid opera sung by the best stars once a week. Eh, Mr. Bumpus?"

"I estimate that the radio income



ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE HOWE

"But," Longfellow answered, "it's the best motive you have had so far"

alone will approximate half a million annually," Mr. Bumpus said.

"And," said Longfellow, "I've got to have some work, besides being a poet. That doesn't take all my time. I've got my regular customers who depend on me, but we've sort of agreed I am to be president of the new organization."

"This board will not consent, Mr. Deeds," said Mr. Cedar.

"I guess maybe you forget I own about ninety per cent of the stock in this business. If you own that much, why,

what you say goes. And I am selling my stock to the new corporation."

"The artists, the singers, Signor Visconti, the orchestra, will never agree."

"I've seen quite a lot of them. I got to know them pretty well. You just show an artist a heap of money and she'll let off her top note, even if she's got a cold in her nose. I'll take care of the artists. They'd rather have a job for fifty-two weeks, with lots of money, than one for fourteen with just a little."

"I resign," shouted a director, forgetting his dignity and hammering on the table.

"That," said Longfellow, "is a very good idea. I think it would be a very good idea if the rest of you resigned, too. Because you might as well. And then we'll elect a new set."

MRS. PALK leaned forward anxiously. "Could Papa be one?" she asked. "Just think if I could tell folks Papa was a director of the Opera!"

Longfellow smiled his very friendly, Mandrake Falls smile. "I think that would be nice," he said, "but don't you think it would be even nicer if you, Mrs. Palk, were the director, yourself?"

"Me!" She commenced to blink, and big tears ran down her chubby cheeks. "Me! You don't mean me!"

"Certainly, Mrs. Palk."

"Now, don't you go bellerin', Mamma," commanded Mr. Palk. "She cries easy," he explained.

"Oh, Papa," she said moistly, "I guess we got where nobody can stick up their noses at us at last."

"And so," Longfellow said, "if you gentlemen, with the exception of Mr. Cedar, will hand in your resignations, we will proceed to adjourn."

"I, also," said Mr. Cedar,

very pompously, "shall resign."

"And as attorney for me, with that retainer and all?"

Mr. Cedar puffed. He considered Longfellow with some amazement. Then he smiled. It was the first time Longfellow had seen him do it. "Possibly I'm like the Opera stars," he said. "Art follows the money. I shall not resign."

The telephone rang—a call for Longfellow.

"District attorney's office," said a voice. "Your (Continued on page 142)

so as not to interrupt the graceful performance, held it out again, shaking his head. "You say engagement, but I can't join you."

Dmitri stiffened. "You refuse?"

"I'm on the wagon."

"Wagon?"

"I don't drink."

"How you do not drink? It is the finest whisky, the man has promised. It has seventeen years. Smell it, and tell me does he say truth. Me, I do not know American whisky. Taste it only."

Forrester sniffed, drew up his lips, sniffed again. "Smells good," he said. He shook his head, held out the cup. "But not for me."

Dmitri grew earnest. "But, Mr. Forrester, it is terrible, this. You are the first I ask to drink to my fiancailles, and you refuse. Oh, you must not. I swear you it will be very terrible luck."

"Sorry. You drink 'em both and then sit down and tell me about life at the imperial court. What you said to the czar, and all that."

The Russian leaned over him, his hands

extended, palms up. "But I beg you. One little glass cannot harm you. You are sick? One little glass . . ."

"One little glass," Forrester said, "leads to one little bottle. Which leads to other little bottles."

"But do not say you are afraid. Do not say you cannot drink a little and no more. I had not thought . . ."

"I can. But I don't like to. It's a dirty trick, teasing your stomach."

"But, please. This time. Because it imports. If you refuse, it is the most bad omen."

FORRESTER sniffed again. "Good rye," he said.

"The man assured me. You will drink a little? For my happiness?"

Forrester inhaled the aroma deeply. He looked up, his eyebrows raised. "For my happiness," he said. "Luck to you."

