Opera Hat

What has happened so far:

BACK in Mandrake Falls, Longfellow Deeds had been a successful dealer in hides, wool, and fertilizer, and the town's only poet. Consequently, when Victor Semple, a little-known uncle, died and left Longfellow a giant fortune and the controlling interest in the Continental Opera Company, life for him became very confusing.

It was the opera company that caused most of his woes. Between Madame Pomponi, a temperamental star, Signor Visconti, the non-English-speaking musical director, and the annual deficit, there wasn't much chance for him to enjoy his new existence as a millionaire. And when a lawyer named Granzi appeared on the scene, told him that Semple's common-law wife (a dancer in the opera, Nina Motti) and child were still alive, and that he, Granzi, had been retained to claim their rightful estate, Longfellow felt like giving up the ghost. He probably would have, too, if it hadn't been for Simonetta Petersen, Madame Pomponi's secretary.

Miss Petersen was a natural, lovable girl, the sort of girl Longfellow had known in Mandrake Falls and the only one he had found in New York whom he could talk to. "I like you," he told her. "I'm glad," she countered.

But, away from Simonetta, Longfellow was miserable, and it is no wonder that he frequently fled from his luxurious mansion and inherited secretary, Roger Bengold, to seek solace in ice cream parlors, shooting galleries, and literary haunts. It was in such a place as the last-mentioned that he met Mr. Dide, one of those authors who are always writing but never have anything published. After hearing of Longfellow's troubles, Mr. Dide introduced him to one Angelo Piazza, an unemployed gangster with several notches on his gun. Longfellow immediately hired Piazza as a bodyguard.

Piazza was a splendid acquisition. He knew opera from *Aïda* to *Emperor Jones* and just the right time to applaud. Longfellow was an apt pupil. Unfortunately, though, while on one of their excursions backstage to congratulate the stars, someone murdered the dancer, Motti. It was not surprising, then, that poor Longfellow, shackled with a motive and a gunman, was at once suspected of the crime.

The story continues. . . .

By Clarence Budington Kelland

Longfellow sat staring at her wistfully. "I wish," he said, "I could find a rhyme for Simonetta"

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE HOWE

LONGFELLOW was going over his morning's mail with Bengold, and among the many letters found one from a group in Cincinnati asking him to become, in effect, the patron of a Civic Grand Opera Company in that city.

"What about this?" he asked.

"Mr. Semple," said Bengold, "dealt with a similar request from St. Louis a short time before his death."

"He didn't do it, did he?"

"He declined."

"I suppose Mr. Semple knew how to do that just the right way. You attend to this like he did."

"Very well."

Some half an hour later Longfellow had occasion to speak to Bengold, and not yet being accustomed to pushing buttons or ordering subordinates about, regardless of their convenience, he stepped into the secretary's room. Bengold was absent on some errand. Longfellow glanced at the desk-top and saw a letter to the Cincinnati Civic Opera group. It was a declination of their request, couched in courteous terms. Beside it lay a file marked St. Louis Civic Opera. This Longfellow opened, curious to see exactly how Mr. Semple had worded his refusal. The letter to the Cincinnati people was, word for word, punctuation mark for punctuation mark, identical with Mr. Semple's, in his somewhat ornate language.

Longfellow shrugged his shoulders. It was all right, he guessed, but if he had been doing the thing he would not have done it in the character of a man no longer alive. He would have eliminated Mr. Semple's eccentricities of style. But then, Longfellow was a literary man.

With correspondence on his mind, Longfellow went back to his own desk

and read carefully the copies of letters Mr. Semple was said to have written Nina Motti, which Mr. Cedar had left with him. There were a half-dozen of them and, Longfellow decided, they went directly to the point. The word *wife* was used more than once, and one was left in no doubt as to the writer's infatuation for the woman. It made things look pretty black.

No man should write such letters, thought Longfellow, unless he meant them and was willing to be responsible for his outpourings. Mr. Semple, according to reports, had been a shrewd individual and not likely to affix his signature to something he did not mean. But, on the other hand, as public records prove, when love comes in the window discretion flies out of the door. Also, Longfellow had heard the old saying that there is no fool like an old fool. How much better, he judged, if Mr. Semple had wished to express himself amorously and had not wished to assume legal liability, if he had sent poetical post cards! There were a dozen of Longfellow's poems which expressed more choicely what these letters said, but which, being printed and, after a fashion, impersonal and commercial, would not have brought about such a regrettable result.

BECAUSE he had a pretty good business mind he determined to write the company which employed him advising an advertising program along these lines. . . . "If you do not wish to incur legal liability, use our lovers' post cards!" Something like that. Or, "Be as loving as you like with our valentines, and avoid Breach of Promise." . . . Certainly the idea had possibilities. And the poems could be discreetly worded. To think, with him, was to act. He therefore set about the composition of such a poem—one that would leave the lawyers no leg to stand upon.

The effort must express much, yet say little. There must be nothing upon which ravening lawyers could lay impious hands. Therefore, he resorted to the oratorical question:

> Do I adore you?
> You yourself must guess.

That was pretty good. It rather left it up to the plaintiff and imposed no onus upon the defendant.

> Is this emotion
> One of devotion?

He liked that. The lady who received the poem could have no doubt of the sentiment. Unquestionably the emotion was devotion, but it did not say so definitely.

> What would my soul express?
> Wish I to wed you?
> Have I misled you?

That, Longfellow judged, was nicely legal. It left a loophole and put the lady on her guard. It did not say he had misled her, and rather implied that she was too smart to be misled—but, all the same, a jury would regard it as a sort of Look-Out-for-the-Dog sign.

