

“OUT, POUNCE, PIGGY!”

I

CRUMTOCHTY, as everybody knows, is one of the great sporting domains of the Highlands' of Scotland. Salmon-fishing, grouse-shooting, and stalking are of the best. The castle is immense, standing in a fine park, surrounded by gardens expensive to keep up. Everybody also knows (and regrets) that the owner, McCullough of McCullough, has never been able to live at Crumtochty since his father's death. The place has been let year after year to very rich men. Last year it was taken by Mr. Joseph P. Munro, of Pasadena, California, one of the cinema magnates. The McCullough expressed surprise when he learned from his agents the nationality of his tenant.

“Is Mr. Munro a sportsman?” he asked.

A representative of a famous firm replied evasively:

“He's a sport; and he has paid, partly in advance, a higher rent than we have ever got before.”

This was heartening news to an impoverished chieftain, who there and then dismissed Mr. Munro from his thoughts, till he received a letter from the gentleman, regarded (and rightly) by the McCullough as an S.O.S. signal. Part of this remarkable epistle ran as follows:

“I know nothing about these butt shoots, and my friends know the same. It would be neighbourly on your part, sir, to put me wise. And I ask you, as a personal favour, to be my guest for as long as you take a notion to stick it. It may interest you to know that Miss Daffodil

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Angell joins our circle, a bunch of live wires, on the 11th of August. . . .”

The McCullough had never heard of Miss Daffodil Angell !

This simply howls for explanation, inasmuch as Miss Angell is almost as well known in America as Miss Pickford. The McCullough, however, was not a patron of the “ pictures ” nor a reader of newspapers. He was fully occupied, indeed, as his own factor, although he left his sporting rights in the hands of the London firm just mentioned. Within twenty-four hours of reading Mr. Munro’s letter, the McCullough had been assured that Daffy Angell was a beauty, a film star of the first magnitude, and that this was her first visit to Europe.

The McCullough, partly out of curiosity, partly out of philanthropy, accepted Mr. Munro’s cordial invitation ; and wrote so pleasantly and unaffectedly to the great man that Mr. Munro wrote another letter, on arrival from New York, saying that he hoped to be at the castle on the first of August to make necessary preparations for his guests. Would the McCullough come around, if not too inconvenient, and make acquaintance ?

The McCullough, who lived quietly in a small lodge upon the fringe of his vast property, drove over in his Ford car upon the afternoon of the second of August. Mr. Munro was delighted to see him, although mentally and physically much upset. He aired his grievance in the gun-room.

“ Look at that, sir.”

The McCullough looked at a glazed cabinet with bitter-sweet emotions. The cabinet, in the good old pre-war days, had held his guns and rifles, and those belonging to his father’s guests. It was now empty.

“ No shot-guns,” sputtered Mr. Munro. “ I ask you, where are our gas-pipes ? ”

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For a moment the chieftain was puzzled. But he was fairly quick at the uptake, replying after a pause :

“Tenants bring their own guns.”

“I’ve paid a walloping rent,” said Mr. Munro. “You don’t spring it on me that a furnished house is let to a stranger with the most important fixings taken out of it? A bit thick, I must say. Never owned a shot-gun in my life. My bunch don’t carry shot-guns. What in blazes are we to do?”

The McCullough murmured thoughtfully :

“You can buy guns or hire them. How many are in your—bunch?”

“Call it a round dozen. Your head keeper says we must have two guns apiece. Now—what about it?”

“So far as you are concerned, Mr. Munro, I think you had better be measured for a pair of guns without loss of time. There isn’t much time. I dare say I can find you a rifle. Your guests, believe me, should be told by you to bring their own guns, fishing gear, rifles, ammunition, and—er—all that.”

Mr. Munro snorted.

“Not on your life. When I ask my friends to have a hog-killing time with me, I foot all bills. Do they bring their own booze?”

The young man laughed. He liked Mr. Munro at sight. He had never met a man like him. Mr. Munro carried on volubly, using his own vernacular :

“This place is great—just right. And something ventilating and breezy to me. Golly! I mean to make things hum up here. And, don’t you forget it, the victualling department is my hobby. We’re out for blood, me and my friends. Say—you ’phone your sporting goods feller. Tell him I’ve spilled the beans. Nice sort of package to hand the boys, that empty cupboard! Yes, sir, I want two dozen gas-pipes and all the fittings, fishing-poles, rifles, and ammunition.”

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The McCullough's good Scots blood was chilled with apprehension.

"B-b-but," he stammered, "h-have you the r-remotest idea what the bill will be?"

"I must wiggle out of this mess. Get the best, and then you have it. There's Daff. Some girl! Daff is going to catch a salmon, shoot a cockerel, and grass a big stag. You pay particular attention to Daff. A darling from Darlingville."

The McCullough smiled.

"Miss Angell has handled a gun and a rod?"

"Not she. She *has* to do it. It's in the contract."

This was Choctaw to the McCullough. He supposed that a genial host had suggested to a novice new excitements. At the moment he was wondering feverishly whether it would be possible to cancel his engagement for the Twelfth. Grouse-shooting, even over his own magnificent moors, with a "bunch" of novices, male and female, put the wind up a gallant gentleman and ex-officer.

"I thought, maybe," continued Mr. Munro genially, "that you wouldn't mind having Daff in your butt. And here and now I want to thank you for joining my crowd. Mrs. Munro told me I'd bitten off more than I could chew, but with you on hand I'm not worrying a little bit."

The McCullough blushed.

"I—I will do my best, Mr. Munro."

"We'll crack a small bot. on that, here and now."

Protest was futile. A pint of the best pop had tonic effect. Two supermen got to work. The McCullough was a superman at all details connected with Highland sport. Mr. Munro, in his line of business, led the cinema world as a hustler. By the eve of the Twelfth everything necessary had been provided. On the eve, the "bunch," as Mr. Munro put it, materialized, before dinner, in the long saloon.

“*Out, Pounce, Piggy!*”

II

Probably Mr. Munro's guests were as impressed with the McCullough, in a chieftain's full kit, as he was by them. But each live wire in turn asked innumerable questions. The McCullough had no time to ask questions. He was meeting for the first time men and women from an unknown world. It was difficult to understand English as spoken by them. He ought, perhaps, to have guessed they were all “picture artists,” but he didn't. Business lay behind their activities. How could he divine that?

Miss Daffodil smiled upon all, knowing that her smile was her greatest asset, but she beamed upon the McCullough as he bowed before her, and assured him, in a voice soft as satin, that he was the “kiltiest” boy she had ever met, even in her dreams.

“Nothing Ritzy about you,” she declared.

“Ritzy——?”

“I mean nothing chesty. When Mr. Munro told me I was up against the big chief of a big tribe——”

“Clan.”

“Yes. I love the way you talk, and your English accent. But I sure got the willies at thought of meeting you. And some ways it never got across that you were so young.”

“Not very young, Miss Angell.”

“Now I got you easy. We're going to be friends. Tell me all you know about the castle.”

“It will take time,” said a cautious Scot.

He could recall his father's guests, who had sat round the great dinner-table, and the guests of his former tenants. But he had to admit that Mr. Munro's bunch were entertaining and, in their peculiar way, the right sort. Glancing up at the family portraits, he seemed to detect reassuring smiles upon their faces. The McCullough who was out with Prince Charlie in '45 challenged attention.

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"Looks a crackerjack," said Miss Angell.

"I am wearing his sporran," murmured her new friend.

He had to explain what a sporran was.

He learned that Angell was the young lady's stage name. Mr. Munro had told the big chief of a big tribe what this little girl earned—a staggering salary even when computed in pounds sterling. Mr. Munro added curtly: "Makes it and saves it."

In the bunch—and the pick of it physically—was Boy Sparling. The McCullough had never heard of HIM till full, too full, information flowed from Mr. Munro's lips. Boy, according to Mr. Munro, was the rival of Mr. Douglas Fairbanks in the cinema world. He had been featured everywhere with Miss Angell. Still, Mr. Munro had to admit that the amazing pair were not quite the household words that deservedly they ought to be in the United Kingdom. "You Britishers," added Mr. Munro, "don't shake on to the goods as quick as we do."

Before dinner Mrs. Munro and Miss Munro were presented to the chieftain. The McCullough was slightly embarrassed at this reversal of ordinary etiquette. Evidently his host regarded him as royalty. And nearly everybody, understanding somehow that the young man was not to be addressed as Mister McCullough, called him, deferentially, "sir." Mrs. Munro, indeed, had asked whether she ought to kiss his hand, and Mr. Munro had replied, with humour: "Not unless you want to."

The McCullough decided that Mirabel Munro and he were the only ordinary persons amongst a brilliant company. Mirabel had never been featured; she spoke English that the McCullough could understand without mental strain; she appeared to be what she was—a quiet body wearing from choice inconspicuous clothes. Her father's blue eyes twinkled in a demure face.