He tipped the paper cup sharply. "Pah!" he exhaled with relish. "Poof! The man didn't lie to you. It's good rye. Fit for kings, queens, and jacks." He switched his chair away from the drawing

board. "Sit down, O'Keefe. Regale me with history. Tell me about the old days, and what they did to revolutionists."

Dmitri sat down, apparently from a sudden softening of the knees.

Forrester went on: "Tell me about Prince Trakiteff and how careless he was with his money."

Dmitri licked his lips. He took up the open bottle.

"Ah, yes," he said, smiling uncertainly. "But first you will have another little drink, eh?"

"Well. . . . One swallow doesn't make a party."

He held out the cup. Dmitri poured it full.

"So," he said in a low voice, "you have met enemies of me?"

Forrester drained the cup. "Enemies? They didn't say. . . . Maybe you'd better put that bottle over here beside me. Save your arm a lot of exercise. . . . They said Prince Trakiteff was a fool. . . . Let's have another of those cups. This one's all soggy."

(To be continued)

Opera Hat

(Continued from page 63)

presence is required on the stage of the opera house at two o'clock this afternoon."

"Very well," said Longfellow, but suddenly the pleasure was gone from the day. . . .

LONGFELLOW had himself driven to the office of the district attorney. After a brief wait he was admitted to the presence.

"It's about the Motti murder," he said. "I don't know what you are going to do at the opera house this afternoon, but I wanted to see you first."

"Why?"

"Because," said Longfellow, "I know who did it."

"Eh?"

Longfellow nodded emphatically. "I know who did, but you got to prove it. That's your job. You see, I knew I didn't do it and I knew Miss Petersen didn't do it, so I knew it must be somebody else," Longfellow said. "And then I got the idea, because Opera people aren't like other folks, that it would be a good notion if I sort of looked into things. So I sent a cable to Italy to find out all about a number of people."

"And?"

"And last night Percival Dide brought me this reply," said Longfellow, handing a cable form across the desk to the official. "Motti was a loose kind of a woman, and cut up a lot with men, and Italians are

pretty jealous. So, if you were her husband, what would you do?"

"Husband!" The district attorney read the cable with close attention. "Husband! Mr. Deeds, I think we should add a squad of poets to the detective force. This is important, but it isn't proof."

"But it's the best motive you have yet."

"Motti married—and concealing her husband through all her notorious affairs. Imagine the humiliation of the man—pushed into the background, hidden, scorned." The district attorney was becoming oratorical. "The poor devil! But there's no proof."

"What are you doing with us this afternoon?"

"Attempting to reconstruct the scene of the killing."

Longfellow sighed heavily. "You'll do your best, won't you?"

"You may depend upon that."

Longfellow withdrew. He lunched alone and then proceeded to the spot where fortune was to be put to the test.

The great stage of the opera house was crowded with stage hands, electricians, chorus people, principals, and executives when Longfellow arrived with Mr. Cedar, who insisted upon accompanying him.

Longfellow managed to find a few moments alone with Simonetta Petersen.

"Don't you be afraid," he told her.

"But I am terribly afraid."

"Detectives are pretty smart," said Longfellow. "If they weren't, they wouldn't get to be detectives. They've been trained for years to find out the truth about things. They want to find out the truth. I mean, I don't believe many detectives would want to send an innocent person to prison or to the chair."

"But if the facts make them believe I am guilty, or you are guilty?"

"That is bad, and makes it unpleasant. But there's a difference between believing a person is guilty and proving he is. So what I think is that the more truth they

find out the better it will be for us." "If they only find all the truth," she said.

"We will help," he said, "if we tell all the truth. We mustn't hold back anything, no matter how bad it looks. Every time they find out a true thing about this murder, they are just that much nearer to finding out all the true things."

She looked at him oddly. "By and large," she said, "you are quite a person."

"And I wanted to say just one thing, and that is that if they should happen to pick on you—well, Mr. Semple left me a lot of money and—I'll spend all of it before I'll let anything happen to you."

"There must," she said, "be something in the air of Mandrake Falls. More people ought to breathe it."

AFTER that he had no more opportunity to talk to her, for there was a demand for silence. At a table, with a stenographer, sat the district attorney.

