

THE IMPERSONATOR

By Harold Carter

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"Gentlemen, Mr. Harry Saunders, the celebrated female impersonator, will now appear before you."

Benson, leaning against a pillar in the background of the little mining camp saloon theater, looked on with disgust. All about him the cowboys were riotously applauding. He, Benson, had tasted the sweet and bitterness of life too long to be stirred by anything.

Five years on a lonely ranch, whither he had betaken himself after that past which the west never inquires about, varied by periodical incursions to such places of amusement as this, had been his portion.

Benson was tired of life. He had again and again meditated self-destruction. Each time he had decided to give the show another chance.

"Hurrah! Bully for you, Harry!" yelled the cowboys.

Benson looked toward the stage. Harry Saunders was certainly impersonating a woman well. His skirt dance was inimitable. His voice, his gestures conveyed the illusion completely. Benson felt his disgust rising.

"Why can't he stick to the sex God made him?" he muttered contemptuously. "Touring the country and showing off in women's clothes, instead of hustling for a living like—like me."

And, glancing toward his patient horse, tethered outside the saloon among a score of others, he thought of the hard, brown earth from which he had so painfully wrung a living during five years.

But he thought, too, of the distant plains, in their glory of blue and crimson, when the sun rose; of the desert wind, the loneliness of the vast spaces. There was peace at

"I was a fool to have come here," said Benson.

Nevertheless, he strode up to the bar and ordered a drink, more to satisfy the manager than because he needed it. And all the while he drank his mind wandered between thoughts of returning to his solitude and thoughts of death.

A prolonged spree, a slow debauch, the quick revolver bullet at the end, and who would care? Surely that was the final atonement that a man could make to a world which he had



"Put Him Down, Ben."

spurned, and which, in turn, had cast him out.

As he mused he became aware that the number had ended. A group of cowboys had surrounded Harry Saunders as he emerged in male garb from his dressing room, and were clapping him on the back, ut-

tering coarse pleasantries. They hustled him toward the bar.

"Name it!" shouted the bartender.

"Five fingers of Lunn's!" shouted the man who had the boy in tow, naming a popular and very fiery brand of rum.

"I beg your pardon! I don't drink!"

The cowboys laughed. They insisted that he should drink. It seemed to them both hospitality and a kind of retribution upon a fellow who could make up as a girl.

Harry's girlishness was apparently a force of habit, for he stammered and pleaded, and the more he did so the more the men insisted. Finally the manager of the troupe interfered but they shook him off. They were determined that Harry should swallow his grog. Then Harry began to cry.

At first discomfited, the cowboys looked at one another in consultation. What was to be done with a kid like that? They were as disgusted as Benson had been. One threw the fiery spirit in his face.

"Dance, then!" yelled one, drawing his revolver and blazing into the floor between his feet. The boy sprang five feet into the air. But he came down again and did not dance. Instead, he planted himself defiantly upon the floor and doubled his fists.

"Leave the kid alone! He's got some spirit!" shouted one of the kindlier of the crowd.

But another ran upon him and struck the boy a vicious blow on the face, knocking him backward into Benson's arms. Instantly the saloon was in an uproar. The drunken cowboys were evenly divided in their opinions of Harry and meant to enforce them.

Then it was that Benson, looking into his face with the perspicacity of sobriety, realized that Harry Saunders was a girl. The "impersonation" had been no impersonation at all. He was the impersonation.

Swiftly he moved toward the door

with Harry and before the cowboys had realized that their quarry and their object of protection respectively was gone he had untethered his horse and mounted.

He leaned over. "Jump!" he shouted, and as he did so the drunken mob came pouring out, all now animated by the same spirit of anger.

Benson leaned tow and hoisted the girl into the saddle in front of him just as the leaders ranged themselves about him.

"Put him down, Ben!" they yelled. "He's got to sing and dance and drink now, and then, maybe, we'll teach him some more."

Benson spurred his horse, which reeled wildly, upsetting the two who clutched at the bridle. Then he was off, galloping down the long, dusty road toward his ranch, miles in the distance. One or two shots were fired; but very soon he had got clear of the town, and looking back, saw that he was not followed.

He reined in his panting steed to a walk and spoke for the first time.

"Who are you? How did you get here?" he demanded. "First, your name—unless you don't want to give it."

The girl looked up at him and the awful fear upon her face disappeared when she saw the kindness on his.

"Ethel Saunders," she said timidly. "Harry was my brother. He was the impersonator. He—he died."

"How did you get here?"

"I had to come west. I was threatened with tuberculosis. I could dance and sing a little, but I had never done so in public, and I—I didn't dare trust myself in the mining camps. So, since Harry had been known I thought I'd take his place and pretend to be a boy. But I'm going home now. I can't bear what happened today." She burst out sobbing, and the discolored mark on her cheek showed like a finger of shame.

"I can take you to Lumley's. The coach will be there this afternoon," said Benson. "But the troupe—"

"They mustn't know. I tell you I have done with it all. I'm going home."

"Where's your home?"

"East."

"People there?"

"What is it to you? No. I have nobody."

"Then you'll do what to live?"

"The same old game!" she cried hopelessly. "The same—but sick as I am of it, what else can I do?"

Benson felt a swift and vast pity for the helplessness of this child, thrust alone into the world, into the west, helpless. A glance at her face showed him that the rose of innocence, scorched though it had been by the life there, still bloomed.

"Listen!" he said. "I guess life has treated both of us pretty badly. But I've got a little ranch yonder, and—will you try it with me? If you won't, I'll take you to Lumley's. Here's the cross-roads."

But since she made no answer, he looked at her again and set his horse toward the ranch.

## WHAT HAS BECOME OF—



THE GIRL WHO PREFERRED A  
STREET-CAR TO A TAXI?

## MACARONI

Macaroni is a thing we have always wondered about.

We know, in a general way, that it is sent out from factories in boxes, looking very naked and white; and that it comes to the table wearing cheese.

Aside from that, macaroni is as much of a mystery to us as what the man says who goes past the house yelling for old clothes.

We have always wondered about the holes in macaroni. Are they set up in rows and the macaroni wrapped around them? Or are they bored, while the young macaroni is still unable to defend itself?

Also, what is macaroni made of? There's rubber, of course. We know that. But what else? We have been letting macaroni down our throat off and on now for 27 years; and yet if some stern-faced scientist should suddenly stop us in the middle of a four-inch piece and ask us if we knew what we were swallowing, we could only answer: "Macaroni."

This is wrong. How long must the world go on without knowing more about its macaroni?

## ONE OF THE CHIEF WARRIORS FIGHTING FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE

