

FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD

A Story.

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There was a crowd at the money-order window of the postoffice. Della waiting with her application in her hand looked about her idly for something to occupy her attention till her turn should come. She found it not two feet away in black, staring letters which formed the words, "Fifty Dollars Reward."

Della did not look like a mercenary young woman, but her eyes lingered long on the headline, as a hungry child might look outside a baker's window viewing all sorts of gastronomic temptations, with only a pane of glass between. "Fifty dollars," Della said of herself, and figuratively she smacked her lips.

At the best of times, \$50 seemed like a great deal of money to Della. Just now her need had magnified it far beyond its usual proportion. She was on the point of sending a money order for \$3.50 to her brother Jack, stranded out in a Western State, sick, forlorn and unable to help himself. The \$3.50 represented numberless little sacrifices on Della's part. She walked to and from her work to save carfare. She wore shoes whose soles were replaced each morning by new ones of pasteboard, deftly fitted into place by Della's own fingers. She had reduced her midday meal to rolls and a glass of milk, and grudged the dime she spent for that modest fare. Fifty dollars would bring Jack home. Della turned her eyes to the poster and read on:

"Fifty dollars reward will be paid for information leading to the apprehension of Leonard Bunting, last seen near the village of Porter Falls, Pa. He is 5 feet 11 inches in height, weighs about 160 pounds and has noticeably heavy eyebrows. The tip of the little finger of the right hand is missing. When last seen he wore a closely cropped brown mustache. His manner is gentlemanly."

Accompanying this description was a likeness of Mr. Leonard Bunting, which Della studied with a fascinated curiosity. He was a rather good-looking young man for an evildoer, she decided, as far as it was possible to judge from his counterfeit presentment, which was somewhat blurred and indistinct. But this thought was immediately lost sight of in the pleasurable pretense that she was about to send Jack a money order for \$50, gained by surrendering Leonard Bunting to justice. Then Jack would be home by the first of the week. It cost her a pang when she came back to reality and slipped the blue slip which stood for exactly \$3.50 into the envelope.

She had waited so long at the window that she would not have had time for much in the way of luncheon, even if her funds had been ample. She gave her order. "Rolls and milk." Della was young and healthy and paid the penalty in a clamorous appetite. She sniffed hungrily and felt a little faint. "If I get that \$50 reward," thought Della, with a whimsical smile, "I'll save enough of it out for a good sirloin, with plenty of gravy. Then she became aware that the young man next her was holding the menu card in her direction. "Have you seen this?" he asked courteously.

"I've given my order, thanks," Della began her reply unconcernedly enough, but jumped before she finished. For the hand extended toward her was slightly mutilated. The end of the little finger was missing.

The young man did not notice her start. He resumed his study of the card and a moment later gave his order. Apparently an uneasy conscience had not decreased his appetite.

Meanwhile, over her rolls and milk, Della was stealing glances in his direction. No; there could be no mistake. Dark, with heavy eyebrows and gentlemanly manners, and, more significant than all, the missing tip of the little finger. The disappearance of the brown mustache changed his appearance slightly, yet he bore sufficient resemblance to the rough cut in the postoffice to be easily identified. Della's heart thumped as she made her plans.

She must finish her rolls, of course. It would not do to arouse his suspicions. And then she would slip out quietly and lay the case before the big policeman at the crossing. He was a blue-eyed policeman. She would tell the policeman and the policeman would do the rest, and presently the \$50 would put in an appearance and Jack would come home. It was extraordinarily simple.

The red-haired waitress introduced a new factor. Della had felt a strong interest in the red-haired waitress ever since the morning when her swollen eyelids were eloquent of long weeping, and Della had asked her if anything was the matter. The waitress had explained that she had dropped a tray that morning and the manager had threatened to discharge her. "He says I'll have to go next time," sniffed the red-haired waitress. "And I've got a mother to take care of. It makes me feel like drowning myself."

Della had tried to encourage her by suggesting that perhaps there would not be any next time, and her sympathy had won the red-haired girl's affections. As she passed now, with a bowl of soup, she smiled in Della's direction and paid the penalty for the momentary distraction of her attention. The bowl of soup lurched. Its contents distributed themselves over the person of the young man next Della.