"We are investigating the murder of Nina Motti," he said in a politician's voice. "There is present on this stage, I believe, every person who was here on the day of the murder. We have checked carefully. You will see that the orchestra are in their places. My intention is to proceed with the opera from the moment of Nina Motti's last appearance on this stage—which was at an impromptu reception given, I understand, to Mr. Deeds. We will start with that reception, and from it we will endeavor to trace the movements of all until the finding of the body."

Longfellow took his place as nearly as he could remember it.

"This gentleman," said Longfellow, indicating one of the officials, "introduced me, and then everybody walked past and shook hands."

"Was Motti in the line?"

"Yes."

"Did you have any conversation with her?"

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"Yes."

"What was said?"

"She said, 'We are relations, eh?' I said I thought not. She said that I should come to see her after the performance, and she laughed and called me 'nephew.'"

"Ah," said the district attorney.

"Then she went along, and pretty soon I had met everybody; and then they showed me all over the stage, and every place, until it was time to go out and listen to the opera. I went out to my box."

"Alone."

"No. With Mr. Piazza."

"Indeed. Mr. Piazza? And who is he?"

"He is a man," said Longfellow, "that follows me around and keeps me from being kidnapped."

"Would it be Angelo Piazza—the gangster?" asked the district attorney.

"He used to be," said Longfellow.

"Then what?"

"After the first act I came back to—to pay a compliment to Madame Ponzi. And I met Madame Pomponi and she was mad because I was going to congratulate Madame Ponzi."

"Was Miss Petersen there?"

"Yes, she—she kind of rescued me from Madame Pomponi, who was pretty wrought up and excited. So I went on to Madame Ponzi's dressing-room, and was talking to her when a woman screamed, and we ran out, and Nina Motti was dead in her dressing-room."

"Did you hear a shot?"

"No."

"Was the man Piazza with you from the moment you entered the theater?"

"No. I found him standing by the elevator when I went out to hear the first act."

The district attorney raised his voice: "Did anyone hear the sound of a shot?"

"I heard a kind of a bang," said a stage-hand, "but I didn't think anything about it."

"Can you state the time you heard this sound?"

"It was a couple of bars after the overture started."

"Will each of you," directed the district attorney, "go to the exact spots you occupied at the opening note of the overture. Take your positions and remain there until I have a chance to check and verify the fact that you were where you say you were—and remained there until after the moment the shot was fired."

THERE was a scurrying about. Longfellow recalled that he had been high in the flies at the moment the orchestra played its first note, and that he had remained there for a few minutes, arriving in his box with Piazza just as the curtain parted.

"Do you want us to stay where we were, or move around afterward like we did?" he asked.

"Stay on the spot till we can check you," said the district attorney.

The time seemed longer than it actually was, because of the tension, before a detective appeared to question Longfellow. It was not difficult for him to verify the fact that he had been where he said he was, for he had been accompanied by the official who guided him.

It was clear what the district attorney was at; he was eliminating. He was narrowing down until he should find an individual or two or three individuals who

could not account for themselves at the instant the shot was fired.

Finally the company were summoned again to the stage.

"Those," said the district attorney, "whose names I read will please find seats in the body of the theater. The rest will remain here."

A little group clustered on the stage, eying one another with apprehension. There were Visconti, Madame Pomponi, Piazza, Simonetta Petersen, the wardrobe woman who had found Motti's body, Ponzi's maid, and three men in overalls.

"Now," said the district attorney, "I must ask each of you to consider very carefully the answers you make. Remember, I am trying to find the truth. No one who is innocent need have any fears. Mr. Deeds, you, yourself, are eliminated. We know where you were at the moment of the murder. But I have asked you to remain because you have a clear motive and because your companion is a notorious gunman who might be hired to do such a killing as the one we are investigating. And because, Mr. Deeds, no one seems to be able to tell me where Piazza was when the shot was fired."

HE CLEARED his throat. "I have asked Madame Pomponi to remain because there is a conflict in stories—and Miss Petersen. Signor Visconti, prominent as he is, also seems to have escaped attention at the moment in question. Madame, you say that you and Miss Petersen were standing yonder in the wings?"