THE last four lines were little short of greatness in that they covered the situation from beginning to end, told the lady where she got off, without really telling her, and tied the legal aspects up into a neat bundle:

> Do I caress with vim?
> If I should woo thee,
> Maid, wouldst thou sue me?
> Is it a vagrant whim?

And there you were. It called discreet attention to the suitor's love-making ability. "Vim" was a forceful word, but no caress was admitted except by inference, and a jury might find that not only was there no vim in his caresses, but there might have been no caresses whatever. And the final line was worthy of John Marshall or Rufus Choate or any of our greater and more astute legal minds. It left it all up in the air.

He typed the whole neatly, wrote a covering letter containing his publicity idea, and placed it in an envelope. He allowed no secretary to meddle with this, his real vocation. He wanted to know it was done correctly, and saw to it himself.

Once more he read the letters to Nina Motti and noted on another paper a reference to the celebrated case of Lithgow vs. Jones. Mr. Cedar had informed him that the cases paralleled each other and that the Jones letters had been held by the courts to constitute comprehensive evidence of common-law marriage.

Suddenly he determined to read this Jones correspondence, and wondered where it was to be found. Certainly not in the house, so he made ready for the street and went out the front door;

there Mr. Piazza, intent upon his duties, paced up and down.

"Good morning," said Longfellow.

"Good mornin'," said Piazza. "Mister, the more I think about this break I'm gettin' the more obliged I am. A couple more days and I'd been on the Relief. Yes, sir. Or sellin' chewin' gum to automobiles on Fifty-sevent' Street. It's the govamint's fault, is what I say. First it builds up my old job with Prohibition. Puts me in the money. Then it kicks out Prohibition, and what does it do for us fellers that's left stranded? Nothin'. . . . Want me to walk wit' you or behind?"

"With me," said Longfellow and, after he had taken a few strides down the Avenue, "We all have our problems."

"Sure," said Piazza.

"One of mine, at the moment, is Opera."

"The night we took Finger Maginn for a ride," said Piazza, "I went to hear Di Vanni sing *Pagliacci*. I had coupla hours to kill before he was on the spot. Yeah, all the time we was ridin' in the car to where they found him I couldn't help whistlin' pieces of it. It made Maginn sore. He didn't like music."

THE import of this naïve confession was not patent to Longfellow, whose mind was on the economic side of the Institution.

"Here," he said, "we got a big investment in the opera house, and use it fourteen weeks a year. It's as if you owned a flat building and it stood idle thirty-eight weeks a year. You wouldn't show a profit. You wouldn't hardly pay your taxes."

"Then," suggested Piazza, "why don't you keep it open all the time?"

"Because," explained Longfellow, "if we lose a couple of hundred thousand in fourteen weeks, we would lose almost a million in a year."

"Yeah. You keep it open just as long as you can get a sucker to hold the bag, eh?"

"It has that appearance," said Longfellow. "And I am expected to be the sucker."

"Listen, Mr. Deeds, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't. Put up that many grand so fellers like me that enjoys Opera can have it, and so a lot of society dames with diamonds that don't know a sharp from a flat can have a place to meet the boy friend! Not me."

"It's the idle thirty-eight weeks that bother me," Longfellow said very sensibly. "How far down is the Library?"

"I'd carry your bundle, Mr. Deeds, only I got to keep my arms free. It's at Forty-second Street."

"If," said Longfellow, "we could only have some kind of a show the other thirty-eight weeks that would pay."

"What I hear along the Main Stem," said Piazza, "shows is all on the fritz. Except the pictures."

"That," said Longfellow, "might be an idea."

After a pleasant walk, unmarred by incident which required the utilization of Piazza's highly specialized talents, they reached the Library, and entered. Longfellow sought information.

"Do you," he asked of a severe elderly attendant of, probably, the female sex, "remember the notorious case of Lithgow vs. Jones?"

"I do," she said severely.

"What newspaper would be likely to have the fullest account of the trial?"

"The *Daily Tabloid*."

"And may I see the files?"

SHE directed him, but he paused in the friendly way customary in Mandrake Falls—and also, because, when he sought enlightenment, he sought it anywhere and everywhere.

"What," he asked, "do you think of Opera?"

"That," she said promptly, "is none of your business."

"I—I beg your pardon But what I mean is—if somebody wanted you to give a couple of hundred thousand dollars to keep it going, would you?"

"My interests," she said, "lie solely in antivivisection."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Longfellow. "I

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Longfellow glared at the police lieutenant. "Neither Miss Petersen nor I," he said, "will answer any more questions. So there isn't any use asking us"

boulder an' shoved with all I had, an' come up a-gaspin' right beside Dr. Belmont on the ledge.

As he took Sliver, he says, "Jerry's there in the same place."

I nodded quick an' went back.

Jerry was easier. He didn't struggle none, like Sliver had, because he'd hit his head on a rock an' was out. When the current sucked us under, I tried to think hard just where I'd raked that jagged rock, so I could brace for it. I stuck out my right arm, hangin' to Jerry with my left—an' smashed into it. That's the last I knowed until I come to on the ledge, with Sliver, an' the doctor, an' Jerry workin' on me. Then I went out again. . . .

THE next daylight I seen was in my own cabin at Joe's. Sliver an' Jerry an' the doctor was still with me. Sliver looked at me once, an' walked out the door. Dr. Belmont put his hand on my head an' says, "How are you, Les? How do you feel?"

"Good," I says, an' I did, too. The old feller was talkin' considerable with his eyes an' not at all with his mouth.

Jerry set down on the foot of the bunk. He was all dressed for travelin'.

"I guess you know how I feel, Les," says Jerry.

I looked at him, an' our private troubles was over. "Yes," I says; "tough."

"That's right."

I'll say one thing for him. He wasn't one of these sloppy, sentimental guys. He give me credit for not wantin' no formal apology, an' I liked him for that, too.

