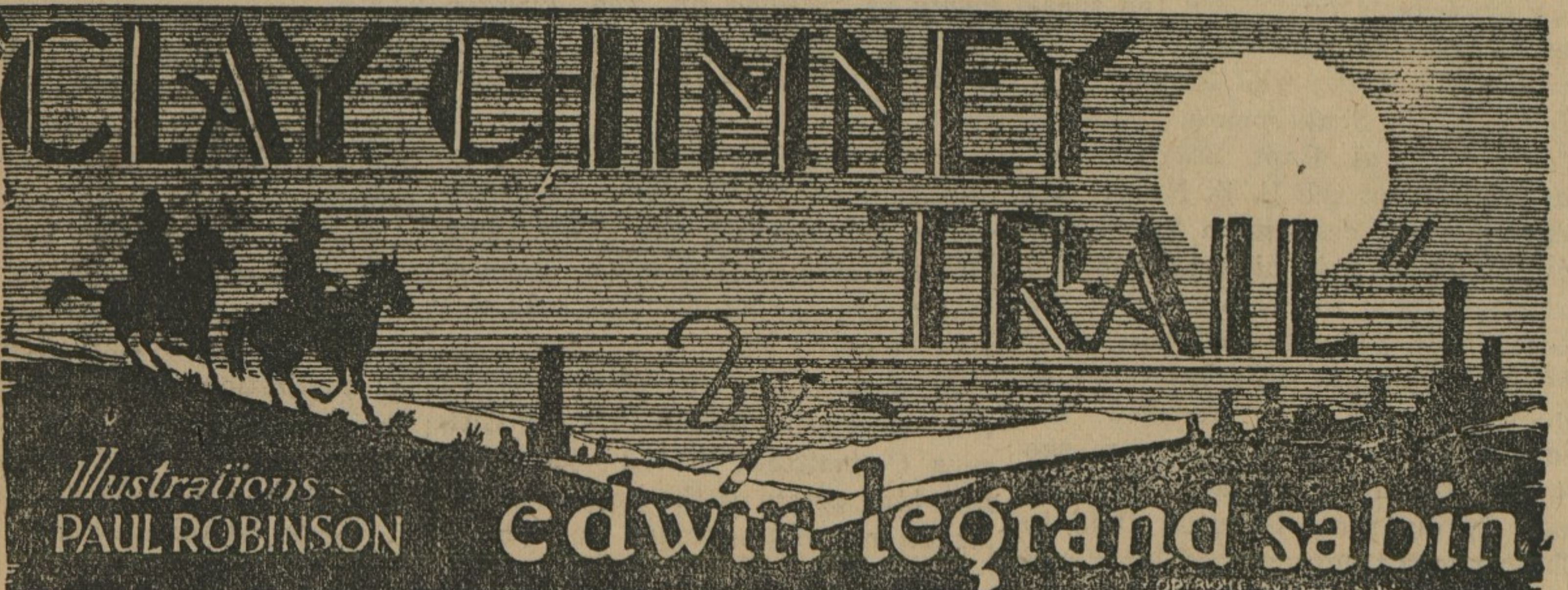
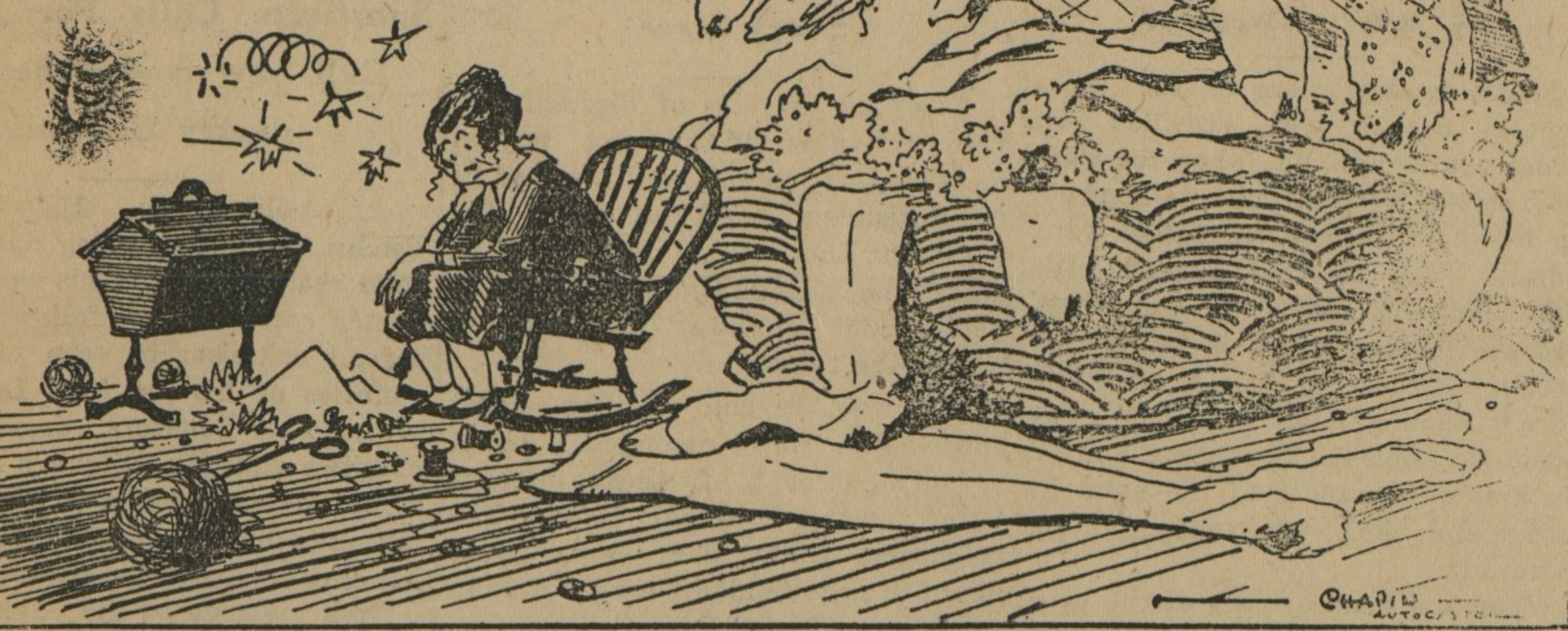