"Right there," said Madame.

"Miss Petersen was with you?"

"Every minute."

"Is this correct?" asked the district attorney of Simonetta.

She was not looking at her interrogator, but at Longfellow. She smiled a wan little smile, not without bravery.

"Mr. Deeds," she said distinctly, "told me to tell the exact truth. He said that the more truth you learned the nearer you were coming to discover who was guilty." She nodded her head at Longfellow. "So I am going to tell the truth. I was not where Madame Pomponi says I was."

"Where were you?"

"On the opposite side of the stage. I was standing there—out of the way, hidden by a piece of scenery, when the overture started." She drew a deep breath. "I had," she said, "just come from Motti's dressing-room."

"Why did you go there, Miss Petersen?"

"To ask Motti to give back to me something of my brother's."

"Did she give it to you?"

"She laughed at me," said Simonetta bitterly.

"And then," said the district attorney, "you shot her."

"No," said Simonetta. "I left her alive."

"How long, after you left Motti's dressing-room, was it before the overture commenced?"

"I think not more than two or three minutes."

"Did you see anyone else in the vicinity?"

"Only Madame Ponzi's maid."

"No one passed you going up as you came down?"

"No one."

"You little fool," said Pomponi. "I



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would have stuck to my story till I rotted."

The district attorney rapped on his desk. "Is everyone here who was here on the day of the murder?" he asked.

There was no answer. "Very well, then, does anyone recall any person or any movement that he did not report to me the other day?"

There was silence. The official arose and walked to the side of the stage upon which had been Motti's dressing-room. "You," he said, "who saw Miss Petersen on that day—did any of you see any other person you have not described in the neighborhood of that dressing-room?"

The women, the maid, the wardrobe woman, the electricians replied instantly that there had been no other person.

"You are sure?"

"Sure."

"Please remain in your places." He returned to his table with a troubled face. Even granting that what he and Longfellow believed was fact, of what good was that accurate guess, of that knowledge, if it could not be proved by evidence which would convince a jury? He was at a loss.

He could question the man upon whom suspicion had been directed by Longfellow's cable, but the man had only to maintain silence or stubbornly to deny.

LONGFELLOW, tense with excitement and buoyed up by hope, could not force himself to remain at his station in the flies, high above the stage, out of earshot. He descended, not to the stage, but to the cavern under the stage, and then climbed the narrow iron stairs to the prompter's box. The quarters were cramped as he stood there, his face on a level with the floor. It was a sort of worm's-eye view of events. He saw the district attorney shake his head in discouragement. The experiment seemed to have failed. But it must not fail. The truth was there, buried in someone's mind.

The district attorney commenced to gather up his papers. Longfellow was desperate. He must jolt up to the surface, into visibility, the negligible thing sunk in the shadows of someone's memory. He thrust his head out of the prompter's box, and looked very absurd indeed.

"Signor Visconti," he said, "which country do you think is most artistic—America or Italy?"

Visconti glowered, pouted at his interpreter, who gave him the substance of Longfellow's question. Visconti replied stormily.

"E say," translated Polese, "it ees not da question w'ich is mos' artistic. 'E say w'en one is ver' artistic and one is none—w'en one is nossing but-a da pig w'ich appreciate nossing but da garbage, there ees no question of most artistic."

Longfellow was half out of the prompter's box now, sprawling with his elbows on the stage.

"I do not hear you very well, Signor Polese. Will you step over this way and tell me again?"

Visconti's heavy-lidded eyes glowed with sullen fires. Polese moved across the stage, small, nondescript, embarrassed at being thrust forward by himself, away from the overshadowing, concealing personality of Visconti. He stood alone. It was almost as if a spotlight had been directed upon him. He emerged; he was separated from his famous familiar, and

for an instant became an individual, not a vague shadow.

"E say," Polese commenced reluctantly, but his translation was interrupted by a cry from the wings.

