Short Stories

"MISS RAFAEL."

(By Frank Fenmore.)

"Where do you think you saw her?" said Harry Nichol to his friend Jack Morton. "I never saw her before."

"Didn't say I ever had seen her," said Morton, after a rather long pause.

"Did you dream of her then?"

"Not exactly that, either. It's a special interference of Providence. Only you're such a soulless sort of fellow I don't care to tell you about it. You'd only make fun."

"Great Scott!" said Nichol. "To think of you having the nerve to call me soulless! Very well then, if you won't tell me, I won't help you—and then where will you be?"

"Well, if you must know it, she's a picture."

"She's a—what?"

"A picture, I said. A picture by an old master."

"Say, old man," said Nichol, taking his pipe out of his mouth and staring at Morton, "aren't you feeling unwell to-night, eh?"

"Nothing the matter with me. I know you wouldn't understand it. I don't suppose you could tell a Rafael from the back of an insurance almanac."

"Did it the almanac wasn't marked in plain figures. Could you?"

"Yes, I could," Morton retorted. "That's just the difference between us."

"Oh. Then this young lady we saw in the street—name and address unknown—is a Rafael, is she?"

"That's just it. You've hit it. I was looking at some antique clothes in a window in New York one day and saw this one—the original of this girl. I didn't know the title of the picture. I went in and asked the man in the store. 'That's a copy of some of Raffaelle's sketches, I suppose.' He hesitated, and then he said, 'Yes, I believe it is.' When I asked how much he wanted for it, he said twenty-five dollars. I couldn't afford to pay that, so I left the shop. But I never forgot that face. I knew it was a Rafael, you see, the moment I set eyes on it."

"Well, that was awfully smart of you. How long have you been going about haunted by the memory of this Rafael?"

"About two years."

"No wonder the appearance of the picture walking about the street startled you. Was she dressed the same way in the picture?"

"Of course not, you idiot. Rafael's Madonnas are not dressed in Nineteenth Century walking costume."

"They're so."

"And, besides, the picture was only a head and neck."

"Well, that's more pretty fanciful, I must say. What are you going to do now, my philosopher?"

"What should you say—eh? Yes, I must write a letter to her."

"Dear me!" said Nichol. "We seem to have got on fast, don't we?"

"Well, you see, Nichol, the fact is, you have committed me to write."

"Have I? I didn't mean to commit you to, or to anything."

"Don't you see that, as you thrust yourself on her on my account, it is only fair for me to apologize for the liberty you have taken for me?"

"Certainly. An apology is due to this young lady."

"All right," said Nichol, yawning and stretching where I left the pipe."

And after that the two thought no more about the matter.

"HE THRUST HIMSELF UPON YOU SOMEWHAT RUDELY."

"HAVE YOU FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER?"

AN ANCIENT CUSTOM.

He was understood to be a French painter. I don't know his name, but should imagine it must be something ending in "ac" or "in," from the south of France. In his east of cheek French he looked well dressed enough for an ocean voyage, but not so much at home as an American or an Englishman would have looked in the same rig. In fact, for the first days of the voyage—we were going from Barcelona round by Gibraltar to Southampton on a slow steamer—he seemed positively unhappy. After that, the motion of the ship having ceased to trouble him, he came on deck with the tops of his tweed traveling cap pushed back and showed a face of more cosmopolitan though it still looked as if the cap had been put on it by way of a joke.

That, of course, rather inclined me at first not to take this foreign man quite seriously. Afterwards it was different.

I stood beside him one evening as he leaned wistfully into the waters of the Mediterranean and opened conversation with the remark, "You do not enjoy a sea voyage?"

"I, sir? It is not for enjoyment that I make sea voyages. It is for my health. My physician prescribed it. You have been on the sea much?"

"A good deal lately," I said. "I am an American."

I told him that I was a "Down-Easter," and from that point our conversation flowed on easily. He had lived in New York, and in Washington, and in Chicago. "In fact," he said, "I have had my adventures in your country. You go on with this steamer to England, you say? I leave at Gibraltar. Yes, I may as well tell you my adventures, some of them. I think I might tell you the greatest one of all.

"I went to America the most Frenchest, because I wanted some of the big American dollars. They are always present souvenirs those dollars. I wished to dance my art studies in Paris and that make dollars very desirable for me. So I went to New York in a steerage—to Castle Garden. A nice place, Castle Garden, is it not? You have been there and seen by your fellow landing? Well, I came in the first place, as an artist.

"When I had passed a few weeks in New York, I began to see that, as a painter, I should not make my fortune. I should