

THE PARODY OUTLINE OF LITERATURE

II: CINDERELLA

By Will Irwin

With a Sketch by Herb Roth



THE room emitted a faint scent of cinders, of dinners old and new, of over-ripegrain. Toright gleamed and sizzled a hot stove with whose lid steam played an irregular tattoo. By these signs, by the skil-

lets arranged in gleaming rows along the wall, by the enameled cabinet, its compartments labeled with such brief, succinct legends as "flour", "salt", "pepper", "mustard", "grain alcohol", and "gin essence", by the small but yet complete still in the corner, the sapient visitor, turning upon it eyes unclouded by sophistication, would shrewdly have guessed it for what it was — a modern, post-Volstead kitchen, unromantic, utilitarian. As unromantic at first sight seemed the girl, now bending over a dishpanful of hot mash at the sink. Yet those same sapient eyes, regarding her as she lifted her hands from the pan, wiped them on the roller towel, would have seen by her mouth, her nose, and her hair that she was beautiful — delicately, hauntingly beautiful. She crossed the room now; stood with a hand poised over the pot lid. Then she spoke.

"Hell!" she said. Only that. Yet subtly, indefinitely, you gained the im-

pression that she was irritated, or peeved. The impression gathered strength as an electric bell rang two sharp, startling peals. With knitted brows and pursed lips she glanced upward at the inoffending bit of metal which had emitted this disturbing sound, turned, not forgetting in her agitation to coax back into place a strayed wisp of her brown hair which here and there shone with a glint of green, moved toward the door. The cat stood at the lintel, mewing to be let out. With a foot clad in a coarse brogue which could not conceal the fine lines of a perfect ankle, the girl kicked her sharply through the door. Then she sped on, up the back stairway, along the solemn corridors of an old-fashioned mansion in the East Thirties, stood before the glints of a mahogany door. Giving her slender, well formed hands a final wipe on her coarse apron, she knocked, entered.

The woman who sat before the glass, amidst the refined elegancies of a chic boudoir, somehow subtly matched her surroundings in their present state. The tawny gilt and delicate blue of the walls looked artificial but beautiful when they reflected back the glints of soft light from innumerable shaded globes; so under the same circumstances did Lilith, stepsister to the girl now standing with an air of obedient expectancy by

the threshold. In the full glare of New York's hazy afternoon sun, these decorations and appointments appeared what they were — old, somewhat faded, the plaster showing through here and there. So did Lilith. Now, clad in a pink negligée, she was with a rag removing the makeup from a stringy neck. Before she spoke, before she even took notice of the girl, whose dewy freshness made chamber and occupant appear still more *passée* and tawdry, she twisted the rag into a cone, with its corner brushed from her eyelashes the black rim. Those eyes of Lilith had not faded. Bold, dark, piercing yet soft, they seemed to make glints in the mirror. From the open door beyond her came silken rustlings and movings about, which hinted at further feminine occupancy in that quarter of the house. Now Lilith spoke in her hard, metallic voice:

"Ella", she said, "you need not serve dinner tonight. Tell the parlor-maid to do that. Don't delay me by eating any dinner yourself, but come up here and get my rose foulard ready and be prepared to dress me, as expeditiously as possible. That tiresome maid of mine insists on taking her day off as usual — tonight when the Patriarchs are giving their formal ball to the visiting Prince of Lusitania!"

"Yes, madame," said the girl, whom we may now call Ella.

"Yes, madame," said Ella, docilely. Yet somehow a sixth sense seemed to tell her that the conversation was not finished. And instinct was right. Lilith was in that mood — *primæval*, basically feminine, atavism of the cave women — which in a moment of perplexity or triumph sometimes drives the most refined flower of our oversophisticated society to indiscreet

confidences, even though the confidante be only a servant.

"I want to look my best tonight," said Lilith. The filmy folds of the almost evanescent foulard lay disposed over a chair. Lilith's fingers caressed them. "My best for the Prince. He danced with me twice at the Junior League ball and cut in three times. How would it seem, Ella, to have a princess in the family — yes", and Lilith's dark eyes struck from the mirror an imperious gleam — "yes, and eventually a queen!"

A voice came from the room beyond, like Lilith's in its hardness yet with a certain feline quality. This was Goldona. Toward Lilith, Ella felt, she felt as a stepsister should feel. It was harder with Goldona.