“Owt, Pounce, Piggy!”

After dinner everybody fox-trotted in the great hall, till the McCullough's piper came in. After that, reels, foursome and eightsome, were in order. Probably the piper and his chief had never tried to instruct keener or more clever pupils. Mr. Munro declared his intention of buying a kilt. The piper commended this, saying that a reel could not be danced properly in pantaloons. Daffodil, equal to any occasion, at once addressed her host as The Munro.”

III

When the ladies went to bed, the men, led by their host, proceeded to the gun-room, often used in Victorian days as a smoking-room. Trophies of the Chase hung upon the walls, each dated. Upon a long table were brand-new gun-cases, fishing rods, reels, and everything else thoughtfully supplied by the “sporting goods feller.” To the McCullough's relief, he discovered that three at least of Mr. Munro's guests had shot duck and quail in California.

“Can I handle a gun?” asked Boy Sparling. “Lemme show you.”

He seized a rifle, spun it cleverly till the barrel was whizzing within an inch of the McCullough's nose, hurled it up to the ceiling, and caught it (by the trigger) as it descended.

“If it had been loaded!” gasped the chief.

“I've never shot with two guns,” said Boy, “but I'll do it, sir, to-morrow.”

“You bet,” added Mr. Munro.

The McCullough drank his toddy. Mr. Munro hoped that nobody would get “hopped.”

“We have to hit the incomers,” he observed solemnly.

As a precaution, the McCullough had seen to it that stout staves were fixed at the corners of each butt, making it impossible for a novice to fire down the line. He had no idea what would happen on the morrow, but hoped for

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the best. His own gillies, functioning as loaders, received careful instructions.

Of course, the shoot was a roaring farce. The ladies who came out saw one of the finest shots in Scotland at work. With undisguised contempt they watched the others at play.

Perhaps Mr. Munro conveyed pithily the conviction that imposed itself upon his bunch :

“ I can't see the derved cockerels against the spinach.”

“ And you won't see them,” said Daffodil, “ not in a month of Sundays. Cross-word puzzles for you after this.”

The McCullough, wise and kind man, poured balm upon lacerated tissues.

“ To-morrow,” he said, “ we'll have a go at clay pigeons. I have two traps on the castle walls. Shooting driven grouse is entirely a matter of practice.”

Next day the bunch practised at clay pigeons, played golf and tennis, and looked at the river, which happened to be in spate and the colour of chocolate. Mr. Munro eyed the famous Crum malevolently.

“ Daff *must* fish to-morrow,” he told the McCullough.

“ Salmon, my dear sir, can't take a fly unless they see it.”

“ But—it's fixed. And I'm counting on you.”

“ On me ? Whatever for ? ”

Mr. Munro took his arm and pressed it affectionately.

“ I feel as if me and you were way back friends. You ain't quite caught on, eh ? You ain't buckled down to the stunt ? ”

“ No, not yet.”

“ Publicity. I had a hunch, see, that Daff and Boy must get a boost over here as sports. It's costing me big money. To-morrow the *Prattler* man answers the bell. It's up to him to snap Daff salmon fishing.”

The McCullough smiled.

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“I’ll attend to that. Yes, I understand. You want me to vet these sporting stunts.”

Mr. Munro nodded. It occurred to him that the chief was “falling for it,” because he had been captivated by the beautiful Daffodil, modestly unaware that he, a stout middle-aged man of business, had inspired honest regard in a descendant of Scottish kings. It is true that Munro’s ways were not McCullough’s ways, but they were soaped with the milk of human kindness. The McCullough had said to himself, “I’m in this, and I must see it through.”

Accordingly Miss Angell was “snapped” when well “into” a fish, holding an entrancingly curved rod at the right angle. The McCullough had previously hooked a small dog; and the River Crum did the rest. Later on—so it was arranged—the *Prattler* man would snap “the Angell girl” at work in the butts; and later on again stalking the tall red deer. Within a week readers of the *Prattler* not only beheld Miss Daffy playing a noble salmon in a famous pool, but saw the fish (taken from the larder for no other purpose) at the end of a gaff wielded by the owner of Crumtochty Castle.

Mr. Munro said:

“That fish is no sardine.”

IV

Pleasant days flitted by, although Boy found another adjective for them. Somehow, for the first time in many years, HE was out of the pictures. The McCullough had become Daffy’s leading man. He led the young lady everywhere. The bunch chaffed Boy, who scowled upon them when they said, “This is a cinch, baby. You go get into petticoats—quick.”

Under pressure from Mr. Munro, Boy did appear in a kilt, and was told brutally by Daffy to apply grease-paint

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to knees too white. What an insult to the cowboy of the Western World!

Each evening Miss Angell wore her scintillating chain of diamonds. Other women might wear ropes of pearls, too easily imitated nowadays. Sham diamonds are not worn. These diamonds represented what Daffy had earned as the "Angel Child"—a magnificent "ad." The necklace went round her lovely neck and reached to her waist. She wore no other jewellery.

On the fourth night the McCullough suggested, "Out, pounce, Piggy!" as a game that could be played to perfection in his ancient castle. Knowing every nook and corner, he volunteered to be "Piggy." The game is played in the dark under strict rules. Everybody, including Piggy, hides himself or herself. At a signal each must return, as silently as possible, to a given place, regarded as sanctuary. Piggy alone can pounce. He pounces and takes prisoner a gasping victim pledged to remain in durance dark till rescued by some bold adventurer who has gained safe harbourage. Screams, struggles, applause are part of this exciting game, which may last for nearly an hour if played with real skill and resource. Piggy, if he knows his ground, generally wins. He can lurk near the sanctuary, and pounce at the last moment; he can lay traps—chairs, footstools, and so forth—to trip up the unwary.

Daffy entered into this game, new to her, with spirit and enthusiasm, the greater, perhaps, because the McCullough had laid her odds, three to one in modest half-crowns, that he would capture her. And he did. Several essayed her rescue and were captured in their turn. Finally, Boy achieved the feat amid loud and prolonged applause. Soon afterwards the game came to an end and the full lights were turned on. Five minutes afterwards Mrs. Munro exclaimed, shrilly:

"Child—where is your necklace?"

“Out, Pounce, Piggy!”

Daffy put her hand to her neck and found nothing there but soft flesh.

“I—I had it on,” she gasped.

There was no doubt of this. The McCullough said quietly :

“A link must have snapped in one of the scrimmages. We shall soon find it.”

But they didn't find it. After exhaustive search, Mr. Munro's guests found themselves in the saloon, silent and dismayed. Mr. Munro hurried out, and came back flushed of countenance.

“It's past twelve,” he growled. “All the servants have gone to bed. Say—hasn't this joke gone far enough?”

Nobody answered him. Mr. Munro spoke more sharply :

“I'm going to lock the doors.” He did so. “And in two jiffs I shall switch off the lights. We'll pretend we're playing ‘Out, pounce, Piggy!’ but there'll be no pouncing. When the lights are switched on again, we'll see, I hope, Daff's diamonds in a chair or on the table or on the carpet. And then we'll—we'll let it go at that.”

A second later they were in Cimmerian darkness.

“Get a move on,” admonished Mr. Munro. “Give the ballyhooing idiot who's played this silly joke a chance.”

Faint rustlings became audible; here and there a couple collided. But Daffy stood still. She said afterwards that the McCullough was standing close to her all the time. When the lights were turned on, no necklace greeted Mr. Munro's eager eyes. He exclaimed huskily :
“Hell!”

Daffy sank into a chair. Mr. Munro approached the McCullough.

“Ain't you a J.P. in these parts? What ought I to do?”

A young man answered, hesitatingly :

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" Really, I—I don't know."

" You're the big noise ; you own this castle. If we were your guests what would you do ? "

" I—I suppose I should sleep over it, and perhaps send for a private detective."

" Who'd link up too late."

Boy said in a defiant tone :

" We ought to be searched, all of us. I'm ready."

He slapped his slender figure significantly.

" Oh, shut up ! " said Mr. Munro. " This ain't a search party ; and I don't entertain thieves. We were all over the place. I guess Daff's necklace will be found by one of the housemaids bright and early—to-morrow."

But it wasn't.

V

The hullabaloo that followed furnished " copy " to every newspaper in England and America. Crumtochy Castle was besieged by reporters and photographers. Mr. Munro refused to call in the police. And then a terrible thing happened. Suspicion spread tentacles about the McCullough and gripped him mercilessly. He—and nobody else—had captured Daffodil in the dark ; the girl had struggled hard to escape. During that struggle the necklace must have been snipped from her neck. To a man who knew every inch of the ancient castle it would be easy to hide it. When Boy Sparling rescued the lovely captive, there had been no struggle. He had just touched her, so she testified, and then, holding his coat tails, she had followed him on tip-toe back to the sanctuary.