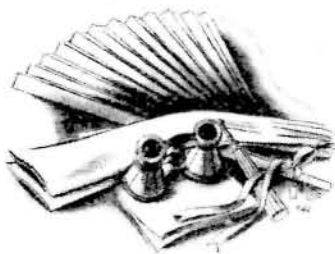
"I remember!" It was the voice of Ponzi's maid. "Until he stood out I forgot, but I remember. It was this man I see. When the Signorina descended, this man come up. He pass me. Just as the orchestra sound the first note he pass me."

Simonetta ran to the table. "I saw him, too. He passed me at the foot of the stairs. He was there—up there."

There was a hush in that vast place. Polese stood looking about him like some cornered rabbit. Longfellow was first to speak.

"I'm kind of sorry for you, Polese," he said, "because she was a pretty awful wife, wasn't she? You just couldn't stand it any longer, could you? So you went up and shot her?"

Polese lifted his head, and in that moment he was given a sort of dignity.



"She was of me ashamed," he said. "Though I teach her all she knew; though I make the dancer of her; though I take her from the olive mill and make her to dance, she is ashamed of me. I mus' tell none she is a my wife. I mus' not spik-a to her. It mak-a my hear-rt to break. So. And then she say now she weel be rich-a and I mus' be throw out forever." He paused and looked about him with a gulf of woe in his eyes. "So," he said simply, "I keel her."

The little man walked toward the district attorney. "All things are all right now," he said softly. "It is not a joy to me for live some more. She was a mos' bad woman, signore, but I am loving her—it is true—even in this minute."

Again the stage was silent. But this time it was Madame Pomponi who became audible.

"Ridi, Pagliaccio!" she said, but her voice was neither strident nor devoid of emotion.

SIMONETTA stood over Longfellow as he sprawled out of the prompter's box. "Mike!" she said.

He fluttered a hand at her. "Not now—er—not this minute. I—the fact is I've got things to fix up. When I get them all fixed I'll—if you don't mind—come to see you."

With that he struggled back through the orifice and disappeared into the bowels of the earth. He ran around to the stairway and caught Mr. Cedar.

"We've got to go to my house now," he said, "before this news gets out."

"For what purpose?" asked Mr. Cedar.

"I got to clean up some loose ends," Longfellow said, "like common-law wives."

"But," said Mr. Cedar, "there can be no question of a common-law wife now—if Motti's marriage to Polese is authentic."

"There are people who do not know about that yet," Longfellow said. "Mr. Granzi, for instance. Because you can't tell, even now, but what he might want to get some money for those letters of Mr. Semple's. What with this murder and all, he might be able to sell them to a tabloid."

"Young man," said Mr. Cedar, "I seem to have underestimated your foresight."

"It's just common sense," Longfellow said.

They arrived at the house and Longfellow directed Bengold to telephone Granzi. "Tell him I would like to have him come up right away," Longfellow said.

"Very well, Mr. Deeds," Bengold replied, and returned presently to say that Granzi was on his way.

"You had better let me handle this now, Mr. Deeds," said Mr. Cedar.

Longfellow shook his head. "I'll take care of this in the Mandrake Falls way," he said. "Don't go away, Bengold, I'm going to want you."

"Very well, Mr. Deeds."

IT WAS not twenty minutes before Granzi was announced. The lawyer entered with an expression of jeering satisfaction.

"I thought," he said, "you'd see the light."

"I've seen quite a good deal of light," Longfellow said courteously. "Bengold, won't you sit down? Now, this common-law wife thing has been an annoyance. You have some letters from Mr. Semple?"

"Yes."

"They are what you might call the backbone of your case. By the way, you represent this child of Nina Motti's?"

"Her guardian, duly appointed by the court, has retained me."

"That's all right, then. Now, if you were to lose or to sell or to destroy those letters, Mr. Granzi, you wouldn't have much case, would you?"

"Not much. But I have them safe."

"There was a pretty notorious case by the name of Lithgow against Jones, wasn't there?"

"There was."

"And this case is sort of like that case?"

"Very similar."