"I hear, Ella", said the slow, taunting voice of Goldona, "that the kitchens of the royal palace are extremely convenient." And now, a slight flush tingeing her delicate cheek, Ella spoke:

"Yes, sister," she said. Only that. But the word brought a sharp crash from the room beyond, as of an ivory hair brush dropped suddenly on old mahogany. The purr was gone from Goldona's voice; it had a tiger quality as she jerked out:

"How often have I told you not to use that word?"

It was Lilith's voice which had now taken on the feline purr.

"Cinder-Ella," she sneered.

In the sophisticated but only partly literate circles in which she moved, Lilith passed for a wit. Yet most of her quips traveled but half way to the mark, as this. It referred to a formal dinner whereat Ella had served with the mark of a cinder across her cheek. This one slip in a perfect record as maid-of-all-work was a secret mortification to Ella. Lilith, with the un-

canny penetration of the cruel, knew that.

"Cinderella!" mockingly echoed the voice of Goldona from the boudoir beyond.

Cinderella, as we will call Ella henceforth, had not used that word "sister", with its unwarranted familiarity, by accident. The black, rebellious mood of the morning had persisted. You knew that by a sudden clenching and unclenching of her hand, by the abruptness with which she turned, by the manner in which she closed the door. Perfect servant though she had trained herself to be, she slammed it. It was wicked to feel so, yet the situation was growing intolerable to a refined girl whose inner spirit harbored a proud sensitiveness. "To hell with both of them," she murmured.

II

How the woman came to be there, Cinderella never knew. But, as she herself took the soup kettle from the stove, began to drain off the stock, there she was. And Cinderella experienced somehow no start of surprise. As the woman sat there—plump, middle aged, but comely, with soft brown hair and a merry brown eye—Cinderella had even a feeling that she had seen her before. Yet nevertheless she spoke abruptly, as though some force superior to her will drove her to the heart of the subject.

"Who are you?" asked Cinderella.

"Call me your Fairy Godmother, kid," said the strange visitor. "That's what I am, I guess. I've come to do you good. Now listen, dearie, I'm a trance, test, clairvoyant, an' materializin' medium an' second-sight seeress. Listen, my spirits has sent me here. I'm in half control now but I'm liable to go right off into full control

any minute. Listen, when I do, don't be scared, but just pay attention. Here I go now. Wuff!" With this exclamative, which drew out into a low, dying wail, the eyes of the Fairy Godmother closed. She shuddered three times, stiffened to rigidity. When she spoke again, it was a child's voice that parted her full lips.

"Hee-hee—I'm Laughin'-Eyes, the child control," said this voice. "Hello, pretty girl! Pretty girl sad. I see a will—oh, ever so long ago. No—go away bad man. He hadn't ought to did what he done. I see a tall, dark complected lady—two ladies. They're rich. Pretty girl very poor. Pretty girl thinks she loves 'em. She don't. Nobody understands pretty girl. She wants dances an' parties an' pretty clothes too. But nobody understands—" For ten minutes Laughin'-Eyes rambled along thus, with each sentence revealing more and more of Cinderella's hidden thoughts and feelings which she had never revealed to a soul. Gradually, conviction came to the girl. Then, "Laughin'-Eyes goin' away—goodby pretty lady!" said the voice of the child control. With a jerk, the Fairy Godmother sat up.

"Where am I?" she said, putting a plump yet attractive hand to her brow. "Ah, yes. Did the spirits give a convincin' demonstration, dearie? When I'm in full control I don't know nothin' they say. Listen, dearie, I'm in half control again now. I can hear the spirits but I can hear you too. Listen. They tell me that things has been bad, but they're goin' to be better. They sent me here to say they're workin' for you, but they can't help you unless'n you help yourself. I'm comin' out of control now, dearie, an' I got a scheme I want to talk over with you just as woman to woman."

The purport of the conversation of the next half hour I will not for the present reveal. Suffice it that as the Fairy Godmother turned at the door, she repeated:

"Now remember, kid, just at midnight."

"I get you — Just at midnight," repeated Cinderella.