Publicity, it will be recalled, threw a searchlight upon the McCullough's financial affairs. He had inherited a great property heavily mortgaged. Income-tax and super-tax had assailed him cruelly. Finally, some paper in America hinted that he was the thief ; and the obscure

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paragraph was copied, with scathing comments, by the English Press. Scotland, of course, took up the cudgels in defence of a favourite son. And this made matters rather worse.

Meanwhile, the “bunch” remained at Crumtochy, and the McCullough, yielding to the impassioned appeals of Mr. Munro, stayed on too. But he said quietly to his host :

“Miss Angell and Boy Sparling think I took it!”

“Great Judas! Then I’ll out ’em both, even if it breaks the contract. Anyways, they’ve got publicity out of this. But, golly! does she dare to put this across you?”

“She has changed in her manner; she avoids me. I—well, I know.”

“I’m beginning to think that baby is half vamp and half floosie.”

Mr. Munro had to explain that a “vamp” was an abbreviation for the blood-sucking vampire bat, who bleeds his victims white without giving anything in return. A “floosie” was a baby face with appealing eyes, very helpful to herself by reason of her helplessness, and, like the vamp, ready to accept everything for nothing. He added generously :

“I guess I’ve made a million out of Daff, and more dollars in sight. But, gee! if she is downing you, she offs it. You get me?”

The McCullough said courteously that under the circumstances he, not Daff, should leave the castle. Mr. Munro, much heated, held his guest to his engagement. The “bunch” acclaimed his decision. Some of them, under the McCullough’s tutelage, were grassing the incoming cockerels. When the river was in order again, Mr. Munro landed a nice clean fish. Boy Sparling was photographed after shooting his first stag.

But the loss of the diamond necklace had wrecked the

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party. Mirabel, with all her father's directness of speech, suggested a plausible hypothesis to Mrs. Munro, who duly passed it on to her masterful lord.

"Daffy," said Mirabel, "is fed up with adulation. The chief didn't adulate. He just can't. That maddened Daffy. She went for him. And that maddened Boy. Boy is back of this."

"That does wind it up," sighed Mrs. Munro.

"And that game, such fun, we haven't played it since."

Mr. Munro, when this was repeated to him, said incisively:

"If Mirabel wants to play the derved game again, she shall."

Mrs. Munro said deprecatingly:

"You know, dearie, I've a notion that Mirabel felt sore because Boy didn't rescue her. If I was you, I'd pay no attention to what she says."

"Ho!" ejaculated Mr. Munro. "Ho—ho!" he repeated angrily. "Are you hinting that my little girl is soft on that guy?"

"It's your fault if she is. You asked him here. I know what you're going to say—*business*. And your business has made you rich. You take care that it doesn't make you poor."

Mr. Munro gasped. Boy Sparling had two wives alive. They had divorced him.

"Hasn't he opened your eyes?"

"He?"

"You know who I mean, Joe. You've been trotting in the right class, with a thoroughbred. And it ought to give you, as it does me, the minnies when you look at him and then look at Boy."

"Why, mother, I think I'll shake you a cocktail."

"No. It's just this, dearie. You haven't sensed the situation. You've always told me you wanted the best,

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and meant to have it. Now you're mixing the worst with the best.”

“I am a mixer,” admitted Mr. Munro, “and I thought myself a good mixer. This is one on the solar plexus for me.”

To cool his brain, he walked down to the river with the McCullough.

VI

That night after dinner Mr. Munro commanded a game of “*Out, pounce, Piggy!*” But Boy Sparling insisted on playing *Piggy*. Mrs. Munro, wearing her rope of pearls, took part in the game. The McCullough, as usual, wore the kilt. A lively member of the “*bunch*” had the bad taste (so Mrs. Munro was of opinion) to comment on this.

“If you lose your pearls——”

“If I do,” replied his hostess, “I shall get me another string, because these are fully insured against all loss.”

Daffy observed with some sprightliness :

“One up on me. My diamonds weren't insured.”

The game began and went on with varying fortunes. Mrs. Munro was taken prisoner by the alert Boy, and so was the McCullough. When the lights were turned up and truce called, Mirabel and the chieftain were missing. Mirabel, it appeared, had stolen off to rescue the prisoner. Hardly had this challenged comment, when Mr. Munro beheld his wife without her pearls.

“Mother—your pearls!”

They had vanished.

Then Boy Sparling dropped a brick upon the toes of everybody present.

“I know where they are,” he declared.

At this moment the McCullough and Mirabel appeared.