Longfellow leaned back in his chair. "People get into habits," he said. "I guess everything alive gets into habits. People with the same type of mind will do things alike. What I mean is, that if you find a man who does a certain thing in a certain way, the next time he does it, he is apt to do it the same way again."

"Maybe you're right, but let's get down to brass tacks."

"I am down to them," said Longfellow. "Now, even if I didn't settle with you, you could probably sell these letters to a sensational tabloid newspaper."

"I could."

"What made me think of that was that one of them printed the Lithgow-against-Jones letters. I read them."

"They won the verdict," said Granzi.

"I've been experimenting," said Longfellow. "The experts said those letters were written on Mr. Semple's own typewriter."

"Right."

"Which means, that whether Mr. Semple



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Name.....

Position.....

Address.....

wrote them himself or not, they were written by somebody in this house. And that brings me to something I noticed, and that is why I wanted Bengold here."

Bengold moved in his chair.

"One day I had some letters, and asked Bengold to answer them the way Mr. Semple would have done. Well, what he did was copy Mr. Semple's letter to another person on the same subject without a change. It was the way his mind worked. So I tried it two or three times, and every time he did the same thing. Which brings me to the Lithgow-against-Jones letters."

"And what about them?" asked Granzi.

"Let us read them one by one and compare them with Mr. Semple's letters. I have certified copies of the Jones letters. You hold them, Mr. Cedar, and I will read the Semple letters, and we will see."

He read letter after letter. At the end Mr. Cedar sat erect, frowning: "This—this is infamous. Why, the words, the phrasing, even the peculiar locutions are identical. It stamps these letters as forgeries beyond any doubt. Mr. Deeds, how did you come to detect this?"

"Oh," said Longfellow, "in Mandrake Falls we notice things like that. And so, Mr. Granzi, I don't think you can find a sale for your letters, and I do not believe the bar association will like what you have done."

He paused. "And, Bengold," he said, "I think you had better get your hat."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"It won't be any fun talking about it," Longfellow said. "I have known for quite a long time that you made these forgeries, and it didn't set well on my stomach to have you around."

He waved wearily toward the door.

"I wish you would both go away," he said. "I seem to feel tired."

When they were gone the room was still. Presently Mr. Cedar spoke: "I feel that Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle should have discovered this forgery. I feel we have been remiss. Doubtless, Mr. Deeds, you will not care to retain us in the future."

"Oh, about that. No. I'm not going to fire you. You're all right, and it isn't your fault that you know so much law you don't have time to notice facts. I'll attend to facts myself, and you can attend to the law. We'll get along."

LONGFELLOW was alone again. He looked at his watch, and the time was after six. The valet entered.

"Will you dress for dinner, sir?" the man asked.

"Yes," said Longfellow. "The stores will be closed?"

"Was there something you wanted, sir?"

"An Opera Hat."

"But you have one, sir, one you have declined to wear."

"I wanted a new one," Longfellow said. "Brand-new. I wanted a very special Opera Hat."

"Very well, sir. . . . Shall I answer the telephone, sir? Mr. Bengold seems to be absent."

"Please do, Aikes."

"It is a Mr. Bumpus," said Aikes.

Longfellow took the receiver. "Hello, Mr. Bumpus; this is Mr. Deeds."

"Our board has been in session all day," said Bumpus. "We have discussed your proposition continuously—and stormily."

But at last we have reached an agreement. We are going to accept your proposition, Mr. Deeds. Radio is going to take over the Grand Opera."

"All right," Longfellow said, and was surprised that he was not very much interested.

"We—it is epochal. We want to break the story. It will stun the world. I'd like to bring some of the gentlemen right over."

"I—you can't do that. I—the fact is, I have something else to do."

"Nothing could be more important than this. Why, it involves—"

"That," said Longfellow, "is what you think."

"You don't mean—?"

"I don't mean anything," said Longfellow, "except that right now I don't seem to give a darn what happens to Opera, or radio either. Go fix up the details with Mr. Cedar. Give your story to the papers or anything you want to do, only don't bother me with it now."

"Well—" commenced Mr. Bumpus.