"Hello!" said the young man. For a criminal with a reward offered for his apprehension, he had his nerves under excellent control. He turned to see the face of the red-haired girl go a deadly white, while behind her lowered the figure of the manager, whose scowl needed no explanation. The young man emptied his pocket of soup and addressed the manager. "All my fault," he said.

"Eh? What's that?" The manager's face began to clear.

"All my fault," the young man repeated, with kindly mendacity, "stuck out my elbow just as the girl was passing. She couldn't help it."

"Oh, all right," said the manager, looking relieved, but though Della had finished her rolls and milk, she was in no haste to go in search of a policeman. It was strange how that falsehood had altered her feelings toward Mr. Leonard Bunting. He might be a criminal, but he had a kind heart: To deliver him up to justice seemed out of the question. There was a throbbing at her temples as she thought of his danger. Even now, some eye might be on him, noting the missing finger tip and the gentlemanly manner.

She leaned toward him breathlessly. "Oh, please," she said, "you oughtn't to stay here. It isn't safe."

He looked toward her genially. "Too much soup?" he inquired, but Della was in no mood to smile.

"I know all about it. There's a description of you hanging up in the postoffice, and \$50 reward for your apprehension."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the young man.

He gave her a sidelong glance. "Do you really think," he began earnestly, "that anybody would hand over another human creature to spend years in prison for the sake of a paltry \$50? Sometimes a fellow does a wrong thing and then wants to turn over a new leaf. Nobody would want to clap him under lock and key—for \$50."

Della shivered.

"They might not know about your being sorry," she said slowly, as if trying to justify something to herself. "And they might need \$50 dreadfully. If you had a brother sick out West, and no way to get him home, for instance."

"Apple pie," said the young man to the waitress.

"See here," he said, leaning forward earnestly over the wedge of pie. "If anybody's going to get the reward for my apprehension I'd rather it would be you. Suppose you let me finish my dessert, and then I'll go along with you and you can deliver me up to justice and claim the reward."

"O, no! No!" Della cried so vehemently that a woman at the next table turned and looked at her curiously. She lowered her voice at once, "I'd rather die than do it," she declared.

"But you were going to, weren't you, so as to bring your brother home?"

"Yes, but that was before——. When I saw how kind you were, trying to keep that poor girl from losing her place, I know I never could do it."

"I only suggested that as a possibility," said the young man with caution.

"O, please don't say that," she begged. "Please go somewhere and be perfectly honest and pay back the money you took, little by little."

The young man laid down his napkin and looked at her fixedly. "Have you quite finished?" he asked with his pleasantly deferential manner. "Then suppose we go outside." He paid her check as well as his own, and Della was too distracted to notice.

As they passed out of the restaurant, side by side, the figure of the blue-eyed policeman suddenly rose before them. Della's head swam. Some one else had been on the watch. She looked about her like a creature in a trap. She wondered wildly whether, if she should attack the policeman, Leonard Bunting would improve the opportunity of escape.

Her companion's voice broke in on her mad thought. "How are you, Foggarty?"

"How's yourself, Mither Manway," said the big policeman, grinning. "Foine day, sorr."

"It is that," said the young man with Della. Then he took her firmly by the arm, for she had swayed slightly. They walked on together, his hand supporting her. Presently she lifted a pale little face that was all one question.

"No, I'm not Bunting." It was thus he answered her eyes. "I saw the bill in the postoffice myself, and was impressed by the resemblance. But my name is Manway. I'm in the men's furnishing goods place."

"Oh, dear! I'm afraid I'm dreadfully late."

"What time do you finish?"

"Oh, I don't know. About half-past 5."

"I'll be waiting for you," said Mr. Manway, deliberately. "There are some things I want to talk over with you. I think perhaps we can fix it up—about getting your brother home."

Mr. Manway was as good as his word. He made arrangements for Jack's return, and incidentally for several other things. Jack came home just in time for the wedding.