Walking with strange sprightliness considering her bulk, the Fairy Godmother crossed the cemented area. Cinderella, watching from the doorway, felt that at any instant she might disappear. She did not, however; her palpable, material form rounded the ashcan, was gone. Cinderella turned back to her work. Beautiful she had been before, but with a subdued beauty. Now, subtle, sparkling color touched cheeks and lips and nimble fingers. It was an intensification of beauty which Lilith and Goldona, just now at eleven o'clock ringing for their morning coffee from their elaborate boudoirs, still glittering artificially behind drawn curtains, would never know. Swiftly Cinderella turned to the still . . . poured out something . . . lifted it . . .

III

Mayor Hylan, when the Prince landed in New York, had ascertained from a secretary that Lusitania was pro-German during the war. And now, all the wealth, beauty, and fashion of Manhattan from Baxter Street to Turtle Bay Gardens was dancing that night at the Grand All-American Municipal Ball and Reception in Grand Central Palace. Silks, furs, and gorgeous jewels, silvery face powder, made bright the assemblage. Always, Lilith contrived artfully to station herself beside the Prince. Twice he had danced with her. Now, in an interval of music, she was conversing, the

courtiers and aldermen standing respectfully aside, almost out of earshot.

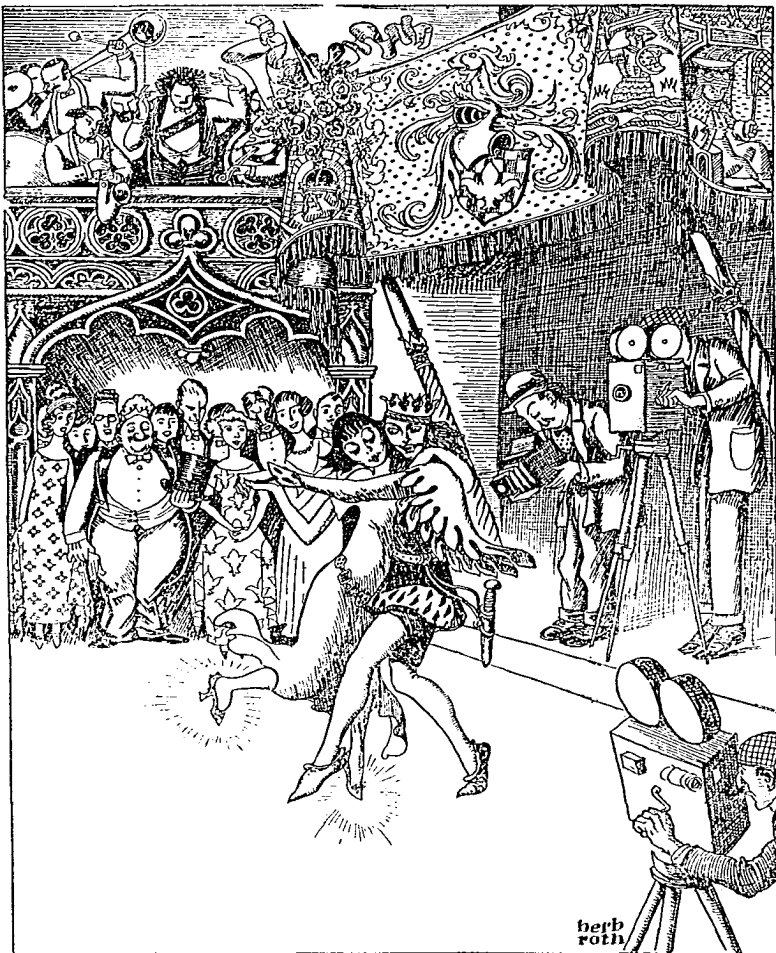
"Prince, it must be great to be a princess," Lilith was heard to say.

How the Prince might have answered this shot, so simple on the surface, so packed with subtle meaning, none will ever know. For, amidst the dying, haunting fall of a shimmy by the Marine Band, even the Prince noticed a commotion at the other end of the majestic hall, and then a hushed silence. The crowd had parted. Through it, lithe yet stately, maidenly yet how graceful, tripped a girl of such transcendent beauty as to make even the most hardened roué in that brilliant throng draw a breath of startled admiration. She was dressed in something of sheer, rippling silver — something, but only just enough to reflect back the light of her eyes, give slimness to her symmetries. Her little feet, as she advanced, both twinkled and glistened from a multitude of — were they diamonds? — on the vamps, the toes, the heels, of tiny high heeled shoes.