"Listen," said Longfellow; "I don't want to be discourteous or anything, but I wish you could ring off. I'm—I'm going to ask a girl to marry me. Yes, sir, and I'm going to wear an Opera Hat."

"What?"

BUT Mr. Bumpus never got an answer to his question, for Longfellow deliberately hung up the receiver.

He dressed with dispatch, called for his car, and was driven to the Cortillon. At Madame Pomponi's apartment he pressed the bell. It was Simonetta herself who opened to him—Simonetta dressed in a gown that clung to her graciously, and made her seem very slender and wonderful—and somehow taller than she was. As Longfellow stood in the door and stared at her he felt very humble and alarmed. He felt futile. Now that he saw her so he wondered how he could have dared to come—and upon such an errand.

"Wipe off that silly expression," she said, "and come in."

He did not know what to say, but he moved over the threshold. Then he held out the Opera Hat. "It—it opens and shuts," he said diffidently. "It goes *plop!*"

"It is a very nice hat," she said gravely. "Some time, when we are better acquainted, will you let me plop it?"

"It's a little chilly out tonight," he volunteered.

"You'd better come a little farther in," she said. "Then it will be harder to get out. It is usually hotter in August than it is in January. And how is your dyspepsia?"

Longfellow did his best. "That is Central Park through the window, isn't it?" he asked. And then, "I guess maybe I shouldn't have come—and worn this hat and all."

"Why?"

"Well, this is almost the first time I've had a chance to really look at you; and when I see how—I mean you are so beautiful, Miss Petersen, and so kind of wonderful, that I guessed I was a fool to think anything about it."

"About what?" she asked.

"About your marrying me," he said.

"Oh, that was the idea?"

"I can see now it wasn't a good idea. You are so lovely and so kind of—of regal—that you make me think of all the lovely

things in the world at once. Do you know what frangipani is?"

"No. What is it?"

"I don't know, either," he answered. "But it is a word I like to say, and it ought to mean about the loveliest thing in the world. And that's how I feel. I mean, I feel as if I haven't any right to come near you without bringing you a gift of frangipani—and—and I haven't any frangipani to bring."

"Now, let's get this straight," said Simonetta. "You wore your Opera Hat down here to ask me to marry you?"

He stood mute.

"You're not going to because you forgot your frangipani? By any chance do you love me?"

"Oh, very, very much," he said.

"It wouldn't occur to you that maybe a girl might prefer other things to frangipani?"

"Not what I mean by it," he said.

"You wouldn't have a vague, indistinct, foggy idea that a girl might set some store by gentleness and modesty and honesty, would you? And that she might think

rather highly of a man who—oh, you hick! Oh, you sap from Mandrake Falls! Oh, you sweet, square, simple darling—now, haven't you got sense enough to see that I love you so much I darn' near worship you—and that you've got it coming?"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Longfellow.

"And so you know what you can do with your old frangipani. And, Mike, won't you please marry me?"

"Er—now!" he exclaimed.

"In five minutes, if you want it that way," she said.

"YOU mean you—you mean it is all right if I—if I take you in my arms and hold you and—kiss you?"

"It will be pretty poisonously all wrong," she said, "if you don't."

It was this moment that Madame Pomponi chose to enter the room.

"Well, of all things!" she commenced.

"What do you think—?"

Longfellow turned his head and looked at her—a brief, sinister look.

"Get the deuce out of here!" he said.

It may have been half an hour, it may have been an hour later that Simonetta, ready for the car, and Longfellow, hat in hand, stood outside the door.

"But I've got to go on writing my poetry," he said.

"I love it."

"I just thought up one about you."

"I want to hear it."

"All right," he said. "It goes like this," and then he recited quite simply:

"Oh, you will be my darling bride

A-riding in my carriage,

But nothing we can ever do

Will be so nice as marriage."

"I think it's beautiful," said Simonetta.

"Honest?"

"Honest."

An expression of satisfaction transfigured his face; the expression of an artist who has wrought well and been appreciated by one capable of appreciation. He sighed. He threw out his chest. He waggled his Opera Hat at her.