WHAT EVERY MOTHER KNOWS

By A. B. CHAPIN

THAT UTTERLY HOPELESS FEELING—WHEN YOU'VE DARNED SOCKS AND DARNED AND DARNED—AND MENDED VARIOUS AND SUNDRY UNMENTIONABLES AND PATCHED PANTS AND TURNED SHIRT CUFFS AND EVERING AND SEWED ON BUTTONS AND SO ON AND SO ON UNTIL YOU'RE BLUE IN THE FACE—AND THE FAMILY MENDING, INSTEAD OF BECOMING SMALLER, SEEMS TO GET BIGGER AND BIGGER!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE: It is 1868 and the Pacific Railroad has reached its newest "farthest west"—Benton, Wyoming, a town described as "roaring," as each new terminus, temporarily, was.

Frank Beeson, a young man from Albany, New York, comes here because he is in search of health and Benton is considered "high and dry."

Edna Montoya, a fellow passenger on the train from Omaha, impresses Beeson with the beauty of her blue eyes and the style of her apparel. Equally she astonished him by taking a "smile" of brandy before breakfast. A brakeman tells Beeson she has "followed her man" to Benton.

Jim, a typical western ruffian whom she knows apparently well insults her and is floored by Frank whose prowess impresses the passengers.

Col. Lunderson and "Bill" Brady volunteer to entertain young Beeson.

Robbed

A crowd had gathered before a youth in galluses, soiled shirt and belled pantaloons, who standing upon a box, was exhorting at the top of his lungs. "Whoop-oop! This way! This way! Rondo cool-o-h! Here's your easy money! Down with your soap! Let her roll. Rondo cool-o-h."

"It's a great game, suh," the colonel said. We pushed forward, to the front. The center for the crowd was a table across one end of which there were several holes. Into these balls, ten or a dozen, resembling miniature billiard balls, might roll. The balls had been banked at the opposite end; and just as we arrived they were propelled all forward, scattering, by a short cue rapidly swept across their base.

"Rondo cool, suh," the Colonel explained, "as you see, is in improvement on the old rondo, foh red-blooded people. Shall we take a turn, foh luck?" The crowd was eyeing the gyrating balls expectantly. A part of the balls entered the pockets; the remainder came to rest.

Nobody but a blind man can lose at monte, by George. "And this spelier's on the level," Bill pronounced, sotto voice. "I vote we hook him for a gudgeon, and yet the price of a meal. Our friend will join us in the turn. He can see for himself that he can't lose. He's got sharp eyes."

The by-standers here were stationed before a man sitting at a low tripod table; and all that he had was the small table—a plain cheap table with folding legs—and three playing cards. Business was a trifle slack.

"Two jacks, and the ace, gentlemen. There they are. I have faced them up. Now I gather them slowly—you can't miss them. Observe closely! The jack on top, between thumb and forefinger. The ace next—ace in the middle. The

three, spreading them in a neat row, face down, upon the table. "Twenty dollars against your twenty that you can't pick out the ace, first try! I'll let the cards lie, if you've watched the ace fall, you win!"

"Just do that trick again, will you, for the benefit of my friend here?" bade the Colonel. The "spelier"—a trin-lipped, cadaverous individual—smiled. "Hello, sir, I'm agreeable. Yes, sir. But as they lie, will you make a guess? No, Or you, sir?" And he addressed Bill. "No? Then you sir?" He appealed to me. "No! But I'm a mind-reader. I can tell by your eyes. Ah! Correct! He had turned up the card and shown the ace. "You should have bet. You would have beaten me,

other jack bottom-most." He turned his hand, with three cards in a tier, so that all might see. "The ace is the winning card. You are to locate the ace. Observe closely again. It's my hand against your eyes. I am going to throw. Who will spot the ace? Watch, everybody. Ready. Go."

The backs of the cards were up. With a swift movement he released the three, spreading them in a neat row, face down, upon the table. "Twenty dollars against your twenty that you can't pick out the ace first try! I'll let the cards lie. If you've watched the ace fall you win!"

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"Five dollars now that one card is not the ace," he challenged. "I shall not touch them." "I'll go halvers with you, Colonel!" Bill proposed.

"I'm on," agreed the Colonel. "There's the soap. And foh the honor of the grand old empire State we will let our friend pick the ace foh us."

I turned up the right-end card. "By the Eternal, he's done it! He has an eye like an eagle's," praised the dealer, with evident chagrin. "I lose. Once again now. Everybody in this time!" He gathered the cards. "I'll play against you all, this gentleman included. I'm afraid he's smarter than me, but I'm game."

He was too insistent. Somehow, I did not like him, anyway, and I was beginning to be suspicious of my company. "You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," I pleaded. "Another time, but not now. I wish to eat and to bathe and I have an engagement following."

"We can't talk this over while we're dry," the Colonel objected, as we moved off. "Let us libate, suhs."

We were verging upon argument, much to my distaste, when of a sudden who should come tripping along but My Lady of the Blue Eyes—yes, the very fresh and action of her, her face shielded from the dust by a little sunshade.

She recognized me in startled fashion, and with a swift glance at my two companions bowed and was gone.

"Gad, suh; You know the lady?" the Colonel ejaculated. "A casual acquaintance," I answered. "We were merely travelers by the same route at the same time. And now if you will recommend a good eating place, and be my guests at supper, after that, as I have said, I must be excused. By the way, while I think of it," I carelessly added, "can you direct me how to get to the Big Tent?"

The Colonel swelled; his fishy eyes hardened upon me as with righteous indignation.

"Suh you are too innocent! I believe, by gad, suh, that you are a capper foh some infernal skinning game, or that you are a professional. Suh, I call your hand!"

I was about to retort hotly, when Mr. Brady, who likewise had been glaring at me, growled morosely.

"She's waitin' for you. You can square with us later."

The black-clad figure had lingered beyond, ostensibly gazing into a window. Without saying another word to my ruffled body guards I approached her.

"Madam," I uttered foolishly, "good-evening."

"You have left your friends?" "Very willingly."

"And I have rescued you?" She smiled again. "Believe me, sir, you would be better off alone. I know the gentlemen. The Colonel is a notorious capper and steerer, and Brady is no better."

"Strange to say, they have just accused me of being a capper," I answered.

Her face brightened. "They were disappointed in finding you no gudgeon to be hooked by such raw methods. Promise me that you will take up with no more strangers! Meanwhile, let me advise you. 'Oufits' while you wait, and become of the country! You look too much the pilgrim—there is Eastern dust, and that spells of other 'dust' in your pockets. Get another hat, a flannel shirt, some coarser trousers, a pair of boots, don a gun and a swagger, say little, make few impromptu friends, win and lose without a smile or frown, if you play (but upon playing I will advise you later). I shall hope to see you tonight. So adios, sir, and remember." With no mention of the Big Tent she flashed a smile at me and mingled with the other pedestrians crossing the street on diagonal course.

When I turned for a final word with my two guides, they had vanished.

The counsel to don a garb smacking less of the recent East struck me as sound and at Levi's Mammoth Emporium: Liquors, Groceries and General Merchandise." I procured a hat, a flannel shirt, a serviceable ready-made suit, boots, and a revolver.

With my bulky parcel I sought a cafe, ate supper and hastened to the hotel for bath and change of costume.

I had yet time to array myself, as an experiment and a lark; and that I did, hurriedly tossing my old garments upon the bed and floor, in order to invest with the new

The third bed was occupied by a plump, round-faced, dust-scalded man, with piggish features accentuated by his small bloodshot eyes; dressed in Eastern mode.

"Hell of a country, ain't it?" he observed. "You a stranger, too?" "What's your line?"

"Well, you don't have to tell 'em," he granted. "Thought you was a salesman. I'm from Saint Louie, myself. Sell groceries, and pasteboards on the side. Cards are the stuff. I got the best line of sure thing stock—strippers, humps, rounds, squares, briefs and marked backs—"

He did not finish. An uproar sounded above the other street clamor: a pistol shot, and another—a chorus of hoarse shouts and shrill frightened cries, the scurrying rush of feet, all in the street; and in the hall of the hotel, and the lobby below, the rush of still more feet, booted, and the din of excited voices.

"A fight, a fight! Shootin' scrapel in a flash my companion was pelting down the hall.

Overcome by the zest of the moment I pelted after, and with several others plunged as madly upon the porch.

A baying mob tramped through the street, with jangle "Hang him! Hang him! String him up!"

I saw first a figure bloody-chested and inert flat in the dust, with stooping figures trying to raise him; then, beyond, a man white as death, hustled to and fro from clutching hands and suddenly forced in firm grips up the street, while the mob trailed after, whooping, cursing, shrieking, flourishing guns and knives and ropes, there were women as well as men in it!

All this turned me sick. From the outskirts of the throng I tramped back to my room and the bath. The hotel was quiet as if emptied; my room was vacant—and more than vacant, for of my clothing not a vestige remained! My bag also was gone.

Worse yet, prompted by an inner voice that stabbed me like an icicle I was awakened to the knowledge that every cent I had possessed was in those garments.

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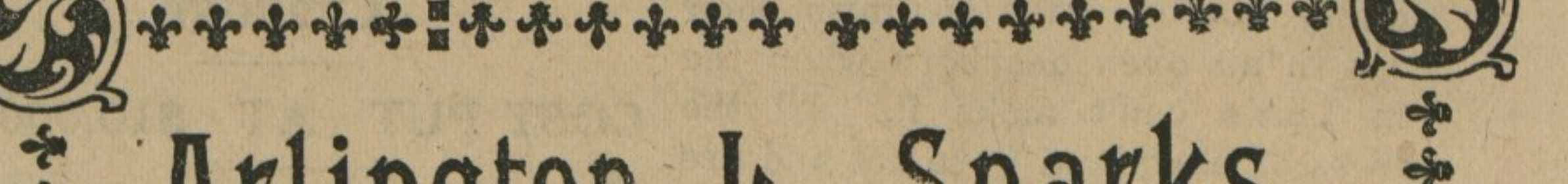
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