"Well, so long," he says.

"S'cuse my left hand, Jerry."

"You're pretty good with it, Les. I see I got to practice on that side with my pole."

"Don't you do it," I says. "If you got good on that side you could tie me."

He grinned an' gripped my left hand hard, an' said "so long" again, an' his father did, too, an' they left.

"Come up an' see us again some time," I says after them.

"Next summer," they says.

Old Joe Keegan brought my supper over, an' he was sure an uncomfortable old sinner. He knowed I had somethin' to say to him, an' he sure looked like he would hate to hear it! All he could think up to say was, "What kind of a trip, Les?"

"You should of been along, Joe," I says. "You'd of loved it. Sliver was a great help at all times, just like you said."

He gulped, an' says "Aw—!" an' aimed for the door. He stuck his head back in an' says, "Say, Doc Belmont left you a thousand bucks. Here she is." He come back in, an' laid the check on the table. Then he skedaddled.

I dressed, but my head sang, an' I lay down agan. I thought how I would tear up the check pretty quick, an' went to sleep again. It was moonlight when I woke up, an' it was misty. I went over to the table an' picked up the check. I thought it would be fun to look at a check for a thousand bucks, even if I was goin' to tear it up. But I looked out the door instead, an' seen Sliver in the moonlight down by the river.

I grinned, thinkin' how her scheme had worked out ag'in' her, an' I thought I'd go down an' wave that check under her nose before I tore it up. Boy, it done me good to see her there, starin' down-river in the direction her Jerry had went.

Well, I took my check an' went down cat-footed, sneakin' up behind her. "Hullo, *darling!*" I says.

She never jumped a mite. "Hullo, Les."

I waved the check under her nose. "Here's what the Doc give me for crockin' your romance," I says.

"Okay," she says, an' begun to cry.

She wasn't cryin' the way women mostly do. She wasn't makin' no noise at all. But the moonlight showed where the tears run down over her cheeks, an' her face was the color of white pine ashes. I guessed it was hurtin' her pretty bad. I stuck the check back in my pocket. I felt bum.

"I guess I'm licked, Les. I guess I made a mess out of everything."

"I'm sorry, Sliver. Honest I am. I didn't know you wanted him that bad."

"Oh, can't you see?" she says. "I'll always want him!" She threw her arms tight around my neck before I could get away. "Les! Les!" she says.

I PUT my arms around her an' held her hard. I guess I just couldn't help it.

"Don't you understand who I want?" she says. "I want you, Les. Oh, Les! I love you!"

She was shakin' in my arms, her face shinin' under the moonlight. I guess I must of loved her all the time an' didn't know it. I kissed her, an' she wouldn't let go, an' I was glad. She just kind of quivered all over.

"Les," she whispered, her cheek against mine. I kissed her again, an' she says, "'Member the time I put the mink trap in your blankets?"

"Sure, darling," I says. "You caught me."

Opera Hat

(*Continued from page 45*)

guess I had better ask somebody else."

He found his way to the room where files of newspapers are kept and was given the volume of the *Daily Tabloid*. Having the approximate date, he was able to find the daily reports of the Lithgow-against-Jones matter, and the series of letters there printed he read with avidity. He compared them with his copies of the Semple letters, and reached the conclusion that Mr. Cedar was right. If the court held the Jones letters were evidence of a valid common-law marriage, it undoubtedly would be of the same opinion with respect to Mr. Semple. Nevertheless, he was exceedingly thoughtful as he left the Library.

Longfellow walked up the avenue still lost in some very engrossing speculation, when he heard his name spoken and, looking up with a startled expression, saw Theresa Garrison. She had just emerged from one of the better shops.

"Hello, neighbor," she said. "I don't let everybody take me to luncheon, so where do we go?"

"I—I don't know," said Longfellow.

"Then," said Theresa, "I'll take you into the secret. We'll go to Tommy's & Teddy's. I'm famished, and, besides, if I've got to marry you I want to give you a thorough once-over."

"Do you—do you have to?" was all Longfellow could find to contribute.

"What do you think?" she asked. "You know Mamma. Let's walk. People will see us, and it'll get in the scandal columns. I love scandal, especially about me."

"I DO not imagine Mrs. Garrison would care for scandal," said Longfellow.

"If you can't think of a better one than that," she retorted, "recite me a poem. . . . We turn here. Only the worst people lunch in this place. You'll see the dregs."

"I do not want to take you to an improper place."

"If I've got to woo you," declared Theresa, "I'm going to do it in my own, natural, childlike way. In here."

As they entered a room where there was a bar and a great deal of red leather furniture, Longfellow was further discomfited to see the bulk of Percival Dide surge up from a little table and to hear him utter a bellow of welcome.

"Who," asked Theresa, "is the blood-sweating behemoth?"

"Mr. Percival Dide—an eminent author."

"We'll annex him," Theresa decided, and Longfellow found himself pronouncing introductions.

"Well, well," said Mr. Dide. "Well, well. My life has a greater range than a coloratura soprano. Yeggs for breakfast and the cream of the Junior League for luncheon. Sit down and be looked at."

"So you," observed Theresa, "are what writes those beautiful love stories!"

"They are my true self—expressing my hidden and lovely soul. This crude and raucous hulk you see is nothing but an outward shell, a protective covering."

"Well," retorted Theresa, "you'd better keep it on. It's chilly outside." And then, "Let's see you hit somebody. I hear you go around socking villagers."

"Only cops."

"I'll wait. Will you promise to poke one for me after the dessert? I want to get onto the technique."

"For you," said Mr. Dide, "I would slap down the Commissioner." He looked belligerently at Longfellow. "Do you have to stay?" he demanded.

"I—I didn't really want to come."

"But he had to. I'm wooing him. It's Mamma's orders," said Theresa.