"Listen to it go *plop!*" he said.

(The End)

Don't
call me
darling

(Continued from page 21)

the other girl employed at the Agency, had had a beach party one evening and invited the three single Tucker salesmen. She had asked Carillon to bring John. This was where John met Fisher and, as he told Carillon afterward, sized him up at a glance.

"The fresh, slick salesman type," was John's diagnosis. "He'll never get far."

"He's got to Europe and South America and back, already," Carillon countered quickly.

"What did he go for?" John asked uncompromisingly.

CARILLON had to admit that it had been for fun, simply because he had wanted to see the world.

"What's wrong about that?" she demanded. "Is there anything wrong in wanting to travel? He paid his own way. Worked his passage over on a cattle boat once, and got a free trip by helping in the purser's office the other time."

"And came back stony broke both times," John finished for her. "Without a job in sight."

Oh, dear, this was perfectly true. No use trying to explain to John how minor this detail had seemed when she had heard Bart describing it. How, instead of being

properly appalled by it, she had actually felt a thrill of admiration at his gay, cocky self-reliance. On his return from each of his trips, for instance, he had eventually managed to land another job, better than the one he had given up in order to go.

"Oh, sure—" He made light of these recoveries. "There's always some opening for a salesman. And, boy, do I like selling! Especially when I've got a proposition like the Tucker. I always get excited, myself, about a Tucker motor."

Carillon was ill-advised enough to report this snatch of conversation to John. It had seemed merely attractive enthusiasm in Bart. But in John's frequent repetitions it seemed to acquire a venal note, to smack of ballyhoo and hypocrisy.

Carillon knew that John did not like the fact that she had begun going out occasionally with the new salesman. John was not in a position to protest too violently, because he occasionally took out the daughter of his immediate superior in the bank.

She prudently did not let John know that Bart was in love with her. In fact, she laughed at Bart, himself, when he declared that he was, only the second time they were out together.

"You don't expect me to take you seriously, do you?" she demanded. "Why, you scarcely know me. You've had a lot of girls—you've told me so, yourself."

"That's just the point," Bart answered quickly. "That's how I know. As long as a fellow can talk about 'a lot of girls,' it proves that he's never had the dimmest glimmer of what it's all about. I—from the moment you turned around that day at the switchboard and looked up at me, I knew that I'd been just—well, there simply isn't any other girl in the world as far as I'm concerned. That's all."

"Why, that's perfectly absurd," Carillon scoffed, trying to force down the bright thrill of excitement that swept over her. "People don't fall in love at first sight."

"That's what you think!" Bart's usually good-humored voice was harsh with quick, angry rudeness. "I know what I'm talking about."

It sounded terribly real for the moment. Even afterward, Carillon couldn't quite believe that it was just a line to be tried out on any pretty girl.

"The men who are wonderful love-makers have usually had a lot of practice," Carillon's mother cautioned her. Then she talked to Carillon earnestly and warningly about Carillon's father.

PERHAPS Carillon, alone of his three pretty daughters, had something of her father in her, which rose in excited response to the flashing warmth of Bart's smile, the careless, gay, quick-witted courage of him.

It was insane, she knew, for a poor girl who had a chance to marry a safe, steady, also prosperous young man, not to do it. Yet, somehow, John's "Would you like to drive out somewhere for dinner Friday?" always seemed so dull compared with Bart stopping by her desk with a hasty "Look here, I found a quarter I didn't know I had. Let's go out and paint the town!"

But, of all the inopportune places for that growing rebellion of Carillon's to show itself, the Wright dinner table was the most dangerous. And it was there that Carillon felt herself the most frequently and irresistibly tempted. Not that Carillon ever introduced Bart's name at that table. It was the Wrights, father and son, who kept bringing him in.

This was because Bart had set his heart on selling Mr. Wright Senior just one brand-new Tucker limousine for the Wright Private Rental Service.

"Sell him just one and he'll come after the next, himself," Bart said.

Though a used-car salesman, he had made some sort of dicker with the Agency manager permitting him to work on this one dubious prospect.