That amazed silence passed into a buzz of admiration. Suddenly the orchestra began the strains of a jazz. Then it was that Alderman Lipschowitz of the Sixth Ward, New York's most successful publicity hound, saw opportunity and grasped it. Advancing with a stalwart and masterful air, he took the new arrival into his arms as by right; they glided away, the ornaments of her slippers giving back light from a thousand facets.

"Curses!" suddenly spoke the Royal Press Agent. "We missed that trick. Cut in, your Highness! Cut in before it is too late!"

Forward strode the Prince, just in time to anticipate Councilman Di Caproni of the Bronx. At his quick tap on the shoulder, Alderman Lipschowitz



herb
roth

"She was floating in the arms of the Prince"

fell away from the girl's side. She was floating, floating now in the arms of the Prince. The dancers had seen over their shoulders his prompt act. As the music died away, they broke into spontaneous applause. The band, taking this for an encore, struck up a haunting waltz. They floated and floated, the Prince and the Unknown, and neither spoke; except only as brown eyes spoke to blue. But finally:

"What shall I call you?" he asked, softly.

The sweet, sad mouth curved into a slight smile as with the thought of old sorrow bravely borne.

"Call me Cinderella!" she said.

At that instant came an astonishing climax. A heavy, metallic sound pierced the music of the orchestra. It was the Metropolitan clock striking twelve. On its first reverberation, the twinkling feet of Cinderella stopped. She had wriggled out of his arms. She was running, gracefully yet swiftly, toward a palm embowered door. With the suddenness of her motion, one of the little slippers spilled like a blob of light from her dainty foot. She did not turn back. The Prince stood for a moment palpably embarrassed. There was no one at hand to tell him what to do. Then the instinct of a born gentleman informed him that since a lady had dropped it the object must be picked up. That conquered his embarrassment. He stooped gracefully to the little, glittering slipper. The hall rang with applause. The Royal Press Agent hurried to his side. "Great stuff, your Highness", he exclaimed, "and right off the reel! You'll do! Now hold the pose. The photographers are about to flash." At the same moment the society editors, craning their necks from the windows to view the carriage entrance, saw a glint of silver and diamond light flash

into a smart Rolls-Royce brougham which rolled rapidly away.

"Hang onto it!" continued the Royal Press Agent with a rapid forefinger, indicating the slipper.

And something in the Prince's attitude subtly suggested that this was exactly what he wanted to do.

IV

The press agents of the municipality, of Alderman Lipschowitz and of the Prince of Lusitania, did not permit this incident to die. For three days the newspapers rang with it. Every morning the latest afternoon edition put to the breakfast tables of New York the shrieking inquiry, "Who is the Fair Unknown that snared the Heart of the Prince?" The Royal Press Agent, as the story died down, tried to ascertain from the Prince the particulars of his conversation with the Unknown. But on that, he was dumb. He did not reveal that quaint yet charming name. Had he done so, had the newspapers published it, this story would else not have been written.

For in the stately old dining room of the mansion in the East Thirties, there was gloom. Lilith voided her disappointment on Goldona, Goldona, her malicious, cat-like jealousy on Lilith. Speculate as they might on the identity of the Unknown, they could get no further than that her face was somehow familiar. And all this time, that face was bending over them as Cinderella patiently, respectfully, removed the hash or offered the onions. Clothes so transform a girl! Cinderella served with her eyes cast meekly down. Yet beneath the humble garb of servitude hers was the only heart in that old house which danced with joy.

Three nights after the Grand Mu-

municipal Ball, the Prince appeared again in public — a rather humble and democratic affair given by the American Federation of Labor. A double line of society reporters waited for the Unknown at the carriage entrance. She did not come. And now, the Prince was going away. At the magnificent Litz-Miltmore Hotel, society was giving him his farewell party.

And she came. Again, the dancers fell back before her. Again her beauty seemed to still the music. But she was no longer in silver! A magnificent creation of taffeta — soft, clinging, velvety, darkly purple — gave emphasis to her outlines. Her feet no longer glittered. They were clad now in little black slippers no larger than an elf's. This time the Prince needed no prompting of his pressagent as he strode forward. Again they floated; and now passing dancers, craning their heads politely toward this focus of interest, saw that they were speaking to each other. As the music died away to its fall, they had danced near to the palms which guarded the entrance to an anteroom. Thither he guided her. A twosing couple, the hotel bootlegger plying his trade behind the palms, hastily withdrew. All the world loves a princely lover. Now, they were kissing. And suddenly — the boom of the Metropolitan bell. Her lips parted from his; her form writhed in his grasp.