"Mamma," said Mr. Dide, "is about to whang her head against a major disappointment."

"Such as?" asked Miss Garrison.

"Me," said Dide. "And why? Because I choose you. There's something about you. You click. I never had one click before. You're so darn' neat that I bet you'd be grand mussed up."

"Have I met a fast worker at last?"

"Child," said Dide, "you've collided with a blasting romance. Will you marry me?"

"Probably not," said Theresa, "but stick around and keep asking."

LONGFELLOW was feeling very much like an extra and very unnecessary pimple on the nose of the body politic. But he need not have done so, for Dide and Theresa continued to ignore him utterly. In one respect he was relieved, for Theresa was off his hands. But his woes were not at an end, for no sooner did he commence to enjoy his luncheon than he saw the ornate, bedizened mass of Madame Pomponi fill the doorway, with Simonetta Petersen peeping over her shoulder.

"There," said Madame in a voice that shook the chandelier, "is Mr. Deeds. Waiter, make room at Mr. Deeds' table." She bore down upon them.

Dide sprang to his feet. "Welcome, sweetheart," he said enthusiastically. "Meet my future wife."

"If she is," said Madame, "I'm sorry for her. Theresa Garrison, isn't it? What are you eating? I'll have some, too. What'll you have, Simonetta?"

She made no move to introduce her secretary. Longfellow flushed.

"Er—Miss Garrison, this is Miss Petersen. And Mr. Dide. I guess Madame forgot to introduce you."

"What are you doing, you young whippersnapper, teaching me manners?"

"Yes," said Longfellow, not knowing what else to say.

"The Challenger," said Dide gleefully, "landed a stiff punch under the heart, leaving the Champion gasping against the ropes. Can you take it, Pomponi?"

"You shut up," she said weakly.

"What is this," demanded Dide, "the lobby of the opera house? Here enters the great Visconti."

"I told you," whispered Theresa in Longfellow's ear, "you'd see the dregs."

"That animal!" exclaimed Pomponi.

Longfellow watched the director enter, and then saw emerge from behind Visconti's rather unsightly bulk, the weazened form of the great man's interpreter.

"What I want to know," Pomponi said in her loudest tones, "is who killed Motti?"

Visconti's drowsy eyes turned to the group. The little interpreter seized his master's hand as a frightened monkey will snatch at the hand of his organ grinder. Visconti spoke out of his flabby impassivity. In Italian.

"Only a fool would wish to know," he said, and then turned majestically. Longfellow could not make out if Visconti left upon his own decision, or if he were dragged away by the colorless interpreter.

"Scum!" said Pomponi.

"Look here," said Longfellow to Ma-

dame Pomponi, "you have been around the Opera a long time, haven't you?"

"Are you implying that—?"

"I am implying nothing, except that you must know a great deal about everybody connected with the place," he said, "and I want to know about everybody."

"If anyone knows more than I," said Madame, "I'd like to know who."

"That's what I am getting at. I don't want to know about Opera itself. That is important, of course, if I am going to put up the money to keep it running. But it is more important to know about what is going on among the singers and all."

"Why?" she snapped.

He regarded her with honest eyes. "Madame," he asked, "do you like me?"

"Yes," said Madame promptly.

"That's nice. So I guess I had better tell you how things are. And Mr. Dide, because he is the only friend I have in New York. It is very private, but I don't mind Miss Garrison, because she is an old friend of the family. Miss Petersen knows I trust her more than anybody else on earth. I've been reasoning it out, and I've got to talk to someone besides Mr. Cedar, who is just my lawyer. I mean, somebody who has a personal interest in me."

"What on earth," asked Pomponi, "are you getting at?"

"Well," said Longfellow, "there's murder, and there's blackmail and there's kidnapping." He paused. "And a common-law wife."

"Trifles," said Dide. "Mere trifles."

"It would not be a trifle to me if I should be sent to the electric chair," Longfellow said.

SIMONETTA leaned forward suddenly. "Do you think it wise to—to talk before so many people? We are all comparative strangers, you know."

"Yes," said Longfellow. "This Motti woman sent a lawyer to see me, and he claimed she was Mr. Semple's common-law wife and that there was a child."

"The nasty liar!" said Pomponi.

"Maybe. But Mr. Cedar thinks there is a strong case. There are letters. If it is so, I might lose all Mr. Semple's money or I might have to settle for millions of dollars."

There was silence.

"And then," said Longfellow, "the Motti woman is murdered. So you see? I was there in the theater, and I had Piazza along. And people used to hire Piazza to shoot people. It's a pretty strong motive."

"Do the police know?" asked Dide.

"Not yet. So, you see," Longfellow explained, "it would be a very good thing for me if I could prove somebody else did the murder. And it would be good if I could prove the Motti thing was just a plot."

"It would, indeed," agreed Dide.

"So," said Longfellow, "I thought that Madame Pomponi might know something that would lead to something. She might have heard stories about Motti. She might know about enemies who had a reason to kill her."

Simonetta, very white now, and tense, spoke in a voice as tight as the string of a guitar. "I think a number of people had ample reason to kill Motti," she said.

"Shut up," snapped Madame. "What do you know about it? Speak when you're told to speak. You didn't have any reason for killing her, so keep your mouth shut."

Suddenly, and he could not have told why, Longfellow was afraid. Perhaps it was Simonetta's face; perhaps it was Pomponi's manner—the way she leaped upon her secretary. And, now that she had spoken, the diva's face was grim.

There was something in the air, something menacing. It was almost physical. Longfellow felt as if he must break it, dissipate it, or a dreadful thing would happen.

"What about Visconti?" he asked. "Was he ever mixed up with Motti?"