Mr. Munro, in excited tones, apprised the absentees of the fact, pointing a trembling finger at Boy Sparling.

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"He knows where they are."

"Tell us," shouted the others.

"Mrs. Munro's pearls are in the chief's sporran."

"Are they really?" murmured the coolest person present. "I never bet on certainties, or I would lay as much as a thousand to three that they are not."

He opened the ancient sporran, which had been "out" in the '45, and invited Mr. Munro to explore its recesses.

"Not a derved thing. Maybe," added Mr. Munro scathingly, turning to the disconcerted Boy, "you expected to find Daff's diamonds there, too?"

"To be honest, I did."

The McCullough, so to speak, took the stage.

"The pearls and the diamonds are in my pocket," he said quietly. "I put them there."

Nobody spoke as the McCullough, with a courtly bow, returned the pearls to Mrs. Munro and the diamonds to Miss Angell. Mr. Munro, wiping his forehead with an immense bandanna, said, feebly:

"You have me sure—cooked to a crisp. What in hell does it mean?"

"In one word, Mr. Munro, your own—*Publicity*."

Then the McCullough made the longest and most effective speech of his life:

"I can guess now, and so can you, who took the diamonds. Mr. Sparling. Before we began the game the brilliant amateur thief must have noticed that I removed my sporran, simply because it is a valuable heirloom. I put it on again when the lights were turned up. I lock it up when I go to bed. I have never carried anything in it, not even a pocket-handkerchief. Had we been searched, as Mr. Sparling suggested, the necklace would have been found in my possession, and Mr. Sparling would have enjoyed the first and last laugh against me. The laugh would have been against him, the joke would have fallen flat, if his plans had miscarried. We know

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what happened after that. I believed that Miss Daffodil, for publicity purposes, had stolen her own necklace.”

“I hadn’t,” exclaimed Daffodil.

“No. I never found the necklace till to-night. Once again I had put the sporran where I placed it before. But it was not quite in the same place, which aroused mild suspicions. In it I found the diamonds and Mrs. Munro’s pearls, which I transferred to my coat pocket. Miss Munro saw me find the precious objects.”

“I did,” said Mirabel.

“And why,” asked Daffodil, turning a furious face to Boy Sparling, “did you play the screaming dumb-bell, when you saw how miserable I was?”

“Publicity,” said Mr. Sparling coolly.

Everybody—except the McCullough and Mirabel—chattered like jays disturbed by a fox. But in the end harmony was restored; and the McCullough was invited to mix a whisky punch, which he did smilingly. Boy Sparling appeared to be rather proud of his achievements.

“I was getting peeved,” he admitted. “Daff was in the limelight and I was in the soup. Daff was annexing more’n her share of Printer’s Pie. My little stunt gingered things up for the big event.”

“What big event?” asked the McCullough.

Everybody stared at him. Then Daff laughed, jumped up, threw her lovely arms round the chieftain’s neck, and kissed him.

“Isn’t he a lamb?” she asked. “He doesn’t yet know, and he won’t understand, that Mr. Munro took this old castle and asked us all here for no other purpose except to advertise the super-film entitled “The Pick-pocket and the Princess,” to be released five weeks hence in London.”

“I didn’t know that,” said the McCullough quietly.

Mr. Munro looked rather ashamed of himself.

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"Maybe," he said hesitatingly, "I ought to have told your agents that. Maybe," he continued, with sincere anxiety, "you think that this has been a skin game, and that you've been skinned?"

The McCullough reassured him.

"Mr. Munro, I give you my word that I feel nothing of the sort. You have entertained me delightfully."

"Golly! You're a mixer."

"I hope you will repeat that after you've tasted this toddy."

VII

An hour later—when the McCullough was removing his sporran (and eyeing it whimsically)—Mr. Munro tapped at the door and came in.

"Honest, now? Ain't you real mad with me?"

"With you, Mr. Munro?"

"Yes, sir. I'm feeling mighty mean. I guess your complex and what Boy calls his complex ain't two of a kind. And when I think that through me you, a descendant of Scotch kings, have been called a thief, why—I want to hunt a kicking machine."

"But I am a thief."

"W-w-w-what——?"

"Yes, to-night, just after your girl rescued me, which she did most cleverly, I stole something infinitely more precious than pearls or diamonds."

"Suffering snakes——!"

"No, Mirabel's heart."

"Why, we all thought that Daff——"

"I know. But, you see, all my traffics and excursions with Daff were just—Publicity."