"Midnight!" she said. "Oh, I must go!"

But his arm restrained her.

"Will you stay if I promise to keep you forever?" he breathed.

For answer, she resumed her kissing.

"But you understand", he said as they paused for breath, "it can be only morganatic."

Cinderella, though she had been

only two nights in society, was already touched by the modern spirit.

"Go as far as you like, Prince," she said.

Their lips met again.

v

Rosalie Le Grange, test, trance, and clairvoyant medium, was playing rum and talking shop with Professor Beach, materializing medium.

"How did you ever get started on that O'Shaughnessy lay?" asked Professor Beach.

"That cat, Goldona O'Shaughnessy," replied Rosalie Le Grange. "She come round to me when she seen her sister Lilith was tryin' to cop the Prince, to get a love philtre to break it up. I smelled money, an' I pumped her — you know. I put two an' two together an' found there was some-thin' phoney in the finances of that family. Suspected they was holdin' out on somebody. Then I found they had a stepsister cookin' in their kitchen an' waitin' on table. I went round disguised as a lace pedler an' looked her over. Pretty! Prettiest thing you ever laid your eyes on. Fresh as dew an' all that. But nothin' upstairs. Wouldn't 'a' stood for it all these years if there had been. One of those — what d' you call 'em when they never grow past fourteen an' can't pass the army intelligence test better than class D an' ain't good for nothin' but ditchdiggers or major generals?"

"Mor'ns?" suggested Professor Beach.

"That's it. Not more'n half witted. She was one of 'em. Right there, like a spirit sent it, I got my idea. That's the kind princes an' millionaires fall for. Fresh as a daisy — contrast. Nothin' above the ears — affinity. Made up my mind to sic her on the

Prince. Even if he didn't pan out, I'd give her the first good time she ever had an' have a lot of fun myself. So I called on her an' threw a trance an' pulled some of the regular stuff an' a few convincin' facts I'd pumped out of that Goldona O'Shaughnessy an' got her confidence an' put her through."

"How'd you ever horn her into those swell society functions?" inquired Professor Beach.

"Schwartz, the caterer," replied Rosalie Le Grange. "He catered for 'em both. He's been comin' to me for ten years. I've got so much on him that when I ask for somethin' he's grateful I ain't askin' more. Jimmy the Greek owns the Rolls-Royce. It's just an old busted Rolls-Royce body he bought cheap and fixed up with a Ford engine. He lets it out to out-of-towners who want to make a splash cheap. Won't send it out of the city limits because it can't climb nothin' higher'n Murray Hill. He let me have it free. I throw bootleg trade his way all the time."

"What was the midnight business for?" asked Professor Beach.

"That", replied Rosalie Le Grange, "was the best thing I done. Sounded spooky, didn't it? Well it's all a matter of the costumes. They was borrowed from Sadie Winkowski—you know—Geraldine Duguesqueline of the Midnight Follies. I've got a lot on her. She has to go on in her clothes at one-ten a. m. — she has a undressed

act before that. Gettin' them clothes off of this Cinderella an' gettin' 'em over to the stage entrance an' onto Sadie in an hour an' ten minutes—well, I nearly broke open my operation, hustlin'. First night she nearly ruined me. I was usin' Sadie's costume for the 'Waters of Niagara' scene. There's a pair of slippers hung all over with glass pendants. Well, that little fool Cinderella overstayed her time an' at midnight she ran so fast she shook off one of the slippers. Didn't have the sense to stop an' pick it up—I'd told her to hurry. Sadie had to go on with plain white shoes an' the stage manager nearly fired her an' I come through next day with twenty-five dollars to the costumer for a new right slipper—the Prince had hung on to that one. I didn't care much, though. I knew by that we had him goin'."

"Well, between your twenty-five dollars and your trouble, I don't see where you get off," said Professor Beach.

"Don't you?" inquired Rosalie Le Grange sarcastically. "Well, as soon as they saw she was marryin' the Prince, Lilith an' Goldona O'Shaughnessy done the next best thing. They wanted to stay square with this Cinderella so's they could be ladies in waitin' or somethin'. So they handed over the fortune they'd been holdin' out on her, pretendin' it was just an engagement present. She's a princess now, but what's more, she's rich. An' I've got somethin' on *her*!"