"That flabby porcupine! That bejeweled bullfrog!" Madame leaped into the breach with a sort of feverish eagerness. "The only decent thing I ever noticed about him was that he left Motti alone! Why? What made you ask?"

"WELL," said Longfellow, "he and his interpreter seemed to have a kind of a cat fit when her name was mentioned."

"He has a cat fit if anybody is mentioned but himself," said Pomponi.

"You also catalogued kidnapping," Dide said.

"I got a letter. That's why I hired Piazza."

"You'd better hang onto it. At least, it accounts for your hiring a gunman."

"So, you see," Longfellow explained, "there isn't much use for people to pester me about keeping Opera alive, because I may not have any money to keep it alive with, and I may get arrested for murder, and I may be kidnapped."

"I take it," said Dide, "you didn't have the lady bumped off?"

"No," said Longfellow simply.

"Wouldn't it be cheaper in the long run—and safer—to buy off this lawyer of Motti's? So he won't ramble off to the police."

"No, Dide," said Longfellow. "If I had done this thing, then I would buy him off. And if I believed Motti was Mr. Semple's common-law wife, I might buy him off. I don't think so, but I might. But it doesn't sound sensible to me to throw away an awful lot of money."

"Better that than sit in the hot seat."

"I don't believe very many people are executed for crimes they didn't commit."

"Her death came in handy for you."

"No," said Longfellow; "on account of the child. I think it came in very unhandy for this lawyer, Granzi; if he and Motti plotted it. I think it mixed everything up for him, because the courts will appoint a guardian for this child—if it should turn out she was Mr. Semple's heir instead of me. And Granzi couldn't touch the money. Like he could have divided with Motti."

"Then you think the murder had nothing to do with this wife business?"

"I'm sure it didn't."

"I don't want to hear any more about it," Pomponi said vehemently.

"But—but I thought maybe you would help me," said Longfellow.

"I've lost my appetite," Madame said. "How do you expect a person to be able to eat with this kind of talk going on? I can't stand it another minute. I'm going. Simonetta, you stay here. I don't want you. I'm going where I can be quiet. Telephone and break all my engagements for the day. Tell them anything. Tell them I broke my leg. Tell them to go to the deuce!"

It was a splendid attempt at an outburst of temperament, but something was wrong with it. It lacked fire. Longfellow felt that it was spurious.

"Shan't I come with you?" asked Simonetta, almost eagerly.

"No!" thundered Madame.

She stalked out of the place.

"It wasn't a very good show," said Dide.

"The rest of you," said Longfellow, "can go, too, if you want to."

"You may be poison ivy," said Dide, "but we'll stick around. If the cops come in for you I'll sock one to show Tessie how it's done."

"Mother will slide into you with spikes if you call me 'Tessie.' It's common."

"What's her first name?" Dide wanted to know.

"Consuelo," said Theresa.

"I'll call her Mike," said Dide. "I call almost everybody Mike. I forget names and it's easy to remember."

"I wish you two would go away," Longfellow said.

"But not Miss Petersen?"

"No."

"I'll catch blazes from Mamma," said Theresa. "I had my orders to woo you. Does this mastodon call you Mike, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mike, let's put our cards on the table. Is there any chance for me?"

"I—I wouldn't think so," said Longfellow uncomfortably.

"Jilted!" exclaimed Theresa, "And I'm darned if I don't believe I'm kind of sorry. Say, lummox, what is your first name?"

"Percival," said Mr. Dide.

"It will still be Lummox. Let's go out and get into trouble. I want to forget all."

Dide walked around and put his hand on Longfellow's shoulder.

"We're not taking a walkout powder," he said. "Do you really want us to scram?"

"Yes."

"I'll be around," said Dide, "and so will the kid. Won't you, Kid?"

"Morning and evening," said Theresa. "She may belong to the Junior League, but a noble heart beats beneath the sable coat. I spotted it on sight. And me, I know people and places. If I, or we, can come in handy, reach for us."

"Thank you," said Longfellow gravely.

IT WAS evident they left reluctantly, speaking together in lowered voices. Simonetta sat silent and listless.

"I wanted to be alone with you," said Longfellow.

"Why?"

"Because," said Longfellow, "you're afraid of something. I want to know about it. It has something to do with this murder."

"Why do you think that?"

"It—it was perfectly evident," he said.

"So what?"

"It's like this," said Longfellow. "Back in Mandrake Falls, if we have a friend, or someone we—we think a great deal of, and this friend gets in trouble, we do the best we can. I mean we offer to help—and we mean it."

"Haven't you got enough troubles of your own?"

"Not so many," said Longfellow, "but what yours seem to be more important."

She looked at him as if she did not understand. "What's that?" she asked.

"It isn't a good time," said Longfellow, "for me to go into that. It wouldn't be

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right—not for me to say personal things about how I feel. Because I'm in a bad mess. But if you are in a bad mess—well, you see, I've got a terrible lot of money and everything that maybe doesn't belong to me. It might be wrong to use it for myself, but I wouldn't care if it was wrong or not, and I would use it for you."

"Don't be idiotic," she said, with more of her old confidence. "You can't do anything. Nobody can do anything."

"So there is something to be done?"

She shrugged. "Well, there seems to be," she said. "Madame Pomponi leans to the opinion that I shot Motti."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Longfellow. "Why?"

"Did you ever hear of Guido Cenci?"

"He was a tenor, wasn't he?"

"He was," said Simonetta, "and he killed himself. He was my brother."

"Cenci?"

"His name was Petersen, too, but that wouldn't do in opera, so he took the other. My father and mother—all of us—worked our fingers to the bone for him. My parents mortgaged everything they owned to send him abroad—because we knew he would be great. And he came back and got a hearing, and for one season he was a sensation. People talked about another Caruso. He made a great deal of money, in concerts and radio. He was saving it to pay us back—and to send me abroad to study."

"Yes."

"And then he killed himself. Over Nina Motti—after she took every penny he had saved and—laughed in his face. We loved him so much. And I am a secretary instead of studying in Europe and—and becoming somebody. I think I was almost crazy for a while. I know there are people who heard me say I would kill Motti."

"But you didn't," said Longfellow.

"But I am glad someone else did."

"The police may not find out who you are."

"They will," she said.

He did not speak for quite a while, nor did she. When he did speak again it was almost incredible that he said what he did. He stared at her; then he spoke.

"I wish," he said, "I could find a rhyme for Simonetta." . . .

LONGFELLOW DEEDS sat in the chair at the head of the table in the offices of Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle around which the board of directors of the Opera were meeting. At the opposite end sat Visconti, flanked by his interpreter. The other gentlemen scattered about the board. A report had just been read which cheered with a story of greatly increased attendance at the opera house for some days. Longfellow commented upon it.

"It proves," he said, "there is a way to get people to come. I mean that murder seems to be a stronger drawing card than music."

Visconti leaped to his feet, puffing and blowing. At the end of his tirade his mouse of an interpreter turned the oration into English, ending with, "'E is ver' angry."

"I noticed that," said Longfellow calmly. "By the way, what do *you* think about this murder?"

The interpreter gripped the end of the table; he shot a glance at his master's face. "I do not theenk," he said.

"Oh, you must think something," Long-

fellow encouraged him. "Now, for instance, do you think it was done by a man or a woman?"

"I do not know. I do not theenk. I theenk a woman."

"Oh, you think it was a woman. Why?"

"The jealous woman—she shoot," said the interpreter.

"But most of the women around there were Italian, weren't they? I mean, isn't it more like an Italian woman to stab? You didn't happen to hear a shot?"

"No, no. I hear nothing. I am not-a able to hear. I am out by the elevator. I seat on da trunk and talk."

THERE were nine directors at the table, and eight of them moved uneasily.

"The sooner," said one of them, "this distressing matter is hushed up, the better for everybody."

"Why?" asked Longfellow.

"You can't tell what will come out."

"But I want things to come out."

"In that," said Mr. Cedar, "I fear you will find scant support from this board."

"Oh," said Longfellow. "Oh. Then I guess we better get down to business. This season is about over. The question is what to do about next season. We cannot have Opera next year unless we get some money."

"We have explained to you that Mr. Semple always took care of that."

"Yes," said Longfellow, "but from what I learn he had other reasons for keeping the Opera going than music. I am not interested in these other things, and I am not very interested in music."

"It is your duty to administer his fortune as he would have administered it."

"He didn't leave any will, did he?" asked Longfellow logically. "He could have done that. He could have said in it about Opera. But he didn't. So it isn't a question of duty. It is just a question of whether it is wise and businesslike."

"Opera is not businesslike. It is an art."

"Anything," said Longfellow, "that has anything to do with money ought to be businesslike. Now, here's one thing I object to. We—and because I seem to own almost all the stock—I own an opera house and the land it is on. It is worth a lot of money. A million, anyhow, and more."

"True."

"But we use it only about a quarter of the time. The rest of the time it is idle. Taxes go on the whole year. So do repairs. We have to hire a lot of people for the twelve months. The property doesn't even try to earn anything for three quarters of the time. It looks silly to me."

"Nothing can be done about that feature of it."

"Why?"

"An opera house is an opera house."

"Yes," said Longfellow, "and so is a pig a pig. But you can use it for ham, and pork chops and bacon and salt pork, and not just for the squeal.

"Now, it seems to me that we are business men. Even if I am a poet I am a business man. I was in business. So it seems to me as if we ought to solve this problem."

"Nobody has ever solved it," said Mr. Cedar.

"Nobody," said Longfellow, "ever flew until they invented airplanes. Now, if we could put something profitable in there for nine months, or even something that would just pay expenses, then we wouldn't have to run Opera like an orphan asylum or a home for stray dogs. On charity."

"It is not charity. We are fostering and preserving a great art."

"For whom?"

"The people."

"The people don't seem to care much about having it preserved, or they would come to it. Or we might make it a straight charity and let them come for nothing, like to band concerts in the park. But I think the public would rather have bands."

"It would not be dignified to use the opera house for other things."

"When dignity," said Longfellow, "costs a quarter of a million dollars a year, it is too expensive."

"I presume you have some sort of proposal?"

"Not yet," said Longfellow, "though I'm getting an idea. But I would start out by cleaning up the place and dolling it up in front, so it would look kind of appetizing. You go along and look at some of these moving picture theaters, and you think—there would be a nice place to go into. Because it looks bright and clean and kind of pretty. But you walk past the opera house, and it looks like it was planned to keep people out."

"Renovation costs money."

"So does standing idle," said Longfellow.

"We aren't getting any place. I move we adjourn."

LONGFELLOW, aware that he had increased the disfavor in which he stood with the directorate, did not pause for informal chat. Nor did Visconti. So the three —including the little interpreter—found themselves in the elevator together. Visconti was dour, aloof, majestic. The little interpreter cringed. Longfellow smiled at him in a neighborly way.

"Where were you born?" he asked with interest.

"Napoli."

"That's Naples, isn't it? Where Vesuvius is? How long have you been in America?"

"Six year."

"And all the rest of your life you lived in Naples?"

"All, signore."

"What did you do there?"

"I work-a in da opera. I am one of the assistant for Roberti, who direct da ballet."

"Oh," said Longfellow. "I guess I didn't catch your name."

"Rodolfo Polese, signore."

Visconti spoke sharply.

"'E say shut up," said Polese. "So I shut up."

Again Visconti poured out a tidal wave of Italian, gesticulating with grandiose gestures. Polese turned his words into English:

"'E say what does it matter if you lose-a da money. 'E say Visconti is wort' it all. 'E say w'at New York be if Visconti leave."

"Anybody would think," said Longfellow, "that he sang the operas and played the orchestra. I haven't found out yet what he does that makes him so important."

Longfellow looked around to see if Piazza was following, then walked on through the lobby of the building to the street.

"Do you think," Longfellow asked musingly, "he could conduct a good vaudeville show?"

"Peeg!" bellowed Visconti.

With which courteous farewell he lunged into his waiting car and disappeared from view. Longfellow and Piazza got into their car and moved up Broadway. "Anyhow," Longfellow said after a period of silence, "I wonder if he could."

Once more in his home, Longfellow went to his office, and telephoned Percival Dide.

"Hello, Mr. Dide. This is Longfellow Deeds."

"Don't you know I'm working? Don't you know a writer is always hoping to be interrupted so he can't work any more? What do you want?"

"How," asked Longfellow, "do you find out about people in Italy?"

"What people?"

"Any people you want to. What I mean is that everybody around the Opera is Italian. I've read detective stories, and the reasons for murders didn't all happen yesterday. They might have started ten years ago."

"Or twenty," said Dide.

"So," said Longfellow, "I just got the idea that maybe if we could find out all about the lives of some of these Opera people before they came here, why, we might get a hint.

"Anyhow," said Dide after a pause, "it's something. It's worth a try. Now, hold the horses. Jimmy Hodge is Community Press man in Rome. If I cabled Jimmy the names he would know how to go ahead. Especially if there might be a story in it. You sit tight and I'll be right up. I didn't want to work, anyhow. Who do you want looked up?"

"I guess it's just as well if I don't mention any names over the telephone," said Longfellow.

Then he sat down and wrote on a paper a list of names: Motti, Visconti, Madame Ponzi, Granzi, the attorney. And then he added one more name and stared at the ceiling fixedly.

"You never can tell," he said to himself. . . .

IT WAS difficult to sit and wait for events to manifest themselves. It was trying to live in constant apprehension. Longfellow was not used to apprehensions and uncertainty. He found he could not write—at least today. He could not endure inaction. If he could take no active steps to cure or to ameliorate the conditions in which he found himself, at any rate he could talk. And in all the world there was but one person to whom he wanted to talk—Simonetta Petersen.

Almost automatically he lifted the telephone and gave the number of Madame Pomponi's apartment in the Cortillon.

"Is Miss Petersen in?" he asked.

"Speaking," said Simonetta.

"This is Longfellow Deeds. I want to see you. I don't want to see anybody but you. Are you busy? I want to see you."

"I gather," said Simonetta's clear, crisp voice, "that you would like to see me. Am I right?"

"That's it," said Longfellow eagerly.

"Madame has gone out to a tea. I shall be glad to give you a cup if you care to run down."

"Immediately," he said. He thrust back the receiver, ran downstairs, snatched coat

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d hat, and hurried across the walk to his waiting car.

Simonetta opened the door. Longfellow breathed more easily, felt less constrained and cornered. She did that to one.

"Well," she said, "you wanted to see me. What about? I gathered from the context it was important."

"It was important," he said, "but it wasn't about anything in particular. It's funny, but right now I feel as if everything was all right. I know everything is not all right, but I don't seem to care. When I called you up I had a kind of an idea I wanted to talk things over—I mean about the murder. But you are here and I don't want to. It's funny about advice. I just found out about it."

"What did you find out?"

"I found out that it isn't much good asking for it, or having a lot of people around telling you what to do. Because when it comes to the pinch you have to make up your own mind what to do. In the end you always have to advise yourself."

"AND can you do it?" she asked curiously.

"I think so," he said simply. "I mean, I know about me. I know how things affect me. I know what is important to me. But people always advise you from their point of view. I mean they consider what would be important to them, and then go on from there. But what is the critical point to them may not matter to me a bit."

"And you don't want any advice from me?"

"Only just to hear you talk," he said. "I like to hear your voice. It sounds good. It's kind of crisp, but it's kind of calm, too, and confident. But what I like best about you, Miss Petersen, is that you wouldn't just up and disappear in case of trouble."

"How did you find out so much about me?" she asked.

"I've been thinking about you a great deal," he said simply. "I have had a lot of time to think."

"And considerable to think about, I should say, without bothering over me."

"I can't help it. You keep popping into my mind. I get to thinking about this common-law wife business, or about the murder, or about being kidnapped, and the first I know, I am thinking about you." He smiled placatingly. "I like to think about you better than I do about those other things."

"If I were you," she said, "I'd be holding my head and thinking about something besides a girl you hardly know."

"I do," he said. "I think about what is going to become of me. I worry about what is going to happen if all these troubles get settled and I keep Mr. Semple's money, and all. I just don't know.

"Miss Petersen," he asked abruptly, "do you remember about a notorious case of Lithgow against Jones that was in all the papers?"

"Yes, Mr. Deeds," she said, imitating his formality. "I remember the World War, and Lindbergh's flight, and the Depression. They all got about the same amount of publicity."

"Mr. Cedar said it was the same as the claim of this Nina Motti. Common-law wife, letters, and everything." He paused, and the thing uppermost in his mind emerged: "There must have been some-

body besides you and me who had a motive for killing her."

"I don't suppose someone did it just for practice," she said.

"I went to the Library," he said, "and read those letters in Lithgow against Jones. They were pretty surprising."

"Why?"

"Oh, something about them I noticed, and so I've got to find a certain kind of a man, and I guess maybe I've found him."

"What kind?" she asked.

"A man who is very literal and hasn't much practical imagination. A kind of a man who would do a thing in a certain way. I wonder if I notice things other people don't?"

"You're a poet," said Simonetta.

"I don't like it," said Longfellow, and his expression was one of real sadness.

"What don't you like?"

"That it makes it necessary for me to suspect everybody. I've never been suspicious of people before. It's not a nice way to be. I've even got to be suspicious of Mr. Cedar."

"It sounds," she said, "as if you have discovered something."

BEFORE he could reply to that the bell rang, and presently a maid appeared. "A Lieutenant Moxon of the police department wishes to speak to Miss Petersen."

Simonetta looked at Longfellow. Then she arose composedly, calmly. "Ask him to step in here," she said, and waited.

The officer entered. "Miss Petersen?"

"Yes."

"Lieutenant Moxon, of the Homicide Squad," he said. "I think it would be better if I saw you alone."

"It would not be better," said Longfellow promptly. "It would be worse."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Longfellow Deeds."

"The young man who inherited the Opera? I've read about you. But I still wish to see Miss Petersen alone."

"You can't," said Longfellow, "because either I am going to stay or she is not going to talk to you at all until Mr. Cedar, of Cedar, Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle, gets here."

"About what did you wish to see me?" asked Simonetta.

"The murder of Nina Motti. You knew her?"

"Yes."

"She was a friend?"

"Why," parried Simonetta, "do you come to me?"

"That will develop. Was she a friend?"

"When you have told me why you come to me," she said, "I will consider answering other questions."

"Very well. Had you a brother?"

"Yes."

"Was his name Guido Cenci?"

"That was the name he assumed."

"Was Nina Motti his mistress?"

"I think he expected to marry her," she said in a cool, detached voice.

"It is true, is it not, that she stripped him of money and threw him out?"

"It is."

"This money was to be used in part for your musical education?"

"It was."

"Then we will come back to my first question. Was she a friend?"

"I hated her," said Simonetta.

"You uttered threats?"

"In my first crazy grief over my brother's death I may have done so."

"In that case, I think I must ask you to account for your time on the day of the killing. You were on the stage?"

"I was."

"When Motti was killed?"

"I do not know when she was killed."

"You are familiar with the stage at the Opera?"

"Yes."

"And the location of Motti's dressing-room?"

"Yes."

"In the confusion of changing sets you could have reached that room unobserved?"

"I don't know."

"Did you do so? And did you have upon your person a gun which you had brought for the purpose, and did you shoot her?"

"Now," interrupted Longfellow, "I guess maybe we had all better wait a minute."

"That will be all from you," said the lieutenant, with police bluster.

"No," said Longfellow almost timidly, "there will be more from me. And you'll want to hear it, I guess. Because the only reason you are questioning Miss Petersen is because she has a kind of motive."

"I call it a pretty strong motive."

"But," said Longfellow, "if you had a choice between two motives, and one was a lot stronger than the other—that is the one you would investigate first. Isn't it?"

"This one will do till a better one comes along."

"That's what I am talking about. It is coming along."

"Mr. Deeds!" exclaimed Simonetta.

"Here it is," said Longfellow doggedly. "This Nina Motti claimed to be Mr. Semple's common-law wife, and that there was a child. You know who Mr. Semple was. Well, Lawyer Granzi came and told me this, and wanted to settle for a couple of million dollars, or he would sue and put the story in all the papers. And I own all of Mr. Semple's money. There were letters and proof. So, if Motti turned out really to be a genuine common-law wife I would have it all taken away from me. And I was on the stage when she was killed, and I helped find her body. So a better motive has come along, Lieutenant."

MOXON stood over Longfellow. "This is true?" he demanded.

"Yes. And now that's all I'm going to say and all Miss Petersen is going to say. There isn't any use asking any more questions. If you stay I shall send for Mr. Cedar, of Cedar—"

"—Cedar, Cedar & McGonigle. I know. I can drag you down to Headquarters."

"To be sure," said Longfellow, "but I don't think you will until you get more to go on than a couple of motives. Not somebody who has as many millions as I have and as many lawyers. This is the first time I've really been glad I'm rich." He reached for the telephone. "So what?" he asked without belligerence.

"So," said the lieutenant, "I'll be seeing you. But don't try to leave town."

"Good afternoon," said Longfellow.

Then they were alone. There was silence.

"Galahad!" said Miss Petersen, but there was no jeer in her voice.

"No Galahad about it," said Longfellow. "Just common sense."

(To be continued)

I'm tame as a Lion

(*Continued from page 59*)

in the face of defeat, but I couldn't put my emotion into the music, for I could hardly play it at all.

"Nix," he said, and that "Nix," it turned out, had a great influence upon my life. I never again had the courage to try to get work as a pianist. Wearily I returned to the agents' offices.

Two weeks later the man who had felt so sorry for us because we *had* to get into pictures, started me out as an extra. I was under way!

THE lions came to my aid several years later when I was making my second, and I feared my last, picture in Hollywood. I had come to Hollywood at the enormous salary of $110 a week, expecting to play the lead in *The Wanters*, but my tests were hideous, and the producer gave the lead to Marie Prevost and I played a bit.

They hadn't learned how to light my face, which is really quite a simple task. One or two lights from above, to throw proper shadows and to bring out the modeling, will do nicely.

The custom then, when a cameraman was in a hurry, was to use "flat" lighting —to throw a great deal of light from all directions, in order to kill all shadows that might be caused by wrinkles or blemishes. But strong lights placed on each side of my face made my blue eyes look almost white and, by nearly eliminating my nose, at times made me seem cross-eyed.

D. W. Griffith once told me I would never succeed in pictures because my eyes were too blue.

I was making *Pleasure Mad* when the real turn came. Some lists of pictures in which I have appeared give it as *Pleasure Man*, which was a play produced several years ago in New York by